

THE
DOOMINGTON
WANDERER
by
Louis Golding



STORIES

THE
DOOMINGTON
WANDERER

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BY

LOUIS

GOLDING



GOLLANCZ

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By Louis Golding

FICTION

FORWARD FROM BABYLON
SEACOAST OF BOHEMIA
DAY OF ATONEMENT
STORE OF LADIES
THE MIRACLE BOY
THE PRINCE OR SOMEBODY
GIVE UP YOUR LOVERS
MAGNOLIA STREET
FIVE SILVER DAUGHTERS

VERSE

SORROW OF WAR
SHEPHERD SINGING RAGTIME
PROPHET AND FOOL

TRAVEL

SUNWARD: ADVENTURES IN ITALY
SICILIAN NOON
THOSE ANCIENT LANDS: A JOURNEY TO PALESTINE

BELLES LETTRES

ADVENTURES IN LIVING DANGEROUSLY
JAMES JOYCE

THE
DOOMINGTON WANDERER

A BOOK OF TALES

by
LOUIS GOLDING

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For
BESSIE AND TOM MOULT
because of old
DOOMINGTON DAYS

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MISS POMFRET AND MISS PRIMROSE

The way in which Miss Pomfret and Miss Primrose met was typical. It was typical of their previous and independent histories and of their subsequent and joint history; but it is their joint history which really concerns us. This is how they met.

Miss Pomfret got into the train at Cirencester, having just buried her younger sister Ursula. It had always been a whim on the part of Ursula that she should not be buried in the little churchyard at Bramlingham, a mile from the cottage which she and her sister occupied in a blue Cotswold valley. No, she shouldn't like to be so near her sister, she lying so cold and doing nothing and Miss Pomfret with all the dusting and the cooking and the washing-up to do, and quite alone. It would make her uncomfortable. She must be taken to Cirencester, where they were born and where their mother had died. There she would not feel contrite, said Ursula, for taking no hand in the cooking of stews and the setting straight of pictures. So when Ursula died (she had always been expected to die first, having been delicate from childhood) her sister duly carried her away to Cirencester.

Miss Pomfret got into the train for the return journey dry eyed and a little stern. (Miss Pomfret, I say. It was only as "Miss Pomfret" that Miss Pomfret was ever thought of or known. Even by Ursula, it would seem. Ursula must have known her Christian name, but she died just before this story begins and the knowledge lies with her in Cirencester.) Somehow, Miss Pomfret was on her mettle. Ursula dead; no relative nearer than Nigeria, and he, as Ursula used to say, a Prince Leopold of Holland the way he ill-treated the natives; herself and the Vicar of Bramlingham sworn enemies; and those two armchairs in the south room facing each other, where Ursula and she used to talk and knit and nod. How Ursula's chair would creak on windy spring evenings! She twisted a loose tress of grey hair from her eyes, stared defiantly into the railway carriage, saw only a little woman in the opposite corner with her face turned away, and entered. Miss Pomfret, as I have said, was on her mettle.

The train moved away and both ladies sat silent and motionless for many minutes. A sense of strain began to tighten the air. Why *wouldn't* she, that other one, turn her head? Why? Was she being superior? Did she resent anybody else getting into the carriage? Gracious me, did the woman think she'd *bought* the carriage? No, it couldn't be exactly that! It didn't belong, somehow, to that old-fashioned bodice and the subdued clothing that wrapped the mysterious little figure. It made Miss Pomfret feel awkward; it was as if one were travelling with a spirit.

Then Miss Pomfret became aware that ever so slightly the shoulders of the stranger were shaking, slightly but quite surely. Then Miss Pomfret felt a cold hand of desolate certainty at her heart. Oh, poor, poor dear, she was sobbing, that tiny, hurt woman, sobbing like a child in the dark.

In one moment Miss Pomfret was by her side, just as she used to find herself suddenly, without quite knowing it, by Ursula's chair or bed, when she gave one of her short sombre coughs.

"Tell me . . . oh, I'm so sorry . . . can I help?"

The stranger shook her head, but did not turn it towards Miss Pomfret. Her hand still covered her eyes, as it were from the sun, though at that moment actually the sun lay behind a heavy stretch of cloud. And then, unaccountably, Miss Pomfret herself broke down. She had not shed a single tear all these last mournful days, and now a stranger's sorrow, in a common train, darted through her like a stiletto, unbearably. Fortunately—Miss Pomfret subsequently remembered—it was at least not a corridor train. . . .

And then a voice said to her—a faded voice and thin, like a forgotten spinet touched in an attic, and a voice, none the less, curiously sweet:

"Oh, what is going to happen to us? Here's you as well! What shall we do?"

And Miss Pomfret replied, "I can't tell you how much she was . . . how little everything is without her! You too! What have you lost? Is it your sister too?"

A silence followed. The women looked away from each other. Miss Pomfret—sworn foe as she was to fidgets—tapped the thumb of each hand with each successive finger, tapped the floor five times with each foot, adjusted her hat.

And then Miss Primrose—this was the stranger's name—said, "He's gone away. He lied."

The humiliation of that bowed head, the catch of that husky voice, were more poignant than tears. And, as Miss Pomfret knew, there was nothing more to say or to learn.

"Where are you going?" said Miss Pomfret briefly.

"I don't know. I just got a ticket for the first train that left the station. It doesn't matter—nothing matters."

Then said Miss Pomfret, that unromantic lady who had never suffered from illusions because the world had never offered them her, to this crushed child of a woman she had not set eyes on half an hour ago:

"I need you and you me, and there's room for you in our cottage. Ursula is dead. I've just buried her at Cirencester. You and Tim—Tim's the dog—will be great friends, and he'd fret with Ursula . . . away. You are coming?"

Miss Primrose looked up into Miss Pomfret's eyes for twenty or thirty

seconds.

“Yes!” she said.

When Miss Pomfret and Miss Primrose arrived at the cottage that evening, what with the oil stove which had to be filled, and the bread which both of them liked ever so thinly cut, and a dozen little domestic concerns and a dozen more, you would have thought that Miss Primrose had occupied that cottage as long as Miss Pomfret. And there was the routine to be explained; oh, there was much to do!

Six years passed quietly at the Cotswold cottage. You can imagine what sort of busy drowsy years they were. Tim, faithless fellow, accepted Miss Primrose in Ursula’s place without the least demur. He did not utter a single whine of inquiry concerning Ursula, though she had petted him even when Miss Pomfret had lifted her voice and said, “Bad dog, go to bed!” But, then, why should he? Never again was Ursula mentioned by Miss Pomfret, as never again was any reference made to that man who had lied to Miss Primrose and left the world black for her; their obsequies had been spoken in that train speeding from Cirencester. They had passed from the world.

On Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, Miss Primrose got up first and made the breakfast. These were egg days, in any permutation of egg. The other three week-days were Miss Pomfret’s, and these were fish days, for Miss Pomfret had a hundred ideas on the correct treatment of plaice or haddock or sole. Sunday was arranged as the spirit directed. After breakfast there was the kitchen garden, not to mention the flower-beds and the minute rockery. There was painting for Miss Primrose in the afternoons, crochet and knitting for Miss Pomfret; in the evenings, for both, there was the circulating library. A gentle world it was, though the Vicar of Bramlingham remained difficult and accused Miss Pomfret of Socialism, as the milkman reported. What if the hair grew a little greyer, the fingers a trifle more reluctant? What mattered these?

And then one Wednesday morning—a Miss Primrose morning—Miss Pomfret came down at the usual hour for poached eggs, or eggs, perhaps, scrambled. But there was no smell of toast. The water had boiled away from the aluminium kettle. The door was open and the cold wind blew in from the garden.

Miss Primrose left no note behind. She had taken with her only her coat, hat, and purse. Miss Pomfret, stealing towards the garden gate that evening, like a ghost, found a briar pipe under the hawthorn that grew just inside the gate. She took it in with her and stuffed it at the bottom of a trunk under a heap of discarded curtains and cloths, so that it was not likely she would come across it again. There was no resentment in Miss Pomfret’s heart. She knew it was not a matter as to who had a greater *right* to Miss Primrose—he, the unnamed man who had lied, or herself. It was not a moral issue, an affair of the

mind or the conscience at all. She felt merely a bitter taste in the mouth, and heard a dull singing behind her forehead all day and deep into the night.

“She has taken the latchkey with her,” said Miss Pomfret. “I shall have to get another one made.”

BLACK FRAILITY

I

The hero of this tale is Tom Molyneux, a fighting negro who came roaring across the sea over a hundred years ago to make himself the champion of the world. He was a hero in the classic sense of the word, like Hippolytus, or Hamlet. He, too, had his tragic frailty; and against him, as against them, the stars were set in their courses. So there was no laurel wreath for the fuzzy hair of Tom Molyneux, who assuredly should have worn it, if ever fist hit hard enough and heart was stout enough to win the whole world's crown.

It is far away and long ago that we first meet Black Tom of Virginia. The year is 1804, and the scene is in a low, long timber house in Richmond, Virginia, with great white pillars at its portico and the walls smothered with creepers. Light and noise splash out upon the dark lawn through the slats of the shutters. In the great sitting-room, round the enormous log-fire, the Bright Young People of Virginia society are gathered. Apple-jack is flowing in rivers, as it flows to this day.

No, of course, Tom Molyneux, the negro, is not there. He is away down country, for he is only a slave on the Molyneux estate. That was why, in fact, he took that grand name later on when he went to New York. He is only a slave, but his biceps are broad enough for twenty free men. He may be poking the eyes out of a potato at this moment, or poking out the eyes of some other young negro who's dared to give him sauce. No, you don't see him at the small house in Richmond, Virginia. But you hear all about him.

For his master, Algernon Molyneux, is very proud of him. The more apple-jack he drinks, the prouder he becomes. "Yes, begad!" cries Algernon Molyneux, "there isn't a nigger in the South can stand up to my Tom! There isn't a nigger with a face as ugly and a fist as powerful!"

"What's that?" roars a young gentleman from Carolina. Peyton, his name is. His face is as scarlet as a cock's comb. "What's that? Have you ever heard tell of my nigger, Abe? My Abe doesn't need his fist to knock your Tom down! He can do it with his breath—like this—poof!" And very rudely he blows his spirit-burdened breath into Algernon's face.

Now Mr. Peyton's father died not long ago. Mr. Peyton has inherited far more money than is good for him. He's hardly been sober a moment since he earthed the poor old gentleman.

Algernon Molyneux's cheek goes pale with anger. He screws up his fist as if he were himself his own fighting negro. But he catches sight of young

Peyton's head dithering on his neck. Why, the fellow's stone-drunk!

"Pah!" snorts Algernon. "I said a nigger, not a kitten! I'll put up any stake you like, Ted Peyton, that my nigger will knock yours into a sweet potato!"

Of course, Algernon wasn't the whole of one hundred per cent sober, either, or he'd have thought twice about putting up any stake Ted Peyton liked—Ted Peyton who'd just inherited the largest estate in Carolina.

"Done!" cried young Peyton. "Do you hear that, everybody? Do you hear that?" He turned round fiercely towards Algernon Molyneux. "A hundred thousand dollars!" he bellowed, like a ship's horn.

"Taken!" said Algernon casually, flicking away a speck of dust from his sleeve. He was so fiercely casual that his teeth bit through his lower lip. A hundred thousand dollars was quite a lot of money then. It is a fair sum now. Algernon was just sober enough to realise it was going to take a lot of finding. He knew his father wouldn't put up the money. He'd have to go along to old Isaacs, the moneylender, just behind Charleston Quay.

If he lost, that is to say . . . if he lost. By God, if Black Tom lost his money for him, he'd horsewhip him till he looked like a hank of ribbons. The ugly son of a gun with the lips like saucers! Then suddenly he had a vision of Tom in a cotton-field by the river. Two of the older negroes were creeping up to him where he stooped between the cotton-rows. It was clear they meant mischief. He knew that the other slaves in the plantation thought Tom an upstart, a cadger. They were jealous of the way Massa took him about all over the place.

So he drew rein on the opposite side of the river, and watched. A dry twig cracked when the two crawlers were within three or four feet of young Tom. He uncurled himself like a watch-spring suddenly released. One-two went his left fist and right fist against the jaws of the hulking brutes, each twice his size. Right and left they slid gently off their feet into the bushes. Tom went on with his work as if he'd just swiped two flies on a window-pane.

"At de throne, at de throne, at de throne of my Big White Brudder,"

sang Black Tom quietly. It was surprising that so sweet and small a voice could issue from lips so large and unsightly.

A hundred thousand dollars! A grand sum to win! Algernon thought of the racing-stables he would set up if he won it. He would build a cock-pit. He would import black pigs from Somerset, in England, and have the finest sties in all America.

Somerset! His heart dropped a beat or two. Somerset! It was in the county of Somerset that the city of Bristol was, or a part of it, and from the city of Bristol that the man Mason came, who had lately brought the boxing-booth down to the meadow by Dexter's Mill. It was odd, coming back again so soon and so queerly to the thought of Mason, whom he had left in the flesh only a

few hours ago.

Algernon's scalp tingled. Yes, it was odd. He had been discussing Black Tom with Mason that very evening, after the last show-bout was over. Mason was a sailor and a prize-fighter. He had apparently slipped his ship a few months ago, and since then had been travelling the country with a boxing-booth, giving lessons to the swells and black eyes to any tough who'd put the mitts up against him. That very evening Algernon had strolled round before supper to see what was doing at the new booth. It was quite entertaining to let the sailor get going with his comic English accent. He'd been singing like a girl in love about Bristol, birthplace and capital of British prize-fighting, nursery of champions. Hadn't the great Jem Belcher come from Bristol? Didn't he himself come from Bristol, who would by rights be champion of England this very moment if something or other hadn't happened that . . .

Whatever that same thing was, Sailor Joe Mason didn't like to think of it. He blushed and coughed and changed the subject. So Algernon Molyneux helped him out. He told him of Black Tom, his bodyguard, who lived on his father's plantation, way down home. He told him of the two hulking crawlers he had laid flat as two yard-brooms, and of deeds still doughtier. Sailor Joe Mason got more and more excited. His eyes shone like a digger hearing tales about a new country all quilted with gold nuggets you could have for the scratching.

"My God!" cried Sailor Mason. "If what you say of him is true, bring him to my booth, sir! Will you, sir, will you? Give me the chance of putting him through the mill, the way we do it with our lads in Bristol. My God, sir, I'll make a champion of him. I'll make him champion of America, that I will!"

"Thank you," Algernon had replied lightly. "He's champion enough for me as he is, Mason. I don't want to put ideas into his head!"

But was he champion enough for him now? Only a few hours had passed, and was he champion enough now? A hundred thousand dollars! It was a large sum to win. It was a larger sum to lose. Bravo, Sailor Mason! You're the very man for me—and Tom. Teach him everything Bristol has to teach, Sailor Mason—and more. We'll take no risks.

"Taken!" said Algernon Molyneux again, a little more loudly than before, holding out his tankard for another filling of apple-jack.

"Taken! Taken!" the crowd of young bucks murmured to each other, nervously, excitedly. A negro servant dropped the bottle he was pouring from. A gentleman dropped like a log under the table.

Algernon Molyneux made a quick calculation. He thought two months would get his lad into the pink of condition—if you could call it *pink*. One month wasn't enough. In three months he'd get stale. Tom had a tendency to overdo things when he once got started.

"I suggest we sign articles in a day or two. I suggest the fight comes off two months from the signing of the articles!" stipulated Algernon.

Ted Peyton and one or two of his cronies wanted the fight to come off then and there. They started taking their own coats off, with the vague idea of taking a corner. But there were one or two difficulties in the way. For instance, the champions were about a hundred miles away from each other at that moment.

So it was fixed up. In two months from the signing of articles. The tension slackened.

"Fill up these darned glasses," cried the host, "you lump of ebony mud!"

The glasses were filled again, toasts were drunk again. But the toasts they drank now were not to the trim ankles, the rose-pink cheeks, of the maidens of Virginia.

"To Abe!" went the toasts. "To Tom!" "I'll take five to four on Tom!"

"Good night, all!" said Algernon Molyneux, and rose. He had more pressing business than to sit here swigging apple-jack till he fell under the table. No one noticed his going. The air struck fresh and sharp on his nostrils as he clattered cloppity-clop over the cobbles. Morning was coming up along the meadow by Dexter's Mill.

Sailor Mason's establishment consisted of a tent he boxed in and a caravan he slept in. He slept very soundly, to judge by the amount of time it took to wake him up.

"Are you there?" bellowed Algernon Molyneux. "Are you dead?" The half-door of the caravan nearly sprung its hinges under his pummelling fist. A latch slid shakily. A door creaked back. A huge face appeared, pale as a streak of dirty dough in the thin light.

"W-w-what's the matter? Who-oo's there?"

"Good God, man! Who d'you think I was? The police?"

The face withdrew itself into the gloom. "Go away! Go away!"

It was not at all the voice of a sailor-prize-fighter from Bristol town who should be champion of England if he had his rights.

"Come out, you sniffing Englishman! Come out! It's Algernon Molyneux!"

The face reappeared. It wore a sick smile smacked on its cheeks like a plaster. "Of course it is, Mr. Molyneux! I recognised your voice at once! I'm coming! What can I be doing for you, Mr. Molyneux? Shall we take a run round the meadow, Mr. Molyneux, and have a bout after?"

"I've got no time to play about, Mason. You remember my nigger I was telling you about? Young Tom, my bodyguard?"

"Of course I do; yes, of course I do!" His voice was almost shrill with relief. "Yes, Mr. Molyneux?"

"I've fixed for him to meet a blackamoor named Abe two months from now. Abe's the toughest nigger in all Carolina. The stakes are one hundred thousand dollars a side!"

"What?" roared Mason. All the stamina was back in his voice again.

"One hundred thousand dollars a side!" repeated Algernon coldly. "I want you to make a Bristol prize-fighter out of him. Teach him everything they ever knew in Bristol—Big Ben Brain and Hooper the Tinman; all those grand champions you were boasting about. If Tom wins, you're a rich man!"

"Belly and brains!" roared Sailor Mason. "I'll make him the master of Jem Belcher himself. S'elp me God, I will! You hear that, Mr. Molyneux?"

"I hear that!" said Algernon, pressing his hands against his ears.

"When do you want me to come?"

"We set out in two days! Get your things packed and stored!"

II

When Sailor Mason first clapped eyes on Black Tom, a shiver ran through him, like a collector in a junk-shop who claps eyes on a priceless ivory he has been hunting for all his life. Those bullock-like shoulders, those fists like elephants' feet, those thighs like stumps of trees. When he first saw him in action, his eyes almost filled with tears, like a devotee of the ballet who for the first time sees the supreme ballerina of the age rising on her toes.

Startlingly clear, he heard in that same moment his own words brought back on the wind to him again: "I'll make him the master of Jem Belcher himself!" And then a subtler voice, and still his own, whispered within his skull: "But not too fast, my hearty, not too fast!" He sat down against the trunk of a tree and closed his eyes. He opened them again. He had his plan in the palm of his hand, clear as a pebble.

III

It was about a week later. Algernon Molyneux was striding furiously up and down the verandah of the big house, up and down, up and down. Sailor Mason sat dumped in a cane chair like a sack of potatoes.

"You and your damned Bristol methods!" Algernon shouted. "What the devil's come over him, eh? Tell me that!"

Sailor Mason's eyes rolled ingenuously. He shook his head and sighed. "Strikes me," he said, "as if the heart's gone out of him!"

"Heart!" roared Algernon. "What right's a black nigger to a heart?"

Sailor Mason shrugged his shoulders. "You can't get anywhere in the prize-fighting line without a heart. I've seen a youngster in Bristol—like a girl he was! But he had so much heart he knocked out Coalheaver Evans——"

“Oh, to hell with your Bristol! A whole week’s gone by and he gets more loggish hour by hour. What are we to do about it? A hundred thousand dollars!” moaned the young gentleman. “A hundred thousand dollars!”

“A hundred thousand dollars!” repeated Mason mournfully.

“I will, yes, I will! I don’t care what you say! I will! Where’s my whip? I’ll thrash him till his flesh hangs in tatters!”

“Please, please, Mr. Molyneux, I beg you!” There were positively tears in Mason’s eyes. “What good will that do, sir? It’ll make him fifty times as stupid! I’ve got an idea, Mr. Molyneux! It occurred to me this very morning, when I saw him looking up the road and away, so lonely and longing like, it fair twisted me double!”

“Yes—and?” snorted Algernon unpleasantly.

“‘We’ve got to find a way to put heart in him,’ says I.” He paused. Then: “Sir!” cried Mason impetuously. “Promise him his liberty if he knocks Carolina Abe through his back ribs—and, belly and brains, if that hundred thousand dollars isn’t yours, sir, safe as a hen in the roost——”

Algernon stopped in his striding up and down. He thought hard for a full minute. Then the colour mounted up into his cheeks. His eyes shone. He rushed forward and seized Mason’s rough hand in his own two hands. “By God!” he cried. “You’re right! Of course you’re right! By God!”

“And perhaps five hundred dollars into the bargain?” whispered Mason softly. “Or perhaps even a thousand?”

“Come!” cried Algernon. “Where have you left him? Tom!” he roared. “Tom! Where are you, you black lump of sin?”

IV

Black Tom of Virginia duly knocked Black Abe of Carolina through his back ribs.

V

It was that same night that Sailor Mason and Black Tom got drunk together, for the first time and not the last time. They had money to burn, and they burned it. They had an agreement to make, and they sealed it. There was a shade of grey in Mason’s whiteness and Tom’s blackness by the time they reached Dexter’s meadow, on the outskirts of Richmond, and staggered into the caravan.

A week or two later the establishment set out for New York. Not much is known of what happened during the next five years, beyond the fact that Tom Molyneux, endowed by nature with the strength of an ox and by Mason with the technique of Bristol, met a number of stout men and beat them, and so

called himself, or Mason called him, "Champion of America." No bruiser was found stout enough, on the other side of the Atlantic, to unnailed those black colours from the mast. The pair earned a great deal of money, and Mason drank it away as fast as they earned it. Molyneux, too, got drunk now and again; but he could stand it, just as an oak-tree can stand being deluged by storms and come out smiling in all its leaves when the sun shines again. Mason could not stand it so well. It led him once or twice into a foolishness of which he repented very bitterly. Or why, even now, when there was a sudden loud knock at the door, a sudden hand clapped on his shoulder, did his face go green with terror?

VI

It is some five years after the first meeting of Sailor Mason and Tom Molyneux. Tom's total worldly possessions are stacked into one small straw basket which lies under the table in the saloon on the New York water-side. He has also a ticket for England in his trouser pocket. It is hard for Sailor Mason to give him up, but the time has at last come for Tom to set sail across the wide waters and make himself the world's champion prize-fighter.

For that is what Sailor Mason has had in mind from the beginning, and has lost no opportunity of impressing upon him. "You are going to England, Tom. There's a new champion now. Jem Belcher's day is over. It's another lad from Bristol; Tom Cribb is his name. But you're worth ten Tom Cribbs, Tom my boy. Do you hear that? Get that into your thick skull—ten Tom Cribbs. You're the best fighter the Lord God ever made, Tom, even though He sewed you up in a black skin. So you're going to England, Tom, and you'll beat this Cribb till he's blacker than you are. And you'll come back world's champion. And we'll build a great shack for you in the Bowery, and we'll scoop up the dollars in great gold shovels!"

"And ah'll have all de roast chicken I want?" asked Tom Molyneux. "Three times a day?"

"Ten times a day, if you want it!" Sailor Mason promised him generously.

And this is the last night before the sailing. There's already a boxful of empty bottles on the table, and here's another full one coming round.

"There's one more thing you've got to bring back from England," says Sailor Mason, leaning forward. His eyes are a little bloodshot already, and his speech is not so clear as it was. "I've waited till to-night to tell you, because I know you can't carry too many ideas in that thick box of yours. Are you listening, you black lump of hog's flesh?"

"Ah'm listenin'," Tom assures him humbly.

He would have scattered the teeth of any other man in America who had

dared to call him a black lump of hog's flesh. But Sailor Mason was father and mother to him; he loved him dearly.

"There's a state in England called Somerset. Say 'Somerset.'"

"Somerset."

"There's a girl in Winfold named Mary Jane Spender. Say 'Mary Jane Spender.'"

"Mary Jane Spender."

"I love that girl more than anything in the world, Tom; even more than you, though I love you, too. And she loves me more than anything in the world. She lives in Winfold with her two brothers. She keeps house for them. She did five years ago. When you beat Tom Cribb you will go and find her."

"But—s'pose she's not dere, Joe?" Tom asked nervously.

Sailor Mason brought his glass down on the table and smashed it. The liquor ran about in runnels and lay about in pools.

"Then you won't find her, you toad! You must go the length and breadth of England till you *do* find her. Wherever she is, she's waiting for me. Find her, and whisper my name into her ear. Let no one else hear, or, by God, Tom——! She's waiting for word from me. She's been waiting all these years. She'll get up and follow you though both her brothers should be dying in their beds. And you'll go to Liverpool, or Bristol, or wherever it may be, and bring her to me. You hear, Tom? You'll bring her to me!"

"Yes, Joe, sho' ah will!"

"Swear you will, by the love of God!"

"By de love of God, ah sho' will, Joe!"

"Then fill your glass again and pledge it! Hi, you nigger there, fetch me another glass! And another bottle!"

Another glass for the broken one, another bottle for the empty one, were set before them. Then suddenly Tom Molyneux gave tongue. His voice was excited and shrill as a small boy's. An idea had, in fact, entered his head, without anyone helping it there, and that was a rare occurrence.

"Say, Joe," he cried, "why don' you come to England, too, and mebbe yuh can go and fetch her yo'self? Ah reckon sho' she'd like dat, don' you, Joe?"

Then suddenly Sailor Mason's jaw dropped, as if something had gone wrong with the sinews. His face became pale as marsh-grass. He lifted his forefinger to his lips, and it trembled there like a leaf. "Hush! hush!" he whispered. He moved his chair nearer to Tom's. "Bring your ear close, Tom. That's right, Tom. Look round. See if anybody's listening. No one? Are you sure? I'll tell you why, Tom. I murdered a man on Bristol Quay the night before we sailed. I didn't intend to kill him. Would I kill you? And he was white, Tom, like my own brother. We played together in Fishponds, by Bristol, when we were both so high. What should I kill him for?"

“Now, Joe, now, Joe!” It was queer to see that elephantine hand stroking the sailor’s shaggy mane as gently as any mother might stroke her child.

“We had some drink inside us,” the sailor went on, “and we had two or three words, and he lunged out at me, and I heaved back at him—no harder than this, Tom. And there he was, God help me, lying at my feet, dead as beef!”

“Come, Joe, don’ shiver so! Heah, let me fill yo’ glass again! Listen, Joe; ah wan’ you to listen! Ah can say it all off pat. *Somerset. Winfold. Mary Jane Spender.* Ah swear by God ah’ll find her for you and ah’ll . . . Listen! Listen!”

But Sailor Mason was beyond listening. His head fell in upon his chest. Tom Molyneux shook him by the shoulder once or twice, then he let him be. His drunken snores ripped healthily along his palate.

Tom Molyneux stood over him for a minute or so, shaking his head from side to side like a huge black doll. Then he stooped and lifted his straw basket from under the table.

“Ah guess he’ll be all right again to-morrow, nigger!” he said haughtily to the dusky young gentleman by his side. “How much will all dat be? Thank yuh, nigger! And tek dis heah for yo’self!”

He rose and strode to the door, and out along the water-side to the dark ship; and, a few hours later, set sail for England, the winds there and the bare fields there, and the bare knuckles.

VII

In the year 1809 there was an inn called the Horse and Dolphin in St. Martin’s Street, Leicester Square, in London, much affected by the sporting swells of that time, the Corinthians. The owner was a negro, Bill Richmond by name, who was well thought of, not only as a publican, but as a prize-fighter, for he had met the redoubtable Tom Cribb himself, and, though he had not won—for he lacked the supreme stamina of the white man—he had put up a very stout show.

One night, in the late spring of that year, the door of the inn-parlour was thrust open, and a large negro entered, whose shoulders almost filled the threshold. He had a straw basket in his hand. He put the basket down and stood staring at the assembled company, his eyes moving from face to face as if he sought someone he failed to find.

There was a silence for some moments, for the negro was a slightly disconcerting spectacle, appearing unexpectedly in the doorway there, with those purple lips that swelled like cushions, and that fuzz of jungly hair. Then the air darkened with a volley of ribaldries.

“Hello, snowball!”

“Hello, daisy!”

“Is that you, Prince Georgy? When did you leave Brighton?”

“Hi, stinkwort! You smell!”

But it might have been a drift of thistledown for all the notice the negro took of it.

“Well, brother,” cried Bill Richmond at length, “what can I do for you? Are you looking for anybody?”

“Sho’ ah’m lookin’ fer somebody. Ah’ve come from America special for to find him.”

The pleasantries on the lips of the swells faltered and ceased. All eyes were turned curiously on the stranger.

“And who might that be, my dusky friend?” an almost too refined voice asked.

Tom Molyneux stood in the doorway and squared his shoulders. He placed himself more firmly on his elephantine feet.

“Ah’ve come to find Tom Cribb. Ah’ve come to fight him, so’s when ah’ve done dat ah’ll be champion of de world!”

The silence continued for some seconds. Then suddenly, as if it had been rehearsed, the whole company broke into a guffaw so uproarious that the glasses danced on the shelves like things twitched by wires.

Tom Molyneux stood in the doorway, scowling, clenching his fists. His eye wandered dourly from mouth to bellowing mouth.

“Come this way, brother!” cried Bill Richmond from behind his counter. “Come and have something to eat. You must surely be hungry, coming all that way!” For, indeed, Bill Richmond had perceived with a clearer eye than those others what sort of customer it was that had turned up from over the sea.

VIII

Bill Richmond had, in fact, exactly as keen an eye for the qualities which go to make up a champion as Sailor Mason, once of Bristol, now of New York. He had as keen an eye for the main chance, too. But he had a motive for taking up Tom Molyneux, for working himself to the bone training him and managing him, which Sailor Mason lacked. He, too, was a black man, like Tom Molyneux. The swells frequented his inn, and liked him, but it did not occur to them to disguise their contempt for him. Now and again it was all he could do to prevent himself rushing in upon them and mowing them down, with their lily faces and corseted hips. If Black Tom Molyneux became champion over the white man, how grand it would be, thought Black Bill Richmond. His eyes rolled hungrily in his skull. Moreover, he had himself been beaten by Tom Cribb. He had a great respect for the fellow, who was no sniggering swell, like

these. But it would be a pleasant thing to get his own back on the tips of Tom Molyneux's clenched knuckles.

So the two black men set to work. The champion of England refused to have anything to do, at first, with the thick-lipped heathen. The heathen was forced to content himself, therefore, with lesser men. But so terrific were his victories, so clearly did he out-top all other contenders for the championship, that it was impossible for Tom Cribb to ignore the challenge Molyneux now issued.

The battle was joined in December 1810, and was as titan an affair as any in the history of prize-fighting. The white man and the black fought like creatures out of some shaggy saga. The black man won; the white man received the verdict.

The black man won in the twenty-eighth round as decisively as any fighter ever won any fight. Tom Cribb lay at his feet like a hunk of ribs a butcher lifts from a hook and deposits on a counter. For all the frantic pushings and thumpings and water-squirtings of his seconds, Tom Cribb lay there, quite unconscious, the full half-minute. The referee called to him once, again, a third time. He lay on like a dead man.

"We've won! We've won!" cried Black Bill Richmond, Tom Molyneux's second. He seized Tom's bleeding fist and lifted it to his mouth and kissed it. "We've won, Tom! We've won!"

But louder than Bill Richmond roared the furious crowd. What? A foreigner, a black man, is to become champion of England—to beat our Tom Cribb, and become champion of England? It was the sort of noise that, in epochs and regions only a little more turbulent, precedes the tarring and feathering of negroes, the hanging of them from trees, the burning of their still plunging bodies.

But Tom Molyneux was as unaware of the fists shaken at him, and the teeth that glared at him, as if he were way back in Virginia, stripped to the waist and striding between the cotton-bushes. Excepting that here, in England, it was unconscionably cold. It was December. The sweat of his exertions flowed in thick streams and congealed as it flowed. He heard himself sneezing. It was the only sound he heard above the triumphal thudding of the pulses in his ears.

"Dere yo' are, Joe!" they sang. "Yo' always said so. An' it's true. Ah've beat him, Joe, an' ah'm champion of the world now, an' ah'm comin' back to yo' an' we'll have such a good time together, Joe! My, what a good time we'll have!

"But you don' think I've forgotten, do ye? Ah'm goin' straight off to find her. Ah'm goin' straight to Winfold in Somerset, an' ah'll whisper in her ear: 'Are you Mary Jane Spender? What yo' cryin' for? Now you come straight

along wi' me, missy; you needn't cry any more now. You pack up all your dainty little things an' come straight along wi' me!' ”

But what is all this excitement about, here, in the ring here, this icy December morning? These are Tom Cribb's seconds, aren't they, screaming and swearing and tugging at poor Bill Richmond, as if they're going to tear the flesh from his bones?

“You've won, have you? You've won? You dirty thieving nigger! You lump of carrion, you! You've won, have you? Do you think we didn't see you slip those bullets into your stinking blackamoor's fists? What do you take us for, you lousy black cur, eh?”

They went on like that for a half-minute, a minute. Tom Cribb was beginning to come round, to heave and mutter.

“You can see for yourself I haven't!” pleaded Bill Richmond. “Come here, Tom! Come here! Show them you haven't got any bullets in your fists! Show the gentlemen!”

But the gentlemen spent another good minute abusing Bill Richmond, and another good minute seeing for themselves that Tom Molyneux had not, as a matter of fact, any bullets hidden in his fists. And by that time Tom Cribb was standing in the ring, his right knee forward, his fists up before his face. He looked quite a lot better for the child-like sleep he had had.

“Time!” cried the referee. Tom Molyneux sneezed again. The black man and the white man went back to the fight again. The white man won.

IX

Tom Molyneux's mind worked very simply. They had cheated him of the championship. He must bide his time. He would issue another challenge. Next time they would not cheat him.

Then, being champion of England and the world, he would make his way to the village of Winfold, in the state of Somerset, find the maid he had been asked to find, and bring her and the championship over to America, a double gift to lay at the feet of his dear friend, Sailor Joe Mason.

In due time, Tom Molyneux issued a second challenge. Tom Cribb, for one or two reasons, was not very pleased about it. Why couldn't the black man let him be? He was quite happy with his wife and his friends and his business. He declared he would not fight for a stake less than three hundred guineas.

Three hundred guineas! A huge sum of money! Black Bill Richmond scratched his head. Tom Molyneux sat and stared like an ebony image. Then slowly, slowly, certain memories drifted before his mind—the open road, the boxing-booth, the crowds of yokels, the shining heap of dollars.

“Ah've got it, Bill!” said Tom Molyneux. “Listen!” Bill Richmond clapped

his huge hands excitedly. "You've got it, Tom! You've got it!"

And so the two black men went forth into the English countryside, into the country places, showing their muscles, sparring with each other, challenging all comers. The shining shillings clinked musically into the box, heaping themselves higher and higher, till there should be three hundred guineas' worth of silver shillings.

And it was in this way that they reached the state of Somerset on their wanderings, and put up their booth in a meadow not far from the village of Crowleigh, and some two miles away from a smaller village, Winfold by name.

X

Two black men lay in the lee of a caravan in a thick Somerset meadow. One was snoring.

"Get up, brother!" cried Bill Richmond, prodding the other with his toe. "They'll be coming soon! There's some coming along now!"

Tom Molyneux went on snoring. "Get up, you black lump! I want you to run three times round the meadow. It's always good to give them something for nothing!"

Tom Molyneux lay prone as a tree-trunk.

"Now, Tom, now!" insisted Bill Richmond seriously. "It's been easy going lately; you mustn't judge by that. It'll be a different proposition to-night. They were telling me at the Anchor that this butcher fellow—I can't remember his name——"

Tom Molyneux gave a sign of life. He let a noise as unpleasant as it was contemptuous escape his thick lips.

"The Winfold Butcher, they call him!" continued Bill Richmond.

"What?"

Tom raised his trunk from the grass as if something had bit it.

"What name did you say, boss?" asked Tom Molyneux.

"I don't know his name. The Winfold Butcher, they call him."

"Did you say Winfold?"

"Yes. Why?"

"Say it again!"

"Are you going crazy? Winfold!"

"Say, Bill Richmond, what state is dis heah?"

"I told you before. You don't say 'state,' you say 'county.' "

"What state is dis heah?"

"Somerset!"

"Somerset, ha? Somerset?"

“Yes, Somerset! What the——”

“Somerset, ha? Winfold, ha?” Tom Molyneux sprang excitedly to his feet. “It is! It is!” he roared.

“Say, Tom! You just sit back on the grass a bit!” Bill Richmond was looking quite anxious. “There’s a drop of rum in the jar——”

“Which way’s dis heah Winfold?”

“Why, across the meadows there, Tom, where the spire shows up above the trees!”

“Ah’m goin’!” cried Tom Molyneux.

“Going where? What’s come over you? Tom! I say, Tom! Come back! Where in hell are you going? Look! There’s a dozen folk coming down the road there! Come back, Tom!”

“Ah’m goin’ to Winfold!” Tom called back over his shoulder. He stopped a moment. “Dere ain’t no help for it! I ain’t champion yet, but I must go and see a party dere, over in Winfold! I shan’t be long, Bill Richmond!”

“But the people—you can’t——”

“Aw, shucks, de people! Dey can wait, cairn’t dey?”

XI

Tom Molyneux came up out of the meadows behind the churchyard. He came rolling forward past the church itself, past the lychgate, and drew up against the village green. It was a large green, with an old cross and a stocks at the end and a duck-pond in the middle. The houses were assembled round the edges of the green, like a lot of old women mumbling under their thatch bonnets.

In one of these, in one of these, Sailor Mason’s darling sat knitting, or stood peeling potatoes behind the scullery sink, perhaps. Her eyes were heavy with longing for the lover who all these years dared send her no word of greeting, for the thing he had done and had had no intention to do.

Tom Molyneux’s imagination was sluggish, if anything. But as he stood on the edge of the green there he was startled by the vividness with which the image of Mary Jane Spender presented itself to him. She was a little thing, pale, with pale brown hair. Her hands fluttered piteously all the time. He breathed his secret, marvellous news to her.

“It’s all right, missy, it’s all right. Ah’ll look after you till we gets dere. Now, now, missy, don’t cry! Tek my handkercher, will yuh, missy? Dere now, dere!”

Tom Molyneux looked round and wondered which of these houses would it be? Which one? There was an inn on the opposite corner of the green. He strode up to the inn as though she might dwindle and die if he wasted more

time finding out where she lived.

He thrust open the door of the bar-room. There was practically no one but old folks about. The younger people were all gone off to Crowleigh, doubtless, to the boxing-booth of the two black men.

“Good evening, all!” proclaimed Tom Molyneux.

“Good evening!” answered the landlord, a little nervously.

“Good evening! Good evening!” soughed the old men in their beards.

“Dis heah’s de village of Winfold, isn’t it?”

“It be!” agreed the landlord.

“Does a lady by de name of Mary Jane Spender live in dis place?”

“She do!” hesitated the landlord.

“Where does she live?”

“Er—er——” the landlord started. “That is——” he temporised. He looked anxiously at his guests. They looked anxiously back at him. What right had one to tell a heathen blackamoor where a Christian body lived, and that one a female? Let him find out for himself, if he wanted to!

“Where does she live?” roared Tom Molyneux, striding forward and bringing his fist down heavily on the counter.

“There, there!” hastily quivered the landlord. “Just come this way. I’ll show you!” The negro followed him to the door. “That house there, do you see, with the big snowball tree in the garden?”

“Ah see!” said Tom Molyneux, and thrust himself out through the doorway.

“You won’t have a drink?” the landlord called after him.

Tom Molyneux shook his head. He strode forward like a machine, solid, full of purpose. In a minute he reached the garden with the snowball tree. The gate squealed on its hinges as he pushed it before him. He knocked at the door.

A young man opened it. The young man looked very surprised indeed to see what visitor this was.

“Is Mary Jane Spender in?” asked Tom Molyneux.

It will not be objected against Harry Spender—that was the young man’s name—that, without thinking twice, he lied.

“No!” he said. “What do you want her for?”

“Ah’ve a message for her!”

“Aren’t you Tom Molyneux? Wasn’t it you I saw last night over at Crowleigh?”

“Yes, ah’m Tom Molyneux. When will she be in? Is she yo’ sister?”

“Look here, Mr. Molyneux, I don’t understand this at all. If you have a message to give my sister——”

Tom Molyneux’s protruding lower lip protruded an inch or two more. He lifted his hand, outstretched his fingers, and made as if to push Harry

Spender's skull down into his neck.

