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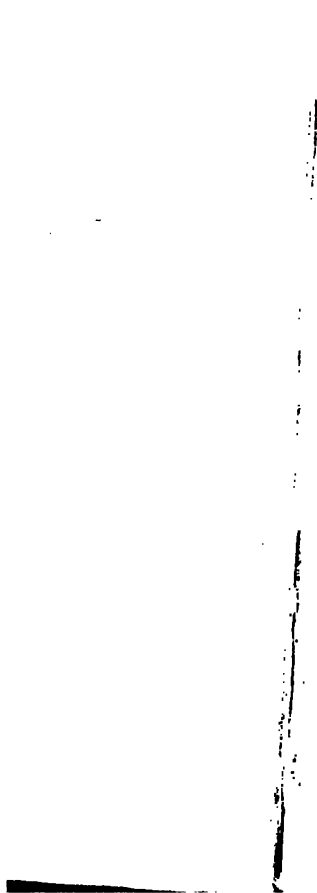
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STORIES OF
STRANGE WOMEN





20

**Stories of
Strange
Women**

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

A SPRAY OF LILAC
A HAPPY LITTLE ADVENTURE

Stories of Strange Women

By
J. Y. F. Cooke

What lies between!



London

John Long

13 and 14 Norris Street, Haymarket

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First Published in 1906

**AD
O. & C.
W.
I.M.A.**

*A wastrel I, and a wanton she—
And a damned bad pair, was the world's decree
But I cared nought, and neither did she,
For all in all to each other were we.*

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The Garments of a Girl



La vision s'est évanouie avant le jour à l'heure où les
songes rentrent chez eux par la porte de corne ou d'ivoire.
. . . Combien sont morts qui moins heureux que vous
n'ont pas même donné un seul baiser à leur chimère?

T. G.

Through thy garments the grace of thee glows.

A. C. S.

The substance of our lives is woman ; all other things
are irrelevancies, hypocrisies, subterfuges.

G. M.

*And now being femininely all array'd
With some small aid from scissors, paint, and tweezers,
He look'd in almost all respects a maid.*

B.

*My love in her attire doth show her wit,
It doth so well become her.*

Anon.

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AN August sun blazed down on the white high-road along which I—an undersized, neatly-built young chap, in a rough suit and heavy boots—was trudging, steadily and stolidly, indifferent to accustomed discomfort. The air down in the lowlands was close and languid, and the dusty road hard and unwelcome to tired feet. I had come down from the Limestone fells, where the atmosphere is cool and fresh and a soft wind always stirs, and was walking to catch my train at the little wayside station of Lonsdale and Loam on the L. & N. W. in North Lancashire.

Up there among the fells the ancient silence was set at nought, and the gentle greyness of the scarred, weather-worn rocks defiled by an army of navvies who picked and shovelled the

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hillside where it was soft, and drilled and smashed it with gelegnite where it was hard ; who blasted rock (and much else) and applied one sanguinary adjective to all things ; who clamoured hourly for "sub" and drank heavily and worked lightly; but who, after all, were the one indispensable factor in the making of the big aqueduct which was to bring the waters of Westmoreland to the millions of the Midlands.

It was my duty, in the capacity of contractors' agent and engineer, to control and direct a brigade of this army, and this particular day had been a more than usually harassing and anxious one for me, inasmuch as there had been a strike among the navvies. My principals, meaning thereby the contractors—two keen, shrewd, capacious persons—had instructed me to be firm and to stand no nonsense, but to settle ; and to settle without involving any extra expense to them. Violence and damage had been threatened, so I carried a revolver, and had been accompanied by the police with a warrant

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for the arrest of one of the ringleaders. However, with the help of a little bit of luck and the exercise of a great deal of tact and pertinacity, I had succeeded in quietly settling the whole thing. I don't want any one to suppose that I was inherently possessed of these qualities—no, but my principals were, to an inordinate extent, and my contact with and subservience to these men temporarily endowed me with their attributes. Under their influence and when on their business—which was almost always—I became exactly like them, keen, hard, determined and economical in all things—except the expenditure of personal energy. My only recreation was a day once or twice a year in magical London—that place of pictures and plays and pretty women—and it so happened that one such short visit had fallen to my lot the previous Saturday.

I recollect—and rather curious it was, when viewed in the light of after events—that I tried to lessen the tedium of my long tramp by going

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over in my head some of the incidents of my visit, and among others—this is the odd part of it—a scene at Christie's sale rooms, the Saturday before, where a magnificent necklace of 640 graduated orient pearls had been bid and bid for by the circle of swarthy parrot-beaked dealers till the price had reached £30,000. So engrossing were my recollections that unconsciously my pace slackened, with the result that, when I rounded the last corner and caught sight of the station, my train was already at the platform, and evidently about to start ; while there was still a couple of hundred yards for me to do. There was nothing for it but to run, and run my best. It was out of the question for a man in my position to miss trains, and most reprehensible to lose time loitering by the way ; therefore, I was quite determined, and pelted along at top speed. The engine whistled, faster and faster I ran, through the waiting hall, past the booking office, and on to the platform as the train was moving out.

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The station-master shouted and tried to intercept me; but at my pace it would have required an expert full-back to have collared me. Fixing my eye on one of the shining handles, now streaming rapidly past, I made straight for it, and in the nick of time managed to turn it, and shoot bang into the compartment.

Completely blown, streaming with sweat that quite blinded my eyes, dizzy and stunned by that headlong rush, I lay some minutes almost unconscious in the corner: gradually my wind came back—then very slowly something began to dawn on my recovered wits: the train was bowling smoothly northwards with a steady powerful roll. There was no mistaking that magnificent stroke of the big compound loco. for the thrumpity trump of the slow local-stopping train— Great heavens! I had jumped into the Perth express—next stop Carlisle, ninety miles north! It appeared afterwards that the express, which was running in two portions, owing to the weight of the shooting traffic, had been pulled

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up by signal at my obscure station—just for a moment, as she was overrunning the block.

Just imagine my plight—whirled away ninety miles from my home in shabby clothes, dirty collar, huge boots coated with the grey mud out of a tunnel heading; my flannel shirt wringing wet, no pocket-handkerchief, unshaved, uncomfortable, ashamed—an unwelcome intruder even into a third—and, as luck would have it, this was a first, and one of the most luxurious sort.

Then the horror of my situation began slowly to filter into my brain.

What was in the carriage with me?

The seat in front was unoccupied,—but the corner to my left? I dared not turn my head to look at it.

But the very atmosphere was eloquent.

A fragrance, a sweet penetrating emanation—far subtler than any scent that is sold in shops—proclaimed, clearer than words or looks, the presence of femininity, and of the finest brand.

In other words—there was a woman in the

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compartment. And the certainty of the fact came to me without anything approaching a look at her—for I felt too shamefaced and nervous to risk the presumption of catching her eyes. When, however, after great preliminary caution I screwed my courage up and my head the least bit round to the left, it was an immense relief to find that—nothing was visible.

Nothing at least more formidable than the *Morning Post* and the white-gloved tips of the fingers which held it; this saved me from the humiliation of a look which I felt would shrivel me up with its aversion and disdain. Moreover, it gave me the chance of studying her skirts at my leisure, for there was

“A winning wave deserving note
In the tempestuous petticoat.”

She was in a dress of pale grey-blue voile, pleated very closely from the waist to the knees, then it went mad and dashed out in all directions—like the water through the sluice of a lock-gate. From beneath the hem foamed out

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the frills innumerable of a pale salmon-coloured underskirt, hiding all but the tip of a patent leather shoe.

It may have been the contrast with my uncouth clothes, or the novelty of it, or simply because I was young and ignorant—though I don't believe in that explanation—but at any rate it all seemed to me exquisitely attractive, graceful, elegant, with an indefinable insistent suggestion that all these things, undoubtedly very charming and fascinating, were only hints and promises, foretastes and preludes—the merest decorative trifles. I may say that further acquaintance with this subject has modified my views; these things now seem to me like the *hors d'œuvres* lavishly laid before you in the cheaper French restaurants—dine off them, there's nothing better to follow.

Behind her newspaper the lady remained perfectly motionless. Her impassivity restored my ease and confidence a little and enabled me to devote some attention to my own affairs.

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The first thing to be done was to turn out my pockets. Out came pipe and tobacco pouch, the revolver, then the warrant (which the police had given me)—these I placed on the seat in front—then a lot of papers, accounts and correspondence which I unfolded and read, finding among them a letter from my principals ordering me to take an early opportunity to go to Newcastle-on-Tyne and inspect some plant that was for sale. This was lucky, because I could go on there from Carlisle and turn my involuntary journey to some use. Having spent as long as possible reading and sorting my papers, I began to return them to my pockets, glancing for an instant to see if the *Morning Post* still surceined the lady.

It was still there.

Something, however, had taken place.

Though not very observant of slight changes of appearance, still I was aware that her position had altered—it now gave the idea of motion suddenly arrested—there was a slight quiver in

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the osprey in her hat visible over the edge of the paper. The whole thing was slight and might have been my fancy; besides, why shouldn't she move if she wanted to? It was not to be expected she was going to sit like a statue till we got to Carlisle. With this reflection I went on with my papers and glanced over the warrant—unfolding and reading it for lack of anything better to do. There was the least stir from her corner. I looked up suddenly and caught the lady's eyes fixed on the warrant—the *Post* was up again like the snap-shot shutter of a camera, but in that fraction of a second I saw her face.

Its expression completely puzzled me. In addition to intense interest, there was something in it like apprehension and alarm, as if she thought immediate danger threatened her. It was vexing and humiliating to me to find myself an object of dread as well as disgust to this amazingly magnificent creature; certainly it was natural enough that she should be annoyed at the intrusion of a rough-looking person, but not to

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be frightened, for after all, despite any dress deficiencies, a man who has been to a University, young and decently good-looking, and with moreover the air of refinement that is given by a liking for literature and art, ought to be correctly placed by an average well-bred woman. Still whatever the reason might be she was obviously apprehensive on some grounds, and she kept up her newspaper screen so persistently that the situation began to grow painfully monotonous. I fidgeted about, changed over to the seat opposite, and finally composed myself quietly in a corner and went to sleep—that sort of railway sleep where one's eyes are shut, but the brain wanders like a butterfly. No matter what subject my thoughts settled on, they invariably fluttered back to her and to surmises and fancies about her. Ten minutes might have passed when I languidly let my eyes open the least bit and look at whatever was before them.

It was now my turn to be frightened.

The paper was still up, but through a tiny

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hole in it there glistened something—her eye fixed on me ; the newspaper was grasped convulsively in her hands, one of which also clutched a dagger ; her right leg was drawn well back and carried the weight of her body, while the left seemed to be poised in the air, with the toe just going to drop—it was the position of a wild animal about to strike its prey.

Instantly, without the least conscious volition, my hand went out to the revolver beside me. Then gradually, imperceptibly, the threat, the tenseness died out of her attitude, the merciless knife disappeared, and without anything to mark the change, there she sat quietly as at the first.

What did it mean ?

Could it have been a mere fancy that had come to me between sleeping and waking ? Perhaps : still there was the hole in the newspaper, and I still grasped the revolver. Ah ! the revolver of course, how inconsiderate of me. A big-booted rough-looking fellow to burst into a lady's reserved carriage and then go handling

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a revolver—to be sure, she must be frightened out of her wits. Dagger indeed! it likely was only a paper-knife.

Then an inspiration came to me.

Standing up and making a profound bow to the *Morning Post*, then opening the window and putting as much significance and dramatic gesture into the action as was possible, I flung the pistol forth.

When my back was turned, there's no doubt she had taken a good look at me, for she gave me a little flash of her face before the paper went up again—a glimpse that left the impression of refined delicate features and a complexion of dazzling brilliancy. It was pretty evident that this proceeding of mine was a relief to her, and that she appreciated my tact, and was beginning to see that she was dealing with a man of feeling and not a lunatic. All the same she kept up that impenetrable screen dividing us as completely as though we were in different rooms. It began to irritate me, knowing it was my

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odious presence that put her to so much inconvenience, and I felt that if something did not happen soon it would be my duty to follow the revolver out of the window. At last an idea presented itself—why not go into the lavatory? Yet the delicacy and propriety of this seemed rather doubtful; the compartment was hers, like her boudoir; it seemed profanity; but my exasperation soon waived such scruples aside, and in I went, leaving my papers scattered about the seat.

What a comfort to be able to wash and look in the glass! All my nervous apprehensions about my appearance were set at rest. I was looking fairly nice; the disfiguring red that must have flamed in my face had cooled down to my usual clear brown. There's no denying that my complexion is one of my points; the sun and air tan my skin a nice dusky olive like a hazel nut with a flush of cream in it, which must be rather attractive—more so, of course, than my talking about it.

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Having smartened myself up, what was to be done? Nothing, but think about her and wonder what she was doing, and if my absence satisfied her. How I envied my empty seat, whence now a full view could be had of that face I longed to look upon. For in truth there was some mysterious charm in those half-revealed, half-divined attractions which held me as in a spell, and I could not restrain myself at last from gently opening the door an inch—not to peep, for as she sat on the same side as the door nothing would be visible, but only that the delicious aura of her presence might penetrate into the stuffy dog-box in which I was imprisoned.

But there was something to be seen when I looked through that half-inch.

What?

Well, as near as I could make out, it was that legal document, the warrant, being chucked across from her side of the carriage to mine. I shut the door noiselessly and began considering what she meant by reading my papers. After a

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little there came a distinct, peremptory rat-tat-tat at the door. A tremor ran through me and I felt myself blushing scarlet; however embarrassing the explanation that suggested itself, there was no mistaking what was wanted. I was to come out.

So I did.

There was a complete transformation; she had got out a big luncheon-basket and spread napkins on the seat, and arranged on them a lot of tempting eatables and drinkables; there she sat surrounded by it all, smiling, and apparently much pleased to see the improvement in my appearance. There was no awkward pause; the moment I appeared she spoke to me with a merry laugh and in a light flexible contralto voice.

“Oh, you awful, awful young man! do you know you frightened me out of my wits.”

“I cannot believe that,” I said, too busy looking at her face to know what I was saying.

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“Do you make a habit of jumping into carriages and flourishing pistols at unprotected ladies?”

“Now, I threw it out the moment it appeared to annoy you.” I said this very stoutly, for I was rather proud of my action, and, besides, the revolver was value for seven-and-six; and with my business training, one doesn't throw three half-crowns out of the window every day.

“Annoy! upon my word, you take a very mild view of it.”

“Alarm, I should have said. But you can't tell how sorry I am. Were you really and truly frightened?”

“What did you think? How did my behaviour strike you?”

“Oh, simply perfect; nothing could be better.”

“Ah!” She said this with a long, varied inflection, that expressed surprise, amusement and interest. I suppose the warmth of my admiration was to be seen in my dancing eyes. She

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seemed to reflect a moment, then with a curious amused sort of a smile she said—

“I’m going to ask you if you will share my luncheon with me.”

“Thanks so much, but I couldn’t think of _____”

“Perhaps you’ve had luncheon? It’s rather late of course.”

“I’ve had nothing since six this morning ; but it would be robbing you.”

“Robbing me !” she exclaimed with a bright merry laugh, “that would be a new sensation for me ; a thing I’m always on the hunt for. Come along now, I’ve lunched hours ago, so there’s plenty for you. I’m only going to have a cup of tea.”

Her voice was firm and level, her manner easy and assured, just a trifle of condescension in it, as if—as was quite true—she was meeting some one out of her social ambit, but one who might possess other passports to acceptance besides society ones, such as—but I’ll pass that over.

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She made me sit beside her, and helped me to a splendid feed—chicken, pressed beef, salad—she mixed a dressing so good you could have eaten cabbage leaves with it ; lots of pastry and fruit ; oh, you never tasted such delicious rolls and butter ! “ Was I thirsty ? ” of course I was ; so she concocted a cup—beaune, seltzer, spice, and a dash of something out of one of the silver-topped bottles from her dressing-case—because she had no liqueur, she said. All the while she chatted so pleasantly and took such interest in my business and my doings, and how I got into the wrong train, and what I intended to do, while I explained my happy idea of going on to Newcastle-on-Tyne, *via* Carlisle, to attend the sale of plant there.

At last everything eatable having disappeared, we began to put the things up.

“ Won't you finish the claret cup ? ” she asked.
“ Don't you like it ? ”

“ Like it ! why I could drink a gallon of it, ” so I said ; but the fact was I felt it getting into my

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head. Perhaps she had been too liberal with that "dash of liqueur," but as it pleased her to see me enjoy it, I finished the lot.

"There's that wretched *Morning Post*," I said, lifting it and glancing at it. "How I hate it."

"Do you? I think it's the least stupid of the Pennies."

"It's not that, it's because I kept you looking at it so long, and all the time I might—well —"

"I might have kept you looking at me—now, now, I really cannot allow you to say such dreadful things."

Not seeing where the dread came in, I said helplessly, "I hope you had something interesting to read;" then as my eye caught a paragraph, "Oh! did you see this—'Great Robbery of Pearls'? What a curious coincidence!"

It seemed as if she suddenly caught at her wind.

"Why?" she said, after a pause, in the tone of an indifferent questioner.

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“Because I’ve seen those very pearls.”

“You? Where?” There was the least tremor in her voice.

“At Christie’s; I happened to be there last Saturday when this necklace was being sold. There were six hundred and forty pearls in it, they say, and it fetched the enormous price of thirty thousand pounds, that’s—let me see—that’s forty-six seventeen six a pearl. By Jove.”

“You calculate quickly,” she said coldly. “How did you do it?”

“By *practice*,” a little jape of my own which she did not see.

“Thirty thousand—a large sum—are they worth it? What did you think?”

“I thought it monstrous that people who have money to throw away so unproductively should be allowed to go at large; why one of those pearls would drive thirty feet of heading through the solid rock.”

“A very penetrating thought,” she said. “I’m afraid such people are very sinful.”

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“ If I had my way I’d throw those pearls back into the sea, then there would be thirty thousand pounds available for public works.”

“ You ought to be in Parliament.”

“ Think so ?”

“ Yes ; we want men like you.”

“ Really ?”

“ Well, I can only speak for myself.”

Of course, I knew she was only rotting, for she had to turn her head to hide her amusement ; but, after all, she mayn’t have been far out, she was a very clever woman, and appreciated me, I think, seriously, and it’s very few can do that.

Then she lit a cigarette, and, after a couple of puffs, came over to me and put it between my lips, saying she did not like women who smoked.

“ Yes, I quite agree with you,” I replied ; “ all the attraction of women depends on contrast, they lose when they adopt men’s ways—we like women simply because they are not like us.”

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By this time the wine had got into my head, and I was greatly daring. I wanted to go on talking to her and to say brilliant and profound things: for she was easy to get on with, and unlike the usual society women—the few at least that I've come across, who seem to pounce on some simple remark and twist it upside down and tell you you're not very complimentary. No, she was clever and quick, and understood what a fellow meant, without troubling him to express it according to copy-book. The worst of it was, a sort of elated drowsiness was coming over me, and although voluble enough, it's possible I wasn't very coherent; my sentences began very well, but they would never wind up. She must have guessed at my state, for she put a pillow under my head and made me lie down. A presentiment came over me that this was my last chance, so, when she advised me to go to sleep, I said with deep emotion, "I can never, never thank you enough."

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“What for? the chicken, the claret, the cigarette, or the companionship?”

I went on with my own train of thought, unheeding. “I’ve never been so happy before—it’s been like half-an-hour in Paradise.”

“And that’s quite long enough for you.”

Absorbed with my purpose and struggling hard to keep my wits clear, I proceeded—“It’s very wrong—very unconventional and all that, and I’ve no right to speak to you—you mayn’t be able to understand me”—which was very probable; “but,” I pumped out with a supreme effort and with conviction, “I know you.”

She interrupted me with one of her arrowy interrogative glances that lasted a second and vanished before an amused smile.

“I know you—that is, in some other life, in some other world: yes, you have been mine before—now I’ve found you: and oh! how I have been wanting you.”

“There are others wanting me quite as

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ardently," she said laughingly, "but they may not be quite so nice as you."

"Are there?" I said fatuously, as though I was the only man she had ever met. "Where?"

"No doubt in Glasgow, when I arrive."

"I suppose so," I said gloomily. "Well, there may be others, but none who would do the things for you that I would do."

"You would help me if you could?" She had come and sat down beside me and was patting my hair.

"I would die for you."

"What a pretty boy you are: oh! what it is to be young and . . . innocent."

"Come now, I don't know about that. You have no idea the wickedness I'm capable of, if you did you'd hate me."

"Or love you."

She said it with a strange coquetry, her eyelids drooping and her eyes looking downwards and sideways, as if she had discovered more in the words than she meant, and was timidly

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waiting to see if the additional meaning had struck me. Then she rose slowly and went back to her corner. Were we getting into deeper waters than I could navigate? It was not clear to me what was expected of me, or what to do; for I had all a boy's deep reverence for a good woman a little older than himself, and my love was a very new thing to me, and timid; so, I judged it wisest and easiest to say nothing. It was enough to lie there in the sweet silence with her pillow under my head and watch the western sun go down behind her, and see his gold and amber lighting up the bronze undulations of her hair. And always were fixed on me those wonderful eyes, so quick and penetrating—at times a little hard perhaps, then melting into merriment; while about the corners of her mouth ever lurked that amused smile in which a trace of contempt or superiority blended with kindly interest.

Thus from the corners diagonally opposite we two watched each other, while the express

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wound its way up and up through the clear air of Shap Fell, and the evening light grew fainter and fainter and my eyes heavier and heavier. Before I slept—or was it a dream?—she rose and came over to me and settled my head more comfortably, taking my collar off and loosening my belt, and—but this surely was in my dream—bending across my face, till the line of her lips and mine formed a cross, the faint flicker of a kiss was born between us.

Then the stars came out.

* * * * *

You wonder what happened? I can't tell you.

I never saw her again.

Does it matter who she was, or what she had done? I was happy, utterly happy; never again will I be happy like that. It was the first time I lifted the foils to fight in the eternal duel, and with me was the elation, the

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confidence of manhood, the exhilarating feeling that my weapon had got through my adversary's guard and touched, heedless if the next lunge were through my heart.

When I awoke, the carriage was in darkness, and some demon of discomfort had got hold of me. My head was aching with a persistent split that must eventually open it—evidently the drink had not agreed with me ; then there was a most disagreeable sensation of tightness somewhere below my stomach—evidently the food had not agreed with me. Soon the train began to slow down ; and I lifted one of the blinds and saw the lights of a big town, rainy and dirty and tall-chimneyed—could it be—oh ! impossible—but yes—it was—Glasgow ! How abominably annoying to oversleep myself and miss getting out at Carlisle. Then I recollected my travelling companion ; why hadn't she called me ? She, my beautiful kind angel—I must ask her. But there was no one in the carriage save myself.

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Strange, for she was going to Glasgow ; why then had she got out ? Anyhow I'd better get up. Then I pulled myself together and shambled on to my feet. What was the matter ? There didn't appear to be a level spot on the floor—it felt jerky, dotty, unsafe ; besides something was squeezing my toes most horribly, and then when I moved there was an odd swishy feel, as if one were going through two feet deep of hay. I was astray all over—head and feet and middle—what could it be ? To throw some light on the question I made a grab at the green silk cover which was hiding the roof lamp, but my arm wouldn't lift properly—my jacket seemed to fit so tightly. Just at the moment the carriage, striking the check rail at a crossing, gave a lurch which knocked me off my wobbly balance and pitched me against the lavatory door, which gave way. There was light in the lavatory and a looking-glass. Some unaccountable change in my nature impelled me instinctively towards that glass. Why on earth a looking-glass should

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appear the one thing necessary to me at that moment is odd—but it did : a burning curiosity to look in the glass possessed me ; and this was what I saw.

A delicate ivory complexion, softly tinted with the wild rose flush, blue-veined temples, arched slender eyebrows, dark kohol-tinted eyes, a mouth carmined to a cupid's bow, a mass of ruddy hair in myriad waves, crowned by a great projecting hat with osprey plume. In fact the face of a charming girl, whose sweet little mouth, I could not help thinking, even in my bewilderment, seemed to be waiting for a kiss. And I was going to bestow one, when another twinge made me look down at my feet ; and behold, petticoats, skirts and the rest of it—hers—yes, I was dressed head to foot in her clothes, and my feet were jammed into her pointed patent leathers, which I straightway kicked off. Then I could not resist the temptation gently, gradually, to raise my skirts, revealing the most seductive open-work stockings of silk ; sup-

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ported in some wonderful way from—how was it?—no—stop—I felt this was going too far—so I let the beastly things drop with a bang—and a blush.

In the carriage were her rugs and bags—all her belongings, but not a single article of mine. How had it been done? When I was asleep, yes; she had undressed; yes, shaved off my neat little moustache; yes, but had she—a—taken off—my—impossible—I know she was incapable of immodesty—my face flamed under its rouge and powder at the bare thought—perhaps she did it in the dark—but no matter how it was done, why did she give me a twenty-inch waist?

The train was now gliding into the Caledonian Station: before it stopped, there was a man hanging on to the handle on the offside, and on the platform side a knot of men separated out and formed a semicircle round my door directly we came to a stand-still. Then a brisk individual opened the door and said—

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“Mrs. Burton Browne, *alias*”—something I didn’t catch, “I arrest you on the charge of having in your possession six hundred and forty pearls stolen in London—more or less.”

“My good men, you are making a great mistake,” I stammered.

“Here is my warrant,” said he; “anything you say will be taken down and used in evidence against you.”

“But will you let me explain?” here they handcuffed me. “I tell you that you are a parcel of unutterable idiots—let me explain.”

Unheeding the assertion and request, and failing moreover to take them down, they bundled me into a brougham and took me to a police station. On the way I informed them that they should be ashamed to treat a lady in such a manner—rudely squeezing up against me—and that they might know a lady when they saw one, but they said nothing and simply tried to look as if they had brought off a tremendous

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coup, and that it needed great nerve and stern self-control to carry the thing to the end.

For myself—what were my sensations, my explanations? None. I was surprised, bewildered, and inclined in a silly incoherent way to accept everything as it came along as normal—to be in keeping I think I even talked falsetto—always with a dim expectation that in the end there would be something funny—for some of us. I formed no theory or opinion: it was all too unreal; a kind of wild nightmare panorama rolled before me, where I saw myself facing single-handed a horde of demoniac navvies, putting out blazing huts, sprinting along dusty roads, leaping on to flying expresses, meeting long-sought-for ladies, lunching gloriously, kissing red lips in the red sunset, changing into the fairy queen, graceful and slim—“Slim! oh, hang these corsets—they’re real enough, at any rate!” I ejaculated.

At the station the police began to search me.

“Stop!” I cried, “you mustn’t do that.” For

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the instant the feminine instinct was strong in me ; there was, or should be, a sanctity about the very garments.

“What’s the matter with you?” asked the most truculent of them.

“Have you no sense of delicacy? Are women treated in this way?”

“Come, Jim, no use in that nonsense ; we know who you are very well,” said the Inspector.

“I tell you,” said I, “you haven’t the remotest idea who I am.”

“Haven’t we, indeed! You’re Jim Bailey, the notorious and infamous criminal.”

“It isn’t true—I swear it isn’t true,” I fairly shrieked in shame and distress. “A man—my princess, a man! horrible, absurd, it is a lie—do you hear?”

“Well, you can be who you please,” said the man quietly. “Anyhow, we’re going to see if the pearls are on you.”

Whenever they tried to touch me I giggled

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hysterically and doubled up. It was so natural—and in fact with those things on me I couldn't help being a girl—the men were puzzled and wavered.

“Look here,” I said, “one thing's certain; if I'm the person you take me for, I'm a lady.”

