

THE WORLD'S
DAUGHTER
BY
C. HARCOURT

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CYRIL
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Marjorie Bell.

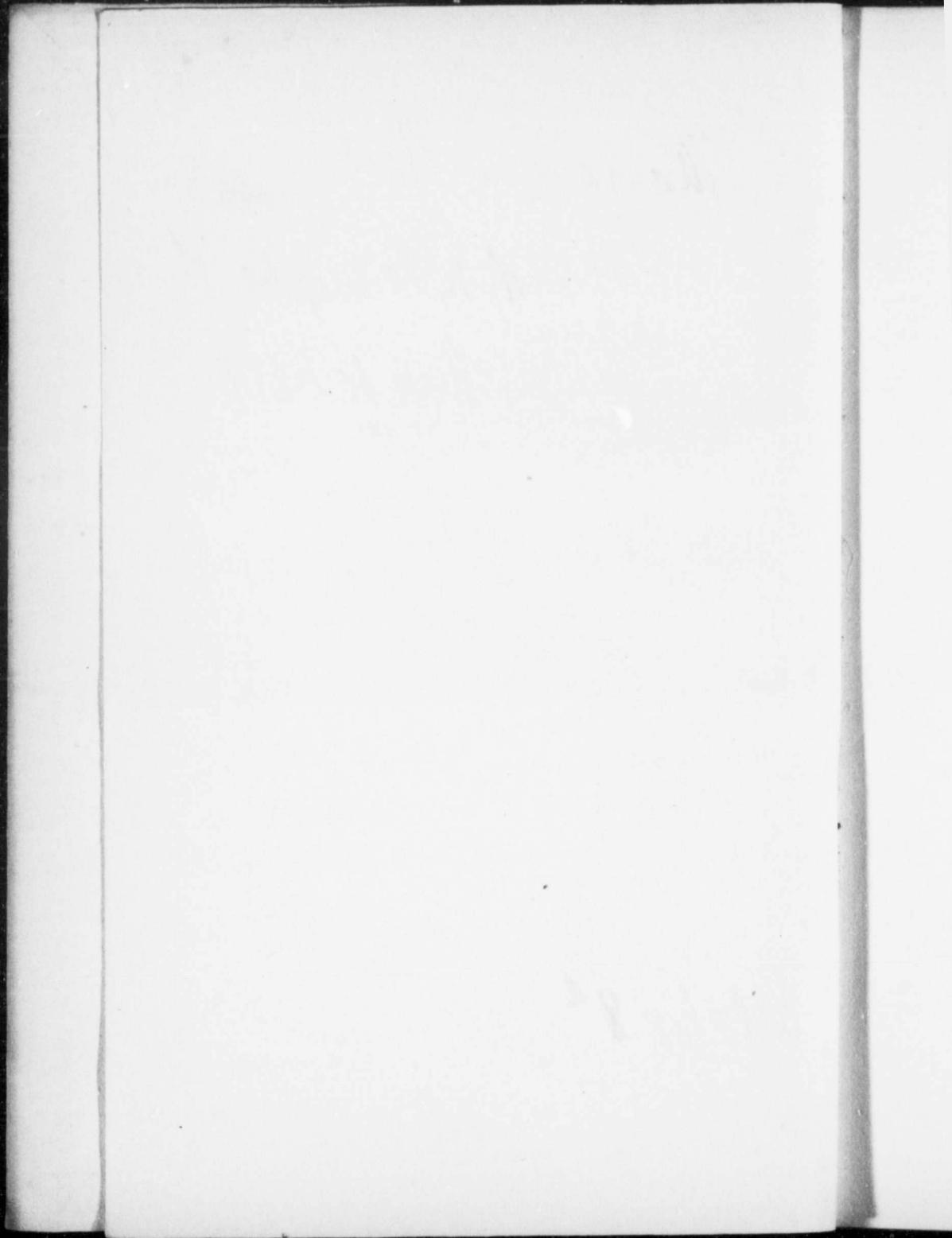
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BY CYRIL HARCOURT



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A MAN WHO DIED
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THE WORLD'S DAUGHTER

PART I

AS I turned and looked at her she was in the act of formulating the word "damn." You may say I took her in the act. "Damn," she breathed with subdued and quite unconscious vehemence, and the tail of her train disappeared out of the station.

She gave the saddle of her bicycle an annoyed little thump and stared pathetically after the disappearing train. It was the merest little bit of commonplace, everyday drama : scarcely that, but I was interested, I was attracted. She was so obviously herself, and something in me awoke and responded as I stood there looking at her. Then she caught my eye and knew that I had overheard her, and she blushed. I remember I was glad she blushed. It indicated a certain modesty and added the shade of an intangible "something" to my awakened interest. I wondered who she was and where she might be

going. I listened like a common eavesdropper when she caught a porter, and her voice was like a flute.

"When is there another train, please?" she enquired.

"Where do yer want to go, lady?" asked the porter.

"Oh—anywhere," she cried recklessly, with the sweetest little droop at the corners of her mouth.

But the porter was not the man to bandy words with such as she. A copperless life was passing. He dealt bitterly with a virile milk-can.

"'Eaven knows what 'arf of 'em do want," he remarked, passing, simultaneously, out of her life.

She stood and looked forlorn and lovely. The gallant in me awoke, as he is likely to do in the heart of every man, at the sight of lovely ladies in distress.

"I know all about trains," I said suddenly. "Can I help you?"

"Oh! N-no, thank you," she answered, somewhat startled.

"I really do know," I persisted. "It isn't the least use asking porters."

"Aren't they rude?" she flashed.

"Yes. The whole race. You can catch a train as far as Leicester at ten o'clock," I volunteered.

"Oh, Leicester," she murmured absently, as if that would not help matters at all.

"It stops at every station," I said.

"Thank you very much," she replied. "Perhaps that—perhaps that will do."

It might so easily have ended there. I couldn't tell for the life of me why I had obtruded upon her at all. To do such a thing was not natural to me; it was, in fact altogether foreign to the ingredients of which I imagined myself to be composed. If I had merely turned away to the bookstall to buy a Sunday paper, or, if I had not already bought my ticket, the memory of that June day and the flick of her skirt would not be stinging across my heart now, as I write. I was, however, to be carried, urged, irresistibly, to unwonted lengths of boldness.

"Look here," I said, "I'm all forlorn too. Will you come along with me?"

"Come with you? Where to?" she asked, quite surprised out of herself.

"Anywhere," I answered. "Anywhere—in reason."

Then I waited, wondering whether she would turn upon her heel affronted and leave me to inglorious solitude. I expected it. Not one woman out of fifty, in the circumstances, would dream of doing anything else; not one in a thousand, of her class. For she was a gentle-

woman, every inch of her ; a dozen little touches indicated that ; it was atmospheric, it was in her voice, it was in her bearing, it was in the very way she looked at me ; there was that indefinable quality about her which said race, breeding, and heaps of grandfathers.

I waited, and hoped she felt lonely. If she felt as lonely as she looked convention might, possibly, be relegated temporarily, to the dickens, I reflected, and she would not turn upon her affronted heel and ruthlessly spurn me with a stare. I hoped she would notice the club colours in my tie and be persuaded that I passed for a gentleman in spite of my behaviour. It would allow of breathing space if she did, and one might be permitted to discuss the proposition and, peradventure, win ground on further speech ; for I was desperately alive to her, in love with her, I verily believe, even then. And there would be nothing particularly strange in that. No analysis has yielded up the secret of the precise moment or of the circumstances that allow of soul to leap to soul and rush to the fulfilment of their purpose ; the platform of St. Pancras under the fat St. Pancras clock would be as likely a setting to the miracle as a sun-kissed hill.

She was exquisite. Her hair was gold and her eyes were blue, as blue as old Cathedral glass ; windows that veil a mystery and shroud a holy

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thing. Her mouth was merely maddening, and I, for one, could never quarrel with her chiselled little nose delicately tip-tilted, or with her peach-tinted skin. There was a suppleness about her body that suggested all sorts of things, saddles, ice-hatchets, dumb-bells, guns. Her lilac frock was as simple as could be, cut beautifully, and it draped a figure that reminded me of a wave. Half girl and wholly woman there was a touch of boy about her, an unstudied frankness when she walked, and she walked with the poise of a young deer placing her feet with a dainty precision, and they took the earth toes first. One knew that she could run, and run with lithe round limbs swinging from the hips and waist, and it was certain that she could throw a stone. But, bravely though she held the eye one felt that she could bless. There was a wistfulness in that tranquil gaze that spoke of deeper things than games for all its witchery and twinkle. She was a personality. I knew it ten yards off. Her hands arrested me instantly. One wanted to kiss them and adore them for their sheer delicate beauty, for something they expressed. They told a story like the hands of *Giaconda*. She was crowned by a shady hat. The right hat. As she stood there wondering she seemed a perfect thing; perfect in form and breeding, perfect in taste. I thought of all she symbolised,

of all that had gone to her making, of the links that joined her in that long chain to Eve. From the chaos of the world's story emerged the world's daughter, a girl of to-day, vital, merciful, sincere; a type; possibly the highest type; the essence of things that have been, the spirit of things that are.

She considered me and my proposal in mild amaze before she spoke. She allowed me to become thoroughly hot.

"Well, really!" she remarked at length; "and whatever would you think of me if I did?"

"All the world," I replied, pat. I might have been saying such things all my life. I was surprised at myself. I felt that she ought to have someone belonging to her who would emerge from space and hit me, and I couldn't tell in the least, yet, if she meant to come with me or not.

"Why should I?" she asked, looking at something a thousand miles away.

"No reason in the world," I answered. "Because it's altogether unreasonable, if you like. Because it's June. Because you are twenty and I am—not. Primarily, perhaps, because you said 'damn' in the precise way you said it."

"Oh, and does that attract you?" she enquired with just the flicker of a smile.

"Enormously," I answered.

"Why?" she asked.

"Oh, character," I explained. "Just that. It showed me something I responded to, I suppose. Haven't you ever heard a church window rattle at the sound of an organ note? Haven't you ever——"

"I think I understand, thank you," she remarked demurely.

Of course she understood.

"How splendid!" I said.

"What is splendid?" she asked, looking a little puzzled.

"Being understood," I answered.

She hesitated.

"But I've never done, or thought of doing such a thing in all my life," she said.

Then I knew that the nail had been hit, so to speak, well and truly on the head.

"If I thought the practice was habitual with you," I remarked, "I certainly should not want you to come."

"Then I suppose you've never done or thought of doing such a thing either?" she asked.

I rose to the needs of the moment.

"Never," I said firmly, remembering that language was given us to conceal our thoughts.

"I'll come," she said, and she blushed again.

I felt extremely young and victorious.

"My every homage," I remarked.

"But there must be no compliments," she said, "and there must be no pretty phrases."

"Never an eyebrow," I protested. "How could you think it of me? Not so much as the arch of an instep—and such an instep," I added.

She laughed. We met on the perfectly right plane. She was just a shade embarrassed, as she ought to have been, and I was pleased. Then she owned up to it and I was still more pleased.

"I'm thoroughly self-conscious," she said. "I don't know how to comport myself or what to say next, or where to look."

"In the circumstances it becomes you," I replied. "That is precisely as it should be. Those are the feelings that should be felt by such an one. I respect the emotion though I lack it. You create an atmosphere that tells with me."

"Suppose you tell me where we are going and what we are going to do when we get there," she laughed.

"We are going down the line some few dozen miles," I replied, "to the far horizons of my youth. The claret and the sandwiches are upon my bicycle. What did you mean to do with yourself if you had caught your train?"

"Me?" she queried, absently.

"You," I answered. "Don't bother about grammar."

"I meant to look out of the train till it got pretty and then get out and ride London out of my blood," she said, *not* bothering.

"Jolly good idea," I assured her. "Quite on my lines."

"And I want a cuckoo," she cried. "Oh! how I want a cuckoo!"

"You shall have one," I said. "I've got the very bird. He lives in a bank of larches near a pool by a whispering weir."

"Heavenly," she cried.

"It will be," I said, "with you."

"And is the larch wood near the far horizons of your youth?" she asked.

"I've robbed every nest in it," I answered, "in my time."

"Cruel little wretch," she cried. "It would serve you right if there wasn't a cuckoo's nest left there."

It wasn't in me to upset her natural history. I hadn't the heart to tell her that the cuckoo uses other people's nests. What did it matter whether they have nests of their own or not? I felt more interest in the pedigrees of the Kings of Israel—or coal tar.

"We always left the blackbirds alone," I explained, "though not from motives of mercy,

he being a too prolific fowl, and his eggs a drug in the mart. So there may still be a concert in my larches."

"But my cuckoo!" she cried. "I really must have my cuckoo! What is June without him?"

"Mere November," I agreed. "But this is only the ninth of June; if necessary we can continue to search for him for twenty one more days. It will still be June."

"Oh, but I want him early," she objected. "That won't do at all. I want him when he really sounds like Spring, when his voice is all fluty and excited. By the end of June he sounds like a melancholy old gentleman brooding on his youth."

"It's a pretty idea," I said, irrelevantly.

"What is?" she asked.

"A pair of lovers allowed to love each other only until the cuckoo changed his note."

"They wouldn't have to waste much time, poor things!" she cried. "What a mad, wild month they'd have of it."

I agreed that this was probable.

"Oh!" she cried, "what a pity one——"

Then she thought better of it.

"Do continue," I said, with my most encouraging smile.

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and June and irresponsibility; but we're too far away from the Equator," she commented dismally, "we have too many encumbrances who insist on 'keeping hours.' Your pair of lovers wouldn't dream of 'keeping hours.' They wouldn't have watches; they wouldn't dream of going home just because it was dinner time; they'd dine off locusts and wild honey, like John the Baptist. Then, when the cuckoo lost his voice," she went on, "you might have another pair whose day was set by the roses. 'The long decline of roses.' When the last rose had bloomed—! No, it's too pathetic; in another moment I shall cry."

"Why, you're half a poet yourself," I said.

"I'm not," she laughed, "I'm hungry. Poets aren't hungry ever."

"Invariably," I answered. "Milton sold *Paradise Lost* for a fiver; that proves it."

"I wouldn't have given him five shillings for it," she exclaimed. "I don't know which of the two irritates me the most, Milton, or that silly old man, Chaucer."

"No," I said. "You're not a poet. I retract."

"Suppose you introduce yourself to me," she suggested suddenly.

"Coltover is my name," I said. "Gerard Bevis—Bachelor," I added, trying to make the most of myself.

"And when were you elected to the Zingari?" she asked.

My tie had told with her!

"You perfect dear!" I cried. "Most girls would have thought it was the Hussars or Leander. I knew my instinct about you was right." And I considered her with true appreciation.

"Go on with your introduction," she said.

"But I can't! You don't really want me to tell you 'all about myself,' do you?"

She crinkled her nose as if she were not quite sure.

"Let it leak out," I suggested. "It's bound to if we go on talking nineteen to the dozen like this, and there seems to be every indication that we shall. I've got such a heap of things to say to you."

"Very well," she agreed. "But just give me a point or two."

I wondered how on earth I could describe myself in a word.

"Oh, I deal in ink," I said.

She seemed surprised.

"Ink?" she echoed, incredulously.

"Pen and ink," I explained further.

Did she think I ran a bucket shop, or sat behind a piece of glass in a bank or——

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though perhaps I ought to be," I added, with great bitterness. "I don't take bottles of ink round the country to shops. I write a bit; books and things. My photograph has appeared in 'The Sketch.' That's fame, you know."

She appeared not to hear this.

"A boy like you," she murmured. "How odd."

Whatever did she mean by "odd"? I didn't really like it. Still, she had called me a boy, and I am not a boy. Things are happening to my hair; there is a place on my—Well, it was balm to be called a boy.

"Thank you for telling me," she said, "and don't be angry with me because I called you a boy."

Angry indeed!

"Let the rest leak out, as you suggested," she remarked demurely. "I don't mean out of the bottles—since you say you are not a commercial traveller."

I looked at her out of the corner of my eye. She was pulling my leg. I felt I must re-establish the atmosphere of masculine supremacy by a remark that proved my incisiveness.

"As for you, you're a singer," I said.

She stared at me in astonishment.

"How on earth did you know?" she asked incredulously.

"I didn't," I answered.

Then I grinned.

"And I don't believe I *am* on earth," I remarked.

She ignored this.

"Then did you simply guess?" she queried.

"No," I said, "I'm really clever. I divined."

"How?"

"Ah! You had to be told what I was," I went on. "I knew what you were. I'm not such a fool as I look."

"How did you know I was a singer?" she persisted.

"Do you admit the superiority of my intellect?" I asked.

"Certainly not," she cried.

"Then I am dumb," I said, "till you do."

"I admit it," she remarked after a moment.

"You are wise," said I.

"And so are you. Oh! so are you!" she exclaimed fervently.

She was pulling my leg again. She smiled the smile one smiles when a little battle has been won.

"Now will you tell me how you knew I was a singer?" she asked.

"Yes," I said meekly. "I'll tell you anything you like now."

"Go on," she ordered.

I went on.

"Everything about you proclaims it," I said.

"You're the type. You understand sound,

even the sound of a cuckoo. You appreciate it and I believe you devote yourself to it—with that throat. You breathe with your shoulders down and you don't insult your lungs with corsets.

"Heavens!" she cried. "What eyes."

"Yes," I answered. "And when we get to my larch wood I shall make you sing to me. Will you?"

"Compete with the gracious blackbird? No indeed!" she laughed. "I call that pure cheek."

"All the same, I believe you could sing a flock of blackbirds into adoration."

"Do continue this masterly analysis," she said.

"No," I replied, "not until you have told me whether my masterly analysis is correct."

"Quite correct," she said demurely, "down to details. But I don't sing to order or for hire. I sing for myself and the people I am fond of."

"Then of course you——"

I left the sentence unfinished.

We were in the train by now; and we were in an empty carriage. This had been achieved by an inspiration involving the guard, a florin of the realm and myself. I felt I had never previously put my resources to such satisfying uses. No human being had ever attracted me

as I was attracted now. The whole world was changing before my eyes and I was changing with it.

"And half an hour ago I didn't even know of your existence," she said in a dreamy voice as if she had almost read my thoughts. "Isn't life queer?"

"Isn't it interesting?" I said.

"Awfully," she answered, after a little pause. "Awfully, at the moment."

"We've got hours and hours yet," I said, "unless we quarrel."

"I don't think we shall do that," she replied, quietly.

As for me I was sure of it. I told her so.

"Won't you tell me your name?" I asked.

"Or shall I guess it? I believe I could."

"Try," she said, smiling.

"Ursula," I answered.

Again she stared at me in astonishment.

"Are you a wizard?" she asked. "My name is Ursula."

"It isn't really remarkable that I should know," I said, "if you consider."

She considered.

"Why; what do you mean?" she asked.

"I mean everything I can't put into words," I said. "I knew, but I can't tell you how I knew any more than I can tell you why I spoke

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to you or why I wanted to. It was inevitable. It happened because it had to."

"I wonder why I answered you?" she said; half to herself.

"For the same reason, probably. There's no such thing as chance. Do you think Napoleon was a fluke? Do you really think we met by accident?"

"I suppose not," she said, after a pause.

"If we did," I continued, "I shall take to my knees again after an interval of many years."

"Your knees?" she said, with her eyes a thousand miles away again. "Why?"

I had come to a crisis.

"Shall I tell you?" I asked.

"Yes," she murmured, after another little pause.

"I should want to *thank* someone for this accident. I should want to say a prayer, because—I love you. Did you know?" I asked.

"Yes," she said, simply.

Then we turned and kissed each other, and the very heavens opened. The train rushed on through the June meadows and we sat with clasped hands and tense pulses, full of wonder. I felt like a child who has lost its way and found it again; then, a great weight fell away from me and I found I was being shaken by my own sobs. Sobs! and she understood.

"Poor boy," she whispered. "Poor, poor boy."

There was such a catch in her voice. Then, she drew my head down to her own throbbing heart and let it rest there. I could have died every death.

Presently she took my face between her slim, cool hands and smiled.

"Laugh," she murmured, with that maddening, whimsical little coo of hers, "laugh,"

"God!" I gasped. "How can I laugh while I am being born again?"

Then we laughed together at the mystery and delight of it all, and a new phase of my life began.

"Your name might have been Herbert," she said, "and that would have been a real tragedy to me. I don't think I could have loved you quite so much if it had been Herbert—or Luke."

"Tell me the rest of your name," I said. "I can't guess it all."

"Wait a minute," she said. "There's so much of it that I have to think."

She puckered her nose and thought for a moment.

"Helen Phyllis Ursula Ormonde le Poer Moore-Lantry. Fancy being asked to say all that in a police court. I might."

"Or even in a church," I said. "You might."

"I will," she remarked.

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"Your christening must have been expensive. Didn't they charge you extra?" I enquired.

She had forgotten. She had been very young at the time, she said.

"But all these names of yours sound frightfully swagger," I remarked. "They suggest the giddiest social heights. I suppose really, you're a queen."

"My father was a younger son," she said, demurely.

"Of a queen?" I exclaimed. "Good heavens! Shall I have to walk backwards?"

"Silly," she laughed.

"Who was he?" I demanded.

"He was the son of a Peer," she smiled.

"Thank goodness," I said. "That staggers me less."

Her mother, it appeared, had been the daughter of an Oxford Don. Subsequently her mother had become the heiress of an uncle who had strenuously grown sheep in the Australian wastes.

"Well, I can't hold a candle to you," I remarked. "There's no Debrett about me."

"Pooh," she laughed. "As if that mattered. Can anyone be more than a gentleman?"

"Well, no," I admitted. "Perhaps not."

"Tell me some more about you," she said.

"My lot have been mostly Indian," I informed her.

"Services?" she asked.

I nodded. I could remember my father in uniform. He had commanded at Quetta when I was four. I remembered him as glittering friend with white plumes in his hat, and as a mint from whose pockets issued *pice*.

"But you, you," she demanded.

"Oh," I said, "I've been most things."

"Such as?" she questioned.

"Well," I pursued, "I've driven a cab and I've been a cook——"

"You?" she interrupted. "But why?"

"Why not?" I asked. "Honourable callings, both of them."

"But did you do it for fun?" she asked in astonishment.

"Fun? Good Lord, no. I did it for money. Wouldn't you, if you were hungry?"

She thought, on the whole, that she would have trimmed hats, if temporary poverty had been forced upon her, as from time to time it had been forced upon me. I explained that my desire had been to see the world around me in as many of its phases as I could reach; thus I had found myself in many cheerless lands and in many dubious places. At the end of it all I had perhaps acquired some few morsels of wisdom coupled with the loss of certain illusions. When peeling potatoes for my life in a Chicago kitchen,

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I had witnessed, for example, the creation of a soup. Consommé. I had not consumed it, certainly, being held, as it were, unworthy; but I had seen it pass in a purifying process through a Chinaman's socks, and the sight had hurt me. I distrusted soup. On the other hand there were many things I still trusted, and many people; but not Chinese.

"I would trust you," I said, "willingly."

She assured me that I might reasonably do so and resumed the process of describing herself.

"The long and short of it is that I am my own mistress," she remarked, finally.

There was a look in my eye when she said this. Only a look.

"H'm," I said.

"Well, at all events I was my own mistress until I met you," she corrected.

"Ah!" I said. "That's better. That's much better. Every statement one makes should be precise, and, if possible, accurate."

She lived in Westminster, in the shadow of gothic things. From her window she could see the Abbey and, of course, she could hear Big Ben whom, naturally, she loved. It symbolized London. No bells, she thought, were quite so beautiful, except, perhaps, those of Lucerne. Had I ever heard them sounding over the lake? I had, often. Would I take her there some day?

I would, certainly. In Westminster she had discovered "the duckiest little house imaginable" and in it and outside it she lived her own life, refusing to subscribe to superfluous conventions. Many, however, she cherished. It was her habit to save the bits of string off parcels and to eat plum pudding on Christmas Day. On the other hand she never cut her name on gates. Companions and chaperons she disliked and she declined to submit to them except upon occasion, lamentations notwithstanding. She had tried them, she said; she had tried more than one, but they didn't do, they really didn't do; they interfered too much with reasonable ideas of life. With such people on her premises she found it quite impossible to be herself.