Then a voice cried out, musical as running water. "Harry, Harry, who's that?" A moment later there was a pattering down stairs. A moment later a young woman stood at the door, the loveliest of all women that that poor negro had seen in all his days till now.

"Hello?" she cried. "Hello?" She peeked her pretty head interrogatively, like a plump robin. Her brown eyes rolled enchantingly. "Harry, did I hear you say the name of Mr. Molyneux? Surely you *are* Mr. Molyneux? I saw you fighting last night. It *was* you, wasn't it?"

A noise made itself in Molyneux's throat, but it stayed there. Harry Spender made gestures indicating that the sooner his sister went back into the house the better.

"What have you come for, Mr. Molyneux? Have you come to fight the Butcher? He lives next door. I believe I saw him going to Crowleigh half an hour ago. You must have missed him. Oh, you'll beat him, of course you will! I was with Harry last night at Crowleigh! *I* saw you, too! You were *lovely!*"

"Mary Jane!" her brother broke in angrily. "Get in at once! Do you hear?"

Mary Jane looked up with mock pathos into the negro's eyes. "Did you ever hear of a brother so unmannerly? And Ben—that's my other brother—he's worse!"

"What have you come for, Mr. Molyneux?" asked Harry curtly.

The negro did not reply. He did not remove his eyes from the girl's eyes. His heart was pounding, pounding, up against his ribs, more violently than ever it had pounded when he and Tom Cribb had met for the championship. The sky lay in pieces at his feet. The world jiggled up and down.

He had never seen a creature like this before; there was no other creature like this in all this cold land . . . full bosomed, wide hipped, she was like the rich ripe maidens of his native South. She was like a plum bursting with juices. Under the southern peonies of her cheeks spread the white northern lilies.

"Ah've come wid a message, miss!" he brought out, each syllable harder to eject from his dry throat than the one before it. "From America!" he added.

"I know! I know!" cried Mary Jane Spender. "From Joe Mason! Isn't it? Tell me at once! Isn't it?"

Tom Molyneux could utter not even a single syllable now. He nodded his bushy head.

"He's dead!" she shrieked. "You've come to tell me he's dead! Is he dead, Mr. Molyneux?"

Once more Tom Molyneux nodded his bushy head . . . frail Tom Molyneux, not only black of skin, but black of heart, too . . . Black Tom Molyneux who betrayed his friend.

Then Mary Jane Spender flung herself against the negro's bosom. She

threw her arms about him as far as they would reach, and there sobbed and sobbed.

It was like a circlet of sweet fire about his ribs. The scent of her hair struck up into his nostrils like strong wine.

He had anticipated that she might need his comfort. In very truth he comforted her, and in the very words he had chosen for her comfort.

"It's all right, missy, it's all right. Ah'll look after yuh. Now, now, missy, don't cry! Tek my handkercher, will yuh, missy? Dere now, dere!"

As for the brother, Harry Spender, he might have been away up in Scotland for all the notice those two took of him—Mary Jane, his sister, and the sore-smitten negro, Tom Molyneux of America.

XII

Harry Spender managed to get himself heard at last.

"For the last time, are you coming in?"

"I'm *coming!*" She stamped her foot. She detached her arms from round Tom's chest. "Such dreadful news!" she sighed. "But you're such a comfort, Mr. Molyneux! So big and strong! I'll be seeing you again soon, won't I?" She stood and ogled him.

"Yo' sho' will!" he said, and turned away. He walked straight back to the inn—the Golden Lion, its name was—on the further side of the green.

"Good evening, Mr. Molyneux!" the landlord greeted him. "For it is Mr. Molyneux, isn't it? You'll have a pint of ale with us, won't you, before you go back to Crowleigh?"

"Ah'm not goin' back to Crowleigh," said the negro quietly. "Hev yo' gotta room heah? Ah want a room facin' dat way, lookin' out 'cross de green."

"I'll ask my lady, Mr. Molyneux. I don't know. I don't know at all."

"I know!" said Mr. Molyneux.

XIII

There was another black visitor that night at the Golden Lion—Bill Richmond, of course. He had waited two hours, three hours, for his partner to return. In four hours he went after him.

There had naturally been no show. It broke Bill's heart to turn so much good money away. But no Tom Molyneux, no show. He had to give the Winfold Butcher a piece of his mind, for the young gentleman had taken it into his head that Tom Molyneux had heard what a tough customer he was, and had scuttled. But there had been no money in it. It happened on the meadow in front of the booth, and it was soon over—in less than one round.

Bill Richmond turned up at the Golden Lion soon after midnight. It was

hard luck on the old people there. They had had enough of black men for one day.

There was no withstanding this one, either. "Take me up to his room at once—do you hear?—or I'll smash every bottle in the place!"

So they took him up, and tiptoed back to their bed, trembling in every limb.

The argument between the two black men went on for a good hour. It wasn't quite an argument. It was a series of speeches, appeals, rhetorical questions from Bill, punctuated with a very occasional "No!" or "Get out!" from Tom. There was finally a "Get out!" louder than any that had gone before—one that almost lifted the door from its beams. It was like the peal of a wild elephant. "Get out, or, by God——!"

Bill Richmond got out. He stormed downstairs, flung back the door with the noise of a bough cracking, and threw himself into the darkness.

He was a little, but not much, calmer when morning came round. "He'd best have his head for a few days," he muttered savagely. "Perhaps I'm lucky. It might have happened before, and more than once. Well, there's nothing to do but wait, blast him! The black tub of hogwash! Blast his eyes!"

XIV

Now followed a strange courting.

Most of the day Tom Molyneux sat in the window of his bedroom, looking out—doing no more than looking out—beyond the children playing under the elms, beyond the pond where the ducks quacked, over the green to the garden with the snowball tree, to the home of his lady. He was quite content to be looking out, humbly worshipping the thatch that roofed her, the windows that let light in upon her.

It was almost more joy than he could bear to see her coming to the door in the early morning to take in the milk-can. When, later, she crossed the green to the stores, the bag swinging from her wrist, he felt his heart must stop beating.

The first two days he did no more than that, excepting to eat or drink. On the third day he sallied forth. He had commanded his landlady to make up a huge bouquet for him, the brightest, richest flowers that were blooming. He went across to the stores and asked them to cram a basket with dainties—fruits and crystallised ginger and every sweetmeat they had.

In one hand the bouquet, in the other his basket, unaware, or indifferent to, the Winfold windows that were all agog with eyes, he marched across to his love's house. He knocked at the door, once, and once again. He knocked a third time so loudly that those within must have judged it wise to open to him.

The two brothers Spender stood at the door, their faces livid with rage.

"What do you want?" they said.

“Yo’ please take dese things with ma good wishes to yo’ sister!” said Tom.

“Thank you, but our sister is well enough for flowers with the flowers in our own garden. And as for that basket there——”

“Yo’ listen to me!” said Tom Molyneux quietly. “Yo’ take dose things wid ma good wishes to yo’ sister. If yo’ don’ hand dem over fair an’ honest——” He paused. The nostrils widened dreadfully. The face was slit with a white flare of teeth.

“Of course, Mr. Molyneux,” the brothers whispered. “Why should we not?” They went into the house and came out again. “Our sister says to thank you,” they whispered. Their faces were rigid with the strain of their self-control.

“Thank yuh!” said Tom Molyneux, and returned to his orisons behind the window of his room.

The ponderous enginery of his heart did not, during three more days, quicken its revolutions. But when he presented himself on the fourth day, he insisted that Mary Jane herself should come from within and with her own hands take her gifts from him.

The brothers uttered no syllable of protest, despite the murder in their hearts. “Mary Jane!” they called out. “Will you come?”

She came out, so speedily, in fact, that it was clear she was waiting in the room just a few feet along the passage.

“What is it?” she asked innocently. “Oh, it is you, Mr. Molyneux?” She curtsied. “Oh, what lovely flowers! Really you should not! And what are these here? Gingerbreads? I don’t know where to turn, indeed I don’t!” She stood ogling him for a moment, then bade her brothers relieve him of his burdens; then she curtsied again, and returned to the inner room, carrying with her her sweet odours.

Then at last, on a certain evening, he did not go away after the brothers had taken his offerings from him. “Miss Spender, ah’ve been meanin’ to ask yuh for some time,” he began. He stood there, hooking his fingers and rolling his eyes with embarrassment.

“Yes?” she encouraged him.

“Will yo’ come for a li’l walk wid me dis evening?” he stammered fearfully.

“Not this evening!” she stipulated coyly. “To-morrow evening!”

The next evening they took the air together—not for long; just half an hour or so—along the high road and back again, once round the green, then back to her house. There was a grotesque formality about it, like a town councillor and his lady taking a turn in the Regent’s Park.

A smile of infantine bliss was spread all across his face as he turned from the gate. He went back, as always, to the Golden Lion, but this time he did not

go straight upstairs to his own room. He sat down in the bar-room among the other villagers.

“Drinks all round!” he beamed.

“Yes, surely!” said the landlord.

“Good health, Mr. Ben!” Tom Molyneux called, lifting his tankard towards the elder brother. “An’ yo’s, too, Mr. Harry!”

“Good health!” replied the brothers, lifting their tankards to their lips. They felt the stuff must choke them.

XV

The motives and emotions of Mary Jane Spender are worthy of study in this matter of Tom Molyneux, the prize-fighter. It is probable that they were bound up to some considerable extent with her recent engagement to marry that same Winfold Butcher of whom we have heard—his name was Bert Dalrymple. For one reason or another, this Dalrymple had decided it would be better for his peace of mind if he did not marry Mary Jane Spender. (It is to be presumed she had been about as loyal to his present image as she had been to the absent image of Sailor Joe Mason, on whose behalf Tom Molyneux had shown himself so false an ambassador.)

The Dalrymple *débâcle* was a matter of recent history. The apparition of Tom Molyneux gave the young lady an opportunity for a sweeter and swifter revenge than she had contemplated; not on Dalrymple alone, but on the whole village, which had of late taken to the habit of using quite harsh language regarding her.

As a male man, Molyneux was portentous; as a prize-fighter, even more than that. It was gratifying that he could knock down her recent *fiancé* with a push of the shoulder, half Dalrymple’s size though he was.

And he had money in his pockets, and he was very free with it, too. And his manners were impeccable, never taking any liberties. And it was rather flattering to know you had a large hulking nigger, a world-beater, tied round your little finger by a length of pale blue ribbon.

And the other girls could simmer and spit and lift their hands in horror, but she knew they were wasting away with jealousy, visibly, hour by hour.

“Yes, indeed, Mr. Molyneux. I will walk with you in the meadows. It is a fine evening, is it not?”

XVI

“Something must be done!” said the village of Winfold.

“Something must be done!” said the brothers Spender.

“Something must be done!” said Bill Richmond, gnashing his teeth in his

lonely caravan.

But what could be done? There was a constable who lived about a dozen miles away. Somebody said, "Call in the constable." But what was Tom Molyneux doing to justify calling in constables? Not the curate himself had conducted his courtship with more patent respectability. And what constable would relish being called in to manhandle Tom Molyneux?

So the young men of Winfold determined on manhandling Tom Molyneux on their own account. About twenty of them, including the brothers Spender, and Bert Dalrymple, the Butcher, who saw no reason for being left out of it, set upon the negro late one night. (For Tom Molyneux had betaken himself to going out late of nights to commune with the stars and stand gazing by the river, like any love-struck stripling.)

The young men all took the precaution of wearing masks, dark though the night was; they also equipped themselves with knuckle-dusters. But these things did not help them much. The champion fought even more magnificently than he had fought Tom Cribb. Love seemed to have added to his fist both strength and subtlety—even a faculty of seeing at what points the darkness was not darkness, but face or stomach.

It was decided in Winfold that brute force was of no use in the matter of Tom Molyneux.

And then it occurred to the brothers Spender that, after all, the other prize-fighter, Bill Richmond, mooning about in his forlorn encampment at Crowleigh, had some responsibility in the affair. Wasn't it his fault, anyway, that the accursed nigger was here at all? So they went and interviewed Bill Richmond.

"What are you going to do about it?" they asked with extreme rancour.

"Do about it?" shouted Bill. "*Do* about it? Is it *me* he's fallen in love with? Is it *my* sister? I've a good mind to go to law against you! *Do* about it!"

"Well, it's our interest to get him out of the way, and it's yours, too! Can't you kidnap him?"

He looked at them morosely. "Try it!" he said. They admitted it was not a good idea. They sat about for several minutes, puffing and grunting and shaking their heads.

Suddenly Bill Richmond slapped his thighs excitedly. "Why don't you kidnap *her*?" he said. The brothers shook their heads despondently. "We'd rather kidnap *him*, any day!" they agreed. "Besides, she'd escape. And nothing in the world then would stop her wedding him. No, it's a bad idea, a bad idea!"

The consultation went on another hour or so. The brothers proposed quite a number of ideas, but they were all too clever.

"What you can't get into your heads," he told them as they miserably rose to go, "is that Tom Molyneux is simple as a child. Think out something simple

enough, gentlemen, and the job's done! Good night, gentlemen, good night! And the quicker you think, you muffs," he added under his breath, "the more I'll like it!"

"Simple as a child!" growled Harry Spender. "Ignorant as a savage, he means!"

"What's that you say? A savage?" shouted Ben. "Why, Harry, you're right! That's exactly what he is—nothing more nor less than an ignorant African savage! Let me think now, let me think!" He paused and thought for a full five minutes. Then he cried out at the top of his voice: "I've got it, Harry, I've got it! Listen, Harry!" He bent forward and whispered his plan into his brother's ear, as if the very trees might overhear him.

XVII

The night that followed, both air and moon were muffled behind bolsters of slow cloud. It was the sort of night you do not go walking out late through country not too well known to you.

Tom Molyneux had gone fairly early to bed. There was nothing much to keep him in the bar-room. The clientele had been dwindling lately, and tonight there was practically no one about.

He lay awake for half an hour or so, a smile of dim bliss on his face. The smile persisted after sleep had fallen upon him. So it was that first upon his sleeping ears the lugubrious noises swelled, then on his slowly awakening ears. So on his sleeping eyes first the horrific light flared, then on his suddenly awakened eyes.

"Please, Big Man God, do ah still bin sleepin'? Please, please, God, ah ain't wakin', am I?"

Louder swelled the moanings, and the clankings came clearer, nearer. The square of window grew more starkly defined in the white desperate light.

Then the flame itself overtopped the window-sill. Then the apparition that the flame crested. O direful Thing! O hellish Thing! O Thing of flames for eyes, and teeth huge as a shark's teeth! O Thing swathed round in cerements! O Thing encompassed by moanings and sobbings and the whole hideous reproach of hell let loose!

For minutes that may have been minutes only, or may have been hours, Tom Molyneux stared at the Thing. His body was tight in its terror as a steel bar. The sweat soaked into his pillow like a standing marsh. His eyelids were clamped back in his sockets as if nails held them.

Then suddenly—for he would have gone mad else—he uttered a yell that the newly interred dead in the churchyard must have heard. As if his bed had discharged him like a catapult, he hurtled into the air. He flung open the door,

crashed down the stairs like collapsing masonry, thrust his shoulder to the locked door, and emerged through the debris into the appalling night.

He ran and ran as if the Thing would any moment reach forth its hand and lift him from his feet and take him to its icy bosom. He ran and ran, through hedge and thicket, over bog and stream. He ran and ran till he reached a caravan standing solitary in a meadow. He knocked at the door so desperately that it came away as he knocked a second time.

“Let me in! Let me in!” he roared.

“Why!” cried Bill Richmond. “What’s this? What’s the matter, Tom? And you in your underclothes, too!”

“Let me in!” sobbed Tom Molyneux. “De spirrut’s after me! De spirrut of Joe Mason!”

“Sure I’ll let you in! *Come* in! There isn’t any door to stop you!”

“Oh, Bill, Bill! Ah done him wrong, Bill! Ah stole his girl, Bill! Ah hadn’t no right to do any such thing. Is he dere any mo’, Bill?”

“Of course he isn’t, Tom! You just wait a moment! I’ll say the Lord’s Prayer at him; that’ll scare him. There, see! He isn’t there any more! Why, Tom! Just look at those feet! You won’t be fit to stand on them for weeks! You should have waited to put your boots on, Tom. Honest you should!”

XVIII

Bill Richmond’s establishment left the vicinity the next day, though Bill warned his partner to rest up for a day or two. But Tom Molyneux wouldn’t think of delaying at any price.

“Please, Bill!” Tom implored. “Ah’ll be good, ah’ll be so good! Ah’ll not eat an’ drink nutten’ but what yo’ want me to eat an’ drink, honest to God I won’t. An’ ah’ll do all ma exercises good and proper, same as yo’ tell me! So saddle the horses, will yo’, Bill? Ah’ll clear up inside heah!”

“Just you rest up, Tom! I’ll look after things. There, Tom, there! Don’t shake so! Have another drop of rum? It won’t harm you!”

XIX

Tom Molyneux did not meet the ghost again; but he met a creature he was almost as loth to meet—the maiden from Winfold, Mary Jane Spender, the Lilith of his black frailty. She had come a good thirty miles to tell him what she thought of him.

She posted herself just outside the caravan at the time when he was due to go over to the booth to start the evening’s entertainment.

But Mary Jane Spender provided the first turn that evening. Her language was not at all maidenly. “You lump of black blubber!” she said. “You lily-

livered heathen! You yellow toad! Scared of a hollowed-out turnip, are you? With a candle behind its eyes, are you? Scared of a bed-sheet round a broomstick, are you? Pah! I spit at you!”

She spat at him and returned to the attack. Some fifteen minutes later, having said what she had come to say, she turned and went back to Winfold, a contented and liberated woman.

Tom Molyneux was more than usually silent that night, when the show was over, and they had eaten and repaired for the night into the caravan.

Then at last he spoke.

“Bill,” he said heavily, “yo’ heard what dat . . . what dat female said?”

“Not all of it!” answered Bill Richmond cautiously.

“Yo’ heard what she said about de ghost of Joe Mason being . . . yo’ heard what she said?”

“I did.”

“Is it true, Bill?”

“It may be. Perhaps it is. Many folks say there’s no such things as ghosts.”

“Whose ah-deah was it, Bill?”

Bill was silent a moment or two. “Whose idea was it?” he ruminated. “I shouldn’t be surprised,” he said lightly, “if it wasn’t those two brothers of hers did it.”

“Ah see!” said Tom. “All right, Bill! Good night!”

“Good night, Tom!”

XX

The tour continued. There were no more major excitements on the way beyond the excitement of making money. That was what the tour was all about, of course. The two prize-fighters had set out to make three hundred guineas, the stake money for the second championship fight between Tom Cribb and Tom Molyneux.

The tour became more and more successful. They made more than three hundred guineas. They added Tom Belcher to their team, brother of the recent champion, and made still more money. They made so much money, in fact, that they almost forgot that all England was seething with excitement over the forthcoming second fight between the great white champion and the great black challenger.

But no one in England was less excited than Tom Molyneux himself. The savour had gone out of it. If he won the championship, at whose feet now would he lay it as an offering? The woman who had broken his heart? The friend whose trust he had wickedly betrayed?

He ate and drank and made love as he chose. Bill Richmond was so

delighted with the money his big black exhibit brought in that he made no effort to discipline him. The white champion and the black champion met again on a day in September 1811. And Tom Cribb was lean and fit as a racehorse. Tom Molyneux was gross as a sow.

Once faced up against his superb rival, something of his old ferocity and majesty returned to the negro. For a man in so bloated a condition he put up a fight which staggered all its beholders. But he could not last. In fifteen minutes his breath was labouring and his eyes bloodshot. In twenty minutes he lay beaten, knocked quite senseless. His jaw, too, was broken. To this inglorious end came Tom Molyneux's second bid for the championship, which he might have won on the first bid had Fate been kinder to him.

He made no further bid for the championship, but during the long weeks it took him to recover from his injuries it became more and more firmly impressed on his slow mind that he still had an account to settle.

Being put to rights at length, Tom Molyneux set out on a journey. He went westward—to the state of Somerset, as he called it—and arrived late one evening at the village of Winfold. Though his heart contracted with pain as he passed a small garden where once a snowball tree bloomed, which was not blooming now, he did not pause there. He marched slowly and sombrely to an inn on the edge of the green—the Golden Lion.

He thrust open the door of the bar-room and stood a moment or two staring round from face to face. No one spoke. The place was stiff in an enchantment of fear. Then the negro recognised the faces he had come to find. He walked up to two young men, brothers, planting his feet somewhat deliberately before him, like a gorilla.

He seized the two young men by the backs of their jackets and lifted them from the benches they were sitting on. Then he carried them out, dangling from his clenched fists like two ungainly puppies. Still silent as a dumb man, he crossed the roadway to the village green, holding the two young men before him. There was a duckpond in the centre of the green. He carried them over to the edge of it and placed them there. They stood rigid and still as wooden toys.

Then with the flat of his two hands he pushed them both backwards into the pond; he then turned round again, and so disappeared into the darkness out of which he had come.

THE DOOMINGTON WANDERER

Begley Hill, in the dark city of Doomington, was where he lived. He was the sort of obscure little Jew you saw but did not look at. He might speak but you did not listen to him. Why should you?

He lived with his mother in Jilk Street, which is one of the meaner avenues in that unradiant neighbourhood. His mother was not notable, except for the excellence of her cooking. But her competitors in Jilk Street were nearly all as able. Perhaps there was a certain ultimate savour about her *varrenikas* which Mrs. Levinsky could not compass, and her *blintsies* were so fragile and airy that her own tenants, Mr. and Mrs. Murphy (who occupied the parlour and the front bedroom), condescended to share them with her.

His first name was Hyman. There was no reason why it should not be. The family name was Lipshin. He did not resent it. If some entirely grotesque destiny had named him Porphyrogenitos Ebenezer Andritsaena, he would have taken no steps in the matter. He had been educated at the Ealing Street school, not far away, where he had achieved no formidable distinction. His history was bad; his drawing was scarcely better; in geography he was top of the class. He knew where jute came from and whether Cotopaxi was a mountain or an isthmus, and where it was. The whereabouts of Cedar Falls in Ohio did not deceive him, but he lost ground, as I have suggested, in the Wars of the Roses.

He was not elected, therefore, to any scholarship at a secondary school which might have enabled him to continue his researches into the products of Sfax and the situation of Filicudi. He became an invoice clerk in Messrs. Cohen & Montague's Hat and Cap Works, where he remained for the next twenty years of his uneventful existence.

Messrs. Cohen & Montague allowed him to repair home well before his mother lit the Friday evening candles on the eve of the Sabbath, nor did they expect pagan dues from him in the matter of invoice clerking on the holy day that follows. The festivals, too, remained inviolate; for, though Mr. Montague was a scion of the ancient Norman aristocracy, Mr. Cohen was aware of the sacrosanctitude of the Feast of Weeks and the Feast of Tabernacles.

Hyman Lipshin drew a dim pleasure out of the white Friday evening cloths, the serried candlesticks, the brimful wine-beaker; out of the long hours of holy invocation at the little synagogue round the corner. I said his pleasure was dim, not because any other pleasures he experienced were crimson, but because he lived dimly. His mind was not in Jilk Street nor at the hat and cap works of Messrs. Cohen & Montague. Do I make that statement purely on *a posteriori* grounds? Would Hyman himself have declared any such disturbing

thing? I doubt it.

Mrs. Lipshin did not occupy herself with the question. Her domestic labours achieved, she brought forth her Pentateuch, with its Yiddish version interleaved, and bent her black wig towards the dog-eared pages. A butcher's skewer, held in her frail but efficient fingers, pursued hour beyond hour the awful eloquence. Her voice did not cease from its single intonation, hour beyond hour, until the Friday evening candles flickered in their sockets and she made ready for bed at length, stumping off in her loose slippers. Hyman sat snoring in the corner, under the shelf where the samovar, so reverently brought over from Russia, stood. His feeble lower jaw drooped towards his chest.

Were there dreams, then, beyond that sallow brow, behind the leaden waters of his eyes? What dreams shall Hyman Lipshin dream in a Jilk Street kitchen at the heart of the dark city of Doomington?

"Come then, *Hymele!*" his mother said, clawing at his shoulder. He followed her as obediently at the age of thirty as at the age of three.

"I come, *mutterel*, little mother," he said.

Dreams? Dreams? What folly! No room for dreams in Doomington. What would Mr. Cohen say about it to Mr. Montague should their third invoice clerk take to dreaming? Rather more, I should fancy, than the old greybeards at the synagogue might have said should they have heard that young Hyman Lipshin was possessed of any such malady. For they did not take much notice of him where he sat in his praying-shawl at a corner of the bench against the women's partition. He was not meritorious in the fervour of his religious transports; nor, on the other hand, an object of suspicion for any laxity in ceremonial observance. It was true he carried his handkerchief on the Sabbath, not round his waist, but in his pocket. That was to be deplored. But no man had ever seen him ascend a tramcar upon the Sabbath. The bearded gentlemen greeted him courteously. They called him, honorifically, Reb Hyman.

Now what, I ask you, can have explained the mystery of the Pocket Atlas? Why Mr. Lipshin should find a Pocket Atlas an object worthy of his attention at all is mystifying, but why he should secrete it in his prayer-book on no less a day than *Rosh Hashonah*, the feast of the New Year, is surely a problem beyond all human solution. Most regrettable—oh, most regrettable. The thing slid from his prayer-book on to the floor, open at a map of Polynesia. The beadle picked it up—not more than two yards away from the Holy Ark. There was a gasp of horror, a beardy whistle of dismay. Hyman Lipshin blushed all round his ears and a long way down his neck. He seized the atlas, thrust it into his pocket, and glued his eyes on to his prayer-book.

No explanation was asked for or forthcoming. It was all so incredible that quite soon everyone ceased to believe it. It was held to be a sort of autumnal hallucination. If it had happened at all, it had happened eight years ago.

Ten years ago . . .

Twelve years ago . . .

Then Uncle Gustave died.

Uncle Gustave was quite the supreme uncle of fiction. His name was very rarely mentioned in Jilk Street or anywhere at all in Doomington. He had lingered but briefly in that city during his pilgrimage between Russia and the Argentine. He had disappeared westwards in the company of a Gentile maiden. There was only this much to be said regarding him, little though it was. He was not married to the Gentile maiden. He developed ranches and converted them later into cinematograph companies. It was rumoured the Gentile maiden was dead without issue. Uncle Gustave in due course died too, and confirmed the rumour. He left a handsome fortune to his brother's son, Hyman Lipshin, of Jilk Street, in Doomington.

And then the mystery of the Pocket Atlas was resolved. Hyman Lipshin promptly took a ticket to Otaheite.

I wonder if it is all clear now? Surely it is. There was never a time when an infinite nostalgia for far places did not possess the sad little mind of Hyman Lipshin. Whether he checked moneys for the further glory of Messrs. Cohen & Montague, whether he stood meekly in his corner of the synagogue reciting the Nineteen Prayers, enjoying a mild prestige due rather to his mother's piety than his own merits, whether he dozed under the samovar in the Jilk Street kitchen—his soul was over the seas and far away. He was possessed by a planetary glamour. He ascended the fir-slopes of Kirishimi or lay down under the date-laden palms of the oasis of Nefta. He penetrated the palæolithic caverns of Puente Viesgo and beat the swamps of Papua. The surf thundered against the outer reefs of the coral islands. Lulled by that organ-music, a scarlet lily behind his ear, his fingers idly paddled the pellucid waters of the lagoon.

Otaheite, mainly. Bread-fruit, yam-yams, colossal turtles, coco-nuts, green macaws screeching in the branches, a scarlet-tufted monkey swinging by his tail. Otaheite . . .

He was no dynamic young man. They would merely at length have transported him to the cemetery on the confines of Begley Hill (for he had paid the burial dues punctiliously from an early age), and Kilimanjaro, Sunium, Nebraska, would have dissolved equally into undistinguished dust.

But, as I have said, Uncle Gustave died. And Hyman took a ticket for Otaheite. But to go to Otaheite and to be there are not the same things. Let me insist on making that clear. For it was not the thunder of the surf he heard in Otaheite, nor in Ravenna the soughing of the pine-branches. It was the sirens of the factories in Doomington he heard. He did not hear the dusky maidens chanting as they twined their hair with flowers, nor the bronzed peasants

halloing behind their oxen. He heard the old men and women wailing on the Fast of the Destroyed Temple. How should little Hyman Lipshin detach from his ear-drums those ancestral voices, and from his timid nostrils expel the fumes of the dark city?

Otaheite was a failure, as Ravenna was destined to be. He fared forth from the coral islands towards the creeks of the Amazon and later found himself upon the peaks of the Rockies. The voices were not stilled. And though the most superb cuisine of the expensive continent was laid before him upon such plate and flanked by such silver as Sennacherib would not have scorned, he found himself aching for the *halkies* steeped in the fat of chickens and the stuffed *varrenikas* and the crisp *blintsies* of his mother, though never in Jilk Street had the prospect of them caused any especial excitement in his bosom. Gentlemen of considerable accomplishments and ladies of no mean beauty courted him. But he remembered odd half-hours he had spent in the Jilk Street parlour with Mr. and Mrs. Murphy, his mother's tenants, and wondered how he had not perceived what wisdom was theirs and how graceful a humour.

Thereon he found himself in the Mediterranean basin, disconsolately wandering between Stamboul and Oran, hoping to find in Sicilian Castrogiovanni or in the holy Tunisian city of Kairwan the glory he had dreamed of in the offices of Messrs. Cohen & Montague. He did not succeed, nor in Nauplia, nor in Burgos. The great factories interposed themselves; he heard only the machines drumming and, closer at hand, the old men chanting in the synagogue. A curious obstinacy seized him, sapless little man that he was. He wandered wretchedly from continent to continent, from bleak northern fastness to lush tropic glade, seeking the lost glamour. Doomington was not to be dislodged. He was himself Doomington.

And then a letter reached him in some obscure corner of the world from his mother in Jilk Street. (She was a lady of the older sort, and, though she might now so easily have transferred her black wig and Pentateuch to some horrific mansion in the Gentile suburbs, she would not for the world be dislodged from Jilk Street, from her next-door neighbours, or the synagogue round the corner.)

Mrs. Lipshin was, in fact, ill. She hoped she might set eyes on her son again before she died, though the strange demon had withheld him so long from her. Her son sped home by whatsoever most speedy and costly mode of travel was available. He did not arrive too late.

But when, some weeks later, she died, and all that had seemed to bind him to Doomington was thus dissolved, he did not make swift preparations to render himself once again in the world's lost places. For, indeed, no sooner had he set foot once more in Doomington than the Otaheite and Ravenna that had eluded him became manifest. He heard the thunder of the surf and the chanting of the dusky maidens. He heard the halloing of the bronzed peasants

behind their oxen. He appeared duly among the old men of the synagogue, but now that their wailing was in his ears he did not hear it. Now that the smoke-pall hung all day over his head his vision pursued brilliantly and ruthlessly the superb contours of Etna. He did not move from the tiny house in Jilk Street, even though his mother was dead and the Murphys long since gone. He was appeased in the presence of their ghosts. He wandered from Jilk Street into Ealing Street, through the drab places of Begley Hill, linking thus the Carpathians with the Blue Mountains of Australia. His soul was fulfilled of its desire. He sat meekly among the greybeards of the synagogue, but there was no second scandal of an impious Pocket Atlas slipping down from the sacred pages of the prayer-book. He saw now those tawny pillars of Corinth which he had been blind to when his physical eyes beheld them. His Jilk Street candle was the infinite terracing of lights above the harbour of Hong Kong.

But it had been Otaheite mainly—green macaws, hairy coco-nuts, tufted monkeys. And when he died, it was the thunder of the surf among the coral-reefs he heard, as he lay paddling his fingers in the pellucid waters of the lagoon. Otaheite was a scarlet lily thrust behind his cold ear.

THE MAN IN THE WHITE TIE

I

It took place—or it did not take place—at the Cullen-Kerrs' house in Perthshire. The name of the house is Rossiton Towers. The name of the young lady principally involved in the episode which did or did not take place is Amy Redhearst.

It was the first night of Mrs. Cullen-Kerr's big house-party. Eight o'clock had just struck in the almost too grandfatherly grandfather-clock in the big hall, the notes wandering deviously in and out among a forest of antlers. One or two guests had only just arrived. Three or four guests were still due. It was a bad night; there was no knowing when they might turn up.

"Take the cocktails round again, Johnson," Mrs. Cullen-Kerr demanded. Johnson took the cocktails round again. "Listen, everybody," she exclaimed, in a rather louder tone. "We'll have dinner at eight-thirty, shall we? I don't think we dare put it off any longer. That might give the others time to get here. But it won't give them time to dress. So we'll all not dress to-night, eh? What do you think?"

"Yes, Molly, rather!" the others agreed, the women not quite so enthusiastically as the men. But of course there wasn't really time to do much with oneself in half an hour—hardly more. Perhaps it would be as well to reserve the big ammunition for to-morrow night.

"Yes, Molly, rather!" agreed Amy Redhearst, with quite an acute pang of disappointment. She had had it in her head for weeks how she would sweep down to dinner in that Schiaparelli composition, that poem in frosty silver and glacier-water greenness, on the very first night of Molly's party. She didn't believe in postponing her effects. That dress would give her a full two nights' lead over the other women; it would take them quite as long as that to recover their breaths.

She walked up to her room. It was a warm and agreeable room. Rossiton Towers was good at that sort of thing. The room was big and went back to the Macbeth epoch, but it included hot-water radiators as well as a mellow log fire. A bathroom and a dressing-room led out through the left-hand wall. A frock was laid out for her in the dressing-room—a pleasant in-between confection, pleasant, yet with a certain severity—a model in black satin moiré. It was, in fact, the dress she had had in mind to put on as she came upstairs.

"Can I be of any use to you, madame?" a voice asked. It was one of the maids. Amy had not heard her come in. She had left the door open, doubtless.

She lifted her eyes, but did not turn round. The maid was visioned full-length in the tall swivel-mirror.

“No, I hardly think so, thank you,” she smiled. “But to-morrow, please, won’t you?”

There was the ghost of a curtsy, a “Yes, indeed, madame!” and the maid had passed out of the dressing-room into the bedroom and so out again into the corridor. A draught from some open window might have caught the door; or perhaps the handle had slipped through the maid’s fingers as she brought it to. There was a bang of the door in its frame and a click of the lock into its groove. There was no question now of the door being open.

Amy Redhearth went on with her *toilette*. She disliked, rather, having to rush it, but it was all going to be rather picnicky to-night; and, as picnic frocks go, the black satin moiré didn’t look at all bad. She adjusted the angle of the mirror and swivelled herself half round to get a better view of the way the frock sheathed the hips. She stood and gazed with a certain satisfaction. And, standing and gazing, she became aware that the mirror was rendering again two images, not only one.

The second image was the image of a man impeccably dressed for dinner—white tie, white waistcoat. It may have been that at that obliquity of the mirror he took to himself most of the light in the dressing-room; it may have been that he possessed a luminousness peculiar to himself. The fact was, he stood out so brightly in the mirror as almost to expunge the pale blossoming of her own neck and face out of the dark calyx of her dress. His build, his face, his attire, impressed themselves upon her to their last detail in the not more than two seconds the bright image was superimposed on the shadowy one in the slanting mirror. As starkly clear as the high-arched brows, the small moustache, she observed the black onyx buttons in his waistcoat, barred with two parallel lines of minute diamonds.

Then the mirror trembled into unrest again, like the surface of a pool slit by the tip of a wheeling swallow’s wing. The man, or the image of the man, opened his lips as if to speak. But he did not speak. He smiled an apology. She observed how attractively the outer corners of his eyes wrinkled as he did so. He bowed; he turned. A moment later he was gone.

He made no noise at all as he closed the door behind him again. The silence of his going was almost audible, the more so as she heard her hostess’s words again with astonishing clarity, though she knew it was only within her own brain she heard them.

“So we’ll all not dress to-night, eh? What do you think?”

And she, too, had responded, like the others: “Yes, Molly, rather!”—perhaps a little louder than the others, and perhaps a little less affably.

For she really had wanted to put on that Schiaparelli dress to-night. It

appealed to her sense of *chic* to come down gowned like the Faubourg St. Honoré, here in the moorlands, among the stags and the snarls of heather.

Standing there before her cheval-glass, she stamped her foot with temper. She might have worn her Schiaparelli after all. It was really most annoying to have the men come down to dinner in their full rig and to come down oneself looking as sketchy as a housemaid. Most annoying!

It was too late to do anything about it now. It wasn't a dress you could slip into as if it was a mackintosh. She grimaced at herself in the glass. There was the gong going, too. . . .

She lifted a cigarette from the shagreen box on the dressing-table and lit it. She left the dressing-table and stood a moment at her bedroom door. Yes, it was shut. He had been a silent as well as a good-looking young man, the way he had closed the door to behind him without making any noise at all.

"No, I'll smoke my cigarette in here," she told herself. "It'll calm my nerves!"

She liked those high-arched brows of his. And that small moustache was very tricky. Very. She looked forward to meeting the young man. The black satin moiré wasn't such a rag after all. It wouldn't show up so very badly if none of the other women had stolen a march on her and got into full rig.

The thought upset her a little. She threw the cigarette into the fire and marched almost threateningly out of the room, and so down to dinner.

Dinner had already started—no formality to-night, no announcings and going in in couples in the rather sticky way Molly Cullen-Kerr liked it. Amy's first impression was one of relief. None of the other women was dressed for dinner—none of those, at any rate, who had already come down. There were still four places vacant—two men, two women.

"Anyhow," said Molly, "thank the Lord we've all got here anyhow! Hello, Amy, how *jolly* you're looking! There, that's where you are, see? Between Colonel Bingham and Sir John. There's only the Colonel between us, so if he'll let us get in a word edgeways— Hello, here are the Huxtables. There you are, my dears! There and there. Yes, that's right!"

The Huxtables, too, weren't dressed. So that left only the other fellow, the intruder, to arrive on the scene all dressed up. And the woman with him—that is to say, if the woman who hadn't come down yet was with him.

But she wasn't. The missing woman came down almost at once; it was Lady Blackmere, an oldish widow, who went everywhere alone. The stranger was on his own, then. She wondered what his name might be. She wondered where the Cullen-Kerrs had met him.

"What *are* you thinking about, Amy?" asked Mrs. Cullen-Kerr. "This is the third time Colonel Bingham's thrust the almonds on you! You're in love, Amy, that's what it is!"

“My dear! My dear!” protested Amy. “I’m so sorry, Colonel Bingham! I’d love one!”

She wondered if the fellow would feel a little embarrassed, a little ostentatious, with his black onyx and diamond buttons, among the sweaters and the plus-fours. She thought perhaps he wouldn’t. He had presence and a sense of humour. He would be able to laugh off his sartorial isolation quite becomingly, she was sure of it.

And then—the last of Mrs. Cullen-Kerr’s guests came in, with a good deal of puffing and blowing and apologising and tripping over chairs and carpets. It was Tom Whittaker. Amy Redhearst knew him quite well. He always puffed and blew and tripped over chairs and carpets. He wore a Norfolk jacket and flannel trousers. Despite all his puffing and blowing, he didn’t seem to have got all the mud off his boots.

“Excuse me, Colonel Bingham!” said Molly Cullen-Kerr a few minutes later, bending across his rather glum face. “Right you are!” said the Colonel; all the more willingly since he had quite given up hope of getting any change out of the little Redhearst woman. As for Molly Cullen-Kerr herself, she was so busy looking after things in general, she didn’t seem to have much time for him, either. So it looked like being a damned cheerful dinner-party for *him*, damn it! “Really, Amy!” Molly said. “You’re not looking a bit well! Can I get you anything?”

“No, Molly, really not! I’m perfectly all right! Thanks awfully! Do forgive me, Colonel Bingham! Am I behaving very badly? Let me see now, don’t you know the Mulcasters?”

That was better. The Colonel cleared his throat and twirled his moustache. The little woman was fretting after somebody, bless her little heart. Damned pretty little woman!

“The Mulcasters?” boomed the Colonel. “Of course I do. Why, Johnny Mulcaster was my fag at Wellington!” He went on for quite a long time with the career of Johnny Mulcaster and the other Mulcasters and his own career and how many tigers he had bagged this time and the weight of the salmon he had caught that time. And it was only his hostess leaning forward across him a second time, and the pale face of the girl at his right hand with her eyes staring out fixed and dark before her, that made him realise he must have been talking to himself for quite a number of minutes.

“I insist, Amy. I insist you go up to your room at once! I’ll go up with you!”

“I tell you, Molly, I’m perfectly all right!” The little woman turned round really quite nastily. Then she blushed and her voice softened. “I’m so sorry, Molly darling. But the fact is—the fact is——”

“Yes, dear?”