“Well, we take you for a thief, so you ain't a gentleman,” said one idiot.

Suddenly the Inspector made a suggestion which cornered me. “Do you demand a female searcher? You can have one if you like.”

“I demand to be let alone,” I snapped. “You touch me at your peril. Call yourselves men——”

“Nothing in his baggage,” said an officer, entering.

“They're concealed on his person, that's plain.”

“No, it isn't,” was my last retort. Then they began.

One by one they took off my things, revealing to me—then unacquainted with the

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advertisement sheets of Ladies' Pictorials—the Eleusinian mysteries of a woman of fashion's garments. At last, denuded of ninety-five per cent. (by weight) of my attire, I stood there *en bicyclette*—if you know what that means. They had found no pearls.

Then something got the better of me—besides, the beastly corsets were squeezing me to death—I jeered at them recklessly, and forgetful of all femininity, said—

“What's the matter now? What are you stopping for? Afraid? I wish to heaven you'd take these damned things off, when you're about it.”

Their indecision vanished; they saw through my bravado. It gave them an idea. In a moment they had pulled the corsets off and were examining them greedily.

Soon there was a hoarse cry of triumph.

There, where fairer forms may have lain, were twin hemispherical objects, designed, I have been told, in certain circumstances, to suggest

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“the breast’s superb abundance,” and in these lay concealed the six hundred and forty pearls.

That night in the cells there was plenty of time to cool down and think it out, and the conclusion I came to was this. My friend was making her escape to Glasgow with the pearls, when I burst into her compartment, and suspecting she was being traced, her first idea was to take me for a pursuing detective ; but when she had found out who I was and read all my papers, she resolved on the bold scheme of personating me and doubling back ; in this way she would avoid the danger at Glasgow, get unsuspected to Newcastle-on-Tyne, and catch the Hamburg boat that night, arriving before the trick would be found out. No doubt she trusted, too, that I would not give her away, for there was a sort of freemasonry of love between us, and she was right. I determined to say nothing till she was safe ; they had got the pearls, that was enough. It seemed curious she should have forgotten them ; per-

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haps she felt it was impossible to escape with them, and had trouble enough to save herself; still, when one recalled that easy assured smile, it puzzled one.

Next day, by afternoon train, we set out for London. Inspector Littlejohn, three officers and their prisoner, myself, now suitably dressed in a serge suit, which cost the Treasury thirty bob in a Glasgow slop-shop, and with all my beautiful complexion, which was a work of art, washed off. About five o'clock the train stopped for half-an-hour at Carnforth, a big junction station in the district where the chief part of our works were situated. By that time my friend was safe in Hamburg; so, judging the time had come for a word with my captors, I broke a long silence.

“ Pearls were all right ? ” I remarked contritely to Littlejohn.

“ All right, my hearty, six hundred and forty—counted them twice—not one missing.”

“ Um—liked the look of them ? ”

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"Eh?" He flashed a penetrating look at my empty face. "I didn't look very much at 'em."

"No? Well, suppose you just draw one of them gently over your tooth."

"What?" he cried, thoroughly alarmed, "you don't mean they're wrong 'uns?"

"Yes," I sighed, "I've tried so hard to convey that information—will you please take it down this time and use it in evidence against me?"

Unheeding me, and again failing to take my remarks down, they hurriedly began to examine the pearls.

"Oh! and another thing," I said, "wouldn't you like Jim Bailey identified? Just put your head out of the window and call up the first porter you see on the platform." Every man about that station knew me well, for it did an enormous goods traffic for us which it was my business to attend to.

Littlejohn looked at me in astonishment, but did as he was asked. When the porter came

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up I started at once abusing him in my best style—firing questions at him. What was the superintendent thinking about? Why were more waggons not supplied? Didn't he know two cargoes of cement were waiting? What would the demurrage bill be like? and so on. The man replied they would do all they could, addressing me by my name. Littlejohn listened, open-mouthed. Another porter was called up—same thing.

Then I turned to the gentlemen examining the pearls. "Like the look of them?"

"Damnation, there's not a pearl in the lot—all Parisians."

"Parisians? I've been told they're fascinating—but not necessarily false."

"Do you know where the real ones are?" asked Littlejohn breathlessly.

"Well, it wouldn't surprise me if they were by this time lighting the eyes of some of the chosen race in Hamburg."

"But if you're the innocent engineer you

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want us to believe you, how on earth do you know?" asked Littlejohn, much perplexed.

"Now, if I tell you," I said mysteriously, "you'll really and truly promise me one thing?"

"Yes, yes—go on—what is it?"

"That, this time, you will take it down and use——"

"Oh, go on—there's no time for foolery."

When he had heard my story he flew to the wires; but he was too late—a good-looking boy in knickerbockers *had* landed from the steamer—and vanished.

About eight o'clock that evening I presented myself at the Contractors' Head Office—greatly perturbed to account for my absence without leave: of course it was impossible to say I had been to Newcastle—for where was my report on the plant? Late though it was the clerks were still there and working with unwholesome avidity. In fear and trembling I was ushered into the presence of one of the principals. He was vigorously writing or making calculations—

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much too busy to notice me for some minutes : then he looked at me, and made a dive for a telegram which he sorted from a pile at his elbow. I was just going to say that a very near relative had suddenly died, when having glanced at the telegram he said—

“Your wire from Newcastle reports plant unsuitable—’m, yes ;” then in an aggrieved tone : “Let me suggest to you the necessity of avoiding the expense of useless journeys—the Bank of England couldn’t stand the way this firm is being robbed by its officials ; besides, your absence from the work means money—you’d better return at once.”

“The strike was—” I began, thinking it a score for me. “Yes,” he reluctantly admitted, “you managed it very well—a little firmness did it. But it’s monstrous these louts asking more money ; if they were in heaven—where they’d sicken the Almighty—they’d strike for extra strings to their harps—Dev’n’g.” With that he flung himself into his work again, and I left.

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Now, wasn't she wide awake? Look at the way she got the whole hang of my business and was able to send that wire which accounted for my absence. Fancy her having those dummy pearls that gained her time to reach Hamburg, and think what a tight hole she was in when I appeared. Lord! she was a pretty smart woman—and a smart pretty one too—and the best of it all was, those gorgeous detectives persisted in swearing that she was *Jim Bailey!* No doubt they were very clever and experienced, and I was an ignorant young ass—quite admit all that—still there's one thing I *do* know—that is, a lady when I meet one, even without being two hours alone together, and—and—well, such friends as we were.

Sometimes, alone in the railway carriage running north in the evening, when there is a sunset, I lean back wearily in my corner to watch the colours changing in the western windows ; through the amber light comes a face outlined in wavy gold, with a firm, hard little

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mouth that relaxes into that well-remembered wonderful smile. The light fades—I fall half asleep, something stirs on my lips—lighter than the thistledown—a faint flicker—the phantom of her kiss.

Since those days I have learnt much—and still nothing—about women. They have been tender and charming, troublesome and wearying : they have inspired me and fooled me : I have denounced them and desired them : damned the whole collection and gone in deeper than ever ; wondering always wherein their potency lay—how much to the universal sex compulsion, which is nothing to their credit, and how much to the artificial outward attraction, which surely is a good deal, the mere clothes, the colour, the scent, the coiffure, the calculated concealment. But that's a problem each one may solve as he pleases ; all I know is this—I would give the happiest hour women ever brought me just to have " Jim Bailey " sitting opposite me in the fading light, looking at me with that kind amused smile.

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. . . On some grey windy dawn, or odorous eve of
silence and of silver, we find ourselves looking with
callous wonder, or dull heart of stone, at the tress of gold-
flecked hair that we had once so wildly worshipped and
so madly kissed.

O. W.

And though thy lips, once mine, be oftener prest
To many another brow and balmier breast,
And sweeter arms, or sweeter to thy mind,
Lull thee or lure, more fond thou wilt not find.

A. C. S.

Better by far you should forget and smile
Than that you should remember and be sad.

C. G. R.

But she who in those garden ways
Had learned to love, would now no more
Be bartered in the market-place
For silver, as in days before.

L. H.

*So soon! alas so soon!
I knew it had to be—
The end, the sorry end,
For lovers such as we.
Oh, sweet it was, so sweet!
Dear God, give back to me
My year, my heavenly year,
And take—eternity.*

*'Tis best, I know, 'tis best
To seek no reason why,
Nor churlishly desire
To drain the goblet dry.
But ah,—the bitter jest—
That your brave love should die,
And mine—alas poor mine—
Should but intensify.*

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THE place, whatever it may be, is very dark and cold and silent.

At first all you are aware of is this negation of light and heat and sound, but after a long time you perceive a ghostly greenish rectangle glimmering in front of you—it is a window-blind faintly translucent to a frail light coming from street lamps far below—then slowly you are conscious that the silence is not absolute, but that it creeps and teems with myriads of muted sounds—if there were nothing else, around you are beating ten million hearts. You have another sensation, and about this one there is nothing uncertain; it is a smell, a precise distinctive smell—rakish, improper, obscene—it exists in the early morning in certain rooms where prayers are not wont to be made the night

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before, and it is compounded of such things as stale smoke, fags of cigars and cigarettes, spilled champagne, corks, boots, faded flowers and lights that have failed.

A faint clicking of metal grinding against metal, the heavy swish of drapery as of a falling door-curtain, and you feel pretty certain some one is entering the room.

“Damn it.”

You feel quite certain that a man has kicked his bare feet against a hard substance. After a pause, during which the man is groping about the floor, with his fingers probably—

“Boots,” he says, “good ; then my bags are over there by the window.”

The tail end of the blind is thrust aside, and there looms out vaguely a white mass—the torso of a man. It is as well perhaps that you cannot see him any better—any worse, rather—for the sight of a modern man, naked save for a flapping shirt, does not command the serious admiration of most people : they consider it undignified,

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unpleasant, improper. It does seem a little curious that the one thing said to be made in the image of the Highest should be esteemed ridiculous and indecent when divested of the sorry fig leaves of its own devising. However, be that as it may, when, after the sound of much scrimmaging in the dark, the man strikes a match and lights a candle, you are relieved to find that he is sufficiently dressed for your inspection.

He is a quite ordinary young fellow of two or three and twenty, moderately good-looking, clean, healthy, sensible—without side, as the phrase is—well educated, not Oxford or Cambridge, but the next best thing : people probably middle-class commercial : a well-brought-up, non-riotous, non-drinking, non-gambling boy who will try to give a good account of himself in the tussle of life. He is in one of those little rooms in the typical London flat, newly built in one of the back streets off Oxford Street. The walls—which meet each other at all sorts of angles but right ones—are covered with a pale

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blue, large-patterned paper, topped by a yard deep of cream-coloured frieze. The Tottenham Court Road furniture is very nice and new, that ebonized and rosewooded variety of Chippendale-in-caricature, which no doubt next century will be rare and valuable, as few specimens will have survived, owing to flimsy workmanship. There are photogravures and etchings, coloured china groups, and other "ornamental items" which show a perhaps laudable effort to be modern and artistic and stylish, and at the same time very moderate in cost; but the utter lack of any personal, individual, home-like touch in the decorations makes you sick, or possibly sorry.

"Beastly thing's stopped," says the youth, coming upon his watch as he buttons on his waistcoat; "wonder what o'clock it is—these mornings are so dark there's no telling;" he peers anxiously past the edge of the blind looking for a trace of daylight; "it may be eight or it may only be five—anyhow it's better to be on the safe side and get out of this."

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By this time he is fully dressed and on the point of leaving; however, he stops, and begins searching his breast and tail pockets; soon he produces a letter-case and takes from it an addressed envelope, turning it over undecidedly.

“I wonder ought I to leave it? My beautiful letter!”

Before he makes up his mind the door leading into the outer hall or passage of the flat opens, and a housemaid comes in with a candle and a box of cleaning utensils, black-lead brushes, dusters, and so forth. She is a plainish, middle-sized, slightly stout, untidy young woman of London-Irish extraction; round her raven locks a duster is tied, and she wears a black silk skirt, which, though it may have seen better days, has probably seen worse deeds. At sight of the man she gives vent to a perfunctory little scream and start of surprise, conveying the impression that she wishes you to consider her shocked, but that personally she has no criticism to offer.

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“Save us! oh, begging yer parding—I didn’t know it was you, Surr.”

“That you, Kate? I say, can you tell me what hour it is?”

“Yeth’ur, it ’ill be gettin’ on for nine.”

“Is it? You don’t say so! Good Lord! near nine, and the Tilbury train leaves King’s Cross at 10.30.”

“Yeth’ur.” She proceeds with her preliminary arrangements for cleaning the grate, paying no more attention to the man, who has replaced the letter in his case and is going out, when he turns and looks at the girl and calls—

“Kate, stop that a minute and come here : I must be off—mayn’t see you for a while. Good-bye ; there, that’s for yourself.”

“Saints be good to us! Do you know what you’ve guv’ me? Shure, be the weight of it, it’s gould. Here, I hev’n’t nineteen and six change about me this marnin’, Surr.”

“No, no, Kate ; I mustn’t take it back—that would not be lucky, you know. Besides, you

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won't get another sovereign from me in a hurry again—nor even a tanner for that matter. Good-bye, Kate.”

There is something unusual in his manner that attracts the girl's notice, and she fancies the hardness and constraint are unlike him and put on. She looks into his face and guesses he is holding back a secret, and at once takes alarm.

“Why would you be saying that? You're not—not goin' away—goin' away for good?”

“For good? for good?” he laughs bitterly. “Damned if I know.”

“If you leave the mistress now, I tell you it will break her heart.”

“Oh, rubbish, you mustn't talk like that—there's no sense in it.”

“Don't you know how that poor thing worships you? She believes that you're the finest creature that walks the earth: all the day is not too long for her to praise you, what you've done for her, what you've larned her, and what you've guv'—

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though it's little I've seen myself bar them poetry books."

"Yes? Well, it's a consolation to know I've done her some good."

"Oh, go aisy now, it's oney love makes her talk like that. Listen to me—it's very little good you'll have done her, oney harm, if yer going till lave her now. All them fine things you've larned her 'ill oney make her life the harder and the horrider."

"You really believe that?"

"'Deed do I."

"Well, I'm sorry. I did my best, as well as I knew how, and it seems a bit hard. Anyhow I've got to go."

"Where to?"

"What does it matter. I've to do it."

"It's not marrying you are?"

"Likely story indeed! I'll never marry any one. No, it's simply business; it's a long way off, but it's my job."

"Well, you're a mean scut to go without

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lettin' on, and I'll go and tell her myself this minyit." She rises to go towards the curtained door, but does not carry out her threat, for the boy has made no protest, no move to stop her. She goes back to him, and says, "You wouldn't hurt her more than ye could help?"

"Look here, Kate, I'll tell you the whole thing, and advise me what I should do; you're a good little soul."

"Go on; none of yer flummery to me."

"Well, I'm leaving to-day for Australia. My uncle out there has died lately, and I've to take up the management of his big sheep run; if I don't start to-day I lose the post, and all my father's savings that are invested in the concern. I knew of this a month ago, but I had not the pluck to tell her. It seemed better to have that month to be happy in, and let the end come without warning."

"That's the way of it, then?"

"That's the way of it. It's my one chance in life. I must go and take up my work or

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be an idler, a rotter and a failure here. What use would I be to her without a penny? Besides, there's something else to do in this world besides frivolling and messing about a woman."

"Oh, don't I know it well?"

"Then you think I am right?"

"It's for yourself to tell."

"Well, I've decided—made up my mind."

"That's all right then; now will ye let me get on with my work?"

"Kate, if you tell me I ought to stay——"

"Not I, indeed. She'll do better wantin' ye. Love's too much of a luxury for the likes of us. Good-bye to ye."

She kneels in front of the grate and begins raking out the ashes: while he produces his letter-case again, and taking the letter from its envelope, glances over it.

"Should I leave it? it's a sweet letter, but it takes away hope. Wouldn't she be happier expecting me back every day? Still," looking

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at Kate, "she knows; she'd tell her. Yes, I may as well leave it."

"Aren't you gone yet?"

"Go and whistle for a hansom, will you?"

"Anything to get redd of ye," she says, and goes out.

The lad, left standing there alone, takes a last farewell look round the familiar room; no doubt recalling in rapid memory the pleasures he has tasted there, and feeling a poignant regret for them, now they are past and dead. Very sorry for himself, and, if he had time, for her too. He is young and quite inexperienced; so, unaware that he runs the danger of seeming merely melodramatic, he drops on his knees at the table, and stretching his arms across it towards the curtained door, says unsteadily, "Good-bye, Rosie—dear, dear Rosie—good-bye. I may never see you, never enter your little room again. Always good to me, always bright and pleasant and grateful for all I ever did for

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you—honest, decent, true-hearted little girl that loved me. Good-bye.”

He is very nearly crying, but manages to pull himself up in the nick of time, and rises from his knees, a little shamefacedly, but feeling the better for it, as if he had done all that sentiment demanded; then he tries to put on the *blasé*, cynical air.

“To-morrow I’ll be walking up and down the deck, looking across the tumbling milky waves at the Sussex Downs, and making a heart’s queen out of a poor girl of the street.”

“I’ve got you a cab, sir,” says Kate, re-appearing.

“Right: I’m ready. Look here now, Kate,” drawing her towards him. “Promise you’ll be always good to her.”

“What’s up with you? Not crying? Have you——”

“Such rot; do have some sense. Good-bye, and—and——”

Suddenly he pulls her to his breast and

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kisses her on the mouth. "I'm leaving that with you—for the mistress."

He couldn't help it. After all his feelings are stronger than he knows, and his control over himself is almost gone. As for Kate, she is puzzled and taken aback, but pleased and hugely interested at becoming even vicariously a factor in the emotional disturbance: so she returns the kiss, and assists at the clasp, but in the middle of it the girl's quick sense detects over her shoulder the click of a door-handle. She thinks, "If the mistress were to see me"—and pretending she is repulsing the kisser, she pushes him towards the hall-door, barely giving him time to lick the flap of his beautiful letter and drop it on the side-board. After that they disappear, to go down twelve flights of stairs into the street.

Scarcely has the hall-door closed behind them, when the curtain which hides the door by which the man came in at first is slowly pushed aside, and a woman enters—a medium-height, plump

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person, in a showy dressing-robe of pleated *crêpe de chine*, with many pink bows and much sloppy lace ; she has a pair of bed-room slippers on—likely nothing else. Her face is quite ordinary—a formless, bulgy nose, indifferent teeth, muddy hair, grey eyes—but eyes capable of expression ; they can flash with pleasure and welcome or soften with sympathy ; and about the corners of an irregular mouth sweet little dimples lurk and charming curves come at times. Her hands, though white, retain evidences of the wash-tub or the milk-pail of an earlier epoch. One would say she has little knowledge, education, or culture, and an easy, indulgent habit of body and mind. She is indeed ignorant of very many things, and among the number she is quite ignorant of the art of being disagreeable—and she possesses a curious cat-like, fireside way of purring and pleasing and making you comfortable.

At the present moment she seems to have just got up from a good sound sleep : she

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yawns and stretches herself, manifesting neither interest nor surprise. Then she stumbles across to the fire-place, where Kate's unachieved efforts at the grate are in evidence.

"Where's she gone? I'm sure she was rattling at that grate two minutes ago. Wonder when Willy left. Wish he'd wake me when he goes—says if he did, he wouldn't go—so there it is. Heigh-o-o-oh! Wonder what woke me up so early? Where on earth's Kate? I must have some one to talk to."

She plops herself into an arm-chair, feeling a little offended at being left alone, and her eyes wander ineffectually about the room until they light upon the letter on the sideboard. But the sight of it arouses little interest—probably she is used to getting morning missives from her retreating Romeo; then, having nothing else to do, she rises and moons across to the sideboard, lifting the letter unconcernedly, much bored at the prospect of spelling through its contents. She runs a

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puddy finger lazily under the flap, which yields easily without tearing, then she begins to fumble in the envelope for the letter.

Suddenly there is a scream—and she lets the letter drop.

“The saints defend us! you nearly frightened the wits out of me!”

It is hardly necessary to say that this very unveracious remark comes from Kate, who, returning noiselessly and finding her mistress about to read the letter, takes this way of causing her to drop it; having succeeded, she then sets her coal-box on top of it.

“Kate! what a silly you are. I see nothing to frighten you.”

“Maybe no, but I did. What are you doin’ out of yer bed, and it only nine and the fire not lit? Tell me that, now.”

“Oh, I don’t know—something awoke me; you rattling at that grate, I suppose, and talking, talking like one o’clock. Who was it to?”

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“Never mind.”

“You ought to be careful about talking to strangers, Kate.”

“Strangers, indeed: how would I know strangers? Will you go back to your bed?”

“No; I can’t sleep now, and I want to talk, so try and be nice and sweet-tempered, and do, do get me a drink.”

“The divil a drink you’ll get till the tea’s ready; away to yer bed till I tidy the room.”

“Tidy be hanged: no, I mean I’m going to help and see you do it properly—now don’t be cross, that’s a dear, sweet, sooty pooty Kate. Now get you along, and I’ll watch you; give me a match.” She settles herself comfortably in the arm-chair, puts her feet up and lights a cigarette.

“Notice any change in Willy lately—Mr. Dixon, I mean? Eh? No? Stupid you are. Notice anything about me either? No? Of course you did; but you couldn’t put a name

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on it—don't wonder at that. It's a secret, a most splendiferous secret. No, I mustn't tell you; no, you need not entreat me."

"The divil a treat you'll get."

"We dined at the Troc. last night; a most gorgeous feed; how I did enjoy it."

"Call that a secret? Strikes me you're a sight too fond of——"

"Of my little Billy?"

"No—of your little Mary."

"Oh! oh!—how horrid of you. This is far better than eating or drinking. They were playing 'Amoureuse'; it does make you feel hot and at the same time good. I knew it all along, but I was certain of it then—I've seen too much flam, not to know the real thing."

"Cham? When he gives it, he gives it good I dessay."

"Rot, Kate; can't you understand I'm the happiest girl in London—in the whole world? He's in love with me—honest."

"Honest! an' what about you?"

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“And I’m in love—head over heels in love with him.”

“Love be jiggered—wicked I call it to talk such nonsense. We can’t afford luxuries—no, mem—business is business, and it don’t do to make a pleasure of it.”

“Go on, talk as you like, it’s all the same to me: but you don’t know anything about it. For the first time in my life, to be in love! I didn’t know there was anything half so good in the world. Oh, I’m so happy, so happy! I wish I could just die for him. You can’t tell, Kate, what it feels like. You’re floating off the ground, half-way to heaven; you don’t care one damn what happens, as long as you’re let alone. He loves me, I love him, that’s it all.”

“An’ little enough: to hear you talk a body would think you a child. Like them and be good to them for what they give to you, and get all you can out of a man when the fit’s on him, for by Jasus it’ll soon pass. Never love: you lose yer houl’t when you lose yer heart.”

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“Never. You’re right enough judging by the common run, but this one’s different. He’s fresh and innocent, and has never kicked about with gay girls : besides, he’s a real good-hearted fellow ; look how he’s tried to help me—give me books and wants to teach me things, and he says I must start in some business—a little tobacco shop I’m thinking of. I’d like to know now which of all the others would have done that—which now ?”

“The others indeed ! the whole boilin’ of them’s bad ; brutes when they’re sober ; devils when they’re drunk.”

“Tut, tut, don’t be so hard, God made them all.”

“And who spoiled them ? Maybe you think it was the women ?”

“So you see my luck has come : the first, the only chance I ever had, and, my word, it’s a rare fine thing to get a man like him. Am n’t I fortunate ? I’ve no great looks, I can’t play or sing or talk like books ; yet I’ve got him safe and sure, and, Kate, one day he’ll marry me !”

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“Listen to that! May I never rise from this if I thought you were such a fool.”

“Why shouldn’t he marry me?”

“You know rightly—marry the likes of you!”

“Didn’t Nelly Bates marry a tea-traveller?”

“Yes; he travelled that far he’s never come back to her.”

“And Dora Martin married a shop-walker in Harrod’s, yes, and she’s got two children——”

“She has; but he walked off.”

“Oh, Kate, you have a tongue and such a temper: please, please, be nice and good. I’m so happy; don’t vex me; like a good girl—there. He thinks all the world of me and is never tired of being with me; he likes me and I like him. Isn’t that all that matters?”

“A woman in love’s a fool!—you reckon because he’s young and innocent that he’ll stick to you—why that’s the very thing that’s sure to upset the show. When he meets other women and finds out that you’re not the pick of the basket, he’ll try another. Besides, you wouldn’t

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keep him from his business—I suppose he's got something to do. He'll have to leave London, and you won't see him for months and months."

"Because a man's got business, is he not to have a wife?"

"Oh, do drop it—it's cool. Marry you! Don't delude yourself with that—more be token, if you really do love him, you wouldn't let him."

"What do you mean?"

"You know well enough."

"That? Don't talk about what you don't understand. I tell you I'm all right. The doctor says so."

"I'm sorry now, sure I meant nothing; I wouldn't vex you for the world."

"Of course you wouldn't. After all, I don't really want him to marry me. I don't mind that a rap; what I care for is that we should always be lovers, for he won't ever forget me. I'm the first, and no other woman will be the same. Some day, perhaps in three or four years, he can marry if he likes—I don't want to

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think about that ; it can come if it has to come, but now is my time. We two have found one another, and we have strayed away from everybody into a little path of our own, where the sun shines and there are leaves and singing birds and hawthorn, and you hear running water ; oh, such a sweet little path, where it leads I don't care, where it ends I don't know."

"Go back to your bed and dreme of it."

"Leave the fire just when you have lit it—not me. Reach me over that letter."

"What letthur ?"

"Over by the sideboard there, can't you see it? Stupid! you've set your dirty coal-box on it."

The girl, who has been lolling over the fire indolently watching it kindle, unexpectedly rises to get the letter herself. Kate, alarmed and intent on staving off the catastrophe, gets up and makes a wild dive for the coal-box ; but she arrives a tenth of a tick too late. The two women, their faces blanched, their breath caught,

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stand staring at each other. Kate can do or say nothing ; she is paralyzed, for she knows the horrible thing is there, in the room, beside her, ready to spring at the other's throat. Rose's wits move very slowly, and she dislikes solving problems ; so, having waited in vain for an explanation from Kate, she naturally looks for one in the letter, which she resolutely unfolds, and slowly reads aloud this :—

“MY OWN DARLING GIRL,—

“You and I have been good friends. We have had many pleasant hours together, on the summer river or by your winter fireside. You have been very good to me—always cheerful and kind, always contented and grateful for the least thing I did. And I have been so happy with you ; I am certain that never again in this life I shall be so happy.

“I could not bear—and looking into those sweetest eyes I would not have been able—to tell you yourself that to-day it has all come to

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an end. I'm going away to Australia; my ship sails to-day; when you read this I shall be gone. There is no use telling you why. I simply have to go. It is good-bye, Rosie—good-bye for a long, long time.

“Do you remember that sunny afternoon on the Thames, as we glided past Clieveden woods, when I said that I never would forget the moment? Well, when you are a prosperous landlady married to that mysterious New Cross friend of yours—if ever you have a thought to spare for me and long-past days, will you try and remember only that moment when we sat side by side with gladness in our hearts and all that green and golden glory round us?”

Her voice dies away as if she too died.

“Be gob, it's nothin' but pothry,” says Kate, a little indignant at the unsatisfactory farewell provision of the last paragraph.

