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AN OMNIBUS OF
ALDOUS HUXLEY'S
BOOKS



Garden City, New York
DOUBLEDAY, DORAN & COMPANY, INC.

1933


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RETROSPECT, An Omnibus of ALDOUS HUXLEY'S Books, is an attempt to capture some of the books and parts of books by Aldous Huxley that would go in a single volume to fit on a shelf beside POINT COUNTER POINT. In order to make the book as inexpensive as possible, it is printed from the same plates as the original editions. Therefore the types will differ and the page numbers are not continuous throughout the book. To print this book from new type would make it prohibitive in price. Included, however, is the poem *Leda* which for ten years has been out of print and unavailable and in this volume represents a new edition printed from plates made especially for RETROSPECT.

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CROME YELLOW
The Novel Complete

CROME YELLOW

CHAPTER I

A LONG this particular stretch of line no express had ever passed. All the trains—the few that there were—stopped at all the stations. Denis knew the names of those stations by heart. Bole, Tritton, Spavin Delawarr, Knipswich for Timpany, West Bowlby, and, finally, Camlet-on-the-Water. Camlet was where he always got out, leaving the train to creep indolently onward, goodness only knew whither, into the green heart of England.

They were snorting out of West Bowlby now. It was the next station, thank Heaven. Denis took his chattels off the rack and piled them neatly in the corner opposite his own. A futile proceeding. But one must have something to do. When he had finished, he sank back into his seat and closed his eyes. It was extremely hot.

Oh, this journey! It was two hours cut clean out of his life; two hours in which he

might have done so much, so much—written the perfect poem, for example, or read the one illuminating book. Instead of which—his gorge rose at the smell of the dusty cushions against which he was leaning.

Two hours. One hundred and twenty minutes. Anything might be done in that time. Anything. Nothing. Oh, he had had hundreds of hours, and what had he done with them? Wasted them, spilt the precious minutes as though his reservoir were inexhaustible. Denis groaned in the spirit, condemned himself utterly with all his works. What right had he to sit in the sunshine, to occupy corner seats in third-class carriages, to be alive? None, none, none.

Misery and a nameless nostalgic distress possessed him. He was twenty-three, and oh! so agonizingly conscious of the fact.

The train came bumpingly to a halt. Here was Camlet at least. Denis jumped up, crammed his hat over his eyes, deranged his pile of baggage, leaned out of the window and shouted for a porter, seized a bag in either hand, and had to put them down again in order to open the door. When at last he had safely bundled himself and his baggage on to the platform, he ran up the train towards the van.

"A bicycle, a bicycle!" he said breathlessly to the guard. He felt himself a man of action. The guard paid no attention, but continued methodically to hand out, one by one, the packages labelled to Camlet. "A bicycle!" Denis repeated. "A green machine, cross-framed, name of Stone. S-T-O-N-E."

"All in good time, sir," said the guard soothingly. He was a large, stately man with a naval beard. One pictured him at home, drinking tea, surrounded by a numerous family. It was in that tone that he must have spoken to his children when they were tiresome. "All in good time, sir." Denis's man of action collapsed, punctured.

He left his luggage to be called for later, and pushed off on his bicycle. He always took his bicycle when he went into the country. It was part of the theory of exercise. One day one would get up at six o'clock and pedal away to Kenilworth, or Stratford-on-Avon—anywhere. And within a radius of twenty miles there were always Norman churches and Tudor mansions to be seen in the course of an afternoon's excursion. Somehow they never did get seen, but all the same it was nice to feel that the bicycle was there, and that one fine morning one really might get up at six.

Once at the top of the long hill which led up from Camlet station, he felt his spirits mounting. The world, he found, was good. The far-away blue hills, the harvests whitening on the slopes of the ridge along which his road led him, the treeless sky-lines that changed as he moved—yes, they were all good. He was overcome by the beauty of those deeply embayed combs, scooped in the flanks of the ridge beneath him. Curves, curves: he repeated the word slowly, trying as he did so to find some term in which to give expression to his appreciation. Curves—no, that was inadequate. He made a gesture with his hand, as though to scoop the achieved expression out of the air, and almost fell off his bicycle. What was the word to describe the curves of those little valleys? They were as fine as the lines of a human body, they were informed with the subtlety of art. . . .

Galbe. That was a good word; but it was French. *Le galbe évasé de ses hanches:* had one ever read a French novel in which that phrase didn't occur? Some day he would compile a dictionary for the use of novelists. *Galbe, gonflé, goulu: parfum, peau, pervers, potelé, pudeur: vertu, volupté.*

But he really must find that word. Curves curves. . . . Those little valleys had the

lines of a cup moulded round a woman's breast; they seemed the dented imprints of some huge divine body that had rested on these hills. Cumbrous locutions, these; but through them he seemed to be getting nearer to what he wanted. Dented, dimpled, wimpled—his mind wandered down echoing corridors of assonance and alliteration ever further and further from the point. He was enamoured with the beauty of words.

Becoming once more aware of the outer world, he found himself on the crest of a descent. The road plunged down, steep and straight, into a considerable valley. There, on the opposite slope, a little higher up the valley, stood Crome, his destination. He put on his brakes; this view of Crome was pleasant to linger over. The façade with its three projecting towers rose precipitously from among the dark trees of the garden. The house basked in full sunlight; the old brick rosily glowed. How ripe and rich it was, how superbly mellow! And at the same time, how austere! The hill was becoming steeper and steeper; he was gaining speed in spite of his brakes. He loosed his grip of the levers, and in a moment was rushing headlong down. Five minutes later he was passing through the gate of the great

courtyard. The front door stood hospitably open. He left his bicycle leaning against the wall and walked in. He would take them by surprise.

CHAPTER II

HE took nobody by surprise; there was nobody to take. All was quiet; Denis wandered from room to empty room, looking with pleasure at the familiar pictures and furniture, at all the little untidy signs of life that lay scattered here and there. He was rather glad that they were all out; it was amusing to wander through the house as though one were exploring a dead, deserted Pompeii. What sort of life would the excavator reconstruct from these remains; how would he people these empty chambers? There was the long gallery, with its rows of respectable and (though, of course, one couldn't publicly admit it) rather boring Italian primitives, its Chinese sculptures, its unobtrusive, dateless furniture. There was the panelled drawing-room, where the huge chintz-covered arm-chairs stood, oases of comfort among the austere flesh-mortifying antiques. There was the morning-room, with its pale lemon walls, its painted Venetian chairs and rococo tables, its mirrors, its modern pictures.

There was the library, cool, spacious, and dark, book-lined from floor to ceiling, rich in portentous folios. There was the dining-room, solidly, portwinily English, with its great mahogany table, its eighteenth-century chairs and sideboard, its eighteenth-century pictures—family portraits, meticulous animal paintings. What could one reconstruct from such data? There was much of Henry Wimbush in the long gallery and the library, something of Anne, perhaps, in the morning-room. That was all. Among the accumulations of ten generations the living had left but few traces.

Lying on the table in the morning-room he saw his own book of poems. What tact! He picked it up and opened it. It was what the reviewers call "a slim volume." He read at hazard:

". . . But silence and the topless dark
Vault in the lights of Luna Park;
And Blackpool from the nightly gloom
Hollows a bright tumultuous tomb."

He put it down again, shook his head, and sighed. "What genius I had then!" he reflected, echoing the aged Swift. It was nearly six months since the book had been published; he was glad to think he would never write anything of the same sort again.

Who could have been reading it, he wondered? Anne, perhaps; he liked to think so. Perhaps, too, she had at last recognised herself in the Hamadryad of the popular sapling; the slim Hamadryad whose movements were like the swaying of a young tree in the wind. "The Woman who was a Tree" was what he had called the poem. He had given her the book when it came out, hoping that the poem would tell her what he hadn't dared to say. She had never referred to it.

He shut his eyes and saw a vision of her in a red velvet cloak, swaying into the little restaurant where they sometimes dined together in London—three quarters of an hour late, and he at his table, haggard with anxiety, irritation, hunger. Oh, she was damnable!

It occurred to him that perhaps his hostess might be in her boudoir. It was a possibility; he would go and see. Mrs. Wimbush's boudoir was in the central tower on the garden front. A little staircase corkscrewed up to it from the hall. Denis mounted, tapped at the door. "Come in." Ah, she was there; he had rather hoped she wouldn't be. He opened the door.

Priscilla Wimbush was lying on the sofa. A blotting-pad rested on her knees and she

was thoughtfully sucking the end of a silver pencil.

"Hullo," she said, looking up. "I'd forgotten you were coming."

"Well, here I am, I'm afraid," said Denis deprecatingly. "I'm awfully sorry."

Mrs. Wimbush laughed. Her voice, her laughter, were deep and masculine. Everything about her was manly. She had a large, square, middle-aged face, with a massive projecting nose and little greenish eyes, the whole surmounted by a lofty and elaborate coiffure of a curiously improbable shade of orange. Looking at her, Denis always thought of Wilkie Bard as the cantatrice.

"That's why I'm going to
Sing in op'ra, sing in op'ra,
Sing in op-pop-pop-pop-popera."

To-day she was wearing a purple silk dress with a high collar and a row of pearls. The costume, so richly dowagerish, so suggestive of the Royal Family, made her look more than ever like something on the Halls.

"What have you been doing all this time?" she asked.

"Well," said Denis, and he hesitated, almost voluptuously. He had a tremendously amusing account of London and its doings

all ripe and ready in his mind. It would be a pleasure to give it utterance. "To begin with," he said

But he was too late. Mrs. Wimbush's question had been what the grammarians call rhetorical; it asked for no answer. It was a little conversational flourish, a gambit in the polite game.

"You find me busy at my horoscopes," she said, without even being aware that she had interrupted him.

A little pained, Denis decided to reserve his story for more receptive ears. He contented himself, by way of revenge, with saying "Oh?" rather icily.

"Did I tell you how I won four hundred on the Grand National this year?"

"Yes," he replied, still frigid and monosyllabic. She must have told him at least six times.

"Wonderful, isn't it? Everything is in the Stars. In the Old Days, before I had the Stars to help me, I used to lose thousands. Now"—she paused an instant—"well, look at that four hundred on the Grand National. That's the Stars."

Denis would have liked to hear more about the Old Days. But he was too discreet and, still more, too shy to ask. There had been something of a bust up; that was

all he knew. Old Priscilla—not so old then, of course, and sprightlier—had lost a great deal of money, dropped it in handfuls and hatfuls on every race-course in the country. She had gambled too. The number of thousands varied in the different legends, but all put it high. Henry Wimbush was forced to sell some of his Primitives—a Taddeo da Poggibonsi, an Amico di Taddeo, and four or five nameless Sieneſe—to the Americans. There was a crisis. For the first time in his life Henry asserted himself, and with good effect, it ſeemed.

Priscilla's gay and gadding existence had come to an abrupt end. Nowadays she ſpent almost all her time at Crome, cultivating a rather ill-defined malady. For conſolation ſhe dallied with New Thought and the Occult. Her paſſion for racing ſtill poſſeſſed her, and Henry, who was a kind-hearted fellow at bottom, allowed her forty pounds a month betting money. Moſt of Priscilla's days were ſpent in caſting the horoſcopes of horſes, and ſhe inveſted her money ſcientifically, as the ſtars dictated. She betted on football too, and had a large notebook in which ſhe regiſtered the horoſcopes of all the players in all the teams of the League. The proceſs of balancing the horoſcopes of two elevens one againſt the

other was a very delicate and difficult one. A match between the Spurs and the Villa entailed a conflict in the heavens so vast and so complicated that it was not to be wondered at if she sometimes made a mistake about the outcome.

"Such a pity you don't believe in these things, Denis, such a pity," said Mrs. Wim-bush in her deep, distinct voice.

"I can't say I feel it so."

"Ah, that's because you don't know what it's like to have faith. You've no idea how amusing and exciting life becomes when you do believe. All that happens means something; nothing you do is ever insignificant. It makes life so jolly, you know. Here am I at Crome. Dull as ditchwater, you'd think; but no, I don't find it so. I don't regret the Old Days a bit. I have the Stars . . ." She picked up the sheet of paper that was lying on the blotting-pad. "Inman's horoscope," she explained. "(I thought I'd like to have a little fling on the billiards championship this autumn.) I have the Infinite to keep in tune with," she waved her hand. "And then there's the next world and all the spirits, and one's Aura, and Mrs. Eddy and saying you're not ill, and the Christian Mysteries and Mrs. Besant. It's all splendid. One's never dull for a mo-

ment. I can't think how I used to get on before—in the Old Days. Pleasure—running about, that's all it was; just running about. Lunch, tea, dinner, theatre, supper every day. It was fun, of course, while it lasted. But there wasn't much left of it afterwards. There's rather a good thing about that in Barbecue-Smith's new book. Where is it?"

She sat up and reached for a book that was lying on the little table by the head of the sofa.

"Do you know him, by the way?" she asked.

"Who?"

"Mr. Barbecue-Smith."

Denis knew of him vaguely. Barbecue-Smith was a name in the Sunday papers. He wrote about the Conduct of Life. He might even be the author of *What a Young Girl Ought to Know*.

"No, not personally," he said.

"I've invited him for next week-end." She turned over the pages of the book. "Here's the passage I was thinking of. I marked it. I always mark the things I like."

Holding the book almost at arm's length, for she was somewhat long-sighted, and making suitable gestures with her free hand, she began to read, slowly, dramatically.

“ ‘What are thousand pound fur coats, what are quarter million incomes?’ ” She looked up from the page with a histrionic movement of the head; her orange coiffure nodded portentously. Denis looked at it, fascinated. Was it the Real Thing and henna, he wondered, or was it one of those Complete Transformations one sees in the advertisements?

“ ‘What are Thrones and Sceptres?’ ”

The orange Transformation—yes, it must be a Transformation—bobbed up again.

“ ‘What are the gaieties of the Rich, the splendours of the Powerful, what is the pride of the Great, what are the gaudy pleasures of High Society?’ ”

The voice, which had risen in tone, questioningly, from sentence to sentence, dropped suddenly and boomed reply.

“ ‘They are nothing. Vanity, fluff, dandelion seed in the wind, thin vapours of fever. The things that matter happen in the heart. Seen things are sweet, but those unseen are a thousand times more significant. It is the Unseen that counts in Life.’ ”

Mrs. Wimbush lowered the book. “ ‘Beautiful, isn’t it?’ ” she said.

Denis preferred not to hazard an opinion, but uttered a non-committal “ ‘H’m.’ ”

“Ah, it’s a fine book this, a beautiful book,” said Priscilla, as she let the pages flick back, one by one, from under her thumb. “And here’s the passage about the Lotus Pool. He compares the Soul to a Lotus Pool, you know.” She held up the book again and read. “‘A Friend of mine has a Lotus Pool in his garden. It lies in a little dell embowered with wild roses and eglantine, among which the nightingale pours forth its amorous descant all the summer long. Within the pool the Lotuses blossom, and the birds of the air come to drink and bathe themselves in its crystal waters. . . .’ Ah, and that reminds me,” Priscilla exclaimed, shutting the book with a clap and uttering her big profound laugh—“that reminds me of the things that have been going on in our bathing-pool since you were here last. We gave the village people leave to come and bathe here in the evenings. You’ve no idea of the things that happened.”

She leaned forward, speaking in a confidential whisper; every now and then she uttered a deep gurgle of laughter. “. . . mixed bathing . . . saw them out of my window . . . sent for a pair of field-glasses to make sure . . . no doubt of it. . . .” The laughter broke out again. Denis

laughed too. Barbecue-Smith was tossed on the floor.

"It's time we went to see if tea's ready," said Priscilla. She hoisted herself up from the sofa and went swishing off across the room, striding beneath the trailing silk. Denis followed her, faintly humming to himself:

"That's why I'm going to
Sing in op'ra, sing in op'ra,
Sing in op-pop-pop-pop-opera."

And then the little twiddly bit of accompaniment at the end: "ra-ra."

CHAPTER III

THE terrace in front of the house was a long narrow strip of turf, bounded along its outer edge by a graceful stone balustrade. Two little summer-houses of brick stood at either end. Below the house the ground sloped very steeply away, and the terrace was a remarkably high one; from the balusters to the sloping lawn beneath was a drop of thirty feet. Seen from below, the high unbroken terrace wall, built like the house itself of brick, had the almost menacing aspect of a fortification—a castle bastion, from whose parapet one looked out across airy depths to distances level with the eye. Below, in the foreground, hedged in by solid masses of sculptured yew trees, lay the stone-brimmed swimming-pool. Beyond it stretched the park, with its massive elms, its green expanses of grass, and, at the bottom of the valley, the gleam of the narrow river. On the farther side of the stream the land rose again in a long slope, chequered with cultivation. Looking up the valley, to the right, one saw a line of blue, far-off hills.

The tea-table had been planted in the shade of one of the little summer-houses, and the rest of the party was already assembled about it when Denis and Priscilla made their appearance. Henry Wimbush had begun to pour out the tea. He was one of those ageless, unchanging men on the farther side of fifty, who might be thirty, who might be anything. Denis had known him almost as long as he could remember. In all those years his pale, rather handsome face had never grown any older; it was like the pale grey bowler hat which he always wore, winter and summer—unageing, calm, serenely without expression.

Next him, but separated from him and from the rest of the world by the almost impenetrable barriers of her deafness, sat Jenny Mullion. She was perhaps thirty, had a tilted nose and a pink-and-white complexion, and wore her brown hair plaited and coiled in two lateral buns over her ears. In the secret tower of her deafness she sat apart, looking down at the world through sharply piercing eyes. What did she think of men and women and things? That was something that Denis had never been able to discover. In her enigmatic remoteness Jenny was a little disquieting. Even now some interior joke seemed to be amusing her,

for she was smiling to herself, and her brown eyes were like very bright round marbles.

On his other side the serious, moonlike innocence of Mary Bracegirdle's face shone pink and childish. She was nearly twenty-three, but one wouldn't have guessed it. Her short hair, clipped like a page's, hung in a bell of elastic gold about her cheeks. She had large blue china eyes, whose expression was one of ingenuous and often puzzled earnestness.

Next to Mary a small gaunt man was sitting, rigid and erect in his chair. In appearance Mr. Scogan was like one of those extinct bird-lizards of the Tertiary. His nose was beaked, his dark eye had the shining quickness of a robin's. But there was nothing soft or gracious or feathery about him. The skin of his wrinkled brown face had a dry and scaly look; his hands were the hands of a crocodile. His movements were marked by the lizard's disconcertingly abrupt clockwork speed; his speech was thin, fluty, and dry. Henry Wimbush's school-fellow and exact contemporary, Mr. Scogan looked far older and, at the same time, far more youthfully alive than did that gentle aristocrat with the face like a grey bowler.

Mr. Scogan might look like an extinct

saurian, but Gombauld was altogether and essentially human. In the old-fashioned natural histories of the 'thirties he might have figured in a steel engraving as a type of *Homo Sapiens*—an honour which at that time commonly fell to Lord Byron. Indeed, with more hair and less collar, Gombauld would have been completely Byronic—more than Byronic, even, for Gombauld was of Provençal descent, a black-haired young corsair of thirty, with flashing teeth and luminous large dark eyes. Denis looked at him enviously. He was jealous of his talent: if only he wrote verse as well as Gombauld painted pictures! Still more, at the moment, he envied Gombauld his looks, his vitality, his easy confidence of manner. Was it surprising that Anne should like him? Like him?—it might even be something worse, Denis reflected bitterly, as he walked at Priscilla's side down the long grass terrace.

Between Gombauld and Mr. Scogan a very much lowered deck-chair presented its back to the new arrivals as they advanced towards the tea-table. Gombauld was leaning over it; his face moved vivaciously; he smiled, he laughed, he made quick gestures with his hands. From the depths of the chair came up a sound of soft, lazy laughter.

Denis started as he heard it. That laughter—how well he knew it! What emotions it evoked in him! He quickened his pace.

In her low deck-chair Anne was nearer to lying than to sitting. Her long, slender body reposed in an attitude of listless and indolent grace. Within its setting of light brown hair her face had a pretty regularity that was almost doll-like. And indeed there were moments when she seemed nothing more than a doll; when the oval face, with its long-lashed, pale blue eyes, expressed nothing; when it was no more than a lazy mask of wax. She was Henry Wimbush's own niece; that bowler-like countenance was one of the Wimbush heirlooms; it ran in the family, appearing in its female members as a blank doll-face. But across this dollish mask, like a gay melody dancing over an unchanging fundamental bass, passed Anne's other inheritance—quick laughter, light ironic amusement, and the changing expressions of many moods. She was smiling now as Denis looked down at her: her cat's smile, he called it, for no very good reason. The mouth was compressed, and on either side of it two tiny wrinkles had formed themselves in her cheeks. An infinity of slightly malicious amusement lurked in those little folds, in the puckers about the half-

closed eyes, in the eyes themselves, bright and laughing between the narrowed lids.

The preliminary greetings spoken, Denis found an empty chair between Gombauld and Jenny and sat down.

"How are you, Jenny?" he shouted to her.

Jenny nodded and smiled in mysterious silence, as though the subject of her health were a secret that could not be publicly divulged.

"How's London been since I went away?" Anne inquired from the depth of her chair.

The moment had come; the tremendously amusing narrative was waiting for utterance. "Well," said Denis, smiling happily, "to begin with . . ."

"Has Priscilla told you of our great antiquarian find?" Henry Wimbush leaned forward; the most promising of buds was nipped.

"To begin with," said Denis desperately, "there was the Ballet . . ."

"Last week," Mr. Wimbush went on softly and implacably, "we dug up fifty yards of oaken drain-pipes; just tree trunks with a hole bored through the middle. Very interesting indeed. Whether they were laid down by the monks in the fifteenth century, or whether . . ."

Denis listened gloomily. "Extraordinary!" he said, when Mr. Wimbush had finished; "quite extraordinary!" He helped himself to another slice of cake. He didn't even want to tell his tale about London now; he was damped.

For some time past Mary's grave blue eyes had been fixed upon him. "What have you been writing lately?" she asked. It would be nice to have a little literary conversation.

"Oh, verse and prose," said Denis—"just verse and prose."

"Prose?" Mr. Scogan pounced alarmingly on the word. "You've been writing prose?"

"Yes."

"Not a novel?"

"Yes."

"My poor Denis!" exclaimed Mr. Scogan. "What about?"

Denis felt rather uncomfortable. "Oh, about the usual things, you know."

"Of course," Mr. Scogan groaned. "I'll describe the plot for you. Little Percy, the hero, was never good at games, but he was always clever. He passes through the usual public school and the usual university and comes to London, where he lives among the artists. He is bowed down with melancholy thought; he carries the whole weight of the

universe upon his shoulders. He writes a novel of dazzling brilliance; he dabbles delicately in Amour and disappears, at the end of the book, into the luminous Future."

Denis blushed scarlet. Mr. Scogan had described the plan of his novel with an accuracy that was appalling. He made an effort to laugh. "You're entirely wrong," he said. "My novel is not in the least like that." It was a heroic lie. Luckily, he reflected, only two chapters were written. He would tear them up that very evening when he unpacked.

Mr. Scogan paid no attention to his denial, but went on: "Why will you young men continue to write about things that are so entirely uninteresting as the mentality of adolescents and artists? Professional anthropologists might find it interesting to turn sometimes from the beliefs of the Blackfellow to the philosophical preoccupations of the undergraduate. But you can't expect an ordinary adult man, like myself, to be much moved by the story of his spiritual troubles. And after all, even in England, even in Germany and Russia, there are more adults than adolescents. As for the artist, he is preoccupied with problems that are so utterly unlike those of the ordinary adult man—problems of pure æsthetics

which don't so much as present themselves to people like myself—that a description of his mental processes is as boring to the ordinary reader as a piece of pure mathematics. A serious book about artists regarded as artists is unreadable; and a book about artists regarded as lovers, husbands, dipsomaniacs, heroes, and the like is really not worth writing again. Jean-Christophe is the stock artist of literature, just as Professor Radium of *Comic Cuts* is its stock man of science."

"I'm sorry to hear I'm as uninteresting as all that," said Gombauld.

"Not at all, my dear Gombauld," Mr. Scogan hastened to explain. "As a lover or a dipsomaniac, I've no doubt of your being a most fascinating specimen. But as a combiner of forms, you must honestly admit it, you're a bore."

"I entirely disagree with you," exclaimed Mary. She was somehow always out of breath when she talked, and her speech was punctuated by little gasps. "I've known a great many artists, and I've always found their mentality very interesting. Especially in Paris. Tschuplitski, for example—I saw a great deal of Tschuplitski in Paris this spring. . . ."

"Ah, but then you're an exception, Mary,

you're an exception," said Mr. Scogan.
"You are a *femme supérieure*."

A flush of pleasure turned Mary's face into a harvest moon.

CHAPTER IV

DENIS woke up next morning to find the sun shining, the sky serene. He decided to wear white flannel trousers—white flannel trousers and a black jacket, with a silk shirt and his new peach-coloured tie. And what shoes? White was the obvious choice, but there was something rather pleasing about the notion of black patent leather. He lay in bed for several minutes considering the problem.

Before he went down—patent leather was his final choice—he looked at himself critically in the glass. His hair might have been more golden, he reflected. As it was, its yellowness had the hint of a greenish tinge in it. But his forehead was good. His forehead made up in height what his chin lacked in prominence. His nose might have been longer, but it would pass. His eyes might have been blue and not green. But his coat was very well cut and, discreetly padded, made him seem robuster than he actually was. His legs, in their white casing, were long and elegant. Satisfied, he descended

the stairs. Most of the party had already finished their breakfast. He found himself alone with Jenny.

"I hope you slept well," he said.

"Yes, isn't it lovely?" Jenny replied, giving two rapid little nods. "But we had such awful thunderstorms last week."

Parallel straight lines, Denis reflected, meet only at infinity. He might talk for ever of care-charmer sleep and she of meteorology till the end of time. Did one ever establish contact with anyone? We are all parallel straight lines. Jenny was only a little more parallel than most.

"They are very alarming, these thunderstorms," he said, helping himself to porridge. "Don't you think so? Or are you above being frightened?"

"No. I always go to bed in a storm. One is so much safer lying down."

"Why?"

"Because," said Jenny, making a descriptive gesture, "because lightning goes downwards and not flat ways. When you're lying down you're out of the current."

"That's very ingenious."

"It's true."

There was a silence. Denis finished his porridge and helped himself to bacon. For lack of anything better to say, and because

Mr. Scogan's absurd phrase was for some reason running in his head, he turned to Jenny and asked:

"Do you consider yourself a *femme supérieure?*" He had to repeat the question several times before Jenny got the hang of it.

"No," she said, rather indignantly, when at last she heard what Denis was saying. "Certainly not. Has anyone been suggesting that I am?"

"No," said Denis. "Mr. Scogan told Mary she was one."

"Did he?" Jenny lowered her voice. "Shall I tell you what I think of that man? I think he's slightly sinister."

Having made this pronouncement, she entered the ivory tower of her deafness and closed the door. Denis could not induce her to say anything more, could not induce her even to listen. She just smiled at him, smiled and occasionally nodded.

Denis went out on to the terrace to smoke his after-breakfast pipe and to read his morning paper. An hour later, when Anne came down, she found him still reading. By this time he had got to the Court Circular and the Forthcoming Weddings. He got up to meet her as she approached, a Hamadryad in white muslin, across the grass.

“Why, Denis,” she exclaimed, “you look perfectly sweet in your white trousers.”

Denis was dreadfully taken aback. There was no possible retort. “You speak as though I were a child in a new frock,” he said, with a show of irritation.

“But that’s how I feel about you, Denis dear.”

“Then you oughtn’t to.”

“But I can’t help it. I’m so much older than you.”

“I like that,” he said. “Four years older.”

“And if you do look perfectly sweet in your white trousers, why shouldn’t I say so? And why did you put them on, if you didn’t think you were going to look sweet in them?”

“Let’s go into the garden,” said Denis. He was put out; the conversation had taken such a preposterous and unexpected turn. He had planned a very different opening, in which he was to lead off with, “You look adorable this morning,” or something of the kind, and she was to answer, “Do I?” and then there was to be a pregnant silence. And now she had got in first with the trousers. It was provoking; his pride was hurt.

That part of the garden that sloped down from the foot of the terrace to the pool had a beauty which did not depend on colour so much as on forms. It was as beautiful by moonlight as in the sun. The silver of water, the dark shapes of yew and ilex trees remained, at all hours and seasons, the dominant features of the scene. It was a landscape in black and white. For colour there was the flower-garden; it lay to one side of the pool, separated from it by a huge Babylonian wall of yews. You passed through a tunnel in the hedge, you opened a wicket in a wall, and you found yourself, startlingly and suddenly, in the world of colour. The July borders blazed and flared under the sun. Within its high brick walls the garden was like a great tank of warmth and perfume and colour.

Denis held open the little iron gate for his companion. "It's like passing from a cloister into an Oriental palace," he said, and took a deep breath of the warm, flower-scented air. "In fragrant volleys they let fly . . .' How does it go?"

"Well shot, ye firemen! O how sweet
And round your equal fires do meet;
Whose shrill report no ear can tell,
But echoes to the eye and smell . . ."

"You have a bad habit of quoting," said Anne. "As I never know the context or author, I find it humiliating."

Denis apologized. "It's the fault of one's education. Things somehow seem more real and vivid when one can apply somebody else's ready-made phrase about them. And then there are lots of lovely names and words—Monophysite, Iamblichus, Pomponazzi; you bring them out triumphantly, and feel you've clinched the argument with the mere magical sound of them. That's what comes of the higher education."

"You may regret your education," said Anne; "I'm ashamed of my lack of it. Look at those sunflowers! Aren't they magnificent?"

"Dark faces and golden crowns—they're kings in Ethiopia. And I like the way the tits cling to the flowers and pick out the seeds, while the other loutish birds, grubbing dirtily for their food, look up in envy from the ground. Do they look up in envy? That's the literary touch, I'm afraid. Education again. It always comes back to that." He was silent.

Anne had sat down on a bench that stood in the shade of an old apple tree. "I'm listening," she said.

He did not sit down, but walked backwards and forwards in front of the bench, gesticulating a little as he talked. "Books," he said—"books. One reads so many, and one sees so few people and so little of the world. Great thick books about the universe and the mind and ethics. You've no idea how many there are. I must have read twenty or thirty tons of them in the last five years. Twenty tons of ratiocination. Weighted with that, one's pushed out into the world."

He went on walking up and down. His voice rose, fell, was silent a moment, and then talked on. He moved his hands, sometimes he waved his arms. Anne looked and listened quietly, as though she were at a lecture. He was a nice boy, and to-day he looked charming—charming!

One entered the world, Denis pursued, having ready-made ideas about everything. One had a philosophy and tried to make life fit into it. One should have lived first and then made one's philosophy to fit life. . . . Life, facts, things were horribly complicated; ideas, even the most difficult of them, deceptively simple. In the world of ideas everything was clear; in life all was obscure, embroiled. Was it surprising that one was miserable; horribly unhappy? Denis came

to a halt in front of the bench, and as he asked this last question he stretched out his arms and stood for an instant in an attitude of crucifixion, then let them fall again to his sides.

"My poor Denis!" Anne was touched. He was really too pathetic as he stood there in front of her in his white flannel trousers. "But does one suffer about these things? It seems very extraordinary."

"You're like Scogan," cried Denis bitterly. "You regard me as a specimen for an anthropologist. Well, I suppose I am."

"No, no," she protested, and drew in her skirt with a gesture that indicated that he was to sit down beside her. He sat down. "Why can't you just take things for granted and as they come?" she asked. "It's so much simpler."

"Of course it is," said Denis. "But it's a lesson to be learnt gradually. There are the twenty tons of ratiocination to be got rid of first."

"I've always taken things as they come," said Anne. "It seems so obvious. One enjoys the pleasant things, avoids the nasty ones. There's nothing more to be said."

"Nothing—for you. But, then, you were born a pagan; I am trying laboriously to make myself one. I can take nothing for

granted, I can enjoy nothing as it comes along. Beauty, pleasure, art, women—I have to invent an excuse, a justification for everything that's delightful. Otherwise I can't enjoy it with an easy conscience. I make up a little story about beauty and pretend that it has something to do with truth and goodness. I have to say that art is the process by which one reconstructs the divine reality out of chaos. Pleasure is one of the mystical roads to union with the infinite—the ecstasies of drinking, dancing, love-making. As for women, I am perpetually assuring myself that they're the broad highway to divinity. And to think that I'm only just beginning to see through the silliness of the whole thing! It's incredible to me that anyone should have escaped these horrors."

"It's still more incredible to me," said Anne, "that anyone should have been a victim to them. I should like to see myself believing that men are the highway to divinity." The amused malice of her smile planted two little folds on either side of her mouth, and through their half-closed lids her eyes shone with laughter. "What you need, Denis, is a nice plump young wife, a fixed income, and a little congenial but regular work."

“What I need is you.” That was what he ought to have retorted, that was what he wanted passionately to say. He could not say it. His desire fought against his shyness. “What I need is you.” Mentally he shouted the words, but not a sound issued from his lips. He looked at her despairingly. Couldn’t she see what was going on inside him? Couldn’t she understand? “What I need is you.” He would say it, he would—he would.

“I think I shall go and bathe,” said Anne. “It’s so hot.” The opportunity had passed.

CHAPTER V

MR. WIMBUSH had taken them to see the sights of the Home Farm, and now they were standing, all six of them—Henry Wimbush, Mr. Scogan, Denis, Gombauld, Anne, and Mary—by the low wall of the piggery, looking into one of the styes.

“This is a good sow,” said Henry Wimbush. “She had a litter of fourteen.”

“Fourteen?” Mary echoed incredulously. She turned astonished blue eyes towards Mr. Wimbush, then let them fall on to the seething mass of *élan vital* that fermented in the sty.

An immense sow reposed on her side in the middle of the pen. Her round, black belly, fringed with a double line of dugs, presented itself to the assault of an army of small, brownish-black swine. With a frantic greed they tugged at their mother’s flank. The old sow stirred sometimes uneasily or uttered a little grunt of pain. One small pig, the runt, the weakling of the litter, had been unable to secure a place at the banquet. Squealing shrilly, he ran backwards and forwards, trying to push in among his stronger

brothers or even to climb over their tight little black backs towards the maternal reservoir.

"There *are* fourteen," said Mary. "You're quite right. I counted. It's extraordinary."

"The sow next door," Mr. Wimbush went on, "has done very badly. She only had five in her litter. I shall give her another chance. If she does no better next time, I shall fat her up and kill her. There's the boar," he pointed towards a farther sty. "Fine old beast, isn't he? But he's getting past his prime. He'll have to go too."

"How cruel!" Anne exclaimed.

"But how practical, how eminently realistic!" said Mr. Scogan. "In this farm we have a model of sound paternal government. Make them breed, make them work, and when they're past working or breeding or begetting, slaughter them."

"Farming seems to be mostly indecency and cruelty," said Anne.

With the ferrule of his walking-stick Denis began to scratch the boar's long bristly back. The animal moved a little so as to bring himself within easier range of the instrument that evoked in him such delicious sensations; then he stood stock still, softly grunting his contentment. The mud of

years flaked off his sides in a grey powdery scurf.

"What a pleasure it is," said Denis, "to do somebody a kindness. I believe I enjoy scratching this pig quite as much as he enjoys being scratched. If only one could always be kind with so little expense or trouble. . . ."

A gate slammed; there was a sound of heavy footsteps.

"Morning, Rowley!" said Henry Wimbush.

"Morning, sir," old Rowley answered. He was the most venerable of the labourers on the farm—a tall, solid man, still unbent, with grey side-whiskers and a steep, dignified profile. Grave, weighty in his manner, splendidly respectable, Rowley had the air of a great English statesman of the mid-nineteenth century. He halted on the outskirts of the group, and for a moment they all looked at the pigs in a silence that was only broken by the sound of grunting or the squelch of a sharp hoof in the mire. Rowley turned at last, slowly and ponderously and nobly, as he did everything, and addressed himself to Henry Wimbush.

"Look at them, sir," he said, with a motion of his hand towards the wallowing swine. "Rightly is they called pigs."

“Rightly indeed,” Mr. Wimbush agreed.

“I am abashed by that man,” said Mr. Scogan, as old Rowley plodded off slowly and with dignity. “What wisdom, what judgment, what a sense of values! ‘Rightly are they called swine.’ Yes. And I wish I could, with as much justice, say, ‘Rightly are we called men.’”

They walked on towards the cowsheds and the stables of the cart-horses. Five white geese, taking the air this fine morning, even as they were doing, met them in the way. They hesitated, cackled; then, converting their lifted necks into rigid, horizontal snakes, they rushed off in disorder, hissing horribly as they went. Red calves paddled in the dung and mud of a spacious yard. In another enclosure stood the bull, massive as a locomotive. He was a very calm bull, and his face wore an expression of melancholy stupidity. He gazed with reddish-brown eyes at his visitors, chewed thoughtfully at the tangible memories of an earlier meal, swallowed and regurgitated, chewed again. His tail lashed savagely from side to side; it seemed to have nothing to do with his impassive bulk. Between his short horns was a triangle of red curls, short and dense.

“Splendid animal,” said Henry Wim-

bush. "Pedigree stock. But he's getting a little old, like the boar."

"Fat him up and slaughter him," Mr. Scogan pronounced, with a delicate old-maidish precision of utterance.

"Couldn't you give the animals a little holiday from producing children?" asked Anne. "I'm so sorry for the poor things."

Mr. Wimbush shook his head. "Personally," he said, "I rather like seeing fourteen pigs grow where only one grew before. The spectacle of so much crude life is refreshing."

"I'm glad to hear you say so," Gombauld broke in warmly. "Lots of life: that's what we want. I like pullulation; everything ought to increase and multiply as hard as it can."

Gombauld grew lyrical. Everybody ought to have children—Anne ought to have them, Mary ought to have them—dozens and dozens. He emphasised his point by thumping with his walking-stick on the bull's leather flanks. Mr. Scogan ought to pass on his intelligence to little Scogans, and Denis to little Denises. The bull turned his head to see what was happening, regarded the drumming stick for several seconds, then turned back again satisfied, it seemed, that nothing was happening. Sterility was

odious, unnatural, a sin against life. Life, life, and still more life. The ribs of the placid bull resounded.

Standing with his back against the farm-yard pump, a little apart, Denis examined the group. Gombauld, passionate and vivacious, was its centre. The others stood round, listening—Henry Wimbush, calm and polite beneath his grey bowler; Mary, with parted lips and eyes that shone with the indignation of a convinced birth-controller. Anne looked on through half-shut eyes, smiling; and beside her stood Mr. Scogan, bolt upright in an attitude of metallic rigidity that contrasted strangely with that fluid grace of hers which even in stillness suggested a soft movement.

Gombauld ceased talking, and Mary, flushed and outraged, opened her mouth to refute him. But she was too slow. Before she could utter a word Mr. Scogan's fluty voice had pronounced the opening phrases of a discourse. There was no hope of getting so much as a word in edgeways; Mary had perforce to resign herself.

"Even your eloquence, my dear Gombauld," he was saying—"even your eloquence must prove inadequate to reconvert the world to a belief in the delights of mere multiplication. With the gramophone, the

cinema, and the automatic pistol, the goddess of Applied Science has presented the world with another gift, more precious even than these—the means of dissociating love from propagation. Eros, for those who wish it, is now an entirely free god; his deplorable associations with Lucina may be broken at will. In the course of the next few centuries, who knows? the world may see a more complete severance. I look forward to it optimistically. Where the great Erasmus Darwin and Miss Anna Seward, Swan of Lichfield, experimented—and, for all their scientific ardour, failed—our descendants will experiment and succeed. An impersonal generation will take the place of Nature's hideous system. In vast state incubators, rows upon rows of gravid bottles will supply the world with the population it requires. The family system will disappear; society, sapped at its very base, will have to find new foundations; and Eros, beautifully and irresponsibly free, will flit like a gay butterfly from flower to flower through a sunlit world."

"It sounds lovely," said Anne.

"The distant future always does."

Mary's china blue eyes, more serious and more astonished than ever, were fixed on Mr. Scogan. "Bottles?" she said. "Do you really think so? Bottles. . . ."

CHAPTER VI

MR. BARBECUE-SMITH arrived in time for tea on Saturday afternoon. He was a short and corpulent man, with a very large head and no neck. In his earlier middle age he had been distressed by this absence of neck, but was comforted by reading in Balzac's *Louis Lambert* that all the world's great men have been marked by the same peculiarity, and for a simple and obvious reason: Greatness is nothing more nor less than the harmonious functioning of the faculties of the head and heart; the shorter the neck, the more closely these two organs approach one another; *argal* . . . It was convincing.

Mr. Barbecue-Smith belonged to the old school of journalists. He sported a leonine head with a greyish-black mane of oddly unappetising hair brushed back from a broad but low forehead. And somehow he always seemed slightly, ever so slightly, soiled. In younger days he had gaily called himself a ~~Behemoth~~. He did so no longer. He was a teacher now, a kind of prophet.

Some of his books of comfort and spiritual teaching were in their hundred and twentieth thousand.

Priscilla received him with every mark of esteem. He had never been to Crome before; she showed him round the house. Mr. Barbecue-Smith was full of admiration.

"So quaint, so old-world," he kept repeating. He had a rich, rather unctuous voice.

Priscilla praised his latest book. "Splendid, I thought it was," she said in her large, jolly way.

"I'm happy to think you found it a comfort," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith.

"Oh, tremendously! And the bit about the Lotus Pool—I thought that so beautiful."

"I knew you would like that. It came to me, you know, from without." He waved his hand to indicate the astral world.

They went out into the garden for tea. Mr. Barbecue-Smith was duly introduced.

"Mr. Stone is a writer too," said Priscilla, as she introduced Denis.

"Indeed!" Mr. Barbecue-Smith smiled benignly, and, looking up at Denis with an expression of Olympian condescension. "And what sort of things do you write?"

Denis was furious, and, to make matters

worse, he felt himself blushing hotly. Had Priscilla no sense of proportion? She was putting them in the same category—Barbecue-Smith and himself. They were both writers, they both used pen and ink. To Mr. Barbecue-Smith's question he answered, "Oh, nothing much, nothing," and looked away.

"Mr. Stone is one of our younger poets." It was Anne's voice. He scowled at her, and she smiled back exasperatingly.

"Excellent, excellent," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith, and he squeezed Denis's arm encouragingly. "The Bard's is a noble calling."

As soon as tea was over Mr. Barbecue-Smith excused himself; he had to do some writing before dinner. Priscilla quite understood. The prophet retired to his chamber.

Mr. Barbecue-Smith came down to the drawing-room at ten to eight. He was in a good humour, and, as he descended the stairs, he smiled to himself and rubbed his large white hands together. In the drawing-room someone was playing softly and ramblingly on the piano. He wondered who it could be. One of the young ladies, perhaps. But no, it was only Denis, who got up hurriedly and with some embarrassment as he came into the room.

"Do go on, do go on," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. "I am very fond of music."

"Then I couldn't possibly go on," Denis replied. "I only make noises."

There was a silence. Mr. Barbecue-Smith stood with his back to the hearth, warming himself at the memory of last winter's fires. He could not control his interior satisfaction, but still went on smiling to himself. At last he turned to Denis.

"You write," he asked, "don't you?"

"Well, yes—a little, you know."

"How many words do you find you can write in an hour?"

"I don't think I've ever counted."

"Oh, you ought to, you ought to. It's most important."

Denis exercised his memory. "When I'm in good form," he said, "I fancy I do a twelve-hundred-word review in about four hours. But sometimes it takes me much longer."

Mr. Barbecue-Smith nodded. "Yes, three hundred words an hour at your best." He walked out into the middle of the room, turned round on his heels, and confronted Denis again. "Guess how many words I wrote this evening between five and half-past seven."

"I can't imagine."

"No, but you must guess. Between five and half-past seven—that's two and a half hours."

"Twelve hundred words," Denis hazarded.

"No, no, no." Mr. Barbecue-Smith's expanded face shone with gaiety. "Try again."

"Fifteen hundred."

"No."

"I give it up," said Denis. He found he couldn't summon up much interest in Mr. Barbecue-Smith's writing.

"Well, I'll tell you. Three thousand eight hundred."

Denis opened his eyes. "You must get a lot done in a day," he said.

Mr. Barbecue-Smith suddenly became extremely confidential. He pulled up a stool to the side of Denis's arm-chair, sat down in it, and began to talk softly and rapidly.

"Listen to me," he said, laying his hand on Denis's sleeve. "You want to make your living by writing; you're young, you're inexperienced. Let me give you a little sound advice."

What was the fellow going to do? Denis wondered: give him an introduction to the editor of *John o' London's Weekly*, or tell

him where he could sell a light middle for seven guineas? Mr. Barbecue-Smith patted his arm several times and went on.

"The secret of writing," he said, breathing it into the young man's ear—"the secret of writing is Inspiration."

Denis looked at him in astonishment.

"Inspiration . . ." Mr. Barbecue-Smith repeated.

"You mean the native wood-note business?"

Mr. Barbecue-Smith nodded.

"Oh, then I entirely agree with you," said Denis. "But what if one hasn't got Inspiration?"

"That was precisely the question I was waiting for," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. "You ask me what one should do if one hasn't got Inspiration. I answer: you have Inspiration; everyone has Inspiration. It's simply a question of getting it to function."

The clock struck eight. There was no sign of any of the other guests; everybody was always late at Crome. Mr. Barbecue-Smith went on.

"That's my secret," he said. "I give it you freely." (Denis made a suitably grateful murmur and grimace.) "I'll help you to find your Inspiration, because I don't like to see a nice, steady young man like you ex-

hausting his vitality and wasting the best years of his life in a grinding intellectual labour that could be completely obviated by Inspiration. I did it myself, so I know what it's like. Up till the time I was thirty-eight I was a writer like you—a writer without Inspiration. All I wrote I squeezed out of myself by sheer hard work. Why, in those days I was never able to do more than sixty words an hour, and what's more, I often didn't sell what I wrote." He sighed. "We artists," he said parenthetically, "we intellectuals aren't much appreciated here in England." Denis wondered if there was any method, consistent, of course, with politeness, by which he could dissociate himself from Mr. Barbecue-Smith's "we." There was none; and besides, it was too late now, for Mr. Barbecue-Smith was once more pursuing the tenor of his discourse.

"At thirty-eight I was a poor, struggling, tired, overworked, unknown journalist. Now, at fifty . . ." He paused modestly and made a little gesture, moving his fat hands outwards, away from one another, and expanding his fingers as though in demonstration. He was exhibiting himself. Denis thought of that advertisement of Nestlé's milk—the two cats on the wall, under the moon, one black and thin, the

other white, sleek, and fat. Before Inspiration and after.

"Inspiration has made the difference," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith solemnly. "It came quite suddenly—like a gentle dew from heaven." He lifted his hand and let it fall back on to his knee to indicate the descent of the dew. "It was one evening. I was writing my first little book about the Conduct of Life—*Humble Heroisms*. You may have read it; it has been a comfort—at least I hope and think so—a comfort to many thousands. I was in the middle of the second chapter, and I was stuck. Fatigue, overwork—I had only written a hundred words in the last hour, and I could get no further. I sat biting the end of my pen and looking at the electric light, which hung above my table, a little above and in front of me." He indicated the position of the lamp with elaborate care. "Have you ever looked at a bright light intently for a long time?" he asked, turning to Denis. Denis didn't think he had. "You can hypnotise yourself that way," Mr. Barbecue-Smith went on.

The gong sounded in a terrific crescendo from the hall. Still no sign of the others. Denis was horribly hungry.

"That's what happened to me," said Mr.

Barbecue-Smith. "I was hypnotised. I lost consciousness like that." He snapped his fingers. "When I came to, I found that it was past midnight, and I had written four thousand words. Four thousand," he repeated, opening his mouth very wide on the *ou* of thousand. "Inspiration had come to me."

"What a very extraordinary thing," said Denis.

"I was afraid of it at first. It didn't seem to me natural. I didn't feel, somehow, that it was quite right, quite fair, I might almost say, to produce a literary composition unconsciously. Besides, I was afraid I might have written nonsense."

"And had you written nonsense?" Denis asked.

"Certainly not," Mr. Barbecue-Smith replied, with a trace of annoyance. "Certainly not. It was admirable. Just a few spelling mistakes and slips, such as there generally are in automatic writing. But the style, the thought—all the essentials were admirable. After that, Inspiration came to me regularly. I wrote the whole of *Humble Heroisms* like that. It was a great success, and so has everything been that I have written since." He leaned forward and jabbed at Denis with his finger. "That's my secret,"

he said, "and that's how you could write too, if you tried—without effort, fluently, well."

"But how?" asked Denis, trying not to show how deeply he had been insulted by that final "well."

"By cultivating your Inspiration, by getting into touch with your Subconscious. Have you ever read my little book, *Pipe-Lines to the Infinite?*"

Denis had to confess that that was, precisely, one of the few, perhaps the only one, of Mr. Barbecue-Smith's works he had not read.

"Never mind, never mind," said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. "It's just a little book about the connection of the Subconscious with the Infinite. Get into touch with the Subconscious and you are in touch with the Universe. Inspiration, in fact. You follow me?"

"Perfectly, perfectly," said Denis. "But don't you find that the Universe sometimes sends you very irrelevant messages?"

"I don't allow it to," Mr. Barbecue-Smith replied. "I canalise it. I bring it down through pipes to work the turbines of my conscious mind."

"Like Niagara," Denis suggested. Some of Mr. Barbecue-Smith's remarks sounded

strangely like quotations—quotations from his own works, no doubt.

“Precisely. Like Niagara. And this is how I do it.” He leaned forward, and with a raised forefinger marked his points as he made them, beating time, as it were, to his discourse. “Before I go off into my trance, I concentrate on the subject I wish to be inspired about. Let us say I am writing about the humble heroisms; for ten minutes before I go into the trance I think of nothing but orphans supporting their little brothers and sisters, of dull work well and patiently done, and I focus my mind on such great philosophical truths as the purification and uplifting of the soul by suffering, and the alchemical transformation of leaden evil into golden good.” (Denis again hung up his little festoon of quotation marks.) “Then I pop off. Two or three hours later I wake up again, and find that inspiration has done its work. Thousands of words, comforting, uplifting words, lie before me. I type them out neatly on my machine and they are ready for the printer.”

“It all sounds wonderfully simple,” said Denis.

“It is. All the great and splendid and divine things of life are wonderfully simple.” (Quotation marks again.) “When

I have to do my aphorisms," Mr. Barbecue-Smith continued, "I prelude my trance by turning over the pages of any Dictionary of Quotations or Shakespeare Calendar that comes to hand. That sets the key, so to speak; that ensures that the Universe shall come flowing in, not in a continuous rush, but in aphorismic drops. You see the idea?"

Denis nodded. Mr. Barbecue-Smith put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a notebook. "I did a few in the train to-day," he said, turning over the pages. "Just dropped off into a trance in the corner of my carriage. I find the train very conducive to good work. Here they are." He cleared his throat and read:

"The Mountain Road may be steep, but the air is pure up there, and it is from the Summit that one gets the view."

"The Things that Really Matter happen in the Heart."

It was curious, Denis reflected, the way the Infinite sometimes repeated itself.

"Seeing is Believing. Yes, but Believing is also Seeing. If I believe in God, I see God, even in the things that seem to be evil."

Mr. Barbecue-Smith looked up from his notebook. "That last one," he said, "is particularly subtle and beautiful, don't you

think? Without Inspiration I could never have hit on that." He re-read the apophthegm with a slower and more solemn utterance. "Straight from the Infinite," he commented reflectively, then addressed himself to the next aphorism.

"The flame of a candle gives Light, but it also Burns."

Puzzled wrinkles appeared on Mr. Barbecue-Smith's forehead. "I don't exactly know what that means," he said. "It's very gnomic. One could apply it, of course, to the Higher Education—illuminating, but provoking the Lower Classes to discontent and revolution. Yes, I suppose that's what it is. But it's gnomic, it's gnomic." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. The gong sounded again, clamorously, it seemed imploringly: dinner was growing cold. It roused Mr. Barbecue-Smith from meditation. He turned to Denis.

"You understand me now when I advise you to cultivate your Inspiration. Let your Subconscious work for you; turn on the Niagara of the Infinite."

There was the sound of feet on the stairs. Mr. Barbecue-Smith got up, laid his hand for an instant on Denis's shoulder, and said:

"No more now. Another time. And remember, I rely absolutely on your discretion

in this matter. There are intimate, sacred things that one doesn't wish to be generally known."

"Of course," said Denis. "I quite understand."

CHAPTER VII

AT Crome all the beds were ancient hereditary pieces of furniture. Huge beds, like four-masted ships, with furled sails of shining coloured stuff. Beds carved and inlaid, beds painted and gilded. Beds of walnut and oak, of rare exotic woods. Beds of every date and fashion from the time of Sir Ferdinando, who built the house, to the time of his namesake in the late eighteenth century, the last of the family, but all of them grandiose, magnificent.

The finest of all was now Anne's bed. Sir Julius, son to Sir Ferdinando, had had it made in Venice against his wife's first lying-in. Early *seicento* Venice had expended all its extravagant art in the making of it. The body of the bed was like a great square sarcophagus. Clustering roses were carved in high relief on its wooden panels, and luscious *putti* wallowed among the roses. On the black ground-work of the panels the carved reliefs were gilded and burnished. The golden roses twined in spirals up the four pillar-like posts, and cherubs, seated at

the top of each column, supported a wooden canopy fretted with the same carved flowers.

Anne was reading in bed. Two candles stood on the little table beside her. In their rich light her face, her bare arm and shoulder took on warm hues and a sort of peach-like quality of surface. Here and there in the canopy above her carved golden petals shone brightly among profound shadows, and the soft light, falling on the sculptured panel of the bed, broke restlessly among the intricate roses, lingered in a broad caress on the blown cheeks, the dimpled bellies, the tight, absurd little posteriors of the sprawling *putti*.

There was a discreet tap at the door. She looked up. "Come in, come in." A face, round and childish within its sleek bell of golden hair, peered round the opening door. More childish-looking still, a suit of mauve pyjamas made its entrance.

It was Mary. "I thought I'd just look in for a moment to say good-night," she said, and sat down on the edge of the bed.

Anne closed her book. "That was very sweet of you."

"What are you reading?" She looked at the book. "Rather second-rate, isn't it?" The tone in which Mary pronounced the word "second-rate" implied an almost in-

finite denigration. She was accustomed in London to associate only with first-rate people who liked first-rate things, and she knew that there were very, very few first-rate things in the world, and that those were mostly French.

"Well, I'm afraid I like it," said Anne. There was nothing more to be said. The silence that followed was a rather uncomfortable one. Mary fiddled uneasily with the bottom button of her pyjama jacket. Leaning back on her mound of heaped-up pillows, Anne waited and wondered what was coming.

"I'm so awfully afraid of repressions," said Mary at last, bursting suddenly and surprisingly into speech. She pronounced the words on the tail-end of an expiring breath, and had to gasp for new air almost before the phrase was finished.

"What's there to be depressed about?"

"I said repressions, not depressions."

"Oh, repressions; I see," said Anne. "But repressions of what?"

Mary had to explain. "The natural instincts of sex . . ." she began didactically. But Anne cut her short.

"Yes, yes. Perfectly. I understand. Repressions! old maids and all the rest. But what about them?"

"That's just it," said Mary. "I'm afraid of them. It's always dangerous to repress one's instincts. I'm beginning to detect in myself symptoms like the ones you read of in the books. I constantly dream that I'm falling down wells; and sometimes I even dream that I'm climbing up ladders. It's most disquieting. The symptoms are only too clear."

"Are they?"

"One may become a nymphomaniac if one's not careful. You've no idea how serious these repressions are if you don't get rid of them in time."

"It sounds too awful," said Anne. "But I don't see that I can do anything to help you."

"I thought I'd just like to talk it over with you."

"Why, of course; I'm only too happy, Mary darling."

Mary coughed and drew a deep breath. "I presume," she began sententiously, "I presume we may take for granted that an intelligent young woman of twenty-three who has lived in civilised society in the twentieth century has no prejudices."

"Well, I confess I still have a few."

"But not about repressions."

"No, not many about repressions; that's true."

"Or, rather, about getting rid of repressions."

"Exactly."

"So much for our fundamental postulate," said Mary. Solemnity was expressed in every feature of her round young face, radiated from her large blue eyes. "We come next to the desirability of possessing experience. I hope we are agreed that knowledge is desirable and that ignorance is undesirable."

Obedient as one of those complaisant disciples from whom Socrates could get whatever answer he chose, Anne gave her assent to this proposition.

"And we are equally agreed, I hope, that marriage is what it is."

"It is."

"Good!" said Mary. "And repressions being what they are . . ."

"Exactly."

"There would therefore seem to be only one conclusion."

"But I knew that," Anne exclaimed, "before you began."

"Yes, but now it's been proved," said Mary. "One must do things logically. The question is now . . ."

"But where does the question come in? You've reached your only possible conclusion—logically, which is more than I could have done. All that remains is to impart the information to someone you like—someone you like really rather a lot, someone you're in love with, if I may express myself so baldly."

"But that's just where the question comes in," Mary exclaimed. "I'm not in love with anybody."

"Then, if I were you, I should wait till you are."

"But I can't go on dreaming night after night that I'm falling down a well. It's too dangerous."

"Well, if it really is *too* dangerous, then of course you must do something about it; you must find somebody else."

"But who?" A thoughtful frown puckered Mary's brow. "It must be somebody intelligent, somebody with intellectual interests that I can share. And it must be somebody with a proper respect for women, somebody who's prepared to talk seriously about his work and his ideas and about my work and my ideas. It isn't, as you see, at all easy to find the right person."

"Well," said Anne, "there are three unattached and intelligent men in the house at

the present time. There's Mr. Scogan, to begin with; but perhaps he's rather too much of a genuine antique. And there are Gombauld and Denis. Shall we say that the choice is limited to the last two?"

Mary nodded. "I think we had better," she said, and then hesitated, with a certain air of embarrassment.

"What is it?"

"I was wondering," said Mary, with a gasp, "whether they really were unattached. I thought that perhaps you might . . . you might . . ."

"It was very nice of you to think of me, Mary darling," said Anne, smiling the tight cat's smile. "But as far as I'm concerned, they are both entirely unattached."

"I'm very glad of that," said Mary, looking relieved. "We are now confronted with the question: Which of the two?"

"I can give no advice. It's a matter for your taste."

"It's not a matter of my taste," Mary pronounced, "but of their merits. We must weigh them and consider them carefully and dispassionately."

"You must do the weighing yourself," said Anne; there was still the trace of a smile at the corners of her mouth and round

the half-closed eyes. "I won't run the risk of advising you wrongly."

"Gombauld has more talent," Mary began, "but he is less civilised than Denis." Mary's pronunciation of "civilised" gave the word a special and additional significance. She uttered it meticulously, in the very front of her mouth, hissing delicately on the opening sibilant. So few people were civilised, and they, like the first-rate works of art, were mostly French. "Civilisation is most important, don't you think?"

Anne held up her hand. "I won't advise," she said. "You must make the decision."

"Gombauld's family," Mary went on reflectively, "comes from Marseilles. Rather a dangerous heredity, when one thinks of the Latin attitude towards women. But then, I sometimes wonder whether Denis is altogether serious-minded, whether he isn't rather a dilettante. It's very difficult. What do you think?"

"I'm not listening," said Anne. "I refuse to take any responsibility."

Mary sighed. "Well," she said, "I think I had better go to bed and think about it."

"Carefully and dispassionately," said Anne.

At the door Mary turned round. "Good-

night," she said, and wondered as she said the words why Anne was smiling in that curious way. It was probably nothing, she reflected. Anne often smiled for no apparent reason; it was probably just a habit. "I hope I shan't dream of falling down wells again to-night," she added.

"Ladders are worse," said Anne.

Mary nodded. "Yes, ladders are much graver."

CHAPTER VIII

BREAKFAST on Sunday morning was an hour later than on week-days, and Priscilla, who usually made no public appearance before luncheon, honoured it by her presence. Dressed in black silk, with a ruby cross as well as her customary string of pearls round her neck, she presided. An enormous Sunday paper concealed all but the extreme pinnacle of her coiffure from the outer world.

"I see Surrey has won," she said, with her mouth full, "by four wickets. The sun is in Leo: that would account for it!"

"Splendid game, cricket," remarked Mr. Barbecue-Smith heartily to no one in particular; "so thoroughly English."

Jenny, who was sitting next to him, woke up suddenly with a start. "What?" she said. "What?"

"So English," repeated Mr. Barbecue-Smith.

Jenny looked at him, surprised. "English? Of course I am."

He was beginning to explain, when Mrs.

Wimbush veiled her Sunday paper, and appeared, a square, mauve-powdered face in the midst of orange splendours. "I see there's a new series of articles on the next world just beginning," she said to Mr. Barbecue-Smith. "This one's called 'Summer Land and Gehenna.'"

"Summer Land," echoed Mr. Barbecue-Smith, closing his eyes. "Summer Land. A beautiful name. Beautiful—beautiful."

Mary had taken the seat next to Denis's. After a night of careful consideration she had decided on Denis. He might have less talent than Gombauld, he might be a little lacking in seriousness, but somehow he was safer.

"Are you writing much poetry here in the country?" she asked, with a bright gravity.

"None," said Denis curtly. "I haven't brought my typewriter."

"But do you mean to say you can't write without a typewriter?"

Denis shook his head. He hated talking at breakfast, and, besides, he wanted to hear what Mr. Scogan was saying at the other end of the table.

". . . My scheme for dealing with the Church," Mr. Scogan was saying, "is beautifully simple. At the present time the Anglican clergy wear their collars the wrong

way round. I would compel them to wear, not only their collars, but all their clothes, turned back to front—coat, waistcoat, trousers, boots—so that every clergyman should present to the world a smooth façade, unbroken by stud, button, or lace. The enforcement of such a livery would act as a wholesome deterrent to those intending to enter the Church. At the same time it would enormously enhance, what Archbishop Laud so rightly insisted on, the ‘beauty of holiness’ in the few incorrigibles who could not be deterred.”

“In hell, it seems,” said Priscilla, reading in her Sunday paper, “the children amuse themselves by flaying lambs alive.”

“Ah, but, dear lady, that’s only a symbol,” exclaimed Mr. Barbecue-Smith, “a material symbol of a h-piritual truth. Lambs signify . . .”

“Then there are military uniforms,” Mr. Scogan went on. “When scarlet and pipe-clay were abandoned for khaki, there were some who trembled for the future of war. But then, finding how elegant the new tunic was, how closely it clipped the waist, how voluptuously, with the lateral bustles of the pockets, it exaggerated the hips; when they realized the brilliant potentialities of breeches and top-boots, they were reassured.

Abolish these military elegances, standardise a uniform of sack-cloth and mackintosh, you will very soon find that . . .”

“Is anyone coming to church with me this morning?” asked Henry Wimbush. No one responded. He baited his bare invitation. “I read the lessons, you know. And there’s Mr. Bodiham. His sermons are sometimes worth hearing.”

“Thank you, thank you,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith. “I for one prefer to worship in the infinite church of Nature. How does our Shakespeare put it? ‘Sermons in books, stones in the running brooks.’” He waved his arm in a fine gesture towards the window, and even as he did so he became vaguely, but none the less insistently, none the less uncomfortably aware that something had gone wrong with the quotation. Something—what could it be? Sermons? Stones? Books?

CHAPTER IX

MR. BODIHAM was sitting in his study at the Rectory. The nineteenth-century Gothic windows, narrow and pointed, admitted the light grudgingly; in spite of the brilliant July weather, the room was sombre. Brown varnished bookshelves lined the walls, filled with row upon row of those thick, heavy theological works which the second-hand booksellers generally sell by weight. The mantelpiece, the over-mantel, a towering structure of spindly pillars and little shelves, were brown and varnished. The writing-desk was brown and varnished. So were the chairs, so was the door. A dark red-brown carpet with patterns covered the floor. Everything was brown in the room, and there was a curious brownish smell.

In the midst of this brown gloom Mr. Bodiham sat at his desk. He was the man in the Iron Mask. A grey metallic face with iron cheek-bones and a narrow iron brow; iron folds, hard and unchanging, ran perpendicularly down his cheeks; his nose was the iron beak of some thin, delicate

bird of rapine. He had brown eyes, set in sockets rimmed with iron; round them the skin was dark, as though it had been charred. Dense wiry hair covered his skull; it had been black, it was turning grey. His ears were very small and fine. His jaws, his chin, his upper lip were dark, iron-dark, where he had shaved. His voice, when he spoke and especially when he raised it in preaching, was harsh, like the grating of iron hinges when a seldom-used door is opened.

It was nearly half-past twelve. He had just come back from church, hoarse and weary with preaching. He preached with fury, with passion, an iron man beating with a flail upon the souls of his congregation. But the souls of the faithful at Crome were made of india-rubber, solid rubber; the flail rebounded. They were used to Mr. Bodigham at Crome. The flail thumped on india-rubber, and as often as not the rubber slept.

That morning he had preached, as he had often preached before, on the nature of God. He had tried to make them understand about God, what a fearful thing it was to fall into His hands. God—they thought of something soft and merciful. They blinded themselves to facts; still more, they blinded themselves to the Bible. The passengers on the *Titanic* sang "Nearer my God to

Thee" as the ship was going down. Did they realise what they were asking to be brought nearer to? A white fire of righteousness, an angry fire. . . .

When Savonarola preached, men sobbed and groaned aloud. Nothing broke the polite silence with which Crome listened to Mr. Bodiham—only an occasional cough and sometimes the sound of heavy breathing. In the front pew sat Henry Wimbush, calm, well-bred, beautifully dressed. There were times when Mr. Bodiham wanted to jump down from the pulpit and shake him into life,—times when he would have liked to beat and kill his whole congregation.

He sat at his desk dejectedly. Outside the Gothic windows the earth was warm and marvellously calm. Everything was as it had always been. And yet, and yet . . . It was nearly four years now since he had preached that sermon on Matthew xxiv. 7: "For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." It was nearly four years. He had had the sermon printed; it was so terribly, so vitally important that all the world should know what he had to say. A copy of the little pamphlet lay on his desk—eight small grey pages, printed by a fount

of type that had grown blunt, like an old dog's teeth, by the endless champing and champing of the press. He opened it and began to read it yet once again.

“For nation shall rise up against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places.’

“Nineteen centuries have elapsed since Our Lord gave utterance to those words, and not a single one of them has been without wars, plagues, famines, and earthquakes. Mighty empires have crashed in ruin to the ground, diseases have unpeopled half the globe, there have been vast natural cataclysms in which thousands have been overwhelmed by flood and fire and whirlwind. Time and again, in the course of these nineteen centuries, such things have happened, but they have not brought Christ back to earth. They were ‘signs of the times’ inasmuch as they were signs of God's wrath against the chronic wickedness of mankind, but they were not signs of the times in connection with the Second Coming.

“If earnest Christians have regarded the present war as a true sign of the Lord's approaching return, it is not merely because it happens to be a great war involving the lives of millions of people, not merely because

famine is tightening its grip on every country in Europe, not merely because disease of every kind, from syphilis to spotted fever, is rife among the warring nations; no, it is not for these reasons that we regard this war as a true Sign of the Times, but because in its origin and its progress it is marked by certain characteristics which seem to connect it almost beyond a doubt with the predictions in Christian Prophecy relating to the Second Coming of the Lord.

“Let me enumerate the features of the present war which most clearly suggest that it is a Sign foretelling the near approach of the Second Advent. Our Lord said that ‘this Gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come.’ Although it would be presumptuous for us to say what degree of evangelisation will be regarded by God as sufficient, we may at least confidently hope that a century of unflagging missionary work has brought the fulfilment of this condition at any rate near. True, the larger number of the world’s inhabitants have remained deaf to the preaching of the true religion; but that does not vitiate the fact that the Gospel *has* been preached ‘for a witness’ to all unbelievers from the Papist to the Zulu. The responsibility for the continued preva-

lence of unbelief lies, not with the preachers, but with those preached to.

“Again, it has been generally recognised that ‘the drying up of the waters of the great river Euphrates,’ mentioned in the sixteenth chapter of Revelation, refers to the decay and extinction of Turkish power, and is a sign of the near approaching end of the world as we know it. The capture of Jerusalem and the successes in Mesopotamia are great strides forward in the destruction of the Ottoman Empire; though it must be admitted that the Gallipoli episode proved that the Turk still possesses a ‘notable horn’ of strength. Historically speaking, this drying up of Ottoman power has been going on for the past century; the last two years have witnessed a great acceleration of the process, and there can be no doubt that complete desiccation is within sight.

“Closely following on the words concerning the drying up of Euphrates comes the prophecy of Armageddon, that world war with which the Second Coming is to be so closely associated. Once begun, the world war can end only with the return of Christ, and His coming will be sudden and unexpected, like that of a thief in the night.

“Let us examine the facts. In history,

exactly as in St. John's Gospel, the world war is immediately preceded by the drying up of Euphrates, or the decay of Turkish power. This fact alone would be enough to connect the present conflict with the Armageddon of Revelation and therefore to point to the near approach of the Second Advent. But further evidence of an even more solid and convincing nature can be adduced.

“Armageddon is brought about by the activities of three unclean spirits, as it were toads, which come out of the mouths of the Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet. If we can identify these three powers of evil much light will clearly be thrown on the whole question.

“The Dragon, the Beast, and the False Prophet can all be identified in history. Satan, who can only work through human agency, has used these three powers in the long war against Christ which has filled the last nineteen centuries with religious strife. The Dragon, it has been sufficiently established, is pagan Rome, and the spirit issuing from its mouth is the spirit of Infidelity. The Beast, alternatively symbolised as a Woman, is undoubtedly the Papal power, and Popery is the spirit which it spews forth. There is only one power which answers to

the description of the False Prophet, the wolf in sheep's clothing, the agent of the devil working in the guise of the Lamb, and that power is the so-called 'Society of Jesus.' The spirit that issues from the mouth of the False Prophet is the spirit of False Morality.

"We may assume, then, that the three evil spirits are Infidelity, Popery, and False Morality. Have these three influences been the real cause of the present conflict? The answer is clear.

"The spirit of Infidelity is the very spirit of German criticism. The Higher Criticism, as it is mockingly called, denies the possibility of miracles, prediction, and real inspiration, and attempts to account for the Bible as a natural development. Slowly but surely, during the last eighty years, the spirit of Infidelity has been robbing the Germans of their Bible and their faith, so that Germany is to-day a nation of unbelievers. Higher Criticism has thus made the war possible; for it would be absolutely impossible for any Christian nation to wage war as Germany is waging it.

"We come next to the spirit of Popery, whose influence in causing the war was quite as great as that of Infidelity, though not, perhaps, so immediately obvious. Since the Franco-Prussian War the Papal power has

steadily declined in France, while in Germany it has steadily increased. To-day France is an anti-papal state, while Germany possesses a powerful Roman Catholic minority. Two papally controlled states, Germany and Austria, are at war with six anti-papal states—England, France, Italy, Russia, Serbia, and Portugal. Belgium is, of course, a thoroughly papal state, and there can be little doubt that the presence on the Allies' side of an element so essentially hostile has done much to hamper the righteous cause and is responsible for our comparative ill-success. That the spirit of Popery is behind the war is thus seen clearly enough in the grouping of the opposed powers, while the rebellion in the Roman Catholic parts of Ireland has merely confirmed a conclusion already obvious to any unbiased mind.

“The spirit of False Morality has played as great a part in this war as the two other evil spirits. The Scrap of Paper incident is the nearest and most obvious example of Germany's adherence to this essentially unchristian or Jesuitical morality. The end is German world-power, and in the attainment of this end, any means are justifiable. It is the true principle of Jesuitry applied to international politics.

“The identification is now complete. As was predicted in Revelation, the three evil spirits have gone forth just as the decay of the Ottoman power was nearing completion, and have joined together to make the world war. The warning, ‘Behold, I come as a thief,’ is therefore meant for the present period—for you and me and all the world. This war will lead on inevitably to the war of Armageddon, and will only be brought to an end by the Lord’s personal return.

“And when He returns, what will happen? Those who are in Christ, St. John tells us, will be called to the Supper of the Lamb. Those who are found fighting against Him will be called to the Supper of the Great God—that grim banquet where they shall not feast, but be feasted on. ‘For,’ as St. John says, ‘I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried in a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the Great God; that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.’ All the enemies of Christ will be slain with the sword of him that sits upon the horse,

‘and all the fowls will be filled with their flesh.’ That is the Supper of the Great God.

“It may be soon or it may, as men reckon time, be long; but sooner or later, inevitably, the Lord will come and deliver the world from its present troubles. And woe unto them who are called, not to the Supper of the Lamb, but to the Supper of the Great God. They will realise then, but too late, that God is a God of Wrath as well as a God of Forgiveness. The God who sent bears to devour the mockers of Elisha, the God who smote the Egyptians for their stubborn wickedness, will assuredly smite them too, unless they make haste to repent. But perhaps it is already too late. Who knows but that to-morrow, in a moment even, Christ may be upon us unawares, like a thief? In a little while, who knows? the angel standing in the sun may be summoning the ravens and vultures from their crannies in the rocks to feed upon the putrefying flesh of the millions of unrighteous whom God’s wrath has destroyed. Be ready, then; the coming of the Lord is at hand. May it be for all of you an object of hope, not a moment to look forward to with terror and trembling.”

Mr. Bodiham closed the little pamphlet and leaned back in his chair. The argument

was sound, absolutely compelling; and yet—it was four years since he had preached that sermon; four years, and England was at peace, the sun shone, the people of Crome were as wicked and indifferent as ever—more so, indeed, if that were possible. If only he could understand, if the heavens would but make a sign! But his questionings remained unanswered. Seated there in his brown varnished chair under the Ruskinian window, he could have screamed aloud. He gripped the arms of his chair—gripping, gripping for control. The knuckles of his hands whitened; he bit his lip. In a few seconds he was able to relax the tension; he began to rebuke himself for his rebellious impatience.

Four years, he reflected; what were four years, after all? It must inevitably take a long time for Armageddon to ripen to yeast itself up. The episode of 1914 had been a preliminary skirmish. And as for the war having come to an end—why, that, of course, was illusory. It was still going on, smouldering away in Silesia, in Ireland, in Anatolia; the discontent in Egypt and India was preparing the way, perhaps, for a great extension of the slaughter among the heathen peoples. The Chinese boycott of Japan, and the rivalries of that country and America in

the Pacific, might be breeding a great new war in the East. The prospect, Mr. Bodiham tried to assure himself, was hopeful; the real, the genuine Armageddon might soon begin, and then, like a thief in the night . . . But, in spite of all his comfortable reasoning, he remained unhappy, dissatisfied. Four years ago he had been so confident; God's intention seemed then so plain. And now? Now, he did well to be angry. And now he suffered too.

Sudden and silent as a phantom Mrs. Bodiham appeared, gliding noiselessly across the room. Above her black dress her face was pale with an opaque whiteness, her eyes were pale as water in a glass, and her strawy hair was almost colourless. She held a large envelope in her hand.

"This came for you by the post," she said softly.

The envelope was unsealed. Mechanically Mr. Bodiham tore it open. It contained a pamphlet, larger than his own and more elegant in appearance. "The House of Sheeny, Clerical Outfitters, Birmingham." He turned over the pages. The catalogue was tastefully and ecclesiastically printed in antique characters with illuminated Gothic initials. Red marginal lines,

crossed at the corners after the manner of an Oxford picture frame, enclosed each page of type; little red crosses took the place of full stops. Mr. Bodiham turned the pages.

Soutane in best black merino. Ready to wear; in all sizes.

Clerical frock coats. From nine guineas. A dressy garment, tailored by our own experienced ecclesiastical cutters.

Half-tone illustrations represented young curates, some dapper, some Rugbeian and muscular, some with ascetic faces and large ecstatic eyes, dressed in jackets, in frock-coats, in surplices, in clerical evening dress, in black Norfolk suitings.

A large assortment of chasubles.

Rope girdles.

Sheeny's Special Skirt Cassocks. Tied by a string about the waist. . . . When worn under a surplice presents an appearance indistinguishable from that of a complete cassock. . . . Recommended for summer wear and hot climates.

With a gesture of horror and disgust Mr. Bodiham threw the catalogue into the waste-paper basket. Mrs. Bodiham looked at him; her pale, glaucous eyes reflected his action without comment.

"The village," she said in her quiet voice,

“the village grows worse and worse every day.”

“What has happened now?” asked Mr. Bodiham, feeling suddenly very weary.

“I’ll tell you.” She pulled up a brown varnished chair and sat down. In the village of Crome, it seemed, Sodom and Gomorrah had come to a second birth.

CHAPTER X

DENIS did not dance, but when ragtime came squirting out of the pianola in gushes of treacle and hot perfume, in jets of Bengal light, then things began to dance inside him. Little black nigger corpuscles jigged and drummed in his arteries. He became a cage of movement, a walking *palais de danse*. It was very uncomfortable, like the preliminary symptoms of a disease. He sat in one of the window-seats, glumly pretending to read.

At the pianola, Henry Wimbush, smoking a long cigar through a tunnelled pillar of amber, trod out the shattering dance music with serene patience. Locked together, Gombauld and Anne moved with a harmoniousness that made them seem a single creature, two-headed and four-legged. Mr. Scogan, solemnly buffoonish, shuffled round the room with Mary. Jenny sat in the shadow behind the piano, scribbling, so it seemed, in a big red notebook. In arm-chairs by the fireplace, Priscilla and Mr. Barbecue-Smith discussed higher things,

without, apparently, being disturbed by the noise on the Lower Plane.

“Optimism,” said Mr. Barbecue-Smith with a tone of finality, speaking through strains of the “Wild, Wild Women”—“optimism is the opening out of the soul towards the light; it is an expansion towards and into God, it is a h-piritual self-unification with the Infinite.”

“How true!” sighed Priscilla, nodding the baleful splendours of her coiffure.

“Pessimism, on the other hand, is the contraction of the soul towards darkness; it is a focusing of the self upon a point in the Lower Plane; it is a h-piritual slavery to mere facts; to gross physical phenomena.”

“They’re making a wild man of me.” The refrain sang itself over in Denis’s mind. Yes, they were; damn them! A wild man, but not wild enough; that was the trouble. Wild inside; raging, writhing—yes, “writhing” was the word, writhing with desire. But outwardly he was hopelessly tame; outwardly—baa, baa, baa.

There they were, Anne and Gombauld, moving together as though they were a single supple creature. The beast with two backs. And he sat in a corner, pretending to read, pretending he didn’t want to dance, pretend-

ing he rather despised dancing. Why? It was the baa-baa business again.

Why was he born with a different face? Why *was* he? Gombauld had a face of brass—one of those old, brazen rams that thumped against the walls of cities till they fell. He was born with a different face—a woolly face.

The music stopped. The single harmonious creature broke in two. Flushed, a little breathless, Anne swayed across the room to the pianola, laid her hand on Mr. Wim-bush's shoulder.

"A waltz this time, please, Uncle Henry," she said.

"A waltz," he repeated, and turned to the cabinet where the rolls were kept. He trod off the old roll and trod on the new, a slave at the mill, uncomplaining and beautifully well bred. "Rum; Tum; Rum-ti-ti; Tum-ti-ti. . . ." The melody wallowed oozily along, like a ship moving forward over a sleek and oily swell. The four-legged creature, more graceful, more harmonious in its movements than ever, slid across the floor. Oh, why was he born with a different face?

"What are you reading?"

He looked up, startled. It was Mary. She had broken from the uncomfortable

embrace of Mr. Scogan, who had now seized on Jenny for his victim.

“What are you reading?”

“I don’t know,” said Denis truthfully. He looked at the title page; the book was called *The Stock Breeder’s Vade Mecum*.

“I think you are so sensible to sit and read quietly,” said Mary, fixing him with her china eyes. “I don’t know why one dances. It’s so boring.”

Denis made no reply; she exacerbated him. From the arm-chair by the fireplace he heard Priscilla’s deep voice.

“Tell me, Mr. Barbecue-Smith—you know all about science, I know——” A deprecating noise came from Mr. Barbecue-Smith’s chair. “This Einstein theory. It seems to upset the whole starry universe. It makes me so worried about my horoscopes. You see . . .”

Mary renewed her attack. “Which of the contemporary poets do you like best?” she asked. Denis was filled with fury. Why couldn’t this pest of a girl leave him alone? He wanted to listen to the horrible music, to watch them dancing—oh, with what grace, as though they had been made for one another!—to savour his misery in peace. And she came and put him through this absurd catechism! She was like “Mangold’s Ques-

tions": "What are the three diseases of wheat?"—"Which of the contemporary poets do you like best?"

"Blight, Mildew, and Smut," he replied, with the laconism of one who is absolutely certain of his own mind.

It was several hours before Denis managed to go to sleep that night. Vague but agonising miseries possessed his mind. It was not only Anne who made him miserable; he was wretched about himself, the future, life in general, the universe. "This adolescence business," he repeated to himself every now and then, "is horribly boring. But the fact that he knew his disease did not help him to cure it.

After kicking all the clothes off the bed, he got up and sought relief in composition. He wanted to imprison his nameless misery in words. At the end of an hour, nine more or less complete lines emerged from among the blots and scratchings.

"I do not know what I desire
 When summer nights are dark and still,
 When the wind's many-voicéd quire
 Sleeps among the muffled branches.
 I long and know not what I will:
 And not a sound of life or laughter stanches
 Time's black and silent flow.
 I do not know what I desire,
 I do not know."

He read it through aloud; then threw the scribbled sheet into the waste-paper basket and got into bed again. In a very few minutes he was asleep.

CHAPTER XI

MR. BARBECUE-SMITH was gone. The motor had whirled him away to the station; a faint smell of burning oil commemorated his recent departure. A considerable detachment had come into the courtyard to speed him on his way; and now they were walking back, round the side of the house, towards the terrace and the garden. They walked in silence; nobody had yet ventured to comment on the departed guest.

“Well?” said Anne at last, turning with raised inquiring eyebrows to Denis.

“Well?” It was time for someone to begin.

Denis declined the invitation; he passed it on to Mr. Scogan. “Well?” he said.

Mr. Scogan did not respond; he only repeated the question, “Well?”

It was left for Henry Wimbush to make a pronouncement. “A very agreeable adjunct to the week-end,” he said. His tone was obituary.

They had descended, without paying

much attention where they were going, the steep yew-walk that went down, under the flank of the terrace, to the pool. The house towered above them, immensely tall, with the whole height of the built-up terrace added to its own seventy feet of brick façade. The perpendicular lines of the three towers soared up, uninterrupted, enhancing the impression of height until it became overwhelming. They paused at the edge of the pool to look back.

“The man who built this house knew his business,” said Denis. “He was an architect.”

“Was he?” said Henry Wimbush reflectively. “I doubt it. The builder of this house was Sir Ferdinando Lapith, who flourished during the reign of Elizabeth. He inherited the estate from his father, to whom it had been granted at the time of the dissolution of the monasteries; for Crome was originally a cloister of monks and this swimming-pool their fish-pond. Sir Ferdinando was not content merely to adapt the old monastic buildings to his own purposes; but using them as a stone quarry for his barns and byres and outhouses, he built for himself a grand new house of brick—the house you see now.”

He waved his hand in the direction of the

house and was silent. Severe, imposing, almost menacing, Crome loomed down on them.

“The great thing about Crome,” said Mr. Scogan, seizing the opportunity to speak, “is the fact that it’s so unmistakably and aggressively a work of art. It makes no compromise with nature, but affronts it and rebels against it. It has no likeness to Shelley’s tower, in the ‘Epipsychidion,’ which, if I remember rightly—

“ ‘Seems not now a work of human art,
But as it were titanic, in the heart
Of earth having assumed its form and grown
Out of the mountain, from the living stone,
Lifting itself in caverns light and high.’

No, no; there isn’t any nonsense of that sort about Crome. That the hovels of the peasantry should look as though they had grown out of the earth, to which their inmates are attached, is right, no doubt, and suitable. But the house of an intelligent, civilised, and sophisticated man should never seem to have sprouted from the clods. It should rather be an expression of his grand unnatural remoteness from the cloddish life. Since the days of William Morris that’s a fact which we in England have been unable to comprehend. Civilised and sophisticated

men have solemnly played at being peasants. Hence quaintness, arts and crafts, cottage architecture, and all the rest of it. In the suburbs of our cities you may see, reduplicated in endless rows, studiedly quaint imitations and adaptations of the village hovel. Poverty, ignorance, and a limited range of materials produced the hovel, which possesses undoubtedly, in suitable surroundings, its own 'as it were titanic' charm. We now employ our wealth, our technical knowledge, our rich variety of materials for the purpose of building millions of imitation hovels in totally unsuitable surroundings. Could imbecility go further?"

Henry Wimbush took up the thread of his interrupted discourse. "All that you say, my dear Scogan," he began, "is certainly very just, very true. But whether Sir Ferdinando shared your views about architecture or if, indeed, he had any views about architecture at all, I very much doubt. In building this house, Sir Ferdinando was, as a matter of fact, preoccupied by only one thought—the proper placing of his privies. Sanitation was the one great interest of his life. In 1573 he even published, on this subject, a little book—now extremely scarce—called, *Certaine Priuy Counsels by One of Her Maiestie's Most Honourable Priuy*

Counsels, F. L. Knight, in which the whole matter is treated with great learning and elegance. His guiding principle in arranging the sanitation of a house was to secure that the greatest possible distance should separate the privy from the sewage arrangements. Hence it followed inevitably that the privies were to be placed at the top of the house, being connected by vertical shafts with pits or channels in the ground. It must not be thought that Sir Ferdinando was moved only by material and merely sanitary considerations; for the placing of his privies in an exalted position he had also certain excellent spiritual reasons. For, he argues in the third chapter of his *Privy Counsels*, the necessities of nature are so base and brutish that in obeying them we are apt to forget that we are the noblest creatures of the universe. To counteract these degrading effects he advised that the privy should be in every house the room nearest to heaven, that it should be well provided with windows commanding an extensive and noble prospect, and that the walls of the chamber should be lined with bookshelves containing all the ripest products of human wisdom, such as the Proverbs of Solomon, Boëthius's *Consolations of Philosophy*, the apophthegms of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius,

the *Enchiridion* of Erasmus, and all other works, ancient or modern, which testify to the nobility of the human soul. In Crome he was able to put his theories into practice. At the top of each of the three projecting towers he placed a privy. From these a shaft went down the whole height of the house, that is to say, more than seventy feet, through the cellars, and into a series of conduits provided with flowing water tunnelled in the ground on a level with the base of the raised terrace. These conduits emptied themselves into the stream several hundred yards below the fish-pond. The total depth of the shafts from the top of the towers to their subterranean conduits was a hundred and two feet. The eighteenth century, with its passion for modernisation, swept away these monuments of sanitary ingenuity. Were it not for tradition and the explicit account of them left by Sir Ferdinando, we should be unaware that these noble privies had ever existed. We should even suppose that Sir Ferdinando built his house after this strange and splendid model for merely æsthetic reasons."

The contemplation of the glories of the past always evoked in Henry Wimbush a certain enthusiasm. Under the grey bowler his face worked and glowed as he spoke.

The thought of these vanished privies moved him profoundly. He ceased to speak; the light gradually died out of his face, and it became once more the replica of the grave, polite hat which shaded it. There was a long silence; the same gently melancholy thoughts seemed to possess the mind of each of them. Permanence, transience—Sir Ferdinando and his privies were gone, Crome still stood. How brightly the sun shone and how inevitable was death! The ways of God were strange; the ways of man were stranger still. . . .

“It does one’s heart good,” exclaimed Mr. Scogan at last, “to hear of these fantastic English aristocrats. To have a theory about privies and to build an immense and splendid house in order to put it into practise—it’s magnificent, beautiful! I like to think of them all: the eccentric milords rolling across Europe in ponderous carriages, bound on extraordinary errands. One is going to Venice to buy La Bianchi’s larynx; he won’t get it till she’s dead, of course, but no matter; he’s prepared to wait; he has a collection, pickled in glass bottles, of the throats of famous opera singers. And the instruments of renowned virtuosi—he goes in for them too; he will try to bribe Paganini to part with his little Guarnerio, but he has

small hope of success. Paganini won't sell his fiddle; but perhaps he might sacrifice one of his guitars. Others are bound on crusades—one to die miserably among the savage Greeks, another, in his white top hat, to lead Italians against their oppressors. Others have no business at all; they are just giving their oddity a continental airing. At home they cultivate themselves at leisure and with greater elaboration. Beckford builds towers, Portland digs holes in the ground, Cavendish, the millionaire, lives in a stable, eats nothing but mutton, and amuses himself—oh, solely for his private delectation—by anticipating the electrical discoveries of half a century. Glorious eccentrics! Every age is enlivened by their presence. Some day, my dear Denis," said Mr. Scogan, turning a beady bright regard in his direction—"some day you must become their biographer—'The Lives of Queer Men.' What a subject! I should like to undertake it myself."

Mr. Scogan paused, looked up once more at the towering house, then murmured the word, "Eccentricity," two or three times.

"Eccentricity. . . . It's the justification of all aristocracies. It justifies leisured classes and inherited wealth and privilege and endowments and all the other injustices

of that sort. If you're to do anything reasonable in this world, you must have a class of people who are secure, safe from public opinion, safe from poverty, leisured, not compelled to waste their time in the imbecile routines that go by the name of **Honest Work**. You must have a class of which the members can think and, within the obvious limits, do what they please. You must have a class in which people who have eccentricities can indulge them and in which eccentricity in general will be tolerated and understood. That's the important thing about an aristocracy. Not only is it eccentric itself—often grandiosely so; it also tolerates and even encourages eccentricity in others. The eccentricities of the artist and the new-fangled thinker don't inspire it with that fear, loathing, and disgust which the burgesses instinctively feel towards them. It is a sort of Red Indian Reservation planted in the midst of a vast horde of Poor Whites—colonials at that. Within its boundaries wild men disport themselves—often, it must be admitted, a little grossly, a little too flamboyantly; and when kindred spirits are born outside the pale it offers them some sort of refuge from the hatred which the Poor Whites, *en bons bourgeois*, lavish on anything that is wild or out of the

ordinary. After the social revolution there will be no Reservations; the Redskins will be drowned in the great sea of Poor Whites. What then? Will they suffer you to go on writing villanelles, my good Denis? Will you, unhappy Henry, be allowed to live in this house of the splendid privies, to continue your quiet delving in the mines of futile knowledge? Will Anne . . .”

“And you,” said Anne, interrupting him, “will you be allowed to go on talking?”

“You may rest assured,” Mr. Scogan replied, “that I shall not. I shall have some **Honest Work** to do.”

CHAPTER XII

BLIGHT, Mildew, and Smut. . . .” Mary was puzzled and distressed. Perhaps her ears had played her false. Perhaps what he had really said was, “Squire, Bin-
yon, and Shanks, or “Childe, Blunden, and Earp,” or even Abercrombie, Drinkwater, and Rabindranath Tagore.” Perhaps. But then her ears never did play her false. “Blight, Mildew, and Smut.” The impression was distinct and ineffaceable. “Blight, Mildew . . .” she was forced to the conclusion, reluctantly, that Denis had indeed pronounced those improbable words. He had deliberately repelled her attempts to open a serious discussion. That was horrible. A man who would not talk seriously to a woman just because she was a woman—oh, impossible! Egeria or nothing. Perhaps Gombauld would be more satisfactory. True, his meridional heredity was a little disquieting; but at least he was a serious worker, and it was with his work that she would associate herself. And Denis? After all, what *was* Denis? A dilettante, an amateur. . . .

Gombauld had annexed for his painting-room a little disused granary that stood by itself in a green close beyond the farm-yard. It was a square brick building with a peaked roof and little windows set high up in each of its walls. A ladder of four rungs led up to the door; for the granary was perched above the ground, and out of reach of the rats, on four massive toadstools of grey stone. Within, there lingered a faint smell of dust and cobwebs; and the narrow shaft of sunlight that came slanting in at every hour of the day through one of the little windows was always alive with silvery motes. Here Gombauld worked, with a kind of concentrated ferocity, during six or seven hours of each day. He was pursuing something new, something terrific, if only he could catch it.

During the last eight years, nearly half of which had been spent in the process of winning the war, he had worked his way industriously through cubism. Now he had come out on the other side. He had begun by painting a formalised nature; then, little by little, he had risen from nature into the world of pure form, till in the end he was painting nothing but his own thoughts, externalised in the abstract geometrical forms of the mind's devising. He found the

process arduous and exhilarating. And then, quite suddenly, he grew dissatisfied; he felt himself cramped and confined within intolerably narrow limitations. He was humiliated to find how few and crude and uninteresting were the forms he could invent; the inventions of nature were without number, inconceivably subtle and elaborate. He had done with cubism. He was out on the other side. But the cubist discipline preserved him from falling into excesses of nature worship. He took from nature its rich, subtle, elaborate forms, but his aim was always to work them into a whole that should have the thrilling simplicity and formality of an idea; to combine prodigious realism with prodigious simplification. Memories of Caravaggio's portentous achievements haunted him. Forms of a breathing, living reality emerged from darkness, built themselves up into compositions as luminously simple and single as a mathematical idea. He thought of the "Call of Matthew," of "Peter Crucified," of the "Lute Players," of "Magdalen." He had the secret, that astonishing ruffian, he had the secret! And now Gombauld was after it, in hot pursuit. Yes, it would be something terrific, if only he could catch it.

For a long time an idea had been stirring

and spreading, yeastily, in his mind. He had made a portfolio full of studies, he had drawn a cartoon; and now the idea was taking shape on canvas. A man fallen from a horse. The huge animal, a gaunt white cart-horse, filled the upper half of the picture with its great body. Its head, lowered towards the ground, was in shadow; the immense bony body was what arrested the eye, the body and the legs, which came down on either side of the picture like the pillars of an arch. On the ground, between the legs of the towering beast, lay the foreshortened figure of a man, the head in the extreme foreground, the arms flung wide to right and left. A white, relentless light poured down from a point in the right foreground. The beast, the fallen man, were sharply illuminated; round them, beyond and behind them, was the night. They were alone in the darkness, a universe in themselves. The horse's body filled the upper part of the picture; the legs, the great hoofs, frozen to stillness in the midst of their trampling, limited it on either side. And beneath lay the man, his foreshortened face at the focal point in the centre, his arms outstretched towards the sides of the picture. Under the arch of the horse's belly, between his legs, the eye looked through into an intense dark-

ness; below, the space was closed in by the figure of the prostrate man. A central gulf of darkness surrounded by luminous forms. . . .

The picture was more than half finished. Gombauld had been at work all the morning on the figure of the man, and now he was taking a rest—the time to smoke a cigarette. Tilting back his chair till it touched the wall, he looked thoughtfully at his canvas. He was pleased, and at the same time he was desolated. In itself, the thing was good; he knew it. But that something he was after, that something that would be so terrific if only he could catch it—had he caught it? Would he ever catch it?

Three little taps—rat, tat, tat! Surprised, Gombauld turned his eyes towards the door. Nobody ever disturbed him while he was at work; it was one of the unwritten laws. “Come in!” he called. The door, which was ajar, swung open, revealing, from the waist upwards, the form of Mary. She had only dared to mount half-way up the ladder. If he didn’t want her, retreat would be easier and more dignified than if she climbed to the top.

“May I come in?” she asked.

“Certainly.”

She skipped up the remaining two rungs

and was over the threshold in an instant. "A letter came for you by the second post," she said. "I thought it might be important, so I brought it out to you." Her eyes, her childish face were luminously candid as she handed him the letter. There had never been a flimsier pretext.

Gombauld looked at the envelope and put it in his pocket unopened. "Luckily," he said, "it isn't at all important. Thanks very much all the same."

There was a silence; Mary felt a little uncomfortable. "May I have a look at what you've been painting?" she had the courage to say at last.

Gombauld had only half smoked his cigarette; in any case he wouldn't begin work again till he had finished. He would give her the five minutes that separated him from the bitter end. "This is the best place to see it from," he said.

Mary looked at the picture for some time without saying anything. Indeed, she didn't know what to say; she was taken aback, she was at a loss. She had expected a cubist masterpiece, and here was a picture of a man and a horse, not only recognisable as such, but even aggressively in drawing. *Trompe-l'œil*—there was no other word to describe the delineation of that foreshortened figure

under the trampling feet of the horse. What was she to think, what was she to say? Her orientations were gone. One could admire representationalism in the Old Masters. Obviously. But in a modern . . . ? At eighteen she might have done so. But now, after five years of schooling among the best judges, her instinctive reaction to a contemporary piece of representation was contempt—an outburst of laughing disparagement. What could Gombauld be up to? She had felt so safe in admiring his work before. But now—she didn't know what to think. It was very difficult, very difficult.

"There's rather a lot of chiaroscuro, isn't there?" she ventured at last, and inwardly congratulated herself on having found a critical formula so gentle and at the same time so penetrating.

"There is," Gombauld agreed.

Mary was pleased; he accepted her criticism; it was a serious discussion. She put her head on one side and screwed up her eyes. "I think it's awfully fine," she said. "But of course it's a little too . . . too . . . *trompe-l'œil* for my taste." She looked at Gombauld, who made no response, but continued to smoke, gazing meditatively all the time at his picture. Mary went on gaspingly. "When I was in Paris this spring

I saw a lot of Tschuplitski. I admire his work so tremendously. Of course, it's frightfully abstract now—frightfully abstract and frightfully intellectual. He just throws a few oblongs on to his canvas—quite flat, you know, and painted in pure primary colours. But his design is wonderful. He's getting more and more abstract every day. He'd given up the third dimension when I was there and was just thinking of giving up the second. Soon, he says, there'll be just the blank canvas. That's the logical conclusion. Complete abstraction. Painting's finished; he's finishing it. When he's reached pure abstraction he's going to take up architecture. He says it's more intellectual than painting. Do you agree?" she asked, with a final gasp.

Gombauld dropped his cigarette end and trod on it. "Tschuplitski's finished painting," he said. "I've finished my cigarette. But I'm going on painting." And, advancing towards her, he put his arm round her shoulders and turned her round, away from the picture.

Mary looked up at him; her hair swung back, a soundless bell of gold. Her eyes were serene; she smiled. So the moment had come. His arm was round her. He moved

slowly, almost imperceptibly, and she moved with him. It was a peripatetic embracement. "Do you agree with him?" she repeated. The moment might have come, but she would not cease to be intellectual, serious.

"I don't know. I shall have to think about it." Gombauld loosened his embrace, his hand dropped from her shoulder. "Be careful going down the ladder," he added solicitously.

Mary looked round, startled. They were in front of the open door. She remained standing there for a moment in bewilderment. The hand that had rested on her shoulder made itself felt lower down her back; it administered three or four kindly little smacks. Replying automatically to its stimulus, she moved forward.

"Be careful going down the ladder," said Gombauld once more.

She was careful. The door closed behind her and she was alone in the little green close. She walked slowly back through the farmyard; she was pensive.

CHAPTER XIII

HENRY WIMBUSH brought down with him to dinner a budget of printed sheets loosely bound together in a cardboard portfolio.

“To-day,” he said, exhibiting it with a certain solemnity, “to-day I have finished the printing of my *History of Crome*. I helped to set up the type of the last page this evening.”

“The famous *History*?” cried Anne. The writing and the printing of this *Magnum Opus* had been going on as long as she could remember. All her childhood long Uncle Henry’s *History* had been a vague and fabulous thing, often heard of and never seen.

“It has taken me nearly thirty years,” said Mr. Wimbush. “Twenty-five years of writing and nearly four of printing. And now it’s finished—the whole chronicle, from Sir Ferdinando Lapith’s birth to the death of my father William Wimbush—more than three centuries and a half: a history of Crome, written at Crome, and printed at Crome by my own press.”

"Shall we be allowed to read it now it's finished?" asked Denis.

Mr. Wimbush nodded. "Certainly," he said. "And I hope you will not find it uninteresting," he added modestly. "Our muniment room is particularly rich in ancient records, and I have some genuinely new light to throw on the introduction of the three-pronged fork."

"And the people?" asked Gombauld. "Sir Ferdinando and the rest of them—were they amusing? Were there any crimes or tragedies in the family?"

"Let me see," Henry Wimbush rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "I can only think of two suicides, one violent death, four or perhaps five broken hearts, and half a dozen little blots on the scutcheon in the way of misalliances, seductions, natural children, and the like. No, on the whole, it's a placid and uneventful record."

The Wimbushes and the Lapiths were always an unadventurous, respectable crew," said Priscilla, with a note of scorn in her voice. "If I were to write my family history now! Why, it would be one long continuous blot from beginning to end." She laughed jovially, and helped herself to another glass of wine.

"If I were to write mine," Mr. Scogan

remarked, "it wouldn't exist. After the second generation we Scogans are lost in the mists of antiquity."

"After dinner," said Henry Wimbush, a little piqued by his wife's disparaging comment on the masters of Crome, "I'll read you an episode from my History that will make you admit that even the Lapiths, in their own respectable way, had their tragedies and strange adventures."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Priscilla.

"Glad to hear what?" asked Jenny, emerging suddenly from her private interior world like a cuckoo from a clock. She received an explanation, smiled, nodded, cuckooed at last "I see," and popped back, clapping shut the door behind her.

Dinner was eaten; the party had adjourned to the drawing-room.

"Now," said Henry Wimbush, pulling up a chair to the lamp. He put on his round pince-nez, rimmed with tortoise-shell, and began cautiously to turn over the pages of his loose and still fragmentary book. He found his place at last. "Shall I begin?" he asked, looking up.

"Do," said Priscilla, yawning.

In the midst of an attentive silence Mr. Wimbush gave a little preliminary cough and started to read.

“The infant who was destined to become the fourth baronet of the name of Lapith was born in the year 1740. He was a very small baby, weighing not more than three pounds at birth, but from the first he was sturdy and healthy. In honour of his maternal grandfather, Sir Hercules Occam of Bishop’s Occam, he was christened Hercules. His mother, like many other mothers, kept a notebook, in which his progress from month to month was recorded. He walked at ten months, and before his second year was out he had learnt to speak a number of words. At three years he weighed but twenty-four pounds, and at six, though he could read and write perfectly and showed a remarkable aptitude for music, he was no larger and heavier than a well-grown child of two. Meanwhile, his mother had borne two other children, a boy and a girl, one of whom died of croup during infancy, while the other was carried off by smallpox before it reached the age of five. Hercules remained the only surviving child.

“On his twelfth birthday Hercules was still only three feet and two inches in height. His head, which was very handsome and nobly shaped, was too big for his body, but otherwise he was exquisitely proportioned, and, for his size, of great strength and agil-

ity. His parents, in the hope of making him grow, consulted all the most eminent physicians of the time. Their various prescriptions were followed to the letter, but in vain. One ordered a very plentiful meat diet; another exercise; a third constructed a little rack, modelled on those employed by the Holy Inquisition, on which young Hercules was stretched, with excruciating torments, for half an hour every morning and evening. In the course of the next three years Hercules gained perhaps two inches. After that his growth stopped completely, and he remained for the rest of his life a pigmy of three feet and four inches. His father, who had built the most extravagant hopes upon his son, planning for him in his imagination a military career equal to that of Marlborough, found himself a disappointed man. 'I have brought an abortion into the world,' he would say, and he took so violent a dislike to his son that the boy dared scarcely come into his presence. His temper, which had been serene, was turned by disappointment to moroseness and savagery. He avoided all company (being, as he said, ashamed to show himself, the father of a *lusus naturæ*, among normal, healthy human beings), and took to solitary drinking, which carried him very rapidly to his grave; for the year before

Hercules came of age his father was taken off by an apoplexy. His mother, whose love for him had increased with the growth of his father's unkindness, did not long survive, but little more than a year after her husband's death succumbed, after eating two dozen of oysters, to an attack of typhoid fever.

“Hercules thus found himself at the age of twenty-one alone in the world, and master of a considerable fortune, including the estate and mansion of Crome. The beauty and intelligence of his childhood had survived into his manly age, and, but for his dwarfish stature, he would have taken his place among the handsomest and most accomplished young men of his time. He was well read in the Greek and Latin authors, as well as in all the moderns of any merit who had written in English, French, or Italian. He had a good ear for music, and was no indifferent performer on the violin, which he used to play like a bass viol, seated on a chair with the instrument between his legs. To the music of the harpsichord and clavichord he was extremely partial, but the smallness of his hands made it impossible for him ever to perform upon these instruments. He had a small ivory flute made for him, on which, whenever he was melancholy, he used

to play a simple country air or jig, affirming that this rustic music had more power to clear and raise the spirits than the most artificial productions of the masters. From an early age he practised the composition of poetry, but, though conscious of his great powers in this art, he would never publish any specimen of his writing. 'My stature,' he would say, 'is reflected in my verses; if the public were to read them it would not be because I am a poet, but because I am a dwarf.' Several MS. books of Sir Hercules's poems survive. A single specimen will suffice to illustrate his qualities as a poet.

"In ancient days, while yet the world was young,
 Ere Abram fed his flocks or Homer sung;
 When blacksmith Tubal tamed creative fire,
 And Jabal dwelt in tents and Jubal struck the
 lyre;
 Flesh grown corrupt brought forth a monstrous
 birth
 And obscene giants trod the shrinking earth,
 Till God, impatient of their sinful brood,
 Gave rein to wrath and drown'd them in the Flood.
 Teeming again, re-peopled Tellus bore
 The lubber Hero and the Man of War;
 Huge towers of Brawn, topp'd with an empty
 Skull,
 Witlessly bold, heroically dull.
 Long ages pass'd and Man grown more refin'd,
 Slighter in muscle but of vaster Mind,
 Smiled at his grandsire's broadsword, bow and
 bill,

And learn'd to wield the Pencil and the Quill.
 The glowing canvas and the written page
 Immortaliz'd his name from age to age,
 His name emblazon'd on Fame's temple wall;
 For Art grew great as Humankind grew small.
 Thus man's long progress step by step we trace;
 The Giant dies, the hero takes his place;
 The Giant vile, the dull heroic Block:
 At one we shudder and at one we mock.
 Man last appears. In him the Soul's pure flame
 Burns brightlier in a not inord'nate frame.
 Of old when Heroes fought and Giants swarmed,
 Men were huge mounds of matter scarce inform'd;
 Wearied by leavening so vast a mass,
 The spirit slept and all the mind was crass.
 The smaller carcase of these later days
 Is soon inform'd; the Soul unwearied plays
 And like a Pharos darts abroad her mental rays.
 But can we think that Providence will stay
 Man's footsteps here upon the upward way?
 Mankind in understanding and in grace
 Advanc'd so far beyond the Giants' race?
 Hence impious thought! Still led by God's own
 Hand,

Mankind proceeds towards the Promised Land.
 A time will come (prophetic, I descry
 Remoter dawns along the gloomy sky),
 When happy mortals of a Golden Age
 Will backward turn the dark historic page,
 And in our vaunted race of Men behold
 A form as gross, a Mind as dead and cold,
 As we in Giants see, in warriors of old.
 A time will come, wherein the soul shall be
 From all superfluous matter wholly free;
 When the light body, agile as a fawn's,
 Shall sport with grace along the velvet lawns.

Nature's most delicate and final birth,
Mankind perfected shall possess the earth.
But ah, not yet! For still the Giants' race,
Huge, though diminish'd, tramps the Earth's fair
face;

Gross and repulsive, yet perversely proud,
Men of their imperfections boast aloud.
Vain of their bulk, of all they still retain
Of giant ugliness absurdly vain;
At all that's small they point their stupid scorn
And, monsters, think themselves divinely born.
Sad is the Fate of those, ah, sad indeed,
The rare precursors of the nobler breed!
Who come man's golden glory to foretell,
But pointing Heav'nwards live themselves in
Hell."

"As soon as he came into the estate, Sir Hercules set about remodelling his household. For though by no means ashamed of his deformity—indeed, if we may judge from the poem quoted above, he regarded himself as being in many ways superior to the ordinary race of man—he found the presence of full-grown men and women embarrassing. Realising, too, that he must abandon all ambitions in the great world, he determined to retire absolutely from it and to create, as it were, at Crome a private world of his own, in which all should be proportionable to himself. Accordingly, he discharged all the old servants of the house and replaced them gradually, as he was able

to find suitable successors, by others of dwarfish stature. In the course of a few years he had assembled about himself a numerous household, no member of which was above four feet high and the smallest among them scarcely two feet and six inches. His father's dogs, such as setters, mastiffs, greyhounds, and a pack of beagles, he sold or gave away as too large and too boisterous for his house, replacing them by pugs and King Charles spaniels and whatever other breeds of dog were the smallest. His father's stable was also sold. For his own use, whether riding or driving, he had six black Shetland ponies, with four very choice piebald animals of New Forest breed.

“Having thus settled his household entirely to his own satisfaction, it only remained for him to find some suitable companion with whom to share his paradise. Sir Hercules had a susceptible heart, and had more than once, between the ages of sixteen and twenty, felt what it was to love. But here his deformity had been a source of the most bitter humiliation, for, having once dared to declare himself to a young lady of his choice, he had been received with laughter. On his persisting, she had picked him up and shaken him like an importunate child, telling him to run away and plague her no more.

The story soon got about—indeed, the young lady herself used to tell it as a particularly pleasant anecdote—and the taunts and mockery it occasioned were a source of the most acute distress to Hercules. From the poems written at this period we gather that he meditated taking his own life. In course of time, however, he lived down this humiliation; but never again, though he often fell in love, and that very passionately, did he dare to make any advances to those in whom he was interested. After coming to the estate and finding that he was in a position to create his own world as he desired it, he saw that, if he was to have a wife—which he very much desired, being of an affectionate and, indeed, amorous temper—he must choose her as he had chosen his servants—from among the race of dwarfs. But to find a suitable wife was, he found, a matter of some difficulty; for he would marry none who was not distinguished by beauty and gentle birth. The dwarfish daughter of Lord Bemboro he refused on the ground that besides being a pigmy she was hunchbacked; while another young lady, an orphan belonging to a very good family in Hampshire, was rejected by him because her face, like that of so many dwarfs, was wizened and repulsive. Finally, when he was almost de-

spairing of success, he heard from a reliable source that Count Titimalo, a Venetian nobleman, possessed a daughter of exquisite beauty and great accomplishments, who was by three feet in height. Setting out at once for Venice, he went immediately on his arrival to pay his respects to the count, whom he found living with his wife and five children in a very mean apartment in one of the poorer quarters of the town. Indeed, the count was so far reduced in his circumstances that he was even then negotiating (so it was rumoured) with a travelling company of clowns and acrobats, who had had the misfortune to lose their performing dwarf, for the sale of his diminutive daughter Filomena. Sir Hercules arrived in time to save her from this untoward fate, for he was so much charmed by Filomena's grace and beauty, that at the end of three days' courtship he made her a formal offer of marriage, which was accepted by her no less joyfully than by her father, who perceived in an English son-in-law a rich and unfailing source of revenue. After an unostentatious marriage, at which the English ambassador acted as one of the witnesses, Sir Hercules and his bride returned by sea to England, where they settled down, as it proved, to a life of uneventful happiness.

“Crome and its household of dwarfs delighted Filomena, who felt herself now for the first time to be a free woman living among her equals in a friendly world. She had many tastes in common with her husband, especially that of music. She had a beautiful voice, of a power surprising in one so small, and could touch A in alt without effort. Accompanied by her husband on his fine Cremona fiddle, which he played, as we have noted before, as one plays a bass viol, she would sing all the liveliest and tenderest airs from the operas and cantatas of her native country. Seated together at the harpsichord, they found that they could with their four hands play all the music written for two hands of ordinary size, a circumstance which gave Sir Hercules un-failing pleasure.

“When they were not making music or reading together, which they often did, both in English and Italian, they spent their time in healthful outdoor exercises, sometimes rowing in a little boat on the lake, but more often riding or driving, occupations in which, because they were entirely new to her, Filomena especially delighted. When she had become a perfectly proficient rider, Filomena and her husband used often to go hunting in the park, at that time very much

more extensive than it is now. They hunted not foxes nor hares, but rabbits, using a pack of about thirty black and fawn-coloured pugs, a kind of dog which, when not overfed, can course a rabbit as well as any of the smaller breeds. Four dwarf grooms, dressed in scarlet liveries and mounted on white Exmoor ponies, hunted the pack, while their master and mistress, in green habits, followed either on the black Shetlands or on the piebald New Forest ponies. A picture of the whole hunt—dogs, horses, grooms, and masters—was painted by William Stubbs, whose work Sir Hercules admired so much that he invited him, though a man of ordinary stature, to come and stay at the mansion for the purpose of executing this picture. Stubbs likewise painted a portrait of Sir Hercules and his lady driving in their green enamelled calash drawn by four black Shetlands. Sir Hercules wears a plum-coloured velvet coat and white breeches; Filomena is dressed in flowered muslin and a very large hat with pink feathers. The two figures in their gay carriage stand out sharply against a dark background of trees; but to the left of the picture the trees fall away and disappear, so that the four black ponies are seen against a pale and strangely lurid sky that has the golden-

brown colour of thunder-clouds lighted up by the sun.

“In this way four years passed happily by. At the end of that time Filomena found herself great with child. Sir Hercules was overjoyed. ‘If God is good,’ he wrote in his day-book, ‘the name of Lapith will be preserved and our rarer and more delicate race transmitted through the generations until in the fullness of time the world shall recognise the superiority of those beings whom now it uses to make mock of.’ On his wife’s being brought to bed of a son he wrote a poem to the same effect. The child was christened Ferdinando in memory of the builder of the house.

“With the passage of the months a certain sense of disquiet began to invade the minds of Sir Hercules and his lady. For the child was growing with an extraordinary rapidity. At a year he weighed as much as Hercules had weighed when he was three. ‘Ferdinando goes *crescendo*,’ wrote Filomena in her diary. ‘It seems not natural.’ At eighteen months the baby was almost as tall as their smallest jockey, who was a man of thirty-six. Could it be that Ferdinando was destined to become a man of the normal, gigantic dimensions? It was a thought to which neither of his parents dared yet give

open utterance, but in the secrecy of their respective diaries they brooded over it in terror and dismay.

“On his third birthday Ferdinando was taller than his mother and not more than a couple of inches short of his father’s height. ‘To-day for the first time,’ wrote Sir Hercules, ‘we discussed the situation. The hideous truth can be concealed no longer: Ferdinando is not one of us. On this, his third birthday, a day when we should have been rejoicing at the health, the strength, and beauty of our child, we wept together over the ruin of our happiness. God give us strength to bear this cross.’

“At the age of eight Ferdinando was so large and so exuberantly healthy that his parents decided, though reluctantly, to send him to school. He was packed off to Eton at the beginning of the next half. A profound peace settled upon the house. Ferdinando returned for the summer holidays larger and stronger than ever. One day he knocked down the butler and broke his arm. ‘He is rough, inconsiderate, unamenable to persuasion,’ wrote his father. ‘The only thing that will teach him manners is corporal chastisement.’ Ferdinando, who at this age was already seventeen inches taller

than his father, received no corporal chastisement.

“One summer holidays about three years later Ferdinando returned to Crome accompanied by a very large mastiff dog. He had bought it from an old man at Windsor who had found the beast too expensive to feed. It was a savage, unreliable animal; hardly had it entered the house when it attacked one of Sir Hercules’s favourite pugs, seizing the creature in its jaws and shaking it till it was nearly dead. Extremely put out by this occurrence, Sir Hercules ordered that the beast should be chained up in the stable-yard. Ferdinando sullenly answered that the dog was his, and he would keep it where he pleased. His father, growing angry, bade him take the animal out of the house at once, on pain of his utmost displeasure. Ferdinando refused to move. His mother at this moment coming into the room, the dog flew at her, knocked her down, and in a twinkling had very severely mauled her arm and shoulder; in another instant it must infallibly have had her by the throat, had not Sir Hercules drawn his sword and stabbed the animal to the heart. Turning on his son, he ordered him to leave the room immediately, as being unfit to remain in the same place with the mother whom he had nearly mur-

dered. So awe-inspiring was the spectacle of Sir Hercules standing with one foot on the carcase of the gigantic dog, his sword drawn and still bloody, so commanding were his voice, his gestures, and the expression of his face that Ferdinando slunk out of the room in terror and behaved himself for all the rest of the vacation in an entirely exemplary fashion. His mother soon recovered from the bites of the mastiff, but the effect on her mind of this adventure was ineradicable; from that time forth she lived always among imaginary terrors.

“The two years which Ferdinando spent on the Continent, making the Grand Tour, were a period of happy repose for his parents. But even now the thought of the future haunted them; nor were they able to solace themselves with all the diversions of their younger days. The Lady Filomena had lost her voice and Sir Hercules was grown too rheumatical to play the violin. He, it is true, still rode after his pugs, but his wife felt herself too old and, since the episode of the mastiff, too nervous for such sports. At most, to please her husband, she would follow the hunt at a distance in a little gig drawn by the safest and oldest of the Shetlands.

“The day fixed for Ferdinando’s return

came round. Filomena, sick with vague dreads and presentiments, retired to her chamber and her bed. Sir Hercules received his son alone. A giant in a brown travelling-suit entered the room. 'Welcome home, my son,' said Sir Hercules in a voice that trembled a little.

" 'I hope I see you well, sir.' Ferdinando bent down to shake hands, then straightened himself up again. The top of his father's head reached to the level of his hip.

"Ferdinando had not come alone. Two friends of his own age accompanied him, and each of the young men had brought a servant. Not for thirty years had Crome been desecrated by the presence of so many members of the common race of men. Sir Hercules was appalled and indignant, but the laws of hospitality had to be obeyed. He received the young gentlemen with grave politeness and sent the servants to the kitchen, with orders that they should be well cared for.

"The old family dining-table was dragged out into the light and dusted (Sir Hercules and his lady were accustomed to dine at a small table twenty inches high). Simon, the aged butler, who could only just look over the edge of the big table, was helped at

supper by the three servants brought by Ferdinando and his guests.

“Sir Hercules presided, and with his usual grace supported a conversation on the pleasures of foreign travel, the beauties of art and nature to be met with abroad, the opera at Venice, the singing of the orphans in the churches of the same city, and on other topics of a similar nature. The young men were not particularly attentive to his discourses; they were occupied in watching the efforts of the butler to change the plates and replenish the glasses. They covered their laughter by violent and repeated fits of coughing or choking. Sir Hercules affected not to notice, but changed the subject of the conversation to sport. Upon this one of the young men asked whether it was true, as he had heard, that he used to hunt the rabbit with a pack of pug dogs. Sir Hercules replied that it was, and proceeded to describe the chase in some detail. The young men roared with laughter.

“When supper was over, Sir Hercules climbed down from his chair and, giving as his excuse that he must see how his lady did, bade them good-night. The sound of laughter followed him up the stairs. Filomena was not asleep; she had been lying on her bed listening to the sound of enormous

laughter and the tread of strangely heavy feet on the stairs and along the corridors. Sir Hercules drew a chair to her bedside and sat there for a long time in silence, holding his wife's hand and sometimes gently squeezing it. At about ten o'clock they were startled by a violent noise. There was a breaking of glass, a stamping of feet, with an outburst of shouts and laughter. The uproar continuing for several minutes, Sir Hercules rose to his feet and, in spite of his wife's entreaties, prepared to go and see what was happening. There was no light on the staircase, and Sir Hercules groped his way down cautiously, lowering himself from stair to stair and standing for a moment on each tread before adventuring on a new step. The noise was louder here; the shouting articulated itself into recognisable words and phrases. A line of light was visible under the dining-room door. Sir Hercules tiptoed across the hall towards it. Just as he approached the door there was another terrific crash of breaking glass and jangled metal. What could they be doing? Standing on tiptoe he managed to look through the keyhole. In the middle of the ravaged table old Simon, the butler, so primed with drink that he could scarcely keep his balance, was dancing a jig. His feet crunched and tin-

kled among the broken glass, and his shoes were wet with spilt wine. The three young men sat round, thumping the table with their hands or with the empty wine bottles, shouting and laughing encouragement. The three servants leaning against the wall laughed too. Ferdinando suddenly threw a handful of walnuts at the dancer's head, which so dazed and surprised the little man that he staggered and fell down on his back, upsetting a decanter and several glasses. They raised him up, gave him some brandy to drink, thumped him on the back. The old man smiled and hiccoughed. 'To-morrow,' said Ferdinando, 'we'll have a concerted ballet of the whole household.' 'With father Hercules wearing his club and lion-skin,' added one of his companions, and all three roared with laughter.

"Sir Hercules would look and listen no further. He crossed the hall once more and began to climb the stairs, lifting his knees painfully high at each degree. This was the end; there was no place for him now in the world, no place for him and Ferdinando together.

"His wife was still awake; to her questioning glance he answered, 'They are making mock of old Simon. To-morrow it will be our turn.' They were silent for a time.

“At last Filomena said, ‘I do not want to see to-morrow.’

“‘It is better not,’ said Sir Hercules. Going into his closet he wrote in his day-book a full and particular account of all the events of the evening. While he was still engaged in this task he rang for a servant and ordered hot water and a bath to be made ready for him at eleven o’clock. When he had finished writing he went into his wife’s room, and preparing a dose of opium twenty times as strong as that which she was accustomed to take when she could not sleep, he brought it to her, saying, ‘Here is your sleeping-draught.’

“Filomena took the glass and lay for a little time, but did not drink immediately. The tears came into her eyes. ‘Do you remember the songs we used to sing, sitting out there *sulla terrazza* in the summer-time?’ She began singing softly in her ghost of a cracked voice a few bars from Stradella’s ‘*Amor amor, non dormir piu.*’ ‘And you playing on the violin. It seems such a short time ago, and yet so long, long, long. *Addio, amore. A rivederti.*’ She drank off the draught and, lying back on the pillow, closed her eyes. Sir Hercules kissed her hand and tiptoed away, as though he were afraid of waking her. He returned to his

closet, and having recorded his wife's last words to him, he poured into his bath the water that had been brought up in accordance with his orders. The water being too hot for him to get into the bath at once, he took down from the shelf his copy of Suetonius. He wished to read how Seneca had died. He opened the book at random. 'But dwarfs,' he read, 'he held in abhorrence as being *lusus naturæ* and of evil omen' He winced as though he had been struck. This same Augustus, he remembered, had exhibited in the amphitheatre a young man called Lucius, of good family, who was not quite two feet in height and weighed seventeen pounds, but had a stentorian voice. He turned over the pages. Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero: it was a tale of growing horror. 'Seneca his preceptor, he forced to kill himself.' And there was Petronius, who had called his friends about him at the last, bidding them talk to him, not of the consolations of philosophy, but of love and gallantry, while the life was ebbing away through his opened veins. Dipping his pen once more in the ink he wrote on the last page of his diary: 'He died a Roman death.' Then, putting the toes of one foot into the water and finding that it was not too hot, he threw off his dressing-gown and, taking a

razor in his hand, sat down in the bath. With one deep cut he severed the artery in his left wrist, then lay back and composed his mind to meditation. The blood oozed out, floating through the water in dissolving wreaths and spirals. In a little while the whole bath was tinged with pink. The colour deepened; Sir Hercules felt himself mastered by an invincible drowsiness; he was sinking from vague dream to dream. Soon he was sound asleep. There was not much blood in his small body.”

CHAPTER XIV

FOR their after-luncheon coffee the party generally adjourned to the library. Its windows looked east, and at this hour of the day it was the coolest place in the whole house. It was a large room, fitted, during the eighteenth century, with white painted shelves of an elegant design. In the middle of one wall a door, ingeniously upholstered with rows of dummy books, gave access to a deep cupboard, where, among a pile of letter-files and old newspapers, the mummy-case of an Egyptian lady, brought back by the second Sir Ferdinando on his return from the Grand Tour, mouldered in the darkness. From ten yards away and at a first glance, one might almost have mistaken this secret door for a section of shelving filled with genuine books. Coffee-cup in hand, Mr. Scogan was standing in front of the dummy book-shelf. Between the sips he discoursed.

“The bottom shelf,” he was saying, “is taken up by an Encyclopædia in fourteen volumes. Useful, but a little dull, as is also Caprimulge’s *Dictionary of the Finnish*

Language. The *Biographical Dictionary* looks more promising. *Biography of Men who were Born Great*, *Biography of Men who Achieved Greatness*, *Biography of Men who had Greatness Thust upon Them*, and *Biography of Men who were Never Great at All*. Then there are ten volumes of *Thom's Works and Wanderings*, while the *Wild Goose Chase, a Novel*, by an anonymous author, fills no less than six. But what's this, what's this?" Mr. Scogan stood on tiptoe and peered up. "Seven volumes of the *Tales of Knockespotch*. The *Tales of Knockespotch*," he repeated. "Ah, my dear Henry," he said, turning round, "these are your best books. I would willingly give all the rest of your library for them."

The happy possessor of a multitude of first editions, Mr. Wimbush could afford to smile indulgently.

"Is it possible," Mr. Scogan went on, "that they possess nothing more than a back and a title?" He opened the cupboard door and peeped inside, as though he hoped to find the rest of the books behind it. "Phooh!" he said, and shut the door again. "It smells of dust and mildew. How symbolical! One comes to the great masterpieces of the past, expecting some miraculous illumination, and one finds, on open-

ing them, only darkness and dust and a faint smell of decay. After all, what is reading but a vice, like drink or venery or any other form of excessive self-indulgence? One reads to tickle and amuse one's mind; one reads, above all, to prevent oneself thinking. Still—the *Tales of Knocke-spotch . . .*”

He paused, and thoughtfully drummed with his fingers on the backs of the non-existent, unattainable books.

“But I disagree with you about reading,” said Mary. “About serious reading, I mean.”

“Quite right, Mary, quite right,” Mr. Scogan answered. “I had forgotten there were any serious people in the room.”

“I like the idea of the Biographies,” said Denis. “There's room for us all within the scheme; it's comprehensive.”

“Yes, the Biographies are good, the Biographies are excellent,” Mr. Scogan agreed. “I imagine them written in a very elegant Regency style—Brighton Pavilion in words—perhaps by the great Dr. Lemprière himself. You know his classical dictionary? Ah!” Mr. Scogan raised his hand and let it limply fall again in a gesture which implied that words failed him. “Read his biography of Helen; read how Jupiter, disguised as a

swan, was 'enabled to avail himself of his situation' *vis-à-vis* to Leda. And to think that he may have, must have written these biographies of the Great! What a work, Henry! And, owing to the idiotic arrangement of your library, it can't be read."

"I prefer the *Wild Goose Chase*," said Anne. "A novel in six volumes—it must be restful."

"Restful," Mr. Scogan repeated. "You've hit on the right word. A *Wild Goose Chase* is sound, but a bit old-fashioned—pictures of clerical life in the fifties, you know; specimens of the landed gentry; peasants for pathos and comedy; and in the background, always the picturesque beauties of nature soberly described. All very good and solid, but, like certain puddings, just a little dull. Personally, I like much better the notion of *Thom's Works and Wanderings*. The eccentric Mr. Thom of Thom's Hill. Old Tom Thom, as his intimates used to call him. He spent ten years in Thibet organising the clarified butter industry on modern European lines, and was able to retire at thirty-six with a handsome fortune. The rest of his life he devoted to travel and ratiocination; here is the result." Mr. Scogan tapped the dummy books. "And now we come to the *Tales of Knockespotch*.

What a masterpiece and what a great man! Knockespotch knew how to write fiction. Ah, Denis, if you could only read Knockespotch you wouldn't be writing a novel about the wearisome development of a young man's character, you wouldn't be describing in endless, fastidious detail, cultured life in Chelsea and Bloomsbury and Hampstead. You would be trying to write a readable book. But then, alas! owing to the peculiar arrangement of our host's library, you never will read Knockespotch."

"Nobody could regret the fact more than I do," said Denis.

"It was Knockespotch," Mr. Scogan continued, "the great Knockespotch, who delivered us from the dreary tyranny of the realistic novel. My life, Knockespotch said, is not so long that I can afford to spend precious hours writing or reading descriptions of middle-class interiors. He said again, 'I am tired of seeing the human mind bogged in a social plenum; I prefer to paint it in a vacuum, freely and sportively bombinating.'"

"I say," said Gombauld, "Knockespotch was a little obscure sometimes, wasn't he?"

"He was," Mr. Scogan replied, "and with intention. It made him seem even pro-

founder than he actually was. But it was only in his aphorisms that he was so dark and oracular. In his Tales he was always luminous. Oh, those Tales—those Tales! How shall I describe them? Fabulous characters shoot across his pages like gaily dressed performers on the trapeze. There are extraordinary adventures and still more extraordinary speculations. Intelligences and emotions, relieved of all the imbecile preoccupations of civilised life, move in intricate and subtle dances, crossing and re-crossing, advancing, retreating, impinging. An immense erudition and an immense fancy go hand in hand. All the ideas of the present and of the past, on every possible subject, bob up among the Tales, smile gravely or grimace a caricature of themselves, then disappear to make place for something new. The verbal surface of his writing is rich and fantastically diversified. The wit is incessant. The . . .”

“But couldn’t you give us a specimen,” Denis broke in—“a concrete example?”

“Alas!” Mr. Scogan replied, “Knockespotch’s great book is like the sword Excalibur. It remains stuck fast in this door, awaiting the coming of a writer with genius enough to draw it forth. I am not even a writer, I am not so much as qualified to at-

tempt the task. The extraction of Knockes-
potch from his wooden prison I leave, my
dear Denis, to you."

"Thank you," said Denis.

CHAPTER XV

IN the time of the amiable Brantôme," Mr. Scogan was saying, "every debutante at the French Court was invited to dine at the King's table, where she was served with wine in a handsome silver cup of Italian workmanship. It was no ordinary cup, this goblet of the debutantes; for, inside, it had been most curiously and ingeniously engraved with a series of very lively amorous scenes. With each draught that the young lady swallowed these engravings became increasingly visible, and the Court looked on with interest, every time she put her nose in the cup, to see whether she blushed at what the ebbing wine revealed. If the debutante blushed, they laughed at her for her innocence; if she did not, she was laughed at for being too knowing."

"Do you propose," asked Anne, "that the custom should be revived at Buckingham Palace?"

"I do not," said Mr. Scogan. "I merely quoted the anecdote as an illustration of the customs, so genially frank, of the sixteenth

century. I might have quoted other anecdotes to show that the customs of the seventeenth and eighteenth, of the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries, and indeed of every other century, from the time of Hammurabi onward, were equally genial and equally frank. The only century in which customs were not characterised by the same cheerful openness was the nineteenth, of blessed memory. It was the astonishing exception. And yet, with what one must suppose was a deliberate disregard of history, it looked upon its horribly pregnant silences as normal and natural and right; the frankness of the previous fifteen or twenty thousand years was considered abnormal and perverse. It was a curious phenomenon."

"I entirely agree." Mary panted with excitement in her effort to bring out what she had to say. "Havelock Ellis says . . ."

Mr. Scogan, like a policeman arresting the flow of traffic, held up his hand. "He does; I know. And that brings me to my next point: the nature of the reaction."

"Havelock Ellis . . ."

"The reaction, when it came—and we may say roughly that it set in a little before the beginning of this century—the reaction was to openness, but not to the same openness as had reigned in the earlier ages. It

was to a scientific openness, not to the jovial frankness of the past, that we returned. The whole question of Amour became a terribly serious one. Earnest young men wrote in the public prints that from this time forth it would be impossible ever again to make a joke of any sexual matter. Professors wrote thick books in which sex was sterilised and dissected. It has become customary for serious young women, like Mary, to discuss, with philosophic calm, matters of which the merest hint would have sufficed to throw the youth of the sixties into a delirium of amorous excitement. It is all very estimable, no doubt. But still"—Mr. Scogan sighed—"I for one should like to see, mingled with this scientific ardour, a little more of the jovial spirit of Rabelais and Chaucer."

"I entirely disagree with you," said Mary. "Sex isn't a laughing matter; it's serious."

"Perhaps," answered Mr. Scogan, "perhaps I'm an obscene old man, for I must confess that I cannot always regard it as wholly serious."

"But I tell you . . ." began Mary furiously. Her face had flushed with excitement. Her cheeks were the cheeks of a great ripe peach.

"Indeed," Mr. Scogan continued, "it

seems to me one of the few permanently and everlastingly amusing subjects that exist. Amour is the one human activity of any importance in which laughter and pleasure preponderate, if ever so slightly, over misery and pain."

"I entirely disagree," said Mary. There was a silence.

Anne looked at her watch. "Nearly a quarter to eight," she said. "I wonder when Ivor will turn up." She got up from her deck-chair and, leaning her elbows on the balustrade of the terrace, looked out over the valley and towards the farther hills. Under the level evening light the architecture of the land revealed itself. The deep shadows, the bright contrasting lights gave the hills a new solidity. Irregularities of the surface, unsuspected before, were picked out with light and shade. The grass, the corn, the foliage of trees were stippled with intricate shadows. The surface of things had taken on a marvellous enrichment.

"Look!" said Anne suddenly, and pointed. On the opposite side of the valley, at the crest of the ridge, a cloud of dust flushed by the sunlight to rosy gold was moving rapidly along the sky-line. "It's Ivor. One can tell by the speed."

The dust cloud descended into the valley and was lost. A horn with the voice of a sea-lion made itself heard, approaching. A minute later Ivor came leaping round the corner of the house. His hair waved in the wind of his own speed; he laughed as he saw them.

“Anne darling,” he cried, and embraced her, embraced Mary, very nearly embraced Mr. Scogan. “Well, here I am. I’ve come with incredulous speed.” Ivor’s vocabulary was rich, but a little erratic. “I’m not late for dinner, am I?” He hoisted himself up on to the balustrade, and sat there, kicking his heels. With one arm he embraced a large stone flower-pot, leaning his head sideways against its hard and lichenous flanks in an attitude of trustful affection. He had brown, wavy hair, and his eyes were of a very brilliant, pale, improbable blue. His head was narrow, his face thin and rather long, his nose aquiline. In old age—though it was difficult to imagine Ivor old—he might grow to have an Iron Ducal grimness. But now, at twenty-six, it was not the structure of his face that impressed one; it was its expression. That was charming and vivacious, and his smile was an irradiation. He was for ever moving, restlessly and rapidly, but with an engaging gracefulness. His

frail and slender body seemed to be fed by a spring of inexhaustible energy.

"No, you're not late."

"You're in time to answer a question," said Mr. Scogan. "We were arguing whether Amour were a serious matter or no. What do you think? Is it serious?"

"Serious?" echoed Ivor. "Most certainly."

"I told you so," cried Mary triumphantly.

"But in what sense serious?" Mr. Scogan asked.

"I mean as an occupation. One can go on with it without ever getting bored."

"I see," said Mr. Scogan. "Perfectly."

"One can occupy oneself with it," Ivor continued, "always and everywhere. Women are always wonderfully the same. Shapes vary a little, that's all. In Spain"—with his free hand he described a series of ample curves—"one can't pass them on the stairs. In England"—he put the tip of his forefinger against the tip of his thumb and, lowering his hand, drew out this circle into an imaginary cylinder—"in England they're tubular. But their sentiments are always the same. At least, I've always found it so."

"I'm delighted to hear it," said Mr. Scogan.

CHAPTER XVI

THE ladies had left the room and the port was circulating. Mr. Scogan filled his glass, passed on the decanter, and, leaning back in his chair, looked about him for a moment in silence. The conversation rippled idly round him, but he disregarded it; he was smiling at some private joke. Gombauld noticed his smile.

“What’s amusing you?” he asked.

“I was just looking at you all, sitting round this table,” said Mr. Scogan.

“Are we as comic as all that?”

“Not at all,” Mr. Scogan answered politely. “I was merely amused by my own speculations.”

“And what were they?”

“The idlest, the most academic of speculations. I was looking at you one by one and trying to imagine which of the first six Cæsars you would each resemble, if you were given the opportunity of behaving like a Cæsar. The Cæsars are one of my touchstones,” Mr. Scogan explained. “They are characters functioning, so to speak, in the

void. They are human beings developed to their logical conclusions. Hence their unequalled value as a touchstone, a standard. When I meet someone for the first time, I ask myself this question: Given the Cæsarean environment, which of the Cæsars would this person resemble—Julius, Augustus, Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, Nero? I take each trait of character, each mental and emotional bias, each little oddity, and magnify them a thousand times. The resulting image gives me his Cæsarean formula.”

“And which of the Cæsars do you resemble?” asked Gombauld.

“I am potentially all of them,” Mr. Scogan replied, “all—with the possible exception of Claudius, who was much too stupid to be a development of anything in my character. The seeds of Julius’s courage and compelling energy, of Augustus’s prudence, of the libidinousness and cruelty of Tiberius, of Caligula’s folly, of Nero’s artistic genius and enormous vanity, are all within me. Given the opportunities, I might have been something fabulous. But circumstances were against me. I was born and brought up in a country rectory; I passed my youth doing a great deal of utterly senseless hard work for a very little

money. The result is that now, in middle age, I am the poor thing that I am. But perhaps it is as well. Perhaps, too, it's as well that Denis hasn't been permitted to flower into a little Nero, and that Ivor remains only potentially a Caligula. Yes, it's better so, no doubt. But it would have been more amusing, as a spectacle, if they had had the chance to develop, untrammelled, the full horror of their potentialities. It would have been pleasant and interesting to watch their tics and foibles and little vices swelling and burgeoning and blossoming into enormous and fantastic flowers of cruelty and pride and lewdness and avarice. The Cæsarean environment makes the Cæsar, as the special food and the queenly cell make the queen bee. We differ from the bees in so far that, given the proper food, they can be sure of making a queen every time. With us there is no such certainty; out of every ten men placed in the Cæsarean environment one will be temperamentally good, or intelligent, or great. The rest will blossom into Cæsars; he will not. Seventy and eighty years ago simple-minded people, reading of the exploits of the Bourbons in South Italy, cried out in amazement: To think that such things should be happening in the nineteenth century! And a few years

since we too were astonished to find that in our still more astonishing twentieth century, unhappy blackamoors on the Congo and the Amazon were being treated as English serfs were treated in the time of Stephen. To-day we are no longer surprised at these things. The Black and Tans harry Ireland, the Poles maltreat the Silesians, the bold Fascisti slaughter their poorer countrymen: we take it all for granted. Since the war we wonder at nothing. We have created a Cæsarean environment and a host of little Cæsars has sprung up. What could be more natural?"

Mr. Scogan drank off what was left of his port and refilled the glass.

"At this very moment," he went on, "the most frightful horrors are taking place in every corner of the world. People are being crushed, slashed, disembowelled, mangled; their dead bodies rot and their eyes decay with the rest. Screams of pain and fear go pulsing through the air at the rate of eleven hundred feet per second. After travelling for three seconds they are perfectly inaudible. These are distressing facts; but do we enjoy life any the less because of them? Most certainly we do not. We feel sympathy, no doubt; we represent to ourselves imaginatively the suffer-

ings of nations and individuals and we deplore them. But, after all, what are sympathy and imagination? Precious little, unless the person for whom we feel sympathy happens to be closely involved in our affections; and even then they don't go very far. And a good thing too; for if one had an imagination vivid enough and a sympathy sufficiently sensitive really to comprehend and to feel the sufferings of other people, one would never have a moment's peace of mind. A really sympathetic race would not so much as know the meaning of happiness. But luckily, as I've already said, we aren't a sympathetic race. At the beginning of the war I used to think I really suffered, through imagination and sympathy, with those who physically suffered. But after a month or two I had to admit that, honestly, I didn't. And yet I think I have a more vivid imagination than most. One is always alone in suffering; the fact is depressing when one happens to be the sufferer, but it makes pleasure possible for the rest of the world."

There was a pause. Henry Wimbush pushed back his chair.

"I think perhaps we ought to go and join the ladies," he said.

"So do I," said Ivor, jumping up with

alacrity. He turned to Mr. Scogan. "Fortunately," he said, "we can share our pleasures. We are not always condemned to be happy alone."

CHAPTER XVII

IVOR brought his hands down with a bang on to the final chord of his rhapsody. There was just a hint in that triumphant harmony that the seventh had been struck along with the octave by the thumb of the left hand; but the general effect of splendid noise emerged clearly enough. Small details matter little so long as the general effect is good. And, besides, that hint of the seventh was decidedly modern. He turned round in his seat and tossed the hair back out of his eyes.

"There," he said. "That's the best I can do for you, I'm afraid."

Murmurs of applause and gratitude were heard, and Mary, her large china eyes fixed on the performer, cried out aloud, "Wonderful!" and gasped for new breath as though she were suffocating.

Nature and fortune had vied with one another in heaping on Ivor Lombard all their choicest gifts. He had wealth and he was perfectly independent. He was good looking, possessed an irresistible charm of

manner, and was the hero of more amorous successes than he could well remember. His accomplishments were extraordinary for their number and variety. He had a beautiful untrained tenor voice; he could improvise, with a startling brilliance, rapidly and loudly, on the piano. He was a good amateur medium and telepathist, and had a considerable first-hand knowledge of the next world. He could write rhymed verses with an extraordinary rapidity. For painting symbolical pictures he had a dashing style, and if the drawing was sometimes a little weak, the colour was always pyrotechnical. He excelled in amateur theatricals and, when occasion offered, he could cook with genius. He resembled Shakespeare in knowing little Latin and less Greek. For a mind like his, education seemed supererogatory. Training would only have destroyed his natural aptitudes.

"Let's go out into the garden," Ivor suggested. "It's a wonderful night."

"Thank you," said Mr. Scogan, "but I for one prefer these still more wonderful arm-chairs." His pipe had begun to bubble oozily every time he pulled at it. He was perfectly happy.

Henry Wimbush was also happy. He looked for a moment over his pince-nez in

Ivor's direction and then, without saying anything, returned to the grimy little sixteenth-century account books which were now his favourite reading. He knew more about Sir Ferdinando's household expenses than about his own.

The outdoor party, enrolled under Ivor's banner, consisted of Anne, Mary, Denis, and, rather unexpectedly, Jenny. Outside it was warm and dark; there was no moon. They walked up and down the terrace, and Ivor sang a Neapolitan song: "Stretti, stretti"—close, close—with something about the little Spanish girl to follow. The atmosphere began to palpitate. Ivor put his arm round Anne's waist, dropped his head sideways on to her shoulder, and in that position walked on, singing as he walked. It seemed the easiest, the most natural, thing in the world. Denis wondered why he had never done it. He hated Ivor.

"Let's go down to the pool," said Ivor. He disengaged his embrace and turned round to shepherd his little flock. They made their way along the side of the house to the entrance of the yew-tree walk that led down to the lower garden. Between the blank precipitous wall of the house and the tall yew trees the path was a chasm of impenetrable gloom. Somewhere there were

steps down to the right, a gap in the yew hedge. Denis, who headed the party, groped his way cautiously; in this darkness, one had an irrational fear of yawning precipices, of horrible spiked obstructions. Suddenly from behind him he heard a shrill, startled, "Oh!" and then a sharp, dry concussion that might have been the sound of a slap. After that, Jenny's voice was heard pronouncing, "I am going back to the house." Her tone was decided, and even as she pronounced the words she was melting away into the darkness. The incident, whatever it had been, was closed. Denis resumed his forward groping. From somewhere behind Ivor began to sing again, softly:

"Phillis plus avare que tendre,
 Ne gagnant rien à refuser,
 Un jour exigea à Silvandré
 Trente moutons pour un baiser."

The melody drooped and climbed again with a kind of easy languor; the warm darkness seemed to pulse like blood about them.

"Le lendemain, nouvelle affaire:
 Pour le berger, le troc fut bon . . ."

"Here are the steps," cried Denis. He guided his companions over the danger, and in a moment they had the turf of the yew-

tree walk under their feet. It was lighter here, or at least it was just perceptibly less dark; for the yew walk was wider than the path that had led them under the lea of the house. Looking up, they could see between the high black hedges a strip of sky and a few stars.

“Car il obtint de la bergère . . .”

went on Ivor, and then interrupted himself to shout, “I’m going to run down,” and he was off, full speed, down the invisible slope, singing unevenly as he went:

“Trente baisers pour un mouton.”

The others followed. Denis shambled in the rear, vainly exhorting everyone to caution: the slope was steep, one might break one’s neck. What was wrong with these people, he wondered? They had become like young kittens after a dose of cat-nip. He himself felt a certain kittenishness sporting within him; but it was, like all his emotions, rather a theoretical feeling; it did not overmasteringly seek to express itself in a practical demonstration of kittenishness.

“Be careful,” he shouted once more, and hardly were the words out of his mouth when, thump! there was the sound of a heavy fall in front of him, followed by the

long "F-f-f-f" of a breath indrawn with pain and afterwards by a very sincere, "Oo-oo!" Denis was almost pleased; he had told them so, the idiots, and they wouldn't listen. He trotted down the slope towards the unseen sufferer.

Mary came down the hill like a runaway steam-engine. It was tremendously exciting, this blind rush through the dark; she felt she would never stop. But the ground grew level beneath her feet, her speed insensibly slackened, and suddenly she was caught by an extended arm and brought to an abrupt halt.

"Well," said Ivor as he tightened his embrace, "you're caught now, Anne."

She made an effort to release herself. "It's not Anne. It's Mary."

Ivor burst into a peal of amused laughter. "So it is!" he exclaimed. "I seem to be making nothing but floaters this evening. I've already made one with Jenny." He laughed again, and there was something so jolly about his laughter that Mary could not help laughing too. He did not remove his encircling arm, and somehow it was all so amusing and natural that Mary made no further attempt to escape from it. They walked along by the side of the pool, interlaced. Mary was too short for him to be

able, with any comfort, to lay his head on her shoulder. He rubbed his cheek, caressed and caressing, against the thick, sleek mass of her hair. In a little while he began to sing again; the night trembled amorously to the sound of his voice. When he had finished he kissed her. Anne or Mary: Mary or Anne. It didn't seem to make much difference which it was. There were differences in detail, of course; but the general effect was the same; and, after all, the general effect was the important thing.

Denis made his way down the hill.

"Any damage done?" he called out.

"Is that you, Denis? I've hurt my ankle so—and my knee, and my hand. I'm all in pieces."

"My poor Anne," he said. "But then," he couldn't help adding, "it was silly to start running downhill in the dark."

"Ass!" she retorted in a tone of tearful irritation; "of course it was."

He sat down beside her on the grass, and found himself breathing the faint, delicious atmosphere of perfume that she carried always with her.

"Light a match," she commanded. "I want to look at my wounds."

He felt in his pockets for the match-box. The light spurted and then grew steady.

Magically, a little universe had been created, a world of colours and forms—Anne's face, the shimmering orange of her dress, her white, bare arms, a patch of green turf—and round about a darkness that had become solid and utterly blind. Anne held out her hands; both were green and earthy with her fall, and the left exhibited two or three red abrasions.

“Not so bad,” she said. But Denis was terribly distressed, and his emotion was intensified when, looking up at her face, he saw that the trace of tears, involuntary tears of pain, lingered on her eyelashes. He pulled out his handkerchief and began to wipe away the dirt from the wounded hand. The match went out; it was not worth while to light another. Anne allowed herself to be attended to, meekly and gratefully. “Thank you,” she said, when he had finished cleaning and bandaging her hand; and there was something in her tone that made him feel that she had lost her superiority over him, that she was younger than he, had become, suddenly, almost a child. He felt tremendously large and protective. The feeling was so strong that instinctively he put his arm about her. She drew closer, leaned against him, and so they sat in silence. Then, from below, soft but wonderfully

clear through the still darkness, they heard the sound of Ivor's singing. He was going on with his half-finished song:

“Le lendemain Phillis plus tendre,
Ne voulant déplaire au berger,
Fut trop heureuse de lui rendre
Trente moutons pour un baiser.”

There was a rather prolonged pause. It was as though time were being allowed for the giving and receiving of a few of those thirty kisses. Then the voice sang on:

“Le lendemain Phillis peu sage
Aurait donné moutons et chien
Pour un baiser que le volage
A Lisette donnait pour rien.”

The last note died away into an uninterrupted silence.

“Are you better?” Denis whispered.
“Are you comfortable like this?”

She nodded a Yes to both questions.

“Trente moutons pour un baiser.” The sheep, the woolly mutton—baa, baa, baa . . .? Or the shepherd? Yes, decidedly, he felt himself to be the shepherd now. He was the master, the protector. A wave of courage swelled through him, warm as wine. He turned his head, and began to kiss her face, at first rather randomly, then, with more precision, on the mouth.

Anne averted her head; he kissed the ear, the smooth nape that this movement presented him. "No," she protested; "no, Denis."

"Why not?"

"It spoils our friendship, and that was so jolly."

"Bosh!" said Denis.

She tried to explain. "Can't you see," she said, "it isn't . . . it isn't our stunt at all." It was true. Somehow she had never thought of Denis in the light of a man who might make love; she had never so much as conceived the possibilities of an amorous relationship with him. He was so absurdly young, so . . . so . . . she couldn't find the adjective, but she knew what she meant.

"Why isn't it our stunt?" asked Denis. "And, by the way, that's a horrible and inappropriate expression."

"Because it isn't."

"But if I say it is?"

"It makes no difference. I say it isn't."

"I shall make you say it is."

"All right, Denis. But you must do it another time. I must go in and get my ankle into hot water. It's beginning to swell."

Reasons of health could not be gainsaid. Denis got up reluctantly, and helped his companion to her feet. She took a cautious

step. "Ooh!" She halted and leaned heavily on his arm.

"I'll carry you," Denis offered. He had never tried to carry a woman, but on the cinema it always looked an easy piece of heroism.

"You couldn't," said Anne.

"Of course I can." He felt larger and more protective than ever. "Put your arms round my neck," he ordered. She did so and, stooping, he picked her up under the knees and lifted her from the ground. Good heavens, what a weight! He took five staggering steps up the slope, then almost lost his equilibrium, and had to deposit his burden suddenly, with something of a bump.

Anne was shaking with laughter. "I said you couldn't, my poor Denis."

"I can," said Denis, without conviction. "I'll try again."

"It's perfectly sweet of you to offer, but I'd rather walk, thanks." She laid her hand on his shoulder and, thus supported, began to limp slowly up the hill.

"My poor Denis!" she repeated, and laughed again. Humiliated, he was silent. It seemed incredible that, only two minutes ago, he should have been holding her in his embrace, kissing her. Incredible. She was helpless then, a child. Now she had re-

gained all her superiority; she was once more the far-off being, desired and unassailable. Why had he been such a fool as to suggest that carrying stunt? He reached the house in a state of the profoundest depression.

He helped Anne upstairs, left her in the hands of a maid, and came down again to the drawing-room. He was surprised to find them all sitting just where he had left them. He had expected that, somehow, everything would be quite different—it seemed such a prodigious time since he went away. All silent and all damned, he reflected, as he looked at them. Mr. Scogan's pipe still wheezed; that was the only sound. Henry Wimbush was still deep in his account books; he had just made the discovery that Sir Ferdinando was in the habit of eating oysters the whole summer through, regardless of the absence of the justifying R. Gombauld, in horn-rimmed spectacles, was reading. Jenny was mysteriously scribbling in her red notebook. And, seated in her favourite arm-chair at the corner of the hearth, Priscilla was looking through a pile of drawings. One by one she held them out at arm's length and, throwing back her mountainous orange head, looked long and attentively through half-closed eyelids. She

wore a pale sea-green dress; on the slope of her mauve-powdered décolletage diamonds twinkled. An immensely long cigarette-holder projected at an angle from her face. Diamonds were embedded in her high-piled coiffure; they glittered every time she moved. It was a batch of Ivor's drawings—sketches of Spirit Life, made in the course of tranced tours through the other world. On the back of each sheet descriptive titles were written: "Portrait of an Angel, 15th March '20;" "Astral Beings at Play, 3rd December '19;" "A Party of Souls on their Way to a Higher Sphere, 21st May '21." Before examining the drawing on the obverse of each sheet, she turned it over to read the title. Try as she could—and she tried hard—Priscilla had never seen a vision or succeeded in establishing any communication with the Spirit World. She had to be content with the reported experiences of others.

"What have you done with the rest of your party?" she asked, looking up as Denis entered the room.

He explained. Anne had gone to bed, Ivor and Mary were still in the garden. He selected a book and a comfortable chair, and tried, as far as the disturbed state of his mind would permit him, to compose himself

for an evening's reading. The lamplight was utterly serene; there was no movement save the stir of Priscilla among her papers. All silent and all damned, Denis repeated to himself, all silent and all damned. . . .

It was nearly an hour later when Ivor and Mary made their appearance.

"We waited to see the moon rise," said Ivor.

"It was gibbous, you know," Mary explained, very technical and scientific.

"It was so beautiful down in the garden! The trees, the scent of the flowers, the stars . . ." Ivor waved his arms. "And when the moon came up, it was really too much. It made me burst into tears." He sat down at the piano and opened the lid.

"There were a great many meteorites," said Mary to anyone who would listen. "The earth must just be coming into the summer shower of them. In July and August . . ."

But Ivor had already begun to strike the keys. He played the garden, the stars, the scent of flowers, the rising moon. He even put in a nightingale that was not there. Mary looked on and listened with parted lips. The others pursued their occupations, without appearing to be seriously disturbed. On this very July day, exactly three hun-

dred and fifty years ago, Sir Ferdinando had eaten seven dozen oysters. The discovery of this fact gave Henry Wimbush a peculiar pleasure. He had a natural piety which made him delight in the celebration of memorial feasts. The three hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the seven dozen oysters. . . . He wished he had known before dinner; he would have ordered champagne.

On her way to bed Mary paid a call. The light was out in Anne's room, but she was not yet asleep.

"Why didn't you come down to the garden with us?" Mary asked.

"I fell down and twisted my ankle. Denis helped me home."

Mary was full of sympathy. Inwardly, too, she was relieved to find Anne's non-appearance so simply accounted for. She had been vaguely suspicious, down there in the garden—suspicious of what, she hardly knew; but there had seemed to be something a little *louche* in the way she had suddenly found herself alone with Ivor. Not that she minded, of course; far from it. But she didn't like the idea that perhaps she was the victim of a put-up job.

"I do hope you'll be better to-morrow," she said, and she commiserated with Anne

on all she had missed—the garden, the stars, the scent of flowers, the meteorites through whose summer shower the earth was now passing, the rising moon and its gibbosity. And then they had had such interesting conversation. What about? About almost everything. Nature, art, science, poetry, the stars, spiritualism, the relations of the sexes, music, religion. Ivor, she thought, had an interesting mind.

The two young ladies parted affectionately.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE nearest Roman Catholic church was upwards of twenty miles away. Ivor, who was punctilious in his devotions, came down early to breakfast and had his car at the door, ready to start, by a quarter to ten. It was a smart, expensive-looking machine, enamelled a pure lemon yellow and upholstered in emerald green leather. There were two seats—three if you squeezed tightly enough—and their occupants were protected from wind, dust, and weather by a glazed sedan that rose, an elegant eighteenth-century hump, from the midst of the body of the car.

Mary had never been to a Roman Catholic service, thought it would be an interesting experience, and, when the car moved off through the great gates of the courtyard, she was occupying the spare seat in the sedan. The sea-lion horn roared, faintlier, faintlier, and they were gone.

In the parish church of Crome Mr. Bodiam preached on 1 Kings vi. 18: "And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops"—a sermon of immediately local in-

terest. For the past two years the problem of the War Memorial had exercised the minds of all those in Crome who had enough leisure, or mental energy, or party spirit to think of such things. Henry Wimbush was all for a library—a library of local literature, stocked with county histories, old maps of the district, monographs on the local antiquities, dialect dictionaries, handbooks of the local geology and natural history. He liked to think of the villagers, inspired by such reading, making up parties of a Sunday afternoon to look for fossils and flint arrow-heads. The villagers themselves favoured the idea of a memorial reservoir and water supply. But the busiest and most articulate party followed Mr. Bodiham in demanding something religious in character—a second lich-gate, for example, a stained-glass window, a monument of marble, or, if possible, all three. So far, however, nothing had been done, partly because the memorial committee had never been able to agree, partly for the more cogent reason that too little money had been subscribed to carry out any of the proposed schemes. Every three or four months Mr. Bodiham preached a sermon on the subject. His last had been delivered in March; it was high time that his congregation had a fresh reminder.

“And the cedar of the house within was carved with knops.”

Mr. Bodiham touched lightly on Solomon's temple. From thence he passed to temples and churches in general. What were the characteristics of these buildings dedicated to God? Obviously, the fact of their, from a human point of view, complete uselessness. They were unpractical buildings “carved with knops.” Solomon might have built a library—indeed, what could be more to the taste of the world's wisest man? He might have dug a reservoir—what more useful in a parched city like Jerusalem? He did neither; he built a house all carved with knops, useless and unpractical. Why? Because he was dedicating the work to God. There had been much talk in Crome about the proposed War Memorial. A War Memorial was, in its very nature, a work dedicated to God. It was a token of thankfulness that the first stage in the culminating world-war had been crowned by the triumph of righteousness; it was at the same time a visibly embodied supplication that God might not long delay the Advent which alone could bring the final peace. A library, a reservoir? Mr. Bodiham scornfully and indignantly condemned the idea. These were works dedicated to man, not to God.

As a War Memorial they were totally unsuitable. A lich-gate had been suggested. This was an object which answered perfectly to the definition of a War Memorial: a useless work dedicated to God and carved with knops. One lich-gate, it was true, already existed. But nothing would be easier than to make a second entrance into the churchyard; and a second entrance would need a second gate. Other suggestions had been made. Stained-glass windows, a monument of marble. Both these were admirable, especially the latter. It was high time that the War Memorial was erected. It might soon be too late. At any moment, like a thief in the night, God might come. Meanwhile a difficulty stood in the way. Funds were inadequate. All should subscribe according to their means. Those who had lost relations in the war might reasonably be expected to subscribe a sum equal to that which they would have had to pay in funeral expenses if the relative had died while at home. Further delay was disastrous. The War Memorial must be built at once. He appealed to the patriotism and the Christian sentiments of all his hearers.

Henry Wimbush walked home thinking of the books he would present to the War Memorial Library, if ever it came into ex-

istence. He took the path through the fields; it was pleasanter than the road. At the first stile a group of village boys, loutish young fellows all dressed in the hideous ill-fitting black which makes a funeral of every English Sunday and holiday, were assembled, drearily guffawing as they smoked their cigarettes. They made way for Henry Wimbush, touching their caps as he passed. He returned their salute; his bowler and face were one in their unruffled gravity.

In Sir Ferdinando's time, he reflected, in the time of his son, Sir Julius, these young men would have had their Sunday diversions even at Crome, remote and rustic Crome. There would have been archery, skittles, dancing—social amusements in which they would have partaken as members of a conscious community. Now they had nothing, nothing except Mr. Bodiham's forbidding Boys' Club and the rare dances and concerts organised by himself. Boredom or the urban pleasures of the county metropolis were the alternatives that presented themselves to these poor youths. Country pleasures were no more; they had been stamped out by the Puritans.

In Manningham's Diary for 1600 there was a queer passage, he remembered, a very queer passage. Certain magistrates in Berkshire, Puritan magistrates, had had wind of

a scandal. One moonlit summer night they had ridden out with their *posse* and there, among the hills, they had come upon a company of men and women, dancing, stark naked, among the sheepcotes. The magistrates and their men had ridden their horses into the crowd. How self-conscious the poor people must suddenly have felt, how helpless without their clothes against armed and booted horsemen! The dancers were arrested, whipped, gaoled, set in the stocks; the moonlight dance is never danced again. What old, earthy, Panic rite came to extinction here? he wondered. Who knows?—perhaps their ancestors had danced like this in the moonlight ages before Adam and Eve were so much as thought of. He liked to think so. And now it was no more. These weary young men, if they wanted to dance, would have to bicycle six miles to the town. The country was desolate, without life of its own, without indigenous pleasures. The pious magistrates had snuffed out for ever a little happy flame that had burned from the beginning of time.

“And as on Tullia’s tomb one lamp burned clear,
Unchanged for fifteen hundred year . . .”

He repeated the lines to himself, and was desolated to think of all the murdered past.

CHAPTER XIX

HENRY WIMBUSH'S long cigar burned aromatically. The *History of Crome* lay on his knee; slowly he turned over the pages.

"I can't decide what episode to read you to-night," he said thoughtfully. "Sir Ferdinando's voyages are not without interest. Then, of course, there's his son, Sir Julius. It was he who suffered from the delusion that his perspiration engendered flies; it drove him finally to suicide. Or there's Sir Cyprian." He turned the pages more rapidly. "Or Sir Henry. Or Sir George. . . . No, I'm inclined to think I won't read about any of these."

"But you must read something," insisted Mr. Scogan, taking his pipe out of his mouth.

"I think I shall read about my grandfather," said Henry Wimbush, "and the events that led up to his marriage with the eldest daughter of the last Sir Ferdinando."

"Good," said Mr. Scogan. "We are listening."

“Before I begin reading,” said Henry Wimbush, looking up from the book and taking off the pince-nez which he had just fitted to his nose—“before I begin, I must say a few preliminary words about Sir Ferdinando, the last of the Lapiths. At the death of the virtuous and unfortunate Sir Hercules, Ferdinando found himself in possession of the family fortune, not a little increased by his father’s temperance and thrift; he applied himself forthwith to the task of spending it, which he did in an ample and jovial fashion. By the time he was forty he had eaten and, above all, drunk and loved away about half his capital, and would infallibly have soon got rid of the rest in the same manner, if he had not had the good fortune to become so madly enamoured of the Rector’s daughter as to make a proposal of marriage. The young lady accepted him, and in less than a year had become the absolute mistress of Crome and her husband. An extraordinary reformation made itself apparent in Sir Ferdinando’s character. He grew regular and economical in his habits; he even became temperate, rarely drinking more than a bottle and a half of port at a sitting. The waning fortune of the Lapiths began once more to wax, and that in despite of the hard

times (for Sir Ferdinando married in 1809 in the height of the Napoleonic Wars). A prosperous and dignified old age, cheered by the spectacle of his children's growth and happiness—for Lady Lapith had already borne him three daughters, and there seemed no good reason why she should not bear many more of them, and sons as well—a patriarchal decline into the family vault, seemed now to be Sir Ferdinando's enviable destiny. But Providence willed otherwise. To Napoleon, cause already of such infinite mischief, was due, though perhaps indirectly, the untimely and violent death which put a period to this reformed existence.

“Sir Ferdinando, who was above all things a patriot, had adopted, from the earliest days of the conflict with the French, his own peculiar method of celebrating our victories. When the happy news reached London, it was his custom to purchase immediately a large store of liquor and, taking a place on whichever of the outgoing coaches he happened to light on first, to drive through the country proclaiming the good news to all he met on the road and dispensing it, along with the liquor, at every stopping-place to all who cared to listen or drink. Thus, after the Nile, he had driven as far as Edinburgh; and later, when the

coaches, wreathed with laurel for triumph, with cypress for mourning, were setting out with the news of Nelson's victory and death, he sat through all a chilly October night on the box of the *Norwich Meteor* with a nautical keg of rum on his knees and two cases of old brandy under the seat. This genial custom was one of the many habits which he abandoned on his marriage. The victories in the Peninsula, the retreat from Moscow, Leipzig, and the abdication of the tyrant all went uncelebrated. It so happened, however, that in the summer of 1815 Sir Ferdinando was staying for a few weeks in the capital. There had been a succession of anxious, doubtful days; then came the glorious news of Waterloo. It was too much for Sir Ferdinando; his joyous youth awoke again within him. He hurried to his wine merchant and bought a dozen bottles of 1760 brandy. The Bath coach was on the point of starting; he bribed his way on to the box and, seated in glory beside the driver, proclaimed aloud the downfall of the Corsican bandit and passed about the warm liquid joy. They clattered through Uxbridge, Slough, Maidenhead. Sleeping Reading was awakened by the great news. At Didcot one of the ostlers was so much overcome by patriotic emotions and the

1760 brandy that he found it impossible to do up the buckles of the harness. The night began to grow chilly, and Sir Ferdinando found that it was not enough to take a nip at every stage: to keep up his vital warmth he was compelled to drink between the stages as well. They were approaching Swindon. The coach was travelling at a dizzy speed—six miles in the last half-hour—when, without having manifested the slightest premonitory symptom of unsteadiness, Sir Ferdinando suddenly toppled sideways off his seat and fell, head foremost, into the road. An unpleasant jolt awakened the slumbering passengers. The coach was brought to a standstill; the guard ran back with a light. He found Sir Ferdinando still alive, but unconscious; blood was oozing from his mouth. The back wheels of the coach had passed over his body, breaking most of his ribs and both arms. His skull was fractured in two places. They picked him up, but he was dead before they reached the next stage. So perished Sir Ferdinando, a victim to his own patriotism. Lady Lapith did not marry again, but determined to devote the rest of her life to the well-being of her three children—Georgiana, now five years old, and Emmeline and Caroline, twins of two.”

Henry Wimbush paused, and once more put on his pince-nez. "So much by way of introduction," he said. "Now I can begin to read about my grandfather."

"One moment," said Mr. Scogan, "till I've refilled my pipe."

Mr. Wimbush waited. Seated apart in a corner of the room, Ivor was showing Mary his sketches of Spirit Life. They spoke together in whispers.

Mr. Scogan had lighted his pipe again. "Fire away," he said.

Henry Wimbush fired away.

"It was in the spring of 1833 that my grandfather, George Wimbush, first made the acquaintance of the 'three lovely Lapiths,' as they were always called. He was then a young man of twenty-two, with curly yellow hair and a smooth pink face that was the mirror of his youthful and ingenuous mind. He had been educated at Harrow and Christ Church, he enjoyed hunting and all other field sports, and, though his circumstances were comfortable to the verge of affluence, his pleasures were temperate and innocent. His father, an East Indian merchant, had destined him for a political career, and had gone to considerable expense in acquiring a pleasant little Cornish borough as a twenty-first birthday

gift for his son. He was justly indignant when, on the very eve of George's majority, the Reform Bill of 1832 swept the borough out of existence. The inauguration of George's political career had to be postponed. At the time he got to know the lovely Lapiths he was waiting; he was not at all impatient.

"The lovely Lapiths did not fail to impress him. Georgiana, the eldest, with her black ringlets, her flashing eyes, her noble aquiline profile, her swan-like neck, and sloping shoulders, was orientally dazzling; and the twins, with their delicately turned-up noses, their blue eyes, and chestnut hair, were an identical pair of ravishingly English charmers.

"Their conversation at this first meeting proved, however, to be so forbidding that, but for the invincible attraction exercised by their beauty, George would never have had the courage to follow up the acquaintance. The twins, looking up their noses at him with an air of languid superiority, asked him what he thought of the latest French poetry and whether he liked the *Indiana* of George Sand. But what was almost worse was the question with which Georgiana opened her conversation with him. 'In music,' she asked, leaning forward and fixing

him with her large dark eyes, 'are you a classicist or a transcendentalist?' George did not lose his presence of mind. He had enough appreciation of music to know that he hated anything classical, and so, with a promptitude which did him credit, he replied, 'I am a transcendentalist.' Georgiana smiled bewitchingly. 'I am glad,' she said; 'so am I. You went to hear Paganini last week, of course. "The Prayer of Moses"—ah!' She closed her eyes. 'Do you know anything more transcendental than that?' 'No,' said George, 'I don't.' He hesitated, was about to go on speaking, and then decided that after all it would be wiser not to say—what was in fact true—that he had enjoyed above all Paganini's Farmyard Imitations. The man had made his fiddle bray like an ass, cluck like a hen, grunt, squeal, bark, neigh, quack, bellow, and growl; that last item, in George's estimation, had almost compensated for the tediousness of the rest of the concert. He smiled with pleasure at the thought of it. Yes, decidedly, he was no classicist in music; he was a thoroughgoing transcendentalist.

"George followed up this first introduction by paying a call on the young ladies and their mother, who occupied, during the

season, a small but elegant house in the neighbourhood of Berkeley Square. Lady Lapith made a few discreet inquiries, and having found that George's financial position, character, and family were all passably good, she asked him to dine. She hoped and expected that her daughters would all marry into the peerage; but, being a prudent woman, she knew it was advisable to prepare for all contingencies. George Wimbush, she thought, would make an excellent second string for one of the twins.

"At this first dinner, George's partner was Emmeline. They talked of Nature. Emmeline protested that to her high mountains were a feeling and the hum of human cities torture. George agreed that the country was very agreeable, but held that London during the season also had its charms. He noticed with surprise and a certain solicitous distress that Miss Emmeline's appetite was poor, that it didn't, in fact, exist. Two spoonfuls of soup, a morsel of fish, no bird, no meat, and three grapes—that was her whole dinner. He looked from time to time at her two sisters; Georgiana and Caroline seemed to be quite as abstemious. They waved away whatever was offered them with an expression of delicate disgust, shutting their eyes and averting their faces from

the proffered dish, as though the lemon sole, the duck, the loin of veal, the trifle, were objects revolting to the sight and smell. George, who thought the dinner capital, ventured to comment on the sisters' lack of appetite.

"'Pray, don't talk to me of eating,' said Emmeline, drooping like a sensitive plant. 'We find it so coarse, so unspiritual, my sisters and I. One can't think of one's soul while one is eating.'

"George agreed; one couldn't. 'But one must live,' he said.

"'Alas!' Emmeline sighed. 'One must. Death is very beautiful, don't you think?' She broke a corner off a piece of toast and began to nibble at it languidly. 'But since, as you say, one must live . . .' She made a little gesture of resignation. 'Luckily a very little suffices to keep one alive.' She put down her corner of toast half eaten.

"George regarded her with some surprise. She was pale, but she looked extraordinarily healthy, he thought; so did her sisters. Perhaps if you were really spiritual you needed less food. He, clearly, was not spiritual.

"After this he saw them frequently. They all liked him, from Lady Lapith downwards. True, he was not very romantic or poetical; but he was such a pleasant, unpretentious,

kind-hearted young man, that one couldn't help liking him. For his part, he thought them wonderful, wonderful, especially Georgiana. He enveloped them all in a warm, protective affection. For they needed protection; they were altogether too frail, too spiritual for this world. They never ate, they were always pale, they often complained of fever, they talked much and lovingly of death, they frequently swooned. Georgiana was the most ethereal of all; of the three she ate least, swooned most often, talked most of death, and was the palest—with a pallor that was so startling as to appear positively artificial. At any moment, it seemed, she might loose her precarious hold on this material world and become all spirit. To George the thought was a continual agony. If she were to die . . .

“She contrived, however, to live through the season, and that in spite of the numerous balls, routs, and other parties of pleasure which, in company with the rest of the lovely trio, she never failed to attend. In the middle of July the whole household moved down to the country. George was invited to spend the month of August at Crome.

“The house-party was distinguished; in the list of visitors figured the names of two

marriageable young men of title. George had hoped that country air, repose, and natural surroundings might have restored to the three sisters their appetites and the roses of their cheeks. He was mistaken. For dinner, the first evening, Georgiana ate only an olive, two or three salted almonds, and half a peach. She was as pale as ever. During the meal she spoke of love.

“‘True love,’ she said, ‘being infinite and eternal, can only be consummated in eternity. Indiana and Sir Rodolphe celebrated the mystic wedding of their souls by jumping into Niagara. Love is incompatible with life. The wish of two people who truly love one another is not to live together but to die together.’

“‘Come, come, my dear,’ said Lady Lapith, stout and practical. ‘What would become of the next generation, pray, if all the world acted on your principles?’

“‘Mamma! . . .’ Georgiana protested, and dropped her eyes.

“‘In my young days,’ Lady Lapith went on, ‘I should have been laughed out of countenance if I’d said a thing like that. But then in my young days souls weren’t as fashionable as they are now and we didn’t think death was at all poetical. It was just unpleasant.’

“‘Mamma! . . .’ Emmeline and Caroline implored in unison.

“‘In my young days——’ Lady Lapith was launched into her subject; nothing, it seemed, could stop her now. ‘In my young days, if you didn’t eat, people told you you needed a dose of rhubarb. Nowadays . . .’

“‘There was a cry; Georgiana had swooned sideways on to Lord Timpany’s shoulder. It was a desperate expedient; but it was successful. Lady Lapith was stopped.

“‘The days passed in an uneventful round of pleasures. Of all the gay party George alone was unhappy. Lord Timpany was paying his court to Georgiana, and it was clear that he was not unfavourably received. George looked on, and his soul was a hell of jealousy and despair. The boisterous company of the young men became intolerable to him; he shrank from them, seeking gloom and solitude. One morning, having broken away from them on some vague pretext, he returned to the house alone. The young men were bathing in the pool below; their cries and laughter floated up to him, making the quiet house seem lonelier and more silent. The lovely sisters and their mamma still kept their chambers; they did not customarily make their appearance till

luncheon, so that the male guests had the morning to themselves. George sat down in the hall and abandoned himself to thought.