"And after all," she remarked, "there's really nobody belonging to me who is concerned very much with what I do or with what I don't do. London is very large and there's nobody I can hurt in it by being me."

"On the contrary," I observed, "there is one person in it whom you please inordinately by being you. I myself live in London and I would not have you other than you are. Even your names are adorable."

"People are so very like their names sometimes, aren't they?" she remarked. "Especially

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cooks. Haven't you ever noticed it? I suppose they're all called Mary because they look alike. Or perhaps they look alike because they're all called Mary. That must be it. I expect they simply conform to the type in the same way that fishes who live in caverns under the sea lose their eyesight because they don't want it."

This lucid explanation moved me to mirth.

"Let me think that out," I said.

"I don't see anything in it to laugh at," she remarked seriously. "The same idea goes all through nature. Take a clock. When it says half past one, could it possibly be tea time? Of course it couldn't. It *looks* like lunch; it has to be lunch, or supper, perhaps, but never tea. By the way, are we going to have any lunch, and where do we have it?"

"By the larch wood when we find your cuckoo," I answered, "and for old sake's sake. One always had a meal there even if it was only toffee from the lining of the pocket, or blackberries. To-day it will consist of sandwiches and claret. The menu has improved with the advance of years."

"I won't even quarrel with a station sandwich," she said. "My breakfast was so inconspicuous."

"No breakfast?" I asked. "Why?"

"Sunday," she said shortly, "and my maid.

The combination stands for treachery. She will *not* get up. That's why I missed my train and why I looked like Absalom after his little accident in the wood."

"But you don't," I said. "You look like Eve before hers. And you can't regret that you missed your train."

"No," she whispered, and her eyes shone.

"I think housemaids should be called Emma," she went on, thoughtfully "Mine is named Kate and I believe that is the explanation of her deficiencies. She's one of the new sort and refuses to change her name. She's stubborn and she wants a vote. She says her young man won't let her change her name and if he would she wouldn't. It's no use shouting at her. I've tried that. Bother her young man! He wouldn't have fallen in love with her if she hadn't been wearing one of my frocks. There's ingratitude for you. And it isn't as if I annoyed her much. I don't. I'm only troublesome about baths. I admit I have more baths than most people. Whenever I see water I feel I must get into it, don't you?"

"Generally," I answered, "and I have brought a towel with me because I know, presently, I shall want to get into that pool by my larchwood. I always did when young."

"Oh!" she cried, "if only I could bathe too."

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"Why shouldn't you?" I asked absently. She looked at me.

"Boys," she said darkly, in the tone of one who has suffered upon the shores of Britain. "Besides, I haven't a bathing dress. If only I'd known!"

"There won't be any boys," I said. "It is to be quite a small affair. Only the blackbirds and a bachelor cuckoo or two and ourselves. Just ourselves."

"And I do so much prefer these small parties to a big crush, my dear!" she remarked; and she smoothed out her frock and folded her hands with the air of a faded old lady.

"I think perhaps you are more yourself upon such occasions, my love," I rejoined.

"Have you reflected that this entire proceeding is absolutely scandalous," she laughed. "Just think. Whatever would 'the neighbours' say?"

"Neighbours! We're outside them, beyond them, above them; they don't *matter*. This is Genesis! Huge! Amazing. It's the thing one has dreamed of and never thought remotely possible. Life has become a tremendous adventure in a flash."

"Yes, yes," she cried, breathlessly; "an adventure."

"And it's luck, God-like, irresistible luck. Law. It's the thing that scarcely ever splendidly

happens ; yet it's a fact, a fact there's no standing up against. Meeting like this was our *purpose*, the thing we were born to do. Don't you feel it? Don't you know it?"

"Yes, yes!" she cried, catching fire.

"And it isn't as if we were remarkable. We're not; that's the extraordinary thing about it. We're just two bits of a big machine revolving together. But we fit. We satisfy each other. That's the pith of it, satisfying, understanding. There isn't a sham or a compromise in the thing at all. We've hit on each other without a search."

"That's just—*just* how I feel it too!" she exclaimed, ecstatically. "Just that, without the smallest reflection."

"Reflection is outside it, doesn't belong to it. Besides, there hasn't been much for time reflection. Surely the snake isn't given to reflection during the process of changing his skin; and that is my attitude, precisely."

"Oh!" she cried. "What an atrocious illustration. You mean to say you're a tempter then?"

"Figure of speech. Consider me, if you prefer it, as Adam in the matter; consider me as one curious in the matter of apples."

"And does that mean that I am Eve?" she cried. "Oh! I *didn't* tempt you."

"You did," I answered, drawing her closer.

"Oh no, no, I didn't—not consciously."

She was on the edge of tears at the thought. I had hurt her.

"Belovedest," I whispered, with my lips against her cheek. "There's no such thing as a reproach between you and me. This isn't chance. It was as inevitable as time. Anything else is unthinkable."

"Absolutely, utterly!" she cried. "And it was such a darling, easy apple. I've only just begun to realise what living means. Oh! I've been blind. I've been in a cage where I couldn't see and now I'm out of it with lovely spectacles on. Do they disfigure me much?"

"I don't know what you were before," I said. "I want you as you are."

The train raced on; my thoughts chimed in with the beat of the wheels.

"We rode; it seemed my spirit flew,
Saw other regions, cities new,
As the world rushed by on either side."

"Who are you, witch man?" she smiled up at me. "Let me look at you. I scarcely know what you are like. Green eyes. That means jealousy, doesn't it? Shall I drive you mad with jealousy, do you think? I always thought *His* eyes would be black. And the little grey hairs on the side of your dear head, I want to kiss them. Why have they gone grey? Was it a

woman? How I hate her! How could she let you go, how *could* she? And how I love her because she did let you go. I suppose she had lovely eyes and hair and all the things that fascinate men. Oh! tell me *my* mouth is pretty, too."

"Roses filled with snow," I whispered.

"Jerry! Oh! my beloved!"

A tunnel shut out the sun.

"And your coat," she went on, "your adorable Harris tweed coat! How delicious and smelly! Heather and mountains and wild mists. And now stand up and let me see how big you are. Jerry! Jerry! You're *Him*, you really, really are *Him*. Oh! why do you make me want to say my prayers so? And where were you born and how old are you and how many years do you think there are before we need die?"

"We'll get a bible," I said, as she stopped to take breath, "and we'll put the front door key in the book of the prophet Isaiah and say things at it. I forget exactly what things you say, but I know the answer comes out all right and everyone lives happily ever after. I'll write to my old nurse and ask her for the recipe and then we'll do it."

"Oh!" she cried, delightedly, "what a dear babyish mind you've got, and how thankful I am that you can play the fool!"

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"Oh yes," I answered. "Oh yes, I can do that."

"We won't ever grow up, will we, Jerry?"

"No fear," I answered. "To-morrow I propose to resume knickerbockers and you shall let your hair down and say the multiplication table up to 'six times'; not beyond."

"And not beyond William the Conqueror either," she cried, "because I don't know any. But I do know that," she announced as triumphantly as if she had discovered the fourth dimension, "ten sixty six."

"That devilish date," I muttered. "Even cannibals know it. Say another, quickly, if you love me."

"Eleven hundred, Gerard—I mean Rufus," she said hurriedly. I thanked her, but I fancy she was wrong. In the educated deeps of my soul I believed it to be the scoundrel Stephen who obsesses the year eleven hundred. To change the current of my thoughts Ursula asked me if I liked her hair.

"Is it really and truly the colour you wanted?" she enquired anxiously. "Really-and-truly-kiss-the-book?"

"It is, s'welp me," I replied, kissing her hair. "Thank goodness it isn't red. It's the lord's own gold."

"I can sit on it," she said. "If we ever get really hard up, it's worth ten minted quid."

"Pounds," I corrected, pretending to frown.

"Quid," she cried. "I will not sacrifice my slang because I've married a man who deals in ink."

"But you haven't married me yet."

"Ridiculous," she answered. "I married you at St. Pancras. I married you as soon as I looked at you. Didn't you know?"

"Yes," I said.

"Then don't talk nonsense," she continued. "Marriages aren't made in heaven; they're made on the Midland. I always did prefer it to the London and North Western; now I know why. Take your arm away. I want to jump about."

But in a moment she was by my side again. "Feel how my heart is beating," she cried. "Stop its beating or I shall die. Oh! how I love you, love you!"

Then the brakes clutched against the wheels as the train rolled over the river bridge.

"This is the place where I was once a boy," I said.

"And were you waiting for me even then?" she whispered.

"Yes," I whispered back, "even then." And it was true.

Then I took her to the place I had come to see, the old grey school where my first illusions had melted away, where the first hard things had been

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faced, the nursery abandoned and the new code learned. We stood together by the gateway where I had stood alone, a forlorn little boy in a new bewildering world.

"Jerry," she cried, "what a darling little boy you must have been!"

"I was a little beast," I replied, occupied with many contexts to that effect.

Then the years fell away from me and forgotten sights and sounds came surging back across the seas of memory as I stood by my first landmarks. She waited with her arm linked through mine, and I knew she understood the thoughts the place awakened in the boy who had travelled through man's estate—this dear, understanding woman. Through that door I had gone to my first examination, and I was examining myself now; the "paper" was of my own setting—and she was beside me. Many of the questions concerned her, and a look in her face unsealed every lingering reticence in me. It was infinitely beautiful and tender. It told me she belonged to me. It was a dedication. The same look, I think, must be on the faces of devout priests who pray before the altar and on the faces of mothers who comfort little children in pain.

"Begin at the beginning," she smiled, "and tell me everything."

With a backward leap to the days of catapults

and call-over, and the other attributes of school I tried to "tell her everything," to begin at the beginning.

"From the very beginning," I began, "mainly, I wanted a friend—and I never found him. His image never dawned outside the radius of my own imagination, and through all my life here I was compelled to make grudging concessions to my ideal of what a friend should be. Not that I was morbid; far from it; I could kill rats with anyone and I did, frequently; and many a cat owes an early grave to my skill with the wayside stone. And this is as it should be and merely argues boy. But with another part of me I longed for the creature of my imagination as David must have longed for Jonathan, and I could have loved him as well. But I never found him; my first abstraction never formulated in spite of all my efforts to reduce it to human shape; a friend, that is to say, with an eye for a magpie's nest, a nose for the smell of wet earth, an ear for the turn of a line, and a lip for a sounding Saxon oath when occasion should demand it. In embryonic form some of these qualities were to be found but not in any shape or degree that satisfied; none really soothed my poetic soul or met its needs—as you do."

She smiled and drew me closer; she knew what a tremendous event she was.

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"On the first day of each new term," I continued, "I used to come and stand here to look at each new boy and wonder if my undiscovered friend would be there. I scanned every boy as he passed me, and I used to say to my empty æsthetic heart 'It isn't you, it isn't you, it isn't you.' I should have known him at once, you see, if he had been there, just as I knew you, but he never was, and I always turned away with a sigh to make concessions. I think my idea must have been to pounce upon him before he was polluted by the school, by other contact than mine. I wanted him first, uncontaminated. After a time I compromised. I suppose it dawned on me that this is no world for idealists and that one must be content with the bread without the butter and the picture without the frame. How could I know, at fourteen, that I was asking for the biggest thing in all the world? Yet now I am standing here with you, you who might almost—No. I and my friend were to love each other with a love passing the love of women."

"Passing even mine?" she whispered.

"I don't know," I said. "It would have been different—sexless."

"If you could, would you have me sexless?"

"I was telling you about a boy."

"Go on telling me," she cried. "Tell me

everything, show me everything. I must see every place where you were young."

I took her through empty class rooms that looked strange and unreal in the silence and tidiness of Sunday. I took her to the old "Gym." by the river where the fights used to come off, where my own blood had stained the stones in its day; and we found my name, to her delight, cut deep in the grain of an old beam. "G. B. Coltover" and the date, and again, in another place, "Coltover Minor."

"What does 'minor' mean?" she asked. "Is it a nickname?"

"It means I had a brother," I replied. "Poor old chap."

"Why poor?" she asked.

"Two thousand pounds of education shot like a rabbit in a ride," I quoted. "That's where he chucked me in the river one day for giving him cheek," I went on, showing her the place.

"You seem proud of it."

"I was. I still am. There is a peculiar bliss in being manhandled by a hero, and my big brother in the 'sixth' and 'the fifteen' and stroke of the 'eight' was as a god to such as I. In my comparatively ignoble orbit I scintillated in his reflected glory, a youthful but rightminded snob."

"Oh, go on, do go on," cried Ursula excitedly,

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"all this is a new world to me. What a thing it must be to have been a boy!"

Then I told her old school stories by the river wall till the old school Sergeant came along and knew me.

"Jerry Coltover," he ejaculated. "My Gawd!" We launched into old times.

"To fancy it's you," he remarked, "and never been back all these years. I must be a good 'un for faces. So them farmers got 'Major'; got 'im good and tight—through the 'eart, por feller. Eh, Mr. Jerry?"

I nodded and looked at the river. I saw "Major" in my mind's eye stroking a racing four round the corner of the river by the Brewery. Myself, a diminutive "cox" being ordered by this god of the boats "not to wobble so, you d—d little fool." And I saw him in the glory of a "dropped goal" against a Cambridge fifteen and I heard the appreciative roar of the school standing at the ropes in the November mist, and the cries of "Well played, sir. Oh! well played."

"Forty-seven we lost from 'ere," continued the old Sergeant, "and I knowed 'em all, or most of 'em. And when might one of your own be coming?" he enquired with a glance at Ursula. "I'm ready to wallop 'im the same as I walloped you."

"Some day, Sergeant," answered Ursula, with a lovely blush.

"This is my wife," I said, and she looked straight into my eyes with her steadfast smile as I said it and bound herself into sacred memories. For a man's wife and his school are the tie-rods of his life.

"I want you all to myself for a little, now," she said, as we came through the gateway again, "to assimilate you."

"Are you good for a ten miles ride?" I asked her.

"I'm good for fifty with you," she answered, "provided I may keep in touch with your beginnings. I want to see all I can of what made you you."

"Keep your eyes open in that case; all this is pure me. I am proud to remember, for example that I have smashed every lamp in this 'ere street."

"Little monkey," she laughed. "Did you get walloped?"

"Didn't I just. I can feel it still."

She crinkled her nose and considered me. "Jerry," she remarked, critically, "you look to me as if you'd been an unholy little terror when you wore an Eton jacket. How many times were you walloped in an average week?"

"Oh, ask the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours," I remarked flippantly.

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"Pooh, as if they'd know."

"They wouldn't," I admitted, "any more than I do. See that road with the horse-chestnuts?"

"Yes," she said, not seeing it, but nearly falling off her bicycle in a loyal effort. "What about it?"

"That's where I kissed a whole girls' school for five bob."

"Jerry, you didn't. I don't believe it."

"It's quite true. It got into the local paper, and I can tell you the fat was in the fire. Followed a searching scene in which I played a prominent but painful part. It was a hard earned five bob."

"But who——"

"An uncle, down for the day. I can hear him laughing now as he stood and watched me. You should have heard those girls giggle. They didn't mind, bless their hearts. I was a duck of a boy; most kissable, even then."

"Jerry!"

"I only missed out one who was having trouble with her complexion, and I ended up with a sporting attempt on the old dragon in charge, but she broke her umbrella on my head."

"Splendid," laughed Ursula. "Go on."

Ursula was a born listener; a listener such as one seldom meets. She belonged to that class of listeners who seem almost to invite a tampering

with hardened facts. Legend is born through listeners as she.

"If you maintain that lovely rapt expression," I remarked, "I shall continue to buck about myself for hours. You silently scream *Ego* at me."

"Of course I do," she laughed. "I want to catch up. Just think what a lot there is for me to find out about you. Go on telling me things, darling. I'm loving you more every moment."

We were out of the town by now, high above it. I turned in my saddle and looked round.

"Wait a moment," I said, "something has happened."

I stared down at the little place in astonishment. It wasn't there—the town I used to know. It had gone, shrunk, dwindled away. Yet, when I looked again, there was the Parish Church as large as life and twice as ugly, the prison where a man had been hanged for stealing sheep as late as 1830, the Town Hall and the Butter Market. Why did it all seem so different? I rubbed my eyes, as they say, and looked again. What was the matter with the place? Then it came to me that it was I who had changed, that childhood's eye was gone and its vision altered. That view of streets and houses once had seemed immense; now, it was scarcely more than a big village, almost without dignity or sufficient

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importance to have civic affairs. It was more than fifteen years since I had looked across those roofs and gables to the rookneys in the deer park. The view had become very small now and very clear, very circumscribed. I could see its real proportions. I was looking through the telescope from the other end.

"I have felt the same thing," said Ursula. "One felt it with one's dolls. But that expression is not permitted on a honeymoon," she remarked, catching sight of my face, "it's much too sad."

"Honeymoons must end," I said, "like childhood."

"If you please we will talk that out," said she. "Why must they end? Why shouldn't they go on and on?"

"Well—" I began, tentatively.

"Don't invent," she interrupted. "Don't be led away by your own beautiful eloquence. Now I'll tell you why this particular honeymoon is never going to end."

"I'm dying to know," I remarked.

"Don't harp so about death and endings," she cried, "or I shall begin to think you want a little pill with your lunch. Listen. Just occupy your dear mind with two ideas. The faith of little children, that's one; the other is that love harbours no doubts. There's a whole philosophy for you. Don't let go. If one lets go one must

expect to be swamped. It isn't really difficult to keep the essential things in one's hands."

"Isn't it?"

"It shouldn't be if one realises what they are."

"Have you?"

"I'm beginning to," she said. "Simple things."

"This is scarcely honeymoon talk," I interrupted.

"Yes, it is," she replied, "because I've never talked it to anyone else."

"Continue your remarks," I said. "I am reduced."

"But I want to convince you, not to reduce you."

"The thing is possible," I admitted. "You are trying to convince me that this honeymoon need never end."

"Have I convinced you yet?"

"Quite," I answered. "My only fear was that it might degenerate into a debate. I shouldn't like that. I am sure it is not one of the essential things."

She boxed my ears.

I kissed her.

She kissed me.

"It is the custom of this land," I remarked, "to precede the honeymoon by searching rites. What is your feeling in the matter?"

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"I feel I should be a fool not to conform to the laws made for my convenience," she replied, "though in my own nice soul they seem absurd. It is a terrible thing for any young girl to be driven to the altar in a hired carriage when she might be married just as well by jumping over a stick if only it were customary. Personally, I would rather be kissed three times under a star; once for faith, once for hope, once for charity: Oh! and once for luck. That makes it four."

"And so you should be," I remarked, "if it wasn't for the neighbours. But they expect *confetti* and 'The Voice that Breathed o'er Croydon' before they call and leave their cards."

"I rather despise the neighbours," remarked Ursula.

She was becoming more of a companion every moment.

"Why?" I asked, wondering.

"Rather a nuisance, the neighbours, don't you think?"

"A curse," I replied, "from one's youth up. They begin by resenting one's affection for their apples and they end by cutting one's wife if she isn't precisely to their pattern."

"So one is forced to be two persons."

"Only two? I'm twenty," I remarked.

"That's too many," she said, severely. "I don't like the idea of being all things to all men!"

"You prefer the idea of one man being everything to one woman."

"In order that the honeymoon shall continue indefinitely."

I saw her point. But by the nature of things and the human constitution we are driven, most of us, to be cheats. There is a Mr. Facing-Both-Ways in us all. We are one thing to Tom and another thing to Dick. In my Utopia we shall merely be ourselves to everyone.

We were riding past a pine plantation.

"I believe I am really a gipsy under my skin," said Ursula, sniffing luxuriantly, "a gipsy with a bias towards a gent's family residence."

"I'm afraid you won't achieve that with me," I replied, "I'm not the chap."

"I don't mean a villa," said Ursula, severely

"That makes a difference," I admitted.

"I could achieve anything with you," she cried enthusiastically, "Say what you want me to be and I'll be it."

"I want you to be mine," I said.

She found it necessary to dismount. After a fitting interval I looked at my watch.

"Twelve o'clock," I said.

"All hail!" cried Ursula. "Oh, Jerry, I do want me lunch."

"The place appointed for your victuals is five miles on, you vulgar girl," I remarked

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"How anxious you seem to get there."

I was.

"But I want to dawdle," she objected. "We're going much too fast. Do let me get down and pick a buttercup. Don't ruin my entire day."

So she got down again and picked a bunch of buttercups and it was proved by a primitive process that I was one of those given over to an inordinate consumption of butter and that I looked like a man with jaundice into the bargain.

"However shall I be able to keep house for you if you consume such quantities of fat?" enquired Ursula in despair. "You'll drain our resources; our herds simply will not run to it, not to mention the fact that I shall leave off loving you if you become fat. You must undergo a perpetual Lent."

"I won't!" I cried. "I refuse. I will not be deprived of my beef and beer even to gain a perpetual honeymoon."

"Must you have beer?" she asked anxiously. "It is so fattening. Let me keep a bee, then I can brew you great draughts of mead out of a stoup."

"I hate bees," I said. "Besides, they'd sting us. You ask Maeterlinck."

"They don't sting if you tell them your secrets," said Ursula. "Besides we simply cannot eat the

stuff that comes from the Stores. I bought a pot the other day and it was horrid ; there was far too much of it for the money. I don't believe even a Californian bee could make all that honey for a shilling. I told the man so. What secrets can we tell the bees ? ”

“ I don't hide anything,” I said.

“ That's the worst of it,” she remarked, plaintively, “ neither do I ; not even my ankles when there's a wind. If it blows it just has to blow. The only precaution I can take is to wear distinguished stockings with clocks on them. Then we can't keep a bee after all, you think ? ”

“ You might give up wearing distinguished stockings with clocks on them,” I suggested as a way out of the difficulty.

“ I was talking about secrets,” she cried.

“ You were talking about stockings,” I said, severely, “ and stockings are secrets—or they should be.”

“ Mine are not, anyhow,” she laughed. “ Look.”

She kicked out a dainty Greek foot that looked like the stem of a bronze lily.

“ It has been in our family for years,” she remarked. “ I don't know how many generations it didn't take to produce it ; a great many, I should think. It takes four to produce a person who eats peas with a fork, doesn't it ? Oh !

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what a lovely old bridge! How did it get here? Did some American build it?"

"The Romans," I said briefly.

"The Romans! Is this really a Roman bridge? Stop, please. I must look at it this instant. Oh!" she cried, breathlessly, "what a thrill it gives me; doesn't it you? To think that it was here before the Doomsday Book! To think that Roman legions actually marched over it—with lictors! It must have had monks and pilgrims and gentlemen of the road on it, too. Dick Turpin! Why, this must be the Old North Road, Jerry, isn't it? This must be the way he came when he broke the record to York. Oh, you lucky little imp to go to school in such a place. How could you help having a nice mind?"

"I couldn't," I answered, lighting a nice pipe

"And how perfectly delicious for you to have dropped on to the one girl in all the world to match you."

"Suppose the one girl in all the world bucks up a bit," I suggested.

"Oh, it's so lovely here. Do wait while it sinks into me, and say some Latin to make the atmosphere feel right."

"*Quis separabit*," I remarked, lighting my seventh match.

"Translate it for me, please."

"It means wild horses shall not separate us," I said, with my arms round her. "It means an everlasting honeymoon. But come along now, like a good girl, or I shall excommunicate you."

"Not another inch do I go," she announced, "until you've told me a story about this bridge."

"But I don't know one," I objected. "The thing doesn't exist."

"Nonsense."

"Don't you understand that this place was out of bounds?"

I made her understand what "out of bounds" meant, but she persisted.

"And were you never up to any mischief in the neighbourhood?"

"Never, barring a few fish."

"Fish?"

"Yes. This is preserved water."

"Oho!" she laughed. "I thought so. Out with it, you little poacher. Oh! rainbow trout," she cried as a fish flopped at a fly. "Jerry, how often have you helped yourself in that shallow water?"