The other makes no reply, but remains standing there motionless, bewildered, in a dull, nerve-

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less, stupid, trance-like state. She has not the mental activity or capacity to grasp the whole significance of it in a moment. She feels that the disappointment and trouble and sorrow are so huge that her brain cannot deal with them, and she prefers to wait and to think of nothing as long as she can. She might stand there for hours in this semi-cataleptic daze, but Kate is getting alarmed, and, putting her arm around her, tries to caress her back to consciousness. The moment she recognizes Kate she recoils from the girl, regaining her wits and losing her temper at the same time. Then she hurls at Kate—

“ You knew ! ”

“ Now, darlint, be easy—how could I know ? ”

“ You wanted to stop me reading it. ”

“ I declare to you solemn, I hadn't a notion what was in it. ”

“ Did you see him this morning ? ”

“ Now, don't take on—be quiet and—— ”

“ You dirty deceiving little beast ! You did

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see him, and you let him go, without telling me. I see you knew all about it ; you first help him to get away, and then you begin to me with your jaw. ‘ He’ll tire of you and leave,’ and ‘ don’t delude yourself—marry you indeed ’ ; a nice kind of a friend you are. I’ll swear he has given you a fiver to keep quiet.”

“ Oh, may I never stir ! the divil such ’n a thing he gave me ; I wouldn’t demean myself. Like a thing he would do—a fiver indeed ! ”

“ I don’t believe a word you say ; you treacherous little viper ! Oh, if only I had known ; if only I had known ! ” she moans, the fierceness of her anger already gone. As for Kate, she is quite unruffled by the appellations applied to her ; indeed, she considers them rather ineffective and unequal to the occasion, and expected something a little spicier.

“ Oh, if only I had known ! If only I had seen him, he would never have done it, never ; he wouldn’t have left me. Oh, it was cruel of you,”—she is beginning to cry.

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"That's right now; take it quiet and easy, and let me tell you all about it."

"What is there to tell? I want to hear nothing. He's gone, gone, gone, that's all—that's everything. Gone, when a word from me would have kept him. I know it. Doesn't he say it here?"

"After all, dearie, it's all for the best. He could do you no good, you could do him a lot of harm. And sooner or later it had to come: and the best way is to get it over quick, and not think about it beforehand."

"If I had only got half a chance I could have kept him—only a few words, only a kiss, just a look, he would have stayed."

"And what good 'ud it be? He had no money: he had to go or starve. And, moreover, another thing, maybe he'll come back to you again a rich man."

"Money! you're always harping on money as if it was everything. We were happy with little. No matter how rich he may get, he'll be no

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happier than he was. Why shorten it, then, by an instant? Besides, we could have earned something: he was clever, and I was learning fast, soon I could have beaten him at his own books."

"Gawd! you think that 'ud 'a pleased him!"

"I could have helped him."

"Helped him to ruin his life—that's all."

"And what about my life? It's nothing, I suppose? I've no feelings, no sense, no mind, nothing. Ah, but I know different, and he did it. Why could he not have left me alone? What's the good of all his poetry and philosophy to me now? The softer you are the more you feel!"

"Just what I said to him. None o' yer love and less o' yer literachoor. It's business we attend to."

"Business! How am I ever to go back to the old life after this? No, this was my one chance—I was entitled to it, and to have it out face to face with him: he would have

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stayed. If he were back again only for half-an-hour I could keep him. He would have stayed, or he might have taken me with him, but I know he would never have pushed me away from him."

"Maybe so, but he would have been sorry for it. He said there was more in the world for a man to do beside lying in a woman's lap. After a while they all tire of it, and want to be up and away round the world to sport, or fight, or gamble, or make money—they can't help it."

"It is very hard for us poor women who love."

"Harder for them poor women who never will. You have had what some would die to have had. You have had it at its very finest and sweetest and best, and had the luck to stop before it sickened and faded and turned to hate."

"Kate, what a wonderful way of talking you have; it's easy enough when it isn't your-

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self—oh, I'm so miserable, and I was so happy."

"You'll be far happier thinking you've done the real dacent thing by him instead of chewing your heart to bits for destroying his life, and him a fine, clane young chap as ever stepped."

"Ah! wasn't he a good boy? Such a hearty, handsome, cheery good fellow. How he tried to lift me out of this and put me in the way of earning an honest living. He wouldn't have harmed or injured me, and I'm not going to harm or injure him. Kate, you're right; poor little Kate; and I'm very sorry I was so cross with you, and will you forgive what I said?"

"Never name it; I'd have said a lash more myself."

"It's the best way for him, I suppose; but it's nearly broke my heart. Still, I'm glad—very glad—for his sake."

"That's right, darlint, you've done the right thing by him."

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"And mind, Kate, I'm not going to the devil. He put me on the other road, and I'll try and keep on it."

"Sartintly, that's the way to talk; now get into your bed again, and I'll go out and buy you a nice fresh sole."

"I don't want it—I—couldn't—touch——"

"Well, you can look at it. Away now; it's daylight."

Kate has gone to the window, about to raise the blind, and Rosie has taken up the candle and is slowly entering the curtained door, when she is arrested by an exclamation from the other.

"Holy St. Peter, what's this?"

"What's what?"

"Look there—there—that's his cab; he's coming back!"

"Coming back! you don't mean it; can it be true? Let me see, let me see!"

"There he is, gettin' out of the cab."

"Oh, Kate, little Kate! it's splendid; it's

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gorgeous ; it's heavenly ; all my happiness come back !”

“ It's your luck ; there's no denying it. It's come to you, what you asked for ; and you've got to take it now it's come back. Dry your eyes ; tidy your hair be'ind ; put your face in the flour-barrel—you'll want to look your best, for now's your chance ; keep him if you can, he may only have forgot something ; all you've got to do is to keep him half-an-hour till he misses the Tilbury train ; run quick now and fix yourself ; he'll take five minutes to get up them half-dozen pair o' stairs at the rate he's going ; run now, and mind you try all you know.”

To all these excited admonitions Rosie appears perfectly irresponsive, standing there as if uncertain, unprepared, unresolved. The wild sparkling light that sprang into her eyes and made them flame with triumphant desire and victorious love has faded and vanished. The truth is, her poor little cogitative appar-

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atus is being subjected to such an enormous working pressure that it refuses to act. She **does** not move or speak, a confused uncorrelated succession of ideas and impulses—distracting, imperfect, ungoverned—pass through her brain ; then something seems to prevail, to sway and dominate her ; who can say what it is ? A phlegmatic dislike to strenuous action, a knowledge that she is looking her very worst, and of the futility of the proposed re-decorative means, a reluctance to re-open the finished chapter and re-harrow herself over again with arguments, an acquiescence in the validity and cogency of Kate's reasons, or the unbelievable fact that she feels the beauty of sacrifice, the ghastly delight of strangling the thing she holds most dear, their love, so that he, her lover, may be the gainer. Whatever the process, it had but an instant wherein to act ; but in that instant, by some amazing telepathy, Kate, holding the other's hands, had divined the struggle and its upshot.

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“Kate, I won’t do it.”

“Then he must not see you.”

“Hide me somewhere and lock me in.”

“Useless, he’d break any door.”

“Have I time to get down the stairs?”

“No, he’d meet you coming up.”

“You must swear I’ve gone out.”

“He’ll search every corner.”

“Then what’s to be done, if his train goes in half-an-hour?”

“You must face him and make him go.”

“Impossible! no matter what my lips said, my eyes would implore him to stay: if he ever kisses me again, it will be all over.”

“Mistress!”

“Kate.”

The two women, baffled and out-manceuvred, are on the point of abandoning their quixotic combat, when an inspiration comes to the quick-witted Kate. She whispers something.

“You think so? then I’ll try it. Kate, that’s one of my old frocks? off with it, quick.”

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She rushes to the writing-table, takes a blank sheet of paper, which she folds and places in the envelope that contained the letter—there is gum enough left to fasten it—then she places it on the table exactly as the boy had left it at first. Kate by this time has got out of her dress, she helps the other into it, touzles her hair and ties it round with the duster. There is a ring at the hall-door. “Mind,” says Rosie breathlessly, shoving her through the portière, “when I rattle the fire-irons—you understand.”

There is another ring. Rosie kneels by the grate; blackleads her arms and face; settles the candle beside her; changes her slippers for Kate's.

Again the hall-bell rings.

She rises, carrying a brass shovel, which she keeps polishing with a cloth, goes to the door and lets in the boy. She comes back at once and goes straight to the grate, where she kneels down again and begins polishing the fender.

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“I thought, Kate, you were never going to let me in.” He is very animated with a bright, cheery, resolute air. The kneeling figure mutters grumblingly some reply which winds up with,

“Soon enough.”

“Been polishing the grate ever since I left? hardworking little cuss you are.”

“What is’t you want?”

“I’ve come back, Kate, because I found I’d forgot something.”

“So?”

“Yes, it’s only a little thing.”

“What?”

“You mightn’t think it very valuable or very pretty, but I can’t do without it.”

“Get it an’ go.”

“Ah! my letter there still; she hasn’t seen it or read it; so much the better. How I thought of her waking up and finding me gone; then reading the letter and finding I was gone for ever, and then crying and sobbing so bitterly. How fortunate; she shall never read it now.”

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He tears the envelope across and throws the pieces on the fire, now burning brightly.

"You must never tell her, Kate. I may be wrong or I may be right; but all I know is that I found I could not do it, and I've come back."

"For what?"

"For her. I'm going to ask her to follow me to Australia and marry me."

"Marry you!"

"That's it. I know that she would do anything to please me, or to save me the least pain or trouble. I believe she'd give up all she possesses for me, and that she loves me with all her heart. It is a rotten bad world, we know, and men are pretty selfish, I allow, but we are not all ruffians. So when she'd do so much for me, I'll do a little for her. Now I'm going to tell her."

"Wait!"

The supreme moment has come.

It is in her grasp—it has been offered—all

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she hardly dared in her fondest day dream to hope for—her dearest wish, her triumph, her salvation. He is there ready to give it.

All she need do is whisper “Willy”; almost a look, only a meeting of the eyes, and his arms will be round her and all this torture over.

There she kneels, this poor little ignorant semi-souled creature, with her smudged face and housemaid’s hands grasping as if for her life at a set of cheap brass fire-irons which she keeps poised a few inches above the fender. Engaged in what may seem an absurd and futile effort to win through the natural envelope of self and will and wish to some cold and blank ideal. Striving to give up what is at hand and actual, what is warm and pleasant and palpitating, for a phrase, a precept, a dimly guessed-at duty.

“Wait!”

He stops and turns round to see what she wants.

Her body is between him and the light, so

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that it presents to him only a wavering, uncertain silhouette, whose outlines reveal no hint or indication that there is a soul within that formless, huddled bundle, convulsed in the throes of its supremest life struggle.

But no word of explanation comes ; so he moves towards the door, and lifts the curtain with his left arm, while he grasps the knob of the door in his right hand.

There is a rattle of fire-irons from the grate behind him ; then, just as he is about to turn the handle, he hears a sound within. It is a laugh, a vapid, unpleasant laugh, with a horrid distinct suggestion of the amorous and venal.

The lad stops as if an hundred-feet chasm had suddenly opened a yard from him ; the curtain drops over the door, and he staggers backwards, his eyes ablaze with a curious mixture of anger and disgust. Back, back, until his heel comes in contact with the girl kneeling by the fender.

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“Kate! did you hear? That—that—laugh
—and—”

“Better go, now.”

“Some one—in there—with her!”

“Better go.”

“It can't be; surely, surely she couldn't; tell me I am wrong. Can't you deny it; can't you deny it, Kate? You must know; answer me, you must. Has she—is there a man in there with her?”

The girl inclines her head slowly; she has no strength left for the utterance of her sacrificial lie, and he understands, readily enough. He is very calm, very restrained, quite superbly so—the air of one who, having received provocation and affront of the deadliest, is going to exact no requital, to utter no complaint; perhaps too—men are such brutes—there may be a slight sense of relief underlying his rancour as he says:

“So! it's like that. I've been made a fool of all the time. Some frightful brute, some rich

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bounder of a Jew who could give her more money. Lives on the premises, I shouldn't wonder. What an ending to a love story! Rosie, my Rosie, the little girl with the golden heart, that loved me all for myself—loved me because she couldn't help it; the girl I was ready to throw over the chance of my life for. She—oh! the falseness!—the vileness!—to take another into and my kiss still wet upon her lips.”

“ Better go.”

She reiterates it monotonously, in a toneless, tearless voice like the sound of clay on a coffin.

“ Yes, yes, I see you are sorry for me, Kate ; you knew how I loved her ; I thought all the gold in Australia was not worth an honest, loving heart, and I was right. You were wise, Kate—of course you understood ; but I wish I could have gone and never known ; I wish she had my letter. Well, it's her trade, why should I complain ? she gave me just as much as I paid for. I expected a pearl with a pound of tea.”

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“Go.”

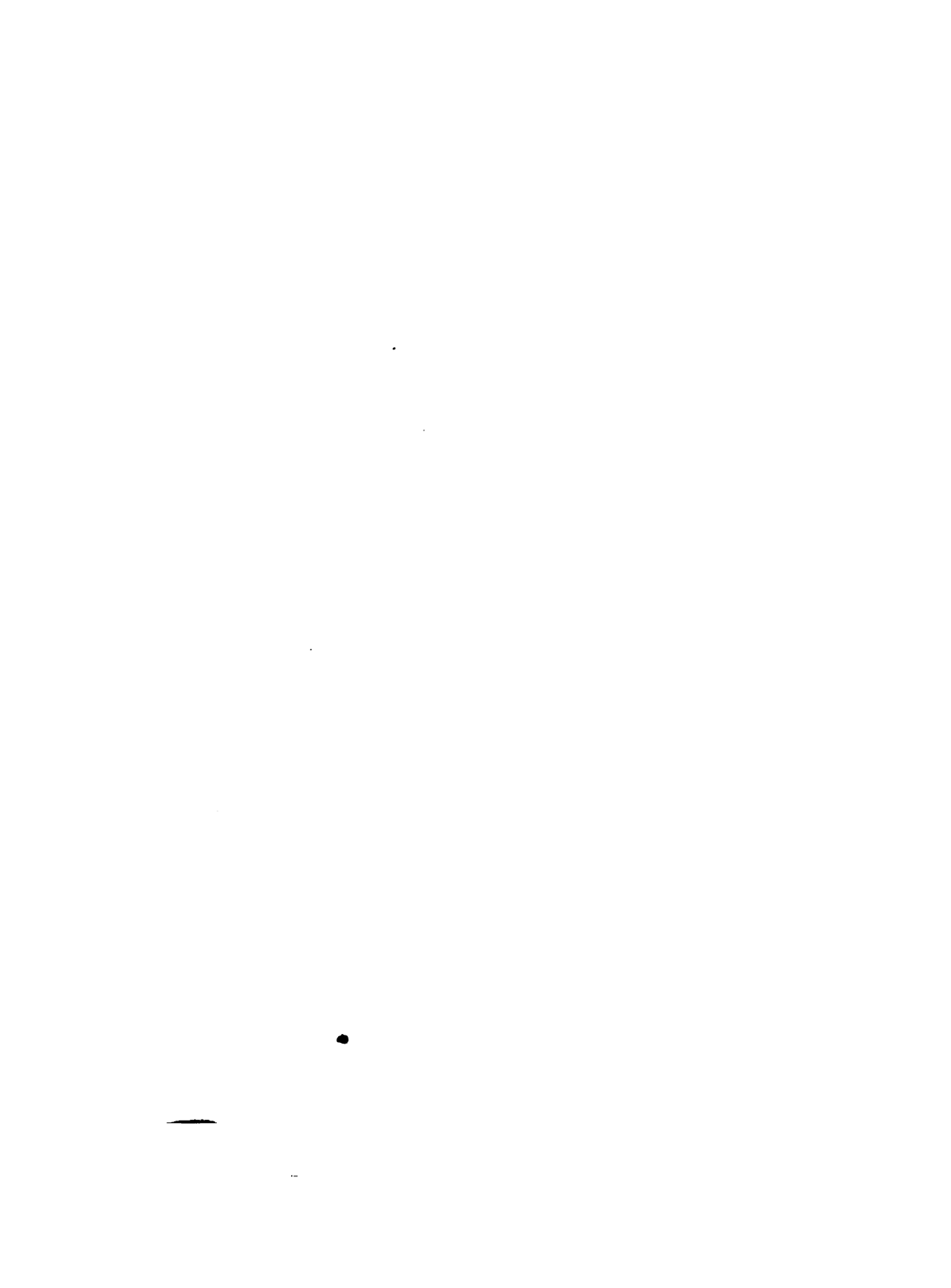
“Right—good-bye ; and, Kate, give me back that kiss I left with you for her.”

She draws shudderingly away from him.

“Oh ! very well—keep it for yourself. Good-bye.”

He is gone—out into the air, into the great world, with all before him—liberty, action, achievement, a future.

She is there for ever alone by the deserted hearth, and on it lies the little Love God, and he is dead, slain by her hand.



When the *Vestilinden* Was Lost





She said, "I stayed alone at home,
A dreary woman, grey and cold ;
I never asked them how they fared,
Yet still they loved me as of old."

She said, "God knows they owe me nought,
I tossed them to the foaming sea,
I tossed them to the howling waste,
Yet still their love comes home to me."

E. L.

*“ If I could know some child of mine
Would live his life, and see the sun
Across these fields of poppies shine,
What should I care that mine is done ? ”*

* * * * *

*Throughout the not and silent night
All that he asked of her she gave.
And, left alone ere morning light,
He went serenely to the grave.*

L. H.

*Then rose from sea to sky the wild fare-
well.*

B.

When the *Vestilinden* Was Lost

IT was the middle of the North Atlantic, and the sun was going down. A wind-swept sky, forlorn and featureless, spanned over an empty plain of tumbling grey, whereon was no sign of life save for one lonely vessel—and she too was going down.

She lay there, this unfortunate ship, alone in her sore distress, without chance of help. No sudden sail would rise upon the circling rim of water, for the North Atlantic was not crowded then as it is now, with flying hotels and tramping grain stores. It was in the late sixties, the last years of the old wooden passenger ships.

The fine, fast sailing, full-rigged ship *Vestilinden*, coppered and copper fastened—so ran the official description—of 830 register tons, Captain Cabena, sailed from Derry in the month

When the *Vestilinden* Was Lost

of March, bound for Philadelphia. In her hold were 300 tons of pig-iron, and in the rough deal bunks between decks were 300 emigrants from Donegal.

Her royals and top-gallant sails were still set, and bellied helplessly in the wind, catching the sunset rays which lit up the white blocks among the rigging, and touched with gold the rusty stains at the hawse-pipe hole and cathead. On her sides were painted big white-and-black squares like the gun-ports of a frigate; these ran up with fine sweeping curves at the stem and stern, and the latter was decorated with a carving of the Derry arms in crimson and blue with the motto "Vita, Veritas, Victoria" in gold letters. She had a high poop-deck, surrounded with a balustrade of teak, and approached from the main-deck by two stair-ways, shining with brass and mahogany. Forward of the mizzen-mast were two brass cannons, used for salutes as she left or entered port. The lower masts were painted white, and the dark pine spars tipped

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with it ; everything trim, taut, and substantial, almost like a man-o'-war. Just as gallant a sight as eyes could wish to look upon when she cleared Lough Foyle and rounded Innishowen Head, setting sail after sail and standing for the west.

And there she lay, the last of her kind. There were none to follow like her, for the Plimsoll days were soon to come, when gradually all the wooden ships had to disappear or skulk shamefacedly under the flag of Norway. What a loss to art, and life, and manhood, that these beautiful things should have been chased off the seas, and hideous iron troughs, devoid of masts, or rigging, or seamen, should take their place. For with the wooden ships went the merchant seaman—the fine, swarthy, reckless young chap in red shirt and sea boots, with a knife stuck in his belt, simple as a child, yet affecting deep cunning, and an American tongue, as became one who had sailed the Spanish main.

There the good ship lay, with a heavy list

When the *Vestilinden* Was Lost

to port and terribly down by the bows, slowly sinking. The water was up to the breasts of the white lady—the figure-head on her bow—who still folded her arms meekly, and wore her sweet inane smile, all unaware of the great sea-change impending, when, instead of listening to the jibboom-stay singing in the wind, and feeling on her cheeks the sting of the salt spray, she would have to lie for ever in the grey Atlantic ooze.

There are those who could not look upon this sinking ship without a feeling strange and deep, and that quite apart from the peril or perishing of many human beings. As to them it is another matter, and one that Nature looks after very carefully; but the loss of this thing of grace and speed and beauty, this aristocrat of the sea, the resultant of the skill of man daring the mystery of the deep, perfected down the ages since the first sail was spread to catch a breeze, and to think she was the last—this is sad, sadder than death, even when the dead are

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young, and have left no child behind them—for the work of man's art when it is of the finest is far more rare and precious than Nature's.

What had happened to the vessel was never rightly known ; of those who could say, none lived to tell. She had been going along, all well, in the night, when there came a crashing bump—it might have been ice, or a submerged derelict, or jettisoned timber. Her bows were stove in below the water-line, and although the pumps were manned immediately and worked with a will, there never had been any chance of keeping the ship afloat. About mid-day the captain had seen the futility of their efforts, and began to get the boats out ; there were six of these, two life-boats, three long-boats, and the gig—possibly they were not enough, but, after all, what is the good of a row-boat crammed with people in mid-Atlantic ? One might just as well stick by the ship and go down comfortably with her ; and the same notion soon occurred to the passengers.

When the *Vestilinden* Was Lost

The emigrants were very poor, ignorant country folk. They were leaving a land of eternal sorrow and constant rain, where few things flourished but religion and grass (in places), very barren and desolate, but dear to them. They carried all their worldly possessions with them, even to the few sticks of worthless furniture ; they had gone through heartrending scenes of leave-taking of friends and native land, and they had been very sick. And so, when they were summoned on deck, the poor people were wildly excited and uncontrollable ; they understood the ship was doomed when they saw the first boat alongside, and there followed a mindless rush of wailing women and infantile men who poured over the bulwarks as if the Gadarene fiends possessed them. The boat was swamped, and many—the lucky ones—were drowned. Just for a moment the captain's authority went. His shouted orders were unheeded, and he himself nearly swirled over the side ; but he managed to grip the main

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shrouds and wrench himself clear of the throng. He was very small, this captain, but plucky as a game-cock, and somehow he managed to steady the people by will power and personality, and the smell of powder—he shot point blank a seaman who tried to get into the women's boat—there will sometimes be a scoundrelly lubber in the best of crews. After that the unfortunate emigrants were quite quiet and resigned—indifferent whether they stood by the ship or tempted fate in the little boats. They watched the captain with wild-eyed awe, and muttered prayers to the saints and to Mary of the Sea. But the crew knew he was right, trusted him implicitly, and obeyed him cheerfully, caring not one damn for themselves. In all the ship, his alone was the active, useful, working brain. It was well that the call on his skill and energy left him not a moment to think upon the terror that had come to him. His beloved vessel, her freight of human beings, his own life—all lost, or soon to be. Nevertheless, he was well aware

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the thought lay there at the back of his brain, lying in wait, eager, insistent, ready to come out and possess him. Rather a curious scrap of a man, Captain Cabena was—very shy and quiet and unassuming when ashore, but as tight a seaman as ever sailed; none more daring ever left the Foyle, none prouder of his ship, or better able to command it. He stood there on the poop, directing, ordering, bearing a hand, hoping to God that the strain would only last till she sank.

After the first mischance, everything had gone smoothly. The boats, all but one, had been safely got away full—too full of women and children and a few helpless folk—for it was Captain Cabena's old-fashioned view of fitness to save the most helpless and useless. It gave him keen delight to exercise a somewhat quixotic chivalry about the women—with him a short petticoat had a better claim to safety than a long pedigree. He had nice futile ideas about womankind, regarding them as beings apart

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and consecrate to the mysteries of religion and maternity. In practice, however, he kept very clear of the ladies, and thought of them in the neuter gender as "hands," or "heads," or "souls."

It had at last become clear to every one, what the captain knew from the beginning, that all the men, save the boat crews, would have to go down with the ship. Only one boat now remained—the captain's gig—staunch and stout enough but very small; twenty people would fill her, and there were twenty women still on the ship. Every one realized the truth, but no one said a word. Instinctively the work stopped, the struggle was over, for the ship was going to float an hour at least, and five minutes would lower the gig from the davits. The seamen had worked like devils and were dead beat; they stopped to draw their breath gladly. There was nothing more to be done. Then the captain, throwing an anxious look around, left the second mate in charge and went reluctantly below to

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write up his log book, and get his instruments and the ship's papers.

By this time the forecastle was nearly level with the sea. It was obvious even to the ignorant peasants that the *Vestilinden* was going to make her last plunge head foremost ; and so, they drew away from the forepart, and came crowding amidships, pushing the little group of the twenty remaining women in front of them till they were close under the rise of the poop at the stairways. Very quiet and helpless, but tense with dread of the unknown, this mass of wild-eyed men, dressed in grey homespun flannel with red mufflers, their pale faces of a yellowish tan, their hair straight and black, wide mouthed, long lipped (in some ways not very far removed from the primitive), the degenerate remnant of a high-souled race, pushed back to starve among the barren mountains of the north-western seaboard ; a people that had never mixed their blood with the alien settlers who possessed the fair lands once theirs.

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In the foremost ranks were some athletic young men who had been helping the sailors at the pumps. They had been induced and encouraged to work by a fellow-passenger, a man who seemed not quite of themselves, and yet one to whom they willingly accorded a certain respect. The captain, quick to appreciate his services and pluck, had called him up beside him on the poop and thanked him, and there he now stood, leaning on the capstan, with his arm across the shining brass plate which bore the ship's name.

An ordinary steerage passenger like all the rest, with clothes that differed little from theirs, and whose appearance betokened poverty, yet one whose present circumstances you judged to be accidental and temporary. His hands were not those of the constant toilers, nor had his mouth been coarsened by rough food and vulgar speech, and in his bearing there was a little repressed air of disdain and superiority that rarely comes except by breeding. Tall, dark-

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visaged, stern, his impassive countenance hid every trace of whatever emotions possessed his heart. How came such a strange figure to herd among the £3 passengers of an emigrant ship?

Well—Eugène O’Feylan was leaving Ireland, as many of his race had done before, with the hope of repairing the fortunes of his people, now fallen so low that even £3 was a consideration. An only son, he left behind him in the dilapidated old house they styled Castle-Feylan, his mother and sister; and with very unusual self-denial, went steerage, so that he might leave them not absolutely penniless when he had gone. But the fact of his going steerage in a working man’s dress gave rise to gloomy forebodings, for there was an old saying—

“The ould O’Feylan’s line will en’
If wance they work like common men.”

The O’Feylans were undoubtedly of the “good old stock,” and their history a long one—for they began with Scota, the Egyptian princess who founded the Milesian race; be that as it may,

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it's fairly certain that a Feylan was the eighteenth King of Leinster, what time the neatherd was the first of England. Long afterwards they fought the Danes of Dublin when the Normans were preparing for Hastings ; then they were to be found resisting Strongbow and Henry II's Anglo-Normans. After the Desmond wars, when good Queen Bess had harried the land and stripped it as a dog cleans a bone, they were driven overseas. Back they returned as grantees of the first James, only to rise against their old enemy and be again scoured out of the country in the ruthless Cromwellian invasion. Restored by Charles II "for reasons known unto Us," they suffered once more in the Williamite confiscations, and after Limerick took wing with the Wild Geese for the Spanish Netherlands, and were at Fontenoy, where the Hanoverian king cursed the laws that lost him such fighting men ; before the Red days of the Revolution—fatal to the remnants of the Irish Brigades—the O'Feylans had once more slipped back to their old

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land. Some benignant fate never failed the family when its chances seemed utterly gone; and just as the long line was about to end, always an O'Feylan turned up to continue it. Evil times had fallen on them in the famine days, and latterly they had been sadly straitened in finances. Yet still they managed to retain a semblance of the condition they had lost, and from the poor peasantry at least, with whom the fanciful traditions of former greatness lacked nothing in the way of imaginative embellishment, they always had the respect and homage which their ancestors commanded.