“At any moment she might die; at any moment she might become Lady Timpany. It was terrible, terrible. If she died, then he would die too; he would go to seek her beyond the grave. If she became Lady Timpany . . . ah, then! The solution of the problem would not be so simple. If she became Lady Timpany: it was a horrible thought. But then suppose she were in love with Timpany—though it seemed incredible that anyone could be in love with Timpany—suppose her life depended on Timpany, suppose she couldn’t live without him? He was fumbling his way along this clueless labyrinth of suppositions when the clock struck twelve. On the last stroke, like an automaton released by the turning clockwork, a little maid, holding a large covered tray, popped out of the door that led from the kitchen regions into the hall. From his deep arm-chair George watched her (himself, it was evident, unobserved) with an idle curiosity. She pattered across the room and came to a halt in front of what seemed a blank expanse of panelling. She reached out her hand and, to George’s ex-

treme astonishment, a little door swung open, revealing the foot of a winding staircase. Turning sideways in order to get her tray through the narrow opening, the little maid darted in with a rapid crab-like motion. The door closed behind her with a click. A minute later it opened again and the maid, without her tray, hurried back across the hall and disappeared in the direction of the kitchen. George tried to recompose his thoughts, but an invincible curiosity drew his mind towards the hidden door, the staircase, the little maid. It was in vain he told himself that the matter was none of his business, that to explore the secrets of that surprising door, that mysterious staircase within, would be a piece of unforgivable rudeness and indiscretion. It was in vain; for five minutes he struggled heroically with his curiosity, but at the end of that time he found himself standing in front of the innocent sheet of panelling through which the little maid had disappeared. A glance sufficed to show him the position of the secret door—secret, he perceived, only to those who looked with a careless eye. It was just an ordinary door let in flush with the panelling. No latch nor handle betrayed its position, but an unobtrusive catch sunk in the wood invited the

thumb. George was astonished that he had not noticed it before; now he had seen it, it was so obvious, almost as obvious as the cupboard door in the library with its lines of imitation shelves and its dummy books. He pulled back the catch and peeped inside. The staircase, of which the degrees were made not of stone but of blocks of ancient oak, wound up and out of sight. A slit-like window admitted the daylight; he was at the foot of the central tower, and the little window looked out over the terrace; they were still shouting and splashing in the pool below.

“George closed the door and went back to his seat. But his curiosity was not satisfied. Indeed, this partial satisfaction had but whetted its appetite. Where did the staircase lead? What was the errand of the little maid? It was no business of his, he kept repeating—no business of his. He tried to read, but his attention wandered. A quarter-past twelve sounded on the harmonious clock. Suddenly determined, George rose, crossed the room, opened the hidden door, and began to ascend the stairs. He passed the first window, corkscrewed round, and came to another. He paused for a moment to look out; his heart beat uncomfortably, as though he were affronting some

unknown danger. What he was doing, he told himself, was extremely ungentlemanly, horribly underbred. He tiptoed onward and upward. One turn more, then half a turn, and a door confronted him. He halted before it, listened; he could hear no sound. Putting his eye to the keyhole, he saw nothing but a stretch of white sunlit wall. Emboldened, he turned the handle and stepped across the threshold. There he halted, petrified by what he saw, mutely gaping.

“In the middle of a pleasantly sunny little room—‘it is now Priscilla’s boudoir,’ Mr. Wimbush remarked parenthetically—stood a small circular table of mahogany. Crystal, porcelain, and silver,—all the shining apparatus of an elegant meal—were mirrored in its polished depths. The carcass of a cold chicken, a bowl of fruit, a great ham, deeply gashed to its heart of tenderest white and pink, the brown cannon ball of a cold plum-pudding, a slender Hock bottle, and a decanter of claret jostled one another for a place on this festive board. And round the table sat the three sisters, the three lovely Lapiths—eating!

“At George’s sudden entrance they had all looked towards the door, and now they sat, petrified by the same astonishment which kept George fixed and staring.

Georgiana, who sat immediately facing the door, gazed at him with dark, enormous eyes. Between the thumb and forefinger of her right hand she was holding a drumstick of the dismembered chicken; her little finger, elegantly crooked, stood apart from the rest of her hand. Her mouth was open, but the drumstick had never reached its destination; it remained, suspended, frozen, in mid-air. The other two sisters had turned round to look at the intruder. Caroline still grasped her knife and fork; Emmeline's fingers were round the stem of her claret glass. For what seemed a very long time, George and the three sisters stared at one another in silence. They were a group of statues. Then suddenly there was movement. Georgiana dropped her chicken bone, Caroline's knife and fork clattered on her plate. The movement propagated itself, grew more decisive; Emmeline sprang to her feet, uttering a cry. The wave of panic reached George; he turned and, mumbling something unintelligible as he went, rushed out of the room and down the winding stairs. He came to a standstill in the hall, and there, all by himself in the quiet house, he began to laugh.

“At luncheon it was noticed that the sisters ate a little more than usual.

Georgiana toyed with some French beans and a spoonful of calves'-foot jelly. 'I feel a little stronger to-day,' she said to Lord Timpany, when he congratulated her on this increase of appetite; 'a little more material,' she added, with a nervous laugh. Looking up, she caught George's eye; a blush suffused her cheeks and she looked hastily away.

"In the garden that afternoon they found themselves for a moment alone.

" 'You won't tell anyone, George? Promise you won't tell anyone,' she implored. 'It would make us look so ridiculous. And besides, eating *is* unspiritual, isn't it? Say you won't tell anyone.'

" 'I will,' said George brutally. 'I'll tell everyone, unless . . .'

" 'It's blackmail.'

" 'I don't care,' said George. 'I'll give you twenty-four hours to decide.'

"Lady Lapith was disappointed, of course; she had hoped for better things—for Timpany and a coronet. But George, after all, wasn't so bad. They were married at the New Year.

"My poor grandfather!" Mr. Wimbush added, as he closed his book and put away his pince-nez. "Whenever I read in the papers about oppressed nationalities, I think

of him." He relighted his cigar. "It was a maternal government, highly centralised, and there were no representative institutions."

Henry Wimbush ceased speaking. In the silence that ensued Ivor's whispered commentary on the spirit sketches once more became audible. Priscilla, who had been dozing, suddenly woke up.

"What?" she said in the startled tones of one newly returned to consciousness; "what?"

Jenny caught the words. She looked up, smiled, nodded reassuringly. "It's about a ham," she said.

"What's about a ham?"

"What Henry has been reading." She closed the red notebook lying on her knees and slipped a rubber band round it. "I'm going to bed," she announced, and got up.

"So am I," said Anne, yawning. But she lacked the energy to rise from her arm-chair.

The night was hot and oppressive. Round the open windows the curtains hung unmoving. Ivor, fanning himself with the portrait of an Astral Being, looked out into the darkness and drew a breath.

"The air's like wool," he declared.

"It will get cooler after midnight," said

Henry Wimbush, and cautiously added, "perhaps."

"I shan't sleep, I know."

Priscilla turned her head in his direction; the monumental coiffure nodded exorbitantly at her slightest movement. "You must make an effort," she said. "When I can't sleep, I concentrate my will: I say, 'I will sleep, I am asleep!' And pop! off I go. That's the power of thought."

"But does it work on stuffy nights?" Ivor inquired. "I simply cannot sleep on a stuffy night."

"Nor can I," said Mary, "except out of doors."

"Out of doors! What a wonderful idea!" In the end they decided to sleep on the towers—Mary on the western tower, Ivor on the eastern. There was a flat expanse of leads on each of the towers, and you could get a mattress through the trap doors that opened on to them. Under the stars, under the gibbous moon, assuredly they would sleep. The mattresses were hauled up, sheets and blankets were spread, and an hour later the two insomniasts, each on his separate tower, were crying their good-nights across the dividing gulf.

On Mary the sleep-compelling charm of the open air did not work with its expected

magic. Even through the mattress one could not fail to be aware that the leads were extremely hard. Then there were noises: the owls screeched tirelessly, and once, roused by some unknown terror, all the geese of the farmyard burst into a sudden frenzy of cackling. The stars and the gibbous moon demanded to be looked at, and when one meteorite had streaked across the sky, you could not help waiting, open-eyed and alert, for the next. Time passed; the moon climbed higher and higher in the sky. Mary felt less sleepy than she had when she first came out. She sat up and looked over the parapet. Had Ivor been able to sleep? she wondered. And as though in answer to her mental question, from behind the chimney-stack at the farther end of the roof a white form noiselessly emerged—a form that, in the moonlight, was recognisably Ivor's. Spreading his arms to right and left, like a tight-rope dancer, he began to walk forward along the roof-tree of the house. He swayed terrifyingly as he advanced. Mary looked on speechlessly; perhaps he was walking in his sleep! Suppose he were to wake up suddenly, now! If she spoke or moved it might mean his death. She dared look no more, but sank back on her pillows. She listened intently. For

what seemed an immensely long time there was no sound. Then there was a patter of feet on the tiles, followed by a scrabbling noise and a whispered "Damn!" And suddenly Ivor's head and shoulders appeared above the parapet. One leg followed, then the other. He was on the leads. Mary pretended to wake up with a start.

"Oh!" she said. "What are you doing here?"

"I couldn't sleep," he explained, "so I came along to see if you couldn't. One gets bored by oneself on a tower. Don't you find it so?"

It was light before five. Long, narrow clouds barred the east, their edges bright with orange fire. The sky was pale and watery. With the mournful scream of a soul in pain, a monstrous peacock, flying heavily up from below, alighted on the parapet of the tower. Ivor and Mary started broad awake.

"Catch him!" cried Ivor, jumping up. "We'll have a feather." The frightened peacock ran up and down the parapet in an absurd distress, curtseying and bobbing and clucking; his long tail swung ponderously back and forth as he turned and turned again. Then with a flap and swish he launched himself upon the air and sailed

magnificently earthward, with a recovered dignity. But he had left a trophy. Ivor had his feather, a long-lashed eye of purple and green, of blue and gold. He handed it to his companion.

"An angel's feather," he said.

Mary looked at it for a moment, gravely and intently. Her purple pyjamas clothed her with an ampleness that hid the lines of her body; she looked like some large, comfortable, unjointed toy, a sort of Teddy-bear—but a Teddy bear with an angel's head, pink cheeks, and hair like a bell of gold. An angel's face, the feather of an angel's wing. . . . Somehow the whole atmosphere of this sunrise was rather angelic.

"It's extraordinary to think of sexual selection," she said at last, looking up from her contemplation of the miraculous feather.

"Extraordinary!" Ivor echoed. "I select you, you select me. What luck!"

He put his arm round her shoulders and they stood looking eastward. The first sunlight had begun to warm and colour the pale light of the dawn. Mauve pyjamas and white pyjamas; they were a young and charming couple. The rising sun touched their faces. It was all extremely symbolic; but then, if you choose to think so, nothing

in this world is not symbolical. Profound and beautiful truth!

"I must be getting back to my tower," said Ivor at last.

"Already?"

"I'm afraid so. The varletry will soon be up and about."

"Ivor. . . ." There was a prolonged and silent farewell.

"And now," said Ivor, "I repeat my tight-rope stunt."

Mary threw her arms round his neck. "You mustn't, Ivor. It's dangerous. Please."

He had to yield at last to her entreaties. "All right," he said, "I'll go down through the house and up at the other end."

He vanished through the trap door into the darkness that still lurked within the shuttered house. A minute later he had reappeared on the farther tower; he waved his hand, and then sank down, out of sight, behind the parapet. From below, in the house, came the thin wasp-like buzzing of an alarm-clock. He had gone back just in time.

CHAPTER XX

IVOR was gone. Lounging behind the wind-screen in his yellow sedan he was whirling across rural England. Social and amorous engagements of the most urgent character called him from hall to baronial hall, from castle to castle, from Elizabethan manor-house to Georgian mansion, over the whole expanse of the kingdom. To-day in Somerset, to-morrow in Warwickshire, on Saturday in the West Riding, by Tuesday morning in Argyll—Ivor never rested. The whole summer through, from the beginning of July till the end of September, he devoted himself to his engagements; he was a martyr to them. In the autumn he went back to London for a holiday. Crome had been a little incident, an evanescent bubble on the stream of his life; it belonged already to the past. By tea-time he would be at Goble, and there would be Zenobia's welcoming smile. And on Thursday morning—but that was a long, long way ahead. He would think of Thursday morning when Thursday morning arrived. Meanwhile there was Goble, meanwhile Zenobia.

In the visitors' book at Crome Ivor had left, according to his invariable custom in these cases, a poem. He had improvised it magisterially in the ten minutes preceding his departure. Denis and Mr. Scogan strolled back together from the gates of the courtyard, whence they had bidden their last farewells; on the writing-table in the hall they found the visitors' book, open, and Ivor's composition scarcely dry. Mr. Scogan read it aloud:

“The magic of those immemorial kings,
 Who webbed enchantment on the bowls of night,
 Sleeps in the soul of all created things;
 In the blue sea, th' Acroceraunian height,
 In the eyed butterfly's auricular wings
 And orgied visions of the anchorite;
 In all that singing flies and flying sings,
 In rain, in pain, in delicate delight.
 But much more magic, much more cogent spells
 Weave here their wizardries about my soul.
 Crome calls me like the voice of vesperal bells,
 Haunts like a ghostly-peopled necropole.
 Fate tears me hence. Hard fate! since far from
 Crome
 My soul must weep, remembering its Home.”

“Very nice and tasteful and tactful,” said Mr. Scogan, when he had finished. “I am only troubled by the butterfly's auricular wings. You have a first-hand knowledge of

the workings of a poet's mind, Denis; perhaps you can explain."

"What could be simpler," said Denis. "It's a beautiful word, and Ivor wanted to say that the wings were golden."

"You make it luminously clear."

"One suffers so much," Denis went on, "from the fact that beautiful words don't always mean what they ought to mean. Recently, for example, I had a whole poem ruined, 'just because the word 'carminative' didn't mean what it ought to have meant. Carminative—it's admirable, isn't it?"

"Admirable," Mr. Scogan agreed. "And what does it mean?"

"It's a word I've treasured from my earliest infancy," said Denis, "treasured and loved. They used to give me cinnamon when I had a cold—quite useless, but not disagreeable. One poured it drop by drop out of narrow bottles, a golden liquor, fierce and fiery. On the label was a list of its virtues, and among other things it was described as being in the highest degree carminative. I adored the word. 'Isn't it carminative?' I used to say to myself when I'd taken my dose. It seemed so wonderfully to describe that sensation of internal warmth, that glow, that—what shall I call it?—physical self-satisfaction which fol-

lowed the drinking of cinnamon. Later, when I discovered alcohol, 'carminative' described for me that similar, but nobler, more spiritual glow which wine evokes not only in the body but in the soul as well. The carminative virtues of burgundy, of rum, of old brandy, of Lacryma Christi, of Marsala, of Aleatico, of stout, of gin, of champagne, of claret, of the raw new wine of this year's Tuscan vintage—I compared them, I classified them. Marsala is rosily, downily carminative; gin pricks and refreshes while it warms. I had a whole table of carmination values. And now"—Denis spread out his hands, palms upwards, despairingly—"now I know what carminative really means."

"Well, what *does* it mean?" asked Mr. Scogan, a little impatiently.

"Carminative," said Denis, lingering lovingly over the syllables, "carminative. I imagined vaguely that it had something to do with *carmen-carminis*, still more vaguely with *caro-carnis*, and its derivatives, like carnival and carnation. Carminative—there was the idea of singing and the idea of flesh, rose-coloured and warm, with a suggestion of the jollities of mi-Carême and the masked holidays of Venice. Carminative—the warmth, the glow, the interior

ripeness were all in the word. Instead of which . . ."

"Do come to the point, my dear Denis," protested Mr. Scogan. "Do come to the point."

"Well, I wrote a poem the other day," said Denis; "I wrote a poem about the effects of love."

"Others have done the same before you," said Mr. Scogan. "There is no need to be ashamed."

"I was putting forward the notion," Denis went on, "that the effects of love were often similar to the effects of wine, that Eros could intoxicate as well as Bacchus. Love, for example, is essentially carminative. It gives one the sense of warmth, the glow.

'And passion carminative as wine . . .'

was what I wrote. Not only was the line elegantly sonorous; it was also, I flattered myself, very aptly compendiously expressive. Everything was in the word carminative—a detailed, exact foreground, an immense, indefinite hinterland of suggestion.

'And passion carminative as wine . . .'

I was not ill-pleased. And then suddenly it occurred to me that I had never actually

looked up the word in a dictionary. Carminative had grown up with me from the days of the cinnamon bottle. It had always been taken for granted. Carminative: for me the word was as rich in content as some tremendous, elaborate work of art; it was a complete landscape with figures.

'And passion carminative as wine . . .'

It was the first time I had ever committed the word to writing, and all at once I felt I would like lexicographical authority for it. A small English-German dictionary was all I had at hand. I turned up C, ca, car, carm. There it was: 'Carminative: *windtreibend.* *Windtreibend!*' he repeated. Mr. Scogan laughed. Denis shook his head. "Ah," he said, "for me it was no laughing matter. For me it marked the end of a chapter, the death of something young and precious. There were the years—years of childhood and innocence—when I had believed that carminative meant—well, carminative. And now, before me lies the rest of my life—a day, perhaps, ten years, half a century, when I shall know that carminative means *windtreibend.*

'Plus ne suis ce que j'ai été
Et ne le saurai jamais être.'

It is a realisation that makes one rather melancholy."

"Carminative," said Mr. Scogan thoughtfully.

"Carminative," Denis repeated, and they were silent for a time. "Words," said Denis at last, "words—I wonder if you can realise how much I love them. You are too much preoccupied with mere things and ideas and people to understand the full beauty of words. Your mind is not a literary mind. The spectacle of Mr. Gladstone finding thirty-four rhymes to the name 'Margot' seems to you rather pathetic than anything else. Mallarmé's envelopes with their versified addresses leave you cold, unless they leave you pitiful; you can't see that

'Apte à ne point te cabrer, hue!
Poste, et j'ajouterai, dia!
Si tu ne fuis onze-bis Rue
Balzac, chez cet Hérédia,'

is a little miracle."

"You're right," said Mr. Scogan. "I can't."

"You don't feel it to be magical?"

"No."

"That's the test for the literary mind," said Denis; "the feeling of magic, the sense that words have power. The technical,

verbal part of literature is simply a development of magic. Words are man's first and most grandiose invention. With language he created a whole new universe; what wonder if he loved words and attributed power to them! With fitted, harmonious words the magicians summoned rabbits out of empty hats and spirits from the elements. Their descendants, the literary men, still go on with the process, morticing their verbal formulas together and, before the power of the finished spell, trembling with delight and awe. Rabbits out of empty hats? No, their spells are more subtly powerful, for they evoke emotions out of empty minds. Formulated by their art the most insipid statements become enormously significant. For example, I proffer the constatation, 'Black ladders lack bladders.' A self-evident truth, one on which it would not have been worth while to insist, had I chosen to formulate it in such words as 'Black fire-escapes have no bladders,' or, 'Les échelles noires manquent de vessie.' But since I put it as I do, 'Black ladders lack bladders,' it becomes, for all its self-evidence, significant, unforgettable, moving. The creation by word-power of something out of nothing—what is that but magic? And, I may add, what is that but literature? Half the world's greatest poetry

is simply 'Les échelles noires manquent de vessie,' translated into magic significance as, 'Black ladders lack bladders.' And you can't appreciate words. I'm sorry for you."

"A mental carminative," said Mr. Scogan reflectively. "That's what you need."

CHAPTER XXI

PERCHED on its four stone mushrooms, the little granary stood two or three feet above the grass of the green close. Beneath it there was a perpetual shade and a damp growth of long, luxuriant grasses. Here, in the shadow, in the green dampness, a family of white ducks had sought shelter from the afternoon sun. Some stood, preening themselves, some reposed with their long bellies pressed to the ground, as though the cool grass were water. Little social noises burst fitfully forth, and from time to time some pointed tail would execute a brilliant Lisztian tremolo. Suddenly their jovial repose was shattered. A prodigious thump shook the wooden flooring above their heads; the whole granary trembled, little fragments of dirt and crumbled wood rained down among them. With a loud, continuous quacking the ducks rushed out from beneath this nameless menace, and did not stay their flight till they were safely in the farmyard.

“Don’t lose your temper,” Anne was saying. “Listen! You’ve frightened the

ducks. Poor dears! no wonder." She was sitting sideways in a low, wooden chair. Her right elbow rested on the back of the chair and she supported her cheek on her hand. Her long, slender body drooped into curves of a lazy grace. She was smiling, and she looked at Gombauld through half-closed eyes.

"Damn you!" Gombauld repeated, and stamped his foot again. He glared at her round the half-finished portrait on the easel.

"Poor ducks!" Anne repeated. The sound of their quacking was faint in the distance; it was inaudible.

"Can't you see you make me lose my time?" he asked. "I can't work with you dangling about distractingly like this."

"You'd lose less time if you stopped talking and stamping your feet and did a little painting for a change. After all, what am I dangling about for, except to be painted?"

Gombauld made a noise like a growl. "You're awful," he said, with conviction. "Why do you ask me to come and stay here? Why do you tell me you'd like me to paint your portrait?"

"For the simple reasons that I like you—at least, when you're in a good temper—and that I think you're a good painter."

"For the simple reason"—Gombauld mimicked her voice—"that you want me to make love to you and, when I do, to have the amusement of running away."

Anne threw back her head and laughed. "So you think it amuses me to have to evade your advances! So like a man! If you only knew how gross and awful and boring men are when they try to make love and you don't want them to make love! If you could only see yourselves through our eyes!"

Gombauld picked up his palette and brushes and attacked his canvas with the ardour of irritation. "I suppose you'll be saying next that you didn't start the game, that it was I who made the first advances, and that you were the innocent victim who sat still and never did anything that could invite or allure me on."

"So like a man again!" said Anne. "It's always the same old story about the woman tempting the man. The woman lures, fascinates, invites; and man—noble man, innocent man—falls a victim. My poor Gombauld! Surely you're not going to sing that old song again. It's so unintelligent, and I always thought you were a man of sense."

"Thanks," said Gombauld.

"Be a little objective," Anne went on.

"Can't you see that you're simply externalising your own emotions? That's what you men are always doing; it's so barbarously naïve. You feel one of your loose desires for some woman, and because you desire her strongly you immediately accuse her of luring you on, of deliberately provoking and inviting the desire. You have the mentality of savages. You might just as well say that a plate of strawberries and cream deliberately lures you on to feel greedy. In ninety-nine cases out of a hundred women are as passive and innocent as the strawberries and cream."

"Well, all I can say is that this must be the hundredth case," said Gombauld, without looking up.

Anne shrugged her shoulders and gave vent to a sigh. "I'm at a loss to know whether you're more silly or more rude."

After painting for a little time in silence Gombauld began to speak again. "And then there's Denis," he said, renewing the conversation as though it had only just been broken off. "You're playing the same game with him. Why can't you leave that wretched young man in peace?"

Anne flushed with a sudden and uncontrollable anger. "It's perfectly untrue about Denis," she said indignantly. "I

never dreamt of playing what you beautifully call the same game with him." Recovering her calm, she added in her ordinary cooing voice and with her exacerbating smile, "You've become very protective towards poor Denis all of a sudden."

"I have," Gombauld replied, with a gravity that was somehow a little too solemn. "I don't like to see a young man . . ."

" . . . being whirled along the road to ruin," said Anne, continuing his sentence for him. I admire your sentiments and, believe me, I share them."

She was curiously irritated at what Gombauld had said about Denis. It happened to be so completely untrue. Gombauld might have some slight ground for his reproaches. But Denis—no, she had never flirted with Denis. Poor boy! He was very sweet. She became somewhat pensive.

Gombauld painted on with fury. The restlessness of an unsatisfied desire, which, before, had distracted his mind, making work impossible, seemed now to have converted itself into a kind of feverish energy. When it was finished, he told himself, the portrait would be diabolic. He was painting her in the pose she had naturally adopted at the first sitting. Seated sideways, her

elbow on the back of the chair, her head and shoulders turned at an angle from the rest of her body, towards the front, she had fallen into an attitude of indolent abandonment. He had emphasised the lazy curves of her body; the lines sagged as they crossed the canvas, the grace of the painted figure seemed to be melting into a kind of soft decay. The hand that lay along the knee was as limp as a glove. He was at work on the face now; it had begun to emerge on the canvas, doll-like in its regularity and listlessness. It was Anne's face—but her face as it would be, utterly unilluminated by the inward lights of thought and emotion. It was the lazy, expressionless mask which was sometimes her face. The portrait was terribly like; and at the same time it was the most malicious of lies. Yes, it would be diabolic when it was finished, Gombauld decided; he wondered what she would think of it.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR the sake of peace and quiet Denis had retired earlier on this same afternoon to his bedroom. He wanted to work, but the hour was a drowsy one, and lunch, so recently eaten, weighed heavily on body and mind. The meridian demon was upon him; he was possessed by that bored and hopeless post-prandial melancholy which the cœnobites of old knew and feared under the name of "accidie." He felt, like Ernest Dowson, "a little weary." He was in the mood to write something rather exquisite and gentle and quietist in tone; something a little droopy and at the same time—how should he put it?—a little infinite. He thought of Anne, of love hopeless and unattainable. Perhaps that was the ideal kind of love, the hopeless kind—the quiet, theoretical kind of love. In this sad mood of repletion he could well believe it. He began to write. One elegant quatrain had flowed from beneath his pen:

"A brooding love which is at most
The stealth of moonbeams when they slide,
Evoking colour's bloodless ghost,
O'er some scarce-breathing breast or side . . ."

when his attention was attracted by a sound from outside. He looked down from his window; there they were, Anne and Gombauld, talking, laughing together. They crossed the courtyard in front, and passed out of sight through the gate in the right-hand wall. That was the way to the green close and the granary; she was going to sit for him again. His pleasantly depressing melancholy was dissipated by a puff of violent emotion; angrily he threw his quatrain into the waste-paper basket and ran downstairs. "The stealth of moonbeams," indeed!

In the hall he saw Mr. Scogan; the man seemed to be lying in wait. Denis tried to escape, but in vain. Mr. Scogan's eye glittered like the eye of the Ancient Mariner.

"Not so fast," he said, stretching out a small saurian hand with pointed nails—"not so fast. I was just going down to the flower garden to take the sun. We'll go together."

Denis abandoned himself; Mr. Scogan put on his hat and they went out arm in arm. On the shaven turf of the terrace Henry Wimbush and Mary were playing a solemn game of bowls. They descended by the yew-tree walk. It was here, thought Denis, here that Anne had fallen, here that

he had kissed her, here--and he blushed with retrospective shame at the memory--here that he had tried to carry her and failed. Life was awful!

"Sanity!" said Mr. Scogan, suddenly breaking a long silence. "Sanity--that's what's wrong with me and that's what will be wrong with you, my dear Denis, when you're old enough to be sane or insane. In a sane world I should be a great man; as things are, in this curious establishment, I am nothing at all; to all intents and purposes I don't exist. I am just *Vox et præterea nihil.*"

Denis made no response; he was thinking of other things. "After all," he said to himself--"after all, Gombauld is better looking than I, more entertaining, more confident; and, besides, he's already somebody and I'm still only potential. . . ."

"Everything that ever gets done in this world is done by madmen," Mr. Scogan went on. Denis tried not to listen, but the tireless insistence of Mr. Scogan's discourse gradually compelled his attention. "Men such as I am, such as you may possibly become, have never achieved anything. We're too sane; we're merely reasonable. We lack the human touch, the compelling enthusiastic mania. People are quite ready to listen

to the philosophers for a little amusement, just as they would listen to a fiddler or a mountebank. But as to acting on the advice of the men of reason—never. Wherever the choice has had to be made between the man of reason and the madman, the world has unhesitatingly followed the madman. For the madman appeals to what is fundamental, to passion and the instincts; the philosophers to what is superficial and supererogatory—reason.”

They entered the garden; at the head of one of the alleys stood a green wooden bench, embayed in the midst of a fragrant continent of lavender bushes. It was here, though the place was shadeless and one breathed hot, dry perfume instead of air—it was here that Mr. Scogan elected to sit. He thrived on untempered sunlight.

“Consider, for example, the case of Luther and Erasmus.” He took out his pipe and began to fill it as he talked. “There was Erasmus, a man of reason if ever there was one. People listened to him at first—a new virtuoso performing on that elegant and resourceful instrument, the intellect; they even admired and venerated him. But did he move them to behave as he wanted them to behave—reasonably, decently, or at least a little less porkishly than usual?

He did not. And then Luther appears, violent, passionate, a madman insanely convinced about matters in which there can be no conviction. He shouted, and men rushed to follow him. Erasmus was no longer listened to; he was reviled for his reasonableness. Luther was serious, Luther was reality—like the Great War. Erasmus was only reason and decency; he lacked the power, being a sage, to move men to action. Europe followed Luther and embarked on a century and a half of war and bloody persecution. It's a melancholy story." Mr. Scogan lighted a match. In the intense light the flame was all but invisible. The smell of burning tobacco began to mingle with the sweetly acrid smell of the lavender.

"If you want to get men to act reasonably, you must set about persuading them in a maniacal manner. The very sane precepts of the founders of religions are only made infectious by means of enthusiasms which to a sane man must appear deplorable. It is humiliating to find how impotent unadulterated sanity is. Sanity, for example, informs us that the only way in which we can preserve civilisation is by behaving decently and intelligently. Sanity appeals and argues; our rulers persevere in their customary porkishness, while we acquiesce and obey.

The only hope is a maniacal crusade; I am ready, when it comes, to beat a tambourine with the loudest, but at the same time I shall feel a little ashamed of myself. However” —Mr. Scogan shrugged his shoulders and, pipe in hand, made a gesture of resignation —“It’s futile to complain that things are as they are. The fact remains that sanity unassisted is useless. What we want, then, is a sane and reasonable exploitation of the forces of insanity. We sane men will have the power yet.” Mr. Scogan’s eyes shone with a more than ordinary brightness, and, taking his pipe out of his mouth, he gave vent to his loud, dry, and somehow rather fiendish laugh.

“But I don’t want power,” said Denis. He was sitting in limp discomfort at one end of the bench, shading his eyes from the intolerable light. Mr. Scogan, bolt upright at the other end, laughed again.

“Everybody wants power,” he said. “Power in some form or other. The sort of power you hanker for is literary power. Some people want power to persecute other human beings; you expend your lust for power in persecuting words, twisting them, moulding them, torturing them to obey you. But I divagate.”

“Do you?” asked Denis faintly.

"Yes," Mr. Scogan continued, unheeding, "the time will come. We men of intelligence will learn to harness the insanities to the service of reason. We can't leave the world any longer to the direction of chance. We can't allow dangerous maniacs like Luther, mad about dogma, like Napoleon, mad about himself, to go on casually appearing and turning everything upside-down. In the past it didn't so much matter; but our modern machine is too delicate. A few more knocks like the Great War, another Luther or two, and the whole concern will go to pieces. In future, the men of reason must see that the madness of the world's maniacs is canalised into proper channels, is made to do useful work, like a mountain torrent driving a dynamo. . . ."

"Making electricity to light a Swiss hotel," said Denis. "You ought to complete the simile."

Mr. Scogan waved away the interruption. "There's only one thing to be done," he said. "The men of intelligence must combine, must conspire, and seize power from the imbeciles and maniacs who now direct us. They must found the Rational State."

The heat that was slowly paralysing all Denis's mental and bodily faculties, seemed to bring to Mr. Scogan additional vitality.

He talked with an ever-increasing energy, his hands moved in sharp, quick, precise gestures, his eyes shone. Hard, dry, and continuous, his voice went on sounding and sounding in Denis's ears with the insistence of a mechanical noise.

"In the Rational State," he heard Mr. Scogan saying, "human beings will be separated out into distinct species, not according to the colour of their eyes or the shape of their skulls, but according to the qualities of their mind and temperament. Examining psychologists, trained to what would now seem an almost superhuman clairvoyance, will test each child that is born and assign it to its proper species. Duly labelled and docketed, the child will be given the education suitable to members of its species, and will be set, in adult life, to perform those functions which human beings of his variety are capable of performing."

"How many species will there be?" asked Denis.

"A great many, no doubt," Mr. Scogan answered; "the classification will be subtle and elaborate. But it is not in the power of a prophet to go into details, nor is it his business. I will do no more than indicate the three main species into which the subjects of the Rational State will be divided."

He paused, cleared his throat, and coughed once or twice, evoking in Denis's mind the vision of a table with a glass and water-bottle, and, lying across one corner, a long white pointer for the lantern pictures.

"The three main species," Mr. Scogan went on, "will be these: the Directing Intelligences, the Men of Faith, and the Herd. Among the Intelligences will be found all those capable of thought, those who know how to attain a certain degree of freedom—and, alas, how limited, even among the most intelligent, that freedom is!—from the mental bondage of their time. A select body of Intelligences, drawn from among those who have turned their attention to the problems of practical life, will be the governors of the Rational State. They will employ as their instruments of power the second great species of humanity—the men of Faith, the Madmen, as I have been calling them, who believe in things unreasonably, with passion, and are ready to die for their beliefs and their desires. These wild men, with their fearful potentialities for good or for mischief, will no longer be allowed to react casually to a casual environment. There will be no more Cæsar Borgias, no more Luthers and Mohammeds, no more Joanna Southcotts, no more Comstocks.

The old-fashioned Man of Faith and Desire, that haphazard creature of brute circumstance, who might drive men to tears and repentance, or who might equally well set them on to cutting one another's throats, will be replaced by a new sort of madman, still externally the same, still bubbling with a seemingly spontaneous enthusiasm, but, ah, how very different from the madman of the past! For the new Man of Faith will be expending his passion, his desire, and his enthusiasm in the propagation of some reasonable idea. He will be, all unawares, the tool of some superior intelligence."

Mr. Scogan chuckled maliciously; it was as though he were taking a revenge, in the name of reason, on enthusiasts. "From their earliest years, as soon, that is, as the examining psychologists have assigned them their place in the classified scheme, the Men of Faith will have had their special education under the eye of the Intelligences. Moulded by a long process of suggestion, they will go out into the world, preaching and practising with . . . generous mania the coldly reasonable projects of the Directors from above. When these projects are accomplished, or when the ideas that were useful a decade ago have ceased to be useful, the Intelligences will inspire a new generation of madmen with

a new eternal truth. The principal function of the Men of Faith will be to move and direct the Multitude, that third great species consisting of those countless millions who lack intelligence and are without valuable enthusiasm. When any particular effort is required of the Herd, when it is thought necessary, for the sake of solidarity, that humanity shall be kindled and united by some single enthusiastic desire or idea, the Men of Faith, primed with some simple and satisfying creed, will be sent out on a mission of evangelisation. At ordinary times, when the high spiritual temperature of a Crusade would be unhealthy, the Men of Faith will be quietly and earnestly busy with the great work of education. In the upbringing of the Herd, humanity's almost boundless suggestibility will be scientifically exploited. Systematically, from earliest infancy, its members will be assured that there is no happiness to be found except in work and obedience; they will be made to believe that they are happy, that they are tremendously important beings, and that everything they do is noble and significant. For the lower species the earth will be restored to the centre of the universe and man to pre-eminence on the earth. Oh, I envy the lot of the commonalty in the Rational

State! Working their eight hours a day, obeying their betters, convinced of their own grandeur and significance and immortality, they will be marvellously happy, happier than any race of men has ever been. They will go through life in a rosy state of intoxication, from which they will never awake. The Men of Faith will play the cup-bearers at this lifelong bacchanal, filling and ever filling again with the warm liquor that the Intelligences, in sad and sober privacy behind the scenes, will brew for the intoxication of their subjects."

"And what will be my place in the Rational State?" Denis drowsily inquired from under his shading hand.

Mr. Scogan looked at him for a moment in silence. "It's difficult to see where you would fit in," he said at last. "You couldn't do manual work; you're too independent and unsuggestible to belong to the larger Herd; you have none of the characteristics required in a Man of Faith. As for the Directing Intelligences, they will have to be marvellously clear and merciless and penetrating." He paused and shook his head. "No, I can see no place for you; only the lethal chamber."

Deeply hurt, Denis emitted the imitation

of a loud Homeric laugh. "I'm getting sunstroke here," he said, and got up.

Mr. Scogan followed his example, and they walked slowly away down the narrow path, brushing the blue lavender flowers in their passage. Denis pulled a sprig of lavender and sniffed at it; then some dark leaves of rosemary that smelt like incense in a cavernous church. They passed a bed of opium poppies, dispetaled now; the round, ripe seedheads were brown and dry—like Polynesian trophies, Denis thought; severed heads stuck on poles. He liked the fancy enough to impart it to Mr. Scogan.

"Like Polynesian trophies. . . ." Uttered aloud, the fancy seemed less charming and significant than it did when it first occurred to him.

There was a silence, and in a growing wave of sound the whir of the reaping machines swelled up from the fields beyond the garden and then receded into a remoter hum.

"It is satisfactory to think," said Mr. Scogan, as they strolled slowly onward, "that a multitude of people are toiling in the harvest fields in order that we may talk of Polynesia. Like every other good thing in this world, leisure and culture have to be paid for. Fortunately, however, it is not the leisured and the cultured who have to

pay. Let us be duly thankful for that, my dear Denis—duly thankful,” he repeated, and knocked the ashes out of his pipe.

Denis was not listening. He had suddenly remembered Anne. She was with Gombauld—alone with him in his studio. It was an intolerable thought.

“Shall we go and pay a call on Gombauld?” he suggested carelessly. “It would be amusing to see what he’s doing now.”

He laughed inwardly to think how furious Gombauld would be when he saw them arriving.

CHAPTER XXIII

GOMBAULD was by no means so furious at their apparition as Denis had hoped and expected he would be. Indeed, he was rather pleased than annoyed when the two faces, one brown and pointed, the other round and pale, appeared in the frame of the open door. The energy born of his restless irritation was dying within him, returning to its emotional elements. A moment more and he would have been losing his temper again—and Anne would be keeping hers, infuriatingly. Yes, he was positively glad to see them.

“Come in, come in,” he called out hospitably.

Followed by Mr. Scogan, Denis climbed the little ladder and stepped over the threshold. He looked suspiciously from Gombauld to his sitter, and could learn nothing from the expression of their faces except that they both seemed pleased to see the visitors. Were they really glad, or were they cunningly simulating gladness? He wondered.

Mr. Scogan, meanwhile, was looking at the portrait.

"Excellent," he said approvingly, "excellent. Almost too true to character, if that is possible; yes, positively too true. But I'm surprised to find you putting in all this psychology business." He pointed to the face, and with his extended finger followed the slack curves of the painted figure. "I thought you were one of the fellows who went in exclusively for balanced masses and impinging planes."

Gombauld laughed. "This is a little infidelity," he said.

"I'm sorry," said Mr. Scogan. "I for one, without ever having had the slightest appreciation of painting, have always taken particular pleasure in Cubismus. I like to see pictures from which nature has been completely banished, pictures which are exclusively the product of the human mind. They give me the same pleasure as I derive from a good piece of reasoning or a mathematical problem or an achievement of engineering. Nature, or anything that reminds me of nature, disturbs me; it is too large, too complicated, above all too utterly pointless and incomprehensible. I am at home with the works of man; if I choose to set my mind to it, I can understand anything that any

man has made or thought. That is why I always travel by Tube, never by bus if I can possibly help it. For, travelling by bus, one can't avoid seeing, even in London, a few stray works of God—the sky, for example, an occasional tree, the flowers in the window-boxes. But travel by Tube and you see nothing but the works of man—iron riveted into geometrical forms, straight lines of concrete, patterned expanses of tiles. All is human and the product of friendly and comprehensible minds. All philosophies and all religions—what are they but spiritual Tubes bored through the universe! Through these narrow tunnels, where all is recognisably human, one travels comfortable and secure, contriving to forget that all round and below and above them stretches the blind mass of earth, endless and unexplored. Yes, give me the Tube and Cubismus every time; give me ideas, so snug and neat and simple and well made. And preserve me from nature, preserve me from all that's inhumanly large and complicated and obscure. I haven't the courage, and, above all, I haven't the time to start wandering in that labyrinth."

While Mr. Scogan was discoursing, Denis had crossed over to the farther side of the little square chamber, where Anne was sit-

ting, still in her graceful, lazy pose, on the low chair.

"Well?" he demanded, looking at her almost fiercely. What was he asking of her? He hardly knew himself.

Anne looked up at him, and for answer echoed his "Well?" in another, a laughing key.

Denis had nothing more, at the moment, to say. Two or three canvases stood in the corner behind Anne's chair, their faces turned to the wall. He pulled them out and began to look at the paintings.

"May I see too?" Anne requested.

He stood them in a row against the wall. Anne had to turn round in her chair to look at them. There was the big canvas of the man fallen from the horse, there was a painting of flowers, there was a small landscape. His hands on the back of the chair, Denis leaned over her. From behind the easel at the other side of the room Mr. Scogan was talking away. For a long time they looked at the pictures, saying nothing; or, rather, Anne looked at the pictures, while Denis, for the most part, looked at Anne.

"I like the man and the horse; don't you?" she said at last, looking up with an inquiring smile.

Denis nodded, and then in a queer,

strangled voice, as though it had cost him a great effort to utter the words, he said, "I love you."

It was a remark which Anne had heard a good many times before and mostly heard with equanimity. But on this occasion—perhaps because they had come so unexpectedly, perhaps for some other reason—the words provoked in her a certain surprised commotion.

"My poor Denis," she managed to say, with a laugh; but she was blushing as she spoke.

CHAPTER XXIV

IT was noon. Denis, descending from his chamber, where he had been making an unsuccessful effort to write something about nothing in particular, found the drawing-room deserted. He was about to go out into the garden when his eye fell on a familiar but mysterious object—the large red notebook in which he had so often seen Jenny quietly and busily scribbling. She had left it lying on the window-seat. The temptation was great. He picked up the book and slipped off the elastic band that kept it discreetly closed.

“Private. Not to be opened,” was written in capital letters on the cover. He raised his eyebrows. It was the sort of thing one wrote in one’s Latin Grammar while one was still at one’s preparatory school.

“Black is the raven, black is the rook,
But blacker the thief who steals this book!”

It was curiously childish, he thought, and he smiled to himself. He opened the book.

What he saw made him wince as though he had been struck.

Denis was his own severest critic; so, at least, he had always believed. He liked to think of himself as a merciless vivisector probing into the palpitating entrails of his own soul; he was Brown Dog to himself. His weaknesses, his absurdities—no one knew them better than he did. Indeed, in a vague way he imagined that nobody beside himself was aware of them at all. It seemed, somehow, inconceivable that he should appear to other people as they appeared to him; inconceivable that they ever spoke of him among themselves in that same freely critical and, to be quite honest, mildly malicious tone in which he was accustomed to talk of them. In his own eyes he had defects, but to see them was a privilege reserved to him alone. For the rest of the world he was surely an image of flawless crystal. It was almost axiomatic.

On opening the red notebook that crystal image of himself crashed to the ground, and was irreparably shattered. He was not his own severest critic after all. The discovery was a painful one.

The fruit of Jenny's unobtrusive scribbling lay before him. A caricature of himself; reading (the book was upside-down).

In the background a dancing couple, recognisable as Gombauld and Anne. Beneath, the legend: "Fable of the Wallflower and the Sour Grapes." Fascinated and horrified, Denis pored over the drawing. It was masterful. A mute, inglorious Rouveyre appeared in every one of those cruelly clear lines. The expression of the face, an assumed aloofness and superiority tempered by a feeble envy; the attitude of the body and limbs, an attitude of studious and scholarly dignity, given away by the fidgety pose of the turned-in feet—these things were terrible. And, more terrible still, was the likeness, was the magisterial certainty with which his physical peculiarities were all recorded and subtly exaggerated.

Denis looked deeper into the book. There were caricatures of other people: of Priscilla and Mr. Barbecue-Smith; of Henry Wim-bush, of Anne and Gombauld; of Mr. Scogan, whom Jenny had represented in a light that was more than slightly sinister, that was, indeed, diabolic; of Mary and Ivor. He scarcely glanced at them. A fearful desire to know the worst about himself possessed him. He turned over the leaves, lingering at nothing that was not his own image. Seven full pages were devoted to him.

“Private. Not to be opened.” He had disobeyed the injunction; he had only got what he deserved. Thoughtfully he closed the book, and slid the rubber band once more into its place. Sadder and wiser, he went out on to the terrace. And so this, he reflected, this was how Jenny employed the leisure hours in her ivory tower apart. And he had thought her a simple-minded, uncritical creature! It was he, it seemed, who was the fool. He felt no resentment towards Jenny. No, the distressing thing wasn't Jenny herself; it was what she and the phenomenon of her red book represented, what they stood for and concretely symbolised. They represented all the vast conscious world of men outside himself; they symbolised something that in his studious solitariness he was apt not to believe in. He could stand at Piccadilly Circus, could watch the crowds shuffle past, and still imagine himself the one fully conscious, intelligent, individual being among all those thousands. It seemed, somehow, impossible that other people should be in their way as elaborate and complete as he in his. Impossible; and yet, periodically he would make some painful discovery about the external world and the horrible reality of its consciousness and its intelligence. The red

notebook was one of these discoveries, a footprint in the sand. It put beyond a doubt the fact that the outer world really existed.

Sitting on the balustrade of the terrace, he ruminated this unpleasant truth for some time. Still chewing on it, he strolled pensively down towards the swimming-pool. A peacock and his hen trailed their shabby finery across the turf of the lower lawn. Odious birds! Their necks, thick and greedily fleshy at the roots, tapered up to the cruel inanity of their brainless heads, their flat eyes and piercing beaks. The fabulists were right, he reflected, when they took beasts to illustrate their tractates of human morality. Animals resemble men with all the truthfulness of a caricature. (Oh, the red notebook!) He threw a piece of stick at the slowly pacing birds. They rushed towards it, thinking it was something to eat.

He walked on. The profound shade of a giant ilex tree engulfed him. Like a great wooden octopus, it spread its long arms abroad.

“Under the spreading ilex tree . . .”

He tried to remember who the poem was by, but couldn't.

“The smith, a brawny man is he,
With arms like rubber bands.”

Just like his; he would have to try and do his Muller exercises more regularly.

He emerged once more into the sunshine. The pool lay before him, reflecting in its bronze mirror the blue and various green of the summer day. Looking at it, he thought of Anne's bare arms and seal-sleek bathing-dress, her moving knees and feet.

“And little Luce with the white legs,
And bouncing Barbary . . .”

Oh, these rags and tags of other people's making! Would he ever be able to call his brain his own? Was there, indeed, anything in it that was truly his own, or was it simply an education?

He walked slowly round the water's edge. In an embayed recess among the surrounding yew trees, leaning her back against the pedestal of a pleasantly comic version of the Medici Venus, executed by some nameless mason of the *seicento*, he saw Mary pensively sitting.

“Hullo!” he said, for he was passing so close to her that he had to say something.

Mary looked up. “Hullo!” she answered in a melancholy, uninterested tone.

In this alcove hewed out of the dark trees, the atmosphere seemed to Denis agreeably elegiac. He sat down beside her under the shadow of the pudic goddess. There was a prolonged silence.

At breakfast that morning Mary had found on her plate a picture postcard of Gobley Great Park. A stately Georgian pile, with a façade sixteen windows wide; parterres in the foreground; huge, smooth lawns receding out of the picture to right and left. Ten years more of the hard times and Gobley, with all its peers, will be deserted and decaying. Fifty years, and the countryside will know the old landmarks no more. They will have vanished as the monasteries vanished before them. At the moment, however, Mary's mind was not moved by these considerations.

On the back of the postcard, next to the address, was written, in Ivor's bold, large hand, a single quatrain.

"Hail, maid of moonlight! Bride of the sun, farewell!

Like bright plumes moulted in an angel's flight,
There sleep within my heart's most mystic cell
Memories of morning, memories of the night."

There followed a postscript of three lines:
"Would you mind asking one of the house-

maids to forward the packet of safety-razor blades I left in the drawer of my washstand. Thanks.—IVOR.

Seated under the Venus's immemorial gesture, Mary considered life and love. The abolition of her repressions, so far from bringing the expected peace of mind, had brought nothing but disquiet, a new and hitherto unexperienced misery. Ivor, Ivor. . . . She couldn't do without him now. It was evident, on the other hand, from the poem on the back of the picture postcard, that Ivor could very well do without her. He was at Goble now; so was Zenobia. Mary knew Zenobia. She thought of the last verse of the song he had sung that night in the garden.

“Le lendemain, Phillis peu sage
Aurait donné moutons et chien
Pour un baiser que le volage
A Lisette donnait pour rien.”

Mary shed tears at the memory; she had never been so unhappy in all her life before.

It was Denis who first broke the silence. “The individual,” he began in a soft and sadly philosophical tone, “is not a self-supporting universe. There are times when he comes into contact with other individuals, when he is forced to take cognisance of the

existence of other universes beside himself."

He had contrived this highly abstract generalisation as a preliminary to a personal confidence. It was the first gambit in a conversation that was to lead up to Jenny's caricatures.

"True," said Mary; and, generalising for herself, she added, "When one individual comes into intimate contact with another, she—or he, of course, as the case may be—must almost inevitably receive or inflict suffering."

"One is apt, Denis went on, "to be so spellbound by the spectacle of one's own personality that one forgets that the spectacle presents itself to other people as well as to oneself."

Mary was not listening. "The difficulty," she said, "makes itself acutely felt in matters of sex. If one individual seeks intimate contact with another individual in the natural way, she is certain to receive or inflict suffering. If on the other hand, she avoids contacts, she risks the equally grave sufferings that follow on unnatural repressions. As you see, it's a dilemma."

"When I think of my own case," said Denis, making a more decided move in the desired direction, "I am amazed how ignorant I am of other people's mentality in

general and, above all and in particular, of their opinions about myself. Our minds are sealed books only occasionally opened to the outside world." He made a gesture that was faintly suggestive of the drawing off of a rubber band.

"It's an awful problem," said Mary thoughtfully. "One has to have had personal experience to realise quite how awful it is."

"Exactly." Denis nodded. "One has to have had first-hand experience." He leaned towards her and slightly lowered his voice. "This very morning, for example . . ." he began, but his confidences were cut short. The deep voice of the gong, tempered by distance to a pleasant booming, floated down from the house. It was lunch-time. Mechanically Mary rose to her feet, and Denis, a little hurt that she should exhibit such a desperate anxiety for her food and so slight an interest in his spiritual experiences, followed her. They made their way up to the house without speaking.

CHAPTER XXV

I HOPE you all realise," said Henry Wimbush during dinner, "that next Monday is Bank Holiday, and that you will all be expected to help in the Fair."

"Heavens!" cried Anne. "The Fair—I had forgotten all about it. What a nightmare! Couldn't you put a stop to it, Uncle Henry?"

Mr. Wimbush sighed and shook his head. "Alas," he said, "I fear I cannot. I should have liked to put an end to it years ago; but the claims of Charity are strong."

"It's not charity we want," Anne murmured rebelliously; "it's justice."

"Besides," Mr. Wimbush went on, "the Fair has become an institution. Let me see, it must be twenty-two years since we started it. It was a modest affair then. Now . . ." he made a sweeping movement with his hand and was silent.

It spoke highly for Mr. Wimbush's public spirit that he still continued to tolerate the Fair. Beginning as a sort of glorified church bazaar, Crome's yearly Charity Fair had

grown into a noisy thing of merry-go-rounds, cocoanut shies, and miscellaneous side shows—a real genuine fair on the grand scale. It was the local St. Bartholomew, and the people of all the neighbouring villages, with even a contingent from the county town, flocked into the park for their Bank Holiday amusement. The local hospital profited handsomely, and it was this fact alone which prevented Mr. Wimbush, to whom the Fair was a cause of recurrent and never-diminishing agony, from putting a stop to the nuisance which yearly desecrated his park and garden.

“I’ve made all the arrangements already,” Henry Wimbush went on. “Some of the larger marquees will be put up to-morrow. The swings and the merry-go-round arrive on Sunday.”

“So there’s no escape,” said Anne, turning to the rest of the party. “You’ll all have to do something. As a special favour you’re allowed to choose your slavery. My job is the tea tent, as usual, Aunt Priscilla . . .”

“My dear,” said Mrs. Wimbush, interrupting her, “I have more important things to think about than the Fair. But you need have no doubt that I shall do my best when Monday comes to encourage the villagers.”

"That's splendid," said Anne. "Aunt Priscilla will encourage the villagers. What will you do, Mary?"

"I won't do anything where I have to stand by and watch other people eat."

"Then you'll look after the children's sports."

"All right," Mary agreed. "I'll look after the children's sports."

"And Mr. Scogan?"

Mr. Scogan reflected. "May I be allowed to tell fortunes?" he asked at last. "I think I should be good at telling fortunes."

"But you can't tell fortunes in that costume!"

"Can't I?" Mr. Scogan surveyed himself.

"You'll have to be dressed up. Do you still persist?"

"I'm ready to suffer all indignities."

"Good!" said Anne; and turning to Gombauld, "You must be our lightning artist," she said. "Your portrait for a shilling in five minutes."

"It's a pity I'm not Ivor," said Gombauld, with a laugh. "I could throw in a picture of their Auras for an extra sixpence."

Mary flushed. "Nothing is to be gained," she said severely, "by speaking with levity of serious subjects. And, after all, what-

ever your personal views may be, psychological research is a perfectly serious subject.

“And what about Denis?”

Denis made a deprecating gesture. “I have no accomplishments,” he said, “I’ll just be one of those men who wear a thing in their buttonholes and go about telling people which is the way to tea and not to walk on the grass.”

“No, no,” said Anne. “That won’t do. You must do something more than that.”

“But what? All the good jobs are taken, and I can do nothing but lisp in numbers.”

“Well, then, you must lisp,” concluded Anne. “You must write a poem for the occasion—an ‘Ode on Bank Holiday.’ We’ll print it on Uncle Henry’s press and sell it at twopence a copy.”

“Sixpence,” Denis protested. “It’ll be worth sixpence.”

Anne shook her head. “Twopence,” she repeated firmly. “Nobody will pay more than twopence.”

“And now there’s Jenny,” said Mr. Wim-bush. “Jenny,” he said, raising his voice, “what will you do?”

Denis thought of suggesting that she might draw caricatures at sixpence an execution, but decided it would be wiser to go on feigning ignorance of her talent. His

mind reverted to the red notebook. Could it really be true that he looked like that?

"What will I do," Jenny echoed, "what will I do?" She frowned thoughtfully for a moment; then her face brightened and she smiled. "When I was young," she said, "I learnt to play the drums."

"The drums?"

Jenny nodded, and, in proof of her assertion, agitated her knife and fork, like a pair of drumsticks, over her plate. "If there's any opportunity of playing the drums . . ." she began.

"But of course," said Anne, "there's any amount of opportunity. We'll put you down definitely for the drums. That's the lot," she added.

"And a very good lot too," said Gombauld. "I look forward to my Bank Holiday. It ought to be gay."

"It ought indeed," Mr. Scogan assented. "But you may rest assured that it won't be. No holiday is ever anything but a disappointment."

"Come, come," protested Gombauld. "My holiday at Crome isn't being a disappointment."

"Isn't it?" Anne turned an ingenuous mask towards him.

"No, it isn't," he answered.

"I'm delighted to hear it."

"It's in the very nature of things," Mr. Scogan went on; "our holidays can't help being disappointments. Reflect for a moment. What is a holiday? The ideal, the Platonic Holiday of Holidays is surely a complete and absolute change. You agree with me in my definition?" Mr. Scogan glanced from face to face round the table; his sharp nose moved in a series of rapid jerks through all the points of the compass. There was no sign of dissent; he continued: "A complete and absolute change; very well. But isn't a complete and absolute change precisely the thing we can never have—never, in the very nature of things?" Mr. Scogan once more looked rapidly about him. "Of course it is. As ourselves, as specimens of *Homo Sapiens*, as members of a society, how can we hope to have anything like an absolute change? We are tied down by the frightful limitation of our human faculties, by the notions which society imposes on us through our fatal suggestibility, by our own personalities. For us, a complete holiday is out of the question. Some of us struggle manfully to take one, but we never succeed, if I may be allowed to express myself metaphorically, we never succeed in getting farther than Southend."

"You're depressing," said Anne.

"I mean to be," Mr. Scogan replied, and, expanding the fingers of his right hand, he went on: "Look at me, for example. What sort of a holiday can I take? In endowing me with passions and faculties Nature has been horribly niggardly. The full range of human potentialities is in any case distressingly limited; my range is a limitation within a limitation. Out of the ten octaves that make up the human instrument, I can compass perhaps two. Thus, while I may have a certain amount of intelligence, I have no æsthetic sense; while I possess the mathematical faculty, I am wholly without the religious emotions; while I am naturally addicted to venery, I have little ambition and am not at all avaricious. Education has further limited my scope. Having been brought up in society, I am impregnated with its laws; not only should I be afraid of taking a holiday from them, I should also feel it painful to try to do so. In a word, I have a conscience as well as a fear of gaol. Yes, I know it by experience. How often have I tried to take holidays, to get away from myself, my own boring nature, my insufferable mental surroundings!" Mr. Scogan sighed. "But always without success," he added, "always without success."

In my youth I was always striving—how hard!—to feel religiously and æsthetically. Here, said I to myself, are two tremendously important and exciting emotions. Life would be richer, warmer, brighter, altogether more amusing, if I could feel them. I try to feel them. I read the works of the mystics. They seemed to me nothing but the most deplorable claptrap—as indeed they always must to anyone who does not feel the same emotion as the authors felt when they were writing. For it is the emotion that matters. The written work is simply an attempt to express emotion, which is in itself inexpressible, in terms of intellect and logic. The mystic objectifies a rich feeling in the pit of the stomach into a cosmology. For other mystics that cosmology is a symbol of the rich feeling. For the unreligious it is a symbol of nothing, and so appears merely grotesque. A melancholy fact! But I divagate.” Mr. Scogan checked himself. “So much for the religious emotion. As for the æsthetic—I was at even greater pains to cultivate that. I have looked at all the right works of art in every part of Europe. There was a time when, I venture to believe, I knew more about Taddeo da Poggibonsi, more about the cryptic Amico di Taddeo, even than Henry does. To-day, I am happy

to say, I have forgotten most of the knowledge I then so laboriously acquired; but without vanity I can assert that it was prodigious. I don't pretend, of course, to know anything about nigger sculpture or the later seventeenth century in Italy; but about all the periods that were fashionable before 1900 I am, or was, omniscient. Yes, I repeat it, omniscient. But did that fact make me any more appreciative of art in general? It did not. Confronted by a picture, of which I could tell you all the known and presumed history—the date when it was painted, the character of the painter, the influences that had gone to make it what it was—I felt none of that strange excitement and exaltation which is, as I am informed by those who do feel it, the true æsthetic emotion. I felt nothing but a certain interest in the subject of the picture; or more often, when the subject was hackneyed and religious, I felt nothing but a great weariness of spirit. Nevertheless, I must have gone on looking at pictures for ten years before I would honestly admit to myself that they merely bored me. Since then I have given up all attempts to take a holiday. I go on cultivating my old stale daily self in the resigned spirit with which a bank clerk performs from ten till six his daily task. A

holiday, indeed! I'm sorry for you, Gombauld, if you still look forward to having a holiday."

Gombauld shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps," he said, "my standards aren't as elevated as yours. But personally I found the war quite as thorough a holiday from all the ordinary decencies and sanities, all the common emotions and preoccupations, as I ever want to have."

"Yes," Mr. Scogan thoughtfully agreed. "Yes, the war was certainly something of a holiday. It was a step beyond Southend; it was Weston-super-Mare; it was almost Ilfracombe."

CHAPTER XXVI

A LITTLE canvas village of tents and booths had sprung up, just beyond the boundaries of the garden, in the green expanse of the park. A crowd thronged its streets, the men dressed mostly in black—holiday best, funeral best—the women in pale muslins. Here and there tricolour bunting hung inert. In the midst of the canvas town, scarlet and gold and crystal, the merry-go-round glittered in the sun. The balloon-man walked among the crowd, and above his head, like a huge, inverted bunch of many-coloured grapes, the balloons strained upwards. With a scythe-like motion the boat-swings reaped the air, and from the funnel of the engine which worked the roundabout rose a thin, scarcely wavering column of black smoke.

Denis had climbed to the top of one of Sir Ferdinando's towers, and there, standing on the sun-baked leads, his elbows resting on the parapet, he surveyed the scene. The steam-organ sent up prodigious music. The clashing of automatic cymbals beat out with

inexorable precision the rhythm of piercingly sounded melodies. The harmonies were like a musical shattering of glass and brass. Far down in the bass the Last Trump was hugely blowing, and with such persistence, such resonance, that its alternate tonic and dominant detached themselves from the rest of the music and made a tune of their own, a loud, monotonous see-saw.

Denis leaned over the gulf of swirling noise. If he threw himself over the parapet, the noise would surely buoy him up, keep him suspended, bobbing, as a fountain balances a ball on its breaking crest. Another fancy came to him, this time in metrical form.

“My soul is a thin white sheet of parchment
stretched
Over a bubbling cauldron.”

Bad, bad. But he liked the idea of something thin and distended being blown up from underneath.

“My soul is a thin tent of gut. . . .”

or better—

“My soul is a pale, tenuous membrane. . . .”

That was pleasing: a thin, tenuous membrane. It had the right anatomical quality.

Tight blown, quivering in the blast of noisy life. It was time for him to descend from the serene empyrean of words into the actual vortex. He went down slowly. "My soul is a thin, tenuous membrane. . . ."

On the terrace stood a knot of distinguished visitors. There was old Lord Moleyn, like a caricature of an English milord in a French comic paper: a long man, with a long nose and long, drooping moustaches and long teeth of old ivory, and lower down, absurdly, a short covert coat, and below that long, long legs cased in pearl-grey trousers—legs that bent unsteadily at the knee and gave a kind of sideways wobble as he walked. Beside him, short and thick-set, stood Mr. Callamay, the venerable conservative statesman, with a face like a Roman bust, and short white hair. Young girls didn't much like going for motor drives alone with Mr. Callamay; and of old Lord Moleyn one wondered why he wasn't living in gilded exile on the island of Capri among the other distinguished persons who, for one reason or another, find it impossible to live in England. They were talking to Anne, laughing, the one profoundly, the other hootingly.

A black silk balloon towing a black-and-

white striped parachute proved to be old Mrs. Budge from the big house on the other side of the valley. She stood low on the ground, and the spikes of her black-and-white sunshade menaced the eyes of Priscilla Wimbush, who towered over her—a massive figure dressed in purple and topped with a queenly toque on which the nodding black plumes recalled the splendours of a first-class Parisian funeral.

Denis peeped at them discreetly from the window of the morning-room. His eyes were suddenly become innocent, childlike, unprejudiced. They seemed, these people, inconceivably fantastic. And yet they really existed, they functioned by themselves, they were conscious, they had minds. Moreover, he was like them. Could one believe it? But the evidence of the red notebook was conclusive.

It would have been polite to go and say, "How d'you do?" But at the moment Denis did not want to talk, could not have talked. His soul was a tenuous, tremulous, pale membrane. He would keep its sensibility intact and virgin as long as he could. Cautiously he crept out by a side door and made his way down towards the park. His soul fluttered as he approached the noise and movement of the fair. He paused for a

moment on the brink, then stepped in and was engulfed.

Hundreds of people, each with his own private face and all of them real, separate, alive: the thought was disquieting. He paid twopence and saw the Tatooned Woman; twopence more, the Largest Rat in the World. From the home of the Rat he emerged just in time to see a hydrogen-filled balloon break loose for home. A child howled up after it; but calmly, a perfect sphere of flushed opal, it mounted, mounted. Denis followed it with his eyes until it became lost in the blinding sunlight. If he could but send his soul to follow it! . . .

He sighed, stuck his steward's rosette in his buttonhole, and started to push his way, aimlessly but officially, through the crowd.

CHAPTER XXVII

MR. SCOGAN had been accommodated in a little canvas hut. Dressed in a black skirt and a red bodice, with a yellow-and-red bandana handkerchief tied round his black wig, he looked—sharp-nosed, brown, and wrinkled—like the Bohemian Hag of Frith's Derby Day. A placard pinned to the curtain of the doorway announced the presence within the tent of "Sesostris, the Sorceress of Ecbatana." Seated at a table, Mr. Scogan received his clients in mysterious silence, indicating with a movement of the finger that they were to sit down opposite him and to extend their hands for his inspection. He then examined the palm that was presented him, using a magnifying glass and a pair of horn spectacles. He had a terrifying way of shaking his head, frowning and clicking with his tongue as he looked at the lines. Sometimes he would whisper, as though to himself, "Terrible, terrible!" or "God preserve us!" sketching out the sign of the cross as he uttered the words. The clients who came

in laughing grew suddenly grave; they began to take the witch seriously. She was a formidable-looking woman; could it be, was it possible, that there was something in this sort of thing after all? After all, they thought, as the hag shook her head over their hands, after all . . . And they waited, with an uncomfortably beating heart, for the oracle to speak. After a long and silent inspection, Mr. Scogan would suddenly look up and ask, in a hoarse whisper, some horrifying question, such as, "Have you ever been hit on the head with a hammer by a young man with red hair?" When the answer was in the negative, which it could hardly fail to be, Mr. Scogan would nod several times, saying, "I was afraid so. Everything is still to come, still to come, though it can't be very far off now." Sometimes, after a long examination, he would just whisper, "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise," and refuse to divulge any details of a future too appalling to be envisaged without despair. Sesostris had a success of horror. People stood in a queue outside the witch's booth waiting for the privilege of hearing sentence pronounced upon them.

Denis, in the course of his round, looked with curiosity at this crowd of suppliants before the shrine of the oracle. He had a

great desire to see how Mr. Scogan played his part. The canvas booth was a rickety, ill-made structure. Between its walls and its sagging roof were long gaping chinks and crannies. Denis went to the tea-tent and borrowed a wooden bench and a small Union Jack. With these he hurried back to the booth of Sesostris. Setting down the bench at the back of the booth, he climbed up, and with a great air of busy efficiency began to tie the Union Jack to the top of one of the tent-poles. Through the crannies in the canvas he could see almost the whole of the interior of the tent. Mr. Scogan's bandana-covered head was just below him; his terrifying whispers came clearly up. Denis looked and listened while the witch prophesied financial losses, death by apoplexy, destruction by air-raids in the next war.

"Is there going to be another war?" asked the old lady to whom he had predicted this end.

"Very soon," said Mr. Scogan, with an air of quiet confidence.

The old lady was succeeded by a girl dressed in white muslin, garnished with pink ribbons. She was wearing a broad hat, so that Denis could not see her face; but from her figure and the roundness of her bare arms he judged her young and pleasing. Mr.

Scogan looked at her hand, then whispered, "You are still virtuous."

The young lady giggled and exclaimed, "Oh, lor'!"

"But you will not remain so for long," added Mr. Scogan sepulchrally. The young lady giggled again. "Destiny, which interests itself in small things no less than in great, has announced the fact upon your hand." Mr. Scogan took up the magnifying-glass and began once more to examine the white palm. "Very interesting," he said, as though to himself—"very interesting. It's as clear as day." He was silent.

"What's clear?" asked the girl.

"I don't think I ought to tell you." Mr. Scogan shook his head; the pendulous brass ear-rings which he had screwed on to his ears tinkled.

"Please, please!" she implored.

The witch seemed to ignore her remark. "Afterwards, it's not at all clear. The fates don't say whether you will settle down to married life and have four children or whether you will try to go on the cinema and have none. They are only specific about this one rather crucial incident."

"What is it? What is it? Oh, do tell me!"

The white muslin figure leant eagerly forward.

Mr. Scogan sighed. "Very well," he said, "if you must know, you must know. But if anything untoward happens you must blame your own curiosity. Listen. Listen." He lifted up a sharp, claw-nailed forefinger. "This is what the fates have written. Next Sunday afternoon at six o'clock you will be sitting on the second stile on the footpath that leads from the church to the lower road. At that moment a man will appear walking along the footpath." Mr. Scogan looked at her hand again as though to refresh his memory of the details of the scene. "A man," he repeated—"a small man with a sharp nose, not exactly good looking nor precisely young, but fascinating." He lingered hissing over the word. "He will ask you, 'Can you tell me the way to Paradise?' and you will answer, 'Yes, I'll show you,' and walk with him down towards the little hazel copse. I cannot read what will happen after that." There was a silence.

"Is it really true?" asked white muslin.

The witch gave a shrug of the shoulders. "I merely tell you what I read in your hand. Good afternoon. That will be sixpence. Yes, I have change. Thank you. Good afternoon."

Denis stepped down from the bench; tied insecurely and crookedly to the tentpole, the Union Jack hung limp on the windless air. "If only I could do things like that!" he thought, as he carried the bench back to the tea-tent.

Anne was sitting behind a long table filling thick white cups from an urn. A neat pile of printed sheets lay before her on the table. Denis took one of them and looked at it affectionately. It was his poem. They had printed five hundred copies, and very nice the quarto broadsheets looked.

"Have you sold many?" he asked in a casual tone.

Anne put her head on one side deprecatingly. "Only three so far, I'm afraid. But I'm giving a free copy to everyone who spends more than a shilling on his tea. So in any case it's having a circulation."

Denis made no reply, but walked slowly away. He looked at the broadsheet in his hand and read the lines to himself relishingly as he walked along:

"This day of roundabouts and swings,
Struck weights, shied cocoa-nuts, tossed rings,
Switchbacks, Aunt Sallies, and all such small
High jinks—you call it ferial?
A holiday? But paper noses
Sniffed the artificial roses

Of round Venetian cheeks through half
 Each carnival year, and masks might laugh
 At things the naked face for shame
 Would blush at—laugh and think no blame.
 A holiday? But Galba showed
 Elephants on an airy road;
 Jumbo trod the tightrope then,
 And in the circus arméd men
 Stabbed home for sport and died to break
 Those dull imperatives that make
 A prison of every working day,
 Where all must drudge and all obey.
 Sing Holiday! You do not know
 How to be free. The Russian snow
 Flowered with bright blood whose roses spread
 Petals of fading, fading red
 That died into the snow again,
 Into the virgin snow; and men
 From all the ancient bonds were freed.
 Old law, old custom, and old creed,
 Old right and wrong there bled to death;
 The frozen air received their breath,
 A little smoke that died away;
 And round about them where they lay
 The snow bloomed roses. Blood was there
 A red gay flower and only fair.
 Sing Holiday! Beneath the Tree
 Of Innocence and Liberty,
 Paper Nose and Red Cockade
 Dance within the magic shade
 That makes them drunken, merry, and strong
 To laugh and sing their ferial song:
 'Free, free . . . !'

But Echo answers
 Faintly to the laughing dancers,
 'Free'—and faintly laughs, and still,

Within the hollows of the hill,
Faintlier laughs and whispers, 'Free,'
Fadingly, diminishingly:
'Free,' and laughter faints away . . .
Sing Holiday! Sing Holiday!"

He folded the sheet carefully and put it in his pocket. The thing had its merits. Oh, decidedly, decidedly! But how unpleasant the crowd smelt! He lit a cigarette. The smell of cows was preferable. He passed through the gate in the park wall into the garden. The swimming-pool was a centre of noise and activity.

"Second Heat in the Young Ladies' Championship." It was the polite voice of Henry Wimbush. A crowd of sleek, seal-like figures in black bathing-dresses surrounded him. His grey bowler hat, smooth, round, and motionless in the midst of a moving sea, was an island of aristocratic calm.

Holding his tortoise-shell-rimmed pince-nez an inch or two in front of his eyes, he read out names from a list.

"Miss Dolly Miles, Miss Rebecca Balister, Miss Doris Gabell . . ."

Five young persons ranged themselves on the brink. From their seats of honour at the other end of the pool, old Lord Moleyn and Mr. Callamay looked on with eager interest.

Henry Wimbush raised his hand. There was an expectant silence. "When I say 'Go,' go. Go!" he said. There was an almost simultaneous splash.

Denis pushed his way through the spectators. Somebody plucked him by the sleeve; he looked down. It was old Mrs. Budge.

"Delighted to see you again, Mr. Stone," she said in her rich, husky voice. She panted a little as she spoke, like a short-winded lap-dog. It was Mrs. Budge who, having read in the *Daily Mirror* that the Government needed peach stones—what they needed them for she never knew—had made the collection of peach stones her peculiar "bit" of war work. She had thirty-six peach trees in her walled garden, as well as four hot-houses in which trees could be forced, so that she was able to eat peaches practically the whole year round. In 1916 she ate 4200 peaches, and sent the stones to the Government. In 1917 the military authorities called up three of her gardeners, and what with this and the fact that it was a bad year for wall fruit, she only managed to eat 2900 peaches during that crucial period of the national destinies. In 1918 she did rather better, for between January 1st and the date of the Armistice she ate

3300 peaches. Since the Armistice she had relaxed her efforts; now she did not eat more than two or three peaches a day. Her constitution, she complained, had suffered; but it had suffered for a good cause.

Denis answered her greeting by a vague and polite noise.

"So nice to see the young people enjoying themselves," Mrs. Budge went on. "And the old people too, for that matter. Look at old Lord Moleyn and dear Mr. Callamay. Isn't it delightful to see the way they enjoy themselves?"

Denis looked. He wasn't sure whether it was so very delightful after all. Why didn't they go and watch the sack races? The two old gentlemen were engaged at the moment in congratulating the winner of the race; it seemed an act of supererogatory graciousness; for, after all, she had only won a heat.

"Pretty little thing, isn't she?" said Mrs. Budge huskily, and panted two or three times.

"Yes," Denis nodded agreement. Sixteen, slender, but nubile, he said to himself, and laid up the phrase in his memory as a happy one. Old Mr. Callamay had put on his spectacles to congratulate the victor,

and Lord Moleyn, leaning forward over his walking-stick, showed his long ivory teeth, hungrily smiling.

“Capital performance, capital,” Mr. Callamay was saying in his deep voice.

The victor wriggled with embarrassment. She stood with her hands behind her back, rubbing one foot nervously on the other. Her wet bathing-dress shone, a torso of black polished marble.

“Very good indeed,” said Lord Moleyn. His voice seemed to come from just behind his teeth, a toothy voice. It was as though a dog should suddenly begin to speak. He smiled again, Mr. Callamay readjusted his spectacles.

“When I say ‘Go,’ go. Go!”

Splash! The third heat had started.

“Do you know, I never could learn to swim,” said Mrs. Budge.

“Really?”

“But I used to be able to float.”

Denis imagined her floating—up and down, up and down on a great green swell. A blown black bladder; no, that wasn’t good, that wasn’t good at all. A new winner was being congratulated. She was atrociously stubby and fat. The last one, long and harmoniously, continuously curved from knee to breast, had been an Eve by

Cranach; but this, this one was a bad Rubens.

“. . . go—go—go!” Henry Wimbush’s polite level voice once more pronounced the formula. Another batch of young ladies dived in.

Grown a little weary of sustaining a conversation with Mrs. Budge, Denis conveniently remembered that his duties as a steward called him elsewhere. He pushed out through the lines of spectators and made his way along the path left clear behind them. He was thinking again that his soul was a pale, tenuous membrane, when he was startled by hearing a thin, sibilant voice, speaking apparently from just above his head, pronounce the single word “Disgusting!”

He looked up sharply. The path along which he was walking passed under the lee of a wall of clipped yew. Behind the hedge the ground sloped steeply up towards the foot of the terrace and the house; for one standing on the higher ground it was easy to look over the dark barrier. Looking up, Denis saw two heads overtopping the hedge immediately above him. He recognised the iron mask of Mr. Bodiham and the pale, colourless face of his wife. They were looking over his head, over the heads

of the spectators, at the swimmers in the pond.

"Disgusting!" Mrs. Bodiham repeated, hissing softly.

The rector turned up his iron mask towards the solid cobalt of the sky. "How long?" he said, as though to himself; "how long?" He lowered his eyes again, and they fell on Denis's upturned curious face. There was an abrupt movement, and Mr. and Mrs. Bodiham popped out of sight behind the hedge.

Denis continued his promenade. He wandered past the merry-go-round, through the thronged streets of the canvas village; the membrane of his soul flapped tumultuously in the noise and laughter. In a roped-off space beyond, Mary was directing the children's sports. Little creatures seethed round about her, making a shrill, tinny clamour; others clustered about the skirts and trousers of their parents. Mary's face was shining in the heat; with an immense output of energy she started a three-legged race. Denis looked on in admiration.

"You're wonderful," he said, coming up behind her and touching her on the arm. "I've never seen such energy."

She turned towards him a face, round,

red, and honest as the setting sun; the golden bell of her hair swung silently as she moved her head and quivered to rest.

"Do you know, Denis," she said, in a low, serious voice, gasping a little as she spoke—"do you know that there's a woman here who has had three children in thirty-one months?"

"Really," said Denis, making rapid mental calculations.

"It's appalling. I've been telling her about the Malthusian League. One really ought . . ."

But a sudden violent renewal of the metallic yelling announced the fact that somebody had won the race. Mary became once more the centre of a dangerous vortex. It was time, Denis thought, to move on; he might be asked to do something if he stayed too long.

He turned back towards the canvas village. The thought of tea was making itself insistent in his mind. Tea, tea, tea. But the tea-tent was horribly thronged. Anne, with an unusual expression of grimness on her flushed face, was furiously working the handle of the urn; the brown liquid spurted incessantly into the proffered cups. Portentous, in the farther corner of the tent, Priscilla, in her royal toque, was encourag-

ing the villagers. In a momentary lull Denis could hear her deep, jovial laughter and her manly voice. Clearly, he told himself, this was no place for one who wanted tea. He stood irresolute at the entrance to the tent. A beautiful thought suddenly came to him; if he went back to the house, went unobtrusively, without being observed, if he tiptoed into the dining-room and noiselessly opened the little doors of the side-board—ah, then! In the cool recess within he would find bottles and a siphon; a bottle of crystal gin and a quart of soda water, and then for the cups that inebriate as well as cheer. . . .

A minute later he was walking briskly up the shady yew-tree walk. Within the house it was deliciously quiet and cool. Carrying his well-filled tumbler with care, he went into the library. There, the glass on the corner of the table beside him, he settled into a chair with a volume of *Sainte-Beuve*. There was nothing, he found, like a *Causerie du Lundi* for settling and soothing the troubled spirits. That tenuous membrane of his had been too rudely buffeted by the afternoon's emotions; it required a rest.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TOWARDS sunset the fair itself became quiescent. It was the hour for the dancing to begin. At one side of the village of tents a space had been roped off. Acetylene lamps, hung round it on posts, cast a piercing white light. In one corner sat the band, and, obedient to its scraping and blowing, two or three hundred dancers trampled across the dry ground, wearing away the grass with their booted feet. Round this patch of all but daylight, alive with motion and noise, the night seemed preternaturally dark. Bars of light reached out into it, and every now and then a lonely figure or a couple of lovers, interlaced, would cross the bright shaft, flashing for a moment into visible existence, to disappear again as quickly and surprisingly as they had come.

Denis stood by the entrance of the enclosure, watching the swaying, shuffling crowd. The slow vortex brought the couples round and round again before him, as though he were passing them in review. There was

Priscilla, still wearing her queenly toque, still encouraging the villagers—this time by dancing with one of the tenant farmers. There was Lord Moleyn, who had stayed on to the disorganised, passoverish meal that took the place of dinner on this festal day; he one-stepped shamblingly, his bent knees more precariously wobbly than ever, with a terrified village beauty. Mr. Scogan trotted round with another. Mary was in the embrace of a young farmer of heroic proportions; she was looking up at him, talking, as Denis could see, very seriously. What about? he wondered. The Malthusian League, perhaps. Seated in the corner among the band, Jenny was performing wonders of virtuosity upon the drums. Her eyes shone, she smiled to herself. A whole subterranean life seemed to be expressing itself in those loud rat-tats, those long rolls and flourishes of drumming. Looking at her, Denis ruefully remembered the red notebook; he wondered what sort of a figure he was cutting now. But the sight of Anne and Gombauld swimming past—Anne with her eyes almost shut and sleeping, as it were, on the sustaining wings of movement and music—dissipated these preoccupations. Male and female created He them. . . . There they were, Anne and Gombauld, and

a hundred couples more—all stepping harmoniously together to the old tune of Male and Female created He them. But Denis sat apart; he alone lacked his complementary opposite. They were all coupled but he; all but he. . . .

Somebody touched him on the shoulder and he looked up. It was Henry Wimbush.

“I never showed you our oaken drain-pipes,” he said. “Some of the ones we dug up are lying quite close to here. Would you like to come and see them?”

Denis got up, and they walked off together into the darkness. The music grew fainter behind them. Some of the higher notes faded out altogether. Jenny’s drumming and the steady sawing of the bass throbbled on, tuneless and meaningless in their ears. Henry Wimbush halted.

“Here we are,” he said, and, taking an electric torch out of his pocket, he cast a dim beam over two or three blackened sections of tree trunk, scooped out into the semblance of pipes, which were lying forlornly in a little depression in the ground.

“Very interesting,” said Denis, with a rather tepid enthusiasm.

They sat down on the grass. A faint white glare, rising from behind a belt of trees, indicated the position of the dancing-

floor. The music was nothing but a muffled rhythmic pulse.

"I shall be glad," said Henry Wimbush, "when this function comes at last to an end."

"I can believe it."

"I do not know how it is," Mr. Wimbush continued, "but the spectacle of numbers of my fellow-creatures in a state of agitation moves in me a certain weariness, rather than any gaiety or excitement. The fact is, they don't very much interest me. They aren't in my line. You follow me? I could never take much interest, for example, in a collection of postage stamps. Primitives or seventeenth-century books—yes. They are my line. But stamps, no. I don't know anything about them; they're not my line. They don't interest me, they give me no emotion. It's rather the same with people, I'm afraid. I'm more at home with these pipes." He jerked his head sideways towards the hollowed logs. "The trouble with the people and events of the present is that you never know anything about them. What do I know of contemporary politics? Nothing. What do I know of the people I see round about me? Nothing. What they think of me or of anything else in the world, what they will do in five minutes' time, are

things I can't guess at. For all I know, you may suddenly jump up and try to murder me in a moment's time."

"Come, come," said Denis.

"True," Mr. Wimbush continued, "the little I know about your past is certainly reassuring. But I know nothing of your present, and neither you nor I know anything of your future. It's appalling; in living people, one is dealing with unknown and unknowable quantities. One can only hope to find out anything about them by a long series of the most disagreeable and boring human contacts, involving a terrible expense of time. It's the same with current events; how can I find out anything about them except by devoting years to the most exhausting first-hand study, involving once more an endless number of the most unpleasant contacts? No, give me the past. It doesn't change; it's all there in black and white, and you can get to know about it comfortably and decorously and, above all, privately—by reading. By reading I know a great deal of Cæsar Borgia, of St. Francis, of Dr. Johnson; a few weeks have made me thoroughly acquainted with these interesting characters, and I have been spared the tedious and revolting process of getting to know them by personal contact, which I should

have to do if they were living now. How gay and delightful life would be if one could get rid of all the human contacts! Perhaps, in the future, when machines have attained to a state of perfection—for I confess that I am, like Godwin and Shelley, a believer in perfectibility, the perfectibility of machinery—then, perhaps, it will be possible for those who, like myself, desire it, to live in a dignified seclusion, surrounded by the delicate attentions of silent and graceful machines, and entirely secure from any human intrusion. It is a beautiful thought.”

“Beautiful,” Denis agreed. “But what about the desirable human contacts, like love and friendship?”

The black silhouette against the darkness shook its head. “The pleasures even of these contacts are much exaggerated,” said the polite level voice. “It seems to me doubtful whether they are equal to the pleasures of private reading and contemplation. Human contacts have been so highly valued in the past only because reading was not a common accomplishment and because books were scarce and difficult to reproduce. The world, you must remember, is only just becoming literate. As reading becomes more and more habitual and wide-

spread, an ever-increasing number of people will discover that books will give them all the pleasures of social life and none of its intolerable tedium. At present people in search of pleasure naturally tend to congregate in large herds and to make a noise; in future their natural tendency will be to seek solitude and quiet. The proper study of mankind is books."

"I sometimes think that it may be," said Denis; he was wondering if Anne and Gombauld were still dancing together.

"Instead of which," said Mr. Wimbush, with a sigh, "I must go and see if all is well on the dancing-floor." They got up and began to walk slowly towards the white glare. "If all these people were dead," Henry Wimbush went on, "this festivity would be extremely agreeable. Nothing would be pleasanter than to read in a well-written book of an open-air ball that took place a century ago. How charming! one would say; how pretty and how amusing! But when the ball takes place to-day, when one finds oneself involved in it, then one sees the thing in its true light. It turns out to be merely this." He waved his hand in the direction of the acetylene flares. "In my youth," he went on after a pause, "I found myself, quite fortuitously, involved in

a series of the most phantasmagorical amorous intrigues. A novelist could have made his fortune out of them, and even if I were to tell you, in my bald style, the details of these adventures, you would be amazed at the romantic tale. But I assure you, while they were happening—these romantic adventures—they seemed to me no more and no less exciting than any other incident of actual life. To climb by night up a rope-ladder to a second-floor window in an old house in Toledo seemed to me, while I was actually performing this rather dangerous feat, an action as obvious, as much to be taken for granted, as—how shall I put it?—as quotidian as catching the 8.52 from Surbiton to go to business on a Monday morning. Adventures and romance only take on their adventurous and romantic qualities at second-hand. Live them, and they are just a slice of life like the rest. In literature they become as charming as this dismal ball would be if we were celebrating its tercentenary.” They had come to the entrance of the enclosure and stood there, blinking in the dazzling light. “Ah, if only we were!” Henry Wimbush added.

Anne and Gombauld were still dancing together.

CHAPTER XXIX

IT was after ten o'clock. The dancers had already dispersed and the last lights were being put out. To-morrow the tents would be struck, the dismantled merry-go-round would be packed into waggons and carted away. An expanse of worn grass, a shabby brown patch in the wide green of the park, would be all that remained. Crome Fair was over.

By the edge of the pool two figures lingered.

"No, no, no," Anne was saying in a breathless whisper, leaning backwards, turning her head from side to side in an effort to escape Gombauld's kisses. "No, please. No." Her raised voice had become imperative.

Gombauld relaxed his embrace a little. "Why not?" he said. "I will."

With a sudden effort Anne freed herself. "You won't," she retorted. "You've tried to take the most unfair advantage of me."

"Unfair advantage?" echoed Gombauld in genuine surprise.

"Yes, unfair advantage. You attack me after I've been dancing for two hours, while I'm still reeling drunk with the movement, when I've lost my head, when I've got no mind left but only a rhythmical body! 'It's as bad as making love to someone you've drugged or intoxicated."

Gombauld laughed angrily. "Call me a White Slaver and have done with it."

"Luckily," said Anne, "I am now completely sobered, and if you try and kiss me again I shall box your ears. Shall we take a few turns round the pool?" she added. "The night is delicious."

For answer Gombauld made an irritated noise. They paced off slowly, side by side.

"What I like about the painting of Degas . . ." Anne began in her most detached and conversational tone.

"Oh, damn Degas!" Gombauld was almost shouting.

From where he stood, leaning in an attitude of despair against the parapet of the terrace, Denis had seen them, the two pale figures in a patch of moonlight, far down by the pool's edge. He had seen the beginning of what promised to be an endless passionate embrace, and at the sight

he had fled. It was too much; he couldn't stand it. In another moment, he felt, he would have burst into irrepressible tears.

Dashing blindly into the house, he almost ran into Mr. Scogan, who was walking up and down the hall smoking a final pipe.

"Hullo!" said Mr. Scogan, catching him by the arm; dazed and hardly conscious of what he was doing or where he was, Denis stood there for a moment like a somnambulist. "What's the matter?" Mr. Scogan went on. "You look disturbed, distressed, depressed."

Denis shook his head without replying.

"Worried about the cosmos, eh?" Mr. Scogan patted him on the arm. "I know the feeling," he said. "It's a most distressing symptom. 'What's the point of it all? All is vanity. What's the good of continuing to function if one's doomed to be snuffed out at last along with everything else?' Yes, yes. I know exactly how you feel. It's most distressing if one allows oneself to be distressed. But then why allow oneself to be distressed? After all, we all know that there's no ultimate point. But what difference does that make?"

At this point the somnambulist suddenly woke up. "What?" he said, blinking and frowning at his interlocutor. "What?"

Then breaking away he dashed up the stairs, two steps at a time.

Mr. Scogan ran to the foot of the stairs and called up after him. "It makes no difference, none whatever. Life is gay all the same, always, under whatever circumstances—under whatever circumstances," he added, raising his voice to a shout. But Denis was already far out of hearing, and even if he had not been, his mind to-night was proof against all the consolations of philosophy. Mr. Scogan replaced his pipe between his teeth and resumed his meditative pacing. "Under any circumstances," he repeated to himself. It was ungrammatical to begin with; was it true? And is life really its own reward? He wondered. When his pipe had burned itself to its stinking conclusion he took a drink of gin and went to bed. In ten minutes he was deeply, innocently asleep.

Denis had mechanically undressed and, clad in those flowered silk pyjamas of which he was so justly proud, was lying face downwards on his bed. Time passed. When at last he looked up, the candle which he had left alight at his bedside had burned down almost to the socket. He looked at his watch; it was nearly half-past one. His head ached, his dry, sleepless eyes felt as

though they had been bruised from behind, and the blood was beating within his ears a loud arterial drum. He got up, opened the door, tiptoed noiselessly along the passage, and began to mount the stairs towards the higher floors. Arrived at the servants' quarters under the roof, he hesitated, then turning to the right he opened a little door at the end of the corridor. Within was a pitch-dark cupboard-like boxroom, hot, stuffy, and smelling of dust and old leather. He advanced cautiously into the blackness, groping with his hands. It was from this den that the ladder went up to the leads of the western tower. He found the ladder, and set his feet on the rungs; noiselessly, he lifted the trap-door above his head; the moonlit sky was over him, he breathed the fresh, cool air of the night. In a moment he was standing on the leads, gazing out over the dim, colourless landscape, looking perpendicularly down at the terrace seventy feet below.

Why had he climbed up to this high, desolate place? Was it to look at the moon? Was it to commit suicide? As yet he hardly knew. Death—the tears came into his eyes when he thought of it. His misery assumed a certain solemnity; he was lifted up on the wings of a kind of exaltation. It was a

mood in which he might have done almost anything, however foolish. He advanced towards the farther parapet; the drop was sheer there and uninterrupted. A good leap, and perhaps one might clear the narrow terrace and so crash down yet another thirty feet to the sun-baked ground below. He paused at the corner of the tower, looking now down into the shadowy gulf below, now up towards the rare stars and the waning moon. He made a gesture with his hand, muttered something, he could not afterwards remember what; but the fact that he had said it aloud gave the utterance a peculiarly terrible significance. Then he looked down once more into the depths.

"What *are* you doing, Denis?" questioned a voice from somewhere very close behind him.

Denis uttered a cry of frightened surprise, and very nearly went over the parapet in good earnest. His heart was beating terribly, and he was pale when, recovering himself, he turned round in the direction from which the voice had come.

"Are you ill?"

In the profound shadow that slept under the eastern parapet of the tower, he saw something he had not previously noticed—an oblong shape. It was a mattress, and

someone was lying on it. Since that first memorable night on the tower, Mary had slept out every evening; it was a sort of manifestation of fidelity.

"It gave me a fright," she went on, "to wake up and see you waving your arms and gibbering there. What on earth were you doing?"

Denis laughed melodramatically. "What, indeed!" he said. If she hadn't woken up as she did, he would be lying in pieces at the bottom of the tower; he was certain of that, now.

"You hadn't got designs on me, I hope?" Mary inquired, jumping too rapidly to conclusions.

"I didn't know you were here," said Denis, laughing more bitterly and artificially than before.

"What *is* the matter, Denis?"

He sat down on the edge of the mattress, and for all reply went on laughing in the same frightful and improbable tone.

An hour later he was reposing with his head on Mary's knees, and she, with an affectionate solicitude that was wholly maternal, was running her fingers through his tangled hair. He had told her everything, everything: his hopeless love, his jealousy, his despair, his suicide—as it were provi-

dentially averted by her interposition. He had solemnly promised never to think of self-destruction again. And now his soul was floating in a sad serenity. It was embalmed in the sympathy that Mary so generously poured. And it was not only in receiving sympathy that Denis found serenity and even a kind of happiness; it was also in giving it. For if he had told Mary everything about his miseries, Mary, reacting to these confidences, had told him in return everything, or very nearly everything, about her own.

"Poor Mary!" He was very sorry for her. Still, she might have guessed that Ivor wasn't precisely a monument of constancy.

"Well," she concluded, "one must put a good face on it." She wanted to cry, but she wouldn't allow herself to be weak. There was a silence.

"Do you think," asked Denis hesitatingly—"do you really think that she . . . that Gombauld . . ."

"I'm sure of it," Mary answered decisively. There was another long pause.

"I don't know what to do about it," he said at last, utterly dejected.

"You'd better go away," advised Mary. "It's the safest thing, and the most sensible."

"But I've arranged to stay here three weeks more."

"You must concoct an excuse."

"I suppose you're right."

"I know I am," said Mary, who was recovering all her firm self-possession. "You can't go on like this, can you?"

"No, I can't go on like this," he echoed.

Immensely practical, Mary invented a plan of action. Startlingly, in the darkness, the church clock struck three.

"You must go to bed at once," she said. "I'd no idea it was so late."

Denis clambered down the ladder, cautiously descended the creaking stairs. His room was dark; the candle had long ago guttered to extinction. He got into bed and fell asleep almost at once.

CHAPTER XXX

DENIS had been called, but in spite of the parted curtains he had dropped off again into that drowsy, dozy state when sleep becomes a sensual pleasure almost consciously savoured. In this condition he might have remained for another hour if he had not been disturbed by a violent rapping at the door.

"Come in," he mumbled, without opening his eyes. The latch clicked, a hand seized him by the shoulder and he was rudely shaken.

"Get up, get up!"

His eyelids blinked painfully apart, and he saw Mary standing over him, bright-faced and earnest.

"Get up!" she repeated. "You must go and send the telegram. Don't you remember?"

"O Lord!" He threw off the bed-clothes; his tormentor retired.

Denis dressed as quickly as he could and ran up the road to the village post office. Satisfaction glowed within him as he re-

turned. He had sent a long telegram, which would in a few hours evoke an answer ordering him back to town at once—on urgent business. It was an act performed, a decisive step taken—and he so rarely took decisive steps; he felt pleased with himself. It was with a whetted appetite that he came in to breakfast.”

“Good morning,” said Mr. Scogan. “I hope you’re better.”

“Better?”

“You were rather worried about the cosmos last night.”

Denis tried to laugh away the impeachment. “Was I?” he lightly asked.

“I wish,” said Mr. Scogan, “that I had nothing worse to prey on my mind. I should be a happy man.”

“One is only happy in action,” Denis enunciated, thinking of the telegram.

He looked out of the window. Great florid baroque clouds floated high in the blue heaven. A wind stirred among the trees, and their shaken foliage twinkled and glittered like metal in the sun. Everything seemed marvellously beautiful. At the thought that he would soon be leaving all this beauty he felt a momentary pang; but he comforted himself by recollecting how decisively he was acting.

"Action," he repeated aloud, and going over to the sideboard he helped himself to an agreeable mixture of bacon and fish.

Breakfast over, Denis repaired to the terrace, and, sitting there, raised the enormous bulwark of the *Times* against the possible assaults of Mr. Scogan, who showed an unappeased desire to go on talking about the Universe. Secure behind the crackling pages, he meditated. In the light of this brilliant morning the emotions of last night seemed somehow rather remote. And what if he had seen them embracing in the moonlight? Perhaps it didn't mean much after all. And even if it did, why shouldn't he stay? He felt strong enough to stay, strong enough to be aloof, disinterested, a mere friendly acquaintance. And even if he weren't strong enough . . .

"What time do you think the telegram will arrive?" asked Mary suddenly, thrusting in upon him over the top of the paper.

Denis started guiltily. "I don't know at all," he said.

"I was only wondering," said Mary, "because there's a very good train at 3.27, and it would be nice if you could catch it, wouldn't it?"

"Awfully nice," he agreed weakly. He felt as though he were making arrangements

for his own funeral. Train leaves Waterloo 3.27. No flowers. . . . Mary was gone. No, he was blowed if he'd let himself be hurried down to the Necropolis like this. He was blowed. The sight of Mr. Scogan looking out, with a hungry expression, from the drawing-room window made him precipitately hoist the *Times* once more. For a long while he kept it hoisted. Lowering it at last to take another cautious peep at his surroundings, he found himself, with what astonishment! confronted by Anne's faint, amused, malicious smile. She was standing before him,—the woman who was a tree,—the swaying grace of her movement arrested in a pose that seemed itself a movement.

“How long have you been standing there?” he asked, when he had done gazing at her.

“Oh, about half an hour, I suppose,” she said airily. “You were so very deep in your paper—head over ears—I didn't like to disturb you.”

“You look lovely this morning,” Denis exclaimed. It was the first time he had ever had the courage to utter a personal remark of the kind.

Anne held up her hand as though to ward off a blow. “Don't bludgeon me, please.”

She sat down on the bench beside him. He was a nice boy, she thought, quite charming; and Gombauld's violent insistences were really becoming rather tiresome. "Why don't you wear white trousers?" she asked. "I like you so much in white trousers."

"They're at the wash," Denis replied rather curtly. This white-trouser business was all in the wrong spirit. He was just preparing a scheme to manœuvre the conversation back to the proper path, when Mr. Scogan suddenly darted out of the house, crossed the terrace with clockwork rapidity, and came to a halt in front of the bench on which they were seated.

"To go on with our interesting conversation about the cosmos," he began, "I become more and more convinced that the various parts of the concern are fundamentally discrete. . . . But would you mind, Denis, moving a shade to your right?" He wedged himself between them on the bench. "And if you would shift a few inches to the left, my dear Anne. . . . Thank you. Discrete, I think, was what I was saying."

"You were," said Anne. Denis was speechless.

They were taking their after luncheon coffee in the library when the telegram ar-

rived. Denis blushed guiltily as he took the orange envelope from the salver and tore it open. "Return at once. Urgent family business." It was too ridiculous. As if he had any family business! Wouldn't it be best just to crumple the thing up and put it in his pocket without saying anything about it? He looked up; Mary's large blue china eyes were fixed upon him, seriously, penetratingly. He blushed more deeply than ever, hesitated in a horrible uncertainty.

"What's your telegram about?" Mary asked significantly.

He lost his head. "I'm afraid," he mumbled, "I'm afraid this means I shall have to go back to town at once." He frowned at the telegram ferociously.

"But that's absurd, impossible," cried Anne. She had been standing by the window talking to Gombauld; but at Denis's words she came swaying across the room towards him.

"It's urgent," he repeated desperately.

"But you've only been here such a short time," Anne protested.

"I know," he said, utterly miserable. Oh, if only she could understand! Women were supposed to have intuition.

"If he must go, he must," put in Mary firmly.

"Yes, I must." He looked at the telegram again for inspiration. "You see, it's urgent family business," he explained.

Priscilla got up from her chair in some excitement. "I had a distinct presentiment of this last night," she said. "A distinct presentiment."

"A mere coincidence, no doubt," said Mary, brushing Mrs. Wimbush out of the conversation. "There's a very good train at 3.27." She looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. "You'll have nice time to pack."

"I'll order the motor at once." Henry Wimbush rang the bell. The funeral was well under way. It was awful, awful.

"I am wretched you should be going," said Anne.

Denis turned towards her; she really did look wretched. He abandoned himself hopelessly, fatalistically to his destiny. This was what came of action, of doing something decisive. If only he'd just let things drift! If only . . .

"I shall miss your conversation," said Mr. Scogan.

Mary looked at the clock again. "I think

perhaps you ought to go and pack," she said.

Obediently Denis left the room. Never again, he said to himself, never again would he do anything decisive. Camlet, West Bowlby, Knipswich for Timpany, Spavin Delawarr; and then all the other stations; and then, finally, London. The thought of the journey appalled him. And what on earth was he going to do in London when he got there? He climbed wearily up the stairs. It was time for him to lay himself in his coffin.

The car was at the door—the hearse. The whole party had assembled to see him go. Good-bye, good-bye. Mechanically he tapped the barometer that hung in the porch; the needle stirred perceptibly to the left. A sudden smile lighted up his lugubrious face.

“‘It sinks and I am ready to depart,’” he said, quoting Landor with an exquisite aptness. He looked quickly round from face to face. Nobody had noticed. He climbed into the hearse.

THE END

THE PALIO AT SIENA
A Traveller's Impression
From *Along the Road*

THE PALIO AT SIENA

OUR rooms were in a tower. From the windows one looked across the brown tiled roofs to where, on its hill, stood the cathedral. A hundred feet below was the street, a narrow canyon between high walls, perennially sunless; the voices of the passers-by came up, reverberating, as out of a chasm. Down there they walked always in shadow; but in our tower we were the last to lose the sunlight. On the hot days it was cooler, no doubt, down in the street; but we at least had the winds. The waves of the air broke against our tower and flowed past it on either side. And at evening, when only the belfries and the domes and the highest roofs were still flushed by the declining sun, our windows were level with the flight of the swifts and swallows. Sunset after sunset all through the long summer, they wheeled and darted round our tower. There was always a swarm of them intricately manœuvring just outside the window. They swerved this way and that, they dipped and rose, they checked their headlong flight with a flutter of their long pointed wings and

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turned about within their own length. Compact, smooth and tapering, they seemed the incarnation of airy speed. And their thin, sharp, arrowy cry was speed made audible. I have sat at my window watching them tracing their intricate arabesques until I grew dizzy; till their shrill crying sounded as though from within my ears and their flying seemed a motion, incessant, swift and bewilderingly multitudinous, behind my eyes. And all the while the sun declined, the shadows climbed higher up the houses and towers, and the light with which they were tipped became more rosy. And at last the shadow had climbed to the very top and the city lay in a grey and violet twilight beneath the pale sky.

One evening, towards the end of June, as I was sitting at the window looking at the wheeling birds, I heard through the crying of the swifts the sound of a drum. I looked down into the shadowy street, but could see nothing. Rub-a-dub, dub, dub, dub—the sound grew louder and louder, and suddenly there appeared round the corner where our street bent out of sight, three personages out of a Pinturicchio fresco. They were dressed in liveries of green and yellow—yellow doublets slashed and tagged with green, parti-coloured hose and shoes, with feath-

ered caps of the same colours. Their leader played the drum. The two who followed carried green and yellow banners. Immediately below our tower the street opens out a little into a tiny piazza. In this clear space the three Pinturicchio figures came to a halt and the crowd of little boys and loafers who followed at their heels grouped themselves round to watch. The drummer quickened his beat and the two banner-bearers stepped forward into the middle of the little square. They stood there for a moment quite still, the right foot a little in advance of the other, the left fist on the hip and the lowered banners drooping from the right. Then, together, they lifted the banners and began to wave them round their heads. In the wind of their motion the flags opened out. They were the same size and both of them green and yellow, but the colours were arranged in a different pattern on each. And what patterns! Nothing more "modern" was ever seen. They might have been designed by Picasso for the Russian Ballet. Had they been by Picasso, the graver critics would have called them futuristic, the sprightlier (I must apologize for both these expressions) jazz. But the flags were not Picasso's; they were designed some four hundred years ago by the name-

less genius who dressed the Sienese for their yearly pageant. This being the case, the critics can only take off their hats. The flags are classical, they are High Art; there is nothing more to be said.

The drum beat on. The bannermen waved their flags, so artfully that the whole expanse of patterned stuff was always unfurled and tremulously stretched along the air. They passed the flags from one hand to the other, behind their backs, under a lifted leg. Then, at last, drawing themselves together to make a supreme effort, they tossed their banners into the air. High they rose, turning slowly, over and over, hung for an instant at the height of their trajectory, then dropped back, the weighted stave foremost, towards their throwers, who caught them as they fell. A final wave, then the drum returned to its march rhythm, the bannermen shouldered their flags, and followed by the anachronistic children and idlers from the twentieth century, Pinturicchio's three young bravos swaggered off up the dark street out of sight and at length, the drum taps coming faintlier and ever faintlier, out of hearing.

Every evening after that, while the swallows were in full cry and flight about the tower, we heard the beating of the drum.

Every evening, in the little piazza below us, a fragment of Pinturicchio came to life. Sometimes it was our friends in green and yellow who returned to wave their flags beneath our windows. Sometimes it was men from the other *contrade* or districts of the town, in blue and white, red and white, black, white and orange, white, green and red, yellow and scarlet. Their bright pied doublets and parti-coloured hose shone out from among the drabs and funereal blacks of the twentieth-century crowd that surrounded them. Their spread flags waved in the street below, like the painted wings of enormous butterflies. The drummer quickened his beat, and to the accompaniment of a long-drawn rattle, the banners leapt up, furred and fluttering, into the air.

To the stranger who has never seen a Palio these little dress rehearsals are richly promising and exciting. Charmed by these present hints, he looks forward eagerly to what the day itself holds in store. Even the Sienese are excited. The pageant, however familiar, does not pall on them. And all the gambler in them, all the local patriot looks forward to the result of the race. Those last days of June before the first Palio, that middle week of August before the second, are days of growing excitement and tension

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in Siena. One enjoys the Palio the more for having lived through them.

Even the mayor and corporation are infected by the pervading excitement. They are so far carried away that, in the last days of June, they send a small army of men down in the great square before the Palazzo Comunale to eradicate every blade of grass or tuft of moss that can be found growing in the crannies between the flagstones. It amounts almost to a national characteristic, this hatred of growing things among the works of men. I have often, in old Italian towns, seen workmen laboriously weeding the less frequented streets and squares. The Colosseum, mantled till thirty or forty years ago with a romantic, Piranesian growth of shrubs, grasses and flowers, was officially weeded with such extraordinary energy that its ruinousness was sensibly increased. More stones were brought down in those few months of weeding than had fallen of their own accord in the previous thousand years. But the Italians were pleased; which is, after all, the chief thing that matters. Their hatred of weeds is fostered by their national pride; a great country, and one which specially piques itself on being modern, cannot allow weeds to grow even among its ruins. I entirely understand and sympathise with

the Italian point of view. If Mr. Ruskin and his disciples had talked about my house and me as they talked about Italy and the Italians, I too should pique myself on being up-to-date; I should put in bathrooms, central heating and a lift, I should have all the moss scratched off the walls, I should lay cork lino on the marble floors. Indeed, I think that I should probably, in my irritation, pull down the whole house and build a new one. Considering the provocation they have received, it seems to me that the Italians have been remarkably moderate in the matter of weeding, destroying and rebuilding. Their moderation is due in part, no doubt, to their comparative poverty. Their ancestors built with such prodigious solidity that it would cost as much to pull down one of their old houses as to build a new one. Imagine, for example, demolishing the Palazzo Strozzi in Florence. It would be about as easy to demolish the Matterhorn. In Rome, which is predominantly a baroque, seventeenth-century city, the houses are made of flimsier stuff. Consequently, modernisation progresses there much more rapidly than in most other Italian towns. In wealthier England very little antiquity has been permitted to stand. Thus, most of the great country houses of England

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were rebuilt during the eighteenth century. If Italy had preserved her independence and her prosperity during the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there would probably be very much less mediæval or Renaissance work now surviving than is actually the case. Money is lacking to modernize completely. Weeding has the merit of being cheap and, at the same time, richly symbolic. When you say of a town that the grass grows in its streets, you mean that it is utterly dead. Conversely, if there is no grass in its streets, it must be alive. No doubt the mayor and corporation of Siena did not put the argument quite so explicitly. But that the argument was put somehow, obscurely and below the surface of the mind, I do not doubt. The weeding was symbolic of modernity.

With the weeders came other workmen who built up round the curving flanks of the great piazza a series of wooden stands, six tiers high, for the spectators. The piazza which is shaped, whether by accident or design I do not know, like an ancient theatre, became for the time being indeed a theatre. Between the seats and the central area of the place, a track was railed off and the slippery flags covered parsimoniously with sand. Expectation rose higher than ever.

And at last the day came. The swallows and swifts wove their arabesques as usual in the bright golden light above the town. But their shrill crying was utterly inaudible, through the deep, continuous, formless murmur of the crowd that thronged the streets and the great piazza. Under its canopy of stone the great bell of the Mangia tower swung incessantly backwards and forwards; it too seemed dumb. The talking, the laughter, the shouting of forty thousand people rose up from the piazza in a column of solid sound, impenetrable to any ordinary noise.

It was after six. We took our places in one of the stands opposite the Palazzo Comunale. Our side of the piazza was already in the shade; but the sun still shone on the palace and its tall slender tower, making their rosy brickwork glow as though by inward fire. An immense concourse of people filled the square and all the tiers of seats round it. There were people in every window, even on the roofs. At the Derby, on boat-race days, at Wembley I have seen larger crowds; but never, I think, so many people confined within so small a space.

The sound of a gunshot broke through the noise of voices; and at the signal a company of mounted carabinieri rode into the piazza,

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driving the loungers who still thronged the track before them. They were in full dress uniform, black and red, with silver trimmings; cocked hats on their heads and swords in their hands. On their handsome little horses, they looked like a squadron of smart Napoleonic cavalry. The idlers retreated before them, squeezing their way through every convenient opening in the rails into the central area, which was soon densely packed. The track was cleared at a walk and, cleared, was rounded again at the trot, dashingly, in the best Carle Vernet style. The carabinieri got their applause and retired. The crowd waited expectantly. For a moment there was almost a silence. The bell on the tower ceased to be dumb. Some one in the crowd let loose a couple of balloons. They mounted perpendicularly into the still air, a red sphere and a purple. They passed out of the shadow into the sunlight; and the red became a ruby, the purple a glowing amethyst. When they had risen above the level of the roofs, a little breeze caught them and carried them away, still mounting all the time, over our heads, out of sight.

There was another gunshot and Vernet was exchanged for Pinturicchio. The noise of the crowd grew louder as they appeared, the

bell swung, but gave no sound, and across the square the trumpets of the procession were all but inaudible. Slowly they marched round, the representatives of all the seventeen *contrade* of the city. Besides its drummer and its two bannermen, each *contrada* had a man-at-arms on horseback, three or four halbardiers and young pages and, if it happened to be one of the ten competing in the race, a jockey, all of them wearing the Pinturicchian livery in its own particular colours. Their progress was slow; for at every fifty paces they stopped, to allow the bannermen to give an exhibition of their skill with the flags. They must have taken the best part of an hour to get round. But the time seemed only too short. The Palio is a spectacle of which one does not grow tired. I have seen it three times now and was as much delighted on the last occasion as on the first.

English tourists are often sceptical about the Palio. They remember those terrible "pageants" which were all the rage some fifteen years ago in their own country, and they imagine that the Palio will turn out to be something of the same sort. But let me reassure them; it is not. There is no poetry by Louis Napoleon Parker at Siena. There are no choruses of young ladies voicing high

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moral sentiments in low voices. There are no flabby actor-managers imperfectly disguised as Hengist and Horsa, no crowd of gesticulating supernumeraries dressed in the worst of taste and the cheapest of bunting. Nor finally does one often meet at Siena with that almost invariable accompaniment of the English pageant—rain. No, the Palio is just a show; having no “meaning” in particular, but by the mere fact of being traditional and still alive, signifying infinitely more than the dead-born English affairs for all their Parkerian blank verse and their dramatic re-evocations. For these pages and men-at-arms and bannermen come straight out of the Pinturicchian past. Their clothes are those designed for their ancestors, copied faithfully, once in a generation, in the same colours and the same rich materials. They walk, not in cotton or flannelette, but in silks and furs and velvets. And the colours were matched, the clothes originally cut by men whose taste was the faultless taste of the early Renaissance. To be sure there are costumiers with as good a taste in these days. But it was not Paquin, not Lanvin or Poiret who dressed the actors of the English pageants; it was professional wig-makers and lady amateurs. I have already spoken of the beauty of the flags—the bold, fantastic,

“modern” design of them. Everything else at the Palio is in keeping with the flags, daring, brilliant and yet always right, always irreproachably refined. The one false note is always the *Palio* itself—the painted banner which is given to the *contrada* whose horse wins the race. This banner is specially painted every year for the occasion. Look at it, where it comes along, proudly exposed on the great mediæval war chariot which closes the procession—look at it, or preferably don’t look at it. It is a typical property from the wardrobe of an English pageant committee. It is a lady amateur’s masterpiece. Shuddering, one averts the eyes.

Preceded by a line of *quattrocento* pages carrying festoons of laurel leaves and escorted by a company of mounted knights, the war chariot rolled slowly and ponderously past, bearing aloft the unworthy trophy. And by now the trumpets at the head of the procession sounded, almost inaudibly for us, from the further side of the piazza. And at last the whole procession had made its round and was lined up in close order in front of the Palazzo Comunale. Over the heads of the spectators standing in the central area, we could see all the thirty-four banners waving and waving in a last concerted display and at last, together, all leap-

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ing high into the air, hesitating at the top of their leap, falling back, out of sight. There was a burst of applause. The pageant was over. Another gunshot. And in the midst of more applause, the racehorses were ridden to the starting place.

The course is three times round the piazza, whose shape, as I have said, is something like that of an ancient theatre. Consequently, there are two sharp turns, where the ends of the semicircle meet the straight diameter. One of these, owing to the irregularity of the plan, is sharper than the other. The outside wall of the track is padded with mattresses at this point, to prevent impetuous jockeys who take the corner too fast from dashing themselves to pieces. The jockeys ride bareback; the horses run on a thin layer of sand spread over the flagstones of the piazza. The Palio is probably the most dangerous flat-race in the world. And it is made the more dangerous by the excessive patriotism of the rival *contrade*. For the winner of the race as he reins in his horse after passing the post, is set upon by the supporters of the other *contrade* (who all think that *their* horse should have won), with so real and earnest a fury that the carabinieri must always intervene to protect man and beast from lynching. Our places were at a point

some two or three hundred yards beyond the post, so that we had an excellent view of the battle waged round the winning horse, as he slackened speed. Scarcely was the post passed when the crowd broke its ranks and rushed out into the course. Still cantering, the horse came up the track. A gang of young men ran in pursuit, waving sticks and shouting. And with them, their Napoleonic coat tails streaming in the wind of their own speed, their cocked hats bobbing, and brandishing their swords in their white-gloved hands, ran the rescuing carabinieri. There was a brief struggle round the now stationary horse, the young men were repulsed, and surrounded by cocked hats, followed by a crowd of supporters from its native *contrada*, the beast was led off in triumph. We climbed down from our places. The piazza was now entirely shaded. It was only on the upper part of the tower and the battlements of the great Palazzo that the sun still shone. Rosily against the pale blue sky, they glowed. The swifts still turned and turned overhead in the light. It is said that at evening and at dawn these light-loving birds mount on their strong wings into the sky to bid a last farewell or earliest good-morrow to the sinking or the rising sun. While we lie sleeping or have resigned ourselves to darkness the

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swifts are looking down from their watchtower in the height of heaven over the edge of the turning planet towards the light. Was it a fable, I wondered, looking up at the wheeling birds? Or was it true? Meanwhile, some one was swearing at me for not looking where I was going. I postponed the speculation.

A Selection of Short Stories

From *Mortal Coils*,
Young Archimedes,
Two or Three Graces,
Brief Candles,

including:

THE GIOCONDA SMILE

THE TILLOTSON BANQUET

UNCLE SPENCER

TWO OR THREE GRACES

CHAWDRON

AFTER THE FIREWORKS

MORTAL COILS

I: THE GIOCONDA SMILE

I

MISS SPENCE will be down directly, sir."

"Thank you," said Mr. Hutton, without turning round. Janet Spence's parlourmaid was so ugly—ugly on purpose, it always seemed to him, malignantly, criminally ugly—that he could not bear to look at her more than was necessary. The door closed. Left to himself, Mr. Hutton got up and began to wander round the room, looking with meditative eyes at the familiar objects it contained.

Photographs of Greek statuary, photographs of the Roman Forum, coloured prints of Italian masterpieces, all very safe and well known. Poor, dear Janet, what a prig—what an intellectual snob! Her real taste was illustrated in that water-colour by the pavement artist, the one she had paid half

a crown for (and thirty-five shillings for the frame). How often he had heard her tell the story, how often expatiate on the beauties of that skilful imitation of an oleograph! "A real Artist in the streets," and you could hear the capital A in Artist as she spoke the words. She made you feel that part of his glory had entered into Janet Spence when she tendered him that half-crown for the copy of the oleograph. She was implying a compliment to her own taste and penetration. A genuine Old Master for half a crown. Poor, dear Janet!

Mr. Hutton came to a pause in front of a small oblong mirror. Stooping a little to get a full view of his face, he passed a white, well-manicured finger over his moustache. It was as curly, as freshly auburn as it had been twenty years ago. His hair still retained its colour, and there was no sign of baldness yet—only a certain elevation of the brow. "Shakespearean," thought Mr. Hutton, with a smile, as he surveyed the smooth and polished expanse of his forehead.

Others abide our question, thou art free. . . . Footsteps in the sea . . . Majesty . . . Shakespeare, thou shouldst be living at this hour. No, that was Milton, wasn't it? Milton, the Lady of Christ's. There was no lady about him. He was what

the women would call a manly man. That was why they liked him—for the curly auburn moustache and the discreet redolence of tobacco. Mr. Hutton smiled again; he enjoyed making fun of himself. Lady of Christ's? No, no. He was the Christ of Ladies. Very pretty, very pretty. The Christ of Ladies. Mr. Hutton wished there were somebody he could tell the joke to. Poor, dear Janet wouldn't appreciate it, alas!

He straightened himself up, patted his hair, and resumed his peregrination. Damn the Roman Forum; he hated those dreary photographs.

Suddenly he became aware that Janet Spence was in the room, standing near the door. Mr. Hutton started, as though he had been taken in some felonious act. To make these silent and spectral appearances was one of Janet Spence's peculiar talents. Perhaps she had been there all the time, had seen him looking at himself in the mirror. Impossible! But, still, it was disquieting.

"Oh, you gave me such a surprise," said Mr. Hutton, recovering his smile and advancing with outstretched hand to meet her.

Miss Spence was smiling too: her Gioconda smile, he had once called it in a moment of half-ironical flattery. Miss Spence

had taken the compliment seriously, and had always tried to live up to the Leonardo standard. She smiled on his silence while Mr. Hutton shook hands; that was part of the Gioconda business.

"I hope you're well," said Mr. Hutton. "You look it."

What a queer face she had! That small mouth pursed forward by the Gioconda expression into a little snout with a round hole in the middle as though for whistling—it was like a penholder seen from the front. Above the mouth a well-shaped nose, finely aquiline. Eyes large, lustrous, and dark, with the largeness, lustre, and darkness that seems to invite sties and an occasional blood-shot suffusion. They were fine eyes, but unchangingly grave. The penholder might do its Gioconda trick, but the eyes never altered in their earnestness. Above them, a pair of boldly arched, heavily pencilled black eyebrows lent a surprising air of power, as of a Roman matron, to the upper portion of the face. Her hair was dark and equally Roman; Agrippina from the brows upward.

"I thought I'd just look in on my way home," Mr. Hutton went on. "Ah, it's good to be back here"—he indicated with a wave of his hand the flowers in the vases, the

sunshine and greenery beyond the windows —“it’s good to be back in the country after a stuffy day of business in town.”

Miss Spence, who had sat down, pointed to a chair at her side.

“No, really, I can’t sit down,” Mr. Hutton protested. “I must get back to see how poor Emily is. She was rather seedy this morning.” He sat down, nevertheless. “It’s these wretched liver chills. She’s always getting them. Women——” He broke off and coughed, so as to hide the fact that he had uttered. He was about to say that women with weak digestions ought not to marry; but the remark was too cruel, and he didn’t really believe it. Janet Spence, moreover, was a believer in eternal flames and spiritual attachments. “She hopes to be well enough,” he added, “to see you at luncheon to-morrow. Can you come? Do!” He smiled persuasively. “It’s my invitation too, you know.”

She dropped her eyes, and Mr. Hutton almost thought that he detected a certain reddening of the cheek. It was a tribute; he stroked his moustache.

“I should like to come if you think Emily’s really well enough to have a visitor.”

“Of course. You’ll do her good. You’ll

do us both good. In married life three is often better company than two."

"Oh, you're cynical."

Mr. Hutton always had a desire to say "Bow-wow-wow" whenever that last word was spoken. It irritated him more than any other word in the language. But instead of barking he made haste to protest.

"No, no. I'm only speaking a melancholy truth. Reality doesn't always come up to the ideal, you know. But that doesn't make me believe any the less in the ideal. Indeed, I believe in it passionately—the ideal of a matrimony between two people in perfect accord. I think it's realisable. I'm sure it is."

He paused significantly and looked at her with an arch expression. A virgin of thirty-six, but still unwithered; she had her charms. And there was something really rather enigmatic about her. Miss Spence made no reply but continued to smile. There were times when Mr. Hutton got rather bored with the Gioconda. He stood up.

"I must really be going now. Farewell, mysterious Gioconda." The smile grew intenser, focused itself, as it were, in a narrower snout. Mr. Hutton made a Cinquecento gesture, and kissed her extended hand. It was the first time he had done such a

thing; the action seemed not to be resented. "I look forward to to-morrow."

"Do you?"

For answer Mr. Hutton once more kissed her hand, then turned to go. Miss Spence accompanied him to the porch.

"Where's your car?" she asked.

"I left it at the gate of the drive."

"I'll come and see you off."

"No, no." Mr. Hutton was playful, but determined. "You must do no such thing. I simply forbid you."

"But I should like to come," Miss Spence protested, throwing a rapid Gioconda at him.

Mr. Hutton held up his hand. "No," he repeated, and then, with a gesture that was almost the blowing of a kiss, he started to run down the drive, lightly on his toes, with long, bounding strides like a boy's. He was proud of that run; it was quite marvellously youthful. Still, he was glad the drive was no longer. At the last bend, before passing out of sight of the house, he halted and turned round. Miss Spence was still standing on the steps, smiling her smile. He waved his hand, and this time quite definitely and overtly wafted a kiss in her direction. Then, breaking once more into his magnificent canter, he rounded the last dark promontory of trees. Once out of sight

of the house he let his high paces decline to a trot, and finally to a walk. He took out his handkerchief and began wiping his neck inside his collar. What fools, what fools! Had there ever been such an ass as poor, dear Janet Spence? Never, unless it was himself. Decidedly he was the more malignant fool, since he, at least, was aware of his folly and still persisted in it. Why did he persist? Ah, the problem that was himself, the problem that was other people.

He had reached the gate. A large, prosperous-looking motor was standing at the side of the road.

"Home, M'Nab." The chauffeur touched his cap. "And stop at the cross-roads on the way, as usual," Mr. Hutton added, as he opened the door of the car. "Well?" he said, speaking into the obscurity that lurked within.

"Oh, Teddy Bear, what an age you've been!" It was a fresh and childish voice that spoke the words. There was the faintest hint of Cockney impurity about the vowel sounds.

Mr. Hutton bent his large form and darted into the car with the agility of an animal regaining its burrow.

"Have I?" he said, as he shut the door. The machine began to move. "You must

have missed me a lot if you found the time so long." He sat back in the low seat; a cherishing warmth enveloped him.

"Teddy Bear . . ." and with a sigh of contentment a charming little head declined on to Mr. Hutton's shoulder. Ravished, he looked down sideways at the round, babyish face.

"Do you know, Doris, you look like the pictures of Louise de Kerouaille." He passed his fingers through a mass of curly hair.

"Who's Louise de Kera-whatever-it-is?" Doris spoke from remote distances.

"She was, alas! *Fuit*. We shall all be 'was' one of these days. Meanwhile . . ."

Mr. Hutton covered the babyish face with kisses. The car rushed smoothly along. M'Nab's back, through the front window was stonily impassive, the back of a statue.

"Your hands," Doris whispered. "Oh, you mustn't touch me. They give me electric shocks."

Mr. Hutton adored her for the virgin imbecility of the words. How late in one's existence one makes the discovery of one's body!

"The electricity isn't in me, it's in you." He kissed her again, whispering her name several times: Doris, Doris, Doris. The scientific appellation of the

sea-mouse, he was thinking as he kissed the throat, she offered him, white and extended like the throat of a victim awaiting the sacrificial knife. The sea-mouse was a sausage with iridescent fur: very peculiar. Or was Doris the sea cucumber, which turns itself inside out in moments of alarm? He would really have to go to Naples again, just to see the aquarium. These sea creatures were fabulous, unbelievably fanastic.

“Oh, Teddy Bear!” (More zoology; but he was only a land animal. His poor little jokes!) “Teddy Bear, I’m so happy.”

“So am I,” said Mr. Hutton. Was it true?

“But I wish I knew if it were right. Tell me, Teddy Bear, is it right or wrong?”

“Ah, my dear, that’s just what I’ve been wondering for the last thirty years.”

“Be serious, Teddy Bear. I want to know if this is right; if it’s right that I should be here with you and that we should love one another, and that it should give me electric shocks when you touch me.”

“Right? Well, it’s certainly good that you should have electric shocks rather than sexual repressions. Read Freud; repressions are the devil.”

“Oh, you don’t help me. Why aren’t you

ever serious? If only you knew how miserable I am sometimes, thinking it's not right. Perhaps, you know, there is a hell, and all that. I don't know what to do. Sometimes I think I ought to stop loving you."

"But could you?" asked Mr. Hutton, confident in the powers of his seduction and his moustache.

"No, Teddy Bear, you know I couldn't. But I could run away, I could hide from you, I could lock myself up and force myself not to come to you."

"Silly little thing!" He tightened his embrace.

"Oh, dear, I hope it isn't wrong. And there are times when I don't care if it is."

Mr. Hutton was touched. He had a certain protective affection for this little creature. He laid his cheek against her hair and so, interlaced, they sat in silence, while the car, swaying and pitching a little as it hastened along, seemed to draw in the white road and the dusty hedges towards it devouringly.

"Good-bye, good-bye."

The car moved on, gathered speed, vanished round a curve, and Doris was left standing by the sign-post at the cross-roads, still dizzy and weak with the languor born of those kisses and the electrical touch of

those gentle hands. She had to take a deep breath, to draw herself up deliberately, before she was strong enough to start her homeward walk. She had half a mile in which to invent the necessary lies.

Alone, Mr. Hutton suddenly found himself the prey of an appalling boredom.

II

MRS. HUTTON was lying on the sofa in her boudoir, playing Patience. In spite of the warmth of the July evening a wood fire was burning on the hearth. A black Pomeranian, extenuated by the heat and the fatigues of digestion, slept before the blaze.

“Phew! Isn’t it rather hot in here?” Mr. Hutton asked as he entered the room.

“You know I have to keep warm, dear.” The voice seemed breaking on the verge of tears. “I get so shivery.”

“I hope you’re better this evening.”

“Not much, I’m afraid.”

The conversation stagnated. Mr. Hutton stood leaning his back against the mantelpiece. He looked down at the Pomeranian lying at his feet, and with the toe of his right boot he rolled the little dog over and rubbed its white-flecked chest and belly. The creature lay in an inert ecstasy. Mrs. Hutton continued to play Patience. Arrived at an *impasse*, she altered the position of one card,

took back another, and went on playing. Her Patiences always came out.

"Dr. Libbard thinks I ought to go to Llandrindod Wells this summer."

"Well—go, my dear—go, most certainly."

Mr. Hutton was thinking of the events of the afternoon: how they had driven, Doris and he, up to the hanging wood, had left the car to wait for them under the shade of the trees, and walked together out into the windless sunshine of the chalk down.

"I'm to drink the waters for my liver, and he thinks I ought to have massage and electric treatment, too."

Hat in hand, Doris had stalked four blue butterflies that were dancing together round a scabious flower with a motion that was like the flickering of blue fire. The blue fire burst and scattered into whirling sparks; she had given chase, laughing and shouting like a child.

"I'm sure it will do you good, my dear."

"I was wondering if you'd come with me, dear."

"But you know I'm going to Scotland at the end of the month."

Mrs. Hutton looked up at him entreatingly. "It's the journey," she said. "The

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thought of it is such a nightmare. I don't know if I can manage it. And you know I can't sleep in hotels. And then there's the luggage and all the worries. I can't go alone."

"But you won't be alone. You'll have your maid with you." He spoke impatiently. The sick woman was usurping the place of the healthy one. He was being dragged back from the memory of the sunlit down and the quick, laughing girl, back to this unhealthy, overheated room and its complaining occupant.

"I don't think I shall be able to go."

"But you must, my dear, if the doctor tells you to. And, besides, a change will do you good."

"I don't think so."

"But Libbard thinks so, and he knows what he's talking about."

"No, I can't face it. I'm too weak. I can't go alone." Mrs. Hutton pulled a handkerchief out of her black silk bag, and put it to her eyes.

"Nonsense, my dear, you must make the effort."

"I had rather be left in peace to die here." She was crying in earnest now.

"O Lord! Now do be reasonable. Listen now, please." Mrs. Hutton only sobbed

more violently. "Oh, what is one to do?" He shrugged his shoulders and walked out of the room.

Mr. Hutton was aware that he had not behaved with proper patience; but he could not help it. Very early in his manhood he had discovered that not only did he not feel sympathy for the poor, the weak, the diseased, and deformed; he actually hated them. Once, as an undergraduate, he spent three days at a mission in the East End. He had returned, filled with a profound and ineradicable disgust. Instead of pitying, he loathed the unfortunate. It was not, he knew, a very comely emotion; and he had been ashamed of it at first. In the end he had decided that it was temperamental, inevitable, and had felt no further qualms. Emily had been healthy and beautiful when he married her. He had loved her then. But now—was it his fault that she was like this?

Mr. Hutton dined alone. Food and drink left him more benevolent than he had been before dinner. To make amends for his show of exasperation he went up to his wife's room and offered to read to her. She was touched, gratefully accepted the offer, and Mr. Hutton, who was particularly proud of his accent, suggested a little light reading in French.

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“French? I am so fond of French.” Mrs. Hutton spoke of the language of Racine as though it were a dish of green peas.

Mr. Hutton ran down to the library and returned with a yellow volume. He began reading. The effort of pronouncing perfectly absorbed his whole attention. But how good his accent was! The fact of its goodness seemed to improve the quality of the novel he was reading.

At the end of fifteen pages an unmistakable sound aroused him. He looked up; Mrs. Hutton had gone to sleep. He sat still for a little while, looking with a dispassionate curiosity at the sleeping face. Once it had been beautiful; once, long ago, the sight of it, the recollection of it, had moved him with an emotion profounder, perhaps, than any he had felt before or since. Now it was lined and cadaverous. The skin was stretched tightly over the cheekbones, across the bridge of the sharp, bird-like nose. The closed eyes were set in profound bone-rimmed sockets. The lamplight striking on the face from the side emphasized with light and shade its cavities and projections. It was the face of a dead Christ by Morales.

*Le squelette était invisible
Au temps heureux de l'art païen.*

He shivered a little, and tiptoed out of the room.

On the following day Mrs. Hutton came down to luncheon. She had had some unpleasant palpitations during the night, but she was feeling better now. Besides, she wanted to do honour to her guest. Miss Spence listened to her complaints about Llandrindod Wells, and was loud in sympathy, lavish with advice. Whatever she said was always said with intensity. She leaned forward, aimed, so to speak, like a gun, and fired her words. Bang! the charge in her soul was ignited, the words whizzed forth at the narrow barrel of her mouth. She was a machine-gun riddling her hostess with sympathy. Mr. Hutton had undergone similar bombardments, mostly of a literary or philosophic character—bombardments of Maeterlinck, of Mrs. Besant, of Bergson, of William James. To-day the missiles were medical. She talked about insomnia, she expatiated on the virtues of harmless drugs and beneficent specialists. Under the bombardment Mrs. Hutton opened out, like a flower in the sun.

Mr. Hutton looked on in silence. The spectacle of Janet Spence evoked in him an unfailing curiosity. He was not romantic enough to imagine that every face

masked an interior physiognomy of beauty or strangeness, that every woman's small talk was like a vapour hanging over mysterious gulfs. His wife, for example, and Doris; they were nothing more than what they seemed to be. But with Janet Spence it was somehow different. Here one could be sure that there was some kind of a queer face behind the Gioconda smile and the Roman eyebrows. The only question was: What exactly was there? Mr. Hutton could never quite make out.

"But perhaps you won't have to go to Llandrindod after all," Miss Spence was saying. "If you get well quickly Dr. Libbard will let you off."

"I only hope so. Indeed, I do really feel rather better to-day."

Mr. Hutton felt ashamed. How much was it his own lack of sympathy that prevented her from feeling well every day? But he comforted himself by reflecting that it was only a case of feeling, not of being better. Sympathy does not mend a diseased liver or a weak heart.

"My dear, I wouldn't eat those red currants if I were you," he said, suddenly solicitous. "You know that Libbard has banned everything with skins and pips."

"But I am so fond of them," Mrs. Hutton protested, "and I feel so well to-day."

"Don't be a tyrant," said Miss Spence, looking first at him and then at his wife. "Let the poor invalid have what she fancies: it will do her good." She laid her hand on Mrs. Hutton's arm and patted it affectionately two or three times.

"Thank you, my dear." Mrs. Hutton helped herself to the stewed currants.

"Well, don't blame me if they make you ill again."

"Do I ever blame you, dear?"

"You have nothing to blame me for," Mr. Hutton answered playfully. "I am the perfect husband."

They sat in the garden after luncheon. From the island of shade under the old cypress tree they looked out across a flat expanse of lawn, in which the parterres of flowers shone with a metallic brilliance.

Mr. Hutton took a deep breath of the warm and fragrant air. "It's good to be alive," he said.

"Just to be alive," his wife echoed, stretching one pale, knot-jointed hand into the sunlight.

A maid brought the coffee; the silver pots and the little blue cups were set on a folding table near the group of chairs.

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“Oh, my medicine!” exclaimed Mrs. Hutton. “Run in and fetch it, Clara, will you? The white bottle on the sideboard.”

“I’ll go,” said Mr. Hutton. “I’ve got to go and fetch a cigar in any case.”

He ran in towards the house. On the threshold he turned round for an instant. The maid was walking back across the lawn. His wife was sitting up in her deck-chair, engaged in opening her white parasol. Miss Spence was bending over the table, pouring out the coffee. He passed into the cool obscurity of the house.

“Do you like sugar in your coffee?” Miss Spence inquired.

“Yes, please. Give me rather a lot. I’ll drink it after my medicine to take the taste away.”

Mrs. Hutton leaned back in her chair, lowering the sunshade over her eyes, so as to shut out from her vision the burning sky.

Behind her, Miss Spence was making a delicate clinking among the coffee-cups.

“I’ve given you three large spoonfuls. That ought to take the taste away. And here comes the medicine.”

Mr. Hutton had reappeared, carrying a wine-glass, half full of a pale liquid.

“It smells delicious,” he said, as he handed it to his wife.

"That's only the flavouring." She drank it off at a gulp, shuddered, and made a grimace. "Ugh, it's so nasty. Give me my coffee."

Miss Spence gave her the cup; she sipped at it. "You've made it like syrup. But it's very nice, after that atrocious medicine."

At half-past three Mrs. Hutton complained that she did not feel as well as she had done, and went indoors to lie down. Her husband would have said something about the red currants, but checked himself; the triumph of an "I told you so" was too cheaply won. Instead, he was sympathetic, and gave her his arm to the house.

"A rest will do you good," he said. "By the way, I shan't be back till after dinner."

"But why? Where are you going?"

"I promised to go to Johnson's this evening. We have to discuss the war memorial, you know."

"Oh, I wish you weren't going." Mrs. Hutton was almost in tears. "Can't you stay? I don't like being alone in the house."

"But, my dear, I promised—weeks ago." It was a bother having to lie like this. "And now I must get back and look after Miss Spence."

He kissed her on the forehead and went

out again into the garden. Miss Spence received him aimed and intense.

"Your wife is dreadfully ill," she fired off at him.

"I thought she cheered up so much when you came."

"That was purely nervous, purely nervous. I was watching her closely. With a heart in that condition and her digestion wrecked—yes, wrecked—anything might happen."

"Libbard doesn't take so gloomy a view of poor Emily's health." Mr. Hutton held open the gate that led from the garden into the drive; Miss Spence's car was standing by the front door.

"Libbard is only a country doctor. You ought to see a specialist."

He could not refrain from laughing. "You have a macabre passion for specialists."

Miss Spence held up her hand in protest. "I am serious. I think poor Emily is in a very bad state. Anything might happen—at any moment."

He handed her into the car and shut the door. The chauffeur started the engine and climbed into his place, ready to drive off.

"Shall I tell him to start?" He had no desire to continue the conversation.

Miss Spence leaned forward and shot a Gioconda in his direction. "Remember, I expect you to come and see me again soon."

Mechanically he grinned, made a polite noise, and, as the car moved forward, waved his hand. He was happy to be alone.

A few minutes afterwards Mr. Hutton himself drove away. Doris was waiting at the cross-roads. They dined together twenty miles from home, at a roadside hotel. It was one of those bad, expensive meals which are only cooked in country hotels frequented by motorists. It revolted Mr. Hutton, but Doris enjoyed it. She always enjoyed things. Mr. Hutton ordered a not very good brand of champagne. He was wishing he had spent the evening in his library.

When they started homewards Doris was a little tipsy and extremely affectionate. It was very dark inside the car, but looking forward, past the motionless form of M'Nab, they could see a bright and narrow universe of forms and colours scooped out of the night by the electric head-lamps.

It was after eleven when Mr. Hutton reached home. Dr. Libbard met him in the hall. He was a small man with delicate hands and well-formed features that were almost feminine. His brown eyes were large and melancholy. He used to waste a great

deal of time sitting at the bedside of his patients, looking sadness through those eyes and talking in a sad, low voice about nothing in particular. His person exhaled a pleasing odour, decidedly antiseptic but at the same time suave and discreetly delicious.

"Libbard?" said Mr. Hutton in surprise. "You here? Is my wife ill?"

"We tried to fetch you earlier," the soft, melancholy voice replied. "It was thought you were at Mr. Johnson's, but they had no news of you there."

"No, I was detained. I had a breakdown," Mr. Hutton answered irritably. It was tiresome to be caught out in a lie.

"Your wife wanted to see you urgently."

"Well, I can go now." Mr. Hutton moved towards the stairs.

Dr. Libbard laid a hand on his arm. "I am afraid it's too late."

"Too late?" He began fumbling with his watch; it wouldn't come out of the pocket.

"Mrs. Hutton passed away half an hour ago."

The voice remained even in its softness, the melancholy of the eyes did not deepen. Dr. Libbard spoke of death as he would speak of a local cricket match. All things were equally vain and equally deplorable.

Mr. Hutton found himself thinking of

Janet Spence's words. At any moment—at any moment. She had been extraordinarily right.

“What happened?” he asked. “What was the cause?”

Dr. Libbard explained. It was heart failure brought on by a violent attack of nausea, caused in its turn by the eating of something of an irritant nature. Red currants? Mr. Hutton suggested. Very likely. It had been too much for the heart. There was chronic valvular disease: something had collapsed under the strain. It was all over; she could not have suffered much.

III

IT'S a pity they should have chosen the day of the Eton and Harrow match for the funeral," old General Grego was saying as he stood, his top hat in his hand, under the shadow of the lych gate, wiping his face with his handkerchief.

Mr. Hutton overheard the remark and with difficulty restrained a desire to inflict grievous bodily pain on the General. He would have liked to hit the old brute in the middle of his big red face. Monstrous great mulberry, spotted with meal! Was there no respect for the dead? Did nobody care? In theory he didn't much care; let the dead bury their dead. But here, at the graveside, he had found himself actually sobbing. Poor Emily, they had been pretty happy once. Now she was lying at the bottom of a seven-foot hole. And here was Grego complaining that he couldn't go to the Eton and Harrow match.

Mr. Hutton looked round at the groups of black figures that were drifting slowly out of the churchyard towards the fleet of cabs

and motors assembled in the road outside. Against the brilliant background of the July grass and flowers and foliage, they had a horribly alien and unnatural appearance. It pleased him to think that all these people would soon be dead, too.

That evening Mr. Hutton sat up late in his library reading the life of Milton. There was no particular reason why he should have chosen Milton; it was the book that first came to hand, that was all. It was after midnight when he had finished. He got up from his armchair, unbolted the French windows, and stepped out on to the little paved terrace. The night was quiet and clear. Mr. Hutton looked at the stars and at the holes between them, dropped his eyes to the dim lawns and hueless flowers of the garden, and let them wander over the farther landscape, black and grey under the moon.

He began to think with a kind of confused violence. There were the stars, there was Milton. A man can be somehow the peer of stars and night. Greatness, nobility. But is there seriously a difference between the noble and the ignoble? Milton, the stars, death, and himself—himself. The soul, the body; the higher and the lower nature. Perhaps there was something in it, after all. Milton had a god on his side and righteous-

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ness. What had he? Nothing, nothing whatever. There were only Doris's little breasts. What was the point of it all? Milton, the stars, death, and Emily in her grave, Doris and himself—always himself . . .

Oh, he was a futile and disgusting being. Everything convinced him of it. It was a solemn moment. He spoke aloud: "I will, I will." The sound of his own voice in the darkness was appalling; it seemed to him that he had sworn that infernal oath which binds even the gods: "I will, I will." There had been New Year's days and solemn anniversaries in the past, when he had felt the same contritions and recorded similar resolutions. They had all thinned away, these resolutions, like smoke, into nothingness. But this was a greater moment and he had pronounced a more fearful oath. In the future it was to be different. Yes, he would live by reason, he would be industrious, he would curb his appetites, he would devote his life to some good purpose. It was resolved and it would be so.

In practice he saw himself spending his mornings in agricultural pursuits, riding round with the bailiff, seeing that his land was farmed in the best modern way—silos and artificial manures and continuous crop-

ping, and all that. The remainder of the day should be devoted to serious study. There was that book he had been intending to write for so long—*The Effect of Diseases on Civilization*.

Mr. Hutton went to bed humble and contrite, but with a sense that grace had entered into him. He slept for seven and a half hours, and woke to find the sun brilliantly shining. The emotions of the evening before had been transformed by a good night's rest into his customary cheerfulness. It was not until a good many seconds after his return to conscious life that he remembered his resolution, his Stygian oath. Milton and death seemed somehow different in the sunlight. As for the stars, they were not there. But the resolutions were good; even in the daytime he could see that. He had his horse saddled after breakfast, and rode round the farm with the bailiff. After luncheon he read Thucydides on the plague at Athens. In the evening he made a few notes on malaria in Southern Italy. While he was undressing he remembered that there was a good anecdote in Skelton's jest-book about the Sweating Sickness. He would have made a note of it if only he could have found a pencil.

On the sixth morning of his new life Mr.

Hutton found among his correspondence an envelope addressed in that peculiarly vulgar handwriting which he knew to be Doris's. He opened it, and began to read. She didn't know what to say; words were so inadequate. His wife dying like that, and so suddenly—it was too terrible. Mr. Hutton sighed, but his interest revived somewhat as he read on:

“Death is so frightening, I never think of it when I can help it. But when something like this happens, or when I am feeling ill or depressed, then I can't help remembering it is there so close, and I think about all the wicked things I have done and about you and me, and I wonder what will happen. and I am so frightened. I am so lonely, Teddy Bear, and so unhappy, and I don't know what to do. I can't get rid of the idea of dying, I am so wretched and helpless without you. I didn't mean to write to you; I meant to wait till you were out of mourning and could come and see me again, but I was so lonely and miserable, Teddy Bear, I had to write. I couldn't help it. Forgive me, I want you so much; I have nobody in the world but you. You are so good and gentle and understanding; there is nobody like you. I shall never forget how good and kind you have been to me, and you are so clever and

know so much, I can't understand how you ever came to pay any attention to me, I am so dull and stupid, much less like me and love me, because you do love me a little, don't you, Teddy Bear?"

Mr. Hutton was touched with shame and remorse. To be thanked like this, worshipped for having seduced the girl—it was too much. It had just been a piece of imbecile wantonness. Imbecile, idiotic: there was no other way to describe it. For, when all was said, he had derived very little pleasure from it. Taking all things together, he had probably been more bored than amused. Once upon a time he had believed himself to be a hedonist. But to be a hedonist implies a certain process of reasoning, a deliberate choice of known pleasures, a rejection of known pains. This had been done without reason, against it. For he knew beforehand—so well, so well—that there was no interest or pleasure to be derived from these wretched affairs. And yet each time the vague itch came upon him he succumbed, involving himself once more in the old stupidity. There had been Maggie, his wife's maid, and Edith, the girl on the farm, and Mrs. Pringle, and the waitress in London, and others—there seemed to be

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dozens of them. It had all been so stale and boring. He knew it would be; he always knew. And yet, and yet . . . Experience doesn't teach.

Poor little Doris! He would write to her kindly, comfortingly, but he wouldn't see her again. A servant came to tell him that his horse was saddled and waiting. He mounted and rode off. That morning the old bailiff was more irritating than usual.

Five days later Doris and Mr. Hutton were sitting together on the pier at South-end; Doris, in white muslin with pink garnishings, radiated happiness; Mr. Hutton, legs outstretched and chair tilted, had pushed the panama back from his forehead, and was trying to feel like a tripper. That night, when Doris was asleep, breathing and warm by his side, he recaptured, in this moment of darkness and physical fatigue, the rather cosmic emotion which had possessed him that evening, not a fortnight ago, when he had made his great resolution. And so his solemn oath had already gone the way of so many other resolutions. Unreason had triumphed; at the first itch of desire he had given way. He was hopeless, hopeless.

For a long time he lay with closed eyes, ruminating his humiliation. The girl stirred

in her sleep. Mr. Hutton turned over and looked in her direction. Enough faint light crept in between the half-drawn curtains to show her bare arm and shoulder, her neck, and the dark tangle of hair on the pillow. She was beautiful, desirable. Why did he lie there moaning over his sins? What did it matter? If he were hopeless, then so be it; he would make the best of his hopelessness. A glorious sense of irresponsibility suddenly filled him. He was free, magnificently free. In a kind of exaltation he drew the girl towards him. She woke, bewildered, almost frightened under his rough kisses.

The storm of his desire subsided into a kind of serene merriment. The whole atmosphere seemed to be quivering with enormous silent laughter.

"Could anyone love you as much as I do, Teddy Bear?" The question came faintly from distant worlds of love.

"I think I know somebody who does," Mr. Hutton replied. The submarine laughter was swelling, rising, ready to break the surface of silence and resound.

"Who? Tell me. What do you mean?" The voice had come very close; charged with suspicion, anguish, indignation, it belonged to this immediate world.

"A—ah!"

“Who?”

“You’ll never guess.” Mr. Hutton kept up the joke until it began to grow tedious, and then pronounced the name “Janet Spence.”

Doris was incredulous. “Miss Spence of the Manor? That old woman?” It was too ridiculous. Mr. Hutton laughed too.

“But it’s quite true,” he said. “She adores me.” Oh, the vast joke. He would go and see her as soon as he returned—see and conquer. “I believe she wants to marry me,” he added.

“But you wouldn’t . . . you don’t intend . . .”

The air was fairly crepitating with humour. Mr. Hutton laughed aloud. “I intend to marry you,” he said. It seemed to him the best joke he had ever made in his life.

When Mr. Hutton left Southend he was once more a married man. It was agreed that, for the time being, the fact should be kept secret. In the autumn they would go abroad together, and the world should be informed. Meanwhile he was to go back to his own house and Doris to hers.

The day after his return he walked over in the afternoon to see Miss Spence. She received him with the old Gioconda.

"I was expecting you to come."

"I couldn't keep away," Mr. Hutton gallantly replied.

They sat in the summer-house. It was a pleasant place—a little old stucco temple bowered among dense bushes of evergreen. Miss Spence had left her mark on it by hanging up over the seat a blue-and-white Della Robbia plaque.

"I am thinking of going to Italy this autumn," said Mr. Hutton. He felt like a ginger-beer bottle, ready to pop with bubbling humorous excitement.

"Italy. . . ." Miss Spence closed her eyes ecstatically. "I feel drawn there too."

"Why not let yourself be drawn?"

"I don't know. One somehow hasn't the energy and initiative to set out alone."

"Alone. . . ." Ah, sound of guitars and throaty singing! "Yes, travelling alone isn't much fun."

Miss Spence lay back in her chair without speaking. Her eyes were still closed. Mr. Hutton stroked his moustache. The silence prolonged itself for what seemed a very long time.

Pressed to stay to dinner, Mr. Hutton did not refuse. The fun had hardly started. The table was laid in the loggia. Through its arches they looked out on to the sloping

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garden, to the valley below and the farther hills. Light ebbed away; the heat and silence were oppressive. A huge cloud was mounting up the sky, and there were distant breathings of thunder. The thunder drew nearer, a wind began to blow, and the first drops of rain fell. The table was cleared. Miss Spence and Mr. Hutton sat on in the growing darkness.

Miss Spence broke a long silence by saying meditatively:

"I think everyone has a right to a certain amount of happiness, don't you?"

"Most certainly." But what was she leading up to? Nobody makes generalisations about life unless they mean to talk about themselves. Happiness: he looked back on his own life, and saw a cheerful, placid existence disturbed by no great griefs or discomforts or alarms. He had always had money and freedom; he had been able to do very much as he wanted. Yes, he supposed he had been happy—happier than most men. And now he was not merely happy; he had discovered in irresponsibility the secret of gaiety. He was about to say something about his happiness when Miss Spence went on speaking.

"People like you and me have a right to be happy some time in our lives."

"Me?" said Mr. Hutton surprised.

"Poor Henry! Fate hasn't treated either of us very well."

"Oh, well, it might have treated me worse."

"You're being cheerful. That's brave of you. But don't think I can't see behind the mask."

Miss Spence spoke louder and louder as the rain came down more and more heavily. Periodically the thunder cut across her utterances. She talked on, shouting against the noise.

"I have understood you so well and for so long."

A flash revealed her, aimed and intent, leaning towards him. Her eyes were two profound and menacing gun-barrels. The darkness re-engulfed her.

"You were a lonely soul seeking a companion soul. I could sympathise with you in your solitude. Your marriage . . ."

The thunder cut short the sentence. Miss Spence's voice became audible once more with the words:

". . . could offer no companionship to a man of your stamp. You needed a soul mate."

A soul mate—he! a soul mate. It was incredibly fantastic. "Georgette Leblanc,

the ex-soul mate of Maurice Maeterlinck." He had seen that in the paper a few days ago. So it was thus that Janet Spence had painted him in her imagination—a soul-mate. And for Doris he was a picture of goodness and the cleverest man in the world. And actually, really, he was what?—Who knows?

"My heart went out to you. I could understand; I was lonely, too." Miss Spence laid her hand on his knee. "You were so patient." Another flash. She was still aimed, dangerously. "You never complained. But I could guess—I could guess."

"How wonderful of you!" So he was an *âme incomprise*. "Only a woman's intuition . . ."

The thunder crashed and rumbled, died away, and only the sound of the rain was left. The thunder was his laughter, magnified, externalised. Flash and crash, there it was again, right on top of them.

"Don't you feel that you have within you something that is akin to this storm?" He could imagine her leaning forward as she uttered the words. "Passion makes one the equal of the elements."

What was his gambit now? Why, obviously, he should have said "Yes," and

ventured on some unequivocal gesture. But Mr. Hutton suddenly took fright. The ginger beer in him had gone flat. The woman was serious—terribly serious. He was appalled.

Passion? “No,” he desperately answered. “I am without passion.”

But his remark was either unheard or unheeded, for Miss Spence went on with a growing exaltation, speaking so rapidly, however, and in such a burningly intimate whisper that Mr. Hutton found it very difficult to distinguish what she was saying. She was telling him, as far as he could make out, the story of her life. The lightning was less frequent now, and there were long intervals of darkness. But at each flash he saw her still aiming towards him, still yearning forward with a terrifying intensity. Darkness, the rain, and then flash! her face was there, close at hand. A pale mask, greenish white; the large eyes, the narrow barrel of the mouth, the heavy eyebrows. Agrippina, or wasn't it rather—yes, wasn't it rather George Robey?

He began devising absurd plans for escaping. He might suddenly jump up, pretending he had seen a burglar—Stop thief! stop thief!—and dash off into the night in pursuit. Or should he say that he felt faint,

a heart attack? or that he had seen a ghost—Emily's ghost—in the garden? Absorbed in his childish plotting, he had ceased to pay any attention to Miss Spence's words. The spasmodic clutching of her hand recalled his thoughts.

"I honoured you for that, Henry," she was saying.

Honoured him for what?

"Marriage is a sacred tie, and your respect for it, even when the marriage was, as it was in your case, an unhappy one, made me respect you and admire you, and—shall I dare say the word?—"

Oh, the burglar, the ghost in the garden! But it was too late.

". . . yes, love you, Henry, all the more. But we're free now, Henry."

Free? There was a movement in the dark, and she was kneeling on the floor by his chair.

"Oh, Henry, Henry, I have been unhappy too."

Her arms embraced him, and by the shaking of her body he could feel that she was sobbing. She might have been a suppliant crying for mercy.

"You mustn't, Janet," he protested. Those tears were terrible, terrible. "Not now, not now! You must be calm; you

must go to bed." He patted her shoulder, then got up, disengaging himself from her embrace. He left her still crouching on the floor beside the chair on which he had been sitting.

Groping his way into the hall, and without waiting to look for his hat, he went out of the house, taking infinite pains to close the front door noiselessly behind him. The clouds had blown over, and the moon was shining from a clear sky. There were puddles all along the road, and a noise of running water rose from the gutters and ditches. Mr. Hutton splashed along, not caring if he got wet.

How heartrendingly she had sobbed! With the emotions of pity and remorse that the recollection evoked in him there was a certain resentment: why couldn't she have played the game that he was playing—the heartless, amusing game? Yes, but he had known all the time that she wouldn't, she couldn't play that game; he had known and persisted.

What had she said about passion and the elements? Something absurdly stale, but true, true. There she was, a cloud black bosomed and charged with thunder, and he, like some absurd little Benjamin Franklin, had sent up a kite into the heart of the

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menace. Now he was complaining that his toy had drawn the lightning.

She was probably still kneeling by that chair in the loggia, crying.

But why hadn't he been able to keep up the game? Why had his irresponsibility deserted him, leaving him suddenly sober in a cold world? There were no answers to any of his questions. One idea burned steady and luminous in his mind—the idea of flight. He must get away at once.

IV

WHAT are you thinking about, Teddy Bear?"

"Nothing."

There was a silence. Mr. Hutton remained motionless, his elbows on the parapet of the terrace, his chin in his hands, looking down over Florence. He had taken a villa on one of the hilltops to the south of the city. From a little raised terrace at the end of the garden one looked down a long fertile valley on to the town and beyond it to the bleak mass of Monte Morello and, eastward of it, to the peopled hill of Fiesole, dotted with white houses. Everything was clear and luminous in the September sunshine.

"Are you worried about anything?"

"No, thank you."

"Tell me, Teddy Bear."

"But, my dear, there's nothing to tell." Mr. Hutton turned round, smiled, and patted the girl's hand. "I think you'd better go in and have your siesta. It's too hot for you here."

"Very well, Teddy Bear. Are you coming too?"

"When I've finished my cigar."

"All right. But do hurry up and finish it, Teddy Bear." Slowly, reluctantly, she descended the steps of the terrace and walked towards the house.

Mr. Hutton continued his contemplation of Florence. He had need to be alone. It was good sometimes to escape from Doris and the restless solicitude of her passion. He had never known the pains of loving hopelessly, but he was experiencing now the pains of being loved. These last weeks had been a period of growing discomfort. Doris was always with him, like an obsession, like a guilty conscience. Yes, it was good to be alone.

He pulled an envelope out of his pocket and opened it; not without reluctance. He hated letters; they always contained something unpleasant—nowadays, since his second marriage. This was from his sister. He began skimming through the insulting home-truths of which it was composed. The words "indecent haste," "social suicide," "scarcely cold in her grave," "person of the lower classes," all occurred. They were inevitable now in any communication from a well-meaning and right-thinking relative. Im-

patient, he was about to tear the stupid letter to pieces when his eye fell on a sentence at the bottom of the third page. His heart beat with uncomfortable violence as he read it. It was too monstrous! Janet Spence was going about telling everyone that he had poisoned his wife in order to marry Doris. What damnable malice! Ordinarily a man of the suavest temper, Mr. Hutton found himself trembling with rage. He took the childish satisfaction of calling names—he cursed the woman.

Then suddenly he saw the ridiculous side of the situation. The notion that he should have murdered anyone in order to marry Doris! If they only knew how miserably bored he was. Poor, dear Janet! She had tried to be malicious; she had only succeeded in being stupid.

A sound of footsteps aroused him; he looked round. In the garden below the little terrace the servant girl of the house was picking fruit. A Neapolitan, strayed somehow as far north as Florence, she was a specimen of the classical type—a little debased. Her profile might have been taken from a Sicilian coin of a bad period. Her features, carved floridly in the grand tradition, expressed an almost perfect stupidity. Her mouth was the most beautiful thing about

her; the calligraphic hand of nature had richly curved it into an expression of mulish bad temper. . . . Under her hideous black clothes, Mr. Hutton divined a powerful body, firm and massive. He had looked at her before with a vague interest and curiosity. To-day the curiosity defined and focused itself into a desire. An idyll of Theocritus. Here was the woman; he, alas, was not precisely like a goatherd on the volcanic hills. He called to her.

“Armida!”

The smile with which she answered him was so provocative, attested so easy a virtue, that Mr. Hutton took fright. He was on the brink once more—on the brink. He must draw back, oh! quickly, quickly, before it was too late. The girl continued to look up at him.

“*Ha chiamato?*” she asked at last.

Stupidity or reason? Oh, there was no choice now. It was imbecility every time.

“*Scendo,*” he called back to her. Twelve steps led from the garden to the terrace. Mr. Hutton counted them. Down, down, down, down. . . . He saw a vision of himself descending from one circle of the inferno to the next—from a darkness full of wind and hail to an abyss of stinking mud.

V

FOR a good many days the Hutton case had a place on the front page of every newspaper. There had been no more popular murder trial since George Smith had temporarily eclipsed the European War by drowning in a warm bath his seventh bride. The public imagination was stirred by this tale of a murder brought to light months after the date of the crime. Here, it was felt, was one of those incidents in human life, so notable because they are so rare, which do definitely justify the ways of God to man. A wicked man had been moved by an illicit passion to kill his wife. For months he had lived in sin and fancied security—only to be dashed at last more horribly into the pit he had prepared for himself. Murder will out, and here was a case of it. The readers of the newspapers were in a position to follow every movement of the hand of God. There had been vague, but persistent, rumours in the neighbourhood; the police had taken action at last. Then came the exhumation order, the post-

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mortem examination, the inquest, the evidence of the experts, the verdict of the coroner's jury, the trial, the condemnation. For once Providence had done its duty, obviously, grossly, didactically, as in a melodrama. The newspapers were right in making of the case the staple intellectual food of a whole season.

Mr. Hutton's first emotion when he was summoned from Italy to give evidence at the inquest was one of indignation. It was a monstrous, a scandalous thing that the police should take such idle, malicious gossip seriously. When the inquest was over he would bring an action for malicious prosecution against the Chief Constable; he would sue the Spence woman for slander.

The inquest was opened; the astonishing evidence unrolled itself. The experts had examined the body, and had found traces of arsenic; they were of opinion that the late Mrs. Hutton had died of arsenic poisoning.

Arsenic poisoning. . . . Emily had died of arsenic poisoning? After that, Mr. Hutton learned with surprise that there was enough arsenicated insecticide in his greenhouses to poison an army.

It was now, quite suddenly, that he saw it: there was a case against him. Fascinated,

he watched it growing, growing, like some monstrous tropical plant. It was enveloping him, surrounding him; he was lost in a tangled forest.

When was the poison administered? The experts agreed that it must have been swallowed eight or nine hours before death. About lunch-time? Yes, about lunch-time. Clara, the parlour-maid, was called. Mrs. Hutton, she remembered, had asked her to go and fetch her medicine. Mr. Hutton had volunteered to go instead; he had gone alone. Miss Spence—ah, the memory of the storm, the white aimed face! the horror of it all!—Miss Spence confirmed Clara's statement, and added that Mr. Hutton had come back with the medicine already poured out in a wineglass, not in the bottle.

Mr. Hutton's indignation evaporated. He was dismayed, frightened. It was all too fantastic to be taken seriously, and yet this nightmare was a fact—it was actually happening.

M'Nab had seen them kissing, often. He had taken them for a drive on the day of Mrs. Hutton's death. He could see them reflected in the wind-screen, sometimes out of the tail of his eye.

The inquest was adjourned. That evening Doris went to bed with a headache.

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When he went to her room after dinner, Mr. Hutton found her crying.

“What’s the matter?” He sat down on the edge of her bed and began to stroke her hair. For a long time she did not answer, and he went on stroking her hair mechanically, almost unconsciously; sometimes, even he bent down and kissed her bare shoulder. He had his own affairs, however, to think about. What had happened? How was it that the stupid gossip had actually come true? Emily had died of arsenic poisoning. It was absurd, impossible. The order of things had been broken, and he was at the mercy of an irresponsibility. What had happened, what was going to happen? He was interrupted in the midst of his thoughts.

“It’s my fault—it’s my fault!” Doris suddenly sobbed out. “I shouldn’t have loved you; I oughtn’t to have let you love me. Why was I ever born?”

Mr. Hutton didn’t say anything, but looked down in silence at the abject figure of misery lying on the bed.

“If they do anything to you I shall kill myself.”

She sat up, held him for a moment at arm’s length, and looked at him with a kind of violence, as though she were never to see him again.

“I love you, I love you, I love you.” She drew him, inert and passive, towards her, clasped him, pressed herself against him. “I didn’t know you loved me as much as that, Teddy Bear. But why did you do it—why did you do it?”

Mr. Hutton undid her clasping arms and got up. His face became very red. “You seem to take it for granted that I murdered my wife,” he said. “It’s really too grotesque. What do you all take me for? A cinema hero?” He had begun to lose his temper. All the exasperation, all the fear and bewilderment of the day, was transformed into a violent anger against her. “It’s all such damned stupidity. Haven’t you any conception of a civilised man’s mentality? Do I look the sort of man who’d go about slaughtering people? I suppose you imagined I was so insanely in love with you that I could commit any folly. When will you women understand that one isn’t insanely in love? All one asks for is a quiet life, which you won’t allow one to have. I don’t know what the devil ever induced me to marry you. It was all a damned stupid, practical joke. And now you go about saying I’m a murderer. I won’t stand it.”

Mr. Hutton stamped towards the door. He had said horrible things, he knew—

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odious things that he ought speedily to unsay. But he wouldn't. He closed the door behind him.

"Teddy Bear!" He turned the handle; the latch clicked into place. "Teddy Bear!" The voice that came to him through the closed door was agonised. Should he go back? He ought to go back. He touched the handle, then withdrew his fingers and quickly walked away. When he was half-way down the stairs he halted. She might try to do something silly—throw herself out of the window or God knows what! He listened attentively; there was no sound. But he pictured her very clearly, tiptoeing across the room, lifting the sash as high as it would go, leaning out into the cold night air. It was raining a little. Under the window lay the paved terrace. How far below? Twenty-five or thirty feet? Once, when he was walking along Piccadilly, a dog had jumped out of a third-storey window of the Ritz. He had seen it fall; he had heard it strike the pavement. Should he go back? He was damned if he would; he hated her.

He sat for a long time in the library. What had happened? What was happening? He turned the question over and over in his mind and could find no answer. Suppose the nightmare dreamed itself out to its

horrible conclusion. Death was waiting for him. His eyes filled with tears; he wanted so passionately to live. "Just to be alive." Poor Emily had wished it too, he remembered: "Just to be alive." There were still so many places in this astonishing world unvisited, so many queer delightful people still unknown, so many lovely women never so much as seen. The huge white oxen would still be dragging their wains along the Tuscan roads, the cypresses would still go up, straight as pillars, to the blue heaven; but he would not be there to see them. And the sweet southern wines—Tear of Christ and Blood of Judas—others would drink them, not he. Others would walk down the obscure and narrow lanes between the bookshelves in the London Library, sniffing the dusty perfume of good literature, peering at strange titles, discovering unknown names, exploring the fringes of vast domains of knowledge. He would be lying in a hole in the ground. And why, why? Confusedly he felt that some extraordinary kind of justice was being done. In the past he had been wanton and imbecile and irresponsible. Now Fate was playing as wantonly, as irresponsibly, with him. It was tit for tat, and God existed after all.

He felt that he would like to pray. Forty

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years ago he used to kneel by his bed every evening. The nightly formula of his childhood came to him almost unsought from some long unopened chamber of the memory. "God bless Father and Mother, Tom and Cissie and the Baby, Mademoiselle and Nurse, and everyone that I love, and make me a good boy. Amen." They were all dead now—all except Cissie.

His mind seemed to soften and dissolve; a great calm descended upon his spirit. He went upstairs to ask Doris's forgiveness. He found her lying on the couch at the foot of the bed. On the floor beside her stood a blue bottle of liniment, marked "Not to be taken"; she seemed to have drunk about half of it.

"You didn't love me," was all she said when she opened her eyes to find him bending over her.

Dr. Libbard arrived in time to prevent any very serious consequences. "You mustn't do this again," he said while Mr. Hutton was out of the room.

"What's to prevent me?" she asked defiantly.

Dr. Libbard looked at her with his large, sad eyes. "There's nothing to prevent you," he said. "Only yourself and your baby. Isn't it rather bad luck on your baby, not

allowing it to come into the world because you want to go out of it?"

Doris was silent for a time. "All right," she whispered. "I won't."

Mr. Hutton sat by her bedside for the rest of the night. He felt himself now to be indeed a murderer. For a time he persuaded himself that he loved this pitiable child. Dozing in his chair, he woke up, stiff and cold, to find himself drained dry, as it were, of every emotion. He had become nothing but a tired and suffering carcass. At six o'clock he undressed and went to bed for a couple of hours' sleep. In the course of the same afternoon the coroner's jury brought in a verdict of "Wilful Murder," and Mr. Hutton was committed for trial.

VI

MISS SPENCE was not at all well. She had found her public appearances in the witness-box very trying, and when it was all over she had something that was very nearly a breakdown. She slept badly, and suffered from nervous indigestion. Dr. Libbard used to call every other day. She talked to him a great deal—mostly about the Hutton case. . . . Her moral indignation was always on the boil. Wasn't it appalling to think that one had had a murderer in one's house. Wasn't it extraordinary that one could have been for so long mistaken about the man's character? (But she had had an inkling from the first.) And then the girl he had gone off with—so low class, so little better than a prostitute. The news that the second Mrs. Hutton was expecting a baby—the posthumous child of a condemned and executed criminal—revolted her; the thing was shocking—an obscenity. Dr. Libbard answered her gently and vaguely, and prescribed bromide.

One morning he interrupted her in the

midst of her customary tirade, "By the way," he said in his soft, melancholy voice, "I suppose it was really you who poisoned Mrs. Hutton."

Miss Spence stared at him for two or three seconds with enormous eyes, and then quietly said, "Yes." After that she started to cry.

"In the coffee, I suppose."

She seemed to nod assent. Dr. Libbard took out his fountain-pen, and in his neat, meticulous calligraphy wrote out a prescription for a sleeping-draught.

III: THE TILLOTSON BANQUET

I

YOUNG Spode was not a snob; he was too intelligent for that, too fundamentally decent. Not a snob; but all the same he could not help feeling very well pleased at the thought that he was dining, alone and intimately, with Lord Badgery. It was a definite event in his life, a step forward, he felt, towards that final success, social, material, and literary, which he had come to London with the fixed intention of making. The conquest and capture of Badgery was an almost essential strategical move in the campaign.

Edmund, forty-seventh Baron Badgery, was a lineal descendant of that Edmund, surnamed Le Blayreau, who landed on English soil in the train of William the Conqueror. Ennobled by William Rufus, the Badgerys had been one of the very few baronial families to survive the Wars of the Roses and all the other changes and chances of English history. They were a sensible

and philoprogenitive race. No Badgery had ever fought in any war, no Badgery had ever engaged in any kind of politics. They had been content to live and quietly to propagate their species in a huge machicolated Norman castle, surrounded by a triple moat, only sallying forth to cultivate their property and to collect their rents. In the eighteenth century, when life had become relatively secure, the Badgerys began to venture forth into civilised society. From boorish squires they blossomed into *grands seigneurs*, patrons of the arts, virtuosi. Their property was large, they were rich; and with the growth of industrialism their riches also grew. Villages on their estate turned into manufacturing towns, unsuspected coal was discovered beneath the surface of their barren moorlands. By the middle of the nineteenth century the Badgerys were among the richest of English noble families. The forty-seventh baron disposed of an income of at least two hundred thousand pounds a year. Following the great Badgery tradition, he had refused to have anything to do with politics or war. He occupied himself by collecting pictures; he took an interest in theatrical productions; he was the friend and patron of men of letters, of painters, and musicians. A personage, in a word, of con-

siderable consequence in that particular world in which young Spode had elected to make his success.

Spode had only recently left the university. Simon Gollamy, the editor of the *World's Review* (the "Best of all possible Worlds"), had got to know him—he was always on the look out for youthful talent—had seen possibilities in the young man, and appointed him art critic of his paper. Gollamy liked to have young and teachable people about him. The possession of disciples flattered his vanity, and he found it easier, moreover, to run his paper with docile collaborators than with men grown obstinate and case-hardened with age. Spode had not done badly at his new job. At any rate, his articles had been intelligent enough to arouse the interest of Lord Badgery. It was, ultimately, to them that he owed the honour of sitting to-night in the dining-room of Badgery House.

Fortified by several varieties of wine and a glass of aged brandy, Spode felt more confident and at ease than he had done the whole evening. Badgery was rather a disquieting host. He had an alarming habit of changing the subject of any conversation that had lasted for more than two minutes. Spode had found it, for example, horribly

mortifying when his host, cutting across what was, he prided himself, a particularly subtle and illuminating disquisition on baroque art, had turned a wandering eye about the room and asked him abruptly whether he liked parrots. He had flushed and glanced suspiciously towards him, fancying that the man was trying to be offensive. But no; Badgery's white, fleshy, Hanoverian face wore an expression of perfect good faith. There was no malice in his small greenish eyes. He evidently did genuinely want to know if Spode liked parrots. The young man swallowed his irritation and replied that he did. Badgery then told a good story about parrots. Spode was on the point of capping it with a better story, when his host began to talk about Beethoven. And so the game went on. Spode cut his conversation to suit his host's requirements. In the course of ten minutes he had made a more or less witty epigram on Benvenuto Cellini, Queen Victoria, sport, God, Stephen Phillips, and Moorish architecture. Lord Badgery thought him the most charming young man, and so intelligent.

"If you've quite finished your coffee," he said, rising to his feet as he spoke, "we'll go and look at the pictures."

Spode jumped up with alacrity, and only then realised that he had drunk just ever so little too much. He would have to be careful, talk deliberately, plant his feet consciously, one after the other.

"This house is quite cluttered up with pictures," Lord Badgery complained. "I had a whole wagon-load taken away to the country last week; but there are still far too many. My ancestors would have their portraits painted by Romney. Such a shocking artist, don't you think? Why couldn't they have chosen Gainsborough, or even Reynolds? I've had all the Romneys hung in the servants' hall now. It's such a comfort to know that one can never possibly see them again. I suppose you know all about the ancient Hittites?"

"Well . . ." the young man replied, with befitting modesty.

"Look at that, then." He indicated a large stone head which stood in a case near the dining-room door. "It's not Greek, or Egyptian, or Persian, or anything else; so if it isn't ancient Hittite, I don't know what it is. And that reminds me of that story about Lord George Sanger, the Circus King . . ." and, without giving Spode time to examine the Hittite relic, he led the way up the huge staircase, pausing every now and then

in his anecdote to point out some new object of curiosity or beauty.

"I suppose you know Deburau's pantomimes?" Spode rapped out as soon as the story was over. He was in an itch to let out his information about Deburau. Badgery had given him a perfect opening with his ridiculous Sanger. "What a perfect man, isn't he? He used to . . ."

"This is my main gallery," said Lord Badgery, throwing open one leaf of a tall folding door. "I must apologise for it. It looks like a roller-skating rink." He fumbled with the electric switches and there was suddenly light—light that revealed an enormous gallery, duly receding into distance according to all the laws of perspective. "I dare say you've heard of my poor father," Lord Badgery continued. "A little insane, you know; sort of mechanical genius with a screw loose. He used to have a toy railway in this room. No end of fun he had, crawling about the floor after his trains. And all the pictures were stacked in the cellars. I can't tell you what they were like when I found them: mushrooms growing out of the Botticellis. Now I'm rather proud of this Poussin; he painted it for Scarron."

"Exquisite!" Spode exclaimed, making with his hand a gesture as though he were

modelling a pure form in the air. "How splendid the onrush of those trees and leaning figures is! And the way they're caught up, as it were, and stemmed by that single godlike form opposing them with his contrary movement! And the draperies . . ."

But Lord Badgery had moved on, and was standing in front of a little fifteenth-century Virgin of carved wood.

"School of Rheims," he explained.

They "did" the gallery at high speed. Badgery never permitted his guest to halt for more than forty seconds before any work of art. Spode would have liked to spend a few moments of recollection and tranquillity in front of some of these lovely things. But it was not permitted.

The gallery done, they passed into a little room leading out of it. At the sight of what the lights revealed, Spode gasped.

"It's like something out of Balzac," he exclaimed. "Un de ces salons dorés où se déploie un luxe insolent. You know."

"My nineteenth-century chamber," Badgery explained. "The best thing of its kind, I flatter myself, outside the State Apartments at Windsor."

Spode tiptoed round the room, peering with astonishment at all the objects in glass, in gilded bronze, in china, in feathers, in

embroidered and painted silk, in beads, in wax, objects of the most fantastic shapes and colours, all the queer products of a decadent tradition, with which the room was crowded. There were paintings on the walls—a Martin, a Wilkie, an early Landseer, several Ettys, a big Haydon, a slight pretty water-colour of a girl by Wainewright, the pupil of Blake and arsenic poisoner, a score of others. But the picture which arrested Spode's attention was a medium sized canvas representing Troilus riding into Troy among the flowers and plaudits of an admiring crowd, and oblivious (you could see from his expression) of everything but the eyes of Cressida, who looked down at him from a window, with Pandarus smiling over her shoulder.

"What an absurd and enchanting picture!" Spode exclaimed.

"Ah, you've spotted my Troilus." Lord Badgery was pleased.