“The fact is——” Amy Redhearst stopped again. Then the words tumbled out of her lips. “Are we all down, Molly? Please tell me. Hasn’t there been a mistake? Shouldn’t there be another place at table? I mean——”

“What on earth *do* you mean, Amy? Of course we’re all down! What *are* you talking about?”

“I’ll tell you why, Molly! As I was dressing, a man came into my room. He walked straight through my bedroom into my dressing-room. I saw him quite clearly in my mirror. He’d made a mistake, of course. And as soon as he saw it he apologised and went out!”

As she spoke, she bent across the Colonel as if there were no Colonel there at all. The Colonel was not used to being treated like that. He said “Haw!” twice loudly. But the young lady took no notice of him. She gripped the edge of the table till her knuckles were quite white. “Who was it then, Molly? Why isn’t he here now?”

“Amy, my dear,” said Molly Cullen-Kerr, “I told you you weren’t well. I want you to be absolutely fit to-morrow, so I say it again——”

“I tell you I saw him as clearly as I see you now. He was just a few feet behind me. He had a small moustache——”

“What are you two whispering about?” asked someone on the other side of the table.

The two women did not seem to hear the remark.

“Haw!” said the Colonel, to show his displeasure. Was the little woman a bit tiddly? he wondered.

“Listen, my dear!” said Molly quite firmly. “There are no ghosts in this house. That’s why we bought it. It wasn’t a *man* you saw, was it? You said so yourself. It was a reflection, wasn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Well, then. There’s a fire in your bedroom, isn’t there?”

“Yes.”

“You know what tricks fires can play in looking-glasses. My dear, how can you be such a silly?”

“I’m not!” said Amy, a little sulkily.

“You say he apologised. What did he say?”

“He bowed and went out!”

“My dear! My dear! Doesn’t that prove——”

“Oh, please don’t let’s talk about it any more!” cried Amy suddenly. “Pass me an olive, Colonel Bingham!” she commanded, without even saying please! —as if he hadn’t passed the damn’ things to her five times already. She seized her claret-glass and drained it at a gulp. Molly made a slight gesture towards Johnson with her eyebrow. Johnson hurried over at once and filled the glass again.

Amy began to feel better. She began to feel much better. It occurred to her that leaping flames do strange things by the time they get themselves reflected in mirrors in adjoining rooms. Strange things.

Molly was right, perfectly right. What a goose she had been! Good Lord, *what* a goose!

And she was getting along quite well without that Schiaparelli creation, thank you! All the men at her end of the table were dithering.

“Yes, please!” Was it a third time, or a fourth time, Johnson had filled her glass for her? She looked ravishing, with her eyes shining and the colour flaring in her cheeks. She slept as sound as any plough-boy that night, and the next night too. The whole time the house-party lasted, gentlemen in dress suits, with high arched eyebrows and small moustaches, avoided her bedroom like the plague. Not one slid into her dressing-room to share her mirror with her, not one. She felt very silly when she thought of the fellow with the black onyx buttons. “Not so many cocktails for Amy!” she cautioned herself. “Never again!”

II

And then she saw him again, a few months later. It was at the theatre this time, at a first night—the most important there had been for several seasons. The traffic was jammed for streets and streets all round the theatre. It was the same inside the theatre during the intervals. The stalls people in the main *foyer* thought it might be a little easier in the dress circle *foyer*. The dress circle people thought it might be a little easier in the main *foyer*. So the two met on the stairs and coagulated.

Amy Redhearst reached the seventh stair down from the dress circle floor when the gluey mass stiffened. She found the front of her very lovely dress—a creation by Schiaparelli, it was, in green and silver—thrust up against the stiff shirt-front of a young man coming upstairs, and embedded on the eighth stair, like a fly in marmalade.

He was a gallant young man, for he perceived that the dress of the young lady above him was not the sort that should be crushed against stiff shirt-fronts. He managed somehow to thrust out both his arms and to push with his rounded back, till he achieved a few inches of breathing-space for the green and silver dress, and, incidentally, for the young lady inside it.

Though they had never been introduced, he took the liberty of smiling at her, for it was all rather jolly—like the Varsity Rigger Match, rather. And when he saw how pretty the young lady was, his smile broadened, for he was the sort of person whom pretty faces take that way.

But Amy Redhearst did not smile back. Her heart knocked fearfully within

her. For this was not the first time she had seen that young man, his white waistcoat, his white tie. In a dressing-room mirror in a house up in Perthshire, she had seen, once before, and very clearly, those high-arched brows, that small moustache. Then, as now, he had smiled, and she observed again how attractively the outer corners of his eyes wrinkled as he did so.

She lowered her eyes, but not, as the young man thought, to escape the pleasant challenge of his smile. It was to assure herself that the buttons in his waistcoat were buttons of black onyx, barred with two parallel lines of minute diamonds. They were, indeed. She did not dare to raise her eyes again.

The young man was a little chagrined. “A pity!” he said to himself. “Nice girl—but sticky! After all, I wasn’t trying anything *on*. Just smiling. No harm in that, is there?” It was a relief for several reasons when the crowd unglued itself and the young man and the young woman were respectively engulfed in the upward and the downward moving streams.

III

Less time elapsed before Amy Redheast met the young man with the onyx buttons again. She met him less than two hours later, in fact, at a first-night party after the theatre. She went along to the party with an easy sense of prescience. She went along with a sense of triumph, too; not over the young man, of course, but over her friend Molly Cullen-Kerr.

“I tell you,” she had said, “I tell you I saw him as clearly as I see you now.” Molly laughed at her, a little pityingly. Or a little severely, perhaps, as if she had taken too many cocktails.

But she had seen him, sure enough.

The name of the young man was Harold Waterlow. They were introduced.

“It was you,” said the young man, “I met on the stairs at the theatre? That stunning dress, I mean.” Then he blushed, as if he feared she might think it was the dress and not the face he remembered her by.

“It was,” said Amy, and smiled sweetly. “But I’ve a feeling we’ve met before somewhere, haven’t we?”

“No, by Jove, no!” he insisted warmly. “You don’t jolly well think I’d forget you if we’d ever met before? Oh, no; good Lord, no!”

“Will you get me something to drink?” she asked. “I’m parched!”

“Rather, by Jove, yes!” said he. And to himself he said: “Good Lord, I thought she was sticky, over at the theatre. Sticky? She’s a peach! Oh, good Lord, she’s grand!”

The young man and the young woman had, in fact, already fallen in love with one another. A couple of months later they got married.

IV

Amy and Harold Waterlow were so happy that whenever they went to stay with anybody they brought a honeymoon atmosphere with them. They were perfectly delightful together.

Amy never mentioned to her husband the fact that the time she had seen him at the theatre was not the first time she had seen him. She could just imagine the sort of thing he would say to her if she told him about it.

“Oh, good lord, darling!” he would say. “What awful rot, my dear! By Jove, honestly, darling?”

And those wrinkles would form again, in the attractive way they had, about the outer corners of his eyes.

Or he might take it another way. He would use exactly the same words, but there would be a rather odd, a rather frightened expression in his eyes. He would change the subject abruptly.

So she did not tell him.

She did not even tell him when the Cullen-Kerrs invited them to their big annual house-party up in Perthshire, at Rossiton Towers. There was no point in making the poor old chap feel *funny*, as he would term it. It would add a couple of strokes a hole to his round of golf, which would be a grave unkindness.

They motored up to Perthshire, for the extra couple of days would do him good. He had been having rather a thick time in the office lately.

They were swimming along nicely—plenty of time to have a hot bath and change for dinner—when they had a puncture.

“Damn!” said Harold, and stared mournfully.

“I’ll change the tyre if you like!” said Amy, a little grimly, after a minute or two.

“Good Lord, no!” said Harold, and got down to it.

It was quite late when they arrived at Rossiton Towers. But there were one or two other people still on their way, apparently.

“Terribly sorry!” muttered the Waterlows.

“My dears, my dears!” objected Molly Cullen-Kerr. “As if you punctured your tyre on *purpose*! I’ll tell you what, everybody!” she cried out. “What do you think about not dressing to-night? I think we’d best not!”

“Yes, Molly, rather!” agreed everybody, and went upstairs.

“Oh, I say, what fun!” exclaimed Amy Waterlow, when she and her husband had been shown into their room. “This is the room I had last year! Topping room, isn’t it?”

“I take it there was only one bed in it last year!” said Harold mischievously.

“I can’t quite remember!” she said in the same tone. “But I’m certain there

was only one dressing-room! This one on the left! That door on the right was locked. That's your dressing-room, I suppose!"

"Clever!" said Harold. "Good Lord, what a clever little girl it is!"

"I'll wash first," said Amy. "I'm not going to wait till you get all that grease off!"

"Right-ho, darling! Get busy!"

Amy washed. Then she went over into her dressing-room. She found a frock had been laid out for her—an in-between frock, high in the neck, with puffed shoulders; an attractive garment. She attended to her face, her hands. She was in no hurry. She could hear Harold in the bathroom, scrubbing away at the grease on his hands. She heard him leave the bathroom and cross the bedroom.

"I'll only be a moment, darling," he cried out. "I'll just slip the old pullover on!" He went over into his own dressing-room.

She polished her nails dreamily. They were not at all bad-looking nails. Then she got into her dress. She moved over to the cheval-glass to see that it sat on her properly; and as she stood there, gazing with some indulgence at the figure the mirror gave back to her, she became aware that now, for the second time in her history, the mirror gave back two images, not merely one.

The second image was the image of her husband, Harold Waterlow. He wore his tail-coat, white tie, waistcoat, the buttons of black onyx barred with two parallel lines of minute diamonds. She saw the high-arched eyebrows she loved well, the small moustache.

"Harold! Harold!" she shouted—or thought she did—in sudden hideous terror. Her voice was hardly louder than a whisper. "But Molly said . . . she said . . . we weren't to dress for dinner to-night!"

Through the mirror's hollow agency he smiled at her. She saw the small wrinkles that formed about the outer corners of his eyes. He opened his mouth as if to speak, but he did not. Instead, he bowed and turned, and was gone almost at once.

She did not move. Minute upon minute she stood before the mirror, dark, icy, immobile, like a winter tree. Then, suddenly, sound was in the base of her throat, like a thing extraneous to the activity of her own vocal organs.

"Harold! Harold! Harold!"

She turned from the mirror, and, like a demented creature, flung herself across the bedroom into the small dressing room beyond. Her husband was not there.

"Harold! Harold!" she shrieked, running into the corridor. "Harold! Harold!"

People came out of their rooms. "Mrs. Waterlow! Amy! What's wrong? What's wrong?"

“Harold! Harold!” she shrieked, running from corridor to corridor, from floor to floor of the great house. But she did not find him. She did not ever find him again.

THE LAST TROUBADOUR

The suburbs on the south side have at least a certain vitality; the children dance to the barrel-organs not as if they were withered leaves jiggling impotently on the wind. The eastern suburbs, though they crowd and simmer like insects under a log, are freshened by the river's continual passage, and even their most intimate desolation is touched by a remote promise of the grimeless and tumbling sea. It is on the north-west side that you will traverse long colonnades of aspidistras to world's end, it seems. Here there is only a forlorn complacency; the butcher's stock submits meekly to the inquisition of flies; even the skies of April are timorous and subdued.

Here live Mrs. Pettigrew and John Pettigrew, her son, at number forty-seven Thatcher Street. All day and all year she sits upright on her high chair, her feet never moving from the padded stool—never moving because they cannot move. Neither do her thin hands have traffic with needles and wools, for these too were frozen many years ago into living death. Her chair is placed at a corner of the room so as to look towards a blank wall. John had once hung three or four pictures on that space, one morning before he had lifted her from her bed in the adjoining room, carried her along the lobby, and placed her in the chair.

“Johnnie!” she had said, “these frivolities! I do not like pictures! Take them down! Thou shalt not worship graven images!” Her lips closed and her eyes resumed their wonted emptiness. For that dreamless vigil had been distracted, that uneventful vigil towards a sunset only more barren than her noon. John had moved to the wall and meekly taken down the lady fluttering her kerchief from a tower of bronze, and the stream dappled by willows and dawn, and that rose-lit evening road curving through the hushed Hesperides. The pictures, whose frames are warped and peeling and the glass cracked, now lie under the packing-boxes which collect in the cavity below the first-floor stairs.

She rarely speaks. The thing most vocal in that room is the gas-stove, whose garrulity in winter is for John the quality nearest to human companionship he has known for many years. Spring, which elsewhere brings the persistence of sweet birds, brings silence only to John, for the gas-stove is quiet and the asbestos caverns are no more haunted with scarlet caps and the little people. At last comes night, and, “Johnnie, it is my time for bed!” she says; and he takes her once more to that bed where she lies so still that the counterpane is hardly creased, and the pillow dented in one place only.

John is Johnnie to Mrs. Pettigrew, and has been Johnnie for over fifty

years. He too is small and thin, and his hair is more grey than his mother's; for, even as she has retained so long her control over a body of which so little is hers for her own uses, so her tameless will has kept until so late a day streaks and patches of black in the thin hair under her cap. If you looked casually upon John's face and his crushed body, you would say, "An insurance collector; perhaps a bank clerk." Because he never moved from his mother's side, you would add, "Pensioned, after humble and faithful service." But if you crossed over to the heaped book-shelves facing the blank wall of paint, you would say, "A scholar, this man, and of much quaint wisdom." Here were rare books in the early mediæval tongues, and stained folios of Kaballa, and treatises on magic in the most crabbed of late Latin. There were books of herbs and sorceries and leisurely tortures, and instructions for the battering down of tremendous cities. You would find the lives and loves of flowers and tales of continents older than Atlantis, and of the anthropophagi, and of one-eyed, two-hearted men. But folding all these mysteries was the perpetual benediction of poetry, the artful and artless Minnesinger and the troubadours of Northern Italy, and that music in England which was the earliest pipe of half-awakened birds.

It was only then that you looked closer into the eyes of John Pettigrew, and, seeing the strange, wild things lurking there, you knew him a poet, though set at the heart of this suburban wilderness, and though not streams, not lyric leaves, not windy plovers made music for him, but only the gas-stove and the rag-man at the backyard door.

It is now evening, and he is at the table before a litter of books and scrawled papers. In the corner his mother sits unmoving, only at precise intervals declaring, "Johnnie, my evening milk!" and, "Boiled fish for supper to-morrow, Johnnie! Boiled in milk!"

"Yes, mother!" he replies, dismissing from his obedient mind the love-lorn gallant and the grove of cypresses. Reinmar von Hagenau, calm in his moth-eaten covers, waits patiently till the supper is boiled, till the son has laid the last morsel in his mother's mouth and wiped her lips. He sits down once more to his woven magics. Some hours pass. Then suddenly, like a dry clock speaking, she exclaims, "Johnnie, what are you reading?"

"Bishop Jenkin's Sermons!" he avows, his eyes blinking unhappily at the lie.

"I am glad, Johnnie! You are a good boy!"

Or John Pettigrew may be embarked on perilous seas, upon boats whose sails are wrought of lily petals and their masts of lily stems. See, we approach anchorage, and there is flute-song creeping towards the storm-beaten ears of sailors. What queen stands there, calling?

"Johnnie! Read to me from Ecclesiastes!"

“At once, mother?”

“At once, Johnnie! Alacrity, as Canon Sidegarth used to say, is the better part of obedience!”

But he not only reads poetry. He is the last of the troubadours, this little, lost man. He is a maker of poetry. Often under the sapling-curve of the moon he sings to latticed windows whose lights have brought him over far hills and through the ranks of enemies to the wall of his lady’s garden and the foot of her tower. The strings of his guitar twang among the petals of the opened June. Is there a little hand at the latch of the window? Is there a holy head bends forward, listening?

“Really, Johnnie, I wish you would not scratch so hard with your pen. Can you not get a new nib?”

“Yes, mother!” Nervously he changes the nib. “I must finish this letter to the paperhangers.”

Yes, it is she! What new and lovely things shall be said about her teeth? Are they like small white buds? And her cool arms? These antique forms of poetry . . . they are difficult . . . but not for a poet! The more complicated my rondel, the more firmly are her beauties netted in a golden net. Is the head withdrawing now? Is the lattice closing? I must sing louder, sweeter, to bring her once more. Listen . . .!

“I am afraid you have not told me the truth, Johnnie! You cannot have been writing to the paperhangers all this time!”

Was there a man who betrayed her once, and he loved pictures and poetry, loved them perhaps better than her?

“I’m doing the household expenses now, and they’re rather more than usual!”

“Let me see, Johnnie!”

He is not unprepared for this emergency. He shuffles quietly among his papers. He lifts one and walks with triumph towards the gaunt woman. “See, mother, I told you!” He bends towards her and places his lips reassuringly on hers. “I told you!”

And once more for the moony garden and the high tower. . . .

THE VICAR OF DUNKERLY BRIGGS

The Dean and Fellows of Crispin's College, in Oxford, were expecting great things from John Atwater. They expected him to carry away from the forthcoming Final Schools in Modern Literature as brilliant a First as the college had known for years. The college servants on his staircase, the messenger, the gardener's boy, all expected as much from him. It was only John Atwater himself who was not quite so confident. He was feeling jaded.

He had been doing far too much lately. He had written a novel which the publishers' readers considered as good as the work of most professional novelists. He had edited a University magazine which required as much industry as ferocity. He had been Secretary of the College Beagles and Lector of the White Rose Society. He had been . . . the point was, he had been in love. He could have managed all the rest standing on his head, but he had been in love. That wretched tow-haired Russian girl. . . . As you see, he was not in love any longer. If he had been, it would have sustained him through a cycle of novels and a dozen Final Schools. He hated her. He saw through her. The discovery left him limp as chewed string.

He was thoroughly out of sorts, and the examination was less than a week ahead. He would muff it miserably, he who had never known what it was to be second to anybody in anything. So it was that he determined to cut clean away for a few days, from the lecture-rooms and the libraries and anything that reminded him of . . . grrr! . . . he refused to let himself even utter her name. He would take a rucksack and walking-stick and tramp northward into the lonely region of Otmoor. He would sleep out in barns or under hedges, or, if the weather was unsuitable, in one or other of the quiet inns upon the fringe of the moor.

The college authorities understood. They were solicitous. They beamed upon him. He had determined to keep his mind completely care-free, and to read not even a newspaper—not even, if he could help it, the notices for cattle-shows pasted up on barn walls. But he could not resist, at the last moment, thrusting his *Beowulf* and his *Anglo-Saxon Syntax* into a corner of his rucksack. He was rather shaky on these two subjects. Perhaps, if he felt completely himself again, he might take a gentle glance at them on his way back into Oxford. He remembered also his reading-glasses. Very studious they were, with thick lenses like the bottoms of lemonade-bottles. Pince-nez upon the bridge of his nose, reading-glasses in his rucksack, walking-stick in hand, John Atwater set forth northward for Otmoor and spirit's ease.

The whole of that first day was exquisitely eventless. The sound of its birds

and winds blended into a symphony he did not hear with his conscious mind; its flowers and grasses were knit into a tapestry that flapped lazily behind his eyes. He could almost hear his brain unfolding in the easy air with faint crepitations. At evening a village presented itself, and there was an inn at the heart of it. It seemed that he uttered no word, yet food was set before him and bedclothes smelling of lavender turned down for him. Dawn came, heralded by an urgent blackbird. He jumped out of bed, and into a hip-bath which he had filled with icy water out of two large enamel ewers. He set forth, whistling vigorously, into the heart of Otmoor.

This was grand, he said to himself. Two or three more days of such refreshment for soul and body, and he was fit for anything. He felt ambition stir in him again. His hand reached furtively for the Anglo-Saxon Syntax. "No, no!" he insisted. "I'm going to get back to Oxford unjaded, like a lion from the drinking-pool."

It was in the late afternoon that he came across a small gipsy encampment on the edge of a thicket. It was hardly an encampment, for the gipsies had neither roof to their heads nor anything much to put under it if they had one. There was a certain amount of sacking lying about and a few osiers. Beyond this there were a few cutting implements and a small mound of chips. The chips were in process of being converted into clothes-pegs, but the work had been laid aside a few minutes ago while the young man with hair like pale straw blew at a twig fire, and the young girl with black hair like a yew-tree boiled a billy-can of tea. A man and woman of middle age, presumably the girl's parents, both very dark, both smoking short clay pipes, leaned back against the twisted stumps of two hawthorns.

"Good day, maister!" said the man. "Fine day!"

"Fine day indeed!" John replied with alacrity. He suddenly realised how thirsty he was, and that he was a little cold and tired.

"How about a cup of tay, maister?" asked the woman. "Nothen' like a cup of tay to warm up the insides!"

"Delightful," said John. "It's awfully kind of you!" He sat down. The youth lifted the handle of the boiling billy-can with a twig. The girl rummaged about under the sacking and produced a tin and an enamel cup. She threw a large handful of tea into the water and poured into the cup a liquor which almost instantaneously ran black as pitch.

"You first!" said John politely. It was evident that the kitchen contained one cup only. She smiled her insistence at him. Her eyes were blacker than the tea, blacker than a coal-cellar, blacker than anything he had ever seen. Her lips were bright red, like haws on the bare thorn. The eyes of the youth with hair like straw moved with the movement of her eyes and lips and hands, as if the same set of nerves directed them.

"Thanks immensely!" said John. There was no milk, no sugar. He did not remark their absence. He had a vision of droves of undergraduates sipping from their fragile cups in awkward drawing-rooms in North Oxford. They extended their little fingers as they raised the cups. They reached for small and silly sandwiches. "A slice from the loaf?" the man inquired.

"And a lump of cheese?" the woman supplemented.

He ate and drank as if he had known his hosts for years. He did not talk. No one talked. He perceived how late and unimportant an invention speech was in the history of social relationship. The man, the woman, and the youth took out short clay pipes. John offered the girl a cigarette. She took it. Her smile wrinkled up the corners of her eyes. Her mouth puffed open to take the cigarette like a folded poppy blown suddenly apart.

The company was not wholly silent. The man, the woman, the girl, uttered a word or two. Only the youth neither moved nor spoke. He did not turn his eyes away from the girl's black eyes. His body, heavy and uncouth as it was, trembled faintly as her mouth or hand moved.

"It's clear," mused John. "The man and the woman are her parents. She has the man's eyes and the woman's nose, that queer high-lifted bridge. The boy's her lover. And no gipsy either. It's not the Romany blood that's fed the blue-grey eyes and the dull yellow hair. How the boy loves her! How she loves him!"

The girl put the enamel cup and the billy-can back under the sacking. The man wiped his knife on his knee. There were three other knives lying about.

"Time to be gotten' on with the pegs," said the man. The others took their knives without a word and set to work. John looked on and marvelled, so feately the cheap knives stripped the surfaces and gouged out the curves. Now and again the women rested their dark eyes on him and smiled. It was only to the girl's eyes the youth lifted his. The man worked steadily and speedily.

"We're hopen'," the man said out of the silence, "to be buyen' a new moke soon." The remark seemed intended to explain why he kept so hard at it.

"The last one," said the youth suddenly, speaking for the first time, "died of bronchitis! It was a shame! It need not have happened!"

The quality of his voice was as astonishing as the clarity of his enunciation. There was a gentleness and precision about both. They accorded strangely with the crude mop of hair and the rough yellow scrub on his cheeks, and the knobbed hands.

"Hush! Hush!" the girl whispered. "Don't take on so!"

The knives glimmered and glanced. John sat looking on, less like a stranger who had not suspected the existence of these people half an hour ago than like the small boy of the family. In a year, perhaps, they would let him, too, handle a knife and cut a clothes-peg. For the present he was as likely to

take his thumb off.

"I say," he said, exactly like that small boy, "may I have a shot at one?" There was a note of anxiety in his voice. He was in the habit of doing things well, and those things all, at this moment, seemed trivial things to do compared with the cutting of clothes-pegs with jack-knives.

The man looked up under his steep brows. "Mind your finger, maister!" he said. "Them blades is sharp! Give 'im your knife, Sal!"

Laughter was in the nest of her throat, like a small bird stirring its wings. "Like this," she said; "hold it like this!"

He cut the first peg badly, the second not so badly. Silence was amongst them again. The man and the woman worked without pause. The shock-headed youth sliced and slashed and looked up to the pippin-red cheeks of his darling; his jaw dropped, the knife and the chip slid from his fingers. Then he started and took them in hand again. John hove away manfully, such peace and such felicity upon him as he had never known before. The girl leaned back upon the palms of her hands, her body bent slightly like a young tree in the path of a prevailing sea-wind.

It did not occur to John that he should not camp out this night among the gipsies. It was not merely that, speechlessly and effortlessly, like a dream flowing or like water flowing, they had accepted him as one of themselves. He was not any remoter from them than the love-lorn youth with yellow hair. They had stolen John Atwater, too, as they had stolen the other one, when they were both children, and their nursemaids had looked the other way; and the gipsies, who had, after all, not been trees or the shadow of trees, had caught him up suddenly and stifled his cries in a thick blanket, and carried him away beyond a hundred villages—him and the other one with such blue eyes and hair like wind-havocked corn. It did not occur to John that he should not camp out this night among his people.

Dusk came towards them from low down, like a flock of grey birds coming out of the southward thicket.

"You two," said the man, "you'd best be putten' it up!" He meant the women. They rose at once and proceeded to draw out the osiers from under the sacking and to cross them cunningly over in arcs, fixing their pointed ends into the ground. They then pulled the sacking over the taut framework till such a small bivouac was ready for them, snug and dark, as primitive wanderers the world over, in steppe and desert, foothill and prairie, know how to fashion for themselves. The man, being the best craftsman among them, went on whittling away at the clothes-pegs while there was still light. The youth rose and, taking in hand a bill-hook, swayed over to the ditch on his huge limbs. He bent down towards the nettles and dock that grew there and laid them low in a series of sharp lunges. Of course. The youth's bed was in the ditch. You could have told

that from the burrs and straw in his hair and the caked mud on him. Besides, it would be as much as the man and the woman and the girl could do to lie down in that small tent with any comfort. And, if it were larger, you'd not be thinking the youth and the girl would be sleeping together in so small a space the night long.

"And me?" asked John. "Is there room for me too at your head or feet?"

The youth showed his even compact teeth as he smiled. He held out the bill-hook. "Would you like to cut down the roses for yourself?"

"It's damp!" the girl called out from inside the tent. "You won't like it!"

John was not to be put off so lightly. He swaggered across to the ditch and assaulted the dank weeds. He did not make much progress. "Let me!" said the other.

"It's damp!" the woman called out. Her voice was a shade more peremptory.

John saw the moisture welling up between the chopped stalks. A small reptile—it may have been a large insect—crawled away down the channel. A wisp of cold air, which the clearing of the tangle seemed to have liberated, crawled up his trouser-leg. A bead of cold sweat moved down the centre of his forehead. John looked mournfully from the ditch into the youth's eyes and down to the ditch again.

"It's naught to me," said the youth. "I'm used to it."

"If the genelman likes it——" the man said, collecting the finished clothes-pegs and heaping them under a piece of sacking.

The genelman . . .

It was as if a flame that had been burning inside him were put out. A desolation fell on him. He felt a dull rheumatically ache under his left kneecap. He'd never got over it, since they'd wrenched it out in the final against Magdalen.

A genelman . . . alas, alas, he was nothing but a genelman, after all. With what exquisite courtesy they had been making believe he was something more all this while. They had not stolen him away early enough from his nursemaid.

He tried to speak. A fine soot seemed to have sifted into the back of his throat. "I say, I say!" he brought out hoarsely.

The youth raised his untidy brows.

"Is there . . . is there"—John swallowed hard—"is there a village round about here?"

The youth repeated the question. The man was inside the tent now, taking his boots off.

"Let me see now, maister! There'll be Ottenden up along the moor there. How far? Six or seven miles, I'd reckon. When once you hit the cart-track. . . . What's that you're sayen', mother?"

“Let him take the other way!” the woman called out. “Goen’ through the woods, Dunkerly Briggs can’t be but a mile or two away!”

“For sure,” the man said.

“I’d be able to get a . . . a bed for the night?” asked John, again swallowing a lump of mortification.

“’Twould be surer in Ottenden. There’s two or three publics that lets beds there. There’s just one old woman as runs the Lion in Dunkerly, and two beds is full house with her.”

“They’d all be shut dead in Ottenden,” the woman said, “by the time the genelman got there.”

“I think,” John murmured, “if you’d just give me an idea what way Dunkerly Briggs lies——”

“He’d get lost!” the girl called out firmly. “Will! You best take him along!”

“Yes, Sal!”

“I say! It’s awfully kind of you! Of all of you!” John hovered awkwardly. Money? How could he offer money?

“When you marry and settle down,” the girl cried merrily, “tell your lady to get her clothes-pegs from us! Move on, Will! He’ll be lucky to get to the Lion in time, as it is!”

“Good night! Good night to you!”

“Good night, maister! Good luck go with you!”

The two young men walked in silence for some time, John treading closely behind the other, out of the hawthorn-brake, into a wood of stunted pines, round again into a thicket of thorn and bramble. When a word passed John’s lips, it so surprised him that he was hardly sure which of them had uttered it.

“She’s lovely!” he said.

The youth stopped. He stared through the owl-light hard up against John’s eyes. He was reassured.

“Aye,” he said. “She’s lovely!”

Thereafter she walked with them. Her hair was the cobwebs that brushed their faces. Her breath was the odour of some musky herb they trod on. Where the way permitted it, the two young men walked side by side. Sometimes the youth spoke—of their adventures by field and hedgerow, of the donkey that had died, of the van he and she hoped to possess some day. Then no word passed between them. The last light, refracted into the east out of the sunset, was drained away in the moor’s dykes.

“And this,” said the youth, “is Dunkerly Briggs! This is the green. That’s the duck-pond on your left. The Lion’s open still. There, mister, where you see them lights.”

“What luck!” said John. “No, don’t go off now. Come along, let’s have a drink!”

The youth held back awkwardly.

"I insist!" said John. "Hang it all!"

The young man from Oxford and the youth from the weedy ditches of Otmoor strode forward across the green. The light in the parlour of the Lion was pleasantly softened by rosy chintz curtains.

"Look!" the youth said suddenly. "There's someone looking out of the window there! It's the old dame, I suppose!"

"I didn't see anyone," said John easily. "I suppose it is late for guests to be coming in out of the moor!" The pair stood within the warm circuit of the diffused light. "Thank the Lord we're not *too* late! Hello, what've they put the light out for?"

"Like what I said!" the youth said. "You'd best try and get in alone, see? Or there'll be no bed for you to-night!"

"But why . . . what on earth . . .?" Then John stopped short. For one brief instant he beheld his companion with disenchanted eyes, as he might have seemed to him if he saw him the first time this very moment, coming towards him out of the dark moor. He beheld the lurching tough he was, with grim-jowled head thrust forward from uneven shoulders, the coarse tousled hair, the huge knotted hands.

"Will, old chap," he implored. "You won't mind waiting just till I let the old lady see it's all right?" The youth was already moving away into the darkness. "Don't go," John called out after him, in a loud whisper. "Oh, please don't go!" He was desperately afraid of hurting his feelings.

"All right!" the other whispered. "I'll wait if you want me to!"

With somewhat exaggerated ease John strolled up to the door of the inn; at the very moment he took the door-knob in hand, he felt a bolt slide into place on the inner side of the door. His heart sank.

"Hello!" he called out. "Hello, inside there!" There was no reply. "Hello! If you don't mind! It can't be closing-time yet!" There was no reply. He shook the door vigorously. It really was very awkward. He *must* get into a decent bed to-night. He knocked hard at the panels two or three times. "Hello! Hello!" There was no reply. "What the hell's wrong?" he called out. "Why don't you open?" There was no sound. He beat a tattoo with his fists.

Then there was the sound of a click above his head. He withdrew a few yards from the door and looked up. A small window had been cautiously opened. A head, or a nose at least, had been thrust through the chink.

"Go away! Go away!" an old voice quivered. "Go away at once!"

"I will *not* go away! I want a bed for the night! And something to eat and drink! You can't turn me away like this!"

"There's no room here! Go away! Go away!"

"Now, look here, mother, what's all this nonsense about——"

“If you don’t go away, I’ll shoot you! Yes, I will! And him, too!”

“Him? I say, don’t be ridiculous! I just wanted——”

The window closed to again. “Hi!” John bawled out. “Hi, there!” He looked round helplessly towards his companion. He saw his thick hulk looming indistinctly up against the faint sheen of the duck-pond. Or was it indeed the same youth, the yellow-haired one, whom the gipsies had stolen, who so loved his black-eyed maiden that he shivered through all his frame like a nervous lap-dog when she said a word to him? He looked much more like an amorphous monument of Evil or old Night, chiselled out of crude stone. And then, in a flash of realisation, he perceived the sweet grotesqueness of the situation. He perceived, as his companion had already perceived, that to the poor old lady in her isolated public-house the spectacle of two young men emerging from the moor and the darkness could not itself have been very engaging. If the travellers had been two gentlemen, or two roughs, she might not have been unduly troubled. But how came two such contrasted young men to be walking forward so game and friendly? And the shaggy one—why did he hang back in the darkness, whilst the smart one came forward with that sinister sack hung from his shoulders? What was all that whispering and signalling? Evidently it was a plant. The smart one did the oily speech-making, got an entrance into the house of the intended victim, and then, when the house was shut up for the night, he opened it up for the rough one. As for what happened then . . .

Loud and sudden the laughter echoed from John’s lips. “Ha! Ha! Ha!” he volleyed. “Ha! Ha! Ha! John Atwater, the Gentleman Cracksman!” The laughter ceased just as suddenly, so lugubriously it sounded in his own ear. He seized a handful of gravel and threw it up at the old lady’s window. “Listen!” he shouted. “Won’t you? Dear lady, please listen!” A note of poignant entreaty entered his supplication. There was no sound or sight of her. He searched for a large stone and cried fiercely: “I’ll smash that window, do you hear, if you don’t open it? Do you hear?”

The window was raised an inch or two. The muzzle of some antique firearm was thrust through. It shook like a leaf in the old hand that held it.

“Dear lady, it’s hateful of you to make me behave like this! I’m John Atwater, I tell you, an undergraduate from Oxford. Won’t you please come down and let me have a bed for the night? The fellow over there—he’s a stranger to me. I just met him this afternoon. I wanted to give him a drink.”

“Go away, I tell you, go away!”

“If you think there’s anything wrong with me, look. You can have all the money I’ve got, till to-morrow morning!” In his desperation he had removed his wallet from his breast-pocket and taken out the five or six pound-notes it contained. Almost immediately he realised how stupid the act was. The money

was evidently the haul from his last victim. The notes were sticky with hair and blood.

“I tell you it’s loaded! Go away! If you don’t, I’ll shoot!”

“For God’s sake, shoot!” he cried furiously. He thrust his ribs forward in the direction of the firearm.

She did not shoot. The old woman suddenly broke down into a fit of inexpressibly melancholy weeping. “Please, please, kind gentleman . . .”

“Oh, hell!” said John. He turned on his heel and strode over to join the youth on the edge of the duck-pond.

“I’m terrible sorry!” the youth said.

“My dear fellow, not at all, not at all! The old imbecile!” he ground out between his teeth. “Well, here I am! Here we are! What am I to do about it?”

“She was scared and no mistake! I shouldn’t have come this far! That’s what the matter is!”

“No, please! I’d have got lost on the moor without you! Though this doesn’t seem much more cheerful, does it? What *can* a fellow do?”

“If you’d like to come back along of me——”

“Oh, thanks! Thanks awfully!” The ditch, the dock, the thistles, the ooze! John trembled slightly. It was not merely cold. There was a hint of rain in the air.

“How about the porch of the church yonder? It feels a bit like rain! It would keep you dry, anyway!”

“The church? Where? Oh, I see! Just beyond that group of houses there! What’s that big house beyond? That’s the Vicarage, surely? Ye Gods, what a fool I am! Of course! Of course!”

The words tumbled from his lips. He slapped his thighs delightedly. Of course! Of course! The Vicar! The Vicar of the place! He’d be an educated man. Perhaps an Oxford man, even! He’d go along and explain the situation. Of course, a poor old peasant lady in a lonely inn could hardly help making such a mistake under the slightly odd circumstances. He’d go along to the Vicar. They’d have a hearty laugh over it—and a whiskey-and-soda, too. Then the Vicar would just come back with him and make it right with the poor old dear. He’d be in bed in half an hour or so. A hot-water bottle and a dash of whiskey in a pint of hot lemonade would kill stone-dead the cold that threatened him.

Even if it meant rousing the jolly old Vicar out of bed . . .

“I say, old chap,” cried John. “We’ll not make the same mistake this time. You won’t mind just waiting a bit out of the way this time? I’m going to explain the whole shoot to the Vicar. He’ll make the old dame see sense. And then we’ll all lift a glass together, eh?”

“Best not,” said the youth, “have me about. You’d best not be seeing me

again at all. I'll wait till I know you're fixed for the night, see?"

"My dear fellow——"

"Good night!" the youth called out. He was already shambling away into the deeper darkness.

"Good night! What a sport you are! I'll hunt you all up again to-morrow!"

John's eyes were beginning to make out more clearly the general outlines of Dunkerly Briggs. There were small houses on all sides of the green, excepting the side that faced towards Otmoor. But they were a race that went early to bed in Dunkerly. Not a light burned in a single window. The Vicarage, too, was dark and silent. None the less, John knocked firmly on the front door. The Vicar could hardly be in bed so early as this. Probably his study was on the other side of the house. He knocked again. He peered through the glass panels of the door. There was no reply. He knocked a third time. And then at length, somewhere far down the dark lobby, an inner door opened throwing a distorted rhomboid of light upon wall and floor. A square-shouldered clerical figure was outlined against the light for one moment, hovering there anxiously. Then it advanced with an almost exaggerated firmness of foot and, drawing a bolt and loosening a chain, it opened the door about nine or ten inches.

"Oh, sir, I'm frightfully sorry! Please forgive me! It's perfectly filthy of me to disturb you like this. But the fact is——" The words tumbled out of John's mouth precipitately, like peas from a split bag. "The fact is, the old lady at the Lion—— You see, it's a wretched mistake and the poor old thing——"

"One moment, sir, one moment," came the clipped syllables of the clergyman. He opened the door another three inches. "What is all this about? Who are you?"

"Oh, I say, *do* open the door, won't you? I mean—I assure you, I'm perfectly all right! My name's John Atwater. I'm an undergraduate at Crispin's. You're an Oxford man, sir, aren't you?" The clergyman nodded. John's heart beat happily. Thank the Lord! As between one Oxford man and another . . . "What college were you at, sir?" he went on, with a just too laborious casualness.

"Non-collegiate!" said the other stiffly.

It would have been more propitious, John realised, not to have asked the question. It does not ingratiate an Oxford man who was unattached to a special college to have the information extracted from him.

"The fact is," said John, "I'm taking the Modern Literature Finals in a few days. My head's beastly muzzy and my tutors sent me packing for a day or two's tramp into Otmoor. My rucksack, you see, sir?"

"I see!" said the other, without warmth. "Well, assuming your story is true, what do you want of me? Why do you come disturbing me at this hour?"

"It's like this, sir," went on John hurriedly. He did not like the tone in the

man's voice. He did not care for the man at all. "It's too dreadfully funny. Ha! Ha! Ha!" he laughed. Again the laughter stopped dead on his lips. It was really a very mournful noise. He went on and explained the whole situation. He warmed to it as his story developed. The Vicar stood like a statue, his foot grimly blocking the door. "And so you see, sir, the poor old lady thinks I'm a sort of Raffles, doing the Otmoor round with my rough-haired colleague. The chaps at Crispin's will be terribly tickled. It is a scream, sir, isn't it?" Perhaps the Vicar imagined the question to be purely rhetorical. He made no reply. But it wasn't a rhetorical question. It was quite important for the Vicar to think the affair *was* a scream. "Isn't it?" John repeated anxiously.

Once more the Vicar disregarded the question. "I am very sorry," he said. "I still fail to see how the matter concerns me. The conduct of Mrs. Phelps of the Lion is no affair of mine. I will trouble you, if you have said all you wished to say——"

"Oh, but don't you see, sir? I'm absolutely lost! I haven't the faintest idea where I am! I know that it all looked fishy to the old lady. But if you'd be so kind as to come along with me and explain to her I'm all right, my troubles would be over. It's only natural, sir, that learning there was a vicar in the place . . . I mean, sir, an educated man——"

"I'm afraid I don't know who you are. Your story may or may not be true. I wish you good night, sir."

"But, hang it all, do I sound like a crook? Do I look like one, with these pince-nez? I mean the way I speak, my clothes, my boots——"

"I fear it would be quite impossible to move Mrs. Phelps out of her bed. Quite impossible, quite!"