So there he stood, beside the capstan, Eugène O'Feylan, the last of this long line, about to perish in the middle of the Atlantic, an unconsidered unit, that went to make up a cargo of rude peasants.

He looked mournfully over the heaving ocean—far away back—and his eyes softened as he saw the old home by the Gweebarra River, with the white-haired lady sitting by the

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window gazing west over the long track left by the sinking sun. Far away back he looked, striving to unite his thought and his mother's: across the ocean plain that stretched level and straight from his feet to hers.

Then he bethought him of his ancestry, and the race pride grew strong in him; one may smile at this lineage as fanciful, and antiquarians may point out the flaws in it, but what matter, he believed in it firmly, reverently as in a religion—he felt a resentment, a rebellion against the Providence that was making his effort and sacrifice the means of his ending. All day long he had toiled at the pumps, hoping to the last, and now the end was near. If he could but have died struggling, fighting; but to stand there idle, helpless, trying to send his unavailing thoughts across the sea! His fingers lying on the capstan tightened and tightened in the effort to control himself, till they grew white as ivory against the brass plate. Yet only a most sympathetic eye would

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have observed it or noted in that hard mouth and set jaw any sign of the useless prayers and protests he smothered in his soul.

A sympathetic eye, where was such? Ah! far away he looked with level gaze that passed over the peasant crowd and the sinking ship as if they did not exist, to the lonely Gweebarra where his sister and his mother were—in vain, while close beside him there was one who could give him all his heart's desire.

A peasant, a poor illiterate, uncultured peasant—but a woman—a true, essential, ultimate woman.

She had watched as he laboured at the pumps, wondering and fearing what was going to happen to him; would they leave him to go down with the ship? She was the only person aboard who knew who he was, for she had been in service at Castle-Feylan and held the family there in great reverence, and perhaps for Mr. Eugène her feeling was mixed with more than admiration. They had recognized

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each other during the voyage, but neither had spoken, she was too timid and his manner too forbidding; indeed, the situation embarrassed her, for she felt it was an affront to him that the likes of her should share the same accommodation as one of the ould stock.

Bridget O'Doherty had the type of face often seen among the western Celts—a round oval, almost a circle, broken by the clean-cut pointed chin, eyebrows arched high above the lids (the empty space left gives an air of supposititious innocence; you will see it in Réjane's face), great sweeping lashes shading the most wonderful, melting eyes—eyes that seemed capable of all sympathy, all tenderness, all sweetness. They had that clear transparent bluish white, which one sees in some of the finer older Nankin china; the colour of the iris you couldn't always tell, for often the pupil spread over it till all was black, but you never troubled whether they were blue or grey or violet, you were too occupied with what they said—for surely

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they saw into your heart and you felt they had understanding and compassion—and a regret and sadness came over you that those eyes should have a message and a meaning for any one in the world but yourself—sadness, for you knew but too well that it was not in you to respond to their soft gracious appeal.

She was standing by the mizzen shrouds, half hidden in ropes, looking intently at Eugène's face, now proud and resolved, as if he recognized the decree of Fate and would meet it in the old Greek way. Her eyes strove anxiously, pitifully to read his face, to pierce behind that pallid mask and find the hidden thought. And she was able—by some concordant feeling, arising possibly from an unknown, forgotten strain of race in the degraded peasant—to divine wherein lay for him the poignancy of the fate impending, and the inmost desire of his soul was laid bare before her.

When the lull came and the shouting and

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turmoil of the boat launching had ceased, she stole very timorously over to his side, and with an air of deference, even awe, she touched his arm. He started, then without looking down at her said—

“Ah! Bidy, is that you? This is a poor ending.”

“Mister Eugène, if you plaze, wan wurrd. I’m to go in this boat—it’s the last—will you—take my place?” she spoke in little jerks with pitiful entreaty, as if beseeching an extraordinary favour.

“Thank you kindly—Bridget O’Doherty—but you hardly know what you are saying.”

“Mr. Eugène—will you think of Miss Onora and the poor mistress?”

He felt the appeal, saw the picture she called up, and he shrank as a man might when a careless hand pulls the bandage from a wound; and he said roughly—

“I think you want to see Captain Cabena shoot me.”

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"Niver," she cried quickly. "The captain will let you, he's a dacent little man."

"Bridget O'Doherty," he said coldly, "you have lived in our house, you ought to know what kind of people the O'Feylans have always been."

"Och! I know, I know it well, and wirras-thrue, I know there are none left, only you : and are you goin' to drown the last of the ould stock in the dirty say?"

Again the appeal pierced through the man's heart—the extinction of his race—his duty to the stock. But in that sinking ship what were birthrights?—the captain's word was law, and it was justice, humanity, chivalry as well. His blood was dear to him, but was he to be no better than a helpless woman when all these poor ignorant people were men? He hurled sternly at her—

"Leave me, woman, I tell you."

It was not the harshness of his words that she minded, but the futility of her effort. She had nothing more to urge, no other argument to use ;

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she had failed ; she did not know what to do ; she was in despair.

But all unknown to herself something had come to her that would make her all-prevailing. The novel experience, the moment's intimacy, the talk together, the contest, the mere closeness to him,—one might name twenty reasons and not the right one—something had transmuted her old-time reverential feeling into another—another mysterious and unknown. She did not try to conceal or stifle it, or pause to think what it was or where it led to ; it simply took possession of her and set her cold Irish blood on fire. Then, obeying some impulse or instinct, she put forth her hand and with it all her will, her adoration, her yearning, her desire, and laid it on his. Laid it, hot and moist and quivering, on his that lay on the capstan, as cold as if it were cut out of bronze. At the contact the idle currents awoke in his nerves and tingled to his brain with some dimly apprehended message.

Of course a simpler way of stating it is, that

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she wanted to attract his attention and get him to look at her face. At any rate, that was the effect, for Eugène withdrew his gaze from the horizon and looked down for the first time at the girl beside him. He saw her pale, passionate face and her eyes—indescribably beautiful they always were, but now shining with a new light—the magic light that brings opal fires into any woman's eyes, howsoever tired and colourless.

He was certainly very dull and slow enough about comprehending it, and it was most unlooked-for and astonishing to him—but at last it became plain enough—he read it in the swaying outlines of her figure, in the heaving breasts, the averted head; yes, this poor Irish girl loved him—he drew back in fear as he sought to measure the fulness, the completeness, the utter abandonment of that love; and the useless cruelty of this added anguish made him more tender and pitiful. A moment he seemed to consider and weigh some objection and put it aside, then he stooped down and touched with

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his lips her forehead, ever so lightly, just where the blue-black hair divided.

“I’m sorry for this—very sorry, Bridget,” he said.

With rapid intuition she was conscious of the effect she had on him: she knew it was slowly breaking on him, and that by and by he would understand—for at the touch of his lips she felt there was some responsive answer to her mute message, she was sure of her hold or claim upon him, and she said—

“Won’t you do it now, dear, for me? It’s all I’ll ever ask you.”

“No, Biddy, nothing will make me do it. But it’s hard on you to feel this way for a man that’s to be drowned in an hour.”

The way he said it convinced her he was unshakeable, and that all was in vain and hopeless.

Then all of a sudden she lost her self-control and sank on the deck at his feet sobbing convulsively—her whole body shaken and torn by

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the pent-up violence of this new-generated volcanic emotion. But sudden storms are short, and gradually she grew calm, slowly her face cleared, then became very grave and thoughtful. The weakness, the inefficacy disappeared, and the outlines of her figure grew firmer. She half rose, crouching beside him on one knee, and leaning closely against his body as if for help and comfort, with her cheek resting in the hollow of his thigh. The idea that had arisen within her was filling her whole cogitative being, it clarified and took definite form—almost a decision—a smile flitted across her face. Then, drawn by some strange magnetism, his hand slid down and rested on her head. In a moment she had caught the hand and kissed it passionately, nestling all the while against that warm, throbbing pillar. Thus they remained, close, for a long time.

Then she was quite sure.

Holding tightly to that beloved hand, she murmured—

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“Misther Eugène, you will be sorry in heaven that you did not leave the child of your own blood to carry on the ould name.”

“Aye, Biddy, I will. I would give all my hopes of heaven to know my son was left on earth. And it is all my fault. I should never have gone. But God knows the O’Feylans have had a long time, and it’s little the last of them made of it, so the end had to come—and now, it’s over, all over, for ever and ever.”

“Misther Eugène, dear, it’s not. There is a way.”

She had risen, straightening herself, until her lips were close to his ear, and she said the words with conviction and profound reverence, as though she were in the presence of the Blessed Sacrament.

The man was infected by the solemnity, the impressiveness of her manner.

“For the love of God, Biddy, what is it you mean?” he said hoarsely.

Her arms slipped round his shoulders, her

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hands met and clasped on his cheek, drawing his head down towards her, then into his ear she whispered one word—it was scarcely articulated, sounding little more than “hush”—one word, but ah! the dearest word there is to the real woman’s heart.

Then at last he knew.

He put his arms round her quivering form, ardently, vehemently straining her to his breast, and kissed her on the mouth.

At that moment Captain Cabena came up through the cabin hatchway, carrying an oblong japanned tin case with the ship’s papers and his log-book and chronometer: the first thing he saw was this marvellous pair, doing their love scene on the sinking ship, heedless of everything around them. Captain Cabena was a strange little man, with a strange womanly heart, that no woman had ever made to beat fast: so he was very sensitive about them, and held in much respect those seas of emotion wherein he had never sailed.

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Bridget heard his step and turned her head. There was quiet interest and kindness in the captain's eyes ; she went straight over to him and turned on the sensitive little soul the irresistible artillery of her own.

"Captain dear, wan minyit." He listened to her.

What she said to him doesn't matter : it's the little captain's secret. He had a big heart, and despite his ignorance and Biddy's modesty they understood one another, and what she wanted he did.

* * * * *

The sun had gone down. The crimson had glowed and faded. The night was at hand. A cold wind was rising and moaned through the cordage of the fated ship. The captain's gig was alongside, well provisioned, with a crew of four men headed by the second mate, and in her all the remaining women—but one.

The time had come.

Captain Cabena went to the hatchway and

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sang out. Eugène O'Feylan and Biddy came up. He shook hands with them, and showed her an entry in the log-book which he put into her hands. Biddy may have tried to give him a kiss ; then he and a sailor slung her over the side and dropped her into the gig, which at once shoved off.

At that instant the *Vestilinden* seemed to know the play was over. She gave a sort of a shuddering heave and pitched forward, the pent-up wind rushed from under the deck with a wheeze like a death rattle, then she lurched by the stern, bringing down the main mast with a crash. The dense black mass of men rushed aft, and many clambered up the mizzen rigging. The forepart dropped and her stern lifted high in the air, the Derry arms flashing out in the twilight in its glory of colour and gold. The women in the little boat saw the shining words "Vita, Veritas, Victoria," and above them Eugène and the captain standing.

Then across the water from the Donegal men

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in the rigging came a strange wild cry, shrill and piercing, and horribly sad, that rose and fell with a heartrending cadence—that melancholy Irish wail, wherein are blended all longings and regrets, all prayers and farewells.

The sea closed over, and there was silence and night.

* * * * *

One sunny summer morning the coast-guardmen on Dawross Head, looking idly out to sea, noticed a strange little craft, sailing with the wind dead aft, apparently heading blindly for the rock-bound coast. Luckily for her, a strong flood tide setting north carried her along the land till she was able to sail right into the dangerous entrance of the Gweebarra estuary. Through the telescope the coastguard saw that her white sides, as she lifted on the swell, were covered thick with sea-weed, her sail was a tattered bit of canvas rigged on an oar, over her side a lot of frayed rope trailed in the water, and her sole occupants were a man steering and

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another lying over the bow, looking out. That was all.

The boat followed the direction of the wind, which carried her right across the broad estuary, up and up for miles, till it narrowed and became a river; she entered this on the last of the flood tide. The Gweebarra river is a long narrow cleft in the mountains, dividing north-west Donegal as if you had slashed a bit off with a sword cut. Up this lonely passage the little white boat sailed and sailed before the wind, seeking a place to land. No one was in sight, and the man steering feared to make a landing without help, for he was very weak—in fact, he was dying from starvation; his companion at the bow was better off; he had gone mad. At last they came opposite a long white house, standing in a plantation of trees; there was a gravel beach at the foot of the slope, and the wind, always dead aft, brought the boat towards it. The steersman lifted himself very feebly on to his legs, the better to see his course. As the

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boat grated on the beach her way stopped suddenly—she had been sailing three months. The shock threw the man off his balance, and he toppled over the stern ; the madman laughed and said “ Another.” He had seen so many go over that way.

When the coastguard came on the boat some hours later, the tide had left her high and dry. At the stern lay the steersman dead, and at her bow sat the madman gibbering : but a flash of sanity came into his vacant eyes when he saw the coastguardmen, and he gesticulated frantically, pointing to something in the bottom of the boat. They lifted a tarpaulin in the stern sheets, and under it found the body of a woman.

She lay with a book clasped in one of her arms. The men raised their caps, reverently.

But she was not dead, only fast asleep.

After they had made a litter with the oars and sail, they lifted her very tenderly and carried her towards the station. The path led past the windows of the big white house, in one

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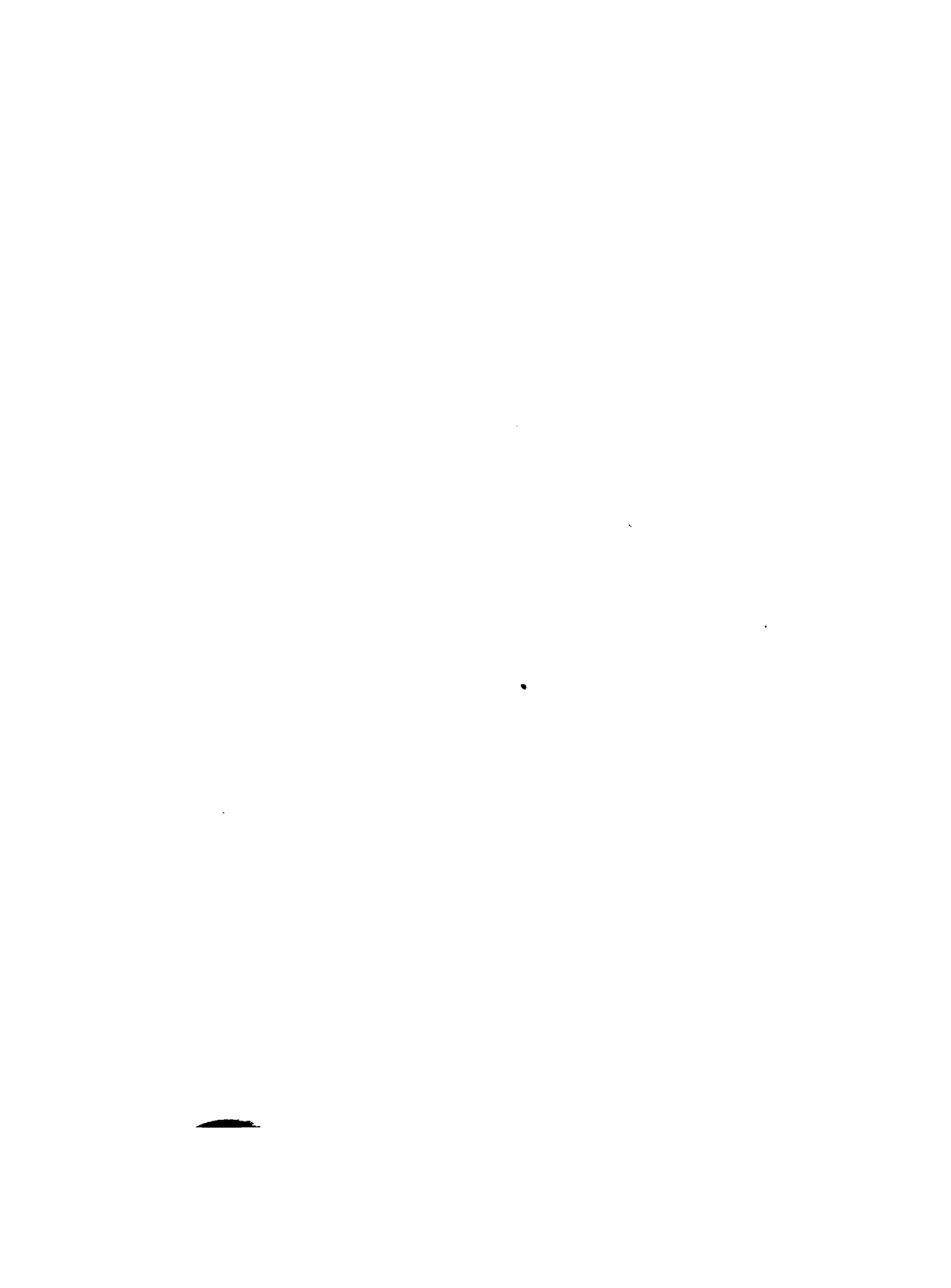
of which an old lady was sitting, gazing wistfully westwards. She took pity on the cast-aways and had them brought into her house. She and her daughter looked after the girl with their own hands. The old lady took the book from the girl's breast, she read the last entry in the *Vestilinden's* log-book, and after a long time she understood.

When his son came, poor Bridget's task was accomplished. She had given everything she had—her unbounded love, her will and strength—nothing was left for herself; the wonderful power that had sustained her and made all wills gladly subservient to hers, ceased.

He and she, if God so please, are in His house together, and another O'Feylan is here to carry on the legend of the race, and at the bottom of the sea lies the good ship *Vestilinden*, and over her bones the sheet-iron tramps go rattling.

Leave it Alone





Marriage is the most licentious of human institutions—
that is the secret of its popularity. And a woman seeking
a husband is the most unscrupulous of all beasts of prey.

G. B. S.

C'est notre éternelle rehabilitation à nous les courti-
sanes après être allées plus loin que les autres femmes
dans le péché de les dépasser toutes par l'élan de nos
dévouements envers le sage, le poète et le prophète. Il
y a entre eux et nous, depuis Marie-Madeline une har-
monie, une attirance mystérieuse. C'nous, qu'ils trouvent
toujours sur leur chemin, ce n'est ni la vierge craintive ni
l'épouse embarrassée par les soins grossières de la vie.

M. F.

The man gets something from her which he fails to
find in the maternal type. . . .

Great men have always preferred women of the other
type.

Weiniger.

*What a laugh she had! just like a thrush singing,
And how pretty she had been in her cotton dresses
and her large hats! She knew nothing, but she had
everything that he had lost.*

O. W.

*Your heart has trembled to my tongue,
Your hands in mine have lain,
Your thought to me has leaned and clung
Again and yet again.*

W. E. H.

*Love and let love, as I will do,
Love and let love, and so will I.
But sweet, for me, not though I die,
Good-night, good-bye.*

A. C. S.

*The devil hath not in all his quiver's choice
An arrow for the heart like a sweet voice.*

B.

Leave it Alone

“NOT exactly the sort of thing I expected.”

The person speaking is a young lady, obviously and emphatically—it is quite pleasant to make the remark and feel that it is unattended with risk. She is standing alone in the middle of a room surveying rather disdainfully its furnishing and general effect. The sprawly chairs and splashy cabinets meet with her disapproval: she finds absent all the little delicate objects that accompany a settled refined existence, and in their stead a newness and insecurity as if everything had come in yesterday—a job-lot in a furniture van—and might depart to-morrow in like manner.

The room is the parlour-drawing room of the ordinary small London flat, with its three rooms and kitchen opening off one side of a long

Leave it Alone

narrow corridor and on the other the hall door opening on the main staircase. Two windows look from a height of fifty feet—it is the fourth and final floor—down upon a little side street leading into a main thoroughfare of the Charing Cross Road or Shaftesbury Avenue type. Standing with the windows behind you at the left end of the wall facing you is the door into the corridor and thence to the hall door, while in the wall to your right there is a fire-place and beyond it a door into the adjoining room, a bedroom, which has in addition its own door off the corridor, so that you can gain the hall door *via* the bedroom—the usual arrangement whereby the coming need not encounter the parting guest.

Agnes Greenwood, who stands noting all this, is a fine, healthy-complexioned young woman in a well-fitting gown of oyster-coloured cloth relieved with misty grey-brown lace; her fair hair has been neatly arranged by her maid; in appearance she is attractive, in manner well

Leave it Alone

bred, composed, fearless, matter-of-fact, modern, yet all the same, when it comes to the push, correct, conventional and proper.

She is the sort of girl who walks unconcernedly through the promenade when leaving the Alhambra stalls—she is said to have strolled one day into the lounge of the Bristol and sat down, afterwards explaining that she thought it was a part of the Ladies' Army and Navy Club ; she prefers to walk back from the theatre to her Dover Street Hotel along the northern side of Piccadilly, and she sails along in a flamboyant white wrap, with the same pretty confident unconscious air that she walks down the rose garden at home in Somerpurley ; she pays her cabman his precise fare plus twopence, reports the Stores counter-men for inattention, employs boy messengers to keep her front seats, utilizes with dexterity the last contrivance for saving time and money, knows everything that's going on, talks like an expert about a thing she heard of yesterday for the first time, and generally

Leave it Alone

goes everywhere alone fresh as a field daisy amid the dingy doings of the multitudinous London life. It is problematical whether her assured manner comes from knowledge or ignorance.

“No,” she goes on, “not the least bit like the fusty den of the woman-writer. Convenient and clean—apparently ; they’ll have to do for to-night, at all events. But where’s my luggage? What a want of system the North Eastern have with ‘carted luggage’: this is the second time they’ve made a mistake with my things. I don’t know how I am to go to bed without my dressing-bag. I wonder would she have the sense to——”

She goes over to the bedroom door, and switching on the light looks into the room.

“Oh! that’s all right, there is a night-dress. H’m, the sheets . . . satisfactory. But why on earth are there two pillows?”

Then she returns and pushes the electric knob by the mantelpiece : the bell can be heard rattling away in the kitchen, but no one comes.

Leave it Alone

“Sybilla said something in her letter about her servant not residing in the flat. I suppose she’s gone for the night : yes . . . after half-past twelve . . . I’m shockingly late . . . that’s it . . . left the hall door ajar in case I hadn’t the latch key. I don’t altogether like this way of doing business : a strange flat, no servant, no luggage, no directions. Oh ! of course . . . Sybilla’s letter ! I must read it more carefully ; I may discover a spark of intelligent information in the shower of her verbal fireworks.”

She hunts for the letter in a little waist-bag, unfolds it, and reads the following—

“ In sacred confidence.

“ ‘ *Tight Literature for Ladies.*’

“ *Le Beau Monde.*

“ *Publishing Offices, 53 Henrietta St., W.C.*

“ DARLINGEST PET,

“There is to-night in all this heartless hole not a solitary soul save you to whom I can tell my troubles and jabber over the joys—if any—

Leave it Alone

awaiting me. I can see your face grow sweet and the tears come into your eyes—for you can cry without disfigurement—as you bend over these whirling words and discover my wretched beautiful story. I am not going to give you the details : you would not like them : you are too good for them, and besides, I want them all for myself. What matters is briefly this : I have decided to put myself, my life, everything I possess into the hollow of his hands. He may cherish the gift and fashion of it something fine, or he may squash it in pulp and fling it aside. We are going away together to-morrow morning. God knows when I shall come back—most likely never, that is, if I have the luck to find somewhere a pool that is not too cold and shuddery. If ever I do return it will be with a worn-out heart—and fresh copy.

“And now, dearest, I want to talk to you of things less depressing. My sweet little flat—it seems so hard to leave it—I’ve only just had it done up, and now it’s on my hands (I wish

Leave it Alone

there were nothing but it and ink on them); now, as you are coming to town, trousseau choosing, come here instead of that dog-hole in Dover Street; you will be more comfy and independent and it will save you money—I confess the latter argument is rather flabby and pointless; still, dear, I know you so well that I believe it won't be ineffective. Everything is in order; my ancient handmaid Hagar will show you the ropes. She is a discreet old dear, innocent of evil as my grandmother, who must have been—so people are kind enough to tell me—a Hottentot. Hagar sleeps out, that is, after ten o'clock you must attend yourself—also the door; don't leave it open, or you may find odd people pushing in; the Hebrews you will know by their long bills—take no notice of them, say I've gone and you don't know where to—the devil, you expect. My men will of course come calling, and be savage at my disappearance; don't subject them to the artillery of your great artless eyes; don't talk to them—

Leave it Alone

they are liars, but most of them likable; I've tried to pick the nicest, but at times I'm in doubt—it's a terrible worry to me. By the bye, lest I forget, Hagar's wages are twelve and six. I'm not quite sure if I owe her for last week; she'll be able to tell you. There may be some other trifles—will you think me 'stoney' if I talk of them at such a moment? The piano is thirty-five a month, they will tell you date of last payment—it all seems so long ago. Settle the last quarter's rent—twenty-two, five and six—when you pay this. And now, sweetest friend and truest woman, a word for yourself. I need not wish you happiness; you will get it with Ned Brebner as a matter of course and because of the inherent justice of things. It is only poor creatures like me who have to steal it and go about in fear and trembling lest the eternal beak should catch them and put them away for ever.

“Thine,

“SYBILLA SURRAGE.”

Leave it Alone

“It sounds alarming, and if there were a word of truth in the half of it, I'd never speak to Sybilla again; but she gets carried by her style out of the region of hard dry facts. She's always on the scream about her wickedness; in my opinion she has too much respect for sin ever to commit it. She's probably only gone to Folkestone for a fortnight. Fancy writing a private letter on office notepaper! The worst excuse for meanness is want of means. '16 Green Street,' she does give the address. Well, there's nothing for it but go to bed and await handmaid Hagar in the morning.”

With this intention, Agnes proceeds towards the bedroom, when she is pulled up by the sudden jingle of an electric bell.

“Oh, good gracious! are Sybilla's nice men beginning to push in already? What an hour to pay visits. I certainly shall not go to the door; I've not the least liking to make the acquaintance of her 'likable' men.”

She keeps quite still, noting with misgiving

Leave it Alone

that as the windows are open, in all probability the lights can be seen from the street. A minute passes, and she begins to hope the visitor has gone; then she hears a heavy step in the corridor. Some one—a man—has got in. But how? She is sure she banged-to the hall door.

A modest tap sounds at the sitting-room door, and a grave voice, which has to her a familiar ring, says—

“May I come in?”

Agnes remains rooted to the spot; the whole surface of her skin tingling with tiny pricks of apprehension.

“May I come in?” repeats the voice. “Are you there, Billie?”

“Billie!” the girl mutters, and there is indignation as well as surprise in her tone. She quickly moves towards the bedroom door, where she is hidden from the person entering by the little gilt leather screen round the sitting-room door. Presently the latter slowly opens and a

Leave it Alone

man in evening dress comes in. He takes off his white muffler and overcoat, laying them on a sofa in a careless, familiar way that suggests one accustomed to his surroundings. A slightly-built, clean-shaven, presentable-looking man, with brow unparalleled, and clear-cut, firm, distinguished features, which seem indicative of capability and resolution—on the other hand, they may indicate nothing but themselves. Such features are often like the gold case of an old watch whose works are done.

Believing there is no one present, he goes over to the fire-place, muttering to himself—

“Ought I to wait? It’s near one o’clock; she’s sure to be back soon. At the Continental, I suppose.”