"What bright harmonious colours! Like Etty's, only stronger, not so obviously pretty. And there's an energy about it that reminds one of Haydon. Only Haydon could never have done anything so impeccable in taste. Who is it by?" Spode turned to his host inquiringly.

"You were right in detecting Haydon,"

Lord Badgery answered. "It's by his pupil, Tillotson. I wish I could get hold of more of his work. But nobody seems to know anything about him. And he seems to have done so little."

This time it was the younger man who interrupted.

"Tillotson, Tillotson . . ." He put his hand to his forehead. A frown incongruously distorted his round, floridly curved face. "No . . . yes, I have it." He looked up triumphantly with serene and childish brows. "Tillotson, Walter Tillotson—the man's still alive."

Badgery smiled. "This picture was painted in 1846, you know."

"Well, that's all right. Say he was born in 1820, painted his masterpiece when he was twenty-six, and it's 1913 now; that's to say he's only ninety-three. Not as old as Titian yet."

"But he's not been heard of since 1860," Lord Badgery protested.

"Precisely. Your mention of his name reminded me of the discovery I made the other day when I was looking through the obituary notices in the archives of the *World's Review*. (One has to bring them up to date every year or so for fear of being caught napping if one of these old birds

chooses to shuffle off suddenly.) Well, there, among them—I remember my astonishment at the time—there I found Walter Tillotson's biography. Pretty full to 1860, and then a blank, except for a pencil note in the early nineteen hundreds to the effect that he had returned from the East. The obituary has never been used or added to. I draw the obvious conclusion: the old chap isn't dead yet. He's just been overlooked somehow."

"But this is extraordinary," Lord Badgery exclaimed. "You must find him, Spode—you must find him. I'll commission him to paint frescoes round this room. It's just what I've always vainly longed for—a real nineteenth-century artist to decorate this place for me. Oh, we must find him at once—at once."

Lord Badgery strode up and down in a state of great excitement.

"I can see how this room could be made quite perfect," he went on. "We'd clear away all these cases and have the whole of that wall filled by a heroic fresco of Hector and Andromache, or 'Distraining for Rent,' or Fanny Kemble as Belvidera in 'Venice Preserved'—anything like that, provided it's in the grand manner of the 'thirties and 'forties. And here I'd have a landscape with

lovely receding perspectives, or else something architectural and grand in the style of Belshazzar's feast. Then we'll have this Adam fireplace taken down and replaced by something Mauro-Gothic. And on these walls I'll have mirrors, or no! let me see . . ."

He sank into meditative silence, from which he finally roused himself to shout:

"The old man, the old man! Spode, we must find this astonishing old creature. And don't breathe a word to anybody. Tillotson shall be our secret. Oh, it's too perfect, it's incredible! Think of the frescoes."

Lord Badgery's face had become positively animated. He had talked of a single subject for nearly a quarter of an hour.

II

THREE weeks later Lord Badgery was aroused from his usual after-luncheon somnolence by the arrival of a telegram. The message was a short one. "Found.—SPODE." A look of pleasure and intelligence made human Lord Badgery's clayey face of surfeit. "No answer," he said. The footman padded away on noiseless feet.

Lord Badgery closed his eyes and began to contemplate. Found! What a room he would have! There would be nothing like it in the world. The frescoes, the fireplace, the mirrors, the ceiling. . . . And a small, shrivelled old man clambering about the scaffolding, agile and quick like one of those whiskered little monkeys at the Zoo, painting away, painting away. . . . Fanny Kemble as Belvidera, Hector and Andromache, or why not the Duke of Clarence in the Butt, the Duke of Malmsey, the Butt of Clarence. . . . Lord Badgery was asleep.

Spode did not lag long behind his telegram. He was at Badgery House by six o'clock. His lordship was in the nineteenth-

century chamber, engaged in clearing away with his own hands the bric-à-brac. Spode found him looking hot and out of breath.

"Ah, there you are," said Lord Badgery. "You see me already preparing for the great man's coming. Now you must tell me all about him."

"He's older even than I thought," said Spode. "He's ninety-seven this year. Born in 1816. Incredible, isn't it! There, I'm beginning at the wrong end."

"Begin where you like," said Badgery genially.

"I won't tell you all the incidents of the hunt. You've no idea what a job I had to run him to earth. It was like a Sherlock Holmes story, immensely elaborate, too elaborate. I shall write a book about it some day. At any rate, I found him at last."

"Where?"

"In a sort of respectable slum in Holloway, older and poorer and lonelier than you could have believed possible. I found out how it was he came to be forgotten, how he came to drop out of life in the way he did. He took it into his head, somewhere about the 'sixties, to go to Palestine to get local colour for his religious pictures—scapegoats and things, you know. Well, he went to Jerusalem and then on to Mount Lebanon

and on and on, and then, somewhere in the middle of Asia Minor, he got stuck. He got stuck for about forty years."

"But what did he do all that time?"

"Oh, he painted, and started a mission, and converted three Turks, and taught the local Pashas the rudiments of English, Latin, and perspective, and God knows what else. Then, in about 1904, it seems to have occurred to him that he was getting rather old and had been away from home for rather a long time. So he made his way back to England, only to find that everyone he had known was dead, that the dealers had never heard of him and wouldn't buy his pictures, that he was simply a ridiculous old figure of fun. So he got a job as a drawing-master in a girl's school in Holloway, and there he's been ever since, growing older and older, and feebler and feebler, and blinder and deafer, and generally more gaga, until finally the school has given him the sack. He had about ten pounds in the world when I found him. He lives in a kind of black hole in a basement full of beetles. When his ten pounds are spent, I suppose he'll just quietly die there."

Badgery held up a white hand. "No more, no more. I find literature quite depressing enough. I insist that life at least

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shall be a little gayer. Did you tell him I wanted him to paint my room?"

"But he can't paint. He's too blind and palsied."

"Can't paint?" Badgery exclaimed in horror. "Then what's the good of the old creature?"

"Well, if you put it like that . . ." Spode began.

"I shall never have my frescoes. Ring the bell, will you?"

Spode rang.

"What right has Tillotson to go on existing if he can't paint?" went on Lord Badgery petulantly. "After all, that was his only justification for occupying a place in the sun."

"He doesn't have much sun in his basement."

The footman appeared at the door.

"Get someone to put all these things back in their places," Lord Badgery commanded, indicating with a wave of the hand the ravaged cases, the confusion of glass and china with which he had littered the floor, the pictures unhooked. "We'll go to the library, Spode; it's more comfortable there."

He led the way through the long gallery and down the stairs.

"I'm sorry old Tillotson has been such a

disappointment," said Spode sympathetically.

"Let us talk about something else; he ceases to interest me."

"But don't you think we ought to do something about him? He's only got ten pounds between him and the workhouse. And if you'd seen the black-beetles in his basement!"

"Enough—enough. I'll do everything you think fitting."

"I thought we might get up a subscription amongst lovers of the arts."

"There aren't any," said Badgery.

"No; but there are plenty of people who will subscribe out of snobbism."

"Not unless you give them something for their money."

"That's true. I hadn't thought of that."

Spode was silent for a moment. "We might have a dinner in his honour. The Great Tillotson Banquet. Doyen of the British Art. A Link with the Past. Can't you see it in the papers? I'd make a stunt of it in the *World's Review*. That ought to bring in the snobs."

"And we'll invite a lot of artists and critics—all the ones who can't stand one another. It will be fun to see them squabbling." Badgery laughed. Then his face

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darkened once again. "Still," he added, "it'll be a very poor second best to my frescoes. You'll stay to dinner, of course."

"Well, since you suggest it. Thanks very much."

III

THE Tillotson Banquet was fixed to take place about three weeks later. Spode, who had charge of the arrangements, proved himself an excellent organiser. He secured the big banqueting-room at the Café Bomba, and was successful in bullying and cajoling the manager into giving fifty persons dinner at twelve shillings a head, including wine. He sent out invitations and collected subscriptions. He wrote an article on Tillotson in the *World's Review*—one of those charming, witty articles couched in the tone of amused patronage and contempt with which one speaks of the great men of 1840. Nor did he neglect Tillotson himself. He used to go to Holloway almost every day to listen to the old man's endless stories about Asia Minor and the Great Exhibition of '51 and Benjamin Robert Haydon. He was sincerely sorry for this relic of another age.

Mr. Tillotson's room was about ten feet below the level of the soil of South Holloway. A little grey light percolated through the area bars, forced a difficult

passage through panes opaque with dirt, and spent itself, like a drop of milk that falls into an inkpot, among the inveterate shadows of the dungeon. The place was haunted by the sour smell of damp plaster and of woodwork that has begun to moulder secretly at the heart. A little miscellaneous furniture, including a bed, a washstand and chest of drawers, a table and one or two chairs, lurked in the obscure corners of the den or ventured furtively out into the open. Hither Spode now came almost every day, bringing the old man news of the progress of the banquet scheme. Every day he found Mr. Tillotson sitting in the same place under the window, bathing, as it were, in his tiny puddle of light. "The oldest man that ever wore grey hairs," Spode reflected as he looked at him. Only there were very few hairs left on that bald, unpolished head. At the sound of the visitor's knock Mr. Tillotson would turn in his chair, stare in the direction of the door with blinking, uncertain eyes. He was always full of apologies for being so slow in recognising who was there.

"No discourtesy meant," he would say, after asking. "It's not as if I had forgotten who you were. Only it's so dark and my sight isn't what it was."

After that he never failed to give a little

laugh, and, pointing out of the window at the area railings, would say:

“Ah, this is the place for somebody with good sight. It’s the place for looking at ankles. It’s the grand stand.”

It was the day before the great event. Spode came as usual, and Mr. Tillotson punctually made his little joke about the ankles, and Spode, as punctually laughed.

“Well, Mr. Tillotson,” he said, after the reverberation of the joke had died away, “to-morrow you make your re-entry into the world of art and fashion. You’ll find some changes.”

“I’ve always had such extraordinary luck,” said Mr. Tillotson, and Spode could see by his expression that he genuinely believed it, that he had forgotten the black hole and the black-beetles and the almost exhausted ten pounds that stood between him and the workhouse. “What an amazing piece of good fortune, for instance, that you should have found me just when you did. Now, this dinner will bring me back to my place in the world. I shall have money, and in a little while—who knows?—I shall be able to see well enough to paint again. I believe my eyes are getting better, you know. Ah, the future is very rosy.”

Mr. Tillotson looked up, his face puckered

into a smile, and nodded his head in affirmation of his words.

"You believe in the life to come?" said Spode, and immediately flushed for shame at the cruelty of the words.

But Mr. Tillotson was in far too cheerful a mood to have caught their significance.

"Life to come," he repeated. "No, I don't believe in any of that stuff—not since 1859. The 'Origin of Species' changed my views, you know. No life to come for me, thank you! You don't remember the excitement of course. You're very young Mr. Spode."

"Well, I'm not so old as I was," Spode replied. "You know how middle-aged one is as a schoolboy and undergraduate. Now I'm old enough to know I'm young."

Spode was about to develop this little paradox further, but he noticed that Mr. Tillotson had not been listening. He made a note of the gambit for use in companies that were more appreciative of the subtleties.

"You were talking about the 'Origin of Species,' " he said.

"Was I?" said Mr. Tillotson, waking from reverie.

"About its effect on your faith, Mr. Tillotson."

"To be sure, yes. It shattered my faith.

But I remember a fine thing by the Poet Laureate, something about there being more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in all the . . . all the . . . I forget exactly what; but you see the train of thought. Oh, it was a bad time for religion. I am glad my master Haydon never lived to see it. He was a man of fervour. I remember him pacing up and down his studio in Lisson Grove, singing and shouting and praying all at once. It used almost to frighten me. Oh, but he was a wonderful man, a great man. Take him for all in all, we shall not look upon his like again. As usual, the Bard is right. But it was all very long ago, before your time, Mr. Spode."

"Well, I'm not as old as I was," said Spode, in the hope of having his paradox appreciated this time. But Mr. Tillotson went on without noticing the interruption.

"It's a very, very long time. And yet, when I look back on it, it all seems but a day or two ago. Strange that each day should seem so long and that many days added together should be less than an hour. How clearly I can see old Haydon pacing up and down! Much more clearly, indeed, than I see you, Mr. Spode. The eyes of memory don't grow dim. But my sight is

improving, I assure you; it's improving daily. I shall soon be able to see those ankles." He laughed, like a cracked bell—one of those little old bells, Spode fancied, that ring, with much rattling of wires, in the far-off servants' quarters of ancient houses. "And very soon," Mr. Tillotson went on, "I shall be painting again. Ah, Mr. Spode, my luck is extraordinary. I believe in it, I trust in it. And after all, what is luck? Simply another name for Providence, in spite of the 'Origin of Species' and the rest of it. How right the Laureate was when he said that there was more faith in honest doubt, believe me, than in all the . . . er, the . . . er . . . well, you know. I regard you, Mr. Spode, as the emissary of Providence. Your coming marked a turning-point in my life, and the beginning, for me, of happier days. Do you know, one of the first things I shall do when my fortunes are restored will be to buy a hedgehog."

"A hedgehog, Mr. Tillotson?"

"For the blackbeetles. There's nothing like a hedgehog for beetles. It will eat blackbeetles till it's sick, till it dies of surfeit. That reminds me of the time when I told my poor great master Haydon—in joke, of course—that he ought to send in a cartoon

of King John dying of a surfeit of lampreys for the frescoes in the new Houses of Parliament. As I told him, it's a most notable event in the annals of British liberty—the providential and exemplary removal of a tyrant.”

Mr. Tillotson laughed again—the little bell in the deserted house; a ghostly hand pulling the cord in the drawing-room, and phantom footmen responding to the thin, flawed note.

“I remember he laughed, laughed like a bull in his old grand manner. But oh, it was a terrible blow when they rejected his design, a terrible blow! It was the first and fundamental cause of his suicide.”

Mr. Tillotson paused. There was a long silence. Spode felt strangely moved, he hardly knew why, in the presence of this man, so frail, so ancient, in body three parts dead, in the spirit so full of life and hopeful patience. He felt ashamed. What was the use of his own youth and cleverness? He saw himself suddenly as a boy with a rattle scaring birds—rattling his noisy cleverness, waving his arms in ceaseless and futile activity, never resting in his efforts to scare away the birds that were always trying to settle in his mind. And what birds! wide-winged and beautiful, all those serene

thoughts and faiths and emotions that only visit minds that have humbled themselves to quiet. Those gracious visitants he was for ever using all his energies to drive away. But this old man, with his hedgehogs and his honest doubts and all the rest of it—his mind was like a field made beautiful by the free coming and going, the unafraid alightings of a multitude of white, bright-winged creatures. He felt ashamed. But then, was it possible to alter one's life? Wasn't it a little absurd to risk a conversion? Spode shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll get you a hedgehog at once," he said. "They're sure to have some at Whiteley's."

Before he left that evening Spode made an alarming discovery. Mr. Tillotson did not possess a dress-suit. It was hopeless to think of getting one made at this short notice, and, besides, what an unnecessary expense!

"We shall have to borrow a suit, Mr. Tillotson. I ought to have thought of that before."

"Dear me, dear me." Mr. Tillotson was a little chagrined by this unlucky discovery. "Borrow a suit?"

Spode hurried away for counsel to Badgery House. Lord Badgery surprisingly rose to the occasion. "Ask Boreham to come and

see me," he told the footman who answered his ring.

Boreham was one of those immemorial butlers who linger on, generation after generation, in the houses of the great. He was over eighty now, bent, dried up, shrivelled with age.

"All old men are about the same size," said Lord Badgery. It was a comforting theory. "Ah, here he is. Have you got a spare suit of evening clothes, Boreham?"

"I have an old suit, my lord, that I stopped wearing in—let me see—was it nineteen seven or eight?"

"That's the very thing. I should be most grateful, Boreham, if you could lend it to me for Mr. Spode here for a day."

The old man went out, and soon reappeared carrying over his arm a very old black suit. He held up the coat and trousers for inspection. In the light of day they were deplorable.

"You've no idea, sir," said Boreham deprecatingly to Spode—"you've no idea how easy things get stained with grease and gravy and what not. However careful you are, sir—however careful."

"I should imagine so." Spode was sympathetic.

"However careful, sir."

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“But in artificial light they’ll look all right.”

“Perfectly all right,” Lord Badgery repeated. “Thank you, Boreham; you shall have them back on Thursday.”

“You’re welcome, my lord, I’m sure.” And the old man bowed and disappeared.

On the afternoon of the great day Spode carried up to Holloway a parcel containing Boreham’s retired evening-suit and all the necessary appurtenances in the way of shirts and collars. Owing to the darkness and his own feeble sight Mr. Tillotson was happily unaware of the defects in the suit. He was in a state of extreme nervous agitation. It was with some difficulty that Spode could prevent him, although it was only three o’clock, from starting his toilet on the spot.

“Take it easy, Mr. Tillotson, take it easy. We needn’t start till half-past seven, you know.”

Spode left an hour later, and as soon as he was safely out of the room Mr. Tillotson began to prepare himself for the banquet. He lighted the gas and a couple of candles, and, blinking myopically at the image that fronted him in the tiny looking-glass that stood on his chest of drawers, he set to work, with all the ardour of a young girl preparing for her first ball. At six o’clock, when the

last touches had been given, he was not unsatisfied.

He marched up and down his cellar, humming to himself the gay song which had been so popular in his middle years:

"Oh, oh, Anna Maria Jones!

Queen of the tambourine, the cymbals, and the bones!"

Spode arrived an hour later in Lord Badgery's second Rolls-Royce. Opening the door of the old man's dungeon, he stood for a moment, wide-eyed with astonishment, on the threshold. Mr. Tillotson was standing by the empty grate, one elbow resting on the mantelpiece, one leg crossed over the other in a jaunty and gentlemanly attitude. The effect of the candlelight shining on his face was to deepen every line and wrinkle with intense black shadow; he looked immeasurably old. It was a noble and pathetic head. On the other hand, Boreham's outworn evening-suit was simply buffoonish. The coat was too long in the sleeves and the tail; the trousers bagged in elephantine creases about his ankles. Some of the grease-spots were visible even in candlelight. The white tie, over which Mr. Tillotson had taken infinite pains and which he believed in his purblindness to be perfect, was fan-

tastically lop-sided. He had buttoned up his waistcoat in such a fashion that one button was widowed of its hole and one hole of its button. Across his shirt front lay the broad green ribbon of some unknown Order.

"Queen of the tambourine, the cymbals, and the bones," Mr. Tillotson concluded in a gnat-like voice before welcoming his visitor.

"Well, Spode, here you are. I'm dressed already, you see. The suit, I flatter myself, fits very well, almost as though it had been made for me. I am all gratitude to the gentleman who was kind enough to lend it to me; I shall take the greatest care of it. It's a dangerous thing to lend clothes. For loan oft loseth both itself and friend. The Bard is always right."

"Just one thing" said Spode. "A touch to your waistcoat." He unbuttoned the dissipated garment and did it up again more symmetrically.

Mr. Tillotson was a little piqued at being found so absurdly in the wrong.

"Thanks, thanks," he said, protestingly, trying to edge away from his valet. "It's all right, you know; I can do it myself. Foolish oversight. I flatter myself the suit fits very well."

"And perhaps the tie might . . ." Spode

began tentatively. But the old man would not hear of it.

"No, no. The tie's all right. I can tie a tie, Mr. Spode. The tie's all right. Leave it as it is, I beg."

"I like your Order."

Mr. Tillotson looked down complacently at his shirt front. "Ah, you've noticed my Order. It's a long time since I wore that. It was given me by the Grand Porte, you know, for services rendered in the Russo-Turkish War. It's the Order of Chastity, the second class. They only give the first class to crowned heads, you know—crowned heads and ambassadors. And only Pashas of the highest rank get the second. Mine's the second. They only give the first class to crowned heads . . ."

"Of course, of course," said Spode.

"Do you think I look all right, Mr. Spode?" Mr. Tillotson asked, a little anxiously.

"Splendid, Mr. Tillotson—splendid. The Order's magnificent."

The old man's face brightened once more. "I flatter myself," he said, "that this borrowed suit fits me very well. But I don't like borrowing clothes. For loan oft loseth both itself and friend, you know. And the Bard is always right."

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"Ugh, there's one of those horrible beetles!" Spode exclaimed.

Mr. Tillotson bent down and stared at the floor. "I see it," he said, and stamped on a small piece of coal, which crunched to powder under his foot. "I shall certainly buy a hedgehog."

It was time for them to start. A crowd of little boys and girls had collected round Lord Badgery's enormous car. The chauffeur, who felt that honour and dignity were at stake, pretended not to notice the children, but sat gazing, like a statue, into eternity. At the sight of Spode and Mr. Tillotson emerging from the house a yell of mingled awe and derision went up. It subsided to an astonished silence as they climbed into the car. "Bomba's," Spode directed. The Rolls-Royce gave a faintly stertorous sigh and began to move. The children yelled again, and ran along beside the car, waving their arms in a frenzy of excitement. It was then that Mr. Tillotson, with an incomparably noble gesture, leaned forward and tossed among the seething crowd of urchins his three last coppers.

IV

IN Bomba's big room the company was assembling. The long gilt-edged mirrors reflected a singular collection of people. Middle-aged Academicians shot suspicious glances at youths whom they suspected, only too correctly, of being iconoclasts, organisers of Post-Impressionist Exhibitions. Rival art critics, brought suddenly face to face, quivered with restrained hatred. Mrs. Nobes, Mrs. Cayman, and Mrs. Mandragore, those indefatigable hunters of artistic big game, came on one another all unawares in this well-stored menagerie, where each had expected to hunt alone, and were filled with rage. Through this crowd of mutually repellent vanities Lord Badgery moved with a suavity that seemed unconscious of all the feuds and hatreds. He was enjoying himself immensely. Behind the heavy waxen mask of his face, ambushed behind the Hanoverian nose, the little lustreless pig's eyes, the pale thick lips, there lurked a small devil of happy malice that rocked with laughter.

“So nice of you to have come, Mrs. Mandragore, to do honour to England’s artistic past. And I’m so glad to see you’ve brought dear Mrs. Cayman. And is that Mrs. Nobes, too? So it is! I hadn’t noticed her before. How delightful! I knew we could depend on your love of art.”

And he hurried away to seize the opportunity of introducing that eminent sculptor, Sir Herbert Herne, to the bright young critic who had called him, in the public prints, a monumental mason.

A moment later the Maître d’Hôtel came to the door of the gilded saloon and announced, loudly and impressively, “Mr. Walter Tillotson.” Guided from behind by young Spode, Mr. Tillotson came into the room slowly and hesitatingly. In the glare of the lights his eyelids beat heavily, painfully, like the wings of an imprisoned moth, over his filmy eyes. Once inside the door he halted and drew himself up with a conscious assumption of dignity. Lord Badgery hurried forward and seized his hand.

“Welcome, Mr. Tillotson—welcome in the name of English art!”

Mr. Tillotson inclined his head in silence. He was too full of emotion to be able to reply.

“I should like to introduce you to a few

of your younger colleagues, who have assembled here to do you honour."

Lord Badgery presented everyone in the room to the old painter, who bowed, shook hands, made little noises in his throat, but still found himself unable to speak. Mrs. Nobes, Mrs. Cayman, and Mrs. Mandragore all said charming things.

Dinner was served; the party took their places. Lord Badgery sat at the head of the table, with Mr. Tillotson on his right hand and Sir Herbert Herne on his left. Confronted with Bomba's succulent cooking and Bomba's wines, Mr. Tillotson ate and drank a good deal. He had the appetite of one who has lived on greens and potatoes for ten years among the blackbeetles. After the second glass of wine he began to talk, suddenly and in a flood, as though a sluice had been pulled up.

"In Asia Minor," he began, "it is the custom when one goes to dinner, to hiccough as a sign of appreciative fullness. *Eructavit cor meum*, as the Psalmist has it; he was an Oriental himself."

Spode had arranged to sit next to Mrs. Cayman; he had designs upon her. She was an impossible woman, of course, but rich and useful; he wanted to bamboozle her into buying some of his young friends' pictures.

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“In a cellar?” Mrs. Cayman was saying, “with blackbeetles? Oh, how dreadful! Poor old man! And he’s ninety-seven, didn’t you say? Isn’t that shocking! I only hope the subscription will be a large one. Of course, one wishes one could have given more oneself. But then, you know, one has so many expenses, and things are so difficult now.”

“I know, I know,” said Spode, with feeling.

“It’s all because of Labour,” Mrs. Cayman explained. “Of course, I should simply love to have him in to dinner sometimes. But, then, I feel he’s really too old, too *farouche* and *gâteux*; it would not be doing a kindness to him, would it? And so you are working with Mr. Gollamy now? What a charming man, so talented, such conversation . . .”

“*Eructavit cor meum*,” said Mr. Tillotson for the third time. Lord Badgery tried to head him off the subject of Turkish etiquette, but in vain.

By half-past nine a kinder vinolent atmosphere had put to sleep the hatreds and suspicions of before dinner. Sir Herbert Herne had discovered that the young Cubist sitting next him was not insane and actually knew a surprising amount about the

Old Masters. For their part these young men had realised that their elders were not at all malignant; they were just very stupid and pathetic. It was only in the bosoms of Mrs. Nobes, Mrs. Cayman, and Mrs. Mandragore that hatred still reigned undiminished. Being ladies and old-fashioned, they had drunk almost no wine.

The moment for speech-making arrived. Lord Badgery rose to his feet, said what was expected of him, and called upon Sir Herbert to propose the toast of the evening. Sir Herbert coughed, smiled and began. In the course of a speech that lasted twenty minutes he told anecdotes of Mr. Gladstone, Lord Leighton, Sir Almo Tadema, and the late Bishop of Bombay; he made three puns, he quoted Shakespeare and Whittier, he was playful, he was eloquent, he was grave. . . . At the end of his harangue Sir Herbert handed to Mr. Tillotson a silk purse containing fifty-eight pounds ten shillings, the total amount of the subscription. The old man's health was drunk with acclamation.

Mr. Tillotson rose with difficulty to his feet. The dry, snakelike skin of his face was flushed; his tie was more crooked than ever; the green ribbon of the Order of Chastity of the second class had somehow

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climbed up his crumpled and maculate shirt front.

“My lords, ladies, and gentlemen,” he began in a choking voice, and then broke down completely. It was a very painful and pathetic spectacle. A feeling of intense discomfort afflicted the minds of all who looked upon that trembling relic of a man, as he stood there weeping and stammering. It was as though a breath of the wind of death had blown suddenly through the room, lifting the vapours of wine and tobacco-smoke, quenching the laughter and the candle flames. Eyes floated uneasily, not knowing where to look. Lord Badgery, with great presence of mind, offered the old man a glass of wine. Mr. Tillotson began to recover. The guests heard him murmur a few disconnected words.

“This great honour . . . overwhelmed with kindness . . . this magnificent banquet . . . not used to it . . . in Asia Minor . . . *eructavit cor meum.*”

At this point Lord Badgery plucked sharply at one of his long coat tails. Mr Tillotson paused, took another sip of wine, and then went on with a newly won coherence and energy.

“The life of the artist is a hard one. His work is unlike other men’s work, which may

be done mechanically, by rote and almost, as it were, in sleep. It demands from him a constant expense of spirit. He gives continually of his best life, and in return he receives much joy, it is true—much fame, it may be—but of material blessings, very few. It is eighty years since first I devoted my life to the service of art; eighty years, and almost every one of those years has brought me fresh and painful proof of what I have been saying: the artist's life is a hard one."

This unexpected deviation into sense increased the general feeling of discomfort. It became necessary to take the old man seriously, to regard him as a human being. Up till then he had been no more than an object of curiosity, a mummy in an absurd suit of evening-clothes with a green ribbon across the shirt front. People could not help wishing that they had subscribed a little more. Fifty-eight pounds ten—it wasn't enormous. But happily for the peace of mind of the company, Mr. Tillotson paused again, took another sip of wine, and began to live up to his proper character by talking absurdly.

"When I consider the life of that great man, Benjamin Robert Haydon, one of the greatest men England has ever produced . . ."

The audience heaved a sigh

of relief; this was all as it should be. There was a burst of loud bravoing and clapping. Mr. Tillotson turned his dim eyes round the room, and smiled gratefully at the misty figures he beheld. "That great man, Benjamin Robert Haydon," he continued, "whom I am proud to call my master and who, it rejoices my heart to see, still lives in your memory and esteem,—that great man, one of the greatest that England has ever produced, led a life so deplorable that I cannot think of it without a tear."

And with infinite repetitions and divagations, Mr. Tillotson related the history of B. R. Haydon, his imprisonments for debt, his battle with the Academy, his triumphs, his failures, his despair, his suicide. Half-past ten struck. Mr. Tillotson was declaiming against the stupid and prejudiced judges who had rejected Haydon's designs for the decoration of the new Houses of Parliament in favour of the paltriest German scribblings.

"That great man, one of the greatest England has ever produced, that great Benjamin Robert Haydon, whom I am proud to call my master and who, it rejoices me to see, still lives on in your memory and esteem—at that affront his great heart burst; it was the unkindest cut of all. He who had worked

all his life for the recognition of the artist by the State, he who had petitioned every Prime Minister, including the Duke of Wellington, for thirty years, begging them to employ artists to decorate public buildings, he to whom the scheme for decorating the Houses of Parliament was undeniably due . . .” Mr. Tillotson lost a grip on his syntax and began a new sentence. “It was the unkindest cut of all, it was the last straw. The artist’s life is a hard one.”

At eleven Mr. Tillotson was talking about the pre-Raphaelites. At a quarter past he had begun to tell the story of B. R. Haydon all over again. At twenty-five minutes to twelve he collapsed quite speechless into his chair. Most of the guests had already gone away; the few who remained made haste to depart. Lord Badgery led the old man to the door and packed him into the second Rolls-Royce. The Tillotson Banquet was over; it had been a pleasant evening, but a little too long.

Spode walked back to his rooms in Bloomsbury, whistling as he went. The arc lamps of Oxford Street reflected in the polished surface of the road; canals of dark bronze. He would have to bring that into an article some time. The Cayman woman had been very successfully nobbled. “Voi che sapete,”

he whistled—somewhat out of tune, but he could not hear that.

When Mr. Tillotson's landlady came in to call him on the following morning, she found the old man lying fully dressed on his bed. He looked very ill and very, very old; Boreham's dress-suit was in a terrible state, and the green ribbon of the Order of Chastity was ruined. Mr. Tillotson lay very still, but he was not asleep. Hearing the sound of footsteps, he opened his eyes a little and faintly groaned. His landlady looked down at him menacingly.

"Disgusting!" she said; "disgusting, I call it. At your age:"

Mr. Tillotson groaned again. Making a great effort, he drew out of his trouser pocket a large silk purse, opened it, and extracted a sovereign.

"The artist's life is a hard one, Mrs. Green," he said, handing her the coin. "Would you mind sending for the doctor? I don't feel very well. And oh, what shall I do about these clothes? What shall I say to the gentleman who was kind enough to lend them to me? Loan oft loseth both itself and friend. The Bard is always right."

YOUNG ARCHIMEDES

I: UNCLE SPENCER

SOME people I know can look back over the long series of their childish holidays and see in their memory always a different landscape—chalk downs or Swiss mountains; a blue and sunny sea or the grey, ever-troubled fringe of the ocean; heathery moors under the cloud with far away a patch of sunlight on the hills, golden as happiness and, like happiness, remote, precarious, impermanent; or the untroubled waters of Como, the cypresses and the Easter roses.

I envy them the variety of their impressions. For it is good to have seen something of the world with childish eyes, disinterestedly and uncritically, observing not what is useful or beautiful and interesting, but only such things as, to a being less than four feet high and having no knowledge of life or art, seem immediately significant. It is the beggars, it is the green umbrellas under which the cabmen sit when it rains, not

Brunelleschi's dome, not the extortions of the hotel-keeper, not the tombs of the Medici that impress the childish traveller. Such impressions, it is true, are of no particular value to us when we are grown up. (The famous wisdom of babes, with those childish intimations of immortality and all the rest, never really amounted to very much; and the man who studies the souls of children in the hope of finding out something about the souls of men is about as likely to discover something important as the man who thinks he can explain Beethoven by referring him to the savage origins of music or religion by referring it to the sexual instincts.) None the less, it is good to have had such childish impressions, if only for the sake of comparing (so that we may draw the philosophic moral) what we saw of a place when we were six or seven with what we see again at thirty.

My holidays had no variety. From the time when I first went to my preparatory school to the time when my parents came back for good from India—I was sixteen or seventeen then, I suppose—they were all passed with my Uncle Spencer. For years the only places on the earth's surface of which I had any knowledge were Eastbourne, where I was at school; Dover (and that re-

duced itself to the harbour and station), where I embarked; Ostend, where Uncle Spencer met me; Brussels, where we changed trains; and finally Longres in Limburg, where my Uncle Spencer owned the sugar factory, which his mother, my grandmother, had inherited in her turn from her Belgian father, and had his home.

Hanging over the rail of the steamer as it moved slowly, stern foremost, through the narrow gullet of Ostend harbour, I used to strain my eyes, trying to pick out from among the crowd at the quay's edge the small, familiar figure. And always there he was, waving his coloured silk handkerchief, shouting inaudible greetings and advice, getting in the way of the porters and ticket-collectors, fidgeting with a hardly controllable impatience behind the barrier, until at last, squeezed and almost suffocated amongst the grown men and women—whom the process of disembarkation transformed as though by some malevolent Circean magic into brute beasts, reasonless and snarling—I struggled to shore, clutching in one hand my little bag and with the other holding to my head, if it was summer, a speckled straw, gaudy with the school colours; if winter, a preposterous bowler, whose eclipsing melon crammed over my ears made me look like a

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child in a comic paper pretending to be grown up.

“Well, here you are, here you are,” my Uncle Spencer would say, snatching my bag from me. “Eleven minutes late.” And we would dash for the custom-house as though our lives depended on getting there before the other trans-beasted passengers.

My Uncle Spencer was a man of about forty when first I came from my preparatory school to stay with him. Thin he was, rather short, very quick, agile, and impulsive in his movements, with small feet and small delicate hands. His face was narrow, clear-cut, steep, and aquiline; his eyes dark and extraordinarily bright, deeply set under overhanging brows; his hair was black, and he wore it rather long, brushed back from his forehead. At the sides of his head it had already begun to go grey, and above his ears, as it were, two grey wings were folded against his head, so that, to look at him, one was reminded of Mercury in his winged cap.

“Hurry up!” he called. And I scampered after him. “Hurry up!” But of course there was no use whatever in our hurrying; for even when we had had my little hand-bag examined, there was always the registered trunk to wait for; and that, for my Uncle Spencer was agony. For though our

places in the Brussels express were reserved, though he knew that the train would not in any circumstances start without us, this intellectual certainty was not enough to appease his passionate impatience, to allay his instinctive fears.

"Terribly slow," he kept repeating. "Terribly slow." And for the hundredth time he looked at his watch. "Ditesmoi," he would say, yet once more, to the sentry at the door of the custom-house, "le grand bagage . . . ?" until in the end the fellow, exasperated by these questions which it was not his business to answer, would say something rude; upon which my Uncle Spencer, outraged, would call him *mal élevé* and a *grossier personnage*—to the fury of the sentry but correspondingly great relief of his own feelings; for after such an outburst he could wait in patience for a good five minutes, so far forgetting his anxiety about the trunk that he actually began talking to me about other subjects, asking how I had got on this term at school, what was my batting average, whether I liked Latin, and whether Old Thunderguts, which was the name we gave to the headmaster on account of his noble baritone, was still as ill-tempered as ever.

But at the end of the five minutes, unless

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the trunk had previously appeared, my Uncle Spencer began looking at his watch again.

"Scandalously slow," he said. And addressing himself to another official, "Dites-moi, monsieur, le grand bagage . . . ?"

But when at last we were safely in the train and there was nothing to prevent him from deploying all the graces and amiabilities of his character, my Uncle Spencer, all charm and kindness now, devoted himself wholeheartedly to me.

"Look!" he said; and from the pocket of his overcoat he pulled out a large and dampish parcel of whose existence my nose had long before made me aware. "Guess what's in here?"

"Prawns," I said, without an instant's hesitation.

And prawns it was, a whole kilo of them. And there we sat in opposite corners of our first-class carriage, with the little folding table opened out between us and the pink prawns on the table, eating with infinite relish and throwing the rosy carapaces, the tails, and the sucked heads out of the window. And the Flemish plain moved past us; the long double files of poplars, planted along the banks of the canals, along the fringe of the high roads, moving as we

moved, marched parallel with our course or presented, as we crossed them at right angles, for one significant flashing moment the entrance to Hobbema's avenue. And now the belfries of Bruges beckoned from far off across the plain; a dozen more shrimps and we were roaring through its station, all gloom and ogives in honour of Memling and the Gothic past. By the time we had eaten another hectogram of prawns, the modern quarter of Ghent was reminding us that art was only five years old and had been invented in Vienna. At Alost the factory chimneys smoked; and before we knew where we were, we were almost on the outskirts of Brussels, with two or three hundred grammes of sea-fruit still intact on the table before us.

"Hurry up!" cried my Uncle Spencer, threatened by another access of anxiety. "We must finish them before we get to Brussels."

And during the last five miles we ate furiously, shell and all; there was hardly time even to spit out the heads and tails.

"Nothing like prawns," my Uncle Spencer never failed to say, as the express drew slowly into the station at Brussels, and the last tails and whiskers with the fishy paper were thrown out of the window. "Nothing like prawns when the brain is

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tired. It's the phosphorus, you know. After all your end-of-term examinations you need them." And then he patted me affectionately on the shoulder.

How often since then have I repeated in all earnestness my Uncle Spencer's words. "It's the phosphorus," I assure my fagged friends, as I insist that they shall make their lunch off shellfish. The words come gushing spontaneously out of me; the opinion that prawns and oysters are good for brain-fag is very nearly one of my fundamental and, so to say, instinctive beliefs. But sometimes, as I say the words, suddenly I think of my Uncle Spencer. I see him once more sitting opposite me in a corner of the Brussels express, his eyes flashing, his thin face expressively moving as he talks, while his quick, nervous fingers pick impatiently at the pink carapaces or with a disdainful gesture drop a whiskered head into the Flemish landscape outside the open window. And remembering my Uncle Spencer, I find myself somehow believing less firmly than I did in what I have been saying. And I wonder with a certain sense of disquietude how many other relics of my Uncle Spencer's spirit I still carry, all unconsciously, about with me.

How many of our beliefs—more serious even than the belief that prawns revive the

tired brain—come to us haphazardly from sources far less trustworthy than my Uncle Spencer! The most intelligent men will be found holding opinions about certain things, inculcated in them during their childhood by nurses or stable-boys. And up to the very end of our adolescence, and even after, there are for all of us certain admired beings, whose words sink irresistibly into our minds, generating there beliefs which reason does not presume to question, and which though they may be quite out of harmony with all our other opinions persist along with them without our ever becoming aware of the contradictions between the two sets of ideas. Thus an emancipated young man, whose father happens to have been a distinguished Indian civilian, is an ardent apostle of liberty and self-determination; but insists that the Indians are and for ever will be completely incapable of governing themselves. And an art critic, extremely sound on Vlaminck and Marie Laurencin, will praise as masterly and in the grand manner—and praise sincerely, for he genuinely finds them so—the works of an artist whose dim pretentious paintings of the Tuscan landscape used to delight, because they reminded her of her youth, an old lady, now dead, but whom as a very young man he greatly loved and admired.

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My Uncle Spencer was for me, in my boyhood, one of these admired beings whose opinions possess a more than earthly value for the admiring listener. For years my most passionately cherished beliefs were his. Those opinions which I formed myself, I held more diffidently, with less ardour; for they, after all, were only the fruits of my own judgment and observation, superficial rational growths; whereas the opinions I had taken from my Uncle Spencer—such as this belief in the curative properties of prawns—had nothing to do with my reason, but had been suggested directly into the subrational depths, where they seemed to attach themselves, like barnacles, to the very keel and bottom of my mind. Most of them, I hope, I have since contrived to scrape off; and a long, laborious, painful process it has been. But there are still, I dare say, a goodly number of them left, so deeply ingrained and grown in that it is impossible for me to be aware of them. And I shall go down to my grave making certain judgments, holding certain opinions, regarding certain things and actions in a certain way—and the way, the opinions, the judgments will not be mine, but my Uncle Spencer's; and the obscure chambers of my mind will to the end be haunted by his bright, erratic, restless ghost.

There are some people whose habits of thought a boy or a young man might, with the greatest possible advantage to himself, make his own. But my Uncle Spencer was not one of them. His active mind darted hither and thither too wildly and erratically for it to be a safe guide for an inexperienced understanding. It was all too promptly logical to draw conclusions from false premises, too easily and enthusiastically accepted as true. Living as he did in solitude—in a mental solitude; for though he was no recluse and took his share in all social pleasures, the society of Longres could not offer much in the way of high intellectual companionship—he was able to give free play to the native eccentricity of his mind. Having nobody to check or direct him, he would rush headlong down intellectual roads that led nowhere or into morasses of nonsense. When, much later, I used to amuse myself by listening on Sunday afternoons to the speakers at Marble Arch, I used often to be reminded of my Uncle Spencer. For they, like Uncle Spencer, lived in solitude, apart from the main contemporary world of ideas, unaware, or so dimly aware that it hardly counted, of the very existence of organised and systematic science, not knowing even where to look for the accumulated stores of human knowl-

edge. I have talked in the Park to Bible students who boasted that during the day they cobbled or sold cheese, while at night they sat up learning Hebrew and studying the critics of the Holy Book. And I have been ashamed of my own idleness, ashamed of the poor use I have made of my opportunities. These humble scholars heroically pursuing enlightenment are touching and noble figures—but how often, alas, pathetically ludicrous too! For the critics my Bible students used to read and meditate upon were always at least three-quarters of a century out of date—exploded Tübingen scholars or literal inspirationalists; their authorities were always books written before the invention of modern historical research; their philology was the picturesque *lucus a non lucendo*, bloody from by-our-Lady type; their geology had irrefutable proofs of the existence of Atlantis; their physiology, if they happened to be atheists, was obsoletely mechanistic, if Christians, merely providential. All their dogged industry, all their years of heroic striving, had been completely wasted—wasted, at any rate, so far as the increase of human knowledge was concerned, but not for themselves, since the labour, the disinterested ambition, had brought them happiness.

My Uncle Spencer was spiritually a cousin of these Hyde Park orators and higher critics. He had all their passion for enlightenment and profound ideas, but not content with concentrating, like them, on a single subject such as the Bible, he allowed himself to be attracted by everything under the sun. The whole field of history, of science (or rather what my Uncle Spencer thought was science), of philosophy, religion, and art was his province. He had their industry too—an industry, in his case, rather erratic, fitful, and inconstant; for he would start passionately studying one subject, to turn after a little while to another whose aspect seemed to him at the moment more attractive. And like them he displayed—though to a less pronounced degree, since his education had been rather better than theirs (not much better, however, for he had never attended any seat of learning but one of our oldest and most hopeless public schools)—he displayed a vast unawareness of contemporary thought and an uncritical faith in authorities which to a more systematically educated man would have seemed quite obviously out of date; coupled with a profound ignorance of even the methods by which one could acquire a more accurate or at any rate a more “mod-

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ern" and fashionable knowledge of the universe.

My Uncle Spencer had views and information on almost every subject one cared to mention; but the information was almost invariably faulty and the judgments he based upon it fantastic. What things he used to tell me as we sat facing one another in the corners of our first-class carriage, with the prawns piled up in a little coralline mountain on the folding table between us! Fragments of his eager talk come back to me.

"There are cypresses in Lombardy that were planted by Julius Cæsar. . . ."

"The human race is descended from African pygmies. Adam was black and only four feet high. . . ."

"*Similia similibus curantur*. Have you gone far enough with your Latin to know what that means?" (My Uncle Spencer was an enthusiastic homœopathist, and the words of Hahnemann were to him as a mystic formula, a kind of *Om mani padme hum*, the repetition of which gave him an immense spiritual satisfaction.)

And once, I remember, as we were passing through the fabulous new station of Ghent—that station which fifteen or sixteen years later I was to see all smashed and gutted by the departing invaders—he began, apropos

of a squad of soldiers standing on the platform, to tell me how a German professor had proved, mathematically, using the theories of ballistics and probabilities, that war was now impossible, modern quick-firing rifles and machine-guns being so efficient that it was, as my Uncle Spencer put it, "sci-en-tific-ally impossible" for any body of men to remain alive within a mile of a sufficient number of mitrailleuses, moving backwards and forwards through the arc of a circle and firing continuously all the time. I passed my boyhood in the serene certainty that war was now a thing of the past.

Sometimes he would talk to me earnestly across the prawns of the cosmogonies of Boehme, or Swedenborg. But all this was so exceedingly obscure that I never took it in at all. In spite of my Uncle Spencer's ascendancy over my mind I was never infected by his mystical enthusiasms. These mental dissipations had been my Uncle Spencer's wild oats. Reacting from the rather stuffily orthodox respectability of his upbringing, he ran into, not vice, not atheism, but Swedenborg. He had preserved—a legacy from his prosperous nineteenth-century youth—an easy optimism, a great belief in progress and the superiority of modern over ancient times, together with a convenient ignorance of the

things about which it would have been disquieting to think too much. This agreeable notion of the world I sucked in easily and copiously with my little crustaceans; my views about the universe and the destinies of man were as rosy in those days as the prawns themselves.

It was not till seven or eight o'clock in the evening that we finally got to our destination. My Uncle Spencer's carriage—victoria or brougham, according to the season and the state of the weather—would be waiting for us at the station door. In we climbed and away we rolled on our rubbered wheels in a silence that seemed almost magical, so deafeningly did common carts and the mere station cabs go rattling over the cobbles of the long and dismal Rue de la Gare. Even in the winter, when there was nothing to be seen of it but an occasional green gas-lamp, with a little universe of pavement, brick wall and shuttered window dependent upon it and created by it out of the surrounding darkness, the Rue de la Gare was signally depressing, if only because it was so straight and long. But in summer, when the dismal brick houses by which it was flanked revealed themselves in the evening light, when the dust and the waste-paper came puffing along it in gusts of warm, stale smelling wind,

then the street seemed doubly long and disagreeable. But, on the other hand, the contrast between its sordidness and the cool, spacious Grand' Place into which, after what seemed a carefully studied preparatory twisting and turning among the narrow streets of the old town, it finally debouched, was all the more striking and refreshing. Like a ship floating out from between the jaws of a canyon into a wide and sunlit lake, our carriage emerged upon the Grand' Place. And the moment was solemn, breathlessly anticipated and theatrical, as though we were gliding in along the suspended calling of the oboes and bassoons, and the violins trembling with amorous anxiety all around us, rolling silently and with not a hitch in the stage carpentry on to some vast and limelit stage where, as soon as we had taken up our position well forward and in the centre, something tremendous, one imagined, would suddenly begin to happen—a huge orchestral tutti from contrabass trombone to piccolo, from bell instrument to triangle, and then the tenor and soprano in such a duet as had never in all the history of opera been heard before.

But when it came to the point, our entrance was never quite so dramatic as all that. One found, when one actually got

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there, that one had mistaken one's opera; it wasn't *Parsifal* or *Rigoletto*; it was *Pelléas* or perhaps the *village Romeo and Juliet*. For there was nothing grandiosely Wagnerian, nothing Italian and showy about the Grand' Place at Longres. The last light was rosy on its towers, the shadows of the promenaders stretched half across the place, and in the vast square the evening had room to be cool and quiet. The Gothic Church had a sharp steeple and the seminary by its side a tower, and the little seventeenth-century Hôtel de Ville, with its slender belfry, standing in the middle of that open space as though not afraid to let itself be seen from every side, was a miracle of gay and sober architecture; and the houses that looked out upon it had faces simple indeed, burgess and ingenuous, but not without a certain nobility, not without a kind of unassuming provincial elegance. In, then, we glided, and the suspended oboeings of our entrance, instead of leading up to some grand and gaudy burst of harmony, fruitily protracted themselves in this evening beauty, exulted quietly in the rosy light, meditated among the lengthening shadows; and the violins, ceasing to tremble with anticipation, swelled and mounted, like light and leaping towers, into the serene sky.

And if the clock happened to strike at the

moment that we entered, how charmingly the notes of the mechanical carillon harmonised with this imaginary music! At the hours, the bells in the high tower of the Hôtel de Ville played a minuet and trio, tinkly and formal like the first composition of an infant Boccherini, which lasted till fully three minutes past. At the half-hours it was a patriotic air of the same length. But at the quarters the bells no more than began a tune. Three or four bars and the music broke off, leaving the listener wondering what was to have followed, and attributing to this fragmentary stump of an air some rich outflowering in the pregnant and musical silence, some subtle development which should have made the whole otherwise enchanting than the completed pieces that followed and preceded, and whose charm, indeed, consisted precisely, in their old-fashioned mediocrity, in the ancient, cracked, and quavering sweetness of the bells that played them, and the defects in the mechanism, which imparted to the rhythm that peculiar and unforeseeable irregularity which the child at the piano, tongue between teeth, eyes anxiously glancing from printed notes to fingers and back again, laboriously introduces into the flawless evenness of "The Merry Peasant."

This regular and repeated carillonage was

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and indeed still is—for the invaders spared the bells—an essential part of Longres, a feature like the silhouette of its three towers seen from far away between the poplars across the wide, flat land, characteristic and recognisable.

It is with a little laugh of amused delight that the stranger to Longres first hears the jiggling airs and the clashes of thin, sweet harmony floating down upon him from the sky, note succeeding unmuted note, so that the vibrations mingle in the air, surrounding the clear outlines of the melody with a faint quivering halo of discord. After an hour or two the minuet and trio, the patriotic air, become all too familiar, while with every repetition the broken fragments at the quarters grow more and more enigmatic, pregnant, dubious, and irritating. The pink light fades from the three towers, the Gothic intricacies of the church sink into a flat black silhouette against the night sky; but still from high up in the topless darkness floats down, floats up and out over the house-tops, across the flat fields, the minuet and trio. The patriotic air continues still, even after sunset, to commemorate the great events of 1830; and still the fragments between, like pencillings in the notebook of a genius, suggest to the mind in the scribble of twenty

notes a splendid theme and the possibility of fifteen hundred variations. At midnight the bells are still playing; at half-past one the stranger starts yet again out of his sleep; re-evoked at a quarter to four, his speculations about the possible conclusions of the unfinished symphony keep him awake long enough to hear the minuet and trio at the hour and to wonder how any one in Longres manages to sleep at all. But in a day or two he answers the question himself by sleeping unbrokenly through the hints from Beethoven's notebook, and the more deliberate evocations of Boccherini's childhood and the revolution of 1830. The disease creates its own antidote, and the habit of hearing the carillon induces gradually a state of special mental deafness in which the inhabitants of Longres permanently live.

Even as a small boy, to whom insomnia was a thing unknown, I found the bells, for the first night or two after my arrival in Longres, decidedly trying. My Uncle Spencer's house looked on to the Grand' Place itself, and my window on the third floor was within fifty yards of the belfry of the Hôtel de Ville and the source of the aerial music. Three-year-old Boccherini might have been in the room with me whenever the wind came from the south, banging his minuet in my

ears. But after the second night he might bang and jangle as much as he liked! there was no bell in Longres could wake me.

What did wake me, however—every Saturday morning at about half-past four or five—was the pigs coming into market. One had to have spent a month of Saturdays in Longres before one could acquire the special mental deafness that could ignore the rumbling of cart-wheels over the cobbles and the squealing and grunting of two or three thousand pigs. And when one looked out what a sight it was! All the Grand' Place was divided up by rails into a multitude of pens and pounds, and every pound was seething with pink naked pigs that looked from above like so much Bergsonian *élan vital* in a state of incessant agitation. Men came and went between the enclosures, talking, bargaining, critically poking potential bacon or ham with the point of a stick. And when the bargain was struck, the owner would step into the pen, hunt down the victim, and, catching it up by one leather ear and its thin bootlace of a tail, carry it off amid grunts that ended in the piercing long-drawn harmonics of a squeal to a netted cart or perhaps to some other pen a little farther down the line. Brought up in England to regard the infliction of discomfort upon an animal as being, if anything,

rather more reprehensible than cruelty to my fellow-humans, I remember being horrified by this spectacle. So, too, apparently was the German army of occupation. For between 1914 and 1918 no pig in the Longres market might be lifted by tail or ear, the penalty for disobedience being a fine of twenty marks for the first offence, a hundred for the second, and after that a term of forced labour on the lines of communication. Of all the oppressive measures of the invader there was hardly one which more profoundly irritated the Limburgian peasantry. Nero was unpopular with the people of Rome, not because of his crimes and vices, not because he was a tyrant and a murderer, but for having built in the middle of the city a palace so large that it blocked the entrance to several of the main roads. If the Romans hated him, it was because his golden house compelled them to make a circuit of a quarter of a mile every time they wanted to go shopping. The little customary liberties, the right to do in small things what we have always done, are more highly valued than the greater, more abstract, and less immediate freedoms. And, similarly, most people will rather run the risk of catching typhus than take a few irksome sanitary precautions to which they are not accustomed. In this par-

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ticular case, moreover, there was the further question: How *is* one to carry a pig except by its tail and ears? One must either throw the creature on its back and lift it up by its four cloven feet—a process hardly feasible, since a pig's centre of gravity is so near the ground that it is all but impossible to topple him over. Or else—and this is what the people of Longres found themselves disgustingly compelled to do—one must throw one's arms round the animal and carry it clasped to one's bosom as though it were a baby, at the risk of being bitten in the ear and with the certainty of stinking like a hog for the rest of the day.

The first Saturday after the departure of the German troops was a bad morning for the pigs. To carry a pig by the tail was an outward and visible symbol of recovered liberty; and the squeals of the porkers mingled with the cheers of the population, and the trills and clashing harmonies of the bells awakened by the carillonneur from their four years' silence.

By ten o'clock the market was over. The railings of the pens had been cleared away, and but for the traces on the cobbles—and those too the municipal scavengers were beginning to sweep up—I could have believed that the scene upon which I had looked from

my window in the bright early light had been a scene in some agitated morning dream.

But more dream-like and fantastical was the aspect of the Grand' Place when, every year during the latter part of August, Longres indulged in its traditional kermesse. For then the whole huge square was covered with booths, with merry-go-rounds turning and twinkling in the sun, with swings and switchbacks, with temporary pinnacles rivaling in height with the permanent and secular towers of the town, and from whose summits one slid, whooping uncontrollably with horrified delight, down a polished spiral track to the ground below. There was bunting everywhere, there were sleek balloons and flags, there were gaudily painted signs. Against the grey walls of the church, against the whitewashed house-fronts, against the dark brickwork of the seminary and the soft yellow stucco of the gabled Hôtel de Ville, a sea of many colours beat tumultuously. And an immense and featureless noise that was a mingling of the music of four or five steam organs, of the voices of thousands of people, of the blowing of trumpets and whistles, the clashing of cymbals, the beating of drums, of shouting, of the howling of children, of enormous rustic laughter, filled the space between the houses from brim to brim—a noise so

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continuous and so amorphous that hearken-
ing from my high window it was almost, af-
ter a time, as though there were no noise at
all, but a new kind of silence, in which the
tinkling of the infant Boccherini's minuet,
the patriotic air, and the fragmentary sym-
phonies had become for some obscure reason
utterly inaudible.

And after sunset the white flares of acety-
lene and the red flares of coal-gas scooped
out of the heart of the night a little private
day, in which the fun went on more noisily
than ever. And the gaslight striking up on
to the towers mingled half-way up their
shafts with the moonlight from above, so
that to me at my window the belfries seemed
to belong half to the earth, half to the pale
silence overhead. But gradually, as the night
wore on, earth abandoned its claims; the
noise diminished; one after another the flares
were put out, till at last the moon was left in
absolute possession, with only a few dim
greenish gas-lamps here and there, making no
attempt to dispute her authority. The towers
were hers down to the roots, the booths and
the hooded roundabouts, the Russian moun-
tains, the swings—all wore the moon's livery
of silver and black; and audible once more
the bells seemed in her honour to sound a
sweeter, clearer, more melancholy note.

But it was not only from my window that I viewed the kermesse. From the moment that the roundabouts began to turn, which was as soon as the eleven o'clock Mass on the last Sunday but one in August was over, to the moment when they finally came to rest, which was at about ten or eleven on the night of the following Sunday, I moved almost unceasingly among the delights of the fair. And what a fair it was! I have never seen its like in England. Such splendour, such mechanical perfection in the swings, switch-backs, merry-go-rounds, towers, and the like! Such astonishing richness and variety in the side-shows! And withal such marvellous cheapness.

When one was tired of sliding and swinging, of being whirled and jogged, one could go and see for a penny the man who pulled out handfuls of his skin, to pin it up with safety-pins into ornamental folds and pleats. Or one could see the woman with no arms who opened a bottle of champagne with her toes and drank your health, lifting her glass to her lips with the same members. And then in another booth, over whose entry there waved—a concrete symbol of good faith—a pair of enormous female pantaloons, sat the Fat Woman—so fat that she could (and would, you were told, for four

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sous extra), in the words of the Flemish notice at the door, which I prefer to leave in their original dialectical obscurity, "heur gezicht bet heur tiekes wassen."

Next to the Fat Woman's hutch was a much larger tent in which the celebrated Monsieur Figaro, with his wife and seven children, gave seven or eight times daily a dramatic version of the Passion of Our Saviour, at which even the priesthood was authorised to assist. The Figaro family was celebrated from one end of the country to another, and had been for I do not know how many years—forty or fifty at least. For there were several generations of Figaros; and if seven charming and entirely genuine children did indeed still tread the boards, it was not that the seven original sons and daughters of old M. Figaro had remained by some miracle perpetually young; but that marrying and becoming middle-aged they had produced little Figaros of their own, who in their turn gave rise to more, so that the aged and original M. Figaro could count among the seven members of his supposititious family more than one of his great-grandchildren. So celebrated was M. Figaro that there was even a song about him, of which unfortunately I can remember only two lines:

“Et le voilà, et le voilà, Fi-ga-ro,
Le plus comique de la Belgique, Fi-ga-ro!”

But on what grounds and in what remote epoch of history he had been called “Le plus comique de la Belgique,” I was never able to discover. For the only part I ever saw the venerable old gentleman play was that of Caiaphas in the *Passion of Our Saviour*, which was one of the most moving, or at any rate one of the most harrowingly realistic, performances I ever remember to have seen; so much so, that the voices of the actors were often drowned by sobs and sometimes by the piercing screams of a child who thought that they were really and genuinely driving nails into the graceful young Figaro of the third generation, who played the part of the Saviour.

Not a day of my first kermesses passed without my going at least once, and sometimes two or three times, to see the Figaros at their performance; partly, no doubt, because, between the ages of nine and thirteen, I was an extremely devout broad churchman, and partly because the rôle of the Magdalene was played by a little girl of twelve or thereabouts, with whom I fell in love, wildly, extravagantly, as one only can love when one is a child. I would have given fortunes and

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years of my life to have had the courage to go round to the back after the performance and talk to her. But I did not dare; and so give an intellectual justification for my cowardice, I assured myself that it would have been unseemly on my part to intrude upon a privacy which I invested with all the sacredness of the Magdalene's public life, an act of sacrilege like going into church with one's hat on. Moreover, I comforted myself, I should have profited little by meeting my innamorata face to face, since in all likelihood she spoke nothing but Flemish, and besides my own language I only spoke at that time a little French, with enough Latin to know what my Uncle Spencer meant when he said, "*Similia similibus curantur.*" My passion for the Magdalene lasted through three kermesses, but waned, or rather suddenly came to an end, when, rushing to the first of the Figaros' performances at the fourth, I saw that the little Magdalene, who was now getting on for sixteen, had become, like so many young girls in their middle teens, plump and moony almost to the point of grossness. And my love after falling to zero in the theatre was turned to positive disgust when I saw her, a couple of mornings later before the performance began, walking about the Grand' Place in a dark blue blouse with a

sailor collar, a little blue skirt down to her knees, and a pair of bright yellow boots, lacing high up on her full-blown calves, which they compressed so tightly that the exuberant flesh overflowed on to the leather. The next year one of old M. Figaro's great-grandchildren, who could hardly have been more than seven or eight, took her place on the stage. My Magdalene had left it—to get married, no doubt. All the Figaros married early: it was important that there should be no failure in the supply of juvenile apostles and holy women. But by that time I had ceased to take the slightest interest either in her, her family, or their sacred performance; for it was about the time of my fifth kermesse, if I remember rightly, that my period of atheism began—an atheism, however, still combined with all my Uncle Spencer's cheerful optimism about the universe.

My Uncle Spencer, though it would have annoyed him to hear any one say so, enjoyed the kermesse almost as much as I did. In all the year, August was his best month; it contained within its thirty-one days less cause for anxiety, impatience, or irritation than any other month; so that my Uncle Spencer, left in peace by the malignant world, was free to be as high-spirited, as gay and kind-hearted as he possibly could be.

And it was astonishing what a stock of these virtues he possessed. If he could have lived on one of those happy islands where nature provides bananas and cocoanuts enough for all and to spare, where the sun shines every day and a little tattooing is all the raiment one needs, where love is easy, commerce unknown, and neither sin nor progress ever heard of—if he could have lived on one of these carefree islands, how entirely happy and how uniformly a saint my Uncle Spencer would have been! But cares and worldly preoccupations too often overlaid his gaiety, stopped up the vents of his kindness; and his quick, nervous, and impulsive temperament—in the Augusts of his life a bubbling source of high spirits—boiled up in a wild impatience, in bilious fountains of irritation, whenever he found himself confronted by the passive malignity of matter, the stupidity or duplicity of man.

He was at his worst during the Christmas holidays; for the season of universal goodwill happened unfortunately to coincide with the season of sugar-making. With the first frosts the beetroots were taken out of the ground, and every day for three or four months three hundred thousand kilograms of roots went floating down the labyrinth of little canals that led to the washing-machines

and the formidable slicers of my Uncle Spencer's factory. From every vent of the huge building issued a sickening smell of boiled beetroot, mingled with the more penetrating stink of the waste products of the manufacture—the vegetable fibre drained of its juice, which was converted on the upper floors of the building into cattle food and in the backyard into manure. The activity during those few months of the beetroot season was feverish, was delirious. A wild orgy of work, day and night, three shifts in the twenty-four hours. And then the factory was shut up, and for the rest of the year it stood there, alone, in the open fields beyond the fringes of the town, desolate as a ruined abbey, lifeless and dumb.

During the beetroot season my Uncle Spencer was almost out of his mind. Rimmed with livid circles of fatigue, his eyes glittered like the eyes of a madman; his thin face was no more than pale skin stretched over the starting bones. The slightest contrariety set him cursing and stamping with impatience; it was a torture for him to sit still. One Christmas holiday, I remember, something went wrong with the machinery at the factory, and for nearly five hours the slicers, the churning washers were still. My Uncle Spencer was almost a lost man when he got

back to the Grand' Place for dinner that evening. It was as though a demon had possessed him, and had only been cast out as the result of a horrible labour. If the breakdown had lasted another hour, I really believe he would have gone mad.

No, Christmas at Uncle Spencer's was never very cheerful. But by the Easter holidays he was beginning to recover. The frenzied making of sugar had given place to the calmer selling of it. My Uncle Spencer's good nature began to have a chance of reasserting itself. By August, at the end of a long, calm summer, he was perfect; and the kermesse found him at his most exquisitely mellow. But with September a certain premonitory anxiety began to show itself; the machinery had to be overhauled, the state of the labour market examined, and when, about the twentieth of the month, I left again for school, it was a frowning, melancholy, and taciturn Uncle Spencer who travelled with me from Longres to Brussels, from Brussels to Ostend, and who, preoccupied with other thoughts, waved absent-mindedly from the quay, while the steamer slowly slid out through the false calm of the harbour mouth towards a menacing and equinoctial Channel.

But at the kermesse, as I have said, my

Uncle Spencer was at his richest and ripest. Enjoying it all as much as I did myself, he would spend long evenings with me, loitering among the attractions of the Grand' Place. He was sad, I think, that the dignity of his position as one of the leading citizens of Longres did not permit him to mount with me on the round-about, the swings, and the mountain railways. But a visit to the side-shows was not inconsistent with his gravity; we visited them all. While professing to find the exhibition of freaks and monsters a piece of deplorable bad taste, my Uncle Spencer never failed to take me to look at all of them. It was a cardinal point in his theory of education that the young should be brought as early as possible into contact with what he called the Realities of Life. And as nothing, it was obvious, could be more of a Reality than the armless woman or the man who pinned up his skin with safety-pins, it was important that I should make an early acquaintance with them, in spite of the undoubtedly defective taste of the exhibition. It was in obedience to the same educational principle that my Uncle Spencer took me, one Easter holiday, to see the Lunatic Asylum. But the impression made upon me by the huge prison-like building and its queer occupants—one of whom, I remember, gam-

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bolled playfully around me wherever I went, patting my cheeks or affectionately pinching my legs—was so strong and disagreeable, that for several nights I could not sleep; or if I did, I was oppressed by hideous nightmares that woke me, screaming and sweating in the dark. My Uncle Spencer had to renounce his intention of taking me to see the anatomy room in the hospital.

Scattered among the monsters, the rifle-ranges, and the games of skill were little booths where one could buy drink and victuals. There was one vendor, for instance, who always did a roaring trade by selling, for two sous, as many raw mussels as any one could eat without coughing. Torn between his belief in the medicinal qualities of shellfish and his fear of typhoid fever, my Uncle Spencer hesitated whether he ought to allow me to spend my penny. In the end he gave his leave. (“It’s the phosphorus, you know.”) I put down my copper, took my mussel, bit, swallowed, and violently coughed. The fish were briny as though they had come out of the Dead Sea. The old vendor did an excellent business. Still, I have seen him sometimes looking anxious; for not all his customers were as susceptible as I. There were hardy young peasants who could put down half a pound of

this Dead Sea fruit without turning a hair. In the end, however, the brine did its work on even the toughest gullet.

More satisfactory as food were the apple fritters, which were manufactured by thousands in a large temporary wooden structure that stood under the shade of the *Hôtel de Ville*. The Quality, like Uncle Spencer and myself, ate their fritters in the partial privacy of a number of little cubicles arranged like loose-boxes along one side of the building. My Uncle Spencer walked resolutely to our appointed box without looking to the left hand or to the right; and I was bidden to follow his example and not to show the least curiosity respecting the occupants of the other loose-boxes, whose entrances we might pass on the way to our own. There was a danger, my Uncle Spencer explained to me, that some of the families eating apple fritters in the loose-boxes might be Blacks—Blacks, I mean, politically, not ethnically—while we were Liberals or even, positively Freemasons. Therefore—but as a mere stranger to Longres I was never, I confess, quite able to understand the force of this conclusion—therefore, though we might talk to male Blacks in a café, have business relations and even be on terms of friendship with them, it was impossible for us to be known

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by the female Blacks, even under a booth and over the ferial apple fritters; so that we must not look into the loose-boxes for fear that we might see there a dear old friend who would be in the embarrassing situation of not being able to introduce us to his wife and daughters. I accepted, without understanding, this law; and it seemed to be a perfectly good law until the day came when I found that it forbade me to make the acquaintance of even a single one of the eleven ravishing daughters of M. Moulle. It seemed to me then a stupid law.

In front of the booths where they sold sweets my Uncle Spencer never cared to linger. It was not that he was stingy; on the contrary, he was extremely generous. Nor that he thought it bad for me to eat sweets; he had a professional belief in the virtues of sugar. The fact was that the display in the booths embarrassed him. For already at the kermesse one began to see a sprinkling of those little objects in chocolate which, between the Feast of St. Nicholas and the New Year, fill the windows of every confectioner's shop in Belgium. My Uncle Spencer had passed a third of a lifetime at Longres, but even after all these years he was still quite unable to excuse or understand the innocent coprophily of its inhabi-

tants. The spectacle, in a sweet-shop window, of a little *pot de chambre* made of chocolate brought the blush of embarrassment to his cheeks. And when at the kermesse I asked him to buy me some barley-sugar or a few *bêtises de Cambrai*, he pretended not to have heard what I asked, but walked hastily on; for his quick eyes had seen, on one of the higher shelves of the confectioner's booth, a long line of little brown pots, on whose equivocal aspect it would have been an agony to him if, standing there and waiting for the barley-sugar to be weighed out, I had naively commented. Not that I ever should have commented upon them; for I was as thoroughly English as my Uncle Spencer himself—more thoroughly, indeed, as being a generation further away from the Flemish mother, the admixture of whose blood, however, had availed nothing against my uncle's English upbringing. Me, too, the little brown pots astonished and appalled by their lack of reticence. If my companion had been another schoolboy of my own age, I should have pointed at the nameless things and sniggered. But since I was with my Uncle Spencer, I preserved with regard to them an eloquent and pregnant silence; I pretended not to have seen them, but so guiltily that my ignoring of them was in itself a comment that filled

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my poor Uncle Spencer with embarrassment. If we could have talked about them, if only we could have openly deplored them and denounced their makers, it would have been better. But obviously, somehow, we could not.

In the course of years, however, I learned, being young and still malleable, to be less astonished and appalled by the little chocolate pots and the other manifestations of the immemorial Flemish coprophily. In the end I took them almost for granted, like the natives themselves, till finally, when St. Nicholas had filled the shops with these scatological symbols, I could crunch a pot or two between meals as joyously and with as little self-consciousness as any Belgian child. But I had to eat my chocolate, when it was moulded in this particular form, out of my Uncle Spencer's sight. He, poor man, would have been horrified if he had seen me on these occasions.

On these occasions, then, I generally took refuge in the housekeeper's room—and in any case, at this Christmas season, when the sugar was being made, it was better to sit in the cheerful company of Mlle Leeauw than with my gloomy, irritable, demon-ridden Uncle Spencer. Mlle Leeauw was almost from the first one of my firmest and most

trusted friends. She was a woman of, I suppose, about thirty-five when I first knew her, rather worn already by a life of active labour, but still preserving a measure of that blonde, decided, and regular beauty which had been hers in girlhood. She was the daughter of a small farmer near Longres, and had received the usual village education, supplemented, however, in recent years by what she had picked up from my Uncle Spencer, who occupied himself every now and then, in his erratic and enthusiastic way, with the improvement of her mind, lent her books from his library, and delivered lectures to her on the subjects that were at the moment nearest to his heart. Mlle Leeauw, unlike most women of her antecedents, felt an insatiable curiosity with regard to all that mysterious and fantastic knowledge which the rich and leisured keep shut up in their libraries; and not only in their books, as she had seen herself (for as a girl had she not served as nursery-maid in the house of that celebrated collector, the Comte de Zuitigny?) not only in their books, but in their pictures too (some of which, Mlle Leeauw assured me, a child could have painted, so badly drawn they were, so unlike life (and yet the count had given heaven only knew how much for them), in their Chinese pots, in the patterns

of the very carpets on the floor. Whatever my Uncle Spencer gave her she read with eagerness, she listened attentively to what he said; and there emerged, speck-like in the boundless blank ocean of her ignorance, a few little islands of strange knowledge. One, for example, was called homœopathy; another the Construction-of-Domes (a subject on which my Uncle Spencer was prepared to talk with a copious and perverse erudition for hours at a time; his thesis being that any mason who knew how to turn the vaulted roof of an oven could have built the cupolas of St. Peter's, St. Paul's, and Santa Maria del Fiore, and that therefore the praises lavished on Michelangelo, Wren, and Brunelleschi were entirely undeserved). A third was called Anti-Vivisection. A fourth Swedenborg. . . .

The result of my Uncle Spencer's teaching was to convince Mlle Leeauw that the knowledge of the rich was something even more fantastic than she had supposed—something unreal and utterly remote from life as it is actually lived, artificial and arbitrary, like the social activities of these same rich, who pass their time in one another's houses, eating at one another's expense, and being bored.

This conviction of the complete futility of

knowledge did not make her any the less eager to learn what my Uncle Spencer, whom she regarded as a mine and walking compendium of all human learning, could offer her. And she enchanted him by her respectful attentiveness, by the quickness of her understanding—for she was a woman of very great natural intelligence—and her eagerness for every fresh enlightenment. She did not confide to him her real opinion of knowledge, which was that it was a kind of curious irrelevant joke on the margin of life, worth learning for precisely the same reasons as it is worth learning to handle the fork at table—because it is one of the secrets of the rich. Admiring my Uncle Spencer sincerely, she yet took nothing that he taught her seriously, and though, when with him, she believed in millionth-of-a-grain doses and high spiritual potencies, she continued, when she felt out of sorts or I had overeaten, to resort to the old tablespoonful of castor-oil; though with him she was a convinced Swedenborgian, in church she was entirely orthodox; though in his presence she thought vivisection monstrous, she would tell him with gusto of those happy childish days on the farm, when her father cut the pig's throat, her mother held the beast by the hind-legs, her sister danced on the body to make the blood flow,

and she held the pail under the spouting artery.

If to my Uncle Spencer his housekeeper appeared as he liked to see her, and not as at ordinary times she really was, it was not that she practised with him a conscious insincerity. Hers was one of those quick, sensitive natures that adapt themselves almost automatically to the social atmosphere in which at the moment they happen to be. Thus with well-bred people she had beautiful manners; but the peasants from whose stock she had sprung found her as full of a hearty Flemish gusto, as grossly and innocently coarse as themselves. The core of her being remained solidly peasant; but the upper and conscious part of her mind was, so to speak, only loosely fastened to the foundation, so that it could turn freely this way and that, without strain or difficulty, according to changing circumstances. My Uncle Spencer valued her, not only as a competent, intelligent woman, which she always was in every company, but also because she was, considering her class and origins, so remarkably well-mannered and refined, which, except with him and his likes, she was not.

With me, however, Mlle Leeauw was thoroughly natural and Flemish. With her quick and, I might say, instinctive under-

standing of character, she saw that my abashed reaction to coprology, being of so much more recent date than that of my Uncle Spencer, was much less strong, less deeply rooted. At the same time, she perceived that I had no great natural taste for grossness, no leaning to what I may call Flemishism; so that in my presence she could be her natural Flemish self and thus correct an absurd acquired delicacy without running the risk of encouraging to any undue or distressing degree a congenital bias in the opposite direction. And I noticed that whenever Matthieu (or Tcheunke, as they called him), her cousin's boy, came into town and paid a call on her, Mlle Leeauw became almost as careful and refined as she was with my Uncle Spencer. Not that Tcheunke shared my uncle's susceptibilities. On the contrary, he took such an immoderate delight in everything that was excrementitious that she judged it best not in any way to indulge him in his taste, just as she judged it best not to indulge my national prejudice in favour of an excessive reticence about these and similar matters. She was right, I believe, in both cases.

Mlle Leeauw had an elder sister, Louise— Louiseke, in the language of Longres, where they put the symbol of the diminutive after

almost every name. Louiseke, like her sister, had never married; and considering the ugliness of the woman—for she resembled Mlle Leeauw as a very mischievous caricature resembles its original, that is to say, very closely and at the same time hardly at all, the unlikeness being emphasised in this case by the fact that nature had, for the shaping of certain features, drawn on other ancestral sources, and worse ones, than those from which her sister's face had been made up—considering her ugliness, I repeat, it was not surprising. Though considering her dowry, perhaps it was. Louiseke was by no means rich; but she had the five hundred francs a year, or thereabouts, which her sister also had, after their father died and the farm was sold, together with another two hundred inherited from an old aunt of her mother's. This was a sufficient income to allow her to live without working in a leisure principally occupied by the performance of religious exercises.

On the outskirts of Longres there stands a small *béguinage*, long since abandoned by its *Béguines*, who are now all over Belgium a diminishing and nearly extinct community, and inhabited by a colony of ordinary poor folk. The little old gabled houses are built round the sides of a large grassy square, in

the centre of which stands an abandoned church. Louiseke inhabited one of these houses, partly because the rent was very low, but also because she liked the religious associations of the place. There, in her peaked high house, looking out across the monastic quadrangle to the church, she could almost believe herself a genuine Béguine. Every morning she went out to hear early Mass, and on Sundays and days of festival she was assiduous in church almost to the point of supererogation.

At my Uncle Spencer's we saw a great deal of her; on her way to church, on her way home again, she never failed to drop in for a word with her sister Antonieke. Sometimes, I remember, she brought with her—hurrying on these occasions across the Grand' Place with the quick, anxious tread, the frightened, suspicious glances to left and right, of a traveller crossing a brigand-haunted moor—a large bag of green baize, full of strange treasures: the silver crown and sceptre of Our Lady, the gilded diadem of the Child, St. Joseph's halo, the jewelled silver book of I forget which Doctor of the Church, St. Dominick's lilies, and a mass of silver hearts with gilded flames coming out of them. Louiseke, whose zeal was noted and approved of by M. le Curé, had the rare priv-

ilege of being allowed to polish the jewelery belonging to the images in the church. A few days before each of the important feasts the painted plaster saints were stripped of their finery and the spoil handed over to Louiseke, who, not daring to walk with her precious burden under her arm as far as her own house in the béguinage, slipped across the Grand' Place to my Uncle Spencer's. There, on the table, in Antonieke's room, the green baize bag was opened, and the treasures, horribly dirty and tarnished after their weeks or months of neglect, were spread out in the light. A kind of paste was then made out of French chalk mixed with gin, which the two sisters applied to the crowns and hearts with nail-brushes, or if the work was fine and intricate, with an old tooth-brush. The silver was then wiped dry with a cloth and polished with a piece of leather.

A feeling of manly pride forbade me to partake in what I felt to be a womanish labour; but I liked to stand by with my hands in my pockets, watching the sisters at work among these regal and sacred symbols, and trying to understand, so far as my limited knowledge of Flemish and my almost equally limited knowledge of life would admit, the gossip which Louiseke poured out incessantly

in a tone of monotonous and unvarying censoriousness.

I myself always found Louiseke a little forbidding. She lacked the charm and the quality, which I can only call mellowness, of her sister; to me she seemed harsh, sour-tempered, and rather malevolent. But it is very possible that I judged her unfairly; for, I confess, I could never quite get over her ugliness. It was a sharp, hooky, witch-like type of ugliness, which at that time I found particularly repulsive.

How difficult it is, even with the best will in the world, even for a grown and reasonable man, to judge his fellow-beings without reference to their external appearance! Beauty is a letter of recommendation which it is almost impossible to ignore; and we attribute too often the ugliness of the face to the character. Or, to be more precise, we make no attempt to get beyond the opaque mask of the face to the realities behind it, but run away from the ugly at sight without even trying to find out what they are really like. That feeling of instinctive dislike which ugliness inspires in a grown man, but which he has reason and strength enough of will to suppress, or at least conceal, is uncontrollable in a child. At three or four years old a child will run screaming from the room at the as-

pect of a certain visitor whose face strikes him as disagreeable. Why? Because the ugly visitor is "naughty," is a "bad man." And up to a much later age, though we have succeeded in preventing ourselves from screaming when the ugly visitor makes his appearance, we do our best—at first, at any rate, or until his actions have strikingly proved that his face belies his character—to keep out of his way. So that if I always disliked Louiseke, it may be that she was not to blame, and that my own peculiar horror of ugliness made me attribute to her unpleasant characteristics which she did not in reality possess. She seemed to me, then, harsh and sour-tempered; perhaps she wasn't; but, in any case, I thought so. And that accounts for the fact that I never got to know her, never tried to know her, as I knew her sister. Even after the extraordinary event which, a year or two after my first visit to Longres, was to alter completely the whole aspect of her life, I still made no effort to understand Louiseke's character. How much I regret my remissness now! But, after all, one cannot blame a small boy for failing to have the same standards as a man. To-day, in retrospect, I find Louiseke's character and actions in the highest degree curious and worthy of study. But twenty years ago, when I knew her, her ugly-

ness at first appalled me, and always, even after I had got over my disgust, surrounded her, for me, with a kind of unbreathable atmosphere, through which I could never summon the active interest to penetrate. Moreover, the event which now strikes me as so extraordinary, seemed to me then almost normal and of no particular interest. And since she died before my opinion about it had had time to change, I can only give a child's impression of her character and a bald recital of the facts so far as I knew them.

It was, then, at my second or third ker-messe that a side-show, novel not only for me (to whom indeed everything—fat women, fire-swallowers, elastic men, and down to the merest dwarfs and giants—was a novelty), but even to the oldest inhabitants of Longres, who might have been expected to have seen, in their time, almost everything that the world had ever parturated of marvels, rarities, monsters, and abortions, made its appearance on the Grand' Place. This was a troupe of devil dancers, self-styled Tibetan for the sake of the name's high-sounding and mysterious ring; but actually made up of two expatriated Hindus and a couple of swarthy meridional Frenchmen, who might pass at a pinch as the Aryan compatriots of these dark Dravidians. Not that

it mattered much what the nationality or colour of the dancers might be; for on the stage they wore enormous masks—huge false heads, grinning, horned, and diabolic, which, it was claimed in the announcement, were those in which the ritual dances were performed before the Dalai Lama in the principal convent of Lhassa. Comparing my memories of them with such knowledge of oriental art as I now possess, I imagine that they came in reality from the shop of some theatrical property maker in Marseilles, from which place the devil dancers had originally started. But they were none the less startling and blood-curdling for that; just as the dances themselves were none the less salaciously symbolical, none the less typically and conventionally “oriental” for having been in great measure invented by the Frenchmen, who provided all the plot and dramatic substance of the ballets, while the astonished and admiring Indians contributed only a few recollections of Siva worship and the cult of the beneficent *linga*. This cooperation between East and West was what ensured the performance its success; the western substance satisfied by its perfect familiarity, while the eastern detail gave to the old situations a specious air of novelty and almost a new significance.

Charmed by the prospect of seeing what he supposed would be a few characteristic specimens of the religious rites of the mysterious East, and ambitious to improve my education by initiating me into the secrets of this Reality, my Uncle Spencer took me to see the dancers. But the dramatic pantomime of the Frenchmen represented a brand of Reality that my uncle did not at all approve of. He got up abruptly in the middle of the first dance, saying that he thought the circus would be more amusing; which, for me, it certainly was. For I was not of an age to appreciate either the plastic beauty or the peculiar moral significance of the devil dancers' performance.

"Hinduism," said my Uncle Spencer, as we threaded our way between the booths and the whirling machines, "has sadly degenerated from its original Brahmanistic purity." And he began to expound to me, raising his voice to make itself heard through the noise of the steam organs, the principles of Brahmanism. My Uncle Spencer had a great weakness for oriental religions.

"Well," asked Mlle Leeauw, when we got back for dinner, "and how did you enjoy the dancers?"

I told her that my Uncle Spencer had thought that I should find the circus more

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amusing. Antonieke nodded with a significant air of understanding. "Poor man," she said, and she went on to wonder how Louiseke, who was going to see the dancers that evening, would enjoy the show.

I never knew precisely what happened; for a mystery and, as it were, a zone of silence surrounded the event, and my curiosity about everything to do with Louiseke was too feeble to carry me through it. All I know is that, two or three days later, near the end of the kermesse, young Albert Snyders, the lawyer's son, came up to me in the street and asked, with the gleeful expression of one who says something which he is sure his interlocutor will find disagreeable: "Well, and what do you think of your Louiseke and her carryings on with the black man?"

I answered truthfully that I had heard nothing about any such thing, and that in any case Louiseke wasn't our Louiseke, and that I didn't care in the least what she did or what might happen to her.

"Not heard about it?" said young Snyders incredulously. "But the black man goes to her house every evening, and she gives him gin, and they sing together, and people see their shadows dancing on the curtains. Everybody's talking about it."

I am afraid that I disappointed young

Snyders. He had hoped to get a rise out of me, and he miserably failed. His errors were two: first, to have supposed that I regarded Louiseke as our Louiseke, merely because her sister happened to be my Uncle Spencer's housekeeper; and, secondly, to have attributed to me a knowledge of the world sufficient to allow me to realise the scandalousness of Louiseke's conduct. Whereas I disliked Louiseke, took no interest in her actions, and could, moreover, see nothing out of the ordinary in what she was supposed to have done.

Confronted by my unshakable calm, young Snyders retired, rather crestfallen. But he revenged himself before he went by telling me that I must be very stupid and, what I found more insulting, a great baby not to understand.

Antonieke, to whom I repeated young Snyders's words, merely said that the boy ought to be whipped, specifying with a wealth of precise detail and a gusto that were entirely Flemish how, with what instrument, and where the punishment ought to be applied. I thought no more about the incident. But I noticed after the kermesse was over and the Grand' Place had become once more the silent and empty Grand' Place of ordinary days, I noticed loitering aimlessly about the

streets a stout, coffee-coloured man, whom the children of Longres, like those three rude boys in *Struwwelpeter*, pursued at a distance, contorting themselves with mirth. That year I went back to England earlier than usual; for I had been invited to spend the last three weeks of my holidays with a school friend (alas, at Hastings, so that my knowledge of the earth's surface was not materially widened by the visit). When I returned to Longres for the Christmas holidays I found that Louiseke was no longer mere Louiseke, but the bride of a coffee-coloured husband. Madame Alphonse they called her; for nobody could bother with the devil dancer's real name: it had an Al- in it somewhere—that was all that was known. Monsieur and Madame Alphonse. But the news when I heard it did not particularly impress me.

And even if I had been curious to know more, dense silence continued to envelop the episode. Antonieke never spoke to me of it; and lacking all interest in this kind of Reality, disapproving of it even, my Uncle Spencer seemed to take it silently for granted. That the subject was copiously discussed by the gossips of Longres I do not doubt; and remembering Louiseke's own censorious anecdote, I can imagine how. But in my hearing it was never discussed; expressly, I

imagine—for I lived under the protection of Antonieke, and people were afraid of Antonieke. So it came about that the story remained for me no more remarkable than that story recorded by Edward Lear of the

“ . . . old Man of Jamaica
 Who casually married a Quaker;
 But she cried out, ‘Alack,
 I have married a black!’
 Which distressed that old Man of Jamaica.”

And perhaps, after all, that is the best way of regarding such incidents—unquestioningly, without inquisitiveness. For we are all much too curious about the affairs of our neighbours. Particularly about the affairs of an erotic nature. What an itch we have to know whether Mr. Smith makes love to his secretary, whether his wife consoles herself, whether a certain Cabinet Minister is really the satyr he is rumoured to be. And meanwhile the most incredible miracles are happening all round us: stones, when we lift them and let them go, fall to the ground; the sun shines; bees visit the flowers; seeds grow into plants, a cell in nine months multiplies its weight a few thousands of thousands of times, and is a child; and men think, creating the world they live in. These things leave us almost perfectly indifferent.

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But concerning the ways in which different individuals satisfy the cravings of one particular instinct we have, in spite of the frightful monotony of the situation, in spite of the one well-known, inevitable consummation, an endless and ever-fresh curiosity. Some day, perhaps, we may become a little tired of books whose theme is always this particular instinct. Some day, it may be, the successful novelist will write about man's relation to God, to nature, to his own thoughts and the obscure reality on which they work, not about man's relation with woman. Meanwhile, however, . . .

By what stages the old maid passed from her devoutness and her censorious condemnation of love to her passion for the Dravidian I can only guess. Most likely there were no stages at all, but the conversion was sudden and fulgurating, like that upon the road to Damascus—and like that, secretly and unconsciously prepared for, long before the event. It was the sheer wildness, no doubt, the triumphant bestiality, and paganism of the dances that bowled her over, that irresistibly broke down the repressive barriers behind which, all too human, Louiseke's nature had so long chafed. As to Alphonse himself, there could be no question about his motives. Devil dancing, he had found, was

an exhausting, precarious, and not very profitable profession. He was growing stout, his heart was not so strong as it had been, he was beginning to feel himself middle-aged. Louiseke and her little income came as a providence. What did her face matter? He did not hesitate.

Monsieur and Madame Alphonse took a little shop in the Rue Neuve. Before he left India and turned devil dancer, Alphonse had been a cobbler in Madras—and as such was capable of contaminating a Brahman at a distance of twenty-four feet; now, having become an eater of beef and an outcast, he was morally infectious at no less than sixty-four feet. But in Longres, luckily, there were no Brahmans.

He was a large, fat, snub-faced, and shiny man, constantly smiling, with a smile that reminded me of a distended accordion. Many a pair of boots I took to him to be soled—for Antonieke, though she was horrified at having what she called a negro for her brother-in-law, though she had quarrelled with her sister about her insane and monstrous folly, and would hardly be reconciled to her, Antonieke insisted that all our custom should go to the new cobbler. That, as she explained, “owed itself.” The duty of members of one family to forward

one another's affairs overrode, in her estimation, the mere personal quarrels that might arise between them.

My Uncle Spencer was a frequent caller at the cobbler's shop, where he would sit for hours, while M. Alphonse tapped away at his last, listening to mythological anecdotes out of the "Ramayana" or "Mahabharata," and discussing the Brahmanistic philosophy, of which, of course, he knew far more than a poor Sudra like Alphonse. My Uncle Spencer would come back from these visits in the best of humours.

"A most interesting man, your brother-in-law," he would say to Antonieke. "We had a long talk about Siva this afternoon. Most interesting!"

But Antonieke only shrugged her shoulders. "*Mais c'est un nègre,*" she muttered. And my Uncle Spencer might assure her as much as he liked that Dravidians were not negroes and that Alphonse very likely had good Aryan blood in his veins. It was useless. Antonieke would not be persuaded, would not even listen. It was all very well for the rich to believe things like that, but a negro, after all, was a negro; and that was all about it.

M. Alphonse was a man of many accomplishments; for besides all the rest, he was

an expert palmist and told fortunes from the hand with a gravity, a magisterial certainty, that were almost enough in themselves to make what he said come true. This magian and typically Oriental accomplishment was learnt on the road between Marseilles and Longres from a charlatan in the travelling company of amusement makers with whom he had come. But he did the trick in the grand prophetic style, so that people credited his cheiromancy with all the magical authority of the mysterious East. But M. Alphonse could not be persuaded to prophesy for every comer. It was noticed that he selected his subjects almost exclusively from among his female customers, as though he were only interested in the fates of women. I could hint as much as I liked that I should like to have my fortune told, I could ask him outright to look at my hand; but in vain. On these occasions he was always too busy to look, or was not feeling in the prophetic mood. But if a young woman should now come into the shop, time immediately created itself, the prophetic mood came back. And without waiting for her to ask him, he would seize her hand, pore over it, pat and prod the palm with his thick brown fingers, every now and then turning up towards his subject those dark eyes, made the darker and more expres-

sive by the brilliance of the bluish whites in which they were set, and expanding his accordion smile. And he would prophesy love—a great deal of it—love with superb dark men, and rows of children; benevolent dark strangers and blond villains; unexpected fortunes, long life—all, in fact, that the heart could desire. And all the time he squeezed and patted the hand—white between his dark Dravidian paws—from which he read these secrets; he rolled his eyes within their shiny blue enamel setting, and across all the breadth of his fat cheeks the accordion of his smile opened and shut.

My pride and my young sense of justice were horribly offended on these occasions. The inconsistency of a man who had no time to tell my fortune, but an infinite leisure for others, seemed to me abstractly reprehensible and personally insulting. I professed, even at that age, not to believe in palmistry; that is to say, I found the fortunes which M. Alphonse prophesied for others absurd. But my interest in my own personality and my own fate was so enormous that it seemed to me, somehow, that everything said about me must have a certain significance. And if M. Alphonse had taken my hand, looked at it, and said, “You are generous; your head is as large as your heart; you will have a severe

illness at thirty-eight, but your life after that will be healthy into extreme old age; you will make a large fortune early in your career, but you must beware of fair-haired strangers with blue eyes," I should have made an exception and decided for the nonce that there must be something in it. But, alas, M. Alphonse never did take my hand; he never told me anything. I felt most cruelly offended, and I felt astonished too. For it seemed to me a most extraordinary thing that a subject which was so obviously fascinating and so important as my character and future should not interest M. Alphonse as much as it did me. That he should prefer to dabble in the dull fates and silly insignificant characters of a lot of stupid young women seemed to me incredible and outrageous.

There was another who, it seemed, shared my opinion. That was Louiseke. If ever she came into the shop from the little back sitting-room—and she was perpetually popping out through the dark doorway like a cuckoo on the stroke of noon from its clock—and found her husband telling the fortune of a female customer, her witch-like face would take on an expression more than ordinarily malevolent.

"Alphonse!" she would say significantly.

And Alphonse dropped his subject's hand, looked round towards the door, and, rolling his enamelled eyes, creasing his fat cheeks in a charming smile, flashing his ivory teeth, would say something amiable.

But Louiseke did not cease to frown. "If you must tell somebody's fortune," she said, when the customer had left the shop, "why don't you tell the little gentleman's?" pointing to me. "I'm sure he would be only too delighted."

But instead of being grateful to Louiseke, instead of saying, "Oh, of course I'd like it," and holding out my hand, I always perversely shook my head. "No, no," I said. "I don't want to worry M. Alphonse." But I longed for Alphonse to insist on telling me about my exquisite and marvellous self. In my pride, I did not like to owe my happiness to Louiseke, I did not want to feel that I was taking advantage of her irritation and Alphonse's desire to mollify her. And besides pride, I was actuated by that strange nameless perversity, which so often makes us insist on doing what we do not want to do—such as making love to a woman we do not like and whose intimacy, we know, will bring us nothing but vexation—or makes us stubbornly decline to do what we have been passionately desiring, merely because the op-

portunity of doing what we wanted has not presented itself in exactly the way we anticipated, or because the person who offered to fulfil our desires has not been sufficiently insistent with his offers. Alphonse, on these occasions, having no curiosity about my future and taking no pleasure in kneading my small and dirty hand, always took my refusals quite literally and finally, and began to work again with a redoubled ardour. And I would leave the shop, vexed with myself for having let slip the opportunity when it was within my grasp; furious with Louiseke for having presented it in such a way that the seizing of it would be humiliating, and with Alphonse for his obtuseness in failing to observe how much I desired that he should look at my hand, and his gross discourtesy for not insisting even in the teeth of my refusal.

Years passed; my holidays and the seasons succeeded one another with regularity. Summer and the green poplars and my Uncle Spencer's amiability gave place to the cold season of sugar-making, to scatological symbols in chocolate, to early darkness and the moral gloom of my Uncle Spencer's annual neurasthenia. And half-way between the two extremes came the Easter holidays, pale green and hopefully burgeoning, tepid with

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temperate warmth and a moderate amiability. There were terms, too, as well as holidays. Eastbourne knew me no more; my knowledge of the globe expanded; I became a public schoolboy.

At fifteen, I remember, I entered upon a period of priggishness which made me solemn beyond my years. There are many boys who do not know how young they are till they have come of age, and a young man is often much less on his dignity than a growing schoolboy, who is afraid of being despised for his callowness. It was during this period that I wrote from Longres a letter to one of my school friends, which he fortunately preserved, so that we were able to re-read it, years later, and to laugh and marvel at those grave, academic old gentlemen we were in our youth. He had written me a letter describing his sister's marriage, to which I replied in these terms:

“How rapidly, my dear Henry, the saffron robe and Hymen's torches give place to the nenia, the funeral urn, and the cypress! While your days have been passed among the jocundities of a marriage feast, mine have been darkened by the circumambient horrors of death. Such, indeed, is life.”

And I underlined the philosophic reflection.

The horrors of death made more show in my sonorous antitheses than they did in my life. For though the event made a certain impression upon me—for it was the first thing of the kind that had happened within my own personal orbit—I cannot pretend that I was very seriously moved when Louiseke died too old to have attempted the experiment, in giving birth to a half-Flemish, half-Dravidian daughter, who died with her. My Uncle Spencer, anxious to introduce me to the Realities of Life, took me to see the corpse. Death had a little tempered Louiseke's ugliness. In the presence of that absolute repose I suddenly felt ashamed of having always disliked Louiseke so much. I wanted to be able to explain to her that, if only I had known she was going to die, I would have been nicer to her, I would have tried to like her more. And all at once I found myself crying.

Downstairs in the back parlour M. Alphonse was crying too, noisily, lamentably, as was his duty. Three days later, when his duty had been sufficiently done and the conventions satisfied, he became all at once exceedingly philosophic about his loss. Louiseke's little income was now his; and adding to it what he made by his cobbling,

he could live in almost princely style. A week or two after the funeral the kermesse began. His old companions, who had danced several times backwards and forwards across the face of Europe since they were last in Longres, reappeared unexpectedly on the Grand' Place. Alphonse treated himself to the pleasure of playing the generous host, and every evening when their show was over the devils unhorned themselves, and over the glasses in the little back parlour behind Alphonse's shop they talked convivially of old times, and congratulated their companion, a little enviously, on his prodigious good fortune.

In the years immediately preceding the war I was not often in Longres. My parents had come back from India; my holidays were passed with them. And when holidays transformed themselves into university vacations and I was old enough to look after myself, I spent most of my leisure in travelling in France, Italy, or Germany, and it was only rarely and fleetingly—on the way to Milan, on my way back from Cologne, or after a fortnight among the Dutch picture galleries—that I now revisited the house on the Grand' Place, where I had passed so many, and on the whole such happy, days. I liked my Uncle Spencer still, but he had

ceased to be an admired being, and his opinions, instead of rooting themselves and proliferating within my mind, as once they did, seemed mostly, in the light of my own knowledge and experience, too fantastic even to be worth refuting. I listened to him now with all the young man's intolerance of the opinions of the old (and my Uncle Spencer, though only fifty, seemed to me utterly fossilised and antediluvian), acquiescing in all that he said with a smile in which a more suspicious and less single-hearted man would have seen the amused contempt. My Uncle Spencer was leaning during these years more and more towards the occult sciences. He talked less of the construction of domes and more of Hahnemann's mystic high potentials, more of Swedenborg, more of Brahmanistic philosophy, in which he had by this time thoroughly indoctrinated M. Alphonse; and he was enthusiastic now about a new topic—the calculating horses of Elberfeld, which, at that time, were making a great noise in the world by their startling ability to extract cube roots in their heads. Strong in the materialistic philosophy, the careless and unreflecting scepticism which were, in those days, the orthodoxy of every young man who thought himself intelligent, I found my Uncle Spencer's mystical and religious pre-

occupations marvellously ludicrous. I should think them less ridiculous now, when it is the easy creed of my boyhood that has come to look rather queer. Now it is possible—it is, indeed, almost necessary—for a man of science to be also a mystic. But there were excuses then for supposing that one could only combine mysticism with the faulty knowledge and the fantastic mental eccentricity of an Uncle Spencer. One lives and learns.

With Mlle Leeauw, on these later visits, I felt, I must confess, not entirely at my ease. Antonieke saw me as essentially the same little boy who had come so regularly all those years, holiday after holiday, to Longres. Her talk with me was always of the joyous events of the past—of which she had that extraordinarily accurate and detailed memory which men and women, whose minds are not exercised by intellectual preoccupations and who do not read much, always astonish their more studious fellows by possessing. Plunged as I then was in all the newly discovered delights of history, philosophy, and art, I was too busy to take more than a very feeble interest in my childish past. Had there been skating on the canals in 1905? Had I been bitten by a horse-fly, the summer before, so poisonously that my

cheek swelled up like a balloon and I had to go to bed? Possibly, possibly; now that I was reminded of these things I did, dimly, remember. But of what earthly interest were facts such as these when I had Plato, the novels of Dostoievsky, the frescoes of Michelangelo to think of? How entirely irrelevant they were to, shall we say, David Hume! How insipid compared with the sayings of Zarathustra, the Coriolan overture, the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud! But for poor Antonieke they were all her life. I felt all the time that I was not being as sympathetic with her as I ought to have been. But was it my fault? Could I rebecome what I had been, or make her suddenly different from what she was?

At the beginning of August, 1914 I was staying at Longres on my way to the Ardennes, where I meant to settle down quietly for a month or so with two or three friends, to do a little solid reading before going south to Italy in September. Strong in the faith of the German professor who had proved, by the theories of ballistics and probabilities, that war was now out of the question, my Uncle Spencer paid no attention to the premonitory rumbles. It was just another little Agadir crisis and would lead to nothing. I too—absorbed, I remember, in the reading of

William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience*—paid no attention; I did not even look at the papers. At that time, still, my Uncle Spencer's convictions about the impossibility of war were also mine; I had had no experience to make me believe them unfounded, and, besides, they fitted in very well with my hopes, my aspirations, my political creed—for at that time I was an ardent syndicalist and internationalist.

And then, suddenly, it was all on top of us.

My Uncle Spencer, however, remained perfectly optimistic. After a week of fighting, he prophesied, the German professor would be proved right and they would have to stop. My own feeling, I remember, was one of a rather childish exhilaration; my excitement was much more powerful than my shock of horror. I felt rather as I had felt on the eve of the kermesse when, looking from my window, I gazed down at the mountebanks setting up their booths and engines in the square below. Something was really going to happen. That childish sense of excitement is, I suppose, the prevailing emotion at the beginning of a war. An intoxicating Bank Holiday air seems to blow through the streets. War is always popular, at the beginning.

I did not return immediately to England, but lingered for a few days at Longres, in the vague hope that I might "see something," or that perhaps my Uncle Spencer might really—as I still believed—be right, and that, perhaps the whole thing would be over in a few days. My hope that I should "see something" was fulfilled. But the something was not one of those brilliant and romantic spectacles I had imagined. It consisted of a few little troops of refugees from the villages round Liége—unshaven men, and haggard women with long tear-marks on their dusty cheeks, and little boys and girls tottering along as though in their sleep, dumb and stupid with fatigue. My Uncle Spencer took a family of them into his house. "In a few days," he said, "when everything's over, they'll be able to go home again." And when indignantly Antonieke repeated to him their stories of burnings and shootings, he wouldn't believe them.

"After all," he said, "this is the twentieth century. These things don't happen nowadays. These poor people are too tired and frightened to know exactly what they are saying."

In the second week of August I went back to England. My Uncle Spencer was quite indignant when I suggested that he should

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come back with me. To begin with, he said, it would all be over so very soon. In the second place, this was the twentieth century—which was what the Cretans said, no doubt, when in 1500 B.C., after two thousand years of peace, prosperity, and progressive civilisation, they were threatened by the wild men from the north. In the third place, he must stay at Longres to look after his interests. I did not press him any further; it would have been useless.

“Good-bye, dear boy,” he said, and there was an unaccustomed note of emotion in his voice, “good-bye.”

The train slowly moved away. Looking out of the window, I could see him standing on the platform, waving his hat. His hair was white all over now, but his face was as young, his eyes as darkly bright, his small spare body as straight and agile as when I had known him first.

“Good-bye, good-bye.”

I was not to see him again for nearly five years.

Louvain was burnt on the 19th of August. The Germans entered Brussels on the 20th. Longres, though farther east than Louvain, was not occupied till two or three days later—for the town lay off the direct route to Brussels and the interior. One of the first

acts of the German commandant was to put my Uncle Spencer and M. Alphonse under arrest. It was not that they had done anything; it was merely to their existence that he objected. The fact that they were British subjects was in itself extremely incriminating.

"Aber wir sind," my Uncle Spencer protested in his rather rudimentary German, "im zwanzigsten jahrhunderd. Und der—or is it das?—krieg wird nicht lang . . ." he stammered, searched hopelessly for the word, "well, in any case," he concluded, relapsing into his own language and happy to be able to express his astonished protest with fluency, "it won't last a week."

"So we hope," the commandant replied in excellent English, smiling. "But meanwhile I regret . . ."

My Uncle Spencer and his fellow-Briton were locked up for the time being in the lunatic asylum. A few days later they were sent under escort to Brussels. Alphonse, my Uncle Spencer told me afterwards, bore his misfortune with exemplary and oriental patience. Mute, uncomplaining, obedient, he stayed where his captors put him, like a large brown bundle left by the traveller on the platform, while he goes to the buffet for a drink and a sandwich. And more docile than

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a mere bundle, mutely, obediently, he followed wherever he was led.

“I wish I could have imitated him,” said my Uncle Spencer. “But I couldn’t. My blood fairly boiled.”

And from what I remembered of him in the sugar-making season I could imagine the depth, the fury of my Uncle Spencer’s impatience and irritation.

“But this is the twentieth century,” he kept repeating to the guards. “And I have nothing to do with your beastly war. And where the devil are you taking us? And how much longer are we to wait in this damned station without our lunch?” He spoke as a rich man, accustomed to being able to buy every convenience and consideration. The soldiers, who had the patience of poor men and were well used to being ordered hither and thither, to waiting indefinitely in the place where they were told to wait, could not understand this wild irritation against what they regarded as the natural order of things. My Uncle Spencer first amused them; then, as his impatience grew greater instead of less, he began to annoy them.

In the end, one of his guards lost patience too, and gave him a great kick in the breech to make him hold his tongue. My Uncle Spencer turned round and rushed at the man;

but another soldier tripped him up with his rifle, and he tumbled heavily to the ground. Slowly he picked himself up; the soldiers were roaring with laughter. Alphonse, like a brown package, stood where they had put him, motionless, expressionless, his eyes shut.

In the top floor of the Ministry of the Interior the German authorities had established a sort of temporary internment camp. All suspicious persons—dubious foreigners, recalcitrant natives, any one suspected by the invaders of possessing a dangerous influence over his neighbours—were sent to Brussels and shut up in the Ministry of the Interior, to remain there until the authorities should have time to go into their case. It was into this makeshift prison that my Uncle Spencer and his Dravidian compatriot were ushered, one sweltering afternoon towards the end of August. In an ordinary year, my Uncle Spencer reflected, the kermesse at Longres would now be in full swing. The fat woman would be washing her face with her bosom, the Figaros would be re-enacting amid sobs the Passion of Our Saviour, the armless lady would be drinking healths with her toes, the vendor of raw mussels would be listening anxiously for the first hoarse sound that might be taken for a cough. Where were they all this year, all these good people?

And where was he himself? Incredulously he looked about him.

In the attics of the Ministry of the Interior the company was strange and mixed. There were Belgian noblemen whom the invaders considered it unsafe to leave in their châteaux among their peasantry. There were a Russian countess and an anarchist, incarcerated on account of their nationality. There was an opera singer, who might be an international spy. There was a little golden-haired male impersonator, who had been appearing at a music-hall in Liège, and whose offence, like that of my Uncle Spencer and the Dravidian, was to have been a British subject. There were a number of miscellaneous Frenchmen and Frenchwomen, caught on the wrong side of the border. There was an organ-grinder, who had gone on playing the "Brabançonne" when told to stop, and a whole collection of other Belgians, of all classes and both sexes, from every part of the country, who had committed some crime or other, or perhaps had contrived merely to look suspicious, and who were now waiting to have their fate decided, as soon as the authorities should have time to pay attention to them.

Into this haphazardly assembled society my Uncle Spencer and the Dravidian were

now casually dropped. The door closed behind them; they were left, like new arrivals in hell, to make the best of their situation.

The top floor of the Ministry of the Interior was divided up into one very large and a number of small rooms, the latter lined, for the most part, with pigeon-holes and filing cabinets in which were stored the paper products of years of bureaucratic activity.

In the smaller chambers the prisoners had placed the straw mattresses allotted to them by their gaolers; the men slept in the rooms at one end of the corridor, the women in those at the other end. The big room, which must once have housed the staff of the Ministry's registry, still contained a number of desks, tables, and chairs; it served now as the prisoners' drawing-room, dining-room, and recreation ground. There was no bathroom, and only one washing-basin and one *chalet de nécessité*, as my Uncle Spencer, with a characteristic euphemism, always called it: Life in the attics of the Ministry of the Interior was not particularly agreeable.

My Uncle Spencer noticed that those of the prisoners who were not sunk in gloom and a sickening anxiety for the future, preserved an almost too boisterous cheerfulness. You had, it seemed, either to take this sort of thing as a prodigious joke, or brood over

it as the most horrible of nightmares. There seemed to be no alternative. In time, no doubt, the two extremes would level down to the same calm resignation. But confinement had still been too short for that; the situation was still too new, dream-like, and phantasmagorical, and fate too uncertain.

The cheerful ones abounded in japes, loud laughter, and practical jokes. They had created in the prison a kind of private-school atmosphere. Those whose confinement was oldest (and some had been in the Ministry for nearly a week now, almost for the day of the German entry into Brussels) assumed the inalienable right of seniors to make the new arrivals feel raw and uncomfortable. Each freshman was subjected to a searching cross-examination, like that which awaits the new boy at his first school. Sometimes, if the latest victim seemed particularly ingenuous, they would play a little practical joke on him.

The leader of the cheerful party was a middle-aged Belgian journalist—a powerful, stout man, with carrotty red moustaches and a high crimson complexion, a huge roaring voice and a boundless gift for laughter and genial Rabelaisian conversation. At the appearance of the meek Dravidian he had fairly whooped with delight. So great, in-

deed, was his interest in Alphonse that my Uncle Spencer escaped with the most perfunctory examination and the minimum of playful "ragging." It was perhaps for the best; my Uncle Spencer was in no mood to be trifled with, even by a fellow-sufferer.

Round poor Alphonse the journalist immediately improvised a farce. Sitting like a judge at one of the desks in the large room, he had the Dravidian brought before him, giving him to understand that he was the German commissary who had to deal with his case. Under cross-examination the Dravidian was made to tell his whole history. Born, Madras; profession, cobbler—a clerk took down all his answers as he delivered them. When he spoke of devil dancing, the judge made him give a specimen of his performance there and then in front of the desk. The question of his marriage with Louiseke was gone into in the most intimate detail. Convinced that his liberty and probably his life depended on his sincerity, Alphonse answered every question as truthfully as he possibly could.

In the end, the journalist, clearing his throat, gravely summed up and gave judgment. Innocent. The prisoner would forthwith be released. On a large sheet of official paper he wrote *laissez passer*, signed it Von

der Golz, and, opening a drawer of the desk, selected from among the numerous official seals it contained that with which, in happier times, certain agricultural diplomas were stamped. On the thick red wax appeared the figure of a prize shorthorn cow with, round it, the words: "Pour l'amélioration de la race bovine."

"Here," roared the journalist, handing him the sealed paper. "You may go."

Poor Alphonse took his *laissez passer* and, bowing at intervals almost to the ground, retreated backwards out of the room. Joyously he picked up his hat and his little bundle, ran to the door, knocked and called. The sentry outside opened to see what was the matter. Alphonse produced his passport.

"Aber was ist das?" asked the sentry.

Alphonse pointed to the seal; for the amelioration of the bovine race; to the signature; Von der Golz. The sentry, thinking that it was he, not the Dravidian, who was the victim of the joke, became annoyed. He pushed Alphonse roughly back through the door; and when, protesting, propitiatively murmuring and smiling, the poor man advanced again to explain to the sentry his mistake, the soldier picked up his rifle and with the butt gave him a prod in the belly, which sent him back, doubled up and cough-

ing, along the corridor. The door slammed to. Vainly, when he had recovered, Alphonse hammered and shouted. It did not open again. My Uncle Spencer found him standing there—knocking, listening, knocking again. The tears were streaming down his cheeks; it was a long time before my Uncle Spencer could make him understand that the whole affair had been nothing but a joke. At last, however, Alphonse permitted himself to be led off to his mattress. In silence he lay down and closed his eyes. In his right hand he still held the passport—firmly, preciously between his thick brown fingers. He would not throw it away; not yet. Perhaps if he went to sleep this incident at the door would prove, when he woke up, to have been a dream. The paper would have ceased to be a joke, and when, to-morrow, he showed it again, who knew? the sentry would present arms and he would walk downstairs; and all the soldiers in the courtyard would salute and he would walk out into the sunny streets, waving the signature, pointing to the thick red seal.

Quite still he lay there. His arm was crossed over his body. From between the fingers of his hand hung the paper. Bold, as only the signature of a conquering general could be, Von der Goltz sprawled across

the sheet. And in the bottom right-hand corner, stamped in the red wax, the image of the sacred cow was like a symbol of true salvation from across the separating ocean and the centuries. *Pour l'amélioration de la race bovine.* But might it not be more reasonable, in the circumstances, to begin with the human race?

My Uncle Spencer left him to go and expostulate with the journalist on the barbarity of his joke. He found the man sitting on the floor—for there were not enough chairs to go round—teaching the golden-haired male impersonator how to swear in French.

“And this,” he was saying, in his loud, jolly voice, “this is what you must say to Von der Golz if ever you see him.” And he let off a string of abusive words, which the little male impersonator carefully repeated, distorted by her drawling English intonation, in her clear, shrill voice: “Sarl esspayss de coshaw.” The journalist roared with delighted laughter and slapped his thighs. “What comes after that?” she asked.

“Excuse me,” said my Uncle Spencer, breaking in on the lesson. He was blushing slightly. He never liked hearing this sort of language—and in the mouth of a young woman, (a compatriot too, it seemed), it

sounded doubly distressing. "Excuse me." And he begged the journalist not to play any more jokes on Alphonse. "He takes it too much to heart," he explained.

At his description of the Dravidian's despair, the little male impersonator was touched almost to tears. And the journalist, who, like all the rest of us, had a heart of gold whenever he was reminded of its existence—and, like all the rest of us, he needed pretty frequent reminders, for his own pleasures and interests prevented him very often from remembering it—the journalist was extremely sorry at what he had done, declared that he had no idea that Alphonse would take the little farce so seriously, and promised for the future to leave him in peace.

The days passed; the nightmare became habitual, followed a routine. Three times a day the meagre supply of unappetising food arrived and was consumed. Twice a day an officer with a little squad of soldiers behind him made a tour of inspection. In the morning one waited for one's turn to wash; but the afternoons were immense gulfs of hot time, which the prisoners tried to fill with games, with talk, with the reading of ancient dosiers from the files, with solitary brooding or with pacing up and down the corridor—twenty steps each way, up and

down, up and down, till one had covered in one's imagination the distance between one loved and familiar place and another. Up and down, up and down. My Uncle Spencer sometimes walked along the poplar-lined high road between Longres and Waret; sometimes from Charing Cross along the Strand, under the railway bridge and up the hill to St. Paul's and from St. Paul's to the Bank, and from the Bank tortuously to the Tower of London, the river, and the ships. Sometimes he walked with his brother from Chamonix to the Montanvert; from Grenoble over the pass to the Grande Chartreuse. Sometimes, less strenuously, he walked with his long-dead mother through the glades of Windsor Forest, where the grass is so green in early summer that it seems as though each blade were an emerald illumined from within; and here and there among the oak trees the dark-leaved rhododendrons light their innumerable rosy lamps.

In the evening the cheerful ones, with the journalist at their head, organised entertainments for the amusement of the company. The journalist himself recited poems of his own composition about the Kaiser. One of the Frenchmen did some amateur conjuring with packs of cards, handkerchiefs, and coins.

The opera singer bawled out at the top of his prodigious tenor, "La donne è mobile," "O sole mio," and when something more serious was called for, César Frank's "Dieu s'avance à travers la lande"; which last, however, he sang in so richly operatic a style that my Uncle Spencer, who was very fond of this particular song, could hardly recognise it. But the most popular turn was always that of "the celebrated diva, Emmy Wendle," as the journalist called her, when he introduced her to the company. The enthusiasm was tremendous when Emmy Wendle appeared,—dressed in an Eton jacket, broad starched collar, striped trousers, and a top hat, and carrying in her hand a little cane—did two or three rattling clog dances and sang a song with the chorus:

"We are the nuts that get the girls
Ev-ery time;
We get the ones with the curly curls,
We get the peaches, we get the pearls—
Ev-ery time."

And when, at the end of the turn, she took off her top hat, and standing rigidly at attention, like a soldier, her childish snubby little face very grave, her blue eyes fixed on visions not of this world, sang in her tuneless street-urchin's voice an astonishingly Eng-

lish version of the "Brabançonne," then there was something more than enthusiasm. For men would suddenly feel the tears coming into their eyes, and women wept outright; and when it was over, everybody violently stamped and clapped and waved handkerchiefs, and laughed, and shouted imprecations against the Germans, and said, "Vive la Belgique!" and ran to Emmy Wendle, and took her hand, or slapped her on the back as though she had really been a boy, or kissed her—but as though she were not a girl, and dressed in rather tight striped trousers at that—kissed her as though she were a symbol of the country, a visible and charming personification of their own patriotism and misfortunes.

When the evening's entertainment was over, the company began to disperse. Stretched on their hard mattresses along the floor, the prisoners uneasily slept or lay awake through the sultry nights, listening to the steps of the sentries in the court below and hearing every now and then through the unnatural silence of the invaded town, the heavy beat, beat, beat of a regiment marching along the deserted street, the rumble and sharp, hoofy clatter of a battery on the move towards some distant front.

The days passed. My Uncle Spencer soon

grew accustomed to the strange little hell into which he had been dropped. He knew it by heart. A huge, square room, low-ceilinged and stifling under the hot leads. Men in their shirt-sleeves standing, or sitting, some on chairs, some on the corner of a desk or a table, some on the floor. Some leaned their elbows on the window-sill and looked out, satisfying their eyes with the sight of the trees in the park across the street, breathing a purer air—for the air in the room was stale, twice-breathed, and smelt of sweat, tobacco and cabbage soup.

From the first the prisoners had divided themselves, automatically almost, into little separate groups. Equal in their misery, they still retained their social distinctions. The organ-grinder and the artisans and peasants always sat together in one corner on the floor, playing games with a greasy pack of cards, smoking and, in spite of expostulations, in spite of sincere efforts to restrain themselves, spitting on the floor all round them.

“Mine!” the organ-grinder would say triumphantly, and plank down his ace of hearts. “Mine!” And profusely, to emphasise his satisfaction, he spat. “Ah, pardon!” Remembering too late, he looked apologetically round the room. “Excuse me.” And he would get up, rub the gob of

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spittle into the floor with his boot, and going to the window would lean out and spit again—not that he felt any need to, having spat only a moment before, but for the sake of showing that he had good manners and could spit out of the window and not on the floor when he thought of it.

Another separate group was that of the aristocracy. There was the little old count with a face like a teapot—such shiny round cheeks, such a thin, irrelevant nose! and the young count with the monocle—the one so exquisitely affable with every one and yet so remote and aloof under all his politeness; the other so arrogant in manner, but, one could see, so wistfully wishing that his social position would permit him to mingle with his spiritual equals. The old count politely laughed whenever the journalist or some other member of the cheerful party made a joke; the young count scowled, till the only smooth surface left in his corrugated face was the monocle. But he longed to be allowed to join in the horse-play and the jokes. With the two counts were associated two or three rich and important citizens, among them during the first days my Uncle Spencer. But other interests were to make him abandon their company almost completely after a while.

On the fringes of their circle hovered occasionally the Russian countess. This lady spent most of the day in her sleeping apartment, lying on her mattress and smoking cigarettes. She had decided views about the respect that was due to her rank, and expected the wash-house to be immediately evacuated whenever she expressed a desire to use it. On being told that she must wait her turn, she flew into a rage. When she was bored with being alone, she would come into the living-room to find somebody to talk to. On one occasion she took my Uncle Spencer aside and told him at great length and with a wealth of intimate detail about the ninth and greatest love affair of her life. In future, whenever my Uncle Spencer caught sight of her turning her large, dark, rather protruding eyes round the room, he took care to be absorbed in conversation with somebody else.

Her compatriot, the anarchist, was a Jewish-looking man with a black beard and a nose like the figure six. He associated himself with none of the little groups, was delighted by the war, which he gleefully prophesied would destroy so-called civilisation, and made a point of being as disagreeable as he could to every one—particularly to the countess, whom he was able to insult

confidentially in Russian. It was in obedience to the same democratic principles that he possessed himself of the only arm-chair in the prison—it must have been the throne of at least a *sous chef de division*—refusing to part with it even for a lady or an invalid. He sat in it immovably all day, put it between his mattress and the wall at night, and took it with him even into the wash-house and the *chalet de nécessité*.

The cheerful party grouped itself, planet fashion, round the radiant jollity of the journalist. His favourite amusement was hunting through the files for curious dossiers which he could read out, with appropriate comments and improvised emendations to the assembled group. But the most relished of all his jokes was played ritually every morning when he went through the papers of nobility of the whole Belgic aristocracy (discovered, neatly stowed away, in a cupboard in the corridor), selecting from among the noble names a few high-sounding titles which he would carry with him to the chalet of necessity. His disciples included a number of burgesses, French and Belgian; a rather odious and spotty young English bank clerk caught on his foreign holiday; the Russian countess in certain moods; the male impersonator, on and off; and the opera singer.

With this last my Uncle Spencer, who was a great lover of music and even a moderately accomplished pianist, made frequent attempts to talk about his favourite art. But the opera singer, he found, was only interested in music in so far as it affected the tenor voice. He had consequently never heard of Bach or Beethoven. On Leoncavallo, however, on Puccini, Saint-Saëns, and Gounod he was extremely knowledgeable. He was an imposing personage, with a large handsome face and the gracious, condescending smile of a great man who does not object to talking even with you. With ladies, as he often gave it to be understood, he had a great success. But his fear of doing anything that might injure his voice was almost as powerful as his lasciviousness and his vanity; he passed his life, like a monk of the Thebaid, in a state of perpetual conflict. Outwardly and professedly a member of the cheerful party, the opera singer was secretly extremely concerned about his future. In private he discussed with my Uncle Spencer the horrors of the situation.

More obviously melancholy was the little grey-haired professor of Latin who spent most of the day walking up and down the corridor like a wolf in a cage, brooding and pining. Poor Alphonse, squatting with his

back to the wall near the door, was another sad and solitary figure. Sometimes he looked thoughtfully about him, watching his fellow-prisoners at their various occupations with the air of an inhabitant of eternity watching the incomprehensible antics of those who live in time. Sometimes he would spend whole hours with closed eyes in a state of meditation. When some one spoke to him, he came back to the present as though from an immense distance.

But, for my Uncle Spencer, how remote, gradually, they all became! They receded, they seemed to lose light; and with their fading the figure of Emmy Wendle came closer, grew larger and brighter. From the first moment he set eyes on her, sitting there on the floor, taking her lesson in vituperation from the journalist, my Uncle Spencer had taken particular notice of her. Making his way towards the pair of them, he had been agreeably struck by the childishness and innocence of her appearance—by the little snub nose, the blue eyes, the yellow hair, so stubbornly curly that she had to wear it cut short like a boy's, for there was no oiling down or tying back a long mane of it; even in her private feminine life there was a hint—and it only made her seem the more childish—of male impersonation. And then, com-

ing within earshot, it had been "sarl esspayss de coshaw" and a string besides of less endearing locutions proceeding from these lips. Startling, shocking. But a moment later, when he was telling them how hardly poor Alphonse had taken the joke, she said the most charming things and with such a real feeling in her cockney voice, such a genuine expression of sympathy and commiseration on her face, that my Uncle Spencer wondered whether he had heard aright, or if that "sarl coshaw" and all the rest could really have been pronounced by so delicate and sensitive a creature.

The state of agitation in which my Uncle Spencer had lived ever since his arrest, the astonishing and horrible novelty of his situation, had doubtless in some measure predisposed him to falling in love. For it frequently happens that one emotion—providing that it is not so powerful as to make us unconscious of anything but itself—will stimulate us to feel another. Thus danger, if it is not acute enough to cause panic, tends to attach us to those with whom we risk it, the feelings of compassion, sympathy, and even love being stimulated and quickened by apprehension. Grief, in the same way, often brings with it a need of affection and even, though we do not like to admit it to our-

selves, even obscurely a kind of desire; so that a passion of sorrow will convert itself by scarcely perceptible degrees, or sometimes suddenly, into a passion of love. My Uncle Spencer's habitual attitude towards women was one of extreme reserve. Once, as a young man, he had been in love and engaged to be married; but the object of his affections had jilted him for somebody else. Since then, partly from a fear of renewing his disappointment, partly out of a kind of romantic fidelity to the unfaithful one, he had avoided women, or at least taken pains not to fall in love any more, living always in a state of perfect celibacy, which would have done credit to the most virtuous of priests. But the agitations of the last few days had disturbed all his habits of life and thought. Apprehension of danger, an indignation that was a very different thing from the recurrent irritability of the sugar-making season, profound bewilderment, and a sense of mental disorientation had left him without his customary defences and in a state of more than ordinary susceptibility; so that when he saw, in the midst of his waking nightmare, that charming childish head, when he heard those gentle words of sympathy for the poor Dravidian, he was strangely moved; and he found himself

aware of Emmy Wendle as he had not been aware of any woman since the first unfaithful one of his youth had left him.

Everything conspired to make my Uncle Spencer take an interest in Emmy Wendle—everything, not merely his own emotional state, but the place, the time, the outward circumstances. He might have gone to see her at the music-hall every night for a year; and though he might have enjoyed her turn—and as a matter of fact he would not, for he would have thought it essentially rather vulgar—though he might have found her pretty and charming, it would never have occurred to him to try to make her acquaintance or introduce himself into her history. But here, in this detestable makeshift prison, she took on a new significance, she became the personification of all that was gracious, sweet, sympathetic, of all that was not war. And at the end of her performance (still, it was true, in poorish taste, but more permissible, seeing that it was given for the comfort of the afflicted) how profoundly impressive was her singing of the “Brabançonne!” She had become great with the greatness of the moment, with the grandeur of the emotions to which she was giving utterance in that harsh guttersnipe’s voice of hers—singing of exultations, agonies, and man’s un-

conquerable mind. We attribute to the symbol something of the sacredness of the thing or idea symbolised. Two bits of wood set cross-wise are not two ordinary bits of wood, and a divinity has hedged the weakest and worst of kings. Similarly, at any crisis in our lives, the most trivial object, or a person in himself insignificant, may become, for some reason, charged with all the greatness of the moment.

Even the "sarl coshaw" incident had helped to raise my Uncle Spencer's interest in Emmy Wendle. For if she was gentle, innocent, and young, if she personified in her small, bright self all the unhappiness and all the courage of a country, of the whole afflicted world, she was also fallible, feminine, and weak; she was subject to bad influences, she might be led astray. And the recollection of those gross phrases, candidly, innocently, and openly uttered (as the most prudish can always utter them when they happen to be in an unfamiliar language, round whose words custom has not crystallised that wealth of associations which give to the native locutions their peculiar and, from age to age, varying significance), filled my Uncle Spencer with alarm and with a missionary zeal to rescue so potentially

beautiful and even grand a nature from corruption.

For her part, Emmy Wendle was charmed, at any rate during the first days of their acquaintance, with my Uncle Spencer. He was English, to begin with, and spoke her language; he was also—which the equally English and intelligible bank clerk was not—a gentleman. More important for Emmy, in her present mood, he did not attempt to flirt with her. Emmy wanted no admirers, at the moment. In the present circumstances she felt that it would have been wrong, uncomely, and rather disreputable to think of flirtation. She sang the “Brabançonne” with too much religious ardour for that; the moment was too solemn, too extraordinary. True, the solemnity of the moment and the ardour of her patriotic feelings might, if a suitable young man had happened to find himself with her in the attics of the Ministry of the Interior, have caused her to fall in love with a fervour having almost the religious quality of her other feelings. But no suitable young man, unfortunately, presented himself. The bank clerk had spots on his face and was not a gentleman, the journalist was middle-aged and too stout. Both tried to flirt with her. But their advances had, for Emmy, all the impropriety

of a flirtation in a sacred place. With my Uncle Spencer, however, she felt entirely safe. It was not merely that he had white hair; Emmy had lived long enough to know that that symbol was no guarantee of decorous behaviour—on the contrary; but because he was, obviously, such a gentleman, because of the signs of unworldliness and mild idealism stamped all over his face.

At first, indeed, it was only to escape from the tiresome and indecorous attentions of the bank clerk and the journalist that she addressed herself to Uncle Spencer. But she soon came to like his company for its own sake; she began to take an interest in what he said, she listened seriously to my Uncle Spencer's invariably serious conversation—for he never talked except on profitable and intellectual themes, having no fund of ordinary small talk.

During the first days Emmy treated him with the respectful courtesy which, she felt, was due to a man of his age, position, and character. But later, when he began to follow her with his abject adoration, she became more familiar. Inevitably; for one cannot expect to be treated as old and important by some one at whom one looks with the appealing eyes of a dog. She called him Uncle Spenny and ordered him about, made

him carry and fetch as though he were a trained animal. My Uncle Spencer was only too delighted, of course, to obey her. He was charmed by the familiarities she took with him. The period of her pretty teasing familiarity (intermediate between her respectfulness and her later cruelty) was the happiest, so far as my Uncle Spencer was concerned, in their brief connection. He loved and felt himself, if not loved in return, at least playfully tolerated.

Another man would have permitted himself to take liberties in return, to be sportive, gallant, and importunate. But my Uncle Spencer remained gravely and tenderly himself. His only reprisal for "Uncle Spenny" and the rest was to call her by her Christian name instead of "Miss Wendle," as he had always solemnly done before. Yes, Emmy felt herself safe with Uncle Spenny; almost too safe, perhaps.

My Uncle Spencer's conversations were always, as I have said, of a very serious cast. They were even more serious at this time than usual; for the catastrophe, and now his passion, had brought on in his mind a very severe fit of thinking. There was so much that, in the light of the happenings of the last few weeks, needed reconsidering. From the German professor's theory to the prob-

lem of good and evil; from the idea of progress (for, after all, was not this the twentieth century?) to the austere theory and the strange new fact of love; from internationalism to God—everything had to be considered afresh. And he considered them out loud with Emmy Wendle. Goodness, for example, was that no more than a relative thing, an affair of social conventions, gauged by merely local and accidental standards? Or was there something absolute, ultimate, and fundamental about the moral idea? And God—could God be absolutely good? And was there such a vast difference between the twentieth and other centuries? Could fact ever rhyme with ideal? All these disturbing questions had to be asked and answered to his own satisfaction once again.

It was characteristic of my Uncle Spencer that he answered them all—even after taking into consideration everything that had happened—on the hopeful side, just as he had done before the catastrophe; and what was more, with a deeper conviction. Before, he had accepted the cheerful idealistic view a little too easily. He had inherited it from the century in which he was born, had sucked it in from the respectable and ever-prospering elders among whom he had been brought up. Circumstances were now making that facile

cheerfulness seem rather stupid. But it was precisely because he had to reconsider the objections to optimism, the arguments against hopefulness, not theoretically in the void, but practically and in the midst of personal and universal calamity (the latter very bearable if one is comfortably placed oneself, but real, but disturbing, if one is also suffering a little), that he now became convinced, more hardly but more profoundly, of the truth of what he had believed before, but lightly and, as he now saw, almost accidentally. Events were shortly to disturb this new-found conviction.

Emmy listened to him with rapture. The circumstances, the time, the place, inclined her to the serious and reflective mood. My Uncle Spencer's discourses were just what she needed at this particular moment. Naturally superstitious, she lived at all times under the protection of a small gold lucky pig and a coral cross which had once belonged to her mother. And when luck was bad, she went to church and consulted crystal gazers. That time she broke her leg and had to cancel that wonderful engagement to tour in Australia, she knew it was because she had been neglecting God in all the prosperous months before; she prayed and she promised amendment. When she got better, God sent her an offer

from Cohen's Provincial Alhambras Ltd., in token that her repentance was accepted and she was forgiven. And now, though she had seemed to belonged to the cheerful party in the attics of the Ministry of the Interior, her thoughts had secretly been very grave. At night, lying awake on her mattress, she wondered in the darkness what was the reason of all this—the war, her bad luck in getting caught by the Germans. Yes, what could the reason be? Why was God angry with her once again?

But of course she knew why. It was all that dreadful, dreadful business last June when she was working at Wimbledon. That young man who had waited for her at the stage door! and would she do him the honour of having supper with him? And she had said yes, though it was all against her rules. Yes: because he had such a beautiful voice, so refined, almost like a very high-class West End actor's voice. "I came to see the marionettes," he told her. "Marionettes never seem to get farther than the suburbs, do they? But I stayed for you."

They drove in a taxi all the way from Wimbledon to Piccadilly. "Some day," she said, pointing to the Pavilion, "you'll see my name there, in big electric letters: EMMY

WENDLE." A hundred pounds a week and the real West End. What a dream!

He had such beautiful manners and he looked so handsome when you saw him in the light. They had champagne for supper.

In the darkness, Emmy blushed with retrospective shame. She buried her face in the pillow as though she were trying to hide from some searching glance. No wonder God was angry. In an agony she kissed the coral cross. She pulled at the blue ribbon, at the end of which, between her two small breasts, hung the golden pig; she held the mascot in her hand, tightly, as though hoping to extract from it something of that power for happiness stored mysteriously within it, as the power to attract iron filings is stored within the magnet.

A few feet away the Russian countess heavily breathed. At the stertorous sound Emmy shuddered, remembering the wickedness that slumbered so near her. For if she herself had ceased to be, technically, a good girl, she was—now that her luck had turned—ashamed of it; she knew, from God's anger, that she had done wrong. But the countess, if sleep had not overtaken her, would have gone on boasting all night about her lovers. To middle-class Emmy the countess's frankness, her freedom from the

ordinary prejudices, her aristocratic contempt for public opinion, and her assumption—the assumption of almost all idle women and of such idle men as have nothing better to do or think about—that the only end of life is to make love, complicatedly, at leisure and with a great many people, seemed profoundly shocking. It didn't so much matter that she wasn't a good girl—or rather a good ripe widow. What seemed to Emmy so dreadful was that she should talk about it as though not being good were natural, to be taken for granted, and even positively meritorious. No wonder God was angry.

To Emmy my Uncle Spencer—or shall I call him now her Uncle Spenny?—came as a comforter and sustainer in her remorseful misery. His wandering speculations were not, it was true, always particularly relevant to her own trouble; nor did she always understand what he was talking about. But there was a certain quality in all his discourses, whatever the subject, which she found uplifting and sustaining. Thus my Uncle Spencer quoting Swedenborg to prove that, in spite of all present appearances to the contrary, things were probably all right, was the greatest of comforts. There was something about him like a very high-class clergyman—a West End clergyman, so to

say. When he talked she felt better and in some sort safer.

He inspired in her so much confidence that one day, while the journalist was playing some noisy joke that kept all the rest of the company occupied, she took him aside into the embrasure of one of the windows and told him all, or nearly all, about the episode on account of which God was now so angry. My Uncle Spencer assured her that God didn't see things in quite the way she imagined; and that if He had decided that there must be a European War, it was not, in all human probability, to provide an excuse for getting Emmy Wendle—however guilty—locked up in the attics of the Ministry of the Interior at Brussels. As for the sin itself, my Uncle Spencer tried to make her believe that it was not quite so grave as she thought. He did not know that she only thought it grave because she was in prison and, naturally, depressed.

“No, no,” he said comfortingly, “you mustn't take it to heart like that.”

But the knowledge that this exquisite and innocent young creature had once—and if once, why not twice, why not (my Uncle Spencer left to his own midnight thoughts feverishly speculated), why not fifty times?—fallen from virtue distressed him. He had

imagined her, it was true, surrounded by bad influences, like the journalist; but between being taught to say "sarl coshaw" and an actual lapse from virtue, there was a considerable difference. It had never occurred to my Uncle Spencer that Emmy could have got beyond the "coshaw" stage. And now he had it from her own lips that she had.

Celibate like a priest, my Uncle Spencer had not enjoyed the priest's vicarious experience in the confessional. He had not read those astonishing handbooks of practical psychology, fruit of the accumulated wisdom of centuries, from which the seminarist learns to understand his penitents, to classify and gauge their sins, and incidentally—so crude, bald, and uncompromising are the descriptions of human vice that they contain—to loathe the temptations which, when rosily and delicately painted, can seem so damnably alluring. His ignorance of human beings was enormous. In his refinement he had preferred not to know; and circumstances, so far, had wonderfully conspired to spare him knowledge.

Years afterwards, I remember, when we met again, he asked me after a silence, and speaking with an effort, as though overcoming a repugnance, what I really thought about women and all "that sort of thing." It

was a subject about which at that time I happened to feel with the bitterness and mirthful cynicism of one who has been only too amply successful in love with the many in whom he took no interest, and lamentably and persistently unsuccessful with the one being, in whose case success would have been in the least worth while.

“You really think, then,” said my Uncle Spencer, when I paused for breath, “that a lot of that sort of thing actually does go on?”

I really did.

He sighed and shut his eyes, as though to conceal their expression from me. He was thinking of Emmy Wendle. How passionately he had hoped that I should prove her, necessarily, and *a priori*, virtuous.

There are certain sensitive and idealistic people in whom the discovery that the world is what it is brings on a sudden and violent reaction towards cynicism. From soaring in spheres of ideal purity they rush down into the mud, rub their noses in it, eat it, bathe and wallow. They lacerate their own highest feelings and delight in the pain. They take pleasure in defiling the things which before they thought beautiful and noble; they pore with a disgusted attention over the foul entrails of the things whose

smooth and lovely skin was what they had once worshipped.

Swift, surely, was one of these—the greatest of them. His type our islands still produce; and more copiously, perhaps, during the last two or three generations than ever before. For the nineteenth century specialised in that romantic, optimistic idealism which postulates that man is on the whole good and inevitably becoming better. The idealism of the men of the Middle Ages was more sensible; for it insisted, to begin with, that man was mostly and essentially bad, a sinner by instinct and heredity. Their ideals, their religion, were divine and unnatural antidotes to original sin. They saw the worst first and could be astonished by no horror—only by the occasional miracle of sweetness and light. But their descendants of the romantic, optimistic, humanitarian century, in which my Uncle Spencer was born and brought up, vented their idealism otherwise. They began by seeing the best; they insisted that men were naturally good, spiritual, and lovely. A sensitive youth brought up in this genial creed has only to come upon a characteristic specimen of original sin to be astonished, shocked, and disillusioned into despair. Circumstances and temperament had permitted my Uncle

Spencer to retain his romantic optimism very much longer than most men.

The tardy recognition of the existence of original sin disturbed my Uncle Spencer's mind. But the effects of it were not immediate. At the moment, while he was in Emmy's pretty and intoxicating presence, and while she was still kind, he could not believe that she too had her share of original sin. And even when he forced himself to do so, her childish ingenuous face was in itself a complete excuse. It was later—and especially when he was separated from her—that her poison began slowly to work, embittering his whole spirit. At present Emmy's confession only served to increase his passion for her. For, to begin with, it made her seem more than ever in need of protection. And next, by painfully satisfying a little of his curiosity about her life, it quickened his desire to know all, to introduce himself completely into her history. And at the same time it provoked a retrospective jealousy, together with an intense present suspiciousness and an agonised anticipation of future dangers. His passion became like a painful disease. He pursued her with an incessant and abject devotion.

Relieved, partly by my Uncle Spencer's spiritual ministrations, partly by the medi-

cating power of time, from her first access of remorse, depression, and self-reproach, Emmy began to recover her normal high spirits. My Uncle Spencer became less necessary to her as a comforter. His incomprehensible speculations began to bore her. Conversely, the jokes of the cheerful ones seemed more funny, while the gallantries of the journalist and the bank clerk appeared less repulsive, because—now that her mood had changed—they struck her as less incongruous and indecorous. She was no longer, spiritually speaking, in church. In church, my Uncle Spencer's undemonstrative and unimportunate devotion had seemed beautifully in place. But now that she was emerging again out of the dim religious into the brightly secular mood, she found it rather ridiculous and, since she did not return the adoration, tiresome.

"If you could just see yourself now, Uncle Spenny," she said to him, "the way you look."

And she drew down the corners of her mouth, then opened her eyes in a fishy, reverential stare. Then the grimace in which my Uncle Spencer was supposed to see his adoration truly mirrored disintegrated in laughter; the eyes screwed themselves up, a little horizontal wrinkle appeared near the

tip of the snub nose, the mouth opened, waves of mirth seemed to ripple out from it across the face, and a shrill peal of laughter mocked him into an attempted smile.

“Do I really look like that?” he asked:

“You really do,” Emmy nodded. “Not a very cheerful thing to have staring at one day and night, is it?”

Sometimes—and this to my Uncle Spencer was inexpressibly painful—she would even bring in some third person to share the sport at his expense; she would associate the bank clerk, the opera singer, or the journalist in her mocking laughter. The teasing which, in the first days, had been so light and affectionate, became cruel.

Emmy would have been distressed, no doubt, if she had known how much she hurt him. But he did not complain. All she knew was that my Uncle Spencer was ridiculous. The temptation to say something smart and disagreeable about him was irresistible.

To my Uncle Spencer’s company she now preferred that of the journalist, the bank clerk, and the opera singer. With the bank clerk she talked about West End actors and actresses, music-hall artists, and cinema stars. True, he was not much of a gentleman; but on this absorbing subject he was

extremely knowledgeable. The singer revealed to her the gorgeous and almost unknown universe of the operatic stage—a world of art so awe-inspiringly high that it was above even the West End. The journalist told her spicy stories of the Brussels stage. My Uncle Spencer would sit at the fringes of the group, listening in silence and across a gulf of separation, while Emmy and the bank clerk agreed that Clarice Mayne was sweet, George Robey a scream, and Florence Smithson a really high-class artist. When asked for his opinion, my Uncle Spencer always had to admit that he had never seen the artist in question. Emmy and the bank clerk would set up a howl of derision; and the opera singer, with biting sarcasm, would ask my Uncle Spencer how a man who professed to be fond of music could have gone through life without even making an attempt to hear Caruso. My Uncle Spencer was too sadly depressed to try to explain.

The days passed. Sometimes a prisoner would be sent for and examined by the German authorities. The little old nobleman like a teapot was released a week after my Uncle Spencer's arrival; and a few days later the haughty and monocled one disappeared. Most of the peasants next vanished. Then the Russian anarchist was sent for,

lengthily examined and sent back again, to find that his arm-chair was being occupied by the journalist.

In the fourth week of my Uncle Spencer's imprisonment Alphonse fell ill. The poor man had never recovered from the effects of the practical joke that had been played upon him on the day of his arrival. Melancholy, oppressed by fears, the more awful for being vague and without a definite object (for he could never grasp why and by whom he had been imprisoned; and as to his ultimate fate—no one could persuade him that it was to be anything but the most frightful and lingering of deaths), he sat brooding by himself in a corner. His free pardon, signed Von der Goltz and sealed with the image of the Sacred Cow, he still preserved; for though he was now intellectually certain that the paper was valueless, he still hoped faintly in the depths of his being that it might turn out, one day, to be a talisman; and, in any case, the image of the Cow was very comforting. Every now and then he would take the paper out of his pocket, tenderly unfold it and gaze with large sad eyes at the sacred effigy: *Pour l'amélioration de la race bovine*—and tears would well up from under his eyelids, would hang suspended among the lashes and roll at last down his brown cheeks.

They were not so round now, those cheeks, as they had been. The skin sagged, the bright convex high-lights had lost their brilliance. Miserably he pined. My Uncle Spencer did his best to cheer him. Alphonse was grateful, but would take no comfort. He had lost all interest even in women; and when, learning from my Uncle Spencer that the Indian was something of a prophet, Emmy asked him to read her hand, he looked at her listlessly as though she had been a mere male and not a male impersonator, and shook his head.

One morning he complained that he was feeling too ill to get up. His head was hot, he coughed, breathed shortly and with difficulty, felt a pain in his right lung. My Uncle Spencer tried to think what Hahne-mann would have prescribed in the circumstances, and came to the conclusion that the thousandth of a grain of aconite was the appropriate remedy. Unhappily, there was not so much as a millionth of a grain of aconite to be found in all the prison. Inquiry produced only a bottle of aspirin tablets and, from the Russian countess, a packet of cocaine snuff. It was thought best to give the Dravidian a dose of each and wait for the doctor.

At his midday visit the inspecting officer

was informed of Alphonse's state, and promised to have the doctor sent at once. But it was not, in point of fact, till the next morning that the doctor came. My Uncle Spencer, meanwhile, constituted himself the Dravidian's nurse. The fact that Alphonse was the widower of his housekeeper's sister, and had lived in his city of adoption, made my Uncle Spencer feel somehow responsible for the poor Indian. Moreover, he was glad to have some definite occupation which would allow him to forget, if only partially and for an occasional moment, his unhappy passion.

From the first, Alphonse was certain that he was going to die. To my Uncle Spencer he foretold his impending extinction, not merely with equanimity, but almost with satisfaction. For by dying, he felt, he would be spiting and cheating his enemies, who desired so fiendishly to put an end to him at their own time and in their own horrible fashion. It was in vain that my Uncle Spencer assured him that he would not die, that there was nothing serious the matter with him. Alphonse stuck to his assertion.

"In eight days," he said, "I shall be dead."

And shutting his eyes, he was silent.

The doctor, when he came next day, diagnosed acute lobar pneumonia. Through the

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oppression of his fever, Alphonse smiled at my Uncle Spencer with a look almost of triumph. That night he was delirious and began to rave in a language my Uncle Spencer could not understand.

My Uncle Spencer listened in the darkness to the Dravidian's incomprehensible chattering; and all at once, with a shudder, with a sense of terror he felt—in the presence of this man of another race, speaking in an unknown tongue words uttered out of obscure depths for no man's hearing and which even his own soul did not hear or understand—he felt unutterably alone. He was imprisoned within himself. He was an island surrounded on every side by wide and bottomless solitudes. And while the Indian chattered away, now softly, persuasively, cajolingly, now with bursts of anger, now loudly laughing, he thought of all the millions and millions of men and women in the world—all alone, all solitary and confined. He thought of friends, incomprehensible to one another and opaque after a lifetime of companionship; he thought of lovers remote in one another's arms. And the hopelessness of his passion revealed itself to him—the hopelessness of every passion, since every passion aims at attaining to what, in the nature of things, is unattainable: the fusion and

interpenetration of two lives, two separate histories, two solitary and for ever sundered individualities.

The Indian roared with laughter.

But the unattainableness of a thing was never a reason for ceasing to desire it. On the contrary, it tends to increase and even to create desire. Thus our love for those we know, and our longing to be with them, are often increased by their death. And the impossibility of ever communicating with him again will actually create out of indifference an affection, a respect and esteem for some one whose company in life seemed rather tedious than desirable. So, for the lover, the realisation that what he desires is unattainable, and that every possession will reveal yet vaster tracts of what is unpossessed and unpossessable, is not a deterrent, is not an antidote to his passion; but serves rather to exacerbate his desire, sharpening it to a kind of desperation, and at the same time making the object of his desire seem more than ever precious.

The Indian chattered on, a ghost among the ghosts of his imagination, remote as though he were speaking from another world. And Emmy—was she not as far away, as unattainable? And being remote, she was the more desirable; being mysterious, she was

the more lovely. A more brutal and experienced man than my Uncle Spencer would have devoted all his energies to seducing the young woman, knowing that after a time the satisfaction of his physical desire would probably make him cease to take any interest in her soul or her history. But physical possession was the last thing my Uncle Spencer thought of, and his love had taken the form of an immense desire for the impossible union, not of bodies, but of minds and lives. True, what he had so far learned about her mind and history was not particularly encouraging. But for my Uncle Spencer her silliness, love of pleasure, and frivolity were strange and mysterious qualities—for he had known few women in his life and none, before, like Emmy Wendle—rather lovely still in their unfamiliarity, and if recognised as at all bad, excused as being the symptoms of a charming childishness and an unfortunate upbringing. Her solicitude, that first day, about poor Alphonse convinced him that she was fundamentally good-hearted; and if she had proved herself cruel since then towards himself, that was more by mistake and because of surrounding bad influences than from natural malignity. And, then, there was the way in which she sang the “Brabançonne.” It was noble, it was moving. To

be able to sing like that one must have a fine and beautiful character. In thinking like this, my Uncle Spencer was forgetting that no characteristic is incompatible with any other, that any deadly sin may be found in company with any cardinal virtue, even the apparently contradictory virtue. But unfortunately that is the kind of wisdom which one invariably forgets precisely at the moment when it might be of use to one. One learns it almost in the cradle; at any rate, I remember at my preparatory school reading, in Professor Oman's *Shorter History of England*, of "the heroic though profligate Duke of Ormond," and of a great English king who was none the less, "a stuttering, lolling pedant with a tongue too big for his mouth." But though one knows well enough in theory that a duke can be licentious as well as brave, that majestic wisdom may be combined with pedantry and defective speech, yet in practice one continues to believe that an attractive woman is kind because she is charming, and virtuous because she rejects your first advances; without reflecting that the grace of her manner may thinly conceal an unyielding ruthlessness and selfishness, while the coyness in face of insistence may be a mere device for still more completely ensnaring the victim. It is only in the presence of unsym-

pathetic persons that we remember that the most odious actions are compatible with the most genuinely noble sentiments, and that a man or woman who does one thing, while professing another, is not necessarily a conscious liar or hypocrite. If only we could steadfastly bear this knowledge in mind when we are with persons whom we find sympathetic!

Desiring Emmy as passionately as he did, my Uncle Spencer would not have had much difficulty in persuading himself—even in spite of her recent cruelty towards him—that the spirit with which he longed to unite his own was on the whole a beautiful and interesting spirit; would indeed have had no difficulty at all, had it not been for that unfortunate confession of hers. This, though it flattered him as a token of her confidence in his discretion and wisdom, had sadly disturbed him and was continuing to disturb him more and more. For out of all her history—the history in which, it was his longing to make himself entirely at home as though he had actually lived through it with her—this episode was almost the only chapter he knew. Like a thin ray of light her confession had picked it out for him, from the surrounding obscurity. And what an episode! The more my Uncle Spencer re-

flected on it, the more he found it distressing.

The brutal practical man my Uncle Spencer was not would have taken this incident from the past as being a good augury for his own future prospects. But since he did not desire, consciously at any rate, the sort of success it augured, the knowledge of this incident brought him an unadulterated distress. For however much my Uncle Spencer might insist in his own mind on the guiltiness of external circumstance and of the other party, he could not entirely exonerate Emmy. Nor could he pretend that she had not in some sort, if only physically, taken part in her own lapse. And perhaps she had participated willingly. And even if she had not, the thought that she had been defiled, however reluctantly, by the obscene contact was unspeakably painful to him. And while the Indian raved, and through the long, dark silences during which there was no sound but the unnaturally quick and shallow breathing, and sometimes a moan, and sometimes a dry cough, my Uncle Spencer painfully thought and thought; and his mind oscillated between a conviction of her purity and the fear that perhaps she was utterly corrupt. He saw in his imagination, now her childish face and the rapt expression upon it while she sang the "Brabançonne," now the sweet, solicitous

look while she commiserated on poor Alphonse's unhappiness, and then, a moment later, endless embracements, kisses brutal and innumerable. And always he loved her.

Next day the Dravidian's fever was still high. The doctor, when he came, announced that red hepatisation of both lungs was already setting in. It was a grave case which ought to be at the hospital; but he had no authority to have the man sent there. He ordered tepid spongings to reduce the fever.

In the face of the very defective sanitary arrangements of the prison, my Uncle Spencer did his best. He had a crowd of willing assistants; everybody was anxious to do something helpful. Nobody was more anxious than Emmy Wendle. The forced inaction of prison life, even when it was relieved by the jokes of the cheerful ones, by theatrical discussions and the facetious gallantry of the bank clerk and the journalist, was disagreeable to her. And the prospect of being able to do something, and particularly (since it was war-time, after all) of doing something useful and charitable, was welcomed by her with a real satisfaction. She sat by the Dravidian's mattress, talked to him, gave him what he asked for, did the disagreeable jobs that have to be done in the sick-room,

ordered my Uncle Spencer and the others about, and seemed completely happy.

For his part, my Uncle Spencer was delighted by what he regarded as a reversion to her true self. There could be no doubt about it now: Emmy was good, was kind, a ministering angel, and therefore (in spite of the professor's heroic though profligate duke), therefore pure, therefore interesting, therefore worthy of all the love he could give her. He forgot the confession, or at least he ceased to attach importance to it; he was no longer haunted by the odious images which too much brooding over it evoked in his mind. What convinced him, perhaps, better than everything, of her essential goodness was the fact that she was once more kind to him. Her young energy, fully occupied in practical work (which was not, however, sufficiently trying to overtax the strength or set the nerves on edge), did not have to vent itself in laughter and mockery, as it had done when she recovered from the mood of melancholy which had depressed it during the first days of her imprisonment. They were fellow-workers now.

The Dravidian, meanwhile, grew worse and worse, weaker and weaker every day. The doctor was positively irritated.

“The man has no business to be so ill as

he is," he grumbled. "He's not old, he isn't an alcoholic or a syphilitic, his constitution is sound enough. He's just letting himself die. At this rate he'll never get past the crisis."

At this piece of news Emmy became grave. She had never seen death at close quarters—a defect in her education which my Uncle Spencer, if he had had the bringing up of her, would have remedied. For death was one of those Realities of Life with which, he thought, every one ought to make the earliest possible acquaintance. Love, on the other hand, was not one of the desirable Realities. It never occurred to him to ask himself the reason for this invidious distinction. Indeed, there was no reason; it just was so.

"Tell me, Uncle Spenny," she whispered, when the doctor had gone, "what *does* really happen to people when they die?"

Charmed by this sign of Emmy's renewed interest in serious themes, my Uncle Spencer explained to her what Alphonse at any rate thought would happen to him.

At midday, over the repeated cabbage soup and the horrible boiled meat, the bank clerk, with characteristically tasteless facetiousness, asked, "How's our one little nigger boy?"

Emmy looked at him with disgust and an-

ger. "I think you're perfectly horrible," she said. And, lowering her voice reverently, she went on, "The doctor says he's going to die."

The bank clerk was unabashed. "Oh, he's going to kick the bucket, is he? Poor old blacky!"

Emmy made no answer; there was a general silence. It was as though somebody had started to make an unseemly noise in a church.

Afterwards, in the privacy of the little room, where, among the filing cabinets and the dusty papers, the Dravidian lay contentedly dying, Emmy turned to my Uncle Spencer and said, "You know, Uncle Spenny, I think you're a wonderfully decent sort. I do, really."

My Uncle Spencer was too much overcome to say anything but "Emmy, Emmy," two or three times. He took her hand and, very gently, kissed it.

That afternoon they went on talking about all the things that might conceivably happen after one were dead. Emmy told my Uncle Spencer all that she had thought when she got the telegram—two years ago it was, and she was working in a hall at Glasgow, one of her first engagements, too—saying that her father had suddenly died. He

drank too much, her father did; and he wasn't kind to mother when he wasn't himself. But she had been very fond of him, all the same; and when that telegram came she wondered and wondered. . . .

My Uncle Spencer listened attentively, happy in having this new glimpse of her past; he forgot the other incident, which the beam of her confession had illumined for him.

Late that evening, after having lain for a long time quite still, as though he were asleep, Alphonse suddenly stirred, opened his large back eyes, and began to talk, at first in the incomprehensible language which came from him in delirium, then, when he realised that his listeners did not understand him, more slowly and in his strange pidgin-French.

"I have seen everything just now," he said—"everything."

"But what?" they asked.

"All that is going to happen. I have seen that this war will last a long time—a long time. More than fifty months." And he prophesied enormous calamities.

My Uncle Spencer, who knew for certain that the war couldn't possibly last more than three months, was incredulous. But Emmy, who had no preconceived ideas on war and a

strong faith in oracles, stopped him impatiently when he wanted to bring the Dravidian to silence.

"Tell me," she said, "what's going to happen to us." She had very little interest in the fate of civilisation.

"I am going to die," Alphonse began.

My Uncle Spencer made certain deprecating little noises. "No, no," he protested.

The Indian paid no attention to him. "I am going to die," he repeated. "And you," he said to my Uncle Spencer, "you will be let go and then again be put into prison. But not here. Somewhere else. A long way off. For a long time—a very long time. You will be very unhappy." He shook his head. "I cannot help it; even though you have been so good to me. That is what I see. But the man who deceived me"—he meant the journalist—"he will very soon be set free and he will live in freedom, all the time. In such freedom as there will be here. And he who sits in the chair will at last go back to his own country. And he who sings will go free like the man who deceived me. And the small grey man will be sent to another prison in another country. And the fat woman with a red mouth will be sent to another country; but she will not be in prison. I think she will be married there again." The portraits

were recognisably those of the Russian countess and the professor of Latin. "And the man with carbuncles on his face" (this was the bank clerk, no doubt) "will be sent to another prison in another country; and there he will die. And the woman in black who is so sad . . ."

But Emmy could bear to wait no longer. "What about me?" she asked. "Tell me what you see about me."

The Dravidian closed his eyes and was silent for a moment. "You will be set free," he said. "Soon. And some day," he went on, "you will be the wife of this good man." He indicated my Uncle Spencer. "But not yet; not for a long time; till all this strife is at an end. You will have children . . . good fortune. . . ." His words grew fainter; once more he closed his eyes. He sighed as though utterly exhausted. "Beware of fair strangers," he murmured, reverting to the old familiar formula. He said no more.

Emmy and my Uncle Spencer were left looking at one another in silence.

"What do you think, Uncle Spenny?" she whispered at last. "Is it true?"

Two hours later the Indian was dead.

My Uncle Spencer slept that night, or

rather did not sleep, in the living-room. The corpse lay alone among the archives. The words of the Indian continued to echo and re-echo in his mind: "Some day you will be the wife of this kind man." Perhaps, he thought, on the verge of death, the spirit already begins to try its wings in the new world. Perhaps already it has begun to know the fringes, as it were, of secrets that are to be revealed to it. To my Uncle Spencer there was nothing repugnant in the idea. There was room in his universe for what are commonly and perhaps wrongly known as miracles. Perhaps the words were a promise, a statement of future fact. Lying on his back, his eyes fixed on the dark blue starry sky beyond the open window, he meditated on that problem of fixed fate and free will, with which the devils in Milton's hell wasted their infernal leisure. And like a refrain the words repeated themselves: "Some day you will be the wife of this good man." The stars moved slowly across the opening of the window. He did not sleep.

In the morning an order came for the release of the journalist and the opera singer. Joyfully they said good-bye to their fellow-prisoners; the door closed behind them. Emmy turned to my Uncle Spencer with a look almost of terror in her eyes; the Indian's

prophecies were already beginning to come true. But they said nothing to one another. Two days later the bank clerk left for an internment camp in Germany.

And then, one morning, my Uncle Spencer himself was sent for. The order came quite suddenly; they left him no time to take leave. He was examined by the competent authority, found harmless, and permitted to return to Longres, where, however, he was to live under supervision. They did not even allow him to go back to the prison and say good-bye; a soldier brought his effects from the Ministry; he was put on to the train, with orders to report to the commandant at Longres as soon as he arrived.

Antonieke received her master with tears of joy. But my Uncle Spencer took no pleasure in his recovered freedom. Emmy Wendle was still a prisoner. True, she would soon be set free; but then, he now realised to his horror, she did not know his address. He had been released at such startlingly short notice that he had had no time to arrange with her about the possibilities of future meetings; he had not even seen her on the morning of his liberation.

Two days after his return to Longres, he asked permission from the commandant, to whom he had to report himself every day,

whether he might go to Brussels. He was asked why; my Uncle Spencer answered truthfully that it was to visit a friend in the prison from which he himself had just been released. Permission was at once refused.

My Uncle Spencer went to Brussels all the same. The sentry at the door of the prison arrested him as a suspicious person. He was sent back to Longres; the commandant talked to him menacingly. The next week, my Uncle Spencer tried again. It was sheer insanity, he knew; but doing something idiotic was preferable to doing nothing. He was again arrested.

This time they condemned him to internment in a camp in Germany. The Indian's prophecies were being fulfilled with a remarkable accuracy. And the war did last for more than fifty months. And the carbuncular bank clerk, whom he found again in the internment camp, did, in fact, die. . . .

What made him confide in me—me, whom he had known as a child and almost fathered—I do not know. Or perhaps I do know. Perhaps it was because he felt that I should be more competent to advise him on this sort of subject than his brother—my father—or old Mr. Bullinger, the Dante scholar, or any other of his friends. He would have felt ashamed, perhaps, to talk to them about

this sort of thing. And he would have felt, too, that perhaps it wouldn't be much good talking to them, and that I, in spite of my youth, or even because of it, might actually be more experienced in these matters than they. Neither my father nor Mr. Bullinger, I imagine, knew very much about male impersonators.

At any rate, whatever, the cause, it was to me that he talked about the whole affair, that spring of 1919, when he was staying with us in Sussex, recuperating after those dreary months of confinement. We used to go for long walks together, across the open downs, or between the grey pillars of the beechwoods; and painfully overcoming reluctance after reluctance, proceeding from confidence to more intimate confidence, my Uncle Spencer told me the whole story.

The story involved interminable discussions by the way. For we had to decide, first of all, whether there was any possible scientific explanation of prophecy; whether there was such a thing as an absolute future waiting to be lived through. And at much greater length, even, we had to argue about women—whether they were really “like that” (and into what depths of cynicism my poor Uncle Spencer had learned, during the long, embittered meditations of his prison days and

nights, to plunge and wallow!), or whether they were like the angels he had desired them to be.

But more important than to speculate on Emmy's possible character was to discover where she now was. More urgent than to wonder if prophecy could conceivably be reliable, was to take steps to fulfil this particular prophecy. For weeks my Uncle Spencer and I played at detectives.

I have often fancied that we must have looked, when we made our inquiries together, uncommonly like the traditional pair in the stories—my Uncle Spencer, the bright-eyed, cadaverous, sharp-featured genius, the Holmes of the combination; and I, moon-faced and chubby, a very youthful Watson. But, as a matter of fact, it was I, if I may say so without fatuity, who was the real Holmes of the two. My Uncle Spencer was too innocent of the world to know how to set about looking for a vanished mistress; just as he was too innocent of science to know how or where to find out what there was to be discovered on any abstracter subject.

It was I who took him to the British Museum and made him look up all the back numbers of the theatrical papers to see when Emmy had last advertised her desire to be engaged. It was I, the apparent Watson,

who thought of the theatrical agencies and the stage doors of all the suburban music-halls. Sleuth-like in aspect, innocent at heart, my Uncle Spencer followed, marveling at my familiarity with the ways of the strange world.

But I must temper my boasting by the confession that we were always entirely unsuccessful. No agency had heard of Emmy Wendle since 1914. Her card had appeared in no paper. The porters of music-halls remembered her, but only as something antediluvian. "Emmy Wendle? Oh yes, Emmy Wendle. . . ." And scratching their heads, they strove by a mental effort to pass from the mere name to the person, like palæontologists reconstructing the whole diplodocus from the single fossil bone.

Two or three times we were even given addresses. But the landladies of the lodging-houses where she had stayed did not even remember her; and the old aunt at Ealing, from whom we joyfully hoped so much, had washed her hands of Emmy two or three months before the war began. And the conviction she then had that Emmy was a bad girl was only intensified and confirmed by our impertinent inquiries. No, she knew nothing about Emmy Wendle, now, and didn't want to know. And she'd trouble us

to leave respectable people like herself in peace. And, defeated, we climbed back into our taxi, while the inhabitants of the squalid little street peered out at us and our vehicle, as though we had been visitors from another planet, and the metropolitan hackney carriage a fairy chariot.

“Perhaps, she’s dead,” said my Uncle Spencer softly, after a long silence.

“Perhaps,” I said brutally, “she’s found a husband and retired into private life.”

My Uncle Spencer shut his eyes, sighed, and drew his hand across his forehead. What dreadful images filled his mind? He would almost have preferred that she should be dead.

“And yet the Indian,” he murmured, “he was always right. . . .”

And perhaps he may still be right in this. Who knows?

TWO OR THREE GRACES

1: TWO OR THREE GRACES

THE word 'bore' is of doubtful etymology. Some authorities derive it from the verb meaning to pierce. A bore is a person who drills a hole in your spirit, who tunnels relentlessly through your patience, through all the crusts of voluntary deafness, inattention, rudeness, which you vainly interpose—through and through till he pierces to the very quick of your being. But there are other authorities, as good or even better, who derive the word from the French *bourrer*, to stuff, to satiate. If this etymology be correct, a bore is one who stuffs you with his thick and suffocating discourse, who rams his suety personality, like a dumpling, down your throat. He stuffs you; and you, to use an apposite modern metaphor, are 'fed up with him.' I like to think, impossibly, that both these derivations of the word are correct; for bores are both piercers

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and stuffers. They are like dentists' drills, and they are also like stale buns. But they are characterised by a further quality, which drills and doughnuts do not possess; they cling. That is why (though no philologist) I venture to suggest a third derivation, from 'burr.' Burr, *bourrer*, bore—all the sticking, stuffing, piercing qualities of boredom are implicit in those three possible etymologies. Each of the three of them deserves to be correct.

Herbert Comfrey was above all a sticking bore. He attached himself to any one who had the misfortune to come in contact with him; attached himself and could not be shaken off. A burr-bore, vegetable and passive; not actively penetrating. For Herbert, providentially, was not particularly talkative; he was too lazy and lymphatic for that. He was just exceedingly sociable, like a large sentimental dog that cannot bear to be left alone. Like a dog, he followed people about; he lay, metaphorically speaking, at their feet in front of the fire. And like a dog, he did not talk. It was just your company that made him happy; he was quite content if he might trot at your side or doze under your chair. He did not demand that you should pay much attention to him; all that he asked was to be permitted to enjoy

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the light of your countenance and bask in the warmth of your presence. If once a week he got the equivalent of a pat on the head and a 'Good dog, Herbert,' he wagged his spirit's tail and was perfectly happy.

To some of my friends—the quick, the impatient, the highly strung—poor vegetable Herbert was exasperating to the point of madness. His very virtues—that good nature of his, that placidity, that unshakable fidelity—infuriated them. Even his appearance drove them wild. The sight of his broad smiling face, of his big, lazy, lubberly body and limbs was alone sufficient to set their nerves twittering and jumping like a frightened aviary. I have known people who, after living in the same house with Herbert for three days, have secretly packed their trunks, caught the first convenient train, and, leaving no address, have travelled hundreds of miles in order to escape from him.

To me, poor Herbert was boring indeed, but not exasperatingly or intolerably so. Mine is a patient temper; my nerves are not easily set twittering. I even liked him in a way; he was such a good, faithful, kind old dog. And I soon acquired, in his dumb presence, a knack of quite ignoring him, of regarding him simply as a piece of furniture—so much so, that I sometimes caught myself

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on the point of carelessly setting down my emptied coffee-cup on his head as he sat on the floor beside me (he always sat on the floor whenever it was possible), or of flicking my cigarette ash into the inviting cranny between his neck and his coat collar.

As boys, Herbert and I had been at the same public school. But as we were in different houses and he was two years older than I (two years, at that age, is an enormous seniority), we had hardly ever spoken to one another. But none the less, it was on the strength of our old school that Herbert reintroduced himself into my life. His return was doubly disastrous. A bore entered my existence and, in the entering, drove out, temporarily at least, a being who, whatever his other qualities, was the very antithesis of boredom.

It was in a café of the Passage des Panoramas in Paris that the thing happened. We had been sitting there for an hour, Kingham and I, talking and drinking vermouth. It was characteristic of Kingham that he did most of both—drinking as well as talking. Characteristic, too, that he should have been abusing me, among many other things, for wasting my time and spirit in precisely these two occupations.

‘You sit about,’ he said, ‘letting every

thought in your head trickle out uselessly in talk. Not that there are many thoughts, of course, because you daren't think. You do anything not to think. You create futile business, you rush about seeing people you don't like and don't take the slightest interest in, you drift from bar to bar, you swill till you're stupefied—all because you daren't think and can't bring yourself to make the effort to do something serious and decent. It's the result partly of laziness, partly of lack of faith—faith in anything. *Garçon!*' He ordered another vermouth. 'It's the great modern vice,' he went on, 'the great temptation of every young man or woman who's intelligent and acutely conscious. Everything that's easy and momentarily diverting and anæsthetic tempts—people, chatter, drink, fornication. Everything that's difficult and big, everything that needs thought and effort, repels. It's the war that did it. Not to mention the peace. But it would have come gradually in any case. Modern life was making it inevitable. Look at the young people who had nothing to do with the war—were only children when it happened—they're the worst of all. It's time to stop, it's time to do something. Can't you see that you can't go on like this? Can't you see?'

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He leaned across the table at me, angrily. He hated these vices which he had attributed to me, hated them with a special fury because they happened really to be his. He was confessing the weakness he hated in himself—hated and could not eradicate.

Kingham looked handsome in anger. He had dark eyes, beautiful and very bright; his hair was dark brown, fine and plentiful; a close-cut beard, redder than his hair, disguised the lower part of his face, with whose pale, young smoothness it seemed curiously incongruous. There was a brilliancy, a vividness about him. If I were less slow to kindle, I should have burned responsively with his every ardour. Being what I am, I could always remain cool, critical, and cautious, however passionately he might burn. My uninflambleness, I believe, had somehow fascinated him. I exasperated him, but he continued to frequent my company—chiefly to abuse me, to tell me passionately how hopeless I was. I winced under these dissections; for though he often talked, as far as I was concerned, wildly at random (accusing me, as he had done on this particular occasion, of the weakness which he felt and resented in himself), his analysis was often painfully exact and penetrating. I winced, but all the same I delighted in his company.

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We irritated one another profoundly; but we were friends.

I suppose I must have smiled at Kingham's question. Goodness knows, I am no teetotalter, I am not averse to wasting my time over agreeable futilities. But compared with Kingham—particularly the Kingham of 1920—I am a monument of industry, dutiful steadiness, sobriety. I take no credit to myself for it; I happen to be one of nature's burgesses, that is all. I am as little capable of leading a perfectly disorderly life as I am of, shall we say, writing a good book. Kingham was born with both talents. Hence the absurdity, so far as I was concerned, of his hortatory question. I did not mean to smile; but some trace of my amusement must have appeared on my face, for Kingham suddenly became most passionately angry.

'You think it's a joke?' he cried, and thumped the marble table. 'I tell you, it's the sin against the Holy Ghost. It's unforgivable. It's burying your talent. Damn this blasted Bible,' he added with parenthetical fury. 'Why is it that one can never talk about anything serious without getting mixed up in it?'

'It happens to be quite a serious book,' I suggested.

'A lot you understand about it,' said King-

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ham. 'I tell you,' he went on impressively. . . . But at this moment Herbert made his second entry into my life.

I felt a hand laid on my shoulder, looked up, and saw a stranger.

'Hullo, Wilkes,' said the stranger. 'You don't remember me.'

I looked more attentively, and had to admit that I didn't.

'I am Comfrey,' he explained, 'Herbert Comfrey. I was at Dunhill's, don't you remember? You were at Struthers', weren't you? Or was it Lane's?'

At the names of these pedagogues, who had figured so largely in my boyhood, recesses in my mind, long closed, suddenly burst open, as though before a magical word. Visions of inky schoolrooms, football fields, cricket fields, fives courts, the school chapel, rose up confusedly; and from the midst of this educational chaos there disengaged itself the loutish figure of Comfrey of Dunhill's.

'Of course,' I said, and took him by the hand. Through the corner of my eye, I saw Kingham angrily frowning. 'How did you remember me?'

'Oh, I remember every one,' he answered. It was no vain boast, as I afterwards discovered; he *did* remember. He remembered every one he had ever met, and all the trivial

incidents of his past life. He had the enormous memory of royal personages and family retainers—the memory of those who never read, or reason, or reflect, and whose minds are therefore wholly free to indulge in retrospect. ‘I never forget a face,’ he added, and without being invited, sat down at our table.

Indignantly, Kingham threw himself back in his chair. He kicked me under the table. I looked at him and made a little grimace, signifying my helplessness.

I mumbled a perfunctory introduction. Kingham said nothing, only frowned more blackly, as he shook hands with Herbert. And for his part, Herbert was hardly more cordial. True, he smiled his amiable dim smile; but he said nothing, he hardly even looked at Kingham. He was in too much of a hurry to turn back to me and talk about the dear old school. The dear old school—it was the only subject that ever made Herbert really loquacious. It metamorphosed him from a merely vegetable burr-bore into an active, piercing dentist’s drill of tediousness. He had a passion for the school, and thought that all ex-members of it ought to be in constant and friendly communication with one another. I have noticed that, as a general rule, people of decided individuality

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very rarely continue their schoolboy acquaintanceships into later life. It is only to be expected. The chances that they will have found in the tiny microcosm of school the sort of friends they will like when they are grown up—grown out of recognition—are obviously very small. Coteries whose bond of union consists in the fact that their component members happened to be at the same school at the same time are generally the dreariest of assemblages. It could scarcely be otherwise; men who have no better reasons for associating with one another must be colourless indeed, and insipid. Poor Herbert, who regarded the accident of our having worn similarly striped caps and blazers at a certain period of our boyhood as being a sufficient reason for our entering into a bosom friendship, was only an extreme specimen of the type.

I put on my chilliest and most repellent manner. But in vain. Herbert talked and talked. Did I remember the exciting match against Winchester in 1910? And how poor old Mr. Cutler had been ragged? And that memorable occasion when Pye had climbed on to the roof of the school chapel, at night, and hung a chamber-pot on one of the Gothic pinnacles? Anxiously, I looked towards Kingham. He had exchanged his

expression of anger for one of contempt, and was leaning back, his eyes shut, tilting his chair.

Kingham had never been to a public school. He had not had the luck (or the misfortune) to be born a hereditary, professional gentleman. He was proud of the fact, he sometimes even boasted of it. But that did not prevent him from being morbidly sensitive to anything that might be interpreted as a reference to his origin. He was always on the look-out for insults from 'gentlemen.' Veiled insults, insults offered unconsciously even, unintentionally, in perfect ignorance—any sort of insult was enough to set him quivering with pain and fury. More than once I had seen him take violent offence at words that were entirely well-intentioned. Would he regard Herbert's dreary recollections of the dear old school as an insult? He was quite capable of it. I looked forward nervously to an outburst and a violent exit. But the scene, this time, was not to be acted in public. After listening for a few minutes to Herbert's anecdote, Kingham got up, excused himself with ironical politeness, and bade us good evening. I laid my hand on his arm.

'Do stay.'