"I assure you, sir, I'll guarantee to do that! You see, if I smashed a window or two . . . You'd perhaps be so good as to hold a few pound-notes to cover any damages——"

"I do not know who you are, sir, and I cannot associate myself with you in any such scheme!"

"But I'm telling you who I am. I'm just a wretched undergraduate of Crispin's. I'm Secretary of the College Beagles. I speak at the Union. I go to old Trampington's lectures at Merton on the Elizabethan novel. I'm—— Really, sir, it's fantastic! You can't possibly think——"

"I do not know who you are. I cannot take the responsibility of imposing you upon Mrs. Phelps."

"Well, look here, sir——" A brilliant and forlorn idea flashed into John's mind. "I think you're quite right. If we *did* persuade the old lady to give me a bed, she'd be in a sweat all night long. Won't you just give me a shakedown for the night? I'd camp out willingly, but I've a filthy cold coming on. Any old sofa would do."

“I’m afraid I must ask you to go away at once.”

“Is it possible? You really believe . . . after all I’ve told you . . . Oh, really, sir, be a sport! I’ve not convinced you I’m nothing but a benighted undergraduate?” Suddenly John let down his rucksack from his shoulders and opened it out feverishly. “Here’s my blinking Beowulf! And my Anglo-Saxon Syntax! I just slipped them in to freshen up my memory if I felt up to it! Do you see my name—John Atwater, Crispin’s College. Can you still doubt me? Is that the sort of stuff a professional crook carries about with him? As man to man——”

“There is no saying where you may have picked up those volumes. I cannot allow you to pass my door.”

“But look here—for God’s sake, look here!” he shouted shrilly. He fumbled in the outside pocket of the sack and brought out his extra pair of glasses. “Look at these. Does a criminal go about with a second pair of glasses? Do you see? The lenses are thicker. They’re my reading-glasses! You can’t possibly stand up against these! But you can’t! I’ll crawl out quite early, as soon as it’s light——”

“If you do not go away this instant——” said the Vicar of Dunkerly Briggs. And with that the patience of John Atwater snapped. The torrent of his emotions burst their dam. He told the Vicar of Dunkerly Briggs exactly what he thought of him. . . . A man, was he? He was twice the size of himself, John Atwater; yet there he stood, shivering and sniffing, with his foot in the door! A clergyman, was he? Did he remember the tale of Jean val Jean and the silver candlesticks? If he, John Atwater, was, in point of fact, a crook, wasn’t it all the more the Vicar’s Christian duty to take the wretched sinner in and instruct him in the error of his ways? An Oxford man, was he? Did he know the difference between an educated man and an old boot? “To hell with you, sir!” concluded John Atwater. He heard the wind of the door as it was banged to in his face. He turned round and walked two or three yards. Suddenly he felt his knees sagging and giving way under him, so drained was he of the last ounce of his strength. He would have pitched forward on to his face if a great rough arm had not seized his shoulder and held him upright, and a voice had not whispered in his ear: “Never you mind, son, we’ll see you right!”

Of what happened next, John Atwater had only the vaguest memory. It was quite as likely that the yellow-haired youth carried him back to the little tent as that he himself walked there.

What titan trees were these through which they moved! What profound gulfs they skirted! They reached the small camp after a lapse, it seemed to him, of nightmare hours. He heard a whispering over his head, steady and rhythmic as a river. Some fierce liquor was thrust between his lips. One of the persons under the tent of sacking moved. He was deposited in the vacant place. In two

moments he was dead asleep, tucked up like a small child against the warm body of the gipsy woman.

At noon the next day he learned that the girl Sal it was who had made way for him. He only wakened at noon. He learned also, and from Sal's lips, that the doubting Vicar of Dunkerly Briggs had had another caller than John Atwater that same night as ever was.

Leastwise, if you could use the word "caller," which you couldn't, said Gipsy Sal. Her bosom heaved. Her black eyes flashed. It was clear she thought the Vicar of Dunkerly Briggs a lily-livered chicken at best. And then the smile was on her face again, and the white teeth showed, and the great lout named Will shivered with love as he looked on her, and John Atwater whittled clothes-pegs and listened.

So she and Will had set forth for Dunkerly the very moment that John Atwater fell to snoring under the tent. And, as before, Will lingered on the green, over against the duck-pond. But she, for her part, went further, so far as the front window of the Vicarage. And there she laid herself down on the damp grass and moaned. She moaned like a maiden who has been sorely set upon. And loud she moaned and low she moaned and loud again she moaned. Until at length there was the sound of a man approaching along a dark lobby, and of a bolt drawn and a chain loosened. And the Vicar of Dunkerly Briggs shuffled fearfully forward towards the moaning, in slippers and pyjamas and a dressing-gown. And he beheld the smitten maiden under his window and timidly touched her with his finger. Whereupon she cried more mournfully. "What's wrong?" he inquired bravely. "What's wrong?" But the girl was too far gone to be capable of any reply. And what else could a Christian gentleman do than carry into his own house a poor maiden so sorely smitten? Which thing he did not do without pondering it nervously.

But the moaning became feebler and feebler; and afraid of what might be said if a maiden died of exposure under his own front window and himself not lifting a finger to help her, he raised her at length and carried her into his house; and laid her upon a sofa in his sitting-room—the sofa that she would not have occupied if John Atwater had occupied it.

And he propped a cushion under her head, and slowly she opened her eyes and rested them upon him. And, "What has happened, my poor girl?" he asked her. "Who was the scoundrel? What can I get for you?" But, even as he spoke to her, a fearful nervousness fell upon him. For those lustrous black eyes and that rosy cheek with the dimple in it were the eyes and cheek of no maiden whom some blackguard has just left for dead. And with one of those same lustrous eyes she winked, and his face blanched like cheese, and he stammered: "W-w-what's the meaning of this?"

And she said if he thought she was going to spend the night on that mangy

sofa he was mistaken. And would he take her up at once to his bedroom, because she would like a nice fat bed to lie on.

Whereon he advanced towards her, as if to seize her like a sack of coke and drop her somewhere. And she said: "Do if you dare! I'll scream and I'll scream!"

So he said he was going out at once to call in the cottagers; that anything so monstrous had never been known in Dunkerly Briggs before, and if she did not clear out immediately——

So she said if he did any such thing she would tell them that it was all a quarrel about price; that he had promised her so much and he was trying to get away with half as much, now it was all over. And he blustered and he raged, and he swore, even; but the girl merely looked on him with her large eyes like damson-plums.

And suddenly the poor gentleman, called on to suffer so grievously for his lack of faith in his fellow-creatures, unstiffened altogether, like a clothes-line from which a supporting pole has slipped.

"This way!" said the Vicar of Dunkerly Briggs. And he went up the stairs before Gipsy Sal and opened the door of his bedroom for her, and lit the gas.

"There!" he said, pointing to his bed. His lips were like bleached grass. But she was in no hurry. "I would like to brush my hair!" she said. This she did. She also powdered herself with his shaving-powder, which smelled nice. "And I too," she said, "would like some pyjamas." He brought some out for her from his chest-of-drawers. "Thank you!" she said. "I shall be frightened," she went on. "Bring up some cushions and make yourself comfortable outside my door."

She changed into his pyjamas. She thought them a great joke. She could hear her host laying down the cushions and beating at them as if he hated them and wanted to kill them. Then he stretched out on them.

"Good night!" she called out sweetly. "I'm so comfortable! Are you?"

He did not reply to her. She could hear him groaning and stretching and kicking all night long.

Not that there was much of the night left. Dawn came not many hours later. She changed into her own clothes again, but she brought with her the cord of her pyjamas. She had not taken it without asking. She had asked him proper, but he was that tired with the night he'd had, what with one thing and another, that he didn't answer her at all nicely.

So she went off. She couldn't say for certain sure that no one had seen her leaving the Vicarage. And, if they had, surely nobody could think ill of a good kind man that had helped a girl dying under his front window? "Could they, mister?" she asked John Atwater anxiously.

He looked away. It was better not to stare too bravely into those eyes which were like damson-plums.

WIMPOLE'S WOE

Albert Wimpole was the sort of little man concerning whom women nudge each other in omnibuses and say, "What a nice kind face he's got!" He was too kind to be a success as a business man, too industrious to be a success as a bricklayer, too tiny to make a good thing out of odd jobs in Covent Garden. So he became, because even editors could not resist his nice kind face, a literary critic.

He became the nicest and kindest literary critic in London. He found something of novelty in the most laboriously stereotyped novel, a certain lightness of touch in the most thunderous of sermons. Even about minor poetry he could not bring himself to be unkind. As he wrote his criticism he had a feeling that the author he was treating stood by his elbow with clasped hands and beseeching eyes. He could no more bring himself to say an unkind word about the book before him than he could have pushed its author into a vat of hot oil.

So he went on from season to season, finding somehow, somewhere, a little extenuation for the jejune, the lewd, the preposterous. A split infinitive might perhaps earn a gentle rebuke, but he would promptly apologise for his temerity by drawing attention to the author's delicacy or profundity. A nice kind critic.

And then one morning a volume appeared on Wimpole's table entitled *Gangrene and Lilies*, the author being Mr. Eustace Chasuble. I want to insist on this—Wimpole had not, as the saying is, got out of bed the wrong side that morning. His landlady had not scorched the bacon. He suffered occasionally from gumboils, but he was free at that time from that minor but unpleasing affliction. Yet the fact remains that even as he unwrapped the book from the parcel he felt that *Gangrene and Lilies* gave off an offensive odour. It stank. It was a volume of verses, an astonishing amalgam of the jejune, the lewd, the preposterous. No book had ever affected Wimpole in this desperate fashion before. It made him blink; his ears burned with shame; his gorge rose. And he sat down and wrote about it. All the ferocity he had suppressed for years blazed into one tempest of denunciation. (Is not the nicest and kindest little man in the world fundamentally a shrieking ape from the primordial jungles?) Whatever in the past he might have said about all the authors he had been nice and kind to, he now heaped upon Eustace Chasuble. And lots more. The sheets of paper flew from his pen like sparks from a knife-grinder's wheel. Wimpole grunted. Wimpole sweated. Then he sent his landlady's small daughter to the post with the completed jeremiad, and lay back on his chair and wept.

I assure you it was not the last time that Eustace Chasuble dissolved little Wimpole into a pool of tears. It was not the last time that Chasuble's large-eyed phantom came reproachfully into the room and stood beside Wimpole and wrung its hands and moaned. Poor little Wimpole! He could not have felt a more consummate blackguard if he had murdered his grandmother. Waves of repentance surged over him and drowned him. Not a single word he had ever written could have so much as troubled a fly's wing. And now . . . And now . . . He beat his bosom.

He sometimes wondered whether his review had caused Eustace Chasuble to commit suicide. He paraded various methods of suicide in grisly pageantry before him: Chasuble hanging from a beam, his lips and tongue purple . . . Chasuble contorted in the unspeakable anguish of strychnine . . . Chasuble a dismembered corpse in the wake of the great north express. But always the original picture asserted itself in the end—the large-eyed phantom that came reproachfully into the room and stood beside him and wrung its hands and moaned.

He developed in his mind an extraordinarily precise picture of Eustace Chasuble. He was about five feet four inches in height; his head was pear-shaped and rather too big for his body. The hair was long and jet black, the lips a vivid scarlet upon a sallow face. The finger-nails were long and (if the truth were told) a little dirty. He was knock-kneed. He had a fluting, high-pitched voice. But his eyes—his reproachful, melancholy eyes . . . Wimpole lay back in his chair and sobbed.

Many years passed. Never again did Wimpole utter a word of criticism which was not in the last degree nice and kind. But he could not ever exorcise the phantom of Eustace Chasuble—the knock-kneed, long-haired, sad-eyed phantom of little Eustace Chasuble.

Behold him at this moment in the tiny market town of Bugmarsh, where he has a couple of hours to idle away before catching his connection for Town. He has been spending his annual fortnight's holiday in the heart of the country. But now the call of duty has gone forth and he must return to his labours. It is dusk. He is rather short-sighted. He is peering at the posters pasted up outside the parish hall of Bugmarsh. He learns that there is to be an auction sale of farm implements and effects next Tuesday; that to-morrow night an illustrious pianist from the Metropolis is actually going to honour Bugmarsh with his presence; that to-night—that to-night—— Oh, heavens! No!

Wimpole's scalp froze. His hair stood on end. As if to make it quite, quite certain that there could not be two Eustace Chasubles in the world, you were informed, in chaste lettering under his name, that he was the "author of *Gangrene and Lilies*." Mr. Eustace Chasuble was to lecture that night—that very night—in the parish hall of Bugmarsh. His theme was to be—how blunt,

how direct it was—"Pigs." No more than that—"Pigs." The lecture had started at seven o'clock. It was now half past seven. Even if Eustace Chasuble continued for another hour, there would be ample time to catch his train. Could he repudiate this opportunity, after so many years, to make amends? His heart filled with pity. Once more the phantom of little Chasuble stretched out its hands, stared mournfully and reproachfully upon him. Perhaps it was his own vitriolic review that had driven little Chasuble from the rivers of poetry (even though he had made them smell like sewers), and caused him to abandon lilies for mangold-wurzels, gazelles for pigs.

No, he must express his regrets for his intolerable unkindness. At last, at last, the chance he had not dared to hope for had been granted him. True that Chasuble had not thrown himself before a train or tossed off a flask of strychnine. But what if he bore with him to the grave a crushed, a broken heart?

"Pigs" . . . a curious theme . . .

Wimpole pushed his way through the door and across a vestibule. He heard a voice, assured and resonant. The chairman had obviously not finished his introductory remarks. Wimpole pushed open another door. It squeaked frightfully. A hundred large faces turned towards him, large as a harvest moon and red as an apple—ninety-eight in the hall, two upon the platform. A hundred pairs of eyes concentrated upon Wimpole. A wild instinct of flight seized him. All these healthy faces, these breeches and gaiters and leggings and side-whiskers. . . . There was one empty chair in the middle of the room. The chairman pointed at it with a peremptory gesture. It was the lecturer he had interrupted, not the chairman. The chairman sat in the centre of the table before a bell and a flask. The lecturer resumed his interrupted flow.

He roared, he bellowed, like the bull of Bashan. Not because he was angry with anything or anybody, but because that was his natural mode of utterance. He was a genial gentleman and hearty. He must have stood six foot and one or two inches in his stockinged feet. But he looked smaller because of the enormous bulk of his shoulders. He had huge red hands. His knees were like the nobbly ends of lopped branches on the trunk of an oak.

There was an especial species of pig, one gathered, that had won Mr. Eustace Chasuble's affections. It was entitled the "Large Black Pig."

He recommended its virtues to his audience. His audience shook their heads in slow and weighty approbation, and tapped with their gnarled sticks on the ground. "No breed," proclaimed Mr. Chasuble, "could achieve such popularity without genuine merit, in the production both of pork and bacon; in the production of those cuts known as 'medium,' 'fat,' or 'lean sizable' . . ."

Slowly a sweat of terror gathered upon Wimpole's brow. He tried to rise from his chair. The chair grated on the floor. He stumbled over somebody's

stick. A hundred pairs of eyes concentrated upon him once more. The chairman touched the bell. Wimpole relapsed upon his chair. His heart tolled a muffled dirge within him. Mr. Chasuble returned to the Large Black Pig.

“The great weight to which the Large Black Pig was bred formerly has now given way to greater quality, and at an early age it yields a long, deep-sided carcase of 160 lb. to 190 lb. dead weight, light in the shoulder, jowl, and offal . . .”

“They can’t stop me,” thought Wimpole, “slinking away when it’s all over. God help me!”

But the lecture drew to an end and questions followed, and votes of thanks followed those, and the farmers ambled out of the hall. But little Wimpole still sat upon his chair like one hypnotised, his pale grey eyes staring from his head.

“Now’s your chance to escape!” said Wimpole to himself. But his limbs would not obey him. A palsy, a terror, had descended upon him. He was aware that Eustace Chasuble came striding like a tree over to him. Chasuble opened his mouth and spoke.

“If it’s some more advice about the Large Black Pig you’re wanting, sir . . .”

Then suddenly Wimpole found words, or words found Wimpole. He must now and for ever deliver himself from this phantom, even though the phantom had taken to itself so strange and terrible a shape.

“Your book of poems,” he cried, “called *Gangrene and Lilies*. It was me. I wrote the review. My name’s Wimpole! Sir, I assure you . . .”

“You!” exclaimed the other. “So you’re Wimpole!”

Wimpole saw his vast arm shoot through the air towards him like Jove’s thunderbolt. He ducked. He found his tiny fingers crushed in a gigantic hand.

“I’ve been wanting to meet you for years, Mr. Wimpole!” the vast voice boomed. “The only critic who took any notice of my book. Do you understand that, sir? The only damned critic in these islands! Thank you, Mr. Wimpole, thank you! I can’t say how grateful I am! Come round to the Pig and Whistle and let me try and tell you! No? Mr. Wimpole, no! I’ll take no refusal!”

Mr. Wimpole blinked.

NO MORE APPLE-BLOSSOM

What had happened? Where had the apple-trees gone? That was what John couldn't find out. How could you conceive a world without orchards? There were apples enough on the greengrocers' stalls throughout Doomington, but that was not what he wanted. He wanted to lie under the trees where the heavy branches curved down towards him; lie under them, that is, after clearing away the windfalls carefully. Here and there was a diamond of sky between the thick leaves or stuck to a tree like a blue berry. What had happened to the orchards? And when spring came there was a floodtide of blossom, bursting into flaky spray. Even in winter, gaunt and gnarled as they were, the apple-trees stood there, the most trusty of his friends.

He did not resolve the matter in this way. From his earliest memories the orchards were at once the most important and the most obvious thing in the world. And now he could walk till he was hungry and afraid, and still count the trees on both hands. His father had died when he was nine, four years ago (he did not remember his mother excepting as a vague warmth and a voice). Aunt Jane had come down into Herefordshire for him to take him north to Doomington and her ironmongery shop—a phantasm of basins and hammers, scrubbing-brushes and nails.

John's father had been a gentleman-farmer, with a strong insistence on the "gentleman," an insistence which had been the root of many misfortunes. John could not, of course, go to the village school, but must tramp every day to Miss Follett's "Academy" four miles away. It was a frightening institution, because Miss Follett had such large fat hands, and everybody knew she kept claws in the soft of her palms. The kinder she seemed the more she was to be feared. There was always "Calcutta" at the back of everybody's mind, that abyss under the stairs which was the extreme penalty for evil-doing. In John's time its hideous hinges had creaked only twice; once for the contumacious Smithson, who had flung a stone at the portrait of Queen Victoria in the music-room, and once on John himself. It had been a curious event altogether, John remembered. Strictly, it had been Miss Follett's own fault for having a floating kidney. Nobody knew whence the information came first, but it fascinated the entire Academy. Would the floating kidney ever float into visibility? What would Miss Follett say when it appeared? At night, in bed, could she hear it swishing as it floated? The behaviour of Miss Follett's kidney was discussed in fearful whispers.

And then came the episode of the kites. Kites became all the rage at the Academy, and it was customary to identify your kite by attaching a streamer

bearing the name of your favourite cricket-hero or battleship or pudding; anything, in fact, that stood out in your imagination.

John had been foolhardy enough to fasten the legend "Floating Kidney" to his kite; and, when it became entangled with Miss Follett's rose-bushes, the whole school was threatened with "Calcutta" if the culprit did not declare himself.

All afternoon John's heart, as he lay captive in "Calcutta," beat like a piston, clanging, clanging, till he thought the rat in the corner must surely take fright and slink away. Rumour had it that there were toads in "Calcutta" too, and snakes, and even—whatever they might be—scorpions. He did not bring himself to investigate. There was no doubt of the rat. Then suddenly his mind, descending like a gull over the water, fell upon the thought of orchards. He set his chin, a determined young chin, tightly upon this thought of orchards. Bird-song penetrated the opacity of his prison. Blossom flickered and fell. Blue sky lifted itself on airy arches. He was out again with George, who had sole charge of the apples; the same George who thought more of the blight in a fruit-tree than the state of the cows at calving-time. He was out again with George, pruning the twigs, removing a slug from its neat bed at the fork of a branch, scraping the grey lichen from the bark. "Calcutta" did not matter now. They could come when they pleased. Someone opened the door, and John blinked, shuffled forward, and smiled in the felicity of his vision. Miss Follett esteemed it a fresh act of defiance, and "Calcutta" embraced him for one hour longer. Now he was running home again. A few times he stopped for breath, but at last he was home. Through the paddock, over the stream, deep into the heart of the orchards. Then his pent emotions escaped in a fit of exuberant tears. He wept under the falling blossom till he was sick. His stomach heaved for liberty, for love of his apple-trees, while the petals powdered his hair.

When he went in for tea, his father noticed nothing. He was busy reconciling, in as gentlemanly a manner as possible, a sheet of irreconcilable figures.

The smash came only a year later. John, looking at his father one morning, noticed his hair was grey, as if grey moths' wings had been brushing it all night long. In swift, appalling succession followed his father's death, Aunt Jane, and Doomington. He was at school for a time, and then Aunt Jane put him behind her counter. She seemed half iron. He could not help fancying that she kept her hair in place with five-inch nails, and gave her blouse the appearance of a ship's bulwark by an inner lining of sheeted iron. The iron under her boots clanked on the stone corridor between the shop and the kitchen. Iron for apples.

Doomington was one vast extension, in length and width and depth, of the blackness of "Calcutta." But there was no escape into orchards, no weeping of

abandoned tears into the spilt of the petals. He could not, and dared not, put his nostalgia into words. Who would understand?

His bed was high in an attic overlooking a complex pattern of drab roof and streets. It was here that his obsession became most intolerable. He would try to pierce beyond the swart veils at the city's edge to the green places, the trees in their ranks, to blossom, leaf, and fruit at their seasons. He remembered how he had cured himself of toothache by doggedly determining it was cured. He remembered "Calcutta," how he had conjured the orchards into its darkness and extinguished it. He fastened his teeth close together and stared with intent eyes. But if for a time he brought into being the beauty he desired, the reaction became the more poignant.

It was an evening in early autumn, and John at last was falling asleep after wretched hours, when moonlight, like a ghost whose face is dirty with crying, looked in upon him through the window and opened his eyes again. For some moments his mind was empty, and then a fiercer longing than he had ever known for the sight of opening buds, for the creak of boughs, for the plop of apples as the wind swung his orchard, flooded in upon him, engulfing him.

With a swift movement the lad rose from his bed, every feature and limb tense with his resolve. He knew that the great moment had come. He scraped his chair towards the open window and sat down. Both hands tightly grasped his knees. He looked out upon the roofs of houses, the high walls of factories gaunt in the moonlight. The chimneys soared like conquerors through the bleared levels of light. With the furthest chimney his mind came to a sharp halt. Minute after minute passed by, and his head remained like a stone, blank and firm.

He knew that brick and metal, warehouse, factory and furnace, were becoming part of him, his bone and blood. The vision of orchards that had blinded him so long with tears—a thick fog was surging inwards upon it and expunging it from the world. Now one row of trees survived; now one forlorn branch; now nothing but a thick mist heaved and sank.

The lad rose from his chair and walked over to his bed with even steps. He fell asleep at once, and no dream disturbed him. With all the rest, he awoke next morning when the chimneys hooted their summons.

THE HAUNTED CINEMA

The incident I am about to relate concerning Kravest and the cinema there, and the Strange Thing that befell that cinema, I should not myself believe had it taken place outside the limits of the province of Bessarabia; had it taken place, in fact, anywhere but in Kravest itself. I should probably not have shaken off my drowsiness to listen to Reb Laibel at all, had not the sainted syllables of Kravest fallen from his lips.

It was the dusk of the Sabbath, when the greybeards gather in the side-room of the synagogue and tell stories of Eastern Europe, punctuating their memories with subtle quotation or complex analogy. And as Reb Laibel wound like a stream from meadow to meadow of his story, you would have thought that the country he had left three or four months ago was somehow immortally enwalled from our modern age. Until, with a pronunciation I dare not transcribe, he spoke of a cinema—spoke of it, moreover, with no less heat than his Hebrew compatriots must have spoken of Torquemada. And then it was that I heard the name of Kravest, Kravest and its sanctities, and I shook myself and listened.

For my father used frequently to speak of Kravest. It was to him a sort of Hesperides, and its golden apples were the Scrolls of the Law. The ear-locks of the old men in Kravest hung down to their jawbones. The wigs of the married women were prompt and lustrous. Little boys could repeat by heart the whole Pentateuch. Babes had insisted upon fasting throughout the Day of Atonement. It was stated—and my father, for one, would not contravert the report—that one year, when the festivities of Simchas Torah were completed, and Rabbi Avrom, with his flock of revellers, trooped from the synagogue of the “Godly Brethren,” he had ordered the moon to perform a circle four times round a certain star, once for each wall of Paradise—and the moon had obeyed him. So the whole company swore, and who dared question it? And such was the holiness of Kravest that even the Gentiles of that town had been touched with the surf of her holy tides. It was not unknown that certain of them had been seen, on the Feast of the Tabernacles, to shake the palm and reverse the citron as the old Jews passed with them on their way to the “Godly Brethren.”

Such, then, was Kravest. Had a cinema come this way? O dolorous event! And this was how it came to pass, as I learned it from the lips of Reb Laibel. Reb Avrom—peace be upon him!—had gone to his rest, and though his successor at the “Godly Brethren,” Reb Zcharyah, had as much erudition—if that were humanly possible—as he, he had not the same strength of character, the same faculty for prophetic invective against any least transgression of the

Law. This it was which had given their chance to the three principal merchants of the town, Reb Yankel, Reb Shtrom, and Reb Ruven. There was no doubt that they had long been working subterraneously to get the synagogue into their own hands, but they had never dared to emerge into the awful light of Reb Avrom's eyes. One flicker of that inspired eyelid and you saw them scuttle into their burrows with a shaking of timid abdomen and a flash of white tail. But the combination of the weak amiability of Reb Zcharyah with a certain deal in roubles which was little to their credit and much to their profit gave them their opportunity. A bribed and hectored majority elected them to the three positions of office, and Reb Shtrom became the *parnass*, Reb Yankel and Reb Ruven the *gabboim*, of the synagogue.

Before very long rumours were abroad in Kravest that the new officers were convinced that the "Godly Brethren" was far too big and expensive a building for its purpose. It was stated that the upkeep of the establishment was robbing the children and widows. It was too near the centre of the town not to suffer a gentile corruption. It could not be doubted that the barn-like building near the river, on the outskirts of the town, would be more satisfactory as a synagogue from every point of view.

There is no time to enter into the historic battle that raged in Kravest. With a sinking of the heart I narrate only that the "Godly Brethren" removed to the river-side, and the old building itself was sold to an anonymous syndicate who converted it (if I am interpreting Reb Laibel's curious accent aright) into the "Grand Cinéma de Paris." The "Godly Brethren" became a shadow of itself; for, whilst Reb Zcharyah, with pale and haunted eyes, entrenched himself deeper and deeper into the fortresses of his intricate and unworldly scholarship, its three officers paid less and less attention to its physical organisation. Some of the most valued and venerable old men had not the energy to drag themselves there three times a day. Some of the young men set out for the "Godly Brethren," but were entrapped by the cinema *en route*. Ichabod! The glory was departed! And the material state of Reb Shtrom, Reb Yankel, and Reb Ruven, for no explicit reason, became more and more prosperous. They were not seen to be particularly industrious on the money-changing market. Reb Yankel gave up his flour-mill entirely. All three spent their mornings together drinking *Schnaps* and playing cards. Yet their fortunes seemed to expand as under a personal and private sun.

And then God intervened. So said Reb Laibel, drawing his fingers through the thickets of his long yellow beard. And so the others repeated as the miracle was unfolded in the thickening dusk. It must be understood that no special provision of films was made for the cinema at Kravest. Chaplin and Gable were the heroes of Kravest as they are the heroes of Los Angeles. A month or six weeks passed in which the transports of the degenerating Jewry of Kravest

knew no intermission. Gallop and gallop went the horses over the prairies! Crackle and crash went the crockery in the ineffably comic restaurants! And then a calamitous film was displayed. The scene was a very expensive hotel in New York. The viands were of the most wealthy and the most profane order. But when none other than Reb Ruven was seen to be helping himself to a liberal share of milk-pudding after several courses of meats—damnable and most damnable juxtaposition!—conceive the state of mind of the audience at Kravest! There was no room for doubt. The familiar twisted nose of Reb Ruven, the scar below the lower lip, came nearer and nearer to the camera. A howl of execration was heard. But not so formidable as the howl which rent the roof of the cinema two weeks later, when Reb Yankel, in the costume of an English labourer, his corduroy trousers tied with string below the knees and stuffed into a monstrous pair of boots, was seen to be feeding a large sow in her sty and fondling one after another of her litter of sucklings. Walking-sticks hurtled through the air, seats groaned and split. In vain did Reb Yankel plead an alibi. In vain he urged that he never had set foot an inch beyond Kravest, as all the world knew. It was the hand of God, said Kravest, the hand of God!

The climax came a week later. The film displayed a scene which may well have been Hampstead Heath. Three pairs of figures, male and female, appeared on the horizon. Closer and closer they came—Reb Shtrom and Reb Yankel and Reb Ruven—and closer the Gentile hussies on their arms. (The crowd was roaring like a sea). Then the three couples sat under the shade of a chestnut; then their lips . . .

But there was a sudden shrill cry, a hissing and whirring, and, at the moment that the cinematograph was flung to the ground, with a great rip the screen was torn from the beams. For the Above One, said Reb Laibel, who shall understand His ways?

And the “Godly Brethren” returned to their temple, after a solemn purification, and piety came back to Kravest, and as for Reb Shtrom, Reb Ruven, and Reb Yankel, may the Black Wind, said Reb Laibel, uproot their hair in tufts!

BUT THE GODS WILL NOT HAVE IT

There was never a finer lad in the history of boxing than Jem Belcher, young Jem Belcher of Bristol town; Jem Belcher, who was wily as a fox, who could hit like a steam-hammer.

It is the first morning of February, many Februaries ago, in 1809. What is all London doing on Epsom Downs? The Duke of York is here, who is the King's son and the commander-in-chief of his armies. Bill Smith, the least of his private soldiers, has broken out of barracks to get here. The lawyer from the Middle Temple is here: the actress has risen betimes from her bed; the costermonger from Covent Garden has left his potatoes to look after themselves.

For glorious Jem Belcher is fighting Tom Cribb again, champion of England. He has fought him once, and been beaten by him. That was two years ago. Two years before that he had fought the great Hen Pearce, and was beaten by him, too. It was a tragic thing, it may be, he ever stepped into the ring to meet Hen Pearce. His career till that day had been one unbroken song of victory.

Yet the fact remains. He was a better man than Hen Pearce and Tom Cribb. He was the best man who ever darted with bare knuckle from cheek to chin, from chin to heart, of an opponent. Everybody knew it, including Pearce and Cribb. So did Jem Belcher.

Yet it's hard luck on a man who boxes as much with his two eyes as with his fists—it's hard luck on him to lose one of those same eyes. And that's what had happened to poor Jem, at the height of his glory. He was a lad of twenty-two at the time, no more than that. Yet he was already a veteran in the number and splendour of his victories. He was the darling of Society. The high lords took him out riding with them on horseback. The high ladies invited him to take tea in their drawing-rooms and swooned with pleasure if his crude fist brushed their delicate fingers when they reached him a cake.

Mrs. Jem Belcher didn't like that. She hated Jem to accept the invitations of the high ladies. She hated him to accept the invitations of the high lords to go out riding with them, or to play rackets with them. "You mark my words," she cried, "they'll knock your eye out one of these days." She clenched her fist, as if she were a boxer too. Her mouth twisted dreadfully as she stood there shouting and cursing. It was a pity. Sally Belcher had such a pretty mouth, when she used it to kiss him with . . .

So Jem Belcher went to play rackets one fine day with a gentleman of Society in the court at Little St. Martin's Lane. And the marker sent back the

ball so devastatingly that it dislodged Jem's eye from the socket.

"I told you so, you lout! Didn't I tell you so!" shrieked Mrs. Jem Belcher, when they brought her man back blind in one eye. Then she collapsed all of a heap on the door-step, because she loved Jem very dearly. It was obviously quite out of the question for Jem to go on boxing any more. Gone were the great days, the golden days, when he knocked the Firbys and Bartholomews senseless at his feet. There was nothing more terrifying left for that demon fist to do than to grasp the ivory handle of a beer-pump. So the gentlemen brought out their purses and put their guineas together and made him mine host of the Jolly Brewers in Wardour Street.

It would have been a good thing for him had he stayed there. But he was a lad still. Youth raced impetuously along his veins. And there was always Mrs. Jem Belcher, a queer woman. He never knew her mind, for she never knew it herself. "Had you done as I told you, you scarecrow," she would hurl at him, "it's in the ring you'd be standing to-night, earning your hundreds of guineas! Earning your twopences in a low beer-house—that's all you're fit for now!"

And an hour later, in the dark of their bedroom, she would put her arm round him and seek to caress his poor blind eye with her lips. "You dear lad!" she whispered. "You poor dear lad! You must never, never think of going into the ring again! Promise me that, Jem! Kiss me!"

"All right!" he grunted. His head was whirling. Strange creatures, these women. Never knew where you were with them. How much simpler was a man, a boxer, crouching in the ring! Jem almost started out of bed, he could see the fellow so clearly a few feet away. He had his two fists before his face. He was waiting for a lead. Suddenly he hurled himself forward, thrusting in at the jaw with his left. No, no. It was only the shadow of the curtain as the wind swung it. Jem Belcher went off to sleep, his mind a white and red dazzle of whirling flesh and spouting blood. . . .

"Are you listening, Jem darling? Are you awake?"

Jem Belcher's sole reply was a snore that shaved the plaster in flakes from the ceiling.

And then Hen Pearce came up from Bristol, which was Jem's own city. If he himself could wear the bays no longer, another Bristolian must. It was Jem himself had asked Pearce to come up from the West Country and show these Cockneys what trash they were.

Hen Pearce carried all before him. Sally Belcher was white with rage. "What?" she cried, night after night. "Are you going to let a great loose lubber like that stand up before all the world and call himself champion? Get out! I can't bear the sight of you!"

Jem Belcher was not one to make excuses. He set his lips and said nothing. All his friends told him that against a first-rate bruiser like Pearce he might as

well fight minus a fist as minus an eye. He took their advice with bad grace.

“Minus an eye? And why not?” he muttered to himself savagely. “The man’s not born who’s a match for Jem Belcher! Blindfold me, and, by God, I’ve still a trick or two left will bring any mother’s son to his knees! I must beat this Hen Pearce! I must! I will! Then she’ll be quiet again, and gentle as she was in the old time! How lovely she used to be then. Like a rosebud. The fresh smell there was in her hair!” A tear trembled on the lid of his sound eye. “It’s all thorns she is now!” He sighed heavily.

He fought Hen Pearce; for eighteen ferocious rounds he fought him. But for most of them he did not see whom he was fighting, whether he hit or missed. When he put both his arms round Hen Pearce and hurled him through the ropes, he did not see him. And a man who cannot see what he does expends twenty times more strength than his antagonist. It was not Pearce, but his own blindness, that beat him. At length the slow words crawled through his bleeding and battered mouth: “I can fight no more, Hen Pearce!”

A king who had lost his crown got back to the Jolly Brewers in London a day or two later. Sally Belcher slammed the door in his face. She went up to her room and did not show herself for two days. “God help me!” moaned Jem. “I wish he’d smashed my skull in!”

But the gloom passed. He had time to think over what had happened. It was true he had lost the championship. He had learned, in the ring itself, the appalling disqualification of being blind in one eye. But he was not merely as gallant a boxer as ever lived: he was as acute a strategist. He knew that if he should fight again, all his strength and cunning must be based on keeping his one eye inviolate. They could separate the four valves of his heart, if they knew how to. But that eye must remain inviolate.

Hen Pearce never fought again. His fight against Belcher was his last fight and his last victory. The day that dawned now was the day of Tom Cribb. It was true that Cribb’s record to date was not over-brilliant. It was true that Belcher had been decisively beaten by Hen Pearce. But the excitement created by the announcement that Belcher and Cribb were to fight was colossal. Belcher considered that the championship had reverted to him on the disappearance of Pearce. Cribb considered himself the best man in the country. The two men met for the first time in April 1807.

On each side of every battle, whether the battle is fought by single men or by whole armies, there are invisible as well as visible protagonists. You may call them guardian spirits. Or you may call them, in a brief word, luck. Luck did not fight so lustily for Jem Belcher that day as Jem Belcher fought for himself. At every point he out-fought Tom Cribb, a hefty creature more than two stone heavier than himself. For eighteen rounds he seemed to be able to do everything he wished with Cribb. He frisked about him like a terrier or hurled

himself upon him like a buffalo.

Do you believe in the mystic potency of numbers? Wiser men than you or I have done—and do. The Chaldeans did long ago. So do some of the most abstruse modern mathematicians. There was ill luck for Jem Belcher in the number eighteen. In the eighteenth round of his fight against Hen Pearce he had been forced to declare himself beaten. The first fight against Tom Cribb lasted well beyond eighteen rounds—all the way to the forty-first, in fact. But it was in the eighteenth that he so fatally injured his right hand. He saw his way clear to Cribb's head. He shot forth with such terrific power that he all but broke head and hand. Cribb fell, and rose again. He had a skull like a blacksmith's anvil. But for Belcher the fight was over. He tried as long as possible to hide the fact that his right was useless. But it was not for nothing that Cribb had two such crafty seconds as Will Warr and Bill Richmond, the negro. A fatal breach had been made in the wall of strength and skill that guarded Jem Belcher's single eye. Once more from between his battered and bleeding mouth the cruel words were forced: "I can fight no more, Tom Cribb!"

Once more Jem Belcher came home a beaten man. Sally Belcher stood waiting for him, her arms folded across her bosom. "Didn't I tell you he was worth ten of you, you good-for-nothing bag of bones? Didn't I tell you to stay nice and cosy behind your bar, instead of careering off among those blackguards again?" Her words beat upon his face far more viciously than the fists of Tom Cribb.

But she had said no such thing. "And you a grandson of the great John Slack!" she had twitted him night after night. "So you're going to let a heap of tripe like Tom Cribb call himself England's champion? Pah! You make me sick, Jem Belcher!"

None the less, Tom Cribb knew that Jem Belcher was the better man, as Hen Pearce had known it two years earlier. Jem Belcher knew it, too. All England knew it. No man had ever fought more gamely. Would luck be absent from his side till the end of the chapter?

"No!" cried Jem Belcher fiercely to himself. "With one eye and one fist I'm still a better man than Tom Cribb. But I'll go cunning. I shall protect the one and go easy with the other. My left alone will do the trick, if need be. I'll have him snivelling at my feet yet, so help me God!"

He bided his time, though Sally Belcher made the time of waiting a fearsome thing to bear. Cribb went on from strength to strength. "But not too strong for me!" vowed Jem Belcher. A year passed, and two years. Tom Cribb added fresh laurels to his brow by defeating Bob Gregson, the Lancashire champion, a great bullock of a man. "Now's my time!" said Jem Belcher. So he issued his second challenge to Tom Cribb. So all London fared forth to

Epsom Downs that first morning of February many Februaries ago.

“Will Jem Belcher come back?” the crowd roared. “Will Jem Belcher come back?” the wind murmured in the bare trees. A skylark was singing like mad in the blue and frosty heavens. “Will Jem Belcher come back, come back, come back?” he sang. “I doubt it! I doubt it! I doubt it!” another skylark threw back at him out of the top of the sky.

The two men faced each other. The crowd stopped roaring. The wind stopped murmuring. Even the skylarks seemed to fall on silence. The dilemma faced them all that was propounded over a century later when Carpentier met Dempsey. How would brains fare against brute strength? The question had been answered once before as between Cribb and Belcher. Would it be answered in the same way again? If you looked at the perfect symmetry of Jem Belcher’s limbs, if you saw the grimness of that heroic jaw, you said: “No. This time there will be a different answer!” and then you turned your eye upon the towering body of Tom Cribb and saw the coils of muscle beneath his shoulders. Who could withstand a piston launched forward on the pivot of those gigantic muscles? Could a man, already once defeated, who had only one eye to fight with?

For a full half-minute they faced each other, both motionless as carved marble. There was such tension that men dug their nails into their palms and brought blood. One thing was certain: whether Cribb won or Belcher won, no man would forget this day’s fight till the last tooth fell out of his shrivelled gums.

At last! Belcher had broken the trance, like a snake suddenly striking. Left, right. Cribb stopped the left. Belcher had intended him to. Forth shot the right into Cribb’s midriff with a noise like the crack of a whip. The blood retreated from the place where the fist struck and left it pale as ivory. Then the angry blood seeped back again. The angry breath puffed back into his lungs.