His voice is gentle and mellow, and there is a soft note of regretful, pitying tenderness in it as he says—

“The old trail, the old trail. . . . Poor old Billie, I wish to God you were off it.”

He stands dejectedly by the fireside, one

Leave it Alone

shiny shoe on the fender, his elbow on the mantelpiece, and his cheek pressed hard against his clenched fist, looking idly at the array of cheap china figures and vases, with imitation flowers, backed by a long row of comic picture post-cards. After a while his gaze fixes on a little cupid surmounting the gilt-metal clock-case, intently yet unintelligently, for his thoughts are wandering far away. Beyond the cupid looms, scarcely perceived by his unfocussed eyes, the reflection in the chimney-glass of the room behind his back. Down in the confused, uncertain depths there is a whitish blurr, that slowly, slowly assumes definite form and outline—that of a grey-gowned woman, erect and tall, watching him with pale, perplexed face. Gradually he becomes aware that the figure is that of Agnes, the woman who is to be his wife, but not for an instant does he take it for anything but a projection of his own brain, her astral body, come as a warning wraith, and he never moves a muscle lest the vision should

Leave it Alone

be disturbed before its due time and fatality ensue.

Agnes, however, finding herself for the first time face to face with one of the real problems of life, does not hesitate the moment she has satisfied herself of his identity. She clears her throat, and with studied indifference says—

“Excuse me, Mr. Brebner, but your friend is not at home.”

“Agnes!” he exclaims overwhelmed with surprise. “Agnes in flesh and blood: I cannot believe my eyes! what in the name of all that’s sensible and proper are you doing here?”

“I am staying here.”

“Staying here! Oh that’s absurd, impossible: you cannot be staying here—you must be making some extraordinary mistake.”

“No mistake and nothing extraordinary. Sybilla, or as you prefer to call her ‘Billie,’ happens to be a friend of mine, and she has lent me her flat while she is away.”

Leave it Alone

"I don't understand . . . lent you her flat . . . you can't have been here long surely?"

"No. I've just arrived. My train from the North got in at 7.30. I had sent my luggage in advance, so I went and had a very light dinner at the New Gaiety Grill Room; after the play I felt hungry and had supper, and that made me a little late getting here: the servant had gone, but it didn't matter, she'd left the door ajar and everything arranged for me."

"I see; that throws some light on it. Come. It's quite clear you've made a blunder, a most awkward, unfortunate blunder."

"I've made no blunder at all. Will you kindly tell me why it's so clear?"

"Because for one thing it's impossible you could know the . . . I mean, I feel sure you don't know the owner of this flat."

"Impossible, you say. And why, may I ask? Don't you know her? yes, and pretty intimately too, if one may judge by the way you address her."

Leave it Alone

“I may know her; but you couldn't. She belongs to another order of existence altogether. Now without discussing it further I must take you out of this at once.”

“Oh! indeed; you must, must you? 'Pon my word, Ned, you astonish me; I never thought you were a narrow-minded man. Let me tell you that now-a-days a woman must earn her living, and that she has a perfect right to do exactly what she thinks herself best suited for.”

“Well, all I can say, Agnes, is you astonish *me*.”

“What nonsense; I suppose you think because she writes about bad things she must necessarily be bad. Thit! and the preposterous part of it is that *you* can be her intimate friend, but *I* am contaminated because I borrow her flat.”

“One word.”

“Oh, I know, I know; the good old legend—it's different for a woman.”

Leave it Alone

"To put an end to this—will you just tell me whom you think the flat belongs to?"

"Yes : to Mrs. Surrage of the 'Beau Monde.'"

"No : to Mrs. Wrightson of the 'Demi-Monde.'"

In his impatience he has fallen a victim to the fatal attraction of the antithesis. The words are no sooner uttered than he bitterly regrets them. The girl's manner changes on the instant : she becomes a tragedy queen in ice, as she says—

"Then, indeed, I've made a double mistake."

"You've mistaken Green Street, W.C., for Green Street, S.W. That's all."

"I've also mistaken you. Mr. Brebner, I have to wish you good-night. I have done with you." And she strides for the door fully expecting to be stopped before she gets there.

"Stop a moment ; my dear Agnes, you are in the mood for mistakes to-night. Why, you jump to conclusions like a gazelle ; you know you are entitled to an explanation."

Leave it Alone

“Explanation! no thank you. The particulars would only disgust me. I prefer to remain in ignorance of such things.”

“If you were ignorant, it would be all right. But you’re not; in a superficial, second-hand, out-of-book sort of way you know a great deal.”

“Is it your view then that a girl should have an actual experimental acquaintance with vice?”

“Vice, be hanged.”

“Oh! very well: you can hang it or twist it just as you please, but don’t expect me to be convinced.”

“No; you prefer not to be convinced; very well.”

“Ah! now you want to make out that I am unreasonable.”

“Kindly listen, then. You meet me here by accident: the place, the house, the owner you know nothing whatever about, she is wholly outside your experience and you haven’t the least idea of the nature of my relations with her.”

Leave it Alone

“And don't want to have any.”

“No: you simply adopt the lowest, the most odious construction that can be put on my presence.”

“You force me to speak. Of course we women know of the existence of this”—and her arm with a spacious gesture indicates the ‘guilty splendour’ of the modest little room—“but I know you for an honourable, loyal man, and all our intercourse, our confidences, our understanding, and finally our engagement implied the impossibility of this—its utter repugnance to you—yet here, within a few days of our marriage, you come stealthily in the dead of night, an habitual expected visitor, with your pet names and your pathos and your longing. I don't know what more you could do to show how little you value the regard of a good woman.”

“Will you allow me to say, Agnes, that your views seem to me perfectly right and reasonable. I admit that I should not have come here, and I am very sorry.”

Leave it Alone

“So you ought to be,” she says, considerably softened by his judicious yielding. “I couldn’t have dreamt of you doing it; really, it’s too dreadful; within a fortnight of our wedding. You might have waited.”

“You are quite right to be angry: I like you all the better for it. And if things were the way you suppose, you could not be too indignant—but they are not. I can put an end to your wrath in a second. Listen, and it will vanish.”

“Well, go on; come to the point; you talk too much to be innocent.”

“My presence here is as accidental as your own. So far from coming habitually, I have not entered this flat or seen its owner for months and months—years, I may say. Is not that enough?”

“It certainly makes a difference . . . still” . . .

“I give you my word.”

“Oh! I believe you: but, Ned, I want to believe *in* you again. You said ‘for years,’ didn’t

Leave it Alone

you? Then it was before you knew me; 'years' must be at least two?"

"Yes, but you know I'm no good at arithmetic; besides, you don't want particulars."

"On the whole, no doubt, it's better without them . . . still . . . Tell me—why did you come here to-night?"

"I don't think you would understand. I could not explain it to you or even to myself. You see I have not a decisive, practical nature, like yours. I muddle things, they are never quite clear to me; right and wrong are like warp and woof inextricably interwoven. Suppose I came here in some fanciful feeling of farewell, desiring to cast a handful of earth on a corpse long dead, lest the ghost might wander. A strange chance has brought your delicate fingers into a moment's contact with the outer fringe of a dim, wide-spreading, mysterious web. Don't touch it: don't try to lift it or tear it. Leave it alone."

"No wonder you said I would not understand

Leave it Alone

you. To be intelligible, they say, is to be found out. You mean, I take it, nothing . . .”

“That’s it. I mean nothing.”

“Yes, yes ; but I mean something. I take it, nothing is now between you ; given her up, forgotten her, and care for nobody but me? Eh?”

“Nothing, nothing in the world to prevent you and me being happy man and wife.”

“I like you too well, Ned, to share the least bit of you with any one.”

“A heart empty, swept and garnished : yes, dear, you must have it. But when I recollect the way you ridiculed first and only love and preferred a little tact, respect, fellow-feeling, I begin to find you a little changeable—and very charming.”

“There’s not the slightest use in arguing with you, Ned.”

“Now, let’s get out of this : I’ve won you and I am not going to lose you.”

“And I’m not going to lose you ; but I’m afraid you will be troublesome to watch.

Leave it Alone

Indeed, you don't know how I value you. Oh ! it made me wild when I listened to the tremor in your voice as you leaned there and murmured over this abominably attractive creature of powder and paint."

"Leave her alone."

"Why? You don't care for her?"

"I don't care to hear you speak about her at all. Come, now ; we should have left this long ago."

"The time has not been wasted. I'm ready."

He is lifting his coat, when there is a slight noise at the hall door. Agnes hears it, and whispers to him—

"There's some one coming in !"

"The devil! You *would* wait," he mutters to himself. "Hush! keep quiet. You must slip out this way—through the bedroom. There is a door into the Hall on your left."

"Oh! there is, is there?" the peculiar emphasis in her voice suggests a whole volume of suspicion.

Leave it Alone

“Go now . . . softly . . . go . . . I’ll follow you to Dover Street.”

Giving her an encouraging pat and a little push towards the bedroom, Brebner turns and goes over to the fire-place, where he takes up his former position, apparently perfectly calm and indifferent.

Agnes, however, instead of leaving, halts and looks back at him with quick, searching glance ; but she fails to detect anything in the rigid outline of his face—hard and blank and non-committal. She is vexed and puzzled.

Then a thought—a splendid idea, strikes her.

“If it’s true, the first six words she says will be enough : I’m going to listen to them.”

She whisks into the bedroom, and stands peeping through the chink of the nearly-shut door.

The lid of Brebner’s heart, so sedulously opened, shuts up with a snap. All the women who have known him have never doubted his word ; for them his face, his ways, his person-

Leave it Alone

ality sufficed. Not that he is angered against the girl, but she becomes remote and separated from him. Much as he would dislike a scene or a confrontation he will not stir to prevent one ; he has the theory that such forces, though by finesse and management they may be kept apart temporarily, must sooner or later, in one way or another, meet and clash and produce the ultimate effect of their essences. He stands there fatalistically, awaiting whatever event may come, as detached as the mere on-looker of an episode.

A little figure in quiet evening dress—black net over white satin—and a huge hat with black ostrich feather, appears at the door. It is Mrs. Wrightson. The moment she catches sight of the man she gives a start—half sob, half gasp ; then instantaneously seems to read something in the mask-like face.

“ Mr. Brebner ! of all people ! you are the last man in the world I expected to find here.”

“ And why ? ” he asks steadily.

Leave it Alone

"Why? Don't you remember last Wednesday?"

"No."

"Last Wednesday at five o'clock."

"Well?"

"It was just two years since I saw you. Two long, long years; and you never even said good-bye."

"I remember now. Back once more, you see."

"Yes, I see." She speaks with a delicate little voice that goes fluting along like the song of a robin; sometimes it seems very near breaking, then recovering it goes carolling along lightly and evenly.

"Why have you come back?" she continues, the faint quivering break in her tone.

"Oh! give me a little time, and I'll try and think."

"I'm so sorry; what a horrid, inhospitable thing to say. Sit down now, and make yourself comfortable, while I go and take my hat off."

He makes no effort to stop her as she goes to

Leave it Alone

the bedroom door behind which Agnes is standing, and frigidly awaits the cry of surprise, the turmoil and entanglement to follow.

Fortunately, Agnes having heard enough to satisfy her, has very properly withdrawn in the nick of time. On her way to the hall door by the corridor, she pops her head in at the sitting-room door and makes signals to Brebner. She claps her hands noiselessly in applause at his veracity and virtue, and nods good-bye ; all of which he receives with the sulky demeanour expressive of " I told you so." She is just about to pass out through the hall door, when the other woman comes back into the sitting-room, her hat removed, a few deft pushes applied to her hair, and a powder puff to her nose (this latter, being of course, the real reason of her withdrawal), and crosses over to Brebner, now sitting in an arm-chair. Leaning over him she says cheerily—

" Now, what have you to say to me ? But first, aren't you going to kiss me ? "

Leave it Alone

Agnes at the hall door is arrested by the words, and a fit of jealousy and suspicion seized her. Brebner, she reflects, was on his guard, knowing she was listening; by some free-masonic sign he may have conveyed a warning; she will hear just a few words more now that he thinks she is gone; she will be certain. With this intention she glides back to her former point of observation, missing in transit his reply—

“No, my dear Billie, I’m not going to kiss you; I’m not going to stop more than a minute or two.”

“It wouldn’t take so long.”

“So you want to know why I have come back.”

“I don’t want to know now.”

“There’s no secret about it. Simply this. I happened to be passing and saw the old room lit up and the windows open. I wondered if you still lived here, and what you were doing and how you were looking, and if the wicked

Leave it Alone

old world had grown wise enough to know one of the best little creatures in it ; so I mounted the long anguish of your slippery stairs, found your door unfastened——”

“Yes, the catch is out of order ; it does not snap easily.”

“Like it's mistress.”

“Am I out of order ?”

“No, but you're as sweet-tempered a woman as I ever met.”

“You're not out of order anyway,” she says brightly, leaving his side and going out.

“Where are you going to ?” he calls after her ; she has disappeared into the corridor, but comes back at once, holding up the hall door key.

“There now ; I've locked that door, so nobody can get in.”

“That's all very well ; but how am I to get out ?”

“What do you want out for ?”

“Because I mustn't be out. Really and truly I can only stay a short time.”

Leave it Alone

“Stay a short time then ; you’ll have a drink ; I’ve got your favourite J. J. and S.”

“Have you ? Yes, I think I’m entitled to a drink. I want something to unsteady me.”

She fetches a bottle of whisky, some dry biscuits, syphon and glasses ; sets them on a little table at his elbow ; goes to his overcoat and gets his cigar case, clips his cigar for him, and puts matches and an ash-tray within his reach ; then she lights two red candles with red shades, and turns off the electric.

And all the time, her escape cut off by the locking of the hall door, Agnes stands with her eye to the chink of the bedroom door. Perforce she must listen, but it is not obligatory to watch ; nevertheless, she may be well advised not to miss the opportunity of studying the little arts-to-please.

“Here’s luck, Billie, and may the fates send you better fortune and better friends.” He empties the big glass at a draught, and mixes another. Brebner never drinks much—except when he drinks too much.

Leave it Alone

"Your health, Billie, and I wish it was as good as this." He settles himself comfortably in his arm-chair, and lights a cigar.

"Now, dear, start and tell me what you have been doing for these two years past," she begins.

"Doing! What one does is rarely of any importance: if you had asked, have I been thinking——"

"Well, have you been thinking of any one?"

"Sometimes—of you."

"It's nice of you to say it, even if you didn't think it."

"And wondered what you were doing."

"As you said just now, what one does is of no importance."

"But the unimportant things are the things one likes to know."

"Don't you worry about me. I'm all right."

"Why aren't you smoking? I never saw you sit so long without a cigarette."

"Given it up."

"You have? Well, that shows how the wind

Leave it Alone

blows ; it's a whiff in the right direction. I begin to hope you will take my advice. Don't you remember?"

"No, I don't ; and I'm not going to take it."

"I used to call it 'The Via Olorosa back to Virtue.' Start a little cigar shop ; you will have an occupation, a livelihood, an end——"

"What ! in smoke ? It will always end that way."

"We will all end that way ; but something ere the end may still be done. Now, I'm in earnest. I've got my eye on the very thing."

"No, dearie. It's very good of you ; but there's no use talking about it. I couldn't and I can't."

"You say so now. Yet, in time, it will seem different. I don't expect you to change your ways as you would a gown. The time will come when you will look back on all this as if it had happened to some one else."

"Never. I hope I will never do that. I don't want to."

Leave it Alone

"It's not very easy to understand you, Billie ; perhaps I do, perhaps I don't, anyway you are wrong."

"There's nothing to understand, so don't trouble about it. Men don't understand everything. It's a different thing altogether for a man."

"Is it? I'm not so sure about that. If a man has been fond of a woman, known her well, seen her often, been familiar with every inch of her, lived like married folk for long periods——"

"Week ends?"

"Week ends or strong ends, it is never the same to him. He laughs and rides away, but he has taken something with him that he'll have to keep for ever and aye, whether he likes it or not."

"Have you ever lived that way?"

"You know very well, Billie."

"I wish you wouldn't talk like this ; it's no good—not a bit."

"Why? You know I want to be kind, very, very kind to you."

Leave it Alone

"It's no good. When we chucked it, we chucked it. Never again. It hurt me then as much as I could be hurt, and I'm not going to run the chance of being hurt like that a second time."

There is a tremulous stumble in her voice that contradicts the bravery of her words. Through all this banal conversation a momentous issue has been wandering for this common little creature with the incongruous *liaison* that has been the great event of her life—was he coming with a death warrant or a revisit to Paradise? She knows her defects and her limitations, and the uselessness of trying to be other than she is, but she uses all her woman's instinct and clings with tenacity to hope, having nothing else.

"I'm very sorry; there always must be suffering," he replies, "there is always an end to these things; I never forgot that, and you never remembered it. That's where I was a brute."

Leave it Alone

“You were always the kindest and the best of boys. It was because you were so terribly nice, that it made it worse. Do you know, Ned, you have the strangest power ; a woman has no chance with you ; she wants nothing in the world but you ; everything in the world she would give you.”

“I know a lady who thinks my income and connections are the only desirable things I possess.”

“Then I’m sorry for her ; the woman who knows you well and isn’t in love with you has missed what she’ll never get. You’re not perfect, far from it. But your faults are good faults. How often you were cross about nothing and would sit there mum and glum for hours, but then I had vexed you, or disappointed you, and you were sorry for me ; I was such a poor thing, and it was because you cared, because you felt for me. Stupid and silly, yes—but really sweet.”

“There’s a eulogium on a Man of Art and

Leave it Alone

Letters! And from the woman who inspired my best things; curious thing, Billie, though you could do with me, you never had the least appetite for my work. You never could stomach my stories."

"I like stories that make you happy; yours seem like a long washing list of the troubles of life."

"Bad or good, they're done with; no more for me the midnight ink-pot."

"What change has come over you?"

"I don't know. Things alter—one's surroundings, one's interests, one's outlook, one's energies—*Non sum qualis eram*, when you were queen, and yet 'I have been faithful to thee,' Billie, 'in my fashion.'"

"I had a fancy you came here to tell me something; now, I think I can guess it."

"No, indeed, it was about the—the—smoke. What do you want me to tell you?"

"Nothing. You have told me, I think."

"Told you what?"

Leave it Alone

“You are going to be married.”

“What on earth put that into your head? I suppose you think a well-spent life needs some reward, and the converse.”

“I can guess what she will be like. Young, fair and fresh; plump, healthy and lively; clever, lady-like, well-bred; very sensible, with clear opinions and . . . religious . . . let me see, what else am I not?”

“What a catalogue of disqualifications in a nice woman.”

“And of qualifications in a good wife.”

“Oh, undoubtedly highly desirable in the mother of one's children. For my part, I think the married wife has need of all your generosity, for we have something that she will never know anything about; it is that sad sweet unity of feeling that comes from the intimacy of two who have been very happy together and done wrong, and have not hesitated because of spoiled lives, and know the infinite sadness in all things.”

Leave it Alone

“What wrong have we done? who have we injured?”

“Perhaps ourselves; but no, I don’t say that.”

“Of course you want very much to have a son?”

“Only in the cowardly way, where the tired worker, aghast at finding his task unachieved, cries out for a duplicate of himself to prolong his existence.”

“She’ll give you a son, though I could not.”

“Assuming that I count at all in the transaction, you will be the real mother, for all I possess worth handing on is yours and came from you.”

“That’s only nonsense. I’m only a bad woman, that you once, long, long ago used to ca— be kind to, and you will forget all about me and the old days when you lived as you liked.”

“Ah! those were the days! When we sailed in silver hansoms over London’s magic seas. Well! That’s all past and gone and far away.”

Leave it Alone

“It is.”

“Yes, but all the same you and I can jump into a 'bus and ride to Mandalay. There's many a dreary drizzly day in store for me when I shall be able to call you to my side, just as I see you this minute, with your little pale face and your winning, warbling voice.”

“I doubt you will be far too grand to ride in 'buses.”

“I hope not.”

There is a silence between them, a silence in which they say many things that neither would have the courage or skill to put into words. Then, as if winding up their talk, she murmurs her little dirge, her voice sounding like the dry autumn wind among ruined beeches. . . .

“So you have come back, I knew you would ; changed a bit, as I expected you would be ; and now you are going, as I was afraid you would have to go. I don't ask you to stay, nor to come back, nor even to think of me, and what I

Leave it Alone

was going to ask, I must not, for I can hear the bells a-callin'—your wedding bells."

"But, my child, I never told you I was going to be married."

"Then what did you come to tell me?"

"Only to ask you to take . . . you know . . . the little cigar shop."

"I will take nothing. Please never mention this again. I tell you no, no, no, no!"

"But surely—think—you must live: some day you will be old?"

"No fear: I don't mean to live till I am old; I won't."

"You may change your mind: when you do, remember, I am waiting wanting to help. Promise you will let me?"

"Yes, I promise. Now you must go."

He gets up quickly out of his deep arm-chair, and by way of filling in what he feels as an awkward interval, takes one more drink: his plan of taking whisky with the view of making himself unsteady is apparently most ineffective.

Leave it Alone

The glass drained and set down, he holds out his hands to her. She comes close to him and grasps them, looking up into his eyes in timid tentative fashion ; for she has a hard struggle to restrain and conceal the despair, the entreaty, the desire that are filling her frame to overflowing. Do her utmost she cannot control those tremulous lips that will shape themselves into the posture for a kiss. How infinitely piteous a woman's mute appeal for the kiss that does not come ! Brebner knows it, recognizes it . . . and refuses.

If she had any doubt before, she has none now.

"You *are* going to be married," she whispers.

"You know best," he replies, enigmatic to the end.

Collecting his loose belongings, she puts them carefully into his overcoat, and helps him on with it : with lingering fingers she arranges the silk muffler over the white tie ; finally she takes the key from the mantelpiece, and says lightly,

Leave it Alone

“Come along: I am going to see you down-stairs ; you don't like to have to bang the street door, you know, it makes so much noise.”

“ You remember everything,” he returns, as he follows her down-stairs.

A few minutes pass, and then Agnes emerges warily from the bedroom. She listens at the stair head, and hearing no echoing footsteps, looks from the window and sees the pair standing at the entrance door. It is impossible to escape just yet, so she waits.

Her state of mind is peculiar and uncomfortable. The conversation she has been obliged to listen to and the attitude of the two are different from what she had expected. To her the situation appears fantastic and incomprehensible. Caresses and physical endearments she could have understood, but not these allusions to some remote emotional paradise where they could enter freely, but she could not. It annoys her somehow to find they are better than her estimate, and that she has nothing palpable

Leave it Alone

and substantial to be shocked at ; she feels sure she has a tremendous grievance, if she could only get hold of it and state it properly. Although the intimacy or relationship, or whatever it was between them, seems to have come to a definite end, yet she cannot feel sure and at rest about it. Brebner's manner was new to her, and seemed restrained and artificial : in fact, she couldn't and wouldn't trust appearances. What were they doing now, she wonders ; she cannot let them out of her sight, so she leans out of the window to watch. There they are, far below, standing close together on the pavement right beneath her, earnestly talking. Are they never going to stop ? she questions, goading herself into a state of exasperation. What are they at now ? is she going to kiss him ?

Then Agnes has one of her sudden thoughts ; a magnificent notion comes to her as she leans out watching those two ; she hugs it with delight ; it is so complete, so conclusive, so entirely adequate. She will pitch herself out of

Leave it Alone

the window and smash to atoms on the flagstones right between the two. He will recognize her only by her dress, and then will have to tell the other what it means! Fascinated by the brilliant simplicity of the thing, she does not hesitate; clawing up her skirts she prepares to hoist one leg on to the window-sill.

There is a little thin scream behind her.

She looks back.

Her silk petticoat has caught in an ill-fitting ormolu mount on a boule table by the window and been ripped. Carefully disentangling the fabric, she takes it over to the light to examine the extent of the damage. After ascertaining that, nothing in the world would have induced her to lean out of a fourth-floor window again.

“I had no idea,” she says to herself, “that I could be so impulsive or so . . . wicked. After all, is there anything really wrong? A more innocent conversation, no one could overhear. To be sure, I wanted to be sure, and that’s where I was wrong. Certainty might have been

Leave it Alone

very awkward, while uncertainty is at least interesting. I shall not take the slightest notice of the whole affair, and I don't think any nice girl should be asked to do so. I'll leave it alone."

Very soon she recovers her habitual manner, bright, self-possessed, assured. In effect she carried herself back to and recommences at the point where she was just before Brebner's appearance. She was then on the point of "retiring," as it is called, having found the necessary gear for the night. Accordingly, she retreats in good order into the bedroom, and secures her rear by carefully locking both doors. There, we may surmise, she tests the sheets for damp, says her prayers, undresses and gets into bed—where we leave her. She has her thoughts no doubt for company, and if her first three were not particularly happy, this, her final one, is felicitous.

And now the tired little sitting-room is left to itself; empty the big arm-chair he sat in, empty

Leave it Alone

the tall glass he drained, finished and done with the burnt matches and the grey ashes ; the red candles burn to the sockets and they go out, the very smell of the cigars steals away through the open window. A stillness that comes with the middle of the midnight-morning interval falls over the shoulders of London like a great feather-boa. Finished, done with, deserted, the play is over. Why does not the curtain fall on the empty stage ?

Yet the void and vacant room waits and watches like some soulless creature with lidless eyes for something that is going to happen, something unexpected, intolerable, and not to be witnessed.

And something does happen ; not, however, in the least dreadful or improper. A little enigmatical and equivocal, perhaps, and calling for the explanation that cannot be given—to give one is to give it away. Yet an illuminating incident which may cause one to think less of human nature or to think more about it.

Leave it Alone

Be that as it may, what does take place is this—

Silent into the silent room comes, very naturally and properly, its owner, Mrs. Wrightson, followed by quite—no, it is better not to apply any adverbs in his case—Mr. Edward Brebner.

They cross to the bedroom door, and she gently turns the handle; to her surprise she finds the door is locked.

Neither of them says a word.

She stands a moment, wondering and considering the problem, but can find no key for it, for the key she sees is useless to her, being on the other side. Brebner looks on, then gradually a curious light breaks over his face, like the slow strange coming back of light after an eclipse.

The lady goes out into the corridor and tries the other door of the bedroom; this she finds is also locked from the inside. Baffled, she comes back to the sitting-room; it is empty.

Leave it Alone

She stands a long, long time on the threshold
looking into the room that almost seems to ache
with emptiness.

She knows very little, still she knows that she
has seen her last of him.



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11

11

. . . To surprise their inmost secrets, knowing that they have the power to rouse his deepest creative energies, to rescue him from his cold reason, to make him see visions and dream dreams, to inspire him. . . Of all human struggles there is none so treacherous and remorseless as the struggle between the artist man and the mother woman. Which shall use the other up?

G. B. S.

And they buried him. And still the people went about saying, "Where did he find his colour?"

O. S.

Unfolded only out of the inimitable poems of women can come the poems of man.

W. W.

If one loves Art at all, one must love it beyond all other things in the world; and against such love, the reason, if one listened to it, would cry out. There is nothing sane about the worship of beauty.

O. W.

*Thou wert fair in the fearless old fashion,
And thy limbs are as melodies yet.*

A. C. S.

*A vision like Alkestis brought
From underlands of memory,
A dream of form in days of thought,
A dream, a dream, Autonoe.*

A. D.

*L'homme, pour payer sa rançon,
Deux champs au tuf profond et riche
Qu'il faut qu'il remue et défriche*

.

