

Her laugh rang musically loud in the morning air, when she turned and saw him. It came like a burst of rejoicing out of place in a plague-stricken city. But it forced a laugh from him that nearly choked him, as she came floating—or falling, as you choose—into his arms, and his embrace saved her a fall on the gravel.

“ ‘O sweet Oliver!—O brave Oliver!—leave me not behind thee.’ . . . Why so glum, Sir Oliver? ‘Why so pale and wan, fond lover?’ ” . . . But she stopped short in her reminiscences from Shakespeare and Suckling as she saw the forehead-cut. For she had raised as she kissed him the hat he had slouched forward to hide it.

“Silly beauty! Just a scratch, skin-deep. A strip of surgeon’s plaister, and all will be well.” But he had to speak the lie he had arranged for it, in case his courage should fail him. “Your macaw did me that good turn, half an hour since, in the greenhouse. I had some ado to get him clear of my head. . . . No, not his beak; his claw, as I dragged him off.” And then he felt he had made matters worse. Almost better to have told a less clever lie, that she might have suspected, and pressed him to confession. So he who dares not draw his own tooth is almost glad of the dentist’s pincers.

“The darling!—what had you done to provoke him? As if my precious bird—my dearest bird—would scratch except he was provoked! Stupid Sir Oliver!” But she kissed him again on what had been the grin of his resolve to slay her father, scarce two hours ago. O the torture of living, in the face of her ignorance of it all!

But he was in for a term of lying pretexts now, and he would have done better to have said at once, “I am your father’s murderer; but it is by no fault of mine that his blood is on my head.”

He could have thrown himself on her mercy, to take pity on his remorse, and share it. He tried to speak, even