“Take that!” went Cribb’s fist. But Belcher was too quick for it. The blow glanced off his left harmlessly. Then he closed with Cribb, slipped to the ground; the first round was over.

“He’ll come back! He’ll come back! He’ll come back!” the crowd twittered excitedly. “What do you think?” asked the first skylark. “I’m not so sure! I’m not so sure!” said his companion.

“I’m not so sure!” said he again, in the second round, when Cribb came in close, and, despite the flick of bullet-like blows, encircled his man and threw him heavily. During the third round there was silence, in the sky above and on the green downs below. The whole crowd was silent in the sheer joy of witnessing such perfect craftsmanship. Straight and true, like an arrow from a bow-string, Belcher’s fist shot forward. It almost sang, too, as it clove the air.

In the fourth round Belcher seemed to be labouring. His breath came short.

His lip trembled a little. You must hold your wind better than that, Jem Belcher, if you're going to snatch the wreath back from Tom Cribb's forehead! He slips to ground again. He knows Cribb is stronger than he is. He must fight strength, not with strength, but with brains.

In the fifth round, brains win. Never in all his career, never since he stepped into the ring for his first fight ten long years ago, did Jem Belcher fight so gloriously. Brains fought for him. Courage seconded brains. But what avails it that courage and brains fight for a man when luck fights against him?

Though Jem Belcher in that fifth round fought more cleverly and gallantly than ever he had fought before, in that fifth round his doom came upon him. He knew it well, though he concealed it so long and so magnificently from the crowd, from his opponent, even from his seconds. Round after round he went on fighting—a tenth round, a twentieth, a thirtieth. He lasted for thirty-one rounds, though the whole world swung and tottered round him, he was in such pain, and the blue sky was black as ink. Then he held forth in surrender the shapeless thing that was his fist. He declared himself beaten. The glory was over. But he had known the glory was over a long time ago, years ago, it seemed: since that desolate moment in the fifth round when luck left him like a great bird that makes off with a roar of wings.

For once again his right fist betrayed him, as it had done in his last fight with Cribb. It was not a hard blow he delivered with it. Both before and after it happened, he struck out with it much more fiercely. He merely hit Cribb's skull at exactly the wrong angle, with exactly the wrong force, at exactly the moment when Cribb's skull came butting in upon his fist. He heard a crack as if the bone were broken in two. He tottered for a moment in a sick spasm. The air became misty about him, and the mist filled with shapes and voices.

He saw two women, and they were one woman only. The first of them was his wife, Sally, as she had been when he first set eyes on her. Her cheeks were pink, with a brown flush to them, like the petals of the briar rose. He smelled quite distinctly, though his nostrils were stuffed with blood, the fragrance she always had in her hair in those days. The second of them was his wife also. She stood waiting for him on the threshold of their house. Her lips twisted and writhed with her scorn of him. "Get back!" she hurled at him, louder than all the roaring of the mob assembled on Epsom Downs. "Get back, you one-eyed scarecrow! Who wants you here?"

The scene changes. He was not fighting Tom Cribb any more. This was not Epsom Downs any more. He was fighting Andrew Gamble on Wimbledon Common. Not far off was a gibbet. On the gibbet hung the body of Jerry Abershaw, who had been a sprightly highwayman till a week or two ago. Good old Jerry! Jem Belcher waved his hand at him. Jerry grinned back, showing his large yellow teeth, from which the lip curled away like a scimitar. A wind blew

up and set the chains creaking on the gibbet, and Jerry dancing a dance . . .

All his fights, all his victories and his two defeats, came back to him as Jem Belcher gasped for breath like a drowning man. He was fighting his first fight on the day of St. James's Fair, before the windows of his home in Bristol. His mother was cheering him on. His sister's husband gave him a knee. Were they not the offspring of John Slack, and was not John Slack one of the greatest fighters of the great days of fighting? How old is this boy who delivers right, left, right, left, so cunningly? What? Twelve years old? Bravo, little Jem Belcher! You'll be champion of England some day!

Who is this looming up in the mist? Why, this is "Paddington" Jones. They've chosen "Paddington" Jones to be his opponent for his first appearance in the London ring. He is eighteen years old now, the boy wonder from the West Country. From to-day he is to be the boy wonder of the capital.

And these? Who are these four louts skulking in the darkness? These are the paid toughs that Andrew Gamble's backers have hired to set on him. They are going to knock the guts out of him. He'll not be fit to lift a finger against Andrew Gamble. Gamble is going to win the match by default.

Is he? No, he is not! "Take that!" cries young Jem. Down goes the first lout, and his teeth clatter like dice about him as he falls. "Take that!" Down goes the second, his nose streaming like the slit throat of a pig. The third falls to his knees, whimpering like a schoolgirl. The fourth bolts into the blackness like a hare. Like a hound Jem Belcher is after him. He seizes him by the nape of his neck, holds him away, and delivers a couple of short sharp kicks into the seat of his pants. The hero brays like a donkey. Jem Belcher drops him and delicately wipes the dust off his fingers. . . . That is on Saturday night. Two days later, Jem Belcher and Andrew Gamble meet. Jem Belcher is in high spirits. He blows a kiss to the dangling corpse of the highwayman. Then he turns his attention to Andrew Gamble. . . .

The fifth round is over, the fifth round of Jem Belcher's last fight, which is against Tom Cribb on Epsom Downs. Now and again the ghosts come back to him as round follows furious round. Now and again in the place of Tom Cribb he sees the hulking body of Joe Berks the butcher—whom he met four times and defeated four times. Now it is Jack Firby—the "Young Ruffian," as they called him.

Yes, it would have been a good thing if he had never stepped into the ring again after his victory over the Young Ruffian. He'd had no luck since then. How often had Sally cursed him for the fool he was!

Once more in the swaying mist he saw the two women that were one woman only—the sweet girl his wife had been and the sour shrew she was now! How afraid he was of her—ten times more afraid than he was of Tom Cribb, however viciously Tom might drive his fist into his eye. But he had not

even one eye now! It was almost as blind as the blind one!

The thirtieth round was over. It was the thirty-first round now. For hours, it seemed, they had been urging him to throw up the sponge. He had shown them his teeth like a cornered animal.

A man cannot last for ever against the ill will of the gods. Jem Belcher bowed his head. He stretched forth a hand shapeless as a mass of putty. "I'm a beaten man, Tom Cribb!" he whispered.

Jem Belcher had not come back. The roar of the crowd diminished in the distance, like the sea when you turn your back on it. "I thought as much! I thought as much!" mocked the skylark in the blue and frosty heaven. Jem Belcher turned his face towards London. His heart was heavy within him.

It was dark when he reached London that evening. He crept in through a side door, for he did not want his friends to see his shame. He wanted to go straight upstairs and hurl himself upon his bed. He hoped to God she was out. Perhaps she would not come in for several hours.

He crept through the sitting-room on the way to the bedroom stairs. Then a voice lifted itself like a flower out of the darkness.

"Jem!" the voice said.

Could it be Sally's voice? Never in all these years had he known her voice so gentle.

"Is that you, Sally?" he asked fearfully.

"You poor boy!" she said. "Come to me, Jem!"

He came over to her. He made out where she sat, in a big chair under the drawn curtains. She was a faint blur of colour in the darkness. Her hair was a faint blur of scent, the scent of briar roses. Her cool lips sought his swollen lips. "Hush!" she said. "Don't say a word, you poor dear Jem!" She put her arms round him and pillowed his head upon her bosom. "Sleep!" she whispered. He was very tired. He was asleep quite soon.

THE WINDOW OF BROKEN MAGIC

It is a strange tale I have to tell of an old man, a Jew, by name Jean Pinchas, and a dead boy who has been dead for five hundred years. I must ask you indulgence for it. If you find it preposterous, which I dare to hope you will not, you will rather blame the old man, Jean Pinchas, than myself. Yet I am certain if I succeed in presenting him to you, if you will not withhold your censure, you will also not withhold your affection and your pity.

I confess that to me the prime importance of this tale—the only importance, if you like—is the curious reversal in it of a lamentable fantasy—the fantasy by which certain tragic fools hold that the life of a child is taken for some dark esoteric purpose, a fantasy hardly to be spoken of. I do not wish to allow my imagination, or yours, to dwell upon the mode in which sporadically, but during so many centuries, the Jews have been the victims of this chimera. Nor, in presenting the tale of Jean Pinchas and his “Petit Rabbin,” as he called him, the boy who died five hundred years ago, will I linger among the crucibles and retorts, the mortar and pestles, of that ancient sorcerer and fine craftsman, Pierre d’Orange. We will not linger overlong about the spectacle of a lad dying upon a trestle bed, full in the rays of the setting sun, and Pierre d’Orange busy with spell and incantation, the refining of mineral and animal dyes, bubbling cauldrons, the green eyes of his cats.

The tale opens in the tiny village of La Charité, in that region of Provence which Jewish writers in the Middle Ages called “Arba’ Kehillot.” The capital town of this region was the illustrious Papal city of Avignon. With the three further Jewish communities of Carpentras, Cavaillon, and L’Ile, the “Arba’ Kehillot” formed such a curious rich island in an encompassing gentile sea as Salonica, for instance, in later centuries. But these communities had a significance and a culture more memorable than the Levantine. It would be irrelevant to digress further into that fascinating by-path of Jewish history. I must only recall to memory the fact that from the earliest Christian ages these Jews had been established here; that in the time of the Papal captivity in Avignon they became a noble race, famous for skill and learning; that in the later centuries, which extend to the time of the French Revolution, these Jews dwindled, till nothing more than a name and a few stones were left of all their glory.

Now upon the outskirts of this region is the village of La Charité. And I find the name curiously appropriate from more than one point of view. For whereas this countryside is mainly a stony and a barren place, somewhat harsh, somewhat austere, and very few other trees grow there than the sparse olive,

and, when the anemones and the wild jonquils of spring have gone, but few flowers follow, La Charité is hidden away in a green pocket among the grey hills. Not here does the broad turbulent Rhône flow—the Rhône to which of old time the Jews of Avignon consigned their sins—but this is a countryside of sleeping pools. Beyond the willows that rim the pools, elm-woods stretch towards that opening in the hills beyond which once more Provence resumes her arid tale. If a stranger chances here, he forgets to go further on his wandering. Enough of music for him will be the lapse and murmur of breezes, the unceasing cry of doves; and the children tumbling about among the fat geese; and the sleepy builders who are building the new church against the Mairie, and spend more time on the benches in the *brasserie* than on the planks of their scaffolding. And the amiable priest, Père Amyas.

And that strange, sweet old man, old Jean Pinchas, the last Jew of that ancient communion of “Arba’ Kehillot.” And I do not know whether I should most dwell upon his sweetness or his strangeness. No, the traveller will not overlook old Jean, nor be unkind to him. The old priest is not. The children are not. And he is a Jew. There are no more Jews in all that region.

When first I saw Jean Pinchas he was wreathing chains of wild flowers round the dark Sinaitic boulder which stands in Fayard’s meadow. His back was turned from me, but the breeze swung his long beard sideward and the sun refined it into a cadence of fine gold.

Now why did I say of that boulder that it was Sinaitic, a rock pregnant with secrecy and awe like the rocks which stand up upon the riven slopes of Sinai? And why should I so promptly have concluded of old Pinchas that he was a Jew, almost before he turned his face towards me? I confess that my imagination had been possessed by the curious tale of the Jews in this land, how they had prospered and had fallen upon evil days, and now there was little left of them but a name and a few shadows. The old man garlanding the dark rock seemed hardly more substantial than a shadow. But he must have had substance once. And the substance belonged to an epoch before the Middle Ages initiated their glory and their shame, before his ancestors had begun their second wandering, before even they had attained the land out of which they wandered. He was a Jew amongst those earliest Jews who came wandering out of the southward desert and fell upon sudden water and wild flowers that seemed more incredible than moon or stars; and there, among the pools out of which high Jordan rises, he took to weaving chains of wild flowers about the forehead of the dark rock in the meadow.

What? You find my geography more turbid than my history even? You swear that the foot-slopes of Mount Sinai do not send forth those rivulets out of which the pools are fashioned whence high Jordan rises?

Forgive me. Provence is an enchanted land, and La Charité a nucleus of

magic at the heart of that enchantment.

I knew only and at once that Jean Pinchas was a Jew, and the last of that race of Jews. And when he turned to me, and I had given him Jewish greeting, he smiled and said softly: "Ah, you wonder what this might be? This is the footstool of my Master. You have heard of him?"

But I had not. I urged him to tell me more. "The Master?" he said in astonishment. "*Le Petit Rabbin?*" He would have continued, but a gang of children scampered over to him and seized his hands and made him play ring-of-roses with them. I whistled into the broad noonday. Was this man mad, or I? Curiously, I would rather so have maligned myself than him. Children do not trust themselves to madmen. No man in all France was saner than Jean Pinchas, where he crawled and romped with two babies dangling from his beard and others stuck all over him like barnacles of mirth.

It was not easy, however, to get the tale out of the mouths of the villagers or the old priest, though they cared dearly for their "old Jew," and he sat against their thresholds for long hours till the time came for his evening prayers, and he went off to his small hovel and faced the East and shook his shoulders and tugged his beard like any ancient Jew from the pale of Russia. And although it seemed simple enough to ask him what he meant by his mysterious words, and who his *Petit Rabbin* was, he was not only a gentle old man, but somewhat fearful, and in odd moments forbidding even. And less than ever before could I bring myself to bid him expound his secret, until, wandering with me late one Sabbath night, he pointed to the stars which powder the heaven in the region of Vega, and, speaking of one out of all that multitude, proclaimed suddenly: "Ah, then, do you behold him? The Master? The Little Rabbi? The Little Jew of God?"

"Where?" I whispered. "Where?"

He turned from me impatiently. "Ah! You are blind!" he said. "No eyes! No eyes!"

La Charité was not a lucid place, and, though the pools there are full of clear water, they are so deep that you cannot see their beds. It was not lucid, I mean, in the sense that mystery hovered in the air and suspended from the willow-branches. And the very shrine of the mystery was an old disregarded church hidden away behind a mill. I could not help wondering, for my own part, why this lovely church of the early Gothic time should be so disregarded. It seemed peculiarly unaccountable why the people of La Charité should involve themselves in the expense of building a new church while so gracious a building was falling into decay. And neither the priest nor the villagers made any bones about going over to a church at a distance of several kilometres for the morning Mass, whereas, if they had put their shoulders to the wheel, the old Eglise du Sacré Cœur, as the Gothic semi-ruin was called, might have been

fit for service in a month or two.

The priest was *désoccupé*, as it were, except for his local administrations. The peasants lost any amount of time. Yet the repair of the Sacré Cœur seemed to be a matter which did not enter into consideration.

Why? Why was this? It was true that the roof was beginning to let in water. But that could have been repaired quickly enough. The windows were sound—or all but one. This was a window of such stained glass as I have seen nowhere among my wanderings, whether in Chartres or in Ulm, in York or in Regensburg. I do not add as a mere afterthought the fact that this window was not sound. It was something other than a window. That I felt at once, not merely because a great hole gaped across its evil magnificence, so wantonly that I realised that it had been broken of set purpose, but because the window itself seemed to consist of something other than glass, and its dyes to be something more precious and desperate than any cunning mixture of pounded minerals.

I stood one day in the bare aisle, flanked by its soaring arches. I gazed on the window with a sort of terror. Even now, gashed and gaping, it exerted a hypnotic spell. I endeavoured to present to myself the spectacle of that window in its completeness and glory, as it was five hundred years ago, and it might have been ten years ago. I felt at once a constriction at my throat, an evil odour in my nostrils.

I knew then. I knew. I knew that the stained-glass window was at the heart of the secret of La Charité. I knew that that place had not been a house of God when that window hemmed in its western perspective. It was a thing of witchcraft. Not now. Oh, not now. The great blue winds surged in. You saw through the hole the intersection of swallows' wings.

And how then was the old Jew, Jean Pinchas, the last Jew in that country—how was he bound up with the mystery of a Christian church and a remote French village in a hollow among the hills?

I did not ask him bluntly now. It was with an almost conscious cunning, as I was aware, that he skirted all reference to his Master, his Little Rabbi. Nor could I bring myself to ask the priest or the villagers what the meaning was of a window broken, a church abandoned, and an old Jew that wreathed the forehead of a rock with flowers.

I went carefully to work. I told Jean Pinchas tales of all the Jews in the world's strange places—of those that feast upon lotus still in Homer's Island of the Lotophagi; those yellow Jews, with pigtails, on the Mongolian plateaux; of the stout Jews with cigars on Fifth Avenue; the black Jews with tomtoms in the swamps of Abyssinia. And we discussed, not these people only, but their ritual and legends; I learned by slow comparison how the traditional service of these Jews of the "Arba' Kehillot" differed from all others, excepting that it

had great affinities with the Portuguese. I learned of those hymns and poems which they recited once and he alone recites now. We became good friends, that sweet old Jew and I.

Why should I further delay the tale he told me that night thicker with stars than any lawn with daisies? It was a night when lovely airs were abroad, and strings twanged upon invisible instruments. And, when once a chord plucked louder than before, he threw his head back suddenly, and lifted his hand towards a star in the region of Vega, and cried aloud: "O Master, O Little Rabbi—I shall not delay long!"

And this was the tale he told me in that countryside of sleeping pools, where magic suspends from the willow-branches.

"It had been known, my friend, for many centuries," said he. "It had been no secret. That was why the place was haunted by the crying of a boy in the night, and in the morning by the crying of a boy.

"Who was he? From what land do you come that you have not heard his fame? Not more than fifteen years old he was—his confirmation, his *bar-mitzvah*, achieved two years ago. Wiser he was than the greybeards of Livorno or the rabbis of Hamburg. There was not one of the books which was not as open to him as the sky to the noonday sun. Not only the academies of France, but even the ancient academies of Egypt or Babylon, had never known a youth holier than he. He had a skin pale as parchment, and hair black as the jet upon the feet of a raven. But his blood was red with sanctity, urgent with God.

"Now in those days a great artificer lived, and his workshop was in these parts, in the city of Orange. No man was more cunning in the twisting of iron, the carving of stone, the mixing of dyes for stained glass. And it seems certain that this man—Pierre d'Orange his name was—had reached the further boundary of all that may be achieved by natural processes in the domain of beauty. No craftsman in all France was his equal for the illumination of missals or even the stitching of embroidery upon sacred garments. He was a poor man. So much I must say for him. He gave away what money was given to him to scoundrels or poor men, without distinguishing them. He had not the lust for money, but the more terrible lust for beauty. And he had attained all of beauty that was to be achieved in the sweet simple processes of nature.

"Whereupon he betook himself to the dark Sabbatic books, the incantations of the inverse Kabbala, the ritual of Moloch and Beelzebub and of the primal Dionysius, the Dionysius, not of Hellas, but of Thrace. And the request came to him that he should furnish for this church of La Charité its western window. As I have said, he was not a man who loved God. He loved beauty only. And that is why God has never been truly worshipped in that place, for woe of a boy crying in the morning, and a boy crying in the night.

"Obscure and desperate were the recipes which that perverted man learned

out of his books for the fashioning of beauty.

“And the knowledge came to him—— Hold my arm! I am faint! Let me be silent a moment!

“Ah! My heart beats again! So! Let us walk further!

“And the knowledge came to him how the most beautiful window in all the stained glass of the world might be fashioned. And in no other wise than this. How a Jewish lad in the moment of his dying shall be held down in a magic circle by the utterance of the due words; what elements shall be compounded; what herbs gathered under what stars; what resolutions and disintegrations of matter; what persistence of spell and formula.

“So that, when the boy yields up his soul at length, he shall not yield it up to God. It shall be incorporate in the seething brew, among these gross humours of earth. It shall be fixed, perpetually frozen. It shall give the scarlet among the artificers’ dyes the glory of a holy lad’s blood, and the high tints the splendour of his eyes.

“And in the measure that the Jewish lad is a lad of God, opposed therefore to Moloch and sworn foe to Dionysius, in so much the more shall the magnificence be more than the magnificence of comfortable earth or the bright sky.

“Even so, my friend, it came to pass. Even so. And for the five centuries the Little Master was arrested there, who should so long ago have put on white raiment among the companies of God. And no man in these parts did not know it. For at night there was the sound of a lonely boy crying for his own sanctities, and in the morning a lonely boy crying.

“And no Christian durst liberate him, for shall it not be sacrilege for him to do violence to his temple? And no Jew might, for none but a certain one has so dared in all these centuries.

“And no man was happy then in this place. And no man in this place is not happy now.

“And I it was upon a certain midnight came in and cast the stone with all my might, that the boy of the Jews might be free. I it was.

“For a voice said to me: ‘Break the spell of that bad glamour! Thou, the last of the Jews in this region, the last of his kinsmen! Break it, break it, or thou shalt be broken!’

“So I flung the stone into the teeth of the enchantment, straight and terrible at the heart of that corrupt window.

“And there was such a sweep of keen winds, and so splendid a music from beyond the star when the Little Rabbi came from his prison, that for days I lay as one dead. But the Master stood over me, keeping my faint heart beating surely against my return to the earthly day.

“Behold him, O kinsman! Where his hair shines athwart the blue central

star of the summer heavens!

“I shall not delay long, O Little Jew of God!

“Leave me, kinsman, leave me now! I am very tired. . . .”

The sleeping pools slept trancedly under the willows of La Charité.

BISHOPS AND POETS

Albert Wimpole lived alone with his housekeeper in a house by the river. He lived there on sufferance, for books were the real landlords and tenants of the house. There was not a room which was not dizzily crowded with books from floor to ceiling. There was not a passage where you had not to contract your chest as you walked down it, for fear lest an unduly expansive breath might bring down the twelve volumes of a bishop's sermons like theological thunderbolts about you. It was only with difficulty you climbed into your bath, so closely serried were the ranks of books between the bathmat and the taps. It was all Mrs. Shawcross, the housekeeper, could do to wash up the breakfast-things, so preposterously had the books overflowed from kitchen and pantry even to the scullery sink.

And it had to come to a stop. There was no doubt of that. Mrs. Shawcross stood with arms akimbo and tried to glare—as hard as her plump cheeks and kind eyes would let her. Yet still the sinister, inexpugnable armies kept on marching. Still with incredible ingenuity poor little Albert Wimpole found fresh space in attic or cellar for major theologian or minor poet.

For Albert Wimpole was a literary critic, the nicest and kindest literary critic in Town. He had never in his life, or at most once only, been induced to say a harsh word about an author. He felt that a book was the distillation of a man's personality, hence a more sacred thing than the mere man himself; and there was no man or book that did not possess some hidden core of virtue for Albert Wimpole, if only you delved down deep enough. He had on a few occasions tried to sell some of the books he had received for review, for there exist certain dark channels along which review copies may be conducted to some inscrutable anonymous public. But he had been so shamefaced about the transaction that the buyer was not at all certain that little Albert Wimpole had not stolen the books. The truth was that Wimpole was thinking what a poor author might feel if he suddenly walked in and realised that he, Albert Wimpole, had not thought the author's books worth keeping. How mortified, how humiliated, they would both have been! With a catch in his throat Wimpole staggered to the door again.

He had once or twice tried to give the books away, but he found that was even more difficult than selling them.

And so the bishops and the poets crowded the bathroom cistern and the cobwebby space between the ceiling and the gables, and the greenhouses where the long-dispossessed tomatoes had flaunted their unliterary graces.

So it was that there came an occasion when Mrs. Shawcross stood with

arms more resolutely akimbo and glared more ferociously than ever she had stood and glared before. Things had come to an impossible pass. You could not go upstairs to your bedroom without the chance of an avalanche of books carrying you downstairs again. In the middle of the night you might suddenly be awakened by hideous noises like a troop of ghosts in carousal, till you realised that it was only some crazy pagoda of books that had toppled over the landing. The whole house was haunted with books. Time after time little Wimpole had assured her tearfully that he would eliminate. Time after time he would try and start eliminating. Then the old fierce inhibition seized him again. How could you decide which book to retain and which hurl into limbo? Were they not all palpitating flesh and blood? "To-morrow," he said, "to-morrow. I will get rid of some to-morrow." But on the morrow, remorselessly some new storey would be added to this Tower of Babel, and Mrs. Shawcross would find it more difficult than ever before to disengage the baking-powder and semolina from the sermons and sonnets that had invaded her larder-cupboard.

So, on the day previous to her departure, Mrs. Shawcross issued an ultimatum, and there was no doubting the rigour of her resolution this time. Wimpole had never quite seen that set in her jaw before, nor that steely light in her eyes. Mrs. Shawcross's favourite niece was expecting a happy addition to her family, and Mrs. Shawcross had asked permission to absent herself from Mr. Wimpole's service for six days, "to help, like . . ."

"And if," added Mrs. Shawcross, "by the time I come back you 'ave not started helimitating, all I can say is, *I'll show you helimitate!* I'll helimitate myself! The moment I come in, I takes my bag in my 'and and goes out prompt. So there, Mr. Wimpole. Satisfactory as we 'ave been to each other all these years, and our tastes agreeable . . . but for them . . . for *them* . . ." She could not bring herself to enunciate the distasteful word "books," and disappeared in time to prevent that steely light in her eyes melting in a mist of tears.

So Albert Wimpole set himself to eliminate. He remembered the scant success he had had in selling or giving away any of his books. He felt he could not renew efforts so dishonourable. Let no other man, at least, participate in his treason. So the idea occurred to him that he would bury some of the books—those that seemed in some respect to have embodied the message or raptures of earlier writers without recognisably improving on them. Had not the mortal shells of princes and poets been consigned to earth's spacious bosom? What nobler tomb was there? He set to digging a pit between the cucumber-frames. He never realised how refractory a substance earth's spacious bosom was wrought of. The sweat poured copiously down his cheeks. He felt his old lumbago getting hold of him again. He did not remember having spent a more unpleasant day in his life. And what was there to show for it at the end of it

all? He had managed to entomb one dean and two canons, and long regiments of archbishops, bishops, prebendaries, deans, canons, and vicars were still jostling for interment—not to mention the minor poets academic, the minor poets insurgent, the blank versifiers, the vers-librists, the lily-and-languor poets, the poets of the sardine-tin and dust-heap.

Elimination by burial had been so lamentable a failure that he would have put the whole idea of elimination out of his head if he had not been obsessed by a figure of Mrs. Shawcross standing ominous in the doorway: "I'll show you heliminate! I'll heliminate myself!"

So he made a huge fire and loaded it up with poets and bishops. Had not fire been the one worthy immolation of the great library of Alexandria? Had not Virgil and Dido for ever glorified that most terrible and exquisite of deaths? Could Canon Norcross, within reason, complain?

And the chimney caught fire and the fire-engines had to come and put the fire out, and Albert Wimpole had to pay a large fine, and he felt that elimination by fire was a more lamentable failure even than elimination by burial.

That night, that very night, she was returning. He sat wedged in between four piles of books and his desk, his head between his hands. He had laboured so stalwartly and had nothing, nothing at all to show for it, save a few charred corpses of books in the hearth and a little mound of turf between the cucumber-frames. "The moment I come in"—the tones soared in a crescendo of warning—"I takes my bag in my 'and and goes out prompt." His labours produced no more appreciable effect on those piled pyramids than the nibbling of a fly. What else, what else, what else was left to do?

And at that moment it was that he bethought himself of the sack of apples that a friend had sent him in from the country that morning. He tottered out to the larder and emptied the apples on the floor, then fervently stuffed the sack with books—any book that came to hand, so long as it was too heavy to keep afloat. Rats in a trap, he thought dismally: rats in a trap. He blushed with shame. He could not commit the indecency of drowning them by day. So he waited till it was dark, then crept out fearfully along the lane to the river. The sack was very heavy. The sharp corners of the books prodded him reproachfully in the back. He felt like a detestable uncle in a fairy story depositing the corpses of the nephews and nieces consigned to his care. Nobody was in sight upon this deserted stretch of tow-path on this bitter night. Breathing hard, he lifted the sack and thrust it from him into the river. It fell with a mournful splash—so many ardent dreams quenched, so many worthy homilies denied for ever to this sinning world. He crept back home again with shaking knees. A twig snapped under his feet. He started. Some dead leaves hanging from a bough brushed against his forehead. It was like a phantom

curse from one of the drowned bishops. A twig snapped louder than before. Who was that? Had somebody witnessed his infamy? Only a twig. He wiped his clammy brow. Thank God, thank God, he was home again!

Now at last he could stand up to her. "Mrs. Shawcross . . ." he might say. He crawled towards his desk among the piled books. The air was thick with the outraged presences of the drowned dead. He switched on the light. They capered fantastically into the dark corners. Half an hour passed. An hour. Her train was late to-night . . . A ring at the door. But she had her own key. Had she mislaid it? He stumbled out again to the front of the house. Two vast men loomed up from the blackness.

"What do you want?" he asked, startled.

"We want to give yer back summat as belongs to you."

"What do you mean?"

"This 'ere sack, matey. And don't 'oller too loud, neether, or we'll get the 'tecs on your track sooner than none of us wants."

"'Tecs. Detectives? My dear good fellows . . . Don't bring those books in, I tell you! I've just got rid of them! I tell you they're books! What will Mrs. Shawcross say? You're making a mess of the whole place! O dear! O dear!" wailed Albert Wimpole.

The two vast men had pushed him aside, dragging after them the soaked sack. They made their way to the study, for the only light in the house shone there. Wimpole followed behind them, wringing his hands.

"I tell you they're only books, gentlemen," he wailed. They grinned at him knowingly. They lifted their fingers to their noses. "What do you think it is?" he cried, in sudden alarm.

"Do you deny," they said, "as this 'ere sack belongs to you? Would you deny it in a court er law?" They turned the reading-lamp on the lettering that sprawled across the sack—name and full address luridly red in that pallid light.

All of a sudden the humour of the situation struck him overwhelmingly. Albert Wimpole screeched with laughter. "I tried to bury them," he choked, "and it wouldn't work. I tried to drown them. Those poor, poor books!" he spluttered.

"Books!" the bigger man snarled suddenly. "Stow that game, or we'll knock your teeth in, see?" Wimpole's laughter died on his lips. "What do you think it is?" he whispered.

"Who are you tryin' to come it acrorst? Think we don't know a murderer when we sees one?"

A murderer! Wimpole trembled. With what desperate aptness they had described him. How many bishops, how many poets, had he miserably done to death that night? His knees shook.

"You think there's a corpse in that sack?" he whispered.

“Think? We *knows!*”

“Not one!” said Wimpole. “Fifty!”

The big man started forward, lifting his fist. Wimpole cowered back into a corner. His teeth chattered with fright. The big man stopped. “ ‘Ow much do you offer us to keep our mouths shut?”

“How much,” breathed Wimpole, “do you want?”

There was a moment’s pause, a hideous æon it seemed to Wimpole. It was the moment at which the key turned in the lock. A familiar heavy foot pounded into the lobby.

Wimpole suddenly sprang to his feet. “Mrs. Shawcross! Mrs. Shawcross!” he shrieked with the whole force of his lungs. “Help! Help!”

Vast and forbidding, Mrs. Shawcross stood within the doorway.

“And ’oo, may I ask, are these *gentlemen?*” She put an unkindly emphasis into the last word, but not half so unkindly as the stare with which she fixed them. The two gentlemen looked round wildly. There was no escape. They would sooner have dared to charge a mad bull than Mrs. Shawcross, ominous and grandiose, her arms akimbo.

Mr. Wimpole explained. Mrs. Shawcross’s mouth set harder and harder; her eyes stiffened into steel.

“So you was tryin’ to get round my poor Mr. Wimpole?” she asked. “And ’im after all these years at last makin’ an honest effort to get rid of them books! Open that sack!” she commanded. “You can’t make more mess than you’ve made already, and I know ’oo’s goin’ to clear *that* up, and it ain’t Mrs. Shawcross!”

One or two soaked bishops and soused poets slid stickily out upon the carpet from the opened sack. “Do it up again!” she bade. “And first stuff a few more in it. You can carry a few more than my Mr. Wimpole. Now come along with me to the pantry and we’ll get another sack or two.”

The two gentlemen followed meekly as lambs.

“Mr. Wimpole,” she said, “you can be gettin’ together all the books you don’t want up and down the place. These gentlemen ’ave kindly volunteered to take ’em all down to the river and drown ’em for us!”

Wimpole turned virtuously to the tottering pagodas. Sack after sack passed between the house and the river. Hour pursued laborious hour. The two gentlemen had never worked harder in all their lives before. Their backs ached, the sweat poured from their faces. Grimly Mrs. Shawcross presided over them. A first streak of grey dawn paled upon the river.

“And now,” said Mrs. Shawcross, “that there’s room to turn round in this ’ouse, perhaps somebody would care for a rasher of bacon?”

“Very kind of you, to be sure!” said the two gentlemen gratefully. “Thank you, ma’am!”

THE INN

There was nothing to arouse my friend Walton's agile suspicions of the extraordinary. He was wandering somewhere in the Cotswolds with his usual desultoriness, and there was a thirst upon him. So he flung himself through the doorway of the inn with a precipitancy which the event showed indecorous. Indeed, at the very threshold he stopped short suddenly. In a large undefined stone-paved room no light burned excepting a feeble paraffin oil-lamp suspended over a low table in the room's centre. The lamp illumined a woman with loose hair and bony fingers, busied over a basin of water and the washing of several earthy and monstrous cabbages. Nothing, thought Walton, but to withdraw and try another door, when the lady of the cabbages said genially, "Come right in, sir; take a seat!" Then a clot of darkness took tongue and proclaimed, "Evenin', sirr!" At an opposite corner the gloom again became vocal with "Seasonable weather we're 'avin', sirr, for the time o' year!"

"Good evening!" replied Walton rustically, feeling his way into the room with his stick. What crops were functioning now, anyhow? Corn was always, he decided, safe. It was an admirably undifferentiated term, and it covered generously any of the phases of its history which might at the moment be pertinent. "Corn's doing fine!" he said resolutely, but a sharp ear might have detected the slightest quiver of mistrust in the assurance of his last syllable.

"That it do!" said darkness.

"Unusual good!" said darkness antiphonically.

"And what is it I may get for you?" asked the lady of the cabbages, skilfully eliminating an earwig from a crumpled leaf.

"A pint for me," said Walton, "and for the gentleman there—and there," Walton nodded vaguely.

"Thank you kindly," said darkness suddenly, and in a direction for the first time vocal.

"Most kindly!" said the corn-corroborative voice.

"My best respects," uttered a tangled beard.

It was a most extraordinary thing. Barrels, beams, a clothes-press, resolved themselves, as Walton's eyes mastered the curious lights and darkneses of the room, into successive old men grateful for Walton's indeterminate hospitality. The lady lit a candle and retired into an adjacent cellar. "Christopher!" she called sharply. An infant detached itself from an apparently casual collection of arms, legs, and heads under the table. It waddled in the direction of a cellar and returned stately with a large mug of beer foaming indistinctly in the strange gloom. Carefully the two small fat hands proffered Walton his beer,

accompanying it with a curtsy of surprising dignity. Then the infant—its hair was like honey and its eyes large and violet, perhaps, if there was any distinguishing of colour—waddled back to the cellar to repeat the performance. After a time the lady had filled the correct number of mugs. She returned to the bar with beer-mugs growing about her in a sort of cellular coral formation. They grew in layers up her arms and, it seemed, about her neck. Hand after grizzled hand stretched forward to disintegrate her. Then she sat down again to her earwigs and cabbages.

There was silence. Only the noise of beer flowing and an occasional smack of lips. Walton racked his brains furiously to remember what they did to corn when it had stopped growing. His mind was a complete blank on the subject. He smacked his lips to fill in the interval. Then from several feet behind him came the creak of a door, the shuffling of feet. The feet issued into the room, and not for one moment did they rise from the level of the floor. An old man, incredibly bent, belonged to them. He entered the tiny circle of the lamplight. It fell upon a beard at least a foot in length and a head inclined queerly upward from the nape of the neck.

“There’s a stranger here, Alice. I *knew* there was a stranger here!” he intoned. It was a voice cracked and sweet with extreme age, but an indisputable refinement hung about the accent and the articulation of each syllable. “Alice, why didn’t you tell me?”

“Old and silly!” whispered a very old man to Walton. “Lost ’is wits, ’e did, thirty years ago an’ more!”

“Strangers always like to talk to me!” protested the newcomer. “I’ve been to a country no one’s ever been to before.” The lamp fell on eyes rimmed with a bricky redness. The pupils had hardly more colour than the parchment-yellow of the whites they were set in. They looked unblinkingly through the lamplight, beyond it . . .

“Where is the stranger?” the old man asked. No one said a word. He lifted his eyes to the ceiling and waited a moment. Then he swivelled his tottering knees straight in Walton’s direction, and walked towards him. “*Here* you are!” he said. He reached forward with the palms of both hands and passed them down Walton’s forehead and cheeks.

Then the voice of Alice pealed like a trumpet. “Out you go, granfer! The gentleman will send you a beer out there! Do you hear? A be-er, out the-ere!”

“I don’t want a beer sent out to me!” murmured the old man, the dry withered fingers brushing like moths’ wings under Walton’s chin. “The gentleman wants to talk to me!”

Walton’s flesh had frozen, yet not with fear nor horror nor any emotion he could define. There was no resolution in him to move his head even an inch

away from those fantastic questing fingers. It seemed that those hands had bathed indeed in the airs of a land whither no voyager had travelled before. The old man's body was stiff with the intensity of his inquisition.

But, swift as a mænad, Alice had left the table of her cabbages. Was good custom to be frightened from the King's Arms by granfer's dodderings? She raised her hand behind the old man's head and drew the blunt edge of her palm two or three times along the nape of his neck. What terror the act evoked for him of something achieved in his past or apprehended in the meagre future before him was beyond divining. The simulation of a blade, was it—a rope? The old man crumpled suddenly into a looser bag of gristle and brittle bones than had first entered the room. A chill passed into the tip of the fingers even as they slid from Walton's cheeks. He tottered towards the hole whence he had issued. "The gen'l'man won' forget ole granfer's beer!" he croaked. The pride and distinction of his voice had passed out of him like the earth's stiffness after a great thaw. There was wet soil about the voice now, cellar mould, graveyard damps.

"The gentleman won't forget, granfer darling!" proclaimed Alice magnificently.

"Good night, granfer!" said the chorus of old men like a forest of tree-tops soughing in the wind.

"Good night!" whispered Walton. Irrelevantly a whole cyclopædia of knowledge concerning the genesis and destiny of hay, wheat, barley, roots, flooded through his mind. But the theme no longer interested him. He sought for the child's hair like honey and the eyes that must be like violets if the light of ordinary day ever penetrated this room. Then he remembered the little clump of flesh that had rolled secretly along the floor towards granfer's dark hole when the old man had wilted into the gloom.

"Christopher!" called Alice. "Come out of that at once! Leave your poor granfer quiet, God bless him!"

"Quiet, God bless me!" called a voice from the outer darkness.

LITTLE GROCER WITH YELLOW HAIR

At last the tired poet had broken free. London, little men with long hair, stout women with short hair—all these were less than spindrift. With hardly a consciousness of feet or direction Richard Curran had wandered somewhere into quiet folds in the West Country. Precise knowledge of his locality did not interest him. He was content to climb to the most exposed places in this undulating land and to box the wind with all the technical manœuvres of Blackfriars, caring not a whit what startled villager might report the appearance of a madman in those parts. London seemed to exude from him in some more ethereal manner than sweat, so that when he walked further, to some astonishing new meadow, or some spinney quick with the fluffy stars of rabbits' tails, he felt himself disembarassed, lithèr, fleeter.

That was the state of mind which led at last to his determination, for one night at least, to do away with every last palliation of civilisation, whose ultimate condensation was, after all, nothing but the pavements and cafés he had abandoned. He determined, in fact, to sleep out under open sky, accepting the comfort not even of a barn or a hayrick. The lee of a hedge, some quiet margin of field sloping to the processional stars—these, and a newspaper wrapped round him on the inner side of his trousers, should more than suffice to keep his exaltation burning through the tranced periods of a late summer night. He would hold his breath when every least sound from every county was quenched, until below the earth's skin of grass, and her flesh of soil, and her bone of rock, he should hear a massive heart toll quietly and enormously like a holy bell at the altar of some incalculable cathedral.

(He sought for a hummock to prop his head, a hummock a little softer than the two or three he had just discarded, a little less powdery than the first. Ah, this was better! It had the correct consistency! Damn! Insects! Ants, were they? This, anyhow, was free of them? Ah, at last! What were we saying? Heart, bell, cathedral! Oh, yes! Of course!)

A time would come when the air was so rarefied that all sound should become audible to him, not merely in its symphonic mass, but in its intricate difference! Not merely obvious ocean booming along its leagues of coast, not merely rivers gliding like huge machines along their well-oiled beds, but first far streams in sedgy uplands, minute wells bubbling courageously among the steely loneliness of topmost rocks. Further, colder than these, the chipped edges of glaciers. A moon uncovering the secrets of their icy hollows . . .