"A two pounder might have been discovered by the curious inside a top hat upon a day," I admitted.

"I thought so," she remarked. "Your custom always of a Sunday afternoon."

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"There was an infidel named Scott who lured me on. He tempted me."

"Sportsman," remarked Ursula in a scathing voice.

"But the cigarettes were mine," I protested, "and the pipe. He never had any money but he could hypnotise fish. In the matter of tickling a trout I never saw the like. It was uncanny; he pulled them out in heaps. I never could. I sat with my feet in the water, the illicit weed between my teeth and watched him, an artist at his work. And if I spat into the stream as any gentleman engaged in forming the tobacco habit might find occasion to do from time to time, he swore, and once we fought, up to our middles in the water."

"Nice goings on," said Ursula. "Tell me some more about him."

"Scott? He was a ritualist. He knew all about Ember Days and he had an altar in his study with candles on top and some rabbits underneath. Sometimes he used to light the candles and burn incense in a censer. The rabbits hated it."

"You poor boys," murmured Ursula. "I won't ever send *my* boys to a public school."

"You'll have to. The alternative is worse. Better turn 'em out according to the accepted pattern than according to no pattern at all."

"I'm glad God is an Englishman," said Ursula, suddenly. "I wonder if we really shall be smacked for our mistakes."

"This old bridge is making you feel mediæval," I remarked. "Why bother our heads about hells and heavens?"

"No. Quite right; let's be babies," she cried. "Oh, what an idyll all this is. I can't conceive that it has happened to me, or why."

There was an air of mystified wonder about her. She had the look of a devout dead Christian who has found that there is no such place as heaven after all.

"Don't look so shocked," I laughed. "It isn't indecent to be idyllic."

But she was not to be chaffed.

"Ever since a quarter to ten this morning I've been so grateful, so awfully grateful, I don't know what to do. But I must do something," she sobbed, "I must do something desperate out of sheer joy. Why aren't there any beggars here so that I can give them half-crowns? When I met you," she went on, "I was 'letting go' as fast as ever I could. In another six months . . . I don't know. There seemed to be nothing in it beyond the moment, and not much then. Even music couldn't always put me right. So I took to riding about the country to try and get back into touch. I found that birds and trees and

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green things did help a little, then I saw you and everything lifted and let in the sun—and now it's nearly blinding me, it's nearly blinding me. Oh! how glad I am I chose St. Pancras."

As she sobbed out her heart on my shoulder I knew that her sobs solved the riddle of my own existence, and "everything lifted and let in the sun."

"There," she said, presently, smiling through her tears. "What a tumult, and how dreadfully shattering. What are you thinking about?"

"You," I answered. "What else could I possibly be doing?"

She gave my arm an understanding little hug. "How splendid to know the secret of the world." she sighed. "Shall we go on now?"

"Your back tyre is punctured. I must mend it."

"And which way are we going when we've got all that sticky mess off your fingers?"

"Straight on," I said.

"Yes, but which way is that—geographically?"

"That way," I said, pointing to the road.

"But I want to know if it's, north, south, east or west," she persisted.

"Oh," I replied, with a look at the sun, "it's east. Why?"

"Because that's the only way I want to go to-day. East, towards the sun, the beautiful

symbolic sun, blazing with promises. Don't look so puzzled. I'm throwing pretty ideas at you and you won't catch. Jerry dear, you really are a little dull."

"I'm not dull," I replied. "I'm delighted. Who said she wasn't a poet just now? Why, that idea is worthy of *me*; where did you steal it from?"

"I didn't steal it," she cried indignantly. "It just bubbled out of me. I'm full of things like that."

"Good," I remarked, "you'll be useful. There's your bike; get on to it like a good girl and ride east—and don't tear your frock."

"Oh! your way of putting things," she cried, delightedly. "Jerry, you're half my soul. No one has ever been so rude to me in all my life as you have been."

"I find it far more effective than politeness," I remarked.

She told me not to pose. I ceased, therefore, instantly.

"Oh, let's ride, let's ride, belovedest," she cried. "I must work off some of this bounding life through my muscles!"

She gave an intoxicating excited little laugh as we felt the wind rush past us fresh and cold; and there were strange lights. Just here the long ribbon of the road lay deep between high shadowy poplars pregnant with mystery and

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sighing like lost souls as they took the breeze in their cold foliage. The sun did not shine here ; it filtered. As a boy I had always avoided this avenue, preferring to make a longer journey through the more amiable fields on one side. On the other side there was an old disused quarry, a deep pit overgrown with rank malignant weeds where a headless man was said to dwell, and there were stories of galloping hoofs and a wraith-like horse. The fingers of fear must have touched my virgin imagination very roughly, for the marks, I found, still remained, and though it was fifteen years since I had walked under those sighing branches it was with a sense of relief that I emerged again into the sun.

Fifteen years ! Almost a quarter of a man's lifetime. I fell to wondering why I had not found this wonderful echo of myself before. Is a man's wife an accident ? Does he get her as he gets his teeth, by a natural law, or, as he gets his dinner, by the direct exercise of his faculties ? Would one woman do as well as another in the long run ? Probably she would, I reflected, viewed from the point of view of natural law, but that law, mercifully, is not a full statement of the case. A wife had always been my dream, a dream never realised perhaps because of some eclectic principle in me that rejected compromise. Yet I had been receptive. I had not shut the

thing out. I would have welcomed it at any time had the shadow of the substance appeared, but it never had, the accident had not occurred.

"Well?" Ursula was looking at me with a question in her eyes.

"A girl," I said, answering her look. "Not you this time."

"A girl? How dare she be in your thoughts? What girl?"

"A very little one."

"Not another step do I go until I have had a full confession. Sit on these stones. Now then."

"She was six and I was seven," I began; "she was dressed in a pink frock and I kissed her at a party. She had a large fat mother who looked like a cook; but in spite of this I wanted to marry her there and then, her mother's appearance notwithstanding. Her mother's appearance had not the smallest effect upon me. I had seen my life companion, and, mother or no mother, I wanted her. But they beat down our young romance. I was hit on the head and told I wasn't a little gentleman. Circumstances, in fact, got the better of me, both that time and the next."

"And when was the next?"

"She must have been about fourteen and she was apprenticed to the dressmaking."

"Oh, my dear," said Ursula.

“ Ah, I regretted it, but there it was. It was undoubtedly a check. Still, I was the creature of destiny, cursed with a pretty taste for the sparkle of an eye, and the immediate horizon was filled with hers to the exclusion of the skeleton in the shop window. I made her acquaintance through a fickle friend who had had his day with her and was looking elsewhere. She hated my friend for his deflection and, for two pins, I think she could have found it in her heart to hate me at first from a just and maidenly pique ; but I wore down her prejudice in time. I stilled her preliminary scorn with the cheaper forms of chocolate ; flattery fairly ran off my tongue so stirred into persistence was I. She was sweet to look at, and most extraordinarily bashful and shy ; she was not one of your light ladies by any manner of means. It was weeks before I could induce her to let me kiss her and I stood even that. She was a very good little girl, as precise and proper as you please. In the beginning she was afflicted with religion, badly, and I stood that too, for romance had fairly got me by the throat. In the end she became quite a man and a brother, and, in some respects, very satisfying. I cured her of religion and I taught her to throw stones, and once she even smoked about half an inch of cigarette without subsequent distress. It was always very difficult for me to meet her and I took

every conceivable risk. Discovery, for her, would have meant, probably, nothing worse than a slapping, but for me it would have ended in public disgrace and I might have been hounded out of the school like a leper. To be found with a girl meant death even if one was only fourteen. However, we were never caught and we were permitted to adore each other in comparative peace. Our meeting place was in the cemetery among tombs. Wasn't that strange? We chose it because it was remote and quiet, and I suppose we were scarcely old enough to feel the association of ideas. Besides, there were flowers there which sometimes I stole from the tombs of the dead in order that I might offer them at the altar of the living. You may laugh at childish romances as much as you please, but I assure you all mine were beneficial. She really and truly sweetened me, that tiny, pretty little girl with no ideas of her own and none at all beyond those of her class. These I endeavoured to obliterate. I taught her not to say 'nicely, thank you,' and I taught her what to read. I opened her eyes to the joys of the *Lays of Ancient Rome*, and she followed the *Pied Piper* as spell-bound and as happily as all the other children. I liked the sense of power my domination over her gave me and I was as autocratic as you please. Her part was to obey and to respond and to be

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what I thought she was, to live up to the illusion I created. For a time she did so, but disillusion came, and her downfall was a tragedy. It happened suddenly. One evening she took off her gloves and my dream was over. She bit her nails! I couldn't . . . It altered my whole world for me. In the end I turned away and left her—a little boy who had known sorrow. You won't believe me, but I assure you my grief was real; it hurt me beyond telling, but what could I do?"

"You could have thought of her," said Ursula.

"I did. I hated myself, but it was no use. I tried to go back to her but I couldn't. I carried a mental picture of her about with me for days. It haunted me. I saw her all day long and half the night as I had seen her last, sitting on a tombstone, crying. I knew I had fallen short in chivalry and it stung me dreadfully; but the thing was dead; I could not revive it. She was a lost illusion and in time her image faded. I expect I suffered most."

"Don't be too sure of that," said Ursula.

"Go on."

"I was not tortured again until I was sixteen. Then I fell madly in love with a woman of thirty quite. If I had adored the little shopgirl I worshipped the woman of the world. She never knew, though, unless she guessed. I was inarticu-

late. My feelings shocked me while they thrilled ; a new element had crept in since my last amour ; the boy had begun to be a man, to love like a man. She was extraordinarily kind to me. I expect she guessed. If she had known how I hated her husband. . . I read deficiencies into everything he did. His attitude to her seemed inexplicable to me ; his air of complacent undisputed possession was insulting ; as far as I could see there was not a trace of deference about him and it shocked me and puzzled me too. How I hated him ! She used to wear a straw hat with a Club ribbon on it, sometimes, in the summer ; probably it was one of his. Once I remember he knocked it off a hat peg in the hall and said 'damn the hat,' and kicked it away from him. Her hat ! I loathed him. Never had I seen such sacrilege done. I stood and stared at him and from a long way off I heard him say, 'What's the matter with you, Jerry ?'

"However, my cure was contained in that hat, the hat that raised her an inch nearer heaven. One day something went wrong with a hatpin as she was putting it on. She pulled the pin out of the straw (I can see her little frown of annoyance now), she pulled the pin out and took the hat off her head for a moment, and a little curl dropped out and fell to the ground, a little gold curl—too gold. And I had written verses . . . It

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barely took ten seconds but in that ten seconds I had met subterfuge and my idol cracked before my eyes. So you see each time——”

“Of course I see,” cried Ursula. “Of course I do!”

She fairly laughed at me. “I’m a woman, my dear,” she remarked cryptically. “I see exactly what cured you. You polish and polish away at your idol and if you can’t obliterate every little scratch you don’t want it at all. All its beauties won’t balance the scratch. Isn’t that it?”

That certainly was it.

“A little rough on the idols,” she remarked with her eyes on a point in space I couldn’t see.

“I’m not sure that it isn’t roughest on me,” I said.

“I am,” said Ursula. “I’m the last idol. Oh, darling,” she cried as she saw my face, “I didn’t mean it.”

“Don’t you understand that you are above idols?” I asked.

“Yes, yes, I do,” she said quickly. “And I understand that then you were only a boy. But that side of you is still there. It is, isn’t it? It must be. One never changes deep down.”

“No,” I said.

“You could never give yourself, absolutely give yourself to anything short of perfection, could you?”

" Only to perfection—as I see it."

" You're making me tremble. Suppose you—suppose you found I wasn't perfect ? "

" But you are."

" But suppose you came to—to think I wasn't? "

" It's unthinkable," I cried.

But she still trembled.

Presently she smiled again and said she had sufficiently recovered from the sad history of my early amours to continue our ride. She felt, too, that she knew me better and she wanted her lunch.

Lunch, I explained, had not yet been won. It lay off to the right down a lane that curved round a hill shaped like a girl's breast and, at the end of the lane was the larch wood and the pool—and lunch.

Of all the panorama of boyhood this scene was the dearest, most vivid of all. It was here one autumn afternoon that I had seen my first " kill." The law of the preying of beast upon beast had for the first time been fully brought into my consciousness, had emerged from legend and become a fact. I recollect how I was struck by the contradiction that lay in the association of such a beautiful valley with any form of strife ; the colour, the very moulding of the earth and its smell suggested security and peacefulness, and, in a moment it had been atmospherically changed transformed into something sinister and cruel ;

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the chord had resolved into an unexpected unimagined key that awakened a slumbering sense, vaguely, intangibly altering me. Hounds had come tearing over the turf and pulled down their fox here by the very water's edge, I, panting after them, scarcely knowing why, driven on by an instinct that stirred in the jungle of my being and cried out to be satisfied. And I could hear the thudding, galloping hunt behind me, half a field away, as I raced ahead. Then, with the snap of a hound's teeth in a hairy throat came the climax, the close of a chapter palpitating with interest and read at fever heat. At the end of it, as my muscles relaxed, I knew that I had become other than I was before ; a further capacity in myself had been in a flash revealed to me ; I had seen the elemental savage dormant in every man and I stood, panting, staring at the strangled fox, sickened but satisfied.

The hunt rode up in one's and two's with their horses blown after a seven mile run over bad country. I had come three miles on foot, and I was splashed and caked with mud and sweat, scratched and torn with brambles and wire and quivering with the excitement of a new fully lived experience.

Then I heard a woman's voice say with kindly interest, " Who is that little boy ? You ought to give him the brush." The man she spoke to

laughed. He was very muddy and he had a hole in his hat. I liked him. He was even dirtier than I was, and the hole in his hat made him look very companionable. He must have taken a pretty bad toss somewhere to get into that state, I reflected.

"Come 'ere, youngster," he called out, and I went and shook hands with him.

"I think this fairly belongs to you," he said as he gave me the brush. Then this god offered me a nip out of his flask, and I accepted it with the air of one who could take his glass like a gentleman, though privately my stomach rebelled almost to the point of disaster. I remember the huntsman's grin as I gulped the brandy down. Tom Burroughs, his name was, and the devil of a man.

Scott, during this scene decorated an inglorious background. He had been a laggard by the way, while I reaped an athlete's laurels and mingled with the equine great. And this undisputed triumph subsequently did much to lessen the moral gulf created by his greater piscatorial skill, and, when in tones properly modified to a just and conscious humility he proposed an inadequate sum for the possession of the brush, the last vestiges of moral superiority fled. Altogether, it was, properly considered, a day of mental growth.

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It was here, too, that I learnt to swim, below the weir where the water is shallow and the trout flick over the gravelly bottom. Later on the shallows were abandoned for the more adventurous waters of the pool itself, where in floodtime there were currents and eddies that called for muscle and back-bone ; and there was a natural dive from an accommodating tree that also took the more proficient fancy.

Other joys were to be found in the pursuit of the water rat, and eels who might be induced to partake of the wily worm. These lines it was our habit to bait on the eve of departure for "lock-up," and there they remained sometimes for days together with an intrepid eel squirming, as likely as not, upon the hook, till in the fulness of time we should arrive and land him upon the sward and terminate his slimy career with stones upon the head. It was our belief that these creatures were insensible to pain, and I believe we felt that this was rather a matter for regret. Because of their loathliness they seemed to invite a hard death.

Another joy was the foliage. There was a billowy bank of ever-changing, ever-undulating green filled with mysteries and shadows and reflected, as the sun slid round his orbit, in the water below, where we bathed. It was an almost imperceptible progression, a gradation in colour

tones from April to November. First came the feathery promise of future green with a hint of cerise among the lightly clad twigs springing to and fro like sprites as the breezes played with them ; then, as they grew up, they moved more slowly, as children do, feeling the weight of their responsibility and their more sedate clothing of deeper green ; then, almost before they were aware of it, age was upon them and the consciousness of their fate appeared in their movements lethargic and slow in the summer heat. Then they appeared no more in their green dresses ; the time had come to make one more brave show, their last, in sombre russet brown.

When we came in sight of the wood and the stream below it, Ursula gave a little cry of delight.

" Jerry ! " she cried, " it's like a coloured photograph. Oh ! listen to the birds. Hark ! There's my cuckoo ! Cuckoo ! "

She obliged with a rhapsodic little imitation.

" You'll mislead the bird," I said. " Why confuse him with ventriloquism ? "

" How good of you to have him here ; " she cried gratefully, " and what a darling little corner of the world it is. Did Dr. Johnson *really* say that one green field was just like another green field, Jerry ? "

" He did," I answered. " But forget it. "

We walked to the edge of the stream and looked

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at the shadows in the water and heard the whisper of the weir as it splashed over the stones. Ursula drew a deep breath as she clung to my arm.

"How purifying it is," she murmured. "It takes all the finger marks out of my soul. Jerry, I must bathe," she said suddenly.

"Can you swim?" I asked. "It's pretty deep hereabouts."

"Swim?" she cried scornfully, "I'll show you," and she kicked off a shoe.

"W-what are you going to do?" I asked, in slight perplexity.

"Do? Bathe," she cried, "aren't you? You said you were. Go behind that nice bush. I'll race you."

I suppose something in my face arrested her, for she paused, suddenly, in unaffected dismay.

"Why, I believe you're shocked at me, Jerry," she cried with a look of sheer astonishment. "Are you? I didn't think—I mean, it hadn't struck me that there could be anything of that sort between you and me. You are you!" she went on in wondering simplicity. "You're only another bit of myself. You can't mean that you—that you think I'm—*immodest!* Jerry!" she cried, "Jerry! You're not understanding me!" Her voice broke and a deep red flush spread over her till she looked as if she were flooded in a sunset.

"Belovedest," I cried as I caught her in my arms, "I do understand. I do," and, in that moment I knew she was as chaste as any vestal, unconsciously pure. It had never occurred to her that it was possible to be anything else.

"Oh!" she whispered, with a little sigh, "I thought—for a moment—I can't express it. You frightened me."

But in a moment she was all April again, rippling with fun.

"It merely struck me that you hadn't got a bathing dress," I said "That's all."

"A bathing dress," she echoed. "Good gracious! I'd simply forgotten all about it. No wonder you looked horrified. Oh, my dear, what *is* to be done? Can you suggest any way out of the difficulty?"

"It is my habit to be fertile in resource," I answered, "but the present situation fairly beats me. I know of nothing that can be done."

"Are there no looms in Bedfordshire?" asked Ursula. "No shops?"

"Many;" I replied, "but this is the Sabbath day."

"Then I suppose that settles it," she said, "and I shall not be able to get into the water."

"You might paddle," I suggested, "and yet remain quite circumspect."

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"I should not *dream* of paddling," she replied disdainfully, "at any place but Margate."

"The best of us are governed by the fashion," I remarked.

Then I had one of my bright ideas.

"You might use the costume I brought for my own purposes," I said.

"And what will *you* do?" asked Ursula.

"I should do without," I answered. "I should remain unbathed, but I should achieve self-sacrifice."

"Oh, that wouldn't do at all," she cried. "I want you to bathe with *me*."

"We are of one mind," I rejoined.

"And one bathing dress," said Ursula.

"The difficulty, in fact, remains," said I.

"Is your bathing dress a pretty one?" asked Ursula, raising a fresh point.

"Far from it," I replied. "It was last in use when I appeared as an ancient Briton at a pageant. The effect conveyed by it is barbarous, as of a body stained in waud."

"Still, it is quite possible that I should look pretty in it," said Ursula.

I agreed that this was more than probable.

"It comes to this, then," she announced.

"Either we must bathe in turns or we shall not be able to bathe at all. What a pity. Which shall we do?"

"Wait!" said I, suddenly. "Wait! the solution has come to me."

"Tell me," she cried. "Instantly."

"I will bathe in my pyjamas," said I, with triumph in my tone.

"Brilliant," cried Ursula delightedly.

"They are," I admitted. "They are brilliant pink. Pink silk."

"But how charming," exclaimed Ursula.

"I was told so when I purchased them," said I, "by the man in the shop."

Then she thought for a moment.

"Surely," she remarked, "surely it would be better if I wore the pyjamas and you wore the bathing dress."

"Why?" I enquired in my innocence.

"Pink is my colour," said Ursula.

A fresh difficulty had arisen.

"The choice is yours," I said. "I am here not to hinder but to help."

"A decision, clearly, must be made," she remarked.

"Clearly," I replied.

"And I am *not* quite clear," said Ursula, "at present."

"The day, however, is before us," said I.

"Your ideas may be capable of arrangement."

"Let me see these things," she said, "before I decide."

I sought for my effects in the contrivance which held them upon my bicycle. In its recesses there remained further essentials, a Horace and a towel, slippers. . . .

"These are my pyjamas," I remarked as I spread them on the sward, "and this is a bathing dress of the period."

Ursula looked at them thoughtfully. "Each has points," she said.

"The pyjamas have legs," said I. "The fact, perhaps, may weigh with you."

"It certainly would in the water," said Ursula.

"We are now, however, upon dry land," I explained.

"And that, of course, is the true sphere of the pyjama," said Ursula.

I gave this statement my support.

"Legs do weigh one down, don't they?" she asked, doubtfully.

I reminded her that the best angels relied upon wings—if pictorial art is to be trusted.

"Let's toss," said Ursula, "and settle it that way."

I produced half a crown. "Heads you take the pyjamas and tails you take the ancient Briton," said I.

"Righto," said Ursula.

I tossed. It was heads. True to my bond, therefore, I handed her my pyjamas.

"And buck up," I said. "Buck up." I said no more, though at times I have been called a talkative man.

Ursula said nothing at all. There was that in her bearing, however, which suggested indecision.

I waited for the inevitable. Like Brutus (or was it Anthony?) I paused for a reply.

"I think I shall take the bathing dress after all," remarked Ursula, smoothly. "Pyjamas, I am sure, are not intended for day wear, and I shall be able to swim better without things clinging to my legs."

So Ursula had the bathing dress, and I had the pyjamas. I retired with them behind my nice bush.

"Bother," I heard her exclaim, as I turned away.

"There goes one of my stockings," she called out holding up a flimsy piece of hosiery in which there was a lamentable rent. "And all because of my anxiety to get into the water and wash the old life away. Hurry up, boy, or I shall be in first."

I hurried up.

"I'm ready," she cried, after a few moments.

I emerged from my nice bush, garmented as for the night although it was broad day. She stood there waiting for me, lovely, slim, and smiling. If she had looked patrician in her cloth-

ing, she was a proud young empress now, and I saw that modesty could go unclothed and yet remain unclouded.

"Do I look awful in it?" she asked, alluding to her costume with the loveliest blush.

"Heavens!" I exclaimed. "If Phideas could see you."

"I'm very glad he can't," said Ursula. "He'd want me to sit for him. And why should I be a frieze?"

"You lyric," I sighed. "You golden ivory lyric."

She laughed and blew me a kiss with a pink pointed finger. Every movement she made was a dainty delight; everything she did was clear cut, finished, like a leaf in a pre-Raphaelite picture. She made me think of Botticelli.

"Listen! Listen, Jerry!" she cried rapturously, tilting her head into the loveliest pose imaginable, in order that she might listen better.

In the larches there was a chorus; thrushes, robins, and a woodpecker, voiceless, but determined to be in the symphony, was making strenuous efforts to imitate a fairy drum. There were larks and wrens and reedwarblers, and did I see a kingfisher? A gleam and a blue flash. It may have been Ursula's eyes.

"Oh, the darlings," she cried. "*Such* congratulations! And now come and kiss me under

the water, Jerry, where everything is dim and sacred."

I dived in off the bank and waited for her. She dived through the bubbles after me and came up between my arms looking like a dear dragged mermaid. Then the water closed over us and we kissed each other in the wet dark.

"You witch," I cried, as we rose to the air, "where did you learn to swim?"

"Oh! ask the Royal Society of Painters in Water Colours," she laughed.

Circumstances, however, prevented me from interrogating that very illustrious clique.

She knew every art born of water. I was nowhere, yet there had been times when I thought I could swim; but she could give me two yards in twenty and beat me hollow without a wink. I crawled out.

