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Contents

[WHERE WAS WYCH STREET?, by
Stacy Aumonier](#)

[THE OLIVE, by Algernon Blackwood](#)

[ONCE A HERO, by Harold Brighouse](#)

[THE PENSIONER, by William Caine](#)

[BROADSHEET BALLAD, by A. E.
Coppard](#)

[THE CHRISTMAS PRESENT, by
Richmal Crompton](#)

["GENIUS", by Elinor Mordaunt](#)

[THE DEVIL TO PAY, by Max
Pemberton](#)

[EMPTY ARMS, by Roland Pertwee](#)

[LENA WRACE, by May Sinclair](#)

[THE WOMAN WHO SAT STILL, by
Parry Truscott](#)

WHERE WAS WYCH STREET?, by Stacy Aumonier

(From *The Strand Magazine* and *The Saturday Evening Post*)

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Copyright, 1922, by Stacy Aumonier. Reprinted by
permission of the author and of Curtis Brown, Ltd. people
were Mr. and Mrs. Dawes. Mr. Dawes was an entirely negative
person, but Mrs. Dawes shone by virtue of a high, whining,
insistent voice, keyed to within half a note of hysteria.*

In the public bar of the Wagtail, in Wapping, four men and a woman were drinking beer and discussing diseases. It was not a pretty subject, and the company was certainly not a handsome one. It was a dark November evening, and the dingy lighting of the bar seemed but to emphasize the bleak exterior. Drifts of fog and damp from without mingled with the smoke of shag. The sanded floor was kicked into a muddy morass not unlike the surface of the pavement. An old lady down the street had died from pneumonia the previous evening, and the event supplied a fruitful topic of conversation. The things that one could get! Everywhere were germs eager to destroy one. At any minute the symptoms might break out. And so—one foregathered in a cheerful spot amidst friends, and drank forgetfulness.

Prominent in this little group was Baldwin Meadows, a sallow-faced villain with battered features and prominent cheek-bones, his face cut and scarred by a hundred fights. Ex-seaman, ex-boxer, ex-fish-porter—indeed, to every one's knowledge, ex-everything. No one knew how he lived. By his side lurched an enormous coloured man who went by the name of Harry Jones. Grinning above a tankard sat a pimply-faced young man who was known as The Agent. Silver rings adorned his fingers. He had no other name, and most emphatically no address, but he "arranged things" for people, and appeared to thrive upon it in a scrambling, fugitive manner.

Then, at one point, the conversation suddenly took a peculiar turn. It came about through Mrs. Dawes mentioning that her aunt, who died from eating tinned lobster, used to work in a corset shop in Wych Street. When she said that, The Agent, whose right eye appeared to survey the ceiling, whilst his left eye looked over the other side of his tankard, remarked:

"Where was Wych Street, ma?"

"Lord!" exclaimed Mrs. Dawes. "Don't you know, dearie? You must be a young 'un, you must. Why, when I was a gal every one knew Wych Street. It was just down there where they built the Kingsway, like."

Baldwin Meadows cleared his throat, and said:

"Wych Street used to be a turnin' runnin' from Long Acre into Wellington Street."

"Oh, no, old boy," chipped in Mr. Dawes, who always treated the ex-man with great deference. "If you'll excuse me, Wych Street was a narrow lane at the back of the old Globe Theatre, that used to pass by the church."

"I know what I'm talkin' about," growled Meadows.

Mrs. Dawes's high nasal whine broke in:

"Hi, Mr. Booth, you used ter know yer wye abaht. Where was Wych Street?"

Mr. Booth, the proprietor, was polishing a tap. He looked up.

"Wych Street? Yus, of course I knoo Wych Street. Used to go there with some of the boys—when I was Covent Garden way. It was at right angles to the Strand, just east of Wellington Street."

"No, it warn't. It were alongside the Strand, before yer come to Wellington Street."

The coloured man took no part in the discussion, one street and one city being alike to him, provided he could obtain the material comforts dear to his heart; but the others carried it on with a certain amount of acerbity.

Before any agreement had been arrived at three other men entered the bar. The quick eye of Meadows recognized them at once as three of what was known at that time as "The Gallows Ring." Every member of "The Gallows Ring" had done time, but they still carried on a lucrative industry devoted to blackmail, intimidation, shoplifting, and some of the clumsier recreations. Their leader, Ben Orming, had served seven years for bashing a Chinaman down at Rotherhithe.

"The Gallows Ring" was not popular in Wapping, for the reason that many of their depredations had been inflicted upon their own class. When Meadows and Harry Jones took it into their heads to do a little wild prancing they took the trouble to go up into the West-end. They considered "The Gallows Ring" an ungentlemanly set; nevertheless, they always treated them with a certain external deference—an unpleasant crowd to quarrel with.

Ben Orming ordered beer for the three of them, and they leant against the bar and whispered in sullen accents. Something had evidently miscarried with the Ring. Mrs. Dawes continued to whine above the general drone of the bar. Suddenly she said:

"Ben, you're a hot old devil, you are. We was just 'aving a discussion like. Where was Wych Street?"

Ben scowled at her, and she continued:

"Some sez it was one place, some sez it was another. I *know* where it was, 'cors my aunt what died from blood p'ison, after eatin' tinned lobster, used to work at a corset shop——"

"Yus," barked Ben, emphatically. "I know where Wych Street was—it was just sarth of the river, afore yer come to Waterloo Station."

It was then that the coloured man, who up to that point had taken no part in the discussion, thought fit to intervene.

"Nope. You's all wrong, cap'n. Wych Street were alongside de church, way over where the Strand takes a side-line up west."

Ben turned on him fiercely.

"What the blazes does a blanketty nigger know abaht it? I've told yer where Wych Street was."

"Yus, and I know where it was," interposed Meadows.

"Yer both wrong. Wych Street was a turning running from Long Acre into Wellington Street."

"I didn't ask yer what *you* thought," growled Ben.

"Well, I suppose I've a right to an opinion?"

"You always think you know everything, you do."

"You can just keep yer mouth shut."

"It 'ud take more'n you to shut it."

Mr. Booth thought it advisable at this juncture to bawl across the bar:

"Now, gentlemen, no quarrelling—please."

The affair might have been subsided at that point, but for Mrs. Dawes. Her emotions over the death of the old lady in the street had been so stirred that she had been, almost unconsciously, drinking too much gin. She suddenly screamed out:

"Don't you take no lip from 'im, Mr. Medders. The dirty, thieving devil, 'e always thinks 'e's goin' to come it over every one."

She stood up threateningly, and one of Ben's supporters gave her a gentle push backwards. In three minutes the bar was in a complete state of pandemonium. The three members of "The Gallows Ring" fought two men and a woman, for Mr. Dawes merely stood in a corner and screamed out:

"Don't! Don't!"

Mrs. Dawes stabbed the man who had pushed her through the wrist with a hatpin. Meadows and Ben Orm-ing closed on each other and fought savagely with the naked fists. A lucky blow early in the encounter sent Meadows reeling against the wall, with blood streaming down his temple. Then the coloured man hurled a pewter tankard straight at Ben and it hit him on the knuckles. The pain maddened him to a frenzy. His other supporter had immediately got to grips with Harry Jones, and picked up one of the high stools and, seizing an opportunity, brought it down crash on to the coloured man's skull.

The whole affair was a matter of minutes. Mr. Booth was bawling out in the street. A whistle sounded. People were running in all directions.

"Beat it! Beat it for God's sake!" called the man who had been stabbed through the wrist. His face was very white, and he was obviously about to faint.

Ben and the other man, whose name was Toller, dashed to the door. On the pavement there was a confused scramble. Blows were struck indiscriminately. Two policemen appeared. One was laid *hors de combat* by a kick on the knee-cap from Toller. The two men fled into the darkness, followed by a hue-and-cry. Born and bred in the locality, they took every advantage of their knowledge. They tacked through alleys and raced down dark mews, and clambered over walk. Fortunately for them, the people they passed, who might have tripped them up or aided in the pursuit, merely fled indoors. The people in Wapping are not always on the side of the pursuer. But the police held on. At last Ben and Toller slipped through the door of an empty house in Aztec Street barely ten yards ahead of their nearest pursuer. Blows rained on the door, but they slipped the bolts, and then fell panting to the floor. When Ben could speak, he said:

"If they cop us, it means swinging."

"Was the nigger done in?"

"I think so. But even if 'e wasn't, there was that other affair the night before last. The game's up."

The ground-floor rooms were shuttered and bolted, but they knew that the police would probably force the front door. At the back there was no escape, only a narrow stable yard, where lanterns were already flashing. The roof only extended thirty yards either way and the police would probably take possession of it. They made a round of the house, which was sketchily furnished. There was a loaf, a small piece of mutton, and a bottle of pickles, and—the most precious possession—three bottles of whisky. Each man drank half a glass of neat whisky; then Ben said: "Well be able to keep 'em quiet for a bit, anyway," and he went and fetched an old twelve-bore gun and a case of cartridges. Toller was opposed to this last desperate resort, but Ben continued to murmur, "It means swinging, anyway."

And thus began the notorious siege of Aztec Street. It lasted three days and four nights. You may remember that, on forcing a panel of the front door, Sub-Inspector Wraith, of the V Division, was shot through the chest. The police then tried other methods. A hose was brought into play without effect. Two policemen were killed and four wounded. The military was requisitioned. The street was picketed. Snipers occupied windows of the houses opposite. A distinguished member of the Cabinet drove down in a motorcar, and directed operations in a top-hat. It was the introduction of poison-gas which was the ultimate cause of the downfall of the citadel. The body of Ben Orming was never found, but that of Toller was discovered near the front door with a bullet through his heart. The medical officer to the Court pronounced that the man had been dead three days, but whether killed by a chance bullet from a sniper or whether killed deliberately by his fellow-criminal was never revealed. For when the end came Orming had apparently planned a final act of venom. It was known that in the basement a considerable quantity of petrol had been stored. The contents had probably been carefully distributed over the most inflammable materials in the top rooms. The fire broke out, as one witness described it, "almost like an explosion." Orming must have perished in this. The roof blazed up, and the sparks carried across the yard and started a stack of light timber in the annexe of Messrs. Morrel's piano-factory. The factory and two blocks of tenement buildings were burnt to the ground. The estimated cost of the destruction was one hundred and eighty thousand pounds. The casualties amounted to seven killed and fifteen wounded.

At the inquiry held under Chief Justice Pengammon various odd interesting facts were revealed. Mr. Lowes-Parlby, the brilliant young K.C., distinguished himself by his searching cross-examination of many witnesses. At one point a certain Mrs. Dawes was put in the box.

"Now," said Mr. Lowes-Parlby, "I understand that on the evening in question, Mrs. Dawes, you, and the victims, and these other people who have been mentioned, were all seated in the public bar of the Wagtail, enjoying its no doubt excellent hospitality and indulging in a friendly discussion. Is that so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now, will you tell his lordship what you were discussing?"

"Diseases, sir."

"Diseases! And did the argument become acrimonious?"

"Pardon?"

"Was there a serious dispute about diseases?"

"No, sir."

"Well, what was the subject of the dispute?"

"We was arguin' as to where Wych Street was, sir."

"What's that?" said his lordship.

"The witness states, my lord, that they were arguing as to where Wych Street was."

"Wych Street? Do you mean W-Y-C-H?"

"Yes, sir."

"You mean the narrow old street that used to run across the site of what is now the Gaiety Theatre?"

Mr. Lowes-Parlby smiled in his most charming manner.

"Yes, my lord, I believe the witness refers to the same street you mention, though, if I may be allowed to qualify your lordship's description of the locality, may I suggest that it was a little further east—at the side of the old Globe Theatre, which was adjacent to St. Martin's in the Strand? That is the street you were all arguing about, isn't it, Mrs. Dawes?"

"Well, sir, my aunt who died from eating tinned lobster used to work at a corset-shop. I ought to know."

His lordship ignored the witness. He turned to the counsel rather peevishly.

"Mr. Lowes-Parlby, when I was your age I used to pass through Wych Street every day of my life. I did so for nearly twelve years. I think it hardly necessary for you to contradict me."

The counsel bowed. It was not his place to dispute with a chief justice, although that chief justice be a hopeless old fool; but another eminent K.C., an elderly man with a tawny beard, rose in the body of the court, and said:

"If I may be allowed to interpose, your lordship, I also spent a great deal of my youth passing through Wych Street. I have gone into the matter, comparing past and present ordnance survey maps. If I am not mistaken, the street the witness was referring to began near the hoarding at the entrance to Kingsway and ended at the back of what is now the Aldwych Theatre." "Oh, no, Mr. Backer!" exclaimed Lowes-Parlby. His lordship removed his glasses and snapped out: "The matter is entirely irrelevant to the case." It certainly was, but the brief passage-of-arms left an unpleasant tang of bitterness behind. It was observed that Mr. Lowes-Parlby never again quite got the prehensile grip upon his cross-examination that he had shown in his treatment of the earlier witnesses. The coloured man, Harry Jones, had died in hospital, but Mr. Booth, the proprietor of the Wagtail, Baldwin Meadows, Mr. Dawes, and the man who was stabbed in the wrist, all gave evidence of a rather nugatory character. Lowes-Parlby could do nothing with it. The findings of this Special Inquiry do not concern us. It is sufficient to say that the witnesses already mentioned all returned to Wapping. The man who had received the thrust of a hatpin through his wrist did not think it advisable to take any action against Mrs. Dawes. He was pleasantly relieved to find that he was only required as a witness of an abortive discussion.

In a few weeks' time the great Aztec Street siege remained only a romantic memory to the majority of Londoners. To Lowes-Parlby the little dispute with Chief Justice Pengammon rankled unreasonably. It is annoying to be publicly snubbed for making a statement which you know to be absolutely true, and which you have even taken pains to verify. And Lowes-Parlby was a young man accustomed to score. He made a point of looking everything up, of being prepared for an adversary thoroughly. He liked to give the appearance of knowing everything. The brilliant career just ahead of him at times dazzled him. He was one of the darlings of the gods. Everything came to Lowes-Parlby. His father had distinguished himself at the bar before him, and had amassed a modest fortune. He was an only son. At Oxford he had carried off every possible degree. He was already being spoken of for very high political honours. But the most sparkling jewel in the crown of his successes was Lady Adela Charters, the daughter of Lord Vermeer, the Minister for Foreign Affairs. She was his *fiancée*, and it was considered the

most brilliant match of the season. She was young and almost pretty, and Lord Vermeer was immensely wealthy and one of the most influential men in Great Britain. Such a combination was irresistible. There seemed to be nothing missing in the life of Francis Lowes-Parlby, K.C.

One of the most regular and absorbed spectators at the Aztec Street inquiry was old Stephen Garrit. Stephen Garrit held a unique but quite inconspicuous position in the legal world at that time. He was a friend of judges, a specialist at various abstruse legal rulings, a man of remarkable memory, and yet—an amateur. He had never taken sick, never eaten the requisite dinners, never passed an examination in his life; but the law of evidence was meat and drink to him. He passed his life in the Temple, where he had chambers. Some of the most eminent counsel in the world would take his opinion, or come to him for advice. He was very old, very silent, and very absorbed. He attended every meeting of the Aztec Street inquiry, but from beginning to end he never volunteered an opinion.

After the inquiry was over he went and visited an old friend at the London Survey Office. He spent two mornings examining maps. After that he spent two mornings pottering about the Strand, Kingsway, and Aldwych; then he worked out some careful calculations on a ruled chart. He entered the particulars in a little book which he kept for purposes of that kind, and then retired to his chambers to study other matters. But before doing so, he entered a little apophthegm in another book. It was apparently a book in which he intended to compile a summary of his legal experiences. The sentence ran:

"The basic trouble is that people make statements without sufficient data."

Old Stephen need not have appeared in this story at all, except for the fact that he was present at the dinner at Lord Vermeer's, where a rather deplorable incident occurred.

And you must acknowledge that in the circumstances it is useful to have such a valuable and efficient witness.

Lord Vermeer was a competent, forceful man, a little quick-tempered and autocratic. He came from Lancashire, and before entering politics had made an enormous fortune out of borax, artificial manure, and starch.

It was a small dinner-party, with a motive behind it. His principal guest was Mr. Sandeman, the London agent of the Ameer of Bakkan. Lord Vermeer was very anxious to impress Mr. Sandeman and to be very friendly with him: the reasons will appear later. Mr. Sandeman was a self-confessed cosmopolitan. He spoke seven languages and professed to be equally at home in any capital in Europe. London had been his headquarters for over twenty years. Lord Vermeer also invited Mr. Arthur Toombs, a colleague in the Cabinet, his prospective son-in-law, Lowes-Parlby, K.C., James Trolley, a very tame Socialist M.P., and Sir Henry and Lady Breyd, the two latter being invited, not because Sir Henry was of any use, but because Lady Breyd was a pretty and brilliant woman who might amuse his principal guest. The sixth guest was Stephen Garrit.

The dinner was a great success. When the succession of courses eventually came to a stop, and the ladies had retired, Lord Vermeer conducted his male guests into another room for a ten minutes' smoke before rejoining them. It was then that the unfortunate incident occurred. There was no love lost between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman. It is difficult to ascribe the real reason of their mutual animosity, but on the several occasions when they had met there had invariably passed a certain sardonic by-play. They were both clever, both comparatively young, each a little suspect and jealous of the other; moreover, it was said in some quarters that Mr. Sandeman had had intentions himself with regard to Lord Vermeer's daughter, that he had been on the point of a proposal when Lowes-Parlby had butted in and forestalled him. Mr. Sandeman had dined well, and he was in the mood to dazzle with a display of his varied knowledge and experiences. The conversation drifted from a discussion of the rival claims of

great cities to the slow, inevitable removal of old landmarks. There had been a slightly acrimonious disagreement between Lowes-Parlby and Mr. Sandeman as to the claims of Budapest and Lisbon, and Mr. Sandeman had scored because he extracted from his rival a confession that, though he had spent two months in Budapest, he had only spent two days in Lisbon. Mr. Sandeman had lived for four years in either city. Lowes-Parlby changed the subject abruptly.

"Talking of landmarks," he said, "we had a queer point arise in that Aztec Street inquiry. The original dispute arose owing to a discussion between a crowd of people in a pub asto where Wych Street was."

"I remember," said Lord Vermeer. "A perfectly absurd discussion. Why, I should have thought that any man over forty would remember exactly where it was."

"Where would you say it was, sir?" asked Lowes-Parlby.

"Why to be sure, it ran from the corner of Chancery Lane and ended at the second turning after the Law Courts, going west."

Lowes-Parlby was about to reply, when Mr. Sandeman cleared his throat and said, in his supercilious, oily voice:

"Excuse me, my lord. I know my Paris, and Vienna, and Lisbon, every brick and stone, but I look upon London as my home. I know my London even better. I have a perfectly clear recollection of Wych Street. When I was a student I used to visit there to buy books. It ran parallel to New Oxford Street on the south side, just between it and Lincoln's Inn Fields."

There was something about this assertion that infuriated Lowes-Parlby. In the first place, it was so hopelessly wrong and so insufferably asserted. In the second place, he was already smarting under the indignity of being shown up about Lisbon. And then there suddenly flashed through his mind the wretched incident when he had been publicly snubbed by Justice Pengammon about the very same point; and he knew that he was right each time. Damn Wych Street! He turned on Mr. Sandeman.

"Oh, nonsense! You may know something about these—eastern cities; you certainly know nothing about London if you make a statement like that. Wych Street was a little further east of what is now the Gaiety Theatre. It used to run by the side of the old Globe Theatre, parallel to the Strand."

The dark moustache of Mr. Sandeman shot upwards, revealing a narrow line of yellow teeth. He uttered a sound that was a mingling of contempt and derision; then he drawled out:

"Really? How wonderful—to have such comprehensive knowledge!"

He laughed, and his small eyes fixed his rival. Lowes-Parlby flushed a deep red. He gulped down half a glass of port and muttered just above a whisper: "Damned impudence!" Then, in the rudest manner he could display, he turned his back deliberately on Sandeman and walked out of the room.

In the company of Adela he tried to forget the little contretemps. The whole thing was so absurd—so utterly undignified. As though *he* didn't know! It was the little accumulation of pin-pricks all arising out of that one argument. The result had suddenly goaded him to—well, being rude, to say the least of it. It wasn't that Sandeman mattered. To the devil with Sandeman! But what would his future father-in-law think? He had never before given way to any show of ill-temper before him. He forced himself into a mood of rather fatuous jocularity. Adela was at her best in those moods. They would have lots of fun together in the days to come. Her almost pretty, not too clever face was dimpled with kittenish glee. Life was a tremendous rag to her. They were expecting Toccata, the famous opera-singer. She had been

engaged at a very high fee to come on from Covent Garden. Mr. Sandeman was very fond of music. Adela was laughing, and discussing which was the most honourable position for the great Sandeman to occupy. There came to Lowes-Parlby a sudden abrupt misgiving. What sort of wife would this be to him when they were not just fooling? He immediately dismissed the curious, furtive little stab of doubt. The splendid proportions of the room calmed his senses. A huge bowl of dark red roses quickened his perceptions. His career.... The door opened. But it was not La Toccata. It was one of the household flunkies. Lowes-Parlby turned again to his innamorata.

"Excuse me, sir. His lordship says will you kindly go and see him in the library?"

Lowes-Parlby regarded the messenger, and his heart beat quickly. An uncontrollable presage of evil racked his nerve-centres. Something had gone wrong; and yet the whole thing was so absurd, trivial. In a crisis—well, he could always apologize. He smiled confidently at Adela, and said:

"Why, of course; with pleasure. Please excuse me, dear."

He followed the impressive servant out of the room. His foot had barely touched the carpet of the library when he realized that his worst apprehensions were to be plumbed to the depths. For a moment he thought Lord Vermeer was alone, then he observed old Stephen Garrit, lying in an easy-chair in the corner like a piece of crumpled parchment. Lord Vermeer did not beat about the bush. When the door was closed, he bawled out, savagely:

"What the devil have you done?"

"Excuse me, sir. I'm afraid I don't understand. Is it Sandeman——?"

"Sandeman has gone."

"Oh, I'm sorry."

"Sorry! By God, I should think you might be sorry! You insulted him. My prospective son-in-law insulted him in my own house!"

"I'm awfully sorry. I didn't realize——"

"Realize! Sit down, and don't assume for one moment that you continue to be my prospective son-in-law. Your insult was a most intolerable piece of effrontery, not only to him, but to me."

"But I——"

"Listen to me. Do you know that the government were on the verge of concluding a most far-reaching treaty with that man? Do you know that the position was just touch-and-go? The concessions we were prepared to make would have cost the State thirty million pounds, and it would have been cheap. Do you hear that? It would have been cheap! Bakkan is one of the most vulnerable outposts of the Empire. It is a terrible danger-zone. If certain powers can usurp our authority—and, mark you, the whole blamed place is already riddled with this new pernicious doctrine—you know what I mean—before we know where we are the whole East will be in a blaze. India! My God! This contract we were negotiating would have countered this outward thrust. And you, you blockhead, you come here and insult the man upon whose word the whole thing depends."

"I really can't see, sir, how I should know all this."

"You can't see it! But, you fool, you seemed to go out of your way. You insulted him about the merest quibble—in my house!"

"He said he knew where Wych Street was. He was quite wrong. I corrected him."

"Wych Street! Wych Street be damned! If he said Wych Street was in the moon, you should have agreed with him. There was no call to act in the way you did. And you—you think of going into politics!"

The somewhat cynical inference of this remark went unnoticed. Lowes-Parlby was too unnerved. He mumbled:

"I'm very sorry."

"I don't want your sorrow. I want something more practical."

"What's that, sir?"

"You will drive straight to Mr. Sandeman's, find him, and apologize. Tell him you find that he was right about Wych Street after all. If you can't find him to-night, you must find him to-morrow morning. I give you till midday to-morrow. If by that time you have not offered a handsome apology to Mr. Sandeman, you do not enter this house again, you do not see my daughter again. Moreover, all the power I possess will be devoted to hounding you out of that profession you have dishonoured. Now you can go."

Dazed and shaken, Lowes-Parlby drove back to his flat at Knightsbridge. Before acting he must have time to think. Lord Vermeer had given him till to-morrow midday. Any apologizing that was done should be done after a night's reflection. The fundamental purposes of his being were to be tested. He knew that. He was at a great crossing. Some deep instinct within him was grossly outraged. Is it that a point comes when success demands that a man shall sell his soul? It was all so absurdly trivial—a mere argument about the position of a street that had ceased to exist. As Lord Vermeer said, what did it matter about Wych Street?

Of course he should apologize. It would hurt horribly to do so, but would a man sacrifice everything on account of some footling argument about a street?

In his own rooms, Lowes-Parlby put on a dressing-gown, and, lighting a pipe, he sat before the fire. He would have given anything for companionship at such a moment—the right companionship. How lovely it would be to have—a woman, just the right woman, to talk this all over with; some one who understood and sympathized. A sudden vision came to him of Adela's face grinning about the prospective visit of La Toccata, and again the low voice of misgiving whispered in his ears. Would Adela be—just the right woman? In very truth, did he really love Adela? Or was it all—a rag? Was life a rag—a game played by lawyers, politicians, and people?

The fire burned low, but still he continued to sit thinking, his mind principally occupied with the dazzling visions of the future. It was past midnight when he suddenly muttered a low "Damn!" and walked to the bureau. He took up a pen and wrote:

"Dear Mr. Sandeman,—I must apologize for acting so rudely to you last night. It was quite unpardonable of me, especially as I since find, on going into the matter, that you were quite right about the position of Wych Street. I can't think how I made the mistake. Please forgive me. Yours cordially,

"Francis Lowes-Parlby."

Having written this, he sighed and went to bed. One might have imagined at that point that the matter was finished. But there are certain little greedy demons of conscience that require a lot of stilling, and they kept Lowes-Parlby awake more than half the night. He kept on repeating to himself, "It's all positively absurd!" But the little greedy demons pranced around the bed, and they began to group things into two definite issues. On the one side, the great appearances; on the other, something at the back of it all, something deep, fundamental,

something that could only be expressed by one word—truth. If he had *really* loved Adela—if he weren't so absolutely certain that Sandeman was wrong and he was right—why should he have to say that Wych Street was where it wasn't? "Isn't there, after all," said one of the little demons, "something which makes for greater happiness than success? Confess this, and we'll let you sleep."

Perhaps that is one of the most potent weapons the little demons possess. However full our lives may be, we ever long for moments of tranquillity. And conscience holds before our eyes some mirror of an ultimate tranquillity. Lowes-Parlby was certainly not himself. The gay, debonair, and brilliant egoist was tortured, and tortured almost beyond control; and it had all apparently risen through the ridiculous discussion about a street. At a quarter past three in the morning he arose from his bed with a groan, and, going into the other room, he tore the letter to Mr. Sandeman to pieces.

Three weeks later old Stephen Garrit was lunching with the Lord Chief Justice. They were old friends, and they never found it incumbent to be very conversational. The lunch was an excellent, but frugal, meal. They both ate slowly and thoughtfully, and their drink was water. It was not till they reached the dessert stage that his lordship indulged in any very informative comment, and then he recounted to Stephen the details of a recent case in which he considered that the presiding judge had, by an unprecedented paralogy, misinterpreted the law of evidence. Stephen listened with absorbed attention. He took two cob-nuts from the silver dish, and turned them over meditatively, without cracking them. When his lordship had completely stated his opinion and peeled a pear, Stephen mumbled:

"I have been impressed, very impressed indeed. Even in my own field of—limited observation—the opinion of an outsider, you may say—so often it happens—the trouble caused by an affirmation without sufficiently established data. I have seen lives lost, ruin brought about, endless suffering. Only last week, a young man—a brilliant career—almost shattered. People make statements without——"

He put the nuts back on the dish, and then, in an apparently irrelevant manner, he said abruptly:

"Do you remember Wych Street, my lord?"

The Lord Chief Justice grunted.

"Wych Street! Of course I do."

"Where would you say it was, my lord?"

"Why, here, of course."

His lordship took a pencil from his pocket and sketched a plan on the tablecloth.

"It used to run from there to here."

Stephen adjusted his glasses and carefully examined the plan. He took a long time to do this, and when he had finished his hand instinctively went towards a breast pocket where he kept a note-book with little squared pages. Then he stopped and sighed. After all, why argue with the law? The law was like that—an excellent thing, not infallible, of course (even the plan of the Lord Chief Justice was a quarter of a mile out), but still an excellent, a wonderful thing. He examined the bony knuckles of his hands and yawned slightly.

"Do you remember it?" said the Lord Chief Justice.

Stephen nodded sagely, and his voice seemed to come from a long way off:

"Yes, I remember it, my lord. It was a melancholy little street."

THE OLIVE, by Algernon Blackwood

(From *Pearson's Magazine*, London)

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He laughed involuntarily as the olive rolled towards his chair across the shiny parquet floor of the hotel dining-room.

His table in the cavernous *salle à manger* was apart: he sat alone, a solitary guest; the table from which the olive fell and rolled towards him was some distance away. The angle, however, made him an unlikely objective. Yet the lob-sided, juicy thing, after hesitating once or twice *en route* as it plopped along, came to rest finally against his feet.

It settled with an inviting, almost an aggressive air. And he stooped and picked it up, putting it rather self-consciously, because of the girl from whose table it had come, on the white tablecloth beside his plate.

Then, looking up, he caught her eye, and saw that she too was laughing, though not a bit self-consciously. As she helped herself to the *hors d'oeuvres* a false move had sent it flying. She watched him pick the olive up and set it beside his plate. Her eyes then suddenly looked away again—at her mother—questioningly.

The incident was closed. But the little oblong, succulent olive lay beside his plate, so that his fingers played with it. He fingered it automatically from time to time until his lonely meal was finished.

When no one was looking he slipped it into his pocket, as though, having taken the trouble to pick it up, this was the very least he could do with it. Heaven alone knows why, but he then took it upstairs with him, setting it on the marble mantelpiece among his field glasses, tobacco tins, ink-bottles, pipes and candlestick. At any rate, he kept it—the moist, shiny, lob-sided, juicy little oblong olive. The hotel lounge wearied him; he came to his room after dinner to smoke at his ease, his coat off and his feet on a chair; to read another chapter of Freud, to write a letter or two he didn't in the least want to write, and then go to bed at ten o'clock. But this evening the olive kept rolling between him and the thing he read; it rolled between the paragraphs, between the lines; the olive was more vital than the interest of these eternal "complexes" and "suppressed desires."