(He began to realise that the sequence of his thoughts was not wholly fortuitous. One newspaper wasn't enough! Why had he thrown away that copy

of the substantial *Times*? Even a mackintosh would have mitigated the growing severity of the experiment. Nevertheless it had its points. It was impossible to call into question how stimulating it all was to a jaded London imagination. Icy hollows, we were saying . . .)

From under the heavy bosom of the glacier a stream came shuddering into the naked air and slipped from boulder to boulder, more and more terrified of its haunted sub-glacial origins as it ran further from them, to the remote caress of grasses and the company of a thousand lowland streams on pilgrimage to their single altar and their joint dissolution. And . . .

There was no doubt about it. Three of his toes were already irredeemably lost. Another was going. What poor remnant of members should remain to him when this abominable experiment was ended, he was too numbed to calculate. A needle of pain shot across his numbness.

With one frantic howl Richard Curran sprang to his feet. "Anywhere!" he shrieked. "Prison, workhouse, infirmary! I'm going! Do you hear?" he said, vigorously declaiming against the broad blue wink of Vega. Vega winked broadly and bluely again, then composed herself comfortably to the strummings of the Lyre. But Vega had not lost three of her toes, nor was a fourth in serious danger, despite her inveterate habit of spending the night out. She had no toes to lose, probably. The very tired poet climbed painfully into the road.

But prisons and workhouses were luxuries far too sophisticated for this quietest corner of the Cotswolds. It was after eleven when Richard abandoned his arctic bed. Two hours passed, and three, perhaps, but no sign of prison or workhouse manifested itself. He was cold no longer, but an unutterable weariness sat upon his eyelids. Never in his life before had he known such an extremity of fatigue.

Two o'clock had tolled from some spectral tower when the gods vouchsafed at length their assistance. No sound less lovely than the hoot of a train coughed across the darkness. Dick spurred his lagging feet to new efforts. A village, a small country town even, began to close in on him. Houses all made up of rooms with beds in them. Beds are things you lie on, as soft and warm underneath you as they are soft and warm above. Amazing inventions! You are lifted on four sacred pillars from the mean little crawling winds that glide upon their bellies over the earth's gross surface. Beds are things you have breakfast in next morning. (There was a suspicion of a tear in the poet's eyes, even of a lump in his throat. Breakfast is something you have in bed next morning. Divine concubinage, Bed and Breakfast! How had the Euston Road befouled their sacred meaning! Bed and breakfast! Eiderdown and marmalade!)

None of these things for Richard Curran! Impassive casements and flat

blank doors! Streets with not even a ghost in them to relieve their abysmal voidness! Never a lamp burning! Nothing but—ah, thank God! There again, but nearer, the hoot of a belated train! Or, perhaps, an exceedingly early train. Maybe after all there was a chance of a station waiting-room, of a truck luxurious as Cleopatra's barge. Forward again, then, O failing heart!

An oblong of yellow light blocked itself suddenly against the night's indifference, a few yards down a side street. Obviously, the police station. Should he, then, try his luck at the police station? He halted a moment to consider the question. They would demand explanations, of course. They would slide large notebooks from the rumps of their trousers. Where had he come from? What was his name? His occupation? Notorious what cynics police officers were! Was it likely they'd swallow his tale of the hedge-side hostelry? Black clouds of suspicion would gather about him, and their dissipation would require a brighter beam of mental clarity than he could kindle. What if some haphazard burglary or murder, even, had actually been that night committed? He shuddered. None the less, he tapped at the lighted window feebly once and again. How soon would the broad policeman make his appearance, ask a number of unanswerable questions, and haul him away finally to some subterranean dungeon, furnished with manacles and a heap of straw?

There was quite a lot to be said for manacles and a heap of straw . . .

A door to the left of the window opened. A little figure tripped out of the house and entered the area lit up by its yellow gleam. It illumined a head crowned with hair of the same warm light yellow—surprisingly yellow, surprisingly warm.

"What is it?" said a little sweet voice.

"I say," moaned Richard, "you won't believe me!"

"I will, I will!" said the other. "If you haven't come to murder me or rob me! I should hate that!"

Richard's repudiation was a croak of such bitter laughter that the little yellow-haired man immediately seized his coat-sleeve and tugged him towards the house.

"You're all creaking!" said he.

"Newspapers!" said Richard. "I was trying to sleep out!"

"He, he, he!" laughed the little man. "I too once tried to sleep out with newspapers." They had entered the lobby of his house by now. He pushed Richard into the lit room on their right. "Sit down here on this couch," he said. "I'll just remove these boxes of pastilles!" Case after case of cakes, biscuits, tins of fruit, soared into the upper reaches of the room. There was only enough space left for an old couch, a chair, and a table in front of it, covered with piles of silver, ledgers, and neat sheaves of bills. About the legs of the furniture

clustered smaller boxes, opened and unopened, of chocolates, headache powders, tins of shoe-blackening, cards of safety-pins, boxes of toilet-soaps.

“I really can’t bother you!” protested Richard.

“Tush, tush! You’re thirsty, aren’t you?” said the little man. “I can hear that. You’re thirsty. I can only let you have lime-juice with soda-water. Oh, but lots of soda. Will you wait here?”

“But please——” begged Richard. Tired as he might be, he was conscious what a dubious creature he must appear to even the least suspicious of mortals. “I say!” he called out. But the little man was gone. In a few moments he returned with a siphon, a glass, and a bottle of essence of cordial.

“I told my big brother it was absurd of him,” he complained, “getting measles at his time of life. That’s why I’m up to all hours of the night making up the accounts. Lucky thing, too, you with such a thirst on you!”

“I say, what a brick you are, sir! But let me explain!”

“Tush, tush, *tush!* Haven’t you explained? Sleeping out with newspapers and pretending they’re four-poster beds—oh, you boys, you boys! Measles, if you please! I warned him about going to the Trotters’ only a week after their Ursula was taken off to the cottage hospital. But, gracious heavens! You’re not eating! What are those packets of biscuits for at your feet? And these tablets of chocolate? Wait, I’ve got some cherry cake you ought to like! I’ll be back in a moment!” Once more the yellow hair flickered like a benignant Jack o’ Lantern into the outer gloom.

As his physical strength gradually returned, Richard felt his mind going softer and stupider and more imbecilely ecstatic every moment. If the little man with the yellow hair wouldn’t let him explain, *he* wasn’t going to insist. He would just drink lime-juice and soda and eat cherry cake. If he weren’t so profoundly and blissfully sleepy, he would eat lime-juice and cherry and drink soda cake—(Something wrong there. What? Nothing, nothing!)—he would eat lime cake and drink cherry-soda for days and weeks *and* weeks. His head rocked forward on to his chest. He recalled it with a jerk.

“Just a minute or two!” twittered the little man. “I can’t let you go to bed like this, or you’ll get up ravenous in an hour. Just a slice, won’t you?” Richard obediently devoured a slice of cherry cake, then automatically, with drooping eyes, he held out his hand for another.

“What about some crystallised ginger?” asked the grocer.

“Um!” said Richard.

“More lime-juice and soda?”

Richard nodded.

“And a little preserved fruit to finish with, don’t you think?”

Richard’s eyelids nodded assent.

There followed a last lingering draught of lime-juice. Then a busy little

hand seized Richard's elbow. Then finally the sound of feet passing upstairs—Richard's heavy, rhythmic, hypnotic, the feet of the grocer anxious, attentive.

"Don't worry about your clothes! Fling them anywhere!"

"Um!" pronounced Richard, or a sound even less complicated. "I haven't yet said——" he continued, in syllables muted almost to complete fluidity so that the words sounded like "avery-ezeth . . ."

"Tush, tush!" said the grocer, "with all those accounts waiting to be done. If elderly people *will* get measles . . ." He closed the door very softly behind him.

"I *will*," murmured Richard, "I *will* saythaggu! Thaggu!" he called to the patter of descending feet that came to him incredibly remote and muffled through warm mists of beatitude. "Thaggu!"

No further consciousness supervened. Night must, in the order of nature, have run its course. His next sensation was marmalade and eiderdown. Each constituted in its kind the prettiest of patterns as the light of middle morning streamed between the drawn curtains. Pleasant little virginal rosebuds disposed in pale shimmering fields! Marmalade like an autumn pool overhung with burning beeches, tiny lengths of orange-rind like motionless fish suspended in that liquid amber. Or did a tail flirt suddenly and an agitated fin impel three bubbles of air to the surface of the marmalade-waters?

"It is pleasant," mused Richard, "to be mad; stark raving cherubic mad. *What* comely bacon!" Only the noise of crunched toast followed, and the sound of two cubes of sugar, impeccably white, dropped lazily into an emptied cup.

In the absoluteness of his serenity, all sensation of his individual membership in a social world passed from him. He was nothing less than the social world himself. He contained it. It had no existence apart from him. Art no longer mattered. London was less than a breath. Even the little grocer ceased to exist. The world was composed of the following. He carefully tabulated the composition of the world:

1. Me.
2. Bacon.
3. Toast.
4. Butter.
5. Marmalade.
6. Milk.
7. Sugar.
8. Coffee.

The piety of this exaltation suffused him all the time that he was dressing. That explained why he had no need to seek for his clothes. His clothes sought him. Collar dutifully disentangled itself from shirt. Back-stud placed itself obediently to hand. Sock-suspenders made themselves respectively palpable. The glory did not desert him as he passed downstairs and walked into the street with the fixed, even steps of one entranced. He seemed like a saint called by

the Lord to some ecstasy of martyrdom. He trod on the cobbles of some little market town, busy with hand-carts and dog-carts and wheelbarrows, but upon thorns softer to his flesh than petals and flames that caressed his ankles like summer streams. He might have been three or four miles away from the town when he walked blindly into a cyclist. The cyclist swore. But the divine rhythm of his enchantment was not yet broken. For another hour he pursued his path, attended by this strange nimbus composed out of the softness of the pillar of cloud and the radiance of the pillar of fire.

Then at last the appointed moment came. He heard the jingle of a horse's harness across the nebulous lights of his enchantment. He stopped suddenly. Across the cerulean calm of his eye floated November shadow.

"My God!" said the tired poet, "I didn't tip the chambermaid!"

He took his head between his hands and shook it.

"Which chambermaid?" he asked. Then a further and more heinous enormity struck him. "The hog I am!" he groaned. "The unmitigated hog! I didn't say 'Thank you' after all! I never thanked the little grocer! The little grocer with the yellow hair! The little grocer with the yellow hair whose elder brother's got measles! Hog I am! What can he be thinking? Back, you brute!"

There was, he discovered now, a nail in the heel of his right boot. But that did not reduce the extraordinary pace at which he ran back to the town of the yellow-haired grocer.

It may be that the road he had walked in the company of celestial wings was not the road he ran with a nail in his heel. It may be—but there are dim explanations in my mind which I dare not give shape to in gross words. Richard Curran sought high and low for a little grocer with yellow hair. There was none to be found. No one in these parts had a knowledge of a little grocer with yellow hair whose elder brother had measles.

"But it was magnificent marmalade!" sighed the tired poet. "And whoever toasted toast so crisply? And such comely bacon! And oh, the lovely rosebuds on the irrevocable eiderdown! Lovely little grocer from the West Country!"

THE TATTOOED BIRD

The Knowing One rapped on the panel three times duly. He paused. He rapped three times again. Further down the passage a hulk of darkness swerved.

“That,” said the Knowing One, “is the cop who looks after this joint.” That was the way he put it. But there is no cause for alarm. He disappears almost immediately from this story.

I indicated how impressed I was. The monastic panel clicked inward from the grating.

“O.K., Luigi,” breathed my friend toward the grille. I had a feeling that there were not so many bars and bolts to that door as Luigi manipulated. We entered. We checked our garments. If the ladies who should supply us with . . . yes, no less . . . with our alcohol were more exiguously attired than the lady who checked our garments, this (I decided) was a swimming-school and not a cabaret.

We were, a more and a less demure Hylas, escorted by our nymphs to a table in the corner. Breathe hard. Breathe heavily. Bosomy waves of saxophonic air smite you amidships. Upon the walls, in tiny crystals elaborated on black canvas panels, Leda is wooed by her swan, Europa bestrides her bull.

Oh, very superior, Mr. Knowing One. Oh, so Pompeian. But had this been the second altar of our pilgrimage, not the eleventh, upon this wild, wild night you so hospitably devised for your modest visitor from England, Leda and Europa would more effectively have enchanted me. Understand, do not imagine I am discourteous, ungrateful. So hectically to renew one’s youth—ladies, saxophones, woolpated blarers—and the mere sipping of a highball to be itself a whole lewd saturnalia . . .

But I must get down to it. I was worn out. I remind you—my eleventh cabaret that night. I was tired to death. I wanted to go home and read George Eliot and sleep for thirty hours.

And then I heard the lad’s voice in a lull between the stridencies.

“Ella! Ella!”—the voice of one about whom the slow thick whiteness gathers, his knees, his thighs, his throat. Beyond the twanging shuddering heat, pointed like a funeral meadow of five hundred thousand candle-flames, the unreal palms arise, the camels plod in procession from Cambodia, Tartary, Luthany.

I heard the lad’s voice: “Ella! Ella!” Then I saw the lady’s eyes.

Did I at once realise it was she? Had I been reduced to a sort of hypnotic clairvoyance in the extremity of my fatigue? (Try it yourself—eleven cabarets

in one evening.) Her left shoulder was turned away from me towards an unreflecting surface so that by no mere trick of reflection or such odd refraction as that queer smoky air might have engendered did my physical eyes alight upon the tattooed bird in the sleek magnolia pallor of the flesh there. The bird carries (as Abdullah had forewarned me, and as I confirmed some half-hour later) a leaf in his beak. Within the outline of the leaf Abdullah's name is rendered in the Arab script. So, under his own heart, Abdullah carried the tattooing of a bird, and the leaf that the bird bore in its beak had the name of Ella, pricked in the English script. This Abdullah had showed me that day on the caravan-road across the great Salt Sea that lies under the oasis of Nefta, in Tunisia. That was two years ago. Turning fully round this night from her late lover, she brought into my line of vision the desperate pit under her shoulder where I saw with my bodily eyes the thing I had already seen—the tattooed bird and the leaf and the name, the work of Abdullah's needle. There Abdullah died his first death. Here the lad from New York died a death in his turn, while the kettledrum beat like the drums of the desert wanderers and the saxophone howled like the jackals on the edge of the Chott Djerid.

Yes, yes. I know. It is about time I disentangled these threads. I must transport you, as I myself was transported, to a far land, a minute green world between two wildernesses, to the oasis of Nefta in the southern marches of Tunisia. A haunted place. Avoid it. It weaves potent spells for all but a lady cold as ice, cold as Ella, a block of exquisite unmelting ice in the nadir of this burning noon. Nefta, insidiously, incomparably beautiful, on the edge of the Chott Djerid, that enormous barren inland sea of salt. When the sun bleaches all colour from the world, the endless lagoon stretches away and away like a snow-steppe. The whole air is uneasy with mirage, hovering between the desert of sand and the waste of salt marsh. No, the Chott is not a salt marsh even. Not a single green thing emerges from those baleful depths. No bird's wing ever casts a shadow there. The beauty and prodigality of the oasis itself are enhanced by these lamentable juxtapositions. Nowhere is such greenness. Nowhere is water cooler. Nowhere do birds sing or fruit cluster so turbulently. In this place it was I met Abdullah. I am about to present no girls' high school sheikh. He was no fantasiast of bedouin horsemanship. He was no more than an oasis tout, a guide through the tangled thickets of the oasis and the quaking salt-pits of the wilderness. No more than that—one of the twenty feckless bedouin youths hanging about Nefta with camels or asses for the sweet tourist to ride upon.

How had I distinguished him from his brethren? I had not. It happened so. I wanted to be alone after a fierce desert forenoon. The touts would have none of my solitude. They wheedled. They jeered. I flung them off angrily. Abdullah approached me. It was at that lovely angle of the waters where a great palm-

tree throws up its five trunks like a hand. He twitched my sleeve. I turned and showed my teeth. I must have looked nasty. I snarled.

Now I am possessed of that useless and injurious quality of knowing when I have wounded my fellows, and just how deeply. He recoiled like a sick dog, quivering, then he shambled off. Then he turned again.

“Why are you discontented?” he whispered. (They speak a sort of French in this region, with some decorations borrowed from the Sicilian dialect of Trapani.)

I looked at him. I was aware at once some deadly sickness was upon him. But not of the body. He was bedraggled and miserable, but he was a well-set-up lad still. I stayed and stared. What the devil ailed the fellow? He was precisely everything that the tourist ladies looked for on their desert journeys, perched under their white toupees. He was—he had been, rather—a sheikh, a Valentino. A handsome young beast of an Arab. And that is unusual. The oasis Arabs squint. They are rachitic. They have sores. But this young man, who neither wheedled nor jeered—what had happened to him? He’d gone all to pieces. I stared. What then? He was shambling off.

“All right!” I growled at him. “I’ll see your damned *corbeille*, if I’ve got to!” (Their *corbeille* is the beauty-spot of the oasis, an interpleating of trees and waters. Abdullah, at least, will not show you these when you make your way thither.)

He began at once. “Ella! Ella! Do you know Ella?”

“How the devil——” I started.

Again this queer puppy-like shaking took him. I swore at myself. A fine prospect life held for me if the secret woes of every damned tout were going to make me queasy. I altered my tone. “How should I? Cretin that you are!” I said mildly.

“But you are from America!” he said.

I denied the impeachment.

“But you are going!” he insisted, with an intuition for which I cannot make up my mind whether to give him no credit or much.

“How not?”

“You will see her,” his voice rang, “you will see Ella! Tell her——”

I bade him not be a fool. I told him—I had no statistics by me, but I told him there are many millions of ladies who live in America. How should I see Ella? But he had no doubt of it. “Tell me,” I requested, “about the people who live in this place.” “Ella,” he began at once. I interrupted him. What is there to see? He told me what things had impressed Ella. No other thought was entertained in the compass of his being but this lady. Who was she? Ella. She came from America. He had no other data. (She had apparently even given him

a visiting card, and a kindly German gentleman had taken it to Tunis to find out something about her from an agency there. But the kind gentleman had not remembered to do anything about it. Abdullah had nothing but the memory of her, white and cool, and her name pricked out within the outline of a leaf upon his left ribs. !)

I had the sense to reconcile myself speedily to Abdullah's obsession. The tale of this queer passion had not less in it to bemuse me, I realised, than Nefta and the palm-trees, the rivulets, than the Chott Djerid and the smoking forests of mirage. I eked out the Arab's ramblings with the cynical flouts and winks of his brethren sprawling outside the cafés in the evening. Two years ago, before the lady's appearance, Abdullah was a great beau, I gathered; very much of a desert masher. Yet, as I have said, he still kept the tatters of his state about him. And when I saw Ella, I should be quite sure, he said . . .

She had come unaccompanied to Nefta, I gathered. One of the touts had a tale to tell of a lieutenant in the French navy who had drowned himself at Bizerta. That's as it may be. The Arab may have been lying. There is no doubt that Ella was. It is not difficult to believe that she was charmed for a few days by the handsome creature who had offered her his services—liberally. She may have been infatuated. It is hard to understand why otherwise she would have submitted her waxen skin to the harsh jabs of the lad's needle.

He took me to the place where she had stretched her length in the ragged shade of the vans of a banana-tree. Here it was. He lived over again that ineffable hour. During the evening they wandered about among the milky channels that gathered under the heaped sand-mounds of the *corbeille*. At night, when the world slept, and only the camels bickered under their noses and the jackals yapped away among the unprotected graves, he entranced even these by the reedy fluting of his desert pipes. The white girl lay half across his thighs, her face shut like a flower.

And then news came to Ella that she must return to Tunis for a few days. "But not more than that, honey. I'll be back in a week at most. Kiss me, my little sheikh. Not like that. See, like this! Like this!"

"Even so. Like this! Like this! In a week? So long as a week? But you surely will come again?"

"Sure, honey! Don't ask silly questions!"

But of course she did not come again. She had as much intention of coming again as she had of swimming over to Pantelleria. The idea of her return took firm root, as you have seen, in the young man's brain. He had lost all sense of the time that had elapsed since she had left the oasis. It was an hour ago, a century ago. He would look at a bird's shadow thinking their bird preceded her, the creature he had traced upon her flesh and his own flesh, with a leaf in its mouth bearing their names. He would start forward towards some clearing

in the thicket as if they had arranged she was to issue thence. I realised how futile it was to try to dispel his *idée fixe*. I was quite happy to moon about for a few days in the square and the hot, odorous gardens; and then I insisted quite firmly that he was to bring me a camel over early one morning and lead me down to the Chott, to the lean caravan road that crosses the leprous wilderness there. (There is no place in Africa, I have said, where the mirage is more splendid or more desolate.)

He came, leading in a rather handsome beast. For himself, he preferred to walk, he said. On my word, he was almost spruce that morning. It was not Friday, yet he had washed. He had a rose stuck behind his ear. He lifted his head up from his collar-bone. We set forth.

It was very hot. We had several miles to cover before we got down to the uneasy shore. Hardly a word between us. Yes, he spoke just once.

“Look!” he cried, pointing behind us.

I turned round to the oasis, a shield of indigo leather against a sky pulsing like a lizard’s throat.

“Look where?” I asked. But he seemed to have forgotten his gesture. His face was turned towards the lake.

“Do you think . . .” he said. He paused. “Do you think she might come today?” I shut my jaw grimly. “To hell!” I muttered. We went on our way. Sand gave way at length, but imperceptibly, to a white scurf of salt. The air danced. The heat moaned. Upon the dead verges of the horizon blue pools spread and diminished, unreal palms arose and dispersed. A line of elephants bore down upon us, their trunks waving in a clumsy ritual. A moment later they were less than midges. There was no winged or crawling atomy upon these acres of death.

“How much further, Abdullah?”

“Not much further!”

“Is it safe the whole way?”

“It is safe the whole way.”

We continued. The dizzy nightmares jiggled, the slow nightmares crumbled. Of a sudden the camel under me stopped and shivered, turned his head and howled. He thrust the great pads of his forelegs into the briny sand.

“Hello! Abdullah!”

He had been following me for some time. He was not behind me now. He had gone off from the firm causeway upon a sort of humpy peninsula to the left. His arms were lifted before him. His eyes shone.

“Abdullah, you fool! Come back!”

He seemed for some moments to be walking upon the salt surface without any contact between his bare feet and the lake. But he walked no longer now. The stuff was about his ankles. It was about his knees. His arms were still

rigid, lifted before him. His eyes shone.

“Ella!” he cried. “Ella!” He saw the white lady. She smiled at him. About his shoulders now, about his chin, his lips.

A sweat came out upon the skin of the beast under me. He whinnied like a hurt horse. But I was dry and hard as a sunbaked rock. Only my ears were sensitive. The drums shivered like wires to a sound which moaned across the wide blank of the morning.

“Ella! Ella!”

She turned her body round upon him, the dazed wretch from Manhattan. “Ella!” he called, but she did not hear him. Someone had entered that moment. The man knew or did not know her. He looked at her through narrowed eyes from under Leda’s panel, where Leda breathed sweet stupidities into her swan’s ears. The magnolia whiteness of the lady’s flesh, under her shoulder-blade. The name of Abdullah was pricked out of the leaf the bird held in his beak. But Abdullah will not receive that token.

THE BONDAGE OF JACK

Jack is now in a bank. He is the most respected senior cashier in a bank of almost painfully upright standing. And that is the paradox. From the story I am about to relate of his early years you would have anticipated the development of Jack into some sort of a gentleman cracksman with a predilection towards villanelles.

It all happened long ago—the time when you bought “Penny Readings from the Poets” for strictly one penny. He was a wistful little man, who had numbered nine uncoloured years. He was the sort of child whom you inevitably called “little man.” That was part of his early tragedy. And every day as he ambled dully along towards the Longton Elementary School, and dully ambled home again, Squilchins, the booksellers, arrested his steps. Booksellers as Squilchins were, they sold a somewhat illiterate assortment of articles. Fans, toys, engines, back combs, cigarettes, tooth-paste, texts, and firescreens figured largely. One dusty corner contained a few books and the week’s comic papers—hilarious productions in yellow, blue, and red paint which always refused to coincide with its allotted channels.

There was a day on which the series of “Penny Readings from the Poets” made their appearance and Messrs. Squilchins were kind enough to expose gratis two pages each from the work of three favoured poets, Tennyson, Keats, and Longfellow by name. What precisely the psychological process was in a young gentleman destined for the sober glories of a bank I do not pretend to analyse. But the fact remains that the exposed poems of Messrs. Tennyson, Keats, and Longfellow fastened upon Jack’s heart and mind and would not be shaken free. When Miss Phelps asked him what a vulgar fraction was, he declared that the squirrel’s granary was full. His elder sister, properly named Eliza by her parents, he addressed as Oriana. He took consolation in the thought that life was but an empty dream when Bill, his stepbrother, tweaked his ear or kicked him suddenly from behind. Days and weeks passed. Tennyson, Keats, and Longfellow had no other devotee at their penny shrines than Jack. In twisted paper firescreens and “God is Love”-s the traffic was uproarious. Tennyson faded in the sun, Longfellow and Keats became woefully fly-blown. No monk’s missal, laboriously gilt and illumined and enamelled, was lovelier than to Jack his desiccating poets. And what glories remained unrevealed in those pages virginal as the crater of the moon? Ladies more sonorous than Oriana? Life redeemed, perhaps, from its empty dream into a magnificent validity? (I translate into a more adult language Jack’s amorphous thought.) How could he sail those uncharted seas? Threepence?

Colossal sum? Who could conceive the pyramidal accumulation of such wealth?

So Jack stole threepence. Understand me. I do not exonerate Jack. Not even to buy poetry. . . . Not even to help a blind cripple. . . . And what must the ghost of Longfellow have thought of the situation? I state the blunt fact. Jack stole threepence. This was how he did it. Every Monday morning he was given threepence to bank with Miss Phelps at the Savings Bank in Longton Elementary School. If, instead of banking the threepence . . .

Several Mondays passed before he dared commit the felony. Then at last the morning came. With such stammerings and blushings Jack reported to Miss Phelps the loss of his bank-book that a less shortsighted lady would have instituted prompt inquiries. "Find it, and bring your two threepences next week!" was all she said. She gathered in the sequence of levies crossly.

After school that day, with threepence burning in his trousers pocket and his bank-book suspended on a string, burning under his shirt, Jack dragged his heavy feet into Squilchins, the booksellers. "Please, ma'am," said Jack, "them three poetry books what's in your window, please!"

"Threepence, please!" said Miss Squilchins.

"Threepence, please!" repeated a voice balefully in his ear. Jack's knees shook. A sweat stood on his poetry-pursuant brow. Stepbrother Bill! One could, with less experience of Bill than Jack, have anticipated it. Bill had the nose for that sort of thing.

"Ain't no use hiding nothing!" said Bill.

"Don't tell!" moaned Jack.

"Not me, sure!" said Bill friendlily, putting his arm through Jack's. Out it all came. You could not have imagined a more transformed Bill, all smiles and winks. And it lasted. No tweaks of the ear, no sudden kickings. There were plans and intrigues whispered in dark corners. (Bill was having a fine time.) Above all, what to do with the incriminating bank-book? At last, late one night, the lads tore it into eight pieces. Each took four of them and dropped them separately into a sewer. A little of the load that had settled upon Jack's heart lifted. That, anyhow, was out of the way. And it was now for Moated Mariana . . . and standing with Keats tiptoe on a little hill . . .

But it was not so simple. Bill did not for nothing abandon the rapture of his tweakings. "Jack, do this!" said Bill softly. "Jack," Bill invited preemptorily, "give me your share or . . .!" Was there a demur? Bill lifted his eyebrows. Was there still a hesitation? "Gank-gook!" said Bill, disguising the consonants of revelation from stepmother, but quite effectively turning the screw upon Jack. Rarely was this clouded threat ineffectual. But if ever some spirit of brazen contumacy possessed Jack, "Bank-book!" pronounced Bill, with painful clarity of consonant and prolonged articulation of syllable. Then it was an ooze of

terror gathered about Jack's brow. Then, like a hunted beast, he would gaze towards the impendent terror of stepmother. Then, lest the hideous significance of Bill's utterance dawn upon her, he would fly to perform his master's behest. For never to Mephistopheles was Faust more firmly bounden. Miserable Jack! Heir, like Adam, to so many misfortunes because of thy one lapse from grace. Years passed. The actual details of the bank-book episode dimmed with time. But never did the potency of Bill's incantation relax its hold. Jack's slavery became automatic. It was less fear now than the mystic inherent properties of those two harsh syllables which maintained the manacles about Jack's limbs.

Then the great day came. It came heralded by no trumpets. It was merely a grey morning, like many grey mornings. Nor was the request Bill made at the point of a mere "Gank-gook!" peculiarly outrageous. Yet there was a sudden rush of blood to Jack's head. He lifted himself straight as a young tree. "No," said Jack, his eyes shining. "What?" Bill said amusedly. "Bank-book!" amended Bill. "No!" cried Jack, fists clenched. "Oho!" followed with a long whistle. "Say, Jack, who stole the bank-book?"

Then from Jack—the grand moment of all his days! "Who stole the bank-book? I stole the bank-book!" Then he turned. "Mother!" said he. "I want to tell you . . ." Not gloating over his stolen poets, not receiving urbanely his elevation to senior cashierdom, was Jack lovelier than now.

And Bill? There was Bill, ashen grey, crumbled in his corner. There was Bill shuffling his heavy feet into the outer darkness of his defeat. Nor is all ended with Jack. An hour later you see him making a fire of chips and newspapers. When the sacrificial fire is blazing at last, from the recesses of his pocket come forth the doomed and beloved volumes. Like Patroclus upon his funeral pyre burn Keats and Longfellow and Tennyson. Over their incineration suddenly Jack collapses. You see his eyes streaming and his shoulders shaking with the sobs of his deliverance.

Yes, upon reflection, I think I begin to understand now why Jack was to develop into a highly respected cashier in the most unimpeachable of banks.

BARE-KNUCKLE LOVER

This is the tale of a bare-knuckle prize-fighter who was a coachman and fell in love with a high-born lady. Out of his love for her he challenged a great champion, and fought him to the death. This happened long ago. Nearly two centuries have gone by since then.

It is an old tale and a new tale. It was old in the hanging gardens of Babylon, when some lady of Nebuchadnezzar's Court smiled at the stalwart guardsman by the gate. It will be the latest word in New York scandal next week, when some lady of society sets forth with her chauffeur and does not come back again.

George Stevenson's great fight and his last fight took place in February 1741. It was not only his bid for the championship of England. It was the climax of as romantic and tragic a love-story as you are likely to find in the panting pages of any swooning poet. Only two years before that time he had been nothing more than a stable-lad in a big house at Carthwaite, in Yorkshire. The village bullies were aware of him and afraid of him. He had a fist like a sledge-hammer. The men visitors to the big house were aware of him; for, though the lad had had no lessons, he was a great hand with the quarterstaff and the broadsword; as able as many a fine gentleman that had gone up to London for the season and taken lessons at Mr. Figg's famous academy. The women visitors were aware of him, too. When they were shown round the stables, it was difficult for them not to be aware of a stable-lad who was as handsome as an Apollo and as strong as Hercules. They were all the more aware of him because he was so unaware of them. He would go on brushing and combing his horses, and talking horse-language into their ears, as if he were along with his team at the desert heart of Tartary, and there was not a female woman within a thousand miles. And the women tittered and blushed and turned away crossly. And he went on combing and brushing his horses. "Coom along, Bess! Now then, lass, steady!"

But there was one among them who seemed to be no more aware of him than if he were the stump of a tree. This was Madame Turleigh, the young mistress of the house. When she asked him to saddle her horse, her voice was as hard and cold as ice. As for the stable-lad, he was about as much aware of her as a shoe is of its wearer—a thing to be used, or, if need be, cast aside.

He did not know, her husband did not know, that when the handsome stable-lad helped her to mount into her saddle, his touch went like fire through her veins. There were one or two of the visitors who suspected something, perhaps. They could not help noticing that when young Stevenson attended

upon her, a deep flush spread slowly across her cheeks, though she held herself as aloof and stiff as a rod. They noticed that her wits went wandering, even if the gallantest cavalier was paying her the most elegant of his compliments.

And, indeed, if they noticed anything, they did not blame her. It was not a strait-laced age. Not all the gentlemen could swear that they had never kissed their wives' tiring-maids. Not all the ladies could swear that no arms other than their husband's ever embraced them.

As for Madame Turleigh, poor creature, she was less to be blamed than most of them. She was her husband's second wife, and might have been his daughter. He loved her in a way; it was impossible not to. But he loved his horses more. He kept the finest stud in Yorkshire. The more he loved his horses, the more he looked like them, smelled like them. He was a merchant, and was always going off to London. Nobody quite knew what sort of merchandise took him to London so frequently. At all events, he never took his wife with him. Whether he was so jealous of her charms that he was afraid to let them loose among the London blades, or whether he thought she would be superfluous there, she stayed behind. She was young. She was beautiful. She was lonely.

So she fell in love with her under-coachman. (He had been promoted from stable-lad by this time.) It has happened before. It will happen again.

A day dawned in the white winter of 1739. It was a day that was to end strangely, and sweetly, and bitterly, for the high lady and the menial. Sir Richard was away in London that day. He was always away in London. Madame Turleigh was going to a ball that evening. All day long she tried to make up her mind whether she should go or not. She would be bored, bored with their eternal minuets, gavottes, pavaues. But if she stayed at home she would be bored, too. Her maids were standing about, fluttering and twittering nervously. On days like this her temper was very uncertain. In the late afternoon, the head coachman's wife begged to be allowed to see her. The head coachman had been trying to get up for the last two hours. He was absolutely swollen with gout. He could not put foot to ground. What would madame do?

What would she do? Her eyes sparkled with anger. She stamped on the ground furiously. "Tell him to get the coach ready at once!" she stormed. Then suddenly she stopped. Her heart seemed to stop beating for some moments. She turned away so that the woman should not see the pallor and the blushes that chased each other on her cheeks.

"Your husband is excused," she said. She tried to make her voice as indifferent as possible. "Bid Stevenson get the coach ready! He is to take me in his stead!"

There was no woman at the ball that night more brilliant or beautiful than

she. Her foot was the smallest and deftest. Her cheeks flamed. It might have been the wintry air through which she had been driven. It might have been that some wild spirit had taken possession of her. The men looked from her to their wives, and looked away again with distaste. "How is it possible," they asked themselves, "for that old curmudgeon to leave her? How can he bring himself to it?"

She went before the others. They must excuse her, she said. She had ten long miles before her. The road was frosty and would be difficult going. There was no moon. "Another dance, dear lady!" they implored her. "Just one more!" She would not yield. She was aching to be gone, into the dark night, the frosty starlight, the adventure that awaited her.

It had not gone unnoticed that the man who drove her was not her pot-bellied, red-nosed coachman. It was another and a comelier one. The women whispered to each other behind their fans. The men nudged each other with their elbows.

"Truly, madame!" they insisted. "We cannot allow you to go off unattended! The road to Carthwaite is dark and dangerous. There are highwaymen about! They are well acquainted with the news of to-night's ball! May we attend you?" "May I?" "May I?" the voices came.

"Thank you, indeed!" she said. She lifted her head into the air. "I am well enough attended!" She would have liked a moment later to bite off the tip of her tongue for her indiscretion. But it was said now. She sailed through the room magnificently, like an Empress Maria Theresa.

So forth they fared through the crisp night, the lady in her coach, the young coachman on his box-seat. The hoofs made music on the hard road. The bells on the bridles jingled. The sky was powdered like a great dark peach with a bloom of stars. The young man had never been so proud in all his life before. The lady had never been so happy—and so unhappy. They were alone together, at last, in the night, in the starlight. A distance greater than all China separated them.

"Clop! Clop! Clop!" went the horses' hoofs. "I love him! I love him! I love him!" went a voice in her heart. "Clop! Clop!" the hoofs went again. "The foinest lady in all the land, by God she be!" vowed the young coachman, brandishing his whip at the constellation of Orion.

Past coppice and spinney the coach rattled, past wood and hedge, past lonely tree. Then of a sudden a strangeness struck him. That was a queer lump of blackness there. Was it a tree? A stack? What? Trees do not move! And that thing did! It was a horse! There was a man on it! There was another! And a third! Yes, by God! Highwaymen!

The first lump of blackness approached. But the lad was too quick for him. He whipped a pistol from his holster, quick as a snake striking. Once! Twice!

The highwayman toppled over. The two others pressed forward. There was a ping of bullets beside his ear. The blood roared with fury and glory in George Stevenson's veins. "Take that!" he thundered, lashing out with his whip. "And that!" The horses reared. Across the faces of the horsemen, across the foaming flanks of the horses, the whip curled. The beasts reared and threw their riders.

"Mother of God!" moaned Madame Turleigh. "Save me, mother of God!"

Then suddenly the terror was too much for her. Once and again she shrieked, then fell into a bundle of dim whiteness in the corner of the carriage. Her cries were a lash on Stevenson's eardrums. Flinging himself from the box-seat, he threw himself like a tiger upon the second highwayman. "Thou black toad!" said he, and smashed his face with the butt-end of his pistol. Then he whipped round. The third had his finger on the trigger. But George's straight left was quicker. It had brought down many a Yorkshire bully before now. That night it smashed the jaw clean in two of a Yorkshire highwayman.

Then he turned to his lady. "Madame!" he called. "All is well now! The affair is dispatched!" But she made no answer. "Madame!" he called again. She moaned feebly. What must an under-coachman do when his lady is all of a faint in her carriage? And that noise there? Was it but a bough creaking? Were there more highwaymen?

And then a voice sweet and faint as a bird's in the early morning spoke out of the darkness. "Come within!" said the voice. "Comfort me! I am afraid!"

So the under-coachman went within and comforted the high lady. And soon they drove home again. There were no more highwaymen.

A week from that time the head coachman was pensioned off. His gout had become too severe to permit him to continue in his service. George Stevenson, the fighting coachman, stepped into his shoes.

He stepped into the shoes of another member of the Turleigh household—its master, in fact. He wore them for nearly two years, though Mr. Turleigh refused to believe it. He could not believe that his coachman could be so monstrous impertinent or his wife so faithless. The fact that her husband had been faithless almost from the marriage-day did not make it any easier for him to believe. He went on drinking his three bottles of port a day. He went on keeping his mysterious assignations in London.

Then one day, having said he was going to London, he did no more than go to the next parish. Then he returned. The coachman was not with the stable-lad in the coach-house. His wife was not in the kitchen with the housekeeper. They were together in her bedroom. Mr. Turleigh could not knock George down. George was champion of Yorkshire. Mr. Turleigh's face grew purple. His paunch quivered. "Get you gone!" he roared. "You lump of muck!"

So George Stevenson got him gone to London, with a fat purse which his lady stuffed into his hands before he left. "I'll write, my love," she whispered,

“the moment I am informed whither to write! My sweet love, good-bye!”

The fame of the coachman-pugilist-lover had gone before him. He became the protégé of a prince. But all their blandishments were like soot on his tongue. Month upon month went by, and he heard no word from his fair lady in Yorkshire. What could it be? Was it that her pouchy dragon of a husband kept her under lock and key? Was it that she had found some other young man to comfort her, taller and stronger than George Stevenson? He clenched his fists at the thought and ground his teeth together. By hell, if he should ever see him—the upstart, the thief that had stolen his lady from him—he'd mash his face into a pulp, by hell he would!

But the months went by and still no letter came from her. He tried to forget her in the arms of women high-born and low-born, but these made his heart ache the more unbearably. It was a little easier when he stood heel to heel against his antagonist in the roped ring, and feinted with the right and let fly with the left and involved himself in the subtlety and fury of battle. He almost felt, each time he struck a blow—to the chin, to the heart—it was for her he struck it. But still she did not write.

He knew he could not write to her in Carthwaite. No letter would be allowed to reach her, of course. If he returned to Yorkshire, Mr. Turleigh would have him clapped into gaol as a disturber of the peace and a rogue. What to do then? How could he commend himself to her again, how could he come up into her notice? What thing could he do to make her realise how he adored her, now and still and for ever?

If he could save his patron, Frederick the Prince of Wales, from drowning, or from a burning house, she would get to hear of it; if a bear ran amok in the streets and he caught it and strangled it . . . But no bear ran amok. Prince Frederick resolutely refused to venture into deep water or burning houses.