*L'un est l'Art, et l'autre l'Amour
—Pour rendre le juge propice,
Lorsque de la stricte justice
Paraîtra le terrible jour,*

*Il faudra lui montrer des granges
Pleines de moissons, et des fleurs
Dont les formes et les couleurs
Gagnent le suffrage des Anges.*

C. B.

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IT was one of those bright afternoons in winter which come but now and then to London town, when the sky is clean and joyous, and the air brisk and heartsome ; when the pavements, washed by long rains, for once are dry and seemly, neither plagued by dust nor splashed with mud.

As one stood for a moment near the cupid-crowned fountain—that high altar of the West End—and looked up the curve of Regent Street, the drab house-fronts catching the amber light from the west seemed built of topaz, and above them the slice of sky, cut by the intersecting circles of the Quadrant, looked like a great blue scimeter.¹

The side-walks overflowed with shop-gazing ladies, who had poured from their homes, with

¹ No longer to be seen owing to destruction of the southern side.

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curiosity and cupidity augmented to near the breaking point, owing to the long period of abstinence enforced by the constant wet. Busy, bustling, apparently happy people, they came and went, stopped and passed on, perpetually changing, yet preserving continually the same general forms and groupings, like the water in a running brook, always flowing on and passing away, yet always maintaining the same splash and babble at the same exact spot; so, round certain defined points, such, for example, as the Stereoscopic, the Gophir diamonds, the flowers and the moving toys, the same sized crowd of gaping women was to be found. Here and there, in the eddies of the stream, floated up and down figures less intent and occupied, dressed with an emphasis that seemed to call for some explanation, and with an elegance too assured to be Anglo-Saxon; but as one emerged from the curve of the Quadrant, one certainly got more into the straight, morally as well as rectilinearly. And yet, and yet—who knows—even

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in this native northern quarter of Regent Street, a practised eye might chance on something that had the artistic quality of suggestion, the interesting air of dubiety and possibility.

Some such mysterious figure had attracted the notice of one, Bernard Belsherry—himself a problematic-looking personage, with a dark Byronic face, quite too handsome for the modern English taste—and he was assiduously following it up the western side of the street. The lady was plainly dressed in a black cloth skirt and a little jacket which opened in front over a glimpse of ivory satin and gold embroidery; she wore a long stole of sable lined also with ivory satin, and in her toque an ostrich tuft, and a tiny bit of colour that suggested pale coral and hoarfrost—one felt sure that her petticoat, if one could see it, would be pale celadon and foamy white, like the sea breaking round the lagoon of the coral island. However, what Belsherry was fascinated by was, the movement and grace of her figure. Beneath the thin skirt

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he figured legs that were long, slender, and straight, and he saw that her hips were unexaggerated and her waist flexible and uncompressed; for her clothes fitted, loosely but perfectly, with no distortion or concealment of the tremulous flesh and blood beneath them. She held herself erect, but so graciously; moving without side-sway or bob up-and-down—an even, gentle, rhythmic progression that but to look at made one feel young and glad. The knot of hair at the back was fair—too fair, a sympathetic woman would say to be really fair—the colour of oaten straw, ripe and glossy, when the autumn sun is low; its arrangement was quite simple, but at the same time excessively careful—a circumstance which Belsherry considered propitious, for it was among his memoranda of life, that a woman whose back hair is untidy is certain to be inaccessible, or, at any rate, as good as she should be.

At the corner of Conduit Street the graceful lady stopped to look at the pictures in a shop

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window where bland-faced women exhibit unconcernedly bosoms of an aggressive and highly improbable opulence, and unreal, porcelain-skinned Aphrodites display a nudity which is far from verity. It need hardly be said that Belsherry halted also, glad of the opportunity to get a sight of her face as she looked at the pictures: he found in it something that puzzled him, and stimulated his interest. After a moment their eyes met, and he put all he knew of appreciation and deference into his glance, while she replied with a rather tired look, that studied him carefully and thoughtfully, but in a mechanical fashion, as if her train of ideas proceeded on its journey uninterruptedly all the time; nevertheless there was a little flash of pleasurable approval in her eyes as they flitted over his handsome face. Very soon she finished her scrutiny, and looked again at the pictures, which she dismissed with obvious contempt, and resumed her walk, duly and diligently followed by Belsherry. Once during

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the march he passed and looked back at her, just to enable her to take note of and remember him if she felt inclined, and he came to the conclusion that she did not resent his offered admiration, or at the worst was placidly indifferent about it.

By and by they came to Princes Street, and she stopped undecidedly before crossing, then turned abruptly to the left, and walked towards Hanover Square. Very quickly he was alongside her, raising his hat and saying in a perfectly easy matter-of-fact way—

“How do you do? I thought you weren't quite sure if you remembered me.”

“Oh! indeed,” she replied demurely.

“Yes; but now of course I know you are.”

“Are what?”

“Sure—and sweet.”

“I know what you are—unintelligible.”

“Clever of you to find that out! what else?”

“You are also very good-looking.”

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" Bless my soul ! you find out everything ; and I try to hide it."

" But it isn't your fault."

" Please don't take away my faults—I have so few left."

By this time the pair were walking side by side, chatting like old acquaintances without the least constraint, for each of them was aware of the letter of introduction borne by the other.

" I've been waiting a long time for a fine afternoon like this—to meet you, like this. Isn't it lovely ? "

" Like this ? "

" Yes. A charming afternoon, and it's going to be a charming evening."

" You think so ? "

" Yes. I'm so fond of the effect you get on these clear winter evenings, when the lamps are lit prematurely and the wistful daylight stays on, reluctant to leave the gay gaslight. The two lights are like lovers who have got only this instant in all their lives to be together.

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Just now they are kissing, in a minute it will all be over."

"Even a minute—it's something."

"Look now at the rosy sky over the trees of Hanover Square — is it the blush of love or the flush of anger? Anyway, isn't it lovely?"

"Yes, I dare say; but to me that kind of thing depends altogether on the mood you are in."

"Certainly; you find in that strange wonderful light, just what you bring in your own heart, or rather, I should say what some one has put into it."

Instead of speaking, she turned and looked very intently and curiously at Belsherry's face —rather an uncommon type it was, a sensuous southron face, grown hard and lean through struggle, experience, and that success which is failure most tragic; black abundant hair, flecked with grey; brown eyes not pensive or sleepy, but ready and intelligent—a Hamlet cast for the

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part of Romeo; his age—possibly fifty-two, apparently thirty-two—was in fact forty-two.

In silence the two passed out into the roar of Oxford Street, walking slowly westward. Away at the further end of the long vista of flue-embattled buildings hung the sun, burnished like a new sovereign, and his slanting rays were reflected from the polished wood blocks, so that one might fancy for a moment that the streets were of pure gold, like transparent glass, as in the New Jerusalem. Belsherry watched the golden light till the sun disappeared into a bank of blue-brown haze; then he said—

“You don't often get a sunset like that in London—not twice in a winter, I should think.”

“Yes—and isn't it very hard, in the wet and fog, to remember that all the time the sun is there at the end of Oxford Street?”

“Very hard, and very little good: a day without sunshine and a day without love are no days.”

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"Quite so," she rejoined in an altered note and with a little air of business; "you have had the sun, now you sigh for something else. Well:—we must not stand here—will you call a hansom, please."

He remained silent, taking no notice of her request. Somehow he felt just a little disappointed; he sighed for the sun that had gone, and for the love that had come.

"Let's go and have a drink." When Belsherry had no other suggestion to make he always considered this one appropriate.

"Oh! very well, if you wish," she assented forlornly.

"No, no," he returned, noticing the minor key. "I only want to go somewhere and be quiet—there's a nice little pub over the way—I want to listen to your voice—it's always varying so; here in this eternal drone I lose the charm of it."

"That is very nice of you; but you didn't speak to me in Regent Street because

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you wanted to listen to my voice, I suppose?"

"No, indeed, I did not count on your possessing two extraordinary attractions."

"Yes—and the other?"

"Oh, your figure, of course. I think it divine. Do you know it is like the sleeping Ariadne of the Vatican?"

"Yes, I know," she said, as if his remark were a commonplace; but he noticed nothing and went on—

"Where you got such a figure's a mystery to me, at all events you have no right to be going about with it; you might lose it—you ought to be kept under a glass shade."

"I'm not likely to lose it," she replied, with an enigmatic smile.

They had by this time walked some distance up Old Cavendish Street. Belsherry stopped.

"So this is your little pub?" she asked.

"It is, my Ariadne. Enter, for Bacchus has come to you."

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They went into the bar, by a door round the corner—an inconspicuous innocent door, known only to the *habitué*; then passing through the saloon bar, they came upon—again round a corner—a secluded, decorous nook, where a fire was burning cheerily. It was inviting and cosy enough, but in the profusion of work in brass, mahogany and marble, there was a too obvious attempt to insist on the fact that everything was as expensive as money could procure. Conspicuous over the counter hung two vases of cut glass, long tapering things with silver mountings, containing certain fluids the responsibility for whose concoction the Briton with unusual modesty ascribes invariably to one or other of the sister nations.

Belsherry ordered a small bottle of Heidsieck and some biscuits, which were brought by a homely middle-aged body with a strong Glasgow accent, to whom he talked very amiably while his companion listened and said nothing. The Scotch lady understood that privacy was

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desirable, so she closed all the little falling shutters, thus screening the snuggerly from the public quarters, and left the pair to themselves. Then they drew their arm-chairs close to the fender, and sat down one on either side of the table with the refreshments ; she looked into the fire lost in thought, and he looked at her, enjoying contentedly—as a man enjoys music that has a meaning and a message for him alone—the long melodious line, springing at the shoulder, sloping over the breast and along the arm that lay with the hand in her lap—then running calmly along the swell of the thigh and falling rapidly from the knee to the foot, till at last it died peacefully away—like the long-sustained cadenza at the close of a song—over the instep to the toe.

“Tell me,” she said at last, ending the long intermission during which a dim sub-conscious knowledge of his admiration formed as it were the atmosphere in which her thoughts were vitalized—“Tell me—are you an Artist?”

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"What makes you ask that?"

"Never mind; tell me."

"Perhaps you mean a painter?"

"Well?"

"My dear, one can be an Artist in any medium that the senses can perceive."

"But are you?" she persisted.

"Once—long ago—I thought I was."

"Do you mean that the Artist must be young?"

"Perhaps that's it."

"But you are not too old." She thoughtfully meditated the point, then added, "I'm afraid you have lived."

"Oh! of course, of course you think that," he said, rather hurt.

She went on: "Then you neither are an Artist, nor have been, nor want to be?"

"You leave out another possibility—I might have been."

She did not reply, but at this phrase of his, her face clouded and a trace of apprehension

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came into it. Belsherry found her manner somewhat out of his experience and it puzzled him ; however, he saved the situation by discovering that the small bottle of champagne was finished, and forthwith ordering a large one and busying himself filling up the glasses.

"Tell me, my friend," she resumed in a tender, almost motherly tone, "what spoiled it?"

"Oh! don't ask me—it's one thing to choose your path right, and another to follow it like a man to the end—I hadn't the purpose or concentration."

"No, no, it wasn't that. No man with that resolute determined mouth of yours failed that way. What was it?"

"Well, I suppose it was because I was a bit of a shirk and a coward. I didn't love the labour of my trade, and I was able to make money so easily, and I thought it would help. You see, I'm afraid the Gods had not called me."

"You don't believe that."

She was so gentle and sympathetic, her desire

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to help and understand so evident, that Belsherry became for a moment sincere and confiding.

"Strange little woman, you are—you must know, must you? Then, I'll tell you my own idea—it was because among the many, many women—I never met *her*."

"So—so—so—," she repeated pathetically, inclining her head at each word, "it was that."

"But how is it you come to care about such things—are you an Artist yourself?"

"I? Don't be ridiculous: no woman ever is."

"If she cannot be an Artist—it is she alone who can make one. I always say that woman is the germ and the source, the ultimate origin of all that is fine and precious and true and human in Art."

"You say that; but do you believe it—do you really understand and know it?"

"I do. In Art woman is the Male, it is she who impregnates the artist's soul, he but gives the nurture, the shaping, the building up."

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We must forgive Belsherry, the wine was in his brain and the odorous spirit-charged little room had become for him a dim mysterious palace of all the world, and this creature with her glinting hair, her languorous perfume, her delicate colouring, and above all that gracious pliant body with those curves whose subtle appeal could bring the tears into his eyes, had changed into the eternal Helen, sought for and desired by men through all the ages.

The winter day closed in, the hum of the street drummed softly, and the fire burned low while the two sat on and on heedless of time or sense, talking irresponsibly, widely, of odd out-of-the-way matters, wondering why things are as they are, and are they really bad or do we only think they are so, and is there anything apart from thinking, and could any of us remould the shattered world one atom better? At last the wheel came full circle—they were back again at the point where they started—the meeting in Regent Street and the initial invitation. He

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looked at her again and again and always the question rose—Why? He could not understand. Since that first encounter they seemed to have lived long together, and to have become comrades, intimates of each other's thoughts and ideas, and now suddenly the question thrust itself in between them—Why?

He hesitated long, he did not like to ask it: the thing seemed so impossible: but there was no escaping the question.

"How is it," he said, "I find you—a woman like you—doing—this?"

"Thousands and ten thousands are doing it in this town."

"I know, but you! It is incomprehensible. You are well off, so it is not necessity: it cannot be choice, for naturally you are cold, there is an indomitable chastity in your blood; your bringing up must have been good, for you are high principled, reverential, almost puritanical, and yet here you are on the—the——"

"Yes—say it—on the streets."

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"Tell me how did you ever begin—I shall understand."

"I doubt if you would."

"Well, at any rate, let me be sorry along with you."

"It is in reparation," she said simply.

"For what—to whom? in Heaven's name."

"For what I destroyed. I denied myself once, now I give myself to all."

"Won't you tell me about it—do."

"Very well, since you will."

She fixed her eyes on the dully glowing embers, and told her story as a penitent might at the confessional box, who knows what the penance is well enough, but despairs of the absolution.

"My father—for I will always call him so—was a minister of a religious sect, known as 'The Covenanters,' or according to some 'The Mountain Men.' They were a small body, even in his early days, and have now all but disappeared.

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"He lived by the sea-shore, near a little grey town on the north coast of Antrim. One wild night, the 26th of December it was, a big ship was driven on the rocks and wrecked near his house. Her name was the *Georgie Own*."

"The what?" inquired Belsherry. "I expect they meant that for 'Giorgione.'"

"Perhaps, but I know it was spelled 'George E. Owen.'"

"Then I withdraw my artistic emendation," said Belsherry, filling his glass.

"She had a strange cargo—ironmongery and crockery-ware of all sorts; and I remember pieces, washed in from the wreck, were to be seen in all the cottages for years afterwards. Well—my father gave shelter to some of the rescued people, and among them a foreign woman. She had a brown skin and black hair, and was so well shaped that all the raw-boned natives said she must be wicked: be that as it may, my father at once took a fancy for her. When they brought her into the house she had

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seemed nothing the worse of the cold and the wetting, but in a couple of days she took very ill of congestion of the lungs. Of course she had to stay in the Manse till she got well ; but after that she still remained on, and consequently a lot of ill talk began in his congregation against my father. And so it happened that, three months after the wreck of the *Georgie Own*, he and she were married, and six months after the wedding I was born.

“One evening in the fall of the year, when I was about fifteen months old, my mother went out of the Manse without saying a word to any one ; she walked all through the night to Belfast and left next day by some foreign steamer. You see the place was dreary, and the few neighbours hard, uncouth, and bigoted. It was always cold and the skies dark—she couldn't face another winter there—so she went away just as the swallows leave, only she never came back. When she had gone, father and I lived by ourselves all alone in the little house by the

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sea. He reared me himself, teaching me continually out of the Bible. His life was cheerless and bitter—I don't know that he had any love for me—but my mother's image and her beautiful shape never left his mind, even when he prayed in the pulpit with the blank whitewashed walls around him. So, day by day, the narrow life dragged on until his death, when I was sixteen. He left no will, but as I was his only child I was heir-at-law to his property. Nevertheless his brother and sister disputed my right. It appeared they had possession of an old letter, written by my father to the elders of the church when I was born, and in it he declared that he was not my father—otherwise they would have disgraced him and taken the congregation from him. I had no friends to advise me, and saw no good in trying the law, so I just agreed to take forty pounds and the letter, and in exchange I assigned to them all my interest in the property. These people are now all dead and gone, the money has come back to me, so there's

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an end to it ; but at the time I hated their greed and their lies, and refused to have anything more to do with them ; that's why I left Ireland and went away to my mother's friends who lived near Portovenere in Italy. They were kind to me, and they kept me for a good while ; but they were poor people, and a time came when all the money I had brought with me was gone.

“One day, by the roadside, a painter saw me ; he said all sorts of things to me about my figure, and that he had seen nothing like it outside the Vatican. He gave me the address of his studio in Rome. Soon after I went to him, and then my life began.”

There was a pause. Up to this point she had told her story, simply and unconcernedly in a measured, colourless voice. Belsherry, who had been listening with much gravity and moderate interest, and keeping with conscientious impartiality both glasses full and one empty, looked up, and wondered what was to follow.

When she began again there was a fuller,

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deeper note in her voice—a suggestion, or perhaps it was only the reminiscence of the flash and gleam of a hidden fire—one thought of a pine-torch, lit and ready to blaze to its very end, plunged suddenly into water.

“I went to Rome and became his model. He worked from me all day long with strange facility and pleasure. He delighted in each attitude and movement of my body, he worshipped it all—the curve of my hips, the shape of my breasts, the slope of my legs, the freshness of my skin, my rosy knees, my feet, my hair, the very nails on my fingers. It was given to me, alone of all women, to be his inspiration, to fire his thoughts, to engender in him the faculty to create. I was the source of all the power and truth and meaning in his work—it quivered and glowed with glorious passionate life. It is true, I did not understand all this at the time, for I was a simple, untaught child-woman—you know what my life had been. Later I understood, but then I only watched

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the beautiful things which he said came from us both, and wondered. All the while a fierce desire was gnawing at his heart, and I knew nothing of it, and when he wanted to—to——”

“I know,” said Belsherry; “well?”

“I refused. The four grey walls of my childhood by the barren sea, with my father's stern precepts and scriptures, shut me in tightly. I thought of myself, of his wife, of the Bible, of hell, of everything but his art, and I refused. I had no carnal passions and no love for him. I suppose that cruel indomitable chastity you spoke of had murdered it before its birth; I was not ready, I was only half a woman. Obstinate, implacably, contemptuously, I refused.

“Then, like my mother, suddenly, I fled away. But unlike her, I went north—to London. There all alone, away from him I very soon discovered what it all meant to me. His views, his ideas, his sayings, his likes and dislikes, his look, his presence filled my thoughts every moment. I began to know the value and meaning of life—

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a great fear came on me; then I decided to go back to him.

"It was too late.

"All his pictures, his poor unfinished, priceless things, his studio and everything in it, were burned to ashes, and with them—he himself. An accident with a lamp they said—but I know he did it, and that it was I who had been the destroyer of him and his glorious art—because I valued my body higher than his soul."

She ceased, and inch by inch through the vinous atmosphere crept a silence, closing in, thickening around them and embedding them as in a jelly—a silence they felt they could not break, even if it lasted for ever. Belsherry found himself spiritually exalted (alas, there is an alternative spelling of the penultimate of the adverb); mistily he debated whether he was in the presence of tragedy or—lunacy. In any case he felt he was useless, helpless, uncomprehending. Her reason was absolutely sufficient to herself, and he was aware she believed it so to him, yet

A Light Woman's Reason

all the time he had to confess it was not, and that the essence of her idea lay too deep for his understanding ; he was sure that logically she was right, only he had missed one of her premises. As it was she appeared to have jumped into the sea to escape a shower. What was he to think ? Did she strive to compensate for her one supreme refusal, by a thousand barren gifts ; or was she searching in the hope of lighting upon some one in whom she might kindle the same fire of genius ; or was it her woman's view that be the debt never so great, this is the utmost price she can pay ? He felt so sorry for himself that his heart had lost the softness, the sensitiveness, to fathom her reason. Should he point out to her how sinful and wrong she was ? But was she ? He was not sure. This woman of the worser-world, was her case a thing to make a " goblin of the sun " or had she brought an alabaster box of precious ointment for the feet of Apollo ?

Then another thought struck him ; might not

A Light Woman's Reason

he himself be the destined object of her quest? The fire from heaven might be in her hand, and she might inspire him as she did that other; it was not too late, there was still a chance for him.

He resolved that as far as in him lay this strange quixotic girl should not have walked the Via Dolorosa all in vain.

In that silence between them, both had travelled far; she had come back from the empyrean, he had gone far on the arduous journey thither. They rose from their chairs together, and stood facing each other across the little table with its muddle of empty bottles and cigar ashes—her attitude, as always, supremely graceful; then they looked into one another's eyes, searching, vainly searching for something; finally their hands clasped over the table that separated them, and with the long silence still unbroken they went out together into the night.

There was a hansom standing at the door; she went straight for it and got in; his foot was on the step about to follow her, but he had to draw

A Light Woman's Reason

back, for she was closing one of the apron doors. Rather surprised he laid his hand gently on hers to try and stop her action, but it was unsuccessful ; then he threw himself into a pose which he meant to be eloquent of deference and supplication, and in his tenderest, softest tones said—

“When we went in there you asked me a question.”

“Never mind ; you did not answer.”

“But I can answer now ; I am an Artist.”

“No, no, my friend, you mistake ; you are only an actor.”

“Don't say that ; won't you believe in me ?”

“It would not matter ; you don't believe in yourself.”

“You could help me ; really and truly I think so.”

“But I know. Only once the Gods are kind. Good-bye.”

“Where shall I tell the man to drive you ?” he asked desperately.

A Light Woman's Reason

She smiled and shook her head.

"You don't mean to say—Oh! Ariadne, you abandon Bacchus; twice cruel——"

"Good-bye," she interrupted sternly.

"Really?"

"Really. If ever you think of me—remember our little scene across the table; we can never repeat it. That's the best I can do for you."

She spoke to the driver through the roof, and at once the cab moved off, leaving him alone on the kerb, watching the twin red lights till they were lost in the traffic of Oxford Street.

Then he said thoughtfully—

"Well, I'm damned!"

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111

La nuit voluptueuse monte,
Effaçant tout, même honte.

C. B.

Whatever happens to another happens to oneself.

O. W.

Allez, rien n'est meilleur à l'âme
Que de faire une âme moins triste.

D'A.

*Once I passed through a populous city imprinting
my brain . . . with its shows, architecture, customs,
traditions,*

*Yet now of all that city I remember only a woman
I casually met there who detain'd me for love of me.*

*Day by day and night by night we were together—
all else has long been forgotten by me.*

W. W.

Gagnant trop pour mourir, pas assez pour vivre.

A. G.

*She shall be trodden down like the mire of the
streets.*

M.

For Valour

SCENE I

A STRANGE half Eastern, half English town asleep between a curved sea-shore and a great mountain, with the moon impartially pouring down upon it a piercing whiteness that made the very dust in the streets shine like Carrara marble: an atmosphere so crystal clear, so blithe and stimulating, that the happy breather grew adventurous and strong in hope, an atmosphere such as the world must have had when it was young, and in comparison with which all other air seems centuries old.

It was New Year's eve, the eve of 1900, and early in the night, yet the shining streets were empty and silent, for martial law prevailed in Cape Town; no one could be out after nine o'clock unauthorized. In Adderley Street there

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was a profound silence, broken now and again by the faint strains of a military band in Government House, which was brilliantly lit up as if some entertainment were in progress. After a while four reiterated drum thuds floated down, and one guessed they were at "God Save the Queen," and the end of the show. Some minutes passed, and then an unwieldy monstrous figure emerged mysteriously and appeared in the deserted street. As it came nearer it gradually became evident that the monster was a delicate one with two voices and four legs, like that in the *Tempest*. When it got quite close one saw that the strange shape was composed of a pair of lovers with cheek to cheek and tightly interlacing arms—a slight trifle of a soldier man and a Junoesque lady. They were in full dress and had evidently been at the Government House festival.

Eustace Edgerley, third son of the Earl of Glangollan, was in charge of a detachment of the Coldstreams, awaiting transport arrange-

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ments to take it to the Tugela. He had only been a few days in Cape Town, nevertheless he had found time enough to make the acquaintance of the lady, now in such intimate juxtaposition to him, and to run through an emotional series in geometric progression, starting with mild aversion and ending at blind adoration.

A sensible, steady lad, with a sufficient sense of the obligations of position and duty, and dimly aware that purpose and effort are factors in a man's life, he would, in normal circumstances, have considered his conduct—well, to put it mildly—inappropriate; as it was, he was far too vividly occupied in living the allotted moment to have time for criticism or censure. Young, light-hearted and in a hurry, if he thought at all, it was that the chances were against his ever making love on such a night in Cape Town, or anywhere else. If you are disposed to condemn him, just have a glance first at the scenic setting and the accessories; perhaps these will only increase your severity, or, possibly,

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you may understand the potency of these little things:—The strange city, the silence, the solitude, the exaltation in the air, and the white moonlight; the warmth, the crowd, the colour they had just left, the wine that still ran warm in their veins, and the love music that still lingered in their ears; the facilitating circumstance that all these two knew of one another was what their common senses told them, and the fine idea each had of doing something suicidal for the other's sake.

But there were other things as well, and much more important; the lady knew how to dress—of course, the man would have told you that he neither knew nor cared what she had on, or what she had off, and that she was the kind of woman who would look a queen even in rags; she knew how to dress, and the frock she was out in—or out of—was really quite decent; from beneath her skirt unimaginable whispering things swished and rustled as they crushed invitingly against his leg; she used a sweet

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insidious scent so intensely personal that when he sniffed it up he felt he drew into himself something that not only belonged to her, but emanated from her central self; she wore hair the colour of old Spanish mahogany, and she did it in loose swirls, every hair separate, and these she contrived should flick and fleck deliciously against his cheek (it was hers too); on her bosom, startlingly white in moonlight, she had arranged very effectively a Valley of Shadow, in and out of which her pearl pendant kept sliding when her breathing got excited.

“And in the hollow of her breasts a tomb.”

Of course, poor boy, he did not know the Line; he was in the Guards, you remember; nor, indeed, had he known it, would a glimmer of its appropriateness have occurred to him.

But Destiny, soulless, blind and cruel, lay in waiting, only just round the corner, too, ready for its vindication.

In addition to all these personal things, there was another—the menace of the war. The

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worst week the English had ever known had just passed ; they were reeling back from three big defeats, with three thousand dead and three armies held fast by the enemy, their confidence shaken to bits, their belief in their own power, organization, capacity almost gone, sure of only one thing—that they would stick on until they came out on the top.

And these two, head over heels in this love business, were nevertheless interpenetrated by some awful, momentous feeling ; unavowed, or jested over, or avoided, it was still there, like the smell of newly-spilt blood to one closed in a dark room. And they knew, too, that in their fingers they held a page of their country's history ready for turning, and that of the unknown record on the other side ; some lines were to be written by them.

An hour for love-making ? No, you say. Well, this woman thought it was—found it ideal, irresistible, sublime, felt the thrill of personal contact with big issues and events, and the silky feline

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satisfaction in bringing the attractions of the boudoir to the very border of the battlefield.