The truth was that he kept seeing the eyes of the laughing girl beyond the bouncing olive. She had smiled at him in such a natural, spontaneous, friendly way before her mother's glance had checked her—a smile, he felt, that might lead to acquaintance on the morrow.

He wondered! A thrill of possible adventure ran through him.

She was a merry-looking sort of girl, with a happy, half-roguish face that seemed on the lookout for somebody to play with. Her mother, like most of the people in the big hotel, was an invalid; the girl, a dutiful and patient daughter. They had arrived that very day apparently.

A laugh is a revealing thing, he thought as he fell asleep to dream of a lob-sided olive rolling consciously towards him, and of a girl's eyes that watched its awkward movements, then looked up into his own and laughed. In his dream the olive had been deliberately and

cleverly dispatched upon its uncertain journey. It was a message.

He did not know, of course, that the mother, chiding her daughter's awkwardness, had muttered:

"There you are again, child! True to your name, you never see an olive without doing something queer and odd with it!"

A youngish man, whose knowledge of chemistry, including invisible inks and such-like mysteries, had proved so valuable to the Censor's Department that for five years he had overworked without a holiday, the Italian Riviera had attracted him, and he had come out for a two months' rest. It was his first visit. Sun, mimosa, blue seas and brilliant skies had tempted him; exchange made a pound worth forty, fifty, sixty and seventy shillings. He found the place lovely, but somewhat untenanted.

Having chosen at random, he had come to a spot where the companionship he hoped to find did not exist. The place languished after the war, slow to recover; the colony of resident English was scattered still; travellers preferred the coast of France with Mentone and Monte Carlo to enliven them. The country, moreover, was distracted by strikes. The electric light failed one week, letters the next, and as soon as the electricians and postal-workers resumed, the railways stopped running. Few visitors came, and the few who came soon left.

He stayed on, however, caught by the sunshine and the good exchange, also without the physical energy to discover a better, livelier place. He went for walks among the olive groves, he sat beside the sea and palms, he visited shops and bought things he did not want because the exchange made them seem cheap, he paid immense "extras" in his weekly bill, then chuckled as he reduced them to shillings and found that a few pence covered them; he lay with a book for hours among the olive groves.

The olive groves! His daily life could not escape the olive groves; to olive groves, sooner or later, his walks, his expeditions, his meanderings by the sea, his shopping—all led him to these ubiquitous olive groves.

If he bought a picture postcard to send home, there was sure to be an olive grove in one corner of it. The whole place was smothered with olive groves, the people owed their incomes and existence to these irrepressible trees. The villages among the hills swam roof-deep in them. They swarmed even in the hotel gardens.

The guide books praised them as persistently as the residents brought them, sooner or later, into every conversation. They grew lyrical over them:

"And how do you like our olive trees? Ah, you think them pretty. At first, most people are disappointed. They grow on one."

"They do," he agreed.

"I'm glad you appreciate them. I find them the embodiment of grace. And when the wind lifts the under-leaves across a whole mountain slope—why, it's wonderful, isn't it? One realises the meaning of 'olive-green'."

"One does," he sighed. "But all the same I should like to get one to eat—an olive, I mean."

"Ah, to eat, yes. That's not so easy. You see, the crop is——"

"Exactly," he interrupted impatiently, weary of the habitual and evasive explanations. "But I should like to taste the *fruit*. I should like to enjoy one."

For, after a stay of six weeks, he had never once seen an olive on the table, in the shops, nor even on the street barrows at the market place. He had never tasted one. No one sold olives,

though olive trees were a drug in the place; no one bought them, no one asked for them; it seemed that no one wanted them. The trees, when he looked closely, were thick with a dark little berry that seemed more like a sour sloe than the succulent, delicious spicy fruit associated with its name.

Men climbed the trunks, everywhere shaking the laden branches and hitting them with long bamboo poles to knock the fruit off, while women and children, squatting on their haunches, spent laborious hours filling baskets underneath, then loading mules and donkeys with their daily "catch." But an olive to eat was unobtainable. He had never cared for olives, but now he craved with all his soul to feel his teeth in one.

"Ach! But it is the Spanish olive that you eat" explained the head waiter, a German "from Basel." "These are for oil only." After which he disliked the olive more than ever—until that night when he saw the first eatable specimen rolling across the shiny parquet floor, propelled towards him by the careless hand of a pretty girl, who then looked up into his eyes and smiled.

He was convinced that Eve, similarly, had rolled the apple towards Adam across the emerald sward of the first garden in the world.

He slept usually like the dead. It must have been something very real that made him open his eyes and sit up in bed alertly. There was a noise against his door. He listened. The room was still quite dark. It was early morning. The noise was not repeated.

"Who's there?" he asked in a sleepy whisper. "What is it?"

The noise came again. Some one was scratching on the door. No, it was somebody tapping.

"What do you want?" he demanded in a louder voice. "Come in," he added, wondering sleepily whether he was presentable. Either the hotel was on fire or the porter was waking the wrong person for some sunrise expedition.

Nothing happened. Wide awake now, he turned the switch on, but no light flooded the room. The electricians, he remembered with a curse, were out on strike. He fumbled for the matches, and as he did so a voice in the corridor became distinctly audible. It was just outside his door.

"Aren't you ready?" he heard. "You sleep for ever."

And the voice, although never having heard it before, he could not have recognised it, belonged, he knew suddenly, to the girl who had let the olive fall. In an instant he was out of bed. He lit a candle.

"I'm coming," he called softly, as he slipped rapidly into some clothes. "I'm sorry I've kept you. I shan't be a minute."

"Be quick then!" he heard, while the candle flame slowly grew, and he found his garments. Less than three minutes later he opened the door and, candle in hand, peered into the dark passage.

"Blow it out!" came a peremptory whisper. He obeyed, but not quick enough. A pair of red lips emerged from the shadows. There was a puff, and the candle was extinguished. "I've got my reputation to consider. We mustn't be seen, of course!"

The face vanished in the darkness, but he had recognised it—the shining skin, the bright glancing eyes. The sweet breath touched his cheek. The candlestick was taken from him by a swift, deft movement. He heard it knock the wainscoting as it was set down. He went out into a pitch-black corridor, where a soft hand seized his own and led him—by a back door, it seemed—out into the open air of the hill-side immediately behind the hotel.

He saw the stars. The morning was cool and fragrant, the sharp air waked him, and the last

vestiges of sleep went flying. He had been drowsy and confused, had obeyed the summons without thinking. He now realised suddenly that he was engaged in an act of madness.

The girl, dressed in some flimsy material thrown loosely about her head and body, stood a few feet away, looking, he thought, like some figure called out of dreams and slumber of a forgotten world, out of legend almost. He saw her evening shoes peep out; he divined an evening dress beneath the gauzy covering. The light wind blew it close against her figure. He thought of a nymph.

"I say—but haven't you been to bed?" he asked stupidly.

He had meant to expostulate, to apologise for his foolish rashness, to scold and say they must go back at once. Instead, this sentence came. He guessed she had been sitting up all night. He stood still a second, staring in mute admiration, his eyes full of bewildered question.

"Watching the stars," she met his thought with a happy laugh. "Orion has touched the horizon. I came for you at once. We've got just four hours!" The voice, the smile, the eyes, the reference to Orion, swept him off his feet. Something in him broke loose, and flew wildly, recklessly to the stars.

"Let us be off!" he cried, "before the Bear tilts down. Already Alcyone begins to fade. I'm ready. Come!"

She laughed. The wind blew the gauze aside to show two ivory white limbs. She caught his hand again, and they scampered together up the steep hill-side towards the woods. Soon the big hotel, the villas, the white houses of the little town where natives and visitors still lay soundly sleeping, were out of sight. The farther sky came down to meet them. The stars were paling, but no sign of actual dawn was yet visible. The freshness stung their cheeks.

Slowly, the heavens grew lighter, the east turned rose, the outline of the trees defined themselves, there was a stirring of the silvery green leaves. They were among olive groves—but the spirits of the trees were dancing. Far below them, a pool of deep colour, they saw the ancient sea. They saw the tiny specks of distant fishing-boats. The sailors were singing to the dawn, and birds among the mimosa of the hanging gardens answered them.

Pausing a moment at length beneath a gaunt old tree, whose struggle to leave the clinging earth had tortured its great writhing arms and trunk, they took their breath, gazing at one another with eyes full of happy dreams.

"You understood so quickly," said the girl, "my little message. I knew by your eyes and ears you would." And she first tweaked his ears with two slender fingers mischievously, then laid her soft palm with a momentary light pressure on both eyes.

"You're half-and-half, at any rate," she added, looking him up and down for a swift instant of appraisal, "if you're not altogether." The laughter showed her white, even little teeth.

"You know how to play, and that's something," she added. Then, as if to herself, "You'll be altogether before I've done with you."

"Shall I?" he stammered, afraid to look at her.

Puzzled, some spirit of compromise still lingering in him, he knew not what she meant; he knew only that the current of life flowed increasingly through his veins, but that her eyes confused him.

"I'm longing for it," he added. "How wonderfully you did it! They roll so awkwardly——"

"Oh, that!" She peered at him through a wisp of hair. "You've kept it, I hope."

"Rather. It's on my mantelpiece——"

"You're sure you haven't eaten it?" and she made a delicious mimicry with her red lips, so that he saw the tip of a small pointed tongue.

"I shall keep it," he swore, "as long as these arms have life in them," and he seized her just as she was crouching to escape, and covered her with kisses.

"I knew you longed to play," she panted, when he released her. "Still, it was sweet of you to pick it up before another got it."

"Another!" he exclaimed.

"The gods decide. It's a lob-sided thing, remember. It can't roll straight." She looked oddly mischievous, elusive.

He stared at her.

"If it had rolled elsewhere—and another had picked it up——?" he began.

"I should be with that other now!" And this time she was off and away before he could prevent her, and the sound of her silvery laughter mocked him among the olive trees beyond. He was up and after her in a second, following her slim whiteness in and out of the old-world grove, as she flitted lightly, her hair flying in the wind, her figure flashing like a ray of sunlight or the race of foaming water—till at last he caught her and drew her down upon his knees, and kissed her wildly, forgetting who and where and what he was.

"Hark!" she whispered breathlessly, one arm close about his neck. "I hear their footsteps. Listen! It is the pipe!"

"The pipe——!" he repeated, conscious of a tiny but delicious shudder.

For a sudden chill ran through him as she said it. He gazed at her. The hair fell loose about her cheeks, flushed and rosy with his hot kisses. Her eyes were bright and wild for all their softness. Her face, turned sideways to him as she listened, wore an extraordinary look that for an instant made his blood run cold. He saw the parted lips, the small white teeth, the slim neck of ivory, the young bosom panting from his tempestuous embrace. Of an unearthly loveliness and brightness she seemed to him, yet with this strange, remote expression that touched his soul with sudden terror.

Her face turned slowly.

"Who *are* you?" he whispered. He sprang to his feet without waiting for her answer.

He was young and agile; strong, too, with that quick response of muscle they have who keep their bodies well; but he was no match for her. Her speed and agility outclassed his own with ease. She leapt. Before he had moved one leg forward towards escape, she was clinging with soft, supple arms and limbs about him, so that he could not free himself, and as her weight bore him downwards to the ground, her lips found his own and kissed them into silence. She lay buried again in his embrace, her hair across his eyes, her heart against his heart, and he forgot his question, forgot his little fear, forgot the very world he knew....

"They come, they come," she cried gaily. "The Daws is here. Are you ready?"

"I've been ready for five thousand years," he answered, leaping to his feet beside her.

"Altogether!" came upon a sparkling laugh that was like wind among the olive leaves.

Shaking her last gauzy covering from her, she snatched his hand, and they ran forward together to join the dancing throng now crowding up the slope beneath the trees. Their happy

singing filled the sky. Decked with vine and ivy, and trailing silvery green branches, they poured in a flood of radiant life along the mountain side. Slowly they melted away into the blue distance of the breaking dawn, and, as the last figure disappeared, the sun came up slowly out of a purple sea.

They came to the place he knew—the deserted earthquake village—and a faint memory stirred in him. He did not actually recall that he had visited it already, had eaten his sandwiches with "hotel friends" beneath its crumbling walls; but there was a dim troubling sense of familiarity—nothing more. The houses still stood, but pigeons lived in them, and weasels, stoats and snakes had their uncertain homes in ancient bedrooms. Not twenty years ago the peasants thronged its narrow streets, through which the dawn now peered and cool wind breathed among dew-laden brambles.

"I know the house," she cried, "the house where we would live!" and raced, a flying form of air and sunlight, into a tumbled cottage that had no roof, no floor or windows. Wild bees had hung a nest against the broken wall.

He followed her. There was sunlight in the room, and there were flowers. Upon a rude, simple table lay a bowl of cream, with eggs and honey and butter close against a home-made loaf. They sank into each other's arms upon a couch of fragrant grass and boughs against the window where wild roses bloomed... and the bees flew in and out.

It was Bussana, the so-called earthquake village, because a sudden earthquake had fallen on it one summer morning when all the inhabitants were at church. The crashing roof killed sixty, the tumbling walls another hundred, and the rest had left it where it stood.

"The Church," he said, vaguely remembering the story. "They were at prayer——"

The girl laughed carelessly in his ear, setting his blood in a rush and quiver of delicious joy. He felt himself untamed, wild as the wind and animals. "The true God claimed His own," she whispered. "He came back. Ah, they were not ready—the old priests had seen to that. But he came. They heard his music. Then his tread shook the olive groves, the old ground danced, the hills leapt for joy——"

"And the houses crumbled," he laughed as he pressed her closer to his heart—

"And now we've come back!" she cried merrily. "We've come back to worship and be glad!" She nestled into him, while the sun rose higher.

"I hear them—hark!" she cried, and again leapt, dancing from his side. Again he followed her like wind. Through the broken window they saw the naked fauns and nymphs and satyrs rolling, dancing, shaking their soft hoofs amid the ferns and brambles. Towards the appalling, ruptured church they sped with feet of light and air. A roar of happy song and laughter rose.

"Come!" he cried. "We must go too."

Hand in hand they raced to join the tumbling, dancing throng. She was in his arms and on his back and flung across his shoulders, as he ran. They reached the broken building, its whole roof gone sliding years ago, its walls a-tremble still, its shattered shrines alive with nesting birds.

"Hush!" she whispered in a tone of awe, yet pleasure. "He is there!" She pointed, her bare arm outstretched above the bending heads.

There, in the empty space, where once stood sacred Host and Cup, he sat, filling the niche sublimely and with awful power. His shaggy form, benign yet terrible, rose through the broken stone. The great eyes shone and smiled. The feet were lost in brambles.

"God!" cried a wild, frightened voice yet with deep worship in it—and the old familiar panic came with portentous swiftness. The great Figure rose.

The birds flew screaming, the animals sought holes, the worshippers, laughing and glad a moment ago, rushed tumbling over one another for the doors.

"He goes again! Who called? Who called like that? His feet shake the ground!"

"It is the earthquake!" screamed a woman's shrill accents in ghastly terror.

"Kiss me—one kiss before we forget again..." sighed a laughing, passionate voice against his ear. "Once more your arms, your heart beating on my lips...! You recognised his power. You are now altogether! We shall remember!"

But he woke, with the heavy bed-clothes stuffed against his mouth and the wind of early morning sighing mournfully about the hotel walls.

"Have they left again—those ladies?" he inquired casually of the head waiter, pointing to the table. "They were here last night at dinner."

"Who do you mean?" replied the man, stupidly, gazing at the spot indicated with a face quite blank. "Last night—at dinner?" He tried to think.

"An English lady, elderly, with—her daughter——" at which moment precisely the girl came in alone. Lunch was over, the room empty.

There was a second's difficult pause. It seemed ridiculous not to speak. Their eyes met. The girl blushed furiously.

He was very quick for an Englishman. "I was allowing myself to ask after your mother," he began. "I was afraid"—he glanced at the table laid for one—"she was not well, perhaps?"

"Oh, but that's very kind of you, I'm sure." She smiled. He saw the small white even teeth...

And before three days had passed, he was so deeply in love that he simply couldn't help himself.

"I believe," he said lamely, "this is yours. You dropped it, you know. Er—may I keep it? It's only an olive."

They were, of course, in an olive grove when he asked it, and the sun was setting.

She looked at him, looked him up and down, looked at his ears, his eyes. He felt that in another second her little fingers would slip up and tweak the first, or close the second with a soft pressure——

"Tell me," he begged: "did you dream anything—that first night I saw you?"

She took a quick step backwards. "No," she said, as he followed her more quickly still, "I don't think I did. But," she went on breathlessly as he caught her up, "I knew—from the way you picked it up——"

"Knew what?" he demanded, holding her tightly so that she could not get away again.

"That you were already half and half, but would soon be altogether."

And, as he kissed her, he felt her soft little fingers tweak his ears.

ONCE A HERO, by Harold Brighouse

(From *Pan*)

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Standing in a sheltered doorway a tramp, with a slouch hat crammed low over a notably unwashed face, watched the outside of the new works canteen of the Sir William Rumbold Ltd., Engineering Company. Perhaps because they were workers while he was a tramp, he had an air of compassionate cynicism as the audience assembled and thronged into the building, which, as prodigally advertised throughout Calderside, was to be opened that night by Sir William in person.

There being no one to observe him, the tramp could be frank with his cynicism; but inside the building, in the platform ante-room, Mr. Edward Fosdike, who was Sir William's locally resident secretary, had to discipline his private feelings to a suave concurrence in his employer's florid enthusiasm. Fosdike served Sir William well, but no man is a hero to his (male) secretary.

"I hope you will find the arrangements satisfactory," Fosdike was saying, tugging nervously at his maltreated moustache. "You speak at seven and declare the canteen open. Then there's a meal." He hesitated. "Perhaps I should have warned you to dine before you came."

Sir William was aware of being a very gallant gentleman. "Not at all," he said heroically, "not at all. I have not spared my purse over this War Memorial. Why should I spare my feelings? Well, now, you've seen about the Press?"

"Oh, yes. The reporters are coming. There'll be flashlight photographs. Everything quite as usual when you make a public appearance, sir."

Sir William wondered if this resident secretary of his were quite adequate. Busy in London, he had left all arrangements in his local factotum's hands, and he was doubting whether those hands had grasped the situation competently. "Only as usual?" he said sharply. "This War Memorial has cost me ten thousand pounds."

"The amount," Fosdike hastened to assure him, "has been circulated, with appropriate tribute to your generosity."

"Generosity," criticised Rumbold. "I hope you didn't use that word."

Mr. Fosdike referred to his notebook. "We said," he read, "the cost, though amounting to ten thousand pounds, is entirely beside the point. Sir William felt that no expense was excessive that would result in a fitting and permanent expression of our gratitude to the glorious dead."

"Thank you, Fosdike. That is exactly my feeling," said the gratified Sir William, paying Fosdike the unspoken compliment of thinking him less of a fool than he looked. "It is," he went on, "from no egotistic motive that I wish the Press to be strongly represented to-night. I believe that in deciding that Calderside's War Memorial should take the form of a Works Canteen, I am setting an example of enlightenment which other employers would do well to follow. I have erected a monument, not in stone, but in goodwill, a club-house for both sexes to serve as a centre of social activities for the firm's employees, wherein the great spirit of the noble work carried out at the Front by the Y.M.C.A. will be recaptured and adapted to peace conditions in our local organisation in the Martlow Works Canteen. What are you taking notes for?"

"I thought——" began Fosdike.

"Oh, well, perhaps you are right. Reporters have been known to miss one's point, and a little first aid, eh? By the way, I sent you some notes from town of what I intended to say in my speech. I just sent them ahead in case there was any local point I'd got wrong."

He put it as a question, but actually it was an assertion and a challenge. It asserted that by no possible chance could there be anything injudicious in the proposed speech, and it challenged Fosdike to deny that assertion if he dared.

And Fosdike had to dare; he had to accuse himself of assuming too easily that Rumbold's memory of local Calderside detail was as fresh as the memory of the man on the spot.

"I did want to suggest a modification, sir," he hazarded timidly.

"Really?"—quite below zero—"Really? I felt very contented with the speech."

"Yes, sir, it's masterly. But on the spot here——"

"Oh, agreed. Quite right, Fosdike. I am speaking tonight to the world—no; let me guard against exaggeration. The world includes the Polynesians and Esquimaux—I am speaking to the English-speaking races of the world, but first and foremost to Calderside. My own people. Yes? You have a little something to suggest? Some happy local allusion?"

"It's about Martlow," said Fosdike shortly.

Sir William took him up. "Ah, now you're talking," he approved. "Yes, indeed, anything you can add to my notes about Martlow will be most welcome. I have noted much, but too much is not enough for such an illustrious example of conspicuous gallantry, so noble a life, so great a deed, and so self-sacrificing an end. Any details you can add about Timothy Martlow will indeed——"

Fosdike coughed. "Excuse me, sir, that's just the point. If you talk like that about Martlow down here, they'll laugh at you."

"Laugh?" gasped Rumbold, his sense of propriety outraged. "My dear Fosdike, what's come to you? I celebrate a hero. Our hero. Why, I'm calling the Canteen after Martlow when I might have given it my own name. That speaks volumes." It did.

But Fosdike knew too well what would be the attitude of a Calderside audience if he allowed his chief to sing in top-notes an unreserved eulogy of Tim Martlow. Calderside knew Tim, the civilian, if it had also heard of Tim, the soldier. "Don't you remember Martlow, sir? Before the war, I mean."

"No. Ought I to?"

"Not on the bench?"

"Martlow? Yes, now I think of the name in connection with the old days, there was a drunken fellow. To be sure, an awful blackguard, continually before the bench. Dear me! Well, well, but a man is not responsible for his undesirable relations, I hope."

"No, sir. But that was Martlow. The same man. You really can't speak to Calderside of his as an ennobling life and a great example. The war changed him, but—well, in peace, Tim was absolutely the local bad man, and they all know it. I thought you did, or——"

Sir William turned a face expressive of awe-struck wonder. "Fosdike," he said with deep sincerity, "this is the most amazing thing I've heard of the war. I never connected Martlow the hero with—well, well *de mortuis*." He quoted:

"Nothing in his life Became him like the leaving it; he died As one that had been studied in his death To throw away the dearest thing he owed As 'twere a careless trifle.'

"Appropriate, I think? I shall use that."

It was, at least, a magnificent recovery from an unexpected blow, administered by the very man whose duty it was to guard Sir William against just that sort of blow. If Fosdike was not the local watch-dog, he was nothing; and here was an occasion when the dog had omitted to bark until the last minute of the eleventh hour.

"Very apt quotation, sir, though there have never been any exact details of Martlow's death."

Sir William meditated. "Do you recall the name of the saint who was a regular rip before he got religion?" he asked.

"I think that applies to most of them," said Fosdike.

"Yes, but the one in particular. Francis. That's it." He filled his chest. "Timothy Martlow," he pronounced impressively, "is the St. Francis of the Great War, and this Canteen is his shrine. Now, I think I will go into the hall. It is early, but I shall chat with the people. Oh, one last thought. When you mentioned Martlow, I thought you were going to tell me of some undesirable connections. There are none?"

"There is his mother. A widow. You remember the Board voted her an addition to her pension."

"Oh, yes. And she?"

"Oh, most grateful. She will be with you on the platform. I have seen myself that she is—fittingly attired."

"I think I can congratulate you, Fosdike," said Sir William magnanimously. "You've managed very well. I look forward to a pleasant evening, a widely reported speech, and——"

Then Dolly Wainwright came into the ante-room.

"If you please, sir," she said, "what's going to be done about me?"

Two gentlemen who had all but reached the smug bathos of a mutual admiration society turned astonished eyes at the intruder.

She wore a tarn, and a check blanket coat, which she unbuttoned as they watched her. Beneath it, suitable to the occasion, was a white dress, and Sir William, looking at it, felt a glow of tenderness for this artless child who had blundered into the privacy of the ante-room. Something daintily virginal in Dolly's face appealed to him; he caught himself thinking that her frock was more than a miracle in bleached cotton—it was moonshine shot with alabaster; and the improbability of that combination had hardly struck him when Fosdike's voice forced itself harshly on his ears.

"How did you get in here?"

Sir William moved to defend the girl from the anger of his secretary, but when she said, with a certain challenge, "Through the door," he doubted if she were so defenceless as she seemed.

"But there's a doorkeeper at the bottom," said Fosdike. "I gave him my orders."

"I gave him my smile," said Dolly. "I won."

"Upon my word—" Fosdike began.

"Well, well," interrupted Sir William, "what can I do for you?"

The reply was indirect, but caused Sir William still further to readjust his estimate of her.

"I've got friends in the meeting to-night," she concluded. "They'll speak up for me, too, if I'm not righted. So I'm telling you."

"Don't threaten me, my girl," said Sir William without severity. "I am always ready to pay attention to any legitimate grievance, but——"

"Legitimate?" she interrupted. "Well, mine's not legitimate. So there!"

"I beg your pardon?" She puzzled Sir William. "Come now," he went on in his most patriarchal manner, "don't assume I'm not going to listen to you. I am. To-night there is no thought in my mind except the welfare of Calderside."

"Oh, well," she said apologetically, "I'm sorry if I riled you, but it's a bit awkward to speak it out to a man. Only" (the unconscious cruelty of youth—or was it conscious?) "you're both old, so perhaps I can get through. It's about Tim Martlow."

"Ah," said Sir William encouragingly, "our glorious hero."

"Yes," said Dolly. "I'm the mother of his child."

We are all balloons dancing our lives amongst pins. Therefore, be compassionate towards Sir William. He collapsed speechlessly on a hard chair.

Fosdike reacted more alertly. "This is the first I've heard of Martlow's being married," he said aggressively.

Dolly looked up at him indignantly. "You ain't heard it now, have you?" she protested. "I said it wasn't legitimate. I don't say we'd not have got married if there'd been time, but you can't do everything on short leave."

There seemed an obvious retort. Rumbold and Fosdike looked at each other, and neither made the retort. Instead, Fosdike asked: "Are you employed in the works here?"

"I was here, on munitions," she said, "and then on doles."

"And now you're on the make," he sneered.

"Oh, I dunno," she said. "All this fuss about Tim Martlow. I ought to have my bit out of it."

"Deplorable," grieved Sir William. "The crass materialism of it all. This is so sad. How old are you?"

"Twenty," said Dolly. "Twenty, with a child to keep, and his father's name up in gold lettering in that hall there. I say somebody ought to do something."

"I suppose now, Miss——" Fosdike baulked.

"Wainwright, Dolly Wainwright, though it ought to be Martlow."

"I suppose you loved Tim very dearly?"

"I liked him well enough. He was good-looking in his khaki."

"Liked him? I'm sure it was more than that."

"Oh, I dunno. Why?" asked the girl, who said she was the mother of Martlow's child.

"I am sure," said Fosdike gravely, "you would never do anything to bring a stain upon his memory."

Dolly proposed a bargain. "If I'm rightly done by," she said, "I'll do right by him."

"*Anything* that marred the harmony of to-night's ceremony, Miss Wainwright, would be unthinkable," said Sir William, coming to his lieutenant's support.

"Right," said Dolly cheerfully. "If you'll take steps according, I'm sure I've no desire to make a scene."

"A scene," gasped Sir William.

"Though," she pointed out, "it's a lot to ask of any one, you know. Giving up the certain chance of getting my photograph in the papers. I make a good picture, too. Some do and some don't, but I take well and when you know you've got the looks to carry off a scene, it's asking something of me to give up the idea."

"But you said you'd no desire to make a scene."

"Poor girls have often got to do what they don't wish to. I wouldn't make a scene in the usual way. Hysterics and all that. Hysterics means cold water in your face and your dress messed up and no sympathy. But with scenes, the greater the occasion the greater the reward, and there's no denying this is an occasion, is there? You're making a big to-do about Tim Martlow and the reward would be according. I don't know if you've noticed that if a girl makes a scene and she's got the looks for it, she gets offers of marriage, like they do in the police-court when they've been wronged and the magistrate passes all the men's letters on to the court missionary and the girl and the missionary go through them and choose the likeliest fellow out of the bunch?"

"But my dear young lady——" Fosdike began.

She silenced him. "Oh, it's all right. I don't know that I want to get married."

"Then you ought to," said Sir William virtuously.

"There's better things in life than getting married," Dolly said. "I've weighed up marriage, and I don't see what there is in it for a girl nowadays."

"In your case, I should have thought there was everything."

Dolly sniffed. "There isn't liberty," she said. "And we won the fight for liberty, didn't we? No; if I made that scene it 'ud be to get my photograph in the papers where the film people could see it. I've the right face for the pictures, and my romantic history will do the rest."

"Good heavens, girl," cried the scandalised Sir William, "have you no reverence at all? The pictures! You'd turn all my disinterested efforts to ridicule. You'd—oh, but there! You're not going to make a scene?"

"That's a matter of arrangement, of course," said the cool lady. "I'm only showing you what a big chance I shall miss if I oblige you. Suppose I pipe up my tale of woe just when you're on the platform with the Union Jack behind you and the reporters in front of you, and that tablet in there that says Tim is the greatest glory of Calder-side——"

Sir William nearly screamed. "Be quiet, girl. Fosdike," he snarled, turning viciously on his secretary, "what the deuce do you mean by pretending to keep an eye on local affairs when you miss a thing like this?"

"'Tisn't his fault," said Dolly. "I've been saving this up for you."

"Oh," he groaned, "and I'd felt so happy about to-night." He took out a fountain pen. "Well, I suppose there's no help for it. Fosdike, what's the amount of the pension we allow Martlow's mother?"

"Double it, add a pound a week, and what's the answer, Mr. Fosdike?" asked Dolly quickly.

Sir William gasped ludicrously.

"I mean to say," said Dolly, conferring on his gasp the honour of an explanation, "she's old and didn't go on munitions, and didn't get used to wangling income tax on her wages, and never had no ambitions to go on the pictures, neither. What's compensation to her isn't compensation to me. I've got a higher standard."