"Where's that tree of yours?" she called to me across the pool. "I want to do a high dive."

I had been sitting there looking at her, watching the little eddies and satisfying effortless curves she was creating. Then she slid towards me with lithe svelt strokes, herself the very pulse of the pool.

"Give me a pull out, Jerry," she requested, holding up a wet white arm.

"But if you dive off the tree and scratch your

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nose on the bottom I shall be unable to love you," I objected.

"Not you," she smiled bewitchingly. "It isn't in you to drive me to a suicide's grave. Do you think I'm nice, Jerry, now you've seen me like this?" she asked doubtfully. "You haven't said so."

"I've called you a lyric," I replied. "What further extravagances of speech do you expect from me?"

"Heaps," she cried.

"You'd have staggered Thessaly," I muttered. "But if you love me I beseech you never again to employ the word nice, particularly in praise of your own exquisite proportions."

"Why not?" asked Ursula.

"The word belongs to the suburban villa," I replied, "and you do not. It is an adjective in use amongst a class that cultivates the india-rubber plant in pots. The front parlour class. The spineless backbone of the empire."

"How awful to be married to a fastidious gentleman who deals in ink," she laughed.

"I foresee that our marriage will be the ruin of my prose style," I sighed. "My passion for you will irrigate the lurking adjective."

"*Le style c'est l'homme*," she quoted, demurely.

I looked at her and rioted in phrases that would have caused my publishers to faint if I

had written them. Adoration was my sole excuse.

Wet though I was she nestled up to me. "How I do love you in draggled silk pyjamas," she murmured. "Do, do put your arms round me. You look so disreputable with your hair like that. All your parting's gone. And, oh! how strong and sinewy you are. Oh! Jerry you *are* a joy. I know a statue in the Luxembourg just like you."

"I'm a wonderful chap altogether," I remarked.

"You are," agreed Ursula, adoringly. "And you've no idea how splendid it is to have found a Hermes for my very own."

"Oh, haven't I?" I asked.

"Have you?"

Her tone expressed such a whimsical little doubt of her own beauties that I kissed every part of her that was not clothed as an ancient Briton, knees, and shoulders and lips—the dear red curves of her lips.

"Oh!" she gasped.

"Oh God!" said I.

We sat and looked at the purling pool.

"I was *so* afraid you might think I wasn't pretty," she confessed presently. "I mean when you saw me like this; especially after all those stories you'd told me about other women. You're such a dreadful artist, Jerry. I love you for it, of course, but it's no use pretending that

such things don't matter, because they do. They matter very much to people like you. And me too," she added. "Bodies ought to be lovely, I think, don't you? I'm so glad ours are. And we've got nice minds inside them, haven't we? Wouldn't it be dreadful to have horrid minds? I should think one could never be happy."

"Are you happy?" I asked.

"I feel just as if I'd been drinking champagne in heaven," she said ecstatically. "Don't you?"

"Pretty much," I answered.

"I feel that the kingdom of heaven is within me," exclaimed Ursula. "I feel I'm there."

"You're in a field, you gipsy," I said. "Look at your things lying all over the grass."

"But the wonderful thing is that they *are* lying all over the grass," said Ursula, "and I'm sitting here like this not minding a bit. Yet if anyone had told me when I got up this morning that in a few hours I should be bathing alone with a man I didn't know I think I should have died with shame at the bare thought. It's the naturalness of it all which is so amazing."

"But, darling girl, that's how it ought to be."

"Yes, I know."

"We've had luck, that's all. Most people don't."

"And I suppose, really, it's their own fault."

It's because they're—what's the word I want ? ”

“ Hide-bound,” I suggested.

“ Yes. Hide-bound. Afraid of being themselves. Every one of them just exactly alike. How thankful I am I'm a little different and that this is in my character.”

“ Everything is in your character that matters a continental damn,” I muttered.

“ Or even an English damn,” smiled Ursula, “ considering that's why you spoke to me at all.”

“ Blackguard,” I said. “ How dare I ? ”

“ *What* a blessing you did,” said Ursula, fervently.

I fell to musing over the several women I might have mercilessly married. What a debt they owed to me for not having done so. What happiness I must have caused them, ultimately, by my restraint. Men slip so easily, so inconsiderately into marriage, misled by qualities that soon must leave them cold, so blind are they in the gay, brief, flickering light of romance. I recalled more than one impossible She who had angled, it seemed to me, for my own nibble ; one, in particular, whose “ goodness ” had, for the time, attracted me, eliminating to some extent the drawbacks with which she was endowed. She had belonged to that prolific class of whom it is said that they will make good wives. A detestable phrase conveying to me now a picture of

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desolating dullness ; of gentle undistinguished women whose ideals are in jam-pots and Even-song, whose conversation is "yea yea and nay nay" and silly little bits of gossip about the weather and the Dean. That is all, or very nearly. And their setting is a brick residence which would probably be named "The Firs," in which there would be no place, large though the house might be, for the imaginative quality. The imagination would be misunderstood, frowned upon, vetoed, ruled out, and, if exercised, would in time breed discord and ill will.

"I see you are in one of your *queer* moods, to-day, John," one's life partner would remark frostily. A sniff, and out she would go with never a sparkle, shopping.

That, probably, is more or less the line upon which the conversation would run whenever one sought for a little intellectual response in a moment of enthusiasm. Love, of course, would perish and in time life would be no longer endurable together. Honourable desertion would then be the only course left open. To remain would be immoral, a concession to physical ease and the prejudices of a person who existed to keep one warm and order food because she was unfitted for anything else. One's mental needs would go forever unwatered ; one's soul would be in splints. What an escape had been mine when an attack

"And now, more water," she cried, giving me a final hug. "This baptismal rite must be resumed. Which tree is it? That one?"

"For goodness' sake be careful, star of my soul," I begged; "and on no account disfigure your beloved little nose. I've pitched a perfect brewery-full of bottles into this very pool myself, and there may be others. I don't suppose I am the only thirsty child who has picnicked here."

"Pooh," laughed Ursula. "I'm not going to damage my beloved little nose. I'm far too proud of it. Do you think I'm going to touch bottom? People like me don't. The star of your soul has no intention of setting yet."

"In you go then," I said. "Put your foot in my hand. Up she goes. Excelsior."

I helped her up the tree and watched her as she steadied herself on the bough ten feet above the water; then, with a laugh she dived and cut the water clean, like a knife slipping into warm oil. Peering down I could just see her ghostlike and slim—lying motionless. For a second the world stood still, then I was down by her side trying with all my might to get my arms round her. We rose as I trod water like a madman, and I struggled to the shore. She was just breathing, I thought, as I laid her down and I could see no mark on her. With a horrible fear I did the first

aids to the drowning and stupid irrelevant ideas came crowding into my mind. Whatever should make me think of Gibbon's Roman Empire at such a moment I don't know, but I did think of it; whole passages swarmed in front of me as I laboured to bring her back to life; then I saw a tiny scratch on her throat and I could think of nothing better to do than kiss the blood away. I listened for her breathing but all I could hear was my own heart beating like a drum, and presently its thumping changed into blurred tunes. Tunes! and she lay there dying, slipping away from me. Then I recognized that the melody was the Dead March *motif* distorted by a relentless metronome that was my own heart. It was driving me mad. I shouted and my shouts answered me. There was no one to help. How could I make her breathe? I turned her on her face and let the water run out of her throat and then again I laboured clumsily at artificial respiration. I drew her round arms over her head and pressed them back against her sides a hundred times, until at last she breathed naturally. Then I sat and gibbered like a lunatic. I could do no more. I could only wait for her to open her eyes and when she opened them I almost fainted. She lay and looked at me and presently she spoke. The reaction was just a little more than I could stand. In a moment her arms were round me, and she

was crooning and murmuring over me like a mother, pressing my cheek against her shoulder, rocking me to and fro, and telling me "not to mind."

"I should have been just the same if it had been you," she said.

She had come to life and taken in the whole situation at a glance.

"Was I heavy?" she asked.

"Damned heavy," I gibbered, clinging to her hysterically.

"It's a judgment on us for this mixed bathing."

"What happened?" I asked.

"Hit my head," she laughed. "Such a bump. Kiss the place and make it well."

I did so.

"Now I'm going to do that dive again," she remarked, presently.

I held her back with all my might. "You shan't," I said fiercely. "You shall not."

"Jerry, if you try to stop me, I'll divorce you," she cried. "This is a matter of character. If I were to let myself be beaten by—Why, you wouldn't own me, would you?"

"No," I said, after a moment, as I looked at her. This was the true brand of pluck, I reflected. To leave the hospital at the first possible moment in order to return to the battlefield. I saw in my

mind's eye the mother of my sons, and I wanted them all to be born in jack-boots. I let her go.

"Do your dive," I said; "I'll go first."

"Ah," she cried, "you're just the boy I take you for."

I dived in from the bough and watched her as she scrambled up the tree. Then she dived, curved through the air like a swallow and came up beside me shaking the water out of her hair and laughing. She was always laughing.

"No snags this time," she cried. "Now waltz with me."

"No, you lead me too much of a dance ashore," I said. "Ten minutes ago you were unconscious, you miraculous girl. Go away, you uncanny little mermaid. Stop it!"

But she had me by the shoulders and down I went, spluttering.

"Fairly and properly ducked for cheek," she laughed, as I came up and went for her; but she was not to be caught. Once I just got hold of her by the toe but she wriggled away like an electrified eel.

"I won't play," I cried. "I believe you've got a tail!"

"No, I haven't," she laughed. "There's no end to me."

Then she proceeded to gyrate about in a way that must have made the grandchildren of the

fish I had caught there in my youth fairly ashamed of themselves by comparison.

"Out you come," I ordered at length. "You shan't have cramp on your wedding day."

"True," she remarked, climbing on to the bank obediently. "The thing should be spacious and big; I won't cramp it. What about getting dry? Shall I have to pitch myself about in the sun?"

I gave her the towel I had brought and it was I subsequently, who "pitched myself about in the sun" as I had done there often before, more often, probably, than not, though I could recall vaguely the helpful but inadequate pocket-handkerchief upon occasion. I sought and found one now.

Ursula was standing by the water's edge drying her heaven of hair with the background of sighing forestry behind her. Never had I seen a thing so beautiful. A warm susurrus of sound came drifting over the meadows across the pool as I watched her arms glinting like white marble in the sun.

"To have and to hold; to have and to hold," they said.

Then it came to me in a flash that she belonged to me, that she was mine and I was hers; in our existence there was a purpose and a law. Life murmured in the forest, in the grasses, in the reeds, and Life, triumphant, irresistible Life was

drawing us close and with every heart beat closer still into the blazing wake of unconquerable, inexorable intention.

Then a bird sang its love call in the wood and she turned to me. I only saw her eyes. In their depths there was a message that only I could read; for me only was it written; no other man could decipher the mysteries of that sublime unspoken speech.

Her arms stole round me, and with a sigh softer than the sound of muted flutes she drew my whole soul to her own untroubled lips sweeter than honey in the honeycomb, and in that long surrendering kiss a veil was riven and we touched infinity.

The shadows lengthened imperceptibly; the crescendo had culminated and trembled back into silence. My mate, my bride had smiled herself across the ages to my side and found me waiting there to meet her. Our forbears had existed so that this supreme thing should occur, her creation and mine; as we in our turn existed, so that we too might hand on the burning torch along the lines of time. And there, far from churches and creeds a cry broke in my heart, under the wide high arch of heaven.

Domine non sum dignus.

But a tremendous joy shook me in the plumb centre of my soul.

PART II



PART II

" I am named and known by that moment's feat ;
There took my station and degree ;
So grew my own small life complete,
As nature obtained her best of me.
One born to love you, sweet ! "

I CANNOT gauge or define the transcendent images that surged through me, through us both, as we sat there dreaming while the sunlight laughed along the water. Language ended. A veil had been whisked aside ; our outlook would have a new horizon henceforward. For the moment Ursula seemed hypnotized, as I was, by the unpremeditated mastery of circumstance. Life took a new shape and a new colour. Its magnitude now in that far away meadow was to be considered not in its relation to external displacements and affairs but in the light of subjective experience. The absoluteness of possession and of unity dominated everything. I was conscious only of a linking up of detached ends and fragments, of a condition that was absolutely worship. It seemed impossible that it could be of physical origin, that such an emotion, so spiritualized and so ethereal could have its

roots in earth or be temporal. Such a thought seemed indecent. I felt a wild joy, a wave of confused, inarticulate, unutterable adoration.

Ursula's gold hair drifted across my face, her head rested on my shoulder and her hand was on my knee. From time to time little thrills trembled through her, but when I looked at her she was smiling without a trace of regret or of fear, and her eyes seemed "enamelled in fire." Indeed, a very spirit glowed over her and for me she created all things new. The very air was "coined into song"; every bird on every bush and tree sang to my heart and soul. In giving herself to me she had given me to myself promising an immensity of fulfilment. Such was the power of the dayspring from on high that had visited us.

"Say something," I said clumsily.

She moved from my shoulder and clasped her hands round her knee. She became human again, a tangible personality. I had broken the spell.

"How can I?" she said after a moment. "It won't go into words. It seems almost sacrilege to speak—yet."

Then she lay back against my shoulder.

"How much religion there is that is not to be found in churches," she said, presently, "don't *you* feel that? I feel I'm in touch with some

wonderful immensity. And to think that you and I should have crept out of the muddle of things and met when half the people in the world never meet—and nearly always miss," she added dreamily.

But the "muddle of things" was no muddle, I reflected, even though half the people in the world did indeed seem never to meet and nearly always to miss. There was a law in chaos. To us the surprise lay in the fact that we had met, had met and mated so inevitably, so naturally. Its very simplicity made it seem complex.

"What *does* it mean?" asked Ursula, "what can it possibly mean? It must mean something. Something must *be* because of it, something more than . . ."

But I found no answer. I was concerned only with her. I accepted the immensity without question, without attempting to define it, or to give it a name. Its name, if it had one, didn't matter in the least. She only mattered. My interest was centred in her. Whatever it might be she was its symbol. She satisfied merely by being what she was and to have and to hold was enough.

"You *must* put your arms round me," I said; "Make me believe that you are not a dream girl."

"I'm quite real," she laughed, "if you *must*

come back to earth. Doesn't that seem real?" she said, as she kissed me.

"No, not a bit," I answered. "A feather from an angel's wing happened to drop on my lips, that's all."

"Even that doesn't happen to everybody," remarked Ursula. Then she sneezed.

"There's no question about the reality of that," she laughed. "Are you awake yet? Oh, I'm going to sneeze again. How . . . un-un-romantic. I'm quite back on earth, aren't you? It must be the hay."

"I'm coming back to it by degrees," I said, "but somehow it's quite a different earth."

"Quite," said Ursula, "and on earth it feels very much like lunch time."

I got up and foraged for sandwiches and claret.

"You've seen and heard a good deal about my beginnings," I remarked; "suppose you enlighten me with some of yours. A man should know something of his wife's past history; among the best people it is quite usual. Who are you?"

"Myself," said Ursula, "always. Did you think I was a pale reflection?"

"If I ever harboured the illusion it is quite dispelled," I answered.

"And you want to know how I come to be what I am?" enquired Ursula.

"A few facts might assist the digestion of my

sandwich, not to mention my digestion of you," I replied.

"The sandwiches would certainly be improved by the fact of a little more mustard," said Ursula.

"My housekeeper," I remarked. "We'll sack her."

"As for me," continued Ursula, "I don't know, I'm sure. I have had parents, of course, though I only remember one. My mother died when I was three and all I know about her is that she had pretty hands and knew Greek. In my mind I've always made up the rest of her picture from that. I don't think she could housekeep very well, and I'm sure she couldn't do 'mending' or wear ugly hats. She looked nice by instinct; I'm sure she did, without ever bothering about her clothes. Some people do. Of course she was a lady or the Irascible couldn't have married her."

"The Irascible."

"Dad."

"Oh, I see. And how many of you are there, and why do you call him that?"

"There was Imogen and Irene and me. Imogen's dead; she married a curate; and the Irascible's dead too. He died six years ago, poor darling. I don't know why we called him the Irascible, I'm sure. He wasn't that a bit. I think it was just because we loved him and had to tease him a little."

“And you and your sisters were all babies together? Who brought you up?”

“Oh, we did that ourselves,” said Ursula, “and we all turned out charming. We had no aunts to damp us down you see; that’s why I’m so nice—one reason. Any ordinary aunt would have tried to make us like other people, instead of letting us be ourselves. I’m glad we had no aunts.”

“On the whole I’m not sorry myself,” I said, “but go on telling me about your babyhood. Where did you live?”

“Oh, just wherever the Irascible took it into his head to take us. Italy, Paris, Egypt, and sometimes in England. Once we lived in a lovely old house with peacocks and a moat, a sort of family place, you know. The kind of house that has lawns and prayers before breakfast and dogs. It was lent to us by relations. He was a student, you see; that’s why we travelled about so; he deciphered screeds and inscriptions on old tombs where the writing is in animals and all upside down. An Egyptian tomb was his delight, poor darling; and now he is in his own. I think he was a little mad. Just nicely mad, you know; gentle, and forgetting things like neckties. He used to look splendid against rocks bellowing at guides. He was big and loose and shaggy like a Rodin model. When our governesses complained

about us he used to bellow at them. I can hear him now. All he ever said was, 'Teach 'em how to blow their noses and keep their finger nails clean.' He knew we could educate ourselves, I suppose, and it's much the best way. We didn't have very many governesses; they wouldn't stop; we couldn't be bothered with them. The last one we had tried to marry him. Irene found it out first. She found her trying to help him with some proof sheets and pretending she knew all about tombs. Irene said she distinctly heard her telling him that she adored mummies, and of course we all agreed that that was too much, so we investigated. It was when we were living in the place with the moat and the peacocks. We talked it over, Irene, Imogen and I, sitting on the wall of the moat, and of course we knew that the governess woman would have to go, but we decided to be perfectly fair. So Irene went and fetched her and we made her sit on the wall while we charged her with it. I charged her. Irene said: 'My sister has something to say to you, Miss Adams from the High School!' Irene's tongue was awful. Even the Irascible used to squirm sometimes, but whenever she was sarcastic to him she was answerable to me afterwards. I always thumped her because I wouldn't have him bothered. He was too sweet, much. So Irene caught it from me. Well,

about Miss Adams. I said: 'Look here, Miss Adams, we think you are trying to make love to our father, which is indecent, and we won't have it.'

"She said, 'Oh, Ursula, how can you!'

"So then I said if she really was in love with him we meant to make her prove it, and to put her to the test. First she would have to jump into the moat and after that finish up a glass of milk which the Irascible had left—out of the same glass. We thought if she could do all that she must really be in love with him, and perhaps we would let her go on because she would be heroic. You see the Irascible had a shaggy moustache, and it used to get into rather a state sometimes after soup and things, because he was forgetful and always thinking about toms—and he smoked a good deal too. Of course, Miss Adams wouldn't do it. She said we were horrid, cruel tomboys, and she wished she had never seen us and our stupid old father. Then Irene said it was quite unnecessary for her to be rude to us and that we had every right to protect our father from calculating women and she said Miss Adams might either retract and apologise or be thrown into the moat. Well, of course, she wouldn't apologise, and she said we daren't throw her into the moat, because it would be murder. Irene said we had no wish to kill her, but only to teach her a lesson.

Then Miss Adams began to get down from the wall and Irene called out: 'Stop her, Ursula!' So I stopped her, and we threw her into the moat. It wasn't deep, of course, but she screamed and flopped about until one of the gardeners came and got her out with a ladder. In the end, of course, she went away, and the Irascible had us up to explain. I sat on his knee and Irene sat on the arm of his chair with her arm round his neck. Imogen wasn't there. She had to lie down a great deal because of her anæmia. We told the Irascible we hadn't done it in anger, but only from a sense of responsibility and because, being a man, he didn't know about women like we did. He said: 'My dears, my dears, you needn't have been troubled. I shall never marry . . . again.' And his eyes got wet. Well, that was the end of our governesses. After that nobody brought us up, but I don't see that it has mattered much, especially now I've found you. Irene is married to a man in the Lancers. She's a lovely thing, but her tongue is too awful. Two years ago I went out to stop with her in India. I hated it, and I hated India. Everyone wants to marry you, and they're all exactly alike; they're all just the same type dressed a little differently, that's all. In fact, you're the only understanding person I've ever met. I just looked at you once and life changed. Just sup-

pose you hadn't spoken to me. Wouldn't it have been . . . Well, I can't bear to think about it."

"Your bringing up accounts for you to some extent," I remarked. "But I expect you would have been you even if you had suffered from aunts. The only difference would have been that the aunts might have died comparatively young. Irene sounds wearing, from the point of view of an orthodox aunt. Good heavens! how I do love you, Ursula. It keeps coming over me in waves."

"So it does me," cried Ursula delightedly. "Will it always, do you think? Oh, do say you think it will always."

"Of course it will, you adorable atom. Haven't you conclusively proved to me that this honeymoon is never going to end?"

"Yes," said Ursula, "of course. Atom, though. Do I quite like that?"

"You like everything I say and do," I replied. "I simply can't do anything wrong. I am as near perfection as a man on earth can be."

"Quite true," said Ursula. "It's absolutely true, every word of it," and she sighed with unmixed content.

Lunch was proceeding most successfully. Ursula looked like an angel who had shopped in Paris and having done so had become a little bored with her clothes. There was an unstudied

deshabille about her altogether picturesque and dainty ; a hook didn't meet here and a button declined to meet a buttonhole there, and from time to time the breeze conspired with her blouse to exhibit an incomparable anatomy.

"We really are beside the waters of comfort, Jerry," remarked Ursula. "And what ripping claret this is. Where do you get it?"

"It certainly is a gentleman's tippie," I admitted, as she passed me the flask, and I drank where her lips had touched the silver rim. "I get it from a wine merchant, not from a grocer ; remember that when you are installed."

"Thank you ; I know a headache when I see the cork," said Ursula, demurely. "I think you'll have to be a J.P. and grow roses, Jerry. I think the life would suit your temperament."

"The idea seems sound," I admitted, "and sufficiently slothful."

"All my ideas are sound," said Ursula. "More claret, man, please."

She sipped it thoughtfully. "Brewed by angels," she remarked.

"Brewed *for* an angel," I corrected.

"Carpet knight," she laughed.

But behind this surface chatter there was the depth of understanding that makes irresponsibility possible ; the swift responsiveness that doubles the sense of life ; the divining answering

intelligence that allows of silences and makes communion more complete.

Life was no game to Ursula, for all her gaiety ; or if it was a game it was a very direct one played with a few simple principles. Her play, her resources were all above the board ; subterfuge was impossible to her. And love was, for her, a sacred inviolate selection ; there was no flaw implied or apparent in her refinement, her modesty, her faithfulness or her high breeding. She was as natural as a flower.

"I'm one long infinite prayer," she said presently. "I never felt so sure of myself in all my life, and the queer thing is that I don't feel the smallest compunction, but only a blissful satisfaction. Yet if to-day had been prophesied to me yesterday, I should have denied the bare possibility of it as long as I could breathe. What *is* virtue, Jerry ? Is it simply a convention after all ?"

"It has been said," I answered, "that woman's virtue is man's greatest invention."

"Really I think it must be," said Ursula. "An invention I mean ; because, well, look at this. Nothing could look or sound more outrageous than we have been, yet *really* it isn't outrageous at all, intrinsically. How *can* it be ? I believe those things are only names and catch words. I mean—well, a few prayers said over us, and

banns, and knowing each other longer than we have wouldn't have made any *essential* difference. They wouldn't have made things holier—to *us*. In fact, it wouldn't have been holy at all, but just ordinary and trite. But if all that means virtue, well——”

“Virtue is a matter of motives,” I interrupted, “not of events.”

“I think that must be it,” she mused, “because it would be quite impossible for me to feel more uplifted than I do now. I feel—oh, darling, I want to bear pain for you, live for you, die for you, do anything for you. I'm your woman, and you are my man.”