'A thousand regrets'; he laid his hand on

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his heart, smiled, bowed, and was gone, leaving me (I may add parenthetically that it was his habit) to pay for his drinks.

We public school men were left to ourselves.

The next morning I lay late in bed. At about eleven o'clock Kingham burst into my room. The scene which I had been spared the night before was enacted for me now with redoubled passion. Another man would have slept on the supposed insult and, waking, have found it negligible. Not so Kingham. He had brooded over his wrongs, till what was originally small had grown enormous. The truth was that Kingham liked scenes. He loved to flounder in emotion—his own and other people's. He was exhilarated by these baths of passion; he felt that he really lived, that he was more than a man, while he splashed about in them. And the intoxication was so delicious that he indulged in it without considering the consequences—or perhaps it would be truer to say that he considered the consequences (for intellectually no man could be clearer-sighted than Kingham) but deliberately ignored them.

When I say that he had a great facility for making scenes, I do not mean to imply that he ever simulated an emotion. He

felt genuinely about things—genuinely and strongly, but too easily. And he took pleasure in cultivating and working up his emotions. For instance, what in other men would have been a passing irritation, held in check by self-control, to be modified very likely by subsequent impressions, was converted by Kingham, almost deliberately, into a wild fury which no second thoughts were allowed to assuage. Often these passions were the result of mere mistakes on the part of those who had provoked them. But once emotionally committed, Kingham would never admit a mistake—unless, of course, his passion for self-humiliation happened at the moment to be stronger than his passion for self-assertion. Often, too, he would take up unchanging emotional attitudes towards people. A single powerful impression would be allowed to dominate all other impressions. His intellect was put into blinkers, the most manifest facts were ignored; and until further orders the individual in question produced in Kingham only one particular set of reactions.

As he approached my bed, I could see from the expression on his white face that I was in for a bad quarter of an hour.

‘Well?’ I said, with an affectation of careless cordiality.

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'I always knew you were an intellectual snob,' Kingham began in a low, intense voice, drawing up a chair to my bedside as he spoke. 'But really, I thought you were above being an ordinary, suburban, lower middle-class social snob.'

I made the grimace which in French novels is represented by the sign '——?'

'I know that my father was a plumber,' he went on, 'and that I was educated at the expense of the State and by scholarships for the encouragement of clever paupers. I know I speak Cockney, and not Eton and Oxford. I know that my manners are bad and that I eat dirtily, and that I don't wash my teeth enough.' (None of these things were true; but it suited Kingham, at the moment, to believe that they were. He wanted to feel abased, in order that he might react with greater violence. He insulted himself in order that he might attribute the insults, under which he genuinely winced, to me, and so have an excuse for being angry with me.) 'I know I'm a cad and a little bounder.' He spoke the words with an extraordinary gusto, as though he enjoyed the pain he was inflicting on himself. 'I know I'm an outsider, only tolerated for my cleverness. A sort of buffoon or tame monkey for the amusement of cultured gentlemen. I know all this, and

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I know you knew it. But I really thought you didn't mind, that we met as human beings, not as specimens of upper and lower classes. I was fool enough to imagine that you liked me in spite of it all. I thought you even preferred me to the people in your own herd. It only shows what an innocent I am. No sooner does a gentleman come along, an old school chum, what?' (derisively he assumed the public school accent as rendered on the music hall stage) 'than you fling your arms round his neck and leave the dirty little outsider very definitely outside.' He laughed ferociously.

'My good Kingham,' I began, 'why will you make a bloody fool of yourself?'

But Kingham, who doubtless knew as well as I did that he was making a fool of himself, only went on with the process more vehemently. He was committed to making a fool of himself, and he liked it. Shifting his ground a little, he began telling me home truths—real home truths this time. In the end, I too began to get angry.

'I'll trouble you to get out,' I said.

'Oh, I've not finished yet.'

'And stay out till you've got over your fit of hysterics. You're behaving like a girl who needs a husband.'

'As I was saying,' Kingham went on in

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a voice that had become softer, more sinisterly quiet, more poisonously honied in proportion as mine had grown louder and harsher, 'your great defect is spiritual impotence. Your morality, your art—they're just impotence organised into systems. Your whole view of life—impotence again. Your very strength, such as it is—your horrible passive resistance—that's based in impotence too.'

'Which won't prevent me from throwing you downstairs if you don't clear out at once.' It is one thing to know the truth about oneself; it is quite another thing to have it told one by somebody else. I knew myself a natural bourgeois; but when Kingham told me so—and in his words—it seemed to me that I was learning a new and horribly unpleasant truth.

'Wait,' Kingham drawled out with exasperating calm, 'wait one moment. One more word before I go.'

'Get out,' I said. 'Get out at once.'

There was a knock at the door. It opened. The large, ruddy face of Herbert Comfrey looked round it into the room.

'I hope I don't disturb,' said Herbert, grinning at us.

'Oh, not a bit, not a bit,' cried Kingham. He jumped up, and with an excessive politeness proffered his vacant chair. 'I was just

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going. Do sit down. Wilkes was impatiently expecting you. Sit down, do sit down.' He propelled Herbert towards the chair.

'Really,' Herbert began, politely protesting.

But Kingham cut him short. 'And now I leave you two old friends together,' he said. 'Good-bye. Good-bye. I'm only sorry I shan't have an opportunity for saying that last word I wanted to say.'

Cumbrously, Herbert made as though to get up. 'I'll go,' he said. 'I had no idea. . . . I'm so sorry.'

But Kingham put his hands on his shoulders and forced him back into the chair. 'No, no,' he insisted. 'Stay where you are. I'm off.'

And picking up his hat, he ran out of the room.

'Queer fellow,' said Herbert. 'Who is he?'

'Oh, a friend of mine,' I answered. My anger had dropped, and I wondered, sadly, whether in calling him a friend I was telling the truth. And to think that, if he were no longer my friend, it was because of this lumpish imbecile sitting by my bed! I looked at Herbert pensively. He smiled at me—a smile that was all good nature. One could not bear a grudge against such a man.

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The breach was complete, at any rate for the time; it was more than two years before Kingham and I met again. But if I had lost Kingham, I had acquired Herbert Comfrey—only too completely. From that moment, my life in Paris was no longer my own; I had to share it with Herbert. Being at that moment quite unattached, a dog without a master, he fastened himself to me, taking it ingenuously for granted that I would be just as happy in his company as he was in mine. He established himself in my hotel, and for the rest of my stay in Paris I was almost never alone. I ought, I know, to have been firm with Herbert; I ought to have been rude, told him to go to the devil, kicked him downstairs. But I lacked the heart. I was too kind. (Another symptom of my spiritual impotence! My morality—impotence systematised. I know, I know.) Herbert preyed on me, and, like the Brahman who permits himself, unresistingly, to be devoured by every passing blood-sucker, from mosquitoes to tigers, I suffered him to prey on me. The most I did was occasionally to run away from him. Herbert was fortunately a sluggard. The Last Trump would hardly have got him out of bed before ten. When I wanted a day's freedom, I ordered an eight-o'clock breakfast and left the hotel

while Herbert was still asleep. Returning at night from these holidays, I would find him waiting, dog-like, in my room. I always had the impression that he had been waiting there the whole day—from dawn (or what for him was dawn—about noon) to midnight. And he was always so genuinely pleased to see me back that I was almost made to feel ashamed, as though I had committed an act of perfidy. I would begin to apologise and explain. I had had to go out early to see a man about something; and then I had met another man, who had asked me to have lunch with him; and then I had had to go to my dear old friend, Madame Dubois, for tea; after which I had dropped in on Langlois, and we had dined and gone to a concert. In fine, as he could see, I could not have got back a minute earlier.

It was in answer to the reproaches of my own conscience that I made these apologies. Poor Herbert never complained; he was only too happy to see me back. I could not help feeling that his clinging fidelity had established some sort of claim on me, that I was somehow a little responsible for him. It was absurd, of course, unreasonable and preposterous. For why should I, the victim, feel pity for my persecutor? Preposterous; and yet the fact remained that I did feel pity

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for him. I have always been too tender-hearted, insufficiently ruthless.

The time came for me to return to London. Herbert, who had just enough money to make it unnecessary for him to do anything or to be anywhere at any particular time, packed his bags and got into the same train. It was a very disagreeable journey; the train was crowded, the sea just choppy enough to make me sick. Coming on deck as we drew into Dover harbour, I found Herbert looking exasperatingly well. If I had not been feeling so ill, I should have found an excuse for quarrelling with him. But I had not the requisite energy. Meanwhile, it must be admitted, Herbert made himself very useful about the luggage.

Experience was shortly to teach me that, instead of feeling exasperated with poor Herbert, I ought to have been thankful that he was not far worse. For Herbert, after all, was only a burr-bore, a passive vegetable clinger. I might have been fastened on by one who was actively and piercingly as well as just clingingly boring. Herbert might, for example, have been like his brother-in-law, John Peddley; and then there would have been only three alternatives left me: murder, suicide, exile. I was feeling annoyed with Herbert as we slid slowly across Dover

harbour. A few hours later, I had realised that I ought to have been feeling thankful that he was no worse than he was. On Dover quay we met John Peddley.

Peddley was an active bore, the most active, I think, that I ever met; an indefatigable piercer, a relentless stuffer and crammer. He talked incessantly, and his knowledge of uninteresting subjects was really enormous. All that I know of the Swiss banking system, of artificial manures, of the law relating to insurance companies, of pig-breeding, of the ex-sultan of Turkey, of sugar rationing during the war, and a hundred other similar subjects, is due to Peddley. He was appalling, really appalling; there is no other word. I know no human being with whom I would less willingly pass an hour.

And yet the man was extremely amiable and full of good qualities. He had a kind heart. He was energetic and efficient. He was even intelligent. One could not listen to his account of insurance companies or artificial manures without realising that he had completely mastered his subject. Moreover, a successful solicitor, like Peddley, cannot be a fool; at least, that is what those of us who are not solicitors like to believe. What made the man so afflicting was his genius for dulness; his self-assertive ped-

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antry; his voice; his highly developed social instinct; and finally his insensitiveness. His genius for dulness caused him unfailingly to take an interest in the things which interested nobody else; and even when, by some mistake, he embarked on some more promising theme than the Swiss banking system, he had the power of rendering the most intrinsically fascinating of subjects profoundly dull. By a process of inverse alchemy he transmuted the purest gold to lead. His self-assertiveness and a certain pedagogic instinct made him ambitious to be the instructor of his fellows; he loved the sound of his own lecturing voice. And what a voice! Not unmusical, but loud, booming, persistent. It set up strange, nay, positively dangerous vibrations in one's head. I could never listen to it for more than a few minutes without feeling confused and dizzy. If I had had to live with that voice, I believe I should have begun, one day, to turn and turn like those Japanese waltzing mice—for ever. Peddley's voice affected the semi-circular canals. And then there was his sociability. It was a passion, a vice; he could not live without the company of his fellow-beings. It was an agony for him to be alone. He hunted company ferociously, as wild beasts pursue their prey. But the odd thing

was that he never seemed to crave for friendship or intimacy. So far as I know, he had no friends, in the ordinarily accepted sense of the term. He desired only acquaintances and auditors; and acquaintances and reluctant auditors were all that he had. In the first period of my acquaintance with Peddley I used to wonder what he did when he felt the need of confiding his intimate and private feelings. Later on I came to doubt whether, at ordinary times, he had any private life that needed talking about. Only very rarely and when something catastrophic had explosively shattered the crust of his public existence, did he ever develop a private life. When things were running smoothly in their regular daily grooves, he lived only on the public surface, at the office, at the club, at his own dinner-table, perfectly content so long as there was somebody present to listen to his talk. It mattered not that his auditors might be listening with manifest and extreme reluctance. Like Herbert—and indeed like most bores—John Peddley was more than half unaware of the people upon whom he inflicted himself. He realised that they were there, physically there; that was all. To their feelings and thoughts he was utterly insensitive. It was this insensitiveness, coupled with his passionate sociability, that

gave him his power. He could hunt down his victims and torture them without remorse. The wolf, if he were really sensitive to the feelings of the lamb, might end by turning vegetarian. But he is not sensitive. He is aware only of his own hunger and the deliciousness of mutton. It was the same with John Peddley. Ignorant of the terror which he inspired, of the mental agonies which he inflicted, he could pursue his course relentlessly and with a perfect equanimity.

My first impressions of John Peddley were not unfavourable. True, the halloo with which he greeted Herbert from the quay-side, as we were waiting our turn in the shoving crowd of human sheep to pass down the gangway on to dry land, sounded to me, in my present condition, rather distressingly hearty. And his appearance, when Herbert pointed him out to me, offended me by its robustious healthiness. Nor, when Herbert had introduced us, did I much appreciate the vehemence of his handshake and the loud volubility of his expressions of sympathy. But, on the other hand, he was very kind and efficient. He produced a silver flask from his pocket and made me take a swig of excellent old brandy. Noticing that I was chilled and green with cold, he insisted on my putting on his fur coat. He darted to the

custom-house and returned, in an incredibly short space of time, with the official hieroglyph duly chalked upon our suit-cases. A minute later we were sitting in his car, rolling briskly out of Dover along the Canterbury road.

I was feeling, at the time, too ill to think; and it hardly occurred to me that the situation was, after all, rather odd. Peddley had been waiting on the quay—but not for us; for we were unexpected. Waiting, then, for whom? The question did propound itself to me at the time, but uninsistently. There was no room in my mind for anything but the consciousness of sea-sickness. I forgot to wonder, and took my seat in the car, as though it were the most natural thing in the world that we should have been met at the quay by somebody who did not know that we were crossing. And the apparent naturalness of the situation was confirmed for me by the behaviour of my companions. For Peddley had taken it for granted from the first that we should come and stay with him at his country house. And Herbert, for whom one place was always just as good as another, had accepted the invitation at once. I began by protesting; but feebly, and more out of politeness than in earnest. For it was not essential for me to get back to London

that evening; and the prospect of that dismal journey from Dover, of the cab drive in the chill of the night across London, of a home-coming to fireless and deserted rooms, was very dreadful to me. If I accepted Peddley's invitation, I should find myself in less than half an hour in a warm, comfortable room, at rest and without responsibilities. The temptation to a sea-sick traveller was great; I succumbed.

'Well,' said Peddley heartily, in his loud, trombone-like voice, 'well, this *is* luck.' He brought down his hand with a tremendous clap on to my knee, as though he were patting a horse. 'The greatest luck! Think of running into you and Herbert at the gangway! And carrying you off like this! Too delightful, too delightful!'

I was warmed by his gladness; it seemed so genuine. And genuine it was—the genuine gladness of an ogre who has found a chubby infant straying alone in the woods.

'Extraordinary,' Peddley went on, 'how many acquaintances one meets at Dover quay. I come every day, you know, when I'm staying in the country; every day, to meet the afternoon boat. It's a great resource when one's feeling dull. All the advantages of a London club in the country. And there's always time for a good chat be-

fore the train starts. That's what makes me like this district of Kent so much. I'm trying to persuade my landlord to sell me the house. I've nearly coaxed him, I think.'

'And then,' said Herbert, who had a way of occasionally breaking his habitual silence with one of those simple and devastatingly judicious reflections which render children so dangerous in polite, adult society, 'and then you'll find that every one will be travelling by aeroplane. You'll have to sell the house and move to Croydon, near the aerodrome.'

But Peddley was not the man to be put out by even the most terrible of terrible infants. Wrapped in his insensitiveness, he was not so much as aware of the infant's terribleness.

'Pooh!' he retorted. 'I don't believe in aeroplanes. They'll never be safe or cheap or comfortable enough to compete with the steamers. Not in our day.' And he embarked on a long discourse about helicopters and gyroscopes, air pockets and the cost of petrol.

Meanwhile, I had begun to wonder, in some alarm, what manner of man this kind, efficient, hospitable host of mine could be. A man who, on his own confession, drove into Dover every afternoon to meet the packet; who waylaid sea-sick acquaintances and had good chats with them while they

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waited for the train; and who so much loved his afternoon diversions at the quay-side that he felt moved to refute in serious, technical argument the prophet of aerial travel. . . . Decidedly, a strange, a dangerous man. And his voice, meanwhile, boomed and boomed in my ears till I felt dizzy with the sound of it. Too late, it occurred to me that it might have been better if I had faced that dreary journey, that chilly drive, that icy and inhospitable home-coming to empty rooms. Too late.

I discovered afterwards that Peddley's holidays were always spent at railway junctions, frontier towns and places of international resort, where he was likely to find a good supply of victims. For week-ends, Whitsun and Easter, he had his country house near Dover. At Christmas time he always took a week or ten days on the French Riviera. And during the summer he simultaneously satisfied his social passions and his passion for mountain scenery by taking up some strategic position on the Franco-Swiss, Italo-French, or Swiss-Italian frontier, where he could go for walks in the hills and, in the intervals, meet the trans-continental trains. One year he would take his family to Pontarlier; another to Valorbès; another to Modane; another to Brigue; another to

Chiasso. In the course of a few years he had visited all the principal frontier towns in the mountainous parts of central and southern Europe. He knew the best seasons for each. Valorbes, for example, had to be visited early in the season. It was in July and at the beginning of August that the greatest number of English people passed through on their way to Switzerland. When he had seen them on their homeward way at the end of August, Peddley would move on for a fortnight's stay to one of the Italian frontier towns, so as to catch the September tourists on their way to Florence or Venice. His favourite haunt at this season was Modane. There are lots of good walks round Modane; and the principal trains wait there for two and a half hours. Rosy with healthful exercise, Peddley would come striding down at the appointed hour to meet the express. The victim was marked down, caught, and led away to the station buffet. For the next two hours Peddley indulged in what he called 'a *really* good chat.'

Peddley's circle of acquaintanceship was enormous. There was his legal practice, to begin with; that brought him into professional contact with a great variety of people. Then there were his clubs; he was a member of three or four, which he frequented assidu-

ously. And, finally, there was his own constantly hospitable dinner-table; it is astonishing what even the richest men will put up with for the sake of a good free meal. He was on talking terms with hundreds, almost thousands, of his fellows. It was not to be wondered at if he often spied familiar faces in the Modane custom-house. But there were many days, of course, when nobody of his acquaintance happened to be going South. On these occasions Peddley would seek out some particularly harassed-looking stranger and offer his assistance. The kindness, so far as Peddley was concerned, was entirely whole-hearted; he was not conscious of the wolf concealed beneath his sheep's clothing. He just felt a desire to be friendly and helpful and, incidentally, chatty. And helpful he certainly was. But in the buffet, when the ordeal of the custom-house was over, the stranger would gradually come to the conclusion, as he listened to Peddley's masterly exposition of the financial policy of Sweden, that he would have preferred, on the whole, to face the rapacious porters and the insolent douaniers alone and unassisted.

John Peddley had not yet enumerated all his reasons for supposing that aeroplanes would never cut out the cross-channel steamers, when we reached our destination.

'Ah, here we are,' he said, and opened the door for me to get out. 'But as I was saying,' he added, turning back to Herbert, 'the great defect of gyroscopes is their weight and the excessive rigidity they give to the machine. Now I grant you, my dear boy . . .'

But I forget what he granted. All I remember is that he was still granting it when we entered the drawing-room, where Mrs. Peddley was sitting with her children.

From the first, I found Grace Peddley charming. Positively and actively charming. And yet she was Herbert's own sister and in many respects very like him. Which only shows (what, after all, is sufficiently obvious) that we are prepared to tolerate and even admire in persons of the opposite sex qualities which infuriate us when we meet with them in persons of our own. I found Herbert a bore because he was mentally blank and vague, because he was without initiative, because he attached himself and clung. But Grace, whose character was really very similar to Herbert's, charmed me, in spite, or perhaps even because, of these qualities which made me rank her brother among the minor calamities of my existence.

But it is not only the moral and mental qualities of our fellow-beings that inspire our love or hate. I should not, I am sure,

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have found Herbert so deplorable if he had been smaller and less cumbrous, less clumsy of body. He was altogether too much the lubber fiend for my taste. Physically, Grace displayed little resemblance to her brother. She was tall, it is true, but slim and light of movement. Herbert was thick, shambling and leaden-footed. In a heavy, large-featured way, Herbert was not unhandsome. He had a profile; his nose and chin were Roman and positively noble. At a distance you might mistake him for some formidable Cæsarean man of action. But when you came close enough to see his eyes and read the expression on that large pretentious face, you perceived that, if Roman, he was the dullest and blankest Roman of them all.

Grace was not in the least imposing or classical. You could never, at however great a distance, have mistaken her for the mother of the Gracchi. Her features were small and seemed, somehow, still indefinite, like the features of a child. A lot of dark red-brown hair which, at that epoch, when fashion still permitted women to have hair, she wore looped up in a couple of spirally coiled plaits over either ear, emphasised the pallor of that childish face. A pair of very round, wide-open grey eyes looked out from under the hair with an expression of slightly

perplexed ingenuousness. Her face was the face of a rather ugly but very nice little girl. And when she smiled, she was suddenly almost beautiful. Herbert smiled in the same way—a sudden smile, full of kindness and good nature. It was that smile of his that made it impossible, for me at any rate, to treat him with proper ruthlessness. In both of them, brother and sister, it was a singularly dim and helpless goodness that expressed itself in that smile—a gentle, inefficient kindness that was tinged, in Herbert's case, with a sort of loutish rusticity. He was a bumpkin even in his goodness. Grace's smile was dim, but expressive at the same time of a native refinement which Herbert did not possess. They were brother and sister; but hers was a soul of better, more aristocratic birth.

It was in her relations with her children that the inefficiency of Grace's benevolence revealed itself most clearly in practice. She loved them, but she didn't know what to do with them or how to treat them. It was lucky for her—and for the children too—that she could afford to keep nurses and governesses. She could never have brought her children up by herself. They would either have died in infancy, or, if they had survived the first two years of unpunctual

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and hopelessly unhygienic feeding, would have grown up into little savages. As it was, they had been well brought up by professional child-tamers, were healthy and, except towards their mother, beautifully behaved. Their mother, however, they regarded as a being of another species—a lovely and eminently adorable being, but not serious, like nurse or Miss Phillips, not really grown up; more than half a child, and what wasn't child, mostly fairy. Their mother was the elfin being who permitted or even herself suggested the most fantastic breaches of all the ordinary rules. It was she, for example, who had invented the sport of bathing, in summer-time, under the revolving sprinkler which watered the lawn. It was she who had first suggested that excellent game, so strenuously disapproved of by Miss Phillips, nurse and father, of biting your slice of bread, at dinner-time, into the shape of a flower or a heart, a little bridge, a letter of the alphabet, a triangle, a railway engine. They adored her, but they would not take her seriously, as a person in authority; it never even occurred to them to obey her.

'You're a little girl,' I once heard her four-year-old daughter explaining to her. 'You're a little girl, mummy. Miss Phillips is an old lady.'

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Grace turned her wide, perplexed eyes in my direction. 'You see,' she said despairingly, yet with a kind of triumph, as though she were conclusively proving a disputed point, 'you see! What *can* I do with them?'

She couldn't do anything. When she was alone with them, the children became like little wild beasts.

'But, children,' she would protest, 'children! You really mustn't.' But she knew that she might as well have expostulated with a litter of grizzly bears.

Sometimes, when the protest was more than ordinarily loud and despairing, the children would look up from their absorbing mischief and reassuringly smile to her. 'It's all right, mummy,' they would say. 'It's quite all right, you know.'

And then, helplessly, their mother would give it up.

In Herbert I found this helpless inefficiency intolerable. But the ineptitude of his sister had a certain style; even her clumsiness was somehow graceful. For clumsy she was. When it came to sewing, for example, her fingers were all thumbs. She had quite given up trying to sew when I first knew her. But she still regarded it as part of her maternal duty to knit warm mufflers—she never attempted anything more complicated than

a muffler—for the children. She knitted very slowly, painfully concentrating her whole attention on the work in hand until, after a few minutes, exhausted by the mental strain, she was forced, with a great sigh, to give up and take a little rest. A muffler took months to finish. And when it was finished, what an extraordinary object it was! A sort of woollen fishing-net.

‘Not *quite* right, I’m afraid,’ Grace would say, holding it out at arm’s length. ‘Still,’ she added, cocking her head on one side and half closing her eyes, as though she were looking at a *pointilliste* picture, ‘it isn’t bad, considering.’

Secretly, she was very proud of these mufflers, proud with the pride of a child who has written its first letter or embroidered on canvas its first kettle-holder, with practically no help at all from nurse. It still seemed to her extraordinary that she could do things all by herself, unassisted.

This graceful ineptitude of hers amused and charmed me. True, if I had had to marry it, I might not have found it quite so enchanting, if only for the reason that I should never have been able to afford a sufficiency of servants and child-tamers to counteract its effects on domestic, daily life. Nor, I am afraid, would the absurd charm of her

intellectual vagueness have survived a long intimacy. For how vague, how bottomlessly vague she was! For example, she was quite incapable—and no experience could teach her—of realising the value of money. At one moment she was lavishly extravagant, would spend pounds as though they were pence. The next, overvaluing her money as wildly as she had undervalued it, she would grudge every penny spent on the first necessities of life. Poor Peddley would sometimes come home from his office to find that there was nothing for dinner but lentils. Another man would have been violently and explosively annoyed; but Peddley, whose pedagogic passions were more powerful than his anger, only made a reasoned expostulation in the shape of a discourse on the meaning of money and the true nature of wealth, followed by a brief lecture on dietetics and the theory of calories. Grace listened attentively and with humility. But try as she would, she could never remember a word of what he had said; or rather she remembered, partially, but remembered all wrong. The phrases which Peddley had built up into a rational discourse, Grace rearranged in her mind so as to make complete nonsense. It was the same with what she read. The arguments got turned upside down. The non-

essential facts were vividly remembered, the essential forgotten. Dates were utterly meaningless to her. Poor Grace! she was painfully conscious of her inefficiency of mind; she longed above everything to be learned, authoritative, capable. But though she read a great number of serious books—and read them with genuine pleasure, as well as on principle—she could never contrive to be well read. Inside her head everything got muddled. It was as though her mind were inhabited by some mischievous imp which delighted in taking to pieces the beautifully composed mosaics of learning and genius, and resetting the tesserae (after throwing a good many of them away) in the most fantastic and ludicrous disorder.

The consciousness of these defects made her particularly admire those who were distinguished by the opposite and positive qualities. It was this admiration, I am sure, which made her Peddley's wife. She was very young when he fell in love with her and asked her to marry him—eighteen to his thirty-four or thereabouts—very young and (being fresh from school, with its accompaniment of examination failures and pedagogic reproaches) more than ordinarily sensitive to her own shortcomings and to the merits of those unlike herself. Peddley made his entry

into her life. The well-documented accuracy of his knowledge of artificial manures and the Swiss banking system astonished her. True, she did not feel a passionate interest in these subjects; but for that she blamed herself, not him. He seemed to her the personification of learning and wisdom—omniscient, an encyclopædia on legs.

It is not uncommon for schoolgirls to fall in love with their aged professors. It is the tribute paid by youth—by flighty, high-spirited, but passionately earnest youth—to venerable mind. Grace was not lucky. The most venerable mind with which, at eighteen, she had yet come into contact was Peddley's. Peddley's! She admired, she was awed by what seemed to her the towering, Newtonian intellect of the man. And when the Newtonian intellect laid itself at her feet, she felt at first astonished—was it possible that he, Peddley, the omniscient, should abase himself before one who had failed three times, ignominiously, in the Cambridge Locals?—then flattered and profoundly grateful. Moreover, Peddley, unlike the proverbial professor, was neither grey-bearded nor decrepit. He was in the prime of life, extremely active, healthy, and energetic; good-looking, too, in the ruddy, large-chinned style of those Keen Business Men one sees por-

trayed in advertisements and the illustrations of magazine stories. Quite inexperienced in these matters, she easily persuaded herself that her gratitude and her schoolgirl's excitement were the genuine passion of the novels. She imagined that she was in love with him. And it would have mattered little, in all probability, if she had not. Peddley's tireless courtship would have ended infallibly by forcing her to surrender. There was no strength in Grace; she could be bullied into anything. In this case, however, only a very little bullying was necessary. At his second proposal, she accepted him. And so, in 1914, a month or two before the outbreak of war, they were married.

A marriage which began with the war might have been expected to be a strange, unusual, catastrophic marriage. But for the Peddleys, as a matter of fact, the war had next to no significance; it did not touch their life. For the first year John Peddley made *Business as Usual* his motto. Later, after being rejected for active service on account of his short sight, he enrolled himself as a temporary bureaucrat; was highly efficient in a number of jobs; had managed, when the medical boards became stricter, to make himself indispensable, as a sugar rationer; and ended up with an O.B.E.

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Grace, meanwhile, lived quietly at home and gave birth, in three successive years, to three children. They kept her occupied; the war, for her, was an irrelevance. She witnessed neither its tragedies, nor its feverish and sordid farces. She knew as little of apprehension, suspense, grief, as she knew of the reckless extravagances, the intoxications, the too facile pleasures, the ferocious debaucheries which ran parallel with the agonies, which mingled and alternated with them. Ineffectually, Grace nursed her babies; she might have been living in the eighteenth century.

At the time I knew her first Grace had been married about six years. Her eldest child was five years old, her youngest about two. Peddley, I judged, was still in love with her—in his own way, that is. The wild passion which had hurried him into a not very reasonable marriage, a passion mainly physical, had subsided. He was no longer mad about Grace; but he continued to find her eminently desirable. Habit, moreover, had endeared her to him, had made her indispensable; it had become difficult for him to imagine an existence without her. But for all that, there was no intimacy between them. Possessing, as I have said, no private life of his own, Peddley did not understand

the meaning of intimacy. He could give no confidences and therefore asked for none. He did not know what to do with them when they came to him unasked. I do not know if Grace ever tried to confide in him; if so, she must soon have given it up as a bad job. One might as well have tried to confide into a gramophone; one might whisper the most secret and sacred thoughts into the trumpet of the machine, but there came back only a loud booming voice that expounded the financial policy of Sweden, food control, or the law relating to insurance companies—it depended which particular record out of the large, but still limited repertory, happened at the moment to be on the turn table. In the spiritual home of the Peddleys there was only a bedroom and a lecture-room—no sentimental boudoir for confidences, no quiet study pleasantly violated from time to time by feminine intrusion. Nothing between the physical intimacies of the bedroom and the impersonal relations of pupil and sonorously braying professor in the reverberant lecture-hall. And then, what lectures!

Grace, who still believed in the intellectual eminence of her husband, continued to blame herself for finding them tedious. But tedious they were to her; that was a fact

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she could not deny. Long practice had taught her to cultivate a kind of mental deafness. Peddley's discourses no longer got on her nerves, because she no longer heard them. I have often seen her sitting, her wide eyes turned on Peddley with an expression, apparently, of rapt attention, seeming to drink in every word he uttered. It was so she must have sat in those first months of her marriage, when she really did listen, when she still tried her hardest to be interested and to remember correctly. Only in those days, I fancy, there can never have been quite so perfect a serenity on her face. There must have been little frowns of concentration and agonisingly suppressed yawns. Now there was only an unruffled calm, the calm of complete and absolute abstraction.

I found her out on the very first evening of our acquaintance. John Peddley, who must have been told (I suppose by Herbert) that I was interested, more or less professionally, in music, began, in my honour, a long description of the mechanism of pianolas. I was rather touched by this manifest effort to make me feel spiritually at home, and, though I was dizzied by the sound of his voice, made a great show of being interested in what he was saying. In a pause, while Peddley was helping himself to the vege-

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tables (what a blessing it was to have a moment's respite from that maddening voice!), I turned to Grace and asked her politely, as a new guest should, whether she were as much interested in pianolas as her husband. She started, as though I had woken her out of sleep, turned on me a pair of blank, rather frightened eyes, blushed scarlet.

'As much interested as John in *what?*' she asked.

'Pianolas.'

'Oh, pianolas.' And she uttered the word in a puzzled, bewildered tone which made it quite clear that she had no idea that pianolas had been the subject of conversation for at least the last ten minutes. 'Pianolas?' she repeated almost incredulously. And she had seemed so deeply attentive.

I admired her for this power of absenting herself, for being, spiritually, not there. I admired, but I also pitied. To have to live in surroundings from which it was necessary, in mere self-preservation, to absent oneself—that was pitiable indeed.

Next morning, assuming an invalid's privilege, I had breakfast in bed. By the time I came down from my room, Peddley and Herbert had set out for a hearty walk. I found Grace alone, arranging flowers. We

exchanged good mornings. By the expression of her face, I could see that she found my presence rather formidable. A stranger, a high-brow, a musical critic—what to say to him? Courageously doing her duty, she began to talk to me about Bach. Did I like Bach? Didn't I think he was the greatest musician? I did my best to reply; but somehow, at that hour of the morning, there seemed to be very little to say about Bach. The conversation began to droop.

'And the *Well-Tempered Clavichord*,' she went on desperately. 'What lovely things in that!'

'And so useful for torturing children who learn the piano,' I replied, as desperately. Facetiousness, the last resort.

But my words had touched a chord in Grace's mind. 'Torture,' she said. 'That's the word. I remember when I was at school . . .'

And there we were, happily launched at last upon an interesting, because a personal, subject.

Grace was as fond of her dear old school as Herbert was of his. But, with the rest of her sex, she had a better excuse for her fondness. For many women, the years spent in that uncomplicated, companionable, exciting, purely feminine world, which is the

world of school, are the happiest of their lives. Grace was one of them. She adored her school; she looked back on her schooldays as on a golden age. True, there had been Cambridge Locals and censorious mistresses; but, on the other hand, there had been no Peddley, no annual child-bearing, no domestic responsibilities, no social duties, no money to be too lavish or too stingy with, no servants. She talked with enthusiasm, and I listened with pleasure.

An hour and a half later, when the bores came back, red-faced and ravenous, from their walk, we were sorry to be interrupted. I had learned a great many facts about Grace's girlhood. I knew that she had had an unhappy passion for the younger of the visiting music mistresses; that one of her friends had received a love-letter from a boy of fifteen, beginning: 'I saw a photograph of you in the *Sketch*, walking in the Park with your mother. Can I ever forget it?' I knew that she had had mumps for five weeks, that she had climbed on the roof by moonlight in pyjamas, that she was no good at hockey.

From time to time most of us feel a need, often urgent and imperious, to talk about ourselves. We desire to assert our personalities, to insist on a fact which the world

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about us seems in danger of forgetting—the fact that we exist, that we are we. In some people the desire is so chronic and so strong that they can never stop talking about themselves. Rather than be silent, they will pour out the most humiliating and discreditable confidences. Grace was afflicted by no such perverse and extravagant longings; there was nothing of the exhibitionist in her. But she did like, every now and then, to have a good talk about her soul, her past history, her future. She liked to talk, and she too rarely had an opportunity. In me she found a sympathetic listener and commentator. By the end of the morning she was regarding me as an old friend. And I, for my part, had found her charming. So charming, indeed, that for Grace's sake I was prepared to put up even with John Peddley's exposition of the law regarding insurance companies.

Within a few weeks of our first introduction we were finding it the most natural thing in the world that we should be constantly meeting. We talked a great deal, on these occasions, about ourselves, about Life and about Love—subjects which can be discussed with the fullest pleasure and profit only between persons of opposite sexes. On none of these three topics, it must be admitted, did Grace have very much of significance to say.

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She had lived very little and loved not at all; it was impossible, therefore, that she should know herself. But it was precisely this ignorance and her ingenuous, confident expression of it that charmed me.

'I feel I'm already old,' she complained to me. 'Old and finished. Like those funny straw hats and leg-of-mutton sleeves in the bound volumes of the *Illustrated London News*,' she added, trying to make her meaning clearer for me.

I laughed at her. 'You're absurdly young,' I said, 'and you haven't begun.'

She shook her head and sighed.

When we talked about love, she professed a sad, middle-aged scepticism.

'People make a most ridiculous fuss about it.'

'Rightly.'

'But it's not worth making a fuss about,' she insisted. 'Not in reality. Not outside of books.'

'Isn't it?' I said. 'You'll think differently,' I told her, 'when you've waited two or three hours for somebody who hasn't turned up, when you can't sleep for wondering where somebody's been and with whom, and you want to cry—yes, you do cry—and you feel as though you were just going to have influenza.'

'Ah, but that isn't love,' Grace retorted sententiously, in the tone of one who has some private and certain source of information.

'What is it, then?'

'It's . . . ' Grace hesitated and suddenly blushed, 'it's . . . well, it's physical.'

I could not help laughing, uproariously.

Grace was vexed. 'Well, isn't it true?' she insisted obstinately.

'Perfectly,' I had to admit. 'But why isn't that love?' I added, hoping to elicit Grace's views on the subject.

She let me have them. They were positively Dantesque. I can only suppose that Peddley's ardours had left her cold, disgusted even.

But Life and Love were not our only topics. Grace's ignorance and my own native reticence made it impossible for us to discuss these themes with any profit for very long at a stretch. In the intervals, like John Peddley, I played the pedagogic part. Through casual remarks of mine, Grace suddenly became aware of things whose very existence had previously been unknown to her—things like contemporary painting and literature, young music, new theories of art. It was a revelation. All her efforts, it seemed to her, all her strivings towards culture had

been wasted. She had been laboriously trying to scale the wrong mountain, to force her way into the wrong sanctuary. At the top, if she had ever reached it, within the holy of holies, she would have found—what? a grotesque and moth-eaten collection of those funny little straw hats and leg-of-mutton sleeves from the bound volumes of the *Illustrated London News*. It was dreadful, it was humiliating. But now she had caught a glimpse of another sanctuary, upholstered by Martine, enriched by the offerings of the Poirets and Lanvins of the spirit; a modish, modern sanctuary; a fashionable Olympus. She was eager to climb, to enter.

Acting the part of those decayed gentlewomen who, for a consideration, introduce *parvenus* into good society, I made Grace acquainted with all that was smartest and latest in the world of the spirit. I gave her lessons in intellectual etiquette, warned her against æsthetic *gaffes*. She listened attentively, and was soon tolerably at home in the unfamiliar world—knew what to say when confronted by a Dada poem, a picture by Picasso, a Schoenberg quartet, an Archipenko sculpture.

I was working, at that period, as a musical critic, and two or three times a week I used to take Grace with me to my concerts. It

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did not take me long to discover that she had very little feeling for music and no analytical understanding of it. But she professed, hypocritically, to adore it. And as it bored me most excruciatingly to have to go by myself to listen to second-rate pianists playing the same old morsels of Liszt and Chopin, second-rate contraltos fruitily hooting Schubert and Brahms, second-rate fiddlers scraping away at Tartini and Wieniawski, I pretended to believe in Grace's enthusiasm for the musical art and took her with me to all the most painful recitals. If the hall were empty—which, to the eternal credit of the music-loving public, it generally was—one could get a seat at the back, far away from the other sparsely sprinkled auditors, and talk very pleasantly through the whole performance.

At first, Grace was terribly shocked when, after listening judiciously to the first three bars of *Du bist wie eine Blume* or the *Trillo del Diavolo*, I opened a conversation. She herself had a very perfect concert-goer's technique, and listened with the same expression of melancholy devotion, as though she were in church, to every item on the programme. My whispered chatter seemed to her sacrilegious. It was only when I assured her, professionally and *ex cathedra*, that the stuff

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wasn't worth listening to, that she would consent, albeit with considerable misgivings in the early days of our concert-going, to take her part in the conversation. In a little while, however, she grew accustomed to the outrage; so much so, that when the music or the performance happened to be good (a little detail which Grace was not sufficiently musical to notice) it was I who had to play the verger's part and hush her sacrilegious chatter in a place suddenly made holy. She learned in the end to take her cue from me—to look devout when I looked devout, to chatter when I chattered.

Once, rather maliciously, I put on my raptest expression while some maudlin incompetent was pounding out Rachmaninoff. After a quick glance at me through the tail of her eye, Grace also passed into ecstasy, gazing at the pianist as St. Theresa might have gazed at the uplifted Host. When the ordeal was over, she turned on me a pair of bright, shining eyes.

'Wasn't that splendid?' she said. And such is the power of self-suggestion that she had genuinely enjoyed it.

'I thought it the most revolting performance I ever listened to,' was my answer.

Poor Grace turned fiery red, the tears came into her eyes; to hide them from me, she

averted her face. 'I thought it very good,' she insisted, heroically. 'But of course I'm no judge.'

'Oh, of course it wasn't as bad as all that,' I made haste to assure her. 'One exaggerates, you know.' The sight of her unhappy face had made me feel profoundly penitent. I had meant only to make mild fun of her, and I had managed somehow to hurt her, cruelly. I wished to goodness that I had never played the stupid trick. It was a long time before she completely forgave me.

Later, when I knew her better, I came to understand why it was that she had taken my little clownery so hardly. Rudely and suddenly, my joke had shattered one of those delightful pictures of herself which Grace was for ever fancifully creating and trying to live up to. What had been a joke for me had been, for her, a kind of murder.

Grace was a born visualiser. I discovered, for example, that she had what Galton calls a 'number form.' When she had to do any sort of arithmetical calculation, she saw the figures arranged in space before her eyes. Each number had its own peculiar colour and its own position in the form. After a hundred the figures became dim; that was why she always found it so difficult to work in large numbers. The difference between three

thousand, thirty thousand, and three hundred thousand was never immediately apparent to her, because in the case of these large numbers she could *see* nothing; they floated indistinctly on the blurred fringes of her number form. A million, however, she saw quite clearly; its place was high up, to the left, above her head, and it consisted of a huge pile of those envelopes they have at banks for putting money in—thousands and thousands of them, each marked with the word **MILLION** in large black letters. All her mental processes were a succession of visual images; and these mental pictures were so vivid as to rival in brightness and definition the images she received through her eyes. What she could not visualise, she could not think about.

I am myself a very poor visualiser. I should find it very difficult, for example, to describe from memory the furniture in my room. I know that there are so many chairs, so many tables, doors, bookshelves, and so on; but I have no clear mental vision of them. When I do mental arithmetic, I see no coloured numbers. The word Africa does not call up in my mind, as Grace assured me once that it always did in hers, a vision of sand with palm trees and lions. When I make plans for the future, I do not see myself, as though on the stage, playing a part in

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imaginary dramas. I think without pictures, abstractly and in the void. That is why I cannot pretend to write with complete understanding of the workings of Grace's mind. The congenitally deaf are not the best judges of music. I can only guess, only imaginatively reconstruct.

From what I gathered in conversation with her, I imagine that Grace was in the habit of vividly 'seeing herself' in every kind of situation. Some of these situations had no relation to her actual life, were the purely fantastic and hypothetical situations of day-dreams. Others were real, or at any rate potentially real, situations. Living her life, she saw herself living it, acting in the scenes of the flat quotidian drama a very decided and definite part. Thus, when she went for a walk in the country, she saw herself walking—a female mountaineer for tireless strength and energy. When she accompanied Peddley on his annual expeditions to the Riviera, she saw herself as she climbed into the *wagon lit*, or swam along the Promenade des Anglais, as an immensely rich and haughty milady, envied by the *canaille*, remote and star-like above them. On certain socially important occasions at home, a similar character made its appearance. I saw the milady once or twice during the first months of our acquaint-

anceship. Later on the milady turned into a very Parisian, very twentieth-cum-eighteenth-century *grande dame*. But of that in its place.

Grace was much assisted in these visualisations of herself by her clothes. In the costume which she donned for a two-mile walk in Kent she might have crossed the Andes. And in all her garments, for every occasion, one noticed the same dramatic appropriateness. It was a pity that she did not know how to change her features with her clothes. Her face, whether she lolled along the sea-fronts of the Riviera or addressed herself, in brogues, short skirts, and sweaters to the ascent of some Kentish hillock, was always the same—the face of a rather ugly but very nice little girl; a face that opened on to the world through large, perplexed eyes, and that became, from time to time, suddenly and briefly beautiful with a dim benevolence when she smiled.

Grace's visions of herself were not merely momentary and occasional. There was generally one predominating character in which she saw herself over considerable periods of time. During the first four years of her marriage, for example, she had seen herself predominantly as the housewife and mother. But her manifest incapacity to act either of

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these parts successfully had gradually chilled her enthusiasm for them. She wanted to run the house, she saw herself tinkling about with keys, giving orders to the maids; but, in practice, whenever she interfered with the rule of her masterful old cook, everything went wrong. She loved her children, she pictured them growing up, healthy and good, under her influence; but they were always sick when she fed them, they behaved like beasts when she tried to make them obey. To one who tried to see herself as the complete, the almost German matron, it was not encouraging. By the time her last child was born, she had practically abandoned the attempt. From the first, the baby had been handed over, body and soul, to the nurses. And except when she was seized with a financial panic and forbade the ordering of anything but lentils, she let the old cook have her way.

When I first met her, Grace was not seeing herself continuously in any one predominating rôle. Punctured by sharp experience, the matron had flattened out and collapsed; and the matron had had, so far, no successor. Left without an imaginary character to live up to, Grace had relapsed into that dim characterlessness which in her, as in Herbert, seemed to be the natural state. She still saw

herself vividly enough in the separate, occasional incidents of her life—as the mountain climber, as the rich and haughty milady. But she saw no central and permanent figure in whose life these incidents of mountaineering and opulently visiting the Riviera occurred. She was a succession of points, so to speak; not a line.

Her friendship with me was responsible for the emergence into her consciousness of a new permanent image of herself. She discovered in my company a new rôle, not so important, indeed, not so rich in potentialities as that of the matron, but still a leading lady's part. She had been so long without a character that she eagerly embraced the opportunity of acquiring one, however incongruous. And incongruous it was, this new character; odd and eminently unsuitable. Grace had come to see herself as a musical critic.

It was our concert-going—our professional concert-going—that had done it. If I had happened not to be a journalist, if we had paid for admission instead of coming in free on my complimentary tickets, it would never have occurred to her to see herself as a critic. Simple mortals, accustomed to pay for their pleasures, are always impressed by the sight of a free ticket. The critic's *jus primæ noctis*

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seems to them an enviable thing. Sharing the marvellous privilege, Grace came to feel that she must also share the judicial duties of a critic. She saw herself distributing praise and blame—a rapturous listener when the performance was worth listening to, a contemptuous chatterer when it wasn't. Identifying herself with me—not the real but an ideal exalted me—she pictured herself as the final arbiter of musical reputations. My malicious little practical joke had thrown down this delightful image of herself. The critic had suddenly been murdered.

At the time I did not understand why poor Grace should have been so deeply hurt. It was only in the light of my later knowledge that I realised what must have been her feelings. It was only later, too, that I came to understand the significance of that curious little pantomime which she used regularly to perform as we entered a concert hall. That languid gait with which she strolled across the vestibule, dragging her feet with a kind of reluctance, as though she were on boring business; that sigh, that drooping of the eyelids as she stood, patiently, while the attendant looked at my tickets; that air, when we were in the concert-room, of being perfectly at home, of owning the place (she used, I remember,

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to put her feet up on the seat in front); and that smile of overacted contempt, that wearily amused smile with which she used (once she had got over the idea that she was committing a sacrilege) to respond, during a bad performance, to my whispered chatter—these were the gait, the bored patience, the possessive at-homeness, the contempt of a hardened critic.

And what a quantity of music she bought at this time and never played! How many volumes of musical criticism and biography she took out of the library! And the grave pronouncements she used to make across the dinner-table! 'Beethoven was the greatest of them all'; and so on in the same style. I understood it all afterwards. And the better I understood, the more I regretted my cruel little joke. As the critic, she had been so happy. My joke destroyed that happiness. She became diffident and self-conscious, got actor's fright; and though I never repeated the jest, though I always encouraged her, after that, to believe in her musicianship, she could never whole-heartedly see herself in the part again.

But what a poor part, at the best of times, the critic's was! It was too dry, too intellectual and impersonal to be really satisfying. That it lay within my power to provide her

with a much better rôle—the guilty wife’s—I do not and did not at the time much doubt. True, when I knew her first, Grace was a perfectly virtuous young woman. But her virtue was founded on no solid principle—on a profound love for her husband, for example; or on strong religious prejudices. It was not a virtue that in any way involved her intimate being. If she happened to be virtuous, it was more by accident than on principle or from psychological necessity. She had not yet had any occasion for not being virtuous, that was all. She could have been bullied or cajoled into infidelity as she had been bullied and cajoled by Peddley into marriage. Grace floated vaguely on the surface of life without compass or destination; one had only to persuade her that adultery was Eldorado, and she would have shaped her course forthwith towards that magical shore. It was just a question of putting the case sufficiently speciously. She still retained, at this time, the prejudices of her excellent upper middle-class upbringing; but they were not very deeply rooted. Nothing in Grace was so deeply rooted that it could not quite easily be eradicated.

I realised these facts at the time. But I did not try to take advantage of them. The truth is that, though I liked Grace very much,

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I was never urgently in love with her. True, one can very agreeably and effectively act the part of the 'lover,' in the restricted and technical sense of that term, without being wildly in love. And if both parties could always guarantee to keep their emotions in a state of equilibrium, these little sentimental sensualities would doubtless be most exquisitely diverting. But the equilibrium can never be guaranteed. The balanced hearts begin sooner or later, almost inevitably, to tilt towards love or hatred. In the end, one of the sentimental sensualities turns into a passion—whether of longing or disgust it matters not—and then, farewell to all hope of tranquillity. I should be chary of saying so in Kingham's presence; but the fact remains that I like tranquillity. For me, the love-game, without love, is not worth the candle. Even as a mere hedonist I should have refrained. And I had other scruples—scruples which an overmastering passion might have overridden, but which were sufficient to keep a mere mild sensuality in check. I was never Grace's lover; neither genuinely, by right of passion, nor technically by the accident of physical possession. Never her lover. An ironic fate had reserved for me a less glorious part—the part, not of the lover, but of the introducer of lovers. All uninten-

tionally, I was to play benevolent Uncle Pandarus to Grace's Cressida. And there were two Troiluses.

The first of them was no less—or shouldn't I rather say 'no more?' for how absurdly his reputation was exaggerated!—than Clegg, *the* Clegg, Rodney Clegg, the painter. I have known Clegg for years and liked him, in a way—liked him rather as one likes Grock, or Little Tich, or the Fratellini: as a comic spectacle. This is not the best way of liking people, I know. But with Rodney it was the only way. You had either to like him as a purveyor of amusement, or dislike him as a human being. That, at any rate, was always my experience. I have tried hard to get to know and like him intimately—off the stage, so to speak. But it was never any good. In the end, I gave up the attempt once and for all, took to regarding him quite frankly as a music-hall comedian, and was able, in consequence, thoroughly to enjoy his company. Whenever I feel like a tired business man, I go to see Rodney Clegg.

Perhaps, as a lover, Rodney was somehow different from his ordinary self. Perhaps he dropped his vanity and his worldliness. Perhaps he became unexpectedly humble and unselfish, forgot his snobbery, craved no longer for cheap successes and, for love,

thought the world well lost. Perhaps. Or more probably, I am afraid, he remained very much as he always was, and only in Grace's eyes seemed different from the Rodney whose chatter and little antics diverted the tired business man in me. Was hers the correct vision of him, or was mine? Neither, I take it.

It must have been in the spring of 1921 that I first took Grace to Rodney's studio. For her, the visit was an event; she was about to see, for the first time in her life, a famous man. Particularly famous at the moment, it happened; for Rodney was very much in the papers that season. There had been a fuss about his latest exhibition. The critics, with a fine contemptuous inaccuracy, had branded his pictures as post-impressionistic, cubistic, futuristic; they threw any brick-bat that came to hand. And the pictures had been found improper as well as disturbingly 'modern.' Professional moralists had been sent by the Sunday papers to look at them; they came back boiling with professional indignation. Rodney was delighted, of course. This was fame—and a fame, moreover, that was perfectly compatible with prosperity. The outcry of the professional moralists did not interfere with his sales. He was doing a very good business.

Rodney's conversion to 'modern art,' instead of ruining him, had been the source of increased profit and an enhanced notoriety. With his unfailing, intuitive knowledge of what the public wanted, he had devised a formula which combined modernity with the more appealing graces of literature and pornography. Nothing, for example, could have been less academic than his nudes. They were monstrously elongated; the paint was laid on quite flatly; there was no modelling, no realistic light and shade; the human form was reduced to a paper silhouette. The eyes were round black boot-buttons, the nipples magenta berries, the lips vermilion hearts; the hair was represented by a collection of crinkly black lines. The exasperated critics of the older school protested that a child of ten could have painted them. But the child of ten who could have painted such pictures must have been an exceedingly perverse child. In comparison, Freud's Little Hans would have been an angel of purity. For Rodney's nudes, however unrealistic, were luscious and voluptuous, were even positively indecent. What had distressed the public in the work of the French post-impressionists was not so much the distortion and the absence of realism as the repellent austerity, the intellectual asceticism,

which rejected the appeal both of sex and of the anecdote. Rodney had supplied the deficiencies. For these engagingly luscious nudities of his were never represented in the void, so to speak, but in all sorts of curious and amusing situations—taking tickets at railway stations, or riding bicycles, or sitting at cafés with negro jazz-bands in the background, drinking *crème de menthe*. All the people who felt that they ought to be in the movement, that it was a disgrace not to like modern art, discovered in Rodney Clegg, to their enormous delight, a modern artist whom they could really and honestly admire. His pictures sold like hot cakes.

The conversion to modernism marked the real beginning of Rodney's success. Not that he had been unknown or painfully poor before his conversion. A man with Rodney's social talents, with Rodney's instinct for popularity, could never have known real obscurity or poverty. But all things are relative; before his conversion, Rodney had been obscurer and poorer than he deserved to be. He knew no duchesses, no millionairesses, then; he had no deposit at the bank—only a current account that swelled and ebbed capriciously, like a mountain stream. His conversion changed all that.

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When Grace and I paid our first visit, he was already on the upward path.

'I hope he isn't very formidable,' Grace said to me, as we were making our way to Hampstead to see him. She was always rather frightened by the prospect of meeting new people.

I laughed. 'It depends what you're afraid of,' I said. 'Of being treated with high-brow haughtiness, or losing your virtue. I never heard of any woman who found him formidable in the first respect.'

'Oh, that's all right, then,' said Grace, looking relieved.

Certainly, there was nothing very formidable in Rodney's appearance. At the age of thirty-five he had preserved (and he also cultivated with artful care) the appearance of a good-looking boy. He was small and neatly made, slim, and very agile in his movements. Under a mass of curly brown hair, which was always in a state of picturesque and studied untidiness, his face was like the face of a lively and impertinent cherub. Smooth, rounded, almost unlined, it still preserved its boyish contours. (There were always pots and pots of beauty cream on his dressing-table.) His eyes were blue, bright and expressive. He had good teeth,

and when he smiled two dimples appeared in his cheeks.

He opened the studio door himself. Dressed in his butcher's blue overalls, he looked charming. One's instinct was to pat the curly head and say: 'Isn't he too sweet! Dressed up like that, pretending to be a workman!' Even I felt moved to make some such gesture. To a woman, a potential mother of chubby children, the temptation must have been almost irresistible.

Rodney was very cordial. 'Dear old Dick!' he said, and patted me on the shoulder. I had not seen him for some months; he had spent the winter abroad. 'What a delight to see you!' I believe he genuinely liked me.

I introduced him to Grace. He kissed her hand. 'Too charming of you to have come. And what an enchanting ring!' he added, looking down again at her hand, which he still held in his own. 'Do, please, let me look at it.'

Grace smiled and blushed with pleasure as she gave it him. 'I got it in Florence,' she said. 'I'm so glad you like it.'

It was certainly a charming piece of old Italian jewellery. Sadly I reflected that I had known Grace intimately for more than six months and never so much as noticed the

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ring, far less made any comment on it. No wonder that I had been generally unlucky in love.

We found the studio littered with specimens of Rodney's latest artistic invention. Naked ladies in brown boots leading borzoi dogs; tenderly embracing one another in the middle of a still-life of bottles, guitars and newspapers (the old familiar modern still-life rendered acceptable to the great public and richly saleable by the introduction of the equivocal nudes), more naked ladies riding on bicycles (Rodney's favourite subject, his patent, so to say); playing the concertina; catching yellow butterflies in large green nets. Rodney brought them out one by one. From her armchair in front of the easel, Grace looked at them; her face wore that rapt religious expression which I had so often noticed in the concert-room.

'Lovely,' she murmured, as canvas succeeded canvas, 'too lovely.'

Looking at the pictures, I reflected with some amusement that, a year before, Rodney had been painting melodramatic crucifixions in the style of Tiepolo. At that time he had been an ardent Christian.

'Art can't live without religion,' he used to say then. 'We must get back to religion.'

And with his customary facility Rodney

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had got back to it. Oh, those pictures! They were really shocking in their accomplished insincerity. So emotional, so dramatic, and yet so utterly false and empty. The subjects, you felt, had been apprehended as a cinema producer might apprehend them, in terms of 'effectiveness.' There were always great darknesses and tender serene lights, touches of vivid colour and portentous silhouettes. Very 'stark,' was what Rodney's admirers used to call those pictures, I remember. They were too stark by half for my taste.

Rodney set up another canvas on the easel.

'I call this "The Bicycle Made for Two,"' he said.

It represented a negress and a blonde with a Chinese white skin, riding on a tandem bicycle against a background of gigantic pink and yellow roses. In the foreground, on the right, stood a plate of fruit, tilted forward towards the spectator, in the characteristic 'modern' style. A greyhound trotted along beside the bicycle.

'Really too . . .' began Grace ecstatically. But finding no synonym for 'lovely,' the epithet which she had applied to all the other pictures, she got no further, but made one of those non-committal laudatory noises, which are so much more satisfactory than ar-

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ticulate speech, when you don't know what to say to an artist about his works. She looked up at me. 'Isn't it really . . . ?' she asked.

'Yes, absolutely . . . ' I nodded my affirmation. Then, rather maliciously, 'Tell me, Rodney,' I said, 'do you still paint religious pictures? I remember a most grandiose Descent from the Cross you were busy on not so long ago.'

But my malice was disappointed. Rodney was not in the least embarrassed by this reminder of the skeleton in his cupboard. He laughed.

'Oh, *that*,' he said. 'I painted it over. Nobody would buy. One cannot serve God and Mammon.' And he laughed again, heartily, at his own witticism.

It went into his repertory at once, that little joke. He took to introducing the subject of his religious paintings himself, in order to have an opportunity of bringing out the phrase, with a comical parody of clerical unction, at the end of his story. In the course of the next few weeks I heard him repeat it, in different assemblages, three or four times.

'God and Mammon,' he chuckled again. 'Can't be combined.'

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‘Only goddesses and Mammon,’ I suggested, nodding in the direction of his picture.

Later, I had the honour of hearing my words incorporated into Rodney’s performance. He had a wonderfully retentive memory.

‘Precisely,’ he said. ‘Goddesses, I’m happy to say, of a more popular religion. Are you a believer, Mrs. Peddley?’ He smiled at her, raising his eyebrows. ‘I am—fervently. I’m *croyant* and’ (he emphasised the ‘and’ with arch significance) ‘*pratiquant*.’

Grace laughed rather nervously, not knowing what to answer. ‘Well, I suppose we all are,’ she said. She was not accustomed to this sort of gallantry.

Rodney smiled at her more impertinently than ever. ‘How happy I should be,’ he said, ‘if I could make a convert of you!’

Grace repeated her nervous laugh and, to change the subject, began to talk about the pictures.

We sat there for some time, talking, drinking tea, smoking cigarettes. I looked at my watch; it was half-past six. I knew that Grace had a dinner-party that evening.

‘We shall have to go,’ I said to her. ‘You’ll be late for your dinner.’

‘Good heavens!’ cried Grace, when she

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heard what the time was. She jumped up. 'I must fly. Old Lady Wackerbath—imagine if I kept her waiting!' She laughed, but breathlessly; and she had gone quite pale with anticipatory fright.

'Stay, do stay,' implored Rodney. 'Keep her waiting.'

'I daren't.'

'But, my dear lady, you're young,' he insisted; 'you have the right—I'd say the duty, if the word weren't so coarse and masculine—to be unpunctual. At your age you must do what you like. You see, I'm assuming that you like being here,' he added parenthetically.

She returned his smile. 'Of course.'

'Well then, stay; do what you like; follow your caprices. After all, that's what you're there for.' Rodney was very strong on the Eternal Feminine.

Grace shook her head. 'Good-bye. I've loved it so much.'

Rodney sighed, looked sad and slowly shook his head. 'If you'd loved it as much as all that,' he said, 'as much as I've loved it, you wouldn't be saying good-bye. But if you must. . . .' He smiled seductively; the teeth flashed, the dimples punctually appeared. He took her hand, bent over it and tenderly kissed it. 'You must come

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again,' he added. 'Soon. And,' turning to me with a laugh, and patting my shoulder, 'without old Dick.'

'He's frightfully amusing, isn't he?' Grace said to me a minute later when we had left the studio.

'Frightfully,' I agreed, laying a certain emphasis on the adverb.

'And really,' she continued, 'most awfully nice, I thought.'

I made no comment.

'And a wonderful painter,' she added.

All at once I felt that I detested Rodney Clegg. I thought of my own sterling qualities of mind and heart, and it seemed to me outrageous, it seemed to me scandalous and intolerable that people, that is to say women in general, and Grace in particular, should be impressed and taken in and charmed by this little middle-aged charlatan with the pretty boy's face and the horribly knowing, smart, impertinent manner. It seemed to me a disgrace. I was on the point of giving vent to my indignation; but it occurred to me, luckily, just in time that I should only be quite superfluously making a fool of myself if I did. Nothing is more ridiculous than a scene of jealousy, particularly when the scene is made by somebody who has no right to make it and on no grounds whatever. I

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held my tongue. My indignation against Rodney died down; I was able to laugh at myself. But driving southward through the slums of Camden Town, I looked attentively at Grace and found her more than ordinarily charming, desirable even. I would have liked to tell her so and, telling, kiss her. But I lacked the necessary impudence; I felt diffident of my capacity to carry the amorous undertaking through to a successful issue. I said nothing, risked no gesture. But I decided, when the time should come for us to part, that I would kiss her hand. It was a thing I had never done before. At the last moment, however, it occurred to me that she might imagine that, in kissing her hand, I was only stupidly imitating Rodney Clegg. I was afraid she might think that his example had emboldened me. We parted on the customary handshake.

Four or five weeks after our visit to Rodney's studio, I went abroad for a six months' stay in France and Germany. In the interval, Grace and Rodney had met twice, the first time in my flat, for tea, the second at her house, where she had asked us both to lunch. Rodney was brilliant on both occasions. A little too brilliant indeed—like a smile of false teeth, I thought. But Grace was dazzled. She had never met any

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one like this before. Her admiration delighted Rodney.

'Intelligent woman,' was his comment, as we felt her house together after lunch.

A few days later I set out for Paris.

'You must promise to write,' said Grace in a voice full of sentiment when I came to say good-bye.

I promised, and made her promise too. I did not know exactly why we should write to one another or what we should write about; but it seemed, none the less, important that we should write. Letter-writing has acquired a curious sentimental prestige which exalts it, in the realm of friendship, above mere conversation; perhaps because we are less shy at long range than face to face, because we dare to say more in written than in spoken words.

It was Grace who first kept her promise.

'MY DEAR DICK,' she wrote. 'Do you remember what you said about Mozart? That his music seems so gay on the surface—so gay and careless; but underneath it is sad and melancholy, almost despairing. I think life is like that, really. Everything goes with such a bustle; but what's it all for? And how sad, how sad it is! Now you mustn't flatter yourself by imagining that I feel like this just because you happen to have

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gone away—though as a matter of fact I *am* sorry you aren't here to talk about music and people and life and so forth. No, don't flatter yourself; because I've really felt like this for years, almost for ever. It's, so to speak, the bass of my music, this feeling; it throbs along all the time, regardless of what may be happening in the treble. Jigs, minuets, mazurkas, Blue Danube waltzes; but the bass remains the same. This isn't very good counterpoint, I know; but you see what I mean? The children have just left me, yelling. Phyllis has just smashed that hideous Copenhagen rabbit Aunt Eleanor gave me for Christmas. I'm delighted, of course; but I mayn't say so. And in any case, why must they always act such knockabouts? Sad, sad. And Lecky's *History of European Morals*, that's sadder still. It's a book I can never find my place in. Page 100 seems exactly the same as page 200. No clue. So that—you know how conscientious I am—I always have to begin again at the beginning. It's very discouraging. I haven't the spirit to begin again, yet again, this evening. I write to you instead. But in a moment I must go and dress for dinner. John's partner is coming; surely no man has a right to be so bald. And Sir Walter Magellan, who is something at the Board of Trade and makes jokes; with

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Lady M——, who's *so* affectionate. She has a way of kissing me, suddenly and intently, like a snake striking. And she spits when she talks. Then there's Molly Bone, who's so nice; but why can't she get married? And the Robsons, about whom there's nothing to say. Nothing whatever. Nothing, nothing, nothing. That's how I feel about it all. I shall put on my old black frock and wear no jewels. Good-bye. GRACE.'

Reading this letter, I regretted more than ever my lack of impudence and enterprise in the taxi, that day we had driven down from Rodney's studio. It seemed to me, now, that the impudence would not have been resented.

I returned a letter of consolation; wrote again a week later; again ten days after that; and again, furiously, after another fortnight. A letter at last came back. It smelt of sandalwood and the stationery was pale yellow. In the past, Grace's correspondence had always been odourless and white. I looked and sniffed with a certain suspicion; then unfolded and read.

'I am surprised, my good Dick,' the letter began, 'that you don't know us better. Haven't you yet learned that we women don't like the sound of the words *Must* and *Ought*? We can't abide to have our sense of duty appealed to. That was why I never

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answered any of your impertinent letters. They were too full of "you must write," and "you promised." What do I care what I promised? That was long ago. I am a different being now. I have been thousands of different beings since then—re-born with each caprice. Now, at last, I choose, out of pure grace and kindness, to relent. Here's a letter. But beware of trying to bully me again; don't ever attempt to blackmail my conscience. I may be crueller next time. This is a warning.

'Were you trying, with your descriptions of diversions and entertainments, to make me envious of your Paris? If so, you haven't succeeded. We have our pleasures here too—even in London. For example, the most exquisite masked ball a few days since. Like Longhi's Venice or Watteau's Cythera—and at moments, let me add, towards the end of the evening, almost like Casanova's Venice, almost like the gallant, *grivois* Arcadia of Boucher. But hush! It was in Chelsea; I'll tell you no more. You might come bursting in on the next dance, pulling a long face because the band wasn't playing Bach and the dancers weren't talking about the *Critique of Pure Reason*. For the fact is, my poor Dick, you're too solemn and serious in your pleasures. I shall really

have to take you in hand, when you come back. You must be taught to be a little lighter and more fantastic. For the truth about you is that you're absurdly Victorian. You're still at the Life-is-real-life-is-earnest, Low-living-and-high-thinking stage. You lack the courage of your instincts. I want to see you more frivolous and sociable, yes, and more gluttonous and lecherous, my good Dick. If I were as free as you are, oh, what an Epicurean I'd be! Repent of your ways, Dick, before it's too late and you're irrecoverably middle-aged. No more. I am being called away on urgent pleasure.

'GRACE.'

I read through this extraordinary epistle several times. If the untidy, illegible writing had not been so certainly Grace's, I should have doubted her authorship of the letter. That sham *dix-huitième* language, those neorococo sentiments—these were not hers. I had never heard her use the words 'caprice' or 'pleasure'; she had never generalised in that dreadfully facile way about 'we women.' What, then, had come over the woman since last she wrote? I put the two letters together. What could have happened? Mystery. Then, suddenly, I thought of Rodney Clegg, and where there had been darkness I saw light.

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The light, I must confess, was extremely disagreeable to me, at any rate in its first dawning. I experienced a much more violent return of that jealousy which had overtaken me when I heard Grace expressing her admiration of Rodney's character and talents. And with the jealousy a proportionately violent renewal of my desires. An object hitherto indifferent may suddenly be invested in our eyes with an inestimable value by the mere fact that it has passed irrevocably out of our power into the possession of some one else. The moment that I suspected Grace of having become Rodney's mistress I began to imagine myself passionately in love with her. I tortured myself with distressing thoughts of their felicity; I cursed myself for having neglected opportunities that would never return. At one moment I even thought of rushing back to London, in the hope of snatching my now suddenly precious treasure out of Rodney's clutches. But the journey would have been expensive; I was luckily short of money. In the end I decided to stay where I was. Time passed and my good sense returned. I realised that my passion was entirely imaginary, home-made, and self-suggested. I pictured to myself what would have happened if I had returned to London under its influence. Burning with

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artificial flames, I should have burst dramatically into Grace's presence, only to discover, when I was actually with her, that I was not in love with her at all. Imaginary love can only flourish at a distance from its object; reality confines the fancy and puts it in its place. I had imagined myself unhappy because Grace had given herself to Rodney; but the situation, I perceived, would have been infinitely more distressing if I had returned, had succeeded in capturing her for myself, and then discovered that, much as I liked and charming as I found her, I did not love her.

It was deplorable, no doubt, that she should have been taken in by a charlatan like Rodney; it was a proof of bad taste on her part that she had not preferred to worship me, hopelessly, with an unrequited passion. Still, it was her business and in no way mine. If she felt that she could be happy with Rodney, well then, poor idiot! let her be happy. And so on. It was with reflections such as these that I solaced myself back into the indifference of a mere spectator. When Herbert turned up a few days later at my hotel, I was able to ask him, quite without agitation, for news of Grace.

'Oh, she's just the same as usual,' said Herbert.

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Crass fool! I pressed him. 'Doesn't she go out more than she used to?' I asked. 'To dances and that sort of thing? I had heard rumours that she was becoming so social.'

'She may be,' said Herbert. 'I hadn't noticed anything in particular.'

It was hopeless. I saw that if I wanted to know anything, I should have to use my own eyes and my own judgment. Meanwhile, I wrote to tell her how glad I was to know that she was happy and amusing herself. She replied with a long and very affected essay about 'pleasures.' After that, the correspondence flagged.

A few months later—I had just returned to London—there was a party at Rodney's studio, at which I was present. Rodney's latest masterpiece looked down from an easel set up at the end of the long room. It was an amusingly indecent pastiche of the Douanier Rousseau. 'Wedding,' the composition was called; and it represented a nuptial party, the bride and bridegroom at the centre, the relatives standing or sitting round them, grouped as though before the camera of a provincial photographer. In the background a draped column, palpably cardboard; a rustic bridge; fir-trees with snow and, in the sky, a large pink dirigible. The

only eccentric feature of the picture was that, while the bridegroom and the other gentlemen of the party were duly clothed in black Sunday best, the ladies, except for boots and hats, were naked. The best critics were of opinion that 'Wedding' represented the highest flight, up to date, of Rodney's genius. He was asking four hundred and fifty pounds for it; a few days later, I was told, he actually got them.

Under the stonily fixed regard of the nuptial group Rodney's guests were diverting themselves. The usual people sat, or stood, or sprawled about, drinking white wine or whisky. Two of the young ladies had come dressed identically in the shirts and black velvet trousers of Gavarni's *débardeurs*. Another was smoking a small briar pipe. As I came into the room I heard a young man saying in a loud, truculent voice: 'We're absolutely modern, we are. Anybody can have my wife, so far as I'm concerned. I don't care. She's free. And I'm free. That's what I call modern.'

I could not help wondering why he should call it modern. To me it rather seemed primeval—almost pre-human. Love, after all, is the new invention; promiscuous lust geologically old-fashioned. The really mod-

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ern people, I reflected, are the Brownings.

I shook hands with Rodney.

'Don't be too contemptuous of our simple London pleasures,' he said.

I smiled; it amused me to hear on his lips the word with which Grace's letters had made me so familiar.

'As good as the pleasures of Paris, any day,' I answered, looking round the room. Through the crowd, I caught sight of Grace.

With an air of being spiritually and physically at home, she was moving from group to group. In Rodney's rooms, I could see, she was regarded as the hostess. The mistress of the house, in the left-handed sense of the word. (A pity, I reflected, that I could not share that little joke with Rodney; he would have enjoyed it so much, about any one else.) In the intervals of conversation I curiously observed her; I compared the Grace before my eyes with the remembered image of Grace as I first knew her. That trick of swaying as she walked—rather as a serpent sways to the piping of the charmer—that was new. So, too, was the carriage of the hands—the left on the hip, the right held breast-high, palm upwards, with a cigarette between the fingers. And when she put the cigarette to her lips, she had a novel

way of turning up her face and blowing the smoke almost perpendicularly into the air, which was indescribably dashing and Bohemian. Haughty milady had vanished to be replaced by a new kind of aristocrat—the gay, terrible, beyond-good-and-evil variety.

From time to time snatches of her talk came to my ears. Gossip, invariably scandalous; criticisms of the latest exhibitions of pictures; recollections or anticipations of 'perfect parties'—these seemed to be the principal topics, all of them, in Grace's mouth, quite unfamiliar to me. But the face, the vague-featured face of the nice but ugly little girl, the bewildered eyes, the occasional smile, so full of sweetness and a dim benevolence—these were still the same. And when I overheard her airily saying to one of her new friends of I know not what common acquaintance, 'She's almost too hospitable—positively keeps open bed, you know,' I could have burst out laughing, so absurdly incongruous with the face, the eyes, the smile, so palpably borrowed and not her own did the smart words seem.

Meanwhile, at the table, Rodney was doing one of his famous 'non-stop' drawings—a figure, a whole scene rendered in a single line, without lifting the pencil from the

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paper. He was the centre of an admiring group.

'Isn't it too enchanting?'

'Exquisite!'

'Ravishing!'

The words exploded laughingly all around him.

'There,' said Rodney, straightening himself up.

The paper was handed round for general inspection. Incredibly ingenious it was, that drawing, in a single sinuous line, of a fight between a bull and three naked female toreros. Every one applauded, called for more.

'What shall I do next?' asked Rodney.

'Trick cyclists,' somebody suggested.

'Stale, stale,' he objected.

'Self-portrait.'

Rodney shook his head. 'Too vain.'

'Adam and Eve.'

'Or why not Salmon and Gluckstein?' suggested some one else.

'Or the twelve Apostles.'

'I have it,' shouted Rodney, waving his pencil. 'King George and Queen Mary.'

He bent over his scribbling block, and in a couple of minutes had produced a one-line portrait of the Britannic Majesties. There was a roar of laughter.

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It was Grace who brought me the paper. 'Isn't he wonderful?' she said, looking at me with a kind of eager anxiety, as though she were anxious to have my commendation of her choice, my sacerdotal benediction.

I had only seen her once, for a brief un-intimate moment, since my return. We had not mentioned Rodney's name. But this evening, I saw, she was taking me into her confidence; she was begging me, without words, but none the less eloquently, to tell her that she had done well. I don't exactly know why she should have desired my blessing. She seemed to regard me as a sort of old, grey-haired, avuncular Polonius. (Not a very flattering opinion, considering that I was several years younger than Rodney himself.) To her, my approval was the approval of embodied wisdom.

'Isn't he wonderful?' she repeated. 'Do you know of any other man now living, except perhaps Picasso, who could improvise a thing like that? For fun—as a game.'

I handed the paper back to her. The day before, as it happened, finding myself in the neighbourhood, I had dropped in on Rodney at his studio. He was drawing when I entered, but, seeing me, had closed his book and come to meet me. While we were talking, the plumber called and Rodney had left

the studio to give some instructions on the spot, in the bathroom. I got up and strolled about the room, looking at the latest canvases. Perhaps too inquisitively, I opened the note-book in which he had been drawing when I entered. The book was blank but for the first three or four pages. These were covered with 'non-stop' drawings. I counted seven distinct versions of the bull with the female toreros, and five, a little corrected and improved each time, of King George and Queen Mary. I wondered at the time why he should be practising this peculiar kind of art; but feeling no urgent curiosity about the subject, I forgot, when he came back, to ask him. Now I understood.

'Extraordinary,' I said to Grace, as I returned her the paper. 'Really extraordinary!'

Her smile of gratitude and pleasure was so beautiful that I felt quite ashamed of myself for knowing Rodney's little secret.

Grace and I both lived in Kensington; it was I who drove her home when the party was over.

'Well, that was great fun,' I said, as we settled into the taxi.

We had driven past a dozen lamp-posts before she spoke.

'You know, Dick,' she said, 'I'm so happy.'

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She laid her hand on my knee; and for lack of any possible verbal comment, I gently patted it. There was another long silence.

‘But why do you despise us all?’ she asked, turning on me suddenly.

‘But when did I ever say I despised you?’ I protested.

‘Oh, one needn’t say such things. They proclaim themselves.’

I laughed, but more out of embarrassment than because I was amused. ‘A woman’s intuition, what?’ I said facetiously. ‘But you’ve really got too much of it, my dear Grace. You intuit things that aren’t there at all.’

‘But you despise us all the same.’

‘I don’t. Why should I?’

‘Exactly. Why should you?’

‘Why?’ I repeated.

‘For the sake of what?’ she went on quickly. ‘And in comparison with what do you find our ways so despicable? I’ll tell you. For the sake of something impossible and inhuman. And in comparison with something that doesn’t exist. It’s stupid, when there’s real life with all its pleasures.’ That word again—Rodney’s word! It seemed to me that she had a special, almost unctuous tone when she pronounced it. ‘So delightful. So rich and varied. But you turn up your

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nose and find it all vapid and empty. Isn't it true?' she insisted.

'No,' I answered. I could have told her that life doesn't necessarily mean parties with white wine and whisky, social stunts, fornication and chatter. I might have told her; but however studiously I might have generalised, it was obvious that my remarks would be interpreted (quite correctly, indeed) as a set of disparaging personalities. And I didn't want to quarrel with Grace or offend her. And besides, when all was said, I did go to Rodney's parties. I was an accomplice. The knock-about amused me; I found it hard to deny myself the entertainment. My objection was only theoretical; I did what I denounced. I had no right to strike pontifical attitudes and condemn. 'No, of course it isn't true,' I repeated.

Grace sighed. 'Of course, I can't really expect you to admit it,' she said. 'But bless you,' she added with a forced and unnatural gaiety, 'I don't mind being despised. When one is rich, one can afford the luxury of being disapproved of. And I am rich, you know. Happiness, pleasures—I've got everything. And after all,' she went on, with a certain argumentative truculence in her voice, 'I'm a woman. What do I care for your ridiculous masculine standards. I do what I like, what

amuses me.' The quotation from Rodney rang a little false, I thought. There was a silence.

I wondered what John Peddley thought about it all, or whether any suspicion of what was happening had yet penetrated the horny carapace of his insensitiveness.

And as though she were answering my unspoken question, Grace began again with a new seriousness. 'And there's my other life, parallel. It doesn't make any difference to that, you know. Doesn't touch it. I like John just as much as I did. And the children, of course.'

There was another long silence. All at once, I hardly know why, I felt profoundly sad. Listening to this young woman talking about her lover, I wished that I too were in love. Even the 'pleasures' glittered before my fancy with a new and tempting brilliance. My life seemed empty. I found myself thinking of the melody of the Countess's song in *Figaro*: *Dove sono i bei momenti di dolcezza e di piacer?*

That Grace's adventure made little or no difference to her other life, I had an opportunity of judging for myself in the course of a subsequent week-end with the Peddleys in Kent. John was there—'in great form,' as he put it himself; and Grace, and the chil-

dren, and Grace's father and mother. Nothing could have been more domestic and less like Rodney's party, less 'modern.' Indeed, I should be justified in writing that last word without its inverted commas. For there was something extraordinarily remote and uncontemporary about the whole household. The children were geologically remote in their childishness—only a little beyond the pithecanthropus stage. And Peddley was like a star, separated from the world by the unbridgeable gulfs of his egoism and unawareness. The subjects of his discourse might be contemporary; but spiritually, none the less, he was timeless, an inhabitant of blank and distant space. As for Grace's parents, they were only a generation away; but, goodness knows, that was far enough. They had opinions about socialism and sexual morality, and gentlemen, and what ought or ought not to be done by the best people—fixed, unalterable, habit-ingrained and by now almost instinctive opinions that made it impossible for them to understand or forgive the contemporary world.

This was especially true of Grace's mother. She was a big, handsome woman of about fifty-five, with the clear ringing voice of one who has been accustomed all her life to give orders. She busied herself in doing

good works and generally keeping the poor in their places. Unlike her husband, who had a touch of Peddley's star-like remoteness, she was very conscious of contemporaneity and, consequently, very loud and frequent in her denunciations of it.

Grace's father, who had inherited money, filled his leisure by farming a small estate unprofitably, sitting on committees, and reading Persian, an acquirement of which, in his quiet way, he was very proud. It was a strangely disinterested hobby. He had never been to Persia and had not the slightest intention of ever going. He was quite uninterested in Persian literature or history, and was just as happy reading a Persian cookery book as the works of Hafiz or Rumi. What he liked was the language itself. He enjoyed the process of reading the unfamiliar letters, of looking up the words in the dictionary. For him, Persian was a kind of endlessly complicated jigsaw puzzle. He studied it solely for the sake of killing time and in order not to think. A dim, hopeless sort of man was Mr. Comfrey. And he had an irritating way of looking at you over the top of his spectacles with a puzzled expression, as though he had not understood what you meant; which, indeed, was generally the case. For Mr. Comfrey was very slow of mind and

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made up for his knowledge of Persian by the most extraordinary ignorance of almost all other subjects under the sun.

'Say that again,' he would say, when his incomprehension was too complete.

How strange, how utterly fantastic it seemed, that week-end. I felt as though I had been suddenly lifted out of the contemporary world and plunged into a kind of limbo.

John Peddley's latest subject was the Einstein theory.

'It's so simple,' he assured us the first evening, between the soup and the fish. 'I don't pretend to be a mathematician or anything like one; but I understand it perfectly. All that it needs is a little common sense.' And for the next half-hour the common sense came braying out, as though from the mouth of a trombone.

Grace's father looked at him dubiously over the top of his spectacles.

'Say that again, will you?' he said, after every second sentence.

And John Peddley was only too delighted to oblige.

At the other end of the table, Grace and her mother were discussing the children, their clothes, characters, education, diseases. I longed to join in their conversation. But the

simple domesticities were not for me. I was a man; John Peddley and the intellect were my portion. Reluctantly, I turned back towards my host.

‘What I’d like you to explain,’ Grace’s father was saying, ‘is just exactly how time can be at right angles to length, breadth, and thickness. Where precisely does it come in?’ With two forks and a knife he indicated the three spatial dimensions. ‘Where do you find room for another right angle?’

And John Peddley set himself to explain. It was terrible.

Meanwhile, at my other ear, Grace’s mother had begun to talk about the undesirable neighbours who had taken the house next to theirs on Campden Hill. A man and a woman, living together, unmarried. And the garden behind the houses was the common property of all the householders. What a situation! Leaving Peddley and the old gentleman to find room for the fourth right angle, I turned definitively to the ladies. For my benefit, Grace’s mother began the horrid story again from the beginning. I was duly sympathetic.

Once, for a moment, I caught Grace’s eye. She smiled at me, she almost imperceptibly raised her eyebrows. That little grimace was deeply significant. In the first months of our

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friendship, I had often seen her in the company of her father and mother, and her bearing, on these occasions, had always impressed me. I had never met a young woman of the generation which had come to maturity during the war who was so perfectly at ease with her elders, so unconstrainedly at home in their moral and mental atmosphere as was Grace. She had taken her father and mother entirely for granted, had regarded their views of life as the obvious, natural views of every sane human being. That embarrassment which—in these days, more perhaps than at any other period—afflicts young people when in the presence of their elders had never, so far as I had observed, touched Grace. This smile of apologetic and slightly contemptuous indulgence, this raising of the eyebrows, were symptomatic of a change. Grace had become contemporary, even (in inverted commas) ‘modern.’

Outwardly, however, there was no change. The two worlds were parallel; they did not meet. They did not meet, even when Rodney came to dine *en famille*, even when John accompanied his wife to one of Rodney’s less aggressively ‘artistic’ (which in inverted commas means very much the same as ‘modern’) evening parties. Or perhaps it would be truer to say that Rodney’s world

met John's, but John's did not meet Rodney's. Only if Rodney had been a Zulu and his friends Chinese would John have noticed that they were at all different from the people he was used to meeting. The merely spiritual differences which distinguished them were too small for his notice. He moved through life surrounded by his own atmosphere; only the most glaring lights could penetrate that half opaque and intensely refractive medium. For John, Rodney and his friends were just people, like everybody else; people who could be button-holed and talked to about the Swiss banking system and Einstein's theory, and the rationing of sugar. Sometimes, it was true, they seemed to him rather frivolous; their manners, sometimes, struck him as rather unduly brusque; and John had even remarked that they were sometimes rather coarse-spoken in the presence of ladies—or, if they happened to be ladies themselves, in the presence of gentlemen.

'Curious, these young people,' he said to me, after an evening at Rodney's studio. 'Curious.' He shook his head. 'I don't know that I quite understand them.'

Through a rift in his atmosphere he had caught a glimpse of the alien world beyond; he had seen something, not refracted, but as

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it really was. But John was quite incurious; careless of its significance, he shut out the unfamiliar vision.

'I don't know what your opinion about modern art may be,' he went on, disappointing me of his comments on modern people. 'But what I always say is this.'

And he said it, copiously.

Modern art became another gramophone record added to his repertory. That was the net result of his meeting with Rodney and Rodney's friends.

For the next few months I saw very little either of Grace or of Rodney. I had met Catherine, and was too busy falling in love to do or think of anything else. We were married towards the close of 1921, and life became for me, gradually, once more normal.

From the first Catherine and Grace were friends. Grace admired Catherine for her coolness, her quiet efficiency, her reliableness; admired and liked her. Catherine's affection for Grace was protective and elder-sisterly; and at the same time, she found Grace slightly comic. Affections are not impaired by being tempered with a touch of benevolent laughter. Indeed, I would almost be prepared to risk a generalisation and say that all true affections are tempered with laughter. For affection implies intimacy;

and one cannot be intimate with another human being without discovering something to laugh at in his or her character. Almost all the truly virtuous characters in fiction are also slightly ridiculous; perhaps that is because their creators were so fond of them. Catherine saw the joke—the rather pathetic joke—of Grace. But she liked her none the less; perhaps, even, the more. For the joke was appealing; it was a certain childishness that raised the laugh.

At the time of my marriage, Grace was acting the eternally feminine part more fervently than ever. She had begun to dress very smartly and rather eccentrically, and was generally unpunctual; not very unpunctual (she was by nature too courteous for that), but just enough to be able to say that she was horribly late, but that she couldn't help it; it was in her nature—her woman's nature. She blamed Catherine for dressing too sensibly.

'You must be gayer in your clothes,' she insisted, 'more fantastic and capricious. It'll make you *feel* more fantastic. You think too masculinely.'

And to encourage her in thinking femininely, she gave her six pairs of white kid gloves, marvellously piped with coloured leather and with fringed and intricately scal-

loped gauntlets. But perhaps the most feminine and fantastic thing about them was the fact that they were several sizes too small for Catherine's hand.

Grace had become a good deal more loquacious of late and her style of conversation had changed. Like her clothes, it was more fantastic than in the past. The principle on which she made conversation was simple: she said whatever came into her head. And into that vague, irresponsible head of hers the oddest things would come. A phantasmagoria of images, changing with every fresh impression or as the words of her interlocutor called up new associations, was for ever dancing across her field of mental vision. She put into words whatever she happened to see at any given moment. For instance, I might mention the musician Palestrina.

'Yes, yes,' Grace would say, 'what a marvellous composer!' Then, reacting to the Italian reference, she would add in the same breath: 'And the way they positively *drink* the macaroni. Like those labels that come out of the mouth of caricatures. You know.'

Sometimes I did know. I skipped over the enormous ellipses in this allusive thinking and caught the reference. Sometimes, when

the association of her ideas was too exclusively private, I was left uncomprehending. The new technique was rather disconcerting, but it was always amusing, in a way. The unexpectedness of her remarks, the very nonsensicality of them, surprised one into finding them witty.

As a child, Grace had been snubbed when she talked in this random, fantastic fashion. 'Talk sense,' her governesses had said severely, when she told them during the geography lesson that she didn't like South America because it looked like a boiled leg of mutton. 'Don't be silly.' Grace was taught to be ashamed of her erratic fancy. She tried to talk sense—sense as governesses understand it—found it very difficult, and relapsed into silence. Peddley was even more sensible, in the same style, than the governesses themselves; devastatingly sensible. He was incapable of understanding fancy. If Grace had ever told Peddley why she didn't like South America, he would have been puzzled, he would have asked her to explain herself. And learning that it was the mutton-like shape of the continent on the map that prejudiced Grace against it, he would have given her statistics of South America's real dimensions, would have pointed out that it extended from the tropics

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almost into the antarctic circle, that it contained the largest river and some of the highest mountains in the world, that Brazil produced coffee and the Argentine beef, and that consequently, in actual fact, it was not in the very least like a boiled leg of mutton. With Peddley, Grace's only resources were laboriously talked sense or complete silence.

In Rodney's circle, however, she found that her gift of nonsense was appreciated and applauded. An enthusiast for the 'fantastic' and the 'feminine,' Rodney encouraged her to talk at random, as the spirit of associative fancy might move her. Diffidently at first, Grace let herself go; her conversation achieved an immediate success. Her unstitched, fragmentary utterances were regarded as the last word in modern wit. People repeated her *bons mots*. A little bewildered by what had happened, Grace suddenly found herself in the movement, marching at the very head of the forces of contemporaneity. In the eighteenth century, when logic and science were the fashion, women tried to talk like the men. The twentieth century has reversed the process. Rodney did Grace the honour of appropriating to himself the happiest of her extravagances.

Success made Grace self-confident; and

confident, she went forward triumphantly to further successes. It was a new and intoxicating experience for her. She lived in a state of chronic spiritual tipsiness.

'How stupid people are not to be happy!' she would say, whenever we discussed these eternal themes.

To Catherine, who had taken my place as a confidant—my place and a much more intimate, more confidential place as well—she talked about love and Rodney.

'I can't think why people manage to make themselves unhappy about love,' she said. 'Why can't everybody love gaily and freely, like us? Other people's love seems to be all black and clotted, like Devonshire cream made of ink. Ours is like champagne. That's what love ought to be like: champagne. Don't you think so?'

'I think I should prefer it to be like clear water,' said Catherine. To me, later on, she expressed her doubts. 'All this champagne and gaiety,' she said; 'one can see that Rodney is a young man with a most wholesome fear of emotional entanglements.'

'We all knew that,' I said. 'You didn't imagine, I suppose, that he was in love with her?'

'I hoped,' said Catherine.

'Because you didn't know Rodney. Now

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you do. Champagne—you have the formula. The problem is Grace.'

Was she really in love with him? Catherine and I discussed the question. I was of opinion that she was.

'When Rodney flutters off,' I said, 'she'll be left there, broken.'

Catherine shook her head. 'She only imagines she's in love,' she insisted. 'It's the huge excitement of it all that makes her happy; that, and the novelty of it, and her sense of importance, and her success. Not any deep passion for Rodney. She may think it's a passion—a champagnish passion, if you like. But it isn't really. There's no passion; only champagne. It was his prestige and her boredom that made her fall to him originally. And now it's her success and the fun of it that make her stick to him.'

Events were to show that Catherine was right, or at least more nearly right than I. But before I describe these events, I must tell how it was that Kingham re-entered my world.

It was I who took the first step to end our ridiculous quarrel. I should have made the attempt earlier, if it had not been for Kingham's absence from Europe. A little while after our squabble he left, with a commission to write articles as he went, first for

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North Africa and thence for the further East. I heard of him once or twice from people who had seen him at Tunis, at Colombo, at Canton. And I read the articles, the admirably original articles, as they appeared at intervals in the paper which had commissioned them. But direct communication with him I had none. I did not write; for I was uncertain, to begin with, if my letter would ever reach him. And in any case, even if we had made up our quarrel by letter, what good would that have been? Reconciliations across eight thousand miles of space are never very satisfactory. I waited till I heard of his return and then wrote him a long letter. Three days later he was sitting at our dinner-table.

‘This is good,’ he said, ‘this is very good.’ He looked this way and that, quickly, taking in everything—the furniture, the books, Catherine, me—with his bright, quick eyes. ‘Definitely settled.’

‘Oh, not so definitely as all that, let us hope.’ I laughed in Catherine’s direction.

‘I envy you,’ he went on. ‘To have got hold of something fixed, something solid and absolute—that’s wonderful. Domestic love, marriage—after all, it’s the nearest thing to an absolute that we can achieve, practically. And it takes on more value, when you’ve

been rambling round the world for a bit, as I have. The world proves to you that nothing has any meaning except in relation to something else. Good, evil, justice, civilisation, cruelty, beauty. You think you know what these words mean. And perhaps you do know, in Kensington. But go to India or China. You don't know anything there. It's uncomfortable at first; but then, how exciting! And how much more copiously and multifariously you begin to live! But precisely for that reason you feel the need for some sort of fixity and definition, some kind of absolute, not merely of the imagination, but in actual life. That's where love comes in, and domesticity. Not to mention God and Death and the Immortality of the Soul and all the rest. When you live narrowly and snugly, those things seem absurd and superfluous. You don't even appreciate your snugness. But multiply yourself with travelling, knock the bottom out of all your old certainties and prejudices and habits of thought; then you begin to see the real significance of domestic snugness, you appreciate the reality and importance of the other fixities.'

He spoke with all his old passionate eagerness. His eyes had the same feverish, almost unearthly brightness. His face, which had

been smooth and pale when I saw it last, was burnt by the sun and lined. He looked more mature, tougher and stronger than in the past.

‘Yes, I envy you,’ he repeated.

‘Then why don’t you get married yourself?’ asked Catherine.

Kingham laughed. ‘Why not, indeed? You’d better ask Dick. He knows me well enough to answer, I should think.’

‘No, tell us yourself,’ I said.

Kingham shook his head. ‘It would be a case of cruelty to animals,’ he said enigmatically, and began to talk about something else.

‘I envy you,’ he said again, later that same evening, when Catherine had gone to bed and we were alone together. ‘I envy you. But you don’t deserve what you’ve got. You haven’t earned your right to a fixed domestic absolute, as I have. I’ve realised, intimately and personally realised, the flux and the interdependence and the relativity of things; consequently I know and appreciate the meaning and value of fixity. But you—you’re domestic just as you’re moral; you’re moral and domestic by nature, unconsciously, instinctively, without having known the opposites which give these attitudes their significance—like a worker bee, in fact; like

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a damned cabbage that just grows because it can't help it.'

I laughed. 'I like the way you talk about flux and relativity,' I said, 'when you yourself are the fixed, unchanging antithesis of these things. The same old Kingham! Why, you're a walking fixity; you're the Absolute in flesh and blood. How well I know those dear old home truths, for example!'

'But that doesn't prevent their being true,' he insisted, laughing, but at the same time rather annoyed by what I had said. 'And besides, I *have* changed. My views about everything are quite different. A sensitive man can't go round the world and come back with the same philosophy of life as the one he started with.'

'But he can come back with the same temperament, the same habits of feeling, the same instinctive reactions.'

Kingham ran his fingers through his hair and repeated his petulant laughter. 'Well, I suppose he can,' he admitted reluctantly.

I was only too well justified in what I had said. A few days of renewed intimacy were enough to convince me that Kingham preserved all his old love of a scene, that he enjoyed as much as ever the luxury of a hot emotional bath. He burst in on me one morning, distracted with fury, to tell me

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about a violent quarrel he had had the previous evening with some insignificant young undergraduate—rather tipsy at that—who had told him (with considerable insight, I must admit, in spite of his tipsiness) that he, Kingham, was either insincere or hysterical.

‘And the awful thing is that he may be right,’ he added, when he had finished his story. ‘Perhaps I *am* insincere.’ Restlessly, he walked about the room. From time to time he withdrew a hand from the pocket into which it was deeply plunged and made a gesture, or ran the fingers through his hair. ‘Perhaps I’m just a little comedian,’ he went on, ‘just a mouther of words, a ranter.’ The self-laceration hurt him, but he enjoyed the pain. ‘Do I really feel things deeply?’ he went on speculating. ‘Or do I just deceive myself into believing that I care? Is it all a mere lie?’ The operation continued interminably.

The tipsy undergraduate had diagnosed insincerity or hysteria. It was in my power to relieve Kingham of his haunting fear of insincerity by assuring him that the second of these alternatives was the more correct. But I doubted the efficacy of the consolation; and besides I had no desire for a quarrel. I held my tongue.

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I did not make K^{ing}ham known to Grace; for knowing that he had a passionate and rooted dislike of Rodney, I was afraid that, in spite of my preliminary warnings (or even precisely because of them, for the sake of creating an intolerably unpleasant situation) he might burst out, in Grace's presence, into some violent denunciation of her lover. It was a risk that was not worth running. And besides, I did not imagine that they would get on well together. We were intimate with both; but we kept them, so to speak, in separate water-tight compartments of our intimacy.

One day, when I came home to dinner, I was greeted by Catherine with a piece of news.

'Rodney's being unfaithful,' she said. 'Poor little Grace was here for tea to-day. She pretends not to mind—to be very modern and hard and gay about it. But I could see that she was dreadfully upset.'

'And who's the lucky lady?' I asked.

'Mrs. Melilla.'

'A step up in the world.' I thought of the emeralds and the enormous pearls, which added lustre to the already dazzling Jewish beauty of Mrs. Melilla. 'He'll be in the baronetcy and peerage soon.'

'What a pig!' said Catherine indignantly.

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'I'm so dreadfully sorry for poor Grace.'

'But according to your theory, she isn't really in love with him.'

'No, she isn't,' said Catherine. 'Not *really*. But she thinks she is. And she'll think so much more, of course, now that he's leaving her. And besides, she has put so many of her eggs into his basket; this smashes them all. She'd committed herself body and soul to Rodney and Rodneyism. This affair with Rodney gave sense to her whole existence. Can't you see that?'

'Perfectly.' I remembered the days when Grace had seen herself as a musical critic and how cruelly I had murdered this comforting vision of herself by my little practical joke about the player of Rachmaninoff. A much more significant, much more intimately cherished dream was being murdered now.

She did her best, as Catherine had said, to be very 'modern' about it. I saw her a few days later at one of Rodney's parties; she was smoking a great many cigarettes, drinking glass after glass of white wine and talking more wildly than ever. Her dress was a close-fitting sheath of silver tissue, designed so as to make the wearer look almost naked. Fatigued with sleeplessness, her eyes were circled with dark, bruise-coloured rings; seen in conjunction with the bright, unnatural red

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of her rouged cheeks and lips, these dark circles looked as though they had been painted on with a fard, to heighten the brilliance of the eyes, to hint provocatively at voluptuous fatigues and amorous vigils. She was having a great success and her admirers had never been more numerous. She flirted outrageously with all of them. Even when she was talking with me, she seemed to find it necessary to shoot languorous sidelong glances; to lean towards me, as though offering her whole person to my desires. But looking at her, I could see, under the fard, only the face of the nice but rather ugly little girl; it seemed, I thought, more than usually pathetic.

Rodney sat down at the table to do his usual non-stop drawing.

‘What shall it be?’ he asked.

‘Draw Jupiter and *all* his mistresses,’ cried Grace, who was beginning to be rather tipsy. ‘Europa and Leda and Semele and Danae,’ she clapped her hands at each name, ‘and Io and . . . and Clio and Dio and Scio and Fi-fio and O-my-Eyeo. . . .’

The jest was not a very good one. But as most of Rodney’s guests had drunk a good deal of wine and all were more or less intoxicated by the convivial atmosphere of a successful party, there was a general laugh.

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Grace began to laugh too, almost hysterically. It was a long time before she could control herself.

Rodney, who had made no preparations for improvising a picture of Jove's mistresses, found an excuse for rejecting the suggestion. He ended by drawing Mrs. Eddie pursued by a satyr.

Deserted by Rodney, Grace tried to pretend that it was she who was the deserter. The rôle of the capricious wanton seemed to her more in harmony with the Rodneyan conception of the eternal feminine as well as less humiliating than that of the victim. Provocatively, promiscuously, she flirted. In those first days of her despair she would, I believe, have accepted the advances of almost any tolerably presentable man. Masterman, for example, or Gane the journalist, or Levitski—it was one of those three, I surmised, judging by what I saw at the party, who would succeed to Rodney's felicity, and that very soon.

The day after the party, Grace paid another visit to Catherine. She brought a small powder-puff as a present. In return, she asked, though not in so many words, for comfort, advice, and above all for approval. In a crisis, on the spur of the moment, Grace

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could be rashly and unreflectingly impulsive; but when there was time to think, when it was a question of deliberately planning she was timorous, she hated to stand alone and take responsibilities. She liked to know that the part in which she saw herself was approved of by some trustworthy judge. The powder-puff was a bribe and an argument; an argument in favour of the eternal feminine, with all that that connoted, a bribe for the judge, an appeal to her affection, that she might approve of Grace's sentiments and conduct.

Grace put her case. 'The mistake people make,' she said, 'is getting involved, like the man on the music-halls who does that turn with the fly-paper. I refuse to be involved; that's my principle. I think one ought to be heartless and just amuse oneself, that's all. Not worry about anything else.'

'But do you think one can really be amused if one doesn't worry and takes things heartlessly?' asked Catherine. '*Really* amused, I mean. Happy, if you'll permit me to use an old-fashioned word. Can one be happy?' She thought of Levitski, of Gane and Masterman.

Grace was silent; perhaps she too was thinking of them. Then, making an effort,

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'Yes, yes,' she said with a kind of obstinate, determined gaiety, 'one can; of course one can.'

I was at the Queen's Hall that afternoon. Coming out, when the concert was over, I caught sight of Kingham in the issuing crowd.

'Come home for a late cup of tea and stay to dinner.'

'All right,' he said.

We climbed on to a bus and rode westward. The sun had just set. Low down in the sky in front of us there were streaks of black and orange cloud, and above them a pale, watery-green expanse, limpid and calm up to the zenith. We rode for some time in silence, watching the lovely death of yet another of our days.

'It's all very well,' said Kingham at last, indicating these western serenities with a gesture of his fine, expressive hand, 'it's all very well, no doubt, for tired business men. Gives them comfort, I dare say; makes them feel agreeably repentant for the swindles they've committed during the day, and all that. Oh, it's full of uplift, I've no doubt. But I don't happen to be a tired business man. It just makes me sick.'

'Come, come,' I protested.

He wouldn't listen to me. 'I won't have Gray's *Elcgy* rammed down my throat,' he

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said. 'What I feel like is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, or *Zarathustra*, or the *Chants de Maldoror*.'

'Well, all that I can suggest' (I suggested it mildly) 'is that you should travel inside the bus and not look at the sunset.'

'Ass!' he said contemptuously.

We came in, to find Grace still sitting there, over the tea-cups, with Catherine. I was annoyed; still, there was nothing to be done about it. I introduced Kingham. All unconsciously, I was playing Pandarus for the second time.

My sources for the history of Grace's second love affair are tolerably copious. To begin with, I had opportunities of personally observing it, during a considerable part of its duration. I heard much, too, from Kingham himself. For Kingham was not at all a discreet lover. He was as little capable of being secretive about this class of experiences as about any other. He simply had to talk. Talking renewed and multiplied the emotions which he described. Talk even created new emotions—emotions which he had not felt at the time but which it occurred to him, when he was describing the scene, to think that he ought to have felt. He had no scruples about projecting these *sentiments d'escalier* backwards, anachronistically, into

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his past experience, falsifying history for the sake of future drama. To his memories of a scene with Grace he would add emotional complications, so that the next scene might be livelier. It was in the heat of talk that his finest emendations of history occurred to him. The genuine, or at any rate the on the whole more genuine, story came to me through Catherine from Grace. It was to Catherine that, in moments of crisis (and this particular love affair was almost uninterruptedly a crisis) Grace came for solace and counsel.

The affair began with a misunderstanding. No sooner had Kingham entered the room than Grace, who had been talking quite simply and naturally with Catherine, put on her brazen 'modern' manner of the party and began with a kind of desperate recklessness to demand the attention and provoke the desires of the newcomer. She knew Kingham's name, of course, and all about him. In Rodney's circle it was admitted, albeit with some reluctance, that the man had talent; but he was deplored as a barbarian.

'He's one of those tiresome people,' I once heard Rodney complain, 'who will talk about their soul—and your soul, which is almost worse. Terribly Salvation Army. One wouldn't be surprised to see him on

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Sundays in Hyde Park telling people what they ought to do to be saved.'

At the sight of him, Grace had felt, no doubt, that it would be amusing to bring this curious wild animal to heel and make it do tricks. (It did not occur to her that it might be she who would be doing the tricks.) Kingham was a quarry worthy of any huntswoman. Still, I believe that she would have flirted as outrageously with almost any stranger. This provocative attitude of hers—an attitude which might be described as one of chronic and universal unfaithfulness—was her retort to unkind fate and unfaithful Rodney. She wanted to capture a new lover—several lovers, even—in order to prove to Rodney, to the world at large and above all, surely, to herself, that she was modern, knew how to take love lightly and gaily, as the most exquisite of entertainments, and that, in a word, she didn't care a pin. In another woman, this promiscuous flirtatiousness might have been distasteful, detestable even. But there was, in Grace, a certain fundamental innocence that rendered what ought, by all the rules, to have been the most reprehensible of actions entirely harmless. Text-book moralists would have called her bad, when in fact she was merely pathetic and a trifle comic.

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The text-books assign to every action its place in the moral hierarchy; the text-book moralists judge men exclusively by their actions. The method is crude and unscientific. For in reality certain characters have power to sterilise a dirty action; certain others infect and gangrene actions which, according to the book, should be regarded as clean. The harshest judges are those who have been so deeply hypnotised by the spell of the text-book words that they have become quite insensitive to reality. They can think only of words—'purity,' 'vice,' 'depravity,' 'duty'; the existence of men and women escapes their notice.

Grace, as I have said, possessed an innocence which made nonsense of all the words which might have been used to describe her actions. To any one but a text-book theorist it was obvious that the actions hardly mattered; her innocence remained intact. It was this same innocence which enabled her to give utterance—with perfect unconcern and a complete absence of daring affectation—to those scabrous sentiments, those more than scientific expressions which were almost *de rigueur* in the conversation of Rodney's circle. In a foreign language one can talk of subjects, one can unconcernedly use words, the uttering, the mention of which in one's

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native idiom would horribly embarrass. For Grace, all these words, the most genuinely Old English, all these themes, however intimately connected by gossip with the names of known men and women, were foreign and remote. Even the universal language of coquettish gestures was foreign to her; she acted its provocations and innuendoes with a frankness which would have been shameless, if she had really known what they meant. Kingham entered the room; she turned on him at once all her batteries of looks and smiles—a bombardment of provocations. I knew Grace so well that, in my eyes, the performance seemed merely absurd. These smiles, these sidelong glances and flutteringly dropped eyelids, this teasing mockery by which she irritated Kingham into paying attention to her, struck me as wholly uncharacteristic of Grace and therefore ridiculous—above all, unconvincing. Yes, unconvincing. I could not believe that any one could fail to see what Grace was really like. Was it possible that Kingham didn't realise just as well as I did that she was, in spirit, as in features, just a nice little girl, pretending without much success—particularly in this rôle—to be grown up?

It seemed to me incredible. But Kingham was certainly taken in. He accepted her at

her face value of this particular moment—as an aristocratically reckless hedonist in wanton search of amusement, pleasure, excitement, and power. To the dangerous siren he took her to be, Kingham reacted with a mixed emotion that was half angry contempt, half amorous curiosity. On principle, Kingham violently disapproved of professional *femmes fatales*, sirens, vampires—all women, in fact, who make love and the subjugation of lovers the principal occupation of their lives. He thought it outrageous that self-respecting and useful men should suddenly find themselves at the mercy of these dangerous and irresponsible beings. What perhaps increased his moral indignation was the fact that he himself was constantly falling a victim to them. Youth, vitality, strong personality, frank and unbridled vice had irresistible attractions for him. He was drawn sometimes to the vulgarest possessors of these characteristics. He felt it an indignity, a humiliation (and yet, who knows? perhaps with Kingham this sense of humiliation was only another attraction); but he was none the less unfailingly drawn. He resisted, but never quite firmly enough (that, after all, would have spoiled all the fun). He resisted, succumbed and was subjected. But it must be admitted that his love, however abject it

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might be in the first moment of his surrender, was generally a vengeance in itself. Kingham might suffer; but he contrived in most cases to inflict as much suffering as he received. And while he, with a part of his spirit at any rate, actually enjoyed pain, however acutely and genuinely felt, the tormentors whom he in his turn tormented were mostly quite normal young women with no taste for the pleasures of suffering. He got the best of it; but he regarded himself, none the less, as the victim, and was consequently in a chronic state of moral indignation.

This first meeting convinced Kingham that Grace was the sort of woman she wanted to persuade him (not to mention herself) that she was—a vampire. Like many persons of weak character and lacking in self-reliance, Grace was often extraordinarily reckless. Passive generally and acquiescent, she sometimes committed herself wildly to the most extravagant courses of action—not from any principle of decision, but because, precisely, she did not know what decision was, because she lacked the sense of responsibility, and was incapable of realising the irrevocable nature of an act. She imagined that she could do things irresponsibly and without committing herself; and feeling no inward sense of commitment, she would embark on courses

of action which—externalised and become a part of the great machine of the world—dragged her, sometimes reluctant, sometimes willing, but always ingenuously surprised, into situations the most bewilderingly unexpected. It was this irresponsible impulsiveness of a character lacking the power of making deliberate decisions (this coupled with her fatal capacity for seeing herself in any rôle that seemed, at the moment, attractive) that had made her at one moment a socialist canvasser at the municipal elections; at another, an occasional opium smoker in that sordid and dangerous den near the Commercial Docks which Tim Masterman used to frequent; at another, though she was terrified of horses, a rider to hounds; and at yet another—to her infinite distress; but having light-heartedly insisted that she didn't know what modesty was, she couldn't draw back—the model for one of Levitski's nudes. And if she now threw herself at Kingham's head (just as, a few nights before, she had thrown herself at Masterman's, at Gane's, at Levitski's), it was irresponsibly, without considering what might be the results of her action, without even fully realising that there would be any results at all. True, she saw herself as a 'modern' young woman; and her abandonment by Rodney had made her anxious,

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for the mere saving of her face, to capture a new lover, quickly. And yet it would be wrong to say that she had decided to employ coquettish provocations in order to get what she wanted. She had not decided anything; for decision is deliberate and the fruit of calculation. She was just wildly indulging in action, in precisely the same way as she indulged in random speech, without thinking of what the deeds or the words committed her to. But whereas logical inconsistencies matter extremely little and false intellectual positions can easily be abandoned, the effects of action or of words leading to action are not so negligible. For action commits what is much more important than the intellect—the body. To get the bodily self out of a false position is a difficult and often painful business. Grace, the indecisive, the all too easily and lightly moved to action, had often found it so to her cost. But that did not prevent her from repeating her mistake. Experience never does.

Kingham, as I have said, took her for what she irresponsibly wanted him to believe she was. He was duly provoked by what had been meant to be provocative. To this sort of amorous teasing he was extraordinarily susceptible. So much so, indeed, that his interest in Grace was no great tribute to her

style. It was enough that a woman should exhibit a certain lively, vampirish interest in him; Kingham was almost certain to succumb to the attack. I remember one occasion in Paris when he was positively swept off his feet by the shrill, metallic sallies of an American chorus-girl from the Folies Bergères.

This first impression of Grace—as a ‘modern,’ dangerously provocative, actively wanton vampire—persisted in Kingham’s mind and no evidence to the contrary could obliterate it. In the course of their first meeting, he had taken up his emotional attitude towards her; and the attitude once taken, he would not shift his ground, however palpable the proofs that he was wrong. Whether he ceased to be able to use his intelligence and became incapable of recognising the facts that would have upset his prejudices, or whether he deliberately shut his eyes to what he did not wish to see, I do not exactly know. A powerful emotion had the double effect, I surmise, of rendering him at one and the same time stupid and most ingeniously perverse.

‘I think there’s something really devilish about the women of this generation,’ he said to me, in his intense, emphatic way, some two or three days later. ‘Something devilish,’ he repeated, ‘really devilish.’ It was a trick

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of his, in writing as well as in speech, to get hold of a word and, if he liked the sound of it, work it to death.

I laughed. 'Oh, come,' I protested. 'Do you find Catherine, for example, so specially diabolic?'

'She isn't of this generation,' Kingham answered. 'Spiritually, she doesn't belong to it.'

I laughed again; it was always difficult arguing with Kingham. You might think you had him cornered; you raised your logical cudgel to smash him. But while you were bringing it down, he darted out from beneath the stroke through some little trap door of his own discovery, clean out of the argument. It was impossible to prove him in the wrong, for the simple reason that he never remained long enough in any one intellectual position to be proved anything.

'No, not Catherine,' he went on, after a little pause. 'I was thinking of that Peddley woman.'

'Grace?' I asked in some astonishment. 'Grace devilish?'

He nodded. 'Devilish,' he repeated with conviction. The word, I could see, had acquired an enormous significance for him. It was the core round which, at the moment, all his thoughts and feelings were crystallis-

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ing. All his universe was arranging itself in patterns round the word 'devilish,' round the idea of devilishness in general, and Grace's devilishness in particular.

I protested. 'Of all the un-devilish people I've ever known,' I said, 'Grace seems to me the most superlatively so.'

'You don't know her,' he retorted.

'But I've known her for years.'

'Not really known,' insisted Kingham, diving through another of his little trap doors out of the argument. 'You've never inspired her with one of her devilish concupiscences.' (I thought of Grace and could not help smiling; the smile exasperated Kingham.) 'Grin away,' he said. 'Imagine you're omniscient, if it gives you any pleasure. All I say is this: she's never tried to hunt you down.'

'I suppose you mean that she was rather stupidly flirtatious the other evening,' I said.

Kingham nodded. 'It was devilish,' he said softly, more for himself than for me. 'Devilish concupiscence.'

'But I assure you,' I went on, 'that business the other night was all mere silliness. She's childish, not devilish. She still sees herself in terms of Rodney Clegg, that's all. And she wants to pretend, now that he's deserted her, that she doesn't care. I'm not sure, indeed, that she doesn't want to make

us believe that it was she who deserted him. That's why she wants to get hold of another lover quickly—for the sake of her prestige. But as for devilishness—why, the idea's simply absurd. She isn't definite enough to be a devil. She's just what circumstances and her imagination and other people happen to make her. A child, that's all.'

'You may think you know her,' Kingham persisted obstinately, 'but you don't. How can you, if you've never been hunted by her?'

'Bosh!' I said impatiently.

'I tell you she's devilish,' he insisted.

'Then why on earth did you accept her invitation to lunch with such alacrity?'

'There are things that are unescapable,' he answered oracularly.

'I give you up,' I said, shrugging my shoulders. The man exasperated me. 'The best thing you can do,' I added, 'is to go to your devil and be damned as quickly as possible.'

'That's exactly where I am going,' he said. And as though I had reminded him of an appointment, Kingham looked at his watch. 'And, by God,' he added, in a different voice, 'I shall have to take a taxi, if I'm to get there in time.'

Kingham looked deeply put out; for he hated parting with money unnecessarily. He

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was tolerably well off now; but he still preserved the habits of prudence, almost of avarice, which he had acquired, painfully, in the days of his lower middle class boyhood and his poverty-stricken literary novitiate. He had asked Grace to dine with him in Soho; that had already cost him an effort. And now he was going to be compelled to take a taxi, so as to be in time to pay for the dinner. The thought of it made him suffer. And suffering for her sake, suffering a mean, unavowable pain for which he could not hope to get any sympathy, even his own, he found the ultimate cause of it, Grace, all the more devilish.

‘Unescapable,’ he repeated, still frowning, as he put on his hat to go. There was an expression positively of ferocity on his face. ‘Unescapable.’ He turned and left me.

‘Poor Grace!’ I was thinking, as I closed the front door and walked back to my study. It was just as unescapable for her as for Kingham. And I knew Kingham; my sympathies were all with Grace.

I was quite right, as it turned out, in according my sympathies as I did. For if any one ever needed, ever deserved sympathy, it was poor Grace, during those deplorable months of 1922. She fell in love with Kingham—fell in love, though it was the third

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time she had given herself, for the first, the very first time in her life, painfully, desperately, insanely. She had proposed to herself a repetition of her affair with Rodney. It was to be all charmingly perverse dalliances, with champagne and sandwiches and lightly tender conversation in the intervals; and exquisite little letters in the *dix-huitième* manner; and evening parties; and amusing escapades. That was what it had been with Rodney. He made this kind of love, it must be admitted, with real style; it was charming. Grace imagined that she would make it in just the same way with Rodney's successor. And so she might have, more or less, if the successor had been Levitski, or Masterman, or Gane. But the successor was Kingham. The choice was fatal; but the worst results of it might have been avoided if she had not loved him. Unloving, she might simply have left him when he made things too insupportable. But she did love him and, in love, she was utterly at his mercy.

Kingham had said that the thing was unescapable; and if for him it was so, that was due to the need he perversely felt of giving himself over periodically to strong emotions, the need of being humiliated and humiliating, of suffering and making other people suffer. What he had always loved was the

passion itself, not the women who were the cause or excuse of it. These occasional orgies of passion were necessary to him, just as the periodical drinking bout is necessary to the dipsomaniac. After a certain amount of indulgence, the need was satisfied and he felt quite free to detach himself from the lover who had been dear to him only as the stimulator of his emotions, not for her own sake. Kingham could satisfy his craving; it was an appetite that could be quenched by indulgence. But Grace's desire was one of those desperate, hopeless desires that can only be assuaged by a kind of miracle. What she desired was nothing less than to unite herself wholly with another being, to know him through and through and to be made free of all his secrets. Only the all but miraculous meeting of two equal loves, two equally confiding temperaments can bring fulfilment to that longing. There was no such meeting here.

Kingham made a habit of telling all his acquaintances, sooner or later, what he thought of them—which was invariably disagreeable. He called this process a 'clearing of the atmosphere.' But in point of fact, it never cleared anything; it obscured and made turbid, it created thunder in clear skies. Kingham might not admit the fact; but this

was, none the less, precisely what he intended should happen. Clear skies bored him; he enjoyed storms. But always, when he had succeeded in provoking a storm, he expressed a genuine astonishment at the inability of the world at large to tolerate frankness, however sincere, however manifestly for its own good. Hurt by his brutally plain speaking, his old friends were reproached for being hurt. Few of Kingham's loves or friendships had long survived the effects of his frankness. The affair with Grace was one of the exceptions.

From the very beginning, Kingham had found it necessary to 'clear the atmosphere.' Even at their first meeting, in our house, he was rather rude. Later on, he developed into a kind of Timon of Athens. Her frivolity, her voluptuary's philosophy of life, her heartlessness, her 'devilish concupiscence'—these were the characteristics about which he told her, with all the concentrated passion of which he was capable, what he indignantly thought.

I met him again, at the Queen's Hall, on the day after his dinner in Soho.

'I told her what I thought of her,' he let me know.

'And what did she think about what you thought?' I asked.

Kingham frowned. 'She seemed to be rather pleased than otherwise,' he answered. 'That's the devilish strength of these women. They simply glory in the things they ought to be ashamed of. It makes them impervious to anything decent. Impervious, and therefore utterly ruthless and unscrupulous.'

'How incorrigibly romantic you are!' I mocked at him.

Told—and very mildly, after all—what I thought of him, Kingham winced like a stung horse. Other people's frankness hurt him just as much as his hurt other people; perhaps more. The only difference was that he enjoyed being hurt.

'What nonsense!' he began indignantly.

His retort lasted as long as the interval and was only drowned by the first blaring chords of the *Meistersinger* overture. Bottled up within compulsory silence, what were his emotions? It amused me to speculate. Various, emphatic, tirelessly unflagging and working themselves up into ever more and more clotted complications—were they not the spiritual counterpart of this music to which we were now listening? When the Wagnerian tumult was over, Kingham continued his interrupted protest.

'She seemed to be rather pleased.' That, according to Kingham, had been Grace's re-

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action to his home truths. I felt sure, on reflection, that he had observed her rightly. For Grace still saw herself in terms of Rodneyism—as ‘modern’ and ‘eighteenth-century’ (curious how these terms have come to be largely interchangeable) and what Rodney imagined to be ‘eternally feminine.’ Of course she would be pleased at finding that Kingham had accepted her at her own valuation—and not only accepted her valuation but even voluntarily outbidden it by adding devilishness to the modernity, eighteenth-centuriness, and eternal femininity which she had modestly—too modestly, as she now perceived—attributed to herself. She took Kingham’s denunciations as compliments and smiled with unaffected pleasure when he talked to her of her vampire’s ruthlessness, when he reproached her with her devilish concupiscence for the shuddering souls as well as the less reluctant flesh of her victims. In Rodney’s circle a temperament was as much *de rigueur* as a train and ostrich feathers at Court. Grace saw herself as a prodigy of temperament; but she liked to have this vision of herself confirmed by outside testimony. Kingham’s home truths convinced her that she had seen herself correctly. The more abusive Kingham became, the better pleased she was and the more she liked

him. She felt that he was really taking her seriously as a frivolous woman, that he was appreciating her as she deserved. His appreciation heightened her confidence and, under the rain of his anathemas, she played her part with an easier grace, a more stylish perfection. The spectacle of Grace impertinently blossoming under what had been meant to blast exasperated Kingham. He abused her more violently; and the greater his violence, the more serenely airy her eternal, modern, eighteenth-century femininity.

Underneath, meanwhile, and almost unconsciously, Grace was falling in love with him.

I have seen Kingham in his relations with many men and women. To none of them was he merely indifferent. Either they detested him—and I have never known a man who had more and bitterer enemies—or else they loved him. (Many of the lovers, I may add, turned subsequently into haters.) When I analyse my own feelings towards him, I am forced to the conclusion that I myself was in some manner in love with him. For why should I, who knew him so well and how insufferable he could be and, indeed, generally was, why should I have put up with him, in spite of everything? And why should I always have made such efforts to patch up all

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our incessant quarrels? Why shouldn't I have allowed him to go to the devil, so far as I was concerned, a dozen times? or at least thankfully accepted the estrangement which followed our most violent squabble—the squabble over poor loutish Herbert—and allowed the separation to lengthen into permanency? The only explanation is that, like all those who did not loathe him, I was somehow in love with Kingham. He was in some way important for me, deeply significant and necessary. In his presence I felt that my being expanded. There was suddenly, so to speak, a high tide within me; along dry, sand-silted, desolate channels of my being life strongly, sparkingly flowed. And Kingham was the moon that drew it up across the desert.

All those whom we find sympathetic exercise, in a greater or less degree, this moon-like influence upon us, drawing up the tides of life till they cover what had been, in an antipathetic environment, parched and dead. But there are certain individuals who, by their proximity, raise a higher tide, and in a vastly greater number of souls, than the ordinary man or woman. Kingham was one of these exceptional beings. To those who found him sympathetic he was more sympathetic than other and much more obviously

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amiable acquaintances. There was a glow, a vividness, a brilliance about the man. He could charm you even when he was saying things with which you disagreed, or doing things which you disapproved. Even his enemies admitted the existence and the power of this brilliant charm. Catherine, who was not exactly an enemy, but who profoundly disliked his way of life and habits of mind, had to confess that, whenever he wanted and took the trouble to do so, he could silence, for the moment at any rate, all her prejudices and compel her, so long as he was actually there, in the room with her, to like him. Grace started with no prejudices against him—no prejudices, beyond the opinion, inherited from Rodney, that the man was a savage; and savages, after all, are more attractive than repellent. She was suggestible and easily swayed by stronger and more definite personalities than her own. It was not surprising that she should succumb to his charm to the extent of first liking the man and soon wildly loving him.

It was some little time, however, before Grace discovered that she loved him. In the first days of their intimacy, she was too busy playing the modern part to realise that she felt so un-Rodneyan an emotion. Love, the real insane thing, was out of harmony with

the character she had assumed. It needed a sudden, startling shock to make her understand what she felt for him, to make her, in the same moment, forget to be 'modern' and 'feminine' in Rodney's sense of the terms, and become—what? I had meant to say 'herself.' But after all, can one be said to be 'oneself' when one is being transfigured or dolorously distorted by love? In love, nobody is himself; or if you prefer, romantically, to put it the other way round, nobody is really himself when he is not in love. It comes to very much the same thing. The difference between Grace in love and Grace out of it seemed all the wider, because it was the difference between a Rodneyan eternal female and a woman, and a Kinghamised woman at that. For even in love, Grace saw herself in the part and saw herself, inevitably, in terms of her lover. Her Rodneyisms disappeared and were replaced by Kinghamisms. She saw herself no longer as a modern young aristocrat, but as the primevally 'passional' incarnation ('passional' was one of Kingham's too favourite words) of her new lover's feminine ideal.

Their intimacy had lasted more than a month before Grace discovered the true nature of her feelings. Kingham's courtship had been unremitting. Denunciations of her

devilishness had alternated with appeals to her to become his mistress. Grace took the denunciations as compliments and laughingly replied to them at random with any nonsense that came into her head. These airy irrelevant retorts of hers, which Rodney would have applauded as the height of modern wit, seemed to Kīngham the very height of diabolism.

‘She’s like Nero,’ he said to me one day, ‘fiddling over Rome.’

He was Rome—the centre of the universe—in flames. Grace, having kindled, watched him burn and, in the face of his destruction, talked nonsense.

What was more, she would not quench his conflagration. In spite of the ‘devilish concupiscence,’ which Kīngham had attributed to her, she refused, during the first five or six weeks of their acquaintance, to become his mistress. She had captivated Kīngham; that was sufficient to restore her self-confidence and that fantastic image of herself, as a successful, modern siren, which Rodney’s desertion had temporarily shattered. To have tumbled into his arms at once might, perhaps, have been in the *dix-huitième* part; but a certain native modesty prevented Grace from being perfectly consistent.

Kīngham regarded her refusal to capit-

ulate immediately as yet another piece of devilishness; according to his theory, she was exercising an unnatural self-control merely in order to torment him. A perverse taste for cruelty was added to his list of accusations. Grace was charmed by this soft impeachment.

Kingham's attacks had seemed to her, so far, more amusing than painful, more complimentary than insulting. She was still protected by the armour of her indifference. The realisation that she loved him was soon to strip her of that armour, and with every increase of that love, her naked spirit was to grow more tremulously sensitive to Kingham's assaults upon it.

The critical, the apocalyptic event took place in Kingham's rooms. It was a damp, hot afternoon of early summer. The sky was overcast when Grace arrived, and there was thunder in the air. She was wearing—the fact came out in her account to Catherine of the afternoon's events—she was wearing, for the first time, a brand new frock from Paris; mouse-coloured, with two subtly harmonious, almost discordant, tones of red about the collar, and a repetition of the same colours at the cuffs and in a panel let into the skirt. Poiret, I think, was the inventor; and it was very modern and rather eccentrically

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elegant. In a word, it was a dress created for Rodney's mistress.

Grace, who was very much aware of herself in her clothes, had felt the incongruity most painfully, afterwards. The more so, since, when she came in, she was feeling so happy about her dress. She was thinking what a success it was and how elegant, how original the people who saw her in the street must find her. And she was wondering what effect the dress would have on Kingham. She hoped, she thought that he would like it.

In his way, Kingham was nearly as observant in the matter of clothes as Rodney. True, he had not Rodney's almost professional eye for style and cut and smartness. Rodney was a great couturier *manqué*. The fashionable dressmaker was visible in every picture he painted; he had mistaken his profession. Kingham's way of looking at clothes was different. His was the moralist's eye, not the couturier's. For him, clothes were symbols, the visible expressions of states of soul. Thus, Grace's slightly eccentric, very dashing elegance seemed to him the expressive symbol of her devilishness. He regarded her clothes as an efflorescence of her spirit. They were part of her, and she was directly and wholly responsible for them.

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It never seemed to strike him that tailors, dressmakers and advisory friends might share the responsibility. He took in Grace's frock at a glance.

'You've got a new dress on,' he said accusingly.

'Do you like it?' she asked.

'No,' said Kingham.

'Why not?'

'Why not?' he repeated. 'Well, I suppose it's because the thing's so expressive of you, because it suits you so devilishly well.'

'I should have thought that would be a reason for liking it.'

'Oh, it would be, no doubt,' said Kingham, 'it would be, if I could just regard you as a spectacle, as something indifferent, to be looked at—that's all—like a picture. But you're not indifferent to me, and you know it and you deliberately torture me. How can I be expected to like what makes you seem more devilishly desirable and so increases my torture?'

He glared at her ferociously. It was with an effort that Grace kept her own gaze steady before those bright, dark, expressive eyes. He advanced towards her and laid his two hands on her shoulders.

'To-day,' he said, 'you're going to be my lover.'

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Grace shook her head, smiling a capricious, eternally feminine smile.

‘Yes, you are.’ His grip on her shoulders tightened.

‘No, I’m not,’ Grace answered. She drew in her breath rather sharply; he was hurting her.

‘I tell you, you are.’

They looked at one another, face close to face, enemies. Grace’s heart violently beat.

‘At one moment, I thought he was going to throttle me,’ she told Catherine.

But she braved it out, and conquered.

Kingham withdrew his hands from her shoulders and turned away. He walked across to the other side of the room and, leaning against the wall in the embrasure of the window, looked out in silence at the grey sky.

Greatly relieved, Grace sat down on the divan. With a saucy and defiant movement that was, unfortunately, quite lost on Kingham’s stubbornly presented back, she tucked up her feet under her. Opening her handbag, she took out her cigarette case, opened that in its turn, extracted a cigarette and lighted it—all very nonchalantly and deliberately. She was steadying her nerves to resist another attack—steadying her nerves and perhaps, at the same time, preparing to

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annoy him, when he should turn round, by the spectacle of her unconcernedness.

She had expected a repetition of the violences of a moment since, of the familiar denunciations of all the other days. She was not prepared to resist the new kind of attack which he now launched against her emotions. When at last—and she had more than half finished her cigarette before the long silence was broken—Kingham turned round and came towards her, she saw that he was weeping.

Kingham, as I have said, was no comedian. All that he professed to feel he felt, I am sure, genuinely. But he felt too easily and he was too fond of feeling. In situations where others would have exercised a restraint upon themselves, Kingham gave free rein to his emotions, or even actually roused and goaded them into a more violent and more prolonged activity. He needed no dervish tricks to work himself up, no dancing, no howling and drumming, no self-laceration. He could do the thing inwardly, by intense concentration on the object of his desire or hatred, on the cause of his pain or pleasure. He brooded over his loves or his grievances, making them seem more significant than they really were; he brooded, conjuring up in his imagination appropriate visions—of unper-

mitted raptures, when he was suffering from the pangs of desire; of scenes of insult, humiliation, rage, when he was angry with any one; of his own miserable self, when he desired to feel self-pity—himself, pictured as unloved, in solitude, utterly deserted, even dying. . . .

Long practice had made him an adept in the art of working up his emotions, of keeping himself uninterruptedly on the boil, so to speak, over a long period of time. In the course of these few brief weeks of his courtship, he had managed to convince himself that the interest he took in Grace was the most violent of passions and that he was suffering excruciatingly from her refusal—her devilish, her sadistic refusal—to be his mistress. Painfully and profoundly, he was enjoying it. The zest was still in the orgy; he felt no sense of satiety.

These tears were the result of a sudden and overwhelming feeling of self-pity, which had succeeded his mood of violence. He had perceived, all at once, that his violence was futile; it was absurd to suppose that he could shake or beat or throttle her into accepting him. He turned away in despair. He was alone, an outcast; nobody cared for him; he was expending his spirit in a waste of shame—his precious, beautiful spirit—and there

was no saving himself, the madness was too strong. He was done for, absolutely done for.

Standing there, in the embrasure of the window, he had brooded over his miseries, until his sense of them became all of a sudden intolerable. The tears came into his eyes. He felt like a child, like a tired child who abandons himself, hopelessly, to misery.

All the animation went out of his face; it became like the face of a dead man, frozen into a mask of quiet misery. Pale, ruddy-bearded, delicately featured, it was like the face of a dead or dying Christ in some agonising Flemish picture.

It was this dead Christ's face that now turned back towards Grace Peddley. This dead Christ's face—and it had been the face of Lucifer, burning with life and passion, menacingly, dangerously beautiful, that had turned away from her. The eyes, which had shone so brightly then, were almost shut, giving the face an appearance of blindness; and between the half-closed lids there was a slow welling out of tears.

The first sight of this suffering face startled her into a kind of terror. But the terror was succeeded almost at once by a great pity. That face, at once lifeless and suffering! And those tears! She had never seen a man

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shed tears before. She was overwhelmed by pity—by pity and, at the thought that it was all her fault, by a passion of repentance and self-abasement, by a desire to make amends. And at the same time she felt another and greater emotion, an emotion in which the pity and the repentance were included and from which they derived their strange intensity. It was the feeling that, for her, Kingham was the only person in the world who in any way mattered. It was love.

In silence he crossed the room, dropped down on his knees before the divan where Grace, her cigarette still smoking between her fingers, half sat, half reclined, frozen by astonishment into a statue of lolling modernity, and laying his head in her lap, silently sobbed.

The spell of Grace's immobility was broken. She bent forward over him, she caressed his hair. The gesture recalled to her attention the half-smoked cigarette; she threw it into the fireplace. Her fingers touched his scalp, the nape of his neck, his ears, his averted cheek.

'My darling,' she whispered, 'my darling. You mustn't cry. It's terrible when you cry.'

And she herself began to cry. For a long time they remained in the same position,

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Kingham kneeling, his face pressed against her knees, Grace bending over him, stroking his hair, both weeping.

Our thoughts and feelings are interdependent. It is only in language, not in fact, that they are separate and sharply differentiated. Some men are better mathematicians when they are in love than when they are out of it; some are worse. But in either case the emotion of love conditions the working of the intellect. Still more powerfully does it affect the other emotions, such as pity, courage, shame, fear of ridicule, which it enhances or diminishes as the case may be. It may be laid down as a general rule that the feeling of one strong emotion predisposes us automatically to the feeling of other emotions, however apparently incongruous with the first. Thus joy may predispose to pity and shame to anger. Anger and grief may both dispose to sensual desire. Violent disputes often end in love-making; and there are sometimes strange orgies over new-made graves, orgies, to the eye of the indifferent spectator, most unseemly, but which, as often as not, should be attributed less to a cynical lack of feeling than to its abundant presence. Grief creates a sense of loneliness, a desire in those who feel it to be comforted. At the same time, by throwing the whole personality

into commotion, it renders the soul of the sufferer peculiarly susceptible to voluptuous influences and peculiarly unapt, in its state of disorganisation, to exercise the customary self-restraints; so that when the desired comforter appears, it sometimes happens (conditions of sex and age being propitious) that sympathy is transformed, not merely into love, but into desires demanding immediate satisfaction. Some such transformation took place now. Tears gave place to kisses less and less tearful, to caresses and embraces. There were languors and ecstatic silences.

‘I love you, I love you,’ Grace repeated, and was almost frightened by the vehemence of the new emotions, the intensity of the new and piercing sensations which she expressed in these old, blunted words. ‘I love you.’

And Kingham kissed her and permitted himself, for the moment, to be happy without reserve or inward comment, without a touch of that anticipated afterthought which turns the present into history, even as it unrolls itself, and—criticising, appraising, judging and condemning—takes all the zest out of immediacy. He was simply happy.

The time came for them to part.

‘I must go,’ said Grace, sighing.

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But the Grace who went was a different woman from the Grace who had come, two hours before. It was a worshipping, adoring Grace, a Grace made humble by love, a Grace for whom being modern and a *grande dame* and eighteenth-century and intellectually fashionable had suddenly ceased to have the slightest importance. Adjusting her hair before the glass, she was struck by the incongruity, the garish out-of-placeness of her new frock. Her love for Kingham, she felt, was something vast and significant, something positively holy; in the presence of that love, the new dress seemed a clown's livery worn in a church. Next day she wore an old, pre-Rodney dress—white muslin with black dots; not at all showy, fashionable, or eccentric. Her soul had dressed itself, so to speak, to match.

But Kingham, who had had time in the intervening hours to poison the memory of yesterday's joy with every kind of venomous afterthought, to discover subtle and horrible explanations for actions that were obviously innocent and simple, received her as though she had changed neither her dress nor her spirit and were indeed the woman whose part she had been playing, all these weeks.

'Well,' he said, as he opened the door to her, 'I see you've come for more.'

Grace, who had expected to be received with the gentle and beautiful tenderness which he had displayed on the previous day, was cruelly surprised by the brutality of his tone, the coldness and bitterness of his expression.

‘More what?’ she asked; and from brightly exultant her eyes became apprehensive in their expression, the smile with which she had so eagerly entered the room faded, as she halted in front of him. Anxiously she looked into his face. ‘More what?’

Kingham laughed a loud, unpleasant, mirthless laugh, and pointed to the divan. Grace’s devilish concupiscence—that was what he had been chiefly dwelling on since last he saw her.

For the first second Grace did not understand what he meant. This particular aspect of their love was so far from her mind that it did not occur to her to imagine that it could be in Kingham’s. Then all at once his meaning dawned upon her. The blood ran up into her cheeks.

‘Kingham!’ she protested. (Kingham was one of those men whom everybody, even his closest intimates, called by his surname. For the rest, he had only a pair of initials—J. G. I never knew what they stood for.

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John George, I should think. But it was quite irrelevant; he was always 'Kingham,' pure and simple.) 'Kingham! How can you say such things?'

'How can I?' he repeated mockingly. 'Why, by not keeping a fig-leaf over my mouth, which is where the truly respectable, who never talk about their vices, always keep it. Do what you like, but don't talk about it; that's respectability. But, dear me,' he bantered on, 'I thought you were as much beyond respectability as you are beyond good and evil—or below. whichever the case may be.'

Grace, who had come in expecting a kiss and gentle words, walked slowly away from him across the room, sat down on the divan and began to cry.

A moment later Kingham was holding her in his arms and kissing away her tears. He spoke no word; the kisses became more passionate. At first, she averted her face from them. But in the end she abandoned herself. For a time she was happy. She forgot Kingham's cruel words, or if she remembered them, she remembered them as words spoken in a nightmare—by mistake, so to say, not on purpose, not seriously.

She had begun to feel almost perfectly re-

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assured, when Kingham disengaged himself suddenly and roughly from her embrace, jumped up and began restlessly walking up and down the room, ruffling his hair as he went.

‘What a horrible thing it is to have a vice!’ he began. ‘Something you carry about with you, but that isn’t yourself. Something that’s stronger than you are, that you want to resist and conquer, but can’t. A vice, a vice.’ He was enchanted by the word; it became, for the moment, the core of his universe. ‘It’s horrible. We’re possessed by devils, that’s what’s wrong with us. We carry our private devils about with us, our vices, and they’re too strong for us. They throw us down and horribly triumph.’ He shuddered disgustedly. ‘It’s horrible to feel yourself being murdered by your vice. The devil spiritually murdering you, suffocating your soul with warm soft flesh. My devil uses you as his instrument of murder; your devil uses me. Our vices conspire; it’s a conspiracy, a murder plot.’

By this time Grace was unhappier than she had ever been in her life before. (And yet, if Rodney had said the same thing, expressed a little differently—in terms of compliments on her ‘temperament’—she would have been delighted, two months ago.)

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'But you know I love you, you *know*,' was all that she could say. 'What makes you say these things, when you know?'

Kingham laughed. 'Oh, I know,' he answered, 'I know, only too well. I know what women like you mean by "love."'

'But I'm not a woman like . . . ' Grace hesitated; 'like me' didn't sound quite sensible somehow. '. . . like that.'

'Not like yourself?' Kingham asked derisively.

'Not like what you think,' Grace insisted through the tangled confusion of words. 'Not silly, I mean; not frivolous and all that. Not really.' All those months with Rodney seemed a dream; and yet she had really lived through them. And there had really been champagne and sandwiches, and more than scientific conversations. . . . 'Not now, at any rate,' she added. 'Now I know you. It's different; can't you understand. Utterly different. Because I love you, love you, love you, love you.'

Any one else would have allowed himself to be convinced, at any rate for the moment; would have begged pardon, kissed and made friends. But, for Kingham, that would have been too easy, too emotionally flat. He stuck to his position.

'I know you do,' he answered, averting his

gaze, as he spoke, from that pathetic, suffering face, from those wide-open grey eyes, perplexed and agonised, that looked up at him so appealingly, so abjectly even. 'So do I. Your devil loves me. My devil loves you.'

'But no,' Grace brokenly protested. 'But why? . . .'

'Loves violently,' he went on in a loud voice, almost shouting, 'irresistibly.' And as he spoke the words he swung round and precipitated himself upon her with a kind of fury. 'Do you know what it is,' he went on, as he held her, struggling a little and reluctant in his arms, 'do you know what it is to love, not a person, not even their whole body, but just some part of it—insanely? Do you know what it is when the vice-devil concentrates its whole desire on one point, focuses it inexorably until nothing else exists but the nape of a neck, or a pectoral muscle, a foot, a knee, a hand? This hand, for example.' He took her hand and lifted it towards his face. 'And not even a whole hand,' he continued. 'Just the ball of a thumb, just that little cushion of flesh that's marked off from the rest of the palm by the line of life; just that soft, resilient, strong little cushion of flesh.'

He began to kiss the spot on Grace's hand.

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'Don't, don't. You mustn't.' She tried to pull her hand away.

But Kingham held it fast. He went on kissing that soft, rounded swell of muscle at the base of her palm, insistently, again and again; kissing and kissing. And sometimes he would take the flesh between his teeth and would bite, gently at first, then with a gradually increasing force, until the pain became almost unbearable and Grace cried out, when he would fall to kissing again, softly and tenderly, as though he were asking forgiveness, were trying to kiss the pain away. Grace ceased to struggle and abandoned her hand to him, to do with what he liked. And little by little this insanely limited devil's love-making seemed to evoke a special voluptuous sensibility in that particular square inch of skin upon which it was concentrated. Her whole capacity for feeling pleasure seemed to focus itself at the base of her left hand. Even the gradually increasing pain, as his teeth closed more and more tightly on her flesh, was pleasurable. She abandoned herself; but, at the same time, she felt that there was something shameful and even horrible about this pleasure. What might have been simple and beautiful and joyous had been turned into something painful, complicated, ugly and obscure. King-

ham might congratulate himself on having produced a situation full of the most promising emotional possibilities.

I have reconstructed these scenes at some length because they were characteristic and typical of the whole affair. In his search for intense and painful emotions, Kingham displayed a perverse ingenuity; he was never at a loss for a pretext to complicate the simple and distort the natural. His great resource was always Grace's devilishness. Blind, as only Kingham could be blind, to all evidence to the contrary, he persisted in regarding Grace as a frivolous vampire, a monster of heartless vice. Her vampirishness and her vice were the qualities which attracted him to her; if he could have been convinced that she was really simple, innocent and childish, that her 'devilish concupiscence' was in actual fact an abject, unhappy adoration, he would have ceased to take any interest in her. Pleading meant as little to him as evidence. If Grace protested too vigorously, Kingham would bring up the affair with Rodney. What was that but vice, plain and unvarnished? Had not she herself admitted that she didn't love the man? Miserably, despairingly, Grace would confess in answer that she had certainly been silly and frivolous and feather-headed, but

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that now all that was done with. Everything was different, she was different, now. Because she loved him. To which Kingham would retort by expatiating with fiery eloquence about the horrors of vice, until at last Grace began to cry.

Grace's devilishness formed the staple and chronic pretext for scenes. But Kingham was inventive and there were plenty of other excuses. Observant—for he was acutely observant, wherever he chose not to be blind—Kingham had early realised the entirely vague and accidental nature of all Grace's ideas, convictions, principles, and opinions. He perceived that what she thought about music, for example, was only a distorted and fragmentary version of what I thought; that her opinions on art were Rodney's, muddled; that her philosophic and literary convictions were like a parboiled lobster—'the fading sable and the coming gules'—half Rodney's and half, already, his own. And perceiving these things, he mocked her for her intellectual hypocrisy and snobbery. He found plenty of opportunities for hurting and humiliating her.

On other occasions, he would reproach her with untruthfulness and mean dissimulation, because she did not frankly tell John Peddley of her infidelity to him.

'I don't want to make him unnecessarily miserable,' Grace protested.

Kingham laughed derisively. 'A lot you care about anybody's happiness,' he said, 'particularly his! The truth is that you want to make the best of both worlds—be respectable and vicious at the same time. At all costs, no frankness! It's a case of the misplaced fig-leaf, as usual.'

And then there was a terrible scene, a whole series of terrible scenes, because Grace did not want to have a child by him.

'Our only excuse,' he raged at her, 'the only thing that might justify us—and you won't hear of it. It's to be vice for vice's sake, is it? The uncontaminated æsthetic doctrine.'

At other times, becoming strangely solicitous for the welfare of Grace's children, he reproached her with being a bad, neglectful mother.

'And you know, it's true,' she said to Catherine, with remorseful conviction. 'It's quite true. I *do* neglect them.'

She invited Catherine to accompany her and the two youngest to the Zoo, the very next afternoon. Over the heads of little Pat and Mittie, among the elephants and apes, the bears and the screaming parrots, she talked to Catherine about her love and her

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unhappiness. And every now and then Pat or Mittie would interrupt with a question.

‘Mummy, why do fish swim?’

Or: ‘How do you make tortoises?’

‘You know, you’re a great comfort,’ said Grace to Catherine, as they parted. ‘I don’t know what I should do without you.’

The next time she came, she brought Catherine a present; not a powder-puff this time, not gloves or ribbons, but a copy of Dostoevsky’s *Letters from the Underworld*.

‘You must read it,’ she insisted. ‘You absolutely must. It’s so damnably true.’

Grace’s life during this period was one of almost uninterrupted misery. I say ‘almost uninterrupted’; for there were occasions when Kingham seemed to grow tired of violent emotions, of suffering, and the infliction of suffering; moments when he was all tenderness and an irresistible charm. For these brief spells of happiness, Grace was only too pathetically grateful. Her love, which an absolutely consistent ill-treatment might finally perhaps have crushed and eradicated, was revived by these occasional kindnesses into fresh outflowerings of a passionate adoration. Each time she hoped, she almost believed, that the happiness was going to be permanent. Bringing with her a few select aphorisms of Nietzsche, a pocket

Leopardi, or the reproduction of one of Goya's *Desastres de la Guerra*, she would come and tell Catherine how happy she was, how radiantly, miraculously happy. Almost she believed that, this time, her happiness was going to last for ever. Almost; but never quite. There was always a doubt, an unexpressed, secret, and agonising fear. And always the doubt was duly justified, the fear was proved to be but too well founded. After two or three days' holiday from his emotional orgy—two or three days of calm and kindness—Kingham would appear before her, scowling, his face dark, his eyes angry and accusing. Grace looked at him and her heart would begin to beat with a painful irregularity and violence; she felt suddenly almost sick with anxious anticipation. Sometimes he burst out at once. Sometimes—and that was much worse—he kept her in a state of miserable suspense, that might be prolonged for hours, even for days, sulking in a gloomy silence and refusing, when Grace asked him, to tell her what was the matter. If she ventured to approach him in one of these moods with a kiss or a soothing caress, he pushed her angrily away.

The excuses which he found for these renewals of tempest after calm were of the

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most various nature. One of the periods of happiness ended by his reproaching her with having been too tenderly amorous (too devilishly concupiscent) when he made love to her. On another occasion it was her crime to have remarked, two days before he chose actually to reproach her for it, that she liked the critical essays of Dryden. ('Such an intolerable piece of humbug and affectation,' he complained. 'Just because it's the fashion to admire these stupid, boring classical writers. Mere hypocrisy, that's what it is.' And so on.) Another time he was furious because she had insisted on taking a taxi all the way to Hampton Court. True, she had proposed from the first to pay for it. None the less, when the time came for paying, he had felt constrained in mere masculine decency to pull out his pocket-book. For one painful moment he had actually thought that she was going to accept his offer. He avenged himself for that moment of discomfort by accusing her of stupid and heartless extravagance.

'There's something extraordinarily coarse,' he told her, 'something horribly thick-skinned and unfeeling about people who have been born and brought up with money. The idea of spending a couple of pounds on a mere senseless caprice, when there are hundreds

of thousands of people with no work, living precariously, or just not dying, on state charity! The idea!

Grace, who had proposed the excursion because she thought that Hampton Court was the most romantic place in the world, and because it would be so wonderful to be two and lovers by the side of the Long Water, in the deep embrasures of the windows, before the old grey mirrors, before the triumphing Mantegnas—Grace was appalled that reality should have turned out so cruelly different from her anticipatory dreams. And meanwhile yet another moment of happiness had irrevocably passed.

It was not surprising that Grace should have come to look tired and rather ill. She was paler than in the past and perceptibly thinner. Rimmed with dark circles of fatigue, her eyes seemed to have grown larger and of a paler grey. Her face was still the face of a nice but rather ugly little girl—but of a little girl most horribly ill-treated, hopelessly and resignedly miserable.

Confronted by this perfect resignation to unhappiness, Catherine became impatient.

‘Nobody’s got any business to be so resigned,’ she said. ‘Not nowadays, at any rate. We’ve got beyond the Patient Griselda stage.’

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But the trouble was that Grace hadn't got beyond it. She loved abjectly. When Catherine urged and implored her to break with Kingham, she only shook her head.

'But you're unhappy,' Catherine insisted.

'There's no need for you to tell me that,' said Grace, and the tears came into her eyes. 'Do you suppose I don't know it?'

'Then why don't you leave him?' asked Catherine. 'Why on earth don't you?'

'Because I can't.' And after she had cried a little, she went on in a voice that was still unsteady and broken by an occasional sob: 'It's as though there were a kind of devil in me, driving me on against my will. A kind of dark devil.' She had begun to think in terms of Kingham even about herself. The case seemed hopeless.

We went abroad that summer, to the seaside, in Italy. In the lee of that great limestone mountain which rises suddenly, like the mountain of Paradise, out of the Pomptine marshes and the blue plains of the Mediterranean, we bathed and basked and were filled with the virtue of the life-giving sun. It was here, on the flanks of this mountain, that the enchantress Circe had her palace. Circeus Mons, Monte Circeo—the magic of her name has lingered, through Roman days, to the present. In coves at the mountain's foot

stand the ruins of imperial villas, and walking under its western precipices you come upon the ghost of a Roman sea-port, with the fish-ponds of Lucullus close at hand, like bright eyes looking upwards out of the plain. At dawn, before the sun has filled all space with the quivering gauzes of heat and the colourless brightness of excessive light, at dawn and again at evening, when the air once more grows limpid and colour and distant form are re-born, a mountain shape appears, far off, across the blue gulf of Terracina, a mountain shape and a plume of white unwavering smoke: Vesuvius. And once, climbing before sunrise to the crest of our Circean hill, we saw them both—Vesuvius to the southward, across the pale sea, and northwards, beyond the green marshes, beyond the brown and ilex-dark Alban hills, the great symbolical dome of the world, St. Peter's, glittering above the mists of the horizon.

We stayed at Monte Circeo for upwards of two months, time enough to become brown as Indians and to have forgotten, or at least to have become utterly careless of, the world outside. We saw no newspapers; discouraged all correspondents by never answering their letters, which we hardly even took the trouble to read; lived, in a word, the life of savages in the sun, at the edge of a tepid sea.

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All our friends and relations might have died, England been overwhelmed by war, pestilence and famine, all books, pictures, music destroyed irretrievably out of the world—at Monte Circeo we should not have cared a pin.

But the time came at last when it was necessary to return to London and make a little money. We loaded our bodies with unaccustomed garments, crammed our feet—our feet that had for so long enjoyed the liberty of sandals—into their imprisoning shoes, took the omnibus to Terracina and climbed into the train.

‘Well,’ I said, when we had managed at last to squeeze ourselves into the two vacant places which the extraordinary exuberance of a party of Neapolitans had painfully restricted, ‘we’re going back to civilisation.’

Catherine sighed and looked out of the window at the enchantress’s mountain beckoning across the plain. ‘One might be excused,’ she said, ‘for making a little mistake and thinking it was hell we were going back to.’

It was a dreadful journey. The compartment was crowded and the Neapolitans fabulously large, the weather hot, the tunnels frequent, and the smoke peculiarly black and poisonous. And with the physical there came

a host of mental discomforts. How much money would there be in the bank when we got home? What bills would be awaiting us? Should I be able to get my book on Mozart finished by Christmas, as I had promised? In what state should I find my invalid sister? Would it be necessary to pay a visit to the dentist? What should we do to placate all the people to whom we had never written? Wedged between the Neapolitans, I wondered. And looking at Catherine, I could see by the expression on her face that she was similarly preoccupied. We were like Adam and Eve when the gates of the garden closed behind them.

At Genoa the Neapolitans got out and were replaced by passengers of more ordinary volume. The pressure in the compartment was somewhat relaxed. We were able to secure a couple of contiguous places. Conversation became possible.

'I've been so much wondering,' said Catherine, when at last we were able to talk, 'what's been happening all this time to poor little Grace. You know, I really *ought* to have written to her.' And she looked at me with an expression in which consciousness of guilt was mingled with reproach.

'After all,' I said, responding to her expression rather than to her words, 'it wasn't

my fault if you were too lazy to write. Was it?’

‘Yes, it was,’ Catherine answered. ‘Just as much yours as mine. You ought to have reminded me to write, you ought to have insisted. Instead of which you set the example and encouraged my laziness.’

I shrugged my shoulders. ‘One can’t argue with women.’

‘Because they’re almost always in the right,’ said Catherine. ‘But that isn’t the point. Poor Grace is the point. What’s happened to her, do you suppose? And that dreadful Kingham—what has he been up to? I wish I’d written.’

At Monte Circeo, it is true, we had often spoken of Grace and Kingham. But there, in the annihilating sunshine, among the enormous and, for northern eyes, the almost unreal beauties of that mythological landscape, they had seemed as remote and as unimportant as everything and everybody else in our other life. Grace suffered. We knew it, no doubt, theoretically; but not, so to speak, practically—not personally, not with sympathetic realisation. In the sun it had been hardly possible to realise anything beyond our own well-being. Expose a northern body to the sun and the soul within it seems to evaporate. The inrush from the source

of physical life drives out the life of the spirit. The body must become inured to light and life before the soul can condense again into active existence. When we had talked of Grace at Monte Circeo, we had been a pair of almost soulless bodies in the sun. Our clothes, our shoes, the hideous discomfort of the train gave us back our souls. We talked of Grace now with rediscovered sympathy, speculating rather anxiously on her fate.

‘I feel that in some way we’re almost responsible for her,’ said Catherine. ‘Oh, I wish I’d written to her! And why didn’t she write to me?’

I propounded a comforting theory. ‘She probably hasn’t been with Kingham at all,’ I suggested. ‘She’s gone abroad as usual with Peddley and the children. We shall probably find that the whole thing has died down by the time we get home.’

‘I wonder,’ said Catherine.

We were destined to discover the truth, or at least some portion of it, sooner than we had expected. The first person I saw as I stepped out of the train at Modane, was John Peddley.

He was standing on the platform some ten or fifteen yards away, scanning, with eyes that sharply turned this way and that, the

faces of the passengers descending from the express. His glances were searching, quick, decisive. He might have been a detective posted there on the frontier to intercept the escape of a criminal. No crook, you felt, no gentleman cracksman, however astute, could hope to sneak or swagger past those all-seeing hunter's eyes. It was that thought, the realisation that the thing was hopeless, that made me check my first impulse, which was to flee—out of the station, anywhere—to hide—in the luggage-van, the lavatory, under a seat. No, the game was obviously up. There was no possible escape. Sooner or later, whatever I might do now, I should have to present myself at the custom-house; he would catch me there, infallibly. And the train was scheduled to wait for two and a half hours.

'We're in for it,' I whispered to Catherine, as I helped her down on to the platform. She followed the direction of my glance and saw our waiting danger.

'Heaven help us,' she ejaculated with an unaccustomed piety; then added in another tone: 'But perhaps that means that Grace is here. I shall go and ask him.'

'Better not,' I implored, still cherishing a foolish hope that we might somehow slip past him unobserved. 'Better not.'

But in that instant, Peddley turned round and saw us. His large, brown, handsome face beamed with sudden pleasure; he positively ran to meet us.

Those two and a half hours in John Peddley's company at Modane confirmed for me a rather curious fact, of which, hitherto, I had been only vaguely and inarticulately aware: the fact that one may be deeply and sympathetically interested in the feelings of individuals whose thoughts and opinions—all the products, in a word, of their intellects—are utterly indifferent, even wearisome and repulsive. We read the Autobiography of Alfieri, the Journals of Benjamin Robert Haydon, and read them with a passionate interest. But Alfieri's tragedies, but Haydon's historical pictures, all the things which, for the men themselves, constituted their claim on the world's attention, have simply ceased to exist, so far as we are concerned. Intellectually and artistically, these men were more than half dead. But emotionally they lived.

Mutatis mutandis, it was the same with John Peddley. I had known him, till now, only as a relater of facts, an expounder of theories—as an intellect, in short; one of the most appallingly uninteresting intellects ever created. I had known him only in his public

capacity, so to speak, as the tireless lecturer of club smoking-rooms and dinner-tables. I had never had a glimpse of him in private life. It was not to be wondered at; for, as I have said before, at ordinary times and when things were running smoothly, Peddley had no private life more complicated than the private life of his body. His feelings towards the majority of his fellow-beings were the simple emotions of the huntsman: pleasure when he had caught his victim and could talk him to death; pain and a certain slight resentment when the prey escaped him. Towards his wife he felt the desires of a healthy man in early middle life, coupled with a real but rather unimaginative, habit-born affection. It was an affection which took itself and its object, Grace, altogether too much for granted. In his own way, Peddley loved his wife, and it never occurred to him to doubt that she felt in the same way towards him; it seemed to him the natural inevitable thing, like having children and being fond of them, having a house and servants and coming home in the evening from the office to find dinner awaiting one. So inevitable that it was quite unnecessary to talk or even to think about it; natural to the point of being taken publicly for granted, like the possession of a bank balance.

I had thought it impossible that Peddley should ever develop a private life; but I had been wrong. I had not foreseen the possibility of his receiving a shock violent enough to shake him out of complacency into self-questioning, a shock of sufficient strength to shiver the comfortable edifice of his daily, taken-for-granted life. That shock he had now received. It was a new and unfamiliar Peddley who now came running towards us.

'I'm so glad, I'm so particularly glad to see you,' he said, as he approached us. 'Quite extraordinarily glad, you know.'

I have never had my hand so warmly shaken as it was then. Nor had Catherine, as I could see by the way she winced, as she abandoned her fingers to his crushing cordiality.

'You're the very man I particularly wanted to see,' he went on, turning back to me. He stooped and picked up a couple of our suit-cases. 'Let's make a dash for the douane,' he said. 'And then, when we've got those wretched formalities well over, we can have a bit of a talk.'

We followed him. Looking at Catherine, I made a grimace. The prospect of that bit of a talk appalled me. Catherine gave me an answering look, then quickened her pace so

as to come up with the energetically hurrying Peddley.

‘Is Grace with you here?’ she asked.

Peddley halted, a suit-case in each hand. ‘Well,’ he said, slowly and hesitatingly, as though it were possible to have metaphysical doubts about the correct answer to this question, ‘well, as a matter of fact, she isn’t. Not really.’ He might have been discussing the problem of the Real Presence.

As if reluctant to speak about the matter any further, he turned away and hurried on towards the custom-house, leaving Catherine’s next question—‘Shall we find her in London when we get back?’—without an answer.

The bit of a talk, when it came, was very different from what I had gloomily anticipated.

‘Do you think your wife would mind,’ Peddley whispered to me, when the douanier had done with us and we were making our way towards the station restaurant, ‘if I had a few words with you alone?’

I answered that I was sure she wouldn’t, and said a word to Catherine, who replied, to me by a quick significant look, and to both of us together by a laughing dismissal.

‘Go away and talk your stupid business

if you want to,' she said. 'I shall begin my lunch.'

We walked out on to the platform. It had begun to rain, violently, as it only rains among the mountains. The water beat on the vaulted glass roof of the station, filling all the space beneath with a dull, continuous roar; we walked as though within an enormous drum, touched by the innumerable fingers of the rain. Through the open arches at either end of the station the shapes of mountains were dimly visible through veils of white, wind-driven water.

We walked up and down for a minute or two without saying a word. Never, in my presence at any rate, had Peddley preserved so long a silence. Divining what embarrassments kept him in this unnatural state of speechlessness, I felt sorry for the man. In the end, after a couple of turns up and down the platform, he made an effort, cleared his throat and diffidently began in a small voice that was quite unlike that loud, self-assured, trombone-like voice in which he told one about the Swiss banking system.

'What I wanted to talk to you about,' he said, 'was Grace.'

The face he turned towards me as he spoke was full of a puzzled misery. That commonplace handsome mask was strangely

puckered and lined. Under lifted eyebrows, his eyes regarded me, questioningly, helplessly, unhappily.

I nodded and said nothing; it seemed the best way of encouraging him to proceed.

'The fact is,' he went on, turning away from me and looking at the ground, 'the fact is. . . .' But it was a long time before he could make up his mind to tell me what the fact was.

Knowing so very well what the fact was, I could have laughed aloud, if pity had not been stronger in me than mockery, when he wound up with the pathetically euphemistic understatement: 'The fact is that Grace . . . well, I believe she doesn't love me. Not in the way she did. In fact I know it.'

'How do you know it?' I asked, after a little pause, hoping that he might have heard of the affair only through idle gossip, which I could proceed to deny.

'She told me,' he answered, and my hope disappeared.

'Ah.'

So Kingham had had his way, I reflected. He had bullied her into telling Peddley the quite unnecessary truth, just for the sake of making the situation a little more difficult and painful than it need have been.

'I'd noticed for some time,' Peddley went

on, after a silence, 'that she'd been different.'

Even Peddley could be perspicacious after the event. And besides, the signs of her waning love had been sufficiently obvious and decisive. Peddley might have no sympathetic imagination; but at any rate he had desires and knew when they were satisfied and when they weren't. He hinted at explanatory details.

'But I never imagined,' he concluded—'how could I imagine?—that it was because there was somebody else. How could I?' he repeated in a tone of ingenuous despair. You saw very clearly that it was, indeed, quite impossible for him to have imagined such a thing.

'Quite,' I said, affirming comfortingly I do not know exactly what proposition. 'Quite.'

'Well then, one day,' he pursued, 'one day just before we had arranged to come out here into the mountains, as usual, she suddenly came and blurted it all out—quite suddenly, you know, without warning. It was dreadful. Dreadful.'

There was another pause.

'That fellow called Kingham,' he went on, breaking the silence, 'you know him? he's a friend of yours, isn't he?'

I nodded.

'Very able man, of course,' said Peddley,

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trying to be impartial and give the devil his due. 'But, I must say, the only times I met him I found him rather unsympathetic.' (I pictured the scene: Peddley embarking on the law relating to insurance companies or, thoughtfully remembering that the chap was literary, on pianolas or modern art or the Einstein theory. And for his part, Kingham firmly and in all likelihood very rudely refusing to be made a victim of.) 'A bit too eccentric for my taste.'

'Queer,' I confirmed, 'certainly. Perhaps a little mad sometimes.'

Peddley nodded. 'Well,' he said slowly, 'it was Kingham.'

I said nothing. Perhaps I ought to have 'registered amazement,' as they say in the world of the cinema; amazement, horror, indignation—above all amazement. But I am a poor comedian. I made no grimaces, uttered no cries. In silence we walked slowly along the platform. The rain drummed on the roof overhead; through the archway at the end of the station the all but invisible ghosts of mountains loomed up behind white veils. We walked from Italy towards France and back again from France towards Italy.

'Who could have imagined it?' said Peddley at last.

'Anybody,' I might, of course, have

answered. 'Anybody who had a little imagination and who knew Grace; above all, who knew you.' But I held my tongue. For though there is something peculiarly ludicrous about the spectacle of a self-satisfaction suddenly punctured, it is shallow and unimaginative only to laugh at it. For the puncturing of self-satisfaction gives rise to a pain that can be quite as acute as that which is due to the nobler tragedies. Hurt vanity and exploded complacency may be comic as a spectacle, from the outside; but to those who feel the pain of them, who regard them from within, they are very far from ludicrous. The feelings and opinions of the actor, even in the morally lowest dramas, deserve as much consideration as the spectator's. Peddley's astonishment that his wife could have preferred another man to himself was doubtless, from my point of view, a laughable exhibition. But the humiliating realisation had genuinely hurt him; the astonishment had been mixed with a real pain. Merely to have mocked would have been a denial, in favour of the spectator, of the actor's rights. Moreover, the pain which Peddley felt was not exclusively the product of an injured complacency. With the low and ludicrous were mingled other, more reputable emotions. His next words de-

prived me of whatever desire I might have had to laugh.

‘What am I to do?’ Peddley went on, after another long pause, and looked at me again more miserably and bewilderedly than ever. ‘What *am* I to do?’

‘Well,’ I said cautiously, not knowing what to advise him, ‘it surely depends how you feel about it all—about Grace in particular.’

‘How I feel about her?’ he repeated. ‘Well,’ he hesitated, embarrassed, ‘I’m fond of her, of course. Very fond of her.’ He paused; then, with a great effort, throwing down barriers which years of complacent silence, years of insensitive taking for granted had built up round the subject, he went on: ‘I love her.’

The utterance of that decisive word seemed to make things easier for Peddley. It was as though an obstruction had been removed; the stream of confidences began to flow more easily and copiously.

‘You know,’ he went on, ‘I don’t think I had quite realised how much I did love her till now. That’s what makes it all so specially dreadful—the thought that I ought to have loved her more, or at least more consciously when I had the opportunity, when she loved me; the thought that if I had, I

shouldn't, probably, be here now all alone, without her.' He averted his face and was silent, while we walked half the length of the platform. 'I think of her all the time, you know,' he continued. 'I think how happy we used to be together and I wonder if we shall ever be happy again, as we were, or if it's all over, all finished.' There was another pause. 'And then,' he said, 'I think of her there in England, with that man, being happy with him, happier perhaps than she ever was with me; for perhaps she never really did love me, not like that.' He shook his head. 'Oh, it's dreadful, you know, it's dreadful. I try to get these thoughts out of my head, but I can't. I walk in the hills till I'm dead-beat; I try to distract myself by talking to people who come through on the trains. But it's no good. I can't keep these thoughts away.'

I might have assured him, of course, that Grace was without doubt infinitely less happy with Kingham than she had ever been with him. But I doubted whether the consolation would really be very efficacious.

'Perhaps it isn't really serious,' I suggested, feebly. 'Perhaps it won't last. She'll come to her senses one of these days.'

Peddley sighed. 'That's what I always hope, of course. I was angry at first, when

she told me that she wasn't coming abroad and that she meant to stay with that man in England. I told her that she could go to the devil, so far as I was concerned. I told her that she'd only hear from me through my solicitor. But what was the good of that? I don't want her to go to the devil; I want her to be with me. I'm not angry any more, only miserable. I've even swallowed my pride. What's the good of being proud and not going back on your decisions, if it makes you unhappy? I've written and told her that I want her to come back, that I'll be happy and grateful if she does.'

'And what has she answered?' I asked.

'Nothing,' said Peddley.

I imagined Peddley's poor conventional letter, full of those worn phrases that make their appearance with such a mournful regularity in all the letters that are read in the divorce courts, or before coroners' juries, when people have thrown themselves under trains for unrequited love. Miserable, cold, inadequate words! A solicitor, he had often dictated them, no doubt, to clients who desired to have their plea for the restitution of conjugal rights succinctly and decorously set down in black and white, for the benefit of the judge who was, in due course, to give it legal force. Old, blunted phrases, into which

only the sympathy of the reader has power to instil a certain temporary life—he had had to write them unprofessionally this time, for himself.

Grace, I guessed, would have shown the letter to Kingham. I imagined the derisive ferocity of his comments. A judicious analysis of its style can reduce almost any love-letter to emptiness and absurdity. Kingham would have made that analysis with gusto and with a devilish skill. By his mockery he had doubtless shamed Grace out of her first spontaneous feelings; she had left the letter unanswered. But the feelings, I did not doubt, still lingered beneath the surface of her mind; pity for John Peddley and remorse for what she had done. And Kingham, I felt sure, would find some ingenious method for first encouraging, then deriding these emotions. That would agreeably complicate their relations, would render her love for him a source of even greater pain to her than ever.

Peddley broke the rain-cloud silence and the train of my speculations by saying: ‘And if it is serious, if she goes on refusing to answer when I write—what then?’

‘Ah, but that won’t happen,’ I said, speaking with a conviction born of my knowledge of Kingham’s character. Sooner or later he

would do something that would make it impossible for even the most abject of lovers to put up with him. 'You can be sure it won't.'

'I only wish I could,' said Peddley dubiously: he did not know Kingham, only Grace—and very imperfectly at that. 'I can't guess what she means to do. It was all so unexpected—from Grace. I never imagined . . .' For the first time he had begun to realise his ignorance of the woman to whom he was married. The consciousness of this ignorance was one of the elements of his distress. 'But if it is serious,' he went on, after a pause, obstinately insisting on contemplating the worst of possibilities, 'what am I to do? Let her go, like that, without a struggle? Set her free to go and be permanently and respectably happy with that man?' (At the vision he thus conjured up of a domesticated Kingham, I inwardly smiled.) 'That would be fairest to her, I suppose. But why should I be unfair to myself?'

Under the fingers of the drumming rain, in the presence of the ghostly, rain-blurred mountains, we prolonged the vain discussion. In the end I persuaded him to do nothing for the time being. To wait and see what the next days or weeks or months would bring. It was the only possible policy.

When we returned to the station restaurant, Peddley was considerably more cheerful than when we had left it. I had offered no very effectual consolation, invented no magical solution of his problems; but the mere fact that he had been able to talk and that I had been ordinarily sympathetic had been a relief and a comfort to him. He was positively rubbing his hands as he sat down beside Catherine.

'Well, Mrs. Wilkes,' he said in that professionally hearty tone which clergymen, doctors, lawyers, and all those whose business it is to talk frequently and copiously with people they do not know, so easily acquire, 'well, Mrs. Wilkes, I'm afraid we've shamefully neglected you. I'm afraid you'll never forgive me for having carried off your husband in this disgraceful way.' And so on.

After a little, he abandoned this vein of graceful courtesy for more serious conversation.

'I met a most interesting man at this station a few days ago,' he began. 'A Greek. Theotocopulos was his name. A very remarkable man. He told me a number of most illuminating things about King Constantine and the present economic situation in Greece. He assured me, for one thing,

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that . . .’ And the information about King Constantine and the economic situation in Hellas came pouring out. In Mr. Theotocopoulos, it was evident, John Peddley had found a kindred soul. When Greek meets Greek then comes, in this case, an exchange of anecdotes about the deposed sovereigns of eastern Europe—in a word, the tug of bores. From private, Peddley had returned to public life. We were thankful when it was time to continue our journey.

Kingham lived on the second floor of a once handsome and genteel eighteenth-century house, which presented its façade of blackened brick to a decayed residential street, leading northward from Theobald’s Road towards the easternmost of the Bloomsbury Squares. It was a slummy street in which, since the war, a colony of poor but ‘artistic’ people from another class had settled. In the windows, curtains of dirty muslin alternated with orange curtains, scarlet curtains, curtains in large bright-coloured checks. It was not hard to know where respectable slumminess ended and gay Bohemianism began.

The front door of number twenty-three was permanently open. I entered and addressed myself to the stairs. Reaching the second landing, I was surprised to find the

door of Kingham's rooms ajar. I pushed it open and walked in.

'Kingham,' I called, 'Kingham!'

There was no answer. I stepped across the dark little vestibule and tapped at the door of the main sitting-room.

'Kingham!' I called again more loudly.

I did not want to intrude indiscreetly upon some scene of domestic happiness or, more probably, considering the relations existing between Grace and Kingham, of domestic strife.

'Kingham!'

The silence remained unbroken. I walked in. The room was empty. Still calling discreetly as I went, I looked into the second sitting-room, the kitchen, the bedroom. A pair of suit-cases were standing, ready packed, just inside the bedroom door. Where could they be going? I wondered, hoped I should see them before they went. Meanwhile, I visited even the bathroom and the larder; the little flat was quite empty of life. They must have gone out, leaving the front door open behind them as they went. If pre-occupation and absence of mind be signs of love, why then, I reflected, things must be going fairly well.

It was twenty to six on my watch. I decided to wait for their return. If they

were not back within the hour, I would leave a note, asking them to come to see us, and go.

The two small and monstrously lofty sitting-rooms in Kingham's flat had once been a single room of nobly classical proportions. A lath-and-plaster partition separated one room from the other, dividing into two unsymmetrical parts the gracefully moulded design which had adorned the ceiling of the original room. A single tall sash window, having no proportionable relation to the wall in which it found itself accidentally placed, illuminated either room—the larger inadequately, the smaller almost to excess. It was in the smaller and lighter of the two sitting-rooms that Kingham kept his books and his writing-table. I entered it, looked round the shelves, and having selected two or three miscellaneous volumes, drew a chair up to the window and settled down to read.