"The less you say about your standards, the better, my girl," retorted Sir William. "Do you know that this is blackmail?"

"No, it isn't. Not when I ain't asked you for nothing. And if I pass the remark how that three pounds a week is my idea of a minimum wage, it isn't blackmail to state the fact."

Sir William paused in the act of tearing a page out of Fosdike's note-book. "Three pounds a week!"

"Well," said Dolly reasonably, "I didn't depreciate the currency. Three pounds a week is little enough these times for the girl who fell from grace through the chief glory of Calderside."

"But suppose you marry," suggested Mr. Fosdike.

"Then I marry well," she said, "having means of my own. And I ought to, seeing I'm kind of widow to the chief glory of——"

Sir William looked up sharply from the table. "If you use that phrase again," he said, "I'll tear this paper up."

"Widow to Tim Martlow," she amended it, defiantly. He handed her the document he had drawn up. It was an undertaking in brief, unambiguous terms to pay her three pounds a week for life. As she read it, exulting, the door was kicked open.

The tramp, whose name was Timothy Martlow, came in and turning, spoke through the doorway to the janitor below. "Call out," he said, "and I'll come back and knock you down again." Then he locked the door.

Fosdike went courageously towards him. "What do you mean by this intrusion? Who are you?"

The tramp assured himself that his hat was well pulled down over his face. He put his hands in his pockets and looked quizzically at the advancing Mr. Fosdike. "So far," he said, "I'm the man that locked the door."

Fosdike started for the second door, which led directly to the platform. The tramp reached it first, and locked it, shouldering Fosdike from him. "Now," he said, "Sir William was searching the wall, "are there no bells?" he asked desperately.

"No."

"No?" jeered the tramp. "No bell. No telephone. No nothing. You're scotched without your rifle this time."

Fosdike consulted Sir William. "I might shout for the police," he suggested.

"It's risky," commented the tramp. "They sometimes come when they're called."

"Then——" began the secretary.

"It's your risk," emphasised the tramp. "And I don't advise it. I've gone to a lot of trouble this last week to keep out of sight of the Calderside police. They'd identify me easy, and Sir William wouldn't like that."

"I wouldn't like?" said Rumbold. "I? Who are you?"

"Wounded and missing, believed dead," quoted the tramp. "Only there's been a lot of beliefs upset in this war, and I'm one of them."

"One of what?"

"I'm telling you. One of the strayed sheep that got mislaid and come home at the awkwardest times." He snatched his hat off. "Have a good look at that face, your worship."

"Timothy Martlow," cried Sir William.

Fosdike staggered to a chair while Dolly, who had shown nothing but amusement at the tramp, now gave a quick cry and shrank back against the wall, exhibiting every symptom of the liveliest terror. Of the trio, Sir William, for whom surely this inopportune return had the most serious implications, alone stood his ground, and Martlow grimly appreciated his pluck.

"It's very near made a stretcher-case of him," he said, indicating the prostrated Fosdike. "You're cooler. Walking wounded."

"I... really...."

"Shake hands, old cock," said Martlow, "I know you've got it writ up in there——" he jerked his head towards the hall—"that I'm the chief glory of Calderside, but damme if you're not the second best yourself, and I'll condescend to shake your hand if it's only to show you I'm not a ghost."

Sir William decided that it was politic to humour this visitor. He shook hands. "Then, if you know," he said, "if you know what this building is, it isn't accident that brings you here to-night."

"The sort of accident you set with a time-fuse," said Martlow grimly. "I told you I'd been dodging the police for a week lest any of my old pals should recognise me. I was waiting to get you to-night, and sitting tight and listening. The things I heard! Nearly made me take my hat off to myself. But not quite. Not quite. I kept my hat on and I kept my hair on. It's a mistake to act premature on information received. If I'd sprung this too soon, the wrong thing might have happened to me."

"What wrong thing, Martlow?" asked Sir William with some indignation. If the fellow meant anything, it was that he would have been spirited away by Sir William.

"Oh, anything," replied Martlow. "Anything would be wrong that made me miss this pleasure. You and me conversing affable here. Not a bit like it was in the old days before I rose to being the chief glory of Calderside. Conversation was one-sided then, and all on your side instead of mine. 'Here again, Martlow,' you'd say, and then they'd gabble the evidence, and you'd say 'fourteen days' or 'twenty-one days,' if you'd got up peevish and that's all there was to our friendly intercourse. This time, I make no doubt you'll be asking me to stay at the Towers to-night. And," he went on blandly, enjoying every wince that twisted Sir William's face in spite of his efforts to appear unmoved, "I don't know that I'll refuse. It's a levelling thing, war. I've read that war makes us all conscious we're members of one brotherhood, and I know it's true now. Consequently the chief glory of the place ain't got no right to be too high and mighty to accept your humble invitation. The best guest-room for Sergeant Martlow, you'll say. See

there's a hot water-bottle in his bed, you'll say, and in case he's thirsty in the night, you'll tell them to put the whisky by his side."

After all, a man does not rise to become Sir William Rumbold by being flabby. Sir William struck the table heavily. Somehow he had to put a period to this mocking harangue. "Martlow," he said, "how many people know you're here?"

Tim gave a good imitation of Sir William's gesture. He, too, could strike a table. "Rumbold," he retorted, "what's the value of a secret when it's not a secret? You three in this room know, and not another soul in Calderside."

"Not even your mother?" queried Rumbold.

"No. I been a bad son to her in the past. I'm a good one now I'm dead. She's got a bit o' pension, and I'll not disturb that. I'll stay dead—to her," he added forcibly, dashing the hope which leapt in Rumbold.

"Why have you come here? Here—to-night?"

The easy mockery renewed itself in Martlow's voice. "People's ideas of fun vary," he stated. "The fly's idea ain't the same as the spider's. This 'ere is my idea—shaking your hand and sitting cosy with the bloke that's sent me down more times than I can think. And the fun 'ull grow furious when you and I walk arm in arm on to that platform, and you tell them all I'm resurrected."

"Like this?" The proper Mr. Fosdike interjected.

"Eh?" said Tim. "Like what?"

"You can't go on to the platform in those clothes, Mart-low. Have you looked in a mirror lately? Do you know what you look like? This is a respectable occasion, man."

"Yes," said Tim drily. "It's an occasion for showing respect to me. I'll do as I am, not having had time to go to the tailor's for my dress suit yet."

"Martlow," said Sir William briskly, "time's short. I'm due on that platform."

"Right, I'm with you." Tim moved towards the platform door.

Sir William, with a serene air of triumph, played his trump card. He took out his cheque-book. "No," he said. "You're not coming. Instead——"

He shrank back hastily as a huge fist was projected vehemently towards his face. But the fist swerved and opened. The cheque-book, not Sir William's person, was its objective. "Instead be damned," said Tim Martlow, pitching the cheque-book to the floor. "To hell with your money. Thought I was after money, did you?"

Sir William met his eye. "Yes, I did," he said hardily.

"That's the sort of mean idea you would have, Sir William Rumbold. They say scum rises. You grew a handle to your name during the war, but you ain't grown manners to go with it. War changes them that's changeable. T'others are too set to change."

Sir William felt a strange glow of appreciation for this man who, with so easy an opportunity to grow rich, refused money. "It's changed you," he said with ungrudging admiration that had no tincture of diplomacy in it.

"Has it?" mused Tim. "From what?"

"Well——" Sir William was embarrassed. "From what you were."

"What was I?" demanded Tim. "Go on, spit it out. What sort of character would you have given me then?"

"I'd have called you," said Sir William boldly, "a disreputable drunken loafer who never did an honest day's work in his life." Which had the merit of truth, and, he thought, the demerit of rashness.

To his surprise he found that Tim was looking at him with undisguised admiration. "Lummy," he said, "you've got guts. Yes, that's right. 'Disreputable drunken loafer.' And if I came back now?" he asked.

"You were magnificent in the war, Martlow."

"First thing I did when I got civvies on was to get blind and skinned. Drink and civvies go together in my mind."

"You'll get over that," said Sir William encouragingly; but he was puzzled by the curiously wistful note which had replaced Tim's hectoring.

"There's a chance," admitted Tim. "A bare chance. Not a chance I'd gamble on. Not when I've a bigger chance than that. You wouldn't say, weighing me up now, that I've got a reformed look, would you?"

Sir William couldn't. "But you'll pull yourself together. You'll remember——"

"I'll remember the taste of beer," said Tim with fierce conviction. "No, I never had a chance before, but I've got one now, and, by heaven, I'm taking it." Sir William's apprehension grew acute; if money was not the question, what outrageous demand was about to be made of him? Tim went on, "I'm nothing but a dirty, drunken tramp to-day. Yes, drunk when I can get it and craving when I can't. That's Tim Martlow when he's living. Tim Mart-low dead's a different thing. He's a man with his name wrote up in letters of gold in a dry canteen. Dry! By God, that's funny! He's somebody, honoured in Calder-side for ever and ever, amen. And we won't spoil a good thing by taking chances on my reformation. I'm dead. I'll stay dead." He paused in enjoying the effect he made.

Sir William stooped to pick his cheque-book from the floor. "Don't do that," said Tim sharply. "It isn't out of your mind yet that money's what I came for. Fun's one thing that brought me. Just for the treat of showing you myself and watching your quick-change faces while I did it. And I've had my fun." His voice grew menacing. "The other thing I came for isn't fun. It's this." Dolly screamed as he took her arm and jerked her to her feet from the corner where she had sought obscurity. He shook her urgently. "You've been telling tales about me. I've heard of it. You hear all the news when you lie quiet yourself and let other people do the talking. You came in here to-night to spin a yarn. I watched you in. Well, is it true?"

"No," said Dolly, gasping for breath. "I mean——" he insisted, "what you said about you and me. That isn't true?"

She repeated her denial. "No," he said, releasing her, "it 'ud have a job to be seeing this is the first time I've had the pleasure of meeting you. That'll do." He opened the platform door politely. "I hope I haven't made you late on the platform, sir," he said.

Both Sir William and the secretary stared fascinated at Dolly, the enterprising young person who had so successfully bluffed them. "I repeat, don't let me make you late," said Tim from the now wide open door.

Rumbold checked Fosdike who was, apparently, bent on doing Dolly a personal violence. "That can wait," he said. "What can't wait is this." He held out his hand to Mart-low. "In all sincerity, I beg the honour."

Tim shook his hand, and Rumbold turned to the door. Fosdike ran after him with the notes of his speech. "Your speech, sir."

Sir William turned on him angrily. "Man," he said, "haven't you heard? That muck won't do now. I have to try to do Martlow justice." He went out to the platform, Fosdike after him.

Tim Martlow sat at the table and took a bottle from his pocket. He drew the cork with his teeth, then felt a light touch on his arm. "I was forgetting you," he said, replacing the bottle.

"I ain't likely to forget you," said Dolly ruefully.

He gripped her hard. "But you are going to forget me, my girl," he said. "Tim Martlow's dead, and his letters of gold ain't going to be blotted by the likes of you. You that's been putting it about Calderside I'm the father of your child, and I ain't never seen you in my life till to-night."

"Yes, but you're getting this all wrong," she blubbered. "I didn't have a baby. I was going to borrow one if they'd claimed to see it."

"What? No baby? And you put it across old Rumbold?" Laughter and sheer admiration of her audacity were mingled in his voice. With a baby it was a good bluff; without one, the girl's ingenuity seemed to him to touch genius.

"He gave me that paper," she said, pride subduing tears as she handed him her splendid trophy.

"Three pounds a week for life," he read, with profound reverence. "If you ain't a blinkin' marvel." He complimented her, giving her the paper back. Then he realised that, through him, her gains were lost.

"Gawd, I done wrong. I got no right to mess up a thing like that. I didn't know. See, I'll tell him I made you lie. I'll own the baby's mine."

"But there ain't no baby," she persisted.

"There's plenty of babies looking for a mother with three pounds a week," he said.

She tore the paper up. "Then they'll not find me," she said. "Three pounds a week's gone. And your letters of gold, Mr. Martlow, remain."

The practised voice of Sir William Rumbold, speaking on the platform, filled the ante-room, not with the rhetorician's counterfeit of sincerity, but, unmistakably, with sincerity itself. "I had prepared a speech," he was saying. "A prepared speech is useless in face of the emotion I feel at the life of Timothy Martlow. I say advisedly to you that when I think of Martlow, I know myself for a worm. He was despised and rejected. What had England done for him that he should give his life for her? We wronged him. We made an outcast of him. I personally wronged him from the magistrate's bench, and he pays us back like this, rising from an undeserved obscurity to a height where he rests secure for ever, a reproach to us, and a great example of the man who won. And against what odds he played it out to a supreme end, and _____"

"You're right," said Tim Marlow, motioning the girl to close the door. He wasn't used to hearing panegyrics on himself, nor was he aware that, mechanically, he had raised the bottle to his lips.

Dolly meant to close the door discreetly; instead, she threw it from her and jumped at the bottle. Tim was conscious of a double crash, putting an emphatic stop to the sound of Sir William's eulogy—the crash of the door and the bottle which Dolly snatched from him and

pitched against the wall.

"Letters of gold," she panted, "and you shan't tarnish them. I'll see to that."

He gaped for a moment at the liquor flowing from the bottle, then raised his eyes to hers. "You?" he said.

"I haven't got a baby to look after," said Dolly. "But—I've you. Where were you thinking of going now?"

His eyes went to the door behind which Sir William was, presumably, still praising him, and his head jerked resolutely. "Playing it out," he said. "I've got to vanish good, and sure after that. I'll play it out, by God. I was a hero once, I'll be a hero still." His foot crunched broken glass as he moved. "I'm going to America, my girl. It's dry."

Perhaps she distrusted the absolute dryness of America, and perhaps that had nothing to do with Dolly. She examined her hand minutely. "Going to the Isle of Man on a rough day, I wasn't a bit ill," she said casually. "I'm a good sailor."

"You put it across Sir William," he said. "You're a blinkin' marvel."

"No," she said, "but a thing that's worth doing is worth doing well. I'm not a marvel, but I might be the metal polish in those gold letters of your's if you think it worth while."

His trampish squalor seemed to him suddenly appalling. "There, don't do that," he protested—her arm had found its way into his. "My sleeve's dirty."

"Idiot!" said Dolly Wainwright, drawing him to the door.

THE PENSIONER, by William Caine

(From *The Graphic*)

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Miss Crewe was born in the year 1821. She received a sort of education, and at the age of twenty became the governess of a little girl, eight years old, called Martha Bond. She was Martha's governess for the next ten years. Then Martha came out and Miss Crewe went to be the governess of somebody else. Martha married Mr. William Harper. A year later she gave birth to a son, who was named Edward. This brings us to the year 1853.

When Edward was six, Miss Crewe came back, to be his governess. Four years later he went to school and Miss Crewe went away to be the governess of somebody else. She was now forty-two years old.

Twelve years passed and Mrs. Harper died, recommending Miss Crewe to her husband's care, for Miss Crewe had recently been smitten by an incurable disease which made it impossible for her to be a governess any longer.

Mr. Harper, who had passionately loved his wife, gave instructions to his solicitor to pay Miss Crewe the sum of one hundred and fifty pounds annually. He had some thoughts of buying her an annuity, but she seemed so ill that he didn't. Edward was now twenty-two.

In the year 1888, Mr. Harper died after a very short illness. He had expected Miss Crewe to die any day during the past thirteen years, but since she hadn't he thought it proper now to recommend her to Edward's care. This is how he did it.

"That confounded old Crewe, Eddie. You'll have to see to her. Let her have her money as before, but for the Lord's sake don't go and buy her an annuity now. If you do, shell die on your hands in a week!" Shortly afterwards the old gentleman passed away.

Edward was now thirty-five. Miss Crewe was sixty-seven and reported to be in an almost desperate state. Edward followed his father's advice. He bought no annuity for Miss Crewe. Her one hundred and fifty pounds continued to be paid each year into her bank; but by Edward, not by his late father's solicitors.

Edward had his own ideas of managing the considerable fortune which he had inherited. These ideas were unsound. The first of them was that he should assume the entire direction of his own affairs. Accordingly he instructed his solicitors to realise all the mortgages and railway-stock and other admirable securities in which his money was invested and hand over the cash to him. He then went in for the highest rate of interest which anyone would promise him. The consequence was that, within twelve years, he was almost a poor man, his annual income having dwindled from about three thousand to about four hundred pounds.

Though he was a fool he was an honourable man, and so he continued to pay Miss Crewe her one hundred and fifty pounds each year. This left him about two hundred and fifty for himself. The capital which his so reduced income represented was invested in a Mexican brewery in which he had implicit faith. Nevertheless, he began to think that he might do well were he to try to earn a little extra money.

The only thing he could do was to paint, not at all well, in water-colours. He became the pupil, quite seriously, of a young artist whom he knew. He was now forty-seven years old, while Miss Crewe was seventy-nine. The year was 1900.

To everybody's amazement Edward soon began to make quite good progress in his painting. Yes, his pictures were not at all unpleasant little things. He sent one of them to the Academy. It was accepted. It was, as I live, sold for ten pounds. Edward was an artist.

Soon he was making between thirty and forty pounds a year. Then he was making over a hundred. Then two hundred. Then the Mexican brewery failed, General Malefico having burned it to the ground for a lark.

This happened in the spring of 1914 when Edward was sixty-one and Miss Crewe Was ninety-three. Edward, after paying her money to Miss Crewe, might flatter himself on the possibility of having some fifty pounds a year for himself, that is to say, if his picture sales did not decline. A single man can, however, get along, more or less, on fifty pounds more or less.

Then the Great War broke out.

It has been said that in the autumn of 1914 the Old Men came into their kingdom. As the fields of Britain were gradually stripped bare of their valid toilers, the Fathers of each village assumed, at good wages, the burden of agriculture. From their offices the juniors departed or were torn; the senior clerks carried on desperately until the Girls were introduced. No man was any longer too old at forty. Octogenarians could command a salary. The very cinemas were glad to dress up ancient fellows in uniform and post them on their doorsteps.

Edward could do nothing but paint rather agreeable water-colours, and that was all. The market for his kind of work was shut. A patriotic nation was economising in order to get five per cent on the War Loans. People were not giving inexpensive little water-colours away to one another as wedding gifts any longer. Only the painters of high reputation, whose work was

regarded as a real investment, could dispose of their wares.

Starvation stared Edward in the face, not only his own starvation, you understand, but Miss Crewe's. And Edward was a man of honour.

He hated Miss Crewe intensely, but he had undertaken to provide for her, and provide for her he must—even if he failed to provide for himself.

He wrapped some samples of his paintings in brown paper, and began to seek for a job among the wholesale stationers. He offered himself as one who was prepared to design Christmas-cards and calendars, and things of the kind.

Adversity had sharpened his wits. Even the wholesale stationers were not turning white-headed men from their portals. To Edward was accorded the privilege of displaying the rather agreeable contents of his parcel. After he had unpacked it and packed it up again some thirty times he was offered work. His pictures were really rather agreeable. It was piecework, and he was to do it off the premises, no matter where. By toiling day and night he might be able to earn as much as £4 a week. He went away and toiled. His employers were pleased with what, each Monday, he brought them. They did not offer to increase his remuneration, but they encouraged him to produce, and took practically everything he offered. Edward was very fortunate.

During the first year of the war he lived like a beast, worked like a slave, and earned exactly enough to keep his soul in his body and pay Miss Crewe her one hundred and fifty pounds. During the second year of the war he did it again. The fourth year of the war found him still alive and still punctual to his obligations towards Miss Crewe.

Miss Crewe, however, found one hundred and fifty pounds no longer what it had been. Prices were rising in every direction. She wrote to Edward pointing this out, and asking him if he couldn't see his way to increasing her allowance. She invoked the memory of his dear mother and father, added something about the happy hours that he and she had spent together in the dear old schoolroom, and signed herself his affectionately.

Edward petitioned for an increase of pay. He pointed out to his firm of wholesale stationers that prices were rising in every direction. The firm, who knew when they had a marketable thing cheap, granted his petition. Henceforth Edward was able to earn five pounds a week. He increased Miss Crewe's allowance by fifty pounds, and continued to live more like a beast than ever, for the price of paper and paints was soaring. He worked practically without ceasing, save to sleep (which he could not do) and to eat (which he could not afford). He was now sixty-four, while Miss Crewe was rising ninety-seven.

Edward had been ailing for a long time. On Armistice Day he struck work for an hour in order to walk about in the streets and share in the general rejoicing. He caught a severe cold, and the next day, instead of staying between his blankets (he had no sheets), he went up to the City with some designs which he had just completed. That night he was feverish. The next night he was delirious. The third night he was dead, and there was an end of him.

He had, however, managed, before he died (two days before), to send to Miss Crewe a money order for her quarter's allowance of fifty pounds. This had left him with precisely four shillings and twopence in the Post Office Savings Bank.

He was, consequently, buried by the parish.

Miss Crewe received her money. She was delighted to have it, and at once wrote to Edward her customary letter of grateful and affectionate thanks. She added in a postscript that if he *could* find it in his generous heart to let her have a still little more next quarter it would be most acceptable, because every day seemed to make it harder and harder for her to get along.

Edward was dead when this letter was delivered.

Miss Crewe sent her money order to her bank, asking that it might be placed to her deposit account. This she reminded the bank, would bring up the amount of her deposit to exactly two thousand pounds.

BROADSHEET BALLAD, by A. E. Coppard

(From *The Dial*)

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from "Adam and Eve and Pinch Me," published by Alfred A.
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of Andrew H. Dakers.*

At noon the tiler and the mason stepped down from the roof of the village church which they were repairing and crossed over the road to the tavern to eat their dinner. It had been a nice little morning, but there were clouds massing in the south; Sam the tiler remarked that it looked like thunder. The two men sat in the dim little tap-room eating, Bob the mason at the same time reading from a newspaper an account of a trial for murder.

"I dunno what thunder looks like," Bob said, "but I reckon this chap is going to be hung, though I can't rightly say for why. To my thinking he didn't do it at all: but murder's a bloody thing and someone ought to suffer for it."

"I don't think," spluttered Sam as he impaled a flat piece of beet-root on the point of a pocket-knife and prepared to contemplate it with patience until his stuffed mouth was ready to receive it, "he ought to be hung."

"There can be no other end for him though, with a mob of lawyers like that, and a judge like that, and a jury too... why the rope's half round his neck this minute; he'll be in glory within a month, they only have three Sundays, you know, between the sentence and the execution. Well, hark at that rain then!"

A shower that began as a playful sprinkle grew to a powerful steady summer downpour. It splashed in the open window and the dim room grew more dim, and cool.

"Hanging's a dreadful thing," continued Sam, "and 'tis often unjust I've no doubt, I've no doubt at all."

"Unjust! I tell you... at majority of trials those who give their evidence mostly knows nothing at all about the matter; them as knows a lot—they stays at home and don't budge, not likely!"

"No? But why?"

"Why? They has their reasons. I know that, I knows it for truth... hark at that rain, it's made the room feel cold."

They watched the downfall in complete silence for some moments.

"Hanging's a dreadful thing," Sam at length repeated, with almost a sigh.

"I can tell you a tale about that, Sam, in a minute," said the other. He began to fill his pipe

from Sam's brass box which was labelled cough lozenges and smelled of paregoric.

"Just about ten years ago I was working over in Cotswold country. I remember I'd been into Gloucester one Saturday afternoon and it rained. I was jogging along home in a carrier's van; I never seen it rain like that afore, no, nor never afterwards, not like that. B-r-r-r-r! it came down... bashing! And we came to a crossroads where there's a public house called The Wheel of Fortune, very lonely and onsheltered it is just there. I see'd a young woman standing in the porch awaiting us, but the carrier was wet and tired and angry or something and wouldn't stop. 'No room'—he bawled out to her—'full up, can't take you!' and he drove on. For the love o' God, mate,' I says, 'pull up and take that young creature! She's... she's... can't you see!' 'But I'm all behind as 'tis'—he shouts to me—'You knows your gospel, don't you: time and tide wait for no man?' 'Ah, but dammit all, they always call for a feller'—I says. With that he turned round and we drove back for the girl. She clumb in and sat on my knees; I squat on a tub of vinegar, there was nowhere else and I was right and all, she was going on for a birth. Well, the old van rattled away for six or seven miles; whenever it stopped you could hear the rain clattering on the tarpaulin, or sounding outside on the grass as if it was breathing hard, and the old horse steamed and shivered with it. I had knowed the girl once in a friendly way, a pretty young creature, but now she was white and sorrowful and wouldn't say much. By and bye we came to another cross-roads near a village, and she got out there. 'Good day, my gal'—I says, affable like, and 'Thank you sir,'—says she, and off she popped in the rain with her umbrella up. A rare pretty girl, quite young, I'd met her before, a girl you could get uncommon fond of, you know, but I didn't meet her afterwards: she was mixed up in a bad business. It all happened in the next six months while I was working round those parts. Everybody knew of it. This girl's name was Edith and she had a younger sister Agnes. Their father was old Harry Mallerton, kept The British Oak at North Quainy; he stuttered. Well, this Edith had a love affair with a young chap William, and having a very loving nature she behaved foolish. Then she couldn't bring the chap up to the scratch nohow by herself, and of course she was afraid to tell her mother or father: you know how girls are after being so pesky natural, they fear, O they do fear! But soon it couldn't be hidden any longer as she was living at home with them all, so she wrote a letter to her mother. 'Dear Mother,' she wrote, and told her all about her trouble.

"By all accounts the mother was angry as an old lion, but Harry took it calm like and sent for young William, who'd not come at first. He lived close by in the village so they went down at last and fetched him.

"'Alright, yes,' he said, 'I'll do what's lawful to be done. There you are, I can't say no fairer, that I can't.'

"'No,' they said, 'you can't.'

"So he kissed the girl and off he went, promising to call in and settle affairs in a day or two. The next day Agnes, which was the younger girl, she also wrote a note to her mother telling her some more strange news:

"'God above!' the mother cried out, 'can it be true, both of you girls, my own daughters, and by the same man! Oh, whatever were you thinking on, both of ye! Whatever can be done now!'"

"'What!'" ejaculated Sam, "both on 'em, both on 'em!"

"As true as God's my mercy—both on 'em—same chap. Ah! Mrs. Mallerton was afraid to tell her husband at first, for old Harry was the devil born again when he were roused up, so she sent for young William herself, who'd not come again, of course, not likely. But they made him come, O yes, when they told the girl's father.

"'Well may I go to my d-d-d-damnation at once!' roared old Harry—he stuttered you know—'at once, if that ain't a good one!' So he took off his coat, he took up a stick, he walked down

street to William and cut him off his legs. Then he beat him till he howled for his mercy, but you couldn't stop old Harry once he were roused up—he was the devil born again. They do say as he beat him for a solid hour; I can't say as to that, but then old Harry picked him up and carried him off to The British Oak on his own back, and threw him down in his own kitchen between his own two girls like a dead dog. They do say that the little one Agnes flew at her father like a raging cat until he knocked her senseless with a clout over head; rough man he was."

"Well, a' called for it sure," commented Sam.

"Her did," agreed Bob, "but she was the quietest known girl for miles round those parts, very shy and quiet."

"A shady lane breeds mud," said Sam.

"What do you say?—O ah!—mud, yes. But pretty girls both, girls you could get very fond of, skin like apple bloom, and as like as two pinks they were. They had to decide which of them William was to marry."

"Of course, ah!"

"I'll marry Agnes"—says he.

"'You'll not'—says the old man—'you'll marry Edie.'

"'No I won't'—William says—'it's Agnes I love and I'll be married to her or I won't be married to e'er of 'em.' All the time Edith sat quiet, dumb as a shovel, never a word, crying a bit; but they do say the young one went on like a... a young... Jew."

"The jezebel!" commented Sam.

"You may say it; but wait, my man, just wait. Another cup of beer? We can't go back to church until this humbugging rain have stopped."

"No, that we can't."

"It's my belief the 'bugging rain won't stop this side of four."

"And if the roof don't hold it off it 'ull spoil the Lord's Commandments that's just done up on the chancel front."

"Oh, they be dry by now," spoke Bob reassuringly and then continued his tale. "I'll marry Agnes or I won't marry nobody"—William says—and they couldn't budge him. No, old Harry cracked on, but he wouldn't have it, and at last Harry says: 'It's like this.' He pulls a half-crown out of his pocket and 'Heads it's Agnes,' he says, 'or tails it's Edith,' he says."

"Never! Ha! ha!" cried Sam.

"Heads it's Agnes, tails it's Edie, so help me God. And it come down Agnes, yes, heads it was—Agnes—and so there they were."

"And they lived happy ever after?"

"Happy! You don't know your human nature, Sam; wherever was you brought up? 'Heads it's Agnes,' said old Harry, and at that Agnes flung her arms round William's neck and was for going off with him then and there, ha! But this is how it happened about that. William hadn't any kindred, he was a lodger in the village, and his landlady wouldn't have him in her house one mortal hour when she heard all of it; give him the rightabout there and then. He couldn't get lodgings anywhere else, nobody would have anything to do with him, so of course, for safety's sake, old Harry had to take him, and there they all lived together at The British Oak—

all in one happy family. But they girls couldn't bide the sight of each other, so their father cleaned up an old outhouse in his yard that was used for carts and hens and put William and his Agnes out in it. And there they had to bide. They had a couple of chairs, a sofa, and a bed and that kind of thing, and the young one made it quite snug."

"'Twas a hard thing for that other, that Edie, Bob."

"It was hard, Sam, in a way, and all this was happening just afore I met her in the carrier's van. She was very sad and solemn then; a pretty girl, one you could like. Ah, you may choke me, but there they lived together. Edie never opened her lips to either of them again, and her father sided with her, too. What was worse, it came out after the marriage that Agnes was quite free of trouble—it was only a trumped-up game between her and this William because he fancied her better than the other one. And they never had no child, them two, though when poor Edie's mischance come along I be damned if Agnes weren't fonder of it than its own mother, a jolly sight more fonder, and William—he fair worshipped it."

"You don't say!"

"I do. 'Twas a rum go, that, and Agnes worshipped it, a fact, can prove it by scores o' people to this day, scores, in them parts. William and Agnes worshipped it, and Edie—she just looked on, long of it all, in the same house with them, though she never opened her lips again to her young sister to the day of her death."