And so we dreamed our dreams as the hour glass of the too short day ran down. Sometimes I kissed her with long kisses while the heavens halted and the world marked time till she begged me not to kill her with happiness. Life was being too good to her, she said. She had only asked for a stone and it was giving her bread—and butter. We should have to pay for it, she was sure. There must be some awful law of compensation that would exact disproportionate payment and interest. But these dire forebodings did not prevent her from executing gay little sketches of life in my society.

“Furnishing! Just think of it, Jerry. Furnishing with you!”

“Quite ecstatic,” I agreed, “and probably very expensive.”

But she scouted the idea of expense. She devised a little tour in a large motor and the tour was to be a tour of old towns with lovely names, and, I supposed, no sanitation whatsoever. It all sounded too mediæval for hygiene. But no Hebrew dealers dealt in any of them. I gathered that the dealers, for the most part, would be appreciative creatures whose pleasure it would be almost to present us with their wares, and, in any event, the knowledge was Ursula's that would confound them all if they showed the smallest instinct towards a profit or attempted to negotiate the spurious antique. She was up to all their tricks. She knew her Chippendale and Sheraton, her pewter and her delft ; and she knew how they bored their sham wormholes and let old “marks” into new silver, the wretches. No Jacobean “bits” with deal insides for her on this Utopian tour of real old oak and copper warming pans and little ducks of jugs and china plates.

“At all events, we should avoid the sham mediævalism of Regent Street,” she said.

She had a clear idea of what she wanted in the matter of chairs and tables. Tables! There was to be one in particular where she herself, perhaps, one day would sit, the calm and placid mother of children (the loveliest blush here) dis-

pensing porridge in the teeth, or rather in the gums, of opposition. "They must have porridge," she said, "because it gives them bone, like puppies." Bone was indispensable. "Or else they won't be any use," she remarked, "even with such parents as you and me behind them. Not that they will ever be ill," she continued, "except measles and cuts, because I shall love them too much to let them."

"Much in the matter of our domestic happiness will depend on the manner in which you darn my socks," I remarked. "Should there be lumps where all should be smooth, I cannot say what may not occur. There is a devil in every tortured man. An error in the reconstruction of a sock might jeopardise a hitherto happy home, so let your 'mending' be considered well."

Could she ever be fat and forty? I wondered, as I looked at her in all the tender gracious beauty of youth. Never. And even if she were, she would be my wife. My wife! with "courage, gaiety and the quiet mind!" as dauntless as a queen in a revolution, loyal to her caste, a peerless fearless woman.

"It must be a gate-legged table—to hold four," she mused.

"Four?" I said. "Why four?"

"You and me and the children," she answered.

"Oh, there are two children," I said. "I see."

"A boy and a girl," she remarked.

"Thank you," I said. "What are their names?"

"Billy and Helen," she answered.

"Are they nice children?" I asked.

"Angelic," said Ursula.

"You think I shall like them?"

"I am sure you will," she replied, "and they'll simply adore you."

"That I can understand," I answered.

"How old will they be?" I enquired.

"Their ages will change from year to year," said Ursula. "At first they will be quite young, then they will be older."

"Just like other children," I remarked.

"No," said Ursula, very firmly, "not in the least like other children."

"That pleases me," I said. "I am glad they will not be noisy."

"The subject is closed," said Ursula.

"For the moment," I observed.

"But surely the table will never go into the car," I said presently.

"Tables don't. Only people go into cars."

"But you said it was to be a large car. I thought by that you meant——"

"I meant that I prefer large cars to small ones. Large cars are more imposing."

"Oh, I see; it was mere snobbery on your part."

"Not snobbery at all," she cried. "But when you have a large car they give you better rooms at the hotel."

"Your point is well taken. I had confused worldly ease with ostentation; the two things are distinct."

"Quite," said Ursula. "I, for instance, am much at my ease now, but I have no wish to be seen—except by you."

"I should think not," I remarked, as I considered her costume.

"I want my tea in a cottage, Jerry," she said presently. "Do you know of one where they have roses and honeysuckle over the porch and a notice says 'Teas! Teas! Teas!'"

"I feel sure the locality is equal to the strain," I answered.

"But how splendid," cried Ursula. "You fail me in nothing, Jerry. You've saved my life, and now you're going to give me my tea in a cottage where roses and honeysuckle grow over the porch."

"Yes," I remarked. "Altogether I'm a wonderful chap."

"You are," cried Ursula fervently.

"Praise me," I said. "Nobody ever has."

"The wretches," she muttered.

"Who?" I asked.

"The people who haven't ever praised you," she replied.

"You've quite caught the idea," I said. "Continue in that vein."

She continued in that vein for some time.

"May I bathe again?" she asked presently, when the vein had been to some extent exhausted.

"Do let me. I feel like a warm apple."

"To me you seem far more like a woman than an apple," I remarked, "but I see the connection. Bathe."

In a moment she was in the water and once more her beauty took me by the throat as I saw her shake the water out of her burnished hair. I was obliged to kiss her feet—her perfect feet.

"I don't believe God made things lovely, if he didn't mean them to be seen," remarked Ursula dispassionately. "Why don't we put petticoats on trees and bodices on cucumbers?"

"The poor things are not made in the image of God," I remarked.

"And because we are we cover ourselves up," she observed. "I cannot see why a melon should be given the sun while I am given the cold shoulder."

Her eye suddenly fell upon my flask. "Oh," she cried, "there's a cockroach in it, Jerry."

The interloper! Pitch him out. Kill him for daring to profane it. Why, I do believe he's drunk," she remarked, staring critically at the cockroach as I emptied him upon the grass. "Look at him waving his arms and legs about. Jerry, really he's had a drop too much. He ought to have some Worcester sauce to get him right. Isn't that what you use? Don't kill him. Let him sleep off his liquor like a gentleman."

She pushed the cockroach under a buttercup. "Instead of a table," she remarked.

"Well, you seem to know all about it," I observed. "Whence comes this knowledge of the grape?"

"Perhaps I was a barmaid in a former life," she suggested.

"I wonder if I ever met you in a former life and called you 'Miss'?" I wondered. "Every barmaid I've ever——"

"Jerry! you don't really mean to tell me you——"

"No," I said firmly, "I do not. Most decidedly not. I should think not, indeed. Never, at any time. How could you think it of me? If there is any class of——"

"Don't overdo it, darling," said Ursula.

So we talked of other things.

Before we could go in search of the cottage with picture postcards accessories it was necessary,

I found, to mend her back tyre, which had again punctured.

Ursula regarded it as a supreme test of devotion. She sat on the grass and made herself a daisy chain and said I was simply heavenly.

"Have you ever been called 'heavenly' before?" she asked.

I assured her I had not, and I had been called many things. I had had experience with epithet one way and another, but I had never been called heavenly or anything approaching it.

"Then it's high time you were," said Ursula.

"In that opinion I am with you," I remarked. "Go on running your fingers through my hair. I like it."

"It would be even nicer for you if you had the tiniest bit more hair," she said mournfully. "Can nothing be done?"

"Nothing," I said firmly. "Not even for you will I walk the earth again smelling like a deficient lamp. I refuse and decline, absolutely. I have done it—once, without the smallest effect and at a great expense." For, once I had submitted to the liars of the scalp who had promised hairy health; scented bottles for weeks had been my bane; my fair white pillow-cases had reeked as from contact with the Esquimaux oozing with whale. But never again should a bottle deceive

me. I would fight to the last follicle before I surrendered my—my bald to the further indignities of grease. In good round terms I said all this to Ursula.

“But have you ever tried castor oil?” she asked.

“Castor oil! On my scalp! No!” I almost shrieked. “Nor otherwise!” I added, “since early youth.”

The words castor oil awoke awful memories, memories of jam that had been tampered with, and bribes that had been put forward to induce one to eat of the aforesaid tampered jam, bribes that were totally inadequate—considering. Even though one submitted to the medicated spoon, in the long run one always resented it; one felt it should have carried twopence at the least as a reward. There are jams so vividly associated in my mind with powder that I cannot look them in the face to this day with any gastronomic pleasure. Raspberry jam will taste of “Gregory” until I go to my long home.

Ursula continued to draw her fingers through my hair, soothingly. In places my hair is luxuriant. I am as Esau—in places. From time to time I noticed that her slim fingers paused, just paused in other places, imperceptibly almost, but long enough for the thought to strike me that she was “getting her own back” because I

refused to use any more hairwash. That cheeky little pause said far more clearly than words: "This is the place, here, just here, and it will become bigger and rounder and larger until——"

"Then let it," cried an outraged rebel within me, "but I will no more be oiled."

The prophecy lurking in that pause has been fulfilled. It *is* bigger and rounder and larger now—but I have escaped grease. I have held out, as a man should, against bottles. Sometimes the future final stage of all obtrudes itself. Specifically, this occurs when a chance raindrop catches me without a hat. At such times I know what I have lost—and I shall lose more still. The time will come, must come, when the chance raindrop will insist upon recognition and demand to be wiped or it will trickle down the neck. And there will be dreadful days, warm summer days when all the world looks young, except one hairless outcast who avoids the sun and furtively mops. And, at its highest point, my skull will shine and reflect light, and flies will be persistent and far too familiar, and I shall wish I had been a poet or an actor; for poets always have more hair (and more poetry) than they can do with, and actors don't matter except to themselves. But I shall wish I had served my scalp as faithfully as I have served my king.

"Just come back to earth for a moment, darling," said Ursula. "I want to consult you."

I came back to earth in the twinkling of an eye, as they say, and found two troubled eyes regarding me with all the twinkle gone out of them.

"Whatever is it?" I asked, quite alarmed.

"I can hardly tell you, it's so tragic," she answered.

"I am a strong man," I said, "muscular and hardy; be it rain or shine I will win through."

"Well then," she began, "hold my hand while I tell you."

I held her hand. I more than held it. It seemed to me to be well to brace myself against the approaching crisis.

"Now," I said, "tell me the worst. I am a strong man, muscular and hardy; be it rain or——"

"Don't," she interrupted. "You've said that once."

"I'm always saying it. It's a splendid thing to be able to say."

"What I wanted to tell you was this," continued Ursula. "I left my home to-day a spinster."

"It does seem strange," I admitted. "When I look at you I can scarcely credit it, yet I believe it to be true."

"It was," said Ursula, "and I sleep in a single bed."

"Single bed," I repeated, feeling that some comment was expected of me.

"One of those Chippendale looking beds," said Ursula; "not really Chippendale, of course; still, it's better than brass."

"Much better," I agreed. "Have we come to the tragedy yet, or are we debating a side issue?"

"A side issue," replied Ursula. "The tragedy is that you can't sleep in it," she said mournfully.

"But I wouldn't dream of doing such a thing," I cried. "Whoever heard of a man sleeping in a side issue? I'd rather sleep in a cave. What do you take me for?"

"I took you for better or worse," answered Ursula, "and now I'm married to you, naturally I don't want to be parted from you even—even after sunset."

We had reached the kernel of the situation and things were radically wrong; the times, undeniably, were out of joint. I said so. I developed the idea. I got into the condition of men who write to the papers.

"But what is to be done?" asked Ursula.

Then I came forward with suggestions. Many of them I thought were very helpful, but she

condemned them all. They were all unsatisfactory, she said, though one I knew to be heroic.

"I could sleep on the floor," I said, "even though it is not done and would look singular."

"But I won't *be* singular," cried Ursula with spirit. "That's just it. I want to be thoroughly plural. Where do you live, Jerry?"

"I live in lodgings," I said, "until I go to heaven or live with you. In the meantime I too sleep in a single bed. I left my home a bachelor and my housekeeper thinks I am a gentleman, so if I——"

"Oh, that's no use," said Ursula. "It wouldn't be any bigger than mine."

"And it is brass," I explained. "It doesn't even look like Chippendale. It looks like nothing on earth."

"I wonder if the servants *would* leave?" queried Ursula.

"Servants are very frequently devout," I said. "Some of them might never have heard of the seventh commandment, judging by the things they say in court."

"There are nine others, aren't there?" asked Ursula.

"Servants?"

"No. Commandments!"

"Ah, there you have me. I believe there is

one relating to murder ; the others I fancy are not in use."

" The servants would have to give me a month's notice in any case," said Ursula, " even if they jibbed, and they might not jib. Besides, long before the month was up we could have our marriage lines stuck up in the hall in a little frame, couldn't we? They'd look awful fools then. How long does it take to get married, in a way that one can talk about? "

Here I was a broken reed. I didn't know. I hadn't ever been married. But I knew several men who said they were at the bar and I determined to ask them. My impression was that the law could be made to hustle if one paid it enough. I thought a week ought to be enough to marry anybody in.

" Then I think that's what we'll do," said Ursula, " on account of the servants. It would be a pity to have them giving notice merely for the sake of a marriage certificate. In the meantime——"

" The single bed," I remarked.

It may have been the sunset or it may have been imagination or it may really have been a blush ; in any case it was awfully pretty. I am almost sure it was a blush.

" It must be obvious to you that I can't be parted from you even for a moment," remarked

Ursula. "I simply couldn't bear it; besides, there is heart disease in my family, and under affliction it would be almost certain to declare itself."

"That, of course, must not be allowed to happen," I said.

"Change of air hurts no one," said Ursula tentatively.

"There is a little hotel in Sussex——" I began.

"I know of one where all the walls are of panelled oak," said Ursula. "The dinner is quite good and when they want fires they drag in half a tree and burn it whole."

"That seems as if——"

"I think so," said Ursula. "So to-morrow you must talk to some lawyers," she continued, "and you shall wear my gage while you fight them. I'll give you a little piece of my hair. Wouldn't that help you?"

"I could have won Waterloo with it," I said.

"I expect that's how Nelson did win it," she remarked, "with a little souvenir of Lady Hamilton's."

"Surely you must be thinking of Agincourt," I suggested.

"Am I? Very likely," she answered. "But you see the idea."

"Quite," I answered. "Shall we proceed towards our 'Teas! Teas! Teas!'"

"Yes," she cried, "let's. I'm just in the mood. I should like our cuckoo to burble once more before we go. Do you think he would if you went over there and shoo'd?"

"I don't know," I answered doubtfully. "This particular bird is a stranger to me. He may be a mere egg-wrecker, but if he has the least feeling for the fitness of things he will hoot even without being asked."

And, after a moment, hoot he did. He might have been a cuckoo clock.

"A perfect gentleman," cried Ursula, "not to say an artist. I do wish we had some crumbs."

"No artist should expect more," I said. "Nobody really wants us."

"I want you, at all events; and now I am going to propitiate the gods by a sacrificial rite," she remarked, as she emptied her purse on the grass.

"There. I won't keep a penny of it. Seven pounds odd."

"Quite odd," I agreed, "and quite charming. If I wasn't on my honeymoon I'd do the same thing myself; but I must keep enough money for our 'Teas! Teas! Teas!'"

"It isn't such a bad wedding fee, is it?" asked Ursula, looking at the little pile of coins.

"Too good for the unappreciative cow who will probably devour it. It will merely upset the milk of bovine kindness."

"Nonsense!" cried Ursula. "It will be found by some nice labourer plodding home, or by the village Hampden, and it will help to compensate him for his lost political career. I think I must leave a little note beside it to explain. Have you a pocket book, Jerry, and a pencil?"

I said I had heaps of pocket books every Christmas and on most of my birthdays.

"But haven't you one with you?"

"No," I said sternly, "certainly not. Never, by any chance."

Then I looked away and waited for the inevitable. It came. I knew it would; even from Ursula.

"But a pocket book would be so *useful* to you." She emphasised the word useful.

"Yes," I answered doggedly, "I know."

I never argue the point now. I have found it better in the long run always to acquiesce. Nothing will ever stem the tide of pocket books; argument is useless, the broadest hints too narrow. As I got into years I began to realise that there is a point where the male must abide mentally alone, where his nearest and dearest cannot follow him. From his solitude far above he looks down, as it were, and sees them, sisters, mothers, wives, aunts, standing there with gifts in their kind hands that will obsess his peace; with pocket books and pen-wipers and almanacs, even with

tobacco pouches and purses ; but when it comes to purses the tragedy is great indeed.

" Surely you have a pencil," said Ursula.

" Oh yes," I answered, feeling in every pocket, " I've got a pencil somewhere."

" And a piece of paper ? "

" Yes," I said, " I've got a piece of paper." I gave her an excellent half sheet torn off a letter.

" Surely a pocket book would be far easier and neater ? "

" Yes," I said. " Yes, of course it would."

They don't understand.

Some day Ursula will give me a pocket book. There may even be an inscription on it, or my initials, or both, and I shall find it as " a surprise " on my breakfast plate, though nothing would surprise me less. Then I shall kiss her and thank her and pretend how awfully I like it. I shall say that this is *really* a pocket book, the sort of pocket book worth having, a pocket book with no humbug about it. God save the mark ! And she will be so pleased and delighted and will tell me how she alternated in her choice between this pocket book and that, before she could really make up her mind which one I should prefer ; then she will think of something for me to write in it to " start it with," and I shall do even that, concealing the real tragedy of the thing behind an artificial smile. For a time it will cumber my

pockets. At first I shall take it out quite often and search for a stamp in its difficult recess to show her how useful it is, and then a day will come when the monstrous thing will annoy me past endurance and I shall deliberately drop it down a drain and pretend I have lost it. I shall look for it "everywhere" and she will help me, and I shall think of her face on the day she gave it to me . . .

"How will this do?" she asked, reading out her note. "'This money is not lost but given to the first person who finds it. Please have a good time with it!' Will that do?"

"Couldn't be better."

"Sure?"

"Quite sure. Now blindfold me and turn me round three times," I suggested, "and let me see if I can find it." But this did not come off.

Then she covered the note with the little pile of sovereigns and silver, and with belated good-byes to the still clucking cuckoo and the weir and the stream and the shadowy woods we came back to the road—the altered road.

"How different it is," said Ursula.

How different it was, or rather, how different were we. Nothing tangible had changed; but the essence of things had changed. The road was still merely occupied with its own particular

problem of summer dust ; the little hill so like a girl's breast merely offered shelter and shade to the young sheep. The shadows had moved, that was all.

We rode on and as we rode we listened to the furze buds popping in the waning heat ; small babyish explosions ; fairy salutes announcing that fairy dances would be held under the trees in the twilight when the rest of the world was beginning to think of going to bed. In the morning there would be dark green rings on the grass and everyone would know that the fairies had been out in the dew drawing pictures with their clever scampering little feet.

"Delicious," said Ursula. "These are the best roads I've ever ridden on ; all the gradients seem to be tilted up the right way. I can't understand it ; can you provide me with a theory ?"

"I can provide you with two," I remarked. "One is the mere theory of luck, geographical luck, which we can prove by turning round and riding the other way, uphill ; the other is that we are fairly rolling down the broad and pleasant slope to perdition."

"I don't much care for either theory," she answered, "and we certainly can't prove the second one."

"I have no others," I said.

"Do you think you could ride alongside and kiss me?" she asked.

I thought it quite probable that my talents permitted even this.

"Then will you, please?" she said.

I complied instantly with this request, and for a moment we held together unswerving; then there came a disturbance in the sublimity of things. I skidded over a stone and fell full on my head; the ridiculous intervened effectively with the sublime. I heard Ursula give a gasp as I shot over the handles and took the road with a good business-like thud; then black darkness closed over me and I sank through time itself. After eternities of falling I found myself deep down in swirling water, struggling to throw off a weight and reach—Ursula, Ursula, lying there dim and white and drowning. Then the weight became, most curiously, a living thing. It shifted its position and blocked my way. I saw it change in swirling eddies from a dead gnarled root into a devil with bloodshot eyes and writhing arms that kept me back from Ursula, and it laughed as I watched her die. Then we fought and twisted chin to shoulder and I tried to find its eyes with my thumbs to blind it, but it held me in a closer grip and forced me away as I shouted impossible rewards if only it would let me save her. Then she faded almost out of sight, though I could just

see her lying there stark and still and lovely in her shroud. Suddenly she moved a little, and sobbed, and the relentless arms that held me suddenly let go.

"Jerry," she sobbed, "don't kill me."

She was bending over me, smiling, her face wet with wild tears.

Reality and dreams had blended.

"I thought you were dying," she sobbed.

"Are you? Oh, do speak to me!"

"I'm all right," I muttered. "How long——"

"Years," she interrupted, with a gasp.

"Oh, go it," I said weakly.

"Well, it *seemed* years, anyhow," she persisted.

"My hair's gone white."

This, however, proved to be a fallacy.

"Perhaps it was only months," she admitted, "but it was long enough to break my heart. I *do* wish I were a doctor, darling."

I found I was lying on my back by the side of the road and my head was pillowed on her lap. I closed my eyes and proposed to remain, for the time being, where I was. I felt very tired, very helpless and vacant; nothing short of a steam-roller would have induced me to move.

"If only that wretched beetle hadn't drunk up all the claret some of it would be very useful now," remarked Ursula tearfully. "Isn't there a public house I can go to for some brandy?"

"Not brandy I could drink," I answered.

"But surely you ought to have some sort of stimulant," said Ursula, quite in despair. "Oughtn't you?"

"Yes," I answered, "I ought."

This, however, I may have said from habit.

There was not even a grocer's shop in sight, where one could have purchased the disaster known as Australian Burgundy, so I was compelled to lie there as I was, waiting for the stars to leave off jumping about and playing at General Post in the corners of my skull. The inside of my skull felt like a rejected omelette, the sort of omelette for which a waiter has been cautioned. Yet I liked lying there; there was a vague pleasure about it. I felt I belonged to someone, and, gradually, things in general became less misty and dim and I saw with a clearer eye. I began to feel pretty sure that a tree growing opposite my ambulance really was an oak. I had, in fact, selected it as a sort of barometer of my condition. As soon as I was quite sure it was not an elm I told Ursula so.

"But I'm afraid it's a poplar, darling," she said mournfully.

"In that case I must be frightfully ill," I answered, beginning to feel very nervous and to think of death.

"Are you quite sure it isn't an oak?" I asked.

"Quite sure," said Ursula.

"Are you perfectly certain it isn't a fir?" I asked. "The oak and the fir are very similar. Look again."

She looked again, and hesitated. "Well, perhaps it might be a fir," she said doubtfully. "But I'm almost certain in my own mind that it's a cedar."

"Describe it," I said. "Is the bark rough?"

"No, smooth," said Ursula. "At least, it's smooth for a tree. It looks rather chapped, like hands."

This might have meant anything. I knew of no tree that looked as if it had chapped hands. I began to be concerned for Ursula.

"I'm afraid you're very ill, too," I said.

"I'm very frightened," she faltered. She was on the edge of tears.

"Frightened? Why?" I asked.

"Because you're talking such dreadful nonsense," she replied, "about trees."

I said no more. It seemed to me that it was she who was talking nonsense, but I might be wrong. For all I knew I might be off my head. The best thing to do, in the circumstances, was to do nothing, to lie still, very contentedly, and think. I felt lucid enough, but apparently I was behaving like a fool and clearly it would be better for Ursula if I held my tongue. My speech dis-

tressed her and did no good to me. So I said nothing. I fell to wondering, instead, what it would be like to be permanently ill, to be of no use to anyone, deprived of all activity of body. A clear mind, in these circumstances, would not be an unmixed blessing, I reflected. A clever brain might do much to alleviate one's condition, but it would add to one's tortures too. It would not win the greatest thing of all, a woman; for it is seldom the mental quality alone that attracts a woman and binds her to her man; in the first instance, perhaps, it is never that. A cripple gifted like a god would lose where six feet of muscle would win. Not all the poetry of Hellas nor all the wisdom of the West contained in an ill-shaped frame would tell against sinews and thews and the bravery and beauty of a well-conditioned man. Yet there is no faith like a woman's faithfulness when once it has been won. Its failure condemns her as a sham and marks the future whore—and her fate is not too hard.