'I have no patience,' I read (and it was a volume of Kingham's own writings that I had opened), 'I have no patience with those silly prophets and Utopia-mongers who offer us prospects of uninterrupted happiness. I have no patience with them. Are they too stupid even to realise their own stupidity? Can't they see that if happiness were uninterrupted and well-being universal, these

things would cease to be happiness and well-being and become merely boredom and daily bread, daily business, *Daily Mail*? Can't they understand that, if everything in the world were pea-green, we shouldn't know what pea-green was? "Asses, apes and dogs!" (Milton too, thank God for Milton! didn't suffer fools gladly. Satan—portrait of the artist.) Asses, apes and dogs. Are they too stupid to see that, in order to know happiness and virtue, men must also know misery and sin? The Utopia I offer is a world where happiness and unhappiness are more intense, where they more rapidly and violently alternate than here, with us. A world where men and women endowed with more than our modern sensitiveness, more than our acute and multifarious modern consciousness, shall know the unbridled pleasures, the cruelties and dangers of the ancient world, with all the scruples and remorse of Christianity, all its ecstasies, all its appalling fears. That is the Utopia I offer you—not a sterilised nursing home, with Swedish drill before breakfast, vegetarian cookery, classical music on the radio, chaste mixed sunbaths, and rational free love between aseptic sheets. Asses, apes and dogs!

One thing at least, I reflected, as I turned the pages of the book in search of other

attractive paragraphs, one thing at least could be said in Kingham's favour; he was no mere academic theorist. Kingham practised what he preached. He had defined Utopia, he was doing his best to realise it—in Grace's company.

'Vows of chastity,' the words caught my eye and I read on, 'vows of chastity are ordinarily taken in that cold season, full of disgusts and remorse, which follows after excess. The taker of the oath believes the vow to be an unbreakable chain about his flesh. But he is wrong; the vow is no chain, only a hempen strand. When the blood is cold, it holds fast. But when, with the natural rebirth of appetite, the blood turns to flame, that fire burns through the hemp—the tindery hemp which the binder had thought to be a rope of steel—burns it, and the flesh breaks loose. With renewed satiety come coldness, disgust, remorse, more acute this time than before, and with them a repetition of the Stygian vows. And so on, round and round, like the days of the week, like summer and winter. Futile, you say, no doubt; weak-minded. But I don't agree with you. Nothing that intensifies and quickens life is futile. These vows, these remorse and the deep-rooted feeling from which they spring—the feeling that the pleasure of the

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senses is somehow evil—sharpen this pleasure to the finest of points, multiply the emotions to which it gives rise by creating, parallel with the body's delight, an anguish and tragedy of the mind.'

I had read them before, these abbreviated essays or expanded maxims (I do not know how to name them; Kingham himself had labelled them merely as 'Notions'); had read them more than once and always enjoyed their violence, their queerness, their rather terrifying sincerity. But this time, it seemed to me, I read them with greater understanding than in the past. My knowledge of Kingham's relations with Grace illuminated them for me; and they, in their turn, threw light on Kingham and his relations with Grace. For instance, there was that sentence about love: 'All love is in the nature of a vengeance; the man revenges himself on the woman who has caught and humiliated him; the woman revenges herself on the man who has broken down her reserves and reluctances, who has dared to convert her from an individual into a mere member and mother of the species.' It seemed particularly significant to me, now. I remember noticing, too, certain words about the sin against the Holy Ghost. 'Only those who know the Holy Ghost are tempted to

sin against him—indeed, can sin against him. One cannot waste a talent unless one first possesses it. One cannot do what is wrong, or stupid, or futile, unless one first knows what is right, what is reasonable, what is worth doing. Temptation begins with knowledge and grows as knowledge grows. A man knows that he has a soul to save and that it is a precious soul; it is for that very reason that he passes his time in such a way that it must infallibly be damned. You, reader,' the paragraph characteristically concluded, 'you who have no soul to save, will probably fail to understand what I am talking about.'

I was considering these words in the light of the recent increases of my knowledge of Kingham, when I was suddenly interrupted in the midst of my meditations by the voice of Kingham himself.

'It's no good,' it was saying. 'Can't you understand?' The voice sounded all at once much louder, as the door of the larger sitting-room opened to admit the speaker and his companion. Their footsteps resounded on the uncarpeted boards. 'Why will you go on like this?' He spoke wearily, like one who is tired of being importuned and desires only to be left in peace. 'Why will you?'

'Because I love you.' Grace's voice was

low and dulled. It seemed to express a kind of obstinate misery.

'Oh, I know, I know,' said Kingham with an impatience that was muted by fatigue. He sighed noisily. 'If you only knew how sick I was of all this unnecessary higgling and arguing!' The tone was almost pathetic; it seemed to demand that one should condole with the speaker, that one should do one's best to spare him pain. One might have imagined, from the tone of his voice, that Kingham was the persecuted victim of a relentless Grace. And it was thus indeed that he now saw himself, if, as I guessed, he had reached that inevitable closing phase of all his passions—the phase of emotional satiety. He had drunk his fill of strong feeling; the bout was over, for this time, the zest had gone out of the orgy. He wanted only to live quietly, soberly. And here was Grace, importuning him to continue the orgy. An orgy in cold blood—ugh! For a man sobered by complete satiety, the idea was disgusting, a thought to shudder at. No wonder he spoke thus plaintively. 'I tell you,' he went on, 'it's settled. Definitely. Once and for all.'

'You mean it? You mean definitely that you're going?'

'Definitely,' said Kingham.

'Then I mean what I've said,' the miserable, dully obstinate voice replied. 'Definitely. I shall kill myself if you go.'

My first impulse, when I heard Kingham's voice, had been—goodness knows why—to hide myself. A sudden sense of guilt, a schoolboy's terror of being caught, entirely possessed me. My heart beating, I jumped up and looked about me for some place of concealment. Then, after a second or two, my reason re-asserted itself. I remembered that I was not a schoolboy in danger of being caught and caned; that, after all, I had been waiting here in order to ask Kingham and Grace to dinner; and that, so far from hiding myself, I ought immediately to make my presence known to them. Meanwhile, sentence had succeeded sentence in their muffled altercation. I realised that they were involved in some terrible, mortal quarrel; and realising, I hesitated to interrupt them. One feels shy of breaking in on an exhibition of strong and intimate emotion. To intrude oneself, clothed and armoured in one's daily indifference, upon naked and quivering souls is an insult, almost, one feels, an indecency. This was evidently no vulgar squabble, which could be allayed by a little tact, a beaming face and a tepid douche of platitude. Perhaps it was even so serious, so agonising that

it ought to be put an end to at all costs. I wondered. Ought I to intervene? Knowing Kingham, I was afraid that my intervention might only make things worse. So far from shaming him into peace, it would in all probability have the effect of rousing all his latent violences. To continue an intimately emotional scene in the presence of a third party is a kind of indecency. Kingham, I reflected, would probably be only too glad to enhance and complicate the painfulness of the scene by introducing into it this element of spiritual outrage. I stood hesitating, wondering what I ought to do. Go in to them and run the risk of making things worse? Or stay where I was, at the alternative risk of being discovered, half an hour hence, and having to explain my most inexplicable presence? I was still hesitating when, from the other room, the muffled, obstinate voice of Grace pronounced those words:

‘I shall kill myself if you go.’

‘No, you won’t,’ said Kingham. ‘I assure you, you won’t.’ The weariness of his tone was tinged with a certain ironic mockery.

I imagined the excruciations which might result if I gave Kingham an audience to such a drama and decided not to intervene—not yet, at any rate. I tiptoed across the room

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and sat down where it would be impossible for me to be seen through the open door.

'I've played that little farce myself,' Kingham went on. 'Oh, dozens of times. Yes, and really persuaded myself at the moment that it was the genuinely tragic article.' Even without my intervention, his mockery was becoming brutal enough.

'I shall kill myself,' Grace repeated, softly and stubbornly.

'But as you see,' Kingham pursued, 'I'm still alive.' A new vivacity had come into his weary voice. 'Still alive and perfectly intact. The cyanide of potassium always turned out to be almond icing: and however carefully I aimed at my cerebellum, I never managed to score anything but a miss.' He laughed at his own jest.

'Why will you talk in that way?' Grace asked, with a weary patience. 'That stupid, cruel way?'

'I may talk,' said Kingham, 'but it's you who act. You've destroyed me, you've poisoned me: you're a poison in my blood. And you complain because I talk!'

He paused, as if expecting an answer: but Grace said nothing. She had said all that there was for her to say so often, she had said 'I love you,' and had had the words so constantly and malevolently misunderstood, that

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it seemed to her, no doubt, a waste of breath to answer him.

'I suppose it's distressing to lose a victim,' Kingham went on in the same ironic tone. 'But you can't really expect me to believe that it's so distressing that you've got to kill yourself. Come, come, my dear Grace. That's a bit thick.'

'I don't expect you to believe anything,' Grace replied. 'I just say what I mean and leave it at that. I'm tired.' I could hear by the creaking of the springs that she had thrown herself down on the divan. There was a silence.

'So am I,' said Kingham, breaking it at last. 'Mortally tired.' All the energy had gone out of his voice; it was once more blank and lifeless. There was another creaking of springs; he had evidently sat down beside her on the divan. 'Look here,' he said, 'for God's sake, let's be reasonable.' From Kingham, the appeal was particularly cogent; I could not help smiling. 'I'm sorry I spoke like that just now. It was silly; it was bad-tempered. And you know the way one word begets another; one's carried away. I didn't mean to hurt you. Let's talk calmly. What's the point of making an unnecessary fuss? The thing's inevitable, fatal. A bad

business, perhaps; but let's try to make the best of it, not the worst.'

I listened in astonishment, while Kingham wearily unwound a string of such platitudes. Wearily, wearily; he seemed to be boring himself to death with his own words. Oh, to have done with it, to get away, to be free, never again to set eyes on her! I imagined his thoughts, his desires.

There are moments in every amorous intimacy, when such thoughts occur to one or other of the lovers, when love has turned to weariness and disgust, and the only desire is a desire for solitude. Most lovers overcome this temporary weariness by simply not permitting their minds to dwell on it. Feelings and desires to which no attention is paid soon die of inanition; for the attention of the conscious mind is their food and fuel. In due course love reasserts itself and the moment of weariness is forgotten. To Kingham, however, Kingham who gave his whole attention to every emotion or wish that brushed against his consciousness, the slightest velleity of weariness became profoundly significant. Nor was there, in his case, any real enduring love for the object of his thoughtfully fostered disgust, any strong and steady affection capable of overcoming what should have

been only a temporary weariness. He loved because he felt the need of violent emotion. Grace was a means to an end, not an end in herself. The end—satisfaction of his craving for emotional excitement—had been attained; the means had therefore ceased to possess the slightest value for him. Grace would have been merely indifferent to him, if she had shown herself in this crisis as emotionally cold as he felt himself. But their feelings did not synchronise. Grace was not weary; she loved him, on the contrary, more passionately than ever. Her importunate warmth had conspired with his own habit of introspection to turn weariness and emotional neutrality into positive disgust and even hatred. He was making an effort, however, not to show these violent feelings; moreover he was tired—too tired to want to give them their adequate expression. He would have liked to slip away quietly, without any fuss. Wearily, wearily, he uttered his sedative phrases. He might have been a curate giving Grace a heart-to-heart chat about Life.

‘We must be sensible,’ he said. And: ‘There are other things besides love.’ He even talked about self-control and the consolations of work. It lasted a long time.

Suddenly Grace interrupted him. ‘Stop!’ she cried in a startlingly loud voice. ‘For

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heaven's sake, stop! How can you be so dishonest and stupid?

'I'm not,' Kingham answered, sullenly. 'I was simply saying . . .'

'You were simply saying that you're sick of me,' said Grace, taking up his words. 'Simply saying it in a slimy, stupid, dishonest way. That you're sick to death of me and that you wish to goodness I'd go away and leave you in peace. Oh, I will, I will. You needn't worry.' She uttered a kind of laugh.

There was a long silence.

'Why don't you go?' said Grace at last. Her voice was muffled, as though she were lying with her face buried in a cushion.

'Well,' said Kingham awkwardly. 'Perhaps it might be best.' He must have been feeling the beginnings of a sense of enormous relief, a joy which it would have been indecent to display, but which was bubbling only just beneath the surface. 'Good-bye, then, Grace,' he said, in a tone that was almost cheerful. 'Let's part friends.'

Grace's laughter was muffled by the cushion. Then she must have sat up; for her voice, when she spoke a second later, was clear and unmuted.

'Kiss me,' she said peremptorily. 'I want you to kiss me, just once more.'

There was a silence.

'Not like that,' Grace's voice came almost angrily. 'Kiss me really, really, as though you still loved me.'

Kingham must have tried to obey her; anything for a quiet life and a prompt release. There was another silence.

'No, no.' The anger in Grace's voice had turned to despair. 'Go away, go, go. Do I disgust you so that you can't even kiss me?'

'But, my dear Grace . . . ' he protested.

'Go, go, go.'

'Very well, then,' said Kingham in a dignified and slightly offended tone. But inwardly, what joy! Liberty, liberty! The key had turned in the lock, the prison door was opening. 'If you want me to, I will.' I heard him getting up from the divan. 'I'll write to you when I get to Munich,' he said.

I heard him walking to the door, along the passage to the bedroom, where, I suppose, he picked up his suit-cases, back along the passage to the outer door of the apartment. The latch clicked, the door squeaked on its hinges as it swung open, squeaked as it closed; there was an echoing bang.

I got up from my chair and cautiously peeped round the edge of the doorway into the other room. Grace was lying on the divan in precisely the position I had imagined, quite still, her face buried in a

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cushion. I stood there watching her for perhaps half a minute, wondering what I should say to her. Everything would sound inadequate, I reflected. Therefore, perhaps, the most inadequate of all possible words, the most perfectly banal, trivial and commonplace, would be the best in the circumstances.

I was pondering thus when suddenly that death-still body stirred into action. Grace lifted her face from the pillow, listened for a second, intently, then with a series of swift motions, she turned on her side, raised herself to a sitting position, dropped her feet to the ground and, springing up, hastened across the room towards the door. Instinctively, I withdrew into concealment. I heard her cross the passage, heard the click and squeak of the front door as it opened. Then her voice, a strange, inhuman, strangled voice, called 'Kingham!' and again, after a listening silence that seemed portentously long, 'Kingham!' There was no answer.

After another silence, the door closed. Grace's footsteps approached once more, crossed the room, came to a halt. I peeped out from my ambush. She was standing by the window, her forehead pressed against the glass, looking out—no, looking down, rather. Two storeys, three, if you counted the area that opened like a deep grave at the foot of

the wall beneath the window—was she calculating the height? What were her thoughts?

All at once, she straightened herself up, stretched out her hands and began to raise the sash. I walked into the room towards her.

At the sound of my footsteps, she turned and looked at me—but looked with the disquietingly blank, unrecognising eyes and expressionless face of one who is blind. It seemed as though her mind were too completely preoccupied with its huge and dreadful idea to be able to focus itself at once on the trivialities of life.

‘Dear Grace,’ I said, ‘I’ve been looking for you. Catherine sent me to ask you to come and have dinner with us.’

She continued to look at me blankly. After a second or two, the significance of my words seemed to reach her; it was as though she were far away, listening to sounds that laboured slowly across the intervening gulfs of space. When at last she had heard my words—heard them with her distant mind—she shook her head and her lips made the movement of saying ‘No.’

I took her arm and led her away from the window. ‘But you must,’ I said.

My voice seemed to come to her more quickly this time. It was only a moment

after I had finished speaking that she again shook her head.

‘You must,’ I repeated. ‘I heard everything, you know. I shall make you come with me.’

‘You heard?’ she repeated, staring at me.

I nodded, but did not speak. Picking up her small, close-fitting, casque-shaped hat from where it was lying on the floor, near the divan, I handed it to her. She turned with an automatic movement towards the dim, grey-glassed Venetian mirror that hung above the fireplace, and adjusted it to her head: a wisp of hair straggled over her temple; tidily, she tucked it away.

‘Now, let’s go,’ I said, and led her away, out of the flat, down the dark stairs, into the street.

Walking towards Holborn in search of a taxi, I made futile conversation. I talked, I remember, about the merits of omnibuses as opposed to undergrounds, about second-hand bookshops, and about cats. Grace said nothing. She walked at my side, as though she were walking in her sleep.

Looking at that frozen, unhappy face—the face of a child who has suffered more than can be borne—I was filled with a pity that was almost remorse. I felt that it was somehow my fault; that it was heartless and

insensitive of me not to be as unhappy as she was. I felt, as I have often felt in the presence of the sick, the miserably and hopelessly poor, that I owed her an apology. I felt that I ought to beg her pardon for being happily married, healthy, tolerably prosperous, content with my life. Has one a right to be happy in the presence of the unfortunate, to exult in life before those who desire to die? Has one a right?

'The population of cats in London,' I said, 'must be very nearly as large as the population of human beings.'

'I should think so,' Grace whispered, after a sufficient time had elapsed for her to hear, across the gulfs that separated her mind from mine, what I had said. She spoke with a great effort; her voice was scarcely audible.

'Literally millions,' I pursued.

And then, fortunately, I caught sight of a taxi. Driving home to Kensington, I talked to her of our Italian holiday. I did not think it necessary, however, to tell her of our meeting with Peddley at Modane.

Arrived, I told Catherine in two words what had happened and, handing Grace over to her care, took refuge in my work-room. I felt, I must confess, profoundly and selfishly thankful to be back there, alone, with my books and my piano. It was the kind of

thankfulness one feels, motoring out of town for the week-end, to escape from dark and sordid slums to a comfortable, cool-gardened country house, where one can forget that there exist other human beings besides oneself and one's amusing, cultivated friends and that ninety-nine out of every hundred of them are doomed to misery. I sat down at the piano and began to play the Arietta of Beethoven's Op. 111.

I played it very badly, for more than half my mind was preoccupied with something other than the music. I was wondering what would become of Grace now. Without Rodney, without Kingham, what would she do? What would she be? The question propounded itself insistently.

And then, all at once, the page of printed music before my eyes gave me the oracular reply. *Da capo*. The hieroglyph sent me back to the beginning of my passage. *Da capo*. After all, it was obvious. *Da capo*. John Peddley, the children, the house, the blank existence of one who does not know how to live unassisted. Then another musical critic, a second me—introduction to the second theme. Then the second theme, *scherzando*; another Rodney. Or *molto agitato*, the equivalent of Kingham. And then, inevitably, when the agitation had agi-

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tated itself to the climax of silence, *da capo* again to Peddley, the house, the children, the blankness of her unassisted life.

The miracle of the Arietta floated out from under my fingers. Ah, if only the music of our destinies could be like this!

CHAWDRON

FROM behind the outspread *Times* I broke a silence. "Your friend Chawdron's dead, I see."

"Dead?" repeated Tilney, half incredulously. "Chawdron dead?"

"'Suddenly, of heart failure,'" I went on, reading from the obituary, "'at his residence in St. James's Square.'"

"Yes, his heart . . ." He spoke meditatively. "How old was he? Sixty?"

"Fifty-nine. I didn't realize the ruffian had been rich for so long. ' . . . the extraordinary business instinct, coupled with a truly Scottish doggedness and determination, which raised him, before he was thirty-five, from obscurity and comparative poverty to the height of opulence.' Don't you wish you could write like that? My father lost a quarter of a century's savings in one of his companies."

"Served him right for saving!" said Tilney with a sudden savagery. Surprised, I looked at him over the top of my paper. On his gnarled and ruddy face was an expression of angry gloom. The news had

evidently depressed him. Besides, he was always ill-tempered at breakfast. My poor father was paying. "What sort of jam is that by you?" he asked fiercely.

"Strawberry."

"Then I'll have some marmalade."

I passed him the marmalade and, ignoring his bad temper, "When the Old Man," I continued, "and along with him, of course, most of the other shareholders, had sold out at about eighty per cent. dead loss, Chawdron did a little quiet conjuring and the price whizzed up again. But by that time he was the owner of practically all the stock."

"I'm always on the side of the ruffians," said Tilney. "On principle."

"Oh, so am I. All the same, I do regret those twelve thousand pounds."

Tilney said nothing. I returned to the obituary.

"What do they say about the New Guinea Oil Company scandal?" he asked after a silence.

"Very little; and the touch is beautifully light. 'The findings of the Royal Commission were on the whole favourable, though it was generally considered at the time that Mr. Chawdron had acted somewhat inconsiderately.' "

Tilney laughed. " 'Inconsiderately' is good. I wish I made fourteen hundred thousand pounds each time I was inconsiderate."

"Was that what he made out of the New Guinea Oil business?"

“So he told me, and I don’t think he exaggerated. He never lied for pleasure. Out of business hours he was remarkably honest.”

“You must have known him very well.”

“Intimately,” said Tilney, and, pushing away his plate, he began to fill his pipe.

“I envy you. What a specimen for one’s collection! But didn’t you get rather bored with living inside the museum, so to speak, behind the menagerie bars? Being intimate with a specimen—it must be trying.”

“Not if the specimen’s immensely rich,” Tilney answered. “You see, I’m partial to Napoleon brandy and Corona Coronas; parasitism has its rewards. And if you’re skilful, it needn’t have too many penalties. It’s possible to be a high-souled louse, an independent tapeworm. But Napoleon brandy and Coronas weren’t the only attractions Chawdron possessed for me. I have a disinterested, scientific curiosity about the enormously wealthy. A man with an income of more than fifty thousand a year is such a fantastic and improbable being. Chawdron was specially interesting because he’d *made* all his money—mainly dishonestly; that was the fascinating thing. He was a large-scale, Napoleonic crook. And, by God, he looked it! Did you know him by sight?”

I shook my head.

“Like an illustration to Lombroso. A criminal type. But intelligently criminal, not brutally. He wasn’t brutal.”

"I thought he was supposed to look like a chimpanzee," I put in.

"He did," said Tilney. "But, after all, a chimpanzee isn't brutal-looking. What you're struck by in a chimpanzee is its all-but-human appearance. So very intelligent, so nearly a man. Chawdron's face had just that look. But with a difference. The chimpanzee looks gentle and virtuous and quite without humour. Whereas Chawdron's intelligent all-but-humanity was sly and, underneath the twinkling jocularity, quite ruthless. Oh, a strange, interesting creature! I got a lot of fun out of my study of him. But in the end, of course, he did bore me. Bored me to death. He was so drearily uneducated. Didn't know the most obvious things, couldn't understand a generalization. And then quite disgustingly without taste, without aesthetic sense or understanding. Metaphysically and artistically a cretin."

"The obituarist doesn't seem to be of your opinion." I turned again to the *Times*. "Where is it now? Ah! 'A remarkable writer was lost when Chawdron took up finance. Not entirely lost, however; for the brilliant *Autobiography*, published in 1921, remains as a lasting memorial to his talents as a stylist and narrator.' What do you say to that?" I asked, looking up at Tilney.

He smiled enigmatically. "It's quite true."

"I never read the book, I confess. Is it any good?"

"It's damned good." His smile mocked, incomprehensibly.

“Are you pulling my leg?”

“No, it was really and genuinely good.”

“Then he can hardly have been such an artistic cretin as you make out.”

“Can’t he?” Tilney echoed and, after a little pause, suddenly laughed aloud. “But he *was* a cretin,” he continued on a little gush of confidingness that seemed to sweep away the barriers of his willed discretion, “and the book *was* good. For the excellent reason that he didn’t write it. I wrote it.”

“You?” I looked at him, wondering if he were joking. But his face, after the quick illumination of laughter, had gone serious, almost gloomy. A curious face, I reflected. Handsome in its way, intelligent, aware, yet with something rather sinister about it, almost repulsive. The superficial charm and good humour of the man seemed to overlie a fundamental hardness, an uncaringness, a hostility even. Too much good living, moreover, had left its marks on that face. It was patchily red and lumpy. The fine features had become rather gross. There was a coarseness mingled with the native refinement. Did I like Tilney or did I not? I never rightly knew. And perhaps the question was irrelevant. Perhaps Tilney was one of those men who are not meant to be liked or disliked as men—only as performers. I liked his conversation, I was amused, interested, instructed by what he said. To ask myself if I also liked what he *was*—this was, no doubt, beside the point.

Tilney got up from the table and began to walk

up and down the room, his pipe between his teeth, smoking. "Poor Chawdron's dead now, so there's no reason . . ." He left the sentence unfinished, and for a few seconds, was silent. Standing by the window, he looked out through the rain-blurred glass on to the greens and wet greys of the Kentish landscape. "England looks like the vegetables at a Bloomsbury boarding-house dinner," he said slowly. "Horrible! Why do we live in this horrible country? Ugh!" He shuddered and turned away. There was another silence. The door opened and the maid came in to clear the breakfast table. I say "the maid"; but the brief impersonal term is inaccurate. Inaccurate, because wholly inadequate to describe Hawtrey. What came in, when the door opened, was personified efficiency, was a dragon, was stony ugliness, was a pillar of society, was the Ten Commandments on legs. Tilney, who did not know her, did not share my terror of the domestic monster. Unaware of the intense disapproval which I could feel her silently radiating (it was after ten; Tilney's slug-a-bed habits had thrown out of gear the whole of her morning's routine) he continued to walk up and down, while Hawtrey busied herself round the table. Suddenly he laughed. "Chawdron's *Autobiography* was the only one of my books I ever made any money out of," he said. I listened apprehensively, lest he should say anything which might shock or offend the dragon. "He turned over all the royalties to me," Tilney went on. "I made the best part of three thousand

pounds out of his *Autobiography*. Not to mention the five hundred he gave me for writing it." (Was it quite delicate, I wondered, to talk of such large sums of money in front of one so incomparably more virtuous than ourselves and so much poorer? Fortunately, Tilney changed the subject.) "You ought to read it," he said. "I'm really quite offended that you haven't. All that lower middle-class childhood in Peebles—it's really masterly." ("Lower middle-class"—I shuddered. Hawtrey's father had owned a shop; but he had had misfortunes.) "It's *Clayhanger* and *L'Education Sentimentale* and *David Copperfield* all rolled into one. Really superb. And the first adventurings into the world of finance were pure Balzac—magnificent." He laughed again, this time without bitterness, amusedly; he was warming to his subject. "I even put in a Rastignac soliloquy from the top of the dome of St. Paul's, made him shake his fist at the City. Poor old Chawdron! he was thrilled. 'If only I'd known what an interesting life I'd had,' he used to say to me. 'Known while the life was going on.'" (I looked at Hawtrey to see if she was resenting the references to an interesting life. But her face was closed; she worked as though she were deaf.) "'You wouldn't have lived it,' I told him. 'You must leave the discovery of the excitingness to the artists.'" He was silent again. Hawtrey laid the last spoon on the tray and moved towards the door. Thank heaven! "Yes, the artists," Tilney went on in a tone that had gone melancholy again. "I really

was one, you know." (The departing Hawtrey must have heard that damning confession. But then, I reflected, she always did know that I and my friends were a bad lot.) "Really *am* one," he insisted. "*Qualis artifex!* But *perco, perco*. Somehow, I've never done anything but perish all my life. Perish, perish, perish. Out of laziness and because there always seemed so much time. But I'm going to be forty-eight next June. Forty-eight! There isn't any time. And the laziness is such a habit. So's the talking. It's so easy to talk. And so amusing. At any rate for oneself."

"For other people too," I said; and the compliment was sincere. I might be uncertain whether or no I liked Tilney. But I genuinely liked his performance as a talker. Sometimes, perhaps, that performance was a little too professional. But, after all, an artist must be a professional.

"It's what comes of being mostly Irish," Tilney went on. "Talking's the national vice. Like opium-smoking with the Chinese!" (Hawtrey re-entered silently to sweep up the crumbs and fold the tablecloth.) "If you only knew the number of masterpieces I've allowed to evaporate at dinner tables, over the cigars and the whisky!" (Two things of which, I knew, the Pillar of Society virtuously disapproved.) "A whole library. I might have been—what? Well, I suppose I might have been a frightful old bore," he answered himself with a forced self-mockery. "The Complete Works of Edmund Til-

ney, in Thirty-Eight Volumes, post octavo.' I dare say the world ought to be grateful to me for sparing it *that*. All the same, I get a bit depressed when I look over the back numbers of the *Thursday Review* and read those measly little weekly articles of mine. *Parturiunt montes . . .*"

"But they're good articles," I protested. If I had been more truthful, I would have said that they were sometimes good—when he took the trouble to make them good. Sometimes, on the contrary . . .

"*Merci, cher maître!*" he answered ironically. "But hardly more perennial than brass, you must admit. Monuments of wood pulp. It's depressing being a failure. Particularly if it's your fault, if you might have been something else."

I mumbled something. But what was there to say? Except as a professional talker, Tilney *had* been a failure. He had great talents and he was a literary journalist who sometimes wrote a good article. He had reason to feel depressed.

"And the absurd, ironical thing," he continued, "is that the one really good piece of work I ever did is another man's autobiography. I could never prove my authorship even if I wanted to. Old Chawdron was very careful to destroy all the evidences of the crime. The business arrangements were all verbal. No documents of any kind. And the manuscript, *my* manuscript—he bought it off me. It's burnt."

I laughed. "He took no risks with you." Thank

Brief Candles

heaven! The dragon was preparing to leave the room for good.

“None whatever,” said Tilney. “He was going to be quite sure of wearing his laurel wreath. There was to be no other claimant. And at the time, of course, I didn’t care two pins. I took the high line about reputation. Good art—and Chawdron’s *Autobiography* was good art, a really first-rate novel—good art is its own reward.” (Hawtrey’s comment on this was almost to slam the door as she departed.) “You know the style of thing. And in this case it was more than its own reward. There was money in it. Five hundred down and all the royalties. And I was horribly short of money at the moment. If I hadn’t been, I’d never have written the book. Perhaps that’s been one of my disadvantages—a small independent income and not very extravagant tastes. I happened to be in love with a very expensive young woman at the time when Chawdron made his offer. You can’t go dancing and drinking champagne on five hundred a year. Chawdron’s cheque was timely. And there I was, committed to writing his memoirs for him. A bore, of course. But luckily the young woman jilted me soon afterwards; so I had time to waste. And Chawdron was a ruthless taskmaster. And besides, I really enjoyed it once I got started. It really was its own reward. But now—now that the book’s written and the money’s spent and I’m soon going to be fifty, instead of forty as it was then—now, I must say, I’d rather like to have at least one good book to my

credit. I'd like to be known as the author of that admirable novel, *The Autobiography of Benjamin Chawdron*, but, alas, I shan't be." He sighed. "It's Benjamin Chawdron, not Edmund Tilney, who'll have his little niche in the literary histories. Not that I care much for literary history. But I do rather care, I must confess, for the present anticipations of the niche. The drawing-room reputation, the mentions in the newspapers, the deference of the young, the sympathetic curiosity of the women. All the by-products of successful authorship. But there, I sold them to Chawdron. For a good price. I can't complain. Still, I *do* complain. Have you got any pipe tobacco? I've run out of mine."

I gave him my pouch. "If I had the energy," he went on, as he refilled his pipe, "or if I were desperately hard up, which, thank heaven and at the same time alas! I'm not at the moment, I could make another book out of Chawdron. Another and a better one. Better," he began explaining, and then interrupted himself to suck at the flame of the match he had lighted, "because . . . so much more . . . malicious." He threw the match away. "You can't write a good book without being malicious. In the *Autobiography* I made a hero of Chawdron. I was paid to; besides, it was Chawdron himself who provided me with my documents. In this other book he'd be the villain. Or in other words, he'd be himself as others saw him, not as he saw himself. Which is, incidentally, the only valid difference between the vir-

tuous and the wicked that I've ever been able to detect. When you yourself indulge in any of the deadly sins, you're always justified—they're never deadly. But when anyone else indulges, you're very properly indignant. Old Rousseau had the courage to say that he was the most virtuous man in the world. The rest of us only silently believe it. But to return to Chawdron. What I'd like to do now is to write his biography, not his autobiography. And the biography of a rather different aspect of the man. Not about the man of action, the captain of industry, the Napoleon of finance and so forth. But about the domestic, the private, the sentimental Chawdron."

"The *Times* had its word about that," said I; and picking up the paper once more, I read: "Under a disconcertingly brusque and even harsh manner Mr. Chawdron concealed the kindest of natures. A stranger meeting him for the first time was often repelled by a certain superficial roughness. It was only to his intimates that he revealed"—guess what!—"the heart of gold beneath."

"Heart of gold!" Tilney took his pipe out of his mouth to laugh.

"And he also, I see, had 'a deep religious sense.'" I laid the paper down.

"Deep? It was bottomless."

"Extraordinary," I reflected aloud, "the way they *all* have hearts of gold and religious senses. Every single one, from the rough old man of science to the tough old business man and the gruff old statesman."

“Hearts of gold!” Tilney repeated. “But gold’s much too hard. Hearts of putty, hearts of vaseline, hearts of hog-wash. That’s more like it. Hearts of hog-wash. The tougher and bluffer and gruffer they are outside, the softer they are within. It’s a law of nature. I’ve never come across an exception. Chawdron was the rule incarnate. Which is precisely what I want to show in this other, potential book of mine—the ruthless Napoleon of finance paying for his ruthlessness and his Napoleonism by dissolving internally into hog-wash. For that’s what happened to him: he dissolved into hog-wash. Like the Strange Case of Mr. Valdemar in Edgar Allan Poe. I saw it with my own eyes. It’s a terrifying spectacle. And the more terrifying when you realize that, but for the grace of God, there goes yourself—and still more so when you begin to doubt of the grace of God, when you see that there in fact you *do* go. Yes, you and I, my boy. For it isn’t only the tough old business men who have the hearts of hog-wash. It’s also, as you yourself remarked just now, the gruff old scientists, the rough old scholars, the bluff old admirals and bishops and all the other pillars of Christian society. It’s everybody, in a word, who has made himself too hard in the head or the carapace; everybody who aspires to be non-human—whether angel or machine it doesn’t matter. Super-humanity is as bad as sub-humanity, is the same thing, finally. Which shows how careful one should be if one’s an intellectual. Even the mildest sort of intellectual. Like

me, for example. I'm not one of your genuine ascetic scholars. God forbid! But I'm decidedly high-brow, and I'm literary; I'm even what the newspapers call a 'thinker.' I suffer from a passion for ideas. Always have, from boyhood onwards. With what results? That I've never been attracted by any woman who wasn't a bitch."

I laughed. But Tilney held up his hand in a gesture of protest. "It's a serious matter," he said. "It's disastrous, even. Nothing but bitches. Imagine!"

"I'm imagining," I said. "But where do the books and the ideas come in? *Post* isn't necessarily *propter*."

"It's *propter* in this case all right. Thanks to the book and the ideas, I never learnt how to deal with real situations, with solid people and things. Personal relationships—I've never been able to manage them effectively. Only ideas. With ideas I'm at home. With the *idea* of personal relationships for example. People think I'm an excellent psychologist. And I suppose I am. Spectatorially. But I'm a bad experimenter. I've lived most of my life posthumously, if you see what I mean; in reflections and conversations after the fact. As though my existence were a novel or a text-book of psychology or a biography, like any of the others on the library shelves. An awful situation. That was why I've always liked the bitches so much, always been so grateful to them—because they were the only women I ever contrived to have a non-posthumous, contemporary, concrete

relation with. The only ones." He smoked for a moment in silence.

"But why the only ones?" I asked.

"Why?" repeated Tilney. "But isn't it rather obvious? For the shy man, that is to say the man who doesn't know how to deal with real situations and people, bitches are the only possible lovers, because they're the only women who are prepared to come to meet him, the only ones who'll make the advances he doesn't know how to make."

I nodded. "Shy men have cause to be drawn to bitches: I see that. But why should the bitches be drawn to the shy men? What's their inducement to make those convenient advances? That's what I don't see."

"Oh, of course they don't make them unless the shy man's attractive," Tilney answered. "But in my case the bitches always were attracted. Always. And, quite frankly, they were right. I was tolerably picturesque, I had that professional Irish charm, I could talk, I was several hundred times more intelligent than any of the young men they were likely to know. And then, I fancy, my very shyness was an asset. You see, it didn't really look like shyness. It exteriorized itself as a kind of god-like impersonality and remoteness—most exciting for such women. I had the charm in their eyes of Mount Everest or the North Pole—something difficult and unconquered that aroused the record-breaking instincts in them. And at the same time my shy remoteness made me

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seem somehow superior; and, as you know, few pleasures can be compared with the sport of dragging down superiority and proving that it's no better than oneself. My air of disinterested remoteness has always had a *succès fou* with the bitches. They all adore me because I'm so 'different.' 'But you're different, Edmund, you're different,' " he fluted in falsetto. "The bitches! Under their sentimentalities, their one desire, of course, was to reduce me as quickly as possible to the most ignoble un-difference. . . ."

"And were they successful?" I asked.

"Oh, always. Naturally. It's not because a man's shy and bookish that he isn't a *porco di prim' ordine*. Indeed, the more shyly bookish, the more likely he is to be secretly porkish. Or if not a *porco*, at least an *asino*, an *oca*, a *vitello*. It's the rule, as I said just now; the law of nature. There's no escaping."

I laughed. "I wonder which of the animals I am?"

Tilney shook his head. "I'm not a zoologist. At least," he added, "not when I'm talking to the specimen under discussion. Ask your own conscience."

"And Chawdron?" I wanted to hear more about Chawdron. "Did Chawdron grunt, or bray, or moo?"

"A little of each. And if earwigs made a noise . . . No, not earwigs. Worse than that. Chawdron was an extreme case, and the extreme cases are right outside the animal kingdom."

"What are they, then? Vegetables?"

"No, no. Worse than vegetables. They're spirit-

ual. Angels, that's what they are: putrefied angels. It's only in the earlier stages of the degeneration that they bleat and bray. After that they twang the harp and flap their wings. Pigs' wings, of course. They're Angels in pigs' clothing. Hearts of hog-wash. Did I ever tell you about Chawdron and Charlotte Salmon?"

"The 'cellist?"

He nodded. "What a woman!"

"And her playing! So clotted, so sagging, so greasy . . ." I fumbled for the apt description.

"So terribly Jewish, in a word," said Tilney. "That retching emotionalism, that sea-sickish spirituality—purely Hebraic. If only there were a few more Aryans in the world of music! The tears come into my eyes whenever I see a blonde beast at the piano. But that's by the way. I was going to tell you about Charlotte. You know her, of course?"

"Do I not!"

"Well it was Charlotte who first revealed to me poor Chawdron's heart of hog-wash. Mine too, indirectly. It was one evening at old Cryle's. Chawdron was there, and Charlotte, and myself, and I forget who else. People from all the worlds, anyhow. Cryle, as you know, has a foot in each. He thinks it's his mission to bring them together. He's the match-maker between God and Mammon. In this case he must have imagined that he'd really brought off the marriage. Chawdron was Mammon all right; and though you and I would be chary of labelling Char-

lotte as God, old Cryle, I'm sure, had no doubts. After all, she plays the 'cello; she's an Artist. What more can you want?"

"What indeed!"

"I must say, I admired Charlotte that evening," he went on. "She knew so exactly the line to take with Chawdron; which was the more surprising as with me she's never quite pulled it off. She tries the siren on me, very dashing and at the same time extremely mysterious. Her line is to answer my most ordinary remarks with something absolutely incomprehensible, but obviously very significant. If I ask her, for example: 'Are you going to the Derby this year?' she'll smile a really Etruscan smile and answer: 'No, I'm too busy watching the boat-race in my own heart.' Well, then, obviously it's my cue to be terribly intrigued. 'Fascinating Sphinx,' I ought to say, 'Tell me more about your visceral boat-race,' or words to that effect. Whereupon it would almost certainly turn out that I was rowing stroke in the winning boat. But I'm afraid I can't bring myself to do what's expected of me. I just say: 'What a pity! I was making up a party to go to Epsom'—and hastily walk away. No doubt, if she was less blackly Semitic, I'd be passionately interested in her boat-race. But as it is, her manœuvre doesn't come off. She hasn't yet been able to think of a better one. With Chawdron, however, she discovered the correct strategy from the first moment. No siren, no mystery for him. His heart was too golden and hog-washy for

that. Besides, he was fifty. It's the age when clergymen first begin to be preoccupied with the underclothing of little schoolgirls in trains, the age when eminent archæologists start taking a really passionate interest in the Scout movement. Under Chawdron's criminal mask Charlotte detected the pig-like angel, the sentimental, Pickwickian child-lover with a taste for the *détournement de mineurs*. Charlotte's a practical woman: a child was needed, she immediately became the child. And what a child! I've never seen anything like it. Such prattling! Such innocent big eyes! Such merry, merry laughter! Such a wonderfully ingenuous way of saying extremely *risqué* things without knowing (sweet innocent) what they meant! I looked on and listened—staggered. Horrified too. The performance was really frightful. Suffer little children . . . But when the little child's twenty-eight and tough for her age—ah, no; of such is the kingdom of hell. For me, at any rate. But Chawdron was enchanted. Really did seem to imagine he'd got hold of something below the age of consent. I looked at him in amazement. Was it possible he should be taken in? The acting was so bad, so incredibly unconvincing. Sarah Bernhardt at seventy playing L'Aiglon looked more genuinely like a child than our tough little Charlotte. But Chawdron didn't see it. This man who had lived by his wits, and not merely lived, but made a gigantic fortune by them:—was it possible that the most brilliant financier of the age should be so fabulously stupid?

'Youth's infectious,' he said to me after dinner, when the women had gone out. And then—you should have seen the smile on his face: beatific, lubrically tender—'She's like a jolly little kitten, don't you think?' But what I thought of was the New Guinea Oil Company. How was it possible? And then suddenly I perceived that it wasn't merely possible; it was absolutely necessary. Just because he'd made fourteen hundred thousand pounds out of the New Guinea Oil scandal, it was inevitable that he should mistake a jolly little tarantula like Charlotte for a jolly little kitten. Inevitable. Just as it was inevitable that I should be bowled over by every bitch that came my way. Chawdron had spent his life thinking of oil and stock markets and flotations. I'd spent mine reading the Best that has been Thought or Said. Neither of us had had the time or energy to live—completely and intensely live, as a human being ought to, on every plane of existence. So he was taken in by the pseudo-kitten, while I succumbed to the only too genuine bitch. Succumbed, what was worse, with full knowledge. For I was never really taken in. I always knew that the bitches were bitches and not milk-white hinds. And now I also know why I was captivated by them. But that, of course, didn't prevent me from continuing to be captivated by them. *Experientia* doesn't, in spite of Mrs. Micawber's Papa. Nor does knowledge." He paused to relight his pipe.

"What does, then?" I asked.

Tilney shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing does, once you've gone off the normal instinctive rails."

"I wonder if they really exist, those rails?"

"So do I, sometimes," he confessed. "But I piously believe."

"Rousseau and Shelley piously believed, too. But has anybody ever seen a Natural Man? Those Noble Savages . . . Read Malinowsky about them; read Frazer; read . . ."

"Oh, I have, I have. And of course the savage isn't noble. Primitives are horrible. I know. But then the Natural Man isn't Primitive Man. He isn't the raw material of humanity; he's the finished product. The Natural Man is a manufactured article—no, not manufactured; rather, a work of art. What's wrong with people like Chawdron is that they're such bad works of art. Unnatural because inartistic. Ary Scheffer instead of Manet. But with this difference. An Ary Scheffer is statically bad; it doesn't get worse with the passage of time. Whereas an inartistic human being degenerates, dynamically. Once he's started badly, he becomes more and more inartistic. It needs a moral earthquake to arrest the process. Mere fleabites, like experience or knowledge, are quite unavailing. *Experientia* doesn't. If it did, I should never have succumbed as I did, never have got into financial straits, and therefore never have written Chawdron's autobiography, never have had an opportunity for collecting the intimate and discreditable materials for the biography that, alas, I

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shall never write. No, no; experience didn't save me from falling a victim yet once more. And to such a ruinously expensive specimen. Not that she was mercenary," he put in parenthetically. "She was too well off to need to be. So well off, however, that the mere cost of feeding and amusing her in the style she was accustomed to being fed and amused in was utterly beyond my means. Of course she never realized it. People who are born with more than five thousand a year can't be expected to realize. She'd have been terribly upset if she had; for she had a heart of gold—like all the rest of us." He laughed mournfully. "Poor Sybil! I expect you remember her."

The name evoked for me a pale-eyed, pale-haired ghost. "What an astonishingly lovely creature she was!"

"Was, was," he echoed. "*Fuit*. Lovely and fatal. The agonies she made me suffer! But she was as fatal to herself as to other people. Poor Sybil! I could cry when I think of that inevitable course of hers, that predestined trajectory." With a stretched forefinger he traced in the air a curve that rose and fell away again. "She had just passed the crest when I knew her. The descending branch of the curve was horribly steep. What depths awaited her! That horrible little East-Side Jew she even went to the trouble of marrying! And after the Jew, the Mexican Indian. And meanwhile a little champagne had become rather a lot of champagne, rather a lot of brandy; and the occasional Good Times came to be incessant,

a necessity, but so boring, such a dismal routine, so terribly exhausting. I didn't see her for four years after our final quarrel; and then (you've no idea how painful it was) I suddenly found myself shaking hands with a Memento Mori. So worn and ill and tired, so terribly old. Old at thirty-four. And the last time I'd seen her, she'd been radiant. Eighteen months later she was dead; but not before the Indian had given place to a Chinaman and the brandy to cocaine. It was all inevitable, of course, all perfectly foreseeable. Nemesis had functioned with exemplary regularity. Which only made it worse. Nemesis is all right for strangers and casual acquaintances. But for oneself, for the people one likes—ah, no! *We* ought to be allowed to sow without reaping. But we mayn't. I sowed books and reaped Sybil. Sybil sowed me (not to mention the others) and reaped Mexicans, cocaine, death. Inevitable, but an outrage, an insulting denial of one's uniqueness and difference. Whereas when people like Chawdron sow New Guinea Oil and reap kittenish Charlottes, one's delighted; the punctuality of fate seems admirable."

"I never knew that Charlotte had been reaped by Chawdron," I put in. "The harvesting must have been done with extraordinary discretion. Charlotte's usually so fond of publicity, even in these matters. I should never have expected her . . ."

"But the reaping was very brief and partial," Tilney explained.

That surprised me even more. "Charlotte who's

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always so determined and clinging! And with Chawdron's millions to cling to. . . ."

"Oh, it wasn't her fault that it went no further. She had every intention of being reaped and permanently garnered. But she had arranged to go to America for two months on a concert tour. It would have been troublesome to break the contract; Chawdron seemed thoroughly infatuated; two months are soon passed. So she went. Full of confidence. But when she came back, Chawdron was otherwise occupied."

"Another kitten?"

"A kitten? Poor Charlotte was a grey-whiskered old tigress by comparison. She even came to me in her despair. No enigmatic subtleties this time; she'd forgotten she was the Sphinx. 'I think you ought to warn Mr. Chawdron against that woman,' she told me. 'He ought to be made to realize that she's exploiting him. It's outrageous.' She was full of righteous indignation. Not unnaturally. Even got angry with me, because I wouldn't do anything. 'But he wants to be exploited,' I told her. 'It's his only joy in life.' Which was perfectly true. But I couldn't resist being a little malicious. 'What makes you want to spoil his fun?' I asked. She got quite red in the face. 'Because I think it's disgusting.' " Tilney made his voice indignantly shrill. " 'It really shocks me to see a man like Mr. Chawdron being made a fool of in that way.' Poor Charlotte! Her feelings did her credit. But they were quite unavailing. Chawdron

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went on being made a fool of, in spite of her moral indignation. Charlotte had to retreat. The enemy was impregnably entrenched."

"But who was she—the enemy?"

"The unlikeliest *femme fatale* you ever saw. Little; rather ugly; sickly—yes, genuinely sickly, I think, though she did a good deal of pathetic malingering too; altogether too much the lady—refined; you know the type. A governess; not the modern breezy, athletic sort of governess—the genteel, Jane Eyre, daughter-of-clergyman kind. Her only visible merit was that she was young. About twenty-five, I suppose."

"But how on earth did they meet? Millionaires and governesses . . ."

"A pure miracle," said Tilney. "Chawdron himself detected the hand of Providence. That was the deep religious sense coming in. 'If it hadn't been for *both* my secretaries falling ill on the same day,' he said to me solemnly (and you've no idea how ridiculous he looked when he was being solemn—the saintly forger, the burglar in the pulpit), 'if it hadn't been for that—and after all, how unlikely it is that both one's secretaries should fall ill at the same moment; what a *fateful* thing to happen!—I should never have got to know my little Fairy.' And you must imagine the last words pronounced with a reverent and beautiful smile—indescribably incongruous on that crook's mug of his. 'My little Fairy,' (her real name, incidentally, was Maggie Spindell), 'my little

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Fairy!" " Tilney seraphically smiled and rolled up his eyes. "You can't imagine the expression. St. Charles Borromeo in the act of breaking into the till."

"Painted by Carlo Dolci," I suggested.

"With the assistance of Rowlandson. Do you begin to get it?"

I nodded. "But the secretaries?" I was anxious to hear the story.

"They had orders to deal summarily with all begging letters, all communications from madmen, inventors, misunderstood geniuses, and, finally, women. The job was a heavy one, I can tell you. You've no idea what a rich man's post-bag is like. Fantastic. Well, as I say, Providence had given both private secretaries the flu. Chawdron happened to have nothing better to do that morning (Providence again); so he started opening his own correspondence. The third letter he opened was from the Fairy. It bowled him over."

"What was in it?"

Tilney shrugged his shoulders. "He never showed it me. But from what I gathered, she wrote about God and the Universe in general and her soul in particular, not to mention *his* soul. Having no taste, and being wholly without education, Chawdron was tremendously impressed by her philosophical rigmareole. It appealed to that deep religious sense! Indeed, he was so much impressed that he immediately wrote giving her an appointment. She came, saw, and con-

quered. 'Providential, my dear boy, providential.' And of course he was right. Only I'd have dechristened the power and called it Nemesis. Miss Spindell was the instrument of Nemesis; she was Atè in the fancy dress that Chawdron's way of life had caused him to find irresistible. She was the finally ripened fruit of sowings in New Guinea Oil and the like."

"But if your account's correct," I put in, "delicious fruit—that is, for *his* taste. Being exploited by kittens was his only joy; you said it yourself. Nemesis was rewarding him for his offences, not punishing."

Tilney paused in his striding up and down the room, meditatively knitted his brows and, taking his pipe out of his mouth, rubbed the side of his nose with the hot bowl. "Yes," he said slowly, "that's an important point. I've had it vaguely in my head before now; but now you've put it clearly. From the point of view of the offender, the punishments of Nemesis may actually look like rewards. Yes, it's quite true."

"In which case your Nemesis isn't much use as a policewoman."

He held up his hand. "But Nemesis isn't a policewoman. Nemesis isn't moral. At least she's only incidentally moral, more or less by accident. Nemesis is something like gravitation, indifferent. All that she does is to guarantee that you shall reap what you sow. And if you sow self-stultification, as Chawdron did with his excessive interest in money, you reap

grotesque humiliation. But as you're already reduced by your offences to a sub-human condition, you won't notice that the grotesque humiliation is a humiliation. There's your explanation why Nemesis sometimes seems to reward. What she brings is a humiliation only in the absolute sense—for the ideal and complete human being; or at any rate, in practice, for the nearly complete, the approaching-the-ideal human being. For the sub-human specimen it may seem a triumph, a consummation, a fulfilment of the heart's desire. But then, you must remember, the desiring heart is a heart of hog-wash. . . ."

"Moral," I concluded: "Live sub-humanly and Nemesis may bring you happiness."

"Precisely. But *what* happiness!"

I shrugged my shoulders. "But after all, for the relativist, one sort of happiness is as good as another. You're taking the God's-eye view."

"The Greek's-eye view," he corrected.

"As you like. But anyhow, from the Chawdron's-eye view the happiness is perfect. Therefore we ought to make ourselves like Chawdron."

Tilney nodded. "Yes," he said, "you need to be a bit of a platonist to see that the punishments *are* punishments. And of course if there *were* another life . . . Or better still metempsychosis: there are some unbelievably disgusting insects. . . . But even from the merely utilitarian point of view Chawdronism is dangerous. Socially dangerous. A society constructed by and for men can't work if all its com-

ponents are emotionally sub-men. When the majority of hearts have turned to hog-wash, something catastrophic must happen. So that Nemesis turns out to be a policewoman after all. I hope you're satisfied."

"Perfectly."

"You always did have a very discreditable respect for law and order and morality," he complained.

"They must exist . . ."

"I don't know why," he interrupted me.

"In order that you and I may be immoral in comfort," I explained. "Law and order exist to make the world safe for lawless and disorderly individualists."

"Not to mention ruffians like Chawdron. From whom, by the way, we seem to have wandered. Where was I?"

"You'd just got to his providential introduction to the Fairy."

"Yes, yes. Well, as I said, she came, saw, conquered. Three days later she was installed in the house. He made her his librarian."

"*And* his mistress, I suppose."

Tilney raised his shoulders and threw out his hands in a questioning gesture. "Ah," he said, "that's the question. There you're touching the heart of the mystery."

"But you don't mean to tell me . . ."

"I don't mean to tell you anything, for the good reason that I don't know. I only guess."

"And what do you guess?"

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“Sometimes one thing and sometimes another. The Fairy was genuinely enigmatic. None of poor Charlotte’s fabricated sphinxishness; a real mystery. With the Fairy anything was possible.”

“But not with Chawdron surely. In these matters, wasn’t he . . . well, all too human?”

“No, only sub-human. Which is rather different. The Fairy roused in him all his sub-human spirituality and religiosity. Whereas with Charlotte it was the no less sub-human passion for the *détournement de mineurs* that came to the surface.”

I objected. “That’s too crude and schematic to be good psychology. Emotional states aren’t so definite and clear-cut as that. There isn’t one compartment for spirituality and another, water-tight, for the *détournement de mineurs*. There’s an overlapping, a fusion, a mixture.”

“You’re probably right,” said Tilney. “And, indeed, one of my conjectures was precisely of such a fusion. You know the sort of thing: discourses insensibly giving place to amorous action—though ‘action’ seems too strong a word to describe what I have in mind. Something ever so softly senile and girlish. Positively spiritual contacts. The loves of the angels—so angelic that, when it was all over, one wouldn’t be quite sure whether there had been any interruption in the mystical conversation or not. Which would justify the Fairy in her righteous indignation when she heard of any one’s venturing to suppose that she was anything more than Chaw-

dron's librarian. She could almost honestly believe she wasn't. 'I think people are too horrid,' she used to say to me on these occasions. 'I think they're simply disgusting. Can't they even believe in the possibility of purity?' Angry she was, outraged, hurt. And the emotion seemed absolutely real. Which was such a rare occurrence in the Fairy's life—at any rate, so it seemed to me—that I was forced to believe it had a genuine cause."

"Aren't we all genuinely angry when we hear that our acquaintances say the same sort of things about us as we say about them?"

"Of course; and the truer the gossip, the angrier we are. But the Fairy was angry because the gossip was untrue. She insisted on that—and insisted so genuinely (this is the point I was trying to make) that I couldn't help believing she had some justification. Either nothing had happened, or else something so softly and slimily angelic that it slipped past the attention, escaped notice, counted for nothing."

"But after all," I protested, "it's not because one looks truthful that one's telling the truth."

"No. But then you didn't know the Fairy. She hardly ever looked or sounded truthful. There was hardly anything she said that didn't strike me as being in one way or another a manifest lie. So that when she did seem to be telling the truth (and it was incredible how rarely that happened), I was always impressed. I couldn't help thinking there must be a

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reason. That's why I attach such importance to the really heart-felt way she got angry when doubts were cast on the purity of her relations with Chawdron. I believe that they really were pure, or else, more probably, that the impurity was such a little one, so to speak, that she could honestly regard it as non-existent. You'd have had the same impression too, if you'd heard her. The genuineness of the anger, the outraged protest, was obvious. And then suddenly she remembered that she was a Christian, practically a saint; she'd start forgiving her enemies. 'One's sorry for them,' she'd say, 'because they don't know any better. Poor people! Ignorant of all the finer feelings, all the more beautiful relationships.' I can't tell you how awful the word 'beautiful' was in her mouth! Really blood-curdling. Be-yütiful. Very long-drawn-out, with the oo sound thinned and refined into German u-modified. Be-yütiful. Ugh!" He shuddered. "It made one want to kill her. But then the whole tone of these Christian sentiments made one want to kill her. When she forgave the poor misguided people who couldn't see the be-yüty of her relations with Chawdron you were horrified, you felt sick, you went cold all over. For the whole thing was such a lie, so utterly and bottomlessly false. After the genuine anger against the scandal-mongers, the falseness rang even falser than usual. Obvious, unmistakable, painful—like an untuned piano, like a cuckoo in June. Chawdron was deaf to it, of course; just didn't hear the falseness. If you

have a deep religious sense, I suppose you don't notice those things. 'I think she has the most beautiful character I've ever met with in a human being,' he used to tell me. ('Beautiful' again, you notice. Chawdron caught the trick from her. But in his mouth it was merely funny, not gruesome.) 'The most beautiful character'—and then his beatific smile. Grotesque! It was just the same as with Charlotte; he swallowed her whole. Charlotte played the jolly kitten and he accepted her as the jolly kitten. The Fairy's ambition was to be regarded as a sanctified Christian kitten; and duly, as a Christian kitten, a confirmed, communicant, Catholic, canonized Kitten, he did regard her. Incredible; but, there! if you spend all your wits and energies knowing about Oil, you can't be expected to know much about anything else. You can't be expected to know the difference between tarantulas and kittens, for example; nor the difference between St. Catherine of Siena and a little liar, like Maggie Spindell."

"But did she know she was lying?" I asked. "Was she consciously a hypocrite?"

Tilney repeated his gesture of uncertainty. "*Chi lo sa?*" he said. "That's the finally unanswerable question. It takes us back to where we were just now with Chawdron—to the borderland between biography and autobiography. Which is more real: you as you see yourself, or you as others see you? you in your intentions and motives, or you in the product of your intentions? you in your actions, or you in the

results of your actions? And anyhow, what *are* your intentions and motives? And who is the 'you' who has intentions? So that when you ask if the Fairy was a conscious liar and hypocrite, I just have to say that I don't know. Nobody knows. Not even the Fairy herself. For, after all, there were several Fairies. There was one that wanted to be fed and looked after and given money and perhaps married one day, if Chawdron's wife happened to die."

"I didn't know he had a wife," I interrupted in some astonishment.

"Mad," Tilney telegraphically explained. "Been in an asylum for the last twenty-five years. I'd have gone mad too, if I'd been married to Chawdron. But that didn't prevent the Fairy from aspiring to be the second Mrs. C. Money is always money. Well, there was *that* Fairy—the adventuress, the Darwinian specimen struggling for existence. But there was also a Fairy that genuinely wanted to be Christian and saintly. A spiritual Fairy. And if the spirituality happened to pay with tired business men like Chawdron—well, obviously, *tant micux*."

"But the falseness you spoke of, the lying, the hypocrisy?"

"Mere inefficiency," Tilney answered. "Just bad acting. For, when all's said and done, what is hypocrisy but bad acting? It differs from saintliness as a performance by Lucien Guitry differed from a performance by his son. One's artistically good and the other isn't."

I laughed. "You forget I'm a moralist; at least, you said I was. These aesthetic heresies . . ."

"Not heresies; just obvious statements of the facts. For what is the practice of morality? It's just pretending to be somebody that by nature you aren't. It's acting the part of a saint, or a hero, or a respectable citizen. What's the highest ethical ideal in Christianity? It's expressed in A Kempis's formula—"The Imitation of Christ." So that the organized Churches turn out to be nothing but vast and elaborate Academies of Dramatic Art. And every school's a school of acting. Every family's a family of Crummleses. Every human being is brought up as a mummer. All education, aside from merely intellectual education, is just a series of rehearsals for the part of Jesus or Podsnap or Alexander the Great, or whoever the local favourite may be. A virtuous man is one who's learned his part thoroughly and acts it competently and convincingly. The saint and the hero are great actors; they're Kembles and Siddonses—people with a genius for representing heroic characters not their own; or people with the luck to be born so like the heroic ideal that they can just step straight into the part without rehearsal. The wicked are those who either can't or won't learn to act. Imagine a scene-shifter, slightly drunk, dressed in his overalls and smoking a pipe; he comes reeling on to the stage in the middle of the trial scene in the *Merchant of Venice*, shouts down Portia, gives Antonio a kick in the stern, knocks over a few

Magnificos and pulls off Shylock's false beard. That's a criminal. As for a hypocrite—he's either a criminal interrupter disguised, temporarily and for his own purposes, as an actor (that's Tartuffe); or else (and I think this is the commoner type) he's just a bad actor. By nature, like all the rest of us, he's a criminal interrupter; but he accepts the teaching of the local Academies of Dramatic Art and admits that man's highest duty is to act star parts to applauding houses. But he is wholly without talent. When he's thinking of his noble part, he mouths and rants and gesticulates, till you feel really ashamed as you watch him—ashamed for yourself, for him, for the human species. 'Methinks the lady, or gentleman, doth protest too much,' is what you say. And these protestations seem even more excessive when, a few moments later, you observe that the protester has forgotten altogether that he's playing a part and is behaving like the interrupting criminal that it's his nature to be. But he himself is so little the mummer, so utterly without a talent for convincing representation, that he simply doesn't notice his own interruptions; or if he notices them, does so only slightly and with the conviction that nobody else will notice them. In other words, most hypocrites are more or less unconscious hypocrites. The Fairy, I'm sure, was one of them. She was simply not aware of being an adventuress with an eye on Chawdron's millions. What she was conscious of was her rôle—the rôle of St. Catherine of Siena. She believed in

her acting; she was ambitious to be a high-class West-End artiste. But, unfortunately, she was without talent. She played her part so unnaturally, with such grotesque exaggerations, that a normally sensitive person could only shudder at the shameful spectacle. It was a performance that only the spiritually deaf and blind could be convinced by. And, thanks to his preoccupations with New Guinea Oil, Chawdron *was* spiritually deaf and blind. His deep religious sense was the deep religious sense of a subman. When she paraded the canonized kitten, I felt seasick; but Chawdron thought she had the most beautiful character he'd ever met with in a human being. And not only did he think she had the most beautiful character; he also, which was almost funnier, thought she had the finest mind. It was her metaphysical conversation that impressed him. She'd read a few snippets from Spinoza and Plato and some little book on the Christian mystics and a fair amount of that flabby theosophical literature that's so popular in Garden Suburbs and among retired colonels and ladies of a certain age; so she could talk about the cosmos very profoundly. And, by God, she was profound! I used to lose my temper sometimes, it was such drivel, so dreadfully illiterate. But Chawdron listened reverently, fairly goggling with rapture and faith and admiration. He believed every word. When you're totally uneducated and have amassed an enormous fortune by legal swindling, you can afford to believe in the illusoriness of mat-

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ter, the non-existence of evil, the oneness of all diversity, and the spirituality of everything. All his life he'd kept up his childhood's Presbyterianism—most piously. And now he grafted the Fairy's rigmarole on to the Catechism, or whatever it is that Presbyterians learn in infancy. He didn't see that there was any contradiction between the two metaphysics, just as he'd never seen that there was any incongruity in his being both a good Presbyterian and a consummate swindler. He had acted the Presbyterian part only on Sundays and when he was ill, never in business hours. Religion had never been permitted to invade the sanctities of private life. But with the advance of middle age his mind grew flabbier; the effects of a misspent life began to make themselves felt. And at the same time his retirement from business removed almost all the external distractions. His deep religious sense had more chance to express itself. He could wallow in sentimentality and silliness undisturbed. The Fairy made her providential appearance and showed him which were the softest emotional and intellectual muck-heaps to wallow on. He was grateful—loyally, but a little ludicrously. I shall never forget, for example, the time he talked about the Fairy's genius. We'd been dining at his house, he and I and the Fairy. A terrible dinner, with the Fairy, as a mixture between St. Catherine of Siena and Mahatma Gandhi, explaining why she was a vegetarian and an ascetic. She had that awful genteel middle-class food complex

which makes table manners at Lyons' Corner Houses so appallingly good—that haunting fear of being low or vulgar, which causes people to eat as though they weren't eating. They never take a large mouthful, and only masticate with their front teeth, like rabbits. And they never touch anything with their fingers. I've actually seen a woman eating cherries with a knife and fork at one of those places. Most extraordinary and most repulsive. Well, the Fairy had that complex—it's a matter of class—but it was rationalized, with her, in terms of *ahimsa* and ascetic Christianity. Well, she'd been chattering the whole evening about the spirit of love and its incompatibility with a meat diet and the necessity of mortifying the body for the sake of the soul, and about Buddha and St. Francis and mystical ecstasies and, above all, herself. Drove me almost crazy with irritation, not to mention the fact that she really began putting me off my food with her rhapsodies of pious horror and disgust. I was thankful when at last she left us in peace to our brandy and cigars. But Chawdron leaned across the table towards me, spiritually beaming from every inch of that forger's face of his. 'Isn't she wonderful?' he said. 'Isn't she simply *wonderful?*' 'Wonderful,' I agreed. And then, very solemnly, wagging his finger at me, 'I've known three great intellects in my time,' he said, 'three minds of genius—Lord Northcliffe, Mr. John Morley, and this little girl. Those three.' And he leant back in his

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chair and nodded at me almost fiercely, as though challenging me to deny it."

"And did you accept the challenge?" I asked, laughing.

Tilney shook his head. "I just helped myself to another nip of his 1820 brandy; it was the only retort a rational man could make."

"And did the Fairy share Chawdron's opinion about her mind?"

"Oh, I think so," said Tilney, "I think so. She had a great conceit of herself. Like all these spiritual people. An inordinate conceit. She played the superior rôle very badly and inconsistently. But all the same she was convinced of her superiority. Inevitably; for, you see, she had an enormous capacity for auto-suggestion. What she told herself three times became true. For example, I used at first to think there was some hocus-pocus about her asceticism. She ate so absurdly little in public and at meals that I fancied she must do a little tucking-in privately in between whiles. But later I came to the conclusion that I'd maligned her. By dint of constantly telling herself and other people that eating was unspiritual and gross, not to mention impolite and lower-class, she'd genuinely succeeded, I believe, in making food disgust her. She'd got to a point where she really couldn't eat more than a very little. Which was one of the causes of her sickliness. She was just under-nourished. But under-nourishment was only *one* of the causes. She was also diplomatically sick. She

threatened to die as statesmen threaten to mobilize, in order to get what she wanted. Blackmail, in fact. Not for money; she was curiously disinterested in many ways. What she wanted was his interest, was power over him, was self-assertion. She had headaches for the same reason as a baby howls. If you give in to the baby and do what it wants, it'll howl again, it'll make a habit of howling. Chawdron was one of the weak-minded sort of parents. When the Fairy had one of her famous headaches, he was terribly disturbed. The way he fluttered round the sick-room with ice and hot-water bottles and eau-de-Cologne! The *Times* obituarist would have wept to see him; such a touching exhibition of the heart of gold! The result was that the Fairy used to have a headache every three or four days. It was absolutely intolerable."

"But were they purely imaginary, these headaches?"

Tilney shrugged his shoulders. "Yes and no. There was certainly a physiological basis. The woman did have pains in her head from time to time. It was only to be expected; she was run down, through not eating enough; she didn't take sufficient exercise, so she had chronic constipation; chronic constipation probably set up a slight chronic inflammation of the ovaries; and she certainly suffered from eye-strain—you could tell that from the beautifully vague, spiritual look in her eyes, the look that comes from uncorrected myopia. There were, as you

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see, plenty of physiological reasons for her headaches. Her body made her a present, so to speak, of the pain. Her mind then proceeded to work up this raw material. Into what remarkable forms! Touched by her imagination, the headaches became mystic, transcendental. It was infinity in a grain of sand and eternity in an intestinal stasis. Regularly every Tuesday and Friday she died—died with a beautiful Christian resignation, a martyr's fortitude. Chawdron used to come down from the sick-room with tears in his eyes. He'd never seen such patience, such courage, such grit. There were few men she wouldn't put to shame. She was a wonderful example. And so on. And I dare say it was all quite true. She started by malingering a little, by pretending that the headaches were worse than they were. But her imagination was too lively for her; it got beyond her control. Her pretendings gradually came true and she really did suffer martyrdom each time; she really did very nearly die. And then she got into the habit of being a martyr, and the attacks came on regularly; imagination stimulated the normal activities of inflamed ovaries and poisoned intestines; the pain made its appearance and at once became the raw material of a mystic, spiritual martyrdom taking place on a higher plane. Anyhow, it was all very complicated and obscure. And, obviously, if the Fairy herself had given you an account of her existence at this time, it would have sounded like St. Lawrence's reminiscences of life on the grill. Or rather it would have

sounded like the insincere fabrication of such reminiscences. For the Fairy, as I've said before, was without talent, and sincerity and saintliness are matters of talent. Hypocrisy and insincerity are the products of native incompetence. Those who are guilty of them are people without skill in the arts of behaviour and self-expression. The Fairy's talk would have sounded utterly false to you. But for her it was all genuine. She really suffered, really died, really was good and resigned and courageous. Just as the paranoiac is really Napoleon Bonaparte and the young man with *dementia præcox* is really being spied on and persecuted by a gang of fiendishly ingenuous enemies. If *I* were to tell the story from *her* point of view, it would sound really beautiful—not be-yütiful, mind you; but truly and genuinely beautiful; for the good reason that *I* have a gift of expression, which the poor Fairy hadn't. So that, for all but emotional cretins like Chawdron, she was obviously a hypocrite and a liar. Also a bit of a pathological case. For that capacity for auto-suggestion really was rather pathological. She could make things come *too* true. Not merely diseases and martyrdoms and saintliness, but also historical facts, or rather historical not-facts. She authenticated the not-facts by simply repeating that they had happened. For example, she wanted people to believe—she wanted to believe herself—that she had been intimate with Chawdron for years and years, from childhood, from the time of her birth. The fact that

he had known her since she was 'so high' would explain and justify her present relationship with him. The scandalmongers would have no excuse for talking. So she proceeded bit by bit to fabricate a life-long intimacy, even a bit of an actual kinship, with her Uncle Benny. I told you that that was what she called him, didn't I? That nickname had its significance; it planted him at once in the table of consanguinity and so disinfected their relations, so to speak, automatically made them innocent."

"Or incestuous," I added.

"Or incestuous. Quite. But she didn't consider the D'Annunzioesque refinements. When she gave him that name, she promoted Chawdron to the rank of a dear old kinsman, or at least a dear old family friend. Sometimes she even called him 'Nunky Benny,' so as to show that she had known him from the cradle—had lisped of nunkies, for the nunkies came. But that wasn't enough. The evidence had to be fuller, more circumstantial. So she invented it—romps with Nunky in the hay, visits to the pantomime with him, a whole outfit of childish memories."

"But what about Chawdron?" I asked. "Did he share the invented memories?"

Tilney nodded. "But for him, of course, they *were* invented. Other people, however, accepted them as facts. Her reminiscences were so detailed and circumstantial that, unless you *knew* she was a liar, you simply had to accept them. With Chawdron himself she couldn't, of course, pretend that she'd known

him, literally and historically, all those years. Not at first, in any case. The lifelong intimacy started by being figurative and spiritual. 'I feel as though I'd known my Uncle Benny ever since I was a tiny baby,' she said to me in his presence, quite soon after she'd first got to know him; and as always, on such occasions, she made her voice even more whiningly babyish than usual. Dreadful that voice was—so whiney-piney, so falsely sweet. 'Ever since I was a teeny, tiny baby. Don't you feel like that, Uncle Benny?' And Chawdron heartily agreed; of course he felt like that. From that time forward she began to expatiate on the incidents which ought to have occurred in that far-off childhood with darling Nunky. They were the same incidents, of course, as those which she actually remembered when she was talking to strangers and he wasn't there. She made him give her old photographs of himself—visions of him in high collars and frock-coats, in queer-looking Norfolk jackets, in a top-hat sitting in a victoria. They helped her to make her fancies real. With their aid and the aid of his reminiscences she constructed a whole life in common with him. 'Do you remember, Uncle Benny, the time we went to Cowes on your yacht and I fell into the sea?' she'd ask. And Chawdron, who thoroughly entered into the game, would answer: 'Of course I remember. And when we'd fished you out, we had to wrap you in hot blankets and give you warm rum and milk. And you got quite drunk.' 'Was I funny when I was drunk, Uncle

Benny?’ And Chawdron would rather lamely and ponderously invent a few quaintnesses which were then incorporated in the history. So that on a future occasion the Fairy could begin: ‘Nunky Benny, do you remember those ridiculous things I said when you made me drunk with rum and hot milk that time I fell into the sea at Cowes?’ And so on. Chawdron loved the game, thought it simply too sweet and whimsical and touching—positively like something out of Barrie or A. A. Milne—and was never tired of playing it. As for the Fairy—for her it wasn’t a game at all. The not-facts had been repeated till they became facts. ‘But, come, Miss Spindell,’ I said to her once, when she’d been telling me—*me!*—about some adventure she’d had with Uncle Benny when she was a toddler, ‘come, come, Miss Spindell’ (I always called her that, though she longed to be my Fairy as well as Chawdron’s and would have called me Uncle Ted, if I’d given her the smallest encouragement; but I took a firm line; she was always Miss Spindell for me), ‘come,’ I said, ‘you seem to forget that it’s only just over a year since you saw Mr. Chawdron for the first time.’ She looked at me quite blankly for a moment without saying anything. ‘You can’t seriously expect me to forget too,’ I added. Poor Fairy! The blankness suddenly gave place to a painful, blushing embarrassment. ‘Oh, of course,’ she began, and laughed nervously. ‘It’s as though I’d known him for ever. My imagination . . .’ She trailed off into silence, and a minute later made an

excuse to leave me. I could see she was upset, physically upset, as though she'd been woken up too suddenly out of a sound sleep, jolted out of one world into another moving in a different direction. But when I saw her the next day, she seemed to be quite herself again. She had suggested herself back into the dream world; from the other end of the table, at lunch, I heard her talking to an American business acquaintance of Chawdron's about the fun she and Uncle Benny used to have on his grouse moor in Scotland. But from that time forth, I noticed, she never talked to me about her apocryphal childhood again. A curious incident; it made me look at her hypocrisy in another light. It was then I began to realize that the lie in her soul was mainly an unconscious lie, the product of pathology and a lack of talent. Mainly; but sometimes, on the contrary, the lie was only too conscious and deliberate. The most extraordinary of them was the lie at the bottom of the great Affair of the Stigmata."

"The stigmata?" I echoed. "A pious lie, then."

"Pious." He nodded. "That was how she justified it to herself. Though, of course, in her eyes, all her lies were pious lies. Pious, because they served *her* purposes and she was a saint; her cause was sacred. And afterwards, of course, when she'd treated the lies to her process of imaginative disinfection, they ceased to be lies and fluttered away as snow-white pious truths. But to start with they were undoubtedly pious lies, even for her. The Affair of the Stig-

mata made that quite clear. I caught her in the act. It all began with a boil that developed on Chawdron's foot."

"Curious place to have a boil."

"Not common," he agreed. "I once had one there myself, when I was a boy. Most unpleasant, I can assure you. Well, the same thing happened to Chawdron. He and I were down at his country place, playing golf and in the intervals concocting the *Autobiography*. We'd settle down with brandy and cigars and I'd gently question him. Left to himself, he was apt to wander and become incoherent and unchronological. I had to canalize his narrative, so to speak. Remarkably frank he was. I learnt some curious things about the business world, I can tell you. Needless to say, they're not in the *Autobiography*. I'm reserving them for the *Life*. Which means, alas, that nobody will ever know them. Well, as I say, we were down there in the country for a long week-end, Friday to Tuesday. The Fairy had stayed in London. Periodically she took her librarianship very seriously and protested that she simply had to get on with the catalogue. 'I have my duties,' she said when Chawdron suggested that she should come down to the country with us. 'You must let me get on with my duties. I don't think one ought to be just frivolous; do you Uncle Benny? Besides, I really love my work.' God, how she enraged me with that whiney-piney talk! But Chawdron, of course, was touched and enchanted. 'What an extraordinary little person

she is!' he said to me as we left the house together. Even more extraordinary than you suppose, I thought. He went on rhapsodizing as far as Watford. But in a way, I could see, when we arrived, in a way he was quite pleased she hadn't come. It was a relief to him to be having a little masculine holiday. She had the wit to see that he needed these refreshments from time to time. Well, we duly played our golf, with the result that by Sunday morning poor Chawdron's boil, which had been a negligible little spot on the Friday, had swollen up with the chafing and the exercise into a massive red hemisphere that made walking an agony. Unpleasant, no doubt; but nothing, for any ordinary person, to get seriously upset about. Chawdron, however, wasn't an ordinary person where boils were concerned. He had a carbuncle-complex, a boilo-phobia. Excusably, perhaps; for it seems that his brother had died of some awful kind of gangrene that had started, to all appearances harmlessly, in a spot on his cheek. Chawdron couldn't develop a pimple without imagining that he'd caught his brother's disease. This affair on his foot scared him out of his wits. He saw the bone infected, the whole leg rotting away, amputations, death. I offered what comfort and encouragement I could and sent for the local doctor. He came at once and turned out to be a young man, very determined and efficient and confidence-inspiring. The boil was anaesthetized, lanced, cleaned out, tied up. Chawdron was promised there'd be no complica-

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tions. And there weren't. The thing healed up quite normally. Chawdron decided to go back to town on the Tuesday, as he'd arranged. 'I wouldn't like to disappoint Fairy,' he explained. 'She'd be so sad if I didn't come back when I'd promised. Besides, she might be nervous. You've no idea what an intuition that little girl has—almost uncanny, like second sight. She'd guess something was wrong and be upset; and you know how bad it is for her to be upset.' I did indeed; those mystic headaches of hers were the bane of my life. No, no, I agreed. She mustn't be upset. So it was decided that the Fairy should be kept in blissful ignorance of the boil until Chawdron had actually arrived. But the question then arose: how should he arrive? We had gone down into the country in Chawdron's Bugatti. He had a weakness for speed. But it wasn't the car for an invalid. It was arranged that the chauffeur should drive the Bugatti up to town and come back with the Rolls. In the unlikely event of his seeing Miss Spindell, he was not to tell her why he had been sent to town. Those were his orders. The man went and duly returned with the Rolls. Chawdron was installed, almost as though he were in an ambulance, and we rolled majestically up to London. What a home-coming! In anticipation of the sympathy he would get from the Fairy, Chawdron began to have a slight relapse as we approached the house. 'I feel it throbbing,' he assured me; and when he got out of the car, what a limp! As though he'd lost a leg at Gallipoli.

Really heroic. The butler had to support him up to the drawing-room. He was lowered onto the sofa. 'Is Miss Spindell in her room?' The butler thought so. 'Then ask her to come down here at once.' The man went out; Chawdron closed his eyes—wearily, like a very sick man. He was preparing to get all the sympathy he could and, I could see, luxuriously relishing it in advance. 'Still throbbing?' I asked, rather irreverently. He nodded, without opening his eyes. 'Still throbbing.' The manner was grave and sepulchral. I had to make an effort not to laugh. There was a silence; we waited. And then the door opened. The Fairy appeared. But a maimed Fairy. One foot in a high-heeled shoe, the other in a slipper. Such a limp! 'Another leg lost at Gallipoli,' thought I. When he heard the door open, Chawdron shut his eyes tighter than ever and turned his face to the wall, or at any rate the back of the sofa. I could see that this rather embarrassed the Fairy. Her entrance had been dramatic; she had meant him to see her disablement at once; hadn't counted on finding a death-bed scene. She had hastily to improvise another piece of stage business, a new set of lines; the scene she had prepared wouldn't do. Which was the more embarrassing for her as I was there, looking on—a very cool spectator, as she knew; not in the least a Maggie Spindell fan. She hesitated a second near the door, hoping Chawdron would look round; but he kept his eyes resolutely shut and his face averted. He'd evidently decided to play the mori-

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bund part for all it was worth. So, after one rather nervous glance at me, she limped across the room to the sofa. 'Uncle Benny!' He gave a great start, as though he hadn't known she was there. 'Is that you, Fairy?' This was *pianissimo, con espressione*. Then, *molto agitato* from the Fairy: 'What is it, Nunky Benny? What is it? Oh, tell me.' She was close enough now to lay a hand on his shoulder. 'Tell me.' He turned his face towards her—the tenderly transfigured burglar. His heart overflowed—'Fairy!'—a slop of hog-wash. 'But what's the matter, Nunky Benny?' 'Nothing, Fairy.' The tone implied that it was a heroic understatement in the manner of Sir Philip Sidney. 'Only my foot.' 'Your foot!' The Fairy registered such astonishment that we both fairly jumped. 'Something wrong with your foot?' 'Yes, why not?' Chawdron was rather annoyed; he wasn't getting the kind of sympathy he'd looked forward to. She turned to me. 'But when did it happen, Mr. Tilney?' I was breezy. 'A nasty boil,' I explained. 'Walking round the course did it no good. It had to be lanced on Sunday.' 'At about half-past eleven on Sunday morning?' 'Yes, I suppose it was about half-past eleven,' I said, thinking the question was an odd one. 'It was just half-past eleven when *this* happened,' she said dramatically, pointing to her slippered foot. 'What's "this"?' asked Chawdron crossly. He was thoroughly annoyed at being swindled out of sympathy. I took pity on the Fairy; things seemed to be going so badly for her. I could

see that she had prepared a coup and that it hadn't come off. 'Miss Spindell also seems to have hurt her foot,' I explained. 'You didn't see how she limped.' 'How did you hurt it?' asked Chawdron. He was still very grumpy. 'I was sitting quietly in the library, working at the catalogue,' she began: and I guessed, by the way the phrases came rolling out, that she was at last being able to make use of the material she had prepared, 'when suddenly, almost exactly at half-past eleven (I remember looking at the clock), I felt a terrible pain in my foot. As though some one were driving a sharp, sharp knife into it. It was so intense that I nearly fainted.' She paused for a moment, expecting appropriate comment. But Chawdron wouldn't make it. So I put in a polite 'Dear me, most extraordinary!' with which she had to be content. 'When I got up,' she continued, 'I could hardly stand, my foot hurt me so; and I've been limping ever since. And the most extraordinary thing is that there's a red mark on my foot, like a scar.' Another expectant pause. But still no word from Chawdron. He sat there with his mouth tight shut and the lines that divided his cheeks from that wide simian upper lip of his were as though engraved in stone. The Fairy looked at him and saw that she had taken hopelessly the wrong line. Was it too late to remedy the mistake? She put the new plan of campaign into immediate execution. 'But you poor Nunky Benny!' she began in the sort of tone in which you'd talk to a sick dog. 'How selfish of me to

talk about my ailments, when you're lying there with your poor foot bandaged up!' The dog began to wag his tail at once. The beatific look returned to his face. He took her hand. I couldn't stand it. 'I think I'd better be going,' I said; and I went."

"But the foot?" I asked. "The stabbing pain at exactly half-past eleven?"

"You may well ask. As Chawdron himself remarked, when next I saw him, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy.'" Tilney laughed. "The Fairy had triumphed. After he'd had his dose of mother love and Christian charity and kittenish sympathy, he'd been ready, I suppose, to listen to *her* story. The stabbing pain at eleven-thirty, the red scar. Strange, mysterious, unaccountable. He discussed it all with me, very gravely and judiciously. We talked of spiritualism and telepathy. We distinguished carefully between the miraculous and the super-normal. 'As you know,' he told me, 'I've been a good Presbyterian all my life, and as such have been inclined to dismiss as mere fabrications all the stories of the Romish saints. I never believed in the story of St. Francis's stigmata, for example. But now I accept it!' Solemn and tremendous pause. 'Now I *know* it's true.' I just bowed my head in silence. But the next time I saw M'Crea, the chauffeur, I asked a few questions. Yes, he *had* seen Miss Spindell that day he drove the Bugatti up to London and came back with the Rolls. He'd gone into the secretaries' office

to see if there were any letters to take down for Mr. Chawdron, and Miss Spindell had run into him as he came out. She'd asked him what he was doing in London and he hadn't been able to think of anything to answer, in spite of Mr. Chawdron's orders, except the truth. It had been on his conscience ever since; he hoped it hadn't done any harm. 'On the contrary,' I assured him, and that I certainly wouldn't tell Mr. Chawdron. Which I never did. I thought . . . But good heavens!" he interrupted himself; "what's this?" It was Hawtrey, who had come in to lay the table for lunch. She ignored us, actively. It was not only as though we didn't exist; it was as though we also had no right to exist. Tilney took out his watch. "Twenty past one. God almighty! Do you mean to say I've been talking here the whole morning since breakfast?"

"So it appears," I answered.

He groaned. "You see," he said, "you see what it is to have a gift of the gab. A whole precious morning utterly wasted."

"Not for me," I said.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Perhaps not. But then for you the story was new and curious. Whereas for me it's known, it's stale."

"But for Shakespeare so was the story of Othello, even before he started to write it."

"Yes, but he *wrote*, he didn't talk. There was something to show for the time he'd spent. His Othello didn't just disappear into thin air, like my

poor Chawdron." He sighed and was silent. Stone-faced and grim, Hawtrey went rustling starchily round the table; there was a clinking of steel and silver as she laid the places. I waited till she had left the room before I spoke again. When one's servants are more respectable than one is oneself (and nowadays they generally are), one cannot be too careful.

"And how did it end?" I asked.

"How did it end?" he repeated in a voice that had suddenly gone flat and dull; he was bored with his story, wanted to think of something else. "It ended, so far as I was concerned, with my finishing the *Autobiography* and getting tired of its subject. I gradually faded out of Chawdron's existence. Like the Cheshire Cat."

"And the Fairy?"

"Faded out of life about a year after the Affair of the Stigmata. She retired to her mystic death-bed once too often. Her pretending came true at last; it was always the risk with her. She really did die."

The door opened; Hawtrey re-entered the room, carrying a dish.

"And Chawdron, I suppose, was inconsolable?" Inconsolability is, happily, a respectable subject.

Tilney nodded. "Took to spiritualism, of course. Nemesis again."

Hawtrey raised the lid of the dish; a smell of fried sole escaped into the air. "Luncheon is served," she

said with what seemed to me an ill-concealed contempt and disapproval.

“Luncheon is served,” Tilney echoed, moving towards his place. He sat down and opened his napkin. “One meal after another, punctually, day after day, day after day. Such is life. Which would be tolerable enough if something ever got done between meals. But in my case nothing does. Meal after meal, and between meals a vacuum, a kind of . . .” Hawtrey, who had been offering him the *sauce tartare* for the past several seconds, here gave him the discreetest nudge. Tilney turned his head. “Ah, thank you,” he said, and helped himself.

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AFTER THE FIREWORKS

I

“LATE as usual. Late.” Judd’s voice was censorious. The words fell sharp, like beak-blows. “As though I were a nut,” Miles Fanning thought resentfully, “and he were a woodpecker. And yet he’s devotion itself, he’d do anything for me. Which is why, I suppose, he feels entitled to crack my shell each time he sees me.” And he came to the conclusion, as he had so often come before, that he really didn’t like Colin Judd at all. “My oldest friend, whom I quite definitely don’t like. Still . . .” Still, Judd was an asset, Judd was worth it.

“Here are your letters,” the sharp voice continued.

Fanning groaned as he took them. “Can’t one ever escape from letters? Even here, in Rome? They seem to get through everything. Like filter-passing bacteria. Those blessed days before post offices!” Sipping, he examined over the rim of his coffee cup the addresses on the envelopes.

“You’d be the first to complain if people didn’t

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write," Judd rapped out. "Here's your egg. Boiled for three minutes exactly. I saw to it myself."

Taking his egg, "On the contrary," Fanning answered, "I'd be the first to rejoice. If people write, it means they exist; and all I ask for is to be able to pretend that the world doesn't exist. The wicked flee when no man pursueth. How well I understand them! But letters don't allow you to be an ostrich. The Freudians say . . ." He broke off suddenly. After all he was talking to Colin—to *Colin*. The confessional, self-accusatory manner was wholly misplaced. Pointless to give Colin the excuse to say something disagreeable. But what he had been going to say about the Freudians was amusing. "The Freudians," he began again.

But taking advantage of forty years of intimacy Judd had already started to be disagreeable. "But you'd be miserable," he was saying, "if the post didn't bring you your regular dose of praise and admiration and sympathy and . . ."

"And humiliation," added Fanning, who had opened one of the envelopes and was looking at the letter within. "Listen to this. From my American publishers. Sales and Publicity Department. 'My dear Mr. Fanning.' *My* dear, mark you. Wilbur F. Schmalz's dear. 'My dear Mr. Fanning,—Won't you take us into your confidence with regard to your plans for the Summer Vacation? What aspect of the Great Outdoors are you favouring this year? Ocean or Mountain, Woodland or purling Lake? I would

esteem it a great privilege if you would inform me, as I am preparing a series of notes for the Literary Editors of our leading journals, who are, as I have often found in the past, exceedingly receptive to such personal material, particularly when accompanied by well-chosen snapshots. So won't you cooperate with us in providing this service? Very cordially yours, Wilbur F. Schmalz.' Well, what do you think of that?"

"I think you'll answer him," said Judd. "Charmingly," he added, envenoming his malice. Fanning gave a laugh, whose very ease and heartiness betrayed his discomfort. "And you'll even send him a snapshot."

Contemptuously—too contemptuously (he felt it at the time)—Fanning crumpled up the letter and threw it into the fireplace. The really humiliating thing, he reflected, was that Judd was quite right: he *would* write to Mr. Schmalz about the Great Outdoors, he *would* send the first snapshot anybody took of him. There was a silence. Fanning ate two or three spoonfuls of egg. Perfectly boiled, for once. But still, what a relief that Colin was going away! After all, he reflected, there's a great deal to be said for a friend who has a house in Rome and who invites you to stay, even when he isn't there. To such a man much must be forgiven—even his infernal habit of being a woodpecker. He opened another envelope and began to read.

Possessive and preoccupied, like an anxious

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mother, Judd watched him. With all his talents and intelligence, Miles wasn't fit to face the world alone. Judd had told him so (peck, peck!) again and again. "You're a child!" He had said it a thousand times. "You ought to have somebody to look after you." But if any one other than himself offered to do it, how bitterly jealous and resentful he became! And the trouble was that there were always so many applicants for the post of Fanning's bear-leader. Foolish men or, worse and more frequently, foolish women, attracted to him by his reputation and then conquered by his charm. Judd hated and professed to be loftily contemptuous of them. And the more Fanning liked his admiring bear-leaders, the loftier Judd's contempt became. For that was the bitter and unforgivable thing: Fanning manifestly preferred their bear-leading to Judd's. They flattered the bear, they caressed and even worshipped him; and the bear, of course, was charming to them, until such time as he growled, or bit, or, more often, quietly slunk away. Then they were surprised, they were pained. Because, as Judd would say with a grim satisfaction, they didn't know what Fanning was *really* like. Whereas he did know and had known since they were schoolboys together, nearly forty years before. Therefore he had a right to like him—a right and, at the same time, a duty to tell him all the reasons why he ought not to like him. Fanning didn't much enjoy listening to these reasons; he preferred to go where the bear was a sacred animal. With that air,

which seemed so natural on his grey sharp face, of being dispassionately impersonal, "You're afraid of healthy criticism," Judd would tell him. "You always were, even as a boy."

"He's Jehovah," Fanning would complain. "Life with Judd is one long Old Testament. Being one of the Chosen People must have been bad enough. But to be *the* Chosen Person, in the singular . . ." And he would shake his head. "Terrible!"

And yet he had never seriously quarrelled with Colin Judd. Active unpleasantness was something which Fanning avoided as much as possible. He had never even made any determined attempt to fade out of Judd's existence as he had faded, at one time or another, out of the existence of so many once intimate bear-leaders. The habit of their intimacy was of too long standing and, besides, old Colin was so useful, so bottomlessly reliable. So Judd remained for him the Oldest Friend whom one definitely dislikes; while for Judd, he was the Oldest Friend whom one adores and at the same time hates for not adoring back, the Oldest Friend whom one never sees enough of, but whom, when he *is* there, one finds insufferably exasperating, the Oldest Friend whom, in spite of all one's efforts, one is always getting on the nerves of.

"If only," Judd was thinking, "he could have faith!" The Catholic Church was there to help him. (Judd himself was a convert of more than twenty years' standing.) But the trouble was that Fanning didn't want to be helped by the Church; he could

only see the comic side of Judd's religion. Judd was reserving his missionary efforts till his Friend should be old or ill: But if only, meanwhile, if only, by some miracle of grace. . . . So thought the good Catholic; but it was the jealous friend who felt and who obscurely schemed. Converted, Miles Fanning would be separated from his other friends and brought, Judd realized, nearer to himself.

Watching him, as he read his letter, Judd noticed, all at once, that Fanning's lips were twitching involuntarily into a smile. They were full lips, well cut, sensitive and sensual; his smiles were a little crooked. A dark fury suddenly fell on Colin Judd.

"Telling *me* that you'd like to get no letters!" he said with an icy vehemence. "When you sit there grinning to yourself over some silly woman's flatteries."

Amazed, amused, "But what an outburst!" said Fanning, looking up from his letter.

Judd swallowed his rage; he had made a fool of himself. It was in a tone of calm dispassionate flatness that he spoke. Only his eyes remained angry. "Was I right?" he asked.

"So far as the woman was concerned," Fanning answered. "But wrong about the flattery. Women have no time nowadays to talk about anything except themselves."

"Which is only another way of flattering," said Judd obstinately. "They confide in you, because they

think you'll like being treated as a person who understands."

"Which is what, after all, I am. By profession even." Fanning spoke with an exasperating mildness. "What is a novelist, unless he's a person who understands?" He paused; but Judd made no answer, for the only words he could have uttered would have been whirling words of rage and jealousy. He was jealous not only of the friends, the lovers, the admiring correspondents; he was jealous of a part of Fanning himself, of the artist, the public personage; for the artist, the public personage seemed so often to stand between his friend and himself. He hated, while he gloried in them.

Fanning looked at him for a moment, expectantly; but the other kept his mouth tight shut, his eyes averted. In the same exasperatingly gentle tone, "And flattery or no flattery," Fanning went on, "this is a charming letter. And the girl's adorable."

He was having his revenge. Nothing upset poor Colin Judd so much as having to listen to talk about women or love. He had a horror of anything connected with the act, the mere thought, of sex. Fanning called it his perversion. "You're one of those unspeakable chastity-perverts," he would say, when he wanted to get his own back after a bout of pecking. "If I had children, I'd never allow them to frequent your company. Too dangerous." When he spoke of the forbidden subject, Judd would either writhe, a martyr, or else unchristianly explode. On

this occasion he writhed and was silent. "Adorable," Fanning repeated, provocatively. "A ravishing little creature. Though of course she *may* be a huge great camel. That's the danger of unknown correspondents. The best letter-writers are often camels. It's a piece of natural history I've learned by the bitterest experience." Looking back at the letter, "All the same," he went on, "when a young girl writes to one that she's sure one's the only person in the world who can tell her exactly who and what (both heavily underlined) she is—well, one's rather tempted, I must confess, to try yet once more. Because even if she were a camel she'd be a very young one. Twenty-one—isn't that what she says?" He turned over a page of the letter. "Yes; twenty-one. Also she writes in orange ink. And doesn't like the Botticellis at the Uffizi. But I hadn't told you; she's at Florence. This letter has been to London and back. We're practically neighbours. And here's something that's really rather good. Listen. 'What I like about the Italian women is that they don't seem to be rather ashamed of being women, like so many English girls are, because English girls seem to go about apologizing for their figures, as though they were punctured, the way they hold themselves—it's really rather abject. But here they're all pleased and proud and not a bit apologetic or punctured, but just the opposite, which I really like, don't you?' Yes I do," Fanning answered looking up from the letter. "I like it very much indeed. I've always been opposed to

these modern *Ars est celare arsem* fashions. I like unpuncturedness and I'm charmed by the letter. Yes, charmed. Aren't you?"

In a voice that trembled with hardly restrained indignation, "No, I'm not!" Judd answered; and without looking at Fanning, he got up and walked quickly out of the room.

II

Judd had gone to stay with his old Aunt Caroline at Montreux. It was an annual affair; for Judd lived chronometrically. Most of June and the first half of July were always devoted to Aunt Caroline and devoted, invariably, at Montreux. On the fifteenth of July, Aunt Caroline was rejoined by her friend Miss Gaskin and Judd was free to proceed to England. In England he stayed till September the thirtieth, when he returned to Rome—"for the praying season," as Fanning irreverently put it. The beautiful regularity of poor Colin's existence was a source of endless amusement to his friend. Fanning never had any plans. "I just accept what turns up," he would explain. "Heads or tails—it's the only rational way of living. Chance generally knows so much better than we do. The Greeks elected most of their officials by lot—how wisely! Why shouldn't we toss up for Prime Ministers? We'd be much better governed. Or a sort of Calcutta Sweep for all the responsible posts in Church and State. The only horror would be if one were to win the sweep oneself. Imagine

drawing the Permanent Under-Secretaryship for Education! Or the Archbishopric of Canterbury! Or the Viceroyalty of India! One would just have to drink weed-killer. But as things are, luckily . . .”

Luckily, he was at liberty, under the present dispensation, to stroll, very slowly, in a suit of cream-coloured silk, down the shady side of the Via Condotti towards the Spanish Steps. Slowly, slowly. The air was streaked with invisible bars of heat and cold. Coolness came flowing out of shadowed doorways, and at every transverse street the sun breathed fiercely. Like walking through the ghost of a zebra, he thought.

Three beautiful young women passed him, talking and laughing together. Like laughing flowers, like deer, like little horses. And of course absolutely unpunctured, unapologetic. He smiled to himself, thinking of the letter and also of his own reply to it.

A pair of pink and white monsters loomed up, as though from behind the glass of an aquarium. But not speechless. For “*Grossartig!*” fell enthusiastically on Fanning’s ear as they passed, and “*Fabelhaft!*” These Nordics! He shook his head. Time they were put a stop to.

In the looking-glasses of a milliner’s window a tall man in creamy-white walked slowly to meet him, hat in hand. The face was aquiline and eager, brown with much exposure to the sun. The waved, rather wiry hair was dark almost to blackness. It grew thickly, and the height of the forehead owed nothing

to the approach of baldness. But what pleased Fanning most was the slinness and straightness of the tall figure. Those sedentary men of letters, with their sagging tremulous paunches—they were enough to make one hate the very thought of literature. What had been Fanning's horror when, a year before, he had realized that his own paunch was showing the first preliminary signs of sagging! But Mr. Hornibrooke's exercises had been wonderful. "The Culture of the Abdomen." So much more important, as he had remarked in the course of the last few months at so many dinner tables, than the culture of the mind! For of course he had taken everybody into his confidence about the paunch. He took everybody into his confidence about almost everything. About his love-affairs and his literary projects; about his illnesses and his philosophy; his vices and his bank balance. He lived a rich and variegated private life in public; it was one of the secrets of his charm. To the indignant protests of poor jealous Colin, who reproached him with being an exhibitionist, shameless, a self-exploiter, "You take everything so moralistically," he had answered. "You seem to imagine people do everything on purpose. But people do hardly anything on purpose. They behave as they do because they can't help it; that's what they happen to be like. 'I am that I am'; Jehovah's is the last word in realistic psychology. I am what *I* am—a sort of soft transparent jelly-fish. While you're what *you* are—very tightly shut, opaque, heavily ar-

moured: in a word, a giant clam. Morality doesn't enter; it's a case for scientific classification. You should be more of a Linnæus, Colin, and less the Samuel Smiles." Judd had been reduced to a grumbling silence. What he really resented was the fact that Fanning's confidences were given to upstart friends, to strangers even, before they were given to him. It was only to be expected. The clam's shell keeps the outside things out as effectually as it keeps the inside things in. In Judd's case, moreover, the shell served as an instrument of reproachful pinching.

From his cool street Fanning emerged into the Piazza di Spagna. The sunlight was stinging hot and dazzling. The flower vendors on the steps sat in the midst of great explosions of colour. He bought a gardenia from one of them and stuck it in his button-hole. From the windows of the English bookshop "*The Return of Eurydice*, by Miles Fanning" stared at him again and again. They were making a regular display of his latest volume in Tauchnitz. Satisfactory, no doubt; but also, of course, rather ridiculous and even humiliating, when one reflected that the book would be read by people like that estimable upper middle-class couple there, with their noses at the next window—that Civil Servant, he guessed, with the sweet little artistic wife and the artistic little house on Campden Hill—would be read by them dutifully (for of course they worked hard to keep abreast of everything) and discussed

at their charming little dinner parties and finally condemned as "extraordinarily brilliant, but . . ." Yes, but, but, but. For they were obviously regular subscribers to *Punch*, were vertebrae in the backbone of England, were upholders of all that was depressingly finest, all that was lifelessly and genteelly best in the English upper-class tradition. And when they recognized him (as it was obvious to Fanning, in spite of their discreet politeness, that they did) his vanity, instead of being flattered, was hurt. Being recognized by people like that—such was fame! What a humiliation, what a personal insult!

At Cook's, where he now went to draw some money on his letter of credit, Fame still pursued him, trumpeting. From behind the brass bars of his cage the cashier smiled knowingly as he counted out the bank-notes.

"Of course your name's very familiar to me, Mr. Fanning," he said; and his tone was at once ingratiating and self-satisfied; the compliment to Fanning was at the same time a compliment to himself. "And if I may be permitted to say so," he went on, pushing the money through the bars, as one might offer a piece of bread to an ape, "gratters on your last book. Gratters," he repeated, evidently delighted with his very public-school colloquialism.

"All gratitude for gratters," Fanning answered and turned away. He was half amused, half annoyed. Amused by the absurdity of those more than Etonian congratulations, annoyed at the damned im-

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pertinence of the congratulator. So intolerably patronizing! he grumbled to himself. But most admirers were like that; they thought they were doing you an enormous favour by admiring you. And how much more they admired themselves for being capable of appreciating than they admired the object of their appreciation! And then there were the earnest ones who thanked you for giving such a perfect expression to their ideas and sentiments. They were the worst of all. For, after all, what were they thanking you for? For being *their* interpreter, *their* dragoman, for playing John the Baptist to *their* Messiah. Damn their impertinence! Yes, damn their impertinence!

“Mr. Fanning.” A hand touched his elbow.

Still indignant with the thought of damned impertinences, Fanning turned round with an expression of such ferocity on his face, that the young woman who had addressed him involuntarily fell back.

“Oh . . . I’m so sorry,” she stammered; and her face, which had been bright, deliberately, with just such an impertinence as Fanning was damning, was discomposed into a child-like embarrassment. The blood tingled painfully in her cheeks. Oh, what a fool, she thought, what a fool she was making of herself! This idiotic blushing! But the way he had turned round on her, as if he were going to bite. . . . Still, even that was no excuse for blushing and saying she was sorry, as though she were still at school

and he were Miss Huss. Idiot! she inwardly shouted at herself. And making an enormous effort, she re-adjusted her still scarlet face, giving it as good an expression of smiling nonchalance as she could summon up. "I'm sorry," she repeated, in a voice that was meant to be light, easy, ironically polite, but which came out (oh, idiot, idiot!) nervously shaky and uneven. "I'm afraid I disturbed you. But I just wanted to introduce . . . I mean, as you were passing . . ."

"But how charming of you!" said Fanning, who had had time to realize that this latest piece of impertinence was one to be blessed, not damned. "Charming!" Yes, charming it was, that young face with the grey eyes and the little straight nose, like a cat's, and the rather short upper lip. And the heroic way she had tried, through all her blushes, to be the accomplished woman of the world—that too was charming. And touchingly charming even were those rather red, large-wristed English hands, which she wasn't yet old enough to have learnt the importance of tending into whiteness and softness. They were still the hands of a child, a tomboy. He gave her one of those quick, those brilliantly and yet mysteriously significant smiles of his; those smiles that were still so youthfully beautiful when they came spontaneously. But they could also be put on; he knew how to exploit their fabricated charm, deliberately. To a sensitive eye, the beauty of his expression was, on these occasions, subtly repulsive.

Reassured, "I'm Pamela Tarn," said the young girl, feeling warm with gratitude for the smile. He was handsomer, she was thinking, than in his photographs. And much more fascinating. It was a face that had to be seen in movement.

"Pamela Tarn?" he repeated questioningly.

"The one who wrote you a letter." Her blush began to deepen again. "You answered so nicely. I mean, it was so kind . . . I thought . . ."

"But of course!" he cried, so loudly, that people looked round, startled. "Of course!" He took her hand and held it, shaking it from time to time, for what seemed to Pamela hours. "The most enchanting letter. Only I'm so bad at names. So you're Pamela Tarn." He looked at her appraisingly. She returned his look for a moment, then flinched away in confusion from his bright dark eyes.

"Excuse me," said a chilly voice; and a very large suit of plus fours edged past them to the door.

"I like you," Fanning concluded, ignoring the plus fours; she uttered an embarrassed little laugh. "But then, I liked you before. You don't know how pleased I was with what you said about the difference between English and Italian women." The colour rose once more into Pamela's cheeks. She had only written those sentences after long hesitation and had written them then recklessly, dashing them down with a kind of anger, just because Miss Huss would have been horrified by their unwomanliness, just because Aunt Edith would have found them so dis-

tressing, just because they had, when she spoke them aloud one day in the streets of Florence, so shocked the two schoolmistresses from Boston whom she had met at the pension and was doing the sights with. Fanning's mention of them pleased her and at the same time made her feel dreadfully guilty. She hoped he wouldn't be too specific about those differences; it seemed to her that every one was listening. "So profound," he went on in his musical ringing voice. "But out of the mouths of babes, with all due respect." He smiled again, "And 'punctured'—that was really the *mot juste*. I shall steal it and use it as my own."

"*Permesso.*" This time it was a spotted muslin and brown arms and a whiff of synthetic carnations.

"I think we're rather in the way," said Pamela, who was becoming more and more uncomfortably aware of being conspicuous. And the spirit presences of Miss Huss, of Aunt Edith, of the two American ladies at Florence seemed to hang about her, hauntingly. "Perhaps we'd better . . . I mean . . ."
And, turning, she almost ran to the door.

"Punctured, punctured," repeated his pursuing voice behind her. "Punctured with the shame of being warm-blooded mammals. Like those poor lank creatures that were standing at the counter in there," he added, coming abreast with her, as they stepped over the threshold into the heat and glare. "Did you see them? So pathetic. But, oh dear!" he shook his head. "Oh dear, oh dear!"

She looked up at him and Fanning saw in her face a new expression, an expression of mischief and laughing malice and youthful impertinence. Even her breasts he now noticed with an amused appreciation, even her breasts were impertinent. Small, but beneath the pale blue stuff of her dress, pointed, firm, almost comically insistent. No ashamed deflation here.

“Pathetic,” she mockingly echoed, “but, oh dear, how horrible, how disgusting! Because they *are* disgusting,” she added defiantly, in answer to his look of humorous protest. Here in the sunlight and with the noise of the town isolating her from every one except Fanning, she had lost her embarrassment and her sense of guilt. The spiritual presences had evaporated. Pamela was annoyed with herself for having felt so uncomfortable among those awful old English cats at Cook’s. She thought of her mother; her mother had never been embarrassed, or at any rate she had always managed to turn her embarrassment into something else. Which was what Pamela was doing now. “Really disgusting,” she almost truculently insisted. She was reasserting herself, she was taking a revenge.

“You’re very ruthless to the poor old things,” said Fanning. “So worthy in spite of their mangy dimness, so obviously good.”

“I hate goodness,” said Pamela with decision, speeding the parting ghosts of Miss Huss and Aunt Edith and the two ladies from Boston.

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Fanning laughed aloud. "Ah, if only we all had the courage to say so, like you, my child!" And with a familiar affectionate gesture, as though she were indeed a child and he had known her from the cradle, he dropped a hand on her shoulder. "To say so and to act up to our beliefs. As you do, I'm sure." And he gave the slim hard little shoulder a pat. "A world without goodness—it'd be Paradise."

They walked some steps in silence. His hand lay heavy and strong on her shoulder, and a strange warmth that was somehow intenser than the warmth of mere flesh and blood seemed to radiate through her whole body. Her heart quickened its beating; an anxiety oppressed her lungs; her very mind was as though breathless.

"Putting his hand on my shoulder like that!" she was thinking. "It would have been cheek if some one else . . . Perhaps I ought to have been angry, perhaps . . ." No, that would have been silly. "It's silly to take things like that too seriously, as though one were Aunt Edith." But meanwhile his hand lay heavy on her shoulder, broodingly hot, its weight, its warmth insistently present in her consciousness.

She remembered characters in his books. Her namesake Pamela in *Pastures New*. Pamela the cold, but for that very reason an experimenter with passion; cold and therefore dangerous, full of power, fatal. Was she like Pamela? She had often thought so. But more recently she had often thought she was like Joan in *The Return of Eurydice*—Joan, who

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had emerged from the wintry dark underworld of an unawakened life with her husband (that awful, good, disinterested husband—so like Aunt Edith) into the warmth and brilliance of that transfiguring passion for Walter, for the adorable Walter whom she had always imagined must be so like Miles Fanning himself. She was sure of it now. But what of her own identity? Was she Joan, or was she Pamela? And which of the two would it be nicer to be? Warm Joan, with her happiness—but at the price of surrender? Or the cold, the unhappy, but conquering, dangerous Pamela? Or wouldn't it perhaps be best to be a little of both at once? Or first one and then the other? And in any case there was to be no goodness in the Aunt Edith style; he had been sure she wasn't good.

In her memory the voice of Aunt Edith sounded, as it had actually sounded, only a few weeks before, in disapproving comment on her reference to the passionless, experimental Pamela of *Pastures New*. "It's a book I don't like. A most unnecessary book." And then, laying her hand on Pamela's, "Dear child," she had added, with that earnest, that dutifully willed affectionateness, which Pamela so bitterly resented, "I'd rather you didn't read any of Miles Fanning's books."

"Mother never objected to my reading them. So I don't see . . ." The triumphant consciousness of having at this very moment the hand that had written those unnecessary books upon her shoulder was

promising to enrich her share of the remembered dialogue with a lofty impertinence which the original had hardly possessed. "I don't see that you have the smallest right. . . ."

Fanning's voice fell startlingly across the eloquent silence. "A penny for your thoughts, Miss Pamela," it said.

He had been for some obscure reason suddenly depressed by his own last words. "A world without goodness—it'd be Paradise." But it wouldn't, no more than now. The only paradises were fool's paradises, ostrich's paradises. It was as though he had suddenly lifted his head out of the sand and seen time bleeding away—like the stabbed bull at the end of a bull-fight, swaying on his legs and soundlessly spouting the red blood from his nostrils—bleeding, bleeding away stanchlessly into the darkness. And it was all, even the loveliness and the laughter and the sunlight, finally pointless. This young girl at his side, this beautiful pointless creature pointlessly walking down the Via del Babuino. . . . The feelings crystallized themselves, as usual, into whole phrases in his mind, and suddenly the phrases were metrical.

Pointless and arm in arm with pointlessness,
I pace and pace the Street of the Baboon.

Imbecile! Annoyed with himself, he tried to shake off his mood of maudlin depression, he tried to force his spirit back into the ridiculous and charming uni-

verse it had inhabited, on the whole so happily, all the morning.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said, with a certain rather forced jocularity, giving her shoulder a little clap. "Or forty centesimi, if you prefer them." And, dropping his hand to his side, "In Germany," he went on, "just after the War one could afford to be more munificent. There was a time when I regularly offered a hundred and ninety million marks for a thought—yes, and gained on the exchange. But now . . ."

"Well, if you really want to know," said Pamela, deciding to be bold, "I was thinking how much my Aunt Edith disapproved of your books."

"Did she? I suppose it was only to be expected. Seeing that I don't write for aunts—at any rate, not for aunts in their specifically auntly capacity. Though of course, when they're off duty . . ."

"Aunt Edith's never off duty."

"And I'm never on. So you see." He shrugged his shoulders. "But I'm sure," he added, "you never paid much attention to her disapproval."

"None," she answered, playing the un-good part for all it was worth. "I read Freud this spring," she boasted, "and Gide's autobiography, and Krafft-Ebbing. . . ."

"Which is more than I've ever done," he laughed.

The laugh encouraged her. "Not to mention all *your* books, years ago. You see," she added, suddenly fearful lest she might have said something to offend

him, "my mother never minded my reading your books. I mean, she really encouraged me, even when I was only seventeen or eighteen. My mother died last year," she explained. There was a silence. "I've lived with Aunt Edith ever since," she went on. "Aunt Edith's my father's sister. Older than he was. Father died in 1923."

"So you're all alone now?" he questioned. "Except, of course, for Aunt Edith."

"Whom I've now left." She was almost boasting again. "Because when I was twenty-one . . ."

"You stuck out your tongue at her and ran away. Poor Aunt Edith!"

"I won't have you being sorry for her," Pamela answered hotly. "She's really awful, you know. Like poor Joan's husband in *The Return of Eurydice*." How easy it was to talk to him!

"So you even know," said Fanning, laughing, "what it's like to be unhappily married. Already. Indissolubly wedded to a virtuous Aunt."

"No joke, I can tell you. *I'm* the one to be sorry for. Besides, she didn't mind my going away, whatever she might say."

"She did say something then?"

"Oh, yes. She always says things. More in sorrow than in anger, you know. Like head-mistresses. So gentle and good, I mean. When all the time she really thought me too awful. I used to call her Hippo, because she was such a hypocrite—and so fat. Enormous. Don't you *hate* enormous people? No, she's

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really delighted to get rid of me," Pamela concluded, "simply delighted." Her face was flushed and as though luminously alive; she spoke with a quick eagerness.

"What a tremendous hurry she's in," he was thinking, "to tell me all about herself. If she were older or uglier, what an intolerable egotism it would be! As intolerable as mine would be if I happened to be less intelligent. But as it is . . ." His face, as he listened to her, expressed a sympathetic attention.

"She always disliked me," Pamela had gone on. "Mother too. She couldn't abide my mother, though she was always sweetly hippo-ish with her."

"And your mother—how did she respond?"

"Well, not hippo-ishly, of course. She couldn't be that. She treated Aunt Edith—well, how *did* she treat Aunt Edith?" Pamela hesitated, frowning. "Well, I suppose you'd say she was just natural with the Hippo. I mean . . ." She bit her lip. "Well, if she ever *was* really natural. I don't know. Is anybody natural?" She looked up questioningly at Fanning. "Am I natural, for example?"

Smiling a little at her choice of an example, "I should think almost certainly not," Fanning answered, more or less at random.

"You're right, of course," she said despairingly, and her face was suddenly tragic, almost there were tears in her eyes. "But isn't it awful? I mean, isn't it simply hopeless?"

Pleased that his chance shot should have gone

home, "At your age," he said consolingly, "you can hardly expect to be natural. Naturalness is something you learn, painfully, by trial and error. Besides," he added, "there are some people who are unnatural by nature."

"Unnatural by nature." Pamela nodded, as she repeated the words, as though she were inwardly marshalling evidence to confirm their truth. "Yes, I believe that's us," she concluded. "Mother and me. Not hippos, I mean, not *poseuses*, but just unnatural by nature. You're quite right. As usual," she added, with something that was almost resentment in her voice.

"I'm sorry," he apologized.

"How is it you manage to know so much?" Pamela asked in the same resentful tone. By what right was he so easily omniscient, when she could only grope and guess in the dark?

Taking to himself a credit that belonged, in this case, to chance, "Child's play, my dear Watson," he answered banteringly. "But I suppose you're too young to have heard of Sherlock Holmes. And anyhow," he added, with an ironical seriousness, "don't let's waste any more time talking about me."

Pamela wasted no more time. "I get so depressed with myself," she said with a sigh. "And after what you've told me I shall get still more depressed. Unnatural by nature. And by upbringing too. Because I see now that my mother was like that. I mean, she was unnatural by nature too."

“Even with you?” he asked, thinking that this was becoming interesting. She nodded without speaking. He looked at her closely. “Were you very fond of her?” was the question that now suggested itself.

After a moment of silence, “I loved my father more,” she answered slowly. “He was more . . . more reliable. I mean, you never quite knew where you were with my mother. Sometimes she almost forgot about me; or else she didn’t forget me enough and spoiled me. And then sometimes she used to get into the most terrible rages with me. She really frightened me then. And said such terribly hurting things. But you mustn’t think I didn’t love her. I did.” The words seemed to release a spring; she was suddenly moved. There was a little silence. Making an effort, “But that’s what she was like,” she concluded at last.

“But I don’t see,” said Fanning gently, “that there was anything specially unnatural in spoiling you and then getting cross with you.” They were crossing the Piazza del Popolo; the traffic of four thronged streets intricately merged and parted in the open space. “You must have been a charming child. And also . . . Look out!” He laid a hand on her arm. An electric bus passed noiselessly, a whispering monster. “Also maddeningly exasperating. So where the unnaturalness came in . . .”

“But if you’d known her,” Pamela interrupted, “you’d have seen exactly where the unnaturalness . . .”

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“Forward!” he called and, still holding her arm, he steered her on across the Piazza.

She suffered herself to be conducted blindly. “It came out in the way she spoiled me,” she explained, raising her voice against the clatter of a passing lorry. “It’s so difficult to explain, though; because it’s something I felt. I mean, I’ve never really tried to put it into words till now. But it was as if . . . as if she weren’t just herself spoiling me, but the picture of a young mother—do you see what I mean?—spoiling the picture of a little girl. Even as a child I kind of felt it wasn’t quite as it should be. Later on I began to *know* it too, here.” She tapped her forehead. “Particularly after father’s death, when I was beginning to grow up. There were times when it was almost like listening to recitations—dreadful. One feels so blushy and prickly; you know the feeling.”

He nodded. “Yes, I know. Awful!”

“Awful,” she repeated. “So you can understand what a beast I felt, when it took me that way. So disloyal, I mean. So ungrateful. Because she was being so wonderfully sweet to me. You’ve no idea. But it was just when she was being her sweetest that I got the feeling worst. I shall never forget when she made me call her Clare—that was her christian name. ‘Because we’re going to be companions,’ she said and all that sort of thing. Which was simply too sweet and too nice of her. But if you’d heard the way she said it! So dreadfully unnatural. I mean, it was al-

most as bad as Aunt Edith reading *Prospice*. And yet I know she meant it, I know she wanted me to be her companion. But somehow something kind of went wrong on the way between the wanting and the saying. And then the doing seemed to go just as wrong as the saying. She always wanted to do things excitingly, romantically, like in a play. But you can't *make* things be exciting and romantic, can you?" Fanning shook his head. "She wanted to kind of force things to be thrilling by thinking and wishing, like Christian Science. But it doesn't work. We had wonderful times together; but she always tried to make out that they were more wonderful than they really were. Which only made them less wonderful. Going to the Paris Opera on a gala night is wonderful; but it's never as wonderful as when Rastignac goes, is it?"

"I should think it wasn't!" he agreed. "What an insult to Balzac to imagine that it could be!"

"And the real thing's less wonderful," she went on, "when you're being asked all the time to see it as Balzac, and to *be* Balzac yourself. When you aren't anything of the kind. Because, after all, what am I? Just good, ordinary, middle-class English."

She pronounced the words with a kind of defiance. Fanning imagined that the defiance was for him and, laughing, prepared to pick up the ridiculous little glove. But the glove was not for him; Pamela had thrown it down to a memory, to a ghost, to one of her own sceptical and mocking selves. It had been on

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the last day of their last stay together in Paris—that exciting, exotic Paris of poor Clare’s imagination, to which their tickets from London never seemed quite to take them. They had gone to lunch at La Pérouse. “Such a marvellous, *fantastic* restaurant! It makes you feel as though you were back in the Second Empire.” (Or was it the First Empire? Pamela could not exactly remember.) The rooms were so crowded with Americans, that it was with some difficulty that they secured a table. “We’ll have a marvellous lunch,” Clare had said, as she unfolded her napkin. “And some day, when you’re in Paris with your lover, you’ll come here and order just the same things as we’re having to-day. And perhaps you’ll think of me. Will you, darling?” And she had smiled at her daughter with that intense, expectant expression that was so often on her face, and the very memory of which made Pamela feel subtly uncomfortable. “How should I ever forget?” she had answered, laying her hand on her mother’s and smiling. But after a second her eyes had wavered away from that fixed look, in which the intensity had remained as desperately on the stretch, the expectancy as wholly unsatisfied, as hungrily insatiable as ever. The waiter, thank goodness, had created a timely diversion; smiling at him confidentially, almost amorously, Clare had ordered like a princess in a novel of high life. The bill, when it came, was enormous. Clare had had to scratch the bottom of her purse for the last stray piece of nickel. “It looks as though we should

have to carry our own bags at Calais and Dover. I didn't realize I'd run things so fine." Pamela had looked at the bill. "But, Clare," she had protested, looking up again at her mother with an expression of genuine horror, "it's wicked! Two hundred and sixty francs for a lunch! It wasn't worth it." The blood had risen darkly into Clare's face. "How can you be so disgustingly *bourgeois*, Pamela? So crass, so crawling?" Incensed by the heaping up of this abuse, "I think it's stupid to do things one can't afford," the girl had answered; "stupid and vulgar." Trembling with rage, Clare had risen to her feet. "I'll never take you out again. Never." (How often since then Pamela had recalled that terribly prophetic word!) "You'll never understand life, you'll never be anything but a sordid little middle-class Englishwoman. Never, never." And she had swept out of the room, like an insulted queen. Overheard by Pamela, as she undignifiedly followed, "Gee!" an American voice had remarked, "it's a regular cat fight."

The sound of another, real voice overlaid the remembered Middle Western accents.

"But after all," Fanning was saying, "it's better to be a good ordinary bourgeois than a bad ordinary bohemian, or a sham aristocrat, or a second-rate intellectual. . . ."

"I'm not even third-rate," said Pamela mournfully. There had been a time when, under the influence of the now abhorred Miss Huss, she had

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thought she would like to go up to Oxford and read Greats. But Greek grammar was so awful . . . "Not even fourth-rate."

"Thank goodness," said Fanning. "Do you know what third- and fourth-rate intellectuals are? They're professors of philology and organic chemistry at the minor universities, they're founders and honorary life presidents of the Nuneaton Poetry Society and the Baron's Court Debating Society; they're the people who organize and sedulously attend all those Conferences for promoting international goodwill and the spread of culture that are perpetually being held at Buda-Pesth and Prague and Stockholm. Admirable and indispensable creatures, of course! But impossibly dreary; one simply cannot have any relations with them. And how virtuously they disapprove of those of us who have something better to do than disseminate culture or foster goodwill—those of us who are concerned, for example, with creating beauty—like me; or, like you, my child, in deliciously *being* beauty."

Pamela blushed with pleasure and for that reason felt it necessary immediately to protest. "All the same," she said, "it's rather humiliating not to be able to do anything but be. I mean, even a cow can be."

"Damned well, too," said Fanning. "If I *were* as intensely as a cow *is*, I'd be uncommonly pleased with myself. But this is getting almost too metaphysical. And do you realize what the time is?" He held out

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his watch; it was ten past one. "And where we are? At the Tiber. We've walked miles." He waved his hand; a passing taxi swerved in to the pavement beside them. "Let's go and eat some lunch. You're free?"

"Well . . ." She hesitated. It was marvellous, of course; so marvellous that she felt she ought to refuse. "If I'm not a bore. I mean, I don't want to impose . . . I mean . . ."

"You mean you'll come and have lunch. Good. Do you like marble halls and bands? Or local colour?"

Pamela hesitated. She remembered her mother once saying that Valadier and the Ulpia were the *only* two restaurants in Rome.

"Personally," Fanning went on, "I'm slightly avaricious about marble halls. I rather resent spending four times as much and eating about two-thirds as well. But I'll overcome my avarice if you prefer them."

Pamela duly voted for local colour; he gave an address to the driver and they climbed into the cab.

"It's a genuinely Roman place," Fanning explained. "I hope you'll like it."

"Oh, I'm sure I shall." All the same, she did rather wish they were going to Valadier's.

III

Fanning's old friend, Dodo del Grillo, was in Rome for that one night and had urgently summoned him to dine. His arrival was loud and exclamatory.

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"Best of all possible Dodos!" he cried, as he advanced with outstretched hands across the enormous baroque saloon. "What an age! But what a pleasure!"

"At last, Miles," she said reproachfully; he was twenty minutes late.

"But I know you'll forgive me." And laying his two hands on her shoulders he bent down and kissed her. He made a habit of kissing all his women friends.

"And even if I didn't forgive, you wouldn't care two pins."

"Not one." He smiled his most charming smile. "But if it gives you the smallest pleasure, I'm ready to say I'd be inconsolable." His hands still resting on her shoulders, he looked at her searchingly, at arm's length. "Younger than ever," he concluded.

"I couldn't look as young as you do," she answered. "You know, Miles, you're positively indecent. Like Dorian Gray. What's your horrible secret?"

"Simply Mr. Hornibrooke," he explained. "The culture of the abdomen. So much more important than the culture of the mind." Dodo only faintly smiled; she had heard the joke before. Fanning was sensitive to smiles; he changed the subject. "And where's the marquis?" he asked.

The marchesa shrugged her shoulders. Her husband was one of those dear old friends whom somehow one doesn't manage to see anything of nowadays.

“Filippo’s in Tanganyika,” she explained. “Hunting lions.”

“While you hunt them at home. And with what success! You’ve bagged what’s probably the finest specimen in Europe this evening. Congratulations!”

“*Merci, cher maître!*” she laughed. “Shall we go in to dinner?”

The words invited, irresistibly. “If only I had the right to answer: *Oui, chère maîtresse!*” Though as a matter of fact, he reflected, he had never really found her at all interesting in that way. A woman without temperament. But very pretty once—that time (how many years ago?) when there had been that picnic on the river at Bray, and he had drunk a little too much champagne. “If only!” he repeated; and then was suddenly struck by a grotesque thought. Suppose she were to say yes, now—now! “If only I had the right!”

“But luckily,” said Dodo, turning back towards him, as she passed through the monumental door into the dining-room, “luckily you haven’t the right. You ought to congratulate me on my immense good sense. Will you sit there?”

“Oh, I’ll congratulate. I’m always ready to congratulate people who have sense.” He unfolded his napkin. “And to condole.” Now that he knew himself safe, he could condole as much as he liked. “What you must have suffered, my poor sensible Dodo, what you must have missed!”

“Suffered less,” she answered, “and missed more

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unpleasantnesses than the women who didn't have the sense to say no."

"What a mouthful of negatives! But that's how sensible people always talk about love—in terms of negatives. Never of positives; they ignore those and go about sensibly avoiding the discomforts. Avoiding the pleasures and exultations too, poor sensible idiots! Avoiding all that's valuable and significant. But it's always like that. The human soul is a fried whiting. (What excellent red mullet this is, by the way! Really excellent.) Its tail is in its mouth. All progress finally leads back to the beginning again. The most sensible people—dearest Dodo, believe me—are the most foolish. The most intellectual are the stupidest. I've never met a really good metaphysician, for example, who wasn't in one way or another bottomlessly stupid. And as for the really spiritual people, look what they revert to. Not merely to silliness and stupidity, but finally to crass non-existence. The highest spiritual state is ecstasy, which is just not being there at all. No, no; we're all fried whittings. Heads are invariably tails."

"In which case," said Dodo, "tails must also be heads. So that if you want to make intellectual or spiritual progress, you must behave like a beast—is that it?"

Fanning held up his hand. "Not at all. If you rush too violently towards the tail, you run the risk of shooting down the whiting's open mouth into its stomach, and even further. The wise man . . ."

“So the whittings are fried without being cleaned?”

“In parables,” Fanning answered reprovingly, “whittings are always fried that way. The wise man, as I was saying, oscillates lightly from head to tail and back again. His whole existence—or shall we be more frank and say ‘my’ whole existence?—is one continual oscillation. I am never too consistently sensible, like you; or too consistently feather-headed like some of my other friends. In a word,” he wagged a finger, “I oscillate.”

Tired of generalizations, “And where exactly,” Dodo enquired, “have you oscillated to at the moment? You’ve left me without your news so long. . . .”

“Well, at the moment,” he reflected aloud, “I suppose you might say I was at a dead point between desire and renunciation, between sense and sensuality.”

“Again?” She shook her head. “And who is she this time?”

Fanning helped himself to asparagus before replying. “Who is she?” he echoed. “Well, to begin with, she’s the writer of admiring letters.”

Dodo made a grimace of disgust. “What a horror!” For some reason she felt it necessary to be rather venomous about this new usurper of Fanning’s heart. “Vamping by correspondence—it’s really the lowest. . . .”

“Oh, I agree,” he said. “On principle and in theory I entirely agree.”

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"Then why," she began, annoyed by his agreement; but he interrupted her.

"Spiritual adventuresses," he said. "That's what they generally are, the women who write you letters. Spiritual adventuresses. I've suffered a lot from them in my time."

"I'm sure you have."

"They're a curious type," he went on, ignoring her sarcasms. "Curious and rather horrible. I prefer the good old-fashioned vampire. At least one knew where one stood with her. There she was—out for money, for power, for a good time, occasionally, perhaps, for sensual satisfactions. It was all entirely above-board and obvious. But with the spiritual adventuress, on the contrary, everything's most horribly turbid and obscure and slimy. You see, she doesn't want money or the commonplace good time. She wants Higher Things—damn her neck! Not large pearls and a large motor-car, but a large soul—that's what she pines for: a large soul and a large intellect, and a huge philosophy, and enormous culture, and out sizes in great thoughts."

Dodo laughed. "You're fiendishly cruel, Miles."

"Cruelty can be a sacred duty," he answered. "Besides, I'm getting a little of my own back. If you knew what these spiritual vamps had done to me! I've been one of their appointed victims. Yes, appointed; for, you see, they can't have their Higher Things without attaching themselves to a Higher Person."

“And are you one of the Higher People, Miles?”

“Should I be dining here with you, my dear, if I weren't?” And without waiting for Dodo's answer, “They attach themselves like lice,” he went on. “The contact with the Higher Person makes them feel high themselves; it magnifies them, it gives them significance, it satisfies their parasitic will to power. In the past they could have gone to religion—fastened themselves on the nearest priest (that's what the priest was there for), or sucked the spiritual blood of some saint. Nowadays they've got no professional victims; only a few charlatans and swamis and higher-thought-mongers. Or alternatively the artists. Yes, the artists. They find our souls particularly juicy. What I've suffered! Shall I ever forget that American woman who got so excited by my book on Blake that she came specially to Tunis to see me? She had an awful way of opening her mouth very wide when she talked, like a fish. You were perpetually seeing her tongue; and, what made it worse, her tongue was generally white. Most distressing. And how the tongue wagged! In spite of its whiteness. Wagged like mad, and mostly about the Divine Mind.”

“The Divine Mind?”

He nodded. “It was her specialty. In Rochester, N. Y., where she lived, she was never out of touch with it. You've no idea what a lot of Divine Mind there is floating about in Rochester, particularly in the neighbourhood of women with busy husbands and

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incomes of over fifteen thousand dollars. If only she could have stuck to the Divine Mind! But the Divine Mind has one grave defect: it won't make love to you. That was why she'd come all the way to Tunis in search of a merely human specimen."

"And what did you do about it?"

"Stood it nine days and then took the boat to Sicily. Like a thief in the night. The wicked flee, you know. God, how they can flee!"

"And she?"

"Went back to Rochester, I suppose. But I never opened any more of her letters. Just dropped them into the fire whenever I saw the writing. Ostrichism—it's the only rational philosophy of conduct. According to the Freudians we're all unconsciously trying to get back to . . ."

"But poor woman!" Dodo burst out. "She must have suffered."

"Nothing like what I suffered. Besides she had the Divine Mind to go back to; which was her version of the Freudians' pre-natal . . ."

"But I suppose you'd encouraged her to come to Tunis?"

Reluctantly, Fanning gave up his Freudians. "She could write good letters," he admitted. "Inexplicably good, considering what she was at close range."

"But then you treated her abominably."

"But if you'd seen her, you'd realize how abominably she'd treated me."

"You?"

“Yes, abominably—by merely existing. She taught me to be very shy of letters. That was why I was so pleasantly surprised this morning when my latest correspondent suddenly materialized at Cook’s. Really ravishing. One could forgive her everything for the sake of her face and that charming body. Everything, even the vamping. For a vamp I suppose she is, even this one. That is, if a woman *can* be a spiritual adventuress when she’s so young and pretty and well-made. Absolutely and *sub specie æternitatis*, I suppose she can. But from the very sublunary point of view of the male victim, I doubt whether, at twenty-one . . .”

“Only twenty-one?” Dodo was disapproving. “But Miles!”

Fanning ignored her interruption. “And another thing you must remember,” he went on, “is that the spiritual vamp who’s come of age this year is not at all the same as the spiritual vamp who came of age fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years ago. She doesn’t bother much about Mysticism, or the Lower Classes, or the Divine Mind, or any nonsense of that sort. No, she goes straight to the real point—the point which the older vamps approached in such a tiresomely circuitous fashion—she goes straight to herself. But straight!” He stabbed the air with his fruit-knife. “A bee-line. Oh, it has a certain charm that directness. But whether it won’t be rather frightful when they’re older is another question. But then al-

most everything is rather frightful when people are older."

"Thank you," said Dodo. "And what about you?"

"Oh, an old satyr," he answered with that quick, brilliantly mysterious smile of his. "A superannuated faun. I know it; only too well. But at the same time, most intolerably, a Higher Person. Which is what draws the spiritual vamps. Even the youngest ones. Not to talk to me about the Divine Mind, of course, or their views about Social Reform. But about themselves. Their Individualities, their Souls, their Inhibitions, their Unconsciouses, their Pasts, their Futures. For them, the Higher Things are all frankly and nakedly personal. And the function of the Higher Person is to act as a sort of psycho-analytical father confessor. He exists to tell them all about their strange and wonderful psyches. And meanwhile, of course, his friendship inflates their egotism. And if there should be any question of love, what a personal triumph!"

"Which is all very well," objected Dodo. "But what about the old satyr? Wouldn't it also be a bit of a triumph for him? You know, Miles," she added gravely, "it would really be scandalous if you were to take advantage. . . ."

"But I haven't the slightest intention of taking any advantages. If only for my own sake. Besides, the child is too ingenuously absurd. The most hair-raising theoretical knowledge of life, out of books. You should hear her prattling away about inverts

and perverts and birth control—but prattling from unplumbed depths of innocence and practical ignorance. Very queer. And touching too. Much more touching than the old-fashioned innocences of the young creatures who thought babies were brought by storks. Knowing all about love and lust, but in the same way as one knows all about quadratic equations. And her knowledge of the other aspects of life is really of the same kind. What she's seen of the world she's seen in her mother's company. The worst guide imaginable, to judge from the child's account. (Dead now, incidentally.) The sort of woman who could never live on top gear, so to speak—only at one or two imaginative removes from the facts. So that, in her company, what was nominally real life became actually just literature—yet more literature. Bad, inadequate Balzac in flesh and blood instead of genuine, good Balzac out of a set of nice green volumes. The child realizes it herself. Obscurely, of course; but distressfully. It's one of the reasons why she's applied to me: she hopes I can explain what's wrong. And correct it in practice. Which I won't do in any drastic manner, I promise you. Only mildly, by precept—that is, if I'm not too bored to do it at all."

"What's the child's name?" Dodo asked.

"Pamela Tarn."

"Tarn? But was her mother by any chance Clare Tarn?"

He nodded. "That was it. She even made her

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daughter call her by her christian name. The companion stunt."

"But I used to know Clare Tarn quite well," said Dodo in an astonished, feeling voice. "These last years I'd hardly seen her. But when I was more in London just after the War . . ."

"But this begins to be interesting," said Fanning. "New light on my little friend. . . ."

"Whom I absolutely forbid you," said Dodo emphatically, "to . . ."

"Tamper with the honour of," he suggested. "Let's phrase it as nobly as possible."

"No, seriously, Miles. I really won't have it. Poor Clare Tarn's daughter. If I didn't have to rush off to-morrow I'd ask her to come and see me, so as to warn her."

Fanning laughed. "She wouldn't thank you. And besides if any one is to be warned, I'm the one who's in danger. But I shall be firm, Dodo—a rock. I won't allow her to seduce me."

"You're incorrigible, Miles. But mind, if you dare. . . ."

"But I won't. Definitely." His tone was reassuring. "Meanwhile I must hear something about the mother."

The marchesa shrugged her shoulders. "A woman who couldn't live on top gear. You've really said the last word."

"But I want first words," he answered. "It's not the verdict that's interesting. It's the whole case, it's

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all the evidence. You're *sub-poenaed*, my dear. Speak up."

"Poor Clare!"

"Oh, *nil nisi bonum*, of course, if that's what disturbs you."

"She'd have so loved it to be not *bonum*, poor dear!" said the marchesa, tempering her look of vague condolence with a little smile. "That was her great ambition—to be thought rather wicked. She'd have liked to have the reputation of a vampire. Not a spiritual one, mind you. The other sort. Lola Montes—that was her ideal."

"It's an ideal," said Fanning, "that takes some realizing, I can tell you."

Dodo nodded. "And that's what she must have found out, pretty soon. She wasn't born to be a fatal woman; she lacked the gifts. No staggering beauty, no mysterious fascination or intoxicating vitality. She was just very charming, that was all; and at the same time rather impossible and absurd. So that there weren't any aspiring victims to be fatal to. And a vampire without victims is—well, *what?*"

"Certainly not a vampire," he concluded.

"Except, of course, in her own imagination, if she chooses to think so. In her own imagination Clare certainly was a vampire."

"Reduced, in fact, to being her own favourite character in fiction."

"Precisely. You always find the phrase."

"Only too fatally!" He made a little grimace. "I

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often wish I didn't. The luxury of being inarticulate! To be able to wallow indefinitely long in every feeling and sensation, instead of having to clamber out at once on to a hard, dry, definite phrase. But what about your Clare?"

"Well, she started, of course, by being a riddle to me. Unanswerable, or rather answerable, answered, but so very strangely that I was still left wondering. I shall never forget the first time Filippo and I went to dine there. Poor Roger Tarn was still alive then. While the men were drinking their port, Clare and I were alone in the drawing-room. There was a little chit-chat, I remember, and then, with a kind of determined desperation, as though she'd that second screwed herself up to jumping off the Eiffel Tower, suddenly, out of the blue, she asked me if I'd ever had one of those *wonderful* Sicilian peasants—I can't possibly reproduce the tone, the expression—as a lover. I was a bit taken aback, I must confess. 'But we don't live in Sicily,' was the only thing I could think of answering—too idiotically! 'Our estates are all in Umbria and Tuscany.' 'But the Tuscans are *superb* creatures too,' she insisted. Superb, I agreed. But, as it happens, I don't have affairs with even the superbest peasants. Nor with anybody else, for that matter. Clare was dreadfully disappointed. I think she'd expected the most romantic confidences—moonlight and mandolins and *stretti, stretti, nell'estasi d'amor*. She was really very ingenuous. 'Do you mean to say you've really never . . .?' she insisted. I ought to

have got angry, I suppose; but it was all so ridiculous, that I never thought of it. I just said, 'Never,' and felt as though I were refusing her a favour. But she made up for my churlishness by being lavish to herself. But lavish! You can't imagine what a tirade she let fly at me. How *wonderful* it was to get away from self-conscious, complicated, sentimental love! How profoundly *satisfying* to feel oneself at the mercy of the dumb, dark forces of physical passion! How *intoxicating* to humiliate one's culture and one's class feeling before some *magnificent* primitive, some *earthly* beautiful satyr, some *divine* animal! And so on, *crescendo*. And it ended with her telling me the story of her *extraordinary* affair with—was it a gamekeeper? or a young farmer? I forget. But there was something about rabbit-shooting in it, I know."

"It sounds like a chapter out of George Sand."

"It was."

"Or still more, I'm afraid," he said, making a wry face, "like a most deplorable parody of my *Endymion and the Moon*."

"Which I've never read, I'm ashamed to say."

"You should, if only to understand this Clare of yours."

"I will. Perhaps I'd have solved her more quickly, if I'd read it at the time. As it was I could only be amazed—and a little horrified. That rabbit-shooter!" She shook her head. "He ought to have been so romantic. But I could only think of that awful yellow kitchen soap he'd be sure to wash himself with, or

perhaps carbolic, so that he'd smell like washed dogs—dreadful! And the flannel shirts, not changed quite often enough. And the hands, so horny, with very short nails, perhaps broken. No, I simply couldn't understand her."

"Which is to your discredit, Dodo, if I may say so."

"Perhaps. But you must admit, I never pretended to be anything but what I am—a perfectly frivolous and respectable member of the upper classes. With a taste, I must confess, for the scandalous. Which was one of the reasons, I suppose, why I became so intimate with poor Clare. I was really fascinated by her confidences."

"Going on the tiles vicariously, eh?"

"Well, if you choose to put it grossly and vulgarly. . . ."

"Which I *do* choose," he interposed. "To be tactfully gross and appositely vulgar—that, my dear, is one of the ultimate artistic refinements. One day I shall write a monograph on the aesthetics of vulgarity. But meanwhile shall we say that you were inspired by an intense scientific curiosity to . . ."

Dodo laughed. "One of the tiresome things about you, Miles, is that one can never go on being angry with you."

"Yet another subject for a monograph!" he answered, and his smile was at once confidential and ironical, affectionate and full of mockery. "But let's hear what the scientific curiosity elicited?"

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“Well, to begin with, a lot of really rather embarrassing intimate confidences and questions, which I needn’t repeat.”

“No, don’t. I know what those feminine conversations are. I have a native modesty. . . .”

“Oh, so have I. And, strangely enough, so had Clare. But somehow she wanted to outrage herself. You felt it all the time. She always had that desperate jumping-off-the-Eiffel-Tower manner, when she began to talk like that. It was a kind of martyrdom. But enjoyable. Perversely.” Dodo shook her head. “Very puzzling. I used to have to make quite an effort to change the conversation from gynaecology to romance. Oh, those lovers of hers! Such stories! The most fantastic adventures in East End opium dens, in aeroplanes, and even, I remember (it was that very hot summer of ’twenty-two), even in a refrigerator!”

“My dear!” protested Fanning.

“Honestly! I’m only repeating what she told me.”

“But do you mean to say you believed her?”

“Well, by that time, I must admit, I was beginning to be rather sceptical. You see, I could never elicit the names of these creatures. Nor any detail. It was as though they didn’t exist outside the refrigerator and the aeroplane.”

“How many of them were there?”

“Only two at that particular moment. One was a Grand Passion, and the other a Caprice. A Caprice,” she repeated, rolling the r. “It was one of poor

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Clare's favourite words. I used to try and pump her. But she was mum. 'I want them to be *mysterious*,' she told me the last time I pressed her for details. 'Anonymous, without an *état civil*. Why should I show you their passports and identity cards?' 'Perhaps they haven't got any,' I suggested. Which was malicious. I could see she was annoyed. But a week later she showed me their photographs. There they were; the camera cannot lie; I had to be convinced. The Grand Passion, I must say, was a very striking-looking creature. 'Thin-faced, worn, a bit Roman and sinister. The Caprice was more ordinarily the nice young Englishman. Rather childish and simple, Clare explained; and she gave me to understand that she was initiating him. It was the other, the Grand P., who thought of such refinements as the refrigerator. Also, she now confided to me for the first time, he was mildly a sadist. Having seen his face, I could believe it. 'Am I ever likely to meet him?' I asked. She shook her head. He moved in a very different world from mine."

"A rabbit-shooter?" Fanning asked.

"No: an intellectual. That's what I gathered."

"Golly!"

"So there was not the slightest probability, as you can see, that *I* should ever meet him." Dodo laughed.

"And yet almost the first face I saw on leaving Clare that afternoon was the Grand P.'s."

"Coming to pay his sadistic respects?"

"Alas for poor Clare, no. He was behind glass in

the show-case of a photographer in the Brompton Road, not a hundred yards from the Tarns' house in Ovington Square. The identical portrait. I marched straight in. 'Can you tell me who that is?' But it appears that photography is done under the seal of confession. They wouldn't say. Could I order a copy? Well, yes, as a favour, they'd let me have one. Curiously enough, they told me, as they were taking down my name and address, another lady had come in only two or three days before and also ordered a copy. 'Not by any chance a rather tall lady with light auburn hair and a rather amusing mole on the left cheek?' That did sound rather like the lady. 'And with a very confidential manner,' I suggested, 'as though you were her oldest friends?' Exactly, exactly; they were unanimous. That clinched it. Poor Clare, I thought, as I walked on towards the Park, poor, poor Clare!"

There was a silence.

"Which only shows," said Fanning at last, "how right the Church has always been to persecute literature. The harm we imaginative writers do! Enormous! We ought all to be on the Index, every one. Consider your Clare, for example. If it hadn't been for books, she'd never have known that such things as passion and sensuality and perversity even existed. Never."

"Come, come," she protested.

But, "Never," Fanning repeated. "She was congenitally as cold as a fish; it's obvious. Never had a

spontaneous, untutored desire in her life. But she'd read a lot of books. Out of which she'd fabricated a theory of passion and perversity. Which she then consciously put into practice."

"Or rather didn't put into practice. Only day-dreamed that she did."

He nodded. "For the most part. But sometimes, I don't mind betting, she realized the day-dreams in actual life. Desperately, as you so well described it, with her teeth clenched and her eyes shut, as though she were jumping off the Eiffel Tower. That rabbit-shooter, for instance. . . ."

"But do you think the rabbit-shooter really existed?"

"Perhaps not that particular one. But *a* rabbit-shooter, perhaps several rabbit-shooters—at one time or another, I'm sure, they genuinely existed. Though never *genuinely*, of course, for her. For her, it's obvious, they were just phantoms, like the other inhabitants of her dreamery. Phantoms of flesh and blood, but still phantoms. I see her as a kind of Midas, turning everything she touched into imagination. Even in the embraces of a genuine, solid rabbit-shooter, she was still only indulging in her solitary sultry dream—a dream inspired by Shakespeare, or Mrs. Barclay, or the Chevalier de Nerciat, or D'Annunzio, or whoever her favourite author may have been."

"Miles Fanning, perhaps," Dodo mockingly suggested.

“Yes, I feared as much.”

“What a responsibility!”

“Which I absolutely refuse to accept. What have I ever written but solemn warnings against the vice of imagination? Sermons against mental licentiousness of every kind—intellectual licentiousness, mystical licentiousness, fantastic-amorous licentiousness. No, no. I’ll accept no responsibility. Or at least no special responsibility—only the generic responsibility of being an imaginative author, the original sin of writing in such a way as to influence people. And when I say ‘influence,’ of course I don’t really mean *influence*. Because a writer can’t influence people, in the sense of making them think and feel and act as he does. He can only influence them to be more, or less, like one of their own selves. In other words, he’s never understood. (Thank goodness! because it would be very humiliating to be really understood by one’s readers.) What readers get out of him is never, finally, *his* ideas, but theirs. And when they try to imitate him or his creations, all that they can ever do is to act one of their own potential rôles. Take this particular case. Clare read and, I take it, was impressed. She took my warnings against mental licentiousness to heart and proceeded to do—what? Not to become a creature of spontaneous, unvitiated impulses—for the good reason that that wasn’t in her power—but only to imagine that she was such a creature. She imagined herself a woman like the one I put into *Endymion and the Moon* and acted ac-

cordingly—or else didn't act, only dreamed; it makes very little difference. In a word, she did exactly what all my books told her not to do. Inevitably; it was her nature. I'd influenced her, yes. But she didn't become more like one of my heroines. She only became more intensely like herself. And then, you must remember, mine weren't the only books on her shelves. I think we can take it that she'd read *Les Liaisons Dangereuses* and Casanova and some biography, shall we say, of the Maréchal de Richelieu. So that those spontaneous unvitiated impulses—how ludicrous they are, anyhow, when you *talk* about them!—became identified in her mind with the most elegant forms of 'caprice'—wasn't that the word? She was a child of nature—but with qualifications. The kind of child of nature that lived at Versailles or on the Grand Canal about 1760. Hence those rabbit-shooters and hence also those sadistic intellectuals, whether real or imaginary—and imaginary even when real. I may have been a favourite author. But I'm not responsible for the rabbit-shooters or the Grand P.'s. Not more responsible than any one else. She'd heard of the existence of love before she'd read me. We're all equally to blame, from Homer downwards. Plato wouldn't have any of us in his Republic. He was quite right, I believe. Quite right."

"And what about the daughter?" Dodo asked, after a silence.

He shrugged his shoulders. "In reaction against the mother, so far as I could judge. In reaction, but

also influenced by her, unconsciously. And the influence is effective because, after all, she's her mother's daughter and probably resembles her mother, congenitally. But consciously, on the surface, she knows she doesn't want to live as though she were in a novel. And yet can't help it, because that's her nature, that's how she was brought up. But she's miserable, because she realizes that fiction-life *is* fiction. Miserable and very anxious to get out—out through the covers of the novel into the real world."

"And are you her idea of the real world?" Dodo enquired.

He laughed, "Yes, I'm the real world. Strange as it may seem. And also, of course, pure fiction. The Writer, the Great Man—the Official Biographer's fiction, in a word. Or, better still, the autobiographer's fiction. Chateaubriand, shall we say. And her breaking out—that's fiction too. A pure Miles Fanningism, if ever there was one. And, poor child, she knows it. Which makes her so cross with herself. Cross with me too, in a curious obscure way. But at the same time she's thrilled. What a thrilling situation! And herself walking about in the middle of it. She looks on and wonders and wonders what the next instalment of the feuilleton's going to contain."

"Well, there's one thing we're quite certain it's not going to contain, aren't we? Remember your promise, Miles."

"I think of nothing else," he bantered.

"Seriously, Miles, seriously."

"I think of nothing else," he repeated in a voice that was the parody of a Shakespearean actor's.

Dodo shook her finger at him. "Mind," she said, "mind!" Then, pushing back her chair, "Let's move into the drawing-room," she went on. "We shall be more comfortable there."

IV

"And to think," Pamela was writing in her diary, "how nervous I'd been beforehand, and the trouble I'd taken to work out the whole of our first meeting, question and answer, like the Shorter Catechism, instead of which I was like a fish in water, really at home, for the first time in my life, I believe. No, perhaps not more at home than with Ruth and Phyllis, but then they're girls, so they hardly count. Besides, when you've once been at home in the sea, it doesn't seem much fun being at home in a little glass bowl, which is rather unfair to Ruth and Phyllis, but after all it's not their fault and they can't help being little bowls, just as M. F. can't help being a sea, and when you've swum about a bit in all that intelligence and knowledge and really *devilish* understanding, well, you find the bowls rather narrow, though of course they're sweet little bowls and I shall always be very fond of them, especially Ruth. Which makes me wonder if what he said about Clare and me—unnatural by nature—is always true, because hasn't every unnatural person got somebody she can be natural with, or even that she can't help being natural with, like

oxygen and that other stuff making water? Of course it's not guaranteed that you find the other person who makes you natural, and I think perhaps Clare never did find her person, because I don't believe it was Daddy. But in my case there's Ruth and Phyllis and now to-day M. F.; and he really proves it, because I *was* natural with him more than with any one, even though he did say I was unnatural by nature. No, I feel that if I were with him always, I should always be my *real* self, just kind of easily spouting, like those lovely fountains we went to look at this afternoon, not all tied up in knots and squirting about vaguely in every kind of direction, and muddy at that, but beautifully clear in a big gushing spout, like what Joan in *The Return of Eurydice* finally became when she'd escaped from that awful, awful man and found Walter. But does that mean I'm in love with him?"

Pamela bit the end of her pen and stared, frowning, at the page before her. Scrawled large in orange ink, the question stared back. Disquietingly and insistently stared. She remembered a phrase of her mother's. "But if you knew," Clare had cried (Pamela could *see* her, wearing the black afternoon dress from Patou, and there were yellow roses in the bowl on the table under the window), "if you knew what certain writers were to me! *Shrines*—there's no other word. I could worship the Tolstoy of Anna Karenina." But Harry Braddon, to whom the words were addressed, had laughed at her. And, though she hated

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Harry Braddon, so had Pamela, mockingly. For it was absurd; nobody was a shrine, nobody. And anyhow, what *was* a shrine? Nothing. Not nowadays, not when one had stopped being a child. She told herself these things with a rather unnecessary emphasis, almost truculently, in the style of the professional atheists in Hyde Park. One didn't worship—for the good reason that she herself once had worshipped. Miss Figgis, the classical mistress, had been her pash for more than a year. Which was why she had gone to Early Service so frequently in those days and been so keen to go up to Oxford and take Greats. (Besides, she had even, at that time, rather liked and admired Miss Huss. Ghastly old Hussy! It seemed incredible now.) But oh, that grammar! And Caesar was such a bore, and Livy still worse, and as for Greek . . . She had tried very hard for a time. But when Miss Figgis so obviously preferred that priggish little beast Kathleen, Pamela had just let things slide. The bad marks had come in torrents and old Hussy had begun being more sorrowful than angry, and finally more angry than sorrowful. But she hadn't cared. What made not caring easier was that she had her mother behind her. "I'm so delighted," was what Clare had said when she heard that Pamela had given up wanting to go to Oxford. "I'd have felt so terribly inferior if you'd turned out a blue-stocking. Having my frivolity rebuked by my own daughter!" Clare had always boasted of her frivolity. Once, under the influence of old Hussy and for the love of Miss Fig-

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gis, an earnest disapprover, Pamela had become an apostle of her mother's gospel. "After all," she had pointed out to Miss Figgis, "Cleopatra didn't learn Greek." And though Miss Figgis was able to point out, snubbingly, that the last of the Ptolemies had probably spoken nothing but Greek, Pamela could still insist that in principle she was quite right: Cleopatra hadn't learnt Greek, or what, if you were a Greek, corresponded to Greek. So why should she? She began to parade a violent and childish cynicism, a cynicism which was still (though she had learnt, since leaving school, to temper the ridiculous expression of it) her official creed. There were no shrines—though she sometimes, wistfully and rather shamefacedly, wished there were. One didn't, determinedly didn't worship. She herself might admire Fanning's books, *did* admire them, enormously. But as for worshipping—no, she absolutely declined. Clare had overdone it all somehow—as usual. Pamela was resolved that there should be no nonsense about *her* feelings.

"But does that mean I'm in love with him?" insisted the orange scrawl.

As though in search of an answer, Pamela turned back the pages of her diary (she had already covered nearly eight of them with her account of this memorable twelfth of June). "His face," she read, "is very brown, almost like an Arab's, except that he has blue eyes, as he lives mostly in the South, because he says that if you don't live in the sun, you go slightly mad,

which is why people in the North, like us and the Germans and the Americans are so tiresome, though of course you go still madder where there's too much sun, like in India, where they're even more hopeless. He's very good looking and you don't think of him as being either old or young, but as just being there, like that, and the way he smiles is really very extraordinary, and so are his eyes, and I simply *adored* his white silk suit." But the question was not yet answered. His silk suit wasn't him, nor was his voice, even though he had "an awfully nice one, rather like that man who talks about books on the wireless, only nicer." She turned over a page. "But M. F. is different from most clever people," the orange scrawl proclaimed, "because he doesn't make you feel a fool, even when he does laugh at you, and never, which is so *ghastly* with men like Professor Cobley, talks down to you in that awful patient, gentle way, which makes you feel a million times more of a worm than being snubbed or ignored, because, if you have any pride, that sort of intelligence without tears is just loathsome, as though you were being given milk pudding out of charity. No, M. F. talks to you on the level and the extraordinary thing is that, while he's talking to you and you're talking to him, you *are* on a level with him, or at any rate you feel as though you were, which comes to the same thing. He's like influenza, you catch his intelligence." Pamela let the leaves of the notebook flick past, one by one, under her thumb. The final words on the half-blank page

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once more stared at her, questioningly. "But does that mean I'm in love with him?" Taking her pen from between her teeth, "Certainly," she wrote, "I do find him terribly attractive physically." She paused for a moment to reflect, then added, frowning as though with the effort of raising an elusive fact from the depths of memory, of solving a difficult problem in algebra: "Because really, when he put his hand on my shoulder, which would have been simply intolerable if any one else had done it, but somehow with him I didn't mind, I felt all thrilled with an absolute frisson." She ran her pen through the last word and substituted "thrill," which she underlined to make it seem less lamely a repetition. "Frisson" had been one of Clare's favourite words; hearing it pronounced in her mother's remembered voice, Pamela had felt a sudden mistrust of it; it seemed to cast a kind of doubt on the feelings it stood for, a doubt of which she was ashamed—it seemed so disloyal and the voice had sounded so startlingly, so heart-rendingly clear and near—but which she still couldn't help experiencing. She defended herself; "frisson" had simply had to go, because the thrill was genuine, absolutely genuine, she insisted. "For a moment," she went on, writing very fast, as though she were trying to run away from the sad, disagreeable thoughts that had intruded upon her, "I thought I was going to faint when he touched me, like when one's coming to after chloroform, which I've certainly never felt like with any one else." As

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a protest against the doubts inspired by that unfortunate frisson she underlined "never," heavily. Never; it was quite true. When Harry Braddon had tried to kiss her, she had been furious and disgusted—disgusting beast! Saddening and reproachful, Clare's presence hovered round her once more; Clare had liked Harry Braddon. Still, he was a beast. Pamela had never told her mother about that kiss. She shut her eyes excludingly and thought instead of Cecil Rudge, poor, timid, unhappy little Cecil, whom she liked so much, was so genuinely sorry for. But when, that afternoon at Aunt Edith's, when at last, after an hour's visibly laborious screwing to the sticking point, he had had the courage to take her hand and say "Pamela" and kiss it, she had just laughed, oh! unforgivably, but she simply couldn't help it; he was so ridiculous. Poor lamb, he had been terribly upset. "But I'm so sorry," she had gasped between the bursts of her laughter, "so dreadfully sorry. Please don't be hurt." But his face, she could see, was agonized. "Please! Oh, I feel so miserable." And she had gone off into another explosion of laughter which almost choked her. But when she could breathe again, she had run to him where he stood, averted and utterly unhappy, by the window, she had taken his hand and, when he still refused to look at her, had put her arm round his neck and kissed him. But the emotion that had filled her eyes with tears was nothing like passion. As for Hugh Davies—why, it certainly had been rather thrilling

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when Hugh kissed her. It had been thrilling, but certainly not to a fainting point. But then had she *really* felt like fainting to-day, a small voice questioned. She drowned the small voice with the scratching of her pen. "Consult the oracles of passion," she wrote and, laying down her pen, got up and crossed the room. A copy of *The Return of Eurydice* was lying on the bed; she picked it up and turned over the pages. Here it was! "Consult the oracles of passion," she read aloud and her own voice sounded, she thought, strangely oracular in the solitude. "A god speaks in them, or else a devil, one can never tell which beforehand, nor even, in most cases, afterwards. And, when all is said, does it very much matter? God and devil are equally supernatural, that is the important thing; equally supernatural and therefore, in this all too flatly natural world of sense and science and society, equally desirable, equally significant." She shut the book and walked back to the table. "Which is what he said this afternoon," she went on writing, "but in that laughing way, when I said I could never see why one shouldn't do what one liked, instead of all this Hussy and Hippo rigmarole about service and duty, and he said yes, that was what Rabelais had said" (there seemed to be an awful lot of "saids" in this sentence, but it couldn't be helped; she scrawled on;) "which I pretended I'd read—why can't one tell the truth? particularly as I'd just been saying at the same time that one ought to say what one thinks as well as do what one likes;

but it seems to be hopeless—and he said he entirely agreed, it was perfect, so long as you had the luck to like the sort of things that kept you on the right side of the prison bars and think the sort of things that don't get you murdered when you say them. And I said I'd rather say what I thought and do what I liked and be murdered and put in gaol than be a Hippo, and he said I was an idealist, which annoyed me and I said I certainly wasn't, all I was some one who didn't want to go mad with inhibitions. And he laughed, and I wanted to quote him his own words about the oracles, but somehow it was so shy-making that I didn't. All the same, it's what I intensely feel, that one *ought* to consult the oracles of passion. And I shall consult them." She leaned back in her chair and shut her eyes. The orange question floated across the darkness: "But does that mean I'm in love with him?" The oracle seemed to be saying yes. But oracles, she resolutely refused to remember, can be rigged to suit the interests of the questioner. Didn't the admirer of *The Return of Eurydice* secretly *want* the oracle to say yes? Didn't she think she'd almost fainted, because she'd wished she'd almost fainted, because she'd come desiring to faint? Pamela sighed; then, with a gesture of decision, she slapped her notebook to and put away her pen. It was time to get ready for dinner; she bustled about efficiently and distractingly among her trunks. But the question returned to her as she lay soaking in the warm other-world of her bath. By the time she

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got out she had boiled herself to such a pitch of giddiness that she could hardly stand.

For Pamela, dinner in solitude, especially the public solitude of hotels, was a punishment. Companionlessness and compulsory silence depressed her. Besides, she never felt quite eye-proof; she could never escape from the obsession that every one was looking at her, judging, criticizing. Under a carapace of rather impertinent uncaringness she writhed distressfully. At Florence her loneliness had driven her to make friends with two not very young American women who were staying in her hotel. They were a bit earnest and good and dreary. But Pamela preferred even dreariness to solitude. She attached herself to them inseparably. They were touched. When she left for Rome, they promised to write to her, they made her promise to write to them. She was so young; they felt responsible; a steadying hand, the counsel of older friends. . . . Pamela had already received two steadying letters. But she hadn't answered them, never would answer them. The horrors of lonely dining cannot be alleviated by correspondence.

Walking down to her ordeal in the restaurant, she positively yearned for her dreary friends. But the hall was a desert of alien eyes and faces; and the waiter who led her through the hostile dining-room, had bowed, it seemed to her, with an ironical politeness, had mockingly smiled. She sat down haughtily at her table and almost wished she were under it. When the *sommelier* appeared with his list, she or-

dered half a bottle of something absurdly expensive, for fear he might think she didn't know anything about wine.

She had got as far as the fruit, when a presence loomed over her; she looked up. "You?" Her delight was an illumination; the young man was dazzled. "What marvellous luck!" Yet it was only Guy Browne, Guy whom she had met a few times at dances and found quite pleasant—that was all. "Think of your being in Rome!" She made him sit down at her table. When she had finished her coffee, Guy suggested that they should go out and dance somewhere. They went. It was nearly three when Pamela got to bed. She had had a most enjoyable evening.

V

But how ungratefully she treated poor Guy when, next day at lunch, Fanning asked her how she had spent the evening! True, there were extenuating circumstances, chief among which was the fact that Fanning had kissed her when they met. By force of habit, he himself would have explained, if any one had asked him why, because he kissed every presentable face. Kissing was in the great English tradition. "It's the only way I can be like Chaucer," he liked to affirm. "Just as knowing a little Latin and less Greek is my only claim to resembling Shakespeare and as lying in bed till ten's the nearest I get to Descartes." In this particular case, as perhaps in every other particular case, the force of habit had

been seconded by a deliberate intention; he was accustomed to women being rather in love with him, he liked the amorous atmosphere and could use the simplest as well as the most complicated methods to create it. Moreover he was an experimentalist, he genuinely wanted to see what would happen. What happened was that Pamela was astonished, embarrassed, thrilled, delighted, bewildered. And what with her confused excitement and the enormous effort she had made to take it all as naturally and easily as he had done, she was betrayed into what, in other circumstances, would have been a scandalous ingratitude. But when one has just been kissed, for the first time and at one's second meeting with him, kissed offhandedly and yet (she felt it) significantly, by Miles Fanning—actually Miles Fanning!—little men like Guy Browne do seem rather negligible, even though one did have a very good time with them the evening before.

“I'm afraid you must have been rather lonely last night,” said Fanning, as they sat down to lunch. His sympathy hypocritically covered a certain satisfaction that it should be his absence that had condemned her to dreariness.

“No, I met a friend,” Pamela answered with a smile which the inward comparison of Guy with the author of *The Return of Eurydice* had tinged with a certain amused condescendingness.

“A friend?” He raised his eyebrows. “*Amico* or *amica*? Our English is so discreetly equivocal. With

this key Bowdler locked up his heart. But I apologize. *Co* or *ca*?"

"*Co*. He's called Guy Browne and he's here learning Italian to get into the Foreign Office. He's a nice boy." Pamela might have been talking about a favourite, or even not quite favourite, retriever. "Nice; but nothing very special. I mean, not in the way of intelligence." She shook her head patronizingly over Guy's very creditable First in History as a gutter-snipe capriciously favoured by an archduke might learn in his protector's company to shake his head and patronizingly smile at the name of a marquis of only four or five centuries' standing. "He can dance, though," she admitted.

"So I suppose you danced with him?" said Fanning in a tone which, in spite of his amusement at the child's assumption of an aged superiority, he couldn't help making rather disobligingly sarcastic. It annoyed him to think that Pamela should have spent an evening, which he had pictured as dimly lonely, dancing with a young man.

"Yes, we danced," said Pamela, nodding.

"Where?"

"Don't ask me. We went to about six different places in the course of the evening."

"Of course you did," said Fanning almost bitterly. "Moving rapidly from one place to another and doing exactly the same thing in each—that seems to be the young's ideal of bliss."

Speaking as a young who had risen above such

things, but who still had to suffer from the folly of her unregenerate contemporaries, "It's quite true," Pamela gravely confirmed.

"They go to Peking to listen to the wireless and to Benares to dance the frox-trot. I've seen them at it. It's incomprehensible. And then the tooting up and down in automobiles, and the roaring up and down in aeroplanes and the stinking up and down in motor-boats. Up and down, up and down, just for the sake of not sitting still, of never having time to think or feel. No, I give them up, these young of yours." He shook his head. "But I'm becoming a minor prophet," he added; his good humour was beginning to return.

"But after all," said Pamela, "we're not *all* like that."

Her gravity made him laugh. "There's at least one who's ready to let herself be bored by a tiresome survivor from another civilization. Thank you, Pamela." Leaning across the table, he took her hand and kissed it. "I've been horribly ungrateful," he went on, and his face, as he looked at her was suddenly transfigured by the bright enigmatic beauty of his smile. "If you knew how charming you looked!" he said; and it was true. That ingenuous face, those impertinent little breasts—charming. "And how charming you *were!* But of course you *do* know," a little demon prompted him to add: "no doubt Mr. Browne told you last night."

Pamela had blushed—a blush of pleasure, and em-

barassed shyness, and excitement. What he had just said and done was more significant, she felt, even than the kiss he had given her when they met. Her cheeks burned; but she managed, with an effort, to keep her eyes unwaveringly on his. His last words made her frown. "He certainly didn't," she answered. "He'd have got his face smacked."

"Is that a delicate hint?" he asked. "If so," and he leaned forward, "here's the other cheek."

Her face went redder than ever. She felt suddenly miserable; he was only laughing at her. "Why do you laugh at me?" she said aloud, unhappily.

"But I wasn't," he protested. "I really did think you were annoyed."

"But why should I have been?"

"I can't imagine." He smiled. "But if you would have smacked Mr. Browne's face. . . ."

"But Guy's quite different."

It was Fanning's turn to wince. "You mean he's young, while I'm only a poor old imbecile who needn't be taken seriously?"

"Why are you so stupid?" Pamela asked almost fiercely. "No, but I mean," she added in quick apology, "I mean . . . well, I don't care two pins about Guy. So you see, it would annoy me if he tried to push in, like that. Whereas with somebody who does mean something to me . . ." Pamela hesitated. "With *you*," she specified in a rather harsh, strained voice and with just that look of despairing determination, Fanning imagined, just that jumping-off-

the-Eiffel-Tower expression, which her mother's face must have assumed in moments such as this, "it's quite different. I mean, with you of course I'm not annoyed. I'm pleased. Or at least I *was* pleased, till I saw you were just making a fool of me."

Touched and flattered, "But my dear child," Fanning protested, "I wasn't doing anything of the kind. I meant what I said. And much more than I said," he added, in the teeth of the warning and reproachful outcry raised by his common sense. It was amusing to experiment, it was pleasant to be adored, exciting to be tempted (and how young she was, how perversely fresh!). There was even something quite agreeable in resisting temptation; it had the charms of a strenuous and difficult sport. Like mountain climbing. He smiled once more, consciously brilliant.

This time Pamela dropped her eyes. There was a silence which might have protracted itself uncomfortably, if the waiter had not broken it by bringing the *tagliatelle*. They began to eat. Pamela was all at once exuberantly gay.

After coffee they took a taxi and drove to the Villa Giulia. "For we mustn't," Fanning explained, "neglect your education."

"Mustn't we?" she asked. "I often wonder why we mustn't. Truthfully now, I mean without any hip-posing and all that—why shouldn't I neglect it? Why should I go to this beastly museum?" She was preparing to play the cynical, boastfully unintellectual part which she had made her own. "Why?" she re-

peated truculently. Behind the rather vulgar low-brow mask she cultivated wistful yearnings and concealed the uneasy consciousness of inferiority. "A lot of beastly old Roman odds and ends!" she grumbled; that was one for Miss Figgis.

"Roman?" said Fanning. "God forbid! Etruscan."

"Well, Etruscan then; it's all the same anyhow. Why shouldn't I neglect the Etruscans? I mean, what have they got to do with me—*me?*" And she gave her chest two or three little taps with the tip of a crooked forefinger.

"Nothing, my child," he answered. "Thank goodness, they've got absolutely nothing to do with you, or me, or anybody else."

"Then why . . ."

"Precisely for that reason. That's the definition of culture—knowing and thinking about things that have absolutely nothing to do with us. About Etruscans, for example; or the mountains on the moon; or cat's cradle among the Chinese; or the Universe at large."

"All the same," she insisted, "I still don't see."

"Because you've never known people who weren't cultured. But make the acquaintance of a few practical business-men—the kind who have no time to be anything but alternately efficient and tired. Or of a few workmen from the big towns. (Country people are different; they still have the remains of the old substitutes for culture—religion, folk-lore, tradition.

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The town fellows have lost the substitutes without acquiring the genuine article.) Get to know those people; *they'll* make you see the point of culture. Just as the Sahara'll make you see the point of water. And for the same reason: they're arid."

"That's all very well; but what about people like Professor Cobley?"

"Whom I've happily never met," he said, "but can reconstruct from the expression on your face. Well, all that can be said about those people is: just try to imagine them if they'd never been irrigated. Gobi or Shamo."

"Well, perhaps." She was dubious.

"And anyhow the biggest testimony to culture isn't the soulless philistines—it's the soulful ones. My sweet Pamela," he implored, laying a hand on her bare brown arm, "for heaven's sake don't run the risk of becoming a soulful philistine."

"But as I don't know what that is," she answered, trying to persuade herself, as she spoke, that the touch of his hand was giving her a tremendous *frisson*—but it really wasn't.

"It's what the name implies," he said. "A person without culture who goes in for having a soul. An illiterate idealist. A Higher Thinker with nothing to think about but his—or more often, I'm afraid, *her*—beastly little personal feelings and sensation. They spend their lives staring at their own navels and in the intervals trying to find other people who'll take an interest and come and stare too. Oh, figura-

tively," he added, noticing the expression of astonishment which had passed across her face. "*En tout bien, tout honneur*. At least, sometimes and to begin with. Though I've known cases . . ." But he decided it would be better not to speak about the lady from Rochester, N. Y. Pamela might be made to feel that the cap fitted. Which it did, except that her little head was such a charming one. "In the end," he said, "they go mad, these soulful philistines. Mad with self-consciousness and vanity and egotism and a kind of hopeless bewilderment; for when you're utterly without culture, every fact's an isolated, unconnected fact, every experience is unique and unprecedented. Your world's made up of a few bright points floating about inexplicably in the midst of an unfathomable darkness. Terrifying! It's enough to drive any one mad. I've seen them, lots of them, gone utterly crazy. In the past they had organized religion, which meant that somebody had once been cultured for them, vicariously. But what with protestantism and the modernists, their philistinism's absolute now. They're alone with their own souls. Which is the worst companionship a human being can have. So bad, that it sends you dotty. So beware, Pamela, beware! You'll go mad, if you think only of what has something to do with you. The Etruscans will keep you sane."

"Let's hope so." She laughed. "But aren't we there?"

The cab drew up at the door of the villa; they got out.

“And remember that the things that start with having nothing to do with you,” said Fanning, as he counted out the money for the entrance tickets, “turn out in the long run to have a great deal to do with you. Because they become a part of you and you of them. A soul can’t know or fully become itself without knowing and therefore to some extent becoming what isn’t itself. Which it does in various ways. By loving, for example.”

“You mean . . .?” The flame of interest brightened in her eyes.

But he went on remorselessly. “And by thinking of things that have nothing to do with you.”

“Yes, I see.” The flame had dimmed again.

“Hence my concern about your education.” He beckoned her through the turnstile into the museum. “A purely selfish concern,” he added, smiling down at her. “Because I don’t want the most charming of my young friends to grow into a monster, whom I shall be compelled to flee from. So resign yourself to the Etruscans.”

“I resign myself,” said Pamela, laughing. His words had made her feel happy and excited. “You can begin.” And in a theatrical voice, like that which used to make Ruth go off into such fits of laughter, “I am all ears,” she added, “as they say in the Best Books.” She pulled off her hat and shook out the imprisoned hair.

To Fanning, as he watched her, the gesture brought a sudden shock of pleasure. The impatient, exuberant youthfulness of it! And the little head, so beautifully shaped, so gracefully and proudly poised on its long neck! And her hair was drawn back smoothly from the face to explode in a thick tangle of curls on the nape of the neck. Ravishing!

"All ears," she repeated, delightedly conscious of the admiration she was receiving.

"All ears." And almost meditatively. "But do you know," he went on, "I've never even seen your ears. May I?" And without waiting for her permission, he lifted up the soft, goldy-brown hair that lay in a curve, drooping, along the side of her head.

Pamela's face violently reddened; but she managed none the less to laugh. "Are they as long and furry as you expected?" she asked.

He allowed the lifted hair to fall back into its place and, without answering her question, "I've always," he said, looking at her with a smile which she found disquietingly enigmatic and remote, "I've always had a certain fellow-feeling for those savages who collect ears and thread them on strings, as necklaces."

"But what a horror!" she cried out.

"You think so?" He raised his eyebrows.