"Ah, she died? Well, it's the only way out of such a tangle, poor woman."

"You're sympathizing with the wrong party." Bob filled his pipe again from the brass box; he ignited it with deliberation; going to the open window he spat into a puddle in the road. "The wrong party, Sam; 'twas Agnes that died. She was found on the sofa one morning stone dead, dead as a adder."

"God bless me," murmured Sam.

"Poisoned," added Bob, puffing serenely.

"Poisoned!"

Bob repeated the word poisoned. "This was the way of it," he continued. "One morning the mother went out in the yard to collect her eggs, and she began calling out 'Edie, Edie, here a minute, come and look where that hen have laid her egg; I would never have believed it'—she says. And when Edie went out her mother led her round the back of the outhouse, and there on the top of a wall this hen had laid an egg. 'I would never have believed it, Edie'—she says—'scooped out a nest there beautiful, ain't she; I wondered where her was laying. T'other morning the dog brought an egg round in his mouth and laid it on the doormat. There now, Aggie, Aggie, here a minute, come and look where the hen have laid that egg.' And as Aggie didn't answer the mother went in and found her on the sofa in the outhouse, stone dead."

"How'd they account for it?" asked Sam, after a brief interval.

"That's what brings me to the point about this young feller that's going to be hung," said Bob, tapping the newspaper that lay upon the bench. "I don't know what would lie between two young women in a wrangle of that sort; some would get over it quick, but some would never sleep soundly any more not for a minute of their mortal lives. Edie must have been one of that sort. There's people living there now as could tell a lot if they'd a mind to it. Some knowed all about it, could tell you the very shop where Edith managed to get hold of the poison, and could describe to me or to you just how she administrated it in a glass of barley water. Old Harry knew all about it, he knew all about everything, but he favoured Edith and he never budged a word. Clever old chap was Harry, and nothing came out against Edie at the inquest—nor the trial either."

"Was there a trial then?"

"There was a kind of a trial. Naturally. A beautiful trial. The police came and fetched poor William, they took him away and in due course he was hanged."

"William! But what had he got to do with it?"

"Nothing. It was rough on him, but he hadn't played straight and so nobody struck up for him. They made out a case against him—there was some onlucky bit of evidence which I'll take my oath old Harry knew something about—and William was done for. Ah, when things take a turn against you it's as certain as twelve o'clock, when they take a turn; you get no more chance than a rabbit from a weasel. It's like dropping your matches into a stream, you needn't waste the bending of your back to pick them out—they're no good on, they'll never strike again. And Edith, she sat in court through it all, very white and trembling and sorrowful, but when the judge put his black cap on they do say she blushed and looked across at William and gave a bit of a smile. Well, she had to suffer for his doings, so why shouldn't he suffer for hers. That's how I look at it...."

"But God-a-mighty...!"

"Yes, God-a-mighty knows. Pretty girls they were, both, and as like as two pinks."

There was quiet for some moments while the tiler and the mason emptied their cups of beer. "I think," said Sam then, "the rain's give over now."

"Ah, that it has," cried Bob. "Let's go and do a bit more on this 'bugging church or she won't be done afore Christmas."

THE CHRISTMAS PRESENT, by Richmal Crompton

(From *Truth*)

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Mary Clay looked out of the window of the old farmhouse. The view was dreary enough—hill and field and woodland, bare, colourless, mist-covered—with no other house in sight. She had never been a woman to crave for company. She liked sewing. She was passionately fond of reading. She was not fond of talking. Probably she could have been very happy at Cromb Farm—alone. Before her marriage she had looked forward to the long evenings with her sewing and reading. She knew that she would be busy enough in the day, for the farmhouse was old and rambling, and she was to have no help in the housework. But she looked forward to quiet, peaceful, lamplit evenings; and only lately, after ten years of married life, had she reluctantly given up the hope of them. For peace was far enough from the old farm kitchen in the evening. It was driven away by John Clay's loud voice, raised always in orders or complaints, or in the stumbling, incoherent reading aloud of his newspaper.

Mary was a silent woman herself and a lover of silence. But John liked to hear the sound of his voice; he liked to shout at her; to call for her from one room to another; above all, he liked to hear his voice reading the paper out loud to her in the evening. She dreaded that most of all. It had lately seemed to jar on her nerves till she felt she must scream aloud. His voice going on and on, raucous and sing-song, became unspeakably irritating. His "Mary!" summoning her

from her household work to where-ever he happened to be, his "Get my slippers," or "Bring me my pipe," exasperated her almost to the point of rebellion. "Get your own slippers" had trembled on her lips, but had never passed them, for she was a woman who could not bear anger. Noise of any kind appalled her.

She had borne it for ten years, so surely she could go on with it. Yet today, as she gazed hopelessly at the wintry country side, she became acutely conscious that she could not go on with it. Something must happen. Yet what was there that could happen?

It was Christmas next week. She smiled ironically at the thought. Then she noticed the figure of her husband coming up the road. He came in at the gate and round to the side-door.

"Mary!"

She went slowly in answer to the summons. He held a letter in his hand.

"Met the postman," he said. "From your aunt."

She opened the letter and read it in silence. Both of them knew quite well what it contained.

"She wants us to go over for Christmas again," said Mary.

He began to grumble.

"She's as deaf as a post. She's 'most as deaf as her mother was. She ought to know better than to ask folks over when she can't hear a word any one says."

Mary said nothing. He always grumbled about the invitation at first, but really he wanted to go. He liked to talk with her uncle. He liked the change of going down to the village for a few days and hearing all its gossip. He could quite well leave the farm to the "hands" for that time.

The Crewe deafness was proverbial. Mary's great-grandmother had gone stone deaf at the age of thirty-five; her daughter had inherited the affliction and her granddaughter, the aunt with whom Mary had spent her childhood, had inherited it also at exactly the same age.

"All right," he said at last, grudgingly, as though in answer to her silence, "we'd better go. Write and say we'll go."

It was Christmas Eve. They were in the kitchen of her uncle's farmhouse. The deaf old woman sat in her chair by the fire knitting. Upon her sunken face there was a curious sardonic smile that was her habitual expression. The two men stood in the doorway. Mary sat at the table looking aimlessly out of the window. Outside, the snow fell in blinding showers. Inside, the fire gleamed on to the copper pots and pans, the crockery on the old oak dresser, the hams hanging from the ceiling.

Suddenly James turned.

"Jane!" he said.

The deaf woman never stirred.

"Jane!"

Still there was no response upon the enigmatic old face by the fireside.

"*Jane!*"

She turned slightly towards the voice.

"Get them photos from upstairs to show John," he bawled.

"What about boats?" she said.

"*Photos!*" roared her husband.

"Coats?" she quavered.

Mary looked from one to the other. The man made a gesture of irritation and went from the room.

He came back with a pile of picture postcards in his hand.

"It's quicker to do a thing oneself," he grumbled. "They're what my brother sent from Switzerland, where he's working now. It's a fine land, to judge from the views of it."

John took them from his hand. "She gets worse?" he said nodding towards the old woman.

She was sitting gazing at the fire, her lips curved into the curious smile.

Her husband shrugged his shoulders. "Aye. She's nigh as bad as her mother was."

"And her grandmother."

"Aye. It takes longer to tell her to do something than to do it myself. And deaf folks get a bit stupid, too. Can't see what you mean. They're best let alone."

The other man nodded and lit his pipe. Then James opened the door.

"The snow's stopped," he said. "Shall we go to the end of the village and back?"

The other nodded, and took his cap from behind the door. A gust of cold air filled the room as they went out.

Mary took a paper-backed book from the table and came over to the fireplace.

"Mary!"

She started. It was not the sharp, querulous voice of the deaf old woman, it was more like the voice of the young aunt whom Mary remembered in childhood. The old woman was leaning forward, looking at her intently.

"Mary! A happy Christmas to 'ee."

And, as if in spite of herself, Mary answered in her ordinary low tones.

"The same to you, auntie."

"Thank 'ee. Thank 'ee."

Mary gasped.

"Aunt! Can you hear me speaking like this?"

The old woman laughed, silently, rocking to and fro in her chair as if with pent-up merriment of years.

"Yes, I can hear 'ee, child. I've allus heard 'ee."

Mary clasped her hand eagerly.

"Then—you're cured, Aunt——"

"Ay. I'm cured as far as there was ever anything to be cured."

"You——?"

"I was never deaf, child, nor never will be, please God. I've took you all in fine."

Mary stood up in bewilderment.

"You? Never deaf?"

The old woman chuckled again.

"No, nor my mother—nor her mother neither."

Mary shrank back from her.

"I—I don't know what you mean," she said, unsteadily. "Have you been—pretending?"

"I'll make you a Christmas present of it, dearie," said the old woman. "My mother made me a Christmas present of it when I was your age, and her mother made her one. I haven't a lass of my own to give it to, so I give it to you. It can come on quite sudden like, if you want it, and then you can hear what you choose and not hear what you choose. Do you see?" She leant nearer and whispered, "You're shut out of it all—of having to fetch and carry for 'em, answer their daft questions and run their errands like a dog. I've watched you, my lass. You don't get much peace, do you?"

Mary was trembling.

"Oh, I don't know what to think," she said. "I—I couldn't do it."

"Do what you like," said the old woman. "Take it as a present, anyways—the Crewe deafness for a Christmas present," she chuckled. "Use it or not as you like. You'll find it main amusin', anyways."

And into the old face there came again that curious smile as if she carried in her heart some jest fit for the gods on Olympus.

The door opened suddenly with another gust of cold air, and the two men came in again, covered with fine snow.

"I—I'll not do it," whispered Mary, trembling.

"We didn't get far. It's coming on again," remarked John, hanging up his cap.

The old woman rose and began to lay the supper, silently and deftly, moving from cupboard to table without looking up. Mary sat by the fire, motionless and speechless, her eyes fixed on the glowing coals.

"Any signs o' the deafness in her?" whispered James, looking towards Mary. "It come on my wife jus' when she was that age."

"Aye. So I've heered."

Then he said loudly, "Mary!"

A faint pink colour came into her cheeks, but she did not show by look or movement that she had heard. James looked significantly at her husband.

The old woman stood still for a minute with a cup in each hand and smiled her slow, subtle smile.

"GENIUS", by Elinor Mordaunt

(From *Hutchinson's Magazine* and *The Century Magazine*)

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I have written before of Ben Cohen, with his eternal poring and humming over the scores of great masters; of the timber-yard at Canning Town, for ever changing and for ever the same, devouring forests with the eternal windlike rush of saws, slide of gigantic planes; practical and chill; wrapped in river-fogs, and yet exotic with the dust of cedar, camphor, pargoric.

In those days Ben Cohen was wont to read music as other boys read their penny-dreadfuls, avidly, with the imagined sounds like great waves for ever a-rush through his soul.

In the very beginning it was any music, just music. Then for a while Wagner held him. Any Wagnerian concert, any mixed entertainment which included Wagner—it seemed as though he sniffed them upon the breeze—and he would tramp for miles, wait for hours; biting cold, sleet, snow, mud, rain, all alike disregarded by that persistence which the very poor must bring to the pursuit of pleasure, the capture of cheap seats.

Once ensconced, regardless of hard, narrow seats, heights, crowds, his passion of adoration and excitement took him, shook him, tore him so that it was wonder his frail body did not split in two, render up the soul coming forth as Lazarus from the sepulchre. It was indeed, if you knew little Ben Cohen, him, *himself*, difficult to realise that his body had anything more to do with him than the yellow-drab waterproof which is a sort of uniform—a species of charity, covering a multitude of sins of poverty, shabbiness, thread-bareness—had to do with the real Jenny Bligh.

And yet, Ben Cohen's body was more completely his than one might have imagined. Jenny could, and indeed did, slough off her disguise on Sundays or rare summer days; but Ben and that self which was apart from music—that wildly-beating heart, pulsing blood, flooding warmth, grateful as the watchman's fire in the fog-sodden yard, that little fire over which he used to hang, warming his stiffened hands—were, after all, amazingly one.

The thing surprised him even more than it surprised any one else; above all, when it refused to be separated from his holy of holies, crept, danced, smiled its way through the most portentous scores—a thrilling sense of Jenny Bligh, all crotchets and quavers, smiles and thrills, quaint homeliness, sudden dignity.

By the time he first met Jenny he was clear of Wagner, had glanced a little patronisingly at Beethoven, turned aside and enwrapped himself in the sombre splendour of Bach, right away from the world; then, harking back, with a fresh vision, a sudden sense of the inevitable, had anchored himself in the solemn, wide-stretching harbourage of Beethoven.

It was like a return from a long voyage, tearing round a world full of beauty and interest, and yet, at the same time, full of pettiness, fuss, annoyance: a home-coming beyond words. There was a sense of eternity, a harmony which drew everything to itself, smoothing out the pattern of life, the present life and the life to come, so crumpled that, up to this time, he had had no real idea of the meaning of it.

All at once everything was immensely right, with Jenny as an essential and inevitable part of the rightness. He felt this so strongly that he never stopped to wonder if other people felt it

as plainly as he did.

Apart from all this, he was bound by the inarticulateness of his class. His Jewish blood lent him a wider and more picturesque vocabulary than most, and yet it stopped at any discussion of his feelings.

We have an idea that what we call the "common people" are more communicative on such subjects than we are; but this is not so. They talk of their physical ailments and sensations, but they are deeply shy upon the subject of their feelings. Ben's mother would discuss the state of her inside, the deaths of her relations and friends; his own birth, down to the smallest detail. But she would never have dreamt of telling her son that she loved him, desired his love, hungered for his coming, grieved at his going.

Ben himself put none of his feeling for Beethoven into words, above all to his mother; she would not have understood him if he had. He said nothing of Jenny, either, save as a girl he'd met, a girl he was going to bring home to tea; but she understood that without any words; that was courting, part of the business of human nature; much like the preparation of meals.

It was odd, coming to think of it—might have been ridiculous, save that ridicule was the sort of thing which could find no possible lodgment with Ben—that his determination to devote his whole musical life to Beethoven, to interpret him as no Englishman had ever done before, should have been synonymous with his sacred, heady, and yet absolute determination to marry Jenny Bligh.

Jenny worked in the jam-factory, and there was something of the aroma of ripe fruit about her: ripe strawberries, raspberries, plums, damsons. She was plumpish and fresh: very red lips and very bright eyes, reddish-brown, the colour of blackberry leaves in autumn, with hair to match. Her little figure was neat; her small hands, with their square-tipped fingers, deft and quick in their movements; there was something at once rounded and clear-cut about everything she did.

A sea-faring admirer used to say that she was "a bit short in the beam, but a daisy fur carryin' sail"; and that was the idea she gave: so well-balanced, so trim, going off to work in her wide white apron on those rare mornings when she shook off the yellow mackintosh.

Ben saw her like that for the first time crossing the Lee just below the timber-yard with its cranes like black notes zigzagging out over the river, which had for once discarded its fog. It was a day of bright blue sky, immense, rounded, silvery clouds, fresh and clean; with a wind which caught up the white apron and billowed it out for the sheer fun of the thing: showing trim ankles, the turn of a plump calf, such as Ben Cohen had never even thought of before, the realisation of which was like wine: freshly tasted, red, fruity, running through his veins, mounting to his head. He had known that women had legs; his mother, the laundress, suffered from hers—complainingly, devoted woman as she was—swollen with much standing, and "them there dratted veins": stocky legs, with loose folds of stocking.

As to thinking any more of a woman's legs than of the legs of a table, the idea had never even occurred to him. But there you are! It is the unexpected that happens: the sort of thing which we could never have imagined ourselves as doing, thinking, feeling. The temptations we have recognised, struggled against, are nothing; but there comes a sort of wild, whistling wind from nowhere—much the same as that wind about Jenny's skirts, white apron—and our life is like a kaleidoscope, suddenly shaken up and showing a completely fresh pattern.

Who could have thought it—who?—that Ben Cohen, dreamer, idealist, passionate, pure, the devotee of art, would have fallen in love with Jenny Bligh's legs—or, rather, a pair of ankles, and a little more at that side where the wind caught her skirt—before he had so much as a glimpse of her face?

Just over the bridge she stopped to speak with another girl who worked in his own counting-house. As Ben hurried up to pass them before they separated, really see *her*, this other girl recognised him, flung him a friendly "Hullo!" and was answered in the same fashion.

As he moved on he heard her—was meant to hear, knew that he was meant to hear, from the pitch of the voice—

"Clever ain't no word fur it! There ain't no tune as——"

The end of the sentence was lost; but he knew the sort of thing, knew it by heart, had spent his time running away from it. Now, however, he was grateful: more grateful still when he met Miss Ankles again, and she herself, regarding Florry Hines' eulogy as a sort of introduction, smiled, moved on a step, and herself tossed a "Hullo" over one shoulder.

Ben's thin olive-tinted face was flushed as he drew forward to her side with his odd stoop, his way of ducking his head and raising his eyes, dark and glowing. He took Jenny's dinner-basket, and she noticed his hands, large and well-shaped, with long fingers, widened at the tips. Florry had said that he was a "Sheeny," but there was nothing of the Jew about him apart from his colouring, his brilliant dark eyes; unless it were a sort of inner glow, an ardour, curbed by his almost childlike shyness, lack of self-confidence in everything apart from his music: that something, at once finer and more cruelly persistent, vital, than is to be found in the purely Anglo-Saxon race.

Though Jenny liked what she called "a pretty tune," she knew nothing whatever of music, understood less. And yet, almost from that first moment, she imderstood Ben Cohen, realising him as lover and child: imderstood him better, maybe, than she did later on: losing her sure-ness for a while, shaken and bewildered; everything blurred by her own immensity of love, longing; of fearing that she did not understand—feeling out of it.

But that was not for sometime to come: in the meanwhile she was like a dear little bantam hen with one chick; while Ben himself was content to shelter under her wing, until it grew upon him that, loving her as he did, loving his mother—realising what it meant to be a mother, in thinking of Jenny herself with a child—his child—in her arms—it was "up to" him to prove himself for their sakes, to make them proud of him and his music, without the faintest idea of how proud they were already, lift the whole weight of care from their shoulders.

The worst of it was, he told them nothing whatever about it. The better sort of men are given to these crablike ways of appearing to move away from what they intend to move towards. It simply seemed as though he were forgetting them a little—then, more and more; elbowing them aside to clear the way for his beloved music.

He was no longer deprecating, appealing, leaning upon them: each woman thought of him as "her child," and when his love made a man of him, they realised the hurt, nothing more.

He overdid it, too, as genius does overdo things; was brusque, entirely immersed in his great scheme. Sometimes he even laughed to himself over this. "They don't know what I'm up to!" he would declare to himself, with a sense of triumph.

He had never even thought of his music in the money sense before, but as his love and ambition for the two women grew upon him, he was like a child with a new toy. He would not only make a great name, he would make an immense fortune: his mind blinked, dazzled at the very thought. He moved with a new pride, and also—alas!—a new remoteness.

His health had broken when he was about seventeen—his bent shoulders still showed that old drag upon the chest—and he was away in a sanatorium for a year. When he came back he was cured. It was young Saere, the junior partner in the timber business, who had sent him away; and it was he who, when Ben returned, paid for lessons for him, so that he learnt to play

as well as read music.

From that time onward he had always stuck to the firm, working in the tally sheds; paid, out of his earnings, for the use of a room and a piano for practising upon so many hours each week, completely happy and contented.

He had never even thought of leaving the business until he realised his immense love for Jenny, and, through her, for his mother; the necessity for doing something big. What did sacrifice matter? What did it matter being poor, hungry, shabby?—What did anything matter just for a while? There was so little he wanted; meals were a nuisance; his eyes were so dazzled by the brilliance of the future, set upon a far horizon, that he forgot the path of the present, still beneath his feet.

If his mother had not set food before him he would scarcely have thought of it. But, all the same, he ate it, and money had to be earned by some one or other.

His mother had never let him know the actual pinch of poverty; she wore that shoe upon her own foot. He had no more idea than a child of the cost of mere daily necessities; and during the last few years, between his work and hers, they had been comfortable enough.

"We can hang on for a bit," he said, when he spoke of leaving the wood-yard; and she answered, almost with triumph, that she had "hung on" well enough before he'd earned "aught but a licking."

At first she was proud of reshouldering the entire burden; it made him more entirely hers. He could not do without her; even with Jenny he could not do without her. But she had not been a young woman when Ben was born; she was old now, and tired, with that sort of tiredness which accumulates, heaps up, and which no single night's rest can ever cure; the tiredness which is ready, more than ready, for a narrower bed—eternal sleep.

"—Hold on until after the concert?"

"Sorry fur meself if I couldn't."

The concert! That was the goal. There was a public hall at Clapton where Ben had chanced on some really good music—just one night of it, and quite by chance—and this, to his mind, ennobled the Claptonites; there was the place in which to start the revolutionising of the musical world. Besides—and here he thought himself very canny, by no means a Jew for nothing—there were fine old houses at Clapton, and where there were such houses there must be rich people.

When the date was actually arranged, he practised for the best part of the day. While he was at home he read music; he lived in a maze of music. He never thought of advertising, collecting his public; he even avoided his old friends, his patrons at the timber-yard, overcome by agonies of shyness at the very thought of so much as mentioning his concert. Quite simply, in a way he did not even attempt to explain to himself, he felt that the world of London would scent it from afar off. As to paid *clagues*, presentation-tickets, patrons, advance agents, all the booming and flattery, the jam of the powder for an English audience, he had no idea of the existence of such things. Beethoven was wonderful, and he had found out wonderful things about him: that was enough.

When the Angel Gabriel blew the last trump, there would be no need to invite the dead to rise. Neither was there any need to invite the really elect to his concert. Not to hear him, Ben Cohen, but to hear Beethoven as he ought to be heard; that's how he felt.

During those weeks of preparation for the concert, his mother worked desperately hard to keep their home together without his earnings, while Jenny helped. At first that had been enough for her, too: to help. But later——

Throughout those long evenings when, already tired from her work in the factory, she had stood sorting, sprinkling, folding, ironing, the two women got to a state where they scarcely dared to look at each other: just a passing glance, a hardish stare, but no *looking into*.

If he had but once said, "I can't bear you to work so hard for me," everything would have been different, the fatigue wiped out. But he didn't; he didn't even know they were working for him, working beyond the limit of an ordinary working-woman's working-day, hard enough, in all conscience.

"Men can't not be expected to notice things the way we do." That's what they told themselves—they did not say even this much to each other. But far, far away, out of sight, out of all actual knowledge, was the fear which neither of them would have dared to realise, a vague horror, a sort of ghost....

"He don't care—he's changed."

And, indeed, this is how it appeared. All through that time he wore an odd look of excitement, triumph, pleasure, which lifted him away from himself. There was a sort of lilt in his very step; his eyes shone, his cheeks were flushed. When he cleared a pile of freshly-ironed, starched things from the end of a table, so as to spread out a score upon it, laid them on the floor where the cat padded them over with dirty feet, and his mother railed at him, as she still did rail—on any subject apart from this of not caring—he glanced up at her with bright, amused eyes, his finger still following the black-and-white tangle of notes, looked at Jenny, and laughed—actually laughed.

"You great oaf!" cried Mrs. Cohen, and could have killed him. Up at four o'clock next morning, rewashing, starching, ironing, she retched with sick fatigue and something more—that sense of giddiness, of being hit on the head which had oppressed her of late. It was as though that laugh of Ben's had stuck like a bone in her chest, so sharp that she could scarcely draw breath; driven all the blood to her head.

And yet it had been full of nothing but triumph, a sort of tender triumph, almost childish delight. He was going to do wonders—wonders!—open a new world to them! He was so dazzled by his own work, dreams, by all he had in store for them, that he did not even see them, themselves, worn with toil, realise the meaning of it, the reason for it. In any case he would have laughed, because they had no idea how near it was to an end.

That concert! It would be like nothing so much as opening a door into a new world, where they need never so much as soil a finger: floating around, dressed in silk, feeding from off the finest china, sleeping upon down.

Man-like, his eyes were fixed upon the future. No two women had ever been loved as they were loved. All this work, this washing and ironing, it resembled nothing more than the opening scene in an opera: a sort of prelude, for the sake of contrast. They would see—O-o-oh, yes, they would see!

It was like that old childish "Shut your eyes and open your mouth."

But they—they were bound in the close-meshed strait-waistcoat of endless toil, petty anxiety. The days and hours heaped in front of them obliterated all possible view of the future.

In the beginning they had been as excited as he was over the thought of the concert. He must wear a rosette—no, a flower in his button-hole; and white kid gloves; as he moved forward upon the platform, he must bow right and left, and draw them off as he bowed.

This was Jenny's idea. It was Jenny who made him practise his bows, and it was Jenny who borrowed a dress-suit from a waiter-friend; while it was his mother who "got up" the borrowed

shirt to go with it, stiff and shining; who polished his best boots until they looked "near as near like patent."

All this had been done close upon a fortnight before.

Jenny was a good girl, but if she was not there to see to things, Jenny might fail with a bubble on the shirt-front. No amount of meaning well was of any use in getting up a stiff shirt as it ought to be got up.

"Better 'ave it all ready, 'a-case o' anything happening." That was what Mrs. Cohen said to herself, with a dull dread at the back of her mind, a feeling as though every next day were a Friday.

Her face had been oddly flushed of late, with a rather fixed and glassy look about the eyes. Jenny thought of this, on her way to the concert; alone, for by some ill fate, his nearer vision blurred in that golden maze of the future, Ben had fixed his concert for a Friday.

This Friday! Always a bad day, bad in itself, bad for every one, like an east wind; worst of all for a laundress: not so depressing as a Monday, but so hurried, so overcrowded, with all the ironing and folding, the packing of the lots, all small, into their separate newspaper parcels; the accumulated fatigue of a whole week. Some demon seemed to possess her clients that week: they had come in with a collar here, a shirt there, an odd pillowslip, tablecloth, right over Thursday. She was working until after twelve o'clock that night—so was Jenny—up before dawn next morning, though no one save herself knew of this.

"Whatever they do, they shan't not keep me from my Ben's concert!" That was what she said, with a vision of motors blocking the road in front of the little hall. But she had been a laundress best part of a lifetime—before she discovered herself as the mother of a genius—and it had bit into her bone: she could not get finished, and she could not leave the work undone.

"Some one's got to earn a living!"—that was what she said, embittered by fatigue, the sweat pouring down her face, beaten to every sensibility, apart from her swollen feet, by the time that Jenny called in for her, soon after six. She had longed to go, had never even thought of not going; but by now, apart from her physical pain and weariness, she was alive to but one point, her whole being drawn out to a sort of cone with an eye at the end of it; and far, far away at the back of her brain, struggling with impenetrable mists, but one thought—if she scorched anything, she would have to replace h.

When Jenny found that it was impossible to move her, she made her own way up to Clapton alone. For Ben had to be at the hall early; there were certain matters to arrange, and he would try over the piano.

Her efforts with Mrs. Cohen had delayed her; she was driven desperate by that and malice of inanimate thing: every 'bus and tram was against her, whisking out of sight just as she wanted them, or blocked by slow crawling carts and lorries. There was a tight, hard pain in her heart, like toothache, round which her whole body gathered, pressing, impaled upon it; a sense of desperation, and yet at the heart of this, like a nerve, the wonder if anything really mastered.

Ben had promised to reserve seats for his mother and herself; but had he?—Had he? Would she find the place blocked by swells with their hard stare, duchesses and suchlike, glistening in diamonds? In her minds eye she saw billows of silk, slabs of black doth and shining white shirt-fronts—hundreds and hundreds of them. And Ben bowing, bowing to them as she had taught him to do.

For some time past he had been so far away, so detached that she was haunted by the fear that if she put out a finger to touch him it might go through him, as though he were a ghost. At times she had caught him, had him to her in a passion of love and longing. But even then, with

his head against her heart, his lips, or some pulse or nerve, had moved in a wordless tune, the beat of time.

If only he had still seemed to need her, nothing, nothing would have mattered. But he didn't: he needed no one—no one. He seemed so frail, she had made sure that he wanted looking after; but he didn't. A drunkard might have fallen down in the street, needed fetching, supporting, exhorting; a bully come home with a broken head. But it seemed as though Ben were, in reality, for all his air of appeal, sufficient to himself, moving like a steady light through the darkness; unstirred by so much as a breath of wind.

Overcome by anxiety, she got out of the tram too soon.

It had begun to rain, a dull, dark night, and there was a blur of misty light flooding the pavement a little way ahead. That must be the hall. She was afraid of overshooting the mark. Those trams had such a way of getting going just as one wanted to be out of them!

But the light was nothing more than a cinema, and she she had a good quarter of a mile to walk in the wet. The cruel wet!—just like it to be wet on this night of all nights! Even her optimism was gone. She kept on thinking of Mrs. Cohen, her flushed face and oddly-glazed eyes; the queer stiff way in which she moved, held her head. For once she was angry with Ben.

"'Im and his crowds! 'Im an' 'is fine lydies! 'Im an' 'is *motor-cars!*"

After all, she did overshoot her mark; on inquiry for the hall, she was told that she had passed it, and was obliged to retrace her steps.

No wonder she had passed it; with all she had expected at the back of her mind! The strip of pavement outside was dark, with not so much as a single taxi in sight; the door half-shut, the dreary vestibule badly-lighted, empty, smelling of damp. The sodden-looking sketch of a man in the pay-box seemed half asleep; stretched, yawned when she spoke, pushing a strip of pink paper towards her as she gave her name.

"For two." He poked out a long neck and peered round the edge of the box, like a tortoise from its shell.

"The other lydy wasn't not able ter come ter-night," answered Jenny with dignity, and the beast grinned, displaying a wreckage of broken teeth.

"Ain't not what you might call a crowd, anyway," he remarked.

She could have killed him for that! She realised the white face of a clock, but she would not look at it. She was early, that was it. Look how she had hurried. No wonder that she was early. And great ladies were always late: she had learnt that from the *Daily Mail* stories.

"Two an' two make four—them too late an' me too early!" she said to herself, with a gallant effort after her own brisk way of taking things, a surer tap of heels on the stone floor as she turned towards a swing-door to her left; pushed it open, and was hit in the face by what seemed like a thick black curtain.