I lay and revelled, literally and luxuriantly revelled in the security of Ursula. I felt that nothing could alter her. Nothing short of a mental change in me, an upsetting and a re-arranging of my whole nature would re-act upon her; perhaps not even that would. I believed her to be one of the fine unchanging women who would love only the more deeply if the object of her love

were in any way jeopardised or stricken. For she had given me the only thing a woman has to give: herself. It could never be given back to her, never given away again. She had signed and sealed her own life warrant and given it to me; rubies could not re-buy it, it could not be bought. If she were to forget the gift, to call it in, or to wish it ungiven, it would be to confess herself a lie, beautiful only in her body, irredeemably false in mind and thought.

Yet we had made no promises. We had looked at each other only to discover that we were already bound by unbreakable chains; and the chains could only strengthen as they became riveted by memories, by life itself, until time, the destroyer of all life and every memory, should fling us outside the circle of comprehended things. Thus, with my head on her knees and my soul at her feet, I lay and dreamed. Work, ambition, friends, all the component parts that had, till now, constituted my life shrank and dwindled into nothingness beside the reality of this one supreme friend—and I took my own measure anew. In quiet ecstasy I measured my wings, and all the beauty stretching out before the highest point man may attain unfolded and unfolded.

“Can you move now, darling?” asked Ursula, at length. “I don’t think it can be good for you to lie on your back in the mud.”

"I'm not in the mud," I answered. "I'm——"

She bent over me and smiled at my unfinished sentence. "Most eloquent," she said, with a happy little laugh.

I tried to stand up, she holding out anxious hands to help me. It was such a delight to be the object of so much concern that I could not help overdoing the agony a little. I felt like a child who has cut its finger and must be superlatively displaying the wound in order to obtain the sympathy provoked by circumstances outside the normal. I counterfeited pain. Then I recollected that to her it would seem real; she was tenderly and entirely miserable, and in my immediate efforts to go to the opposite extreme, I overdid the jocular and fell down flat in a wave of weakness that surprised me into fluent revilings.

"Lie quite still a little longer before you try to move again," said Ursula, with a dear little droop at the corners of her mouth.

I swore impotently, forgetful of my company.

"Who *wouldn't* swear?" I asked apologetically.

"Only Trappists, I should think," said Ursula.

"What is a Trappist?" I asked.

"I believe they keep St. Bernard dogs and make liqueurs, Benedictine and Kummel," said Ursula.

"There's simply nothing you don't know," I remarked.

She ran her fingers through my hair again,

without the horrid little pauses with which she had accompanied the process before. This meant much.

"If you had heard the thump you made when you hit the road," she said, "you wouldn't be surprised at being knocked out of time a little. My solar plexus simply stood still and hurt me."

"Has it hurt my bicycle?" I asked.

"I haven't looked," she answered.

"Look," I suggested.

"It seems to be in rather a mess," she said, as she ran her eyes over it. "The handles are twisted and some of the spokes are missing."

"How about the wheels?"

"The front one looks like a Chinese puzzle."

"Could I ride it?"

"I'm afraid not, dearest, unless you are a professional cyclist. Are you?"

"Not yet, but I'm on the right side of forty. It might be worth while to become one with a bicycle like that in my possession."

I fell back into musings. If I could choose my death I would choose a quick one. I would throw up the final sponge lying on my back in the mud with my battered head in Ursula's lap and her cool fingers to help me down, or, possibly, up the steps, with a tree that was perhaps a fir, perhaps an elm, perhaps a poplar, but probably an oak sighing and sighing my requiem. It

would be horrid to die in lodgings under a landlady's livery eye. She would do all sorts of dreadful things and would probably have hairs growing on her neck, and hands with broken finger-nails. And she would "get in" a clergyman for me. He would be awful. He would begin by asking if he could "do anything," write to one's people, and so forth, and he would almost immediately suggest prayer and I should writhe while he reeled off formulæ. Then he would see a book he didn't approve of lying on the bed and take it up with a wounded look and beg one, earnestly, to "forget all that, my dear fellow," and I should probably be too tired to argue with him. My hope would lie in the doctor who, probably, would be a good chap and give orders that the man was to be kept away and not to worry me. The doctor would say, "Buck up," and tell me about the test match and send his wife, probably, with some flowers. If he had time he might even come to my funeral. In any case he would drop on the parson. It wouldn't be the least use for the parson to say, "My place is here." At a nod from me the doctor would be simply top hole, if I knew anything about doctors, and I should breathe my last without rites.

But I should much prefer to accomplish my end under the wide and starry sky with Ursula

and the oak tree. My end was not due yet, however, at all events. There was some good cross country work to be put in by the devil before he got me finally by the heels.

I was a strong man, muscular and hardy, and to prove it I stood up suddenly, and remained standing, somewhat to my surprise. I chucked out my chest, and looked the whole world in the face like the village blacksmith, in spite of the fact that unlike him I owed money to several of its citizens. Ursula beamed, and, notwithstanding my debts, I at once proposed a further expenditure of money upon Tea.

"And you must have 'an egg to it,' to keep up your strength, you poor dear," said Ursula. "What's the thing you say when you're very thankful?" she asked.

"I so seldom am," I answered, "that I have no notion what to say."

"Te deum laudamus," she cried, suddenly remembering.

"But you're not going to say all of it before we go on, are you?" I asked, with a falling jaw.

"No," she answered.

"Good," said I, "come on."

"But where is this apocryphal cottage?" she enquired. "If we don't hurry the kettle will be as cold as charity. Can you hurry, darling?"

"Pace is relative," I answered. "I cannot travel either fast or far with both your arms round my neck."

"But I'm so thankful you still have a neck for me to put them round," she said.

"Then as soon as you have rendered such thanks as seems to you to be sufficient I will demonstrate my turn of speed," I said.

"I'm afraid you won't be able to demonstrate anything at all on your bicycle. I expect it's useless now," said Ursula. "Look at it."

I looked at it. "A poor thing but mine own," I said, as I surveyed the wreck. I saw that I should be compelled to carry it, as it could not carry me, and it would plough long furrows on my back like the man in the Psalms.

"I'd give ten shillings for a cart," said Ursula mournfully.

I reminded her that she hadn't got ten shillings.

"Then I'd give ten of yours," she replied. "I can't bear to see you staggering under the weight of all that machinery, and you're beginning to look pale again. I wish I were strong enough to carry it for you."

"I wish you were," I answered savagely. "No man living should be asked to trek with the remains of a bicycle wound round his neck. No decent man would do it."

But this sort of talk was profitless. "What do you pay for a frock of that description?" I asked, by way of changing the conversation.

"Oh, about eight or ten guineas, I suppose," said Ursula easily.

In reply to this I said the price of her frocks seemed to me to be exorbitant. She paid as much for a frock as I paid for a whole suit of clothes. Boots were about the only things she seemed to be at all economical about.

"But why do you ask? Can't we live on your income?" enquired Ursula. "What is your income actually?"

I told her it varied from about six to eight hundred a year, but that I always spent more. I was quite honest about it. Probably, if I worked a bit harder, I could bring it up to about a thousand, but I wasn't keen. I liked my ease. I couldn't work unless I wanted to, and very often I didn't want to; as a rule I didn't.

"I see," said Ursula; "then you think we shall be rather short of money?"

"We shall if you persist in wearing eight guinea frocks," I answered.

"But sometimes the frocks I wear cost thirty or even forty guineas," said Ursula calmly. "You don't seem to realise what it costs to dress a woman picturesquely."

I didn't. I didn't even know what it cost to

dress me. I hadn't ever thought about it. When I wanted things I just had them, but I supposed in future matters would have to be conducted on a different principle.

"We shall both have to go slow," I said, "that's the long and short of it."

Ursula said nothing.

"Are you frightfully sick at the discovery of my poverty?" I asked.

"No," she said. "I can do without expensive frocks if I want to, and I certainly would for you. As a matter of fact, I am quite able to make my frocks myself."

"Ah," I sighed, "if only I could make my own trousers we could save a lot of money, but I'm a perfect fool with my needle. I can't hem. But I can get my clothes from cheap emporiums though, and I will. I shall have to."

"Why?" asked Ursula.

She seemed a little dense about it, I thought.

"Because we shall be so beastly poor," I explained.

"But I've got lots of money," remarked Ursula calmly, "even if you haven't. Who do you think pays for my thirty guinea frocks now?"

This was an aspect of the case that had not presented itself to me. I had not thought about it in that light at all. It had merely seemed to

me that I should be obliged, in future, to work my poor fingers to the bone.

"We needn't bother about money. I've got lots and lots of it."

I stared at her. I fetched my breath, as they say, as the inner meaning of the thing dawned upon me. It percolated slowly.

"Do you mean to say that you are in a position to keep me in idleness and gilded ease?"

"Yes," said Ursula. "You can have as many trousers as ever you like and I can have as many frocks."

"Can I have a fur coat?" I asked in a whisper.

"Yes," said Ursula, "certainly, if you don't show the fur."

"And a Panhard car and a diamond pin—both too large?"

"Yes."

Some ideas are so immense that they can only be grasped in small bits at a time. I endeavoured to readjust myself to my new condition. I felt like a man who had just seen the sea for the first time. The world I knew was leaving me. The poverty in which I had hitherto existed fell away from me like a nightmare.

I climbed out of my bicycle and put it down in the middle of the road. I looked at it and I looked at her.

"I'm too rich to carry it another foot," I said.

"Far too rich," said Ursula.

"Just look at that front wheel," I said.

"It hardly is a wheel," said Ursula, "it's an impertinence."

"What shall I do with it?" I asked.

"Off with its head," said Ursula.

The death of the thing had, in fact, become a necessity. Both of us felt it.

On the right of the road there lay a pond, a dark water.

It was slimy and it was green and deep. It was just the place for my bicycle. I gathered it up and hurled it in. It flashed through the air like Excalibur. There was one great splash as the primitive slime closed over the symbol of civilisation and all was still.

"Now for our teas," said Ursula.

The cottage was a thatched one and it was a long time before we reached it.

The several yokels whom we questioned during our pilgrimage yielded no information whatsoever. They knew nothing. They were devoid of the very ideas with which they should have been associated, local place and distance.

"How far is London?" enquired Ursula experimentally of one of these degenerates.

The degenerate merely grinned and was mute. He seemed to regard the simple question as a

fatuous sort of joke. He had neither speech nor language.

"How far is the next village?" asked Ursula of another specimen, "and does this road lead to it?"

This particular rustic had speech. He was able to indicate that a village existed and that in his opinion it was "about four mile."

Once again we tried to extract a little geography from a son of the soil, but he knew even less than the others.

"They must be cave men," said Ursula. "The only way to find your way about England is to ask a Portuguese sailor," she exclaimed. "None of the natives ever seem to know. How pale you are looking, Jerry. Are you feeling tucked up again?"

I was beginning to feel particularly tucked up, as it happened, and I had decided, long ago, to abandon tea in favour of something more fiery as soon as I could get it, and I would not be over nice as to quality, I decided, wealthy though I was.

"There's a cottage!" cried Ursula excitedly, as we turned a corner, "roses and honeysuckle complete, and it *does* say 'Teas! Teas! Teas!'"

"Does it say drinks?" I asked.

"It says 'Apartments,'" said Ursula.

This was hopeful. Apartments argue land-

ladies, and many landladies are known to take their glass. Things might not go so badly with me after all; a beaker of fire water might yet be mine. In the meantime I drooped like a little flower and the bump on my head deprived me of far too much vitality for comfort. Ursula regarded me with an anxious eye.

"Give me that signet ring of yours," she said suddenly.

"Why?" I asked, as I gave it to her. "What for?"

"Never mind," she answered, slipping it on the fourth finger of her left hand. I noticed that she turned it with the signet side towards the palm so that to the casual eye it looked for all the world like a plain gold wedding ring with a sober respectable married career behind it. It struck me as being extraordinarily resourceful, and I said so.

"Hush," said Ursula.

In answer to her delicate little rat-tat-tat on the cottage door the dearest little old lady in the world appeared and I knew instinctively that she had a light touch with flour and baked her own bread. If the accident of birth had placed her a few rungs higher up the social ladder, she would probably have played Chopin as Chopin should be played. But when I saw the dreadful medallion ornament she wore below

her chin I was afraid she would prove to be a stranger to any beverage containing malt in a ratio sufficient to satisfy the needs of an invalid gentleman suffering from bumps upon the head. Such an ornament worn as a decoration implied a rigid temperance. Even her home-made sloe gin I feared would be devoid of the true thrill, and would be of the quality consumed at prize-givings at schools for the daughters of gentle-people. I leaned against the lintel and surrendered the command to Ursula.

"Are your apartments vacant?" she enquired, "My husband has had rather a bad accident and I'm afraid he won't be able to go home to-night."

"Deary me," exclaimed the little old lady, much concerned. "Will you please to step inside?"

We were very pleased indeed to step inside and domestic overtures were immediately opened by Ursula. I listened to them with interest. Women conduct these things so wonderfully; they show a grasp of detail undreamed of by mere men. The conversation between the little old lady and Ursula was literally a revelation of character; it disclosed the perils lurking in damp sheets and far-reaching consequences of which, till now, I had never even been conscious. As I listened it seemed to me that I had escaped

chronic rheumatism by the merest miracle, and but from some fortunate perversion in the matter of draughts, I ought to have been suffering from a permanent cold in the head from my youth up. Then Ursula and the little old lady went upstairs. It was clear to me that I had heard no more than the merest rudiments of the thing; the fringe of the subject and no more had been touched upon; before the bargain could finally be struck, before they actually "settled," there was serious spade work to be done. Life, I reflected, is indeed full of surprises. Here at my very door, so to speak, was a great field of human thought and endeavour and I had never so much as suspected its existence; yet it was a subject involving deep knowledge and calculations, beset with inconceivable difficulties and dangers, hemmed in with airings and sheets, bolsters, mattresses, maids and ovens and the grocer. I had heard enough to learn that, at all events, and I guessed that there was more, much more besides. Literature and mathematics, war, statesmanship and cricket, began to assume their true proportions in the scheme of things as I listened to the distant voices overhead and I realised that the great god of housekeeping was a larger and more potent thing than these. At this point the landlord appeared. In my speculation with regard to a much needed stimulant

I had forgotten the possibility of a landlord and here was the very man for me before my eyes. I knew him at once. There is a masonry in these things. His Sunday coat didn't deceive me in the least. It merely indicated a man in a false position. That dainty little cottage was not the proper setting for a man of his quality, the jolly old buck. I knew that well enough. On Sunday—well, Sunday was all very well. No doubt on Sunday he sat in church with the little old lady, but that was only because he was one of the men devised by nature to snore through sermons. He went because it was traditional; his "missus" took him; his fathers had done it before him. I liked him for his respect for "ways." But to see the real man, I knew that you must get at him during the week and then "his talk would be of bullocks." His true setting, I decided, would be after sundown, smoking a good clay pipe by a good coal fire in the bar parlour, and expectorating with the circumstance becoming to one of such paunch. From this hypothetic picture to a little corner cupboard in the red-tiled kitchen was but a step. I took the step. I made known my wants, and the "drop o' something" was produced as I had known it would be; and never had invalid gentleman wanted it more. "Two fingers" went like a wink; "three fingers" like another

wink ; the brooding headache and the unfriendly vacuum "behind my pinny" were no more, and I was ready and fortified against my "tea with an egg to it," if Ursula insisted. The rôle of invalid, in fact, would demand some skill in the playing now and I hoped Ursula was not laying it on too thick about me upstairs.

I endeavoured to assuage these feelings of health by a recital of my accident, supporting it by the exhibition of the mud upon my summer suiting and by assuming the mien of the sufferer. The landlord listened but his comments were brief.

"Nasty things, them bicycles," he said.

Then I told him that I hoped soon to keep a very large car and I rather expected him to be impressed, but instead of being impressed he was furious.

"Why, them darned things is wus than bicycles," he said loudly and with heat. "Wus still, they be, them and their d——d stink."

"Oh! come," I said, with the smile that is associated with the words. "Oh! come."

But he was the last person in the world to say "Oh! come" to. It meant nothing to him, nothing whatever. He was not, in fact, the perfect companion of the moment. He bothered me. I was glad when Ursula re-appeared and he withdrew.

"Clover," cried Ursula, bouncing into the

room, "simply clover. This is the real cottage of fiction, Jerry."

"Good heavens, then we can't stop in it," I exclaimed. "Fiction is far stranger than truth and the truth about a cottage would be unprintable. I fear the sheets."

"But I saw them taken from the linen press where they lived in lavender," cried Ursula.

This appealed to me.

"They are being aired in front of the kitchen fire," she continued.

This, too, appealed to me. I am not the man to carp at comfort.

"As for the little old lady," cried Ursula, "she's simply sweet. Would you believe it, she actually makes lace with lovely old bobbins on a pillow. I've ordered twenty yards of it. Why, you look quite well, Jerry," she cried, staring at me in dismay.

"I am," I said. "I have taken measures to that end. Why this unwifely disquiet on your part?"

"Because I've been saying you were so dreadfully ill," exclaimed Ursula. "Whatever will they think of us if you go about with such a colour—and not a scrap of luggage?"

I agreed that they might easily think the worst of us. There was nothing whatever to prevent them.

"You must get pale again at once," said Ursula.

I looked about me, searching for the means. "There is a poker," I said, "but don't kill me outright."

Then my eye fell upon the picture of our gracious king done in the pigments of an Indian tribe thirsting for scalps. I blanched.

"Give me time," I muttered as I gazed at it. "In another moment I shall look like chalk."

"Oh, darling, do be careful," cried Ursula as she followed my eye. "Don't get really ill."

"How can it be avoided?" I asked, lifelessly. "Look at it."

I gazed and gazed. "How am I?" I asked. "Getting pale yet?"

Then Ursula turned the picture with its face to the wall.

On the back of the frame there was a funeral card telling the death of a dear relation. Her name, it seemed, had been Emmie Fowler, and, knowing that, one felt she had indeed deserved to die.

Now, I was to die too. No man could look upon the terrible memorial card of Emmie Fowler and live. It was executed in a glutinous material—decorated with flowers and fruit and scrolls, in all, five inches square, and it beat into the

brain ; it held the human eye as the eye of a bird is held by a snake.

"Is there any wax fruit in the room?" I asked, "or any woolly mats? If so Satan has me at last."

Ursula looked round the room. "None," she said, "you ridiculous, darling child. I'll be back in a moment."

When she returned it was with a jug of hot water. "To bathe your head with," she announced.

Now I had not bargained for this ; it had not been mentioned, neither was it tacit. The idea found no favour in my sight whatever.

"We *could* go home," I remarked, knowing very well that we shouldn't.

"Nonsense," said Ursula, and I knew from her tone that the subject was closed.

"I'm going to nurse you," she said, and nurse me she did. If ever a man was nursed I was that man. First I got it with hot water, then I got it with cold, and always I got it down my neck. Then I was anointed with a healing oil procured from the little old lady, who would have had a finger in the pie herself had I not let and hindered, but I let and hindered for all I was worth and saved myself from everything but her prolific suggestions. I bore the water and I suffered the healing oil but I put down my foot, as it were,

upon the bread and milk seriously suggested by Ursula in a very frenzy of nursing. I wondered what on earth would happen to me when I had one of my bilious attacks. The account for drugs alone would be enormous if Ursula had a hand in it. I could see that. I should be stuffed with pills and powders and saturated with drenches till I was really ill. It was in her eye. I could see the gleam. The only thing to do would be to hide, to ask a man to send me a wire from North Berwick or some other remote place where there is a good eighteen-hole course and to remain there until I was better.

"Really I'm not ill," I remonstrated from the middle of a morass of oil.

"You *are* ill," said Ursula shortly, dabbing at my head.

I tried again. "That methylated whisky bucked me up like anything," I said.

But I might as well have talked to Mrs. Lot. Ursula was simply immovable. The only thing for it was to be patient, to be brave, and I think I *was* brave. Surely there is a moral courage to be found in one who allows his shirt and collar to be splashed with unnecessary moisture, and all for the love of a lady.

Yet for all this I felt I was conducting myself on the model of the worm, and I wriggled; like the worm, I turned—suddenly.

"I've turned!" I shouted as I took water in scuppersful on my port side. "I won't be bathed on my bump any more. All I want," I continued, "all I really want is to put my head on your shoulder."

"And so you shall," said Ursula, "so you shall, some day; but do consider the fitness of things. And in any case," she added, "it's barely five o'clock."

"I was thinking of a bare shoulder," I sighed.

"I know you were," said Ursula.

We heard the little old lady on the stairs busy with bedding, with bolsters and sheets. Hot water, it appeared, had been taken to our bedrooms in order that we might make ourselves tidy for tea.

The front bedroom, we decided, should be Ursula's so that her thirst for honeysuckle might be satisfied to the full. She had discovered a spray which could be trained through the window, and with the help of a hairpin it might be induced to remain there, she thought, all night.

"And then, when I wake up in the morning, it will be the first thing I shall see," she announced gleefully. "When I'm warm and drowsy. And that will be delicious for me. So you'll let me have this room, won't you?"

I acquiesced. I recognised the artist in her pathetic request. Personally, I occupied an

attic with a sloping roof where no honeysuckle was. There were, however, other compensations. A faint perfume of apples enriched my cell and through my window I could see the stars. Moreover, there were grave drawbacks to Ursula's room. I had observed the Rock of Ages there, terribly cleft. Never had I seen a rock in such distress, so belaboured by a fluid, intended presumably to represent water. This dreadful drawing, I, in my attic, should avoid. I should not see it when I awoke there in the morning. A deep agnosticism, I felt, would seize upon me had I remained, even for a night, with this hydraulic misconception of the faith and of the sea. I accepted the attic feeling I had done well and that I should sleep.

When we came downstairs to our teas we found the little old lady busy with the table.

"The gentleman do pick up," she remarked, as she saw me. She seemed to be delighted.

Then Ursula apologised for upsetting her so on Sunday and, perhaps, putting her out. The little old lady was charmed.

Ursula could do these things so beautifully. She knew when the gracious word should be said and how to say it. And she could praise. Most of us know only how to blame, or, if we have travelled sufficiently far in philosophy, how to keep silent. Under Ursula's praise the little old

lady flitted about delightedly, giving a touch here and an extra touch there, beaming and nodding till she arrived at last at the door and there she paused to wish us good appetites, and would we kindly call if we wanted more hot water?

Who could carp at that ecstatic tea, our first indoor meal together? Not I. Possibly the tea *was* elevenpence a pound; the figures are Ursula's. To me the beverage suggested a free gift, the gift of an enemy, but we drank it and we bore it—just. But if the tea was false the bread at least was true—and the jam! Cherry jam, devoid of tooth-destroying stones, smelling of summer and coloured like the rose, the very syrup of the orchard. I became childish over that ethereal jam.

"We must have the recipe," said Ursula, dealing liberally with it, "for Mary."

But no Mary has ever conducted us to the gastronomic heights we reached that day, nor ever will. Few experiences can be successfully repeated. Decimals are the only things that really recur—and who on earth wants decimals?

"If supper comes up to the level of tea," remarked Ursula, "we shall not be in bed by half-past nine, that's a certainty."

I agreed that supper is an elastic meal, capable of infinite trifling and delay, even of expansion.

"I knew a man once," I remarked, "who con-

tinued to have supper for three whole days and nights. When we began he was just twenty-one."

"You?" queried Ursula, over a tea cup.

"I was older," I answered, "and knew better. In the middle of the second afternoon I went home to bed and he called me a traitor."

"And what did you say to that?" asked Ursula.

"It was largely owing to my desire not to speak that I retired," I explained.

The flicker of a future Mrs. Grundy appeared for a second in Ursula's face.

"Do I quite like these reminiscences?" she asked.

"They are bound to leak out," I answered, "as you wished."

She smiled at that. The phrase itself was a reminiscence, a reminiscence of the morning.

"Leave off stuffing yourself with that jam, darling, and come and say delicious things to me in the garden," she said.

"A woman in a garden!"

"Must the poor icicle be tempted?" she retorted.

"Come and find some mistletoe," said I.

The garden was a place of dim soft-smelling mysteries, where a robin might hide in a syringa bush and a thrush might eat a snail in peace.

"Oh, the syringas, the syringas," murmured

Ursula. "For ever and for ever I shall associate them with you and whenever you smell them won't your heart ache?"