But perhaps, Pamela was thinking, he was a sadist. In that book of Krafft-Ebbing's there had been a lot about sadists. It would be queer, if he were . . .

"But what's certain," Fanning went on in an-

other, business-like voice, "what's only too certain is that ears aren't culture. They've got too much to do with us. With me, at any rate. Much too much." He smiled at her again. Pamela smiled back at him, fascinated and obscurely a little frightened; but the fright was an element in the fascination. She dropped her eyes. "So don't let's waste any more time," his voice went on. "Culture to right of us, culture to left of us. Let's begin with this culture on the left. With the vases. They really have absolutely nothing to do with us."

He began and Pamela listened. Not very attentively, however. She lifted her hand and, under the hair, touched her ear. "A fellow-feeling for those savages." She remembered his words with a little shudder. He'd almost meant them. And "ears aren't culture. Too much to do with us. With me. Much too much." He'd meant that too, genuinely and wholeheartedly. And his smile had been a confirmation of the words; yes, and a comment, full of mysterious significance. What *had* he meant? But surely it was obvious what he had meant. Or wasn't it obvious?

The face she turned towards him wore an expression of grave attention. And when he pointed to a vase and said, "Look," she looked, with what an air of concentrated intelligence! But as for knowing what he was talking about! She went on confusedly thinking that he had a fellow-feeling for those savages, and that her ears had too much to do with him, much too much, and that perhaps he was in

love with her, perhaps also that he was like those people in Krafft-Ebbing, perhaps . . . ; and it seemed to her that her blood must have turned into a kind of hot, red soda-water, all fizzy with little bubbles of fear and excitement.

She emerged, partially at least, out of this bubbly and agitated trance to hear him say, "Look at that, now." A tall statue towered over her. "The Apollo of Veii," he explained. "And really, you know, it *is* the most beautiful statue in the world. Each time I see it, I'm more firmly convinced of that."

Dutifully, Pamela stared. The God stood there on his pedestal, one foot advanced, erect in his draperies. He had lost his arms, but the head was intact and the strange Etruscan face was smiling, enigmatically smiling. Rather like *him*, it suddenly occurred to her.

"What's it made of?" she asked; for it was time to be intelligent.

"Terracotta. Originally coloured."

"And what date?"

"Late sixth century."

"B.C.?" she queried, a little dubiously, and was relieved when he nodded. It really would have been rather awful if it had been A.D. "Who by?"

"By Vulca, they say. But as that's the only Etruscan sculptor they know the name of . . ." He shrugged his shoulders, and the gesture expressed a double doubt—doubt whether the archæologists were right and doubt whether it was really much

good talking about Etruscan art to some one who didn't feel quite certain whether the Apollo of Veii was made in the sixth century before or after Christ.

There was a long silence. Fanning looked at the statue. So did Pamela, who also, from time to time, looked at Fanning. She was on the point, more than once, of saying something; but his face was so meditatively glum that, on each occasion, she changed her mind. In the end, however, the silence became intolerable.

"I think it's extraordinarily fine," she announced in the rather religious voice that seemed appropriate. He only nodded. The silence prolonged itself, more oppressive and embarrassing than ever. She made another and despairing effort. "Do you know, I think he's really rather like you. I mean, the way he smiles. . . ."

Fanning's petrified immobility broke once more into life. He turned towards her, laughing. "You're irresistible, Pamela."

"Am I?" Her tone was cold; she was offended. To be told you were irresistible always meant that you'd behaved like an imbecile child. But her conscience was clear; it was a gratuitous insult—the more intolerable since it had been offered by the man who, a moment before, had been saying that he had a fellow-feeling for those savages and that her ears had altogether *too* much to do with him.

Fanning noticed her sudden change of humour and obscurely divined the cause. "You've paid me the

most irresistible compliment you could have invented," he said, doing his best to undo the effect of his words. For after all what did it matter, with little breasts like that and thin brown arms, if she did mix up the millenniums a bit? "You could hardly have pleased me more if you'd said I was another Rudolph Valentino."

Pamela had to laugh.

"But seriously," he said, "if you knew what this lovely God means to me, how much . . ."

Mollified by being once more spoken to seriously, "I think I can understand," she said in her most understanding voice.

"No, I doubt if you can." He shook his head. "It's a question of age, of the experience of a particular time that's not your time. I shall never forget when I came back to Rome for the first time after the War and found this marvellous creature standing here. They only dug him up in 'sixteen, you see. So there it was, a brand new experience, a new and apocalyptic voice out of the past. Some day I shall try to get it on to paper, all that this God has taught me." He gave a little sigh; she could see that he wasn't thinking about her any more; he was talking for himself. "Some day," he repeated. "But it's not ripe yet. You can't write a thing before it's ripe, before it wants to be written. But you can talk about it, you can take your mind for walks all round it and through it." He paused and, stretching out a hand, touched a fold of the God's sculptured garment, as

though he were trying to establish a more intimate, more real connection with the beauty before him. "Not that what he taught me was fundamentally new," he went on slowly. "It's all in Homer, of course. It's even partially expressed in the archaic Greek sculpture. Partially. But Apollo here expresses it wholly. He's *all* Homer, *all* the ancient world, concentrated in a single lump of terracotta. That's his novelty. And then the circumstances gave him a special point. It was just after the War that I first saw him—just after the apotheosis and the logical conclusion of all the things Apollo *didn't* stand for. You can imagine how marvellously new he seemed by contrast. After that horrible enormity, he was a lovely symbol of the small, the local, the kindly. After all that extravagance of beastliness—yes, and all that extravagance of heroism and self-sacrifice—he seemed so beautifully sane. A God who doesn't admit the separate existence of either heroics or diabolics, but somehow includes them in his own nature and turns them into something else—like two gases combining to make a liquid. Look at him," Fanning insisted. "Look at his face, look at his body, see how he stands. It's obvious. He's neither the God of heroics, nor the God of diabolics. And yet it's equally obvious that he knows all about both, that he includes them, that he combines them into a third essence. It's the same with Homer. There's no tragedy in Homer. He's pessimistic, yes; but never tragic. His heroes aren't heroic in our sense of the

word; they're men." (Pamela took a very deep breath; if she had opened her mouth, it would have been a yawn.) "In fact, you can say there aren't any heroes in Homer. Nor devils, nor sins. And none of our aspiring spiritualities and, of course, none of our horrible, nauseating disgusts—because they're the complement of being spiritual, they're the tails to its heads. You couldn't have had Homer writing 'the expensive spirit in a waste of shame.' Though, of course, with Shakespeare it may have been physiological; the passion violent and brief, and then the most terrible reaction. It's the sort of thing that colours a whole life, a whole work. Only of course one's never allowed to say so. All that one isn't allowed to say!" He laughed. Pamela also laughed. "But physiology or no physiology," Fanning went on, "he couldn't have written like that if he'd lived before the great split—the great split that broke life into spirit and matter, heroics and diabolics, virtue and sin and all the other accursed antitheses. Homer lived before the split; life hadn't been broken when he wrote. They're complete, his men and women, complete and real; for he leaves nothing out, he shirks no issue, even though there is no tragedy. He knows all about it—all." He laid his hand again on the statue. "And this God's his portrait. He's Homer, but with the Etruscan smile. Homer smiling at the sad, mysterious, beautiful absurdity of the world. The Greeks didn't see that divine absurdity as clearly as the Etruscans. Not even in Homer's

day; and by the time you get to any sculptor who was anything like as accomplished as the man who made this, you'll find that they've lost it altogether. True, the earliest Greek Gods used to smile all right—or rather grin; for subtlety wasn't their strong point. But by the end of the sixth century they were already becoming a bit too heroic; they were developing those athlete's muscles and those tiresomely noble poses and damned superior faces. But our God here refused to be a prize-fighter or an actor-manager. There's no *terribiltà* about him, no priggishness, no sentimentality. And yet without being in the least pretentious, he's beautiful, he's grand, he's authentically divine. The Greeks took the road that led to Michelangelo and Bernini and Thorwaldsen and Rodin. A rake's progress. These Etruscans were on a better track. If only people had had the sense to follow it! Or at least get back to it. But nobody has, except perhaps old Maillol. They've all allowed themselves to be lured away. Plato was the arch-seducer. It was he who first sent us whoring after spirituality and heroics, whoring after the complementary demons of disgust and sin. We needs must love—well, not the highest, except sometimes by accident—but always the most extravagant and exciting. Tragedy was much more exciting than Homer's luminous pessimism, than this God's smiling awareness of the divine absurdity. Being alternately a hero and a sinner is much more sensational than being an integrated man. So as men seem to have

the Yellow Press in the blood, like syphilis, they went back on Homer and Apollo; they followed Plato and Euripides. And Plato and Euripides handed them over to the Stoics and the Neo-Platonists. And these in turn handed humanity over to the Christians. And the Christians have handed us over to Henry Ford and the machines. So here we are."

Pamela nodded intelligently. But what she was chiefly conscious of was the ache in her feet. If only she could sit down!

But, "How poetical and appropriate," Fanning began again, "that the God should have risen from the grave exactly when he did, in 1916! Rising up in the midst of the insanity, like a beautiful, smiling reproach from another world. It was dramatic. At least I felt it so, when I saw him for the first time just after the War. The resurrection of Apollo, the Etruscan Apollo. I've been his worshipper and self-appointed priest ever since. Or at any rate I've tried to be. But it's difficult." He shook his head. "Perhaps it's even impossible for us to recapture . . ." He left the sentence unfinished and, taking her arm, led her out into the great courtyard of the Villa. Under the arcades was a bench. Thank goodness, said Pamela inwardly. They sat down.

"You see," he went on, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, his hands clasped, "you can't get away from the things that the God protests against. Because they've become a part of you. Tradition and education have driven them into your very

bones. It's a case of what I was speaking about just now—of the things that have nothing to do with you coming by force of habit to have everything to do with you. Which is why I'd like you to get Apollo and his Etruscans into your system while you're still young. It may save you trouble. Or on the other hand," he added with a rueful little laugh, "it may not. Because I really don't know if he's everybody's God. He may do for me—and do, only because I've got Plato and Jesus in my bones. But does he do for you? *Chi lo sa?* The older one grows, the more often one asks that question. Until, of course, one's arteries begin to harden, and then one's opinions begin to harden too, harden till they fossilize into certainty. But meanwhile, *chi lo sa? chi lo sa?* And after all it's quite agreeable, not knowing. And knowing, and at the same time knowing that it's no practical use knowing—that's not disagreeable either. Knowing, for example, that it would be good to live according to this God's commandments, but knowing at the same time that one couldn't do it even if one tried, because one's very guts and skeleton are already pledged to other Gods."

"I should have thought that was awful," said Pamela.

"For you, perhaps. But I happen to have a certain natural affection for the accomplished fact. I like and respect it, even when it is a bit depressing. Thus, it's a fact that I'd like to think and live in the unsplit, Apollonian way. But it's also a fact—

and the fact as such is lovable—that I can't help indulging in aspirations and disgusts; I can't help thinking in terms of heroics and diabolics. Because the division, the splitness, has been worked right into my bones. So has the microbe of sensationalism; I can't help wallowing in the excitements of mysticism and the tragic sense. Can't help it." He shook his head. "Though perhaps I've wallowed in them rather more than I was justified in wallowing—justified by my upbringing, I mean. There was a time when I was really quite perversely preoccupied with mystical experiences and ecstasies and private universes."

"Private universes?" she questioned.

"Yes, private, not shared. You create one, you live in it, each time you're in love, for example." (Brightly serious, Pamela nodded her understanding and agreement; yes, yes, she knew all about *that*.) "Each time you're spiritually exalted," he went on, "each time you're drunk, even. Everybody has his own favourite short cuts to the other world. Mine, in those days, was opium."

"Opium?" She opened her eyes very wide. "Do you mean to say you smoked opium?" She was thrilled. Opium was a vice of the first order.

"It's as good a way of becoming supernatural," he answered, "as looking at one's nose or one's navel, or not eating, or repeating a word over and over again, till it loses its sense and you forget how to think. All roads lead to Rome. The only bother about opium is that it's rather an unwholesome road.

I had to go to a nursing home in Cannes to get disintoxicated.”

“All the same,” said Pamela, doing her best to imitate the quiet casualness of his manner, “it must be rather delicious, isn’t it? Awfully exciting, I mean,” she added, forgetting not to be thrilled.

“*Too* exciting.” He shook his head. “That’s the trouble. We needs must love the excitingest when we see it. The supernatural *is* exciting. But I don’t want to love the supernatural, I want to love the natural. Not that a little supernaturalness isn’t, of course, perfectly natural and necessary. But you can overdo it. I overdid it then. I was all the time in ’tother world, never here. I stopped smoking because I was ill. But even if I hadn’t been, I’d have stopped sooner or later for aesthetic reasons. The supernatural world is so terribly baroque—altogether too Counter-Reformation and Bernini. At its best it can be Greco. But you can have too much even of Greco. A big dose of him makes you begin to pine for Vulca and his Apollo.”

“But doesn’t it work the other way too?” she asked. “I mean, don’t you sometimes *long* to start smoking again?” She was secretly hoping that he’d let her try a pipe or two.

Fanning shook his head. “One doesn’t get tired of very good bread,” he answered. “Apollo’s like that. I don’t pine for supernatural excitements. Which doesn’t mean,” he added, “that I don’t in practice run after them. You can’t disintoxicate yourself of

your culture. That sticks deeper than a mere taste for opium. I'd like to be able to think and live in the spirit of the God. But the fact remains that I can't."

"Can't you?" said Pamela with a polite sympathy. She was more interested in the opium.

"No, no, you can't entirely disintoxicate yourself of mysticism and the tragic sense. You can't take a Turvey treatment for spirituality and disgust. You can't. Not nowadays. Acceptance is impossible in a split world like ours. You've got to recoil. In the circumstances it's right and proper. But absolutely it's wrong. If only one could accept as this God accepts, smiling like that . . ."

"But you *do* smile like that," she insisted.

He laughed and, unclasping his hands, straightened himself up in his seat. "But unhappily," he said, "a man can smile and smile and not be Apollo. Meanwhile, what's becoming of your education? Shouldn't we . . .?"

"Well, if you like," she assented dubiously. "Only my feet are rather tired. I mean, there's something about sight-seeing. . . ."

"There is indeed," said Fanning. "But I was prepared to be a martyr to culture. Still, I'm thankful you're not." He smiled at her, and Pamela was pleased to find herself once more at the focus of his attention. It had been very interesting to hear him talk about his philosophy and all that. But all the same . . .

"Twenty to four," said Fanning, looking at his

watch. "I've an idea; shouldn't we drive out to Monte Cavo and spend the evening up there in the cool? There's a view. And a really very eatable dinner."

"I'd love to. But . . ." Pamela hesitated. "Well, you see I did tell Guy I'd go out with him this evening."

He was annoyed. "Well, if you prefer . . ."

"But I don't prefer," she answered hastily. "I mean, I'd much rather go with you. Only I wondered how I'd let Guy know I wasn't. . . ."

"Don't let him know," Fanning answered, abusing his victory. "After all, what are young men there for, except to wait when young women don't keep their appointments? It's their function in life."

Pamela laughed. His words had given her a pleasing sense of importance and power. "Poor Guy!" she said through her laughter, and her eyes were insolently bright.

"You little hypocrite!"

"I'm not," she protested. "I really *am* sorry for him."

"A little hypocrite *and* a little devil," was his verdict. He rose to his feet. "If you could see your own eyes now! But *andiamo*." He held out his hand to help her up. "I'm beginning to be rather afraid of you."

"What nonsense!" She was delighted. They walked together towards the door.

Fanning made the driver go out by the Appian

Way. "For the sake of your education," he explained, pointing at the ruined tombs, "which we can continue, thank heaven, in comfort, and at twenty miles an hour."

Leaning back luxuriously in her corner, Pamela laughed. "But I must say," she had to admit, "it is really rather lovely."

From Albano the road mounted through the chestnut woods towards Rocca di Papa. A few miles brought them to a turning on the right; the car came to a halt.

"It's barred," said Pamela, looking out of the window. Fanning had taken out his pocket-book and was hunting among the bank-notes and the old letters. "The road's private," he explained. "They ask for your card—heaven knows why. The only trouble being, of course, that I've never possessed such a thing as a visiting-card in my life. Still, I generally have one or two belonging to other people. Ah, here we are! Good!" he produced two pieces of paste-board. A gatekeeper had appeared and was waiting by the door of the car. "Shall we say we're Count Keyserling?" said Fanning, handing her the count's card. "Or alternatively," he read from the other, "that we're Herbert Watson, Funeral Furnisher, Funerals conducted with Efficiency and Reverence, Motor Hearses for use in every part of the Country." He shook his head. "The last relic of my poor old friend Tom Hatchard. Died last year. I had to bury him. Poor Tom! On the whole I think we'd bet-

ter be Herbert Watson. *Ecco!*" He handed out the card; the man saluted and went to open the gate. "But give me back Count Keyserling." Fanning stretched out his hand. "He'll come in useful another time."

The car started and went roaring up the zig-zag ascent. Lying back in her corner, Pamela laughed and laughed, inextinguishably.

"But what *is* the joke?" he asked.

She didn't know herself. Mr. Watson and the Count had only been a pretext; this enormous laughter, which they had released, sprang from some other, deeper source. And perhaps it was a mere accident that it should be laughter at all. Another pretext, a different finger on the trigger, and it might have been tears, or anger, or singing "Constantinople" at the top of her voice—anything.

She was limp when they reached the top. Fanning made her sit down where she could see the view and himself went off to order cold drinks at the bar of the little inn that had once been the monastery of Monte Cavo.

Pamela sat where he had left her. The wooded slopes fell steeply away beneath her, down, down to the blue shining of the Alban Lake; and that toy palace perched on the hill beyond was the Pope's, that tiny city in a picture-book, Marino. Beyond a dark ridge on the left the round eye of Nemi looked up from its crater. Far off, behind Albano an expanse of blue steel, burnished beneath the sun, was the

Tyrrhenian, and flat like the sea, but golden with ripening corn and powdered goldenly with a haze of dust, the Campagna stretched away from the feet of the subsiding hills, away and up towards a fading horizon, on which the blue ghosts of mountains floated on a level with her eyes. In the midst of the expanse a half-seen golden chaos was Rome. Through the haze the dome of St. Peter's shone faintly in the sun with a glitter as of muted glass. There was an enormous silence, sad, sad but somehow consoling. A sacred silence. And yet when, coming up from behind her, Fanning broke it, his voice, for Pamela, committed no iconoclasms for it seemed, in the world of her feelings, to belong to the silence, it was made, as it were, of the same intimate and friendly substance. He squatted down on his heels beside her, laying a hand on her shoulder to steady himself.

"What a panorama of space and time!" he said. "So many miles, such an expanse of centuries! You can still walk on the paved road that led to the temple here. The generals used to march up sometimes in triumph. With elephants."

The silence enveloped them again, bringing them together; and they were alone and as though conspiratorially isolated in an atmosphere of solemn amorousness.

"*I signori son serviti,*" said a slightly ironic voice behind them.

"That's our drinks," said Fanning. "Perhaps

we'd better . . .” He got up and, as he unbent them, his knees cracked stiffly. He stooped to rub them, for they ached; his joints were old. “Fool!” he said to himself, and decided that to-morrow he'd go to Venice. She was too young, too dangerously and perversely fresh.

They drank their lemonade in silence. Pamela's face wore an expression of grave serenity which it touched and flattered and moved him to see. Still, he was a fool to be touched and flattered and moved.

“Let's go for a bit of a stroll,” he said, when they had slaked their thirst. She got up without a word, obediently, as though she had become his slave.

It was breathless under the trees and there was a smell of damp, hot greenness, a hum and flicker of insects in the probing slants of sunlight. But in the open spaces the air of the heights was quick and nimble, in spite of the sun; the broom-flower blazed among the rocks; and round the bushes where the honeysuckle had clambered, there hung invisible islands of perfume, cool and fresh in the midst of the hot sea of bracken smell. Pamela moved here and there with little exclamations of delight, pulling at the tough sprays of honeysuckle. “Oh, look!” she called to him in her rapturous voice. “Come and look!”

“I'm looking,” he shouted back across the intervening space. “With a telescope. With the eye of faith,” he corrected; for she had moved out of sight. He sat down on a smooth rock and lighted a cigarette. Venice,

he reflected, would be rather boring at this particular season. In a few minutes Pamela came back to him, flushed, with a great bunch of honeysuckle between her hands.

"You know, you ought to have come," she said reproachfully. "There were such *lovely* pieces I couldn't reach."

Fanning shook his head. "He also serves who only sits and smokes," he said and made room for her on the stone beside him. "And what's more," he went on, "let Austin have his swink to him reserved.' Yes, let him. How wholeheartedly I've always agreed with Chaucer's Monk! Besides, you seem to forget, my child, that I'm an old, old gentleman." He was playing the safe, the prudent part. Perhaps if he played it hard enough, it wouldn't be necessary to go to Venice.

Pamela paid no attention to what he was saying. "Would you like this one for your buttonhole, Miles?" she asked, holding up a many-trumpeted flower. It was the first time she had called him by his christian name and the accomplishment of this much-meditated act of daring made her blush. "I'll stick it in," she added, leaning forward, so that he shouldn't see her reddened cheeks, till her face was almost touching his coat.

Near and thus offered (for it was an offer, he had no doubt of that, a deliberate offer) why shouldn't he take this lovely, this terribly and desperately tempting freshness? It was a matter of stretching out one's hands. But no; it would be too insane. She was

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near, this warm young flesh, this scent of her hair, near and offered—with what an innocent perversity, what a touchingly ingenuous and uncomprehending shamelessness! But he sat woodenly still, feeling all of a sudden as he had felt when, a lanky boy, he had been too shy, too utterly terrified, in spite of his longings, to kiss that Jenny—what on earth was her name?—that Jenny Something-or-Other he had danced the polka with at Uncle Fred's one Christmas, how many centuries ago!—and yet only yesterday, only this instant.

“There!” said Pamela and drew back. Her cheeks had had time to cool a little.

“Thank you.” There was a silence.

“Do you know,” she said at last, efficiently, “you’ve got a button loose on your coat.”

He fingered the hanging button. “What a damning proof of celibacy!”

“If only I had a needle and thread. . . .”

“Don’t make your offer too lightly. If you knew what a quantity of unmended stuff I’ve got at home. . . .”

“I’ll come and do it all to-morrow,” she promised, feeling delightfully protective and important.

“Beware,” he said. “I’ll take you at your word. It’s sweated labour.”

“I don’t mind. I’ll come.”

“Punctually at ten-thirty, then.” He had forgotten about Venice. “I shall be a ruthless taskmaster.”

Nemi was already in shadow when they walked

back; but the higher slopes were transfigured with the setting sunlight. Pamela halted at a twist of the path and turned back towards the Western sky. Looking up, Fanning saw her standing there, goldenly flushed, the colours of her skin, her hair, her dress, the flowers in her hands, supernaturally heightened and intensified in the almost level light.

"I think this is the most lovely place I've ever seen." Her voice was solemn with a natural piety. "But you're not looking," she added in a different tone, reproachfully.

"I'm looking at you," he answered. After all, if he stopped in time, it didn't matter his behaving like a fool—it didn't finally matter and, meanwhile, was very agreeable.

An expression of impertinent mischief chased away the solemnity from her face. "Trying to see my ears again?" she asked; and, breaking off a honeysuckle blossom, she threw it down in his face, then turned and ran up the steep path.

"Don't imagine I'm going to pursue," he called after her. "The Pan and Syrinx business is a winter pastime. Like football."

Her laughter came down to him from among the trees; he followed the retreating sound. Pamela waited for him at the top of the hill and they walked back together towards the inn.

"Aren't there any ruins here?" she asked. "I mean, for my education."

He shook his head. "The Young Pretender's

brother pulled them all down and built a monastery with them. For the Passionist Fathers," he added after a little pause. "I feel rather like a Passionist Father myself at the moment." They walked on without speaking, enveloped by the huge, the amorously significant silence.

But a few minutes later, at the dinner table, they were exuberantly gay. The food was well cooked, the wine, an admirable Falernian. Fanning began to talk about his early loves. Vaguely at first, but later, under Pamela's questioning, with an ever-increasing wealth of specific detail. They were indiscreet, impudent questions, which at ordinary times she couldn't have uttered, or at least have only despairingly forced out, with a suicide's determination. But she was a little tipsy now, tipsy with the wine and her own laughing exultation; she rapped them out easily, without a tremor. "As though you were the immortal Sigmund himself," he assured her, laughing. Her impudence and that knowledgeable, scientific ingenuousness amused him, rather perversely; he told her everything she asked.

When she had finished with his early loves, she questioned him about the opium. Fanning described his private universes and that charming nurse who had looked after him while he was being disintoxicated. He went on to talk about the black poverty he'd been reduced to by the drug. "Because you can't do journalism or write novels in the other world," he explained. "At least I never could." And he told her

of the debts he still owed and of his present arrangements with his publishers.

Almost suddenly the night was cold and Fanning became aware that the bottle had been empty for a long time. He threw away the stump of his cigar. "Let's go." They took their seats and the car set off, carrying with it the narrow world of form and colour created by its head-lamps. They were alone in the darkness of their padded box. An hour before Fanning had decided that he would take this opportunity to kiss her. But he was haunted suddenly by the memory of an Australian who had once complained to him of the sufferings of a young colonial in England. "In Sydney," he had said, "when I get into a taxi with a nice girl, I know exactly what to do. And I know exactly what to do when I'm in an American taxi. But when I apply my knowledge in London—God, isn't there a row!" How vulgar and stupid it all was! Not merely a fool, but a vulgar, stupid fool. He sat unmoving in his corner. When the lights of Rome were round them, he took her hand and kissed it.

"Good-night."

She thanked him. "I've had the loveliest day." But her eyes were puzzled and unhappy. Meeting them, Fanning suddenly regretted his self-restraint, wished that he had been stupid and vulgar. And after all would it have been so stupid and vulgar? You could make any action seem anything you liked, from saintly to disgusting, by describing it in the appropriate words. But his regrets had come too late. Here

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was her hotel. He drove home to his solitude feeling exceedingly depressed.

VI

June 14th. Spent the morning with M., who lives in a house belonging to a friend of his who is a Catholic and lives in Rome, M. says, because he likes to get his popery straight from the horse's mouth. A nice house, old, standing just back from the Forum, which I said I thought was like a rubbish heap and he agreed with me, in spite of my education, and said he always preferred live dogs to dead lions and thinks it's awful the way the Fascists are pulling down nice ordinary houses and making holes to find more of these beastly pillars and things. I sewed on a lot of buttons, etc., as he's living in only two rooms on the ground floor and the servants are on their holiday, so he eats out and an old woman comes to clean up in the afternoons, but doesn't do any mending, which meant a lot for me, but I liked doing it, in spite of the darning, because he sat with me all the time, sometimes talking, sometimes just working. When he's writing or sitting with his pen in his hand thinking, his face is quite still and *terribly* serious and far, far away, as though he were a picture, or more like some sort of not human person, a sort of angel, if one can imagine them without nightdresses and long hair, really rather frightening, so that one longed to shout or throw a reel of cotton at him so as to change him back again into a man. He has very beautiful hands, rather long and bony, but strong. Sometimes, after he'd sat thinking for a

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long time, he'd get up and walk about the room, frowning and looking kind of angry, which was still more terrifying—sitting there while he walked up and down quite close to me, as though he were absolutely alone. But one time he suddenly stopped his walking up and down and said how profusely he apologized for his toes, because I was darning, and it was really very wonderful to see him suddenly changed back from that picture-angel sort of creature into a human being. Then he sat down by me and said he'd been spending the morning wrestling with the problem of speaking the truth in books; so I said, but haven't you always spoken it? because that always seemed to me the chief point of M.'s books. But he said, not much, because most of it was quite unspeakable in our world, as we found it too shocking and humiliating. So I said, all the same I didn't see why it shouldn't be spoken, and he said, nor did he in theory, but in practice he didn't want to be lynched. And he said, look for example at those advertisements in American magazines with the photos and life stories of people with unpleasant breath. So I said, yes, aren't they simply *too* awful. Because they really do make one shudder. And he said, precisely, there you are, and they're so successful because every one thinks them so perfectly awful. They're outraged by them, he said, just as you're outraged and they rush off and buy the stuff in sheer terror, because they're so terrified of being an outrage physically to other people. And he said, that's only one small sample of all the

class of truths, pleasant and unpleasant, that you can't speak, except in scientific books, but that doesn't count, because you deliberately leave your feelings outside in the cloak-room when you're being scientific. And just because they're unspeakable, we pretend they're unimportant, but they aren't, on the contrary, they're terribly important and he said, you've only got to examine your memory quite sincerely for five minutes to realize it, and of course he's quite right. When I think of Miss Poole giving me piano lessons—but no, really, one *can't* write these things, and yet one obviously ought to, because they *are* so important, the humiliating physical facts, both pleasant and unpleasant (though I must say, most of the ones I can think of seem to be unpleasant), so important in all human relationships, he says, even in love, which is really rather awful, but of course one must admit it. And M. said it would take a whole generation of being shocked and humiliated and lynching the shockers and humiliators before people could settle down to listening to that sort of truth calmly, which they did do, he says, at certain times in the past, at any rate much more so than now. And he says that when they can listen to it completely calmly, the world will be quite different from what it is now, so I asked, in what way? but he said he couldn't clearly imagine, only he knew it would be different. After that he went back to his table and wrote very quickly for about half an hour without stopping, and I longed to ask him if he'd been writing the truth and if so,

what about, but I didn't have the nerve, which was stupid.

We lunched at our usual place, which I really don't much like, as who wants to look at fat business-men and farmers from the country simply *drinking* spaghetti? even if the spaghetti *is* good, but M. prefers it to the big places, because he says that in Rome one must do as the Romans do, not as the Americans. Still, I must say I do like looking at people who dress well and have good manners and nice jewels and things, which I told him, so he said all right, we'd go to Valadier to-morrow to see how the rich ate macaroni, which made me wretched, as it looked as though I'd been cadging, and of course that's the last thing in the world I meant to do, to make him waste a lot of money on me, particularly after what he told me yesterday about his debts and what he made on the average, which still seems to me shockingly little, considering who he is, so I said no, wouldn't he lunch with *me* at Valadier's and he laughed and said it was the first time he'd heard of a gigolo of fifty being taken out by a woman of twenty. That rather upset me—the way it seemed to bring what we are to each other on to the wrong level, making it all a sort of joke and sniggery, like something in *Punch*. Which is hateful, I can't bear it. And I have the feeling that he does it on purpose, as a kind of protection, because he doesn't want to care too much, and that's why he's always saying he's so old, which is all nonsense, because you're only as old as you feel, and sometimes I even

feel older than he does, like when he gets so amused and interested with little boys in the street playing that game of sticking out your fingers and calling a number, or when he talks about that awful old Dickens. Which I told him, but he only laughed and said age is a circle and you grow into a lot of the things you grew out of, because the whole world is a fried whiting with its tail in its mouth, which only confirms what I said about his saying he was old being all nonsense. Which I told him and he said, quite right, he only *said* he felt old when he *wished* that he felt old. Which made me see still more clearly that it was just a defence. A defence of *me*, I suppose, and all that sort of nonsense. What I'd have liked to say, only I didn't, was that I don't want to be defended, particularly if being defended means his defending himself against me and making stupid jokes about gigolos and old gentlemen. Because I think he really does rather care underneath—from the way he looks at me sometimes—and he'd like to say so and act so, but he won't on principle, which is really against all *his* principles and some time I *shall* tell him so. I insisted he should lunch with me and in the end he said he would, and then he was suddenly very silent and, I thought, glum and unhappy, and after coffee he said he'd have to go home and write all the rest of the day. So I came back to the hotel and had a rest and wrote this and now it's nearly seven and I feel terribly sad, almost like crying. *Next day*. Rang up Guy and had less difficulty than I expected getting him to forgive

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me for yesterday, in fact he almost apologized himself. Danced till 2.15.

June 15th. M. still sad and didn't kiss me when we met, *on purpose*, which made me angry, it's so humiliating to be defended. He was wearing an open shirt, like Byron, which suited him; but I told him, you look like the devil when you're sad (which is true, because his face ought to move, not be still) and he said that was what came of feeling and behaving like an angel; so of course I asked why he didn't behave like a devil, because in that case he'd look like an angel, and I preferred his looks to his morals, and then I blushed, like an idiot. But really it is too stupid that women aren't supposed to say what they think. Why can't we say, I like you, or whatever it is, without being thought a kind of monster, if we say it first, and even thinking ourselves monsters? Because one ought to say what one thinks and do what one likes, or else one becomes like Aunt Edith, hippo-ish and dead inside. Which is after all what M.'s constantly saying in his books, so he oughtn't to humiliate me with his beastly defendings. Lunch at Valadier's was really rather a bore. Afterwards we went and sat in a church, because it was so hot, a huge affair full of pink marble and frescoes and marble babies and gold. M. says that the modern equivalent is Lyons' Corner House and that the Jesuits were so successful because they gave the poor a chance of feeling what it was like to live in a palace, or something better than a palace, because he says the chief difference between a Corner House and

the State rooms at Buckingham Palace is that the Corner House is so much more sumptuous, almost as sumptuous as these Jesuit churches. I asked him if he believed in God and he said he believed in a great many gods, it depended on what he was doing, or being, or feeling at the moment. He said he believed in Apollo when he was working and in Bacchus when he was drinking, and in Buddha when he felt depressed, and in Venus when he was making love, and in the Devil when he was afraid or angry, and in the Categorical Imperative, when he had to do his duty. I asked him which he believed in now and he said he didn't quite know, but he thought it was the Categorical Imperative, which really made me furious, so I answered that I only believed in the Devil and Venus, which made him laugh and he said I looked as though I were going to jump off the Eiffel Tower, and I was just going to say what I thought of his hippo-ishness. I mean I'd really made up my mind, when a most horrible old verger rushed up and said we must leave the church, because it seems the Pope doesn't allow you to be in a church with bare arms, which is really *too* indecent. But M. said that after all it wasn't surprising, because every god has to protect himself against hostile gods and the gods of bare skin *are* hostile to the gods of souls and clothes, and he made me stop in front of a shop window where there were some mirrors and said, you can see for yourself, and I must say I really did look very nice in that pale green linen which goes so awfully well with the skin, when one's a bit sunburnt. But he

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said, it's not merely a question of seeing, you must touch too, so I stroked my arms and said yes, they were nice and smooth, and he said, precisely, and then he stroked my arm very lightly, like a moth crawling, agonizingly creepy but delicious, once or twice, looking very serious and attentive, as though he were tuning a piano, which made me laugh, and I said I supposed he was experimenting to see if the Pope was in the right, and then he gave me the most horrible pinch and said, yes, the Pope was quite right and I ought to be muffled in Jaeger from top to toe. But I was so angry with the pain, because he pinched me really terribly, that I just rushed off without saying anything and jumped into a cab that was passing and drove straight to the hotel. But I was so wretched by the time I got there that I started crying in the lift and the lift man said he hoped I hadn't had any *dispiacere di famiglia*, which made me laugh and that made the crying much worse, and then I suddenly thought of Clare and felt such a horrible beast, so I lay on my bed and simply howled for about an hour, and then I got up and wrote a letter and sent one of the hotel boys with it to M.'s address, saying I was so sorry and would he come at once. But he didn't come, not for hours and hours, and it was simply too awful, because I thought he was offended, or despising, because I'd been such a fool, and I wondered whether he really did like me at all and whether this defending theory wasn't just my imagination. But at last, when I'd quite given him up and was so miserable I didn't

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know what I should do, he suddenly appeared—because he'd only that moment gone back to the house and found my note—and was too wonderfully sweet to me, and said he was so sorry, but he'd been on edge (though he didn't say why, but I know now that the defending theory wasn't just imagination) and I said I was so sorry and I cried, but I was happy, and then we laughed because it had all been so stupid and then M. quoted a bit of Homer which meant that after they'd eaten and drunk they wept for their friends and after they'd wept a little they went to sleep, so we went out and had dinner and after dinner we went and danced, and he dances really very well, but we stopped before midnight, because he said the noise of the jazz would drive him crazy. He was perfectly sweet, but though he didn't say anything sniggery, I could feel he was on the defensive all the time, sweetly and friendlily on the defensive, and when he said good-night he only kissed my hand.

June 18th. Stayed in bed till lunch re-reading *The Return of Eurydice*. I understand Joan so well now, better and better, she's so like me in all she feels and thinks. M. went to Tivoli for the day to see some Italian friends who have a house there. What is he like with other people, I wonder? Got two tickets for the fireworks to-morrow night, the hotel porter says they'll be good, because it's the first Girandola since the War. Went to the Villa Borghese in the afternoon for my education, to give M. a surprise when he comes

back, and I must say some of the pictures and statues were very lovely, but the most awful looking fat man would follow me round all the time and finally the old beast even had the impertinence to speak to me, so I just said, *Lei è un porco*, which I must say was very effective. But it's extraordinary how things do just depend on looks and being sympathique, because if he hadn't looked such a pig, I shouldn't have thought him so piggish, which shows again what rot hippo-ism is. Went to bed early and finished *Eurydice*. This is the fifth time I've read it.

VII

"Oh, it was marvellous before the War, the Girandola. Really marvellous."

"But then what wasn't *marvellous* before the War?" said Pamela sarcastically. These references to a Golden Age in which she had had no part always annoyed her.

Fanning laughed. "Another one in the eye for the aged gentleman!"

There, he had slipped back again behind his defences! She did not answer for fear of giving him some excuse to dig himself in, impregnably. This hateful bantering with feelings! They walked on in silence. The night was breathlessly warm; the sounds of brassy music came to them faintly through the dim enormous noise of a crowd that thickened with every step they took towards the Piazza del Popolo. In the end they had to shove their way by main force.

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Sunk head over ears in this vast sea of animal contacts, animal smells and noise, Pamela was afraid. "Isn't it awful?" she said, looking up at him over her shoulder; and she shuddered. But at the same time she rather liked her fear, because it seemed in some way to break down the barriers that separated them, to bring him closer to her—close with a physical closeness of protective contact that was also, increasingly, a closeness of thought and feeling.

"You're all right," he reassured her through the tumult. He was standing behind her, encircling her with his arms. "I won't let you be squashed"; and as he spoke he fended off the menacing lurch of a large back. "*Ignorante!*" he shouted at it.

A terrific explosion interrupted the distant selections from *Rigoletto* and the sky was suddenly full of coloured light; the Girandola had begun. A wave of impatience ran through the advancing crowd; they were violently pushed and jostled. But, "It's all right," Fanning kept repeating, "it's all right." They were squeezed together in a staggering embrace. Pamela was terrified, but it was with a kind of swooning pleasure that she shut her eyes and abandoned herself limply in his arms.

"*Ma piano!*" shouted Fanning at the nearest jostlers. "*Piano!*" and "'Sblood!" he said in English, for he had the affectation of using literary oaths. "Hell and Death!" But in the tumult his words were as though unspoken. He was silent; and suddenly, in the midst of that heaving chaos of noise and rough

contacts, of movement and heat and smell, suddenly he became aware that his lips were almost touching her hair, and that under his right hand was the firm resilience of her breast. He hesitated for a moment on the threshold of his sensuality, then averted his face, shifted the position of his hand.

“At last!”

The haven to which their tickets admitted them was a little garden on the western side of the Piazza, opposite the Pincio and the source of the fireworks. The place was crowded, but not oppressively. Fanning was tall enough to overlook the interposed heads, and when Pamela had climbed on to a little parapet that separated one terrace of the garden from another, she too could see perfectly.

“But you’ll let me lean on you,” she said, laying a hand on his shoulder, “because there’s a fat woman next to me who’s steadily squeezing me off. I think she’s expanding with the heat.”

“And she almost certainly understands English. So for heaven’s sake . . .”

A fresh volley of explosions from the other side of the great square interrupted him and drowned the answering mockery of her laughter. “Ooh! Ooh!” the crowd was moaning in a kind of amorous agony. Magical flowers in a delirium of growth, the rockets mounted on their slender stalks and, ah! high up above the Pincian Hill, dazzlingly, deafeningly, in a bunch of stars and a thunder-clap, they blossomed.

“Isn’t it marvellous?” said Pamela looking down

at him with shining eyes. "Oh God!" she added, in another voice. "She's expanding again. Help!" And for a moment she was on the verge of falling. She leaned on him so heavily that he had to make an effort not to be pushed sideways. She managed to straighten herself up again into equilibrium.

"I've got you in case . . ." He put his arm round her knees to steady her.

"Shall I see if I can puncture the old beast with a pin?" And Fanning knew, by the tone of her voice, that she was genuinely prepared to make the experiment.

"If you do," he said, "I shall leave you to be lynched alone."

Pamela felt his arm tighten a little about her thighs. "Coward!" she mocked and pulled his hair.

"Martyrdom's not in my line," he laughed back. "Not even martyrdom for your sake." But her youth was a perversity, her freshness a kind of provocative vice. He had taken a step across that supernatural threshold. He had given—after all, why not?—a certain license to his desires. Amid their multitudinous uncoiling, his body seemed to be coming to a new and obscure life of its own. When the time came he would revoke the license, step back again into the daily world.

There was another bang, another, and the obelisk at the centre of the Piazza leapt out sharp and black against apocalypse after apocalypse of jewelled light. And through the now flushed, now pearly-brilliant,

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now emerald-shining smoke-clouds, a pine tree, a palm, a stretch of grass emerged, like strange unearthly visions of pine and palm and grass, from the darkness of the else invisible gardens.

There was an interval of mere lamplight—like sobriety, said Fanning, between two pipes of opium, like daily life after an ecstasy. And perhaps, he was thinking, the time to step back again had already come. "If only one could live without any lucid intervals," he concluded.

"I don't see why not." She spoke with a kind of provocative defiance, as though challenging him to contradict her. Her heart beat very fast, exultantly. "I mean, why shouldn't it be fireworks all the time?"

"Because it just isn't, that's all. Unhappily." It was time to step back again; but he didn't step back.

"Well, then it's a case of damn the intervals and enjoy . . . Oh!" She started. That prodigious bang had sent a large red moon sailing almost slowly into the sky. It burst into a shower of meteors that whistled as they fell, expiringly.

Fanning imitated their plaintive noise. "Sad, sad," he commented. "Even the fireworks can be sad."

She turned on him fiercely. "Only because you want them to be sad. Yes, you want them to be. Why do you want them to be sad?"

Yes, why? It was a pertinent question. She felt his arm tighten again round her knees and was triumphant. He was defending himself no more, he was listening to those oracles. But at the root of his deliberate

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recklessness, its contradiction and its cause, his sadness obscurely persisted. "But I *don't* want them to be sad," he protested.

Another garden of rockets began to blossom. Laughing, triumphant, Pamela laid her hand on his head.

"I feel so superior up here," she said.

"On a pedestal, what?" He laughed. "'*Guardami ben; ben son, ben son Beatrice!*'"

"Such a comfort you're not bald," she said, her fingers in his hair. "That must be a great disadvantage of pedestals—I mean, seeing the baldness of the men down below."

"But the great advantage of pedestals, as I now suddenly see for the first time . . ." Another explosion covered his voice. ". . . make it possible. . . ." Bang!

"Oh, look!" A blueish light was brightening, brightening.

". . . possible for even the baldest . . ." There was a continuous uninterruptedly rattle of detonations. Fanning gave it up. What he had meant to say was that pedestals gave even the baldest men unrivalled opportunities for pinning the idol's legs.

"What were you saying?" she shouted through the battle.

"Nothing," he said back. He had meant, of course, to suit the occasion to the word, playfully. But the fates had decreed otherwise and he wasn't really sorry. For he was tired; he had realized it almost

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suddenly. All this standing. He was no good at standing nowadays.

A cataract of silver fire was pouring down the slopes of the Pincian Hill, and the shining smoke-clouds rolled away from it like the spray from a tumbling river. And suddenly, above it, the eagle of Savoy emerged from the darkness, enormous, perched on the victor's axe and rods. There was applause and patriotic music. Then, gradually, the brightness of the cataract grew dim; the sources of its silver streaming were one by one dried up. The eagle moulted its shining plumage, the axe and rods faded, faded and at last were gone. Lit faintly by only the common lamp-light, the smoke drifted slowly away towards the north. A spasm of motion ran through the huge crowd in the square below them. The show was over.

"But I feel," said Pamela, as they shoved their way back towards the open streets, "I feel as though the rockets were still popping off inside me." And she began to sing to herself as she walked.

Fanning made no comment. He was thinking of that Girandola he'd seen with Alice and Tony, and Laurina Frescobaldi—was it 1907 or 1908? Tony was an ambassador now, and Alice was dead, and one of Laurina's sons (he recalled the expression of despair on that worn, but still handsome face, when she had told him yesterday (Fivoli) was already old enough to be getting housemaids into trouble.

"Not only rockets," Pamela went on, interrupt-

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ing her singing, "but even catherine wheels. I feel all catherine-wheely. You know, like when one's a little drunk." And she went on again with "Old Man River," tipsily happy and excited.

The crowd grew thinner around them and at last they were almost alone. Pamela's singing abruptly ceased. Here, in the open, in the cool of the dark night it had suddenly become inappropriate, a little shameful. She glanced anxiously at her companion; had he too remarked that inappropriateness, been shocked by it? But Fanning had noticed nothing; she wished he had. Head bent, his hands behind his back, he was walking at her side, but in another universe.—When had his spirit gone away from her, and why? She didn't know, hadn't noticed. Those inward fireworks, that private festival of exultation had occupied her whole attention. She had been too excitedly happy with being in love to be able to think of the object of that love. But now, abruptly sobered, she had become aware of him again, repentantly at first, and then, as she realized his new remoteness, with a sinking of the heart. What had happened in these few moments? She was on the point of addressing him, then checked herself. Her apprehension grew and grew till it became a kind of terrified certainty that he'd never loved her at all, that he'd suddenly begun to hate her. But why, but why? They walked on.

"How lovely it is here!" she said at last. Her voice was timid and unnatural. "And so deliciously cool."

They had emerged on to the embankment of the Tiber. Above the river, a second invisible river of air flowed softly through the hot night. "Shall we stop for a moment?" He nodded without speaking. "I mean, only if you want to," she added. He nodded again.

They stood, leaning on the parapet, looking down at the black water. There was a long, long silence. Pamela waited for him to say something, to make a gesture; but he did not stir, the word never came. It was as though he were at the other end of the world. She felt almost sick with unhappiness. Heart-beat after heart-beat, the silence prolonged itself.

Fanning was thinking of to-morrow's journey. How he hated the train! And in this heat. . . . But it was necessary. The wicked flee, and in this case the fleeing would be an act of virtue—painful. Was it love? Or just an itch of desire, of the rather crazy, dirty desire of an aging man? "*A cinquant' anni si diventa un po' pazzo.*" He heard his own voice speaking, laughingly, mournfully, to Laurina. "*Pazzo e porco. Sì, anch' io divento un porco. Le minorenni —a cinquant' anni, sa sono un'ossessione. Proprio un'ossessione.*" Was that all—just an obsession of crazy desire? Or was it love? Or wasn't there any difference, was it just a question of names and approving or disapproving tones of voice? What was certain was that you could be as desperately unhappy when you were robbed of your crazy desire as when you were robbed of your love. A *porco* suffers

as much as Dante. And perhaps Beatrice too was lovely, in Dante's memory, with the perversity of youth, the shamelessness of innocence, the vice of freshness. Still, the wicked flee, the wicked flee. If only he'd had the strength of mind to flee before! A touch made him start. Pamela had taken his hand.

"Miles!" Her voice was strained and abnormal. Fanning turned towards her and was almost frightened by the look of determined despair he saw on her face. The Eiffel Tower . . . "Miles!"

"What is it?"

"Why don't you speak to me?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "I didn't happen to be feeling very loquacious. For a change," he added, self-mockingly, in the hope (he knew it for a vain one) of being able to turn away her desperate attack with a counter-attack of laughter.

She ignored his counter-attack. "Why do you shut yourself away from me like this?" she asked. "Why do you hate me?"

"But, my sweet child . . ."

"Yes, you hate me. You shut me away. Why are you so cruel, Miles?" Her voice broke; she was crying. Lifting his hand, she kissed it, passionately, despairingly. "I love you so much, Miles. I love you." His hand was wet with her tears when, almost by force, he managed to draw it away from her.

He put his arm round her, comfortingly. But he was annoyed as well as touched, annoyed by her despairing determination, by the way she had made up

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her mind to jump off the Eiffel Tower, screwed up her courage turn by turn. And now she was jumping—but how gracelessly! The way he had positively had to struggle for his hand! There was something forced and unnatural about the whole scene. She was being a character in fiction. But characters in fiction suffer. He patted her shoulder, he made consolatory murmurs. Consoling her for being in love with him! But the idea of explaining and protesting and being lucidly reasonable was appalling to him at the moment, absolutely appalling. He hoped that she'd just permit herself to be consoled and ask no further questions, just leave the whole situation comfortably inarticulate. But his hope was again disappointed.

“Why do you hate me, Miles?” she insisted.

“But, Pamela . . .”

“Because you did care a little, you did. I mean, I could see you cared. And now, suddenly . . . What have I done, Miles?”

“But nothing, my child, nothing.” He could not keep a note of exasperation out of his voice. If only she'd allow him to be silent!

“Nothing? But I can hear from the way you speak that there's something.” She returned to her old refrain. “Because you did care, Miles; a little, you did.” She looked up at him, but he had moved away from her, he had averted his eyes towards the street. “You did, Miles.”

Oh, God! he was groaning to himself, God! And aloud (for she had made his silence untenable, she

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had driven him out into articulateness), "I cared too much," he said. "It would be so easy to do something stupid and irreparable, something mad, yes and bad, bad. I like you too much in other ways to want to run that risk. Perhaps, if I were twenty years younger. . . . But I'm too old. It wouldn't do. And you're too young, you can't really understand, you . . . Oh, thank God, there's a taxi." And he darted forward, waving and shouting. Saved! But when they had shut themselves into the cab, he found that the new situation was even more perilous than the old.

"Miles!" A flash of lamplight through the window of the cab revealed her face to him. His words had consoled her; she was smiling, was trying to look happy; but under the attempted happiness her expression was more desperately determined than ever. She was not yet at the bottom of her Tower. "Miles!" And sliding across the seat towards him, she threw her arms round his neck and kissed him. "Take me, Miles," she said, speaking in quick abrupt little spurts, as though she were forcing the words out with violence against a resistance. He recognized the suicide's voice, despairing, strained, and at the same time flat, lifeless. "Take me. If you want me. . . ."

Fanning tried to protest, to disengage himself, gently, from her embrace.

"But I want you to take me, Miles," she insisted. "I want you. . . ." She kissed him again, she pressed herself against his hard body. "I want you, Miles. Even if it is stupid and mad," she added in another

little spurt of desperation, making answer to the expression on his face, to the words she wouldn't permit him to utter. "And it isn't. I mean, love isn't stupid or mad. And even if it were, I don't care. Yes, I want to be stupid and mad. Even if it were to kill me. So take me, Miles." She kissed him again. "Take me."

He turned away his mouth from those soft lips. She was forcing him back across the threshold. His body was uneasy with awakenings and supernatural dawn.

Held up by a tram at the corner of a narrow street, the cab was at a standstill. With quick strong gestures Fanning unclasped her arms from round his neck and, taking her two hands in his, he kissed first one and then the other. "Good-bye, Pamela," he whispered and, throwing open the door, he was half out of the cab before she realized what he was doing.

"But what are you doing, Miles? Where . . ."

The door slammed. He thrust some money into the driver's hand and almost ran. Pamela rose to her feet to follow him, but the cab started with a sudden jerk that threw her off her balance, and she fell back on to the seat.

"Miles!" she called, and then, "Stop!"

But the driver either didn't hear, or else paid no attention. She did not call again, but sat, covering her face with her hands, crying and feeling so agonizingly unhappy that she thought she would die of it.

VIII

“By the time you receive this letter, I shall be—no, not dead, Pamela, though I know how thrilled and proud you’d be, through your temporary inconsolability, if I were to blow my brains out—not dead, but (what will be almost worse in these dog-days) in the train, bound for some anonymous refuge. Yes, a refuge, as though you were my worst enemy. Which in fact you almost are at the moment, for the good reason that you’re acting as your own enemy. If I were less fond of you, I’d stay and join forces with you against yourself. And, frankly, I wish I were less fond of you. Do you know how desirable you are? Not yet, I suppose, not consciously, in spite of Prof. Krafft-Ebbing and the novels of Miles F. You can’t yet know what a terrible army with banners you are, you and your eyes and your laughter and your impertinent breasts, like La Maja’s, and those anti-educational ears in ambush under the hair. You can’t know. But I know. Only too well. Just *how* well you’ll realize, perhaps, fifteen or twenty years from now. For a time will come when the freshness of young bodies, the ingenuousness of young minds will begin to strike you as a scandal of shining beauty and attractiveness, and then finally as a kind of maddeningly alluring perversity, as the exhibition of a kind of irresistibly dangerous vice. The madness of the desirer—for middle-aged desires are mostly more or less mad desires—comes off on the desired object, staining it.

degrading it. Which isn't agreeable if you happen to be fond of the object, as well as desiring. Dear object, let's be a little reasonable—oh, entirely against all my principles; I accept all the reproaches you made me the other day. But what are principles for but to be gone against in moments of crisis? And this *is* a moment of crisis. Consider: I'm thirty years older than you are; and even if one doesn't look one's age, one is one's age, somehow, somewhere; and even if one doesn't feel it, fifty's always fifty and twenty-one's twenty-one. And when you've considered that, let me put a few questions. First: are you prepared to be a disreputable woman? To which, of course, you answer yes, because you don't care two pins about what the old cats say. But I put another question: Do you know, by experience, what it's like to be a disreputable woman? And you must answer, no. Whereupon I retort: If you can't answer yes to the second, you've got no right to answer yes to the first. And I don't intend to give you the opportunity of answering yes to the second question. Which is all pure Podsnapism. But there are certain circumstances in which Podsnap is quite right.

“Sweet Pamela, believe me when I say it would be fatal. For when you say you love me, what do you mean? Who and what is it you love? I'll tell you. You love the author of *Eurydice* and of all those portraits of yourself he's filled his books with. You love the celebrated man, who was not only unsnubbing and attentive, but obviously admiring. Even before

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you saw him, you vaguely loved his reputation, and now you love his odd confidences. You love a kind of conversation you haven't heard before. You love a weakness in him which you think you can dominate and protect. You love—as I, of course, intended you to love—a certain fascinating manner. You even love a rather romantic and still youthful appearance. And when I say (which as yet, you know, I haven't said) that I love you, what do I mean? That I'm amused, and charmed, and flattered, and touched, and puzzled, and affectionate, in a word, a Passionist Father. But chiefly that I find you terribly desirable—an army with banners. Bring these two loves together and what's the result? A manifold disaster. To begin with, the nearer you come to me and the longer you remain with me, the more alien you'll find me, the more fundamentally remote. Inevitably. For you and I are foreigners to one another, foreigners in time. Which is a greater foreignness than the foreignness of space and language. You don't realize it now, because you don't know me—you're only in love, at first sight (like Joan in *Eurydice!*) and, what's more, not really with me, with your imagination of me. When you come to know me better—well, you'll find that you know me much worse. And then one day you'll be attracted by a temporal compatriot. Perhaps, indeed, you're attracted already, only your imagination won't allow you to admit it. What about that long-suffering Guy of yours? Of whom I was, and am, so horribly jealous—jealous with the malign-

ity of a weaker for a stronger rival; for though I seem to hold all the cards at the moment, the ace of trumps is his: he's young. And one day, when you're tired of living at cross-purposes with me, you'll suddenly realize it; you'll perceive that he speaks your language, that he inhabits your world of thought and feeling, that he belongs, in a word, to your nation—that great and terrible nation, which I love and fear and hate, the nation of Youth. In the end, of course, you'll leave the foreigner for the compatriot. But not before you've inflicted a good deal of suffering on every one concerned, including yourself. And meanwhile, what about me? Shall I be still there for you to leave? Who knows? Not I, at any rate. I can no more answer for my future desires than for the Shah of Persia. For my future affection, yes. But it may last (how often, alas, affections do last that way!) only on condition of its object being absent. There are so many friends whom one's fond of when they're not there. Will you be one of them? It's the more possible since, after all, you're just as alien to me as I am to you. My country's called Middle-Ageia and every one who was out of the egg of childhood before 1914 is my compatriot. Through all my desires, shouldn't I also pine to hear my own language, to speak with those who share the national traditions? Of course. But the tragedy of middle-aged life is that its army with banners is hardly ever captained by a compatriot. Passion is divorced from understanding, and the aging man's desire attaches itself

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with an almost insane violence to precisely those outrageously fresh young bodies that house the most alien souls. Conversely, for the body of an understood and understanding soul, he seldom feels desire. And now, Pamela, suppose that my sentiment of your alienness should come to be stronger (as some time it must) than my desire for the lovely scandal of your young body. What then? This time I can answer; for I am answering for a self that changes very little through every change of circumstances—the self that doesn't intend to put up with more discomfort than it can possibly avoid; the self that, as the Freudians tell us, is homesick for that earthly paradise from which we've all been banished, our mother's womb, the only place on earth where man is genuinely omnipotent, where his every desire is satisfied, where he is perfectly at home and adapted to his surroundings, and therefore perfectly happy. Out of the womb, we're in an unfriendly world, in which our wishes aren't anticipated, where we're no longer magically omnipotent, where we don't fit, where we're not snugly at home. What's to be done in this world? Either face out the reality, fight with it, resignedly or heroically accept to suffer or struggle. Or else flee. In practice even the strongest heroes do a bit of fleeing—away from responsibility into deliberate ignorance, away from uncomfortable fact into imagination. Even the strongest. And conversely even the weakest fleers can make themselves strong. No, not the weakest; that's a mistake. The weakest become

day-dreamers, masturbators, paranoiacs. The strong flier is one who starts with considerable advantages. Take my case. I'm so endowed by nature that I can have a great many of the prizes of life for the asking—success, money in reasonable quantities, love. In other words I'm not entirely out of the womb; I can still, even in the extra-uterine world, have at least some of my desires magically satisfied. To have my wishes fulfilled I don't have to rush off every time to some imaginary womb-substitute. I have the power to construct a womb for myself out of the materials of the real world. But of course it's not a completely perfect and water-tight womb; no post-natal uterus can ever in the nature of things be that. It lets in a lot of unpleasantness and alienness and obstruction to wishes. Which I deal with by flight, systematic flight into unawareness, into deliberate ignorance, into irresponsibility. It's a weakness which is a source of strength. For when you can flee at will and with success (which is only possible if nature has granted you, as she has to me, the possibility of anarchic independence of society), what quantities of energy you save, what an enormous amount of emotional and mental wear and tear is spared you! I flee from business by leaving all my affairs in the hands of lawyers and agents, I flee from criticism (both from the humiliations of misplaced and wrongly motivated praise and from the pain of even the most contemptible vermin's blame) by simply not reading what anybody writes of me. I flee from time by living as far

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as possible only in and for the present. I flee from cold weather by taking the train or ship to places where it's warm. And from women I don't love any more, I flee by just silently vanishing. For, like Palmerston, I never explain and never apologize. I just fade out. I decline to admit their existence. I consign their letters to the waste-paper basket, along with the press cuttings. Simple, crude even, but incredibly effective, if one's ready to be ruthless in one's weakness, as I am. Yes, quite ruthless, Pamela. If my desire grew weary or I felt homesick for the company of my compatriots, I'd just run away, determinedly, however painfully much you might still be in love with me, or your imagination, or your own hurt pride and humiliated self-love. And you, I fancy, would have as little mercy on my desires if they should happen to outlive what you imagine to be your passion for me. So that our love affair, if we were fools enough to embark on it, would be a race towards a series of successive goals—a race through boredom, misunderstanding, disillusion, towards the final winning-post of cruelty and betrayal. Which of us is likely to win the race? The betting, I should say, is about even, with a slight tendency in favour of myself. But there's not going to be a winner or a loser, for the good reason that there's not going to be any race. I'm too fond of you, Pamela, to"

"Miles!"

Fanning started so violently that a drop of ink was jerked from his pen on to the paper. He felt as

though his heart had fallen into an awful gulf of emptiness.

“Miles!”

He looked round. Two hands were clutching the bars of the unshuttered window and, as though desperately essaying to emerge from a subterranean captivity, the upper part of a face was peering in, over the high sill, with wide unhappy eyes.

“But Pamela!” There was reproach in his astonishment.

It was to the implied rebuke that she penitently answered. “I couldn’t help it, Miles,” she said; and, behind the bars, he saw her reddened eyes suddenly brighten and overflow with tears. “I simply had to come.” Her voice trembled on the verge of breaking. “*Had to.*”

The tears, her words and that unhappy voice were moving. But he didn’t want to be moved, he was angry with himself for feeling the emotion, with her for inspiring it. “But, my dear child!” he began, and the reproach in his voice had shrilled to a kind of exasperation—the exasperation of one who feels himself hemmed in and helpless, increasingly helpless, against circumstances. “But I thought we’d settled,” he began and broke off. He rose, and walked agitatedly towards the fireplace, agitatedly back again, like a beast in a cage; he was caught, hemmed in between those tearful eyes behind the bars and his own pity, with all those dangerous feelings that have their root in pity. “I thought,” he began once more.

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But, "Oh!" came her sharp cry, and looking again towards the window he saw that only the two small hands and a pair of straining wrists were visible. The tragical face had vanished.

"Pamela?"

"It's all right." Her voice came rather muffled and remote. "I slipped. I was standing on a little kind of ledge affair. The window's so high from the ground," she added plaintively.

"My poor child!" he said on a little laugh of amused commiseration. The reproach, the exasperation had gone out of his voice. He was conquered by the comic patheticness of her. Hanging on to the bars with those small, those rather red and childishly untended hands! And tumbling off the perch she had had to climb on, because the window was so high from the ground! A wave of sentimentality submerged him. "I'll come and open the door." He ran into the hall.

Waiting outside in the darkness, she heard the bolts being shot back, one by one . . . Clank, clank! and then "Damn!" came his voice from the other side of the door. "These things are so stiff. . . . I'm barricaded up as though I were in a safe." She stood there waiting. The door shook as he tugged at the recalcitrant bolt. The waiting seemed interminable. And all at once a huge, black weariness settled on her. The energy of wrought-up despair deserted her and she was left empty of everything but a tired misery. What was the good, what was the good of coming like this to be turned away again? For he *would* turn her

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away; he didn't want her. What was the good of renewing suffering, of once more dying?

"Hell and Death!" On the other side of the door, Fanning was cursing like an Elizabethan.

Hell and Death. The words reverberated in Pamela's mind. The pains of Hell—the darkness and dissolution of Death. What was the good.

Clank! Another bolt had gone back. "Thank goodness. We're almost . . ." A chain rattled. At the sound, Pamela turned and ran in a blind terror down the dimly-lighted street.

"At last!" The door swung back and Fanning stepped out. But the sentimental tenderness of his outstretched hands wasted itself on empty night. Twenty yards away a pair of pale legs twinkled in the darkness. "Pamela!" he called in astonishment. "What the devil . . .?" The wasting on emptiness of his feelings had startled him into annoyance. He felt like one who has put forth all his strength to strike something and, missing his aim, swipes the unresisting air, grotesquely. "Pamela!" he called again, yet louder.

She did not turn at the sound of his voice, but ran on. These wretched high-heeled shoes! "Pamela!" And then came the sound of his pursuing footsteps. She tried to run faster. But the pursuing footsteps came nearer and nearer. It was no good. Nothing was any good. She slackened her speed to a walk.

"But what on earth?" he asked from just behind her, almost angrily. Pursuing, he called up within

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him the soul of a pursuer, angry and desirous. "What on earth?" And suddenly his hand was on her shoulder. She trembled a little at the touch. "But why?" he insisted. "Why do you suddenly run away?"

But Pamela only shook her averted head. She wouldn't speak, wouldn't meet his eyes. Fanning looked down at her intently, questioningly. Why? And as he looked at that weary hopeless face, he began to divine the reason. The anger of the pursuit subsided in him. Respecting her dumb, averted misery, he too was silent. He drew her comfortingly towards him. His arm round her shoulders, Pamela suffered herself to be led back towards the house.

Which would be best, he was wondering with the surface of his mind: to telephone for a taxi to take her back to the hotel, or to see if he could make up a bed for her in one of the upstairs rooms? But in the depths of his being he knew quite well that he would do neither of these things. He knew that he would be her lover. And yet, in spite of this deep knowledge, the surface mind still continued to discuss its little problem of cabs and bed-linen. Discussed it sensibly, discussed it dutifully. Because it would be a madness, he told himself, a criminal madness if he didn't send for the taxi or prepare that upstairs room. But the dark certainty of the depths rose suddenly and exploded at the surface in a bubble of ironic laughter, in a brutal and cynical word. "Comedian!" he said to himself, to the self that agitatedly thought of telephones and taxis and pillow-slips. "Seeing that

it's obvious I'm going to have her." And, rising from the depths, her nakedness presented itself to him palpably in an integral and immediate contact with his whole being. But this was shameful, shameful. He pushed the naked Anadyomene back into the depths. Very well, then (his surface mind resumed its busy efficient rattle), seeing that it was perhaps rather late to start telephoning for taxis, he'd rig up one of the rooms on the first floor. But if he couldn't find any sheets . . .? But here was the house, the open door.

Pamela stepped across the threshold. The hall was almost dark. Through a curtained doorway on the left issued a thin blade of yellow light. Passive in her tired misery, she waited. Behind her the chain rattled, as it had rattled only a few moments before, when she had fled from the ominous sound, and clank, clank! the bolts were thrust back into place.

"There," said Fanning's voice. "And now . . ." With a click, the darkness yielded suddenly to brilliant light.

Pamela uttered a little cry and covered her face with her hands. "Oh, please," she begged, "please." The light hurt her, was a sort of outrage. She didn't want to see, couldn't bear to be seen.

"I'm sorry," he said, and the comforting darkness returned. "This way." Taking her arm he led her towards the lighted doorway on the left. "Shut your eyes," he commanded, as they approached the curtain. "We've got to go into the light again; but I'll turn it out the moment I can get to the switch. Now!"

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She shut her eyes and suddenly, as the curtain rings rattled she saw, through her closed eyelids, the red shining of transparent blood. Still holding her arm, he led her forward into the room.

Pamela lifted her free hand to her face. "Please don't look at me," she whispered. "I don't want you to see me like this. I mean, I couldn't bear . . ." Her voice faded to silence.

"I won't look," he assured her. "And anyhow," he added, when they had taken two or three more steps across the room, "now I can't." And he turned the switch.

The pale translucent red went black again before her eyes. Pamela sighed. "I'm so tired," she whispered. Her eyes were still shut; she was too tired to open them.

"Take off your coat." A hand pulled at her sleeve. First one bare arm, then the other slipped out into the coolness.

Fanning threw the coat over a chair. Turning back, he could see her, by the tempered darkness that entered through the window, standing motionless before him, passive, wearily waiting, her face, her limp arms pale against the shadowy blackness.

"Poor Pamela," she heard him say, and then suddenly light finger-tips were sliding in a moth-winged caress along her arm. "You'd better lie down and rest." The hand closed round her arm, she was pushed gently forward. That taxi, he was still thinking, the upstairs room. . . . But his fingers preserved the

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silky memory of her skin, the flesh of her arm was warm and firm against his palm. In the darkness, the supernatural world was coming mysteriously, thrillingly into existence; he was once more standing upon its threshold.

“There, sit down,” came his voice. She obeyed; a low divan received her. “Lean back.” She let herself fall on to pillows. Her feet were lifted on to the couch. She lay quite still. “As though I were dead,” she thought, “as though I were dead.” She was aware, through the darkness of her closed eyes, of his warm breathing presence, impending and very near. “As though I were dead,” she inwardly repeated with a kind of pleasure. For the pain of her misery had ebbed away into the warm darkness and to be tired, she found, to be utterly tired and to lie there utterly still were pleasures. “As though I were dead.” And the light reiterated touch of his finger-tips along her arm—what were those caresses but another mode, a soothing and delicious mode, of gently dying?

In the morning, on his way to the kitchen to prepare their coffee, Fanning caught sight of his littered writing-table. He halted to collect the scattered sheets. Waiting for the water to boil, he read, “By the time you receive this letter, I shall be, no, not dead, Pamela . . .” He crumpled up each page as he had finished reading it and threw it into the dust-bin.

IX

The architectural background was like something out of Alma Tadema. But the figures that moved

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across the sunlit atrium, that lingered beneath the colonnades and in the coloured shadow of the awnings, the figures were Hogarthian and Rowlandsonian, were the ferocious satires of Daumier and Rouveyre. Huge jellied females overflowed the chairs on which they sat. Sagging and with the gait of gorged bears, old men went slowly shambling down the porticoes. Like princes preceded by their outriders, the rich fat burgesses strutted with dignity behind their bellies. There was a hungry prowling of gaunt emaciated men and women, yellow-skinned and with tragical, blue-injected eyes. And, conspicuous by their trailing blackness, these bloated or cadaverous pencillings from an anti-clerical notebook were priests.

In the midst of so many monsters Pamela was a lovely miracle of health and beauty. These three months had subtly transformed her. The rather wavering and intermittent *savoir-vivre*, the child's forced easiness of manner, had given place to a woman's certainty, to that repose even in action, that decision even in repose, which are the ordinary fruits of the intimate knowledge, the physical understanding of love.

"For it isn't only murder that will out," as Fanning had remarked some few days after the evening of the fireworks. "It isn't only murder. If you could see yourself, my child! It's almost indecent. Any one could tell that you'd been in bed with your lover. Could tell in the dark even; you're luminous, positively luminous. All shining and smooth and pearly

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with love-making. It's really an embarrassment to walk about with you. I've a good mind to make you wear a veil."

She had laughed, delightedly. "But I don't mind them seeing. I *want* them to see. I mean, why should one be ashamed of being happy?"

That had been three months since. At present she had no happiness to be ashamed of. It was by no shining of eyes, no luminous soft pearliness of smoothed and rounded contour that she now betrayed herself. All that her manner, her pose, her gestures proclaimed was the fact that there *had* been such shinings and pearly smoothings, once. As for the present, her shut and sullen face announced only that she was discontented with it and with the man who, sitting beside her, was the symbol and the embodiment of that unsatisfactory present. A rather sickly embodiment at the moment, a thin and jaundiced symbol. For Fanning was hollow-cheeked, his eyes darkly ringed, his skin pale and sallow under the yellow tan. He was on his way to becoming one of those pump-room monsters at whom they were now looking, almost incredulously. For, "Incredible!" was Fanning's comment. "Didn't I tell you that they simply weren't to be believed?"

Pamela shrugged her shoulders, almost imperceptibly, and did not answer. She did not feel like answering, she wanted to be uninterested, sullen, bored.

"How right old Butler was!" he went on, rousing himself by the stimulus of his own talk from the de-

pression into which his liver and Pamela had plunged him. "Making the Erewhonians punish illness as a crime—how right! Because they *are* criminals, all these people. Criminally ugly and deformed, criminally incapable of enjoyment. Look at them. It's a caution. And when I think that I'm one of them . . ."

He shook his head. "But let's hope this will make me a reformed character." And he emptied, with a grimace of disgust, his glass of tepid salt water. "Revolted! But I suppose it's right that Montecatini should be a place of punishment as well as cure. One can't be allowed to commit jaundice with impunity. I must go and get another glass of my punishment—my purgatory, in every sense of the word," he added, smiling at his own joke. He rose to his feet painfully (every movement was now a painful effort for him) and left her, threading his way through the crowd to where, behind their marble counters, the pump-room barmaids dispensed warm laxatives from rows of polished brass taps.

The animation had died out of Fanning's face, as he turned away. No longer distracted and self-stimulated by talk, he relapsed at once into melancholy. Waiting his turn behind two bulging monsignori at the pump, he looked so gloomily wretched, that a passing connoisseur of the waters pointed him out to his companion as a typical example of the hepatic pessimist. But bile, as a matter of fact, was not the only cause of Fanning's depression. There was also Pamela. And Pamela—he admitted it, though the

fact belonged to that great class of humiliating phenomena, whose existence we are always trying to ignore—Pamela, after all, was the cause of the bile. For if he had not been so extenuated by that crazy love-making in the narrow cells of the Passionist Fathers at Monte Cavo, he would never have taken chill and the chill would never have settled on his liver and turned to jaundice. As it was, however, that night of the full moon had finished him. They had gone out, groping their way through the terrors of the nocturnal woods, to a little grassy terrace among the bushes, from which there was a view of Nemi. Deep sunk in its socket of impenetrable darkness and more than half eclipsed by shadow, the eye of water gleamed up at them secretly, as though through eyelids almost closed. Under the brightness of the moon the hills, the woods seemed to be struggling out of ghostly greyness towards colour, towards the warmth of life. They had sat there for a while, in silence, looking. Then, taking her in his arms, “*‘Ceda al tatto la vista, al labro il lume,’*” he had quoted with a kind of mockery—mocking her for the surrender to which he knew he could bring her, even against her will, even though, as he could see, she had made up her mind to sulk at him, mocking himself at the same time for the folly which drove him, weary and undesiring, to make the gesture. “*‘Al labro il lume,’*” he repeated with that undercurrent of derision in his voice, and leaned towards her. Desire returned to him as he touched her and with it a kind of exultation, a re-

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newal (temporary, he knew, and illusory) of all his energies.

“No, Miles. Don’t. I don’t want . . .” And she had averted her face, for she was angry, resentful, she wanted to sulk. Fanning knew it, mockingly, and mockingly he had turned back her face towards him—“*al labro il lume*”—and had found her lips. She struggled a little in his arms, protested, and then was silent, lay still. His kisses had had the power to transform her. She was another person, different from the one who had sulked and been resentful. Or rather she was two people—the sulky and resentful one, with another person superimposed, a person who quiveringly sank and melted under his kisses, melted and sank down, down towards that mystical death, that apocalypse, that almost terrible transfiguration. But beneath, to one side, stood always the angry sulker, unappeased, unreconciled, ready to emerge again (full of a new resentment for the way she had been undignifiedly hustled off the stage), the moment the other should have retired. His realization of this made Fanning all the more perversely ardent, quickened the folly of his passion with a kind of derisive hostility. He drew his lips across her cheek and suddenly their soft electrical touch on her ear made her shudder. “Don’t!” she implored, dreading and yet desiring what was to come. Gently, inexorably his teeth closed and the petal of cartilage was a firm elastic resistance between them. She shuddered yet more violently. Fanning relaxed the muscles of his

jaws, then tightened them once more, gently, against that exquisite resistance. The felt beauty of rounded warmth and resilience was under his hand. In the darkness they were inhabitants of the supernatural world.

But at midnight they had found themselves, almost suddenly, on earth again, shiveringly cold under the moon. Cold, cold to the quick, Fanning had picked himself up. They stumbled homewards through the woods, in silence. It was in a kind of trance of chilled and sickened exhaustion that he had at last dropped down on his bed in the convent cell. Next morning he was ill. The liver was always his weak point. That had been nearly three weeks ago.

The second of the two monsignori moved away; Fanning stepped into his place. The barmaid handed him his hot dilute sulphate of soda. He deposited fifty centesimi as a largesse and walked off, meditatively sipping. But returning to the place from which he had come, he found their chairs occupied by a pair of obese Milanese business-men. Pamela had gone. He explored the Alma Tadema background; but there was no sign of her. She had evidently gone back to the hotel. Fanning, who still had five more glasses of water to get through, took his place among the monsters around the band-stand.

In her room at the hotel Pamela was writing up her diary. "September 20th. Montecatini seems a beastly sort of hole, particularly if you come to a wretched

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little hotel like this, which M. insisted on doing, because he knows the proprietor, who is an old drunkard and also cooks the meals, and M. has long talks with him and says he's like a character in Shakespeare, which is all very well, but I'd prefer better food and a room with a bath, not to mention the awfulness of the other people in the hotel, one of whom is the chief undertaker in Florence, who's always boasting to the other people at meal times about his business and what a fine motor hearse with gilded angels he's got and the number of counts and dukes he's buried. M. had a long conversation with him and the old drunkard after dinner yesterday evening about how you preserve corpses on ice and the way to make money by buying up the best sites at the cemetery and holding them till you could ask five times as much as you paid, and it was the first time I'd seen him looking cheerful and amused since his illness and even for some time before, but I was so horrified that I went off to bed. This morning at eight to the pump-room, where M. has to drink eight glasses of different kinds of water before breakfast and there are hundreds of hideous people all carrying mugs, and huge fountains of purgatives, and a band playing the "Geisha," so I came away after half an hour, leaving M. to his waters, because I really can't be expected to watch him drinking, and it appears there are six hundred W.C.'s."

She laid down her pen and, turning round in her chair, sat for some time pensively staring at her own

reflection in the wardrobe mirror. "If you look long enough," (she heard Clare's voice, she saw Clare, inwardly, sitting at her dressing-table), "you begin to wonder if it isn't somebody else. And perhaps, after all, one *is* somebody else, all the time." Somebody else, Pamela repeated to herself, somebody else. But was that a spot on her cheek, or a mosquito bite? A mosquito, thank goodness. "Oh God," she said aloud, and in the looking-glass somebody else moved her lips, "if only I knew what to do! If only I were dead!" She touched wood hastily. Stupid to say such things. But if only one knew, one were certain! All at once she gave a little stiff sharp shudder of disgust, she grimaced as though she had bitten on something sour. Oh, oh! she groaned; for she had suddenly seen herself in the act of dressing, there, in that moon-flecked darkness, among the bushes, that hateful night just before Miles fell ill. Furious because he'd humiliated her, hating him; she hadn't wanted to and he'd made her. Somebody else had enjoyed beyond the limits of enjoyment, had suffered a pleasure transmuted into its opposite. Or rather *she* had done the suffering. And then that further humiliation of having to ask him to help her look for her suspender belt! And there were leaves in her hair. And when she got back to the hotel, she found a spider squashed against her skin under the chemise. Yes, *she* had found the spider, not somebody else.

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Between the brackish sips Fanning was reading

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in his pocket edition of the *Paradiso*. "*L'acqua che prendo giammai non si corse,*" he murmured;

*Minerva spira e conducemi Apollo,
e nove Muse mi dimostrar l'Orse.*

He closed his eyes. "*E nove Muse mi dimostrar l'Orse.*" What a marvel! "And the nine Muses point me to the Bears." Even translated the spell did not entirely lose its potency. "How glad I shall be," he thought, "to be able to do a little work again."

"*Il caffè?*" said a voice at his elbow. "*Non lo bevo mai, mai. Per il fegato, sa, è pessimo. Si dice anche che per gl'intestini. . . .*" The voice receded out of hearing.

Fanning took another gulp of salt water and resumed his reading.

*Voi altri pochi che drizzante il collo
per tempo al pan degli angeli, del quale
vivesi qui ma non sen vien satollo . . .*

The voice had returned. "*Pesce bollito, carne ai ferri o arrostita, patate lesse. . . .*"

He shut his ears and continued. But when he came to:—

*la concreata e perpetua sete
del deiforme regno,*

he had to stop again. This craning for angels' bread, this thirsting for the god-like kingdom . . . The words reverberated questioningly in his mind. After all, why not? Particularly when man's bread made you sick (he thought with horror of that dreadful

vomiting of bile), when it was a case of *pesce bollito* and you weren't allowed to thirst for anything more palatable than this stuff. (He swigged again.) These were the circumstances when Christianity became appropriate. Christians, according to Pascal, ought to live like sick men; conversely, sick men can hardly escape being Christians. How pleased Colin Judd would be! But the thought of Colin was depressing, if only all Christians were like Dante! But in that case, what a frightful world it would be! Frightful.

*La concreata e perpetua sete
del deiforme regno cen portava
Veloci, quasi come il ciel vedete.
Beatrice in suso ed io in lei guardava. . . .*

He thought of Pamela at the fireworks. On that pedestal. *Ben son, ben son Beatrice* on that pedestal. He remembered what he had said beneath the blossoming of the rockets; and also what he had meant to say about those legs which the pedestal made it so easy for the worshipper to pinch. Those legs how remote now, how utterly irrelevant! He finished off his third glass of Torretta and, rising, made his way to the bar for his first of Regina. Yes, how utterly irrelevant! he thought. A complete solution of continuity. You were on the leg level, then you vomited bile and as soon as you were able to think of anything but vomiting, you found yourself on the Dante level. He handed his mug to the barmaid. She rolled black eyes at him as she filled it. Some liverish gentlemen, it seemed, could still feel amorous. Or perhaps it was only the

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obese ones. Fanning deposited his offering and retired. Irrelevant, irrelevant. It seemed, now, the unlikeliest story. And yet there it was, a fact. And Pamela was solid, too solid.

Phrases floated up, neat and ready-made, to the surface of his mind.

“What does he see in her? What on earth can she see in him?”

“But it’s not a question of sight, it’s a question of touch.”

And he remembered—*sentiments-centimètres*—that French pun about love, so appallingly cynical, so humiliatingly true. “But only humiliating,” he assured himself, “because we choose to think it so, arbitrarily, only cynical because *Beatrice in suso ed io in lei guardava*; only appalling because we’re creatures who sometimes vomit bile and because, even without vomiting, we sometimes feel ourselves naturally Christians.” But in any case, *nove Muse mi dimostran l’Orse*. Meanwhile, however. . . . He tilted another gill of water down his throat. And when he was well enough to work, wouldn’t he also be well enough to thirst again for that other god-like kingdom, with its different ecstasies, its other peace beyond all understanding? But *tant mieux, tant mieux*, so long as the Bears remained unmoved and the Muses went on pointing.

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Pamela was looking through her diary. “June 24th,” she read. “Spent the evening with M. and

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afterwards he said how lucky it was for me that I'd been seduced by him, which hurt my feelings (that word, I mean) and also rather annoyed me, so I said he certainly hadn't seduced me, and he said, all right, if I liked to say that I'd seduced him, he didn't mind, but anyhow it was lucky because almost anybody else wouldn't have been such a good psychologist as he, not to mention physiologist, and I should have hated it. But I said, how could he say such things? because it wasn't that at all and I was happy because I loved him, but M. laughed and said, you don't, and I said, I do, and he said, you don't, but if it gives you any pleasure to imagine you do, imagine, which upset me still more, his not believing, which is due to his not wanting to love himself, because I *do* love . . ."

Pamela quickly turned the page. She couldn't read that sort of thing now.

"June 25th. Went to the Vatican where M. . . ."

She skipped nearly a page of Miles's remarks on classical art and the significance of orgies in the ancient religions; on the duty of being happy and having the sun inside you, like a bunch of ripe grapes; on making the world appear infinite and holy by an improvement of sensual enjoyment; on taking things untragically, unponderously.

"M. dined out and I spent the evening with Guy, the first time since the night of the fireworks, and he asked me what I'd been doing all this time, so I said, nothing in particular, but I felt myself blushing, and he said, anyhow you look extraordinarily well and

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happy and pretty, which also made me rather uncomfortable, because of what M. said the other day about murder will out, but then I laughed, because it was the only thing to do, and Guy asked what I was laughing about, so I said, nothing, but I could see by the way he looked at me that he was rather thrilled, which pleased me, and we had a very nice dinner and he told me about a girl he'd been in love with in Ireland and it seems they went camping together for a week, but he was never her lover because she had a kind of terror of being touched, but afterwards she went to America and got married. Later on, in the taxi, he took my hand and even tried to kiss me, but I laughed, because it was somehow very funny, I don't know why, but afterwards, when he persisted, I got angry with him.

“June 27th. Went to look at mosaics to-day, rather fine, but what a pity they're all in churches and always pictures of Jesus and sheep and apostles and so forth. On the way home we passed a wine shop and M. went in and ordered a dozen bottles of champagne, because he said that love can exist without passion, or understanding, or respect, but not without champagne. So I asked him if he really loved me, and he said, *Je t'adore*, in French, but I said, no, do you really love me? But he said, silence is golden and it's better to use one's mouth for kissing and drinking champagne and eating caviar, because he'd also bought some caviar; and if you start talking about love and thinking about love, you get everything wrong, because

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it's not *meant* to be talked about, but acted, and if people want to talk and think, they'd better talk about mosaics and that sort of thing. But I still went on asking him if he loved me. . . ."

"Fool, fool!" said Pamela aloud. She was ashamed of herself. Dithering on like that! At any rate Miles had been honest; she had to admit that. He'd taken care to keep the thing on the champagne level. And he'd always told her that she was imagining it all. Which had been intolerable, of course; he'd been wrong to be so right. She remembered how she had cried when he refused to answer her insistent question; had cried and afterwards allowed herself to be consoled. They went back to his house for supper; he opened a bottle of champagne, they ate the caviar. Next day he sent her that poem. It had arrived at the same time as some flowers from Guy. She reopened her notebook. Here it was.

At the red fountain's core the thud of drums
Quickens; for hairy-footed moths explore
This aviary of nerves; the woken birds
Flutter and cry in the branched blood; a bee
Hums with his million-times-repeated stroke
On lips your breast promotes geometers
To measure curves, to take the height of mountains,
The depth and silken slant of dells unseen.
I read your youth, as the blind student spells
With finger-tips the song from *Cymbeline*.
Caressing and caressed, my hands perceive
(In lieu of eyes) old Titian's paradise
With Eve unaproned; and the Maja dressed

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Whisks off her muslins, that my skin may know
The blind night's beauty of brooding heat and cool,
Of silk and fibre, of molten-moist and dry,
Resistance and resilience.

But the drum

Throbs with yet faster beat, the wild birds go
Through their red liquid sky with wings yet more
Frantic and yet more desperate crying. Come!
The magical door its soft and breathing valves
Has set ajar. Beyond the threshold lie
Worlds after worlds receding into light,
As rare old wines on the ravished tongue renew
A miracle that deepens, that expands,
Blossoms, and changes hue, and chimes, and shines.
Birds in the blood and doubled drums incite
Us to the conquest of these new, strange lands
Beyond the threshold, where all common times,
Things, places, thoughts, events expire, and life
Enters eternity.

The darkness stirs, the trees are wet with rain;
Knock and it shall be opened, oh, again,
Again! The child is eager for its dam
And I the mother am of thirsty lips,
Oh, knock again!

Wild darkness wets this sound of strings.
How smooth it slides among the clarinets,
How easily slips through the trumpeting!
Sound glides through sound and lo! the apocalypse,
The burst of wings above a sunlit sea.
Must this eternal music make an end?
Prolong, prolong these all but final chords!
Oh, wounded sevenths, breathlessly suspend

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Our fear of dying, our desire to know
The song's last words!
Almost Bethesda sleeps, uneasily.
A bubble domes the flatness; gyre on gyre,
The waves expand, expire, as in the deeps
The woken spring subsides

Play, music, play!

Reckless of death, a singing giant rides
His storm of music, rides; and suddenly
The tremulous mirror of the moon is broken;
On the farthest beaches of our soul, our flesh,
The tides of pleasure foaming into pain
Mount, hugely mount; break; and retire again.
The final word is sung, the last word spoken.

“Do I like it, or do I rather hate it? I don't know.”

“June 28th. When I saw M. at lunch to-day, I told him I didn't really know if I liked his poem, I mean apart from literature, and he said, yes, perhaps the young *are* more romantic than they think, which rather annoyed me, because I believe he imagined I was shocked, which is too ridiculous. All the same, I *don't* like it.”

Pamela sighed and shut her eyes, so as to be able to think more privately, without distractions. From this distance of time she could see all that had happened in perspective, as it were, and as a whole. It was her pride, she could see, her fear of looking ridiculously romantic that had changed the quality of her feelings towards Miles—a pride and a fear on which he had played, deliberately. She had given herself

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with passion and desperately, tragically, as she imagined that Joan would have desperately given herself, at first sight, to a reluctant Walter. But the love he had offered her in return was a thing of laughter and frank, admitted sensuality, was a gay and easy companionship enriched, but uncomplicated, by pleasure. From the first, he had refused to come up to her emotional level. From the first, he had taken it for granted—and his taking it for granted was in itself an act of moral compulsion—that she should descend to his. And she had descended—reluctantly at first, but afterwards without a struggle. For she came to realize, almost suddenly, that after all she didn't really love him in the tragically passionate way she had supposed she loved him. In a propitious emotional climate her belief that she was a despairing Joan might perhaps have survived, at any rate for a time. But it was a hot-house growth of the imagination; in the cool dry air of his laughter and cheerfully cynical frankness it had withered. And all at once she had found herself, not satisfied, indeed, with what he offered, but superficially content. She returned him what he gave. Less even than he gave. For soon it became apparent to her that their rôles were being reversed, that the desperate one was no longer herself, but Miles. For "desperate"—that was the only word to describe the quality of his desires. From light and gay—and perhaps, she thought, the lightness had been forced, the gaiety fabricated for the occasion as a defence against the tragical vehe-

mence of her attack and of his own desires—his sensuality had become heavy, serious, intense. She had found herself the object of a kind of focussed rage. It had been frightening sometimes, frightening and rather humiliating; for she had often felt that, so far as he was concerned, she wasn't there at all; that the body between those strong, those ruthless and yet delicate, erudite, subtly intelligent hands of his, that were like a surgeon's or a sculptor's hands, was not her body, was no one's body, indeed, but a kind of abstraction, tangible, yes, desperately tangible, but still an abstraction. She would have liked to rebel; but the surgeon was a master of his craft, the sculptor's fingers were delicately learned and intelligent. He had the art to overcome her reluctances, to infect her with some of his strange, concentrated seriousness. Against her will. In the intervals he resumed his old manner; but the laughter was apt to be bitter and spiteful, there was a mocking brutality in the frankness.

Pamela squeezed her eyes more tightly shut and shook her head, frowning at her memories. For distraction she turned back to her diary.

“June 30th. Lunched with Guy, who was really rather tiresome, because what is more boring than somebody being in love with you, when you're not in love with them? Which I told him quite frankly, and I could see he was dreadfully upset, but what was I to do?”

Poor Guy! she thought, and she was indignant, not

with herself, but with Fanning. She turned over several pages. It was July now and they were at Ostia for the bathing. It was at Ostia that that desperate seriousness had come into his desire. The long hot hours of the siesta were propitious to his earnest madness. Propitious also to his talents, for he worked well in the heat. Behind her lowered eyelids Pamela had a vision of him sitting at his table, stripped to a pair of shorts, sitting there, pen in hand, in the next room and with an open door between them, but somehow at an infinite distance. Terrifyingly remote, a stranger more foreign for being known so well, the inhabitant of other worlds to which she had no access. They were worlds which she was already beginning to hate. His books were splendid of course; still, it wasn't much fun being with a man who, for half the time, wasn't there at all. She saw him sitting there, a beautiful naked stranger, brown and wiry, with a face like brown marble, stonily focussed on his paper. And then suddenly this stranger rose and came towards her through the door, across the room. "Well?" she heard herself saying. But the stranger did not answer. Sitting down on the edge of her bed, he took the sewing out of her hands and threw it aside on to the dressing-table. She tried to protest, but he laid a hand on her mouth. Wordlessly he shook his head. Then, uncovering her mouth, he kissed her. Under his surgeon's, his sculptor's hands, her body was moulded to a symbol of pleasure. His face was focussed and intent, but not on her, on something

else, and serious, serious, like a martyr's, like a mathematician's, like a criminal's. An hour later, he was back at his table in the next room, in the next world, remote, a stranger once again—but he had never ceased to be a stranger.

Pamela turned over two or three more pages. On July 12th they went sailing and she had felt sick; Miles had been provokingly well all the time. The whole of the sixteenth had been spent in Rome. On the nineteenth they drove to Cerveteri to see the Etruscan tombs. She had been furious with him, because he had put out the lamp and made horrible noises in the cold sepulchral darkness, underground—furious with terror, for she hated the dark.

Impatiently, Pamela went on turning the pages. There was no point in reading; none of the really important things were recorded. Of the earnest madness of his love-making, of those hands, that reluctantly suffered pleasure she hadn't been able to bring herself to write. And yet those were the things that mattered. She remembered how she had tried to imagine that she was like her namesake of *Pastures New*—the fatal woman whose cool detachment gives her such power over her lovers. But the facts had proved too stubborn; it was simply impossible for her to pretend that this handsome fancy-picture was her portrait. The days flicked past under her thumb.

“July 30th. On the beach this morning we met some friends of M.'s, a journalist called Pedder, who has just come to Rome as correspondent for some paper

or other, and his wife, rather awful, I thought, both of them, but M. seemed to be extraordinarily pleased to see them, and they bathed with us and afterwards came and had lunch at our hotel, which was rather boring so far as I was concerned, because they talked a lot about people I didn't know and then there was a long discussion about politics and history, and so forth, *too* highbrow, but what was intolerable was that the woman thought she ought to be kind and talk to me meanwhile about something I could understand, so she talked about shops in Rome and the best places for getting clothes, which was rather ridiculous, as she's obviously one of those absurd arty women, who appeared in M.'s novels as young girls just before and during the War, so advanced in those days, with extraordinary coloured stockings and frocks like pictures by Augustus John. Anyhow, what she was wearing at lunch was really too fancy-dress, and really at her age one ought to have a little more sense of the decencies, because she must have been quite thirty-five. So that the idea of talking about smart shops in Rome was quite ludicrous to start with, and anyhow it was so insulting to me, because it implied that I was too young and half-witted to be able to take an interest in their beastly conversation. But afterwards, apropos of some philosophical theory or other, M. began talking about his opium smoking, and he told them all the things he'd told me and a lot more besides, and it made me feel very uncomfortable and then miserable and rather angry, because I thought

it was only me he talked to like that, so confidentially, but now I see he makes confidences to everybody and it's not a sign of his being particularly fond of a person, or in love with them, or anything like that. Which made me realize that I'm even less important to him than I thought and I found I minded much more than I expected I should mind, because I thought I'd got past minding. But I *do* mind."

Pamela shut her eyes again. "I ought to have gone away then," she said to herself. "Gone straight away." But instead of retiring, she had tried to come closer. Her resentment—for oh, how bitterly she resented those Pedders and his confidential manner towards them!—had quickened her love. She wanted to insist on being more specially favoured than a mere Pedder; and, loving him, she had the right to insist. By a process of imaginative incubation, she managed to revive some of the emotions she had felt before the night of the fireworks. Tragically, with a suicide's determination, she tried to force herself upon him. Fanning fought a retreating battle, ruthlessly. Oh, how cruel he could be, Pamela was thinking, how pitilessly cruel! The way he could shut himself up as though in an iron box of indifference! The way he could just fade out into absent silence, into another world! The way he could flutter out of an embarrassing emotional situation on the wings of some brilliant irrelevance! And the way he could flutter back again, the way he could compel you, with his charm, with the touch of his hands, to reopen the gates of your

life to him, when you'd made up your mind to shut them against him for ever! And not content with forcing you to yield, he would mock you for your surrender, mock himself too for having attacked—jeering, but without seeming to jeer, indirectly, in some terrible little generalization about the weakness of the human soul, the follies and insanities of the body. Yes, how cruel he could be! She reopened her eyes.

“August 10th. M. still very glum and depressed and silent, like a wall when I come near. I think he sometimes hates me for loving him. At lunch he said he'd got to go into Rome this afternoon and he went and didn't come back till late, almost midnight. Waiting for him, I couldn't help crying.

“August 11th. Those Pedders came to lunch again to-day and all M.'s glumness vanished the moment he saw them and he was charming all through lunch and so amusing, that I couldn't help laughing, though I felt more like crying, because why should he be so much nicer and more *friendly* with them than with me? After lunch, when we went to rest, he came into my room and wanted to kiss me, but I wouldn't let him, because I said, I don't want to owe your fits of niceness to somebody else, and I asked him, why? why was he so much nicer to them than to me? And he said they were his people, they belonged to the same time as he did and meeting them was like meeting another Englishman in the middle of a crowd of Kaf-

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firs in Africa. So I said, I suppose I'm the Kaffirs, and he laughed and said, no, not quite Kaffirs, not more than a Rotary Club dinner in Kansas City, with the Pedders playing the part of a man one had known at Balliol in 'ninety-nine. Which made me cry, and he sat on the edge of the bed and took my hand and said he was very sorry, but that's what life was like, and it couldn't be helped, because time was always time, but people weren't always the same people, but sometimes one person and sometimes another, sometimes Pedder-fanciers and sometimes Pamela-fanciers, and it wasn't my fault that I hadn't heard the first performance of *Pelléas* in 1902 and it wasn't Pedder's fault that he had, and therefore Pedder was his compatriot and I wasn't. But I said, after all, Miles, you're my lover, doesn't that make any difference? But he said, it's a question of speech, and bodies don't speak, only minds, and when two minds are of different ages it's hard for them to understand each other when they speak, but bodies can understand each other, because they don't talk, thank God, he said, because it's such a comfort to stop talking sometimes, to stop thinking and just *be*, for a change. But I said that might be all right for him, but just *being* was my ordinary life and the change for me was talking, was being friends with somebody who knew how to talk and do all the other things talking implies, and I'd imagined I was that, besides just being somebody he went to bed with, and that was why I was so miserable, because I found I wasn't, and

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those beastly Pedders were. But he said, damn the Pedders, damn the Pedders for making you cry! and he was so *divinely* sweet and gentle that it was like gradually sinking, sinking and being drowned. But afterwards he began laughing again in that rather hurting way, and he said, your body's so much more beautiful than their minds—that is, so long as one's a Pamela-fancier; which I am he said, or rather was and shall be, but now I must go and work, and he got up and went to his room, and I was wretched again."

The entries of a few days later were dated from Monte Cavo. A superstitious belief in the genius of place had made Pamela insist on the change of quarters. They had been happy on Monte Cavo; perhaps they would be happy there again. And so, suddenly, the sea didn't suit her, she needed mountain air. But the genius of place is an unreliable deity. She had been as unhappy on the hill-top as by the sea. No, not quite so unhappy, perhaps. In the absence of the Pedders, the passion which their coming had renewed declined again. Perhaps it would have declined even if they had still been there. For the tissue of her imagination was, at the best of times, but a ragged curtain. Every now and then she came to a hole and through the hole she could see a fragment of reality, such as the bald and obvious fact that she didn't love Miles Fanning. True, after a peep through one of these indiscreet holes she felt it necessary to repent for having seen the facts, she would work herself up again into believing her fancies. But her faith was

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never entirely whole-hearted. Under the superficial layer of imaginative suffering lay a fundamental and real indifference. Looking back now, from the further shore of his illness, Pamela felt astonished that she could have gone on obstinately imagining, in spite of those loop-holes on reality, that she loved him. "Because I didn't," she said to herself, clear-sighted, weeks too late. "I didn't." But the belief that she did had continued, even on Monte Cavo, to envenom those genuinely painful wounds inflicted by him on her pride, her self-respect, inflicted with a strange malice that seemed to grow on him with the passage of the days.

"August 23d." She had turned again to the notebook. "M. gave me this at lunch to-day.

Sensual heat and sorrow cold
Are undivided twins ;
For there where sorrow ends, consoled,
Lubricity begins.

I told him I didn't exactly see what the point of it was, but I supposed it was meant to be hurting, because he's always trying to be hurting now, but he said, no, it was just a Great Thought for putting into Christmas crackers. But he did mean to hurt, and yet in one way he's crazy about me, he's . . ."

Yes, crazy was the right word. The more and the more crazily he had desired her, the more he had seemed to want to hurt her, to hurt himself too—for every wound he inflicted on her was inflicted at the

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same time on himself. "Why on earth didn't I leave him?" she wondered as she allowed a few more days to flick past.

"August 29th. A letter this morning from Guy in Scotland, so no wonder he took such an endless time to answer mine, which is a relief in one way, because I was beginning to wonder if he wasn't answering on purpose, but also rather depressing, as he says he isn't coming back to Rome till after the middle of September and goodness knows what will have happened by that time. So I felt very melancholy all the morning, sitting under the big tree in front of the monastery, such a marvellous huge old tree with very bright bits of sky between the leaves and bits of sun on the ground and moving across my frock, so that the sadness somehow got mixed up with the loveliness, which it often does do in a queer way, I find. M. came out unexpectedly and suggested going for a little walk before lunch, and he was very sweet for a change, but I dare say it was because he'd worked well. And I said, do you remember the first time we came up to Monte Cavo? and we talked about that afternoon and what fun it had been, even the museum, I said, even my education, because the Apollo was lovely. But he shook his head and said, *Apollo, Apollo, lama sabach-thani*, and when I asked why he thought his Apollo had abandoned him he said it was because of Jesus and the Devil, and you're the Devil, I'm afraid, and he laughed and kissed my hand, but I ought to wring your neck, he said. For something that's *your* fault,

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I said, because it's you who make me a Devil for yourself. But he said it was me who made him make me into a Devil. So I asked how? And he said just by existing, just by having my particular shape, size, colour, and consistency, because if I'd looked like a beetle and felt like wood, I'd have never made him make me into a Devil. So I asked him why he didn't just go away seeing that what was wrong with me was that I was there at all. But that's easier said than done, he said, because a Devil's one of the very few things you can't run away from. And I asked why not? And he said because you can't run away from yourself and a Devil is at least half you. Besides, he said, the essence of a vice is that it is a vice—it holds you. Unless it unscrews itself, I said, because I'd made up my mind that minute that I'd go away, and it was such a relief having made up my mind, that I wasn't furious or miserable any more, and when M. smiled and said, if it *can* unscrew itself, I just laughed."

A little too early, she reflected, as she read the words; she had laughed too early. That night had been the night of the full moon (oh, the humiliation of that lost suspender belt, the horror of that spider squashed against her skin!) and the next day he had begun to be ill. It had been impossible, morally impossible to leave him while he was ill. But how ghastly illness was! She shuddered with horror. Ghastly! "I'm sorry to be so repulsive," he had said to her one day, and from her place at his bedside she had protested,

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but hypocritically, hypocritically. As Aunt Edith might have protested. Still, one's *got* to be hippo-ish, she excused herself, simply *got* to be sometimes. "But, thank goodness," she thought, "he's better now." In a day or two he'd be quite fit to look after himself. These waters were supposed to be miraculous.

She took a sheet of writing-paper from the box on the table and uncorked the bottle of ink.

"Dear Guy," she began, "I wonder if you're back in Rome yet?"

A Selection of Poetry
From *Leda* and *The Cicadas*
and *Other Poems*

including:

LEDA

THE FIRST, SECOND, FIFTH, AND
NINTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONGS

ALMERIA

ARMOUR

THE CICADAS

FEMMES DAMNÉES

ARABIA INFELIX

THE MOOR

LEDA

BROWN and bright as an agate, mountain-cool,
Eurotas singing slips from pool to pool;
Down rocky gullies; through the cavernous pines
And chestnut groves; down where the terraced vines
And gardens overhang; through valleys grey
With olive trees, into a soundless bay
Of the Ægean. Silent and asleep
Lie those pools now: but where they dream most
deep,
Men sometimes see ripples of shining hair
And the young grace of bodies pale and bare,
Shimmering far down—the ghosts these mirrors hold
Of all the beauty they beheld of old,
White limbs and heavenly eyes and the hair's river of
gold,
For once these banks were peopled: Spartan girls
Loosed here their maiden girdles and their curls,
And stooping o'er the level water stole
His darling mirror from the sun through whole
Rapturous hours of gazing.

The first star

Of all this milky constellation, far
Lovelier than any nymph of wood or green,
Was she whom Tyndarus had made his queen

For her sheer beauty and subtly moving grace—
Leda, the fairest of our mortal race.
Hymen had lit his torches but one week
About her bed (and still o'er her young cheek
Passed rosy shadows of those thoughts that sped
Across her mind, still virgin, still unwed,
For all her body was her own no more),
When Leda with her maidens to the shore
Of bright Eurotas came, to escape the heat
Of summer noon in waters coolly sweet.
By a brown pool which opened smooth and clear
Below the wrinkled water of a weir
They sat them down under an old fir-tree
To rest: and to the laughing melody
Of their sweet speech the river's rippling bore
A liquid burden, while the sun did pour
Pure colour out of heaven upon the earth.
The meadows seethed with the incessant mirth
Of grasshoppers, seen only when they flew
Their curves of scarlet or sudden dazzling blue.
Within the fir-tree's round of unpierced shade
The maidens sat with laughter and talk, or played,
Gravely intent, their game of knuckle-bones;
Or tossed from hand to hand the old dry cones
Littered about the tree. And one did sing
A ballad of some far-off Spartan king,
Who took a wife, but left her, well-away!
Slain by his foes upon their wedding-day.
"That was a piteous story," Leda sighed,
"To be a widow ere she was a bride."
"Better," said one, "to live a virgin life

Alone, and never know the name of wife
And bear the ugly burden of a child
And have great pain by it. Let me live wild,
A bird untamed by man!" "Nay," cried another,
"I would be wife, if I should not be mother.
Cypris I honour; let the vulgar pay
Their gross vows to Lucina when they pray.
Our finer spirits would be blunted quite
By bestial teeming; but Love's rare delight
Wings the rapt soul towards Olympus' height."
"Delight?" cried Leda. "Love to me has brought
Nothing but pain and a world of shameful thought.
When they say love is sweet, the poets lie;
'Tis but a trick to catch poor maidens by.
What are their boasted pleasures? I am queen
To the most royal king the world has seen;
Therefore I should, if any woman might,
Know at its full that exquisite delight.
Yet these few days since I was made a wife
Have held more bitterness than all my life,
While I was yet a child." The great bright tears
Slipped through her lashes. "Oh, my childish years!
Years that were all my own, too sadly few,
When I was happy—and yet never knew
How happy till to-day!" Her maidens came
About her as she wept, whispering her name,
Leda, sweet Leda, with a hundred dear
Caressing words to soothe her heavy cheer.
At last she started up with a fierce pride
Upon her face. "I am a queen," she cried,
"But had forgotten it a while; and you,

Wenches of mine, you were forgetful too.
Undress me. We would bathe ourself." So proud
A queen she stood, that all her maidens bowed
In trembling fear and scarcely dared approach
To do her bidding. But at last the brooch
Pinned at her shoulder is undone, the wide
Girdle of silk beneath her breasts untied;
The tunic falls about her feet, and she
Steps from the crocus folds of drapery,
Dazzlingly naked, into the warm sun.
God-like she stood; then broke into a run,
Leaping and laughing in the light, as though
Life through her veins coursed with so swift a flow
Of generous blood and fire that to remain
Too long in statted queenliness were pain
To that quick soul, avid of speed and joy.
She ran, easily bounding, like a boy,
Narrow of haunch and slim and firm of breast.
Lovelier she seemed in motion than at rest,
If that might be, when she was never less,
Moving or still, than perfect loveliness.
At last, with cheeks afire and heaving flank,
She checked her race, and on the river's bank
Stood looking down at her own echoed shape
And at the fish that, aimlessly agape,
Hung midway up their heaven of flawless glass,
Like angels waiting for eternity to pass.
Leda drew breath and plunged; her gasping cry
Splashed up; the water circled brokenly
Out from that pearly shudder of dipped limbs;
The glittering pool laughed up its flowery brims,

And everything, save the poor fish, rejoiced:
 Their idiot contemplation of the Moist,
 The Cold, the Watery, was in a trice
 Ended when Leda broke their crystal paradise.

Jove in his high Olympian chamber lay
 Hugely supine, striving to charm away
 In sleep the long, intolerable noon.
 But heedless Morpheus still withheld his boon,
 And Jove upon his silk-pavilioned bed
 Tossed wrathful and awake. His fevered head
 Swarmed with a thousand fancies, which forecast
 Delights to be, or savoured pleasures past.
 Closing his eyes, he saw his eagle swift,
 Headlong as his own thunder, stoop and lift
 On pinions upward labouring the prize
 Of beauty ravished for the envious skies.
 He saw again that bright, adulterous pair,
 Trapped by the limping husband unaware,
 Fast in each other's arms, and faster in the snare—
 And laughed remembering. Sometimes his thought
 Went wandering over the earth and sought
 Familiar places—temples by the sea,
 Cities and islands; here a sacred tree
 And there a cavern of shy nymphs.

He rolled

About his bed, in many a rich fold
 Crumpling his Babylonian coverlet,
 And yawned and stretched. The smell of his own
 sweat
 Brought back to mind his Libyan desert-fane

Of mottled granite, with its endless train
Of pilgrim camels, reeking towards the sky
Ammonian incense to his hornèd deity;
The while their masters worshipped, offering
Huge teeth of ivory, while some would bring
Their Ethiop wives—sleek wineskins of black silk,
Jellied and huge from drinking asses' milk
Through years of tropical idleness, to pray
For offspring (whom he ever sent away
With prayers unanswered, lest their ebon race
Might breed and blacken the earth's comely face).
Noon pressed on him a hotter, heavier weight.
O Love in Idleness! how celibate
He felt! Libido like a nemesis
Scourged him with itching memories of bliss.
The satin of imagined skin was sleek
And supply warm against his lips and cheek,
And deep within soft hair's dishevelled dusk
His eyelids fluttered; like a flowery musk
The scent of a young body seemed to float
Faintly about him, close and yet remote—
For perfume and the essence of music dwell
In other worlds among the asphodel
Of unembodied life. Then all had flown;
His dream had melted. In his bed, alone,
Jove sweating lay and moaned, and longed in vain
To still the pulses of his burning pain.
In sheer despair at last he leapt from bed,
Opened the window and thrust forth his head
Into Olympian ether. One fierce frown
Rifted the clouds, and he was looking down

Into a gulf of azure calm; the rack
Seethed round about, tempestuously black;
But the god's eye could hold its angry thunders back.
There lay the world, down through the chasméd blue,
Stretched out from edge to edge unto his view;
And in the midst, bright as a summer's day
At breathless noon, the Mediterranean lay;
And Ocean round the world's dim fringes tossed
His glaucous waves in mist and distance lost;
And Pontus and the livid Caspian Sea
Stirred in their nightmare sleep uneasily.
And 'twixt the seas rolled the wide fertile land,
Dappled with green and tracts of tawny sand,
And rich, dark fallows and fields of flowers aglow
And the white, changeless silences of snow;
While here and there towns, like a living eye
Unclosed on earth's blind face, towards the sky
Glanced their bright conscious beauty. Yet the
sight
Of his fair earth gave him but small delight
Now in his restlessness: its beauty could
Do nought to quench the fever in his blood.
Desire lends sharpness to his searching eyes;
Over the world his focused passion flies
Quicker than chasing sunlight on a day
Of storm and golden April. Far away
He sees the tranquil rivers of the East,
Mirrors of many a strange barbaric feast,
Where un-Hellenic dancing-girls contort
Their yellow limbs, and gibbering masks make sport
Under the moons of many-coloured light

That swing their lantern-fruitage in the night
Of overarching trees. To him it seems
An alien world, peopled by insane dreams.
But these are nothing to the monstrous shapes—
Not men so much as bastardy of apes—
That meet his eyes in Africa. Between
Leaves of grey fungoid pulp and poisonous green,
White eyes from black and browless faces stare.
Dryads with star-flowers in their woolly hair
Dance to the flaccid clapping of their own
Black dangling dugs through forests overgrown,
Platted with writhing creepers. Horrified,
He sees them how they leap and dance, or glide,
Glimpse after black glimpse of a satin skin,
Among unthinkable flowers, to pause and grin
Out through a trellis of suppurating lips,
Of mottled tentacles barbed at the tips
And bloated hands and wattles and red lobes
Of pendulous gristle and enormous probes
Of pink and slashed and tasselled flesh . . .

He turns

Northward his sickened sight. The desert burns
All life away. Here in the forkéd shade
Of twin-humped towering dromedaries laid,
A few gaunt folk are sleeping: fierce they seem
Even in sleep, and restless as they dream.
He would be fearful of a desert bride
As of a brown asp at his sleeping side,
Fearful of her white teeth and cunning arts.
Further, yet further, to the ultimate parts
Of the wide earth he looks, where Britons go

Painted among their swamps, and through the snow
Huge hairy snuffling beasts pursue their prey—
Fierce men, as hairy and as huge as they.

Bewildered furrows deepen the Thunderer's scowl;
This world so vast, so variously foul—
Who can have made its ugliness? In what
Revolting fancy were the Forms begot
Of all these monsters? What strange deity—
So barbarously not a Greek!—was he
Who could mismake such beings in his own
Distorted image. Nay, the Greeks alone
Were men; in Greece alone were bodies fair,
Minds comely. In that all-but-island there,
Cleaving the blue sea with its promontories,
Lies the world's hope, the seed of all the glories
That are to be; there, too, must surely live
She who alone can medicinably give
Ease with her beauty to the Thunderer's pain.
Downwards he bends his fiery eyes again,
Glaring on Hellas. Like a beam of light,
His intent glances touch the mountain height
With passing flame and probe the valleys deep,
Rift the dense forest and the age-old sleep
Of vaulted antres on whose pebbly floor
Gallop the loud-hoofed Centaurs; and the roar
Of more than human shouting underground
Pulses in living palpable waves of sound
From wall to wall, until it rumbles out
Into the air; and at that hollow shout
That seems an utterance of the whole vast hill,

The shepherds cease their laughter and are still.
Cities asleep under the noonday sky
Stir at the passage of his burning eye;
And in their huts the startled peasants blink
At the swift flash that bursts through every chink
Of wattled walls, hearkening in fearful wonder
Through lengthened seconds for the crash of thun-
der—

Which follows not: they are the more afraid.
Jove seeks amain. Many a country maid,
Whose sandalled feet pass down familiar ways
Among the olives, but whose spirit strays
Through lovelier lands of fancy, suddenly
Starts broad awake out of her dream to see
A light that is not of the sun, a light
Darted by living eyes, consciously bright;
She sees and feels it like a subtle flame
Mantling her limbs with fear and maiden shame
And strange desire. Longing and terrified,
She hides her face, like a new-wedded bride
Who feels rough hands that seize and hold her
fast;

And swooning falls. The terrible light has passed;
She wakes; the sun still shines, the olive trees
Tremble to whispering silver in the breeze
And all is as it was, save she alone
In whose dazed eyes this deathless light has shone:
For never, never from this day forth will she
In earth's poor passion find felicity,
Or love of mortal man. A god's desire
Has seared her soul; nought but the same strong fire

Can kindle the dead ash to life again,
And all her years will be a lonely pain.

Many a thousand had he looked upon,
Thousands of mortals, young and old; but none—
Virgin, or young ephebus, or the flower
Of womanhood culled in its full-blown hour—
Could please the Thunderer's sight or touch his mind;
The longed-for loveliness was yet to find
Had beauty fled, and was there nothing fair
Under the moon? The fury of despair
Raged in the breast of heaven's Almighty Lord;
He gnashed his foamy teeth and rolled and roared
In bull-like agony. Then a great calm
Descended on him: cool and healing balm
Touched his immortal fury. He had spied
Young Leda where she stood, poised on the river-side.

Even as she broke the river's smooth expanse,
Leda was conscious of that hungry glance,
And knew it for an eye of fearful power
That did so hot and thunderously lour,
She knew not whence, on her frail nakedness.
Jove's heart held but one thought: he must possess
That perfect form or die—possess or die.
Unheeded prayers and supplications fly,
Thick as a flock of birds, about his ears,
And smoke of incense rises; but he hears
Nought but the soft falls of that melody
Which is the speech of Leda; he can see
Nought but that almost spiritual grace

Which is her body, and that heavenly face
Where gay, sweet thoughts shine through, and eyes
are bright

With purity and the soul's inward light.

Have her he must: the tassel-fingered burr
Sticks not so fast in a wild beast's tangled fur
As that insistent longing in the soul

Of mighty Jove. Gods, men, earth, heaven, the
whole

Vast universe was blotted from his thought
And nought remained but Leda's laughter, nought
But Leda's eyes. Magnified by his lust,
She was the whole world now; have her he must, he
must . . .

His spirit worked; how should he gain his end
With most deliciousness? What better friend,
What counsellor more subtle could he find
Than lovely Aphrodite, ever kind
To hapless lovers, ever cunning, too,
In all the tortuous ways of love to do
And plan the best? To Paphos then! His will
And act were one; and straight, invisible,
He stood in Paphos, breathing the languid air
By Aphrodite's couch. O heavenly fair
She was, and smooth and marvellously young!
On Tyrian silk she lay, and purple hung
About her bed in folds of fluted light
And shadow, dark as wine. Two doves, more white
Even than the white hand on the purple lying
Like a pale flower wearily dropped, were flying
With wings that made an odoriferous stir,

Dropping faint dews of bakkaris and myrrh,
Musk and the soul of sweet flowers cunningly
Ravished from transient petals as they die.
Two stripling cupids on her either hand
Stood near with winnowing plumes and gently
fanned

Her hot, love-fevered cheeks and eyelids burning.
Another, crouched at the bed's foot, was turning
A mass of scattered parchments—vows or plaints
Or glad triumphant thanks which Venus' saints,
Martyrs and heroes, on her altars strewed
With bitterest tears or gifts of gratitude.
From the pile heaped at Aphrodite's feet
The boy would take a leaf, and in his sweet,
Clear voice would read what mortal tongues can tell
In stammering verse of those ineffable
Pleasures and pains of love, heaven and uttermost
hell

Jove hidden stood and heard him read these lines
Of votive thanks—

Cypris, this little silver lamp to thee
I dedicate.

It was my fellow-watcher, shared with me
Those swift, short hours, when raised above my
fate

In Sphenura's white arms I drank
Of immortality.

“A pretty lamp, and I will have it placed
Beside the narrow bed of some too chaste
Sister of virgin Artemis, to be
A night-long witness of her cruelty.

Read me another, boy," and Venus bent
Her ear to listen to this short lament.

Cypris, Cypris, I am betrayed!

Under the same wide mantle laid

I found them, faithless, shameless pair!

Making love with tangled hair.

"Alas," the goddess cried, "nor god, nor man,

Nor medicinale balm, nor magic can

Cast out the demon jealousy, whose breath

Withers the rose of life, save only time and death."

Another sheet he took and read again.

Farewell to love, and hail the long, slow pain

Of memory that backward turns to joy.

O I have danced enough and enough sung;

My feet shall be still now and my voice mute;

Thine are these withered wreaths, this Lydian
flute,

Cypris; I once was young.

And piêtous Aphrodite wept to think

How fadingly upon death's very brink

Beauty and love take hands for one short kiss—

And then the wreaths are dust, the bright-eyed bliss

Perished, and the flute still. "Read on, read on."

But ere the page could start, a lightning shone

Suddenly through the room, and they were 'ware

Of some great terrible presence looming there.

And it took shape—huge limbs, whose every line

A symbol was of power and strength divine,

And it was Jove.

"Daughter, I come," said he,

"For counsel in a case that touches me

Close, to the very life." And he straightway
Told her of all his restlessness that day
And of his sight of Leda, and how great
Was his desire. And so in close debate
Sat the two gods, planning their rape; while she,
Who was to be their victim, joyously
Laughed like a child in the sudden breathless chill
And splashed and swam, forgetting every ill
And every fear and all, save only this:
That she was young, and it was perfect bliss
To be alive where suns so goldenly shine,
And bees go drunk with fragrant honey-wine,
And the cicadas sing from morn till night,
And rivers run so cool and pure and bright . . .
Stretched all her length, arms under head, she lay
In the deep grass, while the sun kissed away
The drops that sleeked her skin. Slender and fine
As those old images of the gods that shine
With smooth-worn silver, polished through the years
By the touching lips of countless worshippers,
Her body was; and the sun's golden heat
Clothed her in softest flame from head to feet
And was her mantle, that she scarcely knew
The conscious sense of nakedness. The blue,
Far hills and the faint fringes of the sky
Shimmered and pulsed in the heat uneasily,
And hidden in the grass, cicadas shrill
Dizzied the air with ceaseless noise, until
A listener might wonder if they cried
In his own head or in the world outside.
Sometimes she shut her eyelids, and wrapped round

In a red darkness, with the muffled sound
And throb of blood beating within her brain,
Savoured intensely to the verge of pain
Her own young life, hoarded it up behind
Her shuttered lids, until, too long confined,
It burst them open and her prisoned soul
Flew forth and took possession of the whole
Exquisite world about her and was made
A part of it. Meanwhile her maidens played,
Singing an ancient song of death and birth,
Seed-time and harvest, old as the grey earth,
And moving to their music in a dance
As immemorial. A numbing trance
Came gradually over her, as though
Flake after downy-feathered flake of snow
Had muffled all her senses, drifting deep
And warm and quiet.

From this all-but sleep
She started into life again; the sky
Was full of a strange tumult suddenly—
Beating of mighty wings and shrill-voiced fear
And the hoarse scream of rapine following near.
In the high windlessness above her flew,
Dazzlingly white on the untroubled blue,
A splendid swan, with outstretched neck and wing
Spread fathom wide, and closely following
An eagle, tawny and black. This god-like pair
Circled and swooped through the calm of upper air,
The eagle striking and the white swan still
'Scaping as though by happy miracle

The imminent talons. For the twentieth time
The furious hunter stooped, to miss and climb
A mounting spiral into the height again.
He hung there poised, eyeing the grassy plain
Far, far beneath, where the girls' upturned faces
Were like white flowers that bloom in open places
Among the scarcely budded woods. And they
Breathlessly watched and waited; long he lay,
Becalmed upon that tideless sea of light,
While the great swan with slow and creaking flight
Went slanting down towards safety, where the stream
Shines through the trees below, with glance and
gleam
Of blue aerial eyes that seem to give
Sense to the sightless earth and make it live.
The ponderous wings beat on and no pursuit:
Stiff as the painted kite that guards the fruit,
Afloat o'er orchards ripe, the eagle yet
Hung as at anchor, seeming to forget
His uncaught prey, his rage unsatisfied.
Still, quiet, dead . . . and then the quickest-eyed
Had lost him. Like a star unsphered, a stone
Dropped from the vault of heaven, a javelin thrown,
He swooped upon his prey. Down, down he came,
And through his plumes with a noise of wind-blown
flame
Loud roared the air. From Leda's lips a cry
Broke, and she hid her face—she could not see him
die,
Her lovely, hapless swan.
Ah, had she heard,

Even as the eagle hurtled past, the word
That treacherous pair exchanged. "Peace," cried
the swan;

"Peace, daughter. All my strength will soon be
gone,

Wasted in tedious flying, ere I come
Where my desire hath set its only home."

"Go," said the eagle, "I have played my part,
Roused pity for your plight in Leda's heart
(Pity the mother of voluptuousness).

Go, father Jove; be happy; for success
Attends this moment."

On the queen's numbed sense
Fell a glad shout that ended sick suspense,
Bidding her lift once more towards the light
Her eyes, by pity closed against a sight
Of blood and death—her eyes, how happy now
To see the swan still safe, while far below,
Brought by the force of his eluded stroke
So near to earth that with his wings he woke
A gust whose sudden silvery motion stirred
The meadow grass, struggled the sombre bird
Of rage and rapine. Loud his scream and hoarse
With baffled fury as he urged his course
Upwards again on threshing pinions wide.
But the fair swan, not daring to abide
This last assault, dropped with the speed of fear
Towards the river. Like a winged spear,
Outstretching his long neck, rigid and straight,
Aimed at where Leda on the bank did wait
With open arms and kind, uplifted eyes

And voice of tender pity, down he flies.
Nearer, nearer, terribly swift, he sped
Directly at the queen; then widely spread
Resisting wings, and breaking his descent
'Gainst his own wind, all speed and fury spent,
The great swan fluttered slowly down to rest
And sweet security on Leda's breast.
Menacingly the eagle wheeled above her;
But Leda, like a noble-hearted lover
Keeping his child-beloved from tyrannous harm,
Stood o'er the swan and, with one slender arm
Imperiously lifted, waved away
The savage foe, still hungry for his prey.
Baffled at last, he mounted out of sight
And the sky was void—save for a single white
Swan's feather moulted from a harassed wing
That down, down, with a rhythmic balancing
From side to side dropped sleeping on the air.
Down, slowly down over that dazzling pair,
Whose different grace in union was a birth
Of unimagined beauty on the earth:
So lovely that the maidens standing round
Dared scarcely look. Couched on the flowery ground
Young Leda lay, and to her side did press
The swan's proud-arching opulent loveliness,
Stroking the snow-soft plumage of his breast
With fingers slowly drawn, themselves caressed
By the warm softness where they lingered, loth
To break away. Sometimes against their growth
Ruffling the feathers inlaid like little scales
On his sleek neck, the pointed finger-nails

Rasped on the warm, dry, puckered skin beneath;
And feeling it she shuddered, and her teeth
Grated on edge; for there was something strange
And snake-like in the touch. He, in exchange,
Gave back to her, stretching his eager neck,
For every kiss a little amorous peck;
Rubbing his silver head on her gold tresses,
And with the nip of horny dry caresses
Leaving upon her young white breast and cheek
And arms the red print of his playful beak.
Closer he nestled, mingling with the slim
Austerity of virginal flank and limb
His curved and florid beauty, till she felt
That downy warmth strike through her flesh and melt
The bones and marrow of her strength away.
One lifted arm bent o'er her brow, she lay
With limbs relaxed, scarce breathing, deathly still;
Save when a quick, involuntary thrill
Shook her sometimes with passing shudderings,
As though some hand had plucked the aching strings
Of life itself, tense with expectancy.
And over her the swan shook slowly free
The folded glory of his wings, and made
A white-walled tent of soft and luminous shade
To be her veil and keep her from the shame
Of naked light and the sun's noonday flame.

Hushed lay the earth and the wide, careless sky.
Then one sharp sound, that might have been a cry
Of utmost pleasure or of utmost pain,
Broke sobbing forth, and all was still again.

FIRST PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

A POOR degenerate from the ape,
Whose hands are four, whose tail's a limb,
I contemplate my flaccid shape
And know I may not rival him,

Save with my mind—a nimbler beast
Possessing a thousand sinewy tails,
A thousand hands, with which it scales,
Greedy of luscious truth, the greased

Poles and the coco palms of thought,
Thrives easily through the mangrove maze
Of metaphysics, walks the taut
Frail dangerous liana ways

That link across wide gulfs remote
Analogies between tree and tree;
Outruns the hare, outhops the goat;
Mind fabulous, mind sublime and free!

But oh, the sound of simian mirth!
Mind, issued from the monkey's womb,
Is still umbilical to earth,
Earth its home and earth its tomb.

SECOND PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

IF, O my Lesbia, I should commit,
Not fornication, dear, but suicide,
My Thames-blown body (Pliny vouches it)
Would drift face upwards on the oily tide
With the other garbage, till it putrefied.

But you, if all your lovers' frozen hearts
Conspired to send you, desperate, to drown—
Your maiden modesty would float face down,
And men would weep upon your hinder parts.

'Tis the Lord's doing. Marvellous is the plan
By which this best of worlds is wisely planned.
One law He made for woman, one for man:
We bow the head and do not understand.

FIFTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

A MILLION million spermatozoa,
All of them alive:
Out of their cataclysm but one poor Noah
Dare hope to survive.

And among that billion minus one
Might have chanced to be
Shakespeare, another Newton, a new Donne—
But the One was Me.

Shame to have ousted your betters thus,
Taking ark while the others remained outside!
Better for all of us, froward Homunculus,
If you'd quietly died!

NINTH PHILOSOPHER'S SONG

GOD'S in His Heaven: He never issues
(Wise Man!) to visit this world of ours.
Unchecked the cancer gnaws our tissues,
Stops to lick chops and then again devours.

Those find, who most delight to roam
'Mid castles of remotest Spain,
That there's, thank Heaven, no place like home;
So they set out upon their travels again.

Beauty for some provides escape,
Who gain a happiness in eyeing
The gorgeous buttocks of the ape
Or Autumn sunsets exquisitely dying.

And some to better worlds than this
Mount up on wings as frail and misty
As passion's all-too-transient kiss
(Though afterwards—oh, *omne animal triste!*)

But I, too rational by half
To live but where I bodily am,
Can only do my best to laugh,
Can only sip my misery dram by dram.

While happier mortals take to drink,
A dolorous dipsomaniac,
Fuddled with grief I sit and think,
Looking upon the bile when it is black.

Then brim the bowl with atrabilious liquor!
We'll pledge our Empire vast across the flood:
For Blood, as all men know, than Water's thicker,
But water's wider, thank the Lord, than Blood.

ALMERIA

WINDS have no moving emblems here, but scour
A vacant darkness, an untempered light;
No branches bend, never a tortured flower
Shudders, root-weary, on the verge of flight;
Winged future, withered past, no seeds nor leaves
Attest those swift invisible feet: they run
Free through a naked land, whose breast receives
All the fierce ardour of a naked sun.
You have the Light for lover. Fortunate Earth!
Conceive the fruit of his divine desire.
But the dry dust is all she brings to birth,
That child of clay by even celestial fire.
Then come, soft rain and tender clouds, abate
This shining love that has the force of hate.

ARMOUR

CRABS in their shells, because they cannot play
Don Juan or the flageolet, are safe;
And every stout Sir Roger, stout Sir Ralph,
Every Black Prince, Bayard and Bouchier may
(Their ribs and rumps hermetically canned)
Securely laugh at arrow, sword and mace.
But in their polished and annealed embrace,
Beneath their iron kiss and iron hand,
The soft defenceless lips and flowery breast,
The tender, tender belly of love receive
From helm and clasping cop and urgent greave
So deep a bruise that, mortally possessed,
Love dies. Only the vulnerable will
Hold what it takes and, holding, does not kill.

THE CICADAS

SIGHTLESS, I breathe and touch; this night of pines
Is needly, resinous and rough with bark.
Through every crevice in the tangible dark
The moonlessness above it all but shines.

Limp hangs the leafy sky; never a breeze
Stirs, nor a foot in all this sleeping ground;
And there is silence underneath the trees—
The living silence of continuous sound.

For like inveterate remorse, like shrill
Delirium throbbing in the fevered brain,
An unseen people of cicadas fill
Night with their one harsh note, again, again.

Again, again, with what insensate zest!
What fury of persistence, hour by hour!
Filled with what devil that denies them rest,
Drunk with what source of pleasure and of power!

Life is their madness, life that all night long
Bids them to sing and sing, they know not why;
Mad cause and senseless burden of their song;
For life commands, and Life! is all their cry.

I hear them sing, who in the double night
Of clouds and branches fancied that I went
Through my own spirit's dark discouragement,
Deprived of inward as of outward sight:

Who, seeking, even as here in the wild wood,
A lamp to beckon through my tangled fate,
Found only darkness and, disconsolate,
Mourned the lost purpose and the vanished good.

Now in my empty heart the crickets' shout
Re-echoing denials and still denials
With stubborn folly all my learned doubt,
In madness more than I in reason wise.

Life, life! The word is magical. They sing,
And in my darkened soul the great sun shines;
My fancy blossoms with remembered spring,
And all my autumns ripen on the vines.

Life! and each knuckle of the fig-tree's pale
Dead skeleton breaks out with emerald fire.
Life! and the tulips blow, the nightingale
Calls back the rose, calls back the old desire:

And old desire that is for ever new,
Desire, life's earliest and latest birth,
Life's instrument to suffer and to do,
Springs with the roses from the teeming earth;

Desire that from the world's bright body strips
Deforming time and makes each kiss the first;
That gives to hearts, to satiated lips
The endless bounty of to-morrow's thirst.

Time passes, and the watery moonrise peers
Between the tree-trunks. But no outer light
Tempers the chances of our groping years,
No moon beyond our labyrinthine night.

Clueless we go; but I have heard thy voice,
Divine Unreason! harping in the leaves,
And grieve no more; for wisdom never grieves,
And thou hast taught me wisdom; I rejoice.

FEMMES DAMNÉES

(From the French of Charles Baudelaire)

THE lamps had languisht and their light was pale;
On cushions deep Hippolyta reclined.
Those potent kisses that had torn the veil
From her young candour filled her dreaming mind.

With tempest-troubled eyes she sought the blue
Heaven of her innocence, how far away!
Like some sad traveller, who turns to view
The dim horizons passed at dawn of day.

Tears and the muffled light of weary eyes,
The stupor and the dull voluptuous trance,
Limp arms, like weapons dropped by one who flies—
All served her fragile beauty to enhance.

Calm at her feet and joyful, Delphine lay
And gazed at her with ardent eyes and bright,
Like some strong beast that, having mauled its prey,
Draws back to mark the imprint of its bite.

Strong and yet bowed, superbly on her knees,
She snuffed her triumph, on that frailer grace
Poring voluptuously, as though to seize
The signs of thanks upon the other's face.

Gazing, she sought in her pale victim's eye
The speechless canticle that pleasure sings,
The infinite gratitude that, like a sigh,
Mounts slowly from the spirit's deepest springs.

'Now, now you understand (for love like ours
Is proof enough) that 'twere a sin to throw
The sacred holocaust of your first flowers
To those whose breath might parch them as they blow.

'Light falls my kiss, as the ephemeral wing
That scarcely stirs the shining of a lake.
What ruinous pain your lover's kiss would bring!
A plough that leaves a furrow in its wake.

'Over you, like a herd of ponderous kine,
Man's love will pass and his caresses fall
Like trampling hooves. Then turn your face to mine;
Turn, oh my heart, my half of me, my all!

‘Turn, turn, that I may see their starry lights,
Your eyes of azure; turn. For one dear glance
I will reveal love’s most obscure delights,
And you shall drowse in pleasure’s endless trance.’

‘Not thankless, nor repentant in the least
Is your Hippolyta.’ She raised her head.
‘But one who from some grim nocturnal feast
Returns at dawn feels less disquieted.

‘I bear a weight of terrors, and dark hosts
Of phantoms haunt my steps and seem to lead.
I walk, compelled, behind these beckoning ghosts
Down sliding roads and under skies that bleed.

‘Is ours so strange an act, so full of shame?
Explain the terrors that disturb my bliss.
When you say, Love, I tremble at the name;
And yet my mouth is thirsty for your kiss.

‘Ah, look not so, dear sister, look not so!
You whom I love, even though that love should be
A snare for my undoing, even though
Loving I am lost for all eternity.’

Delphine looked up, and fate was in her eye.
From the god's tripod and beneath his spell,
Shaking her tragic locks, she made reply:
'Who in love's presence dares to speak of hell?

'Thinker of useless thoughts, let him be cursed,
Who in his folly, venturing to vex
A question answerless and barren, first
With wrong and right involved the things of sex!

'He who in mystical accord conjoins
Shadow with heat, dusk with the noon's high fire,
Shall never warm the palsy of his loins
At that red sun which mortals call desire.

'Go, seek some lubber groom's deflowering lust;
Take him your heart and leave me here despised!
Go—and bring back, all horror and disgust,
The livid breasts man's love has stigmatized.

'One may not serve two masters here below.'
But the child answered: 'I am torn apart,
I feel my inmost being rent, as though
A gulf had yawned—the gulf that is my heart.

'Naught may this monster's desperate thirst assuage,—
As fire 'tis hot, as space itself profound—
Naught stay the Fury from her quenchless rage,
Who with her torch explores its bleeding wound.

'Curtain the world away and let us try
If lassitude will bring the boon of rest.
In your deep bosom I would sink and die,
Would find the grave's fresh coolness on your breast.'

Hence, lamentable victims, get you hence!
Hell yawns beneath, your road is straight and steep.
Where all the crimes receive their recompense
Wind-whipped and seething in the lowest deep

With a huge roaring as of storms and fires,
Go down, mad phantoms, doomed to seek in vain
The ne'er-won goal of unassuaged desires,
And in your pleasures find eternal pain!

Sunless your caverns are; the fever damps
That filter in through every crannied vent
Break out with marsh-fire into sudden lamps
And steep your bodies with their frightful scent.

The barrenness of pleasures harsh and stale
Makes mad your thirst and parches up your skin;
And like an old flag volleying in the gale,
Your whole flesh shudders in the blasts of sin.

Far from your kind, outlawed and reprobate,
Go, prowl like wolves through desert worlds apart!
Disordered souls, fashion your own dark fate,
And flee the god you carry in your heart.

ARABIA INFELIX

UNDER a ceiling of cobalt
And mirrored by as void a blue,
Wet only with the wind-blown salt,
The Arabian land implores a dew.

Parched, parched are the hills, and dumb
That thundering voice of the ravine;
Round the dead springs the birds are seen
No more, no more at evening come

(Like lovely thoughts to one who dwells
In quiet, like enchanting hopes)
The leopards and the shy gazelles
And the light-footed antelopes.

Death starts at every rattling gust
That in the withered torrent's bed
Whirls up a phantom of grey dust
And, dying, lets the ghost fall dead.

Dust in a dance may seem to live;
But laid, not blown, it brings to birth.
Not wind, but only rain can give
Life, and to a patient earth.

Hot wind from this Arabian land
Chases the clouds, withholds the rain.
No footstep prints the restless sand
Wherein who sows, he sows in vain.

If there were water, if there were
But a shower, a little fountain springing,
How rich would be the perfumed air,
And the green woods with shade and singing

Bright hills, but by the sun accursed,
Peaceful, but with the peace of hell—
Once on these barren slopes there fell
A plague more violent than thirst:

Anguish to kill inveterate pain
And mortal slaking of desire;
Dew, and a long-awaited rain—
A dew of blood, a rain of fire.

Into a vacant sky the moist
Grey pledge of spring and coming leaves
Swam, and the thirsty hills rejoiced,
All golden with their future sheaves.

Flower-phantoms in the parching air
Nodded, and trees ungrown were bowed;
With love like madness, like despair,
The mountain yearned towards the cloud.

And she in silence slowly came,
Oh! to transfigure, to renew,
Came laden with a gift of dew,
But with it dropped the lightning's flame;

A flame that rent the crags apart,
But rending made a road between
For water to the mountain's heart,
That left a scar, but left it green.

Faithless the cloud and fugitive;
An empty heaven nor burns, nor wets;
At peace, the barren land regrets
Those agonies that made it live.

THE MOOR

CHAMPION of souls and holiness, upholder
Of all the virtues, father of the Church,
Honest, honest, honest Iago! how
Crusadingly, with what indignant zeal
(*Ora pro nobis*), caracoling on
Your high horse and emblazoned, gules on white,
Did you ride forth (Oh, pray for us), ride forth
Against the dark-skinned hosts of evil, ride,
Martyr and saint, against those paynim hosts,
Having for shield all Sinai, and for sword,
To smite rebellion and avenge the Lord,
The sharp, the shining certainty of faith!
(*Ora pro nobis*) point us out the Way.

‘Lily bright and stinking mud:
Fair is fair and foul is ill.
With her, on her, what you will.
This fire must be put out with blood,
Put out with blood.’

But for a glint, a hint of questing eyes,
Invisible, darkness through darkness goes
On feet that even in their victim's dreaming
Wake not an echo.
Lost, he is lost; and yet thus wholly in darkness
Melted, the Moor is more Othello than when,
Green-glittering, the sharp Venetian day
Revealed him armed and kingly and commanding
Captain of men.

How still she lies, this naked Desdemona,
All but a child and sleeping and alone,
How still and white!
Whose breast, whose arms, the very trustfulness
Of her closed eyelids and unhurried breath
More than a philtre maddeningly invite
Lust and those hands, those huge dark hands, and death.

‘For oh, the lily and the mud!
Fair is still fair and foulness, ill.
With her, on her, what you will.
This fire must be put out with blood.’

Well, now the fire is out, and the light too;
All, all put out. In Desdemona's place
Lies now a carrion. That fixed grimace
Of lidless eyes and starting tongue
Derides his foolishness. Cover her face;
This thing but now was beautiful and young.
Honest Iago's Christian work is over;
Short, short the parleying at the Golden Gate.
'For I am one who made the Night ashamed
Of his own essence, that his dark was dark;
One who with good St. Jerome's filthy tongue
Tainted desire and taught the Moor to scorn
His love's pale body, and because she had
Lain gladly in his arms, to call her whore
And strangle her for whoredom.' So he spoke,
And with majestic motion heaven's high door
Rolled musically apart its burnished vans
To grant him entrance.

Turning back meanwhile
From outer darkness, Othello and his bride
Perceive the globe of heaven like one small lamp

Burning alone at midnight in the abyss
Of some cathedral cavern; pause, and then
With face once more averted, hand in hand,
Explore the unseen treasures of the dark.

VULGARITY IN LITERATURE

An Essay

VULGARITY IN LITERATURE

DIGRESSIONS FROM A THEME

THE difficulty, when one is using words of appraisal, the difficulty of knowing what one means!

Then why, if it is so hard, make any attempt to know? Would it not be wiser to follow the example of that Geneva Conference convened, not long ago, to consider means for the suppression of the traffic in obscene publications? For when the Greek delegate (too Socratic by half) suggested that it might be a good thing to establish a preliminary definition of the word 'obscene,' Sir Archibald Bodkin sprang to his feet with a protest. 'There is no definition of indecent or obscene in English Statute Law.' The law of other countries being, apparently, no more explicit, it was unanimously decided that no definition was possible. After which, having triumphantly asserted that they did not know what they were talking about, the members of the Congress settled down to their discussion.

My business is not with the obscene, but with the vulgar. When I call something or somebody 'vulgar,' what *precisely* (as Mr. T. S. Eliot would critically ask) am I saying? Rushing in where Sir Archibald and his colleagues so wisely feared to tread, I shall try to discover.

To begin with, then, I find that there are many occasions when, strictly speaking, I *mean* nothing at all, but am using the word merely to express a dislike—as a term of abuse, a politer synonym, shall we say, of 'bloody.' On such occasions 'vulgar' is no more than a vaguely pejorative noise. More often, however, I find that I intend to *say* something when I employ the word, not merely to snarl.

In certain circumstances, for example, I use the word in its strict etymological sense. When I say that a man has a vulgar accent or vulgar table manners, I mean that his accent and his manners remind me of those current in the lower ranks of society—of the particular society in which I happen to live. For vulgar here is not necessarily vulgar there. *Eructavit cor meum*. East of Constantinople, the action is said to be polite. Here, Sir Toby Belch, though a knight, can never have moved in the highest circles. Or, yes; on second thoughts, he conceivably might have. For the standards of vulgarity are seen to change as you move vertically upwards through the strata of a single society, just as they change before

the eyes of a spectator moving horizontally from one society to another. What is vulgar on high level A may have ceased to be vulgar on the yet higher level B. There are refinements beyond refinements, almost *ad infinitum*. Like Paradise, the *Monde* itself has its high and low. Proust is the Dante of these high mundane spheres; but while it took several centuries to reduce Dante's guide-book to out-of-dateness, Proust's is already, in its factual details (though not, of course, in its spirit), as hopelessly behind the times as a pre-war Baedeker. The social heavens are for ever changing.

But these relativities are too obvious to be very interesting. The Absolute chimerically beckons; and, though we can never hope to come up with it, the chase may be amusing in itself and, who knows? by the way we may actually catch a hare or two, smaller indeed and less noble than the quarry we are after, but having at least the merit of solidly existing, of being visibly there.

We have considered, so far, two cases: the case in which the word 'vulgar' says, 'I don't like this,' and the case in which it says, 'This reminds me of what are, to me, the lower classes.' In the case we are about to consider now, 'vulgar' says something less easily definable. For instance, I can assert that 'This man is vulgar. The fact that he is of good family and was educated at the

right places makes no difference. He is vulgar, intrinsically.' What *precisely* do I mean here?

Etymology is helpful even in this case. The vulgar man of good family is not, indeed, a member of the lower classes in our actual society. But there is an ideal society, in which, we feel, he and his like belong to some very squalid caste.

No values, except perhaps the most rudimentary biological values, are accepted by all human beings. Only the tendency to evaluate is universal. In other words, the machinery for creating values is given, but the values themselves must be manufactured. The process has not yet been rationalized; value-making is still a village industry. Among the educated classes in the West, however, values are sufficiently nearly standardized for us to be able to speak about the ideal society as though it were an absolute.

The extremes of vulgarity are as rare as the extremes of goodness, wickedness, or genius; but it happens occasionally that we meet a nature's non-gentleman who is obviously one of the pariahs of our ideal society. Such people are, intrinsically, what those wretched Indians who sweep the floor and empty the slops are by accident—untouchable. In India, when you leave your hotel and want to tip the sweeper, you must not hold out the coin, expecting him to take it. His immediate reaction to your

gesture will be to shrink away; for if your fingers were to touch his receiving palm you would be defiled. He is considerably sparing you the trouble of having to take a bath, fumigate yourself, and change your under-clothing. The tipping of sweepers has its own special technique; you must halt several yards away from your expectant beneficiary and throw your gift on to the ground at his feet. Commercial transactions during the Black Death must have been carried on in much the same style.

Training has taught the accidentally untouchable Indian to realize his own defiling lowness and to act accordingly. Would that nature had done the same for the intrinsic outcastes of our ideal society! But, alas, she hasn't. You find yourself at dinner sitting next to X, the eminent politician; the journalist, Y, is at large and invites you to his favourite public house. Unlike the sweepers of India, these intrinsic outcastes do not play their untouchable's part. So far are they from knowing their places, that they actually think they are doing you an honour by sitting at your table, a kindness by offering you, before lunch and in some stinking bar parlour, a double whisky or a noggin of glutinous port. As for shrinking, they do not dream of it, on the contrary, they push themselves forward. Indeed, a certain loud self-satisfaction (which renders it impossible for

one to feel much sympathy with the intrinsic untouchable in his affliction), a certain thrusting and pretentious vanity is, as I shall have many occasions of showing in the course of these digressions, one of the essential elements of vulgarity. Vulgarity is a lowness that proclaims itself—and the self-proclamation is also intrinsically a lowness. For pretentiousness in whatever field, unless more than justified by native capacity and demonstrable achievement, is low in itself. Moreover, it underlines all other deficiencies and, as a suitable chemical will reveal words written in invisible ink, calls out the latent lownesses in a character, so that they manifest themselves in the form of open vulgarities.

There is a vulgarity in the sphere of morals, a vulgarity of emotions and intellect, a vulgarity even of the spirit. A man can be wicked, or stupid, or passionate without being vulgar. He can also be vulgarly good, vulgarly intelligent, vulgarly emotional or unemotional, vulgarly spiritual. Moreover, he can belong to the highest class in one sphere of activity and yet be low in another. I have known men of the greatest intellectual refinement, whose emotional life was repugnantly vulgar. Each one of us is like the population of a town built on the slope of a hill: we exist simultaneously at many different levels.

These brief notes on personal vulgarity are meant to

serve as an introduction to what I propose to say about vulgarity in literature. Letters, life—the two worlds are parallel. What is true here is true, with a difference, there. For the sake of completeness I ought, of course, to have illustrated my generalizations about vulgarity in life with concrete examples. But this would have meant an excursion into the realm of fiction, or historical biography—or contemporary libel. I should have had to create a set of artistically living characters, with the circumstances of their existence. World and time, as usual, were lacking. Besides, as it happens, I have, in several works of fiction, elaborately exemplified emotional and intellectual vulgarity as revealed in life—perhaps also, without meaning to, as they are revealed in letters! I shall not begin again here. Here the ready-made examples of vulgarity provided by literature will serve, retrospectively and by analogy, to illustrate my generalizations about vulgarity in life.

§ II

VULGARITY in literature must be distinguished from the vulgarity inherent in the profession of letters. Every man is born with his share of Original Sin, to which every writer adds a pinch of Original Vulgarity. Necessarily and quite inevitably. For exhibitionism is always

vulgar, even if what you exhibit is the most exquisitely refined of souls.

Some writers are more squeamishly conscious than others of the essential vulgarity of their trade—so much so, that, like Flaubert, they have found it hard to commit that initial offence against good breeding: the putting of pen to paper.

It is just possible, of course, that the greatest writers have never written; that the world is full of Monsieur Testes and mute inglorious Miltons, too delicate to come before the public. I should like to believe it; but I find it hard. Your great writer is possessed by a devil, over which he has very little control. If the devil wants to come out (and, in practice, devils always do want to come out), it will do so, however loud the protests of the aristocratic consciousness, with which it uneasily cohabits. The profession of literature may be 'fatally marred by a secret absurdity'; the devil simply doesn't care. *Scribo quia absurdum.*

§ III

TO BE pale, to have no appetite, to swoon at the slightest provocation—these, not so long ago, were the signs of maidenly good breeding. In other words, when a girl was marked with the stigmata of anaemia and chronic

constipation, you knew she was a lady. Virtues are generally fashioned (more or less elegantly, according to the skill of the moral *couturier*) out of necessities. Rich girls had no need to work; the aristocratic tradition discouraged them from voluntarily working; and the Christian tradition discouraged them from compromising their maiden modesty by taking anything like violent exercise. Good carriage-roads and, finally, railways spared them the healthy fatigues of riding. The virtues of Fresh Air had not yet been discovered and the Draught was still the commonest, as it was almost the most dangerous, manifestation of the Diabolic Principle. More perverse than Chinese foot-squeezers, the topiarists of European fashion had decreed that the elegant should have all her viscera constricted and displaced by tight lacing. In a word, the rich girl lived a life scientifically calculated to make her unhealthy. A virtue was made of humiliating necessity, and the pale ethereal swooner of romantic literature remained for years the type and mirror of refined young womanhood.

Something of the same kind happens from time to time in the realm of literature. Moments come when too conspicuous a show of vigour, too frank an interest in common things are signs of literary vulgarity. To be really lady-like, the Muses, like their mortal sisters, must be anaemic and constipated. On the more sensitive

writers of certain epochs circumstances impose an artistic wasting away, a literary consumption. This distressing fatality is at once transformed into a virtue, which it becomes a duty for all to cultivate.

'*Vivre? Nos valets le feront pour nous.*' For, oh, the vulgarity of it! The vulgarity of this having to walk and talk; to open and close the eyes; to think and drink and every day, yes, every day, to eat, eat and excrete. And then this having to pursue the female of one's species, or the male, whichever the case may be; this having to cerebrate, to calculate, to copulate, to propagate. . . . No, no—too gross, too stupidly low. Such things, as Villiers de l'Isle-Adam says, are all very well for footmen. But for a descendant of how many generations of Templars, of Knights of Rhodes and of Malta, Knights of the Garter and the Holy Ghost and all the variously coloured Eagles—obviously, it was out of the question; it simply wasn't done. *Vivre? Nos valets le feront pour nous.*

At the same point, but on another plane, of the great spiral of history, Prince Gotama, more than two thousand years before, had also discovered the vulgarity of living. The sight of a corpse rotting by the roadside had set him thinking. It was his first introduction to death. Now, a corpse, poor thing, is an untouchable and the process of decay is, of all pieces of bad manners, the

vulgarest imaginable. For a corpse is, by definition, a person absolutely devoid of *savoir vivre*. Even your sweeper knows better. But in every greatest king, in every loveliest flowery princess, in every poet most refined, every best dressed dandy, every holiest and most spiritual teacher, there lurks, waiting, waiting for the moment to emerge, an outcaste of the outcastes, a dung carrier, a dog, lower than the lowest, bottomlessly vulgar.

What with making their way and enjoying what they have won, heroes have no time to think. But the sons of heroes—ah, they have all the necessary leisure. The future Buddha belonged to the generation which has time. He saw the corpse, he smelt it vulgarly stinking, he thought. The echoes of his meditations still reverberate, rich with an accumulated wealth of harmonics, like the memory of the organ's final chord pulsing back and forth under the vaulting of a cathedral.

No less than that of war or statecraft, the history of economics has its heroic ages. Economically, the nineteenth century was the equivalent of those brave times about which we read in *Beowulf* and the *Iliad*. Its heroes struggled, conquered or were conquered, and had no time to think. Its bards, the Romantics, sang rapturously, not of the heroes, but of higher things (for they were Homers who detested Achilles), sang with

all the vehemence which one of the contemporary heroes would have put into grinding the faces of the poor. It was only in the second and third generation that men began to have leisure and the necessary detachment to find the whole business—economic heroism and romantic bardism—rather vulgar. Villiers, like Gotama, was one who had time. That he was the descendant of all those Templars and Knights of this and that was, to a great extent, irrelevant. The significant fact was this: he was, or at any rate chronologically might have been, the son and grandson of economic heroes and romantic bards—a man of the decadence. Sons have always a rebellious wish to be disillusioned by that which charmed their fathers; and, wish or no wish, it was difficult for a sensitive man to see and smell the already putrefying corpse of industrial civilization and not be shocked by it into distressful thought. Villiers was duly shocked; and he expressed his shockedness in terms of an aristocratic disdain that was almost Brahminical in its intensity. But his feudal terminology was hardly more than an accident. Born without any of Villiers' perhaps legendary advantages of breeding, other sensitives of the same post-heroic generation were just as profoundly shocked. The scion of Templars had a more striking vocabulary than the others—that was all. For the most self-conscious and intelligent artists of the last

decades of the nineteenth century, too frank an acceptance of the obvious actualities of life, too hearty a manner and (to put it grossly) too many 'guts' were rather vulgar. *Vivre? Nos valets le feront pour nous.* (Incidentally, the suicide rate took a sharp upward turn during the 'sixties. In some countries it is nearly five times what it was seventy years ago.) Zola was the master footman of the age. That vulgar interest in actual life! And all those guts of his—was the man preparing to set up as a tripe-dresser?

A few ageing ninetyites survive; a few young neo-ninetyites, who judge of art and all other human activities in terms of the Amusing and the Tiresome, play kittenishly around with their wax flowers and stuffed owls and Early Victorian beadwork. But, old and young, they are insignificant. Guts and an acceptance of the actual are no longer vulgar. Why not? What has happened? Three things: the usual reaction of sons against fathers, another industrial revolution and a rediscovery of mystery. We have entered (indeed, we have perhaps already passed through) a second heroic age of economics. Its Homers, it is true, are almost without exception sceptical, ironic, denunciatory. But this scepticism, this irony, this denunciation are as lively and vehement as that which is doubted and denounced. Babbitt infects even his detractors with some of his bouncing vitality.

The Romantics, in the same way, possessed an energy proportionate to that of their enemies, the economic heroes who were creating modern industrialism. Life begets life, even in opposition to itself.

Vivre? Nos valets le feront pour nous. But the physicists and psychologists have revealed the universe as a place, in spite of everything, so fantastically queer, that to hand it over to be enjoyed by footmen would be a piece of gratuitous humanitarianism. Servants must not be spoiled. The most refined spirits need not be ashamed in taking a hearty interest in the rediscovered mystery of the actual world. True, it is a sinister as well as a fascinating and mysterious world. And what a mess, with all our good intentions, we have made and are busily making of our particular corner of it! The same old industrial corpse—to some extent disinfected and galvanically stimulated at the moment into a twitching semblance of healthy life—still rots by the wayside, as it rotted in Villiers' time. And as for Gotama's carrion—that of course is always with us. There are, as ever, excellent reasons for personal despair; while the reasons for despairing about society are actually a good deal more cogent than at most times. A Mallarméan shrinking away into pure poetry, a delicate Henry-Jamesian avoidance of all the painful issues would seem to be justified. But the spirit of the time—the industrially

heroic time in which we live—is opposed to these retirements, these handings over of life to footmen. It demands that we should ‘press with strenuous tongue against our palate’ not only joy’s grape, but every Dead Sea fruit. Even dust and ashes must be relished with gusto. Thus, modern American fiction, like the modern American fact which it so accurately renders, is ample and lively. And yet, ‘Dust and ashes, dust and ashes’ is the fundamental theme and final moral of practically every modern American novel of any distinction. High spirits and a heroic vitality are put into the expression of despair. The hopelessness is almost Rabelaisian.

§ IV

IT WAS vulgar at the beginning of the nineteenth century to mention the word ‘handkerchief’ on the French tragic stage. An arbitrary convention had decreed that tragic personages must inhabit a world, in which noses exist only to distinguish the noble Romans from the Greeks and Hebrews, never to be blown. Arbitrary conventions of one sort or another are essential to art. But as the sort of convention constantly varies, so does the corresponding vulgarity. We are back among the relativities.

In the case of the handkerchief we have a particular and rather absurd application of a very widely accepted artistic convention. This convention is justified by the ancient metaphysical doctrine, which distinguishes in the universe two principles, mind and matter, and which attributes to mind an immeasurable superiority. In the name of this principle many religions have demanded the sacrifice of the body; their devotees have responded by mortifying the flesh and, in extreme cases, by committing self-castration and even suicide. Literature has its Manichaeans as well as religion: men who on principle would exile the body and its functions from the world of their art, who condemn as vulgar all too particular and detailed accounts of physical actuality, as vulgar any attempt to relate mental or spiritual events to happenings in the body. The inhabitants of their universe are not human beings, but the tragical heroes and heroines who never blow their noses.

Artistically, the abolition of handkerchiefs and all that handkerchiefs directly or indirectly stand for has certain advantages. The handkerchiefless world of pure mind and spirit is, for an adult, the nearest approach to that infinitely comfortable Freudian womb, towards which, as towards a lost paradise, we are always nostalgically yearning. In the handkerchiefless mental world we are at liberty to work things out to their logical con-

clusions, we can guarantee the triumph of justice, we can control the weather and (in the words of those yearning popular songs which are the national anthems of Wombland) make our Dreams come True by living under Skies of Blue with You. Nature in the mental world is not that collection of tiresomely opaque and recalcitrant objects, so bewildering to the man of science, so malignantly hostile to the man of action; it is the luminously rational substance of a Hegelian nature-philosophy, a symbolic manifestation of the principles of dialectic. Artistically, such a Nature is much more satisfactory (because so much more easy to deal with) than the queer, rather sinister and finally quite incomprehensible monster, by which, when we venture out of our ivory towers, we are instantly swallowed. And man, than whom, as Sophocles long since remarked, nothing is more monstrous, more marvellous, more terrifyingly strange (it is hard to find a single word to render his *deinoteron*)—man, too, is a very unsatisfactory subject for literature. For this creature of inconsistencies can live on too many planes of existence. He is the inhabitant of a kind of psychological Woolworth Building; you never know—he never knows himself—which floor he'll step out at to-morrow, nor even whether, a minute from now, he won't take it into his head to jump into the elevator and shoot up a dozen or

down perhaps twenty stories into some totally different mode of being. The effect of the Manichaeian condemnation of the body is at once to reduce this impossible skyscraper to less than half its original height. Confined henceforward to the mental floors of his being, man becomes an almost easily manageable subject for the writer. In the French tragedies (the most completely Manichaeian works of art ever created) lust itself has ceased to be corporeal and takes its place among the other abstract symbols, with which the authors write their strange algebraical equations of passion and conflict. The beauty of algebraical symbols lies in their universality; they stand not for one particular case, but for all cases. Manichaeians, the classical writers confined themselves exclusively to the study of man as a creature of pure reason and discarnate passions. Now the body particularizes and separates, the mind unites. By the very act of imposing limitations the classicists were enabled to achieve a certain universality of statement impossible to those who attempt to reproduce the particularities and incompletenesses of actual corporeal life. But what they gained in universality, they lost in vivacity and immediate truth. You cannot get something for nothing. Some people think that universality can be paid for too highly.

To enforce their ascetic code the classicists had to

devise a system of critical sanctions. Chief among these was the stigma of vulgarity attached to all those who insisted too minutely on the physical side of man's existence. Speak of handkerchiefs in a tragedy? The solecism was as monstrous as picking teeth with a fork.

At a dinner party in Paris not long ago I found myself sitting next to a French Professor of English, who assured me in the course of an otherwise very agreeable conversation that I was a leading member of the Neo-Classic school and that it was as a leading member of the Neo-Classic school that I was lectured about to the advanced students of contemporary English literature under his tutelage. The news depressed me. Classified, like a museum specimen, and lectured about, I felt most dismally posthumous. But that was not all. The thought that I was a Neo-Classic preyed upon my mind—a Neo-Classic without knowing it, a Neo-Classic against all my desires and intentions. For I have never had the smallest ambition to be a Classic of any kind, whether Neo, Palaeo, Proto or Eo. Not at any price. For, to begin with, I have a taste for the lively, the mixed and the incomplete in art, preferring it to the universal and the chemically pure. In the second place, I regard the classical discipline, with its insistence on elimination, concentration, simplification, as being, for all the formal difficulties it imposes on the writer, essentially an escape

from, a getting out of, the greatest difficulty—which is to render adequately, in terms of literature, that infinitely complex and mysterious thing, actual reality. The world of mind is a comfortable Wombland, a place to which we flee from the bewildering queerness and multiplicity of the actual world. Matter is incomparably subtler and more intricate than mind. Or, to put it a little more philosophically, the consciousness of events which we have immediately, through our senses and intuitions and feelings, is incomparably subtler than any idea we can subsequently form of that immediate consciousness. Our most refined theories, our most elaborate descriptions are but crude and barbarous simplifications of a reality that is, in every smallest sample, infinitely complex. Now, simplifications must, of course, be made; if they were not, it would be quite impossible to deal artistically (or, for that matter, scientifically) with reality at all. What is the smallest amount of simplification compatible with comprehensibility, compatible with the expression of a humanly significant meaning? It is the business of the non-classical naturalistic writer to discover. His ambition is to render, in literary terms, the quality of immediate experience—in other words, to express the finally inexpressible. To come anywhere near achieving this impossibility is much more difficult, it seems to me, than, by eliminating and simplifying, to

achieve the perfectly realizable classical ideal. The cutting out of all the complex particularities of a situation (which means, as we have seen, the cutting out of all that is corporeal in it) strikes me as mere artistic shirking. But I disapprove of the shirking of artistic difficulties. Therefore I find myself disapproving of classicism.

Literature is also philosophy, is also science. In terms of beauty it enunciates truths. The beauty-truths of the best classical works possess, as we have seen, a certain algebraic universality of significance. Naturalistic works contain the more detailed beauty-truths of particular observation. These beauty-truths of art are truly scientific. All that modern psychologists, for example, have done is to systematize and de-beautify the vast treasures of knowledge about the human soul contained in novel, play, poem and essay. Writers like Blake and Shakespeare, like Stendhal and Dostoevsky, still have plenty to teach the modern scientific professional. There is a rich scientific harvest to be reaped in the works even of minor writers. By nature a natural historian, I am ambitious to add my quota to the sum of particularized beauty-truths about man and his relations with the world about him. (Incidentally, this world of relationships, this borderland between 'subjective' and 'objective' is one which literature is peculiarly, perhaps uniquely, well fitted to explore.) I do not want to be a

Classical, or even a Neo-Classical, eliminator and generalizer.

This means, among other things, that I cannot accept the Classicists' excommunication of the body. I think it not only permissible, but necessary, that literature should take cognizance of physiology and should investigate the still obscure relations between the mind and its body. True, many people find the reports of such investigations, when not concealed in scientific textbooks and couched in the decent obscurity of a Graeco-Latin jargon, extremely and inexcusably vulgar; and many more find them downright wicked. I myself have frequently been accused, by reviewers in public and by unprofessional readers in private correspondence, both of vulgarity and of wickedness—on the grounds, so far as I have ever been able to discover, that I reported my investigations into certain phenomena in plain English and in a novel. The fact that many people should be shocked by what he writes practically imposes it as a duty upon the writer to go on shocking them. For those who are shocked by truth are not only stupid, but morally reprehensible as well; the stupid should be educated, the wicked punished and reformed. All these praiseworthy ends can be attained by a course of shocking; retributive pain will be inflicted on the truth-haters by the first shocking truths, whose repetition will gradually

build up in those who read them an immunity to pain and will end by reforming and educating the stupid criminals out of their truth-hating. For a familiar truth ceases to shock. To render it familiar is therefore a duty. It is also a pleasure. For, as Baudelaire says, '*ce qu'il y a d'enivrant dans le mauvais goût, c'est le plaisir aristocratique de déplaire.*'

§ V

THE aristocratic pleasure of displeasing is not the only delight that bad taste can yield. One can love a certain kind of vulgarity for its own sake. To overstep artistic restraints, to protest too much for the fun of baroquely protesting—such offences against good taste are intoxicatingly delightful to commit, not because they displease other people (for to the great majority they are rather pleasing than otherwise), but because they are intrinsically vulgar, because the good taste against which they offend is as nearly as possible an absolute good taste; they are artistic offences that have the exciting quality of the sin against the Holy Ghost.

It was Flaubert, I think, who described how he was tempted, as he wrote, by swarms of gaudy images and how, a new St. Antony, he squashed them ruthlessly, like lice, against the bare wall of his study. He was re-

solved that his work should be adorned only with its own intrinsic beauty and with no extraneous jewels, however lovely in themselves. The saintliness of this ascetic of letters was duly rewarded; there is nothing in all Flaubert's writings that remotely resembles a vulgarity. Those who follow his religion must pray for the strength to imitate their saint. The strength is seldom vouchsafed. The temptations which Flaubert put aside are, by any man of lively fancy and active intellect, incredibly difficult to be resisted. An image presents itself, glittering, iridescent; capture it, pin it down, however irrelevantly too brilliant for its context. A phrase, a situation suggests a whole train of striking or amusing ideas that fly off at a tangent, so to speak, from the round world on which the creator is at work; what an opportunity for saying something witty or profound! True, the ornament will be in the nature of a florid excrescence on the total work; but never mind. In goes the tangent—or rather, out into artistic irrelevancy. And in goes the effective phrase that is too effective, too highly coloured for what it is to express; in goes the too emphatic irony, the too tragical scene, the too pathetic tirade, the too poetical description. If we succumb to all these delightful temptations, if we make welcome all these gaudy lice instead of squashing them at their first appearance, our work will soon glitter like a South

American parvenu, dazzling with parasitic ornament, and vulgar. For a self-conscious artist, there is a most extraordinary pleasure in knowing exactly what the results of showing off and protesting too much must be and then (in spite of this knowledge, or because of it) proceeding, deliberately and with all the skill at his command, to commit precisely those vulgarities, against which his conscience warns him and which he knows he will afterwards regret. To the aristocratic pleasure of displeasing other people, the conscious offender against good taste can add the still more aristocratic pleasure of displeasing himself.

§ VI

EULALIE, Ulalume, Raven and Bells, Conqueror Worm and Haunted Palace. . . . Was Edgar Allan Poe a major poet? It would surely never occur to any English-speaking critic to say so. And yet, in France, from 1850 till the present time, the best poets of each generation—yes, and the best critics, too; for, like most excellent poets, Baudelaire, Mallarmé, Paul Valéry are also admirable critics—have gone out of their way to praise him. Only a year or two ago M. Valéry repeated the now traditional French encomium of Poe, and added at the same time a protest against the faintness of our English praise. We who are speakers of English and not English

scholars, who were born into the language and from childhood have been pickled in its literature—we can only say, with all due respect, that Baudelaire, Mallarmé and Valéry are wrong and that Poe is not one of our major poets. A taint of vulgarity spoils, for the English reader, all but two or three of his poems—the marvellous ‘City in the Sea’ and ‘To Helen,’ for example, whose beauty and crystal perfection make us realize, as we read them, what a very great artist perished on most of the occasions when Poe wrote verse. It is to this perished artist that the French poets pay their tribute. Not being English they are incapable of appreciating those finer shades of vulgarity that ruin Poe for us, just as we, not being French, are incapable of appreciating those finer shades of lyrical beauty which are, for them, the making of La Fontaine.

The substance of Poe is refined; it is his form that is vulgar. He is, as it were, one of Nature’s Gentlemen, unhappily cursed with incorrigible bad taste. To the most sensitive and high-souled man in the world we should find it hard to forgive, shall we say, the wearing of a diamond ring on every finger. Poe does the equivalent of this in his poetry; we notice the solecism and shudder. Foreign observers do not notice it; they detect only the native gentlemanliness in the poetical intention, not the vulgarity in the details of execution. To them,

we seem perversely and quite incomprehensibly unjust.

It is when Poe tries to make it too poetical that his poetry takes on its peculiar tinge of badness. Protesting too much that he is a gentleman, and opulent into the bargain, he falls into vulgarity. Diamond rings on every finger proclaim the parvenu.

Consider, for example, the first two stanzas of 'Ullume.'

*The skies they were ashen and sober;
 The leaves they were crisped and sere—
 The leaves they were withering and sere;
 It was night in the lonesome October
 Of my most immemorial year;
 It was hard by the dim lake of Auber,
 In the misty mid region of Weir—
 It was down by the dank tarn of Auber
 In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir.*

*Here once, through an alley Titanic,
 Of cypress, I roamed with my soul,
 Of cypress, with Psyche my soul.
 These were days when my heart was volcanic
 As the scoriac rivers that roll—
 As the lavas that restlessly roll
 Their sulphurous currents down Yaanek
 In the ultimate clime of the pole—
 That groan as they roll down Mount Yaanek
 In the realms of the boreal pole.*

These lines protest too much (and with what a variety of voices!) that they are poetical, and, protesting, are therefore vulgar. To start with, the walloping dactylic metre is all too musical. Poetry ought to be musical, but musical with tact, subtly and variously. Metres whose rhythms, as in this case, are strong, insistent and practically invariable offer the poet a kind of short cut to musicality. They provide him (my subject calls for a mixture of metaphors) with a ready-made, reach-me-down music. He does not have to create a music appropriately modulated to his meaning; all he has to do is to shovel the meaning into the moving stream of the metre and allow the current to carry it along on waves that, like those of the best hairdressers, are guaranteed permanent. Many nineteenth-century poets used these metrical short cuts to music, with artistically fatal results.

*Then when nature around me is smiling
The last smile which answers to mine,
I do not believe it beguiling,
Because it reminds me of thine.*

How can one take even Byron seriously, when he protests his musicalness in such loud and vulgar accents? It is only by luck or an almost superhuman poetical skill that these all too musical metres can be made to sound, through their insistent barrel-organ rhythms,

the intricate, personal music of the poet's own meaning. Byron occasionally, for a line or two, takes the hard kink out of those dactylic permanent waves and appears, so to speak, in his own musical hair; and Hood, by an unparalleled prodigy of technique, turns even the reach-me-down music of 'The Bridge of Sighs' into a personal music, made to the measure of the subject and his own emotion. Moore, on the contrary, is always perfectly content with the permanent wave; and Swinburne, that super-Moore of a later generation, was also content to be a permanent waver—the most accomplished, perhaps, in all the history of literature. The complexity of his ready-made musics and his technical skill in varying the number, shape and contour of his permanent waves are simply astonishing. But, like Poe and the others, he protested too much, he tried to be too poetical. However elaborately devious his short cuts to music may be, they are still short cuts—and short cuts (this is the irony) to poetical vulgarity.

A quotation and a parody will illustrate the difference between ready-made music and music made to measure. I remember (I trust correctly) a simile of Milton's:—

Like that fair field
Of Enna, where Proserpine gathering flowers,
Herself a fairer flower, by gloomy Dis
Was gathered, which cost Ceres all that pain
To seek her through the world.

chez Edgar. The much too musical metre is (to change the metaphor once more) like a rich chasuble, so stiff with gold and gems that it stands unsupported, a carapace of jewelled sound, into which the sense, like some snotty little seminarist, irrelevantly creeps and is lost. This music of Poe's—how much less really musical it is than that which, out of his nearly neutral decasyllables, Milton fashioned on purpose to fit the slender beauty of Proserpine, the strength and swiftness of the ravisher and her mother's heavy, despairing sorrow!

Of the versification of 'The Raven' Poe says, in his *Philosophy of Composition*: 'My first object (as usual) was originality. The extent to which this has been neglected in versification is one of the most unaccountable things in the world. Admitting that there is little possibility of variety in mere *rhythm*, it is still clear that the possible varieties of metre and stanza are absolutely infinite—and yet, *for centuries, no man, inverse, has ever done or ever seemed to think of doing an original thing.*' This fact, which Poe hardly exaggerates, speaks volumes for the good sense of the poets. Feeling that almost all strikingly original metres and stanzas were only illegitimate short cuts to a music which, when reached, turned out to be but a poor and vulgar substitute for individual music, they wisely stuck to the less blatantly musical metres of tradition. The ordinary

iambic decasyllable, for example, is intrinsically musical enough to be just able, when required, to stand up by itself. But its musical stiffness can easily be taken out of it. It can be now a chasuble, a golden carapace of sound, now, if the poet so desires, a pliant, soft and, musically speaking, almost neutral material, out of which he can fashion a special music of his own to fit his thoughts and feelings in all their incessant transformations. Good landscape painters seldom choose a 'picturesque' subject; they want to paint their own picture, not have it imposed on them by nature. In the thoroughly paintable little places of this world you will generally find only bad painters. (It's so easy to paint the thoroughly paintable.) The good ones prefer the unspectacular neutralities of the Home Counties to those Cornish coves and Ligurian fishing villages, whose picturesqueness is the delight of all those who have no pictures of their own to project on to the canvas. It is the same with poetry: good poets avoid what I may call, by analogy, 'musiquesque' metres, preferring to create their own music out of raw materials as nearly as possible neutral. Only bad poets, or good poets against their better judgment, and by mistake, go to the Musiquesque for their material. 'For centuries no man, in verse, has ever done or ever seemed to think of doing an original thing.' It remained for Poe and the other nineteenth-

century metrists to do it; Procrustes-like, they tortured and amputated significance into fitting the ready-made music of their highly original metres and stanzas. The result was, in most cases, as vulgar as a Royal Academy Sunrise on Ben Nevis (with Highland Cattle) or a genuine hand-painted sketch of Portofino.

How could a judge so fastidious as Baudelaire listen to Poe's music and remain unaware of its vulgarity? A happy ignorance of English versification preserved him, I fancy, from this realization. His own imitations of mediaeval hymns prove how far he was from understanding the first principles of versification in a language where the stresses are not, as in French, equal, but essentially and insistently uneven. In his Latin poems Baudelaire makes the ghost of Bernard of Cluny write as though he had learned his art from Racine. The principles of English versification are much the same as those of mediaeval Latin. If Baudelaire could discover lines composed of equally stressed syllables in Bernard, he must also have discovered them in Poe. Interpreted according to Racinian principles, such verses as

*It was down by the dank tarn of Auber
In the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir*

must have taken on, for Baudelaire, heaven knows what exotic subtlety of rhythm. We can never hope to guess

what that ghoulish-woodland means to a Frenchman possessing only a distant and theoretical knowledge of our language.