And then it was that Jack Broughton, the greatest pugilist of his time, gave him the chance he was waiting for—the chance to show his mettle and put himself in the forefront of the world's notice. On January 1st, 1741, in a paper called the *Flying Post*, Broughton issued a challenge to fight any man living within three months for the championship of England.

Jack Broughton was not only the greatest pugilist of his time, but one of the greatest of all time. It was he who issued the first Rules of the Prize-Ring, which lifted it from the pit of savagery in which it wallowed and elevated it into the clean airs of art and science. He had lately set up a gymnasium in the Tottenham Court Road with the enthusiastic co-operation of half the peerage. It is indeed likely that the art of self-defence and its exponents reached a pinnacle of popularity and fashion at this moment which they never again attained.

For a month, for two months, it seemed that there was not a man in

England who dared step into the same ring as the cunning eye and sledge-hammer fist of Jack Broughton. But over in Clerkenwell the Yorkshire coachman was biding his time. He skipped and ran and jumped, and fed on raw eggs and raw beef. He waited till the three months were almost run before taking up the challenge, for he knew that a last-minute acceptance would be extremely dramatic. For the same reason he made his acceptance as provocative as possible. He wanted people to talk, in Westminster, in Ranelagh. He wanted the echoes of it to penetrate so far as a sleepy village in Yorkshire. So he indited the following message to the champion:

“MR. BROUGHTON.—You think yourself a great fighter. Perhaps you are; but there’s people here living in Clerkenwell say your fighting days are over, and are good for nothing but to show off at them fights. I will meet you a month from to-day. If you don’t come up, you are a coward. If you don’t dust me, you are a humbug. If I beat you, you are a dead man.”

George Stevenson was right. In a few days the impending fight between the champion and the coachman was the talk of the whole town. Lords and ladies, bargees and trollops, talked of nothing else. The men for the most part were for Broughton; the ladies did not see how the coachman, who was so gallant a lover, could fail as a fighting man. The Duke of Cumberland supported Broughton; the Prince of Wales, Stevenson. Statesmen, bankers, washerwomen, errand-boys, ranged themselves on one side or the other. But it was not these whom George Stevenson was interested in. It was a lady far away in Yorkshire. If only he knew she was on his side, there’d be no human born could stand up against him. . . .

The great fight was held in the gymnasium of George Taylor, another of the fistic heroes of the time. It was a warm, damp day in February, and the roads were churned into paste by the press of people that trod them from before dawn. The scene within was extraordinary. In the popular places the people stood on each other’s heads. In the gallery, two royal princes sat each surrounded by his meynie of favourite ladies. The women ogled, simpered, flirted their fans. The princes joked with them and slapped them on the back. The two fighting-men, like wary animals, bided their time.

There was an exhibition of sword-play, wrestling, and cudgelling to start off the proceedings. But the people fidgeted and catcalled. They wanted their champions. At length, sweet and piercing, a silver trumpet called. There was a silence. Then the two umpires and the Captain of the Fight climbed up on to the stage. The silence was unbroken. Then George Stevenson entered from the anteroom. He jumped like a strong-thewed deer upon the stage. A great shout

from the people welcomed him. But he was not aware of them. He turned to the gallery where the princes and the nobles and the ladies sat. Perhaps, by some marvellous chance, she had heard. She had got away; she had come.

No, alas, she was not there . . .

Jack Broughton was on the stage now. The roof rattled with the roars of welcome. The two men turned and eyed each other watchfully while the officials went through the preliminaries. Then they were left to it.

It was a noble fight. Broughton had the advantage in height and reach, but Stevenson, though he was more sturdily built, was quicker. It was not for nothing he had laid all the Yorkshire bullies flat, one after another. Standing square towards each other, knees slightly bent, they waited, balancing on their heels. Then Broughton broke forward. He feinted with the left and shot out the terrific menace of his right. Stevenson leapt aside. Then he leapt forward again and landed magnificently on the chin. He tried to follow up the advantage. He thrust all that he was worth into a blow at the head, but missed. He was about to fall forward, when Broughton's fist, straight to the throat, hurled him backwards again. A mist wavered before his eyes. He charged. Now a right, now a left to the champion's body. Both landed. The champion returned them, with interest. Stevenson, shaking off the fists like a swarm of wasps, seizes Broughton by the waist, hugs him as in a vice, seeks to throw him. But Broughton knows more of wrestling than he. He tears a muscle, it seems, out of its usual place, to get out of the lock. Stevenson is at his mercy. He sweeps his feet from the ground, and hurls him to the ground, as if he would smash all his bones.

The first round is over. Such fierce fighting has not been seen in London for many a long day. The crowd is taut with excitement like a bowstring. Stevenson is by no means disheartened. Thrust and crash and heave; the second round is as desperate as the first. Stevenson lands his left so formidably on the champion's nose that the blood breaks in torrents. The Prince titters with pleasure in the gallery. "Tee-hee! Tee-hee!" he goes. His ladies sweat and titter. It is Broughton falling who brings the second round to an end. He has that inescapable lock on his rival's waist again. Again he is about to throw him. Then he catches his foot in one of the stakes. He falls, Stevenson falling cunningly and heavily upon him.

The third round . . .

Thrust and crash and heave, the epic battle surges like a sea. Stevenson lands more frequently, but Broughton does more damage with each blow. Broughton's eye takes it. Stevenson's ribs take it. Broughton's eye takes it again. Then once more, and this time successfully, Stevenson rushes in for the throw. Broughton lies prone. Broughton rises again.

But why is Stevenson standing there in the centre of the ring, with his

guard dropped? Why? His eyes are lifted to the gallery. Whom has he seen there among the fine ladies and the fine gentlemen?

“Cover yourself, man!” cries his patron, the Prince. “Cover yourself, or by God——!”

But the warning is too late. Broughton drives home with a straight left fierce enough to dislodge all the teeth. Stevenson shakes his head. He remembers. He is in the boxing-ring now. He is fighting against the terrible Jack Broughton, the master-fighter of the century. A prince is backing him. A great crowd has come to acclaim him. He has a duty by them all. He lifts his arm on guard again. He thrusts forward with his left again.

But the heart has gone out of him. A glaze is upon his eyes.

There is a lady up in the gallery now who was not there when the fight started. She has a cavalier with her, who is not her husband. Her husband is a pot-bellied, purple-nosed merchant from Yorkshire. Turleigh is his name. This man who is with Madame Turleigh is not he. He is her lover. It cannot be doubted that he is her lover. She smoothes her small chin against his shoulder. They whisper to each other and look into each other's eyes . . . as if this were a lovers' bower in Yorkshire, and not a howling prize-ring.

The poor fighting-man in one sick moment has seen it all. He knows why he has heard no word from her. He knows what a fool he has been, what a fool he is now, matched up in the prize-ring against his master. Win or lose, the fight means nothing to him now. The sweetness is gone out of the air.

The crowd roars like a storm in the tops of the trees. But it is all a feeble murmur to him now. He staggers about the stage, not knowing what he does. A blow like the kick of a wild horse lands under his heart. His feet fall from under him. He lies crumpled like a last year's leaf.

He does not see Jack Broughton kneel down beside him, nor feel his hand over his heart. He does not hear Jack Broughton's vow never to fight again.

But Jack Broughton did fight again, and more than once. It was he, George Stevenson, whom a lady had loved and cast aside like her old shoe, it was he who never fought again. He died less than a month later. But it was a smaller, whiter hand than Jack Broughton's that had laid him low.

THE CALL OF THE HAND

I

No one knew what sin Nikolai Kupreloff had committed to bring on his head so terrible a penalty. Year after year his wife and he had prayed for a child, and, when his wife gave birth at last, it was neither a child nor children. She had given birth to two little boys, perfectly made and proportioned, excepting for one uncanny thing . . . the tiny right hand of the one was seized by the left hand of the other, beyond all hope of release.

The little woodcutter's cottage of Nikolai lay deeply hidden in the great pinewoods of Lower Serbia, miles from his nearest neighbour. Yet even in that wild country the fame of the intertwined children travelled far, and the wise old women from those parts came to see if they might achieve anything with their herbs or chanting or any of their sorceries. They were no more useful than was a real doctor in practice at Monastir, who was stimulated to keen interest by the account of these strange children. The case defied all the arts of black or white magic, until at length interest in the episode flickered and died down.

So it was that Nikolai reconciled himself to the inevitable, and as the boys grew older he would cross himself devoutly and say: "Thank God, it might have been a thousand times worse!" They were lads of great beauty. Peter and Ivan he called them, Ivan being the lad who held so firmly the wrist of his brother within his fingers. In appearance they were identical—the light tough hair and the laughing blue eyes of the Serbian Slav, sturdy, well-knit limbs, and a sterling robustness of physique. It was only their parents and themselves who knew that between them there was one mark of distinction—below the knuckle of Ivan's thumb was marked dully a little red arrow. In fact, a stranger might not have guessed that this abnormal bond existed between the two brothers as he saw them swinging along under the pines. "What a jolly little pair!" he would exclaim, as he heard them laughing and chattering, or exchanging a word or two softly as two lovers.

When they were about fifteen years old their mother died, and the father Nikolai began more and more to remain behind in his cottage attending to the frugal needs of the little family, while Peter and Ivan, as the years went on, grew more and more skilful in the art of woodcutting; for Peter wielding the axe in his left hand, Ivan in his right, achieved such a fine reciprocity of movement, that Nikolai would laugh in his beard and mutter: "Truly the ways of God are inscrutable, for even out of their calamity He has made a great blessing!"

The passing of time only knit closer their perfect intimacy. They almost did not notice when their father Nikolai sickened and died, and left them to their cottage and their woodcutting and the calm complete love they had for each other, housed in such splendid bodies. So that life, it seemed, had nothing in store for them but long years of undivided love and contentment.

Yet even into their seclusion rumours came of the world beyond. Now and again they would catch glimpses of the marvel of the city of Salonika in the eyes of travelled men. They would hear of a city where lovely women, infinitely more beautiful than the tousled gypsies who flickered from time to time along the forest paths, sang upon stages of golden wood, in gardens full of hanging lights. They would hear of the sea and glowing ships, and men who spoke low musical languages in countries beyond the sea.

So one day the brothers determined to leave their woodcutting behind them for a season and adventure forth into the world of ships and songs and lovely women.

II

To Peter and Ivan, Salonika was a revelation of wonders they could hardly believe to be real. From a little room in the street of Johann Tschimiski they saw the gay cosmopolitan crowds sweeping down from Egnatia Street, down Venizelos Street, to the Place de la Concorde. They would walk along the quay-side past the great hotels to the Gardens of the White Tower, and were sent into an ecstasy of delight by the *chic* little women who smiled archly at these two fair-headed lads from the up-country, who walked along so naïvely, hand clasped in wrist. Yet when they entered the Variety Theatre at the White Tower it seemed to them that the very portals of heaven had opened wide. They would return in a daze of delight to their room and recount with an almost religious fervour the beauties and enchantments of the show. Each little Spanish or French girl who came to do her song or toe-dance had seemed to them more enchanting than the last. No cloud of disagreement ever came between them. There was a perfect coincidence in their tastes. Their love had never seemed so sympathetic and complete as there in Salonika.

The brothers had no large sum of money to spend. The time of their holiday was drawing to a close. One evening they turned up at the theatre for the last time, their nerves keyed to a pitch of delighted impatience, the more tense as the brothers knew that the next day would see them on the arduous road back to their Serbian forest. Turn followed alluring turn, till the evening was almost over. It was then that an English girl of an unexpected simplicity and charm came half shyly from the wings. There was nothing flamboyant in her appearance or her manner. Yet at once she seemed to seize the house with

the graceful and reticent winsomeness of her song. She sang her song through, a dainty little ballad of old-world gardens and fragrant flowers and love unto death. Peter felt the fingers of Ivan tighten round his wrist. He himself had been so stirred by the gentle grace of the girl that it was with a slight feeling of resentment he realised that Ivan had been experiencing once again an identical emotion. As he involuntarily moved his arm, Ivan uttered a slight cry of impatience. He turned round and looked into Peter's eyes and found them aflame with a light more fervent than mere appreciation. Peter was aware of his brother's glance, and looked at Ivan in return, to find his face flushed almost as if he were half drunk.

That night, for the first time in their history, there occurred a slight bickering between the two. No mention of the little English actress passed between them, but each of them determined that some day, when his brother's interest had died away, he would broach the subject and the possibility of a rediscovery of the English actress at Salonika.

Next day they entrained for Monastir, and a few days later saw them installed once again in their father's cottage in the forest.

III

In proportion as the fortunes of the Kupreloff brothers increased, something that had once existed between them receded further away. The perfection of their old intimacy became a mere memory. No longer did the most minute physical or spiritual experience of the one become automatically part of his brother's consciousness. So that now for the first time their indissoluble partnership became more and more galling.

There was no doubt of it. Everything dated from that last night at Salonika, when the English girl appeared on the stage. They would still occasionally revive something of the old fervour as they discussed from time to time their impression of the unforgettable holiday. Yet never a word passed between them concerning the unconscious girl who had captured both their hearts. At night they would lie awake, each thinking that the other was asleep. They would whisper to themselves mournfully in the night's silence: "She is mine, she is mine: I am hers for ever." Yet to each equally his love seemed utterly hopeless. Each loved the girl with an intensity reserved hitherto for his brother. But more fatal than that was the despairing conviction that no girl could ever love the one of two brothers to whom the other would remain physically attached till death carried them both away.

As the months passed by, the friction between them increased. They were now in a position to buy land and a little livestock. But if Peter insisted upon keeping pigs, as most of the peasants did in those parts, Ivan would insist upon

cattle. If Peter felt that he had done enough woodcutting for the day, Ivan felt that the day was only just beginning.

One night in late autumn Peter lay tossing heavily in his sleep. Ivan lay awake, thinking, thinking for ever of the girl, his whole heart full of rancour against the brother who must for ever prevent the consummation of his love. Heavily, wearily, Peter heaved on the bed. Outside, the wind was howling. The dreariness of the wind seemed to enter Peter's heart. "My little girl," he murmured, "my little girl! When shall we meet, my little girl! Never, never, never!" Ivan's forehead contracted with hate. He was filled suddenly with a tremendous loathing of his brother. "Never, never, never!" moaned Peter. Suddenly obeying a frantic impulse, Ivan pulled with all his strength away from the wrist to which Fate had so viciously fastened him. With a great scream of pain Peter half leapt from the bed.

"What's this? What do you mean?" he shouted, his voice thick with pain and sleep. "Nothing! Nothing! I couldn't help it! I was dreaming!" replied Ivan savagely, and the brothers settled down again for the night.

Night after night the same thing happened. Peter would murmur for ever in his sleep, "My little girl, when shall we meet? Never, never, never!" Ivan would lay awake, hatred surging violently through his whole body, till his eyes would see nothing but flames in the darkness of their log-built room: and the sound of the branches in the forest would begin to mutter and moan: "Have done with it, Ivan, have done with it! She is waiting for you, waiting, always waiting. Have done with it! Have done with *him*—with *him*—with *him*!"

One desolate night towards mid-winter the room was full of the miserable sleep-cries of Peter. Outside thunder rumbled among the clouds. A finger of lightning came suddenly through the windows and pointed with a gesture of flame towards the open breast of Peter. A sudden monstrous thought flooded into Ivan's soul. Whatever there was of human kindness and brother-love seemed in one moment to be washed away from before the onset of the flood. All the branches on all the trees shrieked across the night, "We shall be quiet; you shall have rest. She shall be yours. Have done with him, have done with him!"

A great calm settled on Ivan's soul. The issue was decided; the issue which had been hovering for so long in his sub-consciousness was decided at last. There was nothing left to do. The mere deed was but the snapping of a thread. With his eyes wide open, a terrible silence slowing his heart-beats, he stared into the night, waiting, waiting for the dawn.

Dawn came at last. The brothers washed and took food. There was a long way to go, far off into the woods. There was almost a tenderness in Ivan's attitude towards Peter. What did anything matter now? The issue was decided; the gods had taken the thing out of his hands. With their axes swinging they

made their way into the woods, through a day sharp with frost. At last they arrived at the clearing where they were to continue their tree-felling. A brazier stood waiting there, and before work started they lit a fire in preparation for the midday meal. Then they picked up their axes and set to. Lustily their strokes rang through the wood. Chime rang upon chime. It was strenuous work, the work of men with strong muscles and keen eyes.

The morning went by steadily. There was no hate in Ivan's soul—only a deadly patience. He knew the moment would come. He knew, when the moment came, that he would act. For a few minutes they stopped and wiped their foreheads. Peter opened his shirt wide and exposed his breast to Ivan. The quick vision presented itself of Peter heaving darkly in their bed, the sudden finger of lightning, the naked breast.

“Come,” said Ivan thickly, “let us begin!”

They both took up their positions against a tree. Peter, with the axe in his left hand, struck against the tree; Ivan, quick as the lightning which last night had shown him his way, whirled his axe round, away from the tree, and the sharp edge went cracking through Peter's ribs, deep beyond the heart. A great fountain of blood spurted into the air. A long feeble moan left Peter's lips. Deeper than the axe had cut, his eyes looked sorrowfully into the soul of Ivan. His weight tottered, and Ivan felt himself following to the ground. There was not a moment to lose. Again the axe whirled through the air. With the whole of a strong man's strength the axe came down upon his own wrist, and down fell the body of Peter with the hand of his brother indissoluble in death round his wrist, as it had been indissoluble in life.

The thing he had brought about was too monstrous for Ivan at that moment to measure. It was only the little things that his ear and eye seized—the frightened screech of a bird in a tree, the sullen shining of the little red arrow in the thumb of his own severed hand.

Ivan felt the blood streaming from the stump of his forearm. He knew that if he did not reassert complete mastery over himself he would bleed to death. All would be in vain—the call of the far girl, the murder, the last look in Peter's eyes. He staggered over to the brazier and plunged his forearm for one swift instant into embers. Then darkness overwhelmed him.

IV

It was easy enough to explain. Not the least suspicion attached itself to Ivan. People came from remote cabins and farms to sympathise with the bereaved brother. What was more likely in the world than that Ivan's axe should slide from a knot in the tree and come crashing against Peter, who, even if he could see the axe coming, could not by any human means have

disengaged himself from his brother. "I always thought that something like this would happen," people muttered wisely to each other, and shook their heads and crossed their breasts.

Of course, it was clear to them all that Ivan could no longer remain in the cottage darkened by memories of his poor brother. So Ivan sold his accumulation of timber and his land and what little stock the brothers had bought, and, some few weeks after his forearm was healed, embarked on the jangling train from Monastir and set forth on his quest for the pale girl from England.

In Salonika she was nowhere to be found. Forlornly he went from music-hall to music-hall, but she was gone. He haunted the low *cafés chantants* along Ignatius Street, even the degenerate bars on the Monastir Road, where women in red drawers stood on improvised platforms and sang to tipsy crowds to the accompaniment of feeble violins. But there was no trace of her in the whole city. From the director at the White Tower he learned that perhaps she had gone on to Constantinople; perhaps she had returned to Athens, whence the European artistes generally came to Salonika on their round of the greater Levantine towns.

With all the fervent idealism of a mediæval knight Ivan stepped on the deck of a Messageries Maritimes boat returning to Marseilles by way of the Piræus. When the electric train from the harbour landed him at the station in Athens, a mystic conviction filled him that here in this city, some day, the English girl would be revealed to him. Ambitiously he first tried the great Opera, but she was not there. The weeks lengthened into months, and failure followed failure, but an obstinate foreknowledge held up his weary spirit and bade him put aside despair.

When at last she appeared on the stage of one of the lesser music-halls, it was with no great start of surprise or welcome that he recognised her arrival. It was as if a mother or a sister had slipped back into the place from which for some reason she had been absent. Her features had become engraved on every curve of his brain. She came on to the stage and filled his life again as naturally as day fills the place of night. Life became for him a thing of meaning again. He realised that at last Life was to begin.

He knew little of the half-measures and half-advances of Western civilisation. He lost no time in presenting himself before the girl. After only a few words of difficult apology, with a voice of low and subdued passion he told her a fragment or two of his tale. It was a broken French he talked—the French of which his mother long years ago had taught her boys the few phrases she knew, and which his experiences in Salonika and Athens during the last few months had greatly improved.

The large grey eyes of the English girl opened wide in wonder as she

listened, fascinated, to the stammering avowals of this tall stranger from a shadowy land. Half in fright, she drew back against the wall of her wretched little dressing-room, but, even so soon, she realised that the destiny was overwhelming her which was to bring an end to her wanderings. She consented shyly to his suggestion that she should see him for a little while the next night, and it was with a thrill of delight and fear she saw his great figure waiting for her at the gate of the Museum, as the purple Athenian dusk came wandering down from the Acropolis and cast velvet glooms among the pillars of Pentelican marble.

For years, since her mother had died and her father had become a confirmed drunkard, it was a very lonely life that Mary Weston had led. She had no great talent, and she had drifted from theatre to theatre on the Continent, for to her England was a place of no kindly memories. Ivan Kupreloff began to mean for her what her mother had meant before she died, and her father before he had taken to drink.

A few months had passed only. There was no escape from Ivan. There was nothing importunate about him, but he was irresistible. He was Life. Proudly he realised that he had conquered her. To world's end and time's end she was his own.

They were married at length. Athens and all the cities she had known, the Serbian wood and the murdered brother—these were forgotten utterly. They had never existed.

V

Yet not quite utterly was the memory of his dead life to vanish from the heart of Ivan. Even during the times of his most passionate love for Mary there began to invade him months of bitter memory and regret. There was something which prevented the entire fusion with Mary towards which he yearned and ached. It was something deep in his soul. It was something which gnawed at his forearm, bit with teeth of contrition at the place where the axe had fallen and severed the hand from the wrist.

He tried to put all this futility from him. He would seize Mary more closely, look desperately into her eyes, and in the perfume of her lips and hair seek anodyne. Between them there was a sufficient store of money, small though it was, to allow them a few months of liberty, undisturbed by any thought of the future. They wandered lazily about Greece for a little time, finding in the Greek day and the lovely hills a perfect setting for their love.

And yet ever more insistently came to him the call of the hand—the hand which had united in so fierce an embrace his brother with himself.

Again at night voices tormented him. Again, when winds were about, they

called with living words: "The hand! The hand! It is calling you, calling! Answer! He wants you! Peter!" wailed the wind. "Peter! Peter!"

Lines began to draw across his forehead. With anxiety Mary saw shadows growing under his eyes, and in his eyes a hunger which grew more and more forlorn. "What is it, love?" she would murmur. "You've not slept well!"

"Nothing at all, love, nothing! All's well!" he would reply, trying with a kiss to forget the wind and the hand and the call.

"There's something you're longing for. Tell me, Ivan. Let me help you. You must."

"Nothing, Mary. I've got you. There's nothing else in the world." But the call of the hand did not abate. "Peter!" the winds wailed. "Peter! He wants you! Answer!"

The urgency of the call grew more imperious. He was sickening and growing weak. There was a hot torpidity in the dry Greek noon which shrivelled his veins. He would drag his coat down from his neck and lift his head, and try and breathe the deep breath he had known in his Serbian wood. But there was no spaciousness, no great draughts of cool air in the wind, only voices: "Peter! Peter! Peter!"

"We must go somewhere. We must go away," said Mary. "We must go to Athens and see a doctor, Ivan. I'm afraid!"

"Not Athens! No!" he replied with a shudder, his temples contracting as before the hot blast from an oven. Those dry marble spaces! The dusty pepper-trees! The sweating crowds in the shops, swallowing sweet cakes like swine swallowing husks in a sty! Athens became a nightmare.

He was lying awake one night, the body of Mary curled beside him, her hair floating vaguely on the pillow in the half-light of the moon. She stirred in her sleep, and her little white hand unconsciously sought his wrist and fastened tightly round it. That moment bridged the buried time. Unescapably Mary had brought back to him the sensation of Peter lying in the grasp of his own hand. Never before was the call of the hand so imperious. Never so clearly did the wind exclaim: "Peter! He wants you! Answer!"

An irresistible love for his murdered brother overwhelmed him. He raised himself from his bed and lifted helplessly his lopped arm into the whispering room. "Coming, my brother, I am coming! Wait! Peter!" he moaned, and the wind replied: "Peter! Peter!"

He lay back in bed. He realised that the strongest claim in the world upon him was the call of the hand. As for Mary—she was nothing different from himself. For her, as for him, the call of the hand came dictatorially. In each other they were one, but without the hand their unity was uncompleted. The call of the hand must be obeyed. To-morrow they must leave Greece behind. To-morrow to Serbia, to-morrow the response to the hand.

Mary was not surprised when Ivan, without warning, explained that all their plans were altered. She was used to his unaccountable whims, his sudden uncanny impulses. They packed up the few things they possessed, and next day saw them well started on their way to Monastir, carefully skirting Athens. Arrived at Monastir, a few days elapsed before they appeared at the remote wood where Ivan was born. The cottage built by Nikolai Kupreloff was not yet occupied. The strange character of its former inhabitants, combined with the terrible nature of Peter's death, had succeeded in keeping it empty. They obtained permission from its owner to occupy the cottage, and with a great sigh of content Ivan flung open again his father's door.

In a little time Mary had made of the house such a palace of delight as it had not been since Ivan's mother was dead. Happily, Ivan took in large draughts of the Serbian pineland air, filling his lungs. Happily, with Mary beside him on the bed where he and Peter had lain entwined, the dark drowsy nights melted into dawn. He had made his reply to the call of the hand. Only faintly, if at all, the wind or the branches whispered: "Peter! Peter!" Peter seemed to be happy at last. The severed hand seemed at last to be tranquil round the wrist of the murdered brother. Then the winds died away, and there was no sound of "Peter!"—only fitfully a swaying of twigs and a rustle of pine-needles.

So it seemed. Till summer drooped her drowsing hair. Summer became wrinkled and old. Summer went, and swift autumn came. The days shortened into the rigours of winter; the days drew towards the anniversary of that red day when the axe was lifted and Peter fell. Never a moment did it occur to Ivan that now, when the fatal day was approaching, he might leave behind him his Serbian wood. He knew that, more tightly than ever during his living days, the wrist of Peter lay within his own hand, tight, unescapable. Mary and he lay under the thumb of that severed hand wherefrom the red arrow glowed when the night was dark and the wood-fire threw leaping shadows over the log walls. There was no gainsaying the call of the hand till the end of days. Ivan knew that never again would he leave behind his Serbian wood.

The night came at length which was the anniversary of that dead, unburiable night when Peter's doom had been sealed. Again there was the rumbling of thunder, there were evil flashes of lightning that ran among the clouds. Never with so firm an embrace had Mary been clasped within his arms. Nothing in the world was so strong as his love for Mary. They had responded to the call of the hand. There was no further claim upon them. Ivan kissed her sleeping eyes and was lulled in the music of her breathing. A drowsiness came over him, and for a time he slid into sleep.

In his sleep something tightened round him, something growing so tight that it forced through the barriers of his sleep. Vaguely, faintly, a half-

consciousness came back to him. He was not awake. He was not asleep. He was in a borderland where the other world is not dead and this world is half alive. Tighter grew the thing which pressed against his sleep. It was round his wrist, it was round the wrist where something had once come crashing down. What was it? What was it had come crashing down? An axe it was that had come crashing down. It was the hand of Mary growing tighter round his wrist. No, it could not be the hand of Mary. Mary had fallen from his arms. Mary was turned away from him. He could see her hands pale where she had lifted them in sleep above her head. It was not the hand of Mary growing tighter round his wrist. But it was a hand. No doubt of that. It was a hand.

With a dull glow of flame a little red arrow gleamed like embers below the thumb of the hand. Where had he seen that arrow? Where and when? When his hand had fallen away from him, lopped at the wrist. It was the dead hand which was not dead. It was his own hand. It was the hand with the red arrow which had held Peter so tightly. It was the dead hand which was alive, the living hand which had risen from the dead. Tighter round his wrist grew the pressure of the severed hand. The hand was tired of calling. The hand had come. There was no gainsaying the hand. So tight grew the clutch of the hand that his whole arm slowly lifted from his side. Irresistibly the shoulder followed the rising arm. There was no gainsaying the hand. Neither awake nor asleep, neither living nor dead, he followed the hand; he rose from the bed where Mary lay, sleeping sundered from him, his no more. Mary was alive. He was neither living nor dead. The door of the room was opened wide. Closed doors were no barrier against the hand which had arisen from the grave. Slowly, with steady feet, with wide, filmy eyes, Ivan passed through the door. Slowly through the outer door, slowly into the sound of thunder, into the gleam of lightning and the voices of winds moaning unceasingly: "Peter! Peter! He is calling you! Ivan! Peter is calling you! Follow!" and ever again and unceasingly: "Peter! Peter!"

Tighter than the bonds of ice or granite hills, tight only as the bond of death, the risen hand held the lopped wrist, drew the slow body of Ivan through the haunted night, far into the wood, far through the talking trees, far to the place of that tree which had not been cut down, to the place where an axe had fallen through bones and flesh, where Peter had fallen, where Peter lay buried, not deep down; where Peter lay buried under twigs and loose earth.

Tightly round the wrist of the man neither alive nor dead clutched the resurrected hand. Nearer and nearer to the shallow grave the hand pulled down the body of Ivan. Methodically, steadily, working with no pause, the free hand of Ivan moved the twigs and the loose earth—methodically, with no pause, until at last the body of Peter lay revealed; not recognisable, dissolute beneath the change through which all men pass, recognisable only to those filmy eyes

of Ivan, to the questing hungry soul of Ivan which had come to claim its own. Closer and closer to the dead brother the severed hand drew the body of Ivan down; so close, so close, until at last the hand clutched again and for ever that wrist to which Fate had fastened it long years ago. Alongside his dead brother, quietly, with those eyes which neither saw nor did not see, Ivan lay down full length. Gradually the severed hand, the hand which had arisen from the dead to claim him, because the dead brother called and the severed hand called for its own, gradually the hand slipped from the lopped wrist; the wrist and the arm became one. The hand of Ivan had brought Ivan to his own. Indissolubly, Peter and Ivan lay joined together. But the death which lay cold in the heart and body of Peter passed from the clutched wrist, passed into the hand which clutched it, passed along the arm which had been severed once, and along Ivan's shoulder, until it made of his eyes unseeing discs and of his heart cold stone which could beat no more.

As the grey light of dawn drifted emptily down the Serbian woods, the two brothers lay immortally one again, like the two babies that were born to Nikolai Kupreloff long years ago.

POMPEII IN MASSACHUSETTS

I

The third millennium *anno Domini* was hardly more than six decades old—it might have been seven—by the time the last Jacobean mansion had been piously transported from the Cotswolds to the foothills of the Alleghanies. It will be recalled with what elegant and exquisite precision every gable, every mullion, every brick, had been re-erected. I think it was not more than two decades later that the last of the French *châteaux* was transported with equal reverence from the shores of the Loire to the shores of the Mississippi. The *castelli* of Tuscany and Umbria had, for several years, decorated the landscape of New Jersey.

But it was felt by that race of scholarly millionaires who had been in the main responsible for these translations that, with the best will in the world, a man cannot identify himself body and soul with a mere building of stone or brick. Somehow, even yet, Europe kept them at arm's-length. That was why Jabez Q. Pappenheim (whose pork sausages have no compeer all the way between Cape Horn and Alaska) set the fashion of transporting the waters of the more illustrious European lakes, in great sub-oceanic pipes, to his native land. A basin was dug for Loch Lomond at the gates of his estate in Carolina; and his brother millionaires vied with him in the magnificence of their engineering and the purity of their taste. Lugano followed Lomond, Garda followed Lugano. And, though it was expensive, the great-grandson of the poet D'Annunzio was brought over with the waters of Garda, so that the poet's house might be retained in its spectacular loneliness and the poet's progeny pace (at so many fabulous dollars per annum) between the ancestral cypresses.

But Silas F. Birnbaum (you would not dream of wearing any other gumboots than Birnbaum's) felt with some propriety that it was up to a Birnbaum to go one better than a Pappenheim. He set up in Arverne, which is in Long Island, the palace of the last of the Balkan kings. But for a long time it seemed a mere shell, the success Birnbaum had anticipated unaccountably hung fire, till he made the supreme discovery that a Balkan palace without a Balkan king was as doleful a spectacle as home without a mother.

His Balkan majesty was induced to take up his residence in his ancient castle, for an annual consideration which made even Birnbaum's eyelids quiver a little tremulously. But old Pappenheim was never heard of again. He gave up the competition. So did Big Bill Braithwaite, who had, it is true,

brought over the Sphinx and the Pyramid of Cheops (though all his efforts to get Cheops himself over were a complete failure). Birnbaum reigned the supreme cultural millionaire of the United States, despite the magnificent coup of Dave Biffett, the baseball millionaire, who managed to transplant the monastery of the Grand Lama of Thibet. The Grand Lama himself, however, could not stand the central heating and died on Biffett within a fortnight. Birnbaum and his Balkan majesty reigned supreme and unchallenged.

And then it was that Amurath to Amurath succeeded and young to old Pappenheim. Old Pappenheim had never forgiven Birnbaum. On his very deathbed he enjoined upon his young son the supreme duty of going one better than Birnbaum. Young Pappenheim swore. His cheeks were wet with tears.

But by this time it was easier to swear than to achieve. Europe was played out, sacked. So was Asia. What was there left in the Old World that could still add lustre to the New? There was not even a paltry Norman castle or Byzantine tower to cart across the sea.

Young Pappenheim looked about him haggardly. Must his father's ghost go wailing for ever unappeased? Must all America acclaim Birnbaum as the Culture King, *sans pareil*? Young Pappenheim chartered an aeroplane. He scoured the whole ether above the mountain-ridges and plains and rivers of the Old World. Not even a bed Queen Elizabeth had slept in. Not even a pen William Shakespeare had written with. Young Pappenheim bit his finger-nails. He tore his hair.

And then Providence, with infinite considerateness, brought about the downfall of the Fascist Government, which had been tottering for half a century. Like a vulture, almost literally, the apple-cheeked young man swooped down from the clouds and entered on negotiations with the new Government.

The last document was sealed, the last signature appended. Young Pappenheim carolled like a lark.

He had it! He had it! Birnbaum must bury his nose in the dust! He got the engineers, the excavators, the packers, the porters, the shippers, to work without a morning's delay.

Pompeii! Lock, stock and barrel! Pompeii! The whole works! Who'd tell the world now? Who'd turn the pages? Pompeii!

II

The idea had been so colossal and so obvious that it had not occurred to any of them, the Lords of Culture, the Slap-Bang Kings. Even if one of them had conceived it, Pompeii was so very much the bright particular jewel of the Fascist Government that no one would have dared to entertain the fantasy for

two halves of a second. And now Pappenheim—with that superb sense of the moment which had filled the heavens with Pappenheim sausages like a multitudinous flock of airships—Pappenheim had brought it off. In less than a year he had transferred every brick, every gate-post, every fragment of marble and stucco, to the site he had prepared for it on the shores of Massachusetts. He very tastefully determined to erect it in a crook of the magnificent bay called Prospect Water, so as to repeat as far as possible the effect of Pompeii looking out upon Naples Bay.

New Pompeii was a triumph of that art which the American millionaires had developed to such a degree of perfection—an art which was more than half a science. The Pyramids, unfortunately, had been set down a little askew. Lake Lugano, though it was identically the same water, always looked a little muddy. But Pompeii was Pompeii. From the Temple of Apollo to the House of the Vettii, from the Thermæ to the Theatre, Pappenheim's Pompeii was indistinguishable from the Neapolitan. How could you distinguish them? Were they not quite mathematically the same? There was not a tuft of rosemary nor a cinder of pumice which was not transported. Even the guides were brought over to complete the illusion. But, I repeat, it was not an illusion. It needed no completing. It was the real thing.

Now I don't think that Pappenheim can be blamed in the matter at all. After all, even the Pappenheim millions are not quite inexhaustible—for people cannot eat pork sausages for each course at every meal. The establishment of Pompeii in Massachusetts had cost him a very great deal of money. He had fulfilled his father's dying precepts superbly. But a man must live. And a man has cultural duties, too, towards poorer citizens. So that he converted Pompeii into a sort of supernal Brighton, a Coney Island beyond dreams. He did not lay violent hands on a single stick or stone. With the utmost delicacy and reverence he made an open-air cinema out of the Theatre, a mannequin parade out of the Forum. For five dollars you got a dish of the best Italian macaroni in the House of the Faun. He reopened the swimming-baths in the Thermæ, and the bathing-costumes of New Pompeii transcended in daring everything that the Lido, in its most exiguous moments, had curtailed them to. All the most fashionable negresses danced in the lamp-hung gardens. All the most supremely cacophonous orchestras blared and yowled.

Oh, the New Pompeii was a gay place, a gay place! And yet somehow, somewhere, something was missing. What was it? Despite the gold, the glitter, despite the naughty frescoes, the little bronzes you got a glimpse of at a dollar a time, there was no doubt about it—the New Pompeii had not quite, not just quite, definitely come off.

What was it? They had not left a cinder, a blade of grass behind them on

the site of the old Pompeii in Italy.

What was it? What was missing?

It suddenly struck young Pappenheim between the temples like the blow of a fist. Of course! Of course! Of course! He sprung like Archimedes out of his bath and ran straight in to the mannequin parade in the Forum. But they only thought the young gentleman was taking his morning exercise and went on peacocking and curtsying between the pillars of the reconstructed city.

Young Pappenheim walked back soberly to his breakfast. But his mind was already busy with calculations. How could he have been so stupid as not to perceive it earlier? How could Prospect Water pretend to be the Bay of Naples without Vesuvius? What was Pompeii without Vesuvius?

Not of course the real original volcano in Italy. Not even a Pappenheim can start monkeying about with a sulky brute of a volcano. But he would set up the precise replica of Vesuvius, every chasm and rent, a nice harmless decorative Vesuvius.

Pappenheim was right. Pappenheim was always right. Even during the course of the construction of the new Vesuvius, it became evident that just that element which had been lacking was being introduced into the *ensemble*. All America was thrilled to the marrow by it. Rumours went about of the grand gala night upon which Vesuvius was going to make his bow to the public.

What rank, what opulence, were assembled that evening—new-old Pompeii over against the towering pseudo-Vesuvius! All the world listened in aerially, and televisually looked on. The buzz of conversation that hummed in the Pompeian halls re-erected in Massachusetts was caught up in Aberdeen and Peking. Naples, at the heart of the rifled bay, looked and listened, glowered and spat. The great moment was approaching.

What precisely Pappenheim had prepared had been kept a complete secret. Everyone guessed more preposterously than his neighbour. The multitude pressed about young Pappenheim where he stood in the centre of the stage of the open-air theatre. He had a great complex of switches to hand. What revelation was in store for the continents should be manifest now, in not many minutes. The sun's rim had almost touched the western limits of the world. Vesuvius towered, rearing his great false cone in the dusking heavens. Pompeii was a garden of incense, a constellation of lights, an ocean of instruments. Now . . .

Pappenheim leaned forward over the controls. Right. Left. Forward. Right again. Suddenly a seeming jet of flame issued from the cone of Vesuvius. All the heavens were illumined. Another switch. Forward, half right. It seemed that a great river of molten lava lipped the cup of the crater. Pompeii gasped. The world gasped.

All along the crystal channels the successive bulbs were illumined,

thousands upon thousands of glass bulbs painted a fiery scarlet. The phantom rivers of lava flowed down their ingenious courses. The lights under the great cauldrons of blown glass heaved and winked and boiled in an incomparable, in an incomparably impertinent, imitation of the ferocious forces of Nature. All the way down the riven slopes of the pseudo-Vesuvius, towards the fringes of Pompeii in Massachusetts, the rivers of lava ran, glared, broke up in supremely engineered confusion.

Only in Naples, the veritable Naples across the sea, were they aware how the light died suddenly from the summit of the authentic Vesuvius, the light that had not been quenched for two æons. Only in Naples were they aware how the great volcano settled down upon its base in a collapse of dust.

Only in Naples. This was no moment, in the new-old Pompeii, to take an academic interest in geological phenomena. The eruption proper had begun now over the reaches of Prospect Water. The whole illumined air was full of falling petals, the cool petals of flowers. As Pompeii had been buried once in a shower of small pumice-stones not larger than damson-plums, so Pompeii was buried again in a shower of petals not larger than rose-petals. The air swooned with perfume. The music could hardly stagger across an atmosphere so rich with odours and so clogged with petals. Cool, cool petals! How cool they were as they drifted upon hot cheek, hot brow! How softly, how deep, they cushioned the earth! How they buried the ankles, the knees, heaped up the roofs in odorous drifts, softened all the lineaments of Pompeii till it was one enormous feather-bed of petals upon which those lovely ladies, those handsome lads, might recline, like the sailors of Odysseus pillowed on lotus.

The cool petals, cool as water. Did you say cool? Cool?