"Yes," I answered. "Probably." And it always has and it always will. Then I picked her a spray and she kissed it and put it in her hair; and the spray she gave me is in a drawer with some other things.

There were roses too in this garden, roses everywhere.

"Roses all the way," cried Ursula.

There were pallid fine lady roses swaying lifelessly on slender stems dying fast of "the vapours," and there were straight upstanding red ones of hardier breed, on stalks, country-girl roses, mere wenches compared with their more delicate sisters; and there were blush pink artificial beauties, coquettes, dreadful creatures, who knew a thing or two and disgraced themselves with thorns. And, down a little lane, the stocks were out, fighting with the roses for supremacy of scent, the sweetest quarrel in all the world of flowers; and here and there a tuft of love-lies-bleeding drooped looking its name too well; and a tiger lily grew defiantly, proud of her gipsy skin; and clumps of velvet pansies nodded as if they were all talking together, and, in a line along the back stood a rigid row of hollyhocks trying to look dignified.

"They might be a lot of unimaginative school-masters," cried Ursula. "There is just one thing missing, Jerry," she said, as she looked about her.

"It may be lurking in the long grass for all we know," I remarked, thinking of Eden.

"I mean a fuchsia plant," said Ursula. "I shan't be really happy till I've 'popped' some buds."

"At all costs you must be happy," I answered. "We must find a fuchsia plant."

Hunting about, we found one, a beauty, ripe and ready for "popping." We "raced" each other up a long stalk covered with buds, and Ursula won, or said she did; I think she cheated, though I gave her a penny for a prize and admitted that I was only second.

"Who could be wicked in a garden?" she asked, presently. "Only a very wicked person indeed, and such a person would be afflicted with both ophthalmia and catarrh and not in his right mind. The best place for him would be in a pond."

"Well, there's malevolence for you," I remarked, "and in a garden, too."

"I like you best when you agree with everything I say" said Ursula imperturbably.

"That is a feminine delusion," I remarked, as my eye fell on a walnut tree. "You would adore me if I smote you."

" A woman, a dog, and a walnut tree,
The more you beat 'em the better they be "

I quoted.

Suddenly Ursula stopped short and listened.

" Bees, Jerry," she cried, " can't you hear them buzzle? Very likely there's a hive." And off she flew.

The bees in this garden were understood. I found Ursula on the edge of a mustard field by a row of raspberry blooms. These are the things bees love best, raspberries, mustard, and clover. And these were bees who lived in " skeps " made of straw as bee-hives should be, if only for the purpose of art; skeps that held the honey in gold cataracts instead of in the machine-made boxes that come out of the model dwellings in which the up-to-date bee exists. Doubtless the little old lady was the " bee-master " and one felt that what she didn't know about bees and their tricks and tantrums wouldn't be worth knowing. She knew their secrets and they knew hers. When there was " a death " she would come and tell them all about it, whisper it into the hives; and when there was to be " a birth " she would come again to propitiate the bees and beg that the child should be " fortunate " and untroubled by the evil eye and the machinations of the devil.

Now Ursula was asking me to deliver up *my* secrets to the bees.

"So that we may live happily ever after," she pleaded.

"But I don't know what language to address them in," I said.

"Try French," suggested Ursula.

"*Je t'aime*," I whispered, but not into the hives.

"They may be German bees," said Ursula.

"*Ich liebe dich*," I whispered.

"Or English, perhaps."

"I love you, I love you," I cried, in a voice that every bee could hear, and I caught her to me and kissed her.

"Whatever can I tell them after that?" she gasped. "You've exhausted language, Jerry, not to mention me."

"You're not to sneak out of it now," I said, "after making me betray myself. Propitiate the insects instantly. Whisper at them."

"What do you want most in the world?" she asked.

"You," I said.

"And next to me?"

"A jolly little devil who'd call me 'Farver.'"

"Would you like to christen him now?" she asked. She looked like a lovely nun, "breathless with adoration." "Tell me his name," she said.

Then I told her the name of the man whose name I wanted my son to bear.

She whispered something to the bees, and when I turned to her again the light on her face . . .

"There," she said tremulously, with her eyes looking into mine, "do you think I love you?"

I wondered if two human souls could be closer together than ours were then.

"And the bees don't sting, you see," she said, with a light little laugh with some tears in it, "if you're in earnest with them, do they?"

I could only kiss her, kiss her, then—she thrust me away from her with a little cry. A bee had alighted on her hand, on the fourth finger of her left hand just above her ring, our wedding ring, and had buried its sting there deep, devilishly, ironically, as if to give her the lie. The light died out of her eyes, leaving a foreshadowed fear, a superstition where there had been a hope, and I knew her thoughts would jump at once to imagery.

"It's an omen, Jerry," she said in a low voice. She looked like a slim white altar lily, drooping, on the day after Easter.

I tried to comfort her. I abused the whole race of bees, in vain. She drew off the ring from her finger. She wouldn't be comforted, and she couldn't be reassured.

"That's why it hurts me so," she said. "It was so—significant, so close to *this*. Don't you understand?"

I understood her far too well to laugh at her. I knew that in her alert imagination something had quickened, had crystallised into a reproach ; a vague reproof had touched her and frightened her. It may have been that she felt that day she had violated a tradition. I could only guess. Probably even she herself did not know, but I imagined that some vague subconscious feminine freemasonry had declared itself.

We turned away rather dolorously from the irregular little row of hives ; their charm had gone and something almost sinister had taken its place. Yet what, after all, had occurred ?

“ To be affected in this way is a symptom of pure decadence,” I said. “ You think you are a woman and I have thought, at times, that I am a man, yet we behave like two Æolian harps. Aren't you ashamed of yourself ? ”

“ Yes,” said Ursula, “ but I can't help it.”

We sat down on an old seat under a yew tree clipped into the grotesque distorted semblance of a bird—a thing that flew. The suggestion was altogether too significant and I shivered. Ursula looked at me.

“ Come indoors,” she said. “ Let's get away from all this ; it's getting on my nerves, and making me feel as if I were a legendary lady in an enchanted missal. I believe the place is

haunted. It feels as if there were a presence here brooding over it."

As we walked back to the cottage we heard the sound of bells, cracked and old, but in the distance beautiful, chiming for evensong.

"Hush!" whispered Ursula, "listen. Faith was a living thing when they were made."

She leaned forward, supporting her chin on her hand, listening and looking over the misty meadow where the bats were chasing insects in the twilight.

"Shall we go to church, Jerry?" she asked. "I think it would be soothing to hear the Nunc Dimittis."

"I should say it would be most irritating," I answered, thinking of the village choir. "There will be three psalms and the Magnificat to wade through before we come to the Nunc Dimittis, and then you won't like it."

"Why shouldn't I like it?" she asked. "I always do, the words."

So we went to church and all the way there she made me lean on her arm, because I was looking white again, she said, and it made her feel so "protecting" and that I "wanted her more" when I took her arm.

"But I couldn't want you more," I said.

"You may," she answered.

Before I had time to ask her what she meant

we had reached the porch and Ursula stopped to look at the dog-tooth carving of the Norman arch.

"Older than the bells," she remarked critically. "I should like to restore it."

Inside the church there was the faint smell of incense.

"I could fill books and books about it," I whispered to Ursula, "such is its effect upon me."

"You'd never get them published," she whispered back. "You haven't got the mediæval touch."

"Shut up," I said. "Be devotional."

"I am," she answered, squeezing my hand. "I'm devoted to *you*."

The service had not yet begun and three sweating rustics were pulling at the bell-ropes as if their lives depended on it.

"No wonder the poor bells are cracked," remarked Ursula. "So should I be if I worshipped here for long."

In the choir a small boy in a flame coloured cassock was engaged, ostensibly, in the allotting of books and music; it seemed to be a matter of more concern to him, however, that he should be well in the public eye; for, once, at least, in every half-minute he found occasion to cross from one side of the choir stalls to the other, in

order, I imagined, that he might bow with circumstance to the cross upon the altar where another small red infant was lighting candles. I assumed that it was a festal occasion.

"They ought to be stealing apples," remarked Ursula. "Little imps."

A moment later a pedal note shook the windows and the two small red children of grace withdrew to the vestry.

"Why, the man can play," exclaimed Ursula in astonishment, after a few chords, and she immediately became interested.

"And the boys can sing," she remarked in the middle of the psalms.

It was true; the chanting was exceptional; few, if any, of the choir had adenoids, and their voices were well trained. I wondered why Ursula frowned.

"What's up?" I whispered.

"Those words," she answered. "Why should I be compared to the beasts that perish?"

"Why shouldn't you?" I asked.

"I'm not a sheep," she said irritably.

"You're naughty," I whispered. "If you don't behave I shall put you in the font."

She was good through the *Nunc Dimittis* but she broke out during the subsequent prayers and informed me that the man couldn't intone.

"But you can't either," I remarked.

"I should make it my business to if I were a priest," she retorted. "I hope he can preach."

He could. He preached a sermon she never forgot.

"*Weak, weak as water thou shalt not excel,*" he cried, and in terse sentences he dealt out his beliefs. He was a middle-aged man with a face that had looked on trouble.

Ursula sat like a statue with her hand in mine, listening. She listened far too attentively.

"Don't," I said; "it's bad form," but she took no notice. I felt she was in sympathy with something I couldn't share and I hated it. I whispered cynical antidotes but she seemed to have lost all her sense of humour.

"This is very sticky stuff," I whispered. "Don't be deluded by it. He ought to be in Hyde Park on a biscuit box."

But Ursula only wriggled. She was taking it seriously. Something about the man held her, I could see that; he had hit upon a curiously applicable theme and he used it well. But how easy it is, I reflected, to dominate a congregation. A few good gestures, a pause or two, and a few well-balanced sentences and the thing is done. The machinery is simple.

It was almost a grief to me that Ursula listened. It rather surprised me. Then I recollected the bee episode. The parson with his applicable theme had come right on top of it and driven it

home. Of course she listened. When I came to think of it I should have been surprised if she had not. Any woman would have listened. I listened myself. I liked the man's English, and I rather liked his face. It was clever too, to put the pulpit where the light caught the reflection of coloured glass. Then I remembered that the stage was cradled in the church; the first crude plays were services and the first actors were monks; the spirit of stage effect still lingers under the Gothic arch and the pulpit with its decorative background competes, mildly, with Drury Lane. Bees, background, and parson combined to produce a new look in Ursula's face.

"I suppose he wouldn't have had us in the church if he knew," said Ursula darkly.

I said I hoped he wasn't as bad as that. "I daresay he would be very grieved," I said. "I am sure 'grieved' would be the word he would use."

Personally I thought he didn't matter a jot or a tittle one way or the other. We mattered more to ourselves than he or anyone else mattered to us.

"At all events, I'm not going to let him spoil my supper," announced Ursula, recovering her spirits.

She was gay enough when we were inside the

cottage again ; she was all April as she had been all day, and she amused herself by mimicking the parson, and even me, her rightful lord. Then the little old lady appeared on the scene with supper, followed by her rightful lord, who carried a jug in his hand. I assured him he had done the right thing. Ursula preferred milk.

" Bless the victuals, belovedest, please," she said.

" *Benedico, benedicat,*" said I.

" No, no, not that way," cried Ursula ; " that won't do at all. Let me instruct you."

She leaned across the table and kissed me.

" Oh," I said, much enlightened and extremely willing. " So that's it, is it ? "

" That's it," said Ursula serenely.

" But how shall we manage when there's company to dinner ? " I asked. " We can't very well do that in front of company."

" I'm afraid the company will have to put up with it," she remarked. " Besides, nowadays one can do anything one likes."

" I really couldn't go to such lengths at the Savoy," I said ; " and being so rich we might dine there sometimes or even at Gatti's."

Here was another problem.

" Don't stop and solve it now, though," said Ursula. " I'm hungry and it's your deal."

So I allowed the problem of grace before meat

to drop for the moment and helped her to a wonderful whack of crinkly bacon and a magnificent poached egg that really reminded me of one.

"I suppose somebody here keeps poultry," remarked Ursula absently.

"Clearly," I replied, "unless there is a conjurer in the village who produces eggs out of a hat."

"Of course; that's probably it," said Ursula. "How stupid of me. One gets so used to natural things nowadays that it's quite hard to remember they're generally artificial. But it's a nice egg."

She blew me a kiss and drank some milk. I drank some beer. Then she suddenly discovered that the stars were out.

"So is the beer, worse luck," I remarked, looking into the empty jug.

"Come to the window and look at the Plough," said Ursula. "Roses and syringas and you," she sighed. "How you are bound up with June, Jerry. Shall I sing to you?"

"Why didn't you sing in church?" I asked.

"I never can," she answered. "It isn't my way of worshipping. Everyone else sings so badly that I always stop; but I could sing a hymn to you here."

"Sing one," I said.

Then she sang to me; a childish little hymn

about little children and a shepherd. She sounded like a little child herself, and in my mind's eye I saw a picture of her with a baby at her knee ; its eyes were shut very tightly and its fingers were folded fast and a baby voice said baby prayers to her and I heard myself snuffle. Then she drew my face to hers as we looked at the stars and heard the roses falling in the dew. Soon afterwards the little old lady came into the room with two brass candlesticks and intimated that it was time for right-minded folk to be between the sheets.

" And may you and your good lady sleep well, sir, I'm sure," she remarked, as she locked the window and shut out the lovely night. Actually, she shut out June.

Then she ushered us upstairs and would have locked our bedroom windows too had she not seen the revolution brewing at the first attempt.

" Oh, a whiff of grape shot, quick, Jerry," cried Ursula, as the little old lady's fingers made for the window latch.

" Leave the window open, please," I said.

" Open ? " cried the little old lady in amaze.

" Wide open," I repeated, " wide open, all the year round."

" All the year round," echoed Ursula.

The effect on the little old lady was as the crack of doom. Not the last trump itself could have

deepened her look of horror as the meaning of our awful words descended on her.

"But you'll catch your deaths," she gasped.

"We haven't yet," smiled Ursula.

Then speech deserted the little old lady altogether. These strange habits of the town were just too much for her bucolic brain; she could only stand and stare. Many of the windows of her house were permanently closed by screws. Few opened at all. None opened for long. To leave a window open for a night was to violate a tradition. However, there it was. Ursula stood by the window and I stood by the bed ready if it need be to fight for her full share of oxygen. The little old lady saw that the game was up and with many shakings of the head and looks of dire foreboding she tottered away with murmurs of, "Oh, my dears! Oh, deary me!" and it was obvious that she never expected to see either of us again in the light of the morning sun.

"Perhaps we shall hear the chimes at midnight; lovely!" said Ursula, as she loosened her blouse. "Dearest, will you stay for a little and brush my hair?"

Sleepy though I was I agreed to this off-hand.

"What pretty things women wear," I remarked.

"But the lamented reign of Jaegar is not yet past," said Ursula with a sigh. "There are people, I believe, still, who sleep in brown

woollen nightgowns. Just think of it, brown wool!"

"My mind refuses to harbour the thought," I replied. "They really almost deserve to die."

"In a way they are already dead," said Ursula; "æsthetically dead, at all events."

I agreed that theirs was merely a living death. They lived, so to speak, with one lung.

"How dreadful it would be," continued Ursula; "if one could get no pleasure from a sunset, or a scent, or even from a little slip of ribbon like this running in and out of lace. When one comes to think of it, Christianity has much to answer for. Think what it has done to deprive the world of beauty. Two hundred years ago my stockings would have brought me to the stake. I'm so glad I didn't live then."

The little old lady had rescued us from several difficulties, one of which was a hair brush, which I had forgotten to include in my kit.

"And it's a nice clean one if not particularly decorative," remarked Ursula. "Oh, how beautifully you brush."

"These gold waves of yours inspire me," I said. "It's delicious to touch them."

Her hair was a very torrent of burnished colour, and thick—

"Thick as autumnal leaves that strew
The streams in Vallombrosa."

She leaned forward as I hypnotised her with rhythmical sweeps through the rippling coils.

"Lovely," she murmured. "Who taught you how to do it?"

"Ah!" I said, in a tone that was intended to convey much.

Ursula slewed round instantly with the look of a cheated puma.

"Who taught you?" she demanded jealously. "I *will* know."

"You won't," I answered. "I can't tell you."

"Why not?" she cried.

"I don't know," I said. "I really think it must be instinct that leads me to deal tenderly with the tresses of the fair. This is my first attempt." And I went on brushing. Ursula subsided.

"Are you asleep?" I asked, presently.

"Nearly," she murmured drowsily.

"What am I to do with the combings?" I asked.

That woke her. She seized the brush from me and examined it.

"There aren't any," she exclaimed, "you villain, Jerry!"

"All hair dressers are liars," I answered. "Suppose you get into bed like a good girl."

"Oh, but I—I want to say some prayers.

Mayn't I? Say some with me. Do," she coaxed.
"Make some up, just for you and me."

Who could refuse her? I blew out the candle, giving house-room to the moon. Then we knelt down together and this was my prayer:—

"Suffer us yet a little longer, with our broken, purposes for good. Have us to play the man under affliction. Keep us in growing honour, prolong our days. Thou of the vast designs in which we wander blindly, deliver us from the fear of favour, from cheap pleasures and mean hopes. Give us courage, gaiety, and the quiet mind.

"And in all changes of fortune and down to the gates of Death give us to be loyal and loving one to the other. And give us, in the end, the gift of sleep."*

And then we heard the chimes: a far-away little carillon. We listened, and I felt a tear run down her cheek in the dark. I kissed it away and her arm tightened round my neck.

"Say something I shall never, never forget; put to-day into phrase."

"My wife," I whispered. "My wife."

"Oh, my husband, my own husband."

I bent over her, and, in the dim light I could

* Compiled from the Prayers of Robert Louis Stevenson in exile at Samoa.

see her eyes shining; and then, our prayers said, I left her to the stillness of the night and the fragrance of the flowers she loved. In my small eyrie I lay and watched the Pleiades, the twinkling sisters of the sky, till with the dawn they faded and there came to me the gift of sleep.

She had been very quiet in the returning train. She had scarcely spoken. Her hand lay in mine and my ring was still on her finger. She would never take it off, she said, never, never.

Our lives were buried and had been again in it. No other ring could ever mean what that ring meant.

The great gasometers that mark St. Pancras came into view through the carriage windows as the train slowed down and took the curve into the station and I kissed her for the last time. That was the end; the journey was done. A moment later the doors were flung open and we stood once more upon the platform. It seemed incredible that only a day had passed since we had left it. One day. One irresistible day so stocked with memories that every other day went pale before it.

After the stillness of the meadows we had lived it in, the roar of the City was deafening to the point of pain. It swallowed up identity. It

seemed like a tremendous vortex, a swirl, absorbing personality and thought, full of mysterious undercurrents, and Ursula and I were part of it, caught in the relentless swim, swept along in its eddies—swept apart. A couple of straws for all our ecstasies.

PART III



PART III

CONCERNING that bee. That irresponsible insect was responsible for much. He had begun by annoying Ursula. He had stung her. Through that bee I myself became acquainted with Bismuth and Nux Vomica and Digitalis and many other fell chemical combinations hitherto strange to one who had known no drug but alcohol and that in mere biblical doses such as are expressly ordered to make glad the heart of man and to give him a cheerful countenance ; but through that bee—! The brute. He upset a tradition ; that was the first thing he did, a dastardly act in itself. Simultaneously, he stung a pretty lady's finger. No really nice bee would sting anything at all except, perhaps, a small boy who tried to tickle it with a stick, or a man named Herbert.

I shall never be friends again with bees. As a friend they have seen the last of me. I don't believe in them. I would sooner believe in Quinine. I do believe in Quinine. Yet I had always thought that bees, in their way, were artists, that they could "feel the scene" as

actors say. I thought they buzzed so that they might make a sort of background to summer and create an atmosphere that people could be lazy in. Not a bit of it. I believe, now, that they buzz with mere rage because Bacon wrote books about gardens and made people fond of flowers. They're afraid we shall pick the flowers and get the honey before they do. And I don't believe they do improve the shining hour. I know of one shining hour they simply ruined; and as for gathering the honey—they don't gather it at all; they *eat* it because they like it and they stagger home as full as aldermen with a spurious reputation for industry. As for their vaunted honey, what is it, after all? Nowadays it can be made just as well without them. A friend of mine has shares in a place where—well, it would deceive any bee on earth. But this is by the way.

I spent the afternoon of the day Ursula and I returned to town engaged in the manufacture of my will, my last deed and testament, with the minions of the law. I spent heavy hours with heavy men who thought before they spoke and pinned me down to rational statements. As if I could be rational; as if I wanted to be.

"My dear chaps," I said, "if only you would smile now and then, and now and then expand. Enter into the spirit of the thing. Get married yourselves."

But they seemed unlike other men; everything with them was precise and orderly—an impossible state of affairs in June.

“I can't think how you can do it,” I said, when they had “advised” me till I was weary of the word. “No one ever takes advice. I come here to tell you what I want done; I don't want you to tell me what you advise me to do.”

The situation was ridiculous.

“Can't you see,” I said, “can't you see that to all intents and purposes I am drunk, or isn't there enough human nature about you for that?”

But the most I could make them say was that they considered me “unwise.”

When I said that in my opinion only a fool would dream of being anything else they really did begin to think I had been with Bacchus. However, in the end I succeeded in making my will, not theirs. I had seen, of course, that I should have to be firm with them. I was with those who were obsessed with etiquette and formulas, with those who dallied with Father Time while I was in my stride; therefore, I spoke more loudly than is customary with me.

“Bring on your parchments,” I said. “None of your law's delay for me. Get on to it like men.”

And they had got on to it. They were very

angry; they worked their eyebrows and they twitched their lips but they knew their authority over me was bluff, and when I spoke more loudly than is customary with me they remembered the little affair at Jericho and trembled lest they too should fall, fall into disuse so far as I was concerned; therefore, they changed their tune and abased themselves when I spoke more loudly, etc.

As I came into Fleet Street from the Temple I reflected that much may be accomplished by a shout, and Fleet Street knows it. Fleet Street has profited by the little riot at Jericho to the extent of understanding thoroughly the uses of sound—if the knowledge can be called profitable. Fleet Street, one supposes, will in its turn be shouted down, even as Jericho. Sooner or later all the landmarks go.

"What's not destroyed by Time's devouring hand?
Where's Troy, and where's the May Pole in the Strand?"

To-day it is not May Poles but North Poles and South Poles that engage our attention—more's the pity.

By the Griffin, where once stood Temple Bar, a man slapped me on the back.

"Hullo, you old cripple," said he.

"Don't know you," I answered.

"Bunkum," he remarked.

"Don't *want* to know you either," I replied.

"Don't be a blithering idiot, Jerry," said he.

"Are you by chance named Scott?" I asked.

He said he was, and he gave me to understand that he was not so named by chance, but by law.

Scott it actually was, browsing about in a wig and cumbered with briefs, looking as if he had never harmed a trout in all his days. I had met him last in Cape Town, years ago.

"What an end to a man," I remarked. "Do you do this because you like it?"

He said he did.

"Then let us change the subject. Why are you not a minister of religion? As a child you were devout."

He assured me that I was labouring under a delusion.

"What do you want hereabouts?" he asked, indicating the legal region.

"Not you," I replied. "From what I remember of you I imagine you're on the criminal side."

"Your imagination was always your strong point," he remarked. "Come and have tea."

I said I would, and he took me to a place where no man should take his friend. It was a vault below the level of the ground and the company was mixed.

"But what does that matter?" said Scott.

"I am in your hands," I answered. "Your guest."

"Bit of a Sybarite these days, eh?" he remarked when I asked for cream with my tea. He looked me over in an amused sort of way and asked me who made my boots.

I gave him the address of my bootmaker, expressing at the same time the hope that he would proceed there forthwith. He admitted the necessity and lit a pipe that smelt. He was doing very well, he said; nothing to write home about but he mustn't grumble. He had seen me bowl once or twice and he thought on the whole I kept a decent length, but that, of course, might be accident or luck. He remembered seeing a man make fifteen runs off me in one over and he rather wondered why I was played so much. And he had read a book of mine; rather a good book, he thought, of its kind. He fancied he had bought a copy for a lady friend but this he admitted might be untrue. He had intended, more than once, to look me up, but he was a busy beast, he said, out for "silk," and he hadn't much time. Finally he remarked that I had become a better looking chap than he had ever thought possible or likely.