Returning now to 'Ulalume,' we find that its too poetical metre has the effect of vulgarizing by contagion what would be otherwise perfectly harmless and refined technical devices. Thus, even the very mild alliterations in 'the ghoulish-woodland of Weir' seem to protest too much. And yet an iambic verse beginning 'Woodland of Weir, ghoulish-woodland,' would not sound in the least over-poetical. It is only in the dactylic environment that those two w's strike one as protesting too much.

And then there are the proper names. Well used, proper names can be relied on to produce the most thrilling musical-magical effects. But use them without discretion, and the magic evaporates into abracadabral absurdity, or becomes its own mocking parody; the over-emphatic music shrills first into vulgarity and finally into ridiculousness. Poe tends to place his proper names in the most conspicuous position in the line (he uses them constantly as rhyme words), showing them off—these magical-musical jewels—as the *rastacouaire* might display the twin cabochon emeralds at his shirt cuffs and the platinum wrist watch, with his monogram in diamonds. These proper-name rhyme-jewels are par-

ticularly flashy in Poe's case because they are mostly dissyllabic. Now, the dissyllabic rhyme in English is poetically so precious and so conspicuous by its richness that, if it is not perfect in itself and perfectly used, it emphatically ruins what it was meant emphatically to adorn. Thus, sound and association make of 'Thule' a musical-magical proper name of exceptional power. But when Poe writes,

*I have reached these lands but newly
From an ultimate dim Thule,*

he spoils the effect which the word ought to produce by insisting too much, and incompetently, on its musicality. He shows off his jewel as conspicuously as he can, but only reveals thereby the badness of its setting and his own Levantine love of display. For 'newly' does not rhyme with 'Thule'—or only rhymes on condition that you pronounce the adverb as though you were a Bengali, or the name as though you came from Whitechapel. The paramour of Goethe's king rhymed perfectly with the name of his kingdom; and when Laforgue wrote of that '*roi de Thulé, Immaculé*' his *rime riche* was entirely above suspicion. Poe's rich rhymes, on the contrary, are seldom above suspicion. That dank tarn of Auber is only very dubiously a fit poetical companion for the tenth month; and though Mount Yaanek is, *ex hypo-*

thesi, a volcano, the rhyme with volcanic is, frankly, impossible. On other occasions Poe's proper names rhyme not only well enough, but actually, in the particular context, much too well. Dead D'Elormie, in 'The Bridal Ballad,' is prosodically in order, because Poe had brought his ancestors over with the Conqueror (as he also imported the ancestors of that Guy de Vere who wept his tear over Lenore) for the express purpose of providing a richly musical-magical rhyme to 'bore me' and 'before me.' Dead D'Elormie is first cousin to Edward Lear's aged Uncle Arly, sitting on a heap of Barley—ludicrous; but also (unlike dear Uncle Arly) horribly vulgar, because of the too musical lusciousness of his invented name and his display, in all tragical seriousness, of an obviously faked Norman pedigree. Dead D'Elormie is a poetical disaster.

§ VII

IT IS vulgar, in literature, to make a display of emotions which you do not naturally have, but think you ought to have, because all the best people do have them. It is also vulgar (and this is the more common case) to have emotions, but to express them so badly, with so many too many protestings, that you seem to have no natural feelings, but to be merely fabricating emotions by a

process of literary forgery. Sincerity in art, as I have pointed out elsewhere, is mainly a matter of talent. Keats's love letters ring true, because he had great literary gifts. Most men and women are capable of feeling passion, but not of expressing it; their love letters (as we learn from the specimens read aloud at inquests and murder trials, in the divorce court, during breach of promise cases) are either tritely flat or tritely bombastic. In either case manifestly insincere, and in the second case also vulgar—for to protest too much is always vulgar, when the protestations are so incompetent as not to carry conviction. And perhaps such excessive protestations can never be convincing, however accomplished the protester. D'Annunzio, for example—nobody could do a job of writing better than D'Annunzio. But when, as is too often the case, he makes much ado about nothing, we find it hard to be convinced either of the importance of the nothing, or of the sincerity of the author's emotion about it—and this in spite of the incomparable splendour of D'Annunzio's much ado. True, excessive protestings may convince a certain public at a certain time. But when the circumstances, which rendered the public sensitive to the force and blind to the vulgarity of the too much protesting, have changed, the protests cease to convince. Mackenzie's *Man of Feeling*, for example, protests its author's sensibility with an ex-

travagance that seems now, not merely vulgar, but positively ludicrous. At the time of its publication sentimentality was, for various reasons, extremely fashionable. Circumstances changed and *The Man of Feeling* revealed itself as vulgar to the point of ridiculousness; and vulgar and ridiculous it has remained ever since and doubtless will remain.

Again, to take a more modern instance, circumstances conspired to disguise the fundamental vulgarity of those excessive protestations of humanitarian philanthropy, with which, during the War, M. Romain Rolland filled his pacifist pamphlet. At the time they seemed (it depended on your political convictions) either sublime or diabolically wicked. Circumstances have changed and we are now shocked by the indiscriminateness and unintelligence of M. Rolland's loudly protested universal benevolence. When he said, 'Love your enemies,' Jesus affirmed (he was a realist) that there were enemies to love. M. Rolland's humanitarianism went a step further; there were no enemies, nobody was wrong, nobody deserved condemnation, except perhaps for fighting. There was a general obliteration of distinctions; everything was melted down to the consistency of hog-wash. M. Rolland served out this delicious emotional soup, slop after slop, in generous ladlefuls, of emphatic and undistinguished and therefore eminently unconvincing and

vulgar prose. The pamphlet was an infinitely well intentioned and, at the time, a politically valuable performance. But as literature it was vulgar—vulgar, because its excesses of sentiment were quite unbalanced by any excesses of discriminating intelligence; vulgar, because the loud protestings of its manner utterly lacked beauty or elegance. ‘*Le style c’est l’âme,*’ said M. Rolland once, improving (how characteristically!) on the earlier dictum. Papini’s comment was unkind: M. Rolland has no style.

Shortly after the War, M. Rolland wrote a novel which was, in its own way and with much less excuse, as vulgar as his war-time pamphlet. I refer to that painful and (in the artistic, not, of course, the moral sense) profoundly ‘insincere’ book, *Colas Breugnon*. *Colas Breugnon* is loud with protestations of a positively Rabelaisian jollity. *Malgré tout*, a pacifist can be a good fellow and enjoy his bottle of Burgundy as well as another man. Reading it, one was reminded of those acutely distressing exhibitions of facetiousness and waggish joviality, by means of which certain clergymen try so hard to discount their dog collars and curious waistcoats. Methinks the gentleman doth protest too much, is what we say to ourselves when we have to put up with one of these manifestations of Jocular Christianity. Pantagruelian pacifism is just as distressing,

when it fails to come off (for success, I suppose, will justify almost anything) as Jocular Christianity. *Colas Breugnon* failed most lamentably to come off. Its loudly lyrical protestations (so lyrical, that M. Rolland's prose was for ever turning by mistake into blank alexandrines) were simply vulgar. Vulgar, at any rate, for me and, to my knowledge, for several other readers whom, out of self-flattery perhaps, I respect. But I have also met people to whom the too poetical prose and pacifico-pantagruelian protestings of *Colas Breugnon* brought conviction. The vulgarity escaped their notice and they were genuinely moved by what seemed to me, as literature, obviously 'insincere.'

In cases like this one can either shrug one's shoulders and say that there is no accounting for tastes. Or else one can rush in and boldly account for them by invoking, now the influence of special environmental circumstances, now a congenital fatality. The vulgarity of *The Man of Feeling* escaped the notice of most of its readers because, at the time of its publication, sentimentality was, for special historical reasons, more than ordinarily in favour. Similarly there may be, in the environment and history of certain individuals or certain classes, special circumstances which make some kinds of generally recognized vulgarity imperceptible. But there is a natural as well as an acquired blindness to vul-

garity. The Brahmins of the critical hierarchy are sensitive to differences of shade and tone which, among the Sudras, pass quite unnoticed. Needless to say, each one of us conceives that his place is among the Brahmins. I shall make, as a matter of course, the universal assumption—justifiably, in the circumstances; for a critic cannot do his business unless he first assumes that he is right; righter than any one else, or than a few specifically excepted judges. Having made this assumption, I am entitled to affirm that all those who do not agree with me (and with those who think like me) about the vulgarity of a given work are members of a lower caste in the critical hierarchy—that is, unless they can invoke as their excuse for judging badly the pressure of special external circumstances. Here I may speak without irrelevance of that curious dulness of perception, that lack of discrimination displayed, as every critic must have had many opportunities of amazedly discovering, by even apparently intelligent readers, not to mention all the others. Because we all know how to read, we imagine that we know what we read. Enormous fallacy! In reality, I imagine, the gift of literary discrimination is at least as rare as that of musical discrimination. We admit quite cheerfully the truth about music. But if music were not an educational luxury; if every child were taught its notes as now it is taught its letters,

if piano playing were, like geometry and French grammar, a compulsory subject in every school curriculum, what then? Should we as easily admit our lack of musical discrimination as we do at present, when most of us have never learned to read a simple melody or play on any instrument? I think not. Knowing something about the technique of music, we should imagine that we knew something (or, more probably, that we knew everything) about its substance. Anyhow, this is what seems to have happened in the case of literature. Because we have spent some years in acquiring the art of reading books, we think we have acquired the art of judging them. But in spite of universal education, there are still vast numbers of people who spontaneously love the lowest when they read it, and a great many more who, loving the highest, also love, if not the lowest, at any rate the low and the middling with an equal and quiet indiscriminating enthusiasm. To a sensitive critic the judgments passed on books by quite intelligent and highly educated people often seem bewildering in their irrelevance and apparent perversity. He hears them speaking of utterly dissimilar works, as though there were nothing to choose between them. One happens to be refined and another vulgar; one genuine and another manifestly a fraud and a forgery. But such trifling differences seem to pass quite unnoticed. There

are men, I suppose, who find it hard to distinguish between a dog and a toasting fork; but one seldom meets them, because they are almost all in asylums. But men who fail to distinguish between works of art which, for the sensitive critic, are at least as dissimilar as dogs and toasting forks, run no risk of being certified as insane. On the contrary, they seem to be destined, in most cases, to become either the Head Masters of our most splendid Public Schools, or else Prime Ministers.

Even the greatest writers (to return to our original theme) can be guilty on occasion of the most shocking emotional vulgarity. Balzac and Dickens will provide us, in *Séraphita* and *The Old Curiosity Shop*, with striking examples of various kinds of this vulgarity.

Séraphita is the most considerable work in that section of the Human Comedy devoted to religion in general and in particular (for Balzac was always specially interested in mysticism) to mystical religion. 'Mysticism? What you mean is misty schism,' was the remark once made to a friend of mine (who moves, as I, alas, do not, in the highest ecclesiastical circles) by a more than ordinarily eminent Eminence. The pun is not a bad one and, like the best Irish bulls, is pregnant. For the literature of mysticism, which is a literature about the inexpressible, is for the most part misty indeed—a London fog, but coloured pink. It is only in the works

of the very best mystical writers that the fog lifts—to reveal what? A strange alternation of light and darkness: light to the limits of the possibly illuminable and after that the darkness of paradox and incomprehensibility, or the yet deeper, the absolute night of silence. So much for the mist. As for the schism, that has always had a tendency to open its gulfs round the feet of the Catholic mystics. The Church has, at all times and very naturally, felt suspicious of those who insist on approaching God directly and not through the official ecclesiastical channels. And, strong in their immediate knowledge of God, the mystics on their side have often had a very short way with dogmas, rites and the priesthood. Mysticism brings with it the decay of authority. The process is, to some extent at least, reversible; the decay of authority leads to mysticism. For whenever, thanks to the growth of scepticism, dogmas have come to be unbelievable and priesthood has lost its magical prestige, then mysticism comes into its own—into its own, at any rate, as a philosophical theory, though not necessarily as a practical way of life. Mystical religion is the ideal religion for doubters—those ultimate schismatics who have separated themselves from all belief. For the mystic is dispensed from intellectually *believing* in God; he *feels* God. Or, to put it more accurately, he has (in Professor Otto's phrase)

a 'numinous' emotion, which he is at liberty to rationalize into a theological dogma—or not to rationalize, according to taste; for it is perfectly possible to have a numinous emotion without believing in the existence of a *numen*, or divinity, as its hypothetical cause.

Contemporary scepticism is tempered with the usual superstitions—belief in ghosts, preoccupation with magic and the like—and also with an interest in mysticism. In some cases this interest finds a practical expression. But as the practice of mystical religion entails the practice of asceticism, and as asceticism is not popular in this mass-producing age, when the first duty of every good citizen is to consume as much as he possibly can, our interest in mysticism is mainly theoretical and scientific.

It is painfully easy for a sceptic, who is also an amateur, theoretical and non-practising mystic, to fall into artistic insincerity, when writing about the kind of religious experiences which interest him. For to write convincingly about things which you do not know at first hand is very hard. The temptation is always to make up for deficiency of knowledge by stylistic emphasis and redundancy, by protesting too much. Only those who write consummately well can hope, in such circumstances, to avoid insincerity and vulgarity.

Balzac had nearly all the gifts. Two only were lacking

—the gift of writing well and the gift of mysticism (in the mistiest and most schismatic as well as the most definite sense of the word). This was the more unfortunate, as he chose writing as his profession and mysticism as the subject of much of his writing.

Wherever he is dealing with subjects of which he has a natural first-hand knowledge, we do not notice the defects in Balzac's prose. In fact, it is not defective. It is only in cases where he doesn't really know what he is talking about that Balzac's defects as a stylist emerge and become distressingly manifest. For in these cases he protests too much—with fatal results.

Balzac, I think, was less of a natural mystic than almost any other great writer. He had a prodigious intuitive knowledge of man as a social animal, of man in his mundane relations with other men. But of man in solitude, man in his relations with the universe and those mysterious depths within himself—in a word, of man the mystical animal—he knew, personally and at first hand, very little. I remember one day saying something of this kind to D. H. Lawrence, who nodded his agreement with me and summed up the matter by saying that Balzac was 'a gigantic dwarf.' A gigantic dwarf—gigantic in his power of understanding and vividly re-creating every conceivable worldly activity, with all the thoughts and feelings that the world can

give birth to in a human mind; but dwarfish when it came to dealing artistically with those inner activities which fill the mind when a man is living in solitude, or else—a naked individuality—in unworldly relationship with the naked individuality of other human beings. Dwarfish, in a word, precisely in those respects in which Lawrence himself was gigantic; and gigantic in a sphere where Lawrence, the most unworldly of writers, did not exist, did not even want to exist.

Religion and, in its widest, mistiest sense, mysticism have an important place in human life. Ambitious to make his Comedy complete, Balzac gave them an important place in his work. Besides, he had the true romantic feeling for chiaroscuro. He loved to bring together, in picturesque contrast, this world with the heaven of idealism, angels with villainous Du Tillys and Nucingens, ambitious Rastignacs with utterly disinterested sages, artists and saints. Indeed, if there had been no such thing as mysticism, Balzac would have been compelled by his artistic principles to invent it; for that colossal statue of Mammon in his pantheon demanded urgently as pendant and foil a no less colossal statue of Idealism to fill the vacant niche on the opposite side of the aisle. Unhappily for Balzac's reputation as a religious writer, mysticism exists, and with it a considerable body of mystical literature, good, bad and

indifferent. There are standards by which to judge such works as *Séraphita* and *Louis Lambert*. Judged by those standards, Balzac's mysticism turns out to be a very poor and at the same time (and for that very reason) a very pretentious thing. '*Quelle froide plaisanterie!*' was his Don Juan's summing up of the universe; and this, I believe, was what the essential Balzac naturally and intuitively felt about the whole business. Perhaps—his own temperament being more sanguine than Don Juan's—he would have found the pleasantry warm rather than cold; but, whatever its temperature, it was always a joke, huge, bad and rather malicious. On to this natural cynicism Balzac grafted, by a process and as the result of reflection, ideals, religion, angels, Swedenborg—what not? But it is significant that whenever he wrote of these things, he wrote, as Blake declared that Milton wrote of God, 'in chains' (elastic chains; for they allowed him to kick and gesticulate most violently); and that whenever he wrote on a theme, which allowed him to give expression to his high-spirited natural cynicism, he wrote at ease and, relatively, very well.

Fashion, no doubt, as well as philosophy and an ambition to achieve universality, had an influence in turning Balzac, in spite of his temperament, towards mysticism. He lived in that strange age of Catholic re-

action, when smart young men about town would go to the Abbé Dupanloup to study their Catechism and when, in the phrase of Joseph de Maistre, irreligion was *canaille*. Making a pleasure as well as a virtue of political necessity, Balzac's contemporaries used the restored religion as a source of emotional excitement. Not seriously believing (it was difficult at the beginning of the nineteenth century to do that), they went to church for the sake of the aesthetic and 'numinous' thrills which it could provide. To use the modern jargon, they were interested in religious experience, not in religious dogmas, which they made use of simply to procure the pleasant experiences. (Thus, an intellectual belief in the existence of a God now loving and now angry can be made to yield delicious thrills alternately of confidence and terror.) Balzac was 'in the movement'—but, as usual, moving much faster and more violently than the current which bore him along. By nature a high-spirited cynic and sceptic (*plus il vit, plus il doute*), he could transform himself on occasion, by sheer force of make-believe, into a fashionable church-goer, a more than fashionable Swedenborgian. The superstitiousness natural to all sceptics (for to a Pyrrhonist absolutely everything is possible) came to his assistance here. Besides, like most great men, he was a bit of a charlatan; he loved to impress his readers, he loved to tell them the

answer to the Riddle of the Universe—straight from the horse's mouth, so to speak. (For a philosophic tipster, Swedenborg and Boehme are obviously winners.) Finally, Balzac possessed the intelligent literary man's interest in science—that quite irresponsible interest of the man who has never had any scientific training, never done any practical scientific work and for whom, in consequence, science is just a magic art, like any other, only more respectable, guaranteed as it is by sorcerers who have received knighthoods and rosettes of the Legion of Honour. Nor does the intelligent literary man much distinguish one scientist from another; the only preferences he has are for those scientists he can understand and those who deal with the kind of subject that lends itself to literary treatment. Which generally means, in practice, that he prefers bad scientists to good ones. In Balzac's day the literary man's favourite scientist was not Laplace or Faraday, but Mesmer—just as to-day it is to the wilder Freudians rather than to Einstein or Pavlov that he turns. Science—the science of the intelligent literary man—seems to confirm the misty and schismatical doctrines of mysticism. Which, for Balzac, was a further justification, if any were needed, for feeling, or trying to feel, or at any rate saying that one felt those mystical emotions which all the best people, from the *ultra* duchess with her *six cent*

mille livres de rente down to the humblest saint in the calendar, were feeling or had felt.

I have lingered thus long over Balzac, because I feel his case to be so instructive, so profoundly relevant. He set himself the task of reviving in the person of the novelist that man of universal learning, that creator-of-all-trades, who was the glory of the Renaissance. His ambition was to know everything, both in the outer world and in that within; to know everything and to be every one—yes, to be both mystic and mundane, idealist as well as cynic, contemplator no less than man of action. That he should have realized even a part of this immense and impossible ambition is a sign of his extraordinary power. His problems are the problems which confront the contemporary novelist who aspires, not indeed to universality (for only a lunatic or a conscious superman could cherish such ambitions to-day) but, more modestly, to intelligence, to awareness of contemporaneity, to self-consciousness, to truthfulness, to artistic integrity. And the temptations by which Balzac was beset, the dangers which threatened and the artistic disasters which overtook him are precisely the temptations, dangers and disasters, in the midst of which the contemporary novelist must, if he is in the least ambitious, pick his way.

In *Séraphita* we see a terrifying example of the dis-

aster which overtakes writers who succumb to the temptation of protesting too much about matters of which they know too little. (I use the word 'know' to signify, in this case, the immediate, first-hand knowledge that is born of feeling. Balzac had a considerable abstract knowledge of mysticism; it was his crime that he also pretended to possess an intuitive, emotional knowledge from within, and his misfortune that he lacked, or lost, those literary arts, by means of which he might have made the pretence convincing. 'Lost'—for, as I have said, Balzac could write, not beautifully perhaps, but well and vigorously enough about his beloved World, just as Milton could be unaffectedly sublime about the Flesh (his account of the first wedding is bright with an almost unearthly glow of sensuality) and that indomitable Devil, whose self-esteem was founded, like Milton's own, on 'just and right.' The moment Balzac had to protest too much, as he had to do about matters which did not lie near his heart, he lost this power to write well and sank or soared into fustian.

Séraphita is characterized by a peculiar emotional vulgarity. In his attempt to express the mystical emotions which he does not naturally have, Balzac is forced to make incessant overstatements. Not only do the characters themselves protest, both in speech and

in action, much too much; the symbols with which Balzac surrounds them also protest too much. It would be easy by means of extended quotation to illustrate what I have been saying about *Séraphita*. But world and time are lacking, and I must be content to cite this one sentence, into which Balzac has considerably crammed examples of almost all the faults which characterize his mystical writing. 'And with a lifted finger, this singular being showed her the blue aureole which the clouds, by leaving a clear space above their heads, had drawn in the sky and in which the stars could be seen in daylight, in virtue of hitherto unexplained atmospheric laws.' In these few lines Balzac has succumbed to three separate temptations. First, in his anxiety to impress us with the mystical merits of his *Séraphita*, he has called her 'a singular being.' (He gives her many other such honorific titles in the course of his narrative: she is 'unique,' 'inexplicable,' and the like.) The adjective protests too much about a matter which it was the business of the story itself and not the commenting author to make clear.

Consider, in the second place, that aureole of blue sky, which follows *Séraphita* about in all her rambles like a celestial dog, however cloudy the weather. This symbol is so obviously poetical, so loudly significant of Higher Things, that it fails to impress—it merely shocks,

as the diamond rings symbolical of Levantine opulence merely shock without impressing. The stars are just a set of diamond studs to match the rings. But in those hitherto unexplained atmospheric laws, in virtue of which they are visible by daylight, we have another, quite new vulgarity—an intellectual vulgarity this time. It is Balzac the charlatan, Balzac the philosophic tipster giving us a piece of inside information, straight from the scientific horse's mouth. Now one can talk very knowingly in a novel, poem or other work of literary art even about such things as hitherto unexplained atmospheric laws, without necessarily being vulgar; but only on condition that the talking is done tactfully and with perfect relevance. One must be, as Jean Coteau said of that most universally knowing of modern novelists, M. Paul Morand, '*un nouveau riche qui sait recevoir.*' M. Morand has a wonderfully airy, easy way of implying that he has looked into everything—absolutely everything, from God and the Quantum Theory to the slums of Baku (the world's most classy slums—didn't you know it?), from the Vanderbilt family and all the Ritz Hotels to the unpublished poetry of Father Hopkins. Just the quick passing implication of knowledge, just the right word in each particular case, the absolutely correct, esoteric formula—that is all. M. Morand is the almost perfect literary

knower; he hardly ever, at any rate in his earlier books, makes a mistake. Balzac was too serious in his charlatanism, too vastly ambitious, too energetic to be a very tactful intellectual hostess; for all his wealth he did not know how to receive. Thus, in the present case, he has fallen into vulgarity, because he could not resist the temptation of being knowing at a most inopportune moment. That horse's-mouth information about atmospheric laws has been dragged irrelevantly and absurdly into the middle of a poetic symbol—a much too poetic symbol, as we have seen; which only makes the incongruity more apparent. Blue aureoles are a part of an angel's uniform, as much *de rigueur* among Cherubs as top-hats at a Royal Garden Party. Unexplained atmospheric laws have nothing to do with angels. By bringing them thus incongruously together, Balzac calls attention to the vulgarity of a knowingness which insists on displaying itself at all costs and on all occasions.

The case of Dickens is a strange one. The really monstrous emotional vulgarity, of which he is guilty now and then in all his books and almost continuously in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, is not the emotional vulgarity of one who simulates feelings which he does not have. It is evident, on the contrary, that Dickens felt most poignantly for and with his Little Nell; that he wept over her sufferings, piously revered her goodness and

exulted in her joys. He had an overflowing heart; but the trouble was that it overflowed with such curious and even rather repellent secretions. The creator of the later Pickwick and the Cheeryble Brothers, of Tim Linkinwater the bachelor and Mr. Garland and so many other gruesome old Peter Pans was obviously a little abnormal in his emotional reactions. There was something rather wrong with a man who could take this lachrymose and tremulous pleasure in adult infantility. He would doubtless have justified his rather frightful emotional taste by a reference to the New Testament. But the child-like qualities of character commended by Jesus are certainly not the same as those which distinguish the old infants in Dickens's novels. There is all the difference in the world between infants and children. Infants are stupid and unaware and sub-human. Children are remarkable for their intelligence and ardour, for their curiosity, their intolerance of shams, the clarity and ruthlessness of their vision. From all accounts Jesus must have been child-like, not at all infantile. A child-like man is not a man whose development has been arrested; on the contrary, he is a man who has given himself a chance of continuing to develop long after most adults have muffled themselves in the cocoon of middle-aged habit and convention. An

infantile man is one who has not developed at all, or who has regressed towards the womb, into a comfortable unawareness. So far from being attractive and commendable, an infantile man is really a most repulsive, because a truly monstrous and misshapen, being. A writer who can tearfully adore these stout or cadaverous old babies, snugly ensconced in their mental and economic womb-substitutes and sucking, between false teeth, their thumbs, must have something seriously amiss with his emotional constitution.

One of Dickens's most striking peculiarities is that, whenever in his writing he becomes emotional, he ceases instantly to use his intelligence. The overflowing of his heart drowns his head and even dims his eyes; for, whenever he is in the melting mood, Dickens ceases to be able and probably ceases even to wish to see reality. His one and only desire on these occasions is just to overflow, nothing else. Which he does, with a vengeance and in an atrocious blank verse that is meant to be poetical prose and succeeds only in being the worst kind of fustian. 'When Death strikes down the innocent and young, from every fragile form from which he lets the panting spirit free, a hundred virtues rise, in shapes of mercy, charity and love, to walk the world and bless it. Of every tear that sorrowing mortals shed on such

green graves, some good is born, some gentler nature comes. In the Destroyer's steps there spring up bright creations that defy his power, and his dark path becomes a way of light to Heaven.' And so on, a stanchless flux.

Mentally drowned and blinded by the sticky overflowings of his heart, Dickens was incapable, when moved, of re-creating, in terms of art, the reality which had moved him, was even, it would seem, unable to perceive that reality. Little Nelly's sufferings and death distressed him as, in real life, they would distress any normally constituted man; for the suffering and death of children raise the problem of evil in its most unanswerable form. It was Dickens's business as a writer to re-create in terms of his art this distressing reality. He failed. The history of Little Nell is distressing indeed, but not as Dickens presumably meant it to be distressing; it is distressing in its ineptitude and vulgar sentimentality.

A child, Ilusha, suffers and dies in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazov*. Why is this history so agonizingly moving, when the tale of Little Nell leaves us not merely cold, but derisive? Comparing the two stories, we are instantly struck by the incomparably greater richness in factual detail of Dostoevsky's creation. Feeling did not prevent him from seeing and recording, or rather

re-creating. All that happened round Ilusha's deathbed he saw, unerringly. The emotion-blinded Dickens noticed practically nothing of what went on in Little Nelly's neighbourhood during the child's last days. We are almost forced, indeed, to believe that he didn't want to see anything. He wanted to be unaware himself and he wanted his readers to be unaware of everything except Little Nell's sufferings on the one hand and her goodness and innocence on the other. But goodness and innocence and the undeservedness of suffering and even, to some extent, suffering itself are only significant in relation to the actual realities of human life. Isolated, they cease to mean anything, perhaps to exist. Even the classical writers surrounded their abstract and algebraical personages with at least the abstract and algebraical implication of the human realities, in relation to which virtues and vices are significant. Thanks to Dickens's pathologically deliberate unawareness, Nell's virtues are marooned, as it were, in the midst of a boundless waste of unreality; isolated, they fade and die. Even her sufferings and death lack significance because of this isolation. Dickens's unawareness was the death of death itself. Unawareness, according to the ethics of Buddhism, is one of the deadly sins. The stupid are wicked. (Incidentally, the cleverest men can, sometimes and in certain circumstances, reveal themselves as profoundly

—criminally—stupid. You can be an acute logician and at the same time an emotional cretin.) Damned in the realm of conduct, the unaware are also damned aesthetically. Their art is bad; instead of creating, they murder.

Art, as I have said, is also philosophy, is also science. Other things being equal, the work of art which in its own way 'says' more about the universe will be better than the work of art which says less. (The 'other things' which have to be equal are the forms of beauty, in terms of which the artist must express his philosophic and scientific truths.) Why is *The Rosary* a less admirable novel than *The Brothers Karamazov*? Because the amount of experience of all kinds understood, 'felt into,' as the Germans would say, and artistically re-created by Mrs. Barclay is small in comparison with that which Dostoevsky feelingly comprehended and knew so consummately well how to re-create in terms of the novelist's art. Dostoevsky covers all Mrs. Barclay's ground and a vast area beside. The pathetic parts of *The Old Curiosity Shop* are as poor in understood and artistically re-created experience as *The Rosary*—indeed, I think they are even poorer. At the same time they are vulgar (which *The Rosary*, that genuine masterpiece of the servants' hall, is not). They are vulgar, because their poverty is a pretentious poverty, because

their disease (for the quality of Dickens's sentimentality is truly pathological) professes to be the most radiant health; because they protest their unintelligence, their lack of understanding with a vehemence of florid utterance that is not only shocking, but ludicrous.



BRAVE NEW WORLD
The Novel Complete



CHAPTER ONE

A SQUAT grey building of only thirty-four stories. Over the main entrance the words, CENTRAL LONDON HATCHERY AND CONDITIONING CENTRE, and, in a shield, the World State's motto, COMMUNITY, IDENTITY, STABILITY.

The enormous room on the ground floor faced towards the north. Cold for all the summer beyond the panes, for all the tropical heat of the room itself, a harsh thin light glared through the windows, hungrily seeking some draped lay figure, some pallid shape of academic goose-flesh, but finding only the glass and nickel and bleakly shining porcelain of a laboratory. Wintriness responded to wintriness. The overalls of the workers were white, their hands gloved with a pale corpse-coloured rubber. The light was frozen, dead, a ghost. Only from the yellow barrels of the microscopes did it borrow a certain

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rich and living substance, lying along the polished tubes like butter, streak after luscious streak in long recession down the work tables.

“And this,” said the Director opening the door, “is the Fertilizing Room.”

Bent over their instruments, three hundred Fertilizers were plunged, as the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning entered the room, in the scarcely breathing silence, the absent-minded, soliloquizing hum or whistle, of absorbed concentration. A troop of newly arrived students, very young, pink and callow, followed nervously, rather abjectly, at the Director's heels. Each of them carried a notebook, in which, whenever the great man spoke, he desperately scribbled. Straight from the horse's mouth. It was a rare privilege. The D.H.C. for Central London always made a point of personally conducting his new students round the various departments.

“Just to give you a general idea,” he would explain to them. For of course some sort of general idea they must have, if they were to do their work intelligently—though as little of one, if they were to be good and happy members of society, as possible. For particulars, as every one knows, make for virtue and happiness; generalities are intellectually necessary evils. Not philosophers but fret-sawyers and stamp collectors compose the backbone of society.

“To-morrow,” he would add, smiling at them with a slightly menacing geniality, “you'll be set-

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ting down to serious work. You won't have time for generalities. Meanwhile . . ."

Meanwhile, it was a privilege. Straight from the horse's mouth into the notebook. The boys scribbled like mad.

Tall and rather thin but upright, the Director advanced into the room. He had a long chin and big, rather prominent teeth, just covered, when he was not talking, by his full, floridly curved lips. Old, young? Thirty? Fifty? Fifty-five? It was hard to say. And anyhow the question didn't arise; in this year of stability, A.F. 632, it didn't occur to you to ask it.

"I shall begin at the beginning," said the D.H.C. and the more zealous students recorded his intention in their notebooks: *Begin at the beginning*. "These," he waved his hand, "are the incubators." And opening an insulated door he showed them racks upon racks of numbered test-tubes. "The week's supply of ova. Kept," he explained, "at blood heat; whereas the male gametes," and here he opened another door, "they have to be kept at thirty-five instead of thirty-seven. Full blood heat sterilizes." Rams wrapped in theremogene beget no lambs.

Still leaning against the incubators he gave them, while the pencils scurried illegibly across the pages, a brief description of the modern fertilizing process; spoke first, of course, of its surgical introduction—"the operation undergone voluntarily for the good of Society, not to mention the fact that it carries a

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bonus amounting to six months' salary"; continued with some account of the technique for preserving the excised ovary alive and actively developing; passed on to a consideration of optimum temperature, salinity, viscosity; referred to the liquor in which the detached and ripened eggs were kept; and, leading his charges to the work tables, actually showed them how this liquor was drawn off from the test-tubes; how it was let out drop by drop onto the specially warmed slides of the microscopes; how the eggs which it contained were inspected for abnormalities, counted and transferred to a porous receptacle; how (and he now took them to watch the operation) this receptacle was immersed in a warm bouillon containing free-swimming spermatozoa—at a minimum concentration of one hundred thousand per cubic centimetre, he insisted; and how, after ten minutes, the container was lifted out of the liquor and its contents re-examined; how, if any of the eggs remained unfertilized, it was again immersed, and, if necessary, yet again; how the fertilized ova went back to the incubators; where the Alphas and Betas remained until definitely bottled; while the Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons were brought out again, after only thirty-six hours, to undergo Bokanovsky's Process.

"Bokanovsky's Process," repeated the Director, and the students underlined the words in their little notebooks.

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One egg, one embryo, one adult—normality—but a bokanovskified egg will bud, will proliferate, will divide. From eight to ninety-six buds, and every bud will grow into a perfectly formed embryo, and every embryo into a full-sized adult. Making ninety-six human beings grow where only one grew before. Progress.

“Essentially,” the D.H.C. concluded, “bokanovskification consists of a series of arrests of development. We check the normal growth and, paradoxically enough, the egg responds by budding.”

Responds by budding. The pencils were busy.

He pointed. On a very slowly moving band a rack-full of test-tubes was entering a large metal box, another rack-full was emerging. Machinery faintly purred. It took eight minutes for the tubes to go through, he told them. Eight minutes of hard X-rays being about as much as an egg can stand. A few died; of the rest, the least susceptible divided into two; most put out four buds; some eight; all were returned to the incubators, where the buds began to develop; then, after two days, were suddenly chilled, chilled and checked. Two, four, eight, the buds in their turn budded; and having budded were dosed almost to death with alcohol; consequently burgeoned again and having budded—bud out of bud out of bud—were thereafter—further arrest being generally fatal—left to develop in peace. By which time the original egg was in a fair way to

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being anything from eight to ninety-six embryos—a prodigious improvement, you will agree, on nature. Identical twins—but not in piddling twos and threes as in the old viviparous days, when an egg would sometimes accidentally divide; actually by dozens, by scores at a time.

“Scores,” the Director repeated and flung out his arms, as though he were distributing largesse. “Scores.”

But one of the students was fool enough to ask where the advantage lay.

“My good boy!” The Director wheeled sharply round on him. “Can’t you see? Can’t you *see*?” He raised a hand; his expression was solemn. “Bokanovsky’s Process is one of the major instruments of social stability!”

Major instruments of social stability.

Standard men and women; in uniform batches. The whole of a small factory staffed with the products of a single bokanovskified egg.

“Ninety-six identical twins working ninety-six identical machines!” The voice was almost tremulous with enthusiasm. “You really know where you are. For the first time in history.” He quoted the planetary motto. “Community, Identity, Stability.” Grand words. “If we could bokanovskify indefinitely the whole problem would be solved.”

Solved by standard Gammas, unvarying Deltas, uniform Epsilons. Millions of identical twins. The

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principle of mass production at last applied to biology.

“But, alas,” the Director shook his head, “we *can't* bokanovskify indefinitely.”

Ninety-six seemed to be the limit; seventy-two a good average. From the same ovary and with gametes of the same male to manufacture as many batches of identical twins as possible—that was the best (sadly a second best) that they could do. And even that was difficult.

“For in nature it takes thirty years for two hundred eggs to reach maturity. But our business is to stabilize the population at this moment, here and now. Dribbling out twins over a quarter of a century—what would be the use of that?”

Obviously, no use at all. But Podsnap's Technique had immensely accelerated the process of ripening. They could make sure of at least a hundred and fifty mature eggs within two years. Fertilize and bokanovskify—in other words, multiply by seventy-two—and you get an average of nearly eleven thousand brothers and sisters in a hundred and fifty batches of identical twins, all within two years of the same age.

“And in exceptional cases we can make one ovary yield us over fifteen thousand adult individuals.”

Beckoning to a fair-haired, ruddy young man who happened to be passing at the moment, “Mr. Foster,” he called. The ruddy young man ap-

proached. "Can you tell us the record for a single ovary, Mr. Foster?"

"Sixteen thousand and twelve in this Centre," Mr. Foster replied without hesitation. He spoke very quickly, had a vivacious blue eye, and took an evident pleasure in quoting figures. "Sixteen thousand and twelve; in one hundred and eighty-nine batches of identicals. But of course they've done much better," he rattled on, "in some of the tropical Centres. Singapore has often produced over sixteen thousand five hundred; and Mombasa has actually touched the seventeen thousand mark. But then they have unfair advantages. You should see the way a negro ovary responds to pituitary! It's quite astonishing, when you're used to working with European material. Still," he added, with a laugh (but the light of combat was in his eyes and the lift of his chin was challenging), "still, we mean to beat them if we can. I'm working on a wonderful Delta-Minus ovary at this moment. Only just eighteen months old. Over twelve thousand seven hundred children already, either decanted or in embryo. And still going strong. We'll beat them yet."

"That's the spirit I like!" cried the Director, and clapped Mr. Foster on the shoulder. "Come along with us and give these boys the benefit of your expert knowledge."

Mr. Foster smiled modestly. "With pleasure." They went.

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In the Bottling Room all was harmonious bustle and ordered activity. Flaps of fresh sow's peritoneum ready cut to the proper size came shooting up in little lifts from the Organ Store in the sub-basement. Whizz and then, click! the lift-hatches flew open; the bottle-liner had only to reach out a hand, take the flap, insert, smooth-down, and before the lined bottle had had time to travel out of reach along the endless band, whizz, click! another flap of peritoneum had shot up from the depths, ready to be slipped into yet another bottle, the next of that slow interminable procession on the band.

Next to the Liners stood the Matriculators. The procession advanced; one by one the eggs were transferred from their test-tubes to the larger containers; deftly the peritoneal lining was slit, the morula dropped into place, the saline solution poured in . . . and already the bottle had passed, and it was the turn of the labellers. Heredity, date of fertilization, membership of Bokanovsky Group—details were transferred from test-tube to bottle. No longer anonymous, but named, identified, the procession marched slowly on; on through an opening in the wall, slowly on into the Social Predestination Room.

"Eighty-eight cubic metres of card-index," said Mr. Foster with relish, as they entered.

"Containing *all* the relevant information," added the Director.

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“Brought up to date every morning.”

“And co-ordinated every afternoon.”

“On the basis of which they make their calculations.”

“So many individuals, of such and such quality,” said Mr. Foster.

“Distributed in such and such quantities.”

“The optimum Decanting Rate at any given moment.”

“Unforeseen wastages promptly made good.”

“Promptly,” repeated Mr. Foster. “If you knew the amount of overtime I had to put in after the last Japanese earthquake!” He laughed good-humouredly and shook his head.

“The Predestinators send in their figures to the Fertilizers.”

“Who give them the embryos they ask for.”

“And the bottles come in here to be predestinated in detail.”

“After which they are sent down to the Embryo Store.”

“Where we now proceed ourselves.”

And opening a door Mr. Foster led the way down a staircase into the basement.

The temperature was still tropical. They descended into a thickening twilight. Two doors and a passage with a double turn insured the cellar against any possible infiltration of the day.

“Embryos are like photograph film,” said Mr.

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Foster waggishly, as he pushed open the second door. "They can only stand red light."

And in effect the sultry darkness into which the students now followed him was visible and crimson, like the darkness of closed eyes on a summer's afternoon. The bulging flanks of row on receding row and tier above tier of bottles glinted with innumerable rubies, and among the rubies moved the dim red spectres of men and women with purple eyes and all the symptoms of lupus. The hum and rattle of machinery faintly stirred the air.

"Give them a few figures, Mr. Foster," said the Director, who was tired of talking.

Mr. Foster was only too happy to give them a few figures.

Two hundred and twenty metres long, two hundred wide, ten high. He pointed upwards. Like chickens drinking, the students lifted their eyes towards the distant ceiling.

Three tiers of racks: ground floor level, first gallery, second gallery.

The spidery steel-work of gallery above gallery faded away in all directions into the dark. Near them three red ghosts were busily unloading demi-johns from a moving staircase.

The escalator from the Social Predestination Room.

Each bottle could be placed on one of fifteen racks, each rack, though you couldn't see it, was

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a conveyor travelling at the rate of thirty-three and a third centimetres an hour. Two hundred and sixty-seven days at eight metres a day. Two thousand one hundred and thirty-six metres in all. One circuit of the cellar at ground level, one on the first gallery, half on the second, and on the two hundred and sixty-seventh morning, daylight in the Decanting Room. Independent existence—so called.

“But in the interval,” Mr. Foster concluded, “we’ve managed to do a lot to them. Oh, a very great deal.” His laugh was knowing and triumphant.

“That’s the spirit I like,” said the Director once more. “Let’s walk round. You tell them everything, Mr. Foster.”

Mr. Foster duly told them.

Told them of the growing embryo on its bed of peritoneum. Made them taste the rich blood surrogate on which it fed. Explained why it had to be stimulated with placentin and thyroxin. Told them of the *corpus luteum* extract. Showed them the jets through which at every twelfth metre from zero to 2040 it was automatically injected. Spoke of those gradually increasing doses of pituitary administered during the final ninety-six metres of their course. Described the artificial maternal circulation installed on every bottle at Metre 112; showed them the reservoir of blood-surrogate, the centrifugal pump that kept the liquid moving over the placenta and drove it through the synthetic lung and waste-

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oxygen. Nothing like oxygen-shortage for keeping an embryo below par." Again he rubbed his hands.

"But why do you want to keep the embryo below par?" asked an ingenuous student.

"Ass!" said the Director, breaking a long silence. "Hasn't it occurred to you that an Epsilon embryo must have an Epsilon environment as well as an Epsilon heredity?"

It evidently hadn't occurred to him. He was covered with confusion.

"The lower the caste," said Mr. Foster, "the shorter the oxygen." The first organ affected was the brain. After that the skeleton. At seventy per cent. of normal oxygen you got dwarfs. At less than seventy eyeless monsters.

"Who are no use at all," concluded Mr. Foster.

Whereas (his voice became confidential and eager), if they could discover a technique for shortening the period of maturation what a triumph, what a benefaction to Society!

"Consider the horse."

They considered it.

Mature at six; the elephant at ten. While at thirteen a man is not yet sexually mature; and is only full-grown at twenty. Hence, of course, that fruit of delayed development, the human intelligence.

"But in Epsilons," said Mr. Foster very justly, "we don't need human intelligence."

Didn't need and didn't get it. But though the

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Epsilon mind was mature at ten, the Epsilon body was not fit to work till eighteen. Long years of superfluous and wasted immaturity. If the physical development could be speeded up till it was as quick, say, as a cow's, what an enormous saving to the Community!

"Enormous!" murmured the students. Mr. Foster's enthusiasm was infectious.

He became rather technical; spoke of the abnormal endocrine co-ordination which made men grow so slowly; postulated a germinal mutation to account for it. Could the effects of this germinal mutation be undone? Could the individual Epsilon embryo be made a revert, by a suitable technique, to the normality of dogs and cows? That was the problem. And it was all but solved.

Pilkington, at Mombasa, had produced individuals who were sexually mature at four and full-grown at six and a half. A scientific triumph. But socially useless. Six-year-old men and women were too stupid to do even Epsilon work. And the process was an all-or-nothing one; either you failed to modify at all, or else you modified the whole way. They were still trying to find the ideal compromise between adults of twenty and adults of six. So far without success. Mr. Foster sighed and shook his head.

Their wanderings through the crimson twilight had brought them to the neighbourhood of Metre

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170 on Rack 9. From this point onwards Rack 9 was enclosed and the bottles performed the remainder of their journey in a kind of tunnel, interrupted here and there by openings two or three metres wide.

“Heat conditioning,” said Mr. Foster.

Hot tunnels alternated with cool tunnels. Coolness was wedded to discomfort in the form of hard X-rays. By the time they were decanted the embryos had a horror of cold. They were predestined to emigrate to the tropics, to be miners and acetate silk spinners and steel workers. Later on their minds would be made to endorse the judgment of their bodies. “We condition them to thrive on heat,” concluded Mr. Foster. “Our colleagues upstairs will teach them to love it.”

“And that,” put in the Director sententiously, “that is the secret of happiness and virtue—liking what you’ve *got* to do. All conditioning aims at that: making people like their unescapable social destiny.”

In a gap between two tunnels, a nurse was delicately probing with a long fine syringe into the gelatinous contents of a passing bottle. The students and their guides stood watching her for a few moments in silence.

“Well, Lenina,” said Mr. Foster, when at last she withdrew the syringe and straightened herself up.

The girl turned with a start. One could see that, for all the lupus and the purple eyes, she was uncommonly pretty.

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"Henry!" Her smile flashed redly at him—a row of coral teeth.

"Charming, charming," murmured the Director and, giving her two or three little pats, received in exchange a rather deferential smile for himself.

"What are you giving them?" asked Mr. Foster, making his tone very professional.

"Oh, the usual typhoid and sleeping sickness."

"Tropical workers start being inoculated at Metre 150," Mr. Foster explained to the students. "The embryos still have gills. We immunize the fish against the future man's diseases." Then, turning back to Lenina, "Ten to five on the roof this afternoon," he said, "as usual."

"Charming," said the Director once more, and, with a final pat, moved away after the others.

On Rack 10 rows of next generation's chemical workers were being trained in the toleration of lead, caustic soda, tar, chlorine. The first of a batch of two hundred and fifty embryonic rocket-plane engineers was just passing the eleven hundred metre mark on Rack 3. A special mechanism kept their containers in constant rotation. "To improve their sense of balance," Mr. Foster explained. "Doing repairs on the outside of a rocket in mid-air is a ticklish job. We slacken off the circulation when they're right way up, so that they're half starved, and double the flow of surrogate when they're upside down. They learn to associate topsy-turvydom with well-being; in fact,

they're only truly happy when they're standing on their heads.

"And now," Mr. Foster went on, "I'd like to show you some very interesting conditioning for Alpha Plus Intellectuals. We have a big batch of them on Rack 5. First Gallery level," he called to two boys who had started to go down to the ground floor.

"They're round about Metre 900," he explained. "You can't really do any useful intellectual conditioning till the foetuses have lost their tails. Follow me."

But the Director had looked at his watch. "Ten to three," he said. "No time for the intellectual embryos, I'm afraid. We must go up to the Nurseries before the children have finished their afternoon sleep."

Mr. Foster was disappointed. "At least one glance at the Decanting Room," he pleaded.

"Very well then." The Director smiled indulgently. "Just one glance."



CHAPTER TWO

MR. FOSTER was left in the Decanting Room. The D.H.C. and his students stepped into the nearest lift and were carried up to the fifth floor.

INFANT NURSERIES. NEO-PAVLOVIAN CONDITIONING ROOMS, announced the notice board.

The Director opened a door. They were in a large bare room, very bright and sunny; for the whole of the southern wall was a single window. Half a dozen nurses, trousered and jacketed in the regulation white viscose-linen uniform, their hair aseptically hidden under white caps, were engaged in setting out bowls of roses in a long row across the floor. Big bowls, packed tight with blossom. Thousands of petals, ripe-blown and silkily smooth, like the cheeks of innumerable little cherubs, but of cherubs, in that bright light, not exclusively pink and Aryan, but also luminously Chinese, also Mexican, also apoplectic

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with too much blowing of 'celestial trumpets, also pale as death, pale with the posthumous whiteness of marble.

The nurses stiffened to attention as the D.H.C. came in.

"Set out the books," he said curtly.

In silence the nurses obeyed his command. Between the rose bowls the books were duly set out—a row of nursery quartos opened invitingly each at some gaily coloured image of beast or fish or bird.

"Now bring in the children."

They hurried out of the room and returned in a minute or two, each pushing a kind of tall dumb-waiter laden, on all its four wire-netted shelves, with eight-month-old babies, all exactly alike (a Bokanovsky Group, it was evident) and all (since their caste was Delta) dressed in khaki.

"Put them down on the floor."

The infants were unloaded.

"Now turn them so that they can see the flowers and books."

Turned, the babies at once fell silent, then began to crawl towards those clusters of sleek colours, those shapes so gay and brilliant on the white pages. As they approached, the sun came out of a momentary eclipse behind a cloud. The roses flamed up as though with a sudden passion from within; a new and profound significance seemed to suffuse the shining pages of the books. From the ranks of the

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crawling babies came little squeals of excitement, gurgles and twitterings of pleasure.

The Director rubbed his hands. "Excellent!" he said. "It might almost have been done on purpose."

The swiftest crawlers were already at their goal. Small hands reached out uncertainly, touched, grasped, unpetaling the transfigured roses, crumpling the illuminated pages of the books. The Director waited until all were happily busy. Then, "Watch carefully," he said. And, lifting his hand, he gave the signal.

The Head Nurse, who was standing by a switch-board at the other end of the room, pressed down a little lever.

There was a violent explosion. Shriller and ever shriller, a siren shrieked. Alarm bells maddeningly sounded.

The children started, screamed; their faces were distorted with terror.

"And now," the Director shouted (for the noise was deafening), "now we proceed to rub in the lesson with a mild electric shock."

He waved his hand again, and the Head Nurse pressed a second lever. The screaming of the babies suddenly changed its tone. There was something desperate, almost insane, about the sharp spasmodic yelps to which they now gave utterance. Their little bodies twitched and stiffened; their limbs moved jerkily as if to the tug of unseen wires.

"We can electrify that whole strip of floor," bawled the Director in explanation. "But that's enough," he signalled to the nurse.

The explosions ceased, the bells stopped ringing, the shriek of the siren died down from tone to tone into silence. The stiffly twitching bodies relaxed, and what had become the sob and yelp of infant maniacs broadened out once more into a normal howl of ordinary terror.

"Offer them the flowers and the books again."

The nurses obeyed; but at the approach of the roses, at the mere sight of those gaily-coloured images of pussy and cock-a-doodle-doo and baa-baa black sheep, the infants shrank away in horror; the volume of their howling suddenly increased.

"Observe," said the Director triumphantly, "observe."

Books and loud noises, flowers and electric shocks—already in the infant mind these couples were compromisingly linked; and after two hundred repetitions of the same or a similar lesson would be wedded indissolubly. What man has joined, nature is powerless to put asunder.

"They'll grow up with what the psychologists used to call an 'instinctive' hatred of books and flowers. Reflexes unalterably conditioned. They'll be safe from books and botany all their lives." The Director turned to his nurses. "Take them away again."

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Still yelling, the khaki babies were loaded on to their dumb-waiters and wheeled out, leaving behind them the smell of sour milk and a most welcome silence.

One of the students held up his hand; and though he could see quite well why you couldn't have lower-caste people wasting the Community's time over books, and that there was always the risk of their reading something which might undesirably decondition one of their reflexes, yet . . . well, he couldn't understand about the flowers. Why go to the trouble of making it psychologically impossible for Deltas to like flowers?

Patiently the D.H.C. explained. If the children were made to scream at the sight of a rose, that was on grounds of high economic policy. Not so very long ago (a century or thereabouts), Gammas, Deltas, even Epsilons, had been conditioned to like flowers—flowers in particular and wild nature in general. The idea was to make them want to be going out into the country at every available opportunity, and so compel them to consume transport.

"And didn't they consume transport?" asked the student.

"Quite a lot," the D.H.C. replied. "But nothing else."

Primroses and landscapes, he pointed out, have one grave defect: they are gratuitous. A love of nature keeps no factories busy. It was decided to

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abolish the love of nature, at any rate among the lower classes; to abolish the love of nature, but *not* the tendency to consume transport. For of course it was essential that they should keep on going to the country, even though they hated it. The problem was to find an economically sounder reason for consuming transport than a mere affection for primroses and landscapes. It was duly found.

“We condition the masses to hate the country,” concluded the Director. “But simultaneously we condition them to love all country sports. At the same time, we see to it that all country sports shall entail the use of elaborate apparatus. So that they consume manufactured articles as well as transport. Hence those electric shocks.”

“I see,” said the student, and was silent, lost in admiration.

There was a silence; then, clearing his throat, “Once upon a time,” the Director began, “while our Ford was still on earth, there was a little boy called Reuben Rabinovitch. Reuben was the child of Polish-speaking parents.” The Director interrupted himself. “You know what Polish is, I suppose?”

“A dead language.”

“Like French and German,” added another student, officiously showing off his learning.

“And ‘parent’?” questioned the D.H.C.

There was an uneasy silence. Several of the boys blushed. They had not yet learned to draw the

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significant but often very fine distinction between smut and pure science. One, at last, had the courage to raise a hand.

"Human beings used to be . . ." he hesitated; the blood rushed to his cheeks. "Well, they used to be viviparous."

"Quite right." The Director nodded approvingly.

"And when the babies were decanted . . ."

"'Born'," came the correction.

"Well, then they were the parents—I mean, not the babies, of course; the other ones." The poor boy was overwhelmed with confusion.

"In brief," the Director summed up, "the parents were the father and the mother." The smut that was really science fell with a crash into the boys' eye-avoiding silence. "Mother," he repeated loudly rubbing in the science; and, leaning back in his chair, "These," he said gravely, "are unpleasant facts; I know it. But then most historical facts *are* unpleasant."

He returned to Little Reuben—to Little Reuben, in whose room, one evening, by an oversight, his father and mother (crash, crash!) happened to leave the radio turned on.

("For you must remember that in those days of gross viviparous reproduction, children were always brought up by their parents and not in State Conditioning Centres.")

While the child was asleep, a broadcast pro-

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gramme from London suddenly started to come through; and the next morning, to the astonishment of his crash and crash (the more daring of the boys ventured to grin at one another), Little Reuben woke up repeating word for word a long lecture by that curious old writer ("one of the very few whose works have been permitted to come down to us"), George Bernard Shaw, who was speaking, according to a well-authenticated tradition, about his own genius. To Little Reuben's wink and snigger, this lecture was, of course, perfectly incomprehensible and, imagining that their child had suddenly gone mad, they sent for a doctor. He, fortunately, understood English, recognized the discourse as that which Shaw had broadcasted the previous evening, realized the significance of what had happened, and sent a letter to the medical press about it.

"The principle of sleep-teaching, or hypnopædia, had been discovered." The D.H.C. made an impressive pause.

The principle had been discovered; but many, many years were to elapse before that principle was usefully applied.

"The case of Little Reuben occurred only twenty-three years after Our Ford's first T-Model was put on the market." (Here the Director made a sign of the T on his stomach and all the students reverently followed suit.) "And yet . . ."

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Furiously the students scribbled. "*Hypnopædia, first used officially in A.F. 214. Why not before? Two reasons. (a) . . .*"

"These early experimenters," the D.H.C. was saying, "were on the wrong track. They thought that hypnopædia could be made an instrument of intellectual education . . ."

(A small boy asleep on his right side, the right arm stuck out, the right hand hanging limp over the edge of the bed. Through a round grating in the side of a box a voice speaks softly.

"The Nile is the longest river in Africa and the second in length of all the rivers of the globe. Although falling short of the length of the Mississippi-Missouri, the Nile is at the head of all rivers as regards the length of its basin, which extends through 35 degrees of latitude . . ."

At breakfast the next morning, "Tommy," some one says, "do you know which is the longest river in Africa?" A shaking of the head. "But don't you remember something that begins: The Nile is the . . ."

"The - Nile - is - the - longest - river - in - Africa - and - the - second - in - length - of - all - the - rivers - of - the - globe . . ." The words come rushing out. "Although-falling-short-of . . ."

"Well now, which is the longest river in Africa?"

The eyes are blank. "I don't know."

"But the Nile, Tommy."

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"The-Nile-is-the-longest-river-in-Africa-and-second . . ."

"Then which river is the longest, Tommy?"

Tommy bursts into tears. "I don't know," he howls.)

That howl, the Director made it plain, discouraged the earliest investigators. The experiments were abandoned. No further attempt was made to teach children the length of the Nile in their sleep. Quite rightly. You can't learn a science unless you know what it's all about.

"Whereas, if they'd only started on *moral* education," said the Director, leading the way towards the door. The students followed him, desperately scribbling as they walked and all the way up in the lift. "Moral education, which ought never, in any circumstances, to be rational."

"Silence, silence," whispered a loud speaker as they stepped out at the fourteenth floor, and "Silence, silence," the trumpet mouths indefatigably repeated at intervals down every corridor. The students and even the Director himself rose automatically to the tips of their toes. They were Alphas, of course; but even Alphas had been well conditioned. "Silence, silence." The air of the fourteenth floor was sibilant with the categorical imperative.

Fifty yards of tiptoeing brought them to a door which the Director cautiously unlocked. They stepped

over the threshold into the twilight of a shuttered dormitory. Eighty cots stood in a row against the wall. There was a sound of light regular breathing and a continuous murmur, as of very faint voices remotely whispering.

A nurse rose as they entered and came to attention before the Director.

"What's the lesson this afternoon?" he asked.

"We had Elementary Sex for the first forty minutes," she answered. "But now it's switched over to Elementary Class Consciousness."

The Director walked slowly down the long line of cots. Rosy and relaxed with sleep, eighty little boys and girls lay softly breathing. There was a whisper under every pillow. The D.H.C. halted and, bending over one of the little beds, listened attentively.

"Elementary Class Consciousness, did you say? Let's have it repeated a little louder by the trumpet."

At the end of the room a loud speaker projected from the wall. The Director walked up to it and pressed a switch.

". . . all wear green," said a soft but very distinct voice, beginning in the middle of a sentence, "and Delta Children wear khaki. Oh no, I don't want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They're too stupid to be able to read or write. Besides they wear black, which is such a beastly colour. I'm *so* glad I'm a Beta."

There was a pause; then the voice began again.

“Alpha children wear grey. They work much harder than we do, because they’re so frightfully clever. I’m really awfully glad I’m a Beta, because I don’t work so hard. And then we are much better than the Gammas and Deltas. Gammas are stupid. They all wear green, and Delta children wear khaki. Oh no, I *don’t* want to play with Delta children. And Epsilons are still worse. They’re too stupid to be able . . .”

The Director pushed back the switch. The voice was silent. Only its thin ghost continued to mutter from beneath the eighty pillows.

“They’ll have that repeated forty or fifty times more before they wake; then again on Thursday, and again on Saturday. A hundred and twenty times three times a week for thirty months. After which they go on to a more advanced lesson.”

Roses and electric shocks, the khaki of Deltas and a whiff of asafœtida—wedded indissolubly before the child can speak. But wordless conditioning is crude and wholesale; cannot bring home the finer distinctions, cannot inculcate the more complex courses of behaviour. For that there must be words, but-words without reason. In brief, hypnopædia.

“The greatest moralizing and socializing force of all time.”

The students took it down in their little books. Straight from the horse’s mouth.

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Once more the Director touched the switch.

"... so frightfully clever," the soft, insinuating, indefatigable voice was saying. "I'm really awfully glad I'm a Beta, because . . ."

Not so much like drops of water, though water, it is true, can wear holes in the hardest granite; rather, drops of liquid sealing-wax, drops that adhere, incrust, incorporate themselves with what they fall on, till finally the rock is all one scarlet blob.

"Till at last the child's mind *is* these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions *is* the child's mind. And not the child's mind only. The adult's mind too—all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides—made up of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are *our* suggestions!" The Director almost shouted in his triumph. "Suggestions from the State." He banged the nearest table. "It therefore follows . . ."

A noise made him turn round.

"Oh, Ford!" he said in another tone, "I've gone and woken the children."



CHAPTER THREE

OUTSIDE, in the garden, it was playtime. Naked in the warm June sunshine, six or seven hundred little boys and girls were running with shrill yells over the lawns, or playing ball games, or squatting silently in twos and threes among the flowering shrubs. The roses were in bloom, two nightingales soliloquized in the boskage, a cuckoo was just going out of tune among the lime trees. The air was drowsy with the murmur of bees and helicopters.

The Director and his students stood for a short time watching a game of Centrifugal Bumblepuppy. Twenty children were grouped in a circle round a chrome steel tower. A ball thrown up so as to land on the platform at the top of the tower rolled down into the interior, fell on a rapidly revolving disk, was hurled through one or other of the numer-

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ous apertures pierced in the cylindrical casing, and had to be caught.

"Strange," mused the Director, as they turned away, "strange to think that even in Our Ford's day most games were played without more apparatus than a ball or two and a few sticks and perhaps a bit of netting. Imagine the folly of allowing people to play elaborate games which do nothing whatever to increase consumption. It's madness. Nowadays the Controllers won't approve of any new game unless it can be shown that it requires at least as much apparatus as the most complicated of existing games." He interrupted himself.

"That's a charming little group," he said, pointing.

In a little grassy bay between tall clumps of Mediterranean heather, two children, a little boy of about seven and a little girl who might have been a year older, were playing, very gravely and with all the focussed attention of scientists intent on a labour of discovery, a rudimentary sexual game.

"Charming, charming!" the D.H.C. repeated sentimentally.

"Charming," the boys politely agreed. But their smile was rather patronizing. They had put aside similar childish amusements too recently to be able to watch them now without a touch of contempt. Charming? but it was just a pair of kids fooling about; that was all. Just kids.

"I always think," the Director was continuing in

the same rather maudlin tone, when he was interrupted by a loud boo-hooing.

From a neighbouring shrubbery emerged a nurse, leading by the hand a small boy, who howled as he went. An anxious-looking little girl trotted at her heels.

“What’s the matter?” asked the Director.

The nurse shrugged her shoulders. “Nothing much,” she answered. “It’s just that this little boy seems rather reluctant to join in the ordinary erotic play. I’d noticed it once or twice before. And now again to-day. He started yelling just now . . .”

“Honestly,” put in the anxious-looking little girl, “I didn’t mean to hurt him or anything. Honestly.”

“Of course you didn’t, dear,” said the nurse reassuringly. “And so,” she went on, turning back to the Director, “I’m taking him in to see the Assistant Superintendent of Psychology. Just to see if anything’s at all abnormal.”

“Quite right,” said the Director. “Take him in. You stay here, little girl,” he added, as the nurse moved away with her still howling charge. “What’s your name?”

“Polly Trotsky.”

“And a very good name too,” said the Director. “Run away now and see if you can find some other little boy to play with.”

The child scampered off into the bushes and was lost to sight.

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"Exquisite little creature!" said the Director, looking after her. Then, turning to his students, "What I'm going to tell you now," he said, "may sound incredible. But then, when you're not accustomed to history, most facts about the past *do* sound incredible."

✓ He let out the amazing truth. For a very long period before the time of Our Ford, and even for some generations afterwards, erotic play between children had been regarded as abnormal (there was a roar of laughter); and not only abnormal, actually immoral (no!): and had therefore been rigorously suppressed.

A look of astonished incredulity appeared on the faces of his listeners. Poor little kids not allowed to amuse themselves? They could not believe it.

"Even adolescents," the D.H.C. was saying, "even adolescents like yourselves . . ."

"Not possible!"

"Barring a little surreptitious auto-erotism and homosexuality—absolutely nothing."

"*Nothing?*"

"In most cases, till they were over twenty years old."

"Twenty years old?" echoed the students in a chorus of loud disbelief.

"Twenty," the Director repeated. "I told you that you'd find it incredible."

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“But what happened?” they asked. “What were the results?”

“The results were terrible.” A deep resonant voice broke startlingly into the dialogue.

They looked round. On the fringe of the little group stood a stranger—a man of middle height, black-haired, with a hooked nose, full red lips, eyes very piercing and dark. “Terrible,” he repeated.

The D.H.C. had at that moment sat down on one of the steel and rubber benches conveniently scattered through the gardens; but at the sight of the stranger, he sprang to his feet and darted forward, his hands outstretched, smiling with all his teeth, effusive.

“Controller! What an unexpected pleasure! Boys, what are you thinking of? This is the Controller; this is his fordship, Mustapha Mond.”

In the four thousand rooms of the Centre the four thousand electric clocks simultaneously struck four. Discarnate voices called from the trumpet mouths.

“Main Day-shift off duty. Second Day-shift take over. Main Day-shift off . . .”

In the lift, on their way up to the changing rooms, Henry Foster and the Assistant Director of Predetermination rather pointedly turned their backs on Bernard Marx from the Psychology Bureau: averted themselves from that unsavoury reputation.

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The faint hum and rattle of machinery still stirred the crimson air in the Embryo Store. Shifts might come and go, one lupus-coloured face give place to another; majestically and for ever the conveyors crept forward with their load of future men and women.

Lenina Crowne walked briskly towards the door.

His fordship Mustapha Mond! The eyes of the saluting students almost popped out of their heads. Mustapha Mond! The Resident Controller for Western Europe! One of the Ten World Controllers. One of the Ten . . . and he sat down on the bench with the D.H.C., he was going to stay, to stay, yes, and actually talk to them . . . straight from the horse's mouth. Straight from the mouth of Ford himself.

Two shrimp-brown children emerged from a neighbouring shrubbery, stared at them for a moment with large, astonished eyes, then returned to their amusements among the leaves.

"You all remember," said the Controller, in his strong deep voice, "you all remember, I suppose, that beautiful and inspired saying of Our Ford's: ✓History is bunk. History," he repeated slowly, "is bunk."

He waved his hand; and it was as though, with an invisible feather whisk, he had brushed away a little

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dust, and the dust was Harappa, was Ur of the Chaldees; some spider-webs, and they were Thebes and Babylon and Cnossos and Mycenae. Whisk, Whisk—and where was Odysseus, where was Job, where were Jupiter and Gotama and Jesus? Whisk—and those specks of antique dirt called Athens and Rome, Jerusalem and the Middle Kingdom—all were gone. Whisk—the place where Italy had been was empty. Whisk, the cathedrals; whisk, whisk, King Lear and the Thoughts of Pascal. Whisk, Passion; whisk, Requiem; whisk, Symphony; whisk . . .

“Going to the Feelies this evening, Henry?” enquired the Assistant Predestinator. “I hear the new one at the Alhambra is first-rate. There’s a love scene on a bearskin rug; they say it’s marvellous. Every hair of the bear reproduced. The most amazing tactual effects.”

“That’s why you’re taught no history,” the Controller was saying. “But now the time has come . . .”

The D. H. C. looked at him nervously. There were those strange rumours of old forbidden books hidden in a safe in the Controller’s study. Bibles, poetry—Ford knew what.

Mustapha Mond intercepted his anxious glance

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and the corners of his red lips twitched ironically.

"It's all right, Director," he said in a tone of faint derision, "I won't corrupt them."

The D.H.C. was overwhelmed with confusion.

Those who feel themselves despised do well to look despising. The smile on Bernard Marx's face was contemptuous. Every hair on the bear indeed!

"I shall make a point of going," said Henry Foster.

Mustapha Mond leaned forward, shook a finger at them. "Just try to realize it," he said, and his voice sent a strange thrill quivering along their diaphragms. "Try to realize what it was like to have a viviparous mother."

That smutty word again. But none of them dreamed, this time, of smiling.

"Try to imagine what 'living with one's family' meant."

They tried; but obviously without the smallest success.

"And do you know what a 'home' was?"

They shook their heads

From her dim crimson cellar Lenina Crowne shot up seventeen stories, turned to the right as she

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stepped out of the lift, walked down a long corridor and, opening the door marked *GIRLS' DRESSING-ROOM*, plunged into a deafening chaos of arms and bosoms and underclothing. Torrents of hot water were splashing into or gurgling out of a hundred baths. Rumbling and hissing, eighty vibro-vacuum massage machines were simultaneously kneading and sucking the firm and sunburnt flesh of eighty superb female specimens. Every one was talking at the top of her voice. A Synthetic Music machine was warbling out a super-cornet solo.

"Hullo, Fanny," said Lenina to the young woman who had the pegs and locker next to hers.

Fanny worked in the Bottling Room, and her surname was also Crowne. But as the two thousand million inhabitants of the planet had only ten thousand names between them, the coincidence was not particularly surprising.

Lenina pulled at her zippers—downwards on the jacket, downwards with a double-handed gesture at the two that held trousers, downwards again to loosen her undergarment. Still wearing her shoes and stockings, she walked off towards the bathrooms.

Home, home—a few small rooms, stifflingly over-inhabited by a man, by a periodically teeming woman, by a rabble of boys and girls of all ages. No

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air, no space; an understerilized prison; darkness, disease, and smells.

(The Controller's evocation was so vivid that one of the boys, more sensitive than the rest, turned pale at the mere description and was on the point of being sick.)

Lenina got out of the bath, towelled herself dry, took hold of a long flexible tube plugged into the wall, presented the nozzle to her breast, as though she meant to commit suicide, pressed down the trigger. A blast of warmed air dusted her with the finest talcum powder. Eight different scents and eau-de-Cologne were laid on in little taps over the wash-basin. She turned on the third from the left, dabbed herself with chypre and, carrying her shoes and stockings in her hand, went out to see if one of the vibro-vacuum machines were free.

And home was as squalid psychically as physically. Psychically, it was a rabbit hole, a midden, hot with the frictions of tightly packed life, reeking with emotion. What suffocating intimacies, what dangerous, insane, obscene relationships between the members of the family group! Maniacally, the mother brooded over her children (*her* children) . . . brooded over them like a cat over its kittens; but a cat that could

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talk, a cat that could say, "My baby, my baby," over and over again. "My baby, and oh, oh, at my breast, the little hands, the hunger, and that unspeakable agonizing pleasure! Till at last my baby sleeps, my baby sleeps with a bubble of white milk at the corner of his mouth. My little baby sleeps . . ."

"Yes," said Mustapha Mond, nodding his head, "you may well shudder."

"Who are you going out with to-night?" Lenina asked, returning from the vibro-vac like a pearl illuminated from within, pinkly glowing.

"Nobody."

Lenina raised her eyebrows in astonishment.

"I've been feeling rather out of sorts lately," Fanny explained. "Dr. Wells advised me to have a Pregnancy Substitute."

"But, my dear, you're only nineteen. The first Pregnancy Substitute isn't compulsory till twenty-one."

"I know, dear. But some people are better if they begin earlier. Dr. Wells told me that brunettes with wide pelvises, like me, ought to have their first Pregnancy Substitute at seventeen. So I'm really two years late, not two years early." She opened the door of her locker and pointed to the row of boxes and labelled phials on the upper shelf.

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"SYRUP OF CORPUS LUTEUM," Lenina read the names aloud. "OVARIN, GUARANTEED FRESH: NOT TO BE USED AFTER AUGUST 1ST, A.F. 632. MAMMARY GLAND EXTRACT: TO BE TAKEN THREE TIMES DAILY, BEFORE MEALS, WITH A LITTLE WATER. PLACENTIN: 5CC TO BE INJECTED INTRAVENALLY EVERY THIRD DAY . . . Ugh!" Lenina shuddered. "How I loathe intravenals, don't you?"

"Yes. But when they do ~~do~~ good . . ." Fanny was a particularly sensible girl.

Our Ford—or Our Freud, as, for some inscrutable reason, he chose to call himself whenever he spoke of psychological matters—Our Freud had been the first to reveal the appalling dangers of family life. The world was full of fathers—was therefore full of misery; full of mothers—therefore of every kind of perversion from sadism to chastity; full of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts—full of madness and suicide.

"And yet, among the savages of Samoa, in certain islands off the coast of New Guinea . . ."

The tropical sunshine lay like warm honey on the naked bodies of children tumbling promiscuously among the hibiscus blossoms. Home was in any one of twenty palm-thatched houses. In the Trobriands conception was the work of ancestral ghosts; nobody had ever heard of a father.

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“Extremes,” said the Controller, “meet. For the good reason that they were made to meet.”

“Dr. Wells says that a three months’ Pregnancy Substitute now will make all the difference to my health for the next three or four years.”

“Well, I hope he’s right,” said Lenina. “But, Fanny, do you really mean to say that for the next three months you’re not supposed to . . .”

“Oh no, ~~dear~~. Only for a week or two, that’s all. I shall spend the evening at the Club playing Musical Bridge. I suppose you’re going out?”

Lenina nodded.

“Who with?”

“Henry Foster.”

“Again?” Fanny’s kind, rather moon-like face took on an incongruous expression of pained and disapproving astonishment. “Do you mean to tell me you’re *still* going out with Henry Foster?”

Mothers and fathers, brothers and sisters. But there were also husbands, wives, lovers. There were also monogamy and romance.

“Though you probably don’t know what those are,” said Mustapha Mond.

They shook their ~~heads~~.

Family, monogamy, romance. Everywhere ex-

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clusiveness, everywhere a focussing of interest, a narrow channelling of impulse and energy.

"But every one belongs to every one else," he concluded, citing the hypnopædic proverb.

The students nodded, emphatically agreeing with a statement which upwards of sixty-two thousand repetitions in the dark had made them accept, not merely as true, but as axiomatic, self-evident, utterly indisputable.

"But after all," Lenina was protesting, "it's only about four months now since I've been having Henry."

"*Only* four months! I like that. And what's more," Fanny went on, pointing an accusing finger, "there's been nobody else except Henry all that time. Has there?"

Lenina blushed scarlet; but her eyes, the tone of her voice remained defiant. "No, there hasn't been any one else," she answered almost truculently. "And I jolly well don't see why there should have been."

"Oh, she jolly well doesn't see why there should have been," Fanny repeated, as though to an invisible listener behind Lenina's left shoulder. Then, with a sudden change of tone, "But seriously," she said, "I really do think you ought to be careful. It's such horribly bad form to go on and on like this with

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one man. At forty, or thirty-five, it wouldn't be so bad. But at *your* age, Lenina! No, it really won't do. And you know how strongly the D.H.C. objects to anything intense or long-drawn. Four months of Henry Foster, without having another man—why, he'd be furious if he knew . . .”

“Think of water under pressure in a pipe.” They thought of it. “I pierce it once,” said the Controller. “What a jet!”

He pierced it twenty times. There were twenty piddling little fountains.

“My baby. My baby . . .!”

“Mother!” The madness is infectious.

“My love, my one and only, precious, precious . . .”

Mother, monogamy, romance. High spurts the fountain; fierce and foamy the wild jet. The urge has but a single outlet. My love, my baby. No wonder those poor pre-moderns were mad and wicked and miserable. Their world didn't allow them to take things easily, didn't allow them to be sane, virtuous, happy. What with mothers and lovers, what with the prohibitions they were not conditioned to obey, what with the temptations and the lonely remorse, what with all the diseases and the endless isolating pain, what with the uncertainties and the poverty—they were forced to feel strongly. And feeling strongly

(and strongly, what was more, in solitude, in hopelessly individual isolation, how could they be stable?

“Of course there’s no need to give him up. Have somebody else from time to time, that’s all. He has other girls, doesn’t he?”

Lenina admitted it.

“Of course he does. Trust Henry Foster to be the perfect gentleman—always correct. And then there’s the Director to think of. You know what a stickler . . .”

Nodding, “He patted me on the behind this afternoon,” said Lenina.

“There, you see!” Fanny was triumphant. “That shows what *he* stands for. The strictest conventional-ity.”

“Stability,” said the Controller, “stability. No civilization without social stability. No social stability without individual stability.” His voice was a trumpet. Listening they felt larger, warmer.

The machine turns, turns and must keep on turning—for ever. It is death if it stands still. A thousand millions scabbled the crust of the earth. The wheels began to turn. In a hundred and fifty years there were two thousand millions. Stop all the wheels. In

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a hundred and fifty weeks there are once more only a thousand millions; a thousand thousand thousand men and women have starved to death.

Wheels must turn steadily, but cannot turn untended. There must be men to tend them, men as steady as the wheels upon their axles, sane men, obedient men, stable in contentment.

Crying: My baby, my mother, my only, only love; groaning: My sin, my terrible God; screaming with pain, muttering with fever, bemoaning old age and poverty—how can they tend the wheels? And if they cannot tend the wheels . . . The corpses of a thousand thousand thousand men and women would be hard to bury or burn.

“And after all,” Fanny’s tone was coaxing, “it’s not as though there were anything painful or disagreeable about having one or two men besides Henry. And seeing that you *ought* to be a little more promiscuous . . .”

“Stability,” insisted the Controller, “stability. The primal and the ultimate need. Stability. Hence all this.”

With a wave of his hand he indicated the gardens, the huge building of the Conditioning Centre, the

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naked children furtive in the undergrowth or running across the lawns.

Lenina shook her head. "Somehow," she mused, "I hadn't been feeling very keen on promiscuity lately. There are times when one doesn't. Haven't you found that too, Fanny?"

Fanny nodded her sympathy and understanding. "But one's got to make the effort," she said sententiously, "one's got to play the game. After all, every one belongs to every one else."

"Yes, every one belongs to every one else," Lenina repeated slowly and, sighing, was silent for a moment; then, taking Fanny's hand, gave it a little squeeze. "You're quite right, Fanny. As usual. I'll make the effort."

Impulse arrested spills over, and the flood is feeling, the flood is passion, the flood is even madness: it depends on the force of the current, the height and strength of the barrier. The unchecked stream flows smoothly down its appointed channels into a calm well-being. (The embryo is hungry; day in, day out, the blood-surrogate pump unceasingly turns its eight hundred revolutions a minute. The decanted infant howls; at once a nurse appears with a bottle

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of external secretion. Feeling lurks in that interval of time between desire and its consummation. Shorten that interval, break down all those old unnecessary barriers.

“Fortunate boys!” said the Controller. “No pains have been spared to make your lives emotionally easy—to preserve you, so far as that is possible, from having emotions at all.”

“Ford’s in his flivver,” murmured the D.H.C. “All’s well with the world.”

“Lenina Crowne?” said Henry Foster, echoing the Assistant Predestinator’s question as he zipped up his trousers. “Oh, she’s a splendid girl. Wonderfully pneumatic. I’m surprised you haven’t had her.”

“I can’t think how it is I haven’t,” said the Assistant Predestinator. “I certainly will. At the first opportunity.”

From his place on the opposite side of the changing-room aisle, Bernard Marx overheard what they were saying and turned pale.

“And to tell the truth,” said Lenina, “I’m beginning to get just a tiny bit bored with nothing but Henry every day.” She pulled on her left stocking.

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“Do you know Bernard Marx?” she asked in a tone whose excessive casualness was evidently forced.

Fanny looked startled. “You don’t mean to say . . . ?”

“Why not? Bernard’s an Alpha Plus. Besides, he asked me to go to one of the Savage Reservations with him. I’ve always wanted to see a Savage Reservation.”

“But his reputation?”

“What do I care about his reputation?”

“They say he doesn’t like Obstacle Golf.”

“They say, they say,” mocked Lenina.

“And then he spends most of his time by himself—*alone*.” There was horror in Fanny’s voice.

“Well, he won’t be alone when he’s with me. And anyhow, why are people so beastly to him? I think he’s rather sweet.” She smiled to herself; how absurdly shy he had been! Frightened almost—as though she were a World Controller and he a Gamma-Minus machine minder.

“Consider your own lives,” said Mustapha Mond. “Has any of you ever encountered an insurmountable obstacle?”

The question was answered by a negative silence.

“Has any of you been compelled to live through a long time-interval between the consciousness of a desire and its fulfilment?”

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“Well,” began one of the boys, and hesitated.

“Speak up,” said the D.H.C. “Don’t keep his lordship waiting.”

“I once had to wait nearly four weeks before a girl I wanted would let me have her.”

“And you felt a strong emotion in consequence?”

“Horrible!”

“Horrible; precisely,” said the Controller. “Our ancestors were so stupid and short-sighted that when the first reformers came along and offered to deliver them from those horrible emotions, they wouldn’t have anything to do with them.”

“Talking about her as though she were a bit of meat.” Bernard ground his teeth. “Have her here, have her there. Like mutton. Degrading her to so much mutton. She said she’d think it over, she said she’d give me an answer this week. Oh, Ford, Ford, Ford.” He would have liked to go up to them and hit them in the face—hard, again and again.

“Yes, I really do advise you to try her,” Henry Foster was saying.

“Take Ectogenesis. Pfitzner and Kawaguchi had got the whole technique worked out. But would the Governments look at it? No. There was something

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called Christianity. Women were forced to go on being viviparous."

"He's so ugly!" said Fanny.

"But I rather like his looks."

"And then so *small*." Fanny made a grimace; smallness was so horribly and typically low-caste.

"I think that's rather sweet," said Lenina. "One feels one would like to pet him. You know. Like a cat."

Fanny was shocked. "They say somebody made a mistake when he was still in the bottle—thought he was a Gamma and put alcohol into his blood-surrogate. That's why he's so stunted."

"What nonsense!" Lenina was indignant.

"Sleep teaching was actually prohibited in England. There was something called liberalism. Parliament, if you know what that was, passed a law against it. The records survive. Speeches about liberty of the subject. Liberty to be inefficient and miserable. Freedom to be a round peg in a square hole."

"But, my dear chap, you're welcome, I assure you. You're welcome." Henry Foster patted the

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Assistant Predestinator on the shoulder. "Every one belongs to every one else, after all."

One hundred repetitions three nights a week for four years, thought Bernard Marx, who was a specialist on hypnopædia. Sixty-two thousand four hundred repetitions make one truth. Idiots!

"Or the Caste System. Constantly proposed, constantly rejected. There was something called democracy. As though men were more than physico-chemically equal."

"Well, all I can say is that I'm going to accept his invitation."

Bernard hated them, hated them. But they were two, they were large, they were strong.

"The Nine Years' War began in A.F. 141."

"Not even if it *were* true about the alcohol in his blood-surrogate."

"Phosgene, chloropicrin, ethyl iodoacetate, diphenylcyanarsine, trichlormethyl, chloroformate, di-

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chllorethyl sulphide. Not to mention hydrocyanic acid.”

“Which I simply don’t believe,” Lenina concluded.

“The noise of fourteen thousand aeroplanes advancing in open order. But in the Kurfurstendamm and the Eighth Arrondissement, the explosion of the anthrax bombs is hardly louder than the popping of a paper bag.”

“Because I *do* want to see a Savage Reservation.”

$\text{Ch}_3\text{C}_6\text{H}_2(\text{NO}_2)_3 + \text{Hg}(\text{CNO})_2 =$ well, what? An enormous hole in the ground, a pile of masonry, some bits of flesh and mucus, a foot, with the boot still on it, flying through the air and landing, flop, in the middle of the geraniums—the scarlet ones; such a splendid show that summer!

“You’re hopeless, Lenina, I give you up.”

“The Russian technique for infecting water supplies was particularly ingenious.”

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Back turned to back, Fanny and Lenina continued their changing in silence.

“The Nine Years’ War, the great Economic Collapse. There was a choice between World Control and destruction. Between stability and . . .”

“Fanny Crowne’s a nice girl too,” said the Assistant Predestinator.

In the nurseries, the Elementary Class Consciousness lesson was over, the voices were adapting future demand to future industrial supply. “I do love flying,” they whispered, “I do love flying, I do love having new clothes, I do love . . .”

“Liberalism, of course, was dead of anthrax, but all the same you couldn’t do things by force.”

“Not nearly so pneumatic as Lenina. Oh, not nearly.”

“But old clothes are beastly,” continued the untiring whisper. “We always throw away old clothes.

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Ending is better than mending, ending is better than mending, ending is better . . .”

“Government’s an affair of sitting, not hitting. You rule with the brains and the buttocks, never with the fists. For example, there was the conscription of consumption.”

“There, I’m ready,” said Lenina, but Fanny remained speechless and averted. “Let’s make peace, Fanny darling.”

“Every man, woman and child compelled to consume so much a year. In the interests of industry. The sole result . . .”

“Ending is better than mending. The more stitches, the less riches; the more stitches . . .”

“One of these days,” said Fanny, with dismal emphasis, “you’ll get into trouble.”

“Conscientious objection on an enormous scale. Anything not to consume. Back to nature.”

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“I do love flying, I do love flying.”

“Back to culture. Yes, actually to culture. You can't consume much if you sit still and read books.”

“Do I look all right?” Lenina asked. Her jacket was made of bottle-green acetate cloth with green viscose fur at the cuffs and collar.

“Eight hundred Simple Lifers were mowed down by machine guns at Golders Green.”

“Ending is better than mending, ending is better than mending.”

Green corduroy shorts and white viscose-woollen stockings turned down below the knee.

“Then came the famous British Museum Massacre. Two thousand culture fans gassed with dichlorethyl sulphide.”

A green-and-white jockey cap shaded Lenina's eyes; her shoes were bright green and highly polished.

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“In the end,” said Mustapha Mond, “the Controllers realized that force was no good. The slower but infinitely surer methods of ectogenesis, neo-Pavlovian conditioning and hypnopædia . . .”

And round her waist she wore a silver-mounted green morocco-surrogate cartridge belt, bulging (for Lenina was not a freemartin) with the regulation supply of contraceptives.

“The discoveries of Pfitzner and Kawaguchi were at last made use of. An intensive propaganda against viviparous reproduction . . .”

“Perfect!” cried Fanny enthusiastically. She could never resist Lenina’s charm for long. “And what a perfectly *sweet* Malthusian belt!”

“Accompanied by a campaign against the Past; by the closing of museums, the blowing up of historical monuments (luckily most of them had already been destroyed during the Nine Years’ War); by the suppression of all books published before A.F.150.”

“I simply must get one like it,” said Fanny.

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“There were some things called the pyramids, for example.”

“My old black-patent bandolier . . .”

“And a man called Shakespeare. You’ve never heard of them of course.”

“It’s an absolute disgrace—that bandolier of mine.”

“Such are the advantages of a really scientific education.”

“The more stitches the less riches; the more stitches the less . . .”

“The introduction of Our Ford’s first T-Model . . .”

“I’ve had it nearly three months.”

“Chosen as the opening date of the new era.”

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“Ending is better than mending; ending is better . . .”

“There was a thing, as I’ve said before, called Christianity.”

“Ending is better than mending.”

“The ethics and philosophy of under-consumption . . .”

“I love new clothes, I love new clothes, I love . . .”

“So essential when there was under-production; but in an age of machines and the fixation of nitrogen—positively a crime against society.”

“Henry Foster gave it me.”

“All crosses had their tops cut and became T’s. There was also a thing called God.”

“It’s real morocco-surrogate.”

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“We have the World State now. And Ford’s Day celebrations, and Community Sings, and Solidarity Services.”

“Ford, how I hate them!” Bernard Marx was thinking.

“There was a thing called Heaven; but all the same they used to drink enormous quantities of alcohol.”

“Like meat, like so much meat.”

“There was a thing called the soul and a thing called immortality.”

“Do ask Henry where he got it.”

“But they used to take morphia and cocaine.”

“And what makes it worse, she thinks of herself as meat.”

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“Two thousand pharmacologists and bio-chemists were subsidized in A.F. 178.”

“He does look glum,” said the Assistant Predestinator, pointing at Bernard Marx.

“Six years later it was being produced commercially. The perfect drug.”

“Let’s bait him.”

“Euphoric, narcotic, pleasantly hallucinant.”

“Glum, Marx, glum.” The clap on the shoulder made him start, look up. It was that brute Henry Foster. “What you need is a gramme of *soma*.”

“All the advantages of Christianity and alcohol; none of their defects.”

“Ford, I should like to kill him!” But all he did was to say, “No, thank you,” and fend off the proffered tube of tablets.

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“Take a holiday from reality whenever you like, and come back without so much as a headache or a mythology.”

“Take it,” insisted Henry Foster, “take it.”

“Stability was practically assured.”

“One cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy sentiments,” said the Assistant Predestinator citing a piece of homely hypnopædic wisdom.

“It only remained to conquer old age.”

“Damn you, damn you!” shouted Bernard Marx.

“Hoity-toity.”

“Gonadal hormones, transfusion of young blood, magnesium salts . . .”

“And do remember that a gramme is better than a damn.” They went out, laughing.

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“All the physiological stigmata of old age have been abolished. And along with them, of course . . .”

“Don’t forget to ask him about that Malthusian belt,” said Fanny.

“Along with them all the old man’s mental peculiarities. Characters remain constant throughout a whole lifetime.”

“. . . two rounds of Obstacle Golf to get through before dark. I must fly.”

“Work, play—at sixty our powers and tastes are what they were at seventeen. Old men in the bad old days used to renounce, retire, take to religion, spend their time reading, thinking—*thinking!*”

“Idiots, swine!” Bernard Marx was saying to himself, as he walked down the corridor to the lift.

“Now—such is progress—the old men work, the old men copulate, the old men have no time, no

leisure from pleasure, not a moment to sit down and think—or if ever by some unlucky chance such a crevice of time should yawn in the solid substance of their distractions, there is always *soma*, delicious *soma*, half a gramme for a half-holiday, a gramme for a week-end, two grammes for a trip to the gorgeous East, three for a dark eternity on the moon; returning whence they find themselves on the other side of the crevice, safe on the solid ground of daily labour and distraction, scampering from feely to feely, from girl to pneumatic girl, from Electromagnetic Golf course to . . .”

“Go away, little girl,” shouted the D.H.C. angrily. “Go away, little boy! Can’t you see that his lordship’s busy? Go and do your erotic play somewhere else.”

“Suffer little children,” said the Controller.

Slowly, majestically, with a faint humming of machinery, the Conveyors moved forward, thirty-three centimetres an hour. In the red darkness glinted innumerable rubies.



CHAPTER FOUR

THE lift was crowded with men from the Alpha Changing Rooms, and Lenina's entry was greeted by many friendly nods and smiles. She was a popular girl and, at one time or another, had spent a night with almost all of them.

They were dear boys, she thought, as she returned their salutations. Charming boys! Still, she did wish that George Edzel's ears weren't quite so big (perhaps he'd been given just a spot too much parathyroid at Metre 328?). And looking at Benito Hoover, she couldn't help remembering that he was really *too* hairy when he took his clothes off.

Turning, with eyes a little saddened by the recollection of Benito's curly blackness, she saw in a corner the small thin body, the melancholy face of Bernard Marx.

"Bernard!" she stepped up to him. "I was looking

for you." Her voice rang clear above the hum of the mounting lift. The others looked round curiously. "I wanted to talk to you about our New Mexico plan." Out of the tail of her eye she could see Benito Hoover gaping with astonishment. The gape annoyed her. "Surprised I shouldn't be begging to go with *him* again!" she said to herself. Then aloud, and more warmly than ever, "I'd simply *love* to come with you for a week in July," she went on. (Anyhow, she was publicly proving her unfaithfulness to Henry. Fanny ought to be pleased, even though it was Bernard.) "That is," Lenina gave him her most deliciously significant smile, "if you still want to have me."

Bernard's pale face flushed. "What on earth for?" she wondered, astonished, but at the same time touched by this strange tribute to her power.

"Hadn't we better talk about it somewhere else?" he stammered, looking horribly uncomfortable.

"As though I'd been saying something shocking," thought Lenina. "He couldn't look more upset if I'd made a dirty joke—asked him who his mother was, or something like that."

"I mean, with all these people about . . ." He was choked with confusion.

Lenina's laugh was frank and wholly unmalicious. "How funny you are!" she said; and she quite genuinely did think him funny. "You'll give me at least a week's warning, won't you," she went on in another tone. "I suppose we take the Blue Pacific

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Rocket? Does it start from the Charing-T Tower? Or is it from Hampstead?"

Before Bernard could answer, the lift came to a standstill.

"Roof!" called a creaking voice.

The liftman was a small simian creature, dressed in the black tunic of an Epsilon-Minus Semi-Moron.

"Roof!"

He flung open the gates. The warm glory of afternoon sunlight made him start and blink his eyes. "Oh, roof!" he repeated in a voice of rapture. He was as though suddenly and joyfully awakened from a dark annihilating stupor. "Roof!"

He smiled up with a kind of doggily expectant adoration into the faces of his passengers. Talking and laughing together, they stepped out into the light. The liftman looked after them.

"Roof?" he said once more, questioningly.

Then a bell rang, and from the ceiling of the lift a loud speaker began, very softly and yet very imperiously, to issue its commands.

"Go down," it said, "go down. Floor Eighteen. Go down, go down. Floor Eighteen. Go down, go . . ."

The liftman slammed the gates, touched a button and instantly dropped back into the droning twilight of the well, the twilight of his own habitual stupor.

It was warm and bright on the roof. The summer afternoon was drowsy with the hum of passing heli-

copters; and the deeper drone of the rocket-planes hastening, invisible, through the bright sky five or six miles overhead was like a caress on the soft air. Bernard Marx drew a deep breath. He looked up into the sky and round the blue horizon and finally down into Lenina's face.

"Isn't it beautiful!" His voice trembled a little.

She smiled at him with an expression of the most sympathetic understanding. "Simply perfect for Obstacle Golf," she answered rapturously. "And now I must fly, Bernard. Henry gets cross if I keep him waiting. Let me know in good time about the date." And waving her hand, she ran away across the wide flat roof towards the hangars. Bernard stood watching the retreating twinkle of the white stockings, the sunburnt knees vivaciously bending and unbending, again, again, and the softer rolling of those well-fitted corduroy shorts beneath the bottle green jacket. His face wore an expression of pain.

"I should say she was pretty," said a loud and cheery voice just behind him.

Bernard started and looked round. The chubby red face of Benito Hoover was beaming down at him—beaming with manifest cordiality. Benito was notoriously good-natured. People said of him that he could have got through life without ever touching *soma*. The malice and bad tempers from which other people had to take holidays never afflicted him. Reality for Benito was always sunny.

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"Pneumatic too. And how!" Then, in another tone: "But, I say," he went on, "you do look glum! What you need is a gramme of *soma*." Diving into his right-hand trouser-pocket, Benito produced a phial. "One cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy . . . But, I say!"

Bernard had suddenly turned and rushed away.

Benito stared after him. "What can be the matter with the fellow?" he wondered, and, shaking his head, decided that the story about the alcohol having been put into the poor chap's blood-surrogate must be true. "Touched his brain, I suppose."

He put away the *soma* bottle, and taking out a packet of sex-hormone chewing-gum, stuffed a plug into his cheek and walked slowly away towards the hangars, ruminating.

Henry Foster had had his machine wheeled out of its lock-up and, when Lenina arrived, was already seated in the cockpit, waiting.

"Four minutes late," was all his comment, as she climbed in beside him. He started the engines and threw the helicopter screws into gear. The machine shot vertically into the air. Henry accelerated; the humming of the propeller shrilled from hornet to wasp, from wasp to mosquito; the speedometer showed that they were rising at the best part of two kilometres a minute. London diminished beneath them. The huge table-topped buildings were no more, in a few seconds, than a bed of geometrical

mushrooms sprouting from the green of park and garden. In the midst of them, thin-stalked, a taller, slenderer fungus, the Charing-T Tower lifted towards the sky a disk of shining concrete.

Like the vague torsos of fabulous athletes, huge fleshy clouds lolled on the blue air above their heads. Out of one of them suddenly dropped a small scarlet insect, buzzing as it fell.

"There's the Red Rocket," said Henry, "just come in from New York." Looking at his watch, "Seven minutes behind time," he added, and shook his head. "These Atlantic services—they're really scandalously unpunctual."

He took his foot off the accelerator. The humming of the screws overhead dropped an octave and a half, back through wasp and hornet to bumble bee, to cockchafer, to stag-beetle. The upward rush of the machine slackened off; a moment later they were hanging motionless in the air. Henry pushed at a lever; there was a click. Slowly at first, then faster and faster, till it was a circular mist before their eyes, the propeller in front of them began to revolve. The wind of a horizontal speed whistled ever more shrilly in the stays. Henry kept his eye on the revolution-counter; when the needle touched the twelve hundred mark, he threw the helicopter screws out of gear. The machine had enough forward momentum to be able to fly on its planes.

Lenina looked down through the window in the

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floor between her feet. They were flying over the six kilometre zone of park-land that separated Central London from its first ring of satellite suburbs. The green was maggoty with fore-shortened life. Forests of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy towers gleamed between the trees. Near Shepherd's Bush two thousand Beta-Minus mixed doubles were playing Riemann-surface tennis. A double row of Escalator Fives Courts lined the main road from Notting Hill to Willesden. In the Ealing stadium a Delta gymnastic display and community sing was in progress.

"What a hideous colour khaki is," remarked Lenina, voicing the hypnopædic prejudices of her caste.

The buildings of the Hounslow Feely Studio covered seven and a half hectares. Near them a black and khaki army of labourers was busy revitrifying the surface of the Great West Road. One of the huge travelling crucibles was being tapped as they flew over. The molten stone poured out in a stream of dazzling incandescence across the road; the asbestos rollers came and went; at the tail of an insulated watering cart the steam rose in white clouds.

At Brentford the Television Corporation's factory was like a small town.

"They must be changing the shift," said Lenina.

Like aphides and ants, the leaf-green Gamma girls, the black Semi-Morons swarmed round the entrances, or stood in queues to take their places in

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the monorail tram-cars. Mulberry-coloured Beta-Minuses came and went among the crowd. The roof of the main building was alive with the alighting and departure of helicopters.

“My word,” said Lenina, “I’m glad I’m not a Gamma.”

Ten minutes later they were at Stoke Poges and had started their first round of Obstacle Golf.

§ 2

WITH eyes for the most part downcast and, if ever they lighted on a fellow creature, at once and furtively averted, Bernard hastened across the roof. He was like a man pursued, but pursued by enemies he does not wish to see, lest they should seem more hostile even than he had supposed, and he himself be made to feel guiltier and even more helplessly alone.

“That horrible Benito Hoover!” And yet the man had meant well enough. Which only made it, in a way, much worse. Those who meant well behaved in the same way as those who meant badly. Even Lenina was making him suffer. He remembered those weeks of timid indecision, during which he had looked and longed and despaired of ever having the courage to ask her. Dared he face the risk of being humiliated by a contemptuous refusal? But if she were to say yes, what rapture! Well, now she had said it and he was still wretched—wretched that she

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should have thought it such a perfect afternoon for Obstacle Golf, that she should have trotted away to join Henry Foster, that she should have found him funny for not wanting to talk of their most private affairs in public. Wretched, in a word, because she had behaved as any healthy and virtuous English girl ought to behave and not in some other, abnormal, extraordinary way.

He opened the door of his lock-up and called to a lounging couple of Delta-Minus attendants to come and push his machine out on to the roof. The hangars were staffed by a single Bokanovsky Group, and the men were twins, identically small, black and hideous. Bernard gave his orders in the sharp, rather arrogant and even offensive tone of one who does not feel himself too secure in his superiority. To have dealings with members of the lower castes was always, for Bernard, a most distressing experience. For whatever the cause (and the current gossip about the alcohol in his blood-surrogate may very likely—for accidents will happen—have been true) Bernard's physique was hardly better than that of the average Gamma. He stood eight centimetres short of the standard Alpha height and was slender in proportion. Contact with members of the lower castes always reminded him painfully of this physical inadequacy. "I am I, and wish I wasn't"; his self-consciousness was acute and distressing. Each time he found himself looking on the level, instead of

downward, into a Delta's face, he felt humiliated. Would the creature treat him with the respect due to his caste? The question haunted him. Not without reason. For Gammas, Deltas and Epsilons had been to some extent conditioned to associate corporeal mass with social superiority. Indeed, a faint hypnædic prejudice in favour of size was universal. Hence the laughter of the women to whom he made proposals, the practical joking of his equals among the men. The mockery made him feel an outsider; and feeling an outsider he behaved like one, which increased the prejudice against him and intensified the contempt and hostility aroused by his physical defects. Which in turn increased his sense of being alien and alone. A chronic fear of being slighted made him avoid his equals, made him stand, where his inferiors were concerned, self-consciously on his dignity. How bitterly he envied men like Henry Foster and Benito Hoover! Men who never had to shout at an Epsilon to get an order obeyed; men who took their position for granted; men who moved through the caste system as a fish through the water—so utterly at home as to be unaware either of themselves or of the beneficent and comfortable element in which they had their being.

Slackly, it seemed to him, and with reluctance, the twin attendants wheeled his plane out on the roof.

“Hurry up!” said Bernard irritably. One of them glanced at him. Was that a kind of bestial derision

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that he detected in those blank grey eyes? "Hurry up!" he shouted more loudly, and there was an ugly rasp in his voice.

He climbed into the plane and, a minute later, was flying southwards, towards the river.

The various Bureaux of Propaganda and the College of Emotional Engineering were housed in a single sixty-story building in Fleet Street. In the basement and on the lower floors were the presses and offices of the three great London newspapers—*The Hourly Radio*, an upper-caste sheet, the pale green *Gamma Gazette*, and, on khaki paper and in words exclusively of one syllable, *The Delta Mirror*. Then came the Bureaux of Propaganda by Television, by Feeling Picture, and by Synthetic Voice and Music respectively—twenty-two floors of them. Above were the research laboratories and the padded rooms in which the Sound-Track Writers and Synthetic Composers did their delicate work. The top eighteen floors were occupied by the College of Emotional Engineering.

Bernard landed on the roof of Propaganda House and stepped out.

"Ring down to Mr. Helmholtz Watson," he ordered the Gamma-Plus porter, "and tell him that Mr. Bernard Marx is waiting for him on the roof."

He sat down and lit a cigarette.

Helmholtz Watson was writing when the message came down.

“Tell him I’m coming at once,” he said and hung up the receiver. Then, turning to his secretary, “I’ll leave you to put my things away,” he went on in the same official and impersonal tone; and, ignoring her lustrous smile, got up and walked briskly to the door.

He was a powerfully built man, deep-chested, broad-shouldered, massive, and yet quick in his movements, springy and agile. The round strong pillar of his neck supported a beautifully shaped head. His hair was dark and curly, his features strongly marked. In a forcible emphatic way, he was handsome and looked, as his secretary was never tired of repeating, every centimetre an Alpha-Plus. By profession he was a lecturer at the College of Emotional Engineering (Department of Writing) and in the intervals of his educational activities, a working Emotional Engineer. He wrote regularly for *The Hourly Radio*, composed feely scenarios, and had the happiest knack for slogans and hypnopædic rhymes.

“Able,” was the verdict of his superiors. “Perhaps,” (and they would shake their heads, would significantly lower their voices) “a little *too* able.”

Yes, a little too able; they were right. A mental excess had produced in Helmholtz Watson effects very similar to those which, in Bernard Marx, were the result of a physical defect. Too little bone and brawn had isolated Bernard from his fellow men, and the sense of this apartness, being, by all the current

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standards, a mental excess, became in its turn a cause of wider separation. That which had made Helmholtz so uncomfortably aware of being himself and all alone was too much ability. What the two men shared was the knowledge that they were individuals. But whereas the physically defective Bernard had suffered all his life from the consciousness of being separate, it was only quite recently that, grown aware of his mental excess, Helmholtz Watson had also become aware of his difference from the people who surrounded him. This Escalator-Squash champion, this indefatigable lover (it was said that he had had six hundred and forty different girls in under four years), this admirable committee man and best mixer had realized quite suddenly that sport, women, communal activities were only, so far as he was concerned, second bests. Really, and at the bottom, he was interested in something else. But in what? In what? That was the problem which Bernard had come to discuss with him—or rather, since it was always Helmholtz who did all the talking, to listen to his friend discussing, yet once more.

Three charming girls from the Bureau of Propaganda by Synthetic Voice waylaid him as he stepped out of the lift.

“Oh, Helmholtz, darling, *do* come and have a picnic supper with us on Exmoor.” They clung round him imploringly.

He shook his head, he pushed his way through them. "No, no."

"We're not inviting any other man."

But Helmholtz remained unshaken even by this delightful promise. "No," he repeated, "I'm busy." And he held resolutely on his course. The girls trailed after him. It was not till he had actually climbed into Bernard's plane and 'slammed the door that they gave up pursuit. Not without reproaches.

"These women!" he said, as the machine rose into the air. "These women!" And he shook his head, he frowned. "Too awful," Bernard hypocritically agreed, wishing, as he spoke the words, that he could have as many girls as Helmholtz did, and with as little trouble. He was seized with a sudden urgent need to boast. "I'm taking Lenina Crowne to New Mexico with me," he said in a tone as casual as he could make it.

"Are you?" said Helmholtz, with a total absence of interest. Then after a little pause, "This last week or two," he went on, "I've been cutting all my committees and all my girls. You can't imagine what a hullabaloo they've been making about it at the College. Still, it's been worth it, I think. The effects . . ." He hesitated. "Well, they're odd, they're very odd."

A physical shortcoming could produce a kind of mental excess. The process, it seemed, was reversible. Mental excess could produce, for its own

purposes, the voluntary blindness and deafness of deliberate solitude, the artificial impotence of asceticism.

The rest of the short flight was accomplished in silence. When they had arrived and were comfortably stretched out on the pneumatic sofas in Bernard's room, Helmholtz began again.

Speaking very slowly, "Did you ever feel," he asked, "as though you had something inside you that was only waiting for you to give it a chance to come out? Some sort of extra power that you aren't using—you know, like all the water that goes down the falls instead of through the turbines?" He looked at Bernard questioningly.

"You mean all the emotions one might be feeling if things were different?"

Helmholtz shook his head. "Not quite. I'm thinking of a queer feeling I sometimes get, a feeling that I've got something important to say and the power to say it—only I don't know what it is, and I can't make any use of the power. If there was some different way of writing . . . Or else something else to write about . . ." He was silent; then, "You see," he went on at last, "I'm pretty good at inventing phrases—you know, the sort of words that suddenly make you jump, almost as though you'd sat on a pin, they seem so new and exciting even though they're about something hypnopædically obvious. But that doesn't seem enough. It's not enough for

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the phrases to be good; what you make with them ought to be good too."

"But your things are good, Helmholtz."

"Oh, as far as they go." Helmholtz shrugged his shoulders. "But they go such a little way. They aren't important enough, somehow. I feel I could do something much more important. Yes, and more intense, more violent. But what? What is there more important to say? And how can one be violent about the sort of things one's expected to write about? Words can be like X-rays, if you use them properly—they'll go through anything. You read and you're pierced. That's one of the things I try to teach my students—how to write piercingly. But what on earth's the good of being pierced by an article about a Community Sing, or the latest improvement in scent organs? Besides, can you make words really piercing—you know, like the very hardest X-rays—when you're writing about that sort of thing? Can you say something about nothing? That's what it finally boils down to. I try and I try . . ."

"Hush!" said Bernard suddenly, and lifted a warning finger; they listened. "I believe there's somebody at the door," he whispered.

Helmholtz got up, tiptoed across the room, and with a sharp quick movement flung the door wide open. There was, of course, nobody there.

"I'm sorry," said Bernard, feeling and looking uncomfortably foolish. "I suppose I've got things on

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my nerves a bit. When people are suspicious with you, you start being suspicious with them.”

He passed his hand across his eyes, he sighed, his voice became plaintive. He was justifying himself. “If you knew what I’d had to put up with recently,” he said almost tearfully—and the uprush of his self-pity was like a fountain suddenly released. “If you only knew!”

Helmholtz Watson listened with a certain sense of discomfort. “Poor little Bernard!” he said to himself. But at the same time he felt rather ashamed for his friend. He wished Bernard would show a little more pride.



CHAPTER FIVE

BY EIGHT o'clock the light was failing. The loud speakers in the tower of the Stoke Poges Club House began, in a more than human tenor, to announce the closing of the courses. Lenina and Henry abandoned their game and walked back towards the Club. From the grounds of the Internal and External Secretion Trust came the lowing of those thousands of cattle which provided, with their hormones and their milk, the raw materials for the great factory at Farnham Royal.

An incessant buzzing of helicopters filled the twilight. Every two and a half minutes a bell and the screech of whistles announced the departure of one of the light monorail trains which carried the lower caste golfers back from their separate course to the metropolis.

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Lenina and Henry climbed into their machine and started off. At eight hundred feet Henry slowed down the helicopter screws, and they hung for a minute or two poised above the fading landscape. The forest of Burnham Beeches stretched like a great pool of darkness towards the bright shore of the western sky. Crimson at the horizon, the last of the sunset faded, through orange, upwards into yellow and a pale watery green. Northwards, beyond and above the trees, the Internal and External Secretions factory glared with a fierce electric brilliance from every window of its twenty stories. Beneath them lay the buildings of the Golf Club—the huge Lower Caste barracks and, on the other side of a dividing wall, the smaller houses reserved for Alpha and Beta members. The approaches to the monorail station were black with the ant-like pullulation of lower-caste activity. From under the glass vault a lighted train shot out into the open. Following its southeasterly course across the dark plain their eyes were drawn to the majestic buildings of the Slough Crematorium. For the safety of night-flying planes, its four tall chimneys were flood-lighted and tipped with crimson danger signals. It was a landmark.

“Why do the smoke-stacks have those things like balconies round them?” enquired Lenina.

“Phosphorus recovery,” explained Henry telegraphically. “On their way up the chimney the

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gases go through four separate treatments. P_2O_5 used to go right out of circulation every time they cremated some one. Now they recover over ninety-eight per cent. of it. More than a kilo and a half per adult corpse. Which makes the best part of four hundred tons of phosphorus every year from England alone." Henry spoke with a happy pride, rejoicing whole-heartedly in the achievement, as though it had been his own. "Fine to think we can go on being socially useful even after we're dead. Making plants grow."

Lenina, meanwhile, had turned her eyes away and was looking perpendicularly downwards at the monorail station. "Fine," she agreed. "But queer that Alphas and Betas won't make any more plants grow than those nasty little Gammas and Deltas and Epsilons down there."

"All men are physico-chemically equal," said Henry sententiously. "Besides, even Epsilons perform indispensable services."

"Even an Epsilon . . ." Lenina suddenly remembered an occasion when, as a little girl at school, she had woken up in the middle of the night and become aware, for the first time, of the whispering that had haunted all her sleeps. She saw again the beam of moonlight, the row of small white beds; heard once more the soft, soft voice that said (the words were there, unforgotten, unforgettable after so many night-long repetitions): "Every one works for every

one else. We can't do without any one. Even Epsilons are useful. We couldn't do without Epsilons. Every one works for every one else. We can't do without any one . . ." Lenina remembered her first shock of fear and surprise; her speculations through half a wakeful hour; and then, under the influence of those endless repetitions, the gradual soothing of her mind, the soothing, the smoothing, the stealthy creeping of sleep. . . .

"I suppose Epsilons don't really mind being Epsilons," she said aloud.

"Of course they don't. How can they? They don't know what it's like being anything else. We'd mind, of course. But then we've been differently conditioned. Besides, we start with a different heredity."

"I'm glad I'm not an Epsilon," said Lenina, with conviction.

"And if you were an Epsilon," said Henry, "your conditioning would have made you no less thankful that you weren't a Beta or an Alpha." He put his forward propeller into gear and headed the machine towards London. Behind them, in the west, the crimson and orange were almost faded; a dark bank of cloud had crept into the zenith. As they flew over the Crematorium, the plane shot upwards on the column of hot air rising from the chimneys, only to fall as suddenly when it passed into the descending chill beyond.

“What a marvellous switchback!” Lenina laughed delightedly.

But Henry’s tone was almost, for a moment, melancholy. “Do you know what that switchback was?” he said. “It was some human being finally and definitely disappearing. Going up in a squirt of hot gas. It would be curious to know who it was—a man or a woman, an Alpha or an Epsilon. . . .” He sighed. Then, in a resolutely cheerful voice, “Anyhow,” he concluded, “there’s one thing we can be certain of; whoever he may have been, he was happy when he was alive. Everybody’s happy now.”

“Yes, everybody’s happy now,” echoed Lenina. They had heard the words repeated a hundred and fifty times every night for twelve years.

Landing on the roof of Henry’s forty-story apartment house in Westminster, they went straight down to the dining-hall. There, in a loud and cheerful company, they ate an excellent meal. *Soma* was served with the coffee. Lenina took two half-gramme tablets and Henry three. At twenty past nine they walked across the street to the newly opened Westminster Abbey Cabaret. It was a night almost without clouds, moonless and starry; but of this on the whole depressing fact Lenina and Henry were fortunately unaware. The electric sky-signs effectively shut off the outer darkness. “CALVIN STOPES AND HIS SIXTEEN SEXOPHONISTS.” From the façade of the new Abbey the giant letters invitingly glared.

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“LONDON’S FINEST SCENT AND COLOUR ORGAN.
ALL THE LATEST SYNTHETIC MUSIC.”

They entered. The air seemed hot and somehow breathless with the scent of ambergris and sandalwood. On the domed ceiling of the hall, the colour organ had momentarily painted a tropical sunset. The Sixteen Sexophonists were playing an old favourite: “There ain’t no Bottle in all the world like that dear little Bottle of mine.” Four hundred couples were five-stepping round the polished floor. Lenina and Henry were soon the four hundred and first. The sexophones wailed like melodious cats under the moon, moaned in the alto and tenor registers as though the little death were upon them. Rich with a wealth of harmonics, their tremulous chorus mounted towards a climax, louder and ever louder—until at last, with a wave of his hand, the conductor let loose the final shattering note of ether-music and blew the sixteen merely human blowers clean out of existence. Thunder in A flat major. And then, in all but silence, in all but darkness, there followed a gradual deturgescence, a *diminuendo* sliding gradually, through quarter tones, down, down to a faintly whispered dominant chord that lingered on (while the five-four rhythms still pulsed below) charging the darkened seconds with an intense expectancy. And at last expectancy was fulfilled. There was a sudden explosive sunrise, and simultaneously, the Sixteen burst into song:

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*“Bottle of mine, it’s you I’ve always wanted!
Bottle of mine, why was I ever decanted?
Skies are blue inside of you,
The weather’s always fine;
For
There ain’t no Bottle in all the world
Like that dear little Bottle of mine.”*

Five-stepping with the other four hundred round and round Westminster Abbey, Lenina and Henry were yet dancing in another world—the warm, the richly coloured, the infinitely friendly world of *soma*-holiday. How kind, how good-looking, how delightfully amusing every one was! “Bottle of mine, it’s you I’ve always wanted . . .” But Lenina and Henry had what they wanted . . . They were inside, here and now—safely inside with the fine weather, the perennially blue sky. And when, exhausted, the Sixteen had laid by their sexophones and the Synthetic Music apparatus was producing the very latest in slow Malthusian Blues, they might have been twin embryos gently rocking together on the waves of a bottled ocean of blood-surrogate.

“Good-night, dear friends. Good-night, dear friends.” The loud speakers veiled their commands in a genial and musical politeness. “Good-night, dear friends. . . .”

Obediently, with all the others, Lenina and Henry left the building. The depressing stars had travelled quite some way across the heavens. But though the

separating screen of the sky-signs had now to a great extent dissolved, the two young people still retained their happy ignorance of the night.

Swallowed half an hour before closing time, that second dose of *soma* had raised a quite impenetrable wall between the actual universe and their minds. Bottled, they crossed the street; bottled, they took the lift up to Henry's room on the twenty-eighth floor. And yet, bottled as she was, and in spite of that second gramme of *soma*, Lenina did not forget to take all the contraceptive precautions prescribed by the regulations. Years of intensive hypnopædia and, from twelve to seventeen, Malthusian drill three times a week had made the taking of these precautions almost as automatic and inevitable as blinking.

"Oh, and that reminds me," she said, as she came back from the bathroom, "Fanny Crowne wants to know where you found that lovely green morocco-surrogate cartridge belt you gave me."

§2

ALTERNATE Thursdays were Bernard's Solidarity Service days. After an early dinner at the Aphroditæum (to which Helmholtz had recently been elected under Rule Two) he took leave of his friend and, hailing a taxi on the roof, told the man to fly to the Fordson Community Singery. The machine rose a couple of hundred metres, then headed east-

wards, and as it turned, there before Bernard's eyes, gigantically beautiful, was the Singery. Flood-lighted, its three hundred and twenty metres of white Carrara-surrogate gleamed with a snowy incandescence over Ludgate Hill; at each of the four corners of its helicopter platform an immense T shone crimson against the night, and from the mouths of twenty-four vast golden trumpets rumbled a solemn synthetic music.

"Damn, I'm late," Bernard said to himself as he first caught sight of Big Henry, the Singery clock. And sure enough, as he was paying off his cab, Big Henry sounded the hour. "Ford," sang out an immense bass voice from all the golden trumpets. "Ford, Ford, Ford . . ." Nine times. Bernard ran for the lift.

The great auditorium for Ford's Day celebrations and other massed Community Sings was at the bottom of the building. Above it, a hundred to each floor, were the seven thousand rooms used by Solidarity Groups for their fortnight services. Bernard dropped down to floor thirty-three, hurried along the corridor, stood hesitating for a moment outside Room 3210, then, having wound himself up, opened the door and walked in.

Thank Ford! he was not the last. Three chairs of the twelve arranged round the circular table were still unoccupied. He slipped into the nearest of them as inconspicuously as he could and prepared to frown

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at the yet later comers whenever they should arrive.

Turning towards him, "What were you playing this afternoon?" the girl on his left enquired. "Obstacle, or Electro-magnetic?"

Bernard looked at her (Ford! it was Morgana Rothschild) and blushing had to admit that he had been playing neither. Morgana stared at him with astonishment. There was an awkward silence.

Then pointedly she turned away and addressed herself to the more sporting man on her left.

"A good beginning for a Solidarity Service," thought Bernard miserably, and foresaw for himself yet another failure to achieve atonement. If only he had given himself time to look round instead of scuttling for the nearest chair! He could have sat between Fifi Bradlaugh and Joanna Diesel. Instead of which he had gone and blindly planted himself next to Morgana. *Morgana!* Ford! Those black eyebrows of hers—that eyebrow, rather—for they met above the nose. Ford! And on his right was Clara Deterding. True, Clara's eyebrows didn't meet. But she was really *too* pneumatic. Whereas Fifi and Joanna were absolutely right. Plump, blonde, not too large . . . And it was that great lout, Tom Kawaguchi, who now took the seat between them.

The last arrival was Sarojini Engels.

"You're late," said the President of the Group severely. "Don't let it happen again."

Sarojini apologized and slid into her place be-

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tween Jim Bokanovsky and Herbert Bakunin. The group was now complete, the solidarity circle perfect and without flaw. Man, woman, man, in a ring of endless alternation round the table. Twelve of them ready to be made one, waiting to come together, to be fused, to lose their twelve separate identities in a larger being.

The President stood up, made the sign of the T and, switching on the synthetic music, let loose the soft indefatigable beating of drums and a choir of instruments—near-wind and super-string—that plangently repeated and repeated the brief and unescapably haunting melody of the first Solidarity Hymn. Again, again—and it was not the ear that heard the pulsing rhythm, it was the midriff; the wail and clang of those recurring harmonies haunted, not the mind, but the yearning bowels of compassion.

The President made another sign of the T and sat down. The service had begun. The dedicated *soma* tablets were placed in the centre of the table. The loving cup of strawberry ice-cream *soma* was passed from hand to hand and, with the formula, "I drink to my annihilation," twelve times quaffed. Then to the accompaniment of the synthetic orchestra the First Solidarity Hymn was sung.

*"Ford, we are twelve; oh, make us one,
Like drops within the Social River;
Oh, make us now together run
As swiftly as thy shining Flivver."*

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Twelve yearning stanzas. And then the loving cup was passed a second time. "I drink to the Greater Being" was now the formula. All drank. Tirelessly the music played. The drums beat. The crying and clashing of the harmonies were an obsession in the melted bowels. The Second Solidarity Hymn was sung.

*"Come, Greater Being, Social Friend,
Annihilating Twelve-in-One!
We long to die, for when we end,
Our larger life has but begun."*

Again twelve stanzas. By this time the *soma* had begun to work. Eyes shone, cheeks were flushed, the inner light of universal benevolence broke out on every face in happy, friendly smiles. Even Bernard felt himself a little melted. When Morgana Rothschild turned and beamed at him, he did his best to beam back. But the eyebrow, that black two-in-one—alas, it was still there; he couldn't ignore it, couldn't, however hard he tried. The melting hadn't gone far enough. Perhaps if he had been sitting between Fifi and Joanna . . . For the third time the loving cup went round. "I drink to the imminence of His Coming," said Morgana Rothschild, whose turn it happened to be to initiate the circular rite. Her tone was loud, exultant. She drank and passed the cup to Bernard. "I drink to the imminence of His Coming," he repeated, with a sincere attempt to

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leeī tñat the coming was imminent; but the eyebrow continued to haunt him, and the Coming, so far as he was concerned, was horribly remote. He drank and handed the cup to Clara Deterding. "It'll be a failure again," he said to himself. "I know it will." But he went on doing his best to beam.

The loving cup had made its circuit. Lifting his hand, the President gave a signal; the chorus broke out into the third Solidarity Hymn.

*"Feel how the Greater Being comes!
Rejoice and, in rejoicings, die!
Melt in the music of the drums!
For I am you and you are I."*

As verse succeeded verse the voices thrilled with an ever intenser excitement. The sense of the Coming's imminence was like an electric tension in the air. The President switched off the music and, with the final note of the final stanza, there was absolute silence—the silence of stretched expectancy, quivering and creeping with a galvanic life. The President reached out his hand; and suddenly a Voice, a deep strong Voice, more musical than any merely human voice, richer, warmer, more vibrant with love and yearning and compassion, a wonderful, mysterious, supernatural Voice spoke from above their heads. Very slowly, "Oh, Ford, Ford, Ford," it said diminishingly and on a descending scale. A sensation

of warmth radiated thrillingly out from the solar plexus to every extremity of the bodies of those who listened; tears came into their eyes; their hearts, their bowels seemed to move within them, as though with an independent life. "Ford!" they were melting, "Ford!" dissolved, dissolved. Then, in another tone, suddenly, startlingly. "Listen!" trumpeted the voice. "Listen!" They listened. After a pause, sunk to a whisper, but a whisper, somehow, more penetrating than the loudest cry. "The feet of the Greater Being," it went on, and repeated the words: "The feet of the Greater Being." The whisper almost expired. "The feet of the Greater Being are on the stairs." And once more there was silence; and the expectancy, momentarily relaxed, was stretched again, tauter, tauter, almost to the tearing point. The feet of the Greater Being—oh, they heard them, they heard them, coming softly down the stairs, coming nearer and nearer down the invisible stairs. The feet of the Greater Being. And suddenly the tearing point was reached. Her eyes staring, her lips parted, Morgana Rothschild sprang to her feet.

"I hear him," she cried. "I hear him."

"He's coming," shouted Sarojini Engels.

"Yes, he's coming, I hear him." Fifi Bradlaugh and Tom Kawaguchi rose simultaneously to their feet.

"Oh, oh, oh!" Joanna inarticulately testified.

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“He’s coming!” yelled Jim Bokanovsky.

The President leaned forward and, with a touch, released a delirium of cymbals and blown brass, a fever of tom-tomming.

“Oh, he’s coming!” screamed Clara Deterding. “Aie!” and it was as though she were having her throat cut.

Feeling that it was time for him to do something, Bernard also jumped up and shouted: “I hear him; He’s coming.” But it wasn’t true. He heard nothing and, for him, nobody was coming. Nobody—in spite of the music, in spite of the mounting excitement. But he waved his arms, he shouted with the best of them; and when the others began to jig and stamp and shuffle, he also jiggled and shuffled.

Round they went, a circular procession of dancers, each with hands on the hips of the dancer preceding, round and round, shouting in unison, stamping to the rhythm of the music with their feet, beating it, beating it out with hands on the buttocks in front; twelve pairs of hands beating as one; as one, twelve buttocks slabbily resounding. Twelve as one, twelve as one. “I hear Him, I hear Him coming.” The music quickened; faster beat the feet, faster, faster fell the rhythmic hands. And all at once a great synthetic bass boomed out the words which announced the approaching atonement and final consummation of solidarity, the coming of the Twelve-^hOne, the incarnation of the Greater Being.

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“Orgy-porgy,” it sang, while the tom-toms continued to beat their feverish tattoo:

*“Orgy-porgy, Ford and fun,
Kiss the girls and make them One.
Boys at one with girls at peace;
Orgy-porgy gives release.”*

“Orgy-porgy,” the dancers caught up the liturgical refrain, “Orgy-porgy, Ford and fun, kiss the girls . . .” And as they sang, the lights began slowly to fade—to fade and at the same time to grow warmer, richer, redder, until at last they were dancing in the crimson twilight of an Embryo Store. “Orgy-Porgy . . .” In their blood-coloured and foetal darkness the dancers continued for a while to circulate, to beat and beat out the indefatigable rhythm. “Orgy-porgy . . .” Then the circle wavered, broke, fell in partial disintegration on the ring of couches which surrounded—circle enclosing circle—the table and its planetary chairs. “Orgy-porgy . . .” Tenderly the deep Voice crooned and cooed; in the red twilight it was as though some enormous negro dove were hovering benevolently over the now prone or supine dancers.

They were standing on the roof; Big Henry had just sung eleven. The night was calm and warm.

“Wasn’t it wonderful?” said Fifi Bradlaugh.
“Wasn’t it simply wonderful?” She looked at Br-

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nard with an expression of rapture, but of rapture in which there was no trace of agitation or excitement—for to be excited is still to be unsatisfied. Hers was the calm ecstasy of achieved consummation, the peace, not of mere vacant satiety and nothingness, but of balanced life, of energies at rest and in equilibrium. A rich and living peace. For the Solidarity Service had given as well as taken, drawn off only to replenish. She was full, she was made perfect, she was still more than merely herself. "Didn't you think it was wonderful?" she insisted, looking into Bernard's face with those supernaturally shining eyes.

"Yes, I thought it was wonderful," he lied and looked away; the sight of her transfigured face was at once an accusation and an ironical reminder of his own separateness. He was as miserably isolated now as he had been when the service began—more isolated by reason of his unreplenished emptiness, his dead satiety. Separate and unatoned, while the others were being fused into the Greater Being; alone even in Morgana's embrace—much more alone, indeed, more hopelessly himself than he had ever been in his life before. He had emerged from that crimson twilight into the common electric glare with a self-consciousness intensified to the pitch of agony. He was utterly miserable, and perhaps (her shining eyes accused him), perhaps it was his own fault. "Quite wonderful," he repeated; but the only thing he could think of was Morgana's eyebrow.



CHAPTER SIX

ODD, odd, *odd*, was Lenina's verdict on Bernard Marx. So odd, indeed, that in the course of the succeeding weeks she had wondered more than once whether she shouldn't change her mind about the New Mexico holiday, and go instead to the North Pole with Benito Hoover. The trouble was that she knew the North Pole, had been there with George Edzel only last summer, and what was more, found it pretty grim. Nothing to do, and the hotel too hopelessly old-fashioned—no television laid on in the bedrooms, no scent organ, only the most putrid synthetic music, and not more than twenty-five Escalator-Squash Courts for over two hundred guests. No, decidedly she couldn't face the North Pole again. Added to which, she had only been to America once before. And even then, how inadequately! A cheap week-end in New York—had it

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been with Jean-Jacques Habibullah or Bokanovsky Jones? She couldn't remember. Anyhow, it was of absolutely no importance. The prospect of flying West again, and for a whole week, was very inviting. Moreover, for at least three days of that week they would be in the Savage Reservation. Not more than half a dozen people in the whole Centre had ever been inside a Savage Reservation. As an Alpha-Plus psychologist, Bernard was one of the few men she knew entitled to a permit. For Lenina, the opportunity was unique. And yet, so unique also was Bernard's oddness that she had hesitated to take it, had actually thought of risking the Pole again with funny old Benito. At least Benito was normal. Whereas Bernard . . .

"Alcohol in his blood-surrogate," was Fanny's explanation of every eccentricity. But Henry, with whom, one evening when they were in bed together, Lenina had rather anxiously discussed her new lover, Henry had compared poor Bernard to a rhinoceros.

"You can't teach a rhinoceros tricks," he had explained in his brief and vigorous style. "Some men are almost rhinoceroses; they don't respond properly to conditioning. Poor Devils! Bernard's one of them. Luckily for him, he's pretty good at his job. Otherwise the Director would never have kept him. However," he added consolingly, "I think he's pretty harmless."

Pretty harmless, perhaps; but also pretty dis-

quieting. That mania, to start with, for doing things in private. Which meant, in practice, not doing anything at all. For what was there that one *could* do in private. (Apart, of course, from going to bed: but one couldn't do that all the time.) Yes, what *was* there? Precious little. The first afternoon they went out together was particularly fine. Lenina had suggested a swim at Torquay Country Club followed by dinner at the Oxford Union. But Bernard thought there would be too much of a crowd. Then what about a round of Electro-magnetic Golf at St. Andrew's? But again, no: Bernard considered that Electro-magnetic Golf was a waste of time.

"Then what's time for?" asked Lenina in some astonishment.

Apparently, for going walks in the Lake District; for that was what he now proposed. Land on the top of Skiddaw and walk for a couple of hours in the heather. "Alone with you, Lenina."

"But, Bernard, we shall be alone all night."

Bernard blushed and looked away. "I meant, alone for talking," he mumbled.

"Talking? But what about?" Walking and talking—that seemed a very odd way of spending an afternoon.

In the end she persuaded him, much against his will, to fly over to Amsterdam to see the Semi-Demi-Finals of the Women's Heavyweight Wrestling Championship.

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"In a crowd," he grumbled. "As usual." He remained obstinately gloomy the whole afternoon; wouldn't talk to Lenina's friends (of whom they met dozens in the ice-cream *soma* bar between the wrestling bouts); and in spite of his misery absolutely refused to take the half-gramme raspberry sundae which she pressed upon him. "I'd rather be myself," he said. "Myself and nasty. Not somebody else, however jolly."

"A gramme in time saves nine," said Lenina, producing a bright treasure of sleep-taught wisdom.

Bernard pushed away the proffered glass impatiently.

"Now don't lose your temper," she said. "Remember, one cubic centimetre cures ten gloomy sentiments."

"Oh, for Ford's sake, be quiet!" he shouted.

Lenina shrugged her shoulders. "A gramme is always better than a damn," she concluded with dignity, and drank the sundae herself.

On their way back across the Channel, Bernard insisted on stopping his propeller and hovering on his helicopter screws within a hundred feet of the waves. The weather had taken a change for the worse; a south-westerly wind had sprung up, the sky was cloudy.

"Look," he commanded.

"But it's horrible," said Lenina, shrinking back from the window. She was appalled by the rushing

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emptiness of the night, by the black foam-flecked water heaving beneath them, by the pale face of the moon, so haggard and distracted among the hastening clouds. "Let's turn on the radio. Quick!" She reached for the dialling knob on the dash-board and turned it at random.

". . . skies are blue inside of you," sang sixteen tremoloing falsettos, "the weather's always . . ."

Then a hiccough and silence. Bernard had switched off the current.

"I want to look at the sea in peace," he said. "One can't even look with that beastly noise going on."

"But it's lovely. And I don't want to look."

"But I do," he insisted. "It makes me feel as though . . ." he hesitated, searching for words with which to express himself, "as though I were more *me*, if you see what I mean. More on my own, not so completely a part of something else. Not just a cell in the social body. Doesn't it make you feel like that, Lenina?"

But Lenina was crying. "It's horrible, it's horrible," she kept repeating. "And how can you talk like that about not wanting to be a part of the social body? After all, every one works for every one else. We can't do without any one. Even Epsilons . . ."

"Yes, I know," said Bernard derisively. "'Even Epsilons are useful'! So am I. And I damned well wish I weren't!"

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Lenina was shocked by his blasphemy. "Bernard!" She protested in a voice of amazed distress. "How can you?"

In a different key, "How can I?" he repeated meditatively. "No, the real problem is: How is it that I can't, or rather—because, after all, I know quite well why I can't—what would it be like if I could, if I were free—not enslaved by my conditioning?"

"But, Bernard, you're saying the most awful things."

"Don't you wish you were free, Lenina?"

"I don't know what you mean. I am free. Free to have the most wonderful time. Everybody's happy nowadays."

He laughed, "Yes," 'Everybody's happy nowadays.' We begin giving the children that at five. But wouldn't you like to be free to be happy in some other way, Lenina? In your own way, for example; not in everybody else's way."

"I don't know what you mean," she repeated. Then, turning to him, "Oh, do let's go back, Bernard," she besought; "I do so hate it here."

"Don't you like being with me?"

"But of course, Bernard. It's this horrible place."

"I thought we'd be more . . . more *together* here—with nothing but the sea and moon. More together than in that crowd, or even in my rooms. Don't you understand that?"

"I don't understand anything," she said with de-

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cision, determined to preserve her incomprehension intact. "Nothing. Least of all," she continued in another tone, "why you don't take *soma* when you have these dreadful ideas of yours. You'd forget all about them. And instead of feeling miserable, you'd be jolly. *So jolly*," she repeated and smiled, for all the puzzled anxiety in her eyes, with what was meant to be an inviting and voluptuous cajolery.

He looked at her in silence, his face unresponsive and very grave—looked at her intently. After a few seconds Lenina's eyes flinched away; she uttered a nervous little laugh, tried to think of something to say and couldn't. The silence prolonged itself.

When Bernard spoke at last, it was in a small tired voice. "All right then," he said, "we'll go back." And stepping hard on the accelerator, he sent the machine rocketing up into the sky. At four thousand he started his propeller. They flew in silence for a minute or two. Then, suddenly, Bernard began to laugh. Rather oddly, Lenina thought; but still, it was laughter.

"Feeling better?" she ventured to ask.

For answer, he lifted one hand from the controls and, slipping his arm round her, began to fondle her breasts.

"Thank Ford," she said to herself, "he's all right again."

Half an hour later they were back in his rooms. Bernard swallowed four tablets of *soma* at a gulp,

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turned on the radio and television and began to undress.

"Well," Lenina enquired, with significant archness when they met next afternoon on the roof, "did you think it was fun yesterday?"

Bernard nodded. They climbed into the plane. A little jolt, and they were off.

"Every one says I'm awfully pneumatic," said Lenina reflectively, patting her own legs.

"Awfully." But there was an expression of pain in Bernard's eyes. "Like meat," he was thinking.

She looked up with a certain anxiety. "But you don't think I'm *too* plump, do you?"

He shook his head. Like so much meat.

"You think I'm all right." Another nod. "In every way?"

"Perfect," he said aloud. And inwardly, "She thinks of herself that way. She doesn't mind being meat."

Lenina smiled triumphantly. But her satisfaction was premature.

"All the same," he went on, after a little pause, "I still rather wish it had all ended differently."

"Differently?" Were there other endings?

"I didn't want it to end with our going to bed," he specified.

Lenina was astonished.

"Not at once, not the first day."

"But then what . . . ?"

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He began to talk a lot of incomprehensible and dangerous nonsense. Lenina did her best to stop the ears of her mind; but every now and then a phrase would insist on becoming audible. “. . . to try the effect of arresting my impulses,” she heard him say. The words seemed to touch a spring in her mind.

“Never put off till to-morrow the fun you can have to-day,” she said gravely.

“Two hundred repetitions, twice a week from fourteen to sixteen and a half,” was all his comment. The mad bad talk rambled on. “I want to know what passion is,” she heard him saying. “I want to feel something strongly.”

“When the individual feels, the community reels,” Lenina pronounced.

“Well, why shouldn’t it reel a bit?”

“Bernard!”

But Bernard remained unabashed.

“Adults intellectually and during working hours,” he went on. “Infants where feeling and desire are concerned.”

“Our Ford loved infants.”

Ignoring the interruption, “It suddenly struck me the other day,” continued Bernard, “that it might be possible to be an adult all the time.”

“I don’t understand.” Lenina’s tone was firm.

“I know you don’t. And that’s why we went to bed together yesterday—like infants—instead of being adults and waiting.”

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"But it was fun," Lenina insisted. "Wasn't it?"

"Oh, the greatest fun," he answered, but in a voice so mournful, with an expression so profoundly miserable, that Lenina felt all her triumph suddenly evaporate. Perhaps he had found her too plump, after all.

"I told you so," was all that Fanny said, when Lenina came and made her confidences. "It's the alcohol they put in his surrogate."

"All the same," Lenina insisted. "I do like him. He has such awfully nice hands. And the way he moves his shoulders—that's very attractive." She sighed. "But I wish he weren't so odd."

§ 2

HALTING for a moment outside the door of the Director's room, Bernard drew a deep breath and squared his shoulders, bracing himself to meet the dislike and disapproval which he was certain of finding within. He knocked and entered.

"A permit for you to initial, Director," he said as airily as possible, and laid the paper on the writing-table.

The Director glanced at him sourly. But the stamp of the World Controller's Office was at the head of the paper and the signature of Mustapha Mond, bold and black, across the bottom. Everything was perfectly in order. The Director had no choice. He

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pencilled his initials—two small pale letters abject at the feet of Mustapha Mond—and was about to return the paper without a word of comment or genial Ford-speed, when his eye was caught by something written in the body of the permit.

“For the New Mexican Reservation?” he said, and his tone, the face he lifted to Bernard, expressed a kind of agitated astonishment.

Surprised by his surprise, Bernard nodded. There was a silence.

The Director leaned back in his chair, frowning. “How long ago was it?” he said, speaking more to himself than to Bernard. “Twenty years, I suppose. Nearer twenty-five. I must have been your age . . .” He sighed and shook his head.

Bernard felt extremely uncomfortable. A man so conventional, so scrupulously correct as the Director—and to commit so gross a solecism! It made him want to hide his face, to run out of the room. Not that he himself saw anything intrinsically objectionable in people talking about the remote past; that was one of those hypnopædic prejudices he had (so he imagined) completely got rid of. What made him feel shy was the knowledge that the Director disapproved—disapproved and yet had been betrayed into doing the forbidden thing. Under what inward compulsion? Through his discomfort Bernard eagerly listened.

“I had the same idea as you,” the Director was

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saying. "Wanted to have a look at the savages. Got a permit for New Mexico and went there for my summer holiday. With the girl I was having at the moment. She was a Beta-Minus, and I think" (he shut his eyes), "I think she had yellow hair. Anyhow she was pneumatic, particularly pneumatic; I remember that. Well, we went there, and we looked at the savages, and we rode about on horses and all that. And then—it was almost the last day of my leave—then . . . well, she got lost. We'd gone riding up one of those revolting mountains, and it was horribly hot and oppressive, and after lunch we went to sleep. Or at least I did. She must have gone for a walk, alone. At any rate, when I woke up, she wasn't there. And the most frightful thunderstorm I've ever seen was just bursting on us. And it poured and roared and flashed; and the horses broke loose and ran away; and I fell down, trying to catch them, and hurt my knee, so that I could hardly walk. Still, I searched and I shouted and I searched. But there was no sign of her. Then I thought she must have gone back to the rest-house by herself. So I crawled down into the valley by the way we had come. My knee was agonizingly painful, and I'd lost my *soma*. It took me hours. I didn't get back to the rest-house till after midnight. And she wasn't there; she wasn't there," the Director repeated. There was a silence. "Well," he resumed at last, "the next day there was a search. But we couldn't find her. She must have

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fallen into a gully somewhere; or been eaten by a mountain lion. Ford knows. Anyhow it was horrible. It upset me very much at the time. More than it ought to have done, I dare say. Because, after all, it's the sort of accident that might have happened to any one; and, of course, the social body persists although the component cells may change." But this sleep-taught consolation did not seem to be very effective. Shaking his head, "I actually dream about it sometimes," the Director went on in a low voice. "Dream of being woken up by that peal of thunder and finding her gone; dream of searching and searching for her under the trees." He lapsed into the silence of reminiscence.

"You must have had a terrible shock," said Bernard, almost enviously.

At the sound of his voice the Director started into a guilty realization of where he was; shot a glance at Bernard, and averting his eyes, blushed darkly; looked at him again with sudden suspicion and, angrily on his dignity, "Don't imagine," he said, "that I'd had any indecorous relation with the girl. Nothing emotional, nothing long-drawn. It was all perfectly healthy and normal." He handed Bernard the permit. "I really don't know why I bored you with this trivial anecdote." Furious with himself for having given away a discreditable secret, he vented his rage on Bernard. The look in his eyes was now frankly malignant. "And I should like to take this

opportunity, Mr. Marx," he went on, "of saying that I'm not at all pleased with the reports I receive of your behaviour outside working hours. You may say that this is not my business. But it is. I have the good name of the Centre to think of. My workers must be above suspicion, particularly those of the highest castes. Alphas are so conditioned that they do not *have* to be infantile in their emotional behaviour. But that is all the more reason for their making a special effort to conform. It is their duty to be infantile, even against their inclination. And so, Mr. Marx, I give you fair warning." The Director's voice vibrated with an indignation that had now become wholly righteous and impersonal—was the expression of the disapproval of Society itself. "If ever I hear again of any lapse from a proper standard of infantile decorum, I shall ask for your transference to a Sub-Centre—preferably to Iceland. Good morning." And swivelling round in his chair, he picked up his pen and began to write.

"That'll teach him," he said to himself. But he was mistaken. For Bernard left the room with a swagger, exulting, as he banged the door behind him, in the thought that he stood alone, embattled against the order of things; elated by the intoxicating consciousness of his individual significance and importance. Even the thought of persecution left him undismayed, was rather tonic than depressing. He felt strong enough to meet and overcome affliction,

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strong enough to face even Iceland. And this confidence was the greater for his not for a moment really believing that he would be called upon to face anything at all. People simply weren't transferred for things like that. Iceland was just a threat. A most stimulating and life-giving threat. Walking along the corridor, he actually whistled.

Heroic was the account he gave that evening of his interview with the D.H.C. "Whereupon," it concluded, "I simply told him to go to the Bottomless Past and marched out of the room. And that was that." He looked at Helmholtz Watson expectantly, awaiting his due reward of sympathy, encouragement, admiration. But no word came. Helmholtz sat silent, staring at the floor.

He liked Bernard; he was grateful to him for being the only man of his acquaintance with whom he could talk about the subjects he felt to be important. Nevertheless, there were things in Bernard which he hated. This boasting, for example. And the outbursts of an abject self-pity with which it alternated. And his deplorable habit of being bold after the event, and full, in absence, of the most extraordinary presence of mind. He hated these things—just because he liked Bernard. The seconds passed. Helmholtz continued to stare at the floor. And suddenly Bernard blushed and turned away.

§ 3

THE journey was quite uneventful. The Blue Pacific Rocket was two and a half minutes early at New Orleans, lost four minutes in a tornado over Texas, but flew into a favourable air current at Longitude 95 West, and was able to land at Santa Fé less than forty seconds behind schedule time.

“Forty seconds on a six and a half hour flight. Not so bad,” Lenina conceded.

They slept that night at Santa Fé. The hotel was excellent—incomparably better, for example, than that horrible Aurora Bora Palace in which Lenina had suffered so much the previous summer. Liquid air, television, vibro-vacuum massage, radio, boiling caffeine solution, hot contraceptives, and eight different kinds of scent were laid on in every bedroom. The synthetic music plant was working as they entered the hall and left nothing to be desired. A notice in the lift announced that there were sixty Escalator-Squash-Racquet Courts in the hotel, and that Obstacle and Electro-magnetic Golf could both be played in the park.

“But it sounds simply too lovely,” cried Lenina. “I almost wish we could stay here. Sixty Escalator-Squash Courts . . .”

“There won’t be any in the Reservation,” Bernard warned her. “And no scent, no television, no hot

water even. If you feel you can't stand it, stay here till I come back."

Lenina was quite offended. "Of course I can stand it. I only said it was lovely here because . . . well, because progress *is* lovely, isn't it?"

"Five hundred repetitions once a week from thirteen to seventeen," said Bernard wearily, as though to himself.

"What did you say?"

"I said that progress was lovely. That's why you mustn't come to the Reservation unless you really want to."

"But I do want to."

"Very well, then," said Bernard; and it was almost a threat.

Their permit required the signature of the Warden of the Reservation, at whose office next morning they duly presented themselves. An Epsilon-Plus negro porter took in Bernard's card, and they were admitted almost immediately.

The Warden was a blond and brachycephalic Alpha-Minus, short, red, moon-faced, and broad-shouldered, with a loud booming voice, very well adapted to the utterance of hypnopædic wisdom. He was a mine of irrelevant information and unasked-for good advice. Once started, he went on and on—boomingly.

". . . five hundred and sixty thousand square kilometres, divided into four distinct Sub-Reserva-

tions, each surrounded by a high-tension wire fence."

At this moment, and for no apparent reason, Bernard suddenly remembered that he had left the Eau de Cologne tap in his bathroom wide open and running.

". . . supplied with current from the Grand Canyon hydro-electric station."

"Cost me a fortune by the time I get back." With his mind's eye, Bernard saw the needle on the scent meter creeping round and round, antlike, indefatigably. "Quickly telephone to Helmholtz Watson."

". . . upwards of five thousand kilometres of fencing at sixty thousand volts."

"You don't say so," said Lenina politely, not knowing in the least what the Warden had said, but taking her cue from his dramatic pause. When the Warden started booming, she had inconspicuously swallowed half a gramme of *soma*, with the result that she could now sit, serenely not listening, thinking of nothing at all, but with her large blue eyes fixed on the Warden's face in an expression of rapt attention.

"To touch the fence is instant death," pronounced the Warden solemnly. "There is no escape from a Savage Reservation."

The word "escape" was suggestive. "Perhaps," said Bernard, half rising, "we ought to think of going." The little black needle was scurrying, an in-

sect, nibbling through time, eating into his money.

"No escape," repeated the Warden, waving him back into his chair; and as the permit was not yet countersigned, Bernard had no choice but to obey. "Those who are born in the Reservation—and remember, my dear young lady," he added, leering obscenely at Lenina, and speaking in an improper whisper, "remember that, in the Reservation, children still *are* born, yes, actually born, revolting as that may seem . . ." (He hoped that this reference to a shameful subject would make Lenina blush; but she only smiled with simulated intelligence and said, "You don't say so!" Disappointed the Warden began again.) "Those, I repeat, who are born in the Reservation are destined to die there."

Destined to die . . . A decilitre of Eau de Cologne every minute. Six litres an hour. Perhaps," Bernard tried again, "we ought . . ."

Leaning forward, the Director tapped the table with his forefinger. "You ask me how many people live in the Reservation. And I reply"—triumphantly—"I reply that we do not know. We can only guess."

"You don't say so."

"My dear young lady, I do say so."

Six times twenty-four—no, it would be nearer six times thirty-six. Bernard was pale and trembling with impatience. But inexorably the booming continued.

". . . about sixty thousand Indians and half-breeds

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. . . absolute savages . . . our inspectors occasionally visit . . . otherwise, no communication whatever with the civilized world . . . still preserve their repulsive habits and customs . . . marriage, if you know what that is, my dear young lady; families . . . no conditioning . . . monstrous superstitions . . . Christianity and totemism and ancestor worship . . . extinct languages, such as Zuñi and Spanish and Athapascan . . . pumas, porcupines and other ferocious animals . . . infectious diseases . . . priests . . . venomous lizards . . .”

“You don’t say so?”

They got away at last. Bernard dashed to the telephone. Quick, quick; but it took him nearly three minutes to get on to Helmholtz Watson. “We might be among the savages already,” he complained. “Damned incompetence!”

“Have a gramme,” suggested Lenina.

He refused, preferring his anger. And at last, thank Ford, he was through and, yes, it was Helmholtz; Helmholtz, to whom he explained what had happened, and who promised to go round at once, at once, and turn off the tap, yes, at once, but took this opportunity to tell him what the D.H.C. had said, in public, yesterday evening . . .

“What? He’s looking out for some one to take my place?” Bernard’s voice was agonized. “So it’s actually decided? Did he mention Iceland? You say he did? Ford! Iceland . . .” He hung up the receiver

and turned back to Lenina. His face was pale, his expression utterly dejected.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“The matter?” He dropped heavily into a chair. “I’m going to be sent to Iceland.”

Often in the past he had wondered what it would be like to be subjected (*soma*-less and with nothing but his own inward resources to rely on) to some great trial, some pain, some persecution; he had even longed for affliction. As recently as a week ago, in the Director’s office, he had imagined himself courageously resisting, stoically accepting suffering without a word. The Director’s threats had actually elated him, made him feel larger than life. But that, as he now realized, was because he had not taken the threats quite seriously; he had not believed that, when it came to the point, the D.H.C. would ever do anything. Now that it looked as though the threats were really to be fulfilled, Bernard was appalled. Of that imagined stoicism, that theoretical courage, not a trace was left.

He raged against himself—what a fool!—against the Director—how unfair not to give him that other chance, that other chance which, he now had no doubt at all, he had always intended to take. And Iceland, Iceland . . .

Lenina shook her head. “Was and will make me ill,” she quoted, “I take a gramme and only am.”

In the end she persuaded him to swallow four

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tablets of *soma*. Five minutes later roots and fruits were abolished; the flower of the present rosily blossomed. A message from the porter announced that, at the Warden's orders, a Reservation Guard had come round with a plane and was waiting on the roof of the hotel. They went up at once. An octroon in Gamma-green uniform saluted and proceeded to recite the morning's programme.

A bird's-eye view of ten or a dozen of the principal pueblos, then a landing for lunch in the valley of Malpais. The rest-house was comfortable there, and up at the pueblo the savages would probably be celebrating their summer festival. It would be the best place to spend the night.

They took their seats in the plane and set off. Ten minutes later they were crossing the frontier that separated civilization from savagery. Uphill and down, across the deserts of salt or sand, through forests, into the violet depth of canyons, over crag and peak and table-topped mesa, the fence marched on and on, irresistibly the straight line, the geometrical symbol of triumphant human purpose. And at its foot, here and there, a mosaic of white bones, a still unrotted carcass dark on the tawny ground marked the place where deer or steer, puma or porcupine or coyote, or the greedy turkey buzzards drawn down by the whiff of carrion and fulminated as though by a poetic justice, had come too close to the destroying wires.

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"They never learn," said the green-uniformed pilot, pointing down at the skeletons on the ground below them. "And they never will learn," he added and laughed, as though he had somehow scored a personal triumph over the electrocuted animals.

Bernard also laughed; after two grammes of *soma* the joke seemed, for some reason, good. Laughed and then, almost immediately, dropped off to sleep, and sleeping was carried over Taos and Tesuque; over Nambe and Picuris and Pojoaque, over Sia and Cochiti, over Laguna and Acoma and the Enchanted Mesa, over Zuñi and Cibola and Ojo Caliente, and woke at last to find the machine standing on the ground, Lenina carrying the suit-cases into a small square house, and the Gamma-green octoroon talking incomprehensibly with a young Indian.

"Malpais," explained the pilot, as Bernard stepped out. "This is the rest-house. And there's a dance this afternoon at the pueblo. He'll take you there." He pointed to the sullen young savage. "Funny, I expect." He grinned. "Everything they do is funny." And with that he climbed into the plane and started up the engines. "Back to-morrow. And remember," he added reassuringly to Lenina, "they're perfectly tame; savages won't do you any harm. They've got enough experience of gas bombs to know that they mustn't play any tricks." Still laughing, he threw the helicopter screws into gear, accelerated, and was gone.



CHAPTER SEVEN

THE mesa was like a ship becalmed in a strait of lion-coloured dust. The channel wound between precipitous banks, and slanting from one wall to the other across the valley ran a streak of green—the river and its fields. On the prow of that stone ship in the centre of the strait, and seemingly a part of it, a shaped and geometrical outcrop of the naked rock, stood the pueblo of Malpais. Block above block, each story smaller than the one below, the tall houses rose like stepped and amputated pyramids into the blue sky. At their feet lay a straggle of low buildings, a criss-cross of walls; and on three sides the precipices fell sheer into the plain. A few columns of smoke mounted perpendicularly into the windless air and were lost.

“Queer,” said Lenina. “Very queer.” It was her ordinary word of condemnation. “I don’t like it.

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And I don't like that man." She pointed to the Indian guide who had been appointed to take them up to the pueblo. Her feeling was evidently reciprocated; the very back of the man, as he walked along before them, was hostile, sullenly contemptuous.

"Besides," she lowered her voice, "he smells."

Bernard did not attempt to deny it. They walked on.

Suddenly it was as though the whole air had come alive and were pulsing, pulsing with the indefatigable movement of blood. Up there, in Malpais, the drums were being beaten. Their feet fell in with the rhythm of that mysterious heart; they quickened their pace. Their path led them to the foot of the precipice. The sides of the great mesa ship towered over them, three hundred feet to the gunwale.

"I wish we could have brought the plane," said Lenina, looking up resentfully at the blank impending rock-face. "I hate walking. And you feel so small when you're on the ground at the bottom of a hill."

They walked along for some way in the shadow of the mesa, rounded a projection, and there, in a water-worn ravine, was the way up the companion ladder. They climbed. It was a very steep path that zigzagged from side to side of the gully. Sometimes the pulsing of the drums was all but inaudible, at others they seemed to be beating only just round the corner.

When they were half-way up, an eagle flew past

so close to them that the wind of his wings blew chill on their faces. In a crevice of the rock lay a pile of bones. It was all oppressively queer, and the Indian smelt stronger and stronger. They emerged at last from the ravine into the full sunlight. The top of the mesa was a flat deck of stone.

“Like the Charing-T Tower,” was Lenina’s comment. But she was not allowed to enjoy her discovery of this reassuring resemblance for long. A padding of soft feet made them turn round. Naked from throat to navel, their dark brown bodies painted with white lines (“like asphalt tennis courts,” Lenina was later to explain), their faces inhuman with daubings of scarlet, black and ochre, two Indians came running along the path. Their black hair was braided with fox fur and red flannel. Cloaks of turkey feathers fluttered from their shoulders; huge feather diadems exploded gaudily round their heads. With every step they took came the clink and rattle of their silver bracelets, their heavy necklaces of bone and turquoise beads. They came on without a word, running quietly in their deerskin moccasins. One of them was holding a feather brush; the other carried, in either hand, what looked at a distance like three or four pieces of thick rope. One of the ropes writhed uneasily, and suddenly Lenina saw that they were snakes.

The men came nearer and nearer; their dark eyes looked at her, but without giving any sign of recogni-

tion, any smallest sign that they had seen her or were aware of her existence. The writhing snake hung limp again with the rest. The men passed.

"I don't like it," said Lenina. "I don't like it."

She liked even less what awaited her at the entrance to the pueblo, where their guide had left them while he went inside for instructions. The dirt, to start with, the piles of rubbish, the dust, the dogs, the flies. Her face wrinkled up into a grimace of disgust. She held her handkerchief to her nose.

"But how can they live like this?" she broke out in a voice of indignant incredulity. (It wasn't possible.)

Bernard shrugged his shoulders philosophically. "Anyhow," he said, "they've been doing it for the last five or six thousand years. So I suppose they must be used to it by now."

"But cleanliness is next to fordliness," she insisted.

"Yes, and civilization is sterilization," Bernard went on, concluding on a tone of irony the second hypnopædic lesson in elementary hygiene. "But these people have never heard of Our Ford, and they aren't civilized. So there's no point in . . ."

"Oh!" She gripped his arm. "Look."

An almost naked Indian was very slowly climbing down the ladder from the first-floor terrace of a neighbouring house—rung after rung, with the tremulous caution of extreme old age. His face was profoundly wrinkled and black, like a mask of obsidian. The toothless mouth had fallen in. At the

corners of the lips, and on each side of the chin, a few long bristles gleamed almost white against the dark skin. The long unbraided hair hung down in grey wisps round his face. His body was bent and emaciated to the bone, almost fleshless. Very slowly he came down, pausing at each rung before he ventured another step.

“What’s the matter with him?” whispered Lenina. Her eyes were wide with horror and amazement.

“He’s old, that’s all,” Bernard answered as carelessly as he could. He too was startled; but he made an effort to seem unmoved.

“Old?” she repeated. “But the Director’s old; lots of people are old; they’re not like that.”

“That’s because we don’t allow them to be like that. We preserve them from diseases. We keep their internal secretions artificially balanced at a youthful equilibrium. We don’t permit their magnesium-calcium ratio to fall below what it was at thirty. We give them transfusion of young blood. We keep their metabolism permanently stimulated. So, of course, they don’t look like that. Partly,” he added, “because most of them die long before they reach this old creature’s age. Youth almost unimpaired till sixty, and then, crack! the end.”

But Lenina was not listening. She was watching the old man. Slowly, slowly he came down. His feet touched the ground. He turned. In their deep-sunken orbits his eyes were still extraordinarily

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bright. They looked at her for a long moment expressionlessly, without surprise, as though she had not been there at all. Then slowly, with bent back, the old man hobbled past them and was gone.

"But it's terrible," Lenina whispered. "It's awful. We ought not to have come here." She felt in her pocket for her *soma*—only to discover that, by some unprecedented oversight, she had left the bottle down at the rest-house. Bernard's pockets were also empty.

Lenina was left to face the horrors of Malpais unaided. They came crowding in on her thick and fast. The spectacle of two young women giving the breast to their babies made her blush and turn away her face. She had never seen anything so indecent in her life. And what made it worse was that, instead of tactfully ignoring it, Bernard proceeded to make open comments on this revoltingly viviparous scene. Ashamed, now that the effects of the *soma* had worn off, of the weakness he had displayed that morning in the hotel, he went out of his way to show himself strong and unorthodox.

"What a wonderfully intimate relationship," he said, deliberately outrageous. "And what an intensity of feeling it must generate! I often think one may have missed something in not having had a mother. And perhaps you've missed something in not *being* a mother, Lenina. Imagine yourself sitting there with a little baby of your own. . . ."

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“Bernard! How can you?” The passage of an old woman with ophthalmia and a disease of the skin distracted her from her indignation.

“Let’s go away,” she begged. “I don’t like it.”

But at this moment their guide came back and, beckoning to them to follow, led the way down the narrow street between the houses. They rounded a corner. A dead dog was lying on a rubbish heap; a woman with a goitre was looking for lice in the hair of a small girl. Their guide halted at the foot of a ladder, raised his hand perpendicularly, then darted it horizontally forward. They did what he mutely commanded—climbed the ladder and walked through the doorway, to which it gave access, into a long narrow room, rather dark and smelling of smoke and cooked grease and long-worn, long-unwashed clothes. At the further end of the room was another doorway, through which came a shaft of sunlight and the noise, very loud and close, of the drums.

They stepped across the threshold and found themselves on a wide terrace. Below them, shut in by the tall houses, was the village square, crowded with Indians. Bright blankets, and feathers in black hair, and the glint of turquoise, and dark skins shining with heat. Lenina put her handkerchief to her nose again. In the open space at the centre of the square were two circular platforms of masonry and trampled clay—the roofs, it was evident, of under-

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ground chambers; for in the centre of each platform was an open hatchway, with a ladder emerging from the lower darkness. A sound of subterranean flute playing came up and was almost lost in the steady remorseless persistence of the drums.

Lenina liked the drums. Shutting her eyes she abandoned herself to their soft repeated thunder, allowed it to invade her consciousness more and more completely, till at last there was nothing left in the world but that one deep pulse of sound. It reminded her reassuringly of the synthetic noises made at Solidarity Services and Ford's Day celebrations. "Orgy-porgy," she whispered to herself. These drums beat out just the same rhythms.

There was a sudden startling burst of singing—hundreds of male voices crying out fiercely in harsh metallic unison. A few long notes and silence, the thunderous silence of the drums; then shrill, in a neighing treble, the women's answer. Then again the drums; and once more the men's deep savage affirmation of their manhood.

Queer—yes. The place was queer, so was the music, so were the clothes and the goitres and the skin diseases and the old people. But the performance itself—there seemed to be nothing specially queer about that.

"It reminds me of a lower-caste Community Sing," she told Bernard.

But a little later it was reminding her a good deal

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less of that innocuous function. For suddenly there had swarmed up from those round chambers underground a ghastly troop of monsters. Hideously masked or painted out of all semblance of humanity, they had tramped out a strange limping dance round the square; round and again round, singing as they went, round and round—each time a little faster; and the drums had changed and quickened their rhythm, so that it became like the pulsing of fever in the ears; and the crowd had begun to sing with the dancers, louder and louder; and first one woman had shrieked, and then another and another, as though they were being killed; and then suddenly the leader of the dancers broke out of the line, ran to a big wooden chest which was standing at one end of the square, raised the lid and pulled out a pair of black snakes. A great yell went up from the crowd, and all the other dancers ran towards him with outstretched hands. He tossed the snakes to the first-comers, then dipped back into the chest for more. More and more, black snakes and brown and mottled—he flung them out. And then the dance began again on a different rhythm. Round and round they went with their snakes, snakily, with a soft undulating movement at the knees and hips. Round and round. Then the leader gave a signal, and one after another, all the snakes were flung down in the middle of the square; an old man came up from underground and sprinkled them with corn meal, and from the other

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hatchway came a woman and sprinkled them with water from a black jar. Then the old man lifted his hand and, startlingly, terrifyingly, there was absolute silence. The drums stopped beating, life seemed to have come to an end. The old man pointed towards the two hatchways that gave entrance to the lower world. And slowly, raised by invisible hands from below, there emerged from the one a painted image of an eagle, from the other that of a man, naked, and nailed to a cross. They hung there, seemingly self-sustained, as though watching. The old man clapped his hands. Naked but for a white cotton breech-cloth, a boy of about eighteen stepped out of the crowd and stood before him, his hands crossed over his chest, his head bowed. The old man made the sign of the cross over him and turned away. Slowly, the boy began to walk round the writhing heap of snakes. He had completed the first circuit and was half-way through the second when, from among the dancers, a tall man wearing the mask of a coyote and holding in his hand a whip of plaited leather, advanced towards him. The boy moved on as though unaware of the other's existence. The coyote-man raised his whip; there was a long moment of expectancy, then a swift movement, the whistle of the lash and its loud flat-sounding impact on the flesh. The boy's body quivered; but he made no sound, he walked on at the same slow, steady pace. The coyote struck again, again; and at every

blow at first a gasp, and then a deep groan went up from the crowd. The boy walked on. Twice, thrice, four times round he went. The blood was streaming. Five times round, six times round. Suddenly Lenina covered her face with her hands and began to sob. "Oh, stop them, stop them!" she implored. But the whip fell and fell inexorably. Seven times round. Then all at once the boy staggered and, still without a sound, pitched forward on to his face. Bending over him, the old man touched his back with a long white feather, held it up for a moment, crimson, for the people to see, then shook it thrice over the snakes. A few drops fell, and suddenly the drums broke out again into a panic of hurrying notes; there was a great shout. The dancers rushed forward, picked up the snakes and ran out of the square. Men, women, children, all the crowd ran after them. A minute later the square was empty, only the boy remained, prone where he had fallen, quite still. Three old women came out of one of the houses, and with some difficulty lifted him and carried him in. The eagle and the man on the cross kept guard for a little while over the empty pueblo; then, as though they had seen enough, sank slowly down through their hatchways, out of sight, into the nether world.

Lenina was still sobbing. "Too awful," she kept repeating, and all Bernard's consolations were in vain. "Too awful! That blood!" She shuddered. "Oh, I wish I had my *soma*."

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There was the sound of feet in the inner room.

Lenina did not move, but sat with her face in her hands, unseeing, apart. Only Bernard turned round.

The dress of the young man who now stepped out on to the terrace was Indian; but his plaited hair was straw-coloured, his eyes a pale blue, and his skin a white skin, bronzed.

“Hullo. Good-morrow,” said the stranger, in faultless but peculiar English. “You’re civilized, aren’t you? You come from the Other Place, outside the Reservation?”

“Who on earth . . . ?” Bernard began in astonishment.

The young man sighed and shook his head. “A most unhappy gentleman.” And, pointing to the bloodstains in the centre of the square, “Do you see that damned spot?” he asked in a voice that trembled with emotion.

“A gramme is better than a damn,” said Lenina mechanically from behind her hands. “I wish I had my *soma!*”

“I ought to have been there,” the young man went on. “Why wouldn’t they let me be the sacrifice? I’d have gone round ten times—twelve, fifteen. Palowhtiwa only got as far as seven. They could have had twice as much blood from me. The multitudinous seas incarnadine.” He flung out his arms in a lavish gesture; then, despairingly, let them fall again.

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“But they wouldn’t let me. They disliked me for my complexion. It’s always been like that. Always.” Tears stood in the young man’s eyes; he was ashamed and turned away.

Astonishment made Lenina forget the deprivation of *soma*. She uncovered her face and, for the first time, looked at the stranger. “Do you mean to say that you *wanted* to be hit with that whip?”

Still averted from her, the young man made a sign of affirmation. “For the sake of the pueblo—to make the rain come and the corn grow. And to please Pookong and Jesus. And then to show that I can bear pain without crying out. Yes,” and his voice suddenly took on a new resonance, he turned with a proud squaring of the shoulders, a proud, defiant lifting of the chin, “to show that I’m a man . . . Oh!” He gave a gasp and was silent, gaping. He had seen, for the first time in his life, the face of a girl whose cheeks were not the colour of chocolate or dogskin, whose hair was auburn and permanently waved, and whose expression (amazing novelty!) was one of benevolent interest. Lenina was smiling at him; such a nice-looking boy, she was thinking, and a really beautiful body. The blood rushed up into the young man’s face; he dropped his eyes, raised them again for a moment only to find her still smiling at him, and was so much overcome that he had to turn away and pretend to be looking very hard at something on the other side of the square.

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Bernard's questions made a diversion. Who? How? When? From where? Keeping his eyes fixed on Bernard's face (for so passionately did he long to see Lenina smiling that he simply dared not look at her), the young man tried to explain himself. Linda and he—Linda was his mother (the word made Lenina look uncomfortable)—were strangers in the Reservation. Linda had come from the Other Place long ago, before he was born, with a man who was his father. (Bernard pricked up his ears.) She had gone walking alone in those mountains over there to the North, had fallen down a steep place and hurt her head. ("Go on, go on," said Bernard excitedly.) Some hunters from Malpais had found her and brought her to the pueblo. As for the man who was his father, Linda had never seen him again. His name was Tomakin. (Yes, "Thomas" was the D.H.C.'s first name.) He must have flown away, back to the Other Place, away without her—a bad, unkind, unnatural man.

"And so I was born in Malpais," he concluded. "In Malpais." And he shook his head.

The squalor of that little house on the outskirts of the pueblo!

A space of dust and rubbish separated it from the village. Two famine-stricken dogs were nosing obscenely in the garbage at its door. Inside, when they

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entered, the twilight stank and was loud with flies.

“Linda!” the young man called.

From the inner room a rather hoarse female voice said, “Coming.”

They waited. In bowls on the floor were the remains of a meal, perhaps of several meals.

The door opened. A very stout blonde squaw stepped across the threshold and stood looking at the strangers, staring incredulously, her mouth open. Lenina noticed with disgust that two of the front teeth were missing. And the colour of the ones that remained . . . She shuddered: It was worse than the old man. So fat. And all the lines in her face, the flabbiness, the wrinkles. And the sagging cheeks, with those purplish blotches. And the red veins on her nose, the bloodshot eyes. And that neck—that neck; and the blanket she wore over her head—ragged and filthy. And under the brown sack-shaped tunic those enormous breasts, the bulge of the stomach, the hips. Oh, much worse than the old man, much worse! And suddenly the creature burst out in a torrent of speech, rushed at her with outstretched arms and—Ford! Ford! it was too revolting, in another moment she’d be sick—pressed her against the bulge, the bosom, and began to kiss her. Ford! to *kiss*, slobberingly, and smelt too horrible, obviously never had a bath, and simply reeked of that beastly stuff that was put into Delta and Epsilon

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bottles (no, it wasn't true about Bernard), positively stank of alcohol. She broke away as quickly as she could.

A blubbered and distorted face confronted her; the creature was crying.

“Oh, my dear, my dear.” The torrent of words flowed sobbingly. “If you knew how glad—after all these years! A civilized face. Yes, and civilized clothes. Because I thought I should never see a piece of real acetate silk again.” She fingered the sleeve of Lenina's shirt. The nails were black. “And those adorable viscose velveteen shorts! Do you know, dear, I've still got my old clothes, the ones I came in, put away in a box. I'll show them you afterwards. Though, of course, the acetate has all gone into holes. But such a lovely white bandolier—though I must say your green morocco is even lovelier. Not that it did *me much good*, that bandolier.” Her tears began to flow again. “I suppose John told you. What I had to suffer—and not a gramme of *soma* to be had. Only a drink of *mescal* every now and then, when Popé used to bring it. Popé is a boy I used to know. But it makes you feel so bad afterwards, the *mescal* does, and you're sick with the *peyotl*; besides it always made that awful feeling of being ashamed much worse the next day. And I *was* so ashamed. Just think of it: me, a Beta—having a baby: put yourself in my place.” (The mere suggestion made Lenina shudder.) “Though it wasn't my fault, I swear; be-

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cause I still don't know how it happened, seeing that I did all the Malthusian Drill—you know, by numbers, One, two, three, four, always, I swear it; but all the same it happened; and of course there wasn't anything like an Abortion Centre here. Is it still down in Chelsea, by the way?" she asked. Lenina nodded. "And still floodlighted on Tuesdays and Fridays?" Lenina nodded again. "That lovely pink glass tower!" Poor Linda lifted her face and with closed eyes ecstatically contemplated the bright remembered image. "And the river at night," she whispered. Great tears oozed slowly out from between her tight-shut eyelids. "And flying back in the evening from Stoke Poges. And then a hot bath and vibro-vacuum massage . . . But there." She drew a deep breath, shook her head, opened her eyes again, sniffed once or twice, then blew her nose on her fingers and wiped them on the skirt of her tunic. "Oh, I'm so sorry," she said in response to Lenina's involuntary grimace of disgust. "I oughtn't to have done that. I'm sorry. But what *are* you to do when there aren't any handkerchiefs? I remember how it used to upset me, all that dirt, and nothing being aseptic. I had an awful cut on my head when they first brought me here. You can't imagine what they used to put on it. Filth, just filth. 'Civilization is Sterilization,' I used to say to them. And 'Streptocock-Gee to Banbury-T, to see a fine bathroom and W.C.' as though they were children. But

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of course they didn't understand. How should they? And in the end I suppose I got used to it. And anyhow, how *can* you keep things clean when there isn't hot water laid on? And look at these clothes. This beastly wool isn't like acetate. It lasts and lasts. And you're supposed to mend it if it gets torn. But I'm a Beta; I worked in the Fertilizing Room; nobody ever taught me to do anything like that. It wasn't my business. Besides, it never used to be right to mend clothes. Throw them away when they've got holes in them and buy new. 'The more stitches, the less riches.' Isn't that right? Mending's anti-social. But it's all different here. It's like living with lunatics. Everything they do is mad." She looked round; saw John and Bernard had left them and were walking up and down in the dust and garbage outside the house; but, none the less confidentially lowering her voice, and leaning, while Lenina stiffened and shrank, so close that the blown reek of embryo-poison stirred the hair on her cheek. "For instance," she hoarsely whispered, "take the way they have one another here. Mad, I tell you, absolutely mad. Everybody belongs to every one else—don't they? don't they?" she insisted, tugging at Lenina's sleeve. Lenina nodded her averted head, let out the breath she had been holding and managed to draw another one, relatively untainted. "Well, here," the other went on, "nobody's supposed to belong to more than one person. And if you have people in the ordinary

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way, the others think you're wicked and anti-social. They hate and despise you. Once a lot of women came and made a scene because their men came to see me. Well, why not? And then they rushed at me . . . No, it was too awful. I can't tell you about it." Linda covered her face with her hands and shuddered. "They're so hateful, the women here. Mad, mad and cruel. And of course they don't know anything about Malthusian Drill, or bottles, or decanting, or anything of that sort. So they're having children all the time—like dogs. It's too revolting. And to think that I . . . Oh, Ford, Ford, Ford! And yet John *was* a great comfort to me. I don't know what I should have done without him. Even though he did get so upset whenever a man . . . Quite as a tiny boy, even. Once (but that was when he was bigger) he tried to kill poor Waihusiwa—or was it Popé?—just because I used to have them sometimes. Because I never *could* make him understand that that was what civilized people ought to do. Being mad's infectious, I believe. Anyhow, John seems to have caught it from the Indians. Because, of course, he was with them a lot. Even though they always were so beastly to him and wouldn't let him do all the things the other boys did. Which was a good thing in a way, because it made it easier for me to condition him a little. Though you've no idea how difficult that is. There's so much one doesn't know; it wasn't my business to know. I mean, when a child asks you how

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a helicopter works or who made the world—well, what are you to answer if you're a Beta and have always worked in the Fertilizing Room? What *are* you to answer?"



CHAPTER EIGHT

OUTSIDE, in the dust and among the garbage (there were four dogs now), Bernard and John were walking slowly up and down.

“So hard for me to realize,” Bernard was saying, “to reconstruct. As though we were living on different planets, in different centuries. A mother, and all this dirt, and gods, and old age, and disease . . .” He shook his head. “It’s almost inconceivable. I shall never understand unless you explain.”

“Explain what?”

“This.” He indicated the pueblo. “That.” And it was the little house outside the village. “Everything. All your life.”

“But what is there to say?”

“From the beginning. As far back as you can remember.”

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“As far back as I can remember.” John frowned. There was a long silence.

It was very hot. They had eaten a lot of tortillas and sweet corn. Linda said, “Come and lie down. Baby.” They lay down together in the big bed. “Sing,” and Linda sang. Sang “Streptocock-Gee to Banbury-T” and “Bye Baby Banting, soon you’ll need decanting.” Her voice got fainter and fainter . . .