But what flower is this with the warm petals, warm as ash? What is this smell in the nostrils? What strange flower is this, the petals of which powder the hair like ashes and smell like soot?

Not like soot. This is no dead substance. It is warm as coals. These are no flowers. These are cinders, hot cinders that crumble and crunch when you tear them out of your hair.

What joke is this, Pappenheim? Those red rivers ravening towards us down the slopes of the accursed mountain—are they no more than electric bulbs? No more than that, Pappenheim? Why does the mountain-top pant and snarl? Where are you, darling, where are you?

For God's sake, let us get out of this! I can't breathe! Where are you? Your face is hidden in a bed of white cinders! Your face, is it? Are you dead?

Burning ash! I can't move! I can't get to you! I can't breathe! The red river is upon us . . .

All night long and all day long the hail of hot pumice-stone came down, till

Pompeii in Massachusetts was buried in layers six feet deeper down than Pompeii in Italy. That fall of ashes mingled with mud, of which chroniclers tell in the earlier eruption, was also not remitted. Vesuvius spared none of her scourges. Those revellers who managed to reach the further limit of the pumice-shower found further progress barred by the rivers of lava that boiled and churned their fiery courses towards the sea. These will never be disinterred. But it is hoped that the body of young Pappenheim may not be wholly irrecoverable, where he leans over his controls at the centre of the stage of the old Roman Theatre, under fifteen feet of pumice-stones not larger than damson-plums.

DIVINITY IN DEAUVILLE

James Pendon of Brixton was in love. He was officially engaged to Bessie Huxtable of Clapham. But he was in love with Lina Malambri of Hollywood. He might have married Bessie Huxtable. But the odds were a thousand to one against his even setting eyes on Lina Malambri.

There are very few people who have set eyes on Lina Malambri, even in Hollywood, though the directors direct her, of course, and the camera-men photograph her. She has a vitality more tempestuous than Clara Bow's, she has an aloofness more impenetrable than Greta Garbo's. So it seems to the countless myriads of her admirers. So it seemed supremely to James Pendon of Brixton, insurance agent, who was engaged to Bessie Huxtable of Clapham, shorthand-typist.

They would have married and settled down happily, there is no doubt at all, if it had not been for the films in general and Lina Malambri in particular. Bessie hated the films. After a long day's shorthand-typing at the office, the pictures made her eyes come all over queer. As for Lina Malambri, she couldn't stick her at any price. She hated the husky voice which played on James's spine like a mouth on a flute. She hated the sinuous hips. She hated her eyes. They were bad eyes, said Bessie Huxtable. She was a bad woman, said Bessie Huxtable. And she would lift her handkerchief to her nose. The tip of it grew quite pink, James Pendon observed frigidly. If Lina Malambri wept, she wept superbly, like a great storm.

And he would get up and stump out of the house, and go off to the nearest picture-palace where Lina Malambri's brilliant ghost walked. He would sit there hour after hour, if it was a continuous show, in order that he might again and once again pay court to Lina Malambri, the exquisite, the subtle, his dream-darling, his divinity.

She was his solace for Bessie Huxtable's pink nose. She was his solace for the drab street he lived in; for the recurring drudgery, week by week, month by month, year by year, of his work in the insurance office. She was his solace for being alive.

And then one day he went into a café to eat his lunch. He had been to that same café five times a week for twenty-one years. For twenty-one years he had ordered that same luncheon of a glass of hot milk and two poached eggs on toast. It seemed likely that for another twenty-one years he would eat that same luncheon in that same café.

Unless, of course, he married Bessie. She would make things very cosy for him. They had, after all, been engaged for seven years. It was really about time

he put it up to her. She wasn't a bad sort, old Bessie. . . . And then suddenly his eye fell upon an item of news in the newspaper propped up against his cruet. The knife and fork fell out of his hands and clattered down on to his plate. His eyes dilated with the incredible glory of it.

Lina Malambri was in Europe! The Priestess had stepped out of the Pythian mists that enwrapped her shrine in Beverly Hills. She was in Europe, in France, just across the Channel, in Deauville.

She was staying at the Hôtel Papillon. The day after to-morrow she would be gone. It was a great scoop, the newspaper crowed, to have ferreted out the secret of her incognito and the hotel she was staying at. The day after to-morrow she would be gone, back into the Pythian mists that shrouded her marble skin and sapphire eyes and corn-coloured hair.

Just across the Channel there, she would be walking, talking, like any mortal woman. That night she would be sitting at a hotel table, a knife and fork in those immortal hands. Suddenly, with desperate vividness, he got the sense of her actual presence. He heard the gurgle of wine poured into her wineglass. Her scent struck sharp and sweet and desolate against his nostrils.

And in that moment the idea suddenly blazed up in him which had been stored in his skull for ten or fifteen years. It was an idea first implanted by a film of which he had even forgotten the name. He did not remember the name of a single player that took part in it. He only remembered the fact that an insurance agent like himself had had a cheque in his pocket, payable to some client whose endowment policy had attained fruition after payments lasting most of a lifetime. The insurance agent had forged the name of the recipient. He had vanished from the world of his drudgery, risen, fallen, expiated his sin, and married the lady of his heart.

Time after time James Pendon had rehearsed the film in the secret places of his heart, with himself for protagonist. It had been a wistful, lunatic dreaming, like the dreaming of a hunchback who sees himself swimming the Channel and hears the plaudits of the multitude on the beach. Yet he had worked it all out with the precision of a problem in insurance and bonuses. He knew exactly how to get abroad without a passport. He knew where, within half an hour, he could equip himself with the Savile Row elegance of an Adolphe Menjou. Above all, he was aware that in his pocket, at that very moment, burned a cheque. It was made out to a client whose endowment policy attained fruition after payments lasting most of a lifetime. He should be on his way within a few minutes to hand the cheque over to him, to try to induce him to take out another policy, to stand there wheedling, whining. The monotony and humiliation of it, the long years of it that stretched before him, filled him with a sudden fury. His fury transferred itself to the plain face of Bessie Huxtable and her pink sniffing nose that forced itself like a sort of ectoplasmic

blancmange above the cruet. He thrust his poached egg away from him with a spasm of nausea. It seemed a more tangible version of the face of Bessie Huxtable.

He rose; he paid his bill.

The next few hours were a wild phantasm. They moved with a speed more incredible than the most incredible film, and with a fantasy more fantastic than Hollywood at its most preposterous. He forged the cheque, he received the money, as effortlessly as he lit his cigarette. He converted the greater part of the four hundred pounds sterling into French francs. He bought his equipment. He chartered his aeroplane. He arrived in Deauville. He was motored over to the Hôtel Papillon. He ordered the royal suite of rooms. He summoned the *maître d'hôtel*. He commanded that the table next to that occupied by Lina Malambri should be reserved for him. He royally tipped the *maître d'hôtel*. He ordered a *ballon* of brandy. And another *ballon* of brandy. And a third. He went through all these motions flawlessly, a little stiffly, like a marionette worked by a master. There was nothing unusual in his appearance excepting that a spot of high colour flamed in the centre of his sallow cheeks.

A light seemed to shine on him, or from within him, perhaps—a light neither of the sun nor moon. When the valet helped him to dress for dinner, it seemed that it was not himself, James Pendon, insurance agent, who was being helped. It was Menjou, Chevalier, Buchanan, all the elegants of the film miraculously fused into a single body. He existed in a world outside time; or rather all time, past and to come, was concentrated into these few hours, that began with the explosion in his brain and should attain their climax in the moment when he saw his divinity face to face, when he heard her voice, when he smelled the perfume of her hair.

He had ceased to be aware of the relations between phenomena, that effects followed causes. Had he shattered with one blow the edifice upon which his whole life had been long and laboriously built up? Was the life that a swindler and forger decreed for himself a thing shut up within stone walls, garbed in a garb of infamy?

These questions did not present themselves. He merely knew, with a sombre ecstasy, that the long years of monotony were over. He knew that within an hour, half an hour, ten minutes, she would present herself, the subtle, the exquisite one.

He came down to dinner with the nonchalance of all those movie gallants. He paused at the bar to drink a cocktail or two. He entered the dining-room. The *maître d'hôtel* came forward obsequiously and led him to his table. He winked slightly and infinitely respectfully. It was all understood—but perfectly. The waiter drew his chair for him. He spread his napkin over his knee.

A number of the tables were already occupied. James Pendon, connoisseur of the world's ways, did not make the mistake of coming down early for dinner, as if he were a bank-clerk, or an insurance agent, perhaps, who fed on poached eggs and glasses of milk. The hotel was by no means full. The tables in his immediate vicinity were still unoccupied. They were all laid for two. He wondered with a catch in his throat which might be her table. He realised suddenly she was not alone. But, of course, how should Lina Malambri travel alone? She was not married, of course. Or if she had only just married, if this were a honeymoon holiday, the newspaper he had read in London would not have concealed the fact.

In London. . . . He put the sound up to his ear like a sea-shell. The word meant nothing at all, nothing, a mere vague noise without context.

Was she with her mother, perhaps? The film papers often talked of her devotion to her mother. (The waiter took the oyster-shells away. *Sole Manguéry*, monsieur? Yes, he would have some *sole Manguéry*).

The table in front of him was occupied now. An elderly German couple. He merely registered the fact that it was not there Lina Malambri would sit, not there the milky planets of her eyes would shine. (The waiter took the plate away. Yes, he would like a little roast teal. But there was no hurry, waiter, no hurry at all.)

The table on his left hand was occupied now; two drab American females. His soul slid over to the table on his right hand. The table behind him was still unoccupied, but it was quite clear she would not be sitting there. The *maître d'hôtel* would hardly have placed him with his back to the lady, the goddess. She would be sitting there, a few feet away from him, on his right hand. In a few minutes now. He would not merely see her in the radiant flesh. He would hear that voice which was like a harp, like a violin.

He was glad she was late. Perhaps the two drab American females would have gone by the time she came down. He disliked them. They would be silent for minutes at a stretch, leaving him in his enchantment. Then they would break in upon it with a sudden flurry of argument. He disliked them. Why would they not go?

When would she come? The waiter took away the picked anatomy of the roast teal. Yes, he would have a small *châteaubriand*, not too well done. He dawdled over it so long that the waiter solicitously inquired if it was not cooked to his taste; should he bring him another? "No!" snapped James Pendon. "That will do, damn you!" The waiter bowed and withdrew.

The females on his left hand were at it again. "Where are you going?" he barked at the waiter. "Tell the *maître d'hôtel* to come at once!"

"Immediately!" said the waiter. The *maître d'hôtel* appeared immediately.

"Look here!" said James Pendon, between his teeth. "I've had about

enough of this! Is she here? Is she coming in to-night? Have you messed it all up?"

"Hush!" said the *maître d'hôtel*, in embarrassment. He put his finger on his mouth. He made the shadow of a gesture with his thumb. "She is here!" he whispered.

"Here?" exclaimed James Pendon. "Here? What the hell d'you mean? Where?"

And then suddenly, as if some claw had seized his neck and twisted it round upon the vertebræ, he found himself gazing into the eyes of one of the two drab women who sat at the table upon his left hand. She was the younger of the two women, though he had made no differentiation between them. Her skin, her eyes, her hair, had no colour, no vitality. Her cheeks were a pale desert. Her brow was dull and flat. He stared at her. A frantic horror awoke in his bosom, and beat its wings against his ribs. A short cry toppled from his lips. He knew, he knew, that he gazed into the eyes of Lina Malambri. Those were the eyes of no other woman in the world than Lina Malambri. He divined in that moment what a thing of putty she was, a thing moulded and articulated by the superb mechanisms which were brought to bear upon her. She had no existence in herself. She was incomparably null. She was what the lights, the greases, the lenses, the shadows, the angles, made of her.

She stared back into his staring eyes. "My!" she said. "Have you ever seen such sauce?" Her voice was flat and toneless, but it had a slight edge of vulgar asperity. She sniffed. She thrust her bare shoulder towards him and turned to face her companion.

"What may we get you now, sir?" asked the *maître d'hôtel*, the waiter hovering near.

But James Pendon said nothing at all. He got up and tapped his way between the tables, almost as if he were a blind man. In the vestibule his feet stopped shuffling a moment. He heard a ticking. The management had lately installed a tape-machine for the benefit of the business magnates who patronised the Hôtel Papillon. He looked down upon the flowing news-sheet.

Londres, he read. He threw back his head and laughed. That was French for London. What a funny way to spell London! Then the laughter went out of his face, though his mouth was still distended and the teeth showed.

London! That was the place where a man, after many years of honest labour, was sometimes visited by a madness. He forged a cheque, robbing some poor creature who had long waited for the reaping of his harvest. He forged a cheque. In London, in London, retribution came swift and sure.

He thought it best not to take the lift. It would be best to climb up the stairs, one by one, though there should be a thousand of them. Slowly, like an old man, with his back bent and aching, he climbed from flight to flight. He

reached his own room at length. He opened the door, but did not switch on the light. He would need no light for what he purposed to do. He opened the window and climbed through on to the balcony.

It was a pity, of course, about Bessie Huxtable. She could have made things very cosy for him. They had, after all, been engaged for seven years. She wasn't a bad sort, old Bessie. . . .

He stood poised a moment on the parapet. The water was not deep, perhaps, but the rocks were crude and jagged. They would not fail him.

IN ARARAT

It was a land soaked in the smell of waters. Not far off was the sea, whose brine, borne on the east wind, mixed with the lush smell of many rivers and quiet pools ringed by hawthorn. Beneath every willow a fisherman sat, his basket beside him and a battered green hat on his head. It was easy to fancy that each fisherman was the same as the last seen, his reflection cast by some strange mirage of waters under every willow. For certainly the battered green hat was the same, and the celestial slow rapture in each eye was the same. Sometimes a rod lifted deftly, and the floundering shimmer of silver broke the trance of sleep. Or perhaps a little bottle was lifted to appreciative lips. Then again sleepily the willows swayed and the big clouds were too lazy to move, and the yellow-hammer, finding it as vain to ask for a little bit of bread as for no cheese, twittered into silence. Only the water-wagtails flickered by the reeds, like a restless thought on the fringes of a dream. The candelabra of the chestnuts had been extinguished after the carnivals of May and the Chinese lamps of laburnum were burned to their sockets, but the oaks were in full leaf, and beyond a company of oaks I saw the square tower of a church.

Hither, then, thirsty as the fishermen and hungry as the fish that rose so generously to their bait, I made my way. For churches betoken men, and men drink, and on this day the comely village of Ararat. On Ararat there grew a vine? That was in Ararat of Himalay. Here, in Ararat of Lincolnshire, I only saw June roses on the walls, and lupins and stocks and marigolds in the gardens. There were about six houses in Ararat, all buxom under their bonnets of thatch, a post office (where I had read the legend "Ararat Post Office"), an old church, and an inn at their centre. Among the houses and round the church little streams wandered at their will, where fat amphibious children splashed from water to grass. The inn's self was almost surrounded by water, so that when I crossed a bridge of stout planks and looked up to the signboard I was hardly surprised to find a conventional emblem of Noah's Ark there represented, with an assemblage of lions, camels, ostriches, and cows pleasantly looking out from the upper windows, and below all, in weather-fretted gold capitals, "Noah's Ark." The front of the inn was dark with ivy. The inscription over the threshold informed me that Hezekiel Patience was licensed to sell certain liquors on and off the premises.

When I passed into Noah's Ark, the sudden transition from the abounding summer light into the green gloom which filled this place dazzled my sight for many moments. But at once I became aware of the dense watery smell which filled Noah's Ark. It was cool and clean, as a diver finds the bed of a mountain

pool, yet it seemed that the spirit of all this country of waters inhabited this green profound inn. Now I saw great stuffed fish in glass cases round the walls—emblems of the chief triumphs won by the fishermen of Ararat; and now, too, Mr. Hezekiel Patience moving forward from a darker room behind his bar, a foaming mug of beer in each hand. These he placed before two fishermen laden with the trappings of their art, and “Thank ’ee, Noah!” said one, and “Thank ’ee again, Noah!” said the other.

For, indeed, Mr. Hezekiel Patience bore an astounding resemblance to that illustrious worthy—white hair streaming back from his benign brow, a great white beard and whiskers surrounding his face like solar coruscations, and his very nose displaying that partiality for his own genial wares for which Noah himself has been celebrated in antique song.

So I am to be pardoned, perhaps, if I, too, asked for “A pint of the best, Noah!” which, after a “Good-day to ’ee, my lad” that filled the room with amiable thunders, in due time came to me crowned in froth, from the cool cavern behind him, accompanied by a huge smile which rippled into the thickets of Noah’s beard.

In the diamond-paned window, against the outer side of which gloomed twigs and leaves of ivy, I sat down upon an oak bench before an enormous plate loaded with hunks of bread and cheese, which I washed down duly with draughts of beer. I could see beyond the thick green panes the stream curling outside the inn. I could hear the water talking there, and from time to time the sound of beer flowing from the barrel. Sometimes Hezekiel would break out into a roar of laughter, which gradually died among the rafters and below the old oak benches like a receding tide. I had walked far that day and many days before. The beer on draught at Noah’s Ark had the strength and sweetness of some primeval brew. Much bread and much cheese is sleepy food when a man is stretched on a bench carved for comfort two centuries ago. So maybe I slept.

But at all events it seemed now that clouds big with rain came in over Lincolnshire from east and west and north and south, where I walked among the deep meadows. Yet, when rain fell actually, so steeped in the smell of waters were these meadows that the rain seemed to be not a fresh thing but only the soaked air made more manifest. Steadily and steadily the rain fell. Without intermission and without haste the rain came from these big clouds until the rivers and streams and the pools ringed with hawthorn rose as if to meet the embrace of the rain. Now the waters came flowing over the banks, deliberately, with no passion, and flooded the far meadows to the edges of the sky. But by this time I had loosened a skiff from her mooring on a half-submerged bank, and, comfortably lying in the stern, the tide taking me upon its broad bosom, I looked out over this world of rising waters. No intermission and no haste. I noticed how the sea-water now mingled with rain and river,

how seaweed floated in the arms of torn willow branches. Now hawthorn was submerged, and now sycamore and now tall oaks.

Wherever the skiff brought me I saw church towers forlornly holding their heads out against the waters. I saw even the grand towers of Lincoln on the hill subside below the unending floods. I was still feeling mainly the calm interest of the spectator when I began uncomfortably to realise that, alone in my skiff in a drowned world, an unaccompanied life seemed to spread emptily before me. After a space of days and nights (forty perhaps; I had lost count), I alone, in my unworthiness, seemed to have been chosen to survive the deluge. Anxiously my eyes strained to the wet edges of space.

“Heigho! A chimney!”

I seized my oars and made towards the unique perpendicular in this horizontal world. As I came closer the lines of the building whence the chimney rose struck me as things I had seen before. From the upper windows of this place great swaying heads hung and hovered. Now closer. Lions, camels, ostriches, cows! In a marine universe my heart warmed towards these survivors from an animal day. But a voice boomed across the tide, “Welcome to Ararat!” and there at the central window shone gloriously the face of Noah, the face of Mr. Hezekiel Patience.

“Any room, Noah?” I asked joyfully.

“Coom oop and see, lad, coom oop!”

I seized the arm he held out towards me, and the ivy which grew thick round the rim of the window, and at last stumbled in beside him. . . . The rest is dim and unreal. I only know that when I walked out from Noah’s Ark that evening the waters had subsided. The fishermen were coming home with fat baskets and happy eyes. The bells of the church in Ararat were tolling quietly.

IN AND OUT OF THE WINDOW

I

William Sandiford paused a moment to draw breath half way up the drain-pipe, then he resumed the climb. The open window he was making for was not many yards above him, but it took him some time to get there. He had to go very quietly, every bit as quietly as he used to during his Oxford days.

The only difference was, that it was his own room he would be trying to get into then, having returned from a jaunt in town considerably later than the college authorities would have approved. Now it was someone else's room.

He had no idea whose it was. All he knew was that two or three well-to-do people had recently taken over garage-flats in Peveril Mews, which had lately become the most modish mews in Mayfair. You could see that from the new curtains, the new paint, the flowers. The flat he was burgling was quite clearly one of these.

He paused another moment on the window-sill, then swung himself silently into the room below. He hardly needed to let his feet down so cautiously, they landed on so thick and luxurious a carpet. He thought it better not to use his hooded torch. He had good eyes. He would hold on a minute or two till they got used to the darkness.

He wondered what the smell was—a rather exotic smell. He didn't care for it much. Somebody had been burning joss-sticks or incense or something—very decadent and morbid, thought William Sandiford. He had always been up against that sort of thing, both at his public school and at Oxford. Incense, indeed! It was thoroughly un-British.

He was afraid he was going to sneeze. That would be rather a nuisance, he thought; as by this time he could make out that the room he had entered was a bedroom. He could see the bed now pretty clearly—quite a low divan bed. He would have seen it earlier if it had been made up with ordinary bedclothes. But it wasn't. The pillows, blankets, and sheets were all of some dark colour in the style "artistic" people went in for nowadays. It was exactly what you would expect of the person who was lying in that bed (for it had now become evident someone was lying in that bed). He didn't know if it was a man or a woman; but whoever it was was an unhealthy piece of work, what with all this incense and mumbo-jumbo, and maroon bedclothes. (He was sure they must be maroon.)

He twitched his nostrils and pressed his finger in the middle of his upper lip in the effort to suppress his sneeze. But he did not sneeze. He was shocked

out of it by the sound of a voice that addressed itself to him out of the bed.

"I say," said the gentleman (for it was a male voice), "are you a burglar? I suppose you must be." There was the flavour of an Eastern intonation in the voice as there was the flavour of an Eastern odour in the air. There was no violence in the gentleman's tone; on the contrary, there was a rather lively and respectful curiosity.

"And what if I am?" asked William Sandiford a little truculently.

"Would you mind if I switched a light on?" the gentleman asked.

"Now, look here," said William. "If you're trying to pull any dirty stuff on me, you're going for a free ride, see?" He tried hard to make his voice Chicago as well as his idiom. But he did not succeed.

"Oh, I say, you're from Oxford, aren't you? I hope you don't think it's rude, but isn't that what they call the Oxford accent?"

William Sandiford bit his lip with vexation. His Oxford accent was always being thrust back between his teeth. It was always getting in the way of his making a living. "If you want to switch that light on, you'd best!" he said surlily. "I'm not trying to make a get-away."

"Thanks very much, I will," said the other. He put his right arm out and switched on a lamp on his bedside table. It did not add much light to the room, for the lamp-shade was of scarlet silk, heavily fringed. The shade was supported by the carved teak figure of an old man. That was Chinese. The table was a Moorish coffee-table, worked with a mother-of-pearl mosaic. There was an open writing-book and a fountain-pen beside the lamp. Its dull light was reflected from platters of fretted Benares ware hanging on the wall, and from brass urns and basins up and down the room. There were pied cushions of Morocco leather here and there, and Indian curtains inset with small circles of looking-glass. It was not in good taste, but it was Eastern, and expensive stuff of its kind. It was the way that Eastern freshmen at Brazenose College decorated their rooms.

A young man in apple-green silk pyjamas lay back against a maroon pillow. (It was, in fact, maroon, as the counterpane was, and as the sheets were.) The young man's hair was a shining jet-black, his face a rather sallow olive colour.

"My name's Eric el Gazani," said the young man. "What's yours?"

There was something so preposterously naïve about the question that it was impossible to answer it excepting truthfully.

"My name's William Sandiford, if you want to know."

"And were you really at Oxford? Or was it Cambridge?"

"I was at Oxford. St. Crispin's."

"Oh, really? I always wanted to go to Oxford. My mother wanted me to go, too. But my father wouldn't let me, of course."

“Very interesting, I’m sure. But I’m afraid I can’t stay and listen to your family history. I’ve got to be going.”

William hated to talk so gruffly, for the fellow was behaving very nicely about everything. Lots of people would have been really quite offensive.

“Oh, don’t go!” said Eric el Gazani. “Please don’t! I don’t know anybody in London, you know!”

“But look here,” William protested, “I really don’t think you understand! The fact is——”

“Oh, yes, I do. Really I do! I’ve never met a burglar before! You don’t know how exciting it is for me!”

William felt a little sick. He had felt something like it once or twice when he had scored a goal for the First Eleven and the whole school cheered and cheered, and the ball had just bounced off his foot into the goal from a brilliant pass by Timkins Senior.

“I say,” he said, “I think you ought to know. I’m not a *real* burglar. I mean I don’t want you to feel——”

Eric’s jaw dropped. “Oh, aren’t you really? Do you mean to say you weren’t coming in to burgle my flat? Oh, do say you’re joking!”

“I *was* coming in to burgle your flat. Of course I was!”

“There you are, then!” Eric observed, a note of triumphant satisfaction in his voice.

“I mean I’m only a beginner! This is my first job! Just my luck!” he growled bitterly. “It’s always like this!”

“Please do help yourself to a whiskey and soda, would you, on the ledge there?”

“Well, thanks, it’s very kind of you. Can I help you to one?”

“No, thanks. My mother wouldn’t ever let me touch whiskey. I’m a little liverish, you know. Could I have some ginger ale? Oh, please, don’t spill it on my book, will you? Thank you: I hope you don’t mind me asking you, Mr. Sandiford. But I’m so interested! Have you left Oxford long? This new job—is it—how do you call it?—a ‘rag’? Or is it . . . for business?”

“Oh, yes, damn it, it’s business right enough. Though it doesn’t look as if I’m going to make out any better in this line than in any other! It’s *bloody*, that’s what I call it.”

“So you have had other businesses—yes—since you left Oxford?”

“Have I? My *God*, have I! There’s nothing I haven’t tried. Honestly, Mr. el Gaz——”

“El Gazani is my name. But, please, that is for Tunisia. Here, in England, let it be Eric.”

“I say, really. *Eric*. I’ll be damned if I will. You can’t climb up a chap’s drain-pipe in order to burgle his flat and then call him *Eric*. You just can’t!”

"I don't want you to worry about that. If I'd have waited for a caller by the front door—oh, I don't know how long I should have to wait. You were saying . . . forgive me for being so interested!"

"I was saying, *Eric*"—he screwed up his eyes and clenched his fists and managed to get the name out—"I was saying there isn't a single bloody thing I haven't tried since I left Oxford, four or five years ago. I was secretary to a literary fellow till he expected me to make love to his wife for him while he went off with chorus girls. I ask you, can anybody with an elementary sense of decency stand for that sort of thing? Then I tried to sell vacuums, but the damn' things came to pieces in my hands when I tried to demonstrate them. Then I tried——But I don't want to bore you!"

"Please, please!"

"I don't know what I didn't try. I became a schoolmaster, a reporter, an insurance canvasser, a political agent, a waiter—everything you could think of. And I've been no good at anything. I got tired of going hungry and thirsty and sleeping out on benches under newspapers. If Society doesn't want me to go straight, there's nothing for it—I must go crooked. I used to be quite good at climbing college walls in Oxford—we had a sort of mountaineer's club, you know. So I determined to become a burglar. And the very first time I try my hand . . . really, it's too bad! On my word, it's too bad!"

"I'm awfully sorry about it," said Eric el Gazani. There was a pause for several seconds. Then he said a little shamefacedly: "You'll find some biscuits in that box there if you'd like some, or shall I ring and get a few sandwiches made for you?"

"No, thanks, the biscuits will do," said William hastily. "What? Another whiskey and soda? May I really? I say, it's awfully decent of you! Thank you!"

He felt rather thirsty after his little speech, as well as a little self-conscious. He tossed back his whiskey and soda, then stood about uncertainly for some moments.

"I suppose I'd better go now," he ventured. "That is, if I may." He approached the maroon bed a little diffidently, not quite caring to look his host straight in the eye. As he approached, he got into clearer focus the writing-book lying on the coffee-table just under the lamp, with a pen beside it. Then, for the first time, he perceived there was writing on the open pages, and the writing was divided up into regular blocks of four lines apiece, each line roughly of the same length.

"Poetry!" he exclaimed. "Oh," he said, "you write poetry?"

Eric bridled with pleasure. "As a matter of fact, I do!" he conceded. "Do you?"

"Well, to be frank, I edited *Oxford Poetry* in my last year. Not that there

was very much poetry to edit.”

“Really, did you?” There was a new note of respect in Eric’s voice. “I say, do you think . . . would it be awful cheek . . . I mean, would you think I was taking advantage if I asked you to look at some of my poems?”

“Well, I must say you’ve been pretty decent. I’m a bit of a modernist myself. Perhaps I ought to warn you.”

“That’s just what I need, honestly. Someone who really knows what’s been going on in English poetry since Rupert Brooke——”

“Rupert Brooke? Really!” William snorted contemptuously. “Haven’t you ever heard of Auden? Or even Eliot?”

“Eliot? I thought she wrote novels!”

“My dear fellow!” objected William somewhat shrilly. He seemed for a moment as if he was going to deliver a lecture on Recent Tendencies in English Verse. Then he changed his mind. “Let me look at your verses!” he ordered. It was quite the tone of a schoolmaster asking a small boy to show up his exercises—the tone, moreover, of a schoolmaster who discovers quite soon he has mistaken his vocation. Eric el Gazani lifted his poetry-book, like a mother lifting her baby into the hands of a surgeon.

“Thank you!” said William. He read the first quatrain, the second quatrain. He read one poem, a second poem. Then suddenly he almost yelped, as if someone had stuck a pin into him.

“No, sir, no! Really it can’t be done! If you *are* going in for rhyme, *now*, in the fourth decade of the twentieth century, you can’t rhyme ‘morn’ with ‘dawn.’ It can’t be done, I tell you! What? What’s this? ‘Saw’ with ‘more’? My dear fellow!” He turned the pages over, and his face became sour with displeasure. “Breeze, trees!” he ejaculated. “Skies, eyes!” He put the book down, shut his eyes, and lifted the back of his hand to his forehead. Then he spoke again. “Apart from anything else, your *technique*! It was old-fashioned when Tennyson was a choir-boy!” Then he opened his eyes again. “Where on earth have you lived all these years?” he asked. “Tunbridge Wells?”

“No,” the other replied, a deep flush suffusing his olive cheeks. “My mother came from Tunbridge Wells!”

“And your father from Cheltenham?” William Sandiford’s voice was so unpleasant at this moment that it helped you to understand why he had been a schoolmaster, a reporter, an insurance canvasser, a political agent, a waiter—and nothing long.

“No; as a matter of fact, he came from Tozeur.”

“Tozeur?”

“Yes. In Tunisia.”

“Oh!”

“He was a Tunisian sheikh!”

“But you said your mother——”

“Yes. She was English. She came from Tunbridge Wells. My father met her shopping in a bazaar in Tunis when she was a girl. They fell in love with each other, so she became one of his wives. He came from Gazan. That’s why we’re called el Gazani.”

“Oh!”

“But my mother insisted on my Christian name being Eric!”

“Oh!”

William Sandiford sounded quite silly saying “Oh!” all the time. But he found it impossible for the time being to utter any more pertinent observation.

“They went to live in his big house in the oasis of Tozeur. It was like a fortress. He was so jealous of her he would never let her go out. She was very artistic. She had always been very artistic in Tunbridge Wells, and she became more artistic in Tozeur, because she hadn’t anything else to do. She did a lot of pen-painting and poker-work. And poetry, of course.”

“Oh, I see!”

“She taught *me* poetry, too! Perhaps that’s why my *technique*, as you say, isn’t quite up to date,” he suggested pathetically.

“Yes,” said William, “I suppose so. And your subject-matter, too!” His voice was rather quieter than it had been.

“I beg your pardon?” asked Eric.

“Your subject-matter! I mean the stuff you write about—bulbuls, roses, nenuphars, damascene, memories.”

“I would awfully like to write good poetry. I didn’t know you shouldn’t rhyme ‘dawn’ with morn.’ ”

“No, you shouldn’t!” said William firmly. “It’s what they call a Cockney rhyme.”

“Oh, is it?” Eric hung his head. “It sounds very common.”

“I’m sorry. That’s how it is.”

Again the two young men seemed to have come to a dead end. There was another awkward silence that went on for a full two minutes. Then suddenly Eric el Gazani broke it, his eyes flashing with the brilliance of his idea.

“Look here, Mr. Sandiford!” he said. “You are not doing anything . . . settled. Do you think—do you think you could possibly teach me . . . technique, and that sort of thing?”

Mr. Sandiford was conscious he was not doing anything settled; he had not been allowed to settle very deep even into the profession of burglary. He considered the proposition for a little time. There was certainly a thing or two about the craft of verse-writing to teach the young man, things they were not strong on in Tunbridge Wells, apparently. But it would take some time.

“When are you going back?” he asked shortly.

The young man's eyes misted slightly over with tears. "I'm not going back!" he said. "You see, my mother's dead!"

"Oh, I'm sorry. And . . . and your father? You don't get on well with him?"

"He's dead, too. They both died last year. The estate was divided between his various sons. There were rather a lot of us, of course . . . and the others never liked me. They thought I was stuck up, because I was rather whiter than they are. Some of them are coal-black, of course. So I determined to come over to London with my share of the estate. And Ali. He's worth a half-share all by himself. He's wonderful."

"Ali?"

"Yes, my servant. His family has served my father's family for three generations. Before that they served the Wazanis. *They* had the ring then."

"I beg your pardon. The ring? I don't understand."

"Really, I beg yours. I should have explained sooner. This ring. You see here? On my right fourth finger!" He held his hand up in the scarlet-shaded lamplight. William Sandiford bent over and examined it. The ring was shaped in the form of a serpent, with a large ruby pressed between the creature's neck and body.

"I see. Very beautiful. It's very valuable, no doubt?"

"No, it's not a very good ruby, if that's what you mean. Its value is that it is the lord of Ali."

"I see." But William Sandiford sounded as if he didn't see at all. Was this really happening to him, William Sandiford, B.A., or was he dreaming it? Was that the dim rumble of Oxford Street he heard beyond the window there, or was this a Rámádan dream in Fez, or Baghdad, or some other slightly stuffy city of Eastern enchantment?

"But I thought you said Ali was *your* servant," he continued a little forlornly.

"Only because I'm wearing the ring," Eric explained easily. "You see?"

"Oh, yes, I see!"

"Well, please, Mr. Sandiford?"

"Well, what?"

"If you don't mind my putting it like that, I could make it worth your while, perhaps. Just for a few months. As long as you thought necessary."

"Oh, you mean . . . that business . . . about technique . . . in poetry?"

"Yes, yes!"

William Sandiford pondered the matter. "Will you let me see that book again, please? Thank you!"

"Would you like a little more light?"

"No, thank you!" Even yet the thought of a little more light scared him. "Oh, all right! Of course! Yes, please!"

He sat down and examined the volume with real care, as if it might be a sheaf of poems submitted for *Oxford Poetry* by an earnest freshman.

Then he got up again and snapped the book to. "I'm sorry!" he said. There was an almost tragic finality in his voice.

"Why? Why?" wailed Eric el Gazani. "They can't be so bad as all that? And I'm willing to try! I'm willing to work so hard!"

"I'm sorry!" he repeated. "It isn't the technique only!" he said. "It isn't the technique chiefly!"

"What is it, then?"

"You don't *know* anything. About *life*, I mean. You haven't *lived*. How can you expect to write poetry when you've been shut up in a harem in the Sahara all your life? No wonder you burble away about lilies and frankincense. No wonder . . . What was that poem, now? Where is it?" He picked up the volume again and turned the pages rapidly. "Listen to this, my dear fellow:

*The sun is setting in the west
Behind the sighing sea.
His dying rays all seem to rest
Upon the mountain's snowy crest,
Who rears his head as though opprest
By that solemnity.*

The sun is setting in the west? Where the hell do you expect the sun to be setting? You don't know anything! You haven't *lived* anything! How can you expect to write poetry? Why . . . what . . .?"

And, indeed, there was cause for questioning, if not for alarm. The young man had flung the maroon bed-sheet aside. He was standing in the middle of the room in his exquisite apple-green pyjamas. He stood with his head thrown back, his hands outstretched, a fire in his eye.

"You're right!" he cried. "Dear Mr. Sandiford, you're right! Of course that's what's wrong with me! I've never seen anything, done anything, lived anything!" His voice grew more and more enraptured. "Kismet! You have been sent to me! You will help me! I will become a great poet! Quick!" he shouted. "Quick!" He was unbuttoning the coat of his pyjamas. He flung it from him to the ground.

"Not so quick!" William besought him. "What's all this about? You don't think you're going to write good poetry if you sit about with nothing on?"

"Take off your clothes!" ordered Eric. "Do you hear? Take off your clothes! You will get into my pyjamas! You will take my place in my bed! And I——"

"Yes, you?" There was no withstanding the urgency of Eric's command. William Sandiford had already taken off his coat and muffler. (He had had no

tie and collar for some months.) He was already unbuttoning his braces.

“See! I get into your clothes! I will go where you came from! I will go out into the darkness. I will learn what life is! And when I come back——”

“I think I follow. We are to change places, are we?”

“You are right! Be quick, please, with your trousers!”

“Wait a minute! Wait a minute!” William stooped and contemplatively undid his shoe-laces. Then he lifted his face. “Yes, a change wouldn’t do me any harm! A little regular food and drink would do me all the good in the world! I say, but what about Ali? Won’t Ali knife me?”

“Take this, my friend! Take this!” Eric removed the golden snake from his finger. “Let me put it on for you!” he said. “There! So long as you wear the ring, Ali will serve you. You are the lord of Ali!”

William Sandiford blinked. He liked the sound of it. “I say, I think it’s a damn’ good idea. Thanks awfully!”

“Please let me have those trousers! Thank you! Thank you!” He feverishly continued with his *toilette*. “And this?” he said, lifting up the muffler. “How do you wear this? Oh, I see! Thank you! And now, my dear friend, my dear friend——” He seized William’s hands between both his own. “Good-bye, good-bye. How shall I ever be able to thank you?”

“Look, one thing before you rush off! How long do you want this to go on for? I mean . . . when do we see each other again?”

Eric el Gazani had one leg across the window-sill by this time. It hung suspended there as he pondered the matter. “What do you think? Six months from now? Just this same time?”

“Righto! I think that might do the trick! Good-bye, Eric!”

“Good-bye, William!” the other answered softly, and disappeared.

William Sandiford put on the apple-green pyjamas. He rather fancied himself in them. They were certainly very agreeable to the skin. He helped himself to another whiskey and soda, got into bed, and turned out the light. He curled himself up between the maroon bed-sheets, under the maroon blankets. They might be a little decadent to look at, but they were deuced comfortable to sleep in. He was soon sleeping sound as a baby.

II

It was six months later, to the night and the hour. If a policeman had been prowling round Peveril Mews he would hardly have failed to notice the figure of a man shinning up a drain-pipe and letting himself in through an open window on the first floor of a garage-flat.

“Hello, Eric!” a voice whispered out of a jade-green bed. “Is that you? Shall I switch on the light?”

“Yus, Bill! If yer like! Switch on the old left-and-right!”

William switched the lamp on a little fearfully. The voice didn’t sound a bit like his friend from Tunisia, Eric el Gazani. Nor did the vocabulary, either.

But it *was* Eric, a curiously transformed Eric; not the Eric who had climbed out of that window six months ago, dressed in a down-and-out’s suit which looked as if he had hired it from Wardour Street for a fancy-dress party. The down-and-out’s suit he wore looked as if it had become part and parcel of him, through many a long day’s tramping and a short night’s dossing. His cheeks were unshaven, but they had a sort of windy and rainy freshness. The hair lay in a mat over his bright eyes.

“I say, Eric!” William whispered. “Do come in! Do come in out of that window! A policeman will see you!”

“A copper? A bleedin’ ten-a-penny? I should worry!”

“What on earth do you mean?”

“What I mean? Just this, old cocky! I’ve come back, ain’t I? I’ve said I would, didn’t I? Well, I *’ave*! And now I’m orf again, see? That’s all I wanted to tell yer! So long, Bill. I’ll be seein’ yer!”

And the foot that had hung over into the room was there no longer. Eric was there no longer. He was slithering down the drain-pipe, like a trapeze artist or a cat burglar.

And suddenly an unspeakable nausea rose into William Sandiford’s throat, a nausea of the muffins, the marmalade, the wings of chicken, the maroon bedclothes, the jade-green bedclothes, the hideous suavity of Ali, the hideous comfort of his incarceration.

He hurled himself out of bed and rushed over to the window. “Hi, Eric!” he cried. “Wait a minute! Wait a minute! I’m coming, too!” Then he rushed back again to his bedside. He slipped the serpent ring, the lord of Ali, from his finger and laid it on the coffee-table by his pillow. The ruby glared a little malignantly in the fringed red lamplight.

Then he ran back to the window again, seized the drain-pipe, and swung himself out into the open darkness. “Hi, Eric! Eric!” he called.

THE END

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.
[The end of *The Doomington Wanderer* by Louis Golding]