A dim white-gloved hand was thrust through it and took her ticket.

"Mind you don't fall—no good wasting the lights until they come—if ever they does come," exhorted and explained a voice out of the darkness; for, after all, it was not a curtain, but just darkness.

At first Jenny could see nothing. Then, little by little, it seemed as though different objects crept forward, one by one, like wild animals from their lair.

Those white patches, the hands of two white-gloved men, holding sheaves of programmes—

she realised one between her own fingers—whispering together.

There was the platform, the great piano sprawling over it; and in front of this, rows and rows and rows—and rows upon rows—of empty seats.

She looked behind her—they had argued long over the question of places for herself and his mother. "The very best," that's what Ben had said; but they fought against this, fought and conquered, for the best seats meant money.

"What's a seat more or less, I'd like to know?"

"Money, all money." Old Mrs. Cohen had been firm upon this point.

Still, there were a great many seats yet further back—and all empty: a little raised, seeming to push themselves forward with the staring vacuity of an idiot: more seats overhead in a curving balcony, rising above each other as though proud of their emptiness. It would have been impossible to believe that mere vacant places could wear so sinister, as well as foolish, an aspect. An idiot, but a cruel idiot, too: the whole thing one cruel idiot, of the sort that likes to pull legs from flies.

There was a clock there, also. For a long while Jenny would not allow herself to look at it. But something drew her, until it became an unbearable effort to keep her eyes away from it, to look anywhere else; and at last she turned her head, stared, sharply, defiantly, as though daring it.

It was five-and-twenty minutes to nine. Five-and-twenty minutes to nine, and the concert was to have begun at eight!—Five-and-twenty minutes to nine, and there was no one there—no one whatever!

The clock hands dragged themselves on for another five minutes; then one of the men disappeared behind the scene; came back, speaking excitedly, gesticulating with white hands:

"We're to turn on the light. 'E swears as 'e won't give it up—'e's goin' ter play."

"Goin' ter play? Well, I'll be blowed!—Goin' ter play! An' with nothing 'ere but *That!*"

Jenny saw how he jerked his head in her direction. So she was "That"—she, Jenny Bligh!—and so far gone that she did not even care.

As the lights went up the hall seemed to swim in a sort of mist: the terra-cotta walls, the heavy curtains at either side of the platform, those awful empty seats!

Jenny spread her skirt wide, catching at the chair to either side of her, stretching out her arms along the backs of them. She had a wild feeling as though it were up to her to spread herself sufficiently to cover them all. She half rose. Perhaps she could hide more of that emptiness if she moved nearer to the front: that was her thought.

But no; she mustn't do that: this was the place Ben had chosen for her; she must stay where she was. He might look there, miss her, and imagine that there was nobody, nobody at all; that even she had failed him.

If only she could spread herself—spread herself indefinitely—multiply herself: anything, anything to cover those beastly chairs: sticking out there, grinning, shaming her man!

Then she had a sudden idea of running into the street, entreating the people to come in; was upon her feet for the second time, when Ben walked on to the platform.

For once he was not ducking or moving sideways; he came straight forward, bowed to the front of him, right and left; drew off his gloves and bowed again. Mingling with her agony of

pity, a thrill ran through Jenny Bligh at this. He remembered her teaching; he was hers—hers—hers—after all, hers—more than ever hers!

The borrowed coat, far too big for him, rose in a sort of hood at the back of his neck; as he bowed something happened to the centre stud of his shirt, and it disappeared into an aperture shaped like a dark gourd in the whiteness.

But, for all that, Jenny felt herself overawed by his dignity, as any one would have been: there was something in the man so much greater than his clothes, greater than his conscious, half-childish self.

Jenny's hands were raised to clap; but they dropped into her lap, lay there, as, with a face set like marble, Ben turned and seated himself at the piano. There was a moment's pause, while he stared straight in front of him—such a pause that a feeling of goose-flesh ran down the back of her arms—then he began to play.

Jenny had not even glanced at her programme; she would have understood nothing of it if she had; but it gave the Sonata, Op. III, as the opening piece.

Ben, however, took no notice of this; but, for some reason he could not have explained, flung himself straightway into the third item, the tremendous "Hammerclavier."

The sounds flooded the hall; swept through it as if it were not there, obliterating time and space. It was as though the Heavenly Host had descended upon the earth, sweet, wonderful, and yet terrible, with a sweep of pinions, deep-drawn breath—Tubal Cain and his kind, deified and yet human in their immense masculinity and strength.

Jenny Bligh was neither imaginative nor susceptible to sound, but it drew her out of herself. It was like bathing in a sea whose waves overpower one so that, try as one may to cling to the earth, it slips off from beneath one's feet—shamed, beaten. She had a feeling that if it did not stop soon she would die; and would yet die when it did stop. Her heart beat thickly and heavily, her eyes were dim; she was bewildered, lost, and yet exhilarated. It was worse than an air raid, she thought—more exciting, more wonderful.

The end left her almost as much exhausted as Ben himself. The sweat was running down his face as he got up from his seat, came forward to the front of the platform, and bowed right and left. Jenny had not clapped—she would as soon have thought of clapping God with His last trump—but Ben bowed as though a whole multitude had applauded him.

By some chance, the only direction in which he did not turn his eyes was the gallery: even then, he might not have seen a single figure seated a little to one side—a man with a dark overcoat buttoned up to his chin, who clapped his two thumbs noiselessly together, drawing in his breath with a sort of whistle.

"That's the stuff!" he said. "That's the stuff to give 'em!"

After a moment's pause, Ben turned again to the piano. This time he played the Sonata Pathétique in C Minor, Op. XIII; then the Sonata Walsein in C Major. Between each, he got up, moved forward to the edge of the platform, and bowed.

At the end of the Sonata, Op. III—by rights the first on the programme—during the short interval which followed it he straightened his shoulders with a sort of swagger, utterly unlike himself, swung round to the piano again, and slammed out "God Save the King."

He played it through to the very end, then rose, bowed from where he stood, stared round at the empty hall—a dreadful, strained, defiant smile stiffening upon his face—and sinking back upon his stool, laid his arms across the keyboard with a crash of notes, burying his head upon them.

In a moment Jenny was out of her seat. There were chairs in her way, and she kicked them aside; raked one forward with her foot, and scrambled on to the platform; then, catching a sideways glimpse of the empty seats, bent forward and shook her fist at them.

"Beasts! Pigs! A-a-a-ah!—You!"

The attendants had disappeared, the stranger was lost in shadows. There was nobody there but themselves: it would not have mattered if there had been: all the lords and ladies, all the swells in the world, would not have mattered. The great empty hall, suddenly friendly, closed, curving, around them.

Jenny dropped upon her knees at Ben's side, and flung her arms about him, with little moans of love and pity; slid one hand beneath his cheek, with a muffled roll of notes, raised his head and pressed it against her heart.

"There, my dear! There, my love—there—there—there!"

She laid her lips to his thick dark hair, in a passion of adoration, loving every lock of it; and then, woman-like, picked a white thread from off his black coat; clasped him afresh, with joy and sorrow like runnels of living water pouring through and through her.

"There, there, there, there!"

He was too much of a child to fight against her: all his pride was gone. "Oh, Jenny, Jenny, Jenny!" he cried; then, in an extremity of innocent anguish, amazement—

"They didn't come! They don't care—they don't want it! Jenny, they don't want it!"

"Don't you worry about them there blighters, my darling. Selfish pigs! they ain't not worth a thought. Don't you worry about them."

"But—Beethoven..."

"Don't you worry about Beethoven, neifer—ain't no better nor he oughter be, taeke my word for it. Lettin' you in like this ere! There—there—there, my dear!"

They clung together, weeping, rocking to and fro.

"Well," said the man in the gallery, "I'm jiggered!" and crept out very softly, stumbling a little because of the damp air which seemed to have got into his eyes and made them smart.

As the lovers came out into the little vestibule, clinging to each other, they did not so much as see the stranger, who stood talking to the man in the box-office, but went straight on out into the rain, with their umbrellas unopened in their hands.

"A good thing as the 'all people insists upon payment in advance," remarked the man in the box-office.

The other gave him a curious, half-contemptuous glance.

"I'd like to hear you say that in a year's time."

"Why?"

"Because that chap will be able to buy and sell a place like this a hundred times over by then—Queen's Hall—Albert Hall—I know. It's my business to know. There's something about his playing. That *something different* they're all out for."

It took a long time to get back to Canning Town. Even Jenny had lost her certainty: her grasp of the ways of 'buses and such things. She felt oddly clear and empty: like a room swept

and garnished, with the sense of a ghost in some dim corner of it; physically sapped out.

Ben clung to her. He said very little, but he clung to her, with an odd, lost air: the look of a child who has been slapped in the face, and cannot understand why.

She was so much smaller than he, like a diminutive, sturdy steam-tug; and yet if she could have carried him, she would have done so.

As it was, she threw her whole heart and soul into guiding, comforting; thinking of a hundred things at once, her soft mouth folded tight with anxiety.—How to prevent him from feeling shamed before his mother: how to keep the trouble away from her: though at the back of her own mind was a feeling—and she had an idea that it would be at the back of old Mrs. Cohen's also—of immense relief, of some load gone: almost as though her child had been through a bad attack of scarlet-fever, or something which one does not take twice.

With all this, there was the thought of what she would step out and buy for their supper, if the fried-fish shop were still open; all she would do and say to cheer them.

As for Ben, the "Hammerclavier" was surging through his brain, carrying the empty hall with it, those rows upon rows of empty seats—swinging them to and fro so that he felt physically sick, as though he were at sea.

Quite suddenly, as they got out of the last tram, the rain ceased. At the worst it had been a mild night of velvety darkness and soft airs, the reflection from the lamps swimming in a haze of gold across the wet pavement; but now, just as they reached the end of his own street, the black sky opened upon a wide sea of pinkish-amber and a full moon sailed into sight. At the same moment, Ben's sense of anguished bewilderment cleared away, leaving in its place a feeling of incalculable weariness.

To be back in his own home again—that was all he asked. "You'll stay the night at our place, Jenny?"

"Yes; I promised your mother." Her brow knitted, and then cleared again. Ah, well; that was all over: Ben would go back to his regular job again; they would get married; then there would be her money, too: no need for old Mrs. Cohen to do another hand's turn. Plenty of time for her to rest now: all her life for resting in.

"Your mother." As she spoke Ben remembered, for the first time, actively remembered, for of course it was his mother that he meant when he thought of home.

"She wasn't there, Jenny! She wasn't there!"

"She was very busy, 'adn't not finished 'er work." Something beyond Jenny's will stiffened within her. So he had only just realised it! She tried not to remember, but she could not help it—the flushed face, the glassy eyes: the whole look of a woman beaten, with her back against a wall; condemning Ben by her very silence, desperate courage.

"Work?"

"Yes, work." Jenny snapped it: hating herself for it, drawing him closer, and yet unable to help it.

"Why——" began Ben, and then stopped—horrified. At last he realised it: perhaps it ran to him through Jenny's arm; perhaps it was just that he was down on earth again, humble, ductile, seeing other people's lives as they were, not as he meant to make them.

"Ter-night—workin'——"

"All night; one the saeme as another."

"But why——" he began again; stopped dead, loosed his own arm and caught hers. "All this while workin' like that! She works too hard. Jenny, look here: she works too hard. And I—this damned music! Look here, Jenny, it's got to stop! I'll never play a note again; she shall never do a hard stroke of work again; never, never—not so long as I'm here to work for her. All my life—ever since I can remember—washing and ironing, like—like—the very devil!"

He pulled the girl along with him. "That was what I was thinking all the time: to make a fortune so that you'd both have everything you wanted, a big house, servants, motors, silk dresses—— And all the time letting you both work yourselves to death! But this is the end; no more of that. To be happy—that's all that matters—sort of everyday happiness.

"No more of that beastly washing, ironing—it's the end of that, anyhow. When I'm back at the timber-yard——"

He was like a child again, planning; they almost ran down the street. "No more o' that damned washin' and ironin'—no more work——"

True! How true! The street door opened straight into the little kitchen. She was not in bed, for the light was still burning; they could see it at either side of the blind, shrunk crooked with steam. There was one step down into the kitchen; but for all that, the door would not open when they raised the latch and pushed it, stuck against something.

"Some of those beastly old clothes!" Ben shoved it, hailing his mother. "Mother! Mother, you've got something stuck against the door." Odd that she did not come to his help, quick as she always was.

After all, it gave way too suddenly for him to altogether realise the oddness; and he stumbled forward right across the kitchen, seeing nothing until he turned and faced Jenny still standing upon the step, staring downward, with an ashy-white face, wide eyes fixed upon old Mrs. Cohen, who lay there at her feet, resting—incomprehensibly resting.

They need not have been so emphatic about it all—"No more beastly washing, no more work"—for the whole thing was out of their hands once and for all.

She had fallen across the doorway, a flat-iron still in her hand—the weapon with which she had fought the world, kept the wolf from that same door—all the strain gone out of her face, a little twisted to the left side, and oddly smiling. One child's pinafore was still unironed; the rest were folded, finished.

They raised her between them, laid her upon her bed. It was Jenny who washed her, wrapped her in clean linen—no one else should touch her; Ben who sat by her, with hardly a break, until the day that she was buried, wiped out with self-reproach, grief; desolate as any child, sodden with tears.

He collected all his music into a pile, the day before the funeral, gave it to Jenny to put under the copper—a burnt-offering.

"If it hadn't been for that, she might be here now. I don't want ever to see it again—ever to hear a note of it!" That was what he said.

Jenny went back to the house with him after the funeral: she was going to give him his tea, and then return to her own room. In a week they were to be married, and she would be with him for good, looking after him. That evening, before she left, she would set his breakfast, cut his lunch ready for the morrow. By Saturday week they would be settled down to their regular life together. She would not think about his music; pushed it away at the back of her mind—over and done with—would not even allow herself the disloyalty of being glad. And yet was glad, deeply glad, relieved, despite her pride in it, in him: as though it were something

unknown, alien, dangerous, like things forbidden.

Two men were waiting at the door of the narrow slip of a house: the tall, thin one with his overcoat still buttoned up to his chin, and another fat and shining, with a top-hat, black frock-coat, and white spats.

"About that concert——" said the first man.

"We were thinking that if we could persuade you to play——" put in the other.

"There was no one there," interrupted Ben roughly. His shoulders were bent, his head dropped forward on his chest, poking sideways, his eyes sullen as a child's.

"I was there," put in the first man, "and I must say, impressed——"

"Very deeply impressed," added the other; but once again Ben brushed him aside.

"You were there—at my concert!" Jenny, standing a little back—for they were all three crowded upon the tiny door-step—saw him glance up at the speaker with something luminous shining through the darkness of his face. "At my concert——! And you liked it? You liked it?"

"'Like' is scarcely the word."

"We feel that if you could be persuaded to give another concert," put in the stout man, blandly, "and would allow——"

"I shall never play again—never—never!" cried Ben, harshly; but this time the other went on imperturbably:

"—allow us to make all arrangements, take all responsibility: boom you; see to the advertising and all that—we thought if we were to let practically all the seats for the first concert go in complimentary tickets; get a few good names on the committee—perhaps a princess or something of that sort as a patroness—a strong *claque*——"

"Of course, playing Beethoven—playing him as you played him the other night. Grand—magnificent!" put in the first man realising the weariness, the drop to blank indifference in the musician's face. "The 'Hammerclavier' for instance——"

It was magical.—"Oh, yes, yes—that—that!" Ben's eyes widened, his face glowed. He hummed a bar or so. "Was there ever anything like it? My God! was there ever anything like it!"

Jenny, who had the key, squeezed past them at this, and ran through the kitchen to the scullery, where she filled the kettle and put it upon the gas-ring to boil; looked round her for a moment, with quick, darting eyes—like a small wild animal at bay in a strange place—then drew a bucketful of water, turned up her sleeves, the skirt of her new black frock, tied on an old hessian apron of Mrs. Cohen's, with a savage jerk of the strings, and dropping upon her knees, started to scrub the floor, the rough stone floor.

"Men!—trapsin' in an' out, muckin' up a place!"

She could hear the murmur of men's voices in the kitchen, and through it that "trapsin'" of other men struggling with a long coffin on the steep narrow stairs.

On and on it went—the agonised remembrance of all that banging, trampling; the swish of her own scrubbing-brush; the voices round the table where old Mrs. Cohen had stood ironing for hours and hours upon end.

Then the door into the scullery was opened. For a moment or so she kept her head obstinately lowered, determined that she *would* not look up. Then, feeling her own unkind-

ness, she raised it and smiled upon Ben, who stood there, flushed, glowing, and yet too shamefaced to speak—smiled involuntarily, as one must smile at a child.

"Well?"

"That—that—music stuff—I suppose it's burnt?" he began, fidgeting from one foot to another, his head bent, ducking sideways, his shoulder to his ear.

Her glance enwrapped him—smiling, loving, bitter-sweet. Things were not going to be as she had thought; none of that going out regularly to work, coming home to tea like other men; none of that safe sameness of life. At the back of her calm was a fierce battle; then she rose to her feet, wiped her hands upon her apron, stooped to the lowest shelf of the cupboard, and drew out a pile of music.

"There you are, my dear. I didn't not burn it, a'cause—— Well, I suppose as I sorter knowed all the time as you'd be wantin' it."

Children! Well, one knew where one was with children—real children. But men, that was a different pair of shoes altogether—something you could never be sure of—unless you remembered, always remembered, to *treat* them as though they were grown-up, *think* of them as children.

"Now you taeke that an' get along back to yer friends an' yer playin', and let me get on with my work. It'll be dark an' tea-time on us afore ever I've time ter so much as turn round."

"That woman," said the fat, shining man, as they moved away down the street, greasy with river-mist.—"Hang it all! where in the world are we to get a taxi?—Commonplace little thing; a bit of a drag on him, I should think."

"Don't you believe it, my friend—that's the sort to give 'em—some'un who will sort of dry-nurse 'em—feed 'em—mind 'em. That's the wife for a genius. The only sort of wife—mark my word for it."

THE DEVIL TO PAY, by Max Pemberton

(From *The Story-Teller*)

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I

To say that the usually amiable Ambrose Cleaver was in the devil of a temper would be merely to echo the words of his confidential clerk, John, who, looking through the glass partition between their offices, confessed to James, the office boy, that he had not seen such goings on since old Ambrose, the founder of the firm, was gathered to his fathers.

"There won't be a bit of furniture in the place presently," said he, "and I wouldn't give twopence for the cat when he's finished kicking her. This comes of the women, my boy. Never have nothing to say to a woman until you've finished your dinner and lighted your cigar. Many a good business have I seen go into the Bankruptcy Court because of a petticoat before lunch. You keep away from 'em if you want to be Lord Mayor of London, same as Dick Whittington

was."

James did not desire particularly to become Lord Mayor of London, but he was greatly amused by his employer's temper.

"Never heard such language," said he—"and him about to marry her. Why, he almost threw them jewels at her 'ead; and when she told him he must have let the devil in by accident, he says as he was always glad to see her friends. They'll make a happy couple, surely."

John shook his old dense head, and would express no opinion upon the point.

"Misfortunes never come singly," said he. "Here's that Count Florian waiting for him in the ante-room. Now that's a man I can't abide. If anybody told me he was the devil, I'd believe him soon enough. A bad 'un, James, or I don't know the breed. An evil man who seems to pollute the very air you breathe."

James was not so sure of it.

"He give me half a crown for fetching of a cab yesterday, and told me to go to the music-hall with it. He must have a lot of money, for he never smokes his cigars more than half-way through, and he wears a different scarf-pin every day. That's wot comes of observation, Mr. John. I could tell you all the different pairs of trousers he's worn for the last three weeks, and so I'm going to make my fortune as the advertisements say."

Mr. John would not argue about that. The bell of the inner office now tinkled, and that was an intimation that the Count Nicholas Florian was to be admitted to the Holy of Holies. So the old man hurried away and, opening the sacred door with circumspection, narrowly escaped being knocked down by an enraged and hasty cat—glad to escape that inferno at any cost.

"You rang, sir?"

Ambrose Cleaver, thirty-three years of age, square-jawed, fair-haired, a florid complexion and with a wonderful pair of clear blue eyes, admitted that he did ring.

"And don't be so d——d slow next time," he snapped.

"I'll see the Count Florian at once."

The old man withdrew timidly, while his master mopped up the ink from the pot he had broken in his anger.

"Enough to try the devil himself," was the sop that argument offered to his heated imagination. "She knows I hate Deauville like poison, and of course it's to Deauville she must go for the honeymoon. And she looks so confoundedly pretty when she's in a temper—what wonderful eyes she's got! And when she's angry the curls get all round her ears, and it's as much as a man can do not to kiss her on the spot. Of course, I didn't really want her to have opals if she thinks they're unlucky, but she needn't have insisted that I knew about it and bought them on purpose to annoy her. Good God! I wish there were no women in the world sometimes. What a splendid place it would be to live in, and what a fine time the men would have—for, of course, they are all the daughters of the devil really, and that's why they make life too hot for us."

Mr. John entered at this moment showing in the Count, and so a very cheerful argument was thus cut short. Ambrose pulled himself together and suppressing, as best he could, any appearance of aversion from the caller who now presented himself, he sat back in his chair and prepared to hear "the tale."

Count Florian was at that time some fifty-nine years of age, dark as an Italian and not without trace of an Eastern origin. Though it was early in the month of May, he still wore a

light Inverness cape of an ancient fashion, while his patent-leather boots and his silk hat shone with the polish of a well-kept mirror. When he laughed, however, he showed ferocious teeth, some capped with gold, and in his eyes was a fiery light not always pleasant to behold.

"A chilly morning," he began. "You have no fire, I see."

"You find it so?" queried Ambrose. "Well, I thought it quite warm."

"Ah," said the count, "you were born, of course, in this detestable country. Do not forget that where I live there are people who call the climate hell," and he laughed sardonically, with a laugh quite unpleasant to hear.

Ambrose did not like such talk, and showed his displeasure plainly.

"The climate is good enough for me," he said. "Personally, I don't want to live in the particular locality you name. Have a cigar and tell me why you called—the old business, I suppose? Well, you know my opinion about that. I want none of it. I don't believe it is honest business, and I think that if we did it, we might all end in the dock. So you know my mind before we begin."

The Count heard him patiently, but did not seem in any way disturbed.

"There is very little business that is honest," he said; "practically none at all. Look at politics, the Church, art, the sciences—those who flourish are the imposters, while your honest men are foolish enough to starve in garrets. If a man will undertake nothing that is open to the suspicion of self-interest, he should abandon all his affairs at once and retire to a monastery, where possibly he will discover that the prior is cheating the abbot and the cellarer cheating them both. You have a great business opportunity, and if anybody suffers it is only the Government, which you must admit is a pure abstraction—suggesting chiefly a company of undiscovered rascals. The deal which I have to propose to you concerns a sum of half a million sterling, and that is not to be passed by lightly. I suggest, therefore, that at least you read the documents I have brought with me, and that we leave the matter of honesty to be discussed by the lawyers."

He laid upon the table a bundle of papers as he spoke, and lighted a cigarette by lightly rubbing a match against the tip of the fourth finger of his left hand. Ambrose felt strangely uneasy. A most uncanny suspicion had come upon him while the man was speaking. He felt that no ordinary human being faced him, and that he might in very truth be talking with the devil. Nor would this idea quit him despite its apparent absurdity.

"You must have great influence, Count," he remarked presently—"great influence to get such a valuable commission as this!"

The Count was flattered.

"I have servants in every country," he said; "the rich are always my friends—the poor often come to me because they are not rich. Few who know me can do without me; indeed, I may say that but for such men as I am the world would not go on. I am the mainspring of its endeavour."

"And yet when I met you it was on the links above La Turbie."

The count laughed, showing his glittering teeth as any carnivorous animal might have done.

"Ah, I remember. You met me when I was playing golf with a very saintly lady. Latterly, I hear, she has ceased to go to church and taken to bobbed hair. Women are strange creatures, Mr. Cleaver, but difficult, very difficult sometimes. I have had many disappointments with women."

"You find men easier?"

"Indeed, there are few men who are not willing to go to the devil if the consideration be large enough. A woman, on the other hand, is too often the victim of her emotions. She will suffer eternal torment for the man she loves, and she will cheat for him. But for the rest of us—nothing, positively nothing at all; she is neither honest nor dishonest, she merely passes us by."

"Ah," exclaimed Ambrose, a little wearily, "I wish I could think that about my *fiancée*. She's just been up—that's why you find me upset. I bought her opals, and, of course, she wants diamonds. You see, I forgot she wasn't born in October."

The Count nodded his head in sympathy.

"I must have a little talk to her. I am sure we shall be good friends. Miss Kitty Palmer, is it not? Forgive me, I read it in the newspapers—a charming face but a little temper, I think. Well, well, there is no harm in that. What a dull place the world would be but for a little temper! You have much to be thankful for, Mr. Cleaver—very, very much. And now this concession, by which you will make two hundred thousand pounds at a very moderate estimate. There will be very little temper when you take home that news. No woman is angry with a man who makes money, but she has a great contempt for him who does not."

"Even if he made it dishonestly?"

"She does not care a snap of the fingers how he makes it, believe me."

"And afterwards, when he goes to prison——"

"Pshaw—only fools go to prison. If your foolish principles were made the test, there would hardly be a free man in Mincing Lane. We should have to lock up the whole City. Come, let me have your signature, and I will do the rest. To refuse is madness. You are offered the chance of a lifetime."

Ambrose did not reply to him immediately. It had come to him suddenly that this was the hour of a great temptation, and he sat very still, conscious that his heart beat fast because of the evil that was near him. The Count watched him, meanwhile, as a wild beast may watch its prey. The man's eyes appeared to have turned to coals of fire; his fingers twitched; his teeth were on edge—he had even ceased to smoke.

"Well?" he said at last, unable to suffer the silence any longer.

Ambrose rose from his chair and went over slowly to the great safe, which stood in the corner of his office; he unlocked it and took some documents from a shelf upon the right-hand side. The Count stood at his elbow while he did so, and he could feel the man's breath warm upon his shoulder.

Suddenly a violent impulse overcame him. He swung round and seized the fellow by the collar, and in an instant, endowed as it were with superhuman strength, he hurled the man into the safe and turned the key upon him.

"By heaven!" he cried, "but I have locked up the devil."

II

Ambrose dismissed John, the man, and James, the boy, and told them he would have no need of their services for some days.

"I am going away for a little holiday," he said. "The letters can await my return. You may

both go down to Brighton for a week, and I will pay your expenses. It is right that you should have a little change of air more than once a year, so away with you both, and don't let me hear of you until Monday next."

James looked at John and John looked at James. Was their excellent employer demented, then, or had they understood him incorrectly?

"Not," said John, when they were alone together, "that I particularly wished to go to Brighton just now, but there you are. Half the pleasure in life, my boy, is wanting to do things, and when you have to do them without wanting it, even though they are pleasant things, somehow all the savour has gone out of the salt, so to speak. But, of course, we shall have to go, seeing that we couldn't tell Mr. Cleaver a lie."

James was a little astonished at that, for he had told thousands of lies in his brief life, though now he really had no desire to tell one at all.

"I shall be glad to get away from here for a few days, any'ow," he said; "it's so 'ot and close, and when you go near the safe in the other horfice it's just as though you stood by a roaring fire. Good thing, Mr. John, that the thing is fire-proof, or we might have the whole show burned down, as Mr. Ambrose hisself was saying. 'Very 'ot for the time of year, James,' says he, and 'burnin, 'ot,' says I. We'll find it cooler at Brighton, Mr. John, and perhaps we can go to the pictures, though I'm fed up with all them rotten stories about crooks and such like, and so are you, I'm sure."

Mr. John said that he was, though he was surprised at such an opinion emanating from James. When they locked up the inner office—their master being gone home—they discovered in the fire-grate the ashes of what had been a formidable-looking document, and it really did seem as though the concrete upon which the great safe stood had become quite hot, but there was no visible sign of fire, and so they went off, wondering and contented, but by no means in a mood of exhilaration, as properly they should have been.

Ambrose had taken a cab at his own door, and his first visit was to the Bond Street jeweller who had sold him the opals.

He was quite sure that he had shut up the devil in his office safe, and as he drove it seemed to him that he became conscious of a new world round about him, though just how it was new he could not have told you.

Everybody wore a look of great content—there was subdued laughter but no real merriment—nor did any hasten as though he had real business to do; while the very taxi-cabs drove with circumspection, and actually waited for old ladies to cross the street before them. When his own cab stopped he gave the man half a crown as usual; but the driver called him back and pointed out his error.

"Excuse me, sir, eighteenpence is the fare with threepence for my gratuity, that makes one and ninepence. So I have to give you ninepence back, although I thank you all the same."

Ambrose pocketed the money, quite insensible of anything but the man's civility, and entered immediately into the sanctum of the great jeweller. He found that worthy a little distract and far from any desire to do big business. In fact, his first words told of his coming retirement from an occupation which had enriched him during a good forty years of profit and rarely of loss.

"The fact is, Mr. Cleaver, that I foresee the day coming when women will wear no jewellery. Already the spirit of competition has passed, and it is by competition and the pride of competition that this trade has flourished. A woman buys a rope of pearls because another woman wears one. Lady A cannot allow Lady B to have more valuable diamonds than she possesses. Very few really admire the gems for their own sake, and when you think of the

crimes that have been committed because of them, the envious passions they arouse, and the swindles to which they give birth, then, indeed, we may wish that every precious stone lay deep at the bottom of the sea."

"But, my dear sir, are you not thus banishing much beauty from the world—did not the Almighty create precious stones for pretty women to wear?"

The jeweller shrugged his shoulders, sweeping aside carelessly some priceless pearls that lay on the table before him.

"The Almighty created them to lie securely in their shells, or deep in the caverns of the earth; for the rivers to wash them with sweet waters or the lurid fire to shape them in the bowls of the mountains. The beauties given us to enjoy are those upon which our eyes may light in the woodlands or from the heights—the glory of the sunset, the stillness of the sea, the thousand Hues of a garden of flowers, or the cascade as it falls from the mountain top. These things are common to all, but the precious stone is too often for the neck or the fingers of the harlot and the adventuress. No, sir, I shall retire from this business and seek out some quiet spot where I can await with composure the solemn moment of dissolution we all must face."

