

"Take me out? That suits me," murmured the violinist, and he immediately relaxed his muscles so as to render himself a dead weight to his captors. The only resistance he offered was to confuse them by delivering, all recumbently, bits of profuse and profane advice. By the time his shabby shoes had been carried the way of his shabby body, the excited public had resumed their seats and the disturbance was at an end. In due time the music reached a peaceful and natural end, and once more the curtain rose.

Among those who had been near enough to hear as well as to see the disgraceful scene, was a man of military aspect, who sat in the first row of seats. He now leaned forward and tapped the nearest musician on the shoulder, saying:

"Beg pardon—the man who was carried out just now—his name? Do you know him?"

The man stopped blowing noiselessly into his cornet, and turned his eyes (so goggled as to be almost on moveable stalks like crabs) toward his questioner. "Know him? Everybody knows him. Huh!"

"But I am a stranger in the city. What is his name?"

"Him? Vance. Harold Vance."

The questioner made a swift swoop for his hat, and strode vigorously up the aisle and out of the theater, quite oblivious to the outraged glances that were thrown in his wake.

Once outside, he turned down a side street, and proceeded directly to the back door of the theater—rather a remarkable achievement for a stranger. Opening it he walked along the dimly lit passage—dimly lit yet odorless with a prodigal escape of gas—to where two men, seated on boxes, were playing cards upon a barrel head.

"I want Harold Vance, if he is here; if not, tell me where he has gone, quickly!"

One of the players never stirred, except to cut the cards; the other shuffled and dealt methodically, casting but one glance at the speaker to impress him with the folly of haste. The gas-jet flared drunkenly in the draught. The doorkeeper arranged his cards in suits, and murmured "your play," then, keeping an eye upon the board, he condescended to reply:

"Harold Vance, sir, he went hout, sir, cussing tremendous, not 'arf a minute ago. Went to the Big Sun Flower, hopposi'e corner, hif I don't mistake, sir."

"Take your bloomin' time for playin'," came in a morose growl from the other; so the seeker after Harold Vance dashed impatiently into the street again and made for the indicated saloon.

As he attempted to enter, Harold Vance himself came out, almost stepping into the arms of the other, who said with a choke in his throat, "Vance, old fellow, is it you?"

Harold Vance unceremoniously seized his interlocutor by both shoulders, and swung him into the light of a near lamp, under whose rays he proceeded to examine him, apostrophizing meanwhile.

"Before committing ourself, let us, first, be sure of your identity. If you are a creditor, a brazen Bill Dunn, receive our courteous assurance that we are not we. If you are—"

Here the recoiling, loosened his hold and muttered:

"I wish you fellows were dead! all of you!"

"Do you really wish that of me, Vance? Do you know me?"

Bowing suavely, Harold Vance replied with recovered indifference:

"Of course I know you. Once plain Hugh Haines, esteemed co-worker and fellow-student; now, Major Haines, in Her Majesty's service."

"Colonel Haines," was the correction too automatically delivered to be charged to vanity.

Harold Vance bowed lower still, in ironical abasement, but some of his heart's agony pierced through his bravado and spoke in his whitening lips:

"You are coming home with me!" cried the colonel, vehemently.

"Lie number one," was the response.

"Then you are going to take me home with you!"

"I'll see you—well, anywhere you like, first."

"I'll follow you, then; I must speak with you! I will not leave you!"

The other considered a moment.

"Well do as you like; you'll live longer. Pride of place was never a failing of mine, so come on."

With this he led the way, and the colonel accompanied him.

"I was at the theater, volunteered the latter.

Harold Vance emitted a chuckle.

"You were famous for that in the old days at college," continued his friend in vague retrospect.

"Famous for what? Playing the violin, or the devil?"

"The violin," answered the colonel, gently.

"I'm, yes. That was something I could do, and play out of time I will not, no, not for Orpheus himself."

"I heard of your marriage," began the colonel again.

"Did you? And of my wife's death?"

"Dead? No, no, dear friend, I—"

"Pray don't condole. My loss occurred several years ago, and I am slowly recovering." The tone of this rejoinder perfectly conveyed the idea that he had scarcely regarded his wife's death as a loss. He continued:

"I have a little daughter. You will see her to-night. She always sits up for me. She is an owlet, I am an owl, and we car-

ouse together, in the night season, she on books. I on morphine—in a word, we are disreputable!"

"Harold!"

Gospel truth. That is, we take our pleasures in our own way, which constitutes disreputability. I believe. Being poor, we select the cheapest style of orgie that the market affords; and morphine is cheap, when you know how to handle your apothecary."

"You cannot, with your random talk impose upon one who knows you well of old," said Haines, in what was nevertheless a troubled voice.

"Twelve years, it is twelve, is it not, Harold, since we left college and went our ways, each promising to hunt the other out occasionally? Twelve years since we shook hands in parting and we have never met again till now!" The speaker's voice trembled a little with heart-felt emotion.

"And what a joyous meeting it is!" responded the other, with flippant ease.

It has been written that a difference of tastes in jokes strains friendship; so does a difference in pathos. The colonel suffered natural chagrin. He restrained his footsteps and said with grave dignity:

"God knows I have no wish to force a renewal of our friendship. Is it to be good-by?"

Harold turned upon him fiercely.

"Go, and I'll curse you! Do you want me to twine about you like a woman? Would you have me slobber like a child? Is it lost, then, that intuition with which you used to fit your mood to mine? If it be then the sooner you take yourself off, the better!"

These coarse words appeared to comfort the colonel exceedingly, for he slipped his arm through his friend's and drew him forward; and if he pressed that arm almost with a woman's fondness, neither you know it, nor I.

They soon reached that unsavory precinct of old Soho, known as Rapping Court, and before one of its hopeless tenements, Harold Vance stopped. By glowering perseveringly into the dark beyond of the doorway, one could faintly perceive the murky outline of apparently endless stairs.

"Brother, I trust thy feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace," warned Harold Vance, as telling fragments of a brawl floated downwards to their ears. He then commenced to ascend with the grim quotation of, "Hoc opus, hic labor est."

After three flights had been climbed and the disturbance left behind, Vance struck out boldly through the darkness, and arrived at a door from beneath which stole a feeble grin of light.

"Here we are," he announced, opening his portal with a strong kick, less an excess of animal spirits than a necessity, since the door lacked its handle.