

He gave me back my match-box.

"Well—that was just about it," he said. "I'd been fixing some blinds ready for the summer."

"Blinds for the summer," I echoed, "there's a sound about that."

He smiled broadly as he thought of it.

"By the way," said I, "you've lost your narcissus."

He looked down quickly at his coat.

"Sch! Sch!" he said again, and with that turned and went away. I think he was beginning to mistrust me. He explained as he left me that he was in a great hurry. I have no doubt he was.

Now that really was the end of it, and for that I broke the very first letter of the tenth decree of Moses. For that lost narcissus, I envied him most of all. But when I say that I confess to envying him his little nursery maid, I simply mean that I envy every man his womenfolk, and the mood was heavy on me that morning. This little incident served only to make it the heavier. But for this incident, in fact, I might never have taken up my pen; certain it is I should never have gone forth on that wild, mad errand which is to become the subject of these pages.

Indeed, nothing less than this had happened—my electrician and his nursery maid had superinduced a mood, a growing, convincing belief that it was not worth while going on. I said aloud that there is nothing more lonely in this world than a lonely man. I made the remark to Dandy. I dared not tell it solely to myself, it would have been too real.