Ambrose was almost too astonished to speak.

"I admire your philosophy," he said at length, "but the fact is, that I want a diamond ring and a rope of pearls and if——"

"Ah," said the old man interrupting him, "it is odd that you should speak of pearls, for I have just been telling my partner here that whatever he may do in the future, he will find pearls of little profit to him. What with imitations and the 'cultured' article, women are coming already to despise them. But even if you take your *fiancée* a diamond ring, will she not merely say to herself: 'an excellent beginning, now what is the next thing I can get out of him?' Be wise and cultivate no such spirit of cupidity, foreign to a good woman's nature but encouraged by the men, who, for vanity's sake, heap presents upon her. Take rather this little cross, set with pure amethysts, the emblem of faith and so discover, my dear sir, whether she loves the man or the jewel, for indeed but few women love both, as all their story teaches us."

Ambrose took the cross and thanked the old man for his words of wisdom. Another cab carried him on his way to Upper Gloucester Place where Kitty Palmer then lived with her saintly mother—and as he went, he reflected upon the jeweller's words.

"I'll put her to the proof," he said to himself, "if she likes this twopenny halfpenny cross, she is a miracle among women. But, of course, she won't like it and there'll be another scene. What a devil of a temper she was in this morning and how she made the fur fly! If she's like that now, I shall just take her into my arms and kiss her until she's done fighting. After all, I wouldn't give sixpence for a woman who had no spirit. It's their moods that make them so fascinating—little devils that they are at their best!"

The arrival at the house cut short his ruminations and he hastened into the well-known drawing-room and there waited impatiently while the maid summoned Kitty from her bedroom. She came down immediately to his great surprise—for usually she kept him waiting at least half an hour—and her mood was strangely changed, he thought. A pretty, flaxen-haired, blue-eyed, cream and white English type she was, but her chin spoke also of determination and the eyes which could "look love to eyes that looked again" upon occasion could also speak of anger which resented all control. This afternoon, however, Kitty was as meek as a lamb. She had become so utterly changed in an hour that Ambrose hardly knew her.

"My dear girl," he began, "I am so sorry that I lost my temper this morning——"

"Oh, no—not you, Ambrose dear. It was I——of course it was awfully silly and we won't go

to Deauville if you don't want to. Let it be Fontainebleau by all means—though really, it does not seem important whether we do get married or don't while you love me. Love after all is what matters, isn't it, Ambrose dearest?"

He had to say that it was, though he did not like her argument. When, with some hesitation and not a little fear he showed her the little gold cross, she admitted to his astonishment that it was one of the prettiest things she had ever seen.

"Somehow," she said, "I do not seem to care much for jewellery now. It has become so vulgar—the commoner the people, the more diamonds they wear. I shall treasure this, darling—I'll wear it now at lunch. Of course you are going to take me to lunch, aren't you? Suppose we go to the Ritz grill-room, the restaurants are so noisy, and I know that you like grill-rooms, don't you, dear?"

Ambrose said "yes" and they started off. Somehow he felt rather depressed and he had to confess that Kitty—usually so smart—looked quite shabby. She wore one of her oldest dresses and obviously had neither powder on her face nor the lightest touch of the rouge which became her so well. Moreover, she was listless beyond experience, and when he asked her if she would go to the Savoy and dance that night, she answered that she thought she would give up dancing altogether. It quite took his breath away.

"Give up dancing—but, Kitty, you're mad about it!"

"No, dear, I was mad to be mad about it: but what good does it do to anybody, just going up and down and round and round with a man you may never see again. Surely we were not sent into the world to do that! Ask the vicar of the parish what he thinks, or Doctor Lanfry, who is doing such splendid work at the hospitals. I think we have to make good in life, and dancing, surely, will not help us. So I mean to give it up, and smoking and all horrid things. I'm sure you'll like me better for that, dear; you know how jealous my dancing used to make you, but now you'll never have any cause to be jealous again."

Ambrose did not know what to say. This seemed to him quite the flattest lunch he had ever sat out with her, while, as for the people round about, he thought he had never seen a duller lot. Perhaps, after all, he had been a little hasty in shutting up the devil so unceremoniously, but it made him laugh to think that the fellow would get no lunch anyway and that his stock of cigars would hardly last him through the day. "And at any rate," he argued, "the rascal will do no mischief to-day."

He drove Kitty to the King's New Hospital when the stupid meal was over—she was visiting some old people there—and while he waited for her, he met Dr. Lanfry himself and had a little chat with that benevolent old gentleman. Naturally their talk concerned the hospital and he was not a little surprised to find the worthy doctor altogether in an optimistic mood.

"Yes," he said, "we shall have no need of these costly places. Disease is disappearing rapidly from our midst. I see the day coming when men and women will go untroubled by any ailment from the cradle to the grave. In some ways, I confess the world will be poorer. Think of all the human sympathy which human suffering awakens—the profound love of the mother for the ailing child, the sacrifice of those who wait and watch by the beds of the sick, the agony of parting leading to the eternal hope in the justice of God. All these things, the world will miss when we conquer disease, and the spirit will be the poorer for them. Indeed, I foresee the day when men will forget the existence of God just because they have no need to pray for those who suffer; the devil will have no work to do in that day; but, who knows, humanity may be worse and not better because of his idleness."

Ambrose agreed with him, though he would never have expressed such sentiments to Kitty. He found her a little sad when she came out of the ward, and it seemed that all the patients were so very much better that they cared but little for her kindly attentions, and when she tried

to read to them, most of them fell asleep. So she went back to Ambrose and asked him to drive to the vicarage where she hoped to see Canon Kenny, her good pastor, and find out if he could tell her of some work of mercy to be done.

"I feel," she said, "that I must find out the sorrow in the world, I must help it."

"But suppose, my dear, that there isn't any sorrow——"

"Oh, then the world would not be worth living in, I should go out to the islands of the Pacific and become a missionary. Do you know, Ambrose dear, I've often thought of putting on boys' clothes and going to live in the wilderness. A boy seems so much more active than a girl, and what does it matter since sex no longer counts?"

He looked at her aghast.

"Sex no longer counts!"

"No," she said in the simplest way, "people will become too spiritual for that. You will have to love me as though I were your sister, Ambrose——"

Ambrose gulped down a "d——n" and was quite relieved to find himself presently in the study of the venerable canon, who was just leaving. England for a Continental holiday. He said that he was not tired, but really there was very little work to do—and he added, with a laugh: "It would almost appear, my children, as though some one had locked up the devil and there was no more work left for us parsons."

"But that surely would be a great, good thing," exclaimed Ambrose, astonished.

"In a way, yes," the canon rejoined, "but consider, all life depends upon that impulse which comes of strife—strife of the body, strife of the soul. I worship God believing. He has called upon me to take my share in fighting the evil which is in the world. Remove that evil, and what is my inspiration? Beyond the grave, yes, there may be that sphere of holiness to which the human condition contributes nothing—a sphere in which all happiness, all goodness centres about the presence of the Eternal—but here we know that man must strive or perish, must fight or be conquered—must school his immortal soul in the fire of temptation and of suffering. So, I say, it may even be a bad day for the world could the devil be chained in bonds which even he could not burst. It might even be the loss of the knowledge of the God by whom evil is permitted to live that good may come."

This and much more he said, always in the tone of one who bared his head to destiny and had a faith unconquerable. When they left him, Kitty appeared to have made up her mind, and she spoke so earnestly that even her lover could not argue with her.

"Ambrose, dear," she said, "I must see you no more, I shall devote my life to good works. To-night I shall enter the Convent of the Little Sisters at Kensington. It is a long, long good-bye, my dearest."

He did not answer her, but calling a taxi, he ordered the man to drive to Throgmorton Street like the deuce.

III

He had told James and John to go home, but to his annoyance he found them still in the office and busy as though nothing extraordinary had happened. Brushing by them, he dashed into the inner room and turned the key in the lock of his safe.

"Come out!" he cried, but nobody answered him.

It was odd, but when he looked inside that massive room of steel, nobody was to be discerned there. At the same instant, however, he heard the Count's voice immediately behind him, and turning he discovered the man at his elbow.

"Well?" asked the fellow.

So there he stood, exactly in the same attitude as Ambrose had left him when he crossed the room to find the document. Indeed, the very same cigarette was held by his evil-looking fingers, and it was clear that he waited for the word which would signify acceptance of his contract.

"Good heavens," thought Ambrose, "I must have imagined it all."

He returned to his chair and tossed the paper across the table.

"I refuse to sign it," he said curtly, "you had better call on Alderman Karlbard; he's a church-warden, a justice of the peace and a philanthropist. He's your man and he's pretty sure to end in prison anyway."

"Thank you for your introduction," said the Count quietly, and, bowing, he withdrew with the same nonchalant air as he had entered. Trust the devil to know when he is beaten.

Ambrose watched him go and then calling John, he asked what time it was.

"A quarter to one, sir," said that worthy.

"Just in time to lunch with Kitty," Ambrose thought.

And then jumping up as a man who comes by a joyous idea, he cried: "By Gad, what a row I mean to have with her—the darling!"

EMPTY ARMS, by Roland Pertwee

(From *The Ladies' Home Journal*)

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There was a maroon wall paper in the dining-room, abundantly decorated with sweeping curves unlike any known kind of vegetation. There were amber silk sashes to the Nottingham lace curtains at the huge bow window and an amber winding sheet was wrapped about the terra cotta pot in which a tired aspidistra bore forth a yearly leaf. Upon the Brussels carpet was a massive mahogany dining table, and facing the window a Georgian chiffonier, brass railed and surmounted by a convex mirror. The mantelpiece was draped in red serge, ball fringed. There were bronzes upon it and a marble clock, while above was an overmantel, columned and bemirrored, upon the shelves of which reposed sorrowful examples of Doulton ware and a pair of wrought-iron candlesticks. It was a room divorced from all sense of youth and live beings, sunless, grave, unlovely; an arid room that bore to the nostrils the taint and humour of the tomb.

From somewhere near the Edgware Road came the clot-clot of a late four-wheeler and the shake and rumble of an underground train. The curtains had been discreetly drawn, the gas turned off at the metre and an hour had passed since the creaking of the old lady's shoes and

the jingle of the plate basket ascending the stairs had died away. A dim light from the street lamp outside percolated through the blinds and faintly illuminated the frame and canvas of a large picture hanging opposite the mantelpiece.

It was a beautiful picture, a piece of perfect painting—three figures in a simple curve of rocks, lit as it were by an afterglow of sunset. In the centre was a little Madonna draped in blue and gold. Her elbows were tight to her sides and her upturned palms with their tender curving fingers were empty. It seemed almost as though they cradled some one who was not there. Her mouth was pulled down at the corners, as is a child's at the edge of tears, and in her eyes was a questing and bewildered look. To her right, leaning upon a slender staff, was the figure of St. John the Baptist, and upon his face also perplexity was written. A trick brushwork had given to his eyes a changing direction whereby at a certain angle you would say he was looking at the Madonna, and again that he was following the direction of her gaze out into unknown places. His lips were shaped to the utterance of such a word as "why" or "where." It seemed as though the two were in a partnership of sorrow or of search.

The third figure was of Saint Anne, standing a little behind and looking upward. A strange composition, oddly incomplete, giving an impression of sadness, of unrest and of loss irredeemable.

A clock was chiming the parts of an hour when the little Madonna stepped from the frame and tiptoed across the room. To her own reflection in the mirror opposite she shook her head in a sorrowful negative. She peeped into a cupboard and behind the draperies of the mantelpiece, but there was nothing there. She paused before an engraving of Raphael's Holy Family, murmured "Happy Lady" and passed on.

On a small davenport table next to one of the two inexorable armchairs she found the old lady's workbasket. That was a great piece of good fortune, since nightly it was locked away with the tea, the stamps and other temptations that might persuade a soul to steal should opportunity allow.

In the many years of her dwelling in the house, but three times only had she found it unguarded. There are glorious possibilities in a workbasket. Once she had found wool there, not carded, but a hank of it, soft, white and most delicate to touch. To handle it had given her the queerest sensation. She had shut her eyes, and it had seemed to weave itself into the daintiest garments—very small, you understand, and with sleeves no longer than a middle finger. But it was a silly imagining, for not many days afterward, looking down from the canvas, she had seen the old lady, with her clicking ivory needles, knit the wool into an ugly pair of bed socks.

Quite a while she played in the basket that night. She liked the little pearl buttons in the pill box, and the safety pins were nice too. Kind and trustworthy pins they were to hide their points beneath smooth, round shields. She felt it would be good to take some of them back in one of her empty hands and hide them in that little crevice of rock under the juniper tree.

It was the banging of a front door opposite and the sound of running footsteps that moved her to the window. She drew back the curtain and peeped out across the way. There were lights in an upstairs window and a shadow kept crossing and recrossing the blind. It was a nice shadow and wore a head-dress like her own except that it was more sticky out.

The hall, too, showed a light, and, looking up the street, she saw a maidservant, running very fast, disappear round the corner. After that there was silence for a long time. In the street no one moved; it was deserted, empty as the little Madonna's arms, and dark. A fine rain was falling, and there were no stars. The sound of distant traffic had died away. The last underground train had drilled its way through sulphurous tunnels to the sheds where engines sleep.

She could not tell what kept her waiting at the window; perhaps it was the moving shadow on the blind, perhaps a prescience, a sense of happenings near at hand, wonderful yet frightening. A thousand other times she had looked across the street in the dead of night, only to shake her head and steal back sorrowfully to her canvas. But tonight it was different; there was a feeling of promise, as though the question that she ever asked with her eyes might at last be given an answer.

The front door opened a second time, and a man came out and, though he was quite young, he looked older than the world. He was shaking and very white; his hair was disordered and straggled across his brow. He wore no collar, but held the lapels of his coat across his throat with trembling fingers. Fearfully he looked up the street where the maid had gone, then stamped his foot on the paving stones and with his free hand rubbed his forehead and beat it with his knuckles.

"Oh, will he never come!" she heard him cry, and the words echoed through her as though they had been her own.

If it was a prayer he had uttered it was swiftly answered; for at the moment the maid and a bearded man came round the corner at a fast walk. The bearded man had a kind face and broad shoulders.

She did not hear what passed between them; but the bearded man seemed confident and comfortable and compelling, and presently he and the maid went into the house, while the other man leaned against the railings and stared out before him at a tiny star which had appeared in a crack between the driven clouds. Lonely and afraid he looked, and strangely like herself. The misery of him drew her irresistibly. Always before, she had shunned the people of every day, having no understanding of their pleasures or sorrows, seeing little meaning in their lives or deaths. But here was a mortal who was different, who was magnetic, and, almost without realising, she passed out of the house, crossed the road and stood before him, the corners of her cloak draped across her arms.

He did not seem aware of her at once, and even when she spoke to him in Italian of the Renaissance he did not hear. So she spoke again and this time in English: "What is it?"

He started, rubbed his eyes, blinked at her and answered: "Hullo, who are you?"

"What is it?" she repeated. "Have you lost something?"

"Don't—don't!" he pleaded. "Don't even suggest such a thing, little lady."

"I won't. I only thought—and you looked so sad."

"Be all right directly. It's the waiting. Kind of you to stop and speak to me." His eyes strayed over the gold and blue of her cloak. "Been to a theatre?" he asked.

She shook her head and looked up at him with a child's perplexity.

ROLAND PERTWEE 237

"A play?" he amended.

"I've no one to play with," she answered simply. "See!" And she held out her empty arms.

"What's wrong then?"

"I don't know." She seemed to dwell on the last word. "I only thought—perhaps you could tell me."

"Tell you what?"

"Help me to find it perhaps. It seemed as if you were looking, too; that's why I came."

"Looking?" he repeated. "I'm waiting; that's all."

"Me too. But it's such a long time, and I get no nearer."

"Nearer to what?"

"Finding."

"Something you lost?"

"I think so. Must be. I'll go back now."

He put out a hand to stop her. "Listen," he said. "It'll be hours before I shall know. I'm frightened to spend them alone. Be a friend, little lady, and bear me company. 'Tisn't fair to ask, but if you could stay a little."

"I'll stay," she said.

"And will you talk to me?"

"Yes."

"Tell me a story then—just as if I were a kid, a child. A man isn't much more these times."

At the word "child" her arms went out to him, but dropped to her sides again as he said "a man."

"Come under the porch, where the rain won't spoil your pretty silk. That's better. Now tell away."

They sat side by side, and she began to talk. He must have been listening for other sounds, or surely he would have been bewildered at the very beginning of what she told..

"It's hard to remember when one was alive, but I used to be—yes, hundreds of years ago. I lived—can't remember very well; there was a high wall all around, and a tower and a bell that rang for prayers—and long, long passages where we walked up and down to tell our beads. Outside were mountains with snow caps like the heads of the sisters, and it was cold as snow within, cold and pure as snow. I was sixteen years old and very unhappy. We did not know how to smile; that I learnt later and have forgotten since. There was the skull of a dead man upon the table where we sat to eat, that we might never forget to what favour we must come. There were no pretty rooms in that house."

"What would you call a pretty room?" he asked, for the last sentence was the first of which he was aware.

"I don't know," she answered. "I think a room with little beds, and wooden bars across the window, and a high fender would be a pretty room."

"We have been busy making such a room as that," he said. "There's a wall paper with pigs and chickens and huntsmen on it. But go on."

"There were iron bars to the window of my cell. He was very strong and tore them out with his hands as he stood up on the saddle of his horse. We rode into Florence as dawn broke, and the sun was an angry red; while we rode his arm was around me and my head upon his shoulder. He spoke in my ear and his voice trembled for love of me. We had thrown away the raiment of the sisterhood to which I had belonged, and as I lay across the saddle I was wrapped

in a cloak as crimson as the sun."

"Been reading Tennyson, little lady?" asked the man.

She did not understand, and went on: "It was a palace to which he brought me, bright with gold, mosaic and fine hangings that dazzled my eyes after the grey they had been used to look upon. There were many servants and richly clad friends, who frightened me with their laughter and the boldness of their looks. On his shoulder he bore me into the great dining hall, where they sat awaiting us, and one and all they rose to their feet, leaping upon stools and tables with uplifted goblets and shouting toasts.

"The noise was greater than any I had heard before and set my heart a-beating like the clapper of the convent bell. But one only stayed in his chair, and his looks were heavy with anger. At him the rest pointed fingers and called on him derisively to pay the wager and be glad. Whereat he tugged from his belt a bag of gold which he flung at us as though with the will to injure. But he who held me caught the bag in his free hand, broke the sealed cord at the neck of it and scattered the coins in a golden rain among the servants.

"After this, he set me by his side at the board, gave me drink from a brimming goblet and quails cooked in honey from wild bees and silver dishes of nectarines and passion fruit. And presently by twos and threes the guests departed, singing and reeling as they went, and he and I were left alone. Alone," she repeated shuddering.

"Did you hear anything?" said the young man, raising his head. "A cry, a little cry? No? I can hear footsteps moving up and down. Doctors' boots always creak. There! Listen! It was nothing. What were you saying?"

"Twice in the months that followed I tried to run away, to return to the convent; but the servants whom I had counted my friends deceived me, and I was brought back to a beating, brought back strapped to his stirrup iron as I might have been a Nubian slave. Long since he had ceased loving me; that lasted such a little while. He called me Madonna, as though it were a term of shame, and cursed me for coldness and my nunnery ways. He was only happy when he read in my face the fear I held him in. And I was always afraid!"

"Afraid!" echoed the man. "Until to-night I was never afraid."

"And then my baby came, and I was not afraid any more, but contented all through. I carried him always in my arms by day and night. So pink and little and with a smile that warmed like sunshine." She paused and added plaintively: "It's hard to remember when one was alive. My hands, my arms have forgotten the feel of him."

"I wish," said the man, "I'd had a second opinion. It might have frightened her though. Oh, heaven, how much longer! Don't mind me, little lady. You're helping no end. You were speaking of baby. Yes!"

"He killed my baby," said the little Madonna, "because he had killed my fear of him. Then being done with me, he threw me out in the streets alone. I thought to end it that night, because my arms were empty and nothing could be good again. But I could not believe the baby was indeed gone; I thought if I searched I would find him in the course of time. Therefore I searched the city from end to end and spoke with mothers and peeped into nurseries and knocked at many doors. And one day a door was opened by a man with great eyes and bronze hair swept back from his brow—a good man. He wore a loose smock over his doublet, smeared with many colours, and in his left hand he held a palette and brushes. When he saw me he fell back a pace and his mouth opened. 'Mother of mercy!' he breathed. 'A real Madonna at last!' His name was Andrea del Sarto, and he was a painter."

"I am a painter, too," said the young man, forgetting his absorption at the mention of a great

name.

"He brought me into his room, which was bright with windows and a fire. He bade me tell my story, and while I spoke never once did his eyes desert me. When I had ended he rose and walked up and down. Then he took from a chest a cloak of blue and gold and draped it round me. 'Stand upon that throne, Madonna,' said he, 'and I will put an infant in your arms that shall live down all the ages.' And he painted me. So with the child at my breast, I myself had passed into the picture and found contentment there.

"When it was finished the great ones of many cities came to look upon it, and the story of how I came to be painted went from mouth to mouth. Among those who were there was he who had taken me from the nunnery, and, seeing me in perfect happiness, a fury was born in him.

"I was hidden behind a hanging and watched the black anger rising up and knotting his brow into ugly lines. He bought the canvas, and his servants carried it away. But since the child was in my arms for all time it mattered little to me.

"Then one night two men came to my lodging and without question took me across the city and led me into the palace where I had lived with him. And he came forward to meet me in the great hall. There was a mocking smile on his lips and he pointed to a wall upon which a curtain was hanging.

"'I took away that child,' he said, 'because you valued it higher than the love of man. Look now.' At a gesture a servant threw back the hanging and revealed the picture. The babe was gone and my arms crooked to cradle him were empty with the palms upturned.

"I died then—to the sound of his laughter I died, and, looking down from the canvas, I watched them carry me away. And long into the night the man who twice had robbed me of my child sat at the long table staring out before him, drinking great draughts and sometimes beating the boards with his bare fists. As dawn broke he clapped his hands and a servant entered. He pointed at me with a shaking hand. 'Take it away,' he cried. 'To a cellar, and let masons brick up the door.' He was weeping as they carried me down to the dark beneath the house."

"What a strange being you are!" said the young man. "You speak as though these were real memories. What happened to the picture then?"

"I lay in the dark for so long—hundreds of years, I think—and there was nowhere I might look. Afterward I was found and packed in a box and presently put upon the wall in the sad room, where everything is so old that I shall not find him there. This is the furthest I have dared to look. Help me find him, please! Won't you help me find him?"

"Why, little lady," he answered soothingly, "how shall I help? That's a woman's burden that heaven isn't merciful enough to let a man share." He stopped abruptly and threw up his head. "Did you hear that—there?"

Through the still, early morning air came a faint, reedy cry.

The young man was upon his feet, fiercely fitting a key into the lock.

The little Madonna had risen, too, and her eyes were luminous, like glowworms in the dark.

"He's calling me," she cried. "He's calling."

"Mine," said the young man.

She turned to follow, but the door closed between them.

To the firm of Messrs. Ridgewell, Ridgewell, Hitchcock and Plum was given the task of disposing of the furniture and effects of the late Sabina Prestwich, spinster, of 22a Cambridge Avenue, Hyde Park, W.

As Mr. Ridgewell, junior, remarked to Mr. Plum while engaged in compiling the sale list and supplying appropriate encomiums to describe an upright grand by Rubenthal, Berlin: "Victorian muck! Lucky if we clean up two-fifty on the lot."

Mr. Plum was disposed to agree. "Though I must say," he added, "it wouldn't surprise me if that picture was worth a bit. Half a mind to let old Kineagie have a squint at it."

"Please yourself," responded Mr. Ridgewell, Junior, "but to my mind it's ten guineas for nix."

It was the chance discovery of an old document amongst a litter of receipts and papers that persuaded them to engage an expert opinion. The document stated that the picture had been discovered bricked up in a Florentine cellar some fifty years before and had been successfully smuggled out of Italy. But the man who found it died, and it passed with a few other unvalued possessions to Sabina Prestwich, now deceased.

The result of Eden Kineagie's visit to the house in Cambridge Avenue was the immediate transference of the canvas to Sotheby's Sale Rooms, a concerted rush on the part of every European and American connoisseur, a threatening letter from the Italian Foreign Office, some extravagant bidding and the ultimate purchase of the picture for the nation, after a heated debate on the part of twenty-two Royal Academicians and five painters of the new school, who would have accepted death rather than the letters, R.A., after their names. Extensive correspondence appeared in the leading papers; persons wrote expressing the opinion that the picture had never been painted by Del Sarto, that it was the finest example of his work, that the price paid was a further example of government waste, and that the money would have been better employed repairing the main road between Croydon Town Hall and Sydenham High Street, the condition of which constituted a menace to motor-cyclists.

For nearly ten days scarcely a single publication appeared that failed to reproduce a comment or criticism upon the subject; but, strangely enough, no single leader, writer or casual contributor remarked upon the oddness of the composition or the absence of the Infant from the Madonna's arms. In the course of time—that is to say, on the eleventh day—the matter passed from the public mind, a circumstance explainable perhaps by the decent interment of the canvas in the National Gallery, where it affected no one save those mysterious folk who look at pictures for their pleasure and the umbrellaless refugee who is driven to take shelter from the fierceness of storms.

The little Madonna was placed upon a south wall, whence she could look out upon a brave company. And sometimes people would pause to gaze at her and then shake their heads. And once a girl said, "How sad she looks! I wonder why." And once a little old lady with industrious hands set up an easel before her and squeezed little twists of colour upon a palette, then thought a long time and pursed her lips, and puzzled her brow and finally murmured, "I could never copy it. It's so—so changing." And she, too, went away.

The little Madonna did not dare to step from her frame at night, for other mothers were at hand cradling their babes and the sound of her footfalls might have wakened them. But it was hard to stay still and alone in that happy nursery. She could see through an archway to the right a picture Rubens had painted, and it was all aglow with babies like roses clustered at a porch—fat, dimpled babies who rolled and laughed in aerial garlands. It would have been nice to pick one and carry it back with her. Yet perhaps they were not really mothers' children, but sprites and joys that had not learned the way to nestle. Had it been otherwise surely the very call of her spirit must have brought one leaping to her arms.

And then one day came a man and girl, who stopped before her. The girl was half child, half

woman, and the man grey and bearded, but with brave blue eyes. It was seventeen years since the night she had stolen across the way and talked with this man in his hour of terror, but time did not cloud the little Madonna's memory with the dust of forgetfulness.

"That's the new Del Sarto," said the girl, who was reading from a small blue book. "See, daddy?"

Then the man turned and looked at her, fell back a step, came forward again, passed a hand across his mouth and gasped. "What is it?" asked the girl.

He did not answer at once, then: "The night you were born—" he said. "I'm certain.... It's— it's Del Sarto tool And the poor empty arms. Just how she looked, and I closed the door on her."

"Daddy, what are you saying?" There was a frightened tone in the girl's voice.

"It's all right, dear, don't mind me. I must find the keeper of the gallery. Poor little lady! Run back home, tell your mother I may be late."

"But, daddy——"

"There are more things in heaven and earth," he began, but did not finish. It seemed as though the Madonna's eyes were pleading to him, and it seemed as if he could still hear her say, "Help me find him, please!"

He told his story to the Committee of the National Gallery and, to do them credit, it was received with the utmost courtesy.

They did not require him to leave them while their decision was made. This was arrived at by a mere exchange of glances, a nod answered by a tilt of the head, a wave of the hand, a kindly smile; and the thing was done.

As the chairman remarked: "We must not forget that this gentleman was living at the time opposite to the house in which the picture was hanging, and it is possible that a light had been left burning in the room that contained it.

"Those of us who are fathers—and I regret for my own part that I cannot claim the distinction—will bear me out that the condition of a man's mind during the painful period of waiting for news as to his wife's progress is apt to depart from the normal and make room for imaginings that in saner moments he must dismiss as absurd. There has been a great deal of discussion and not a little criticism on the part of the public as to the committee's wisdom in purchasing this picture, and I am confident you will all agree with me that we could be responsible for no greater folly than to work upon the canvas with various removers on the bare hypothesis, unsupported by surface suggestion, that the Madonna's arms actually contain a child painted in the first intention. For my own part, I am well assured that at no period of its being has the picture been tampered with, and it is a matter of no small surprise to me, sir, that an artist of your undoubted quality and achievement should hold a contrary opinion. We are greatly obliged for the courtesy of your visit and trust that you will feel after this liberal discussion that your conscience is free from further responsibility in the matter. Good-day."

That was the end of the interview. Once again the door was slammed in the little Madonna's face.

That night the man told his wife all about it. "So you see," he concluded, "there is nothing more I can do."

But she lay awake and puzzled and yearned long after he had fallen asleep. And once she rose and peeped into the room that used to be the nursery. It was a changed room now, for the

child had grown up, and where once pigs and chickens and huntsmen had jostled in happy, farmyard disorder upon the walls, now there were likenesses of Owen Nares and Henry Ainley, obligingly autographed.

But for her the spirit prevailed, the kindly bars still ribbed the windows and the sense of sleeping children still haunted the air.

And she it was who told the man what he must do; and although it scared him a great deal he agreed, for in the end all good husbands obey their wives.

It felt very eerie to be alone in the National Gallery in the dead of the night with a tiny electric lamp in one's buttonhole and a sponge of alcohol and turpentine in one's hand. While he worked the little Madonna's eyes rested upon him and it could hardly have been mere fancy that made him believe they were full of gratitude and trust. At the end of an hour the outline of a child, faint and misty, appeared in her arms, its head, circled by a tiny white halo, snuggling against the curve of her little breast.

Then the man stepped back and gave a shout of joy and, remembering the words the painter had used, he cried out, "I will put an infant in your arms that shall live down all the ages."

He had thought perhaps there would come an answering gladness from the Madonna herself and looked into her face to find it. And truly enough it was there. Her eyes, which for centuries had looked questingly forth from the canvas, now drooped and rested upon the baby. Her mouth, so sadly downturned at the corners, had sweetened to a smile of perfect and serene content.