There was a loud noise, and he woke with a start. A man was standing by the bed, enormous, frightening. He was saying something to Linda, and Linda was laughing. She had pulled the blanket up to her chin, but the man pulled it down again. His hair was like two black ropes, and round his arm was a lovely silver bracelet with blue stones in it. He liked the bracelet; but all the same, he was frightened; he hid his face against Linda’s body. Linda put her hand on him and he felt safer. In those other words he did not understand so well, she said to the man, “Not with John here.” The man looked at him, then again at Linda, and said a few words in a soft voice. Linda said, “No.” But the man bent over the bed towards him and his face was huge, terrible; the black ropes of hair touched the blanket. “No,” Linda said again, and he felt her hand squeezing him more tightly. “No, no!” But the man took hold of one of his arms, and it hurt. He screamed. The man put up his other

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hand and lifted him up. Linda was still holding him, still saying "No, no." The man said something short and angry, and suddenly her hands were gone. "Linda, Linda." He kicked and wriggled; but the man carried him across to the door, opened it, put him down on the floor in the middle of the other room, and went away, shutting the door behind him. He got up, he ran to the door. Standing on tiptoe he could just reach the big wooden latch. He lifted it and pushed; but the door wouldn't open. "Linda," he shouted. She didn't answer.

He remembered a huge room, rather dark; and there were big wooden things with strings fastened to them, and lots of women standing round them—making blankets, Linda said. Linda told him to sit in the corner with the other children, while she went and helped the women. He played with the little boys for a long time. Suddenly people started talking very loud, and there were the women pushing Linda away, and Linda was crying. She went to the door and he ran after her. He asked her why they were angry. "Because I broke something," she said. And then she got angry too. "How should I know how to do their beastly weaving?" she said. "Beastly savages." He asked her what savages were. When they got back to their house, Popé was waiting at the door, and he came in with them. He had a big gourd

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full of stuff that looked like water; only it wasn't water, but something with a bad smell that burnt your mouth and made you cough. Linda drank some and Popé drank some, and then Linda laughed a lot and talked very loud; and then she and Popé went into the other room. When Popé went away, he went into the room. Linda was in bed and so fast asleep that he couldn't wake her.

Popé used to come often. He said the stuff in the gourd was called *mescal*; but Linda said it ought to be called *soma*; only it made you feel ill afterwards. He hated Popé. He hated them all—all the men who came to see Linda. One afternoon, when he had been playing with the other children—it was cold, he remembered, and there was snow on the mountains—he came back to the house and heard angry voices in the bedroom. They were women's voices, and they said words he didn't understand; but he knew they were dreadful words. Then suddenly, crash! something was upset; he heard people moving about quickly, and there was another crash and then a noise like hitting a mule, only not so bony; then Linda screamed. "Oh, don't, don't, don't!" she said. He ran in. There were three women in dark blankets. Linda was on the bed. One of the women was holding her wrists. Another was lying across her legs, so that she couldn't kick. The third was hitting her with a whip. Once, twice, three times; and each time Linda screamed. Crying, he tugged at the fringe of

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the woman's blanket. "Please, please." With her free hand she held him away. The whip came down again, and again Linda screamed. He caught hold of the woman's enormous brown hand between his own and bit it with all his might. She cried out, wrenched her hand free, and gave him such a push that he fell down. While he was lying on the ground she hit him three times with the whip. It hurt more than anything he had ever felt—like fire. The whip whistled again, fell. But this time it was Linda who screamed.

"But why did they want to hurt you, Linda?" he asked that night. He was crying, because the red marks of the whip on his back still hurt so terribly. But he was also crying because people were so beastly and unfair, and because he was only a little boy and couldn't do anything against them. Linda was crying too. She was grown up, but she wasn't big enough to fight against three of them. It wasn't fair for her either. "Why did they want to hurt you, Linda?"

"I don't know. How should I know?" It was difficult to hear what she said, because she was lying on her stomach and her face was in the pillow. "They say those men are *their* men," she went on; and she did not seem to be talking to him at all; she seemed to be talking with some one inside herself. A long talk which she didn't understand; and in the end she started crying louder than ever.

"Oh, don't cry, Linda. Don't cry."

He pressed himself against her. He put his arm

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round her neck. Linda cried out. "Oh, be careful. My shoulder! Oh!" and she pushed him away, hard. His head banged against the wall. "Little idiot!" she shouted; and then, suddenly, she began to slap him. Slap, slap . . .

"Linda," he cried out. "Oh, mother, don't!"

"I'm not your mother. I won't be your mother."

"But, Linda . . . Oh!" She slapped him on the cheek.

"Turned into a savage," she shouted. "Having young ones like an animal . . . If it hadn't been for you, I might have gone to the Inspector, I might have got away. But not with a baby. That would have been too shameful."

He saw that she was going to hit him again, and lifted his arm to guard his face. "Oh, don't, Linda, please don't."

"Little beast!" She pulled down his arm; his face was uncovered.

"Don't, Linda." He shut his eyes, expecting the blow.

But she didn't hit him. After a little time, he opened his eyes again and saw that she was looking at him. He tried to smile at her. Suddenly she put her arms round him and kissed him again and again.

Sometimes, for several days, Linda didn't get up at all. She lay in bed and was sad. Or else she drank

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the stuff that Popé brought and laughed a great deal and went to sleep. Sometimes she was sick. Often she forgot to wash him, and there was nothing to eat except cold tortillas. He remembered the first time she found those little animals in his hair, how she screamed and screamed.

The happiest times were when she told him about the Other Place. "And you really can go flying, whenever you like?"

"Whenever you like." And she would tell him about the lovely music that came out of a box, and all the nice games you could play, and the delicious things to eat and drink, and the light that came when you pressed a little thing in the wall, and the pictures that you could hear and feel and smell, as well as see, and another box for making nice smells, and the pink and green and blue and silver houses as high as mountains, and everybody happy and no one ever sad or angry, and every one belonging to every one else, and the boxes where you could see and hear what was happening at the other side of the world, and babies in lovely clean bottles—everything so clean, and no nasty smells, no dirt at all—and people never lonely, but living together and being so jolly and happy, like the summer dances here in Malpais, but much happier, and the happiness being there every day, every day. . . . He listened by the hour.

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And sometimes, when he and the other children were tired with too much playing, one of the old men of the pueblo would talk to them, in those other words, of the great Transformer of the World, and of the long fight between Right Hand and Left Hand, between Wet and Dry; of Awonawilona, who made a great fog by thinking in the night, and then made the whole world out of the fog; of Earth Mother and Sky Father; of Ahaiyuta and Marsailema, the twins of War and Chance; of Jesus and Pookong; of Mary and Etsanatilehi, the woman who makes herself young again; of the Black Stone at Laguna and the Great Eagle and Our Lady of Acoma. Strange stories, all the more wonderful to him for being told in the other words and so not fully understood. Lying in bed, he would think of Heaven and London and Our Lady of Acoma and the rows and rows of babies in clean bottles and Jesus flying up and Linda flying up and the great Director of World Hatcheries and Awonawilona.

Lots of men came to see Linda. The boys began to point their fingers at him. In the strange other words they said that Linda was bad; they called her names he did not understand, but that he knew were bad names. One day they sang a song about her, again and again. He threw stones at them. They

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threw back; a sharp stone cut his cheek. The blood wouldn't stop; he was covered with blood.

Linda taught him to read. With a piece of charcoal she drew pictures on the wall—an animal sitting down, a baby inside a bottle; then she wrote letters. THE CAT IS ON THE MAT. THE TOT IS IN THE POT. He learned quickly and easily. When he knew how to read all the words she wrote on the wall, Linda opened her big wooden box and pulled out from under those funny little red trousers she never wore a thin little book. He had often seen it before. "When you're bigger," she had said, "you can read it." Well, now he was big enough. He was proud. "I'm afraid you won't find it very exciting," she said. "But it's the only thing I have." She sighed. "If only you could see the lovely reading machines we used to have in London!" He began reading. *The Chemical and Bacteriological Conditioning of the Embryo. Practical Instructions for Beta Embryo-Store Workers.* It took him a quarter of an hour to read the title alone. He threw the book on the floor. "Beastly, beastly book!" he said, and began to cry.

The boys still sang their horrible song about Linda. Sometimes, too, they laughed at him for being

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so ragged. When he tore his clothes, Linda did not know how to mend them. In the Other Place, she told him, people threw away clothes with holes in them and got new ones. "Rags, rags!" the boys used to shout at him. "But I can read," he said to himself, "and they can't. They don't even know what reading is." It was fairly easy, if he thought hard enough about the reading, to pretend that he didn't mind when they made fun of him. He asked Linda to give him the book again.

The more the boys pointed and sang, the harder he read. Soon he could read all the words quite well. Even the longest. But what did they mean? He asked Linda; but even when she could answer it didn't seem to make it very clear. And generally she couldn't answer at all.

"What are chemicals?" he would ask.

"Oh, stuff like magnesium salts, and alcohol for keeping the Deltas and Epsilons small and backward, and calcium carbonate for bones, and all that sort of thing."

"But how do you make chemicals, Linda? Where do they come from?"

"Well, I don't know. You get them out of bottles. And when the bottles are empty, you send up to the Chemical Store for more. It's the Chemical Store people who make them, I suppose. Or else they send to the factory for them. I don't know. I never did any chemistry. My job was always with the embryos."

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It was the same with everything else he asked about. Linda never seemed to know. The old men of the pueblo had much more definite answers.

“The seed of men and all creatures, the seed of the sun and the seed of earth and the seed of the sky—Awonawilona made them all out of the Fog of Increase. Now the world has four wombs; and he laid the seeds in the lowest of the four wombs. And gradually the seeds began to grow . . .”

One day (John calculated later that it must have been soon after his twelfth birthday) he came home and found a book that he had never seen before lying on the floor in the bedroom. It was a thick book and looked very old. The binding had been eaten by mice; some of its pages were loose and crumpled. He picked it up, looked at the title-page: the book was called *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*.

Linda was lying on the bed, sipping that horrible stinking *mescal* out of a cup. “Popé brought it,” she said. Her voice was thick and hoarse like somebody else’s voice. “It was lying in one of the chests of the Antelope Kiva. It’s supposed to have been there for hundreds of years. I expect it’s true, because I looked at it, and it seemed to be full of nonsense. Uncivilized. Still, it’ll be good enough for you to practise your reading on.” She took a last sip, set the cup

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down on the floor beside the bed, turned over on her side, hiccupped once or twice and went to sleep.

He opened the book at random.

*Nay, but to live
In the rank sweat of an enseamed bed,
Stew'd in corruption, honeying and making love
Over the nasty sty . . .*

The strange words rolled through his mind; rumbled, like talking thunder; like the drums at the summer dances, if the drums could have spoken; like the men singing the Corn Song, beautiful, beautiful, so that you cried; like old Mitsima saying magic over his feathers and his carved sticks and his bits of bone and stone—*kiathla tsilu silokwe siokwe silokwe. Kiai silu silu, tsithl*—but better than Mitsima's magic, because it meant more, because it talked to *him*; talked wonderfully and only half-understandably, a terrible beautiful magic, about Linda; about Linda lying there snoring, with the empty cup on the floor beside the bed; about Linda and Popé, Linda and Popé.

He hated Popé more and more. A man can smile and smile and be a villain. Remorseless, treacherous, lecherous, kindless villain. What did the words exactly mean? He only half knew. But their magic was

strong and went on rumbling in his head, and somehow it was as though he had never really hated Popé before; never really hated him because he had never been able to say how much he hated him. But now he had these words, these words like drums and singing and magic. These words and the strange, strange story out of which they were taken (he couldn't make head or tail of it, but it was wonderful, wonderful all the same)—they gave him a reason for hating Popé; and they made his hatred more real; they even made Popé himself more real.

One day, when he came in from playing, the door of the inner room was open, and he saw them lying together on the bed, asleep—white Linda and Popé almost black beside her, with one arm under her shoulders' and the other dark hand on her breast, and one of the plaits of his long hair lying across her throat, like a black snake trying to strangle her. Popé's gourd and a cup were standing on the floor near the bed. Linda was snoring.

His heart seemed to have disappeared and left a hole. He was empty. Empty, and cold, and rather sick, and giddy. He leaned against the wall to steady himself. Renorseless, treacherous, lecherous . . . Like drums, like the men singing for the corn, like magic, the words repeated and repeated themselves in his head. From being cold he was suddenly hot. His cheeks burnt with the rush of blood, the room

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swam and darkened before his eyes. He ground his teeth. "I'll kill him, I'll kill him, I'll kill him," he kept saying. And suddenly there were more words.

*When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage
Or in the incestuous pleasure of his bed . . .*

The magic was on his side, the magic explained and gave orders. He stepped back into the outer room. "When he is drunk asleep . . ." The knife for the meat was lying on the floor near the fireplace. He picked it up and tiptoed to the door again. "When he is drunk asleep, drunk asleep . . ." He ran across the room and stabbed—oh, the blood!—stabbed again, as Popé heaved out of his sleep, lifted his hand to stab once more, but found his wrist caught, held and—oh, oh!—twisted. He couldn't move, he was trapped, and there were Popé's small black eyes, very close, staring into his own. He looked away. There were two cuts on Popé's left shoulder. "Oh, look at the blood!" Linda was crying. "Look at the blood!" She had never been able to bear the sight of blood. Popé lifted his other hand—to strike him, he thought. He stiffened to receive the blow. But the hand only took him under the chin and turned his face, so that he had to look again into Popé's eyes. For a long time, for hours and hours. And suddenly—he couldn't help it—he began to cry. Popé burst out laughing. "Go," he said, in the other Indian

words. "Go, my brave Ahaiyuta." He ran out into the other room to hide his tears.

"You are fifteen," said old Mitsima, in the Indian words. "Now I may teach you to work the clay."

Squatting by the river, they worked together.

"First of all," said Mitsima, taking a lump of the wetted clay between his hands, "we make a little moon." The old man squeezed the lump into a disk, then bent up the edges; the moon became a shallow cup.

Slowly and unskilfully he imitated the old man's delicate gestures.

"A moon, a cup, and now a snake." Mitsima rolled out another piece of clay into a long flexible cylinder, hooped it into a circle and pressed it on to the rim of the cup. "Then another snake. And another. And another." Round by round, Mitsima built up the sides of the pot; it was narrow, it bulged, it narrowed again towards the neck. Mitsima squeezed and patted, stroked and scraped; and there at last it stood, in shape the familiar water pot of Malpais, but creamy white instead of black, and still soft to the touch. The crooked parody of Mitsima's, his own stood beside it. Looking at the two pots, he had to laugh.

"But the next one will be better," he said, and began to moisten another piece of clay.

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To fashion, to give form, to feel his fingers gaining in skill and power—this gave him an extraordinary pleasure. “A, B, C, Vitamin D,” he sang to himself as he worked. “The fat’s in the liver, the cod’s in the sea.” And Mitsima also sang—a song about killing a bear. They worked all day, and all day he was filled with an intense, absorbing happiness.

“Next winter,” said old Mitsima, “I will teach you to make the bow.”

He stood for a long time outside the house; and at last the ceremonies within were finished. The door opened; they came out. Kothlu came first, his right hand outstretched and tightly closed, as though over some precious jewel. Her clenched hand similarly outstretched, Kiakimé followed. They walked in silence, and in silence, behind them, came the brothers and sisters and cousins and all the troop of old people.

They walked out of the pueblo, across the mesa. At the edge of the cliff they halted, facing the early morning sun. Kothlu opened his hand. A pinch of corn meal lay white on the palm; he breathed on it, murmured a few words, then threw it, a handful of white dust, towards the sun. Kiakimé did the same. Then Kiakimé’s father stepped forward, and holding up a feathered prayer stick, made a long prayer, then threw the stick after the corn meal.

"It is finished," said old Mitsima in a loud voice. "They are married."

"Well," said Linda, as they turned away, "all I can say is, it does seem a lot of fuss to make about so little. In civilized countries, when a boy wants to have a girl, he just . . . But where *are* you going, John?"

He paid no attention to her calling, but ran on, away, away, anywhere to be by himself.

It is finished Old Mitsima's words repeated themselves in his mind. Finished, finished . . . In silence and from a long way off, but violently, desperately, hopelessly, he had loved Kiakimé. And now it was finished. He was sixteen.

At the full moon, in the Antelope Kiva, secrets would be told, secrets would be done and borne. They would go down, boys, into the kiva and come out again, men. The boys were all afraid and at the same time impatient. And at last it was the day. The sun went down, the moon rose. He went with the others. Men were standing, dark, at the entrance to the kiva; the ladder went down into the red lighted depths. Already the leading boys had begun to climb down. Suddenly, one of the men stepped forward, caught him by the arm, and pulled him out of the ranks. He broke free and dodged back into his place among the others. This time the man struck

him, pulled his hair. "Not for you, white-hair!" "Not for the son of the she-dog," said one of the other men. The boys laughed. "Go!" And as he still hovered on the fringes of the group, "Go!" the men shouted again. One of them bent down, took a stone, threw it. "Go, go, go!" There was a shower of stones. Bleeding, he ran away into the darkness. From the red-lit kiva came the noise of singing. The last of the boys had climbed down the ladder. He was all alone.

All alone, outside the pueblo, on the bare plain of the mesa. The rock was like bleached bones in the moonlight. Down in the valley, the coyotes were howling at the moon. The bruises hurt him, the cuts were still bleeding; but it was not for pain that he sobbed; it was because he was all alone, because he had been driven out, alone, into this skeleton world of rocks and moonlight. At the edge of the precipice he sat down. The moon was behind him; he looked down into the black shadow of the mesa, into the black shadow of death. He had only to take one step, one little jump. . . . He held out his right hand in the moonlight. From the cut on his wrist the blood was still oozing. Every few seconds a drop fell, dark, almost colourless in the dead light. Drop, drop, drop. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow . . .

He had discovered Time and Death and God.

"Alone, always alone," the young man was saying.

The words awoke a plaintive echo in Bernard's

mind. Alone, alone . . . "So am I," he said, on a gush of confidingness. "Terribly alone."

"Are you?" John looked surprised. "I thought that in the Other Place . . . I mean, Linda always said that nobody was ever alone there."

Bernard blushed uncomfortably. "You see," he said, mumbling and with averted eyes, "I'm rather different from most people, I suppose. If one happens to be decanted different . . ."

"Yes, that's just it." The young man nodded. "If one's different, one's bound to be lonely. They're beastly to one. Do you know, they shut me out of absolutely everything? When the other boys were sent out to spend the night on the mountains—you know, when you have to dream which your sacred animal is—they wouldn't let me go with the others; they wouldn't tell me any of the secrets. I did it by myself, though," he added. "Didn't eat anything for five days and then went out one night alone into those mountains there." He pointed.

Patronizingly, Bernard smiled. "And did you dream of anything?" he asked.

The other nodded. "But I mustn't tell you what." He was silent for a little; then, in a low voice, "Once," he went on, "I did something that none of the others did: I stood against a rock in the middle of the day, in summer, with my arms out, like Jesus on the cross."

"What on earth for?"

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"I wanted to know what it was like being crucified. Hanging there in the sun . . ."

"But why?"

"Why? Well . . ." He hesitated. "Because I felt I ought to. If Jesus could stand it. And then, if one has done something wrong . . . Besides, I was unhappy; that was another reason."

"It seems a funny way of curing your unhappiness," said Bernard. But on second thoughts he decided that there was, after all, some sense in it. Better than taking *soma* . . .

"I fainted after a time," said the young man. "Fell down on my face. Do you see the mark where I cut myself?" He lifted the thick yellow hair from his forehead. The scar showed, pale and puckered, on his right temple.

Bernard looked, and then quickly, with a little shudder, averted his eyes. His conditioning had made him not so much pitiful as profoundly squeamish. The mere suggestion of illness or wounds was to him not only horrifying, but even repulsive and rather disgusting. Like dirt, or deformity, or old age. Hastily he changed the subject.

"I wonder if you'd like to come back to London with us?" he asked, making the first move in a campaign whose strategy he had been secretly elaborating ever since, in the little house, he had realized who the "father" of this young savage must be. "Would you like that?"

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The young man's face lit up. "Do you really mean it?"

"Of course; if I can get permission, that is."

"Linda too?"

"Well . . ." He hesitated doubtfully. That revolting creature! No, it was impossible. Unless, unless . . . It suddenly occurred to Bernard that her very revoltingness might prove an enormous asset. "But of course!" he cried, making up for his first hesitations with an excess of noisy cordiality.

The young man drew a deep breath. "To think it should be coming true—what I've dreamt of all my life. Do you remember what Miranda says?"

"Who's Miranda?"

But the young man had evidently not heard the question. "O wonder!" he was saying; and his eyes shone, his face was brightly flushed. "How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is!" The flush suddenly deepened; he was thinking of Lenina, of an angel in bottle-green viscose, lustrous with youth and skin food, plump, benevolently smiling. His voice faltered. "O brave new world," he began, then suddenly interrupted himself; the blood had left his cheeks; he was as pale as paper. "Are you married to her?" he asked.

"Am I what?"

"Married. You know—for ever. They say 'for ever' in the Indian words; it can't be broken."

"Ford, no!" Bernard couldn't help laughing.

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John also laughed, but for another reason—
laughed for pure joy.

“O brave new world,” he repeated. “O brave new world that has such people in it. Let’s start at once.”

“You have a most peculiar way of talking sometimes,” said Bernard, staring at the young man in perplexed astonishment. “And, anyhow, hadn’t you better wait till you actually see the new world?”



CHAPTER NINE

LENINA felt herself entitled, after this day of queer-ness and horror, to a complete and absolute holiday. As soon as they got back to the rest-house, she swallowed six half-gramme tablets of *soma*, lay down on her bed, and within ten minutes had embarked for lunar eternity. It would be eighteen hours at the least before she was in time again.

Bernard meanwhile lay pensive and wide-eyed in the dark. It was long after midnight before he fell asleep. Long after midnight; but his insomnia had not been fruitless; he had a plan.

Punctually, on the following morning, at ten o'clock, the green-uniformed octoroon stepped out of his helicopter. Bernard was waiting for him among the agaves.

“Miss Crowne’s gone on *soma*-holiday,” he ex-

plained. "Can hardly be back before five. Which leaves us seven hours."

He could fly to Santa Fé, do all the business he had to do, and be in Malpais again long before she woke up.

"She'll be quite safe here by herself?"

"Safe as helicopters," the octoroon assured him.

They climbed into the machine and started off at once. At ten thirty-four they landed on the roof of the Santa Fé Post Office; at ten thirty-seven Bernard had got through to the World Controller's Office in Whitehall; at ten thirty-nine he was speaking to his fordship's fourth personal secretary; at ten forty-four he was repeating his story to the first secretary, and at ten forty-seven and a half it was the deep, resonant voice of Mustapha Mond himself that sounded in his ears.

"I ventured to think," stammered Bernard, "that your fordship might find the matter of sufficient scientific interest . . ."

"Yes, I do find it of sufficient scientific interest," said the deep voice. "Bring these two individuals back to London with you."

"Your fordship is aware that I shall need a special permit . . ."

"The necessary orders," said Mustapha Mond, "are being sent to the Warden of the Reservation at this moment. You will proceed at once to the Warden's Office. Good-morning, Mr. Marx."

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There was silence. Bernard hung up the receiver and hurried up to the roof.

"Warden's Office," he said to the Gamma-green octoroon.

At ten fifty-four Bernard was shaking hands with the Warden.

"Delighted, Mr. Marx, delighted." His boom was deferential. "We have just received special orders . . ."

"I know," said Bernard, interrupting him. "I was talking to his fordship on the phone a moment ago." His bored tone implied that he was in the habit of talking to his fordship every day of the week. He dropped into a chair. "If you'll kindly take all the necessary steps as soon as possible. As soon as possible," he emphatically repeated. He was thoroughly enjoying himself.

At eleven three he had all the necessary papers in his pocket.

"So long," he said patronizingly to the Warden, who had accompanied him as far as the lift gates. "So long."

He walked across to the hotel, had a bath, a vibro-vac massage, and an electrolytic shave, listened in to the morning's news, looked in for half an hour on the televisior, ate a leisured luncheon, and at half-past two flew back with the octoroon to Malpais.

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The young man stood outside the rest-house.

"Bernard," he called. "Bernard!" There was no answer.

Noiseless on his deerskin moccasins, he ran up the steps and tried the door. The door was locked.

They were gone! Gone! It was the most terrible thing that had ever happened to him. She had asked him to come and see them, and now they were gone. He sat down on the steps and cried.

Half an hour later it occurred to him to look through the window. The first thing he saw was a green suit-case, with the initials L.C. painted on the lid. Joy flared up like fire within him. He picked up a stone. The smashed glass tinkled on the floor. A moment later he was inside the room. He opened the green suit-case; and all at once he was breathing Lenina's perfume, filling his lungs with her essential being. His heart beat wildly; for a moment he was almost faint. Then, bending over the precious box, he touched, he lifted into the light, he examined. The zippers on Lenina's spare pair of viscose velvet-teen shorts were at first a puzzle, then, solved, a delight. Zip, and then zip; zip, and then zip; he was enchanted. Her green slippers were the most beautiful things he had ever seen. He unfolded a pair of ~~zippicamiknicks~~, blushed, put them hastily away again; but kissed a perfumed acetate handkerchief and wound a scarf round his neck. Opening a box, he

spilt a cloud of scented powder. His hands were floury with the stuff. He wiped them on his chest, on his shoulders, on his bare arms. Delicious perfume! He shut his eyes; he rubbed his cheek against his own powdered arm. Touch of smooth skin against his face, scent in his nostrils of musky dust—her real presence. “Lenina,” he whispered. “Lenina!”

A noise made him start, made him guiltily turn. He crammed up his thieveries into the suit-case and shut the lid; then listened again, looked. Not a sign of life, not a sound. And yet he had certainly heard something—something like a sigh, something like the creak of a board. He tiptoed to the door and, cautiously opening it, found himself looking on to a broad landing. On the opposite side of the landing was another door, ajar. He stepped out, pushed, peeped.

There, on a low bed, the sheet flung back, dressed in a pair of pink one-piece zippyjamas, lay Lenina, fast asleep and so beautiful in the midst of her curls, so touchingly childish with her pink toes and her grave sleeping face, so trustful in the helplessness of her limp hands and melted limbs, that the tears came to his eyes.

With an infinity of quite unnecessary precautions—for nothing short of a pistol shot could have called Lenina back from her *soma*-holiday before the appointed time—he entered the room, he knelt on the

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floor beside the bed. He gazed, he clasped his hands, his lips moved. "Her eyes," he murmured,

*"Her eyes, her hair, her cheek, her gait, her voice;
Handlest in thy discourse O! that her hand,
In whose comparison all whites are ink
Writing their own reproach; to whose soft seizure
The cygnet's down is harsh . . ."*

A fly buzzed round her; he waved it away. "Flies," he remembered,

*"On the white wonder of dear Juliet's hand, may seize
And steal immortal blessing from her lips,
Who, even in pure and vestal modesty,
Still blush, as thinking their own kisses sin."*

Very slowly, with the hesitating gesture of one who reaches forward to stroke a shy and possibly rather dangerous bird, he put out his hand. It hung there trembling, within an inch of those limp fingers, on the verge of contact. Did he dare? Dare to profane with his unworthiest hand that . . . No, he didn't. The bird was too dangerous. His hand dropped back. How beautiful she was! How beautiful!

Then suddenly he found himself reflecting that he had only to take hold of the zipper at her neck and give one long, strong pull . . . He shut his eyes, he shook his head with the gesture of a dog shaking its ears as it emerges from the water. Detestable thought! He was ashamed of himself. Pure and vestal modesty . . .

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There was a humming in the air. Another fly trying to steal immortal blessings? A wasp? He looked, saw nothing. The humming grew louder and louder, localized itself as being outside the shuttered windows. The plane! In a panic, he scrambled to his feet and ran into the other room, vaulted through the open window, and hurrying along the path between the tall agaves was in time to receive Bernard Marx as he climbed out of the helicopter.



CHAPTER TEN

THE hands of all the four thousand electric clocks in all the Bloomsbury Centre's four thousand rooms marked twenty-seven minutes past two. "This hive of industry," as the Director was fond of calling it, was in the full buzz of work. Every one was busy, everything in ordered motion. Under the microscopes, their long tails furiously lashing, spermatozoa were burrowing head first into eggs; and, fertilized, the eggs were expanding, dividing, or if bokanovski-fied, budding and breaking up into whole populations of separate embryos. From the Social Predetermination Room the escalators went rumbling down into the basement, and there, in the crimson darkness, stewingly warm on their cushion of peritoneum and gorged with blood-surrogate and hormones, the foetuses grew and grew or, poisoned, languished into a stunted Epsilonhood. With a faint hum and

rattle the moving racks crawled imperceptibly through the weeks and the recapitulated aeons to where, in the Decanting Room, the newly-unbottled babes uttered their first yell of horror and amazement.

The dynamos purred in the sub-basement, the lifts rushed up and down. On all the eleven floors of Nurseries it was feeding time. From eighteen hundred bottles eighteen hundred carefully labelled infants were simultaneously sucking down their pint of pasteurized external secretion.

Above them, in ten successive layers of dormitory, the little boys and girls who were still young enough to need an afternoon sleep were as busy as every one else, though they did not know it, listening unconsciously to hypnopædic lessons in hygiene and sociability, in class-consciousness and the toddler's love-life. Above these again were the playrooms where, the weather having turned to rain, nine hundred older children were amusing themselves with bricks and clay modelling, hunt-the-zipper, and erotic play.

Buzz, buzz! the hive was humming, busily, joyfully. Blithe was the singing of the young girls over their test-tubes, the Predestinators whistled as they worked, and in the Decanting Room what glorious jokes were cracked above the empty bottles! But the Director's face, as he entered the Fertilizing Room with Henry Foster, was grave, wooden with severity.

"A public example," he was saying. "In this room,

because it contains more high-caste workers than any other in the Centre. I have told him to meet me here at half-past two."

"He does his work very well," put in Henry, with hypocritical generosity.

"I know. But that's all the more reason for severity. His intellectual eminence carries with it corresponding moral responsibilities. The greater a man's talents, the greater his power to lead astray. It is better that one should suffer than that many should be corrupted. Consider the matter dispassionately, Mr. Foster, and you will see that no offence is so heinous as unorthodoxy of behaviour. Murder kills only the individual—and, after all, what is an individual?" With a sweeping gesture he indicated the rows of microscopes, the test-tubes, the incubators. "We can make a new one with the greatest ease—as many as we like. Unorthodoxy threatens more than the life of a mere individual; it strikes at Society itself. Yes, at Society itself," he repeated. "Ah, but here he comes."

Bernard had entered the room and was advancing between the rows of fertilizers towards them. A veneer of jaunty self-confidence thinly concealed his nervousness. The voice in which he said, "Good-morning, Director," was absurdly too loud; that in which, correcting his mistake, he said, "You asked me to come and speak to you here," ridiculously soft, a squeak.

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"Yes, Mr. Marx," said the Director portentously. "I did ask you to come to me here. You returned from your holiday last night, I understand."

"Yes," Bernard answered.

"Yes-s," repeated the Director, lingering, a serpent, on the "s." Then, suddenly raising his voice, "Ladies and gentlemen," he trumpeted, "ladies and gentlemen."

The singing of the girls over their test-tubes, the preoccupied whistling of the Microscopists, suddenly ceased. There was a profound silence; every one looked round.

"Ladies and gentlemen," the Director repeated once more, "excuse me for thus interrupting your labours. A painful duty constrains me. The security and stability of Society are in danger. Yes, in danger, ladies and gentlemen. This man," he pointed accusingly at Bernard, "this man who stands before you here, this Alpha-Plus to whom so much has been given, and from whom, in consequence, so much must be expected, this colleague of yours—or should I anticipate and say this ex-colleague?—has grossly betrayed the trust imposed in him. By his heretical views on sport and *soma*, by the scandalous unorthodoxy of his sex-life, by his refusal to obey the teachings of Our Ford and behave out of office hours, 'even as a little infant,' " (here the Director made the sign of the T), "he has proved himself an enemy of Society, a subverter, ladies and gentlemen, of all

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Order and Stability a conspirator against Civilization itself. For this reason I propose to dismiss him, to dismiss him with ignominy from the post he has held in this Centre; I propose forthwith to apply for his transference to a Sub-Centre of the lowest order and, that his punishment may serve the best interest of Society, as far as possible removed from any important Centre of population. In Iceland he will have small opportunity to lead others astray by his unfordly example." The Director paused; then, folding his arms, he turned impressively to Bernard. "Marx," he said, "can you show any reason why I should not now execute the judgment passed upon you?"

"Yes, I can," Bernard answered in a very loud voice.

Somewhat taken aback, but still majestically, "Then show it," said the Director.

"Certainly. But it's in the passage. One moment." Bernard hurried to the door and threw it open. "Come in," he commanded, and the reason came in and showed itself.

There was a gasp, a murmur of astonishment and horror; a young girl screamed; standing on a chair to get a better view some one upset two test-tubes full of spermatozoa. Bloated, sagging, and among those firm youthful bodies, those undistorted faces, a strange and terrifying monster of middle-agedness, Linda advanced into the room, coquettishly smiling

her broken and discoloured smile, and rolling as she walked, with what was meant to be a voluptuous undulation, her enormous haunches. Bernard walked beside her.

"There he is," he said, pointing at the Director.

"Did you think I didn't recognize him?" Linda asked indignantly; then, turning to the Director, "Of course I knew you; Tomakin, I should have known you anywhere, among a thousand. But perhaps you've forgotten me. Don't you remember? Don't you remember, Tomakin? Your Linda." She stood looking at him, her head on one side, still smiling, but with a smile that became progressively, in face of the Director's expression of petrified disgust, less and less self-confident, that wavered and finally went out. "Don't you remember, Tomakin?" she repeated in a voice that trembled. Her eyes were anxious, agonized. The blotched and sagging face twitched grotesquely into the grimace of extreme grief. "Tomakin!" She held out her arms. Some one began to titter.

"What's the meaning," began the Director, "of this monstrous . . ."

"Tomakin!" She ran forward, her blanket trailing behind her, threw her arms round his neck, hid her face on his chest.

A howl of laughter went up irrepressibly.

". . . this monstrous practical joke," the Director shouted.

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Red in the face, he tried to disengage himself from her embrace. Desperately she clung. "But I'm Linda, I'm Linda." The laughter drowned her voice. "You made me have a baby," she screamed above the uproar. There was a sudden and appalling hush; eyes floated uncomfortably, not knowing where to look. The Director went suddenly pale, stopped struggling and stood, his hands on her wrists, staring down at her, horrified. "Yes, a baby—and I was its mother." She flung the obscenity like a challenge into the outraged silence; then, suddenly breaking away from him, ashamed, ashamed, covered her face with her hands, sobbing. "It wasn't my fault, Tomakin. Because I always did my drill, didn't I? Didn't I? Always . . . I don't know how . . . If you knew how awful, Tomakin . . . But he was a comfort to me, all the same." Turning towards the door, "John!" she called. "John!"

He came in at once, paused for a moment just inside the door, looked round, then soft on his moccasined feet strode quickly across the room, fell on his knees in front of the Director, and said in a clear voice: "My father!"

The word (for "father" was not so much obscene as—with its connotation of something at one remove from the loathsomeness and moral obliquity of child-bearing—merely gross, a scatological rather than a pornographic impropriety); the comically smutty word relieved what had become a quite intolerable

tension. Laughter broke out, enormous, almost hysterical, peal after peal, as though it would never stop. My father—and it was the Director! My *father!* Oh, Ford, oh Ford! That was really too good. The whooping and the roaring renewed themselves, faces seemed on the point of disintegration, tears were streaming. Six more test-tubes of spermatozoa were upset. My *father!*

Pale, wild-eyed, the Director glared about him in an agony of bewildered humiliation.

My *father!* The laughter, which had shown signs of dying away, broke out again more loudly than ever. He put his hands over his ears and rushed out of the room.



CHAPTER ELEVEN

AFTER the scene in the Fertilizing Room, all upper-caste London was wild to see this delicious creature who had fallen on his knees before the Director of Hatcheries and Conditioning—or rather the ex-Director, for the poor man had resigned immediately afterwards and never set foot inside the Centre again—had flopped down and called him (the joke was almost too good to be true!) “my father.” Linda, on the contrary, cut no ice; nobody had the smallest desire to see Linda. To say one was a mother—that was past a joke: it was an obscenity. Moreover, she wasn’t a real savage, had been hatched out of a bottle and conditioned like any one else: so couldn’t have really quaint ideas. Finally—and this was by far the strongest reason for people’s not wanting to see poor Linda—there was her appearance. Fat;

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having lost her youth; with bad teeth, and a blotched complexion, and that figure (Ford!)—you simply couldn't look at her without feeling sick, yes, positively sick. So the best people were quite determined *not* to see Linda. And Linda, for her part, had no desire to see them. The return to civilization was for her the return to *soma*, was the possibility of lying in bed and taking holiday after holiday, without ever having to come back to a headache or a fit of vomiting, without ever being made to feel as you always felt after *peyotl*, as though you'd done something so shamefully anti-social that you could never hold up your head again. *Soma* played none of these unpleasant tricks. The holiday it gave was perfect and, if the morning after was disagreeable, it was so, not intrinsically, but only by comparison with the joys of the holiday. The remedy was to make the holiday continuous. Greedily she clamoured for ever larger, ever more frequent doses. Dr. Shaw at first demurred; then let her have what she wanted. She took as much as twenty grammes a day.

“Which will finish her off in a month or two,” the doctor confided to Bernard. “One day the respiratory centre will be paralyzed. No more breathing. Finished. And a good thing too. If we could rejuvenate, of course it would be different. But we can't.”

Surprisingly, as every one thought (for on *soma*-holiday Linda was most conveniently out of the way), John raised objections.

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“But aren’t you shortening her life by giving her so much?”

“In one sense, yes,” Dr. Shaw admitted. “But in another we’re actually lengthening it.” The young man stared, uncomprehending. “*Soma* may make you lose a few years in time,” the doctor went on. “But think of the enormous, immeasurable durations it can give you out of time. Every *soma*-holiday is a bit of what our ancestors used to call eternity.”

John began to understand. “Eternity was in our lips and eyes,” he murmured.

“Eh?”

“Nothing.”

“Of course,” Dr. Shaw went on, “you can’t allow people to go popping off into eternity if they’ve got any serious work to do. But as she hasn’t got any serious work . . .”

“All the same,” John persisted, “I don’t believe it’s right.”

The doctor shrugged his shoulders. “Well, of course, if you prefer to have her screaming mad all the time . . .”

In the end John was forced to give in. Linda got her *soma*. Thenceforward she remained in her little room on the thirty-seventh floor of Bernard’s apartment house, in bed, with the radio and television always on, and the patchouli tap just dripping, and the *soma* tablets within reach of her hand—there she remained; and yet wasn’t there at all, was all the

time away, infinitely far away, on holiday; on holiday in some other world, where the music of the radio was a labyrinth of sonorous colours, a sliding, palpitating labyrinth, that led (by what beautifully inevitable windings) to a bright centre of absolute conviction; where the dancing images of the television box were the performers in some indescribably delicious all-singing feely; where the dripping patchouli was more than scent—was the sun, was a million saxophones, was Popé making love, only much more so, incomparably more, and without end.

“No, we can’t rejuvenate. But I’m very glad,” Dr. Shaw had concluded, “to have had this opportunity to see an example of senility in a human being. Thank you so much for calling me in.” He shook Bernard warmly by the hand.

It was John, then, they were all after. And as it was only through Bernard, his accredited guardian, that John could be seen, Bernard now found himself, for the first time in his life, treated not merely normally, but as a person of outstanding importance. There was no more talk of the alcohol in his blood-surrogate, no gibes at his personal appearance. Henry Foster went out of his way to be friendly; Benito Hoover made him a present of six packets of sex-hormone chewing-gum; the Assistant Predestinator came and cadged almost abjectly for an invitation to one of Bernard’s evening parties.

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As for the women, Bernard had only to hint at the possibility of an invitation, and he could have whichever of them he liked.

"Bernard's asked me to meet the Savage next Wednesday," Fanny announced triumphantly.

"I'm so glad," said Lenina. "And now you must admit that you were wrong about Bernard. Don't you think he's really rather sweet?"

Fanny nodded. "And I must say," she said, "I was quite agreeably surprised."

The Chief Bottler, the Director of Predestination, three Deputy Assistant Fertilizer-Generals, the Professor of Feelies in the College of Emotional Engineering, the Dean of the Westminster Community Singery, the Supervisor of Bokanovskification—the list of Bernard's notabilities was interminable.

"And I had six girls last week," he confided to Helmholtz Watson. "One on Monday, two on Tuesday, two more on Friday, and one on Saturday. And if I'd had the time or the inclination, there were at least a dozen more who were only too anxious . . ."

Helmholtz listened to his boastings in a silence so gloomily disapproving that Bernard was offended.

"You're envious," he said.

Helmholtz shook his head. "I'm rather sad, that's all," he answered.

Bernard went off in a huff. Never, he told himself, never would he speak to Helmholtz again.

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The days passed. Success went fizzily to Bernard's head, and in the process completely reconciled him (as any good intoxicant should do) to a world which, up till then, he had found very unsatisfactory. In so far as it recognized him as important, the order of things was good. But, reconciled by his success, he yet refused to forego the privilege of criticizing this order. For the act of criticizing heightened his sense of importance, made him feel larger. Moreover, he did genuinely believe that there were things to criticize. (At the same time, he genuinely liked being a success and having all the girls he wanted.) Before those who now, for the sake of the Savage, paid their court to him, Bernard would parade a carping unorthodoxy. He was politely listened to. But behind his back people shook their heads. "That young man will come to a bad end," they said, prophesying the more confidently in that they themselves would in due course personally see to it that the end was bad. "He won't find another Savage to help him out a second time," they said. Meanwhile, however, there was the first Savage; they were polite. And because they were polite, Bernard felt positively gigantic—gigantic and at the same time light with elation, lighter than air.

"Lighter than air," said Bernard, pointing upwards.

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Like a pearl in the sky, high, high above them, the Weather Department's captive balloon shone rosily in the sunshine.

". . . the said Savage," so ran Bernard's instructions, "to be shown civilized life in all its aspects. . . ."

He was being shown a bird's-eye view of it at present, a bird's-eye view from the platform of the Charing-T Tower. The Station Master and the Resident Meteorologist were acting as guides. But it was Bernard who did most of the talking. Intoxicated, he was behaving as though, at the very least, he were a visiting World Controller. Lighter than air.

The Bombay Green Rocket dropped out of the sky. The passengers alighted. Eight identical Dravidian twins in khaki looked out of the eight portholes of the cabin—the stewards.

"Twelve hundred and fifty kilometres an hour," said the Station Master impressively. "What do you think of that, Mr. Savage?"

John thought it very nice. "Still," he said, "Ariel could put a girdle round the earth in forty minutes."

"The Savage," wrote Bernard in his report to Mustapha Mond, "shows surprisingly little astonishment at, or awe of, civilized inventions. This is partly due, no doubt, to the fact that he has heard them talked about by the woman Linda, his m——."

(Mustapha Mond frowned. "Does the fool think I'm too squeamish to see the word written out at full length?")

"Partly on his interest being focussed on what he calls 'the soul,' which he persists in regarding as an entity independent of the physical environment; whereas, as I tried to point out to him . . ."

The Controller skipped the next sentences and was just about to turn the page in search of something more interestingly concrete, when his eye was caught by a series of quite extraordinary phrases. ". . . though I must admit," he read, "that I agree with the Savage in finding civilized infantility too easy or, as he puts it, not expensive enough; and I would like to take this opportunity of drawing your lordship's attention to . . ."

Mustapha Mond's anger gave place almost at once to mirth. The idea of this creature solemnly lecturing him—*him*—about the social order was really too grotesque. The man must have gone mad. "I ought to give him a lesson," he said to himself; then threw back his head and laughed aloud. For the moment, at any rate, the lesson would not be given.

It was a small factory of lighting-sets for helicopters, a branch of the Electrical Equipment Corporation. They were met on the roof itself (for that

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circular letter of recommendation from the Controller was magical in its effects) by the Chief Technician and the Human Element Manager. They walked downstairs into the factory.

“Each process,” explained the Human Element Manager, “is carried out, so far as possible, by a single Bokanovsky Group.”

And, in effect, eighty-three almost noseless black brachycephalic Deltas were cold-pressing. The fifty-six four-spindle chucking and turning machines were being manipulated by fifty-six aquiline and ginger Gammas. One hundred and seven heat-conditioned Epsilon Senegalese were working in the foundry. Thirty-three Delta females, long-headed, sandy, with narrow pelvises, and all within 20 millimetres of 1 metre 69 centimetres tall, were cutting screws. In the assembling room, the dynamos were being put together by two sets of Gamma-Plus dwarfs. The two low work-tables faced one another; between them crawled the conveyor with its load of separate parts; forty-seven blonde heads were confronted by forty-seven brown ones. Forty-seven snubs by forty-seven hooks; forty-seven receding by forty-seven prognathous chins. The completed mechanisms were inspected by eighteen identical curly auburn girls in Gamma green, packed in crates by thirty-four short-legged, left-handed male Delta-Minuses, and loaded into the waiting trucks and lorries by sixty-three blue-eyed, flaxen and freckled Epsilon Semi-Morons.

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“O brave new world . . .” By some malice of his memory the Savage found himself repeating Miranda’s words. “O brave new world that has such people in it.”

“And I assure you,” the Human Element Manager concluded, as they left the factory, “we hardly ever have any trouble with our workers. We always find . . .”

But the Savage had suddenly broken away from his companions and was violently retching, behind a clump of laurels, as though the solid earth had been a helicopter in an air pocket.

“The Savage,” wrote Bernard, “refuses to take *soma*, and seems much distressed because the woman Linda, his m——, remains permanently on holiday. It is worthy of note that, in spite of his m——’s senility and the extreme repulsiveness of her appearance, the Savage frequently goes to see her and appears to be much attached to her—an interesting example of the way in which early conditioning can be made to modify and even run counter to natural impulses (in this case, the impulse to recoil from an unpleasant object).”

At Eton they alighted on the roof of Upper School. On the opposite side of School Yard, the fifty-two stories of Lupton’s Tower gleamed white in the sunshine. College on their left and, on their right, the

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School Community Singery reared their venerable piles of ferro-concrete and vita-glass. In the centre of the quadrangle stood the quaint old chrome-steel statue of Our Ford.

Dr. Gaffney, the Provost, and Miss Keate, the Head Mistress, received them as they stepped out of the plane.

“Do you have many twins here?” the Savage asked rather apprehensively, as they set out on their tour of inspection.

“Oh no,” the Provost answered. “Eton is reserved exclusively for upper-caste boys and girls. One egg, one adult. It makes education more difficult of course. But as they’ll be called upon to take responsibilities and deal with unexpected emergencies, it can’t be helped.” He sighed.

Bernard, meanwhile, had taken a strong fancy to Miss Keate. “If you’re free any Monday, Wednesday, or Friday evening,” he was saying. Jerking his thumb towards the Savage, “He’s curious, you know,” Bernard added. “Quaint.”

Miss Keate smiled (and her smile was really charming, he thought); said Thank you; would be delighted to come to one of his parties. The Provost opened a door.

Five minutes in that Alpha Double Plus classroom left John a trifle bewildered.

“What *is* elementary relativity?” he whispered to Bernard. Bernard tried to explain, then thought

better of it and suggested that they should go to some other classroom.

From behind a door in the corridor leading to the Beta-Minus geography room, a ringing soprano voice called, "One, two, three, four," and then, with a weary impatience, "As you were."

"Malthusian Drill," explained the Head Mistress. "Most of our girls are freemartins, of course. I'm a freemartin myself." She smiled at Bernard. "But we have about eight hundred unsterilized ones who need constant drilling."

In the Beta-Minus geography room John learnt that "a savage reservation is a place which, owing to unfavourable climatic or geological conditions, or poverty of natural resources, has not been worth the expense of civilizing." A click; the room was darkened; and suddenly, on the screen above the Master's head, there were the *Penitentes* of Acoma prostrating themselves before Our Lady, and wailing as John had heard them wail, confessing their sins before Jesus on the cross, before the eagle image of Pookong. The young Etonians fairly shouted with laughter. Still wailing, the *Penitentes* rose to their feet, stripped off their upper garments and, with knotted whips, began to beat themselves, blow after blow. Redoubled, the laughter drowned even the amplified record of their groans.

"But why do they laugh?" asked the Savage in a pained bewilderment.

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“Why?” The Provost turned towards him a still broadly grinning face. “*Why?* But because it’s so extraordinarily funny.”

In the cinematographic twilight, Bernard risked a gesture which, in the past, even total darkness would hardly have emboldened him to make. Strong in his new importance, he put his arm round the Head Mistress’s waist. It yielded, willowily. He was just about to snatch a kiss or two and perhaps a gentle pinch, when the shutters clicked open again.

“Perhaps we had better go on,” said Miss Keate, and moved towards the door.

“And this,” said the Provost a moment later, “is Hypnopædic Control Room.”

Hundreds of synthetic music boxes, one for each dormitory, stood ranged in shelves round three sides of the room; pigeon-holed on the fourth were the paper sound-track rolls on which the various hypnopædic lessons were printed.

“You slip the roll in here,” explained Bernard, interrupting Dr. Gaffney, “press down this switch . . .”

“No, that one,” corrected the Provost, annoyed.

“That one, then. The roll unwinds. The selenium cells transform the light impulses into sound waves, and . . .”

“And there you are,” Dr. Gaffney concluded.

“Do they read Shakespeare?” asked the Savage

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as they walked, on their way to the Bio-chemical Laboratories, past the School Library.

“Certainly not,” said the Head Mistress, blushing.

“Our library,” said Dr. Gaffney, “contains only books of reference. If our young people need distraction, they can get it at the feelies. We don’t encourage them to indulge in any solitary amusements.”

Five bus-loads of boys and girls, singing or in a silent embracement, rolled past them over the vitrified highway.

“Just returned,” explained Dr. Gaffney, while Bernard, whispering, made an appointment with the Head Mistress for that very evening, “from the Slough Crematorium. Death conditioning begins at eighteen months. Every tot spends two mornings a week in a Hospital for the Dying. All the best toys are kept there, and they get chocolate cream on death days. They learn to take dying as a matter of course.”

“Like any other physiological process,” put in the Head Mistress professionally.

Eight o’clock at the Savoy. It was all arranged.

On their way back to London they stopped at the Television Corporation’s factory at Brentford.

“Do you mind waiting here a moment while I go and telephone?” asked Bernard.

The Savage waited and watched. The Main Day-

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Shift was just going off duty. Crowds of lower-caste workers were queued up in front of the monorail station—seven or eight hundred Gamma, Delta and Epsilon men and women, with not more than a dozen faces and statures between them. To each of them, with his or her ticket, the booking clerk pushed over a little cardboard pillbox. The long caterpillar of men and women moved slowly forward.

“What’s in those” (remembering *The Merchant of Venice*) “those caskets?” the Savage enquired when Bernard had rejoined him.

“The day’s *soma* ration,” Bernard answered, rather indistinctly; for he was masticating a piece of Benito Hoover’s chewing-gum. “They get it after their work’s over. Four half-gramme tablets. Six on Saturdays.”

He took John’s arm affectionately and they walked back towards the helicopter.

Lenina came singing into the Changing Room.

“You seem very pleased with yourself,” said Fanny.

“I *am* pleased,” she answered. Zip! “Bernard rang up half an hour ago.” Zip, zip! She stepped out of her shorts. “He has an unexpected engagement.” Zip! “Asked me if I’d take the Savage to the feelies this evening. I must fly.” She hurried away towards the bathroom.

"She's a lucky girl," Fanny said to herself as she watched Lenina go.

There was no envy in the comment; good-natured Fanny was merely stating a fact. Lenina *was* lucky; lucky in having shared with Bernard a generous portion of the Savage's immense celebrity, lucky in reflecting from her insignificant person the moment's supremely fashionable glory. Had not the Secretary of the Young Women's Fordian Association asked her to give a lecture about her experiences? Had she not been invited to the Annual Dinner of the Aphroditeum Club? Had she not already appeared in the Feelytone News—visibly, audibly and tactually appeared to countless millions all over the planet?

Hardly less flattering had been the attentions paid her by conspicuous individuals. The Resident World Controller's Second Secretary had asked her to dinner and breakfast. She had spent one week-end with the Ford Chief-Justice, and another with the Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury. The President of the Internal and External Secretions Corporation was perpetually on the phone, and she had been to Deauville with the Deputy-Governor of the Bank of Europe.

"It's wonderful, of course. And yet in a way," she had confessed to Fanny, "I feel as though I were getting something on false pretences. Because, of course, the first thing they all want to know is what it's like to make love to a Savage. And I have to

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say I don't know." She shook her head. "Most of the men don't believe me, of course. But it's true. I wish it weren't," she added sadly and sighed. "He's terribly good-looking; don't you think so?"

"But doesn't he like you?" asked Fanny.

"Sometimes I think he does and sometimes I think he doesn't. He always does his best to avoid me; goes out of the room when I come in; won't touch me; won't even look at me. But sometimes if I turn round suddenly, I catch him staring; and then—well, you know how men look when they like you."

Yes, Fanny knew.

"I can't make it out," said Lenina.

She couldn't make it out; and not only was bewildered; was also rather upset.

"Because, you see, Fanny, *I like him.*"

Liked him more and more. Well, now there'd be a real chance, she thought, as she scented herself after her bath. Dab, dab, dab—a real chance. Her high spirits overflowed in song.

*"Hug me till you drug me, honey;
Kiss me till I'm in a coma:
Hug me, honey, snuggly bunny;
Love's as good as soma."*

The scent organ was playing a delightfully refreshing Herbal Capriccio—rippling arpeggios of thyme and lavender, of rosemary, basil, myrtle,

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tarragon; a series of daring modulations through the spice keys into ambergris; and a slow return through sandalwood, camphor, cedar and new-mown hay (with occasional subtle touches of discord—a whiff of kidney pudding, the faintest suspicion of pig's dung) back to the simple aromatics with which the piece began. The final blast of thyme died away; there was a round of applause; the lights went up. In the synthetic music machine the sound-track roll began to unwind. It was a trio for hyper-violin, super-cello and oboe-surrogate that now filled the air with its agreeable languor. Thirty or forty bars—and then, against this instrumental background, a much more than human voice began to warble; now throaty, now from the head, now hollow as a flute, now charged with yearning harmonics, it effortlessly passed from Gaspard's Forster's low record on the very frontiers of musical tone to a trilled bat-note high above the highest C to which (in 1770, at the Ducal opera of Parma, and to the astonishment of Mozart) Lucrezia Ajugari, alone of all the singers in history, once piercingly gave utterance.

Sunk in their pneumatic stalls, Lenina and the Savage sniffed and listened. It was now the turn also for eyes and skin.

The house lights went down; fiery letters stood out solid and as though self-supported in the darkness. THREE WEEKS IN A HELICOPTER. AN ALL-SUPER-SINGING, SYNTHETIC-TALKING, COLOURED, STEREO-

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SCOPIE FEELY. WITH SYNCHRONIZED SCENT-ORGAN ACCOMPANIMENT.

"Take hold of those metal knobs on the arms of your chair," whispered Lenina. "Otherwise you won't get any of the feely effects."

The Savage did as he was told.

Those fiery letters, meanwhile, had disappeared; there were ten seconds of complete darkness; then suddenly, dazzling and incomparably more solid-looking than they would have seemed in actual flesh and blood, far more real than reality, there stood the stereoscopic images, locked in one another's arms, of a gigantic negro and a golden-haired young brachycephalic Beta-Plus female.

The Savage started. That sensation on his lips! He lifted a hand to his mouth; the titillation ceased; let his hand fall back on the metal knob; it began again. The scent organ, meanwhile, breathed pure musk. Expiringly, a sound-track super-dove cooed "Oo-oo"; and vibrating only thirty-two times a second, a deeper than African bass made answer: "Aa-aah." "Ooh-ah! Ooh-ah!" the stereoscopic lips came together again, and once more the facial erogenous zones of the six thousand spectators in the Alhambra tingled with almost intolerable galvanic pleasure. "Ooh . . ."

The plot of the film was extremely simple. A few minutes after the first Oohs and Aahs (a duet having been sung and a little love made on that famous

bearskin, every hair of which—the Assistant Pre-destinator was perfectly right—could be separately and distinctly felt), the negro had a helicopter accident, fell on his head. Thump! what a twinge through the forehead! A chorus of *ow's* and *aié's* went up from the audience.

The concussion knocked all the negro's conditioning into a cocked hat. He developed for the Beta blonde an exclusive and maniacal passion. She protested. He persisted. There were struggles, pursuits, an assault on a rival, finally a sensational kidnapping. The Beta blonde was ravished away into the sky and kept there, hovering, for three weeks in a wildly anti-social *tête-à-tête* with the black madman. Finally, after a whole series of adventures and much aerial acrobacy three handsome young Alphas succeeded in rescuing her. The negro was packed off to an Adult Re-conditioning Centre and the film ended happily and decorously, with the Beta blonde becoming the mistress of all her three rescuers. They interrupted themselves for a moment to sing a synthetic quartet, with full super-orchestral accompaniment and gardenias on the scent organ. Then the bearskin made a final appearance and, amid a blare of sexophones, the last stereoscopic kiss faded into darkness, the last electric titillation died on the lips like a dying moth that quivers, quivers, ever more feebly, ever more faintly, and at last is quite, quite still.

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But for Lenina the moth did not completely die. Even after the lights had gone up, while they were shuffling slowly along with the crowd towards the lifts, its ghost still fluttered against her lips, still traced fine shuddering roads of anxiety and pleasure across her skin. Her cheeks were flushed, her eyes dewily bright, her breath came deeply. She caught hold of the Savage's arm and pressed it, limp, against her side. He looked down at her for a moment, pale, pained, desiring, and ashamed of his desire. He was not worthy, not . . . Their eyes for a moment met. What treasures hers promised! A queen's ransom of temperament. Hastily he looked away, disengaged his imprisoned arm. He was obscurely terrified lest she should cease to be something he could feel himself unworthy of.

"I don't think you ought to see things like that," he said, making haste to transfer from Lenina herself to the surrounding circumstances the blame for any past or possible future lapse from perfection.

"Things like what, John?"

"Like this horrible film."

"Horrible?" Lenina was genuinely astonished. "But I thought it was lovely."

"It was base," he said indignantly. "it was ignoble."

She shook her head. "I don't know what you mean." Why was he so queer? Why did he go out of his way to spoil things?

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In the taxicopter he hardly even looked at her. Bound by strong vows that had never been pronounced, obedient to laws that had long since ceased to run, he sat averted and in silence. Sometimes, as though a finger had plucked at some taut, almost breaking string, his whole body would shake with a sudden nervous start.

The taxicopter landed on the roof of Lenina's apartment house. "At last," she thought exultantly as she stepped out of the cab. At last—even though he *had* been so queer just now. Standing under a lamp, she peered into her hand mirror. At last. Yes, her nose *was* a bit shiny. She shook the loose powder from her puff. While he was paying off the taxi—there would just be time. She rubbed at the shininess, thinking: "He's terribly good-looking. No need for him to be shy like Bernard. And yet . . . Any other man would have done it long ago. Well, now at last." That fragment of a face in the little round mirror suddenly smiled at her.

"Good-night," said a strangled voice behind her. Lenina wheeled round. He was standing in the doorway of the cab, his eyes fixed, staring; had evidently been staring all this time while she was powdering her nose, waiting—but what for? or hesitating, trying to make up his mind, and all the time thinking, thinking—she could not imagine what extraordinary thoughts. "Good-night, Lenina," he repeated, and made a strange grimacing attempt to smile.

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“But, John . . . I thought you were . . . I mean, aren't you? . . .”

He shut the door and bent forward to say something to the driver. The cab shot up into the air.

Looking down through the window in the floor, the Savage could see Lenina's upturned face, pale in the bluish light of the lamps. The mouth was open, she was calling. Her foreshortened figure rushed away from him; the diminishing square of the roof seemed to be falling through the darkness.

Five minutes later he was back in his room. From its hiding-place he took out his mouse-nibbled volume, turned with religious care its stained and crumpled pages, and began to read *Othello*. *Othello*, he remembered, was like the hero of *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*—a black man.

Drying her eyes, Lenina walked across the roof to the lift. On her way down to the twenty-seventh floor she pulled out her *soma* bottle. One gramme, she decided, would not be enough; hers had been more than a one-gramme affliction. But if she took two grammes, she ran the risk of not waking up in time to-morrow morning. She compromised and, into her cupped left palm, shook out three half-gramme tablets.



CHAPTER TWELVE

BERNARD had to shout through the locked door; the Savage would not open.

"But everybody's there, waiting for you."

"Let them wait," came back the muffled voice through the door.

"But you know quite well, John" (how difficult it is to sound persuasive at the top of one's voice!)

"I asked them on purpose to meet you."

"You ought to have asked *me* first whether I wanted to meet *them*."

"But you always came before, John."

"That's precisely why I don't want to come again."

"Just to please me," Bernard bellowingly wheedled. "Won't you come to please me?"

"No."

“Do you seriously mean it?”

“Yes.”

Despairingly, “But what shall I do?” Bernard wailed.

“Go to hell!” bawled the exasperated voice from within.

“But the Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury is there to-night.” Bernard was almost in tears.

“*Ai yaa tákwa!*” It was only in Zuñi that the Savage could adequately express what he felt about the Arch-Community-Songster. “*Háni!*” he added as an afterthought; and then (with what derisive ferocity!): “*Sons éso tse-ná.*” And he spat on the ground, as Popé might have done.

In the end Bernard had to slink back, diminished, to his rooms and inform the impatient assembly that the Savage would not be appearing that evening. The news was received with indignation. The men were furious at having been tricked into behaving politely to this insignificant fellow with the unsavoury reputation and the heretical opinions. The higher their position in the hierarchy, the deeper their resentment.

“To play such a joke on me,” the Arch-Songster kept repeating, “on *me!*”

As for the women, they indignantly felt that they had been had on false pretences—had by a wretched little man who had had alcohol poured into his bottle by mistake—by a creature with a Gamma-

Minus physique. It was an outrage, and they said so, more and more loudly. The Head Mistress of Eton was particularly scathing.

Lenina alone said nothing. Pale, her blue eyes clouded with an unwonted melancholy, she sat in a corner, cut off from those who surrounded her by an emotion which they did not share. She had come to the party filled with a strange feeling of anxious exultation. "In a few minutes," she had said to herself, as she entered the room, "I shall be seeing him, talking to him, telling him" (for she had come with her mind made up) "that I like him—more than anybody I've ever known. And then perhaps he'll say . . ."

What would he say? The blood had rushed to her cheeks.

"Why was he so strange the other night, after the feelies? So queer. And yet I'm absolutely sure he really does rather like me. I'm sure . . ."

It was at this moment that Bernard had made his announcement; the Savage wasn't coming to the party.

Lenina suddenly felt all the sensations normally experienced at the beginning of a Violent Passion Surrogate treatment—a sense of dreadful emptiness, a breathless apprehension, a nausea. Her heart seemed to stop beating.

"Perhaps it's because he doesn't like me," she said to herself. And at once this possibility became an

established certainty: John had refused to come because he didn't like her. He didn't like her. . . .

"It really is a bit *too* thick," the Head Mistress of Eton was saying to the Director of Crematoria and Phosphorus Reclamation. "When I think that I actually . . ."

"Yes," came the voice of Fanny Crowne, "it's absolutely true about the alcohol. Some one I know knew some one who was working in the Embryo Store at the time. She said to my friend, and my friend said to me . . ."

"Too bad, too bad," said Henry Foster, sympathizing with the Arch-Community-Songster. "It may interest you to know that our ex-Director was on the point of transferring him to Iceland."

Pierced by every word that was spoken, the tight balloon of Bernard's happy self-confidence was leaking from a thousand wounds. Pale, distraught, abject and agitated, he moved among his guests, stammering incoherent apologies, assuring them that next time the Savage would certainly be there, begging them to sit down and take a carotene sandwich, a slice of vitamin A *pâté*, a glass of champagne-surrogate. They duly ate, but ignored him; drank and were either rude to his face or talked to one another about him, loudly and offensively, as though he had not been there.

"And now, my friends," said the Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury, in that beautiful ringing

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voice with which he led the proceedings at Ford's Day Celebrations, "Now, my friends, I think perhaps the time has come . . ." He rose, put down his glass, brushed from his purple viscose waistcoat the crumbs of a considerable collation, and walked towards the door.

Bernard darted forward to intercept him.

"Must you really, Arch-Songster? . . . It's very early still. I'd hoped you would . . ."

Yes, what hadn't he hoped, when Lenina confidentially told him that the Arch-Community-Songster would accept an invitation if it were sent. "He's really rather sweet, you know." And she had shown Bernard the little golden zipper-fastening in the form of a T which the Arch-Songster had given her as a memento of the week-end she had spent at Lambeth. *To meet the Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury and Mr. Savage.* Bernard had proclaimed his triumph on every invitation card. But the Savage had chosen this evening of all evenings to lock himself up in his room, to shout "*Háni!*" and even (it was lucky that Bernard didn't understand Zuñi) "*Sons éso tse-ná!*" What should have been the crowning moment of Bernard's whole career had turned out to be the moment of his greatest humiliation.

"I'd so much hoped . . ." he stammeringly repeated, looking up at the great dignitary with pleading and distracted eyes.

"My young friend," said the Arch-Community-

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Songster in a tone of loud and solemn severity; there was a general silence. "Let me give you a word of advice." He wagged his finger at Bernard. "Before it's too late. A word of good advice." (His voice became sepulchral.) "Mend your ways, my young friend, mend your ways." He made the sign of the T over him and turned away. "Lenina, my dear," he called in another tone. "Come with me."

Obediently, but unsmiling and (wholly insensible of the honour done to her) without elation, Lenina walked after him, out of the room. The other guests followed at a respectful interval. The last of them slammed the door. Bernard was all alone.

Punctured, utterly deflated, he dropped into a chair and, covering his face with his hands, began to weep. A few minutes later, however, he thought better of it and took four tablets of *soma*.

Upstairs in his room the Savage was reading *Romeo and Juliet*.

Lenina and the Arch-Community-Songster stepped out on to the roof of Lambeth Palace. "Hurry up, my young friend—I mean, Lenina," called the Arch-Songster impatiently from the lift gates. Lenina, who had lingered for a moment to

look at the moon, dropped her eyes and came hurrying across the roof to rejoin him.

“A New Theory of Biology” was the title of the paper which Mustapha Mond had just finished reading. He sat for some time, meditatively frowning, then picked up his pen and wrote across the title-page: “The author’s mathematical treatment of the conception of purpose is novel and highly ingenious, but heretical and, so far as the present social order is concerned, dangerous and potentially subversive. *Not to be published.*” He underlined the words. “The author will be kept under supervision. His transference to the Marine Biological Station of St. Helena may become necessary.” A pity, he thought, as he signed his name. It was a masterly piece of work. But once you began admitting explanations in terms of purpose—well, you didn’t know what the result might be. It was the sort of idea that might easily de-condition the more unsettled minds among the higher castes—make them lose their faith in happiness as the Sovereign Good and take to believing, instead, that the goal was somewhere beyond, somewhere outside the present human sphere; that the purpose of life was not the maintenance of well-being, but some intensification and refining of consciousness, some enlargement of knowledge.

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Which was, the Controller reflected, quite possibly true. But not, in the present circumstance, admissible. He picked up his pen again, and under the words "*Not to be published*" drew a second line, thicker and blacker than the first; then sighed. "What fun it would be," he thought, "if one didn't have to think about happiness!"

With closed eyes, his face shining with rapture, John was softly declaiming to vacancy:

*"O! she doth teach the torches to burn bright.
It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night,
Like a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear;
Beauty too rich for use, for earth too dear. . . ."*

The golden T lay shining on Lenina's bosom. Sportively, the Arch-Community-Songster caught hold of it, sportively he pulled, pulled. "I think," said Lenina suddenly, breaking a long silence, "I'd better take a couple of grammes of *soma*."

Bernard, by this time, was fast asleep and smiling at the private paradise of his dreams. Smiling, smiling. But inexorably, every thirty seconds, the minute hand of the electric clock above his bed jumped for-

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ward with an almost imperceptible click. Click, click, click, click . . . And it was morning. Bernard was back among the miseries of space and time. It was in the lowest spirits that he taxied across to his work at the Conditioning Centre. The intoxication of success had evaporated; he was soberly his old self; and by contrast with the temporary balloon of these last weeks, the old self seemed unprecedentedly heavier than the surrounding atmosphere.

To this deflated Bernard the Savage showed himself unexpectedly sympathetic.

"You're more like what you were at Malpais," he said, when Bernard had told him his plaintive story. "Do you remember when we first talked together? Outside the little house. You're like what you were then."

"Because I'm unhappy again; that's why."

"Well, I'd rather be unhappy than have the sort of false, lying happiness you were having here."

"I like that," said Bernard bitterly. "When it's you who were the cause of it all. Refusing to come to my party and so turning them all against me!" He knew that what he was saying was absurd in its injustice; he admitted inwardly, and at last even aloud, the truth of all that the Savage now said about the worthlessness of friends who could be turned upon so slight a provocation into persecuting enemies. But in spite of this knowledge and these admissions, in spite of the fact that his friend's support

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and sympathy were now his only comfort, Bernard continued perversely to nourish, along with his quite genuine affection, a secret grievance against the Savage, to meditate a campaign of small revenges to be wreaked upon him. Nourishing a grievance against the Arch-Community-Songster was useless; there was no possibility of being revenged on the Chief Bottler or the Assistant Predestinator. As a victim, the Savage possessed, for Bernard, this enormous superiority over the others: that he was accessible. One of the principal functions of a friend is to suffer (in a milder and symbolic form) the punishments that we should like, but are unable, to inflict upon our enemies.

Bernard's other victim-friend was Helmholtz. When, discomfited, he came and asked once more for the friendship which, in his prosperity, he had not thought it worth his while to preserve, Helmholtz gave it; and gave it without a reproach, without a comment, as though he had forgotten that there had ever been a quarrel. Touched, Bernard felt himself at the same time humiliated by this magnanimity—a magnanimity the more extraordinary and therefore the more humiliating in that it owed nothing to *soma* and everything to Helmholtz's character. It was the Helmholtz of daily life who forgot and forgave, not the Helmholtz of a half-gramme holiday. Bernard was duly grateful (it was an enormous comfort to have his friend again) and also duly

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resentful (it would be a pleasure to take some revenge on Helmholtz for his generosity).

At their first meeting after the estrangement, Bernard poured out the tale of his miseries and accepted consolation. It was not till some days later that he learned, to his surprise and with a twinge of shame, that he was not the only one who had been in trouble. Helmholtz had also come into conflict with Authority.

"It was over some rhymes," he explained. "I was giving my usual course of Advanced Emotional Engineering for Third Year Students. Twelve lectures, of which the seventh is about rhymes. 'On the Use of Rhymes in Moral Propaganda and Advertisement,' to be precise. I always illustrate my lecture with a lot of technical examples. This time I thought I'd give them one I'd just written myself. Pure madness, of course; but I couldn't resist it." He laughed. "I was curious to see what their reactions would be. Besides," he added more gravely, "I wanted to do a bit of propaganda; I was trying to engineer them into feeling as I'd felt when I wrote the rhymes. Ford!" He laughed again. "What an outcry there was! The Principal had me up and threatened to hand me the immediate sack. I'm a marked man."

"But what were your rhymes?" Bernard asked.

"They were about being alone."

Bernard's eyebrows went up.

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“I’ll recite them to you, if you like.” And Helmholtz began:

*Yesterday’s committee,
Sticks, but a broken drum,
Midnight in the City,
Flutes in a vacuum,
Shut lips, sleeping faces,
Every stopped machine,
The dumb and littered places
Where crowds have been: . . .
All silences rejoice,
Weep (loudly or low),
Speak—but with the voice
Of whom, I do not know.
Absence, say, of Susan’s,
Absence of Egeria’s
Arms and respective bosoms,
Lips and, ah, posteriors,
Slowly form a presence;
Whose? and, I ask, of what
So absurd an essence,
That something, which is not,
Nevertheless should populate
Empty night more solidly
Than that with which we copulate,
Why should it seem so squalidly?*

Well, I gave them that as an example, and they reported me to the Principal.”

“I’m not surprised,” said Bernard. “It’s flatly against all their sleep-teaching. Remember, they’ve had at least a quarter of a million warnings against solitude.”

“I know. But I thought I’d like to see what the effect would be.”

“Well, you’ve seen now.”

Helmholtz only laughed. “I feel,” he said, after a silence, “as though I were just beginning to have something to write about. As though I were beginning to be able to use that power I feel I’ve got inside me—that extra, latent power. Something seems to be coming to me.” In spite of all his troubles, he seemed, Bernard thought, profoundly happy.

Helmholtz and the Savage took to one another at once. So cordially indeed that Bernard felt a sharp pang of jealousy. In all these weeks he had never come to so close an intimacy with the Savage as Helmholtz immediately achieved. Watching them, listening to their talk, he found himself sometimes resentfully wishing that he had never brought them together. He was ashamed of his jealousy and alternately made efforts of will and took *soma* to keep himself from feeling it. But the efforts were not very successful; and between the *soma*-holidays there were, of necessity, intervals. The odious sentiment kept on returning.

At his third meeting with the Savage, Helmholtz recited his rhymes on Solitude.

“What do you think of them?” he asked when he had done.

The Savage shook his head. “Listen to *this*,” was

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his answer; and unlocking the drawer in which he kept his mouse-eaten book, he opened and read:

*“Let the bird of loudest lay,
On the sole Arabian tree,
Herald sad and trumpet be . . .”*

Helmholtz listened with a growing excitement. At “sole Arabian tree” he started; at “thou shrieking harbinger” he smiled with sudden pleasure; at “every fowl of tyrant wing” the blood rushed up into his cheeks; but at “defunctive music” he turned pale and trembled with an unprecedented emotion. The Savage read on:

*“Property was thus appall’d,
That the self was not the same;
Single nature’s double name
Neither two nor one was call’d*

*“Reason in itself confounded
Saw division grow together . . .”*

“Orgy-porgy!” said Bernard, interrupting the reading with a loud, unpleasant laugh. “It’s just a Solidarity Service hymn.” He was revenging himself on his two friends for liking one another more than they liked him.

In the course of their next two or three meetings he frequently repeated this little act of vengeance. It was simple and, since both Helmholtz and the Savage were dreadfully pained by the shattering and defilement of a favourite poetic crystal, extremely

effective. In the end, Helmholtz threatened to kick him out of the room if he dared to interrupt again. And yet, strangely enough, the next interruption, the most disgraceful of all, came from Helmholtz himself.

The Savage was reading *Romeo and Juliet* aloud—reading (for all the time he was seeing himself as Romeo and Lenina as Juliet) with an intense and quivering passion. Helmholtz had listened to the scene of the lovers' first meeting with a puzzled interest. The scene in the orchard had delighted him with its poetry; but the sentiments expressed had made him smile. Getting into such a state about having a girl—it seemed rather ridiculous. But, taken detail by verbal detail, what a superb piece of emotional engineering! "That old fellow," he said, "he makes our best propaganda technicians look absolutely silly." The Savage smiled triumphantly and resumed his reading. All went tolerably well until, in the last scene of the third act, Capulet and Lady Capulet began to bully Juliet to marry Paris. Helmholtz had been restless throughout the entire scene; but when, pathetically mimed by the Savage, Juliet cried out:

*"Is there no pity sitting in the clouds,
That sees into the bottom of my grief?
O sweet my mother, cast me not away:
Delay this marriage for a month, a week;
Or, if you do not, make the bridal bed
In that dim monument where Tybalt lies . . ."*

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when Juliet said this, Helmholtz broke out in an explosion of uncontrollable guffawing.

The mother and father (grotesque obscenity) forcing the daughter to have some one she didn't want! And the idiotic girl not saying that she was having some one else whom (for the moment, at any rate) she preferred! In its smutty absurdity the situation was irresistibly comical. He had managed, with a heroic effort, to hold down the mounting pressure of his hilarity; but "sweet mother" (in the Savage's tremulous tone of anguish) and the reference to Tybalt lying dead, but evidently uncremated and wasting his phosphorus on a dim monument, were too much for him. He laughed and laughed till the tears streamed down his face—quenchlessly laughed while, pale with a sense of outrage, the Savage looked at him over the top of his book and then, as the laughter still continued, closed it indignantly, got up and, with the gesture of one who removes his pearl from before swine, locked it away in its drawer.

"And yet," said Helmholtz when, having recovered breath enough to apologize, he had mollified the Savage into listening to his explanations, "I know quite well that one needs ridiculous, mad situations like that; one can't write really well about anything else. Why was that old fellow such a marvellous propaganda technician? Because he had so many insane, excruciating things to get excited about. You've got to be hurt and upset; otherwise

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you can't think of the really good, penetrating, X-rayish phrases. But fathers and mothers!" He shook his head. "You can't expect me to keep a straight face about fathers and mothers. And who's going to get excited about a boy having a girl or not having her?" (The Savage winced; but Helmholtz, who was staring pensively at the floor, saw nothing.) "No," he concluded, with a sigh, "it won't do. We need some other kind of madness and violence. But what? What? Where can one find it?" He was silent; then, shaking his head, "I don't know," he said at last, "I don't know."



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

HENRY FOSTER loomed up through the twilight of the Embryo Store.

“Like to come to a feely this evening?”

Lenina shook her head without speaking.

“Going out with some one else?” It interested him to know which of his friends was being had by which other. “Is it Benito?” he questioned.

She shook her head again.

Henry detected the weariness in those purple eyes, the pallor beneath that glaze of lupus, the sadness at the corners of the unsmiling crimson mouth. “You’re not feeling ill, are you?” he asked, a trifle anxiously, afraid that she might be suffering from one of the few remaining infectious diseases.

Yet once more Lenina shook her head.

“Anyhow, you ought to go and see the doctor,” said Henry. “A doctor a day keeps the jim-jams

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away," he added heartily, driving home his hypnopædic adage with a clap on the shoulder. "Perhaps you need a Pregnancy Substitute," he suggested. "Or else an extra-strong V.P.S. treatment. Sometimes, you know, the standard passion surrogate isn't quite . . ."

"Oh, for Ford's sake," said Lenina, breaking her stubborn silence, "shut up!" And she turned back to her neglected embryos.

A V.P.S. treatment indeed! She would have laughed, if she hadn't been on the point of crying. As though she hadn't got enough V.P. of her own! She sighed profoundly as she refilled her syringe. "John," she murmured to herself, "John . . ." Then "My Ford," she wondered, "have I given this one its sleeping sickness injection, or haven't I?" She simply couldn't remember. In the end, she decided not to run the risk of letting it have a second dose, and moved down the line to the next bottle.

Twenty-two years, eight months, and four days from that moment, a promising young Alpha-Minus administrator at Mwanza-Mwanza was to die of trypanosomiasis—the first case for over half a century. Sighing, Lenina went on with her work.

An hour later, in the Changing Room, Fanny was energetically protesting. "But it's absurd to let yourself get into a state like this. Simply absurd," she repeated. "And what about? A man—*one* man."

"But he's the one I want."

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“As though there weren’t millions of other men in the world.”

“But I don’t want them.”

“How can you know till you’ve tried?”

“I have tried.”

“But how many?” asked Fanny, shrugging her shoulders contemptuously. “One, two?”

“Dozens. But,” shaking her head, “it wasn’t any good,” she added.

“Well, you must persevere,” said Fanny sententially. But it was obvious that her confidence in her own prescriptions had been shaken. “Nothing can be achieved without perseverance.”

“But meanwhile . . .”

“Don’t think of him.”

“I can’t help it.”

“Take *soma*, then.”

“I do.”

“Well, go on.”

“But in the intervals I still like him. I shall always like him.”

“Well, if that’s the case,” said Fanny, with decision, “why don’t you just go and take him. Whether he wants it or no.”

“But if you knew how terribly *queer* he was!”

“All the more reason for taking a firm line.”

“It’s all very well to *say* that.”

“Don’t stand any nonsense. Act.” Fanny’s voice was a trumpet; she might have been a Y.W.F.A.

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lecturer giving an evening talk to adolescent Beta-Minuses. "Yes, act—at once. Do it now."

"I'd be scared," said Lenina.

"Well, you've only got to take half a gramme of *soma* first. And now I'm going to have my bath." She marched off, trailing her towel.

The bell rang, and the Savage, who was impatiently hoping that Helmholtz would come that afternoon (for having at last made up his mind to talk to Helmholtz about Lenina, he could not bear to postpone his confidences a moment longer), jumped up and ran to the door.

"I had a premonition it was you, Helmholtz," he shouted as he opened.

On the threshold, in a white acetate-satin sailor suit, and with a round white cap rakishly tilted over her left ear, stood Lenina.

"Oh!" said the Savage, as though some one had struck him a heavy blow.

Half a gramme had been enough to make Lenina forget her fears and her embarrassments. "Hullo, John," she said, smiling, and walked past him into the room. Automatically he closed the door and followed her. Lenina sat down. There was a long silence.

"You don't seem very glad to see me, John," she said at last.

"Not glad?" The Savage looked at her reproach-

fully; then suddenly fell on his knees before her and, taking Lenina's hand, reverently kissed it. "Not glad? Oh, if you only knew," he whispered and, venturing to raise his eyes to her face, "Admired Lenina," he went on, "indeed the top of admiration, worth what's dearest in the world." She smiled at him with a luscious tenderness. "Oh, you so perfect" (she was leaning towards him with parted lips), "so perfect and so peerless are created" (nearer and nearer) "of every creature's best." Still nearer. The Savage suddenly scrambled to his feet. "That's why," he said, speaking with averted face, "I wanted to *do* something first . . . I mean, to show I was worthy of you. Not that I could ever really be that. But at any rate to show I wasn't absolutely *un*-worthy. I wanted to do *something*."

"Why should you think it necessary . . ." Lenina began, but left the sentence unfinished. There was a note of irritation in her voice. When one has leant forward, nearer and nearer, with parted lips—only to find oneself, quite suddenly, as a clumsy oaf scrambles to his feet, leaning towards nothing at all—well, there is a reason, even with half a gramme of *soma* circulating in one's blood-stream, a genuine reason for annoyance.

"At Malpais," the Savage was incoherently mumbling, "you had to bring her the skin of a mountain lion—I mean, when you wanted to marry some one. Or else a wolf."

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"There aren't any lions in England," Lenina almost snapped.

"And even if there were," the Savage added, with sudden contemptuous resentment, "people would kill them out of helicopters, I suppose, with poison gas or something. I wouldn't do *that*, Lenina." He squared his shoulders, he ventured to look at her and was met with a stare of annoyed incomprehension. Confused, "I'll do anything," he went on, more and more incoherently. "Anything you tell me. There be some sports are painful—you know. But their labour delight in them sets off. That's what I feel. I mean I'd sweep the floor if you wanted."

"But we've got vacuum cleaners here," said Lenina in bewilderment. "It isn't necessary."

"No, of course it isn't *necessary*. But some kinds of baseness are nobly undergone. I'd like to undergo something nobly. Don't you see?"

"But if there *are* vacuum cleaners . . ."

"That's not the point."

"And Epsilon Semi-Morons to work them," she went on, "well, really, *why?*"

"Why? But for you, for *you*. Just to show that I . . ."

"And what on earth vacuum cleaners have got to do with lions . . ."

"To show how much . . ."

"Or lions with being glad to see *me* . . ." She was getting more and more exasperated.

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"How much I love you, Lenina," he brought out almost desperately.

An emblem of the inner tide of startled elation, the blood rushed up into Lenina's cheeks. "Do you mean it, John?"

"But I hadn't meant to say so," cried the Savage, clasping his hands in a kind of agony. "Not until . . . Listen, Lenina; in Malpais people get married."

"Get what?" The irritation had begun to creep back into her voice. What was he talking about now?

"For always. They make a promise to live together for always."

"What a horrible idea!" Lenina was genuinely shocked.

"Outliving beauty's outward with a mind that doth renew swifter than blood decays."

"*What?*"

"It's like that in Shakespeare too. 'If thou dost break her virgin knot before all sanctimonious ceremonies may with full and holy rite . . .'"

"For Ford's sake, John, talk sense. I can't understand a word you say. First it's vacuum cleaners; then it's knots. You're driving me crazy." She jumped up and, as though afraid that he might run away from her physically, as well as with his mind, caught him by the wrist. "Answer me this question: do you really like me, or don't you?"

There was a moment's silence; then, in a very low

voice, "I love you more than anything in the world," he said.

"Then why on earth didn't you say so?" she cried, and so intense was her exasperation that she drove her sharp nails into the skin of his wrist. "Instead of drivelling away about knots and vacuum cleaners and lions, and making me miserable for weeks and weeks."

She released his hand and flung it angrily away from her.

"If I didn't like you so much," she said, "I'd be furious with you."

And suddenly her arms were round his neck; he felt her lips soft against his own. So deliciously soft, so warm and electric that inevitably he found himself thinking of the embraces in *Three Weeks in a Helicopter*. Ooh! ooh! the stereoscopic blonde and aah! the more than real blackamoor. Horror, horror, horror . . . he tried to disengage himself; but Lenina tightened her embrace.

"Why didn't you say so?" she whispered, drawing back her face to look at him. Her eyes were tenderly reproachful.

"The murkiest den, the most opportune place" (the voice of conscience thundered poetically), "the strongest suggestion our worser genius can, shall never melt mine honour into lust. Never, never!" he resolved.

"You silly boy!" she was saying. "I wanted you

so much. And if you wanted me too, why didn't you? . . ."

"But, Lenina . . ." he began protesting; and as she immediately untwined her arms, as she stepped away from him, he thought, for a moment, that she had taken his unspoken hint. But when she unbuckled her white patent cartridge belt and hung it carefully over the back of a chair, he began to suspect that he had been mistaken.

"Lenina!" he repeated apprehensively.

She put her hand to her neck and gave a long vertical pull; her white sailor's blouse was ripped to the hem; suspicion condensed into a too, too solid certainty. "Lenina, what *are* you doing?"

Zip, zip! Her answer was wordless. She stepped out of her bell-bottomed trousers. Her zippicamknicks were a pale shell pink. The Arch-Community-Songster's golden T dangled at her breast.

"For those milk paps that through the window bars bore at men's eyes. . . ." The singing, thundering, magical words made her seem doubly dangerous, doubly alluring. Soft, soft, but how piercing! boring and drilling into reason, tunnelling through resolution. "The strongest oaths are straw to the fire i' the blood. Be more abstemious, or else . . ."

Zip! The rounded pinkness fell apart like a neatly divided apple. A wriggle of the arms, a lifting first of the right foot, then the left: the zippicamknicks were lying lifeless and as though deflated on the floor.

Still wearing her shoes and socks, and her rakishly tilted round white cap, she advanced towards him. "Darling. *Darling!* If only you'd said so before!" She held out her arms.

But instead of also saying "Darling!" and holding out *his* arms, the Savage retreated in terror, flapping his hands at her as though he were trying to scare away some intruding and dangerous animal. Four backward steps, and he was brought to bay against the wall.

"Sweet!" said Lenina and, laying her hands on his shoulders, pressed herself against him. "Put your arms round me," she commanded. "Hug me till you drug me, honey." She too had poetry at her command, knew words that sang and were spells and beat drums. "Kiss me"; she closed her eyes, she let her voice sink to a sleepy murmur, "kiss me till I'm in a coma. Hug me, honey, snugly . . ."

The Savage caught her by the wrists, tore her hands from his shoulders, thrust her roughly away at arm's length.

"Ow, you're hurting me, you're . . . oh!" She was suddenly silent. Terror had made her forget the pain. Opening her eyes, she had seen his face—no, not *his* face, a ferocious stranger's, pale, distorted, twitching with some insane, inexplicable fury. Aghast, "But what is it, John?" she whispered. He did not answer, but only stared into her face with those mad eyes. The hands that held her wrists were

trembling. He breathed deeply and irregularly. Faint almost to imperceptibility, but appalling, she suddenly heard the grinding of his teeth. "What is it?" she almost screamed.

And as though awakened by her cry he caught her by the shoulders and shook her. "Whore!" he shouted. "Whore! Impudent strumpet!"

"Oh, don't, do-on't," she protested in a voice made grotesquely tremulous by his shaking.

"Whore!"

"Plea-ease."

"Damned whore!"

"A gra-amme is be-etter . . ." she began.

The Savage pushed her away with such force that she staggered and fell. "Go," he shouted, standing over her menacingly, "get out of my sight or I'll kill you." He clenched his fists.

Lenina raised her arm to cover her face. "No, please don't, John . . ."

"Hurry up. Quick!"

One arm still raised, and following his every movement with a terrified eye, she scrambled to her feet and still crouching, still covering her head, made a dash for the bathroom.

The noise of that prodigious slap by which her departure was accelerated was like a pistol shot.

"Ow!" Lenina bounded forward.

Safely locked into the bathroom, she had leisure to take stock of her injuries. Standing with her back

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to the mirror, she twisted her head. Looking over her left shoulder she could see the imprint of an open hand standing out distinct and crimson on the pearly flesh. Gingerly she rubbed the wounded spot.

Outside, in the other room, the Savage was striding up and down, marching, marching to the drums and music of magical words. "The wren goes to't and the small gilded fly does lecher in my sight." Maddeningly they rumbled in his ears. "The fitchew nor the soiled horse goes to't with a more riotous appetite. Down from the waist they are Centaurs, though women all above. But to the girdle do the gods inherit. Beneath is all the fiend's. There's hell, there's darkness, there is the sulphurous pit, burning, scalding, stench, consumption; fie, fie, fie, pah, pah! Give me an ounce of civet, good apothecary, to sweeten my imagination."

"John!" ventured a small ingratiating voice from the bathroom. "John!"

"O thou weed, who art so lovely fair and smell'st so sweet that the sense aches at thee. Was this most goodly book made to write 'whore' upon? Heaven stops the nose at it . . ."

But her perfume still hung about him, his jacket was white with the powder that had scented her velvety body. "Impudent strumpet, impudent strumpet, impudent strumpet." The inexorable rhythm beat itself out. "Impudent . . ."

"John, do you think I might have my clothes?"

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He picked up the bell-bottomed trousers, the blouse, the zippicamiknicks.

"Open!" he ordered, kicking the door.

"No, I won't." The voice was frightened and defiant.

"Well, how do you expect me to give them to you?"

"Push them through the ventilator over the door."

He did what she suggested and returned to his uneasy pacing of the room. "Impudent strumpet, impudent strumpet. The devil Luxury with his fat rump and potato finger . . ."

"John."

He would not answer. "Fat rump and potato finger."

"John."

"What is it?" he asked gruffly.

"I wonder if you'd mind giving me my Malthusian belt."

Lenina sat listening to the footsteps in the other room, wondering, as she listened, how long he was likely to go tramping up and down like that; whether she would have to wait until he left the flat; or if it would be safe, after allowing his madness a reasonable time to subside, to open the bathroom door and make a dash for it.

She was interrupted in the midst of these uneasy speculations by the sound of the telephone bell ringing in the other room. Abruptly the tramping

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ceased. She heard the voice of the Savage parleying with silence.

“Hullo.”

.....

“Yes.”

.....

“If I do not usurp myself, I am.”

.....

“Yes, didn’t you hear me say so? Mr. Savage speaking.”

.....

“What? Who’s ill? Of course it interests me.”

.....

“But is it serious? Is she really bad? I’ll go at once. . . .”

.....

“Not in her rooms any more? Where has she been taken?”

.....

“Oh, my God! What’s the address?”

.....

“Three Park Lane—is that it? Three? Thanks.”

Lenina heard the click of the replaced receiver, then hurrying steps. A door slammed. There was silence. Was he really gone?

With an infinity of precautions she opened the door a quarter of an inch; peeped through the crack; was encouraged by the view of emptiness; opened a little further, and put her whole head out; finally

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tiptoed into the room; stood for a few seconds with strongly beating heart, listening, listening; then darted to the front door, opened, slipped through, slammed, ran. It was not till she was in the lift and actually dropping down the well that she began to feel herself secure.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THE Park Lane Hospital for the Dying was a sixty-story tower of primrose tiles. As the Savage stepped out of his taxicopter a convoy of gaily-coloured aerial hearses rose whirring from the roof and darted away across the Park, westwards, bound for the Slough Crematorium. At the lift gates the presiding porter gave him the information he required, and he dropped down to Ward 81 (a Galloping Senility ward, the porter explained) on the seventeenth floor.

It was a large room bright with sunshine and yellow paint, and containing twenty beds, all occupied. Linda was dying in company—in company and with all the modern conveniences. The air was continuously alive with gay synthetic melodies. At the foot of every bed, confronting its moribund occupant, was a television box. Television was left on, a running tap, from morning till night. Every quarter of

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an hour the prevailing perfume of the room was automatically changed. "We try," explained the nurse, who had taken charge of the Savage at the door, "we try to create a thoroughly pleasant atmosphere here—something between a first-class hotel and a feely-palace, if you take my meaning."

"Where is she?" asked the Savage, ignoring these polite explanations.

The nurse was offended. "You *are* in a hurry," she said.

"Is there any hope?" he asked.

"You mean, of her not dying?" (He nodded.) "No, of course there isn't. When somebody's sent here, there's no . . ." Startled by the expression of distress on his pale face, she suddenly broke off. "Why, whatever is the matter?" she asked. She was not accustomed to this kind of thing in visitors. (Not that there were many visitors anyhow: or any reason why there should be many visitors.) "You're not feeling ill, are you?"

He shook his head. "She's my mother," he said in a scarcely audible voice.

The nurse glanced at him with startled, horrified eyes; then quickly looked away. From throat to temple she was all one hot blush.

"Take me to her," said the Savage, making an effort to speak in an ordinary tone.

Still blushing, she led the way down the ward. Faces still fresh and unwithered (for senility galloped

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so hard that it had no time to age the cheeks—only the heart and brain) turned as they passed. Their progress was followed by the blank, incurious eyes of second infancy. The Savage shuddered as he looked.

Linda was lying in the last of the long row of beds, next to the wall. Propped up on pillows, she was watching the Semi-finals of the South American Riemann-Surface Tennis Championship, which were being played in silent and diminished reproduction on the screen of the television box at the foot of the bed. Hither and thither across their square of illumined glass the little figures noiselessly darted, like fish in an aquarium—the silent but agitated inhabitants of another world.

Linda looked on, vaguely and uncomprehendingly smiling. Her pale, bloated face wore an expression of imbecile happiness. Every now and then her eyelids closed, and for a few seconds she seemed to be dozing. Then with a little start she would wake up again—wake up to the aquarium antics of the Tennis Champions, to the Super-Vox-Wurlitzeriana rendering of “Hug me till you drug me, honey,” to the warm draught of verbena that came blowing through the ventilator above her head—would wake to these things, or rather to a dream of which these things, transformed and embellished by the *soma* in her blood, were the marvellous constituents, and smile once more her broken and discoloured smile of infantile contentment.

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“Well, I must go,” said the nurse. “I’ve got my batch of children coming. Besides, there’s Number 3.” She pointed up the ward. “Might go off any minute now. Well, make yourself comfortable.” She walked briskly away.

The Savage sat down beside the bed.

“Linda,” he whispered, taking her hand.

At the sound of her name, she turned. Her vague eyes brightened with recognition. She squeezed his hand, she smiled, her lips moved; then quite suddenly her head fell forward. She was asleep. He sat watching her—seeking through the tired flesh, seeking and finding that young, bright face which had stooped over his childhood in Malpais, remembering (and he closed his eyes) her voice, her movements, all the events of their life together. “Streptocock-Gee to Banbury T . . .” How beautiful her singing had been! And those childish rhymes, how magically strange and mysterious!

A, B, C, vitamin D:

The fat’s in the liver, the cod’s in the sea.

He felt the hot tears welling up behind his eyelids as he recalled the words and Linda’s voice as she repeated them. And then the reading lessons: The tot is in the pot, the cat is on the mat; and the Elementary Instructions for Beta Workers in the Embryo Store. And long evenings by the fire or, in summer

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time, on the roof of the little house, when she told him those stories about the Other Place, outside the Reservation: that beautiful, beautiful Other Place, whose memory, as of a heaven, a paradise of goodness and loveliness, he still kept whole and intact, undefiled by contact with the reality of this real London, these actual civilized men and women.

A sudden noise of shrill voices made him open his eyes and, after hastily brushing away the tears, look round. What seemed an interminable stream of identical eight-year-old male twins was pouring into the room. Twin after twin, twin after twin, they came—a nightmare. Their faces, their repeated face—for there was only one between the lot of them—pug-nishly stared, all nostrils and pale goggling eyes. Their uniform was khaki. All their mouths hung open. Squealing and chattering they entered. In a moment, it seemed, the ward was maggoty with them. They swarmed between the beds, clambered over, crawled under, peeped into the television boxes, made faces at the patients.

Linda astonished and rather alarmed them. A group stood clustered at the foot of her bed, staring with the frightened and stupid curiosity of animals suddenly confronted by the unknown.

“Oh, look, look!” They spoke in low, scared voices. “Whatever is the matter with her? Why is she so fat?”

They had never seen a face like hers before—had

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never seen a face that was not youthful and tawny-skinned, a body that had ceased to be slim and upright. All these moribund sexagenarians had the appearance of childish girls. At forty-four, Linda seemed, by contrast, a monster of flaccid and distorted senility.

"Isn't she awful?" came the whispered comments. "Look at her teeth!"

Suddenly from under the bed a pug-faced twin popped up between John's chair and the wall, and began peering into Linda's sleeping face.

"I say . . ." he began; but his sentence ended prematurely in a squeal. The Savage had seized him by the collar, lifted him clear over the chair and, with a smart box on the ears, sent him howling away.

His yells brought the Head Nurse hurrying to the rescue.

"What have you been doing to him?" she demanded fiercely. "I won't have you striking the children."

"Well then, keep them away from this bed." The Savage's voice was trembling with indignation. "What are these filthy little brats doing here at all? It's disgraceful!"

"Disgraceful? But what do you mean? They're being death-conditioned. And I tell you," she warned him truculently, "if I have any more of your interference with their conditioning, I'll send for the porters and have you thrown out."

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The Savage rose to his feet and took a couple of steps towards her. His movements and the expression on his face were so menacing that the nurse fell back in terror. With a great effort he checked himself and, without speaking, turned away and sat down again by the bed.

Reassured, but with a dignity that was a trifle shrill and uncertain, "I've warned you," said the nurse, "so mind." Still, she led the too inquisitive twins away and made them join in the game of hunt-the-zipper, which had been organized by one of her colleagues at the other end of the room.

"Run along now and have your cup of caffeine solution, dear," she said to the other nurse. The exercise of authority restored her confidence, made her feel better. "Now children!" she called.

Linda had stirred uneasily, had opened her eyes for a moment, looked vaguely around, and then once more dropped off to sleep. Sitting beside her, the Savage tried hard to recapture his mood of a few minutes before. "A, B, C, vitamin D," he repeated to himself, as though the words were a spell that would restore the dead past to life. But the spell was ineffective. Obstinate the beautiful memories refused to rise; there was only a hateful resurrection of jealousies and uglinesses and miseries. Popé with the blood trickling down from his cut shoulder; and Linda hideously asleep, and the flies buzzing round the spilt *mescal* on the floor beside the bed; and the

boys calling those names as she passed. . . . Ah, no, no! He shut his eyes, he shook his head in strenuous denial of these memories. "A, B, C, vitamin D . . ." He tried to think of those times when he sat on her knees and she put her arms about him and sang, over and over again, rocking him, rocking him to sleep. "A, B, C, vitamin D, vitamin D, vitamin D . . ."

The Super-Vox-Wurlitzeriana had risen to a sobbing crescendo; and suddenly the verbena gave place, in the scent-circulating system, to an intense patchouli. Linda stirred, woke up, stared for a few seconds bewilderedly at the Semi-finalists, then, lifting her face, sniffed once or twice at the newly perfumed air and suddenly smiled—a smile of childish ecstasy.

"Popé!" she murmured, and closed her eyes. "Oh, I do so like it, I do . . ." She sighed and let herself sink back into the pillows.

"But, Linda!" The Savage spoke imploringly. "Don't you know me?" He had tried so hard, had done his very best; why wouldn't she allow him to forget? He squeezed her limp hand almost with violence, as though he would force her to come back from this dream of ignoble pleasures, from these base and hateful memories—back into the present, back into reality: the appalling present, the awful reality—but sublime, but significant, but desperately important precisely because of the imminence of that which made them so fearful. "Don't you know me, Linda?"

He felt the faint answering pressure of her hand. The tears started into his eyes. He bent over her and kissed her.

Her lips moved. "Popé!" she whispered again, and it was as though he had had a pailful of ordure thrown in his face.

Anger suddenly boiled up in him. Balked for the second time, the passion of his grief had found another outlet, was transformed into a passion of agonized rage.

"But I'm John!" he shouted. "I'm John!" And in his furious misery he actually caught her by the shoulder and shook her.

Linda's eyes fluttered open; she saw him, knew him—"John!"—but situated the real face, the real and violent hands, in an imaginary world—among the inward and private equivalents of patchouli and the Super-Wurlitzer, among the transfigured memories and the strangely transposed sensations that constituted the universe of her dream. She knew him for John, her son, but fancied him an intruder into that paradisaical Malpais where she had been spending her *soma*-holiday with Popé. He was angry because she liked Popé, he was shaking her because Popé was there in the bed—as though there were something wrong, as though all civilized people didn't do the same. "Every one belongs to every . . ." Her voice suddenly died into an almost inaudible breathless croaking. Her mouth fell open: she made a des-

perate effort to fill her lungs with air. But it was as though she had forgotten how to breathe. She tried to cry out—but no sound came; only the terror of her staring eyes revealed what she was suffering. Her hands went to her throat, then clawed at the air—the air she could no longer breathe, the air that, for her, had ceased to exist.

The Savage was on his feet, bent over her. "What is it, Linda? What is it?" His voice was imploring; it was as though he were begging to be reassured.

The look she gave him was charged with an unspeakable terror—with terror and, it seemed to him, reproach. She tried to raise herself in bed, but fell back on to the pillows. Her face was horribly distorted, her lips blue.

The Savage turned and ran up the ward.

"Quick, quick!" he shouted. "Quick!"

Standing in the centre of a ring of zipper-hunting twins, the Head Nurse looked round. The first moment's astonishment gave place almost instantly to disapproval. "Don't shout! Think of the little ones," she said, frowning. "You might decordition . . . But what are you doing?" He had broken through the ring. "Be careful!" A child was yelling.

"Quick, quick!" He caught her by the sleeve, dragged her after him. "Quick! Something's happened. I've killed her."

By the time they were back at the end of the ward Linda was dead.

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The Savage stood for a moment in frozen silence, then fell on his knees beside the bed and, covering his face with his hands, sobbed uncontrollably.

The nurse stood irresolute, looking now at the kneeling figure by the bed (the scandalous exhibition!) and now (poor children!) at the twins who had stopped their hunting of the zipper and were staring from the other end of the ward, staring with all their eyes and nostrils at the shocking scene that was being enacted round Bed 20. Should she speak to him? try to bring him back to a sense of decency? remind him of where he was? of what fatal mischief he might do to these poor innocents? Undoing all their wholesome death-conditioning with this disgusting outcry—as though death were something terrible, as though any one mattered as much as all that! It might give them the most disastrous ideas about the subject, might upset them into reacting in the entirely wrong, the utterly anti-social way.

She stepped forward, she touched him on the shoulder. "Can't you behave?" she said in a low, angry voice. But, looking round, she saw that half a dozen twins were already on their feet and advancing down the ward. The circle was disintegrating. In another moment . . . No, the risk was too great; the whole Group might be put back six or seven months in its conditioning. She hurried back towards her menaced charges.

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"Now, who wants a chocolate éclair?" she asked in a loud, cheerful tone.

"Me!" yelled the entire Bokanovsky Group in chorus. Bed 20 was completely forgotten.

"Oh, God, God, God . . ." the Savage kept repeating to himself. In the chaos of grief and remorse that filled his mind it was the one articulate word. "God!" he whispered it aloud. "God . . ."

"Whatever *is* he saying?" said a voice, very near, distinct and shrill through the warblings of the Super-Wurlitzer.

The Savage violently started and, uncovering his face, looked round. Five khaki twins, each with the stump of a long éclair in his right hand, and their identical faces variously smeared with liquid chocolate, were standing in a row, puggily goggling at him.

They met his eyes and simultaneously grinned. One of them pointed with his éclair butt.

"Is she dead?" he asked.

The Savage stared at them for a moment in silence. Then in silence he rose to his feet, in silence slowly walked towards the door.

"Is she dead?" repeated the inquisitive twin trotting at his side.

The Savage looked down at him and still without speaking pushed him away. The twin fell on the floor and at once began to howl. The Savage did not even look round.



CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE menial staff of the Park Lane Hospital for the Dying consisted of one hundred and sixty-two Deltas divided into two Bokanovsky Groups of eighty-four red-headed female and seventy-eight dark dolychcephalic male twins, respectively. At six, when their working day was over, the two Groups assembled in the vestibule of the Hospital and were served by the Deputy Sub-Bursar with their *soma* ration.

From the lift the Savage stepped out into the midst of them. But his mind was elsewhere—with death, with his grief, and his remorse; mechanically, without consciousness of what he was doing, he began to shoulder his way through the crowd.

“Who are you pushing? Where do you think you’re going?”

High, low, from a multitude of separate throats, only two voices squeaked or growled. Repeated

indefinitely, as though by a train of mirrors, two faces, one a hairless and freckled moon haloed in orange, the other a thin, beaked bird-mask, stubbly with two days' beard, turned angrily towards him. Their words and, in his ribs, the sharp nudging of elbows, broke through his unawareness. He woke once more to external reality, looked round him, knew what he saw—knew it, with a sinking sense of horror and disgust, for the recurrent delirium of his days and nights, the nightmare of swarming indistinguishable sameness. Twins, twins. . . . Like maggots they had swarmed defilingly over the mystery of Linda's death. Maggots again, but larger, full grown, they now crawled across his grief and his repentance. He halted and, with bewildered and horrified eyes, stared round him at the khaki mob, in the midst of which, overtopping it by a full head, he stood. "How many goodly creatures are there here!" The singing words mocked him derisively. "How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world . . ."

"Soma distribution!" shouted a loud voice. "In good order, please. Hurry up there."

A door had been opened, a table and chair carried into the vestibule. The voice was that of a jaunty young Alpha, who had entered carrying a black iron cash-box. A murmur of satisfaction went up from the expectant twins. They forgot all about the Savage. Their attention was now focussed on the black cash-box, which the young man had placed on

the table, and was now in process of unlocking. The lid was lifted.

“Oo-oh!” said all the hundred and sixty-two simultaneously, as though they were looking at fireworks.

The young man took out a handful of tiny pill-boxes. “Now,” he said peremptorily, “step forward, please. One at a time, and no shoving.”

One at a time, with no shoving, the twins stepped forward. First two males, then a female, then another male, then three females, then . . .

The Savage stood looking on. “O brave new world, O brave new world . . .” In his mind the singing words seemed to change their tone. They had mocked him through his misery and remorse, mocked him with how hideous a note of cynical derision! Fiendishly laughing, they had insisted on the low squalor, the nauseous ugliness of the nightmare. Now, suddenly, they trumpeted a call to arms. “O brave new world!” Miranda was proclaiming the possibility of loveliness, the possibility of transforming even the nightmare into something fine and noble. “O brave new world!” It was a challenge, a command.

“No shoving there now!” shouted the Deputy Sub-Bursar in a fury. He slammed down the lid of his cash-box. “I shall stop the distribution unless I have good behaviour.”

The Deltas muttered, jostled one another a little,

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and then were still. The threat had been effective. Deprivation of *soma*—appalling thought!

“That’s better,” said the young man, and reopened his cash-box.

Linda had been a slave, Linda had died; others should live in freedom, and the world be made beautiful. A reparation, a duty. And suddenly it was luminously clear to the Savage what he must do; it was as though a shutter had been opened, a curtain drawn back.

“Now,” said the Deputy Sub-Bursar.

Another khaki female stepped forward.

“Stop!” called the Savage in a loud and ringing voice. “Stop!”

He pushed his way to the table; the Deltas stared at him with astonishment.

“Ford!” said the Deputy Sub-Bursar, below his breath. “It’s the Savage.” He felt scared.

“Listen, I beg you,” cried the Savage earnestly. “Lend me your ears . . .” He had never spoken in public before, and found it very difficult to express what he wanted to say. “Don’t take that horrible stuff. It’s poison, it’s poison.”

“I say, Mr. Savage,” said the Deputy Sub-Bursar, smiling propitiatingly. “Would you mind letting me . . .

“Poison to soul as well as body.”

“Yes, but let me get on with my distribution, won’t you? There’s a good fellow.” With the cau-

tious tenderness of one who strokes a notoriously vicious animal, he patted the Savage's arm. "Just let me . . ."

"Never!" cried the Savage.

"But look here, old man . . ."

"Throw it all away, that horrible poison."

The words "Throw it all away" pierced through the enfolding layers of incomprehension to the quick of the Deltas' consciousness. An angry murmur went up from the crowd.

"I come to bring you freedom," said the Savage, turning back towards the twins. "I come . . ."

The Deputy Sub-Bursar heard no more; he had slipped out of the vestibule and was looking up a number in the telephone book.

"Not in his own rooms," Bernard summed up. "Not in mine, not in yours. Not at the Aphroditæum; not at the Centre or the College. Where can he have got to?"

Helmholtz shrugged his shoulders. They had come back from their work expecting to find the Savage waiting for them at one or other of their usual meeting-places, and there was no sign of the fellow. Which was annoying, as they had meant to nip across to Biarritz in Helmholtz's four-seater sporticopter. They'd be late for dinner if he didn't come soon.

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"We'll give him five more minutes," said Helmholtz. "If he doesn't turn up by then, we'll . . ."

The ringing of the telephone bell interrupted him. He picked up the receiver. "Hullo. Speaking." Then, after a long interval of listening, "Ford in Flivver!" he swore. "I'll come at once."

"What is it?" Bernard asked.

"A fellow I know at the Park Lane Hospital," said Helmholtz. "The Savage is there. Seems to have gone mad. Anyhow, it's urgent. Will you come with me?"

Together they hurried along the corridor to the lifts.

"But do you like being slaves?" the Savage was saying as they entered the Hospital. His face was flushed, his eyes bright with ardour and indignation. "Do you like being babies? Yes, babies. Mewling and puking," he added, exasperated by their bestial stupidity into throwing insults at those he had come to save. The insults bounced off their carapace of thick stupidity; they stared at him with a blank expression of dull and sullen resentment in their eyes. "Yes, puking!" he fairly shouted. Grief and remorse, compassion and duty—all were forgotten now and, as it were, absorbed into an intense overpowering hatred of these less than human monsters. "Don't you want to be free and men? Don't you even under-

stand what manhood and freedom are?" Rage was making him fluent; the words came easily, in a rush. "Don't you?" he repeated, but got no answer to his question. "Very well then," he went on grimly. "I'll teach you; I'll *make* you be free whether you want to or not." And pushing open a window that looked on to the inner court of the Hospital, he began to throw the little pill-boxes of *soma* tablets in handfuls out into the area.

For a moment the khaki mob was silent, petrified, at the spectacle of this wanton sacrilege, with amazement and horror.

"He's mad," whispered Bernard, staring with wide open eyes. "They'll kill him. They'll . . ." A great shout suddenly went up from the mob; a wave of movement drove it menacingly towards the Savage. "Ford help him!" said Bernard, and averted his eyes.

"Ford helps those who help themselves." And with a laugh, actually a laugh of exultation, Helmholtz Watson pushed his way through the crowd.

"Free, free!" the Savage shouted, and with one hand continued to throw the *soma* into the area while, with the other, he punched the indistinguishable faces of his assailants. "Free!" And suddenly there was Helmholtz at his side—"Good old Helmholtz!"—also punching—"Men at last!"—and in the interval also throwing the poison out by handfuls through the open window. "Yes, men! men!" and

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there was no more poison left. He picked up the cash-box and showed them its black emptiness. "You're free!"

Howling, the Deltas charged with a redoubled fury.

Hesitant on the fringes of the battle, "They're done for," said Bernard and, urged by a sudden impulse, ran forward to help them; then thought better of it and halted; then, ashamed, stepped forward again; then again thought better of it, and was standing in an agony of humiliated indecision—thinking that *they* might be killed if he didn't help them, and that *he* might be killed if he did—when (Ford be praised!), goggle-eyed and swine-snouted in their gas-masks, in ran the police.

Bernard dashed to meet them. He waved his arms; and it was action, he was doing something. He shouted "Help!" several times, more and more loudly so as to give himself the illusion of helping. "Help! *Help!* HELP!"

The policemen pushed him out of the way and got on with their work. Three men with spraying machines buckled to their shoulders pumped thick clouds of *soma* vapour into the air. Two more were busy round the portable Synthetic Music Box. Carrying water pistols charged with a powerful anæsthetic, four others had pushed their way into the crowd and were methodically laying out, squirt by squirt, the more ferocious of the fighters.

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“Quick, quick!” yelled Bernard. “They’ll be killed if you don’t hurry. They’ll . . . Oh!” Annoyed by his chatter, one of the policemen had given him a shot from his water pistol. Bernard stood for a second or two wambling unsteadily on legs that seemed to have lost their bones, their tendons, their muscles, to have become mere sticks of jelly, and at last not even jelly—water: he tumbled in a heap on the floor.

Suddenly, from out of the Synthetic Music Box a Voice began to speak. The Voice of Reason, the Voice of Good Feeling. The sound-track roll was unwinding itself in Synthetic Anti-Riot Speech Number Two (Medium Strength). Straight from the depths of a non-existent heart, “My friends, my friends!” said the Voice so pathetically, with a note of such infinitely tender reproach that, behind their gas-masks, even the policemen’s eyes were momentarily dimmed with tears, “what is the meaning of this? Why aren’t you all being happy and good together? Happy and good,” the Voice repeated. “At peace, at peace.” It trembled, sank into a whisper and momentarily expired. “Oh, I do want you to be happy,” it began, with a yearning earnestness. “I do so want you to be good! Please, please be good and . . .”

Two minutes later the Voice and the *soma* vapour had produced their effect. In tears, the Deltas were kissing and hugging one another—half a dozen twins

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at a time in a comprehensive embrace. Even Helmholtz and the Savage were almost crying. A fresh supply of pill-boxes was brought in from the Bursary; a new distribution was hastily made and, to the sound of the Voice's richly affectionate, baritone valedictions, the twins dispersed, blubbing as though their hearts would break. "Good-bye, my dearest, dearest friends, Ford keep you! Good-bye, my dearest, dearest friends. Ford keep you. Good-bye, my dearest, dearest . . ."

When the last of the Deltas had gone the policeman switched off the current. The angelic Voice fell silent.

"Will you come quietly?" asked the Sergeant, "or must we anæsthetize?" He pointed his water pistol menacingly.

"Oh, we'll come quietly," the Savage answered, dabbing alternately a cut lip, a scratched neck, and a bitten left hand.

Still keeping his handkerchief to his bleeding nose Helmholtz nodded in confirmation.

Awake and having recovered the use of his legs, Bernard had chosen this moment to move as inconspicuously as he could towards the door.

"Hi, you there," called the Sergeant, and a swine-masked policeman hurried across the room and laid a hand on the young man's shoulder.

Bernard turned with an expression of indignant innocence. Escaping? He hadn't dreamed of such a

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thing. "Though what on earth you want *me* for," he said to the Sergeant, "I really can't imagine."

"You're a friend of the prisoner's, aren't you?"

"Well . . ." said Bernard, and hesitated. No, he really couldn't deny it. "Why shouldn't I be?" he asked.

"Come on then," said the Sergeant, and led the way towards the door and the waiting police car.



CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE room into which the three were ushered was the Controller's study.

"His fordship will be down in a moment." The Gamma butler left them to themselves.

Helmholtz laughed aloud.

"It's more like a caffeine-solution party than a trial," he said, and let himself fall into the most luxurious of the pneumatic arm-chairs. "Cheer up, Bernard," he added, catching sight of his friend's green unhappy face. But Bernard would not be cheered; without answering, without even looking at Helmholtz, he went and sat down on the most uncomfortable chair in the room, carefully chosen in the obscure hope of somehow deprecating the wrath of the higher powers.

The Savage meanwhile wandered restlessly round the room, peering with a vague superficial inquisi-

tiveness at the books in the shelves, at the sound-track rolls and the reading machine bobbins in their numbered pigeon-holes. On the table under the window lay a massive volume bound in limp black leather-surrogate, and stamped with large golden T's. He picked it up and opened it. MY LIFE AND WORK, BY OUR FORD. The book had been published at Detroit by the Society for the Propagation of Fordian Knowledge. Idly he turned the pages, read a sentence here, a paragraph there, and had just come to the conclusion that the book didn't interest him, when the door opened, and the Resident World Controller for Western Europe walked briskly into the room.

Mustapha Mond shook hands with all three of them; but it was to the Savage that he addressed himself. "So you don't much like civilization, Mr. Savage," he said.

The Savage looked at him. He had been prepared to lie, to bluster, to remain sullenly unresponsive; but, reassured by the good-humoured intelligence of the Controller's face, he decided to tell the truth, straightforwardly. "No." He shook his head.

Bernard started and looked horrified. What would the Controller think? To be labelled as the friend of a man who said that he didn't like civilization—said it openly and, of all people, to the Controller—it was terrible. "But, John," he began. A look from Mustapha Mond reduced him to an abject silence.

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"Of course," the Savage went on to admit, "there are some very nice things. All that music in the air, for instance . . ."

"Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments will hum about my ears and sometimes voices."

The Savage's face lit up with a sudden pleasure. "Have you read it too?" he asked. "I thought nobody knew about that book here, in England."

"Almost nobody. I'm one of the very few. It's prohibited, you see. But as I make the laws here, I can also break them. With impunity, Mr. Marx," he added, turning to Bernard. "Which I'm afraid you *can't* do."

Bernard sank into a yet more hopeless misery.

"But why is it prohibited?" asked the Savage. In the excitement of meeting a man who had read Shakespeare he had momentarily forgotten everything else.

The Controller shrugged his shoulders. "Because it's old; that's the chief reason. We haven't any use for old things here."

"Even when they're beautiful?"

"Particularly when they're beautiful. Beauty's attractive, and we don't want people to be attracted by old things. We want them to like the new ones."

"But the new ones are so stupid and horrible. Those plays, where there's nothing but helicopters flying about and you *feel* the people kissing." He

made a grimace. "Goats and monkeys!" Only in Othello's words could he find an adequate vehicle for his contempt and hatred.

"Nice tame animals, anyhow," the Controller murmured parenthetically.

"Why don't you let them see *Othello* instead?"

"I've told you; it's old. Besides, they couldn't understand it."

Yes, that was true. He remembered how Helmholtz had laughed at *Romeo and Juliet*. "Well then," he said, after a pause, "something new that's like *Othello*, and that they could understand."

"That's what we've all been wanting to write," said Helmholtz, breaking a long silence.

"And it's what you never will write," said the Controller. "Because, if it were really like *Othello* nobody could understand it, however new it might be. And if it were new, it couldn't possibly be like *Othello*."

"Why not?"

"Yes, why not?" Helmholtz repeated. He too was forgetting the unpleasant realities of the situation. Green with anxiety and apprehension, only Bernard remembered them; the others ignored him. "Why not?"

"Because our world is not the same as Othello's world. You can't make flivvers without steel—and you can't make tragedies without social instability. The world's stable now. People are happy; they

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get what they want, and they never want what they can't get. They're well off; they're safe; they're never ill; they're not afraid of death; they're blissfully ignorant of passion and old age; they're plagued with no mothers or fathers; they've got no wives, or children, or lovers to feel strongly about; they're so conditioned that they practically can't help behaving as they ought to behave. And if anything should go wrong, there's *soma*. Which you go and chuck out of the window in the name of liberty, Mr. Savage. *Liberty!*" He laughed. "Expecting Deltas to know what liberty is! And now expecting them to understand *Othello!* My good boy!"

The Savage was silent for a little. "All the same," he insisted obstinately, "*Othello's* good, *Othello's* better than those feelies."

"Of course it is," the Controller agreed. "But that's the price we have to pay for stability. You've got to choose between happiness and what people used to call high art. We've sacrificed the high art. We have the feelies and the scent organ instead."

"But they don't mean anything."

"They mean themselves; they mean a lot of agreeable sensations to the audience."

"But they're . . . they're told by an idiot."

The Controller laughed. "You're not being very polite to your friend, Mr. Watson. One of our most distinguished Emotional Engineers . . ."

"But he's right," said Helmholtz gloomily. "Be-

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cause it *is* idiotic. Writing when there's nothing to say . . .”

“Precisely. But that requires the most enormous ingenuity. You're making flivvers out of the absolute minimum of steel—works of art out of practically nothing but pure sensation.”

The Savage shook his head. “It all seems to me quite horrible.”

“Of course it does. Actual happiness always looks pretty squalid in comparison with the over-compensations for misery. And, of course, stability isn't nearly so spectacular as instability. And being contented has none of the glamour of a good fight against misfortune, none of the picturesqueness of a struggle with temptation, or a fatal overthrow by passion or doubt. Happiness is never grand.”

“I suppose not,” said the Savage after a silence. “But need it be quite so bad as those twins?” He passed his hand over his eyes as though he were trying to wipe away the remembered image of those long rows of identical midgets at the assembling tables, those queued-up twin-herds at the entrance to the Brentford monorail station, those human maggots swarming round Linda's bed of death, the endlessly repeated face of his assailants. He looked at his bandaged left hand and shuddered. “Horrible!”

“But how useful! I see you don't like our Bokanovsky Groups; but, I assure you, they're the foundation

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on which everything else is built. They're the gyroscope that stabilizes the rocket plane of state on its unswerving course." The deep voice thrillingly vibrated; the gesticulating hand implied all space and the onrush of the irresistible machine. Mustapha Mond's oratory was almost up to synthetic standards.

"I was wondering," said the Savage, "why you had them at all—seeing that you can get whatever you want out of those bottles. Why don't you make everybody an Alpha Double Plus while you're about it?"

Mustapha Mond laughed. "Because we have no wish to have our throats cut," he answered. "We believe in happiness and stability. A society of Alphas couldn't fail to be unstable and miserable. Imagine a factory staffed by Alphas—that is to say by separate and unrelated individuals of good heredity and conditioned so as to be capable (within limits) of making a free choice and assuming responsibilities. Imagine it!" he repeated.

The Savage tried to imagine it, not very successfully.

"It's an absurdity. An Alpha-decanted, Alpha-conditioned man would go mad if he had to do Epsilon Semi-Moron work—go mad, or start smashing things up. Alphas can be completely socialized—but only on condition that you make them do Alpha work. Only an Epsilon can be expected to make Epsilon sacrifices, for the good reason that for him

they aren't sacrifices; they're the line of least resistance. His conditioning has laid down rails along which he's got to run. He can't help himself; he's foredoomed. Even after decanting, he's still inside a bottle—an invisible bottle of infantile and embryonic fixations. Each one of us, of course," the Controller meditatively continued, "goes through life inside a bottle. But if we happen to be Alphas, our bottles are, relatively speaking, enormous. We should suffer acutely if we were confined in a narrower space. You cannot pour upper-caste champagne-surrogate into lower-caste bottles. It's obvious theoretically. But it has also been proved in actual practice. The result of the Cyprus experiment was convincing."

"What was that?" asked the Savage.

Mustapha Mond smiled. "Well, you can call it an experiment in rebottling if you like. It began in A.F. 473. The Controllers had the island of Cyprus cleared of all its existing inhabitants and re-colonized with a specially prepared batch of twenty-two thousand Alphas. All agricultural and industrial equipment was handed over to them and they were left to manage their own affairs. The result exactly fulfilled all the theoretical predictions. The land wasn't properly worked; there were strikes in all the factories; the laws were set at naught, orders disobeyed; all the people detailed for a spell of low-grade work were perpetually intriguing for high-grade jobs, and all the people with high-grade

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jobs were counter-intriguing at all costs to stay where they were. Within six years they were having a first-class civil war. When nineteen out of the twenty-two thousand had been killed, the survivors unanimously petitioned the World Controllers to resume the government of the island. Which they did. And that was the end of the only society of Alphas that the world has ever seen."

The Savage sighed, profoundly.

"The optimum population," said Mustapha Mond, "is modelled on the iceberg—eight-ninths below the water line, one-ninth above."

"And they're happy below the water line?"

"Happier than above it. Happier than your friend here, for example." He pointed.

"In spite of that awful work?"

"Awful? *They* don't find it so. On the contrary, they like it. It's light, it's childishly simple. No strain on the mind or the muscles. Seven and a half hours of mild, unexhausting labour, and then the *soma* ration and games and unrestricted copulation and the feelies. What more can they ask for? True," he added, "they might ask for shorter hours. And of course we could give them shorter hours. Technically, it would be perfectly simple to reduce all lower-caste working hours to three or four a day. But would they be any the happier for that? No, they wouldn't. The experiment was tried, more than a century and a half ago. The whole of Ireland was put on to the

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four-hour day. What was the result? Unrest and a large increase in the consumption of *soma*; that was all. Those three and a half hours of extra leisure were so far from being a source of happiness, that people felt constrained to take a holiday from them. The Inventions Office is stuffed with plans for labour-saving processes. Thousands of them." Mustapha Mond made a lavish gesture. "And why don't we put them into execution? For the sake of the labourers; it would be sheer cruelty to afflict them with excessive leisure. It's the same with agriculture. We could synthesize every morsel of food, if we wanted to. But we don't. We prefer to keep a third of the population on the land. For their own sakes—because it takes *longer* to get food out of the land than out of a factory. Besides, we have our stability to think of. We don't want to change. Every change is a menace to stability. That's another reason why we're so chary of applying new inventions. Every discovery in pure science is potentially subversive; even science must sometimes be treated as a possible enemy. Yes, even science."

Science? The Savage frowned. He knew the word. But what it exactly signified he could not say. Shakespeare and the old men of the pueblo had never mentioned science, and from Linda he had only gathered the vaguest hints: science was something you made helicopters with, something that caused you to laugh at the Corn Dances, something

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that prevented you from being wrinkled and losing your teeth. He made a desperate effort to take the Controller's meaning.

"Yes," Mustapha Mond was saying, "that's another item in the cost of stability. It isn't only art that's incompatible with happiness; it's also science. Science is dangerous; we have to keep it most carefully chained and muzzled."

"What?" said Helmholtz, in astonishment. "But we're always saying that science is everything. It's a hypnopædic platitude."

"Three times a week between thirteen and seventeen," put in Bernard.

"And all the science propaganda we do at the College . . ."

"Yes; but what sort of science?" asked Mustapha Mond sarcastically. "You've had no scientific training, so you can't judge." I was a pretty good physicist in my time. Too good—good enough to realize that all our science is just a cookery book, with an orthodox theory of cooking that nobody's allowed to question, and a list of recipes that mustn't be added to except by special permission from the head cook. I'm the head cook now. But I was an inquisitive young scullion once. I started doing a bit of cooking on my own. Unorthodox cooking, illicit cooking. A bit of real science, in fact." He was silent.

"What happened?" asked Helmholtz Watson.

The Controller sighed. "Very nearly what's going

to happen to you young men. I was on the point of being sent to an island.”

The words galvanized Bernard into a violent and unseemly activity. “Send *me* to an island?” He jumped up, ran across the room, and stood gesticulating in front of the Controller. “You can’t send *me*. I haven’t done anything. It was the others. I swear it was the others.” He pointed accusingly to Helmholtz and the Savage. “Oh, please don’t send me to Iceland. I promise I’ll do what I ought to do. Give me another chance. Please give me another chance.” The tears began to flow. “I tell you, it’s their fault,” he sobbed. “And not to Iceland. Oh please, your fordship, please . . .” And in a paroxysm of abjection he threw himself on his knees before the Controller. Mustapha Mond tried to make him get up; but Bernard persisted in his grovelling; the stream of words poured out inexhaustibly. In the end the Controller had to ring for his fourth secretary.

“Bring three men,” he ordered, “and take Mr. Marx into a bedroom. Give him a good *soma* vaporization and then put him to bed and leave him.”

The fourth secretary went out and returned with three green-uniformed twin footmen. Still shouting and sobbing, Bernard was carried out.

“One would think he was going to have his throat cut,” said the Controller, as the door closed. “Whereas, if he had the smallest sense, he’d understand that his punishment is really a reward. He’s

being sent to an island. That's to say, he's being sent to a place where he'll meet the most interesting set of men and women to be found anywhere in the world. All the people who, for one reason or another, have got too self-consciously individual to fit into community-life. All the people who aren't satisfied with orthodoxy, who've got independent ideas of their own. Every one, in a word, who's any one. I almost envy you, Mr. Watson."

Helmholtz laughed. "Then why aren't you on an island yourself?"

"Because, finally, I preferred this," the Controller answered. "I was given the choice: to be sent to an island, where I could have got on with my pure science, or to be taken on to the Controllers' Council with the prospect of succeeding in due course to an actual Controllership. I chose this and let the science go." After a little silence, "Sometimes," he added, "I rather regret the science. Happiness is a hard master—particularly other people's happiness. A much harder master, if one isn't conditioned to accept it unquestioningly, than truth." He sighed, fell silent again, then continued in a brisker tone, "Well, duty's duty. One can't consult one's own preferences. I'm interested in truth, I like science. But truth's a menace, science is a public danger. As dangerous as it's been beneficent. It has given us the stablest equilibrium in history. China's was hopelessly insecure by compari-

son; even the primitive matriarchies weren't steadier than we are. Thanks, I repeat, to science. But we can't allow science to undo its own good work. That's why we so carefully limit the scope of its researches—that's why I almost got sent to an island. We don't allow it to deal with any but the most immediate problems of the moment. All other enquiries are most sedulously discouraged. It's curious," he went on after a little pause, "to read what people in the time of Our Ford used to write about scientific progress. They seemed to have imagined that it could be allowed to go on indefinitely, regardless of everything else. Knowledge was the highest good, truth the supreme value; all the rest was secondary and subordinate. True, ideas were beginning to change even then. Our Ford himself did a great deal to shift the emphasis from truth and beauty to comfort and happiness. Mass production demanded the shift. Universal happiness keeps the wheels steadily turning; truth and beauty can't. And, of course, whenever the masses seized political power, then it was happiness rather than truth and beauty that mattered. Still, in spite of everything, unrestricted scientific research was still permitted. People still went on talking about truth and beauty as though they were the sovereign goods. Right up to the time of the Nine Years' War. *That* made them change their tune all right. What's the point of truth or beauty or knowledge when the anthrax bombs are

popping all around you? That was when science first began to be controlled—after the Nine Years' War. People were ready to have even their appetites controlled then. Anything for a quiet life. We've gone on controlling ever since. It hasn't been very good for truth, of course. But it's been very good for happiness. One can't have something for nothing. Happiness has got to be paid for. You're paying for it, Mr. Watson—paying because you happen to be too much interested in beauty. I was too much interested in truth; I paid too."

"But *you* didn't go to an island," said the Savage, breaking a long silence.

The Controller smiled. "That's how I paid. By choosing to serve happiness. Other people's—not mine. It's lucky," he added, after a pause, "that there are such a lot of islands in the world. I don't know what we should do without them. Put you all in the lethal chamber, I suppose. By the way, Mr. Watson, would you like a tropical climate? The Marquesas, for example; or Samoa? Or something rather more bracing?"

Helmholtz rose from his pneumatic chair. "I should like a thoroughly bad climate," he answered. "I believe one would write better if the climate were bad. If there were a lot of wind and storms, for example . . ."

The Controller nodded his approbation. "I like your spirit, Mr. Watson. I like it very much indeed.

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As much as I officially disapprove of it." He smiled.
"What about the Falkland Islands?"

"Yes, I think that will do," Helmholtz answered.
"And now, if you don't mind, I'll go and see how poor Bernard's getting on."



CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ART, science—you seem to have paid a fairly high price for your happiness,” said the Savage, when they were alone. “Anything else?”

“Well, religion, of course,” replied the Controller. “There used to be something called God—before the Nine Years’ War. But I was forgetting; you know all about God, I suppose.”

“Well . . .” The Savage hesitated. He would have liked to say something about solitude, about night, about the mesa lying pale under the moon, about the precipice, the plunge into shadowy darkness, about death. He would have liked to speak; but there were no words. Not even in Shakespeare.

The Controller, meanwhile, had crossed to the other side of the room and was unlocking a large safe let into the wall between the bookshelves. The heavy door swung open. Rummaging in the dark-

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ness within, "It's a subject," he said, "that has always had a great interest for me." He pulled out a thick black volume. "You've never read this, for example."

The Savage took it. "*The Holy Bible, containing the Old and New Testaments,*" he read aloud from the title-page.

"Nor this." It was a small book and had lost its cover.

"*The Imitation of Christ.*"

"Nor this." He handed out another volume.

"*The Varieties of Religious Experience.* By William James."

"And I've got plenty more," Mustapha Mond continued, resuming his seat. "A whole collection of pornographic old books. God in the safe and Ford on the shelves." He pointed with a laugh to his avowed library—to the shelves of books, the racks full of reading-machine bobbins and sound-track rolls.

"But if you know about God, why don't you tell them?" asked the Savage indignantly. "Why don't you give them these books about God?"

"For the same reason as we don't give them *Othello*: they're old; they're about God hundreds of years ago. Not about God now."

"But God doesn't change."

"Men do, though."

"What difference does that make?"

"All the difference in the world," said Mustapha

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Mond. He got up again and walked to the safe. "There was a man called Cardinal Newman," he said. "A cardinal," he exclaimed parenthetically, "was a kind of Arch-Community-Songster."

"'I Pandulph, of fair Milan, cardinal.' I've read about them in Shakespeare."

"Of course you have. Well, as I was saying, there was a man called Cardinal Newman. Ah, here's the book." He pulled it out. "And while I'm about it I'll take this one too. It's by a man called Maine de Biran. He was a philosopher, if you know what that was."

"A man who dreams of fewer things than there are in heaven and earth," said the Savage promptly.

"Quite so. I'll read you one of the things he *did* dream of in a moment. Meanwhile, listen to what this old Arch-Community-Songster said." He opened the book at the place marked by a slip of paper and began to read. "We are not our own any more than what we possess is our own. We did not make ourselves, we cannot be supreme over ourselves. We are not our own masters. We are God's property. Is it not our happiness thus to view the matter? Is it any happiness or any comfort, to consider that we *are* our own? It may be thought so by the young and prosperous. These may think it a great thing to have everything, as they suppose, their own way—to depend on no one—to have to think of nothing out of sight, to be without the irk-

someness of continual acknowledgment, continual prayer, continual reference of what they do to the will of another. But as time goes on, they, as all men, will find that independence was not made for man—that it is an unnatural state—will do for a while, but will not carry us on safely to the end . . .’ ” Mustapha Mond paused, put down the first book and, picking up the other, turned over the pages. “Take this, for example,” he said, and in his deep voice once more began to read: “ ‘A man grows old; he feels in himself that radical sense of weakness, of listlessness, of discomfort, which accompanies the advance of age; and, feeling thus, imagines himself merely sick, lulling his fears with the notion that this distressing condition is due to some particular cause, from which, as from an illness, he hopes to recover. Vain imaginings! That sickness is old age; and a horrible disease it is. They say that it is the fear of death and of what comes after death that makes men turn to religion as they advance in years. But my own experience has given me the conviction that, quite apart from any such terrors or imaginings, the religious sentiment tends to develop as we grow older; to develop because, as the passions grow calm, as the fancy and sensibilities are less excited and less excitable, our reason becomes less troubled in its working, less obscured by the images, desires and distractions, in which it used to be absorbed; whereupon God emerges as from behind a cloud;

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our soul feels, sees, turns towards the source of all light; turns naturally and inevitably; for now that all that gave to the world of sensations its life and charm has begun to leak away from us, now that phenomenal existence is no more bolstered up by impressions from within or from without, we feel the need to lean on something that abides, something that will never play us false—a reality, an absolute and everlasting truth. Yes, we inevitably turn to God; for this religious sentiment is of its nature so pure, so delightful to the soul that experiences it, that it makes up to us for all our other losses.’ ” Mustapha Mond shut the book and leaned back in his chair. “One of the numerous things in heaven and earth that these philosophers didn’t dream about was this” (he waved his hand), “us, the modern world. ‘You can only be independent of God while you’ve got youth and prosperity; independence won’t take you safely to the end.’ Well, we’ve now got youth and prosperity right up to the end. What follows? Evidently, that we can be independent of God. ‘The religious sentiment will compensate us for all our losses.’ But there aren’t any losses for us to compensate; religious sentiment is superfluous. And why should we go hunting for a substitute for youthful desires, when youthful desires never fail? A substitute for distractions, when we go on enjoying all the old fooleries to the very last? What need have we of repose when our minds and bodies continue to

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delight in activity? of consolation, when we have *soma*? of something immovable, when there is the social order?"

"Then you think there is no God?"

"No, I think there quite probably is one."

"Then why? . . ."

Mustapha Mond checked him. "But he manifests himself in different ways to different men. In pre-modern times he manifested himself as the being that's described in these books. Now . . ."

"How does he manifest himself now?" asked the Savage.

"Well, he manifests himself as an absence; as though he weren't there at all."

"That's your fault."

"Call it the fault of civilization. God isn't compatible with machinery and scientific medicine and universal happiness. You must make your choice. Our civilization has chosen machinery and medicine and happiness. That's why I have to keep these books locked up in the safe. They're smut. People would be shocked if . . ."

The Savage interrupted him. "But isn't it *natural* to feel there's a God?"

"You might as well ask if it's natural to do up one's trousers with zippers," said the Controller sarcastically. "You remind me of another of those old fellows called Bradley. He defined philosophy as the finding of bad reason for what one believes by instinct. As

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if one believed anything by instinct! One believes things because one has been conditioned to believe them. Finding bad reasons for what one believes for other bad reasons—that's philosophy. People believe in God because they've been conditioned to believe in God."

"But all the same," insisted the Savage, "it is natural to believe in God when you're alone—quite alone, in the night, thinking about death . . ."

"But people never are alone now," said Mustapha Mond. "We make them hate solitude; and we arrange their lives so that it's almost impossible for them ever to have it."

The Savage nodded gloomily. At Malpais he had suffered because they had shut him out from the communal activities of the pueblo, in civilized London he was suffering because he could never escape from those communal activities, never be quietly alone.

"Do you remember that bit in *King Lear*?" said the Savage at last. "'The gods are just and of our pleasant vices make instruments to plague us; the dark and vicious place where thee he got cost him his eyes,' and Edmund answers—you remember, he's wounded, he's dying—'Thou hast spoken right; 'tis true. The wheel has come full circle; I am here.' What about that now? Doesn't there seem to be a God managing things, punishing, rewarding?"

"Well, does there?" questioned the Controller in

his turn. "You can indulge in any number of pleasant vices with a freemartin and run no risks of having your eyes put out by your son's mistress. 'The wheel has come full circle; I am here.' But where would Edmund be nowadays? Sitting in a pneumatic chair, with his arm round a girl's waist, sucking away at his sex-hormone chewing-gum and looking at the feelies. The gods are just. No doubt. But their code of law is dictated, in the last resort, by the people who organize society; Providence takes its cue from men."

"Are you sure?" asked the Savage. "Are you quite sure that the Edmund in that pneumatic chair hasn't been just as heavily punished as the Edmund who's wounded and bleeding to death? The gods are just. Haven't they used his pleasant vices as an instrument to degrade him?"

"Degrade him from what position? As a happy, hard-working, goods-consuming citizen he's perfect. Of course, if you choose some other standard than ours, then perhaps you might say he was degraded. But you've got to stick to one set of postulates. You can't play Electro-magnetic Golf according to the rules of Centrifugal Bumble-puppy."

"But value dwells not in particular will," said the Savage. "It holds his estimate and dignity as well wherein 'tis precious of itself as in the prizer."

"Come, come," protested Mustapha Mond, "that's going rather far, isn't it?"

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"If you allowed yourselves to think of God, you wouldn't allow yourselves to be degraded by pleasant vices. You'd have a reason for bearing things patiently, for doing things with courage. I've seen it with the Indians."

"I'm sure you have," said Mustapha Mond. "But then we aren't Indians. There isn't any need for a civilized man to bear anything that's seriously unpleasant. And as for doing things—Ford forbid that he should get the idea into his head. It would upset the whole social order if men started doing things on their own."

"What about self-denial, then? If you had a God, you'd have a reason for self-denial."

"But industrial civilization is only possible when there's no self-denial. Self-indulgence up to the very limits imposed by hygiene and economics. Otherwise the wheels stop turning."

"You'd have a reason for chastity!" said the Savage, blushing a little as he spoke the words.

"But chastity means passion, chastity means neurasthenia. And passion and neurasthenia mean instability. And instability means the end of civilization. You can't have a lasting civilization without plenty of pleasant vices."

"But God's the reason for everything noble and fine and heroic. If you had a God . . ."

"My dear young friend," said Mustapha Mond, "civilization has absolutely no need of nobility or

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heroism. These things are symptoms of political inefficiency. In a properly organized society like ours, nobody has any opportunities for being noble or heroic. Conditions have got to be thoroughly unstable before the occasion can arise. Where there are wars, where there are divided allegiances, where there are temptations to be resisted, objects of love to be fought for or defended—there, obviously, nobility and heroism have some sense. But there aren't any wars nowadays. The greatest care is taken to prevent you from loving any one too much. There's no such thing as a divided allegiance; you're so conditioned that you can't help doing what you ought to do. And what you ought to do is on the whole so pleasant, so many of the natural impulses are allowed free play, that there really aren't any temptations to resist. And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there's always *soma* to give you a holiday from the facts. And there's always *soma* to calm your anger, to reconcile you to your enemies, to make you patient and long-suffering. In the past you could only accomplish these things by making a great effort and after years of hard moral training. Now, you swallow two or three half-gramme tablets, and there you are. Anybody can be virtuous now. You can carry at least half your morality about in a bottle. Christianity without tears—that's what *soma* is."

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“But the tears are necessary. Don’t you remember what Othello said? ‘If after every tempest came such calms, may the winds blow till they have wakened death.’ There’s a story one of the old Indians used to tell us, about the Girl of Mátaski. The young men who wanted to marry her had to do a morning’s hoeing in her garden. It seemed easy; but there were flies and mosquitoes, magic ones. Most of the young men simply couldn’t stand the biting and stinging. But the one that could—he got the girl.”

“Charming! But in civilized countries,” said the Controller, “you can have girls without hoeing for them; and there aren’t any flies or mosquitoes to sting you. We got rid of them all centuries ago.”

The Savage nodded, frowning. “You got rid of them. Yes, that’s just like you. Getting rid of everything unpleasant instead of learning to put up with it. Whether ’tis better in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles and by opposing end them . . . But you don’t do either. Neither suffer nor oppose. You just abolish the slings and arrows. It’s too easy.”

He was suddenly silent, thinking of his mother. In her room on the thirty-seventh floor, Linda had floated in a sea of singing lights and perfumed caresses—floated away, out of space, out of time, out of the prison of her memories, her habits, her aged and bloated body. And Tomakin, ex-Director of

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Hatcheries and Conditioning, Tomakin, was still on holiday—on holiday from humiliation and pain, in a world where he could not hear those words, that derisive laughter, could not see that hideous face, feel those moist and flabby arms round his neck, in a beautiful world . . .

“What you need,” the Savage went on, “is something *with* tears for a change. Nothing costs enough here.”

(“Twelve and a half million dollars,” Henry Foster had protested when the Savage told him that. “Twelve and a half million—that’s what the new Conditioning Centre cost. Not a cent less.”)

“Exposing what is mortal and unsure to all that fortune, death and danger dare, even for an egg-shell. Isn’t there something in that?” he asked, looking up at Mustapha Mond. “Quite apart from God—though of course God would be a reason for it. Isn’t there something in living dangerously?”

“There’s a great deal in it,” the Controller replied. “Men and women must have their adrenals stimulated from time to time.”

“What?” questioned the Savage, uncomprehending.

“It’s one of the conditions of perfect health. That’s why we’ve made the V.P.S. treatments compulsory.”

“V.P.S.?”

“Violent Passion Surrogate. Regularly once a month. We flood the whole system with adrenin.

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It's the complete physiological equivalent of fear and rage. All the tonic effects of murdering Desdemona and being murdered by Othello, without any of the inconveniences."

"But I like the inconveniences."

"We don't," said the Controller. "We prefer to do things comfortably."

"But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin."

"In fact," said Mustapha Mond, "you're claiming the right to be unhappy."

"All right then," said the Savage defiantly, "I'm claiming the right to be unhappy."

"Not to mention the right to grow old and ugly and impotent; the right to have syphilis and cancer; the right to have too little to eat; the right to be lousy; the right to live in constant apprehension of what may happen to-morrow; the right to catch typhoid; the right to be tortured by unspeakable pains of every kind."

There was a long silence.

"I claim them all," said the Savage at last.

Mustapha Mond shrugged his shoulders. "You're welcome," he said.



CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

THE door was ajar; they entered.

“John!”

From the bathroom came an unpleasant and characteristic sound.

“Is there anything the matter?” Helmholtz called.

There was no answer. The unpleasant sound was repeated, twice; there was silence. Then, with a click, the bathroom door opened and, very pale, the Savage emerged.

“I say,” Helmholtz exclaimed solicitously, “you *do* look ill, John!”

“Did you eat something that didn’t agree with you?” asked Bernard.

The Savage nodded. “I ate civilization.”

“What?”

“It poisoned me; I was defiled. And then,” he added, in a lower tone, “I ate my own wickedness.”

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"Yes, but what exactly? . . . I mean, just now you were . . ."

"Now I am purified," said the Savage. "I drank some mustard and warm water."

The others stared at him in astonishment. "Do you mean to say that you were doing it on purpose?" asked Bernard.

"That's how the Indians always purify themselves." He sat down and, sighing, passed his hand across his forehead. "I shall rest for a few minutes," he said. "I'm rather tired."

"Well, I'm not surprised," said Helmholtz. After a silence, "We've come to say good-bye," he went on in another tone. "We're off to-morrow morning."

"Yes, we're off to-morrow," said Bernard on whose face the Savage remarked a new expression of determined resignation. "And by the way, John," he continued, leaning forward in his chair and laying a hand on the Savage's knee, "I want to say how sorry I am about everything that happened yesterday." He blushed. "How ashamed," he went on, in spite of the unsteadiness of his voice, "how really . . ."

The Savage cut him short and, taking his hand, affectionately pressed it.

"Helmholtz was wonderful to me," Bernard resumed, after a little pause. "If it hadn't been for him, I should . . ."

"Now, now," Helmholtz protested.

There was a silence. In spite of their sadness—

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because of it, even; for their sadness was the symptom of their love for one another—the three young men were happy.

“I went to see the Controller this morning,” said the Savage at last.

“What for?”

“To ask if I mightn’t go to the islands with you.”

“And what did he say?” asked Helmholtz eagerly.

The Savage shook his head. “He wouldn’t let me.”

“Why not?”

“He said he wanted to go on with the experiment. But I’m damned,” the Savage added, with sudden fury, “I’m damned if I’ll go on being experimented with. Not for all the Controllers in the world. *I shall go away to-morrow too.*”

“But where?” the others asked in unison.

The Savage shrugged his shoulders. “Anywhere. I don’t care. So long as I can be alone.”

From Guildford the down-line followed the Wey valley to Godalming, then, over Milford and Witley, proceeded to Haslemere and on through Petersfield towards Portsmouth. Roughly parallel to it, the up-line passed over Worplesden, Tongham, Puttenham, Elstead and Grayshott. Between the Hog’s Back and Hindhead there were points where the two lines were not more than six or seven kilometres apart. The distance was too small for careless flyers—

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particularly at night and when they had taken half a gramme too much. There had been accidents. Serious ones. It had been decided to deflect the up-line a few kilometres to the west. Between Grayshott and Tongham four abandoned air-lighthouses marked the course of the old Portsmouth-to-London road. The skies above them were silent and deserted. It was over Selborne, Bordon and Farnham that the helicopters now ceaselessly hummed and roared.

The Savage had chosen as his hermitage the old lighthouse which stood on the crest of the hill between Puttenham and Elstead. The building was of ferro-concrete and in excellent condition—almost too comfortable the Savage had thought when he first explored the place, almost too civilizedly luxurious. He pacified his conscience by promising himself a compensatingly harder self-discipline, purifications the more complete and thorough. His first night in the hermitage was, deliberately, a sleepless one. He spent the hours on his knees praying, now to that Heaven from which the guilty Claudius had begged forgiveness, now in Zuñi to Awonawilona, now to Jesus and Pookong, now to his own guardian animal, the eagle. From time to time he stretched out his arms as though he were on the cross, and held them thus through long minutes of an ache that gradually increased till it became a tremulous and excruciating agony; held them, in voluntary crucifixion, while he repeated, through clenched teeth (the sweat, mean-

while, pouring down his face), "Oh, forgive me! Oh, make me pure! Oh, help me to be good!" again and again, till he was on the point of fainting from the pain.

When morning came, he felt he had earned the right to inhabit the lighthouse; yes, even though there still *was* glass in most of the windows, even though the view from the platform *was* so fine. For the very reason why he had chosen the lighthouse had become almost instantly a reason for going somewhere else. He had decided to live there because the view was so beautiful, because, from his vantage point, he seemed to be looking out on to the incarnation of a divine being. But who was he to be pampered with the daily and hourly sight of loveliness? Who was he to be living in the visible presence of God? All he deserved to live in was some filthy sty, some blind hole in the ground. Stiff and still aching after his long night of pain, but for that very reason inwardly reassured, he climbed up to the platform of his tower, he looked out over the bright sunrise world which he had regained the right to inhabit. On the north the view was bounded by the long chalk ridge of the Hog's Back, from behind whose eastern extremity rose the towers of the seven skyscrapers which constituted Guildford. Seeing them, the Savage made a grimace; but he was to become reconciled to them in course of time; for at night they twinkled gaily with geometrical constellations, or

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else, flood-lighted, pointed their luminous fingers (with a gesture whose significance nobody in England but the Savage now understood) solemnly towards the plumbless mysteries of heaven.

In the valley which separated the Hog's Back from the sandy hill on which the lighthouse stood, Puttenham was a modest little village nine stories high, with silos, a poultry farm, and a small vitamin-D factory. On the other side of the lighthouse, towards the South, the ground fell away in long slopes of heather to a chain of ponds.

Beyond them, above the intervening woods, rose the fourteen-story tower of Elstead. Dim in the hazy English air, Hindhead and Selborne invited the eye into a blue romantic distance. But it was not alone the distance that had attracted the Savage to his lighthouse; the near was as seductive as the far. The woods, the open stretches of heather and yellow gorse, the clumps of Scotch firs, the shining ponds with their overhanging birch trees, their water lilies, their beds of rushes—these were beautiful and, to an eye accustomed to the aridities of the American desert, astonishing. And then the solitude! Whole days passed during which he never saw a human being. The lighthouse was only a quarter of an hour's flight from the Charing-T Tower; but the hills of Malpais were hardly more deserted than this Surrey heath. The crowds that daily left London left it only to play Electro-magnetic Golf or Tennis. Puttenham pos-

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sessed no links; the nearest Riemann-surfaces were at Guildford. Flowers and a landscape were the only attractions here. And so, as there was no good reason for coming, nobody came. During the first days the Savage lived alone and undisturbed.

Of the money which, on his first arrival, John had received for his personal expenses, most had been spent on his equipment. Before leaving London he had bought four viscose-woollen blankets, rope and string, nails, glue, a few tools, matches (though he intended in due course to make a fire drill), some pots and pans, two dozen packets of seeds, and ten kilogrammes of wheat flour. "No, *not* synthetic starch and cotton-waste flour-substitute," he had insisted. "Even though it is more nourishing." But when it came to pan-glandular biscuits and vitaminized beef-surrogate, he had not been able to resist the shopman's persuasion. Looking at the tins now, he bitterly reproached himself for his weakness. Loathsome civilized stuff! He had made up his mind that he would never eat it, even if he were starving. "That'll teach them," he thought vindictively. It would also teach him.

He counted his money. The little that remained would be enough, he hoped, to tide him over the winter. By next spring, his garden would be producing enough to make him independent of the outside world. Meanwhile, there would always be game. He had seen plenty of rabbits, and there were water-

fowl on the ponds. He set to work at once to make a bow and arrows.

There were ash trees near the lighthouse and, for arrow shafts, a whole copse full of beautifully straight hazel saplings. He began by felling a young ash, cut out six feet of unbranched stem, stripped off the bark and, paring by paring, shaved away the white wood, as old Mitsima had taught him, until he had a stave of his own height, stiff at the thickened centre, lively and quick at the slender tips. The work gave him an intense pleasure. After those weeks of idleness in London, with nothing to do, whenever he wanted anything, but to press a switch or turn a handle, it was pure delight to be doing something that demanded skill and patience.

He had almost finished whittling the stave into shape, when he realized with a start that he was singing—*singing!* It was as though, stumbling upon himself from the outside, he had suddenly caught himself out, taken himself flagrantly at fault. Guiltily he blushed. After all, it was not to sing and enjoy himself that he had come here. It was to escape further contamination by the filth of civilized life; it was to be purified and made good; it was actively to make amends. He realized to his dismay that, absorbed in the whittling of his bow, he had forgotten what he had sworn to himself he would constantly remember—poor Linda, and his own murderous unkindness to her, and those loathsome twins.

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swarming like lice across the mystery of her death, insulting, with their presence, not merely his own grief and repentance, but the very gods themselves. He had sworn to remember, he had sworn unceasingly to make amends. And here was he, sitting happily over his bow-stave, singing, actually singing. . . .

He went indoors, opened the box of mustard, and put some water to boil on the fire.

Half an hour later, three Delta-Minus landworkers from one of the Puttenham Bokanovsky Groups happened to be driving to Elstead and, at the top of the hill, were astonished to see a young man standing outside the abandoned lighthouse stripped to the waist and hitting himself with a whip of knotted cords. His back was horizontally streaked with crimson, and from weal to weal ran thin trickles of blood. The driver of the lorry pulled up at the side of the road and, with his two companions, stared open-mouthed at the extraordinary spectacle. One, two, three—they counted the strokes. After the eighth, the young man interrupted his self-punishment to run to the wood's edge and there be violently sick. When he had finished, he picked up the whip and began hitting himself again. Nine, ten, eleven, twelve . . .

"Ford!" whispered the driver. And his twins were of the same opinion.

"Fordey!" they said.

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Three days later, like turkey buzzards settling on a corpse, the reporters came.

Dried and hardened over a slow fire of green wood, the bow was ready. The Savage was busy on his arrows. Thirty hazel sticks had been whittled and dried, tipped with sharp nails, carefully nocked. He had made a raid one night on the Puttenham poultry farm, and now had feathers enough to equip a whole armoury. It was at work upon the feathering of his shafts that the first of the reporters found him. Noiseless on his pneumatic shoes, the man came up behind him.

“Good-morning, Mr. Savage,” he said. “I am the representative of *The Hourly Radio*.”

Startled as though by the bite of a snake, the Savage sprang to his feet, scattering arrows, feathers, glue-pot and brush in all directions.

“I beg your pardon,” said the reporter, with genuine compunction. “I had no intention . . .” He touched his hat—the aluminium stove-pipe hat in which he carried his wireless receiver and transmitter. “Excuse my not taking it off,” he said. “It’s a bit heavy. Well, as I was saying, I am the representative of *The Hourly* . . .”

“What do you want?” asked the Savage, scowling. The reporter returned his most ingratiating smile.

“Well, of course, our readers would be profoundly interested . . .” He put his head on one side, his smile became almost coquettish. “Just a few words

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from you, Mr. Savage." And rapidly, with a series of ritual gestures, he uncoiled two wires connected to the portable battery buckled round his waist; plugged them simultaneously into the sides of his aluminium hat; touched a spring on the crown—and antennæ shot up into the air; touched another spring on the peak of the brim—and, like a jack-in-the-box, out jumped a microphone and hung there, quivering, six inches in front of his nose; pulled down a pair of receivers over his ears; pressed a switch on the left side of the hat—and from within came a faint waspy buzzing; turned a knob on the right—and the buzzing was interrupted by a stethoscopic wheeze and crackle, by hiccoughs and sudden squeaks. "Hullo," he said to the microphone, "hullo, hullo . . ." A bell suddenly rang inside his hat. "Is that you, Edzel? Primo Mellon speaking. Yes, I've got hold of him. Mr. Savage will now take the microphone and say a few words. Won't you, Mr. Savage?" He looked up at the Savage with another of those winning smiles of his. "Just tell our readers why you came here. What made you leave London (hold on, Edzel!) so very suddenly. And, of course, that whip." (The Savage started. How did they know about the whip?) "We're all crazy to know about the whip. And then something about Civilization. You know the sort of stuff. 'What I think of the Civilized Girl.' Just a few words, a very few . . ."

The Savage obeyed with a disconcerting literal-

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ness. Five words he uttered and no more—five words, the same as those he had said to Bernard about the Arch-Community-Songster of Canterbury. “*Háni! Sons éso tse-ná!*” And seizing the reporter by the shoulder, he spun him round (the young man revealed himself invitingly well-covered), aimed and, with all the force and accuracy of a champion foot-and-mouth-baller, delivered a most prodigious kick.

Eight minutes later, a new edition of *The Hourly Radio* was on sale in the streets of London. “HOURLY RADIO REPORTER HAS COCCYX KICKED BY MYSTERY SAVAGE,” ran the headlines on the front page. “SENSATION IN SURREY.”

“Sensation even in London,” thought the reporter when, on his return, he read the words. And a very painful sensation, what was more. He sat down gingerly to his luncheon.

Undeterred by that cautionary bruise on their colleague’s coccyx, four other reporters, representing the *New York Times*, the Frankfurt *Four-Dimensional Continuum*, *The Fordian Science Monitor*, and *The Delta Mirror*, called that afternoon at the lighthouse and met with receptions of progressively increasing violence.

From a safe distance and still rubbing his buttocks, “Benighted fool!” shouted the man from *The Fordian Science Monitor*, “why don’t you take *soma*?”

“Get away!” The Savage shook his fist.

The other retreated a few steps then turned round

again. "Evil's an unreality if you take a couple of grammes."

"*Kohakwa iyathtokyai!*" The tone was menacingly derisive.

"Pain's a delusion."

"Oh, is it?" said the Savage and, picking up a thick hazel switch, strode forward.

The man from *The Fordian Science Monitor* made a dash for his helicopter.

After that the Savage was left for a time in peace. A few helicopters came and hovered inquisitively round the tower. He shot an arrow into the impotunately nearest of them. It pierced the aluminium floor of the cabin; there was a shrill yell, and the machine went rocketing up into the air with all the acceleration that its super-charger could give it. The others, in future, kept their distance respectfully. Ignoring their tiresome humming (he likened himself in his imagination to one of the suitors of the Maiden of Mátsaki, unmoved and persistent among the winged vermin), the Savage dug at what was to be his garden. After a time the vermin evidently became bored and flew away; for hours at a stretch the sky above his head was empty and, but for the larks, silent.

The weather was breathlessly hot, there was thunder in the air. He had dug all the morning and was resting, stretched out along the floor. And suddenly the thought of Lenina was a real presence, naked and

tangible, saying "Sweet!" and "Put your arms round me!"—in shoes and socks, perfumed. Impudent strumpet! But oh, oh, her arms round his neck, the lifting of her breasts, her mouth! Eternity was in our lips and eyes. Lenina . . . No, no, no, no! He sprang to his feet and, half naked as he was, ran out of the house. At the edge of the heath stood a clump of hoary juniper bushes. He flung himself against them, he embraced, not the smooth body of his desires, but an armful of green spikes. Sharp, with a thousand points, they pricked him. He tried to think of poor Linda, breathless and dumb, with her clutching hands and the unutterable terror in her eyes. Poor Linda whom he had sworn to remember. But it was still the presence of Lenina that haunted him. Lenina whom he had promised to forget. Even through the stab and sting of the juniper needles, his wincing flesh was aware of her, unescapably real. "Sweet, sweet . . . And if you wanted me too, why didn't you . . ."

The whip was hanging on a nail by the door, ready to hand against the arrival of reporters. In a frenzy the Savage ran back to the house, seized it, whirled it. The knotted cords bit into his flesh.

"Strumpet! Strumpet!" he shouted at every blow as though it were Lenina (and how frantically, without knowing it, he wished it were!), white, warm, scented, infamous Lenina that he was flogging thus. "Strumpet!" And then, in a voice of despair, "Oh,

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Linda, forgive me. Forgive me, God. I'm bad. I'm wicked. I'm . . . No, no, you strumpet, you strumpet!"

From his carefully constructed hide in the wood three hundred metres away, Darwin Bonaparte, the Feely Corporation's most expert big game photographer had watched the whole proceedings. Patience and skill had been rewarded. He had spent three days sitting inside the bole of an artificial oak tree, three nights crawling on his belly through the heather, hiding microphones in gorse bushes, burying wires in the soft grey sand. Seventy-two hours of profound discomfort. But now the great moment had come—the greatest, Darwin Bonaparte had time to reflect, as he moved among his instruments, the greatest since his taking of the famous all-howling stereoscopic feely of the gorillas' wedding. "Splendid," he said to himself, as the Savage started his astonishing performance. "Splendid!" He kept his telescopic cameras carefully aimed—glued to their moving objective; clapped on a higher power to get a close-up of the frantic and distorted face (admirable!); switched over, for half a minute, to slow motion (an exquisitely comical effect, he promised himself); listened in, meanwhile, to the blows, the groans, the wild and raving words that were being recorded on the sound-track at the edge of his film, tried the effect of a little amplification (yes, that was decidedly better); was delighted to hear, in a mo-

mentary lull, the shrill singing of a lark; wished the Savage would turn round so that he could get a good close-up of the blood on his back—and almost instantly (what astonishing luck!) the accommodating fellow did turn round, and he was able to take a perfect close-up.

“Well, that was grand!” he said to himself when it was all over. “Really grand!” He mopped his face. When they had put in the feely effects at the studio, it would be a wonderful film. Almost as good, thought Darwin Bonaparte, as the *Sperm Whale’s Love-Life*—and that, by Ford, was saying a good deal!

Twelve days later *The Savage of Surrey* had been released and could be seen, heard and felt in every first-class feely-palace in Western Europe.

The effect of Darwin Bonaparte’s film was immediate and enormous. On the afternoon which followed the evening of its release John’s rustic solitude was suddenly broken by the arrival overhead of a great swarm of helicopters.

He was digging in his garden—digging, too, in his own mind, laboriously turning up the substance of his thought. Death—and he drove in his spade once, and again, and yet again. And all our yesterdays have lighted fools the way to dusty death. A convincing thunder rumbled through the words. He lifted another spadeful of earth. Why had Linda died? Why had she been allowed to become gradually less than human and at last . . . He shuddered.

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A good kissing carrion. He planted his foot on his spade and stamped it fiercely into the tough ground. As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods; they kill us for their sport. Thunder again; words that proclaimed themselves true—truer somehow than truth itself. And yet that same Gloucester had called them ever-gentle gods. Besides, thy best of rest is sleep, and that thou oft provok'st; yet grossly fear'st thy death which is no more. No more than sleep. Sleep. Perchance to dream. His spade struck against a stone; he stooped to pick it up. For in that sleep of death, what dreams? . . .

A humming overhead had become a roar; and suddenly he was in shadow, there was something between the sun and him. He looked up, startled, from his digging, from his thoughts; looked up in a dazzled bewilderment, his mind still wandering in that other world of truer-than-truth, still focussed on the immensities of death and deity; looked up and saw, close above him, the swarm of hovering machines. Like locusts they came, hung poised, descended all around him on the heather. And from out of the bellies of these giant grasshoppers stepped men in white viscose-flannels, women (for the weather was hot) in acetate-shantung pyjamas or velveteen shorts and sleeveless, half-unzippered singlets—one couple from each. In a few minutes there were dozens of them, standing in a wide circle round the lighthouse, staring, laughing, clicking

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their cameras, throwing (as to an ape) pea-nuts, packets of sex-hormone chewing-gum, pan-glandular *petits beurres*. And every moment—for across the Hog's Back the stream of traffic now flowed unceasingly—their numbers increased. As in a nightmare, the dozens became scores, the scores hundreds.

The Savage had retreated towards cover, and now, in the posture of an animal at bay, stood with his back to the wall of the lighthouse, staring from face to face in speechless horror, like a man out of his senses.

From this stupor he was aroused to a more immediate sense of reality by the impact on his cheek of a well-aimed packet of chewing-gum. A shock of startling pain—and he was broad awake, awake and fiercely angry.

“Go away!” he shouted.

The ape had spoken; there was a burst of laughter and hand-clapping. “Good old Savage! Hurrah, hurrah!” And through the babel he heard cries of: “Whip, whip, the whip!”

Acting on the word's suggestion, he seized the bunch of knotted cords from its nail behind the door and shook it at his tormentors.

There was a yell of ironical applause.

Menacingly he advanced towards them. A woman cried out in fear. The line wavered at its most immediately threatened point, then stiffened again, stood firm. The consciousness of being in overwhelm-

ing force had given these sightseers a courage which the Savage had not expected of them. Taken aback, he halted and looked round.

"Why don't you leave me alone?" There was an almost plaintive note in his anger.

"Have a few magnesium-salted almonds!" said the man who, if the Savage were to advance, would be the first to be attacked. He held out a packet. "They're really very good, you know," he added, with a rather nervous smile of propitiation. "And the magnesium salts will help to keep you young."

The Savage ignored his offer. "What do you want with me?" he asked, turning from one grinning face to another. "What do you want with me?"

"The whip," answered a hundred voices confusedly. "Do the whipping stunt. Let's see the whipping stunt."

Then, in unison and on a slow, heavy rhythm, "We—want—the whip," shouted a group at the end of the line. "We—want—the whip."

Others at once took up the cry, and the phrase was repeated, parrot-fashion, again and again, with an ever-growing volume of sound, until, by the seventh or eighth reiteration, no other word was being spoken. "We—want—the whip."

They were all crying together; and, intoxicated by the noise, the unanimity, the sense of rhythmical atonement, they might, it seemed, have gone on for hours—almost indefinitely. But at about the twenty-

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fifth repetition the proceedings were startlingly interrupted. Yet another helicopter had arrived from across the Hog's Back, hung poised above the crowd, then dropped within a few yards of where the Savage was standing, in the open space between the line of sightseers and the lighthouse. The roar of the air screws momentarily drowned the shouting; then, as the machine touched the ground and the engines were turned off: "We—want—the whip; we—want—the whip," broke out again in the same loud, insistent monotone.

The door of the helicopter opened, and out stepped, first a fair and ruddy-faced young man, then, in green velveteen shorts, white shirt, and jockey cap, a young woman.

At the sight of the young woman, the Savage started, recoiled, turned pale.

The young woman stood, smiling at him—an uncertain, imploring, almost abject smile. The seconds passed. Her lips moved, she was saying something; but the sound of her voice was covered by the loud reiterated refrain of the sightseers.

"We—want—the whip! We—want—the whip!"

The young woman pressed both hands to her left side, and on that peach-bright, doll-beautiful face of hers appeared a strangely incongruous expression of yearning distress. Her blue eyes seemed to grow larger, brighter; and suddenly two tears rolled down her cheeks. Inaudibly, she spoke again; then, with a

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quick, impassioned gesture stretched out her arms towards the Savage, stepped forward.

“We—want—the whip! We—want . . .”

And all of a sudden they had what they wanted.

“Strumpet!” The Savage had rushed at her like a madman. “Fitchew!” Like a madman, he was slashing at her with his whip of small cords.

Terrified, she had turned to flee, had tripped and fallen in the heather. “Henry, Henry!” she shouted. But her ruddy-faced companion had bolted out of harm’s way behind the helicopter.

With a whoop of delighted excitement the line broke; there was a convergent stampede towards that magnetic centre of attraction. Pain was a fascinating horror.

“Fry, lechery, fry!” Frenzied, the Savage slashed again.

Hungrily they gathered round, pushing and scrambling like swine about the trough.

“Oh, the flesh!” The Savage ground his teeth. This time it was on his shoulders that the whip descended. “Kill it, kill it!”

Drawn by the fascination of the horror of pain and, from within, impelled by that habit of coöperation, that desire for unanimity and atonement, which their conditioning had so ineradicably implanted in them, they began to mime the frenzy of his gestures, striking at one another as the Savage struck at his own rebellious flesh, or at that plump in-

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carnation of turpitude writhing in the heather at his feet.

“Kill it, kill it, kill it . . .” The Savage went on shouting.

Then suddenly somebody started singing “Orgy-porgy” and, in a moment, they had all caught up the refrain and, singing, had begun to dance. Orgy-porgy, round and round and round, beating one another in six-eight time. Orgy-porgy . . .

It was after midnight when the last of the helicopters took its flight. Stupefied by *soma*, and exhausted by a long-drawn frenzy of sensuality, the Savage lay sleeping in the heather. The sun was already high when he awoke. He lay for a moment, blinking in owlish incomprehension at the light; then suddenly remembered—everything.

“Oh, my God, my God!” He covered his eyes with his hand.

That evening the swarm of helicopters that came buzzing across the Hog’s Back was a dark cloud ten kilometres long. The description of last night’s orgy of atonement had been in all the papers.

“Savage!” called the first arrivals, as they alighted from their machine. “Mr. Savage!”

There was no answer.

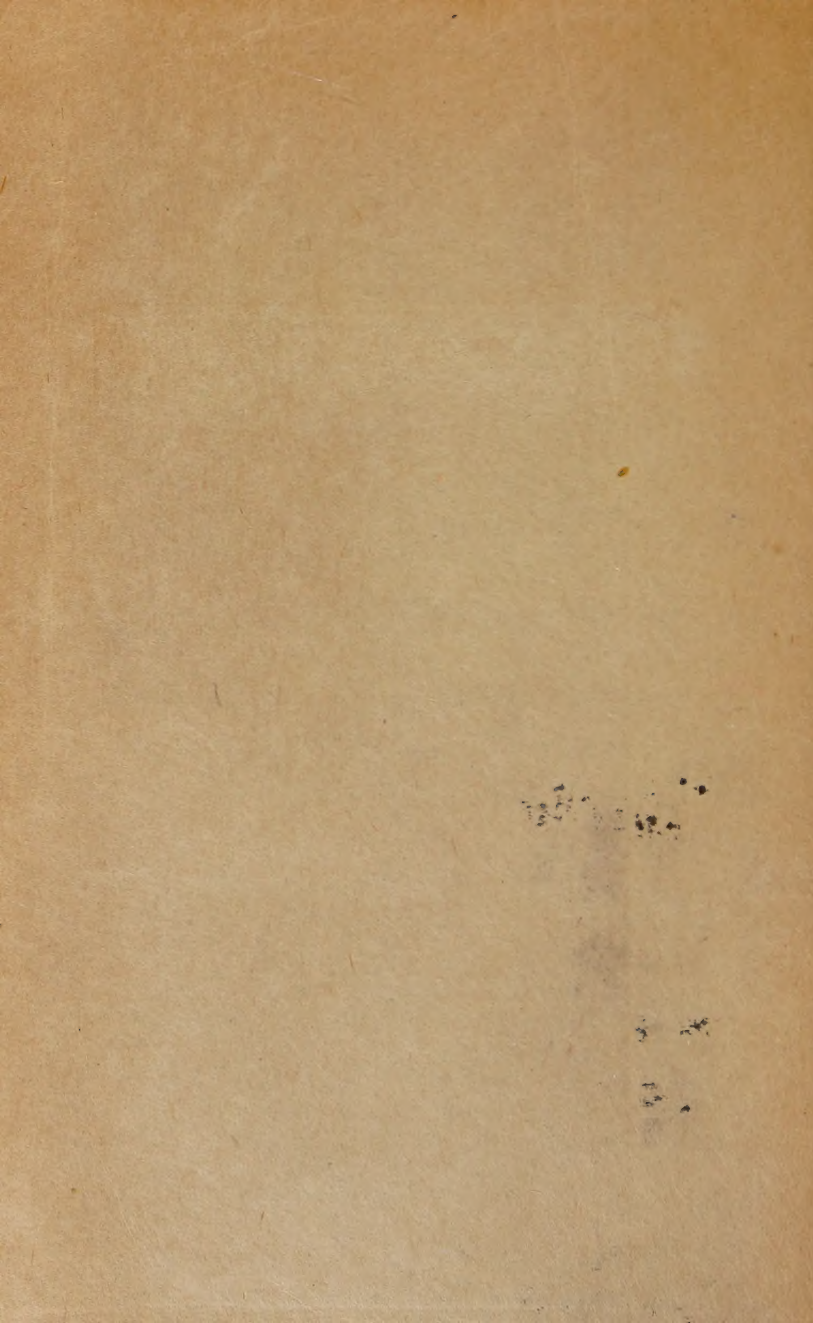
The door of the lighthouse was ajar. They pushed it open and walked into a shuttered twilight.

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Through an archway on the further side of the room they could see the bottom of the staircase that led up to the higher floors. Just under the crown of the arch dangled a pair of feet.

“Mr. Savage!”

Slowly, very slowly, like two unhurried compass needles, the feet turned towards the right; north, north-east, east, south-east, south, south-south-west; then paused, and, after a few seconds, turned as unhurriedly back towards the left. South-south-west, south, south-east, east. . . .



PR 6015 .U9 R4

Huxley, Aldous, 1894-1963.

Retrospect