The soldier boy didn't think or analyze, he acted according to convention and rule—that is, he kissed her: and then again and again and yet again, and everywhere, until he had erased the rose from her lips and the pearly down from her nose's tip, and the mysterious structures over which her tresses bent and billowed were partially revealed. When she allowed such dreadful things to happen, little wonder that minor considerations—tact, prudence, discretion, propriety—were disregarded; she even forgot that her original purpose in capturing the man was simply to prevent her dearest friend Lily Mason from doing so, and certainly did not include her singeing her own wings. Little by little she slipped into a nerveless ecstasy, a languorous swoon, in which nothing seemed to exist, nothing to matter but the undefined, invincible conclusion—dreaded and yet yearned for—against which when it arrived she fully intended, and

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was sure she would remember, to rally all the resistance of her moral and intellectual forces. It was curious that of the two, the one who had the most to risk and to fear, the more experienced and the subtler, should have been the one more adventurous, more responsive to the call, more courageous in abandonment. As regards the boy, indeed, a reversal of the initial conditions was taking place—he began to think he was not playing the game fairly and got a little ashamed of himself; moreover, he grew alarmed at his part in arousing these elemental passions—whose potency he could not gauge—and arriving so soon at that climax where he recognized he was the same, no better, no finer, than any other of his kind.

They have been standing all this time at the corner of a side street, and a little lull had come: it was becoming evident to the lady that the situation could not sustain itself any longer, and as the man was much too stupid to be trusted, she took the initiative by gently disen-

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gaging herself from her lover's arms, and making a movement as if to go up the side street.

"I must go," she said.

"Go? go where?"

"To my place; the house is close by."

"Won't you stay with me a little longer?"

"I've stayed with you far too long already: I must go. You know I ought to go. Don't you see that I must go?"

"No. Why must you?"

"Oh! Eustace!"

"Well, if you must, I must come with you."

"What! with me?"

"Yes! of course."

"Oh! Eustace—have—have some—pity—on—me: leave me."

"I must see you to the door. It isn't safe for you to go alone."

"It's not safe for me to go with you."

He did not quite follow this, but she nestled into his arms again and the Valley of the Shadow looked so alluring.

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"My darling," he said, "I cannot part with you like this. You know it's fifty to one that I ever see you again."

"Eustace, I know it."

"Then I am to leave you? It is good-bye."

"You would not leave me if you loved me."

"Love you? I love you with every fibre I possess."

"Sweetheart! my sweetheart—you love me—oh say it, say it again; say, Eustace, you love me."

"Yes, darling, I love you."

"God will forgive us, Eustace, do what you will."

He kissed her on the mouth, one of those close violent kisses that almost hurt, but he said nothing.

"Don't, dearest, don't," she moaned, "I cannot bear it—you tempt me too much—and I am only a woman."

He was still silent, kissing her mechanically.

"But I am—I want to be a good woman."

There was a long irritating silence: she lay

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helpless in his arms : at last he said very firmly and deliberately—

“ I want you to marry me before I leave Cape Town ; there will be time, I think ; will you ? ”

“ Oh ! ”

All the breath left her lungs, with a long diminishing expiration that suggested the thrusting of a penknife into a pneumatic tyre, only there was no permanent deflation. Her predominant feeling was surprise, but for the life of her she could not keep the note of disappointment out of the inflection of her voice. It was so entirely unexpected, so different from the sort of thing she was anticipating, that for a moment she hadn't a word to say, and luckily she had to pause. It was not a long pause, perhaps not half-a-minute, but in it her mind went back only to circumspection, the conventional and the commercial. She recognized the impropriety of her conduct in giving away valuable property for nothing : for nothing, when it commanded

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such a price. She hesitated, and she won ; for the lad set her hesitation down to unsuspected depths of reserve and modesty, and he began protesting and entreating and finally giving masterly commands, so after a due interval she whispered her promise. Whereupon he became excited, almost violent, and feeling in duty bound, he squeezed her so fervently that it seemed artificial, leaving a long row of little round pits on her chest where his brass buttons had been. After that he found it difficult to get any variety or originality into the last long kiss, the culmination of their transports, in the middle of which simultaneously they separated—that is, she tore herself from him and he from her, both under the impression that they had escaped—each from the ensorcery of the other—he turning and going into Adderley Street, and she dashing headlong into the shadows of the side street.

After running for some sixty or eighty yards she pulled up out of breath and looked back, a little annoyed to find that he had disappeared

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without attempting pursuit, and that consequently the little sprint she had made had been perfectly unnecessary. When she went on again, it was slowly and dreamily, in a hazy, half-awake state, careless and heedless where she was going; she was back again in his arms with all her carnal nature awake and aflame; simply, she had reverted to her condition before the utterance of her epoch-making "oh!" After some minutes walking she looked around and it began to dawn upon her that the "stoeps" of the houses were unfamiliar, and that it was quite possible she had lost her way, but the fact gave her the same concern exactly as if she had been a drunken man. A little further on she came upon a dark alley on the opposite side, and in it stood an uncertain, ill-defined figure of a man; without pausing to consider or investigate she crossed over to him and asked her way. The stranger proved to be a Cape boy, that worthless, deplorable mixture of tar and cream—the Malay, the Hottentot, the West African negro, and the

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Dutchman ; mongrel and brute he might be, still he was an essential man as much as the pure-bred earl's son, and so the fair white flesh, shining in the moonlight triumphant from its victory over the one, now dazzled the eyes of the other, and aroused the same primitive irresistible impulse.

In a vague instinctive way she knew there was something utterly wrong if not dangerous in the effect she was producing, without however feeling that it was imperative to stop it—indeed, what could she do? The man civilly enough offered to point out the way, and moved along beside her, adoring her with all his eyes ; then he stroked her skirt fawningly and touched her bare arm, she repelling him as well as she could. He brought his burning lips close to her face, and thereupon an ungainly, ineffective tussle began, in which she felt that she would be crushed or hurt. The childish fancy came into her head that if she stopped struggling it would save her dress being all torn and rumped—she

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wasn't the build for a physical contest, besides she was paralyzed by fright, and her faculties weakened and exhausted, and her mind in such a chaos that almost her discrimination of individuals was obliterated ; whatever the cause may have been, at any rate she made a very poor fight of it, and uttering a few not very desperate screams, rather prematurely—but indeed no one has any right to express an opinion in such a matter—gave herself up for lost.

At that moment a girl who had heard the feeble cries came upon the scene.

She was an ordinary-looking person, of the shop-girl class, tall, thin and light-haired, unattractively, almost untidily, dressed with no visible indication of refinement, breeding, education or spirit, just an average, lower middle class, commonplace English girl—but had she been the glorious goddess Pallas, with the grand relentless eyes in all the wrath and pride of affronted divinity, she would not have sped more eagerly to the rescue with finer scorn or nobler

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indignation. Without an instant's hesitation, a qualm of fear, a cry for assistance, a thought of herself, she flew straight at the throat of the triumphant beast, who, overborne by the fierce suddenness of the attack, crumpled up and tumbled over on his back spent and exhausted. This set free the lady, who, finding herself unencumbered, contrived to segregate herself from the group ; presently she recovered sufficiently to get to her knees, and in that attitude to move still further away ; then she rose to her feet, and noticing that her frock was a little disarranged, she carefully smoothed it straight and shook off the dust, and, without concerning herself about her succourer slid stealthily away into the darkness and disappeared.

The slight fair-haired girl hung on like grim death to the Cape boy's throat, trying with all her might to squeeze the breath out of him and overpower him ; she nearly succeeded in this, but her method of attack left both his hands free, so that he was able to get a knife out of

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his pocket and open it ; this was an ordinary white-handled affair with a two and a half inch blade, nothing formidable—any one might have carried it. Half choked though he was, yet by convulsively clasping his arms inwards he drove the blade into her between the shoulders. The sting of the wound made her let go her grip of the throat, and to prevent a second stab she seized with both hands his wrist, and giving it a sudden violent wrench ricked the shoulder and caused him to drop the knife. There was a rough scramble between them for its possession. Every time she managed to get near it, he set his knee on the back of her hand, squashing it against the ground. Quickness did not avail against weight, and gradually the heavy collisions exhausted her, and gave him the advantage. He grabbed the knife in his left hand and lashed out straight at her face ; the blade struck on the forehead where the hair began, and sliced downwards slantingly through the eyebrow, just missing the eyeball. It was an ugly wound,

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painful enough, serious enough, any one would say, to put an end to the combat there and then ; but its effect on this slender English girl was all the other way ; it got her blood up and put her in a temper ; she discovered that fine fighting spirit and dogged pluck that will not be beaten and will not acquiesce in wrong. She fought on like fury, too incensed to be aware of pain or effort. The man aimed a second terrible lunge at her face, but before he could deliver it she caught his wrist in her teeth and bit and shook it till the knife was dropped, which this time she captured, and at once began to use. He went for her throat, trying to strangle her as well as he could with one arm disabled, while she struck at him with the knife anywhere she could hit—breast, cheek, and thigh. Blow after blow she dealt until she was too tired to raise her arm for another : she gave in then and fell on the ground beside him.

He had been dead some time.

There were fifty stabs on his body.

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The police took her to the hospital, where she lay six weeks before she could tell them even her name. After her recovery they charged her with the manslaughter of the Cape boy, and she received eight months' imprisonment. On getting out of gaol, she found her little shop, her savings, her friends, her character—everything she had in the world—gone.

A charitable society paid her passage to England, where she was dumped out like a dirty rag on that dunghill of wasted womanhood that finds itself in London.

The lady reached her house that night without further inconvenience or injury—indeed how far she was aware of suffering nobody, perhaps, not even she herself, can tell. A few days afterwards she was married to the Hon. Eustace Edgerley, who had to leave immediately for the front. He went through the whole of the long war, in which his elder brothers both lost their lives, and was very brave and reckless in a useless, unnecessary fashion. Shortly before the

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close of the war, his father died, and he succeeding him, the Lady of the Night became the Countess of Glangollan.

SCENE II

ANOTHER strange town, wide-awake beside a river, midnight, midwinter and (so the almanac said) midmoon.

The air—millions were breathing it—was saturated to excess with aqueous vapour and drugged with carbonic and sulphuric fumes ; innumerable particles of soot floated in it or fell to the ground. It had rained heavily, and now the streets were littered with a substance which displayed the more distressing qualities of ooze, gutta percha and kitchen grease ; on the pavement it was slimy and sticky, because it had partially dried itself in draining the warmth out of the feet of passers-by ; in the carriage way it was fluid and mixed with the “ excremental humours ” of many horses ; in this

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form it was squirted by hoofs and wheels on the faces and clothing of those who walked. All the while a raw, chill wind, discomforting and cruel, slid through the deep-trenched streets, sifting relentlessly all the warmth and vigour and heart out of every one. Only the young, well-clad, well-fed, well-off, could be here and happy on such a starved, insufferable night. It was late, yet many cabs and foot passengers still traversed this irregular space, where seven streets came unintentionally and ineptly together—a space which was the western focus of a vast elliptical area paved with houses, palled with smoke, and hiving with human beings, and which it need hardly be mentioned, was called Piccadilly Circus.

The last West-going omnibuses were drawn up at the Jermyn Street Museum ; beside them lounged and loitered a group of indefinable, undecided persons, academically contemplating the question of taking the White Walham or Red Hammersmith, or possibly they were waiting

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for friends who never came, or were merely enjoying the balmy evening ; or, more likely, they were there because it was the only place they were allowed to lounge and loiter. To and fro between this spot and the corner of the Circus flitted restlessly a few girls, who had the magpie trick of never alighting for long, and were trying perhaps to keep their feet warm till their particular 'bus came forward ; anyway, they carefully kept dodging the dark guardian of the peace. Half-past twelve had come—that dreadful hour when unfortunate people are prohibited from eating and drinking any more—and a few minutes later there slowly approached Piccadilly Circus from Lower Regent Street what appeared at first sight to be a solemn procession—there were incense, chanting, silken vestments and stoles. The incense came from violet powder, white rose and opoponax, and the chanting from files of police who kept on the one note, repeating the phrase, “ Pass along, please.” The great body of the processionists were ladies in

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gilt shoes and blonde hair, and evening dress, that was obvious almost to a blind man. Only when they came quite close, for the street was ill-lit, could one see their faces—broad, high-cheekboned, capable faces, inane animal faces, refined slender faces—faces common as cabbages, faces with the charm of a softly fading tea-rose: Scandinavian, German, Belgian, Austrian and French faces—English not many, Scotch maybe one, Irish none. Fringing this throng were men in opera hats, white mufflers and overcoats—men from the country, Colonials, Americans, lads after exams., a few soldiers, club men and unemployed. Gradually the mass of figures was pushed and passed along, till the circular sweep of the Circus opposite Drew's shop was reached, and from thence it disseminated itself; some got into the cabs that had flanked the procession on its right since it started, some wandered afar down Piccadilly, but most of them radiated up Shaftesbury Avenue, or towards Leicester Square, shining

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like white angels amid the grime and haze, till they were lost to view. Everything had been quite decorous and sedate, almost solemn. An unsophisticated observer might have found something enigmatical in the composition of this crowd, leaving in a body its supper rooms, something incongruous in the association of the finery and the filthy streets, something suggesting iniquity in the presence of the police—especially should one of the latter hale a silken figure to Vine Street Station, for no perceivable offence, yet the observer would be wiser to express neither surprise nor indignation, and concern himself philosophically and no further with the processional units. In ten minutes the show was over and the spectators dispersed—only one or two of the dark, restless figures still flitted around.

One of these, flapping about like a crow with a wounded wing, had perched for a moment at Drew's corner, beside a white-waistcoated man in a fur coat. He may have been in the pro-

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cession from the Continental, or he may have supped at the Carlton, and be going to his chambers in Cork Street, at any rate there he stood all alone that cheerless night, gloomily looking across Piccadilly Circus at the hysterical figure of Cupid shooting inexpedient arrows at unworthy prey. He was a neatly-built, smallish, bred-looking man, and held himself erect and firm, but with a wearied, disappointed sort of air, as of one who had gone through much for nothing, and found himself young and yet with no object in life for which to live. The woman beside him also looked with parallel gaze across the dirty square setts, which shone with incredible sadness and desolation in the pitiless electric light, meditating probably taking reluctant flight away to some beyond-Bloomsbury lodging, where the anomalous situation faced her that two might get in where one could not.

They stood there close together for a good while, neither looking at the other. All the time the man was becoming aware of a strange

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notion that this girl was interesting, special, curious, and in some way a concern of his. Most people will consider it improbable or even impossible that the mere adjacency of an unknown person could convey to another, without look, touch, or speech, any such impression, and most people doubtless know best ; nevertheless, there are some exceptional people who have hearts, and sometimes when those hearts are empty and desolate, their doors stand very wide open, so that strangers enter in easily. But whatever the reason was he did turn round at last to look at her, expecting to see something out of the ordinary ; and he saw this.

A slim, tall girl, in a black serge skirt and three and elevenpenny pneumonia blouse, with a big black chip hat and feather, and an imitation astrachan cape round her shoulders—everything she had on cheap, meagre and the worse for wear. Her face, rosy with a uniform flush that came from no wind-swept heath or western sea-shore, was clear-cut and in its way comely,

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and had plenty to interest in the variety of its modelling ; round it was arranged with no great art or neatness, a wispy cloud of oddly-hued hair, not unlike the tint of a ripe banana. But what caught the eye most was the swinging grace of attitude, and the unmistakable evidence in the firmly-planted feet and assured balance of the hips, of fearlessness and independence—alas ! that in her eyes there lurked a contradiction of this. They were the eyes of the animal that has been brutally used—they watched you stealthily as if expecting you were certain to hurt, and that there was need of fawning and deceit.

Many, indeed most, men would look at her and turn away wholly unmoved—merely remarking something bizarre and unattractive about her ; but if one understood, if one had the right heart and a touch of that curious freemasonry of sex that makes a man feel with a woman's heart, then one was profoundly sorry for the awful havoc wrought there by circumstance.

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Here was material sound and genuine, spoiled, wasted, treated as scrap—here were useful qualities unused, here were spirit, courage, fortitude worsted by hunger, hardship, and ill-luck ; useless for the miserable job she was at, and yet inevitably beaten down to it in the last resort. An indignant, unavailing, mournful “why” rose to one’s lips. “Why does God do it? Is there nobody whose business it is to stop this waste, nobody to discover a process of separating the diamonds from the sludge? Why can’t this work be left to the cabbage-faced women who know how to do it? Why cannot this Iris lily be left to grow among the reeds by the river?”

The man in the white waistcoat, as he studied her, felt something like this—only in a much more simple and genuine fashion, and wholly without the rhetoric and sentimentality. A shiver of discomfort went through him, for all his fur-lined coat, seeing the meagre defence her wretched dress was against the aching, unhappy cold. He knew very well that whatever

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was wrong here was not to be set right by anything he could or would do—but he had compassion of the kind that does not stop to consider arguments or eventualities ; besides—for he was no Galahad—he felt personally attracted by her, and also you must not forget the inexplicable sensation already mentioned. So it was that he spoke to her, and in a low, friendly, mellow voice, just as if resuming a conversation after a silence.

“ It’s time for you to be going home, now.”

“ I’m only waiting for my ’bus.”

“ The last ’bus has gone long ago.”

“ I don’t think so ; but it doesn’t matter.”

“ I’m afraid that cold of yours is settling on your throat.”

“ Oh, no ; I always speak like this.”

“ It’s not much of a night, is it ? ”

“ Well, not so bad ; it isn’t raining.”

“ Which way are you going ? This ? ”

“ Yes.”

He knew that it was not desirable to stand

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there in conversation; "Pass along" would inevitably interrupt, so he turned and moved away. After a little hesitation they found themselves drifting down towards Waterloo Place, chatting quite sociably. What she said and her way of saying it, interested him. He paid no attention to her looks, indeed he felt it unfair to scrutinize them, for she could not be at her best in that rusty gown and wrecked millinery, besides it annoyed him to notice the pathetic efforts she made to express gaiety by a battered rose under her hat brim, and a paste brooch fastening a wisp of thready lace under her chin.

"What do you do?" he asked.

She laughed foolishly.

"I mean, have you been in any kind of employment?"

"Oh! yes—I am a model. I sit to artists—only for the face, not for the figure." She named half-a-dozen fourth-rate men.

"Indeed. And how much do you earn by that?"

For Valour

“ I get half-a-crown an hour. I can sit three to five hours twice a week.”

“ I see ; that’s not at all bad. What? about a pound a week? and you are getting that now? ”

“ N-no : not just now. You see, I’ve had an illness. It lasted a long time, and when I got better I was so thin they would not have me any more. But I’ll get stout again. I’m trying all I can to get fat here,” touching her chest, “ and I will.”

“ Then you do sit for the figure—there’s no harm in that.”

She laughed again, childishly.

“ How did you come to start as a model? ” he went on.

“ I was looking in one day at Swan and Edgar’s window, and a gentleman came and stood beside me, watching me, then he followed me a long way, and after a good while he spoke to me. He said he had been searching for a face like mine for years and years. Then he

For Valour

told me he was an artist, and he pressed me hard to come and sit to him. I did.”

“Exactly—then, in due time, he made love to you.”

She laughed her silly, empty laugh, which seemed to come when there was trouble or unsavouriness in the subject ; it committed her to nothing.

By this time they had come into Pall Mall—a place he had no fancy to be seen in with such a companion : so he stopped and told her that he must bid her good-night—just to see what she would say. Her practice in disappointment, her training in the school of adversity had been so thorough that her look scarcely fell, and she made no objection, no request ; somehow this touched more than any wordy entreaty she could have used. He decided.

“You must be perished with cold. Come in here with me, and you can warm yourself, and I’ll give you a drink. You’ll be a good girl ?”

“ Yes.”

For Valour

Only the turn of a Yale key, and the mounting two flights of stairs, and they stood in a beautiful room, looking out over a lawn with ghostly trees, and roofed with a great space of empty sky. A merry fire was burning in a wrought-iron basket grate, filling the room with gracious warmth, and such a friendly, ruddy glow that beamed on the gilt leather hangings, and caressed the bronze and porcelain, and fairly danced among the decanters and spirit bottles set out, with cake and fruit and cigarettes, on a silver tray.

The girl had a slice of cake, hardly touching it, and declining both the cigarettes and the whisky, while the man lit a cigar, and sat down to study her face—the face that she said the artist had so hunted for. She posed herself, perhaps unconsciously, for the scrutiny, letting the firelight fall on her profile. Not exactly good-looking, he thought, but arresting—funny-coloured hair, melancholy eyes, eyebrow strangely beautiful, beginning with a little fan of hair, it

For Valour

then compacted and ran level for a third of its length, then, with a distinct angle, it turned downwards, in a long, delicate, tapering sweep that persisted till it became the merest filament. He could make nothing of her character from her face or expression : at times he thought she must be a bit mad, she suggested at one moment the strong, capable, tenacious, courageous will ; at another, something erratic, irresponsible, almost childish ; and, again, he thought she must be of a dual sex, her little artifices of affection were only possible when she had cast off her other mood. But always he felt it unfair to submit her to analysis, she was so battered, and scuffed, and abused—it was, he thought, like criticizing the cut and condition of a dress coat by Davies that had descended to the back of a greasy chop-house waiter.

“I wish you would turn your head this way. I don't think I've seen your full face yet,” he said.

She laughed her silly, mirthless giggle ; but

For Valour

she did as he asked. An irregular white furrow ran across her temple, beginning at the hair and cutting through the eyebrow at the beautiful angle, upsetting and distorting all its grace of line.

“What did that?” he asked.

“Got it in a fight.”

“Where?”

“In Cape Town.”

“How?”

“A Kaffir was abusing a white woman, a lady; I stopped him.”

“And you got that wound saving her? It must have been a frightful slash.”

“The stabs between the shoulders were the worst. I had to lie on one side six months. I didn't mind the hospital, but I had to give up my business and leave Cape Town, and I was getting on so well.”

“But the lady you saved: she made it up to you for such suffering?”

“The lady? I never saw her after that night.”

For Valour

“You don’t mean to say that she did not come to you, and nurse you and help you with her last penny?”

“You don’t understand: she was never heard of—the police thought that I only invented her: they said bad things about me.”

“H’m. What was she like?”

“It can make no matter now.”

“Well, it’s an amazing story. One can hardly imagine a lady or any one doing such a cowardly, contemptible thing. I suppose it’s the Christian idea to let another go to hell for your salvation. If I knew that woman I’d spit—I’d disinfect myself if I touched her.”

“Ah! no you wouldn’t; no, I’m sure you wouldn’t.”

“Tell me: when did it happen?”

“It was a New Year’s eve—when the war began.”

“Curious! I was in Cape Town that very night; yes, I remember it well.”

He asked her some further questions, then

For Valour

there was silence awhile. After, they talked of other things: gradually the warmth and cosiness, the colouring and adornment of the room, with the charm and kindness of its owner, wrought a change in the girl's manner, making it sweeter, gentler, more feminine—and the better, long-buried traits sprang up like the crocus in February sun. Soon enough, inevitably, she began to develop the reverential, devoted, diabolic style of affection, and desired but one thing—to make to him the best, the only return in her power. Then it was it finished. He got up and said it was very late; he was sorry to turn her out, but it was better she should go, before she grew sleepy. He rolled up a couple of sovereigns in a sheet of paper, intending to slip them into her hand as she was leaving. They went downstairs together into the hall, and a thin grey fog came into it as he opened the street door. Pall Mall, for all its palaces, looked gloomy and miserable—as you looked east and west, solitary and impenetrable.

For Valour

He felt sorry to leave her, and displeased with himself that some stupidity constrained him from saying to her what he felt. He knew the uselessness, even the real unkindness of it—but he knew how she would value it, and so, whether right or wrong, he didn't care : any way, as they stood there on the doorstep, he bent down and kissed her on the forehead, holding her head in his hands, just where the angle was in her eyebrow.

At that instant a motor-brougham that had emerged swiftly and noiselessly out of the mist, pulled up opposite the door. Inside the vehicle, wrapped in snowy furs and blazing with sapphires and diamonds, sat a superbly magnificent woman.

Both of them turned and saw her ; both of them knew her. “For heaven's sake, go, quick as you can,” he said excitedly, pushing her away. Almost at the same moment the girl, staring at the lady in the motor, ejaculated, with her childish laugh—“ Why, that's the woman ! ”

The lady, who apparently had stopped to

For Valour

leave a letter, altered her intention on seeing the pair, and told the footman to drive home. As she was whirled away westwards to her mansion in Grosvenor Place, lolling back in her cushions, she smiled very contentedly, as if quite satisfied with the cards she held.

The slim girl turned to the left, eastwards down Pall Mall, walking with her resolute step, indomitable in disappointment and distress, squaring her shoulders against the penetrating fog—at two in the morning, without a halfpenny in her pocket—for the destined present was forgotten in his agitation—to spend the rest of the night dodging the police from seat to seat along the Thames Embankment. Perhaps she went over the parapet; perhaps the rare, right man came along, the man with a woman heart. You are not asked to pity her—no need to heave the windy sigh for her—she dealt with life bravely, fearlessly, openly, largely, indomitable as the Titan; she had her reward in herself, and so had the others.

For Valour

The man was left there standing looking blankly out into the impenetrable night, remembering horrible things, and things that had been dark became plain; and there was one thing that was dark and still plain—the little imp who would one day be the Earl of Glengollan.

Out of the Mire





And down the long and silent street
The dawn with silver-sandalled feet
Crept like a frightened girl.

The Harlot's House.

For the crown of our life as it closes
Is darkness, the fruit thereof dust ;
No, thorns go as deep as a rose's,
And love is more cruel than lust.

A. C. S.

*Pourquoi m'avez vous laissée seule,
Brada.*

*Je préfère, tout matérialiste que je suis, la
virginité de l'âme à celle du corps.*
T. G.

Out of the Mire

NIGHT in the long grey street, running away southwards till it is lost in the mist that hangs over the river. The gas-lamps are out ; gloom and darkness shroud the tall house-fronts and hide the ordure-littered roadway. The silence and the emptiness are absolute and unanswerable; you acquiesce in them as normal and unchangeable, as though busy wheels had never bumped over the rough macadam, nor daylight revealed the florid stucco in all its shameless luxuriance. No suspicion ever comes to you of the possibility of a break in the profound monotony of the night, no anticipation of a change, no sanguine hope for the coming of some mysterious thing out of the abysmal nadir. You loiter onwards, hardly noticing that overhead the vague, cloudy mass has thinned,

Out of the Mire

and through the bare places the palest, sickliest lavender-tinted sky is peering. Was it like that always? You hesitate. A little shiver creeps over you—does not the twice-breathed, stale air of yesterday seem nimbler and fresher? A sigh seems to echo over the place, and a spasm of pain flickers through the air or through yourself. Far down the streets the frightened shadows huddle together, grow threadbare and separate. Through them filters a fragile twilight—clear and pale, and sad beyond expression. Soon the upright lines and pedimented windows of the houses explain themselves, and the kerb along the edge of the pavement is defined.

Something is coming—something unfriendly to the kindly darkness. The face of night grows pinched and blurred and faded.

Then from the towers of Westminster three strokes boom out and spread in circles over the sea of smokeless chimney-tops. Suddenly, close at hand, a harsh sound shrills out—a

Out of the Mire

cock-crow—another and another answering from mews and backyard.

It is almost daybreak on a summer morning in Pimlico.

Something has come. Weak, uncertain, unreal, unnatural, and more than anything else, intensely penetrated with sadness—the sadness of eyes that have cried so long for impossible things that now they have no more tears to shed. And this newcomer enters timidly, not venturing into archway or alley or cross street, contenting itself at first with resting along the eastward-facing house-fronts, tinging them with a glow of pale amber, clear, soft, uncanny, and giving to these fashion-deserted, shabby structures a look of radiance, almost of dignity.

Something has come. For you—for every man. Another day; what will it bring? Will it be any better than those barren others, wherein you have waited and worked, tried your hardest or your feeblest, with always close at your heels the woman or the wolf? Well, be

Out of the Mire

that as it may, at any rate it is another; you are to have one more throw of the dice, one more declaration in the game of life.