But the men will not believe he washed away the sadness of her looks with alcohol and turpentine. "I did not touch the head. I am certain I did not," he repeated.

"Then how can you explain——"

"Oh, heaven!" he answered. "Put a child in any woman's arms."

LENA WRACE, by May Sinclair

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She arranged herself there, on that divan, and I knew she'd come to tell me all about it. It was wonderful, how, at forty-seven, she could still give that effect of triumph and excess, of something rich and ruinous and beautiful spread out on the brocades. The attitude showed me that her affair with Norman Hippisley was prospering; otherwise she couldn't have afforded the extravagance of it.

"I know what you want," I said. "You want me to congratulate you."

"Yes. I do."

"I congratulate you on your courage."

"Oh, you don't like him," she said placably.

"No, I don't like him at all."

"He likes you," she said. "He thinks no end of your painting."

"I'm not denying he's a judge of painting. I'm not even denying he can paint a little himself."

"Better than you, Roly."

"If you allow for the singular, obscene ugliness of his imagination, yes."

"It's beautiful enough when he gets it into paint," she said. "He makes beauty. His own beauty."

"Oh, very much his own."

"Well, *you* just go on imitating other people's—God's or somebody's."

She continued with her air of perfect reasonableness. "I know he isn't good-looking. Not half so good-looking as you are. But I like him. I like his slender little body and his clever, faded face. There's a quality about him, a distinction. And look at his eyes. *Your* mind doesn't come rushing and blazing out of your eyes, my dear."

"No. No. I'm afraid it doesn't rush. And for all the blaze—"

"Well, that's what I'm in love with, the rush, Roly, and the blaze. And I'm in love, *far the first time*" (she underlined it) "with a man."

"Come," I said, "come."

"Oh, *I* know. I know you're thinking of Lawson Young and Dickey Harper."

I was.

"Well, but they don't count. I wasn't in love with Lawson. It was his career. If he hadn't been a Cabinet Minister; if he hadn't been so desperately gone on me; if he hadn't said it all depended on me—"

"Yes," I said. "I can see how it would go to your head."

"It didn't. It went to my heart." She was quite serious and solemn. "I held him in my hands, Roly. And he held England. I couldn't let him drop, could I? I had to think of England."

It was wonderful—Lena Wrace thinking that she thought of England.

I said "Of course. But for your political foresight and your virtuous action we should never have had Tariff Reform."

"We should never have had anything," she said. "And look at him now. Look how he's crumpled up since he left me. It's pitiful."

"It is. I'm afraid Mrs. Withers doesn't care about Tariff Reform."

"Poor thing. No. Don't imagine I'm jealous of her, Roly. She hasn't got him. I mean she hasn't got what I had."

"All the same he left you. And you weren't ecstatically happy with him the last year or two."

"I daresay I'd have done better to have married you, if that's what you mean."

It wasn't what I meant. But she'd always entertained the illusion that she could marry me any minute if she wanted to; and I hadn't the heart to take it from her since it seemed to console her for the way, the really very infamous way, he had left her.

So I said, "Much better."

"It would have been so nice, so safe," she said. "But I never played for safety." Then she made one of her quick turns.

"Frances Archdale ought to marry you. Why doesn't she?"

"How should I know? Frances's reasons would be exquisite. I suppose I didn't appeal to her sense of fitness."

"Sense of fiddlesticks. She just hasn't got any temperament, that girl."

"Any temperament for me, you mean."

"I mean pure cussedness," said Lena.

"Perhaps. But, you see, if I were unfortunate enough she probably *would* marry me. If I lost my eyesight or a leg or an arm, if I couldn't sell any more pictures—"

"If you can understand Frances, you can understand me. That's how I felt about Dickey. I wasn't in love with him. I was sorry for him. I knew he'd go to pieces if I wasn't there to keep him together. Perhaps it's the maternal instinct."

"Perhaps," I said. Lena's reasons for her behaviour amused me; they were never exquisite, like Frances's, but she was anxious that you should think they were.

"So you see," she said, "they don't count, and Norry really is the first."

I reflected that he would be also, probably, the last. She had, no doubt, to make the most of him. But it was preposterous that she should waste so much good passion; preposterous that she should imagine for one moment she could keep the fellow. I had to warn her.

"Of course, if you care to take the risk of him—" I said. "He won't stick to you, Lena."

"Why shouldn't he?"

I couldn't tell her. I couldn't say, "Because you're thirteen years older than he is." That would have been cruel. And it would have been absurd, too, when she could so easily look not a year older than his desiccated thirty-four.

It only took a little success like this, her actual triumph in securing him.

So I said, "Because it isn't in him. He's a bounder and a rotter." Which was true.

"Not a bounder, Roly dear. His father's Sir Gilbert Hippisley. Hippisleys of Leicestershire."

"A moral bounder, Lena. A slimy eel. Slips and wriggles out of things. You'll never hold him. You're not Iris first affair, you know."

"I don't care," she said, "as long as I'm his last."

I could only stand and stare at that; her monstrous assumption of his fidelity. Why, he couldn't even be faithful to one art. He wrote as well as he painted, and he acted as well as he wrote, and he was never really happy with a talent till he had debauched it.

"The others," she said, "don't bother me a bit. He's slipped and wriggled out of their clutches, if you like.... Yet there was something about all of them. 'Distinguished.' That's it. He's so awfully fine and fastidious about the women he takes up with. It flatters you, makes you feel so sure of yourself. You know he wouldn't take up with *you* if you weren't fine and fastidious, too—one of his great ladies.... You think I'm a snob, Roly?"

"I think you don't mind coming *after* Lady Willersey."

"Well," she said, "if you *have* to come after somebody—"

"True." I asked her if she was giving me her reasons.

"Yes, if you want them. I don't. I'm content to love out of all reason."

And she did. She loved extravagantly, unintelligibly, out of all reason; yet irrefutably. To the end. There's a sort of reason in that, isn't there? She had the sad logic of her passions.

She got up and gathered herself together in her sombre, violent beauty and in its glittering sheath, her red fox skins, all her savage splendour, leaving a scent of crushed orris root in the warmth of her lair.

Well, she managed to hold him, tight, for a year, fairly intact. I can't for the life of me imagine how she could have cared for the fellow, with his face all dried and frayed with make-up. There was something lithe and sinuous about him that may, of course, have appealed to her. And I can understand his infatuation. He was decadent, exhausted; and there would be moments when he found her primitive violence stimulating, before it wore him out.

They kept up the *ménage* for two astounding years.

Well, not so very astounding, if you come to think of it. There was Lena's money, left her by old Weinberger, her maternal uncle. You've got to reckon with Lena's money. Not that she, poor soul, ever reckoned with it; she was absolutely free from that taint, and she couldn't conceive other people reckoning. Only, instinctively, she knew. She knew how to hold Hippisley. She knew there were things he couldn't resist, things like wines and motor cars he could be faithful to. From the very beginning she built for permanence, for eternity. She took a house in Avenue Road with a studio for Hippisley in the garden; she bought a motor car and engaged an inestimable cook. Lena's dinners, in those years, were exquisite affairs, and she took care to ask the right people, people who would be useful to Hippisley, dealers whom old Weinberger had known, and journalists and editors and publishers. And all his friends and her own; even friends' friends. Her hospitality was boundless and eccentric, and Hippisley liked that sort of thing. He thrived in a liberal air, an air of gorgeous spending, though he sported a supercilious smile at the *fioritura*, the luscious excess of it. He had never had too much, poor devil, of his own. I've seen the little fellow swaggering about at her parties, with his sharp, frayed face, looking fine and fastidious, safeguarding himself with twinklings and gestures that gave the dear woman away. I've seen him, in goggles and a magnificent fur-lined coat, shouting to her chauffeur, giving counter orders to her own, while she sat snuggling up in the corner of the car, smiling at his mastery.

It went on till poor Lena was forty-nine. Then, as she said, she began to "shake in her shoes." I told her it didn't matter so long as she didn't let him see her shaking. That depressed her, because she knew she couldn't hide it; there was nothing secret in her nature; she had always let "them" see. And they were bothering her—"the others"—more than "a bit." She was jealous of every one of them, of any woman he said more than five words to. Jealous of the models, first of all, before she found out that they didn't matter; he was so used to them. She would stick there, in his studio, while they sat, until one day he got furious and turned her out of it. But she'd seen enough to set her mind at rest. He was fine and fastidious, and the models were all "common."

"And their figures, Roly, you should have seen them when they were undressed. Of course, you *have* seen them. Well, there isn't—is there?"

And there wasn't. Hippisley had grown out of models just as he had grown out of cheap Burgundy. And he'd left the stage, because he was tired of it, so there was, mercifully, no

danger from that quarter. What she dreaded was the moment when he'd "take" to writing again, for then he'd have to have a secretary. Also she was jealous of his writing because it absorbed more of his attention than his painting, and exhausted him more, left her less of him.

And that year, their third year, he flung up his painting and was, as she expressed it, "at it" again. Worse than ever. And he wanted a secretary.

She took care to find him one. One who wouldn't be dangerous. "You should just see her, Roly." She brought her in to tea one day for me to look at and say whether she would "do."

I wasn't sure—what can you be sure of?—but I could see why Lena thought she would. She was a little unhealthy thing, dark and sallow and sulky, with thin lips that showed a lack of temperament, and she had a stiffness and preciseness, like a Board School teacher—just that touch of "commonness" which Lena relied on to put him off. She wore a shabby brown skirt and a yellowish blouse. Her name was Ethel Reeves.

Lena had secured safety, she said, in the house. But what was the good of that, when outside it he was going about everywhere with Sybil Fermor? She came and told me all about it, with a sort of hope that I'd say something either consoling or revealing, something that she could go on.

"You know him, Roly," she said.

I reminded her that she hadn't always given me that credit.

"I know how he spends his time," she said.

"How do you know?"

"Well, for one thing, Ethel tells me."

"How does she know?"

"She—she posts the letters."

"Does she read them?"

"She needn't. He's too transparent."

"Lena, do you use her to spy on him?" I said.

"Well," she retorted, "if he uses her—"

I asked her if it hadn't struck her that Sybil Fermor might be using him?

"Do you mean—as a *paravent*? Or," she revised it, "a parachute?"

"For Bertie Granville," I elucidated. "A parachute, by all means."

She considered it. "It won't work," she said. "If it's her reputation she's thinking of, wouldn't Norry be worse?"

I said that was the beauty of him, if Letty Granville's attention was to be diverted.

"Oh, Roly," she said, "do you really think it's that?"

I said I did, and she powdered her nose and said I was a dear and I'd bucked her up no end, and went away quite happy.

Letty Granville's divorce suit proved to her that I was right.

The next time I saw her she told me she'd been mistaken about Sybil Fermor. It was Lady

Hermione Nevin. Norry had been using Sybil as a "*paravent*" for *her*. I said she was wrong again. Didn't she know that Hermione was engaged to Billy Craven? They were head over ears in love with each other. I asked her what on earth had made her think of her? And she said Lady Hermione had paid him thirty guineas for a picture. That looked, she said, as if she was pretty far gone on him. (She tended to disparage Hippisley's talents. Jealousy again.)

I said it looked as if he had the iciest reasons for cultivating Lady Hermione. And again she told me I was a dear. "You don't know, Roly, what a comfort you are to me."

Then Barbara Vining turned up out of nowhere, and from the first minute Lena gave herself up for lost.

"I'm done for," she said. "I'd fight her if it was any good fighting. But what chance have I? At forty-nine against nineteen, and that face?"

The face was adorable if you adore a child's face on a woman's body. Small and pink; a soft, innocent forehead; fawn skin hair, a fawn's nose, a fawn's mouth, a fawn's eyes. You saw her at Lena's garden parties, staring at Hippisley over the rim of her plate while she browsed on Lena's cakes and ices, or bounding about Lena's tennis court with the sash ribbons flying from her little butt end.

Oh, yes; she had her there. As much as he wanted. And there would be Ethel Reeves, in a new blouse, looking on from a back seat, subtle and sullen, or handing round cups and plates without speaking to anybody, like a servant. I used to think she spied on them for Lena. They were always mouching about the garden together or sitting secretly in corners; Lena even had her to stay with them, let him take her for long drives in her car. She knew when she was beaten.

I said, "Why do you let him do it, Lena? Why don't you turn them both neck and crop out of the house?"

"Because I want him in it. I want him at any cost. And I want him to have what he wants, too, even if it's Barbara. I want him to be happy.... I'm making a virtue of necessity. It can be done, Roly, if you give up beautifully."

I put it to her it wasn't giving up beautifully to fret herself into an unbecoming illness, to carry her disaster on her face. She would come to me looking more ruined than ruinous, haggard and ashy, her eyes all shrunk and hot with crying, and stand before the glass, looking at herself and dabbing on powder in an utter abandonment to misery.

"I know," she moaned. "As if losing him wasn't enough I must go and lose my looks. I know crying's simply suicidal at my age, yet I keep on at it. I'm doing for myself. I'm digging my own grave, Roly. A little deeper every day."

Then she said suddenly, "Do you know, you're the only man in London I could come to looking like this."

I said, "Isn't that a bit unkind of you? It sounds as though you thought I didn't matter."

She broke down on that. "Can't you see it's because I know *I* don't any more? Nobody cares whether my nose is red or not. But you're not a brute. You don't let me feel I don't matter. I know I never did matter to you, Roly, but the effect's soothing, all the same.... Ethel says if she were me she wouldn't stand it. To have it going on under my nose. Ethel is so high-minded. I suppose it's easy to be high-minded if you've always looked like that. And if you've never *had* anybody. She doesn't know what it is. I tell you, I'd rather have Norry there with Barbara than not have him at all."

I thought and said that would just about suit Hippisley's book. He'd rather be there than

anywhere else, since he had to be somewhere. To be sure she irritated him with her perpetual clinging, and wore him out. I've seen him wince at the sound of her voice in the room. He'd say things to her; not often, but just enough to see how far he could go. He was afraid of going too far. He wasn't prepared to give up the comfort of Lena's house, the opulence and peace. There wasn't one of Lena's wines he could have turned his back on. After all, when she worried him he could keep himself locked up in the studio away from her.

There was Ethel Reeves; but Lena didn't worry about his being locked up with her. She was very kind to Hippisley's secretary. Since she wasn't dangerous, she liked to see her there, well housed, eating rich food, and getting stronger and stronger every day.

I must say my heart bled for Lena when I thought of young Barbara. It was still bleeding when one afternoon she walked in with her old triumphant look; she wore her hat with an *air crâne*, and the powder on her face was even and intact, like the first pure fall of snow. She looked ten years younger and I judged that Hippisley's affair with Barbara was at an end.

Well—it had never had a beginning; nor the ghost of a beginning. It had never happened at all. She had come to tell me that: that there was nothing in it; nothing but her jealousy; the miserable, damnable jealousy that made her think things. She said it would be a lesson to her to trust him in the future not to go falling in love. For, she argued, if he hadn't done it this time with Barbara, he'd never do it.

I asked her how she knew he hadn't, this time, when appearances all pointed that way? And she said that Barbara had come and told her. Somebody, it seemed, had been telling Barbara it was known that she'd taken Hippisley from Lena, and that Lena was crying herself into a nervous break-down. And the child had gone straight to Lena and told her it was a beastly lie. She hadn't taken Hippisley. She liked ragging with him and all that, and being seen about with him at parties, because he was a celebrity and it made the other women, the women he wouldn't talk to, furious. But as for taking him, why, she wouldn't take him from anybody as a gift. She didn't want him, a scrubby old thing like that. She didn't *like* that dragged look about his mouth and the way the skin wrinkled on his eyelids. There was a sincerity about Barbara that would have blasted Hippisley if he'd known.

Besides, she wouldn't have hurt Lena for the world. She wouldn't have spoken to Norry if she'd dreamed that Lena minded. But Lena had seemed so remarkably not to mind. When she came to that part of it she cried.

Lena said that was all very well, and it didn't matter whether Barbara was in love with Norry or not; but how did she know Norry wasn't in love with *her*? And Barbara replied amazingly that of course she knew. They'd been alone together.

When I remarked that it was precisely *that*, Lena said, No. That was nothing in itself; but it would prove one way or another; and it seemed that when Norry found himself alone with Barbara, he used to yawn.

After that Lena settled down to a period of felicity. She'd come to me, excited and exulting, bringing her poor little happiness with her like a new toy. She'd sit there looking at it, turning it over and over, and holding it up to me to show how beautiful it was.

She pointed out to me that I had been wrong and she right about him, from the beginning. She knew him.

"And to think what a fool, what a damned silly fool I was, with my jealousy. When all those years there was never anybody but me. Do you remember Sybil Fermor, and Lady Hermione—and Barbara? To think I should have so clean forgotten what he was like.... Don't you think, Roly, there must be something in me, after all, to have kept him all those years?"

I said there must indeed have been, to have inspired so remarkable a passion. For Hippisley was making love to her all over again. Their happy relations were proclaimed, not only by her own engaging frankness, but still more by the marvellous renaissance of her beauty. She had given up her habit of jealousy as she had given up eating sweets, because both were murderous to her complexion. Not that Hippisley gave her any cause. He had ceased to cultivate the society of young and pretty ladies, and devoted himself with almost ostentatious fidelity to Lena. Their affair had become irreproachable with time; it had the permanence of a successful marriage without the unflattering element of legal obligation. And he had kept his secretary. Lena had left off being afraid either that Ethel would leave or that Hippisley would put some dangerous woman in her place.

There was no change in Ethel, except that she looked rather more subtle and less sullen. Lena ignored her subtlety as she had ignored her sulks. She had no more use for her as a confidant and spy, and Ethel lived in a back den off Hippisley's study with her Remington, and displayed a convenient apathy in allowing herself to be ignored.

"Really," Lena would say in the unusual moments when she thought of her, "if it wasn't for the clicking, you wouldn't know she was there."

And as a secretary she maintained, up to the last, an admirable efficiency.

Up to the last.

It was Hippisley's death that ended it. You know how it happened—suddenly, of heart failure, in Paris. He'd gone there with Furnival to get material for that book they were doing together. Lena was literally "prostrated" with the shock; and Ethel Reeves had to go over to Paris to bring back his papers and his body.

It was the day after the funeral that it all came out. Lena and Ethel were sitting up together over the papers and the letters, turning out his bureau. I suppose that, in the grand immunity his death conferred on her, poor Lena had become provokingly possessive. I can hear her saying to Ethel that there had never been anybody but her, all those years. Praising his faithfulness; holding out her dead happiness, and apologizing to Ethel for talking about it when Ethel didn't understand, never having had any.

She must have said something like that, to bring it on herself, just then, of all moments.

And I can see Ethel Reeves, sitting at his table, stolidly sorting out his papers, wishing that Lena'd go away and leave her to her work. And her sullen eyes firing out questions, asking her what she wanted, what she had to do with Norman Hippisley's papers, what she was there for, fussing about, when it was all over?

What she wanted—what she had come for—was her letters. They were locked up in his bureau in the secret drawer.

She told me what had happened then. Ethel lifted her sullen, subtle eyes and said, "You think he kept them?"

She said she knew he'd kept them. They were in that drawer.

And Ethel said, "Well then, he didn't. They aren't. He burnt them. We burnt them.... We could, at least, get rid of *them!*"

Then she threw it at her. She had been Hippisley's mistress for three years.

When Lena asked for proofs of the incredible assertion she had *her* letters to show.

Oh, it was her moment. She must have been looking out for it, saving up for it, all those years; gloating over her exquisite secret, her return for all the slighting and ignoring. That was

what had made her poisonous, the fact that Lena hadn't reckoned with her, hadn't thought her dangerous, hadn't been afraid to leave Hippisley with her, the rich, arrogant contempt in her assumption that Ethel would "do" and her comfortable confidences. It made her amorous and malignant. It stimulated her to the attempt.

I think she must have hated Lena more vehemently than she loved Hippisley. She couldn't, *then*, have had much reliance on her power to capture; but her hatred was a perpetual suggestion. Supposing—supposing she were to try and take him?

Then she had tried.

I daresay she hadn't much difficulty. Hippisley wasn't quite so fine and fastidious as Lena thought him. I've no doubt he liked Ethel's unwholesomeness, just as he had liked the touch of morbidity in Lena.

And the spying? That had been all part of the game; his and Ethel's. *They* played for safety, if you like. They had *had* to throw Lena off the scent. They used Sybil Fermor and Lady Hermione and Barbara Vining, one after the other, as their *paravents*. Finally they had used Lena. That was their cleverest stroke. It brought them a permanent security. For, you see, Hippisley wasn't going to give up his free quarters, his studio, the dinners and the motor car, if he could help it. Not for Ethel. And Ethel knew it. They insured her, too.

Can't you see her, letting herself go in an ecstasy of revenge, winding up with a hysterical youp? "You? You thought it was you? It was me—*me*—ME.... You thought what we meant you to think."

Lena still comes and talks to me. To hear her you would suppose that Lawson Young and Dickey Harper never existed, that her passion for Norman Hippisley was the unique, solitary manifestation of her soul. It certainly burnt with the intensest flame. It certainly consumed her. What's left of her's all shrivelled, warped, as she writhed in her fire.

Yesterday she said to me, "Roly, I'm *glad* he's dead. Safe from her clutches."

She'll cling for a little while to this last illusion: that he had been reluctant; but I doubt if she really believes it now.

For you see, Ethel flourishes. In passion, you know, nothing succeeds like success; and her affair with Norman Hippisley advertised her, so that very soon it ranked as the first of a series of successes. She goes about dressed in stained-glass futurist muslins, and contrives provocative effects out of a tilted nose, and sulky eyes, and sallowness set off by a black velvet band on the forehead, and a black scarf of hair dragged tight from a raking backward peak.

I saw her the other night sketching a frivolous gesture—

THE WOMAN WHO SAT STILL, by Parry Truscott

(From *Colour*)

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When he went, when he had to go, he took with him the memory of her that had become crystallised, set for him in his own frequent words to her, standing at her side, looking down at

her with his keen, restless eyes—such words as: "It puzzles me how on earth you manage to sit so still...."

Then, enlarging: "It is wonderful to me how you can keep so happy doing nothing—make of enforced idleness a positive pleasure! I suppose it is a gift, and I haven't got it—not a bit. It doesn't matter how tired I am, I have to keep going—people call it industry, but its real name is nervous energy, run riot. I can't even take a holiday peacefully. I must be actively playing if I cannot work. I'm just the direct descendant of the girl in the red shoes—they were red, weren't they?—who had to dance on and on until she dropped. I shall go on and on until I drop, and then I shall attempt a few more useless yards on all fours...."

"Come now," in answer to the way she shook her head at him, smiled at him from her sofa, "you know very well how I envy you your gift, your power of sitting still—happily still—your power of contemplation...."

And one day, more intimately still, with a sigh and a look (Oh, a look she understood!), "To me you are the most restful person in the world...."

Why he went, except that he had to go; why he stayed away so long, so very long, are not really relevant to this story; the facts, stripped of conjecture, were simply these: she was married, and he was not, and there came the time, it always comes in such relationships as theirs, when he had to choose between staying without honour and going quickly. He went. But even the bare facts concerning his protracted absence are less easily stated because his absence dragged on long after the period when he might, with impeccable honour, have returned.

The likeliest solution was that setting her aside when he had to, served so to cut in two his life, so wrenched at his heartstrings, so burnt and bruised his spirit, that when, in his active fashion he had lived some of the hurt down, he could not bring himself easily to reopen the old subject—fresh wounds for him might still lurk in it—how could he tell? Although it had been at the call, the insistence of honour, still hadn't he left her—deserted her? Does any woman, even his own appointed woman, forgive a man who goes speechless away? Useless, useless speculation! For some reason, some man's reason, when another's death made her a free woman, yet he lingered and did not come.

He knew, afterwards, that it was from the first his intention to claim her. He wanted her—deep down he wanted her as he had always wanted her; meant to come—some time. Knew all the time that he could not always keep away. And then, responding to a sudden whim, some turn of his quickly moving mind—a mind that could forcibly bury a subject and as forcibly resurrect it—hot-foot and eager he came.

He had left her recovering slowly and surely from a long illness; an illness that must have proved fatal but for her gift of tranquillity, her great gift of keeping absolutely, rest-fully still in body, while retaining a happily occupied mind. Her books, and her big quiet room, and the glimpse of the flower-decked garden from her window, with just these things to help her, she had dug herself into the deep heart of life where the wells of contentment spring. Bird's song in the early morn and the long, still day before her in which to find herself—to take a new, firmer hold on the hidden strength of the world. And, just to keep her in touch with the surface of things, visits from her friends.

Then later, more tightly gripping actuality, with a new, keen, sharp, growing pleasure—the visits of a friend.

While those lasted there was nothing she would have changed for her quiet room, her sofa: the room that he lit with his coming; where she rested and rested, shut in with the memory of all he said, looked, thought in her presence—until again he came.

While they lasted! She had been content, never strong, never able to do very much, with seclusion before. During the time of his visits she revelled, rejoiced in it, asking nothing further. While they lasted, sitting still (Oh, so still), hugging her joy, she didn't think, wouldn't think, how it might end.

Sometimes, just sometimes, by a merciful providence, things do not end. She lived for months on the bare chance of its not ending.

Yet, as we know, the end came.

At first while the world called her widowed she sat with her unwidowed heart waiting for him in the old room, in the old way. Surely now he would come? She had given good measure of fondness and duty and friendship—that was only that under another name—to the one who until now had stood between her and her heart's desire, and parting with him, and all the associations that went with him, had surprisingly hurt her. Always frail, she was ill—torn with sorrow and pity—and then, very slowly again, she recovered. And while she recovered, lying still in the old way, she gave her heart wings—wild, surging wings—at last, at last. Sped it forth, forth to bring her joy—to compel it.

While she waited in this fashion a sweet, recaptured sense of familiarity made his coming seem imminent. She had only to wait and he would be here. She couldn't have mistaken the looks that had never been translated into words—that hadn't needed words. Though she had longed and ached for a word—then—she was quite content now. He had wanted her just as she was, unashamed and untainted. And to preserve her as she was he had gone away. And now for the very first time she was truly glad he had gone in that abrupt, speechless fashion—in spite of the heartache and the long years between them, really and truly glad. Nothing had been spoiled; they had snatched at no stolen joys. And the rapture, (what rapture!) of meeting would blot out all that they had suffered in silence—the separation—all of it!

As she waited, getting well for him, she had no regrets, growing more and more sure of his coming.

It was not until she was well again, not until the months had piled themselves on each other, that, growing more frightened than she knew, she began her new work of preparation.

Suddenly, impulsively, when she had reached the stage of giving him up for days at a time, when hope had nearly abandoned her, then he came.

He had left a woman so hopeful in outlook, so young and peaceful in spirit, that with her the advancing years would not matter. On his journey back to her, visualising her afresh, touching up his memory of her, he pictured her going a little grey. That would suit her—grey was her colour—blending to lavender in the clothes she always wore for him. A little grey, but her clear, pale skin unfaded, her large eyes full of pure, guarded secrets—secrets soon to unfold for him alone.

A haven—a haven! So he thought of her, and now, ready for her, coming to her, he craved the rest she would give him—rest more than anything in all the world. She, with her sweet white hands, when he held them, kissed them, would unlock the doors of peace for him, drawing him into her life, letting him potter and linger—linger at her side. Even when long ago he had insisted to her that for him there was no way of rest, he had known that she, just she, meant rest for him, when he could claim her for his own. Other women, other pursuits, offered him excitement, stimulation—and then a weariness too profound for words. But rest, bodily, spiritually, was her unique gift for him. She—he smiled as he thought it—would teach him to sit still.

And tired, so tired, he hurried to her across the world as fast as he could go.

Waiting at her door, the door opened, crossing the threshold—Oh, he had never thought his luck would be so great as to be taken direct to the well remembered room upstairs! Yet with only a few short inquiries he was taken there—she for whom he asked, the mistress of the house, would be in her sitting-room, he was told, and if he was an old friend...? He explained that he was a very old friend, following the maid upstairs. But the maid was mistaken; her mistress was not in her private sitting-room; not in the house at all—she had gone out, and it proved on investigation that she had left no word. The maid, returning, suggested however, that she would not be long. Her mistress had a meeting this evening; she was expecting some one before dinner; no, she would certainly not be long, so—so if he would like to wait?

He elected to wait—a little impatiently. He knew it was absurd that coming, without warning—after how many years was it?—he should yet have made so sure of finding her at home. Absurd, unreasonable—and yet he was disappointed. He ought to have written, but he had not waited to write. He had pictured the meeting—how many times? Times without number—and always pictured her waiting at home. And then the room?

Left alone in it he paced the room. But the room enshrined in his heart of hearts was not this room. Was there, surely there was some mistake?

There could be no mistake. There could not be two upstairs rooms in this comparatively small house, of this size and with this aspect; westward, and overlooking with two large windows the little walled garden into which he had so often gazed, standing and talking to her, saying over his shoulders the things he dare not say face to face—that would have meant so much more, helped out with look and gesture, face to face.

The garden, as far as he could see, was the same except that he fancied it less trim, less perfect in order: in the old days it would be for months at a time all the outside world she saw—there had been object enough in keeping it trim. Now it looked, to his fancy, like a woman whose beauty was fading a little because she had lost incentive to be beautiful. He turned from the garden, his heart amazed, fearful, back to the room.

The room of the old days—with closed eyes he reproduced it; its white walls, its few good pictures, its curtains and carpet of deep blue. Her sofa by the window, the wide armchair on which he always sat, the table where, in and out of season, roses, his roses, stood. The little old gilt clock on the mantelpiece that so quickly, cruelly ticked away their hour. Books, books everywhere, the most important journals and a medley of the lighter magazines; those, with her work-basket, proving her feminine and the range of her interests, her inconsistency. A woman's room, revealing at a glance her individuality, her spirit.

But this room——! He looked for the familiar things—the sofa, the bookshelves, the little table dedicated to flowers. Yes, the sofa was there, but pushed away as though seldom used; on the bookshelves new, strange books were crowding out the old, on the little table drooped a few faded flowers in an awkward vase. On the mantelpiece, where she would never have more than one or two good ornaments, and the old gilt clock, were now stacks of papers, a rack bulging with packing materials—something like that—an ink-bottle, a candlestick, the candle trailed over with sealing-wax, and an untidy ball of string. And right in the centre of the room a great clumsy writing-table, an office table, piled with papers again, ledgers, a portable typewriter, and—a litter of cigarette ends.