They are—except for variations in the degrees of dinginess—exactly alike, all these houses. Each has its flight of white steps, its pair of Tuscan pillars supporting a balcony, its triangular corniced windows; one shouldering another, they range themselves in long perspective, like the units of a regiment on parade. Outside alike, inside probably much the same; no doubt the inhabitants, impressed by this identity of environment, live and look and feel alike. Stay! there is something breaking the uniformity. In one of the houses a first-floor window is showing a pale orange rectangle of light, that looks forlorn and ashamed in the indecent daylight. Some one watches by a sick bed? No, the room is unoccupied. Only a forgotten paraffin lamp burning dimly and emitting by way of protest a very disagreeable smell. The room is sufficiently furnished with a walnut,

Out of the Mire

plush-covered "suite"—inexpensive, machine-made, immoral; but here and there a bit of Sheraton or satin wood, and among the ornaments-to-order, a bronze or china figure or silver photograph frame indicate a difference of taste between the owner and the occupier. A feminine presence seems to follow from the marguerites in the window boxes, the flowers about the room and the crinkled paper petticoats on the pots, an inference which to you is confirmed—or perhaps negatived—by the pile of things lying in a mess on the sofa, among them an opera hat, white waistcoat, evening coat and trousers, white muffler and satin-lined overcoat. The inevitable folding doors obviously lead to a bedroom, for they are ajar and you can get a glimpse of a toilet table, draped with white muslin and pink ribbon, on which are a pair of silver-backed brushes, a tiny clock, scent bottles, a pair of candlesticks and trays—in the "Dresden taste," and so forth. Behind the table is of course the window. A dark green calico blind,

Out of the Mire

quite impervious to light, is drawn ; it appears, however, to have been disturbed or hurriedly pulled down, for one side has fouled the pillar of the glass, causing a gap through which the newly risen sun is finding its way. As the sun wheels slowly but inevitably on his southern course, the triangular splash of white passes on from ring-stand and puff-box to the cut-glass scent-spray ; gradually it leaves the toilet and flares on the brass knob on the back rail of a bedstead ; there it meets a long pair of grey silk stockings, making them shine like frosted silver ; next it lights up the multitudinous corrugations of rose satin which form in some way part of the fabric of a pair of garters ; and now it falls on the edge of a pillow, bringing out caves of shade and mountain peaks of shine among its frills. Along this delicate ground Apollo seems to linger, but onwards his chariot must drive, whether the objects in his route are attractive or the opposite ; and next the sunbeam falls—"like a god kissing carrion"—on the ugly, greenish-yellow skin,

Out of the Mire

creased and rough with dried sweat, of a sleeping man. His black hair is thin and lank, grey at the temples and so bare on the top that the almost spherical skull shines through. He looks ill and haggard, and sleeps heavily and uncomfortably, clearly suffering from a bad stomach attack. He is a man of that uncertain age that looks forty when he is fit, and seventy when he is seedy. You, who know all about such cases, are pretty certain that last night he had been mixing his drinks without brains.

When the strong light reaches his eyeballs it wakes him, and the anguish of his dream troubles is replaced by something much worse. Groaning and venting internal noises, he struggles into a sitting posture, and with elbows on knees squeezes his palms tight into his eyes and forehead. Presently he looks round vacantly at the walls, until he sights a water bottle on the wash stand, then automatically his left arm shoots out endeavouring to reach it. Just before the elbow straightens, the movement

Out of the Mire

is suddenly arrested, and his arm, like Pyrrhus' sword, "seems i' the air to stick." The man is listening stupidly, trying all he can to make out the nature of a sound close by—the sound of breathing, rhythmic, gentle, equable. With rigid neck he squints his eyes round to the right and is aware of a long white mound beside him—the thin counterpane moulded into the form of a snow wreath. A curve like this, so suave, so melodious with its long gentle rise and deep descent coming like a sigh, can be fashioned by one thing only—a woman's body, and by it only when it is exceptionally well made and posed. "H'm, scarcely quite the thing," you think, and being a man of the world, of course it is quite plain to you—and yet—just wait.

She lies facing the wall in a tranquil sleep, quite healthy and pleasant; her head buried in the up-swelling pillow, and her face hidden completely by a mass of wavy hair, whose colour, apparently once black, is at present a curious shade of red brown. To do him justice, the

Out of the Mire

man seems not a little disconcerted, not to say surprised by the contiguity of his neighbour and by his surroundings generally, which he finds unfamiliar and unrecognizable. Although he can't recollect how he came to get into this galley, he soon decides on the propriety of getting out of it at once ; so with caution and precaution he slips out of the bed—you notice of course that he is not in pyjamas—and makes for the folding doors. Meantime the sun, without haste, or rest, or modesty, goes on and on, and now the patch of light is among the sworls of the wonderful red hair, burnishing them till they glow like the copper of an old Dutch milk-pail. This hardly annoys her, but she is remotely conscious of the man's movements and very little would serve to awaken her ; she shifts her position, tries to get her head away from the sunlight, an elbow emerges, and half rising she pushes to one side a bunch of hair ; then nestling once more on the pillow, she resumes her peaceful slumber.

Out of the Mire

But the man—look at him! What's the matter with him, clutching at the door handle to keep himself from falling? His cheeks have gone as white as chalk, his mouth is open and round as a pennypiece, his eyes full of questioning horror, and between them two deep vertical trenches. He is staring at the place where for an instant the woman's head appeared above the bedclothes, and where only the sunlit red hair is now to be seen. After a bit he steadies himself, sobered by the fright.

"What an insane notion! My nerves must be in a wretched state—what a horrible . . . horrible idea to come into my head. But there was some sort of a likeness," he says, as he sidles between the folding doors, closing them behind him. In the front room he finds his clothes and begins to dress, muttering all the time little sentences, and explaining things to himself—from which idiosyncrasy you infer a bachelor existence.

"Oh! yes . . . oh! yes. I see. Begin to

Out of the Mire

remember now—of course—yes, that's it. How could I? Such an ass. Five years I haven't been in London—had to come on that law business—meet old Fisher—said I wasn't to hug trouble—would do me lot of good—Oddenino's—two bottles of Krug at dinner—no end of whiskies at Empire. Romano's, what had we?—can't remember—Fisher said it wasn't much, for there were three of us. How three? Oh, yes, the lady Fisher knew—then what? No, all's blank after that supper. Blind, I suppose—couldn't leave me like that—so brought me along—three in a cab—that's it—dumped me into bed with somebody for a joke. The Preston Puritan—funny indeed—I that have been as clean as ice, ever since she left me. My Margot! Heavens, if she saw me in a place like this! Poor Margot, I wonder where you are now. Curse my hellish temper that drove you from my side. What did Fisher say? Heard she had gone on the stage—impossible.”

Out of the Mire

Poor stage, you think, what feminine frailty shelters itself under the facile phrase!

By this time he is dressed, and about to go down-stairs, when a thought strikes him. He considers, anxious to do what is right and usual, then comes back to the table, and taking some coins from his sovereign case places them on the green table-cover. But this arrangement does not altogether satisfy him—perhaps a doubt arises of their attaining their intended destination, in view of the early housemaid—so he takes them up again and tiptoes softly into the bedroom and up to the toilet table.

The lady is sleeping as soundly as ever.

While he is seeking among the multitude of trifles that crowd the table for a vacant spot, his eye chances on the ring stand: there, hanging on the sprouts of the china tree, are three rings—a half hoop of sapphires, a long marquise in diamonds, with an end stone missing, and another in the shape of a marguerite, a big topaz forming the centre.

Out of the Mire

One glance is enough. He knows them.

"Her rings! Then—then—it is she!"

Horror and repulsion, remorse and anguish are blended in that wild, stifled cry. Sense control, even his manhood disappear. He rushes blindly out of the room, as though a glyceriné bomb were just going to explode in it, headlong down the narrow stairs and through the hall—a momentary check at the door-latch accumulates the propelling force within him to the bursting point—across the steps in one impossible stride, spraining his ankle badly, and collapses in a formless bundle on the roadway.

The intensity of that smothered cry has aroused the lady. She listens with mild surprise to the clangour of his panic-stricken exit; gets up quietly and quickly, and opening the front window steps out on to the balcony to get a view of the flying figure. The long street, sunlit and silent, lies there in pure delight beneath the freshness and beauty of the morning, the watching houses are all asleep, not

Out of the Mire

a creature is visible. She pauses a moment, with the air of good-naturedly awaiting an explanation of no particular interest, sniffing the keen, sweet air, and enjoying its cool touch playing on her skin beneath her nightgown. Pretty in a way and rather striking—you would almost call her lurid, if she were not on the small scale, and this suggests that there is a trifle of make-believe about her wickedness; her figure graceful, pleasantly full, yet retaining a snaky quality; her complexion clear and creamy contrasting vividly with the rolling swathes of hair, now looking some indefinable shade between carrot and caramel. At last she gives it up and moves over to finger the marguerites on the balustrade, leaning on it with her elbows; in this position she can see the street close underneath, and at length, with amused curiosity, she espies the *débris* at her doorstep.

Such a sight! His dress clothes look ghastly in the daylight, and are covered with dust and

Out of the Mire

dirt, for owing to the pain of his ankle he has squirmed about on the road; there is blood on his shirt-front from a cut on his cheek-bone where it has ploughed across the pavement, and there are other things too disagreeable for mention—altogether very deplorable and pitiable if you could help laughing at it. There he lies, unable to move, and as before mumbling his deprecations and imprecations, which the lady listens to, carelessly at first, but when she catches her own name, with breathless attention. She hears his bewailings for her terrible fate, her fearful punishment, the hell into which his jealousy has driven her; his pity and love, his sole desire to help and save her, and much more of the like. She hears it in amazement, trying to understand—love still for her—it seems incredible; a chance of retreat, of escape, comfort, affection, gardens and green fields—a crowd of forgotten things—she falls sobbing on the stone parapet. But only for a moment; soon she recovers and

Out of the Mire

collects her wits, takes in the position of affairs, sees and seizes her chance—she has had enough for the present of the plaster palaces of Pimlico.

Across the sitting-room into the bedroom and up to the looking-glass, she goes; gives a push and a pat to her hair, and uses the scent-spray and the puff-box; needless preparations under the circumstances, you think, but the force of habit is strong; she has always relied on such aids, and it is just possible she understands their value better than you. Firmly and calmly she descends the stairs, and goes out. Bending over the prostrate man, she whispers his name, and with a little kiss, and great tenderness, and the most sublime irrelevance, murmurs in his ear—

“I forgive you. Come.”

Round his waist, and under his armpit, she twines the polished whiteness of her supple right arm, and draws his left across her shoulders, holding the hand; in this way

Out of the Mire

carrying nearly all his weight. Together he and she go up the steps, together disappear into the house. The hall door closes behind them with a bang that echoes conclusively down the street.

A policeman sauntering round the corner with deliberate dilatoriness tries the door ; the sphinx head on the knocker smiles, and when his back is turned, puts out its tongue at him. A black cat, lank and evil-looking, coming home from his night out, gingerly steps across the street to examine the white tie lying on the spot where they met. A flock of pigeons having cleaned up the oats from the more promising cab ranks, settles and struts about in great haste, alarmed at the absurdly short nights. Away in the Vauxhall Road the red carts are rattling, a youth carrying a bag hurries past to Victoria Station : doors open, and the half-awake housemaids look out.

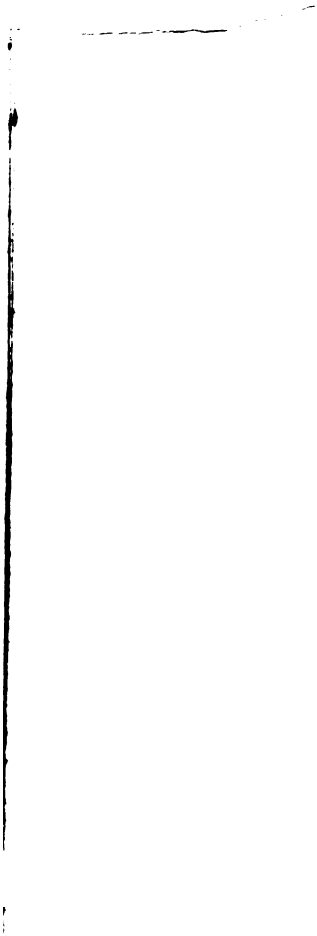
The day has begun.

It is going to be fine.



Joy Cometh in the Morning





We sat beside the river through the burning summer
days,
And many things I taught her of Life and all its ways.
Of Love, man's loveliest duty, of Passion's reckless pain,
Of Youth, whose transient beauty comes once, but not
again.

I know not where she wandered, or went in after days,
Or if her youth was squandered in Love's more doubtful
ways.

Perhaps beside the river she died, still young and fair ;
Perchance the grasses quiver about her slumber there.

L. H.

And up and down he paced this London,
With no work done, but great work undone.

R. B.

*But none shall triumph a whole life through ;
For death is one but the fates are three ;
There are worse things waiting for men than Death.*
A. C. S.

*Whatever we do we regret, still more what we
don't do.*

*Each man lived his own life, and paid his own price
for living it. The only pity was one had to pay so
often for a single fault. One had to pay over and
over again, indeed. In her dealings with man,
Destiny never closed her accounts.*

O. W.

But he knoweth not that the dead are there.

S.

*As I lay dead the woman with the dog's eyes
went her way and would not close my eyelids, so I
went down thus to Hades.*

D'A.

Joy Cometh in the Morning

ORIEL MIDWOOD sat solitary in the library of the old-fashioned Kemble Club. Two hours had passed since he had risen from dinner ; an unadorned, compact, satisfactory meal, rendered distinguished by the best of wine. In that faultless club, if one thing could be better than another, it was the champagne ; and Oriel Midwood knew what to drink and how much. Coffee, fine old brandy, La Intimidad Excelcos cigars, and a pile of French picture papers, had beguiled, indifferently enough, the two hours. Indeed these adjuncts failed to please him—they bored, almost annoyed him ; and yet he would have resented the want of them or the least imperfection in any, as something unjust and inexcusable. The library was a cosy, unpretentious room, gracious to the eye, easeful

Joy Cometh in the Morning

to the limbs. Rows of mellow books in oak cases, surmounted by busts of the great dramatists ; time-tinted furniture, old enough to have escaped the early (and evil) Victorian period ; dull red draperies ; charming cabinet pictures ; old Persian rugs ; everything combined to give the place an atmosphere of refinement and letters. A room where a cultured soul might take his ease among the quaint and curious volumes of forgotten lore ; provided, of course, no ill-omened bird were to come tip-tapping at the chamber door.

To Oriel Midwood, that evening, many birds had come, sweet-voiced and gaily coloured ; but after a time they changed : their plumage darkened, their songs grew hoarse—and what evolved inevitably took the dismal shape, the foreboding croak of the raven. Why, he wondered, should his reveries grow so sinister ? what was wrong ? It couldn't be the champagne or the cigars ; was it the solitude or a haunting sorrow that exhaled from the forms of those

Joy Cometh in the Morning

player women, dead and done with, whose delicate miniatures over the mantelpiece always met his gaze ?

In the zone of light from the reading lamp his face showed that of a man fitted and featured by training and breeding for big accomplishment ; a face where purpose and pertinacity were so intense as to become unscrupulous, even pitiless : but when he turned away and the firelight lit it up, softer touches came about the mouth, gentler curves, less vehement modelling, and a sympathetic observer might, at times, discover a curious contradictory suggestion of the feminine. Could there be, under that iron mask, a vein of pity and tenderness lying there unused, unproved ; like an ill-explored gold reef over which has been built a huge, sordid warehouse ?

One of the papers that he had been reading, the *Journal Amusant*, had fallen by the fender. The vivid scarlet-clad figure on its front page, glowing impressively in the firelight, caught his

Joy Cometh in the Morning

attention. The red suggested authority, retribution, the robe of a judge : a picture came up before him of a criminal trial, with a cold, penetrating, lawyer-like Lord Justice presiding—he recognized the hard emotionless countenance : and the prisoner, standing there fearless and friendless—he seemed to know him too—he was sure the man was doomed ; under the set face of the fighter there was nothing, no case, no hope : the opposing counsel had all the details of the man's life story set down in damning sequence in that brief, and would use them relentlessly—he knew that counsel well. Yes, judge, counsel, prisoner, he knew them all, for they wore the one identical face—his own.

A waiter came into the room, made up the fire, tidied the papers, and went out again. The interruption enabled him to wrench his mind back from its morbid divagations. With an effort he conquered the torpid immobility of his body, sunk in the deep arm-chair ; he

Joy Cometh in the Morning

stood up, stretched himself, and looked at his watch. It was half-past eleven : for a while he felt uncertain where to go or what to do : then he decided to return to his rooms. He put on his fur coat, passed through the great hall, and out into the midnight streets.

All the West End was ringing with a vast tumult of retreat. Crowds of people fresh from witnessing scenes of poignant drama or gorgeous spectacle, surged wildly over the pavements, seeking anything on wheels from motor brougham to penny 'bus. In the windy freshness of the night jewelled women and girls in feathery wraps, with faces flushed by pleasure and excitement, were jostled on the kerb by rough gallery folk or pounced upon by ill-favoured creatures, the jackals of the cabs. A press of vehicles rolled westwards along Piccadilly like a river in high flood—a seething, swaying mass of dark shapes touched with points of light from harness and glass. High over the stream the arc lamps threw a hard, white radiance, in which the mov-

Joy Cometh in the Morning

ing cab lights showed like jewels of ruby and topaz. And roofing over this struggle of humanity hung the sky, a dull blue, quiet and starless—for moon and stars seemed to have withdrawn themselves, too proud to contend with the mimic arc moons and planet cab lights—a sky that was so remote, dissimilar, threatening, one might fancy one saw there the lips of some great Being, drawn tense and blue with disdain at all this waste and paltriness and insignificance of ideal.

Oriel Midwood had let himself become entangled by the crowd, and was being drawn westward along with the stream, and, although he had no definite course of his own, it irked him that the steerage of his vessel should be governed by the set of such a tide ; accordingly he sheered out of the traffic at St. James' Street and passed into the Park at Marlborough House, and in a couple of minutes found himself standing on the little bridge over the lake.

Midnight Piccadilly to midnight Park. What

Joy Cometh in the Morning

a wonderful change it is! Perhaps one of the most startling and vivid London, profuse in such contrasts, has to show. The sensation is something like what one feels who has climbed from the clank and clamour of the engine room of a steamer up into the sea breeze and the quiet of the empty sea ; or stepped from the roar and glare of the street into the dim sanctuary of a city church ; or passed from a ball-room, with its music and lights and swish of odorous silk and exuberant vitality, into a dewy garden. The lake at your feet lies so still and mysterious—you might think it fathomless ; shadowy forms of trees stand along its banks ; away where it ends is the loom of a great Venetian palace, which seems to rise sheer out of the water—you fancy you hear the tiny lip-lap against its walls ; to the left are the fantastic roofs of Whitehall ; and beyond the dim rich city stretching leagues and still more leagues away. There you stand in the central silence, in the one calm spot in the middle of a cyclonic storm.

Joy Cometh in the Morning

For Oriel Midwood, the scenic effect, the charm of unexpectedness, had long ago disappeared ; but to-night, as he watched the place, it moved him to remember that once the beauty and significance of it could bring the tears, not from his eyes, but from his heart. He leant over the rail of the bridge and again fell to thinking.

Here he stood, in the prime of life, in the plenitude of his powers, fit and willing ; and what was he, what had he done ? Here with all the might and magnificence of the world's capital around him, at the very heart of all that moves men, what had he done ? Had he contributed a man's share to the sum of all that "England" means ? Was he trying to ? Was he not rather eating, drinking, indulging his appetites, destroying each day the sustenance of a dozen able workers ? Well, and why not ? Why shouldn't he enjoy the money he had got ? Was he to be for ever plagued with this restlessness, this insensate discontent, this impatience of ease, the dread that when

Joy Cometh in the Morning

the end came it would be *omnis moriar* ; was he to be always tormented with the haunting, longing to leave something after he had gone—a child of his brain, if not of his body? It was useless arguing ; he was determined to do it, or if it were impossible he would die trying, and yet after all perhaps it was only because things were unattainable that they did attract, it was a senseless thing to fix a standard so high that it could never be touched. Surely there was something worth within reach. He pondered and cast up, and considered ; here was the conclusion ; that all he ever had or conceived of happiness, sprung from, or ended in, or was inexplicably involved with—the love of women. Yes, of women. He had loved, not too much, but too many. Was that his error? To have loved love, more than the one beloved ; to have sought the ideal, not the individual — not the single flower, but the essence of all flowers that bloom or ever have bloomed. He mused over the memories of all

Joy Cometh in the Morning

his gossamer loves. One by one he recalled them and they ranged themselves out before him. Would they come like that, he wondered, on the ultimate great day? He did not care, he could look each one in the face; if he had done any of them wrong he had done them good, he well knew each would admit that. It came to him with a sort of satisfaction that these women were remarkable—black or bronze, mournful or merry, all were out of the common. What a diversity of dress; the fashions of five-and-twenty years! They did make a muster; he had no idea there were so many; another and another—would the line stretch out to the crack of doom? Ah! there was the end at last, or rather the beginning, the first. Who was she? Yes, yes, he remembered that one, poor Nelly, the woman who first opened the rose-wreathed gate that led to the garden of joy. Poor Nelly—she called herself Nelly, but her real name was Lynotte—Lynotte Leaf. How well he recalled that Elysian day, twenty-five

Joy Cometh in the Morning

years ago, when he and she together walked the sunny bank of the Thames at Richmond. He saw the ripple on the river, the summer dresses in the boats, the sun-blinds of the "Star and Garter," the envious glances of the passers-by who watched the love-light in their eyes. Then his delight in the new world just opened to him, his joy in everything around him, because—all because she was beside him with her dancing eyes. No angels floating in the azure sparkles about their heads were half so happy; and there was that bench, beside the hawthorn tree where he had spoken; well, yes, perhaps he had gone too far, he was very young and she was the first. The first? Was that the reason, or was she different from all the others? The one woman in the world for him. Looking back on it now, it seemed cowardly, the way he broke it off. He had to return to his work, and it absorbed him so completely he forgot her for the time, and afterwards he could not find her. No doubt it was for the

Joy Cometh in the Morning

best, for, of course, as a wife she was impossible; she had looks, manners, education, but—besides, he was only twenty-one at the time; it would have ruined his career, he had to be cautious and prudent at twenty-one! He cursed the cruelty of youth, cautious and prudent about its future! Now when he was forty-six and knew what life was, and the things that really mattered, what would he not give that Lynotte Leaf and he, these five-and-twenty years, had lived loving, honest lives together, and had their children round them now.

A chill, small wind, the pioneer of a gale from the east, came up, salt and keen, from the estuary of the Thames. It scraped over the glassy surface of the lake, and pushed by the trees which rustled back faintly and so sadly, one might have thought they were ghosts that sorrowed. As it passed over the bridge, Midwood felt it and drew back with a vague fear, for its touch on his forehead was like ice.

Joy Cometh in the Morning

Big Ben chimed the three-quarters ; his reveries were ended. He lit a cigar and started homewards, hesitating at the corner whether to take St. James's Street or Pall Mall ; but the little wind was cold in his face down Pall Mall, so he took the other, passing into Piccadilly, now quite deserted save for a few loitering hansoms, and on the north pavement some promenaders—*pecheurs* (with what accent you please) who were casting their nets far into the night, apparently with no better luck than the poor apostles.

It was one o'clock.

At Sackville Street he stopped a moment to let a cab pass ; before he could move forward again, there was some one at his elbow, who said in a tired little voice—

“Where are you going all by yourself?”

He paid no attention, but walked straight on. Again the little voice said—

“Won't you take me with you?”

Without turning round or looking, he said

Joy Cometh in the Morning

rather roughly, perhaps, "It would be quite impossible."

"Come with me then ; it is not very far."

By this time the two were walking side by side. Midwood glanced round carelessly at the upturned face. She seemed a pretty little thing ; for an instant he thought she resembled Lynotte, had her eyes or something, but he dismissed the idea ; Lynotte's eyes were haunting him still, he supposed ; besides, she was fair and this girl's hair was as dark as his own.

He said a few words to her, then they began to talk, and her manner pleased him.

At the Circus both stopped of one accord. A cab, which had followed them like their shadows, pulled up right in front.

"Keb, sir, keb," chirped the driver.

"Here is a cab fare for you. Now go home and be a good girl."

"I wish you would come ; do, dear," pleaded the little voice.

Joy Cometh in the Morning

"No. Good-night. Here, take this."

"No thank you. I don't want to drive."

She refused the cab fare with a gesture of independence, which she had to use to conceal something more than disappointment. Midwood felt interested, and sorry for her; besides, she was exceedingly pretty.

"Keb, sir, keb," chirped the cabman, impassively, yet managing to convey the distinct suggestion that there had been quite too much shilly-shallying, and it was proper they should make up their minds. Then a policeman swung round the Regent Street corner and approached the group.

A moment later and the pair were in the cab, slinging rapidly towards distant Fulham.

* * * * *

In the early morning, Oriel Midwood, sick with self-contempt, rose, and having placed some tinkling offering on the mantelpiece, was leaving the house, noiselessly.

But she heard him.

Joy Cometh in the Morning

"I must let you out, you can't open the front door."

"I can manage, all right, don't stir," he replied.

But she was up in an instant, and into a blue dressing-gown. Then she went to the window and pulled up the blind.

In the sad daylight he saw her.

The face fascinated him. He could not tell whom she resembled; but he knew this much, it was some one he was quite familiar with, some one he saw lately, some one he saw every day of his life. He went up to her, and holding her by the wrists, drew her close to the window.

He looked at her very earnestly, then said quietly—

"Tell me your name."

"Nelly Somerville."

"Yes, I know, but your real name—your father's name."

"I never knew a luxury of that kind," she said bitterly.

"Your mother's, then."

Joy Cometh in the Morning

"What's the good? She died long ago."

"How long ago?"

"Just when I was born, it's twenty-four years."

His heart stopped beating, and his lips went greyer than the dawn. His hands that gripped her wrists tightened, tightened till they bit into the bone.

"Tell me her name."

"Let me go! You are hurting me!"

"Tell me her name."

"Lynotte Leaf."

* * * * *

A strong flood-tide, piled in front of an easterly gale, had rolled it from Putney Bridge; a sodden carrion thing, when they picked it up at Richmond, stranded on the bank beside an old hawthorn tree.

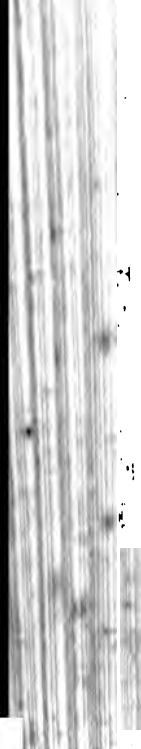
It was on the same spot that, five-and-twenty years before, Oriel Midwood and Lynotte Leaf sat, side by side, that sunny afternoon.



For passion ebbs and passion flows,
But under every new caress
The riven heart more keenly knows
Its own inviolate faithfulness.

Aye, let us sleep. The window pane
Grows pale against the purple sky,
The dawn is with us once again,
The dawn; which always means good-bye.
L. H.

Why wilt thou, my son, be ravished with a
strange woman? S.



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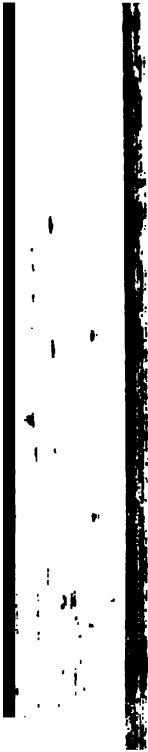
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