Like a Mistress on the track of a much-doubted maid he ran his finger along the edge of a bookcase and then the mantelpiece. He looked at his fingers; there was no denying the dust he had wiped away.

She must have changed her room—why had she done it? But the maid had said—in her sitting-room——

He waited now frightened, now fuming. Still she did not come. Should he not wait—should

he go—if this was her room? But he had come so far, and he needed her so—he must stay. For some dear, foolish woman's reason she must have lent her room for the use of a feminine busy-body; a political, higher-thought, pseudo-spiritualistic friend. (He must weed out her friends!) The trend of the work done in this room now his quick mind had seized upon—titles of books, papers, it was enough. Notices stuck in the Venetian Mirror (the desecration!) for meetings of this and that society, and all of them, so he judged, just excuses for putting unwanted fingers into unwanted, dangerous pies. He thought of it like that—he could not help it; he saw too far into motive and internal action; was too impatient of the little storms, the paltry, tea-cup things. She, with her unique gift of serenity—her place was not among the busybodies grinding axes that were better blunt; interfering with the slow, slow working of the Mills of God. Her gift was example—rare and delicate; her light the silver light of a soul, that through suffering and patience and contemplation, knows itself and is unafraid.

For such fussing, unstable work as it was used for now she ought not even to have lent her room—the room he had looked on as a temple of quietness; the shrine of a priceless temperament.

He smiled his first smile—she should not lend it again.

Then the door opened. Suddenly, almost noisily, she came in.

She had heard, downstairs, his name. So far she was prepared with her greeting. She came with hands outstretched—he took her hands and dropped them.

When he could interrupt her greeting he said—forcing the words—"So now you are quite strong—and busy?"

She told him how busy. She told him how, (but not why) she had awakened from her long, selfish dream. She said she had found so late—but surely not too late?—the joy of action; constant, unremitting work for the world's sake. "*Do you remember how you used to complain you couldn't sit still? I am like that now—*"

And he listened, listened, each word a deeper stab straight at his defenceless heart.

Of all the many things he had done since they met he had nothing to say.

Having just let her talk (how she talked!) as soon as he decently could he went. Of all he had come to tell her he said not a word. Tired, so bitterly tired, he had come seeking rest, and now there was no more a place of rest for him—anywhere.

Yes, he had come across the world to find himself overdue; to find himself too late. He went out again—as soon as he decently could—taking only a picture of her that in sixty over-charged minutes had wiped out the treasured picture of years.

Sixty minutes! After waiting for years she had kept him an hour, desperately, by sheer force of will keeping a man too stunned at first to resist, to break free. (Then at last he broke free of that room and that woman, and went!) For years he had pictured her sitting still as no other woman sat still, tranquil and graceful, her hair going a little grey above her clear, pale skin, her eyes of a dream-ridden saint. And now he must picture her forced into life, vivaciously, restlessly eager; full of plans, (futile plans, how he knew those plans!) for the world's upheaval, adding unrest to unrest. And now he must picture her with the grey hair outwitted by art, with paint on her beautiful ravaged face.

At first he had wanted to take her in his arms; with his strength to still her, with his tears to wash the paint off.

But he couldn't—he couldn't. He knew that his had been a dream of such supreme sweetness that to awaken was an agony he could never hide; knew that you can't re-enter dreamland once

you wake.

So he went.

He never knew, with the door shut on him, how she fell on her sofa—her vivacity quenched, her soul spent. He never knew that having failed, (as she thought) to draw him to her with what she was, she had vainly, foolishly tried a new model—himself.

He did not know how inartistic love can be when love is desperate.

MAJOR WILBRAHAM, By Hugh Walpole

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I am quite aware that in giving you this story just as I was told it I shall incur the charge of downright and deliberate lying.

Especially I shall be told this by any one who knew Wilbraham personally. Wilbraham was not, of course, his real name, but I think that there are certain people who will recognize him from this description of him. I do not know that it matters very much if they do. Wilbraham himself would certainly not mind did he know. (Does he know?) It was the thing above all that he wanted those last hours before he died—that I should pass on my conviction of the truth of what he told me to others. What he did not know was that I was not convinced. How could I be? But when the whole comfort of his last hours hung on the simple fact that I was, of course I pretended to the best of my poor ability. I would have done more than that to make him happy.

It is precisely the people who knew him well who will declare at once that my little story is impossible. But did they know him well? Does any one know any one else well? Aren't we all as lonely and removed from one another as mariners on separate desert islands? In any case I did not know him well and perhaps for that very reason was not so greatly surprised at his amazing revelations—surprised at the revelations themselves, of course, but not at his telling them. There was always in him—and I have known him here and there, loosely, in club and London fashion, for nearly twenty years—something romantic and something sentimental. I knew that because it was precisely those two attributes that he drew out of me.

Most men are conscious at some time in their lives of having felt for a member of their own sex an emotion that is something more than simple companionship. It is a queer feeling quite unlike any other in life, distinctly romantic and the more that perhaps for having no sex feeling in it.

Like the love of women, it is felt generally at sight, but, unlike that love, it is, I think, a supremely unselfish emotion. It is not acquisitive, nor possessive, nor jealous, and exists best perhaps when it is not urged too severely, but is allowed to linger in the background of life, giving real happiness and security and trust, standing out, indeed, as something curiously reliable just because it is so little passionate. This emotion has an odd place in our English life because the men who feel it, if they have been to public school and university, have served a long training in repressing every sign or expression of sentiment towards any other man;

nevertheless it persists, romantically and deeply persists, and the war of 1914 offered many curious examples of it.

Wilbraham roused just that feeling in me. I remember with the utmost distinctness my first meeting with him. It was just after the Boer war and old Johnny Beaminster gave a dinner party to some men pals of his at the Phoenix. Johnny was not so old then—none of us were; it was a short time after the death of that old harpy, the Duchess of Wrexhe, and some wag said that the dinner was in celebration of that happy occasion. Johnny was not so ungracious as that, but he gave us a very merry evening and he did undoubtedly feel a kind of lightness in the general air.

There were about fifteen of us and Wilbraham was the only man present I'd never seen before. He was only a captain then and neither so red faced nor so stout as he afterwards became. He was pretty bulky, though, even then, and with his sandy hair cropped close, his staring blue eyes, his toothbrush moustache and sharp, alert movements, looked the typical traditional British officer.

There was nothing at all to distinguish him from a thousand other officers of his kind, and yet from the moment I saw him I had some especial and personal feeling about him. He was not in type at all the man to whom at that time I should have felt drawn. My first book had just been published and, although as I now perceive, its publication had not caused the slightest ripple upon any water, the congratulations of my friends and relations, who felt compelled, poor things, to say something, because "they had received copies from the author," had made me feel that the literary world was all buzzing at my ears. I could see at a glance that Kipling was probably the only "decent" author about whom Wilbraham knew anything, and the fragments of his conversation that I caught did not promise anything intellectually exciting from his acquaintanceship.

The fact remains that I wanted to know him more than any other man in the room, and although I only exchanged a few words with him that night, I thought of him for quite a long time afterwards.

It did not follow from this as it ought to have done that we became great friends. That we never were, although it was myself whom he sent for three days before his death to tell me his queer little story. It was then at the very last that he confided to me that he, too, had felt something at our first meeting "different" to what one generally feels, that he had always wanted to turn our acquaintance into friendship and had been too shy. I also was shy—and so we missed one another, as I suppose in this funny, constrained, traditional country of ours thousands of people miss one another every day.

But although I did not see him very often and was in no way intimate with him, I kept my ears open for any account of his doings. From one point of view, the Club Window outlook, he was a very usual figure, one of those stout, rubicund, jolly men, a good polo player, a good man in a house party, genial-natured, and none too brilliantly brained, whom every one liked and no one thought about. All this he was on one side of the report, but, on the other, there were certain stories that were something more than the ordinary.

Wilbraham was obviously a sentimentalist and an enthusiast; there was the extraordinary case shortly after T first met him of his championship of X, a man who had been caught in an especially bestial kind of crime and received a year's imprisonment for it. On X leaving prison Wilbraham championed and defended him, put him up for months in his rooms in Duke Street, walked as often as possible in his company down Piccadilly, and took him over to Paris. It says a great deal for Wilbraham's accepted normality and his general popularity that this championship of X did him no harm. It was so obvious that he himself was the last man in the world to be afflicted with X's peculiar habits. Some men, it is true, did murmur something about "birds of a feather"; one or two kind friends warned Wilbraham in the way kind friends

have, and to them he simply said: "If a feller's a pal he's a pal."

All this might in the end have done Wilbraham harm had not X most happily committed suicide in Paris in 1905.

There followed a year or two later the much more celebrated business of Lady C. I need not go into all that now, but here again Wilbraham constituted himself her defender, although she robbed, cheated, and maligned him as she robbed, cheated, and maligned every one who was good to her. It was quite obvious that he was not in love with her; the obviousness of it was one of the things in him that annoyed her.

He simply felt apparently that she had been badly treated (the very last thing that she had been), gave her any money he had, put his rooms at the disposal of herself and her friends, and, as I have said, championed her everywhere. This affair did very nearly finish him socially, and in his regiment. It was not so much that they minded his caring for Lady C—(after all, any man can be fooled by any woman)—but it was Lady C's friends who made the whole thing so impossible. Such a crew! Such a horrible crew! And it was a queer thing to see Wilbraham with his straight blue eyes and innocent mouth and general air of amiable simplicity in the company of men like Colonel B and young Kenneth Parr. (There is no harm, considering the later publicity of his case, in mentioning his name.) Well, that affair luckily came to an end just in time. Lady C disappeared to Berlin and was no more seen.

There were other bases into which I need not go when Wilbraham was seen in strange company, always championing somebody who was not worth the championing. He had no "social tact," and for them at any rate no moral sense. In himself he was the ordinary normal man about town, no prude, but straight as a man can be in his debts, his love affairs, his friendships, and his sport. Then came the war. He did brilliantly at Mons, was wounded twice, went out to Gallipoli, had a touch of Palestine, and returned to France again to share in Foch's final triumph.

No man can possibly have had more of the war than he had, and it is my own belief that he had just a little too much of it.

He had been always perhaps a little "queer," as we are most of us "queer" somewhere, and the horrors of that horrible war undoubtedly affected him. Finally he lost, just a week before the armistice, one of his best friends, Ross McLean, a loss from which he certainly never recovered.

I have now, I think, brought together all the incidents that can throw any kind of light upon the final scene.

In the middle of 1919 he retired from the army, and it was from this time to his death that I saw something of him. He went back to his old home at Horton's in Duke street, and as I was living at that time in Marlborough Chambers in Jermyn street we were in easy reach of one another. The early part of 1920 was a "queer, time.". People had become, I imagine, pretty well accustomed to realizing that those two wonderful hours of Armistice day had not ushered in the millennium any more than those first marvellous moments of the Russian revolution produced it.

Every one has always hoped for the millennium, but the trouble since the days of Adam and Eve has always been that people have such different ideas as to what exactly that millennium shall be. The plain facts of the matter simply were that during 1919 and 1920 the world changed from a war of nations to a war of classes, that inevitable change that history has always shown follows on great wars.

As no one ever reads history, it was natural enough that there should be a great deal of disappointment and a great deal of astonishment. Men at the head of affairs who ought to have

known better cried aloud, "How ungrateful these people are, after all we've done for them!" and the people underneath shouted that everything had been muddled and spoiled and that they would have done much better had they been at the head of affairs, an assertion for which there was no sort of justification.

Wilbraham, being a sentimentalist and an idealist, suffered more from this general disappointment than most people. He had had wonderful relations with the men under him throughout the war. He had never tired of recounting how marvelously they had behaved, what heroes they were, and that it was they who would pull the country together.

At the same time he had a naïve horror of bolshevism and anything unconstitutional, and he watched the transformation of his "brave lads" into discontented and idle workmen with dismay and deep distress. He used sometimes to come around to my rooms and talk to me; he had the bewildered air of a man walking in his sleep.

He made the fatal mistake of reading all the papers, and he took in the Daily Herald in order that he might see "what it was these fellows had to say for themselves."

The Herald upset him terribly. Its bland assumption that Russians and Sein Feiners could do no wrong, but that the slightest sign of assertion of authority on the part of any government was "wicked tyranny," shocked his very soul. I remember that he wrote a long, most earnest letter to Lansbury, pointing out to him that if he subverted all authority and constitutional government his own party would in its turn be subverted when it came to govern. Of course, he received no answer.

During these months I came to love the man. The attraction that I had felt for him from the very first deeply underlay all my relation to him, but as I saw more of him I found many very positive reasons for my liking. He was the simplest, bravest, purest, most loyal, and most unselfish soul alive. He seemed to me to have no faults at all unless it were a certain softness towards the wishes of those whom he loved. He could not bear to hurt anybody, but he never hesitated if some principle in which he believed was called in question.

He had not, of course, a subtle mind—he was no analyst of character—but that did not make him uninteresting. I never heard any one call him dull company, although men laughed at him for his good nature and unselfishness and traded on him all the time. He was the best human being I have ever known or am ever likely to know.

Well, the crisis arrived with astonishing suddenness. About the second or third of August I went down to stay with some friends at the little fishing village of Rafiel in Glebeshire.

I saw him just before I left London, and he told me that he was going to stay in London for the first half of August, that he liked London in August, even though his club would be closed and Horton's delivered over to the painters.

I heard nothing about him for a fortnight, and then I received a most extraordinary letter from Box Hamilton, a fellow clubman of mine and Wilbraham's. Had I heard, he said, that poor old Wilbraham had gone right off his "knocker"? Nobody knew exactly what had happened, but suddenly one day at lunch time Wilbraham had turned up at Grey's (the club to which our own club was a visitor during its cleaning), had harangued every one about religion in the most extraordinary way, had burst out from there and started shouting in Piccadilly, had, after collecting a crowd, disappeared and not been seen until the next morning, when he had been found, nearly killed, after a hand-to-hand fight with the market men in Covent Garden.

It may be imagined how deeply this disturbed me, especially as I felt that I was myself to blame. I had noticed that Wilbraham was ill when I had seen him in London, and I should either have persuaded him to come with me to Glebeshire or stayed with him in London. I was just about to pack up and go to town when I received a letter from a doctor in a nursing home

in South Audley street saying that a certain Major Wilbraham was in the home dying and asking persistently for myself. I took a motor to Drymouth and was in London by five o'clock.

I found the South Audley Street nursing home and was at once surrounded with the hush, the shaded rooms, the scents of medicine and flowers, and some undefinable cleanliness that belongs to those places.

I waited in a little room, the walls decorated with sporting prints, the green baize table gloomily laden with volumes of Punch and the Tatler. Wilbraham's doctor came in to see me, a dapper, smart little man, efficient and impersonal. He told me that Wilbraham had at most only twenty-four hours to live, that his brain was quite clear, and that he was suffering very little pain, that he had been brutally kicked in the stomach by some man in the Covent Garden crowd and had there received the internal injuries from which he was now dying.

"His brain is quite clear," the doctor said. "Let him talk. It can do him no harm. Nothing can save him. His head is full of queer fancies; he wants every one to listen to him. He's worrying because there's some message he wants to send... he wants to give it to you."

When I saw Wilbraham he was so little changed that I felt no shock. Indeed, the most striking change in him was the almost exultant happiness in his voice and eyes.

It is true that after talking to him a little I knew that he was dying. He had that strange peace and tranquillity of mind that one saw so often with dying men in the war.

I will try to give an exact account of Wilbraham's narrative; nothing else is of importance in this little story but that narrative; I can make no comment. I have no wish to do so. I only want to pass it on as he begged me to do.

"If you don't believe me," he said, "give other people the chance of doing so. I know that I am dying. I want as many men and women to have a chance of judging this as is humanly possible. I swear to you that I am telling the truth and the exact truth in every detail."

I began my account by saying that I was not convinced.

How could I be convinced?

At the same time I have none of those explanations with which people are so generously forthcoming on these occasions. I can only say that I do not think Wilbraham was insane, nor drunk, nor asleep. Nor do I believe that some one played a practical joke....

Whether Wilbraham was insane between the hours when his visitor left him and his entrance into the nursing home I must leave to my readers. I myself think he was not.

After all, everything depends upon the relative importance that we place upon ambitions, possessions, emotions,—ideas.

Something suddenly became of so desperate an importance to Wilbraham that nothing else at all mattered. He wanted every one else to see the importance of it as he did. That is all....

It had been a hot and oppressive day; London had seemed torrid and uncomfortable. The mere fact that Oxford street was "up" annoyed him. After a slight meal in his flat he went to the Promenade Concert at Queen's Hall. It was the second night of the season—Monday night, Wagner night.

He bought himself a five shilling ticket and sat in the middle of the balcony overlooking the floor. He was annoyed again when he discovered that he had been given a ticket for the "non-smoking" section of the balcony.

He had heard no Wagner since August, 1914, and was anxious to discover the effect that

hearing it again would have upon him. The effect was disappointing. The music neither caught nor held him.

"The Meistersinger" had always been a great opera for him. The third act music that Sir Henry Wood gave to him didn't touch him anywhere. He also discovered that six years' abstinence had not enraptured him any more deeply with the rushing fiddles in the "Tannhäuser" Overture nor with the spinning music in the "Flying Dutchman." Then came suddenly the prelude to the third act of "Tristan." That caught him; the peace and tranquillity that he needed lapped him round; he was fully satisfied and could have listened for another hour.

He walked home down Regent Street, the quiet melancholy of the shepherd's pipe accompanying him, pleasing him and tranquillizing him. As he reached his flat ten o'clock struck from St. James' Church. He asked the porter whether any one had wanted him during his absence—whether any one was waiting for him now—(some friend had told him that he might come up and use his spare room one night that week). No, no one had been. There was no one there waiting.

Great was his surprise, therefore, when opening the door of his flat he found some one standing there, one hand resting on the table, his face turned towards the open door. Stronger, however, than Wilbraham's surprise was his immediate conviction that he knew his visitor well, and this was curious because the face was undoubtedly strange to him.

"I beg your pardon," Wilbraham said to him, hesitating.

"I wanted to see you," the Stranger said, smiling.

When Wilbraham was telling me this part of Ids story he seemed to be enveloped—"enveloped" is the word that best conveys my own experience of him—by some quite radiant happiness. He smiled at me confidentially as though he were telling me something that I had experienced with him and that must give me the same happiness that it gave to him.

"Ought I to have expected? Ought I to have known——" he stammered.

"No, you couldn't have known," the Stranger answered. "You're not late. I knew when you would come."

Wilbraham told me that during these moments he was surrendering himself to an emotion and intimacy and companionship that was the most wonderful thing that he had ever known. It was that intimacy and companionship, he told me, for which all his days he had been searching. It was the one thing that life never seemed to give; even in the greatest love, the deepest friendship, there was that seed of loneliness hidden. He had never found it in man or woman.

Now it was so wonderful that the first thing he said was: "And now you're going to stay, aren't you? You won't go away at once...?"

"Of course, I'll stay," he answered. "If you want me."

His Visitor was dressed in some dark suit; there was nothing about Him in any way odd or unusual. His Face was thin and pale, His smile kindly.

His English was without accent. His voice was soft and very melodious.

But Wilbraham could notice nothing but His Eyes; they were the most beautiful, tender, gentle Eyes that he had ever seen in any human being.

They sat down. Wilbraham's overwhelming fear was lest his Guest should leave him. They began to talk and Wilbraham took it at once as accepted that his Friend knew all about him—

everything.

He found himself eagerly plunging into details of scenes, episodes that he had long put behind him—put behind him for shame perhaps or for regret or for sorrow. He knew at once that there was nothing that he need veil nor hide—nothing. He had no sense that he must consider susceptibilities nor avoid self-confession that was humiliating.

But he did find, as he talked on, a sense of shame from another side creep towards him and begin to enclose him. Shame at the smallness, meanness, emptiness of the things that he declared.

He had had always behind his mistakes and sins a sense that he was a rather unusually interesting person; if only his friends knew everything about him they would be surprised at the remarkable man that he really was. Now it was exactly the opposite sense that came over him. In the gold-rimmed mirror that was over his mantelpiece he saw himself diminishing, diminishing, diminishing.... First himself, large, red-faced, smiling, rotund, lying back in his chair; then the face shrivelling, the limbs shortening, then the face small and peaked, the hands and legs little and mean, then the chair enormous about and around the little trembling animal cowering against the cushion.

He sprang up.

"No, no.... I can't tell you any more—and you've known it all so long. I am mean, small, nothing—I have not even great ambition... nothing."

His Guest stood up and put His Hand on his shoulder.

They talked, standing side by side, and He said some things that belonged to Wilbraham alone, that he would not tell me.

Wilbraham asked Him why He had come—and to him.

"I will come now to a few of My friends," He said. "First one and then another. Many people have forgotten Me behind My words. They have built up such a mountain over Me with the doctrines they have attributed to Me, the things that they say that I did. I am not really," He said laughing, His Hand on Wilbraham's shoulder, "so dull and gloomy and melancholy as they have made Me. I loved Life—I loved men; I loved laughter and games and the open air—I liked jokes and good food and exercise. All things that they have forgotten. So from now I shall come back to one or two.... I am lonely when they see Me so solemnly."

Another thing He said. "They are making life complicated now. To lead a good life, to be happy, to manage the world only the simplest things are needed—Love, Unselfishness, Tolerance."

"Can I go with You and be with You always?" Wilbraham asked.

"Do you really want that?" He said.

"Yes," said Wilbraham, bowing his head.

"Then you shall come and never leave Me again. In three days from now."

Then he kissed Wilbraham on the forehead and went away.

I think that Wilbraham himself became conscious as he told me this part of his story of the difference between the seen and remembered Figure and the foolish, inadequate reported words. Even now as I repeat a little of what Wilbraham said I feel the virtue and power slipping away.

And so it goes on! As the Figure recedes the words become colder and colder and the air that surrounds them has in it less and less of power. But on that day when I sat beside Wilbraham's bed the conviction in his voice and eyes held me so that although my reason kept me back my heart told me that he had been in contact with some power that was a stronger force than anything that I myself had ever known.

But I have determined to make no personal comment on this story. I am here simply as a narrator of fact....

Wilbraham told me that after his Visitor left him he sat there for some time in a dream. Then he sat up, startled, as though some voice, calling, had wakened him, with an impulse that was like a fire suddenly blazing up and lighting the dark places of his brain. I imagine that all Wilbraham's impulses in the past, chivalric, idealistic, foolish, had been of that kind—sudden, of an almost ferocious energy and determination, blind to all consequences. He must go out at once and tell every one of what had happened to him.

I once read a story somewhere about some town that was expecting a great visitor. Everything was ready, the banners hanging, the music prepared, the crowds waiting in the street.

A man who had once been for some years at the court of the expected visitor saw him enter the city, sombrely clad, on foot. Meanwhile his Chamberlain entered the town in full panoply with the trumpets blowing and many riders in attendance. The man who knew the real thing ran to every one telling the truth, but they laughed at him and refused to listen. And the real king departed quietly as he had come.

It was, I suppose, an influence of this kind that drove Wilbraham now. Suddenly something was of so great an importance to him that nothing else, mockery, hostility, scorn, counted. After all, simply a supreme example of the other impulses that had swayed him throughout his life.

What followed might I think have been to some extent averted had his appearance been different. London is a home of madmen and casually permits any lunacy so that public peace is not endangered; had poor Wilbraham looked a fanatic with pale face, long hair, ragged clothes, much would have been forgiven him, but for a stout, middle-aged gentleman, well dressed, well groomed.... What could be supposed but insanity and insanity of a very ludicrous kind?

He put on his coat and went out. From this moment his account was confused. His mind, as he spoke to me, kept returning to that Visitor.... What happened after his Friend's departure was vague and uncertain to him, largely because it was unimportant.. He does not know what time it was when he went out, but I gather that it must have been about midnight. There were still people in Piccadilly.

Somewhere near the Berkeley Hotel he stopped a gentleman and a lady. He spoke, I am sure, so politely that the man he addressed must have supposed that he was asking for a match, or an address, or something of the kind. Wilbraham told me that very quietly he asked the gentleman whether he might speak to him for a moment, that he had something very important to say.

That he would not, as a rule, dream of interfering in any man's private affairs, but that the importance of his communication outweighed all ordinary conventions; that he expected that the gentleman had hitherto, as had been his own case, felt much doubt about religious questions, but that now all doubt was, once and forever, over, that...

I expect that at that fatal word "Religion" the gentleman started as though he had been stung by a snake, felt that this mild-looking man was a dangerous lunatic and tried to move away. It was the lady with him, so far as I can discover, who cried out:

"Oh, poor man, he's ill," and wanted at once to do something for him. By this time a crowd was beginning to collect and as the crowd closed around the central figures more people gathered upon the outskirts and, peering through, wondered what had happened, whether there was an accident, whether it were a "drunk," whether there had been a quarrel, and so on.

Wilbraham, I fancy, began to address them all, telling them his great news, begging them with desperate urgency to believe him. Some laughed, some stared in wide-eyed wonder, the crowd was increasing and then, of course, the inevitable policeman with his "move on, please," appeared.

How deeply I regret that Wilbraham was not, there and then, arrested. He would be alive and with us now if that had been done. But the policeman hesitated, I suppose, to arrest any one as obviously a gentleman as Wilbraham, a man, too, as he soon perceived, who was perfectly sober, even though he was not in his right mind.

Wilbraham was surprised at the policeman's interference. He said that the last thing that he wished to do was to create any disturbance, but that he could not bear to let all these people go to their beds without giving them a chance of realizing first that everything was now altered, that he had the most wonderful news....

The crowd was dispersed and Wilbraham found himself walking alone with the policeman beside the Green Park.

He must have been a very nice policeman because before Wilbraham's death he called at the Nursing Home and was very anxious to know how the poor gentleman was getting on.

He allowed Wilbraham to talk to him and then did all he could to persuade him to walk home and go to bed. He offered to get him a taxi. Wilbraham thanked him, said he would do so, and bade him good night, and the policeman, seeing that Wilbraham was perfectly composed and sober, left him.

After that the narrative is more confused. Wilbraham apparently walked down Knightsbridge and arrived at last somewhere near the Albert Hall. He must have spoken to a number of different people. One man, a politician apparently, was with him for a considerable time, but only because he was so anxious to emphasise his own views about the Coalition Government and the wickedness of Lloyd George. Another was a journalist, who continued with him for a while because he scented a story for his newspaper. Some people may remember that there was a garbled paragraph about a "Religious Army Officer" in the *Daily Record*. One lady thought that Wilbraham wanted to go home with her and was both angry and relieved when she found that it was not so.

He stayed at a cabman's shelter for a time and drank a cup of coffee and told the little gathering there his news. They took it very calmly. They had met so many queer things in their time that nothing seemed odd to them.

His account becomes clearer again when he found himself a little before dawn in the park and in the company of a woman and a broken down pugilist. I saw both these persons afterwards and had some talk with them. The pugilist had only the vaguest sense of what had happened. Wilbraham was a "proper old bird" and had given him half a crown to get his breakfast with. They had all slept together under a tree and he had made some rather voluble protests because the other two would talk so continuously and prevented his sleeping. It was a warm night and the sun had come up behind the trees "surprisin' quick." He had liked the old boy, especially as he had given him half a crown.

The woman was another story. She was quiet and reserved, dressed in black, with a neat little black hat with a green feather in it. She had yellow fluffy hair and bright childish blue eyes and a simple, innocent expression. She spoke very softly and almost in a whisper. So far

as I could discover she could see nothing odd in Wilbraham nor in anything that he had said. She was the one person in all the world who had understood him completely and found nothing out of the way in his talk.

She had liked him at once, she said. "I could see that he was kind," she added earnestly, as though to her that was the most important thing in all the world. No, his talk had not seemed odd to her. She had believed every word that he had said. Why not? You could not look at him and not believe what he said.

Of course it was true. And why not? What was there against it? It had been a great help for her what the gentleman had told her.... Yes, and he had gone to sleep with his head in her lap... and she had stayed awake all night thinking... and he had waked up just in time to see the sun rise. Some sunrise that was, too.

That was a curious little fact that all three of them, even the battered pugilist, should have been so deeply struck by that sunrise. Wilbraham on the last day of his life, when he hovered between consciousness and unconsciousness, kept recalling it as though it had been a vision.

"The sun—and the trees suddenly green and bright like glittering swords. All shapes—swords, plowshares, elephants, and camels—and the sky pale like ivory. See, now the sun is rushing up, faster than ever, to take us with him, up, up, leaving the trees like green clouds beneath us—far, far beneath us——"

The woman said that it was the finest sunrise she had ever seen. He talked to her all the time about his plans. He was looking disheveled now and unshaven and dirty. She suggested that he should go back to his flat. No, he wished to waste no time. Who knew how long he had got? It might be only a day or two... He would go to Covent Garden and talk to the men there.

She was confused as to what happened after that. When they got to the market the carts were coming in and men were very busy.

She saw the gentleman speak to one of them very earnestly, but he was busy and pushed him aside. He spoke to another, who told him to clear out.

Then he jumped on to a box, and almost the last sight she had of him was his standing there in his soiled clothes, a streak of mud on his face, his arms outstretched and crying: "It's true! Stop just a moment—you *must* hear me!"

Some one pushed him off the box. The pugilist rushed in then, cursing them and saying that the man was a gentleman and had given him half a crown, and then some hulking great fellow fought the pugilist and there was a regular *mêlée*. Wilbraham was in the middle of them, was knocked down and trampled upon. No one meant to hurt him, I think. They all seemed very sorry afterwards....

He died two days after being brought into the Nursing Home. He was very happy just before he died, pressed my hand and asked me to look after the girl....

"Isn't it wonderful," were his last words to me, "that it should be true after all?"

As to Truth, who knows? Truth is a large order. This *is* true as far as Wilbraham goes, every word of it. Beyond that? Well, it must be jolly to be so happy as Wilbraham was.

This will seem a lying story to some, a silly and pointless story to others.

I wonder....

[Several stories omitted because of missing pages in the print copy]