I told him of my present circumstances.

"Good business," he remarked, looking at me over his pipe. "Good business."

After my dreadful afternoon with lawyers he seemed quite a human being and I naturally became loquacious. He was the first real man I had met since I parted from Ursula and the valve of confidence in me opened like an oyster in the neighbourhood of salt. He pulled me up with a kick.

"That chap heard you," he remarked, pointing to a man with his pipe.

"I don't care a continental hayseed who hears me," I exclaimed, with jubilation. "I'm going to be married and I've made my will."

"No need to shout about it," he remarked.

"Every need," I replied.

"You're not the first fool," said Scott.

"*Et tu?*" I enquired.

He shook his head.

"Sour grapes," he said shortly as he sucked his filthy old pipe. "I've put her into these damned things," and he indicated his briefs. "They're safer," he said. "No offence."

He was interested to hear that as recently as yesterday I had been over our juvenile trails. He had been down there once or twice himself to look at the place but it had broken him up and made him feel old. He said it was demoralising to attempt to revitalise past experience and too damned sad. Then, filled with reminiscences and with his restaurant tea, I left him and went home.

As I drove along the love-lit way I determined, in future, to see more of Scott. I must get him married. Ursula, perhaps, would know of some girl who would do. I felt that some nice girl might make him very happy and, for all I knew, he might have a similar effect upon some nice girl. I passed half a dozen who seemed to be the very thing for him. It was a pity that a good fisherman like Scott should be tied up with briefs and bad tea instead of having a nice girl to nag at him and mend his socks. I wondered who the woman was who had let him down. And so home, as complacent and self satisfied as Mr. Pepys himself, there to don my new suit of tweeds "that did please me mightily."

In my rooms I proceeded to shave while I waited for a telegram from Ursula. She was to wire to me as soon as she found life becoming insupportable without me and when she had made her final arrangements for leaving the state of single blessedness behind her; that is to say, we were to meet at Victoria Station at six o'clock with a view to breathing country air again while the marriage law endeavoured, as it were, to catch us up. Marriage licences were elusive things, it seemed; they could not be bought outright; it was necessary that a considerable time should elapse between the application and the grant of such. One brought

down one's bird, so to speak, but he had to hang before one could eat him. This is all very well for the patiently minded, for those who incline to lethargy in the matter of the rites of Hymen, but Ursula and I did not. We desired to become legally one flesh in one day and we found that it could not be done; the law of the land makes no provision for matrimonial speed. In this extremity there was obviously nothing to be done but to alter the usual course of events; the law of the land gave us no choice in the matter. It refused to be amenable either to bullion or to bribery. It wouldn't budge an inch. It made itself into an impasse.

"So in that event there's really nothing to be done," Ursula had said, "except to put the cart before the horse; the honeymoon must precede the wedding. In fact, we will marry at leisure and by so doing we shall not only avoid the worry of the law's delay but we may also avoid the possibility of repenting in haste."

"I am the last person in the world to put a check on enterprise," said I.

It was in these circumstances that I entered upon my last bachelor shave with a light heart and an excellent razor. It had seemed to me for some time past that comparatively late in life I was achieving a certain proficiency with the strop. Few men ever do achieve this. In

common with greatness some are born with it and some few achieve it, but none have it thrust upon them. I apparently was one of those rare spirits who had laboriously achieved this priceless quality by dogged perseverance and the ruin of many razors. Of late, my beard had come from the chin with the true hispid rip. I knew the luxurious shave. I had become an hirsute high priest, the envy of hairy men who cut their chins and bleed.

Ursula's telegram was brought to me as I was giving the final flick to one of the best lathers I have ever known. As I opened it a flake of white soap fell on the pink paper, symbolically. This is what I read :

" I can't see you again. Je t'aime. URSULA."

I went on shaving.

One of the arts of shaving is to dip the razor into the hot water jug before applying it to the beard. It puts an undeniable "kick" into the razor ; it stiffens it against the coming encounter with the hirsute enemy and is quite a thing to know. I always begin my shaves below the left ear, working downwards to the chin ; then I tackle the right-hand side in the same way. By this device one gets the hand in, so to speak, before attempting to negotiate the lower lip and the short but deadly putts in the moustache

area. On this occasion something was wrong with my grip and I "sliced" badly and bled all over the telegram. A symbol might be discovered in this too.

"I can't see you again. Je t'aime. URSULA."

What did it mean? My first feeling was that of something enormous gone, of an immense cavity. Several hours later I found myself sitting on the edge of my bed in the dark with the telegram still in my hand. I had lost Ursula. That seemed to be the long and short of it. It had not occurred to me yet to question it or to rebel against it. I accepted it as one accepts all inexorable, inevitable things, with the consciousness that the essence of events cannot be altered by human shrieks.

It never occurred to me, for a moment, to doubt Ursula; to do that would have been a sheer impossibility. I recognised that she was merely the channel through which the message had reached me, even though her own hand had written and her own brain conceived it.

"Je t'aime," she had said, *"je t'aime."* And she had given me every proof. She had given me herself. If a newer self had been born of the ashes of the old one (and it might be so, was so, I imagined) I had no right to reproach her. In the very wording of her message she had taken me for granted far beyond that point. But my

thoughts were soon outside the control of logic and led me into the very morasses of misery. Disreputable images obsessed me, images created out of sheer pain. I saw her in the arms of other men. I saw them take her and possess her while she smiled—as she had smiled at me; and I heard little children call her mother. I fought with the very devils of wretchedness, and in my misery I must have groaned, for my landlady came into the room, alarmed, and I pretended that it had not been me. But I knew she was not deceived. She saw the telegram and she said something about bad news. And I had had no dinner, she said. Food was her panacea for grief. Could she boil me an egg? I laughed; an egg seemed such a comical thing to suggest.

“Then let me get you a whisky and soda, Mr. Coltover,” she said, and I watched her fetch the things.

I drank in order that she might go. I wanted to be alone. Outside the door her footsteps stopped abruptly and I knew she was listening at the keyhole for further illuminating sounds. There were none.

Why had Ursula done this awful thing? There was a clue if I could only find it, I supposed, and find it I must. My belief in her must be unchallenged if I was to go on living. It seemed to me that the very brevity of her telegram was

intended as an assurance, and, was it, after all, such an intense surprise? Could I trace its birth back into yesterday?

How quiet she had been that very morning in the train.

How shocked she had been when the bee had stung her in the garden.

"This is an omen, Jerry," she had said. "An omen." Some indefinable forecast had troubled her. Was it possible that she could have known, vaguely, even then?

"Put to-day into a phrase, Jerry."

It seemed, now, in perspective, a request for a concentrated memory, a memory almost implying——

But I could not and would not accept such an explanation. There was too much that contradicted it.

"Ever since I met you I've been trying to pray," she had said; and she had prayed; we had prayed together.

"Isn't it splendid to know the secret of the world, Jerry?"

"When I saw you everything lifted and let in the sun, and now it's nearly blinding me, it's nearly blinding me."

She had said these things to me—yesterday. Was it possible that she or any woman could forget things so sacred in a day?

It was impossible, I told myself. Wherever the clue might be, it was certainly not there.

"I can't see you again. Je t'aime. URSULA."

I must find a meaning to the words. I must find some re-arrangement of them that made a meaning; and, suddenly, the re-arrangement and the meaning came.

"Because I love you I must leave you."

It altered the entire sense, put the thing into a nutshell. Here was a hypothesis I could build an argument upon, get some sort of comfort from, perhaps.

First, I argued, it implied a doubt either of herself or of me. Which?

"I am the last idol," she had cried out involuntarily, the day before, in a summary of me.

"You polish away at your idol and if you can't obliterate every little scratch—all its beauties won't balance the little scratch, will they?" These reflections certainly brought things more into line.

The very unveiling of her body, her anxiety to know if it were perfect, perfect enough for me, implied a doubt of me. And all my assurances to the contrary had not convinced her; the doubt had laid dormant and had matured into this! She had chaffed me for being fastidious; physically and mentally fastidious. Her very

surrender argued—what? Could she suppose that I might come to read an imperfection even into that? I could not satisfy myself that these theories were the sole cause of her telegram. The personal equation could not apply only to me. It must apply, if it applied at all, to her as well. But how? Her motive must be a strong one to take her to these lengths, to unwind that wonderful yesterday. I thought of her unconquerable courage by the weir when she dived the second time from the tree. She refused to be beaten; there was no weakness in her. All the day through it had been her courage, her physical and moral courage, that had most impressed me, endeared her to me most. What would explain this inexplicable refutation?

Then suddenly I thought of the pulpit phrase that had hit her so hard. Had it gone deeper, hit her harder than I imagined? Was that it? Could that in some way have led to this?

“Weak, weak as water thou shalt not excel.”

I had called it biscuit box oratory but I remembered now the new look on her face as we had walked home afterwards, and how attentively she had listened at the time. What was the psychology of the thing? The circumstances must be considered. The effect on character implied by the phrase “maiden no more” must be stupendous, in some cases cataclysmic, I

imagined. Had I been too sure of her, too sure of human nature? Had I read a bravery, an almost masculine attribute into her character that was not really there? I couldn't tell, but I believed it was here, in some vague way, that the trouble lay. The idea grew as I thought it out and built it up into an argument, an argument that would have been inconceivable in its application to Ursula as I had known her—before that telegram arrived.

"Weak, weak as water thou shalt not excel."

The words must have touched her imagination with tremendous force. She must have dwelt upon them until she had come to see herself as weak, she who hated weakness. A priest with a strong face and a mouthful of words had beaten her! And beaten me! And what could I do? Nothing. The more I thought of it the more certain I became. In the very brevity of her message I read determination. She was torn but she refused to be false to a newly awakened ideal. She left me with a memory, and, in effect, she begged me not to destroy one. (I felt, as I argued her case for her.) I could almost hear her saying it. She did say it, in the telegram that said everything and only left out hope. She expected it of me. And suppose I refused and held her to every promise of yesterday? I might do that. I might beg. I

had words, arguments, entreaties I could use to beat her down with effectually. I could get her again if I tried, only—I should not be getting *Her*. I should be getting—something, because my will was stronger than the thing it opposed, something that pitied me and yielded, something that was not given but conceded; and before I did that I would bite on the bullet until it broke my teeth. I wouldn't have that thing. I would stick in this sudden, unpremeditated, unexpected, fantastic hell where I should be condemned to the perpetual torture of wondering how I had got there. I took my resolution as quickly as she had taken hers.

She might, of course, "come true" again; there was always that; but I was up against a tremendous thing, I was up against sex, the everlasting opposite, the unsolvable, unbridgable silence of sex, that no man could break or decipher for me. By God!—but a woman might! A woman might at least tell me if my guesses hit the mark. After all, I didn't even know if my hypothesis was right; I was only guessing. It might be possible to let a ray of hope in somewhere. A man's instinct about women—what does a man know of women? I would find a woman, the right one, and ask *her* what it meant. Why hadn't I thought of that before? Hope! That was what I wanted to find. There might

be none or there might be every hope ; but a woman would know. Not every woman ; the right one, of course. I could find one, the streets were full, full of women who had given up hope ; therefore they would be the first to recognise it. I must find a woman. I went out, but in an hour, though many had spoken to me, I had not seen the woman I wanted. I hadn't hit the type. She must be of a certain type if she were to answer my purpose. Once, as I walked along, a woman passed me in a cab and I knew that she would have done. She was with a man, a gross looking brute enough, outwardly ; yet I supposed there must have been a contradictory streak in him, or the lily whom he paid to sit beside him could not have been there. When she smiled in reply to some remark of his I was sure she would have understood. But she was engaged.

I found the woman I was looking for on the pavement outside a women's club—looking through the blinds. A gentlewoman outside a gentlewomen's club—looking through the blinds.

"Well?" she said as I stopped beside her.

"Will you come with me?" I asked.

She studied me for a moment before she replied.

"You seem very sure that I——"

"I beg your pardon," I said hurriedly, and I took off my hat and turned away.

"Don't go," she called to me, and I went back.

"You were quite right," she laughed. "I'm fair game; there's nothing to be apologetic about, only I'm bound to make my little experiments, just as you are."

"Experiments?" I said vaguely.

She laughed.

"Haven't you ever sent down a trial ball or two?"

The illustration was so apt that I wondered if she knew who I was.

"I can pay," I remarked, "if that is the point."

"Obviously it is one of the points."

I called a cab and we drove home. She had the eyes I wanted.

"Well?" she asked as I looked at her, "what do you see?"

"Suffering," I said. "That's why I spoke to you."

"When you spoke to me," she said, "I was looking into the club where I used to be a member, at the women I used to know."

"Oh, you poor thing," I cried involuntarily.

She laughed outright.

"Do you really expect me to believe in your pity, considering where I am and why you've brought me here?"

"You don't know why I have brought you here," I said.

She gave a startled look round the room as if she were not quite sure of what sort of place she had got into.

"There's nothing to be alarmed about," I assured her. "I'm not even going to make love to you. I want to talk."

"You're a very queer man," she remarked, looking hard at me. "You—you rather puzzle me."

She rose as if she intended to go.

"Oh, don't, don't go, please don't. Let me talk, do let me talk," I begged.

She sat back in her chair and lit a cigarette and waited for me to speak. Then the whole situation suddenly seemed to become ridiculous, and I wondered why on earth I had brought her there at all. I couldn't say a word.

"Well, what can I do?" she asked at length.

"Nothing," I answered stupidly. "You wouldn't understand."

"I might," she said. "What have you done?"

"I've been a fool," I muttered.

"How original," she laughed. "So have I. I was rather a fool to come here, rather a fool to wish to remind you that we have met before."

"Where?" I asked, in astonishment.

"Lord's," she answered. "Before I fell from my high estate—and you were so supremely unconscious of your effect upon me," she added with a nonchalant laugh.

"What was my effect upon you?" I asked, not understanding.

She gave me a look that made it pretty clear.

"Can you put a name to me yet?" she asked.

"No," I answered. "And if I could I wouldn't."

"In any case I've lost it," she remarked.

"Things leave one very easily, don't they?"

"Some things don't leave us at all. They take us back to the club window."

Her cigarette fell out of her fingers and burnt a little hole in the carpet. I watched it smoulder. Then she rose suddenly and I saw that her eyes were smouldering too. She was in evening dress; her arms and shoulders were daringly bare, and wonderfully white and beautiful. She made a gesture of appeal.

"Am I still so uninviting?" it seemed to say.

She was the picture of passionate temptation, standing there with her blazing eyes and heaving breast—and I was frozen marble; the quality that could touch me was not in her, and she flushed as she saw it and I stood my ground.

"Surely I am here under false pretences?"

"No," I said.

I knew her for what she was ; a woman who had bartered her drawing-room for the street, and I knew why. But I had seen her blush—the saddest, reddest blush on the whole face of nature, the blush of the rejected wanton. Indirectly I had caused it and I owed her every apology. I offered her the only one possible. I gave her my confidence.

“ I want your help—because you’re a woman.”

Her face changed instantly. The essential womanhood in a woman seldom dies.

“ Thank you,” she said, in a low voice. “ I’ll help you if I can. What is it ? ”

That was all, but we had “ made it up ” ; the shame and the resentment died out of her and we understood one another.

Then I told her about Ursula. I could talk now ; the words came. I was able to make my confusion clear and she listened ; she gave me her full attention as I drew the whole picture of yesterday and waited for her comments or her verdict.

“ What does it mean ? ” I asked. “ Tell me what it means.”

I had explained very fully. I had told her everything that had been characteristic. It was a long time before she spoke. There was no mistaking her sincerity. I might have been confessing to a priest. Once or twice during the long recital

she had moved, restlessly, and once she had made an impatient gesture which I had not understood. I took it, vaguely, to indicate that I had blundered.

"Well," I said again, "haven't you anything at all to say?"

"Poor girl," she murmured, "poor girl."

I think I had expected her to pity me.

"She's crucifying herself for you. She won't come back because she loves you. Isn't that what she says? And can't you see for yourself that it's true?"

"I wasn't sure," I muttered. "How could I be?"

"Take something for granted," she replied. "You may. A woman never forgets the first man who— Let her work out her own salvation even if it puzzles you and you can't understand. Sooner or later she'll come back to you and she knows you're sure of it too. But you must let her be her own judge. Just believe in her and wait."

"Women forget," I muttered.

"Women remember. They go back to the club window and look in or out, as the case may be. She won't forget. If it was in her to forget she——"

"Then do you defend her?"

She waited a moment. "I understand her. It isn't her weakness that has taken her away."

"And what about me?" I asked. "I'm merely weak. I haven't got these subtle principles to support myself with; what about me?"

"You must hold on."

"In the dark?"

"But is it so dark?"

"It will be. One doesn't see much when one is possessed with the devil."

"You'll light things up with the memory of yesterday."

"I can't live on dreams."

"It may not be for long. You don't know. All I can tell you is that you are sure of her—and she thinks she is sure of you. That's what it all means and I can't tell you any more. No one can. Have I served my turn?"

Then I remembered what this woman was and that I had deprived her of her time. It struck me, vaguely, that her time was of value to her, and I made an involuntary movement to the drawer where I kept my cheque book. Before I could open it she stopped me.

"Don't!" she cried. "Don't!"

I paused.

"I wouldn't do much to help a man, but I don't want to be paid if I've done anything that will help a woman," she said.

Then she went away.

And she had merely confirmed my own instinct

after all. I had known all she had told me before she said it—and there was nothing to be done, nothing to be expected. I was conscious of being merely a pawn in a game that had no point. I saw myself condemned to a desert and told to find my way out if I could. I should walk in circles of sand until I dropped in my own tracks, beaten. It was merely a question of comparison between the size of the circle and the resisting power of my moral and muscular outfit unsupported by water ; and there was the faint hope, it seemed, of an improbable rescue. With regard to a rescue I was sceptical. I decided to disregard that from the very beginning ; not to build on it. Having reasoned thus far I gave out. There was the desert and there was I in it, touched already by the sun, compassed in on every side by wastes of sand. My brain very soon became a sort of Bioscope of Ursula. Every moment of my one day's life with her was reproduced and reproduced until it became maddening. The visions never left off ; they went on and on . . .

If I tried to eat I saw pictures of our impromptu meals together. If I drank I heard her voice say "Let me drink where you drank from." If I tried to sleep . . . I stretched out my arms for her . . . It was all the same, there was no escaping from it. I was caught and made to look and listen . . . and the evening and the

morning were the first day. I wondered how many days of it I should be able to stand before I went off my head.

On the seventh day I was permitted to undergo a change of pain. The quality of it altered, and I was as grateful as a convict who is taken off oakum and told to saw wood. The torture in my brains became centred in my teeth, and I fairly wilted under disorders that showed the profound distinction between the pains of the body and the pains of the mind, obliterating the latter. I found, from first-hand knowledge, just about how much the human tabernacle is capable of bearing of each kind without ending the whole business by the friendly fumes of charcoal or in a convenient pond ; and I found the relief was so amazing when one quality was switched off and another quality switched on, that I bore the new quality for four days and nights, achieving during that time the contours of one afflicted with the mumps ; but on the fifth day the white-hot gimlets in my jaw forced me to the decision that the pains of the mind should be restored and the pains of the body suppressed by a visit to a professional person.

"Ha! Got a toothache?" enquired the dentist cheerily, as I was shown in to him.

The fact was perfectly obvious.

"I *am* toothache," I muttered, as well as one

can mutter when one's mouth is behind one's ear. "Do things to me."

I should think he did his damndest.

"How have you got into this state?" he asked, as I mopped myself.

"Guess," I said.

He guessed, inaccurately, and he sent me to a chemist where I bought twenty-four hours' worth of sleep. When I awoke my mumps were on the mend and the Bioscope began once more.

In the third week I went to a Turkish bath, wondering whether I should sweat blood. I was not allowed to sweat at all. When they saw me they flatly refused to sanction the proceeding.

"For 'Eaven's sake see a doctor, Mr. Coltover," said someone who seemed to know me. "What on h'earth have you been a-doing to yourself?"

I cursed him and crawled home to the Bioscope. There was no getting away from it.

A day or two later Scott looked in. He stared at me rather rudely and I stared back. Then he went out of the room for a moment. When he returned he was carrying a tumbler in his hand containing a bilious looking draught which he said was an egg beaten up in milk.

"Drink it, old bird," he said.

I suggested hell as the best place for him and his mixture too, off-hand.

"Got any whisky?" he enquired, disregarding my suggestion.

I didn't know if I had any whisky or not; my interest in the bowl had waned. He found a bottle, however, lurking in a once well-stocked recess, and he added plentifully to the custard-like concoction in the tumbler. I found myself drinking the evil brew and remembering, gradually, who he was.

"How's the Bar?" I asked, stimulated by the taste of whisky.

He said the Bar was all right, but he was not talkative. He said he would look in again as soon as he could but he was very tucked up at the moment with a difficult case. Before going he delivered himself of the opinion that if I was off meat a poached egg now and then would prove to be a good substitute.

"Damn you and your poached eggs," I muttered angrily.

I had tried a poached egg and found that it had merely tickled up the Bioscope. I had eaten poached eggs with Ursula. That was quite enough for the Bioscope. It worked on far less provocation than that.

Scott said nothing; he picked up the broken bits of eggy tumbler and went away.

Soon afterwards my landlady came in and said someone had sent a copy of *Punch* and the

illustrated papers. *Punch* happened to be at its very worst that week—its very worst. It was so utterly un-funny that it very nearly became a joke. For the purposes of amusement it was not, of course, of the least use to me, but Scott had meant well, no doubt, when he sent it in. I looked at it, decided that I could be far funnier myself—and got drunk; there was just enough whisky in the bottle and I found it very helpful. I continued the treatment for about a week, I imagine, having previously replenished the bin with a generous hand. After one or two experiments I got the hang of the thing and I discovered to a hair how to avoid the intervening and quite unnecessary periods of sobriety that are sometimes associated with the drinker. Then, one day, Scott looked me up again and I thought he was a lizard. I tried to hit him with some lumps of coal and got him with the second barrel. He went away at once, returning shortly afterwards with another lizard who changed most curiously into an antelope before my eyes.

“Leopards will be changing their spots next,” I thought to myself, feeling several degrees of fear; but I fought bravely, remembering that I was an Englishman with ancestors who had died at Nelsonloo in ladies’ bathing-dresses. Then the antelope sat on my chest and said I should do a bit better on water. I demanded alcohol.

But they gave me bromide instead. I distinctly recollect seeing Scott pour some out of a blue bottle into a glass. He added words of caution and his intentions were of a friendly kind.

"Steady, old son," he said, "steady. Take a pull on yourself. This sort of thing won't do."

"Go to the devil," I answered from the bowels of gloom.

But he went to Brighton instead, when I was well enough, and he stayed there for a week with me. It was not interesting. When I asked him how he could stand it, he said he didn't know.

"How does one stand anything?" he asked.

When he had gone I pondered the remark. While he was there I cursed him and begged for whisky, but he took me to matinees at music halls instead, and once he brought one of the music hall artistes home to tea. She called it tea; nobody else would have done so. I called it a carouse, a carouse in which I was not allowed to join, and she called me "old dear." I think the subtle Scott intended it as a subtle object lesson, but he said not. Another of his diplomatic though transparent suggestions was a round of golf, and one morning we motored to the links. Scott at that time was plus two, while I had some

time previously been brought down to four. What made me imagine that I could play him level and give him a licking I don't know, but I not only imagined it, but suggested it. I am of the opinion now that the open air and the absence of any association of Ursula with the ancient game of golf had restored a few stray particles of manhood to my drug-ridden system. I was merely bucking. Scott, however, to my surprise, fell in with the suggestion at once, though he said no man could do it. Having driven a long ball from the first tee I felt a mild cheeriness when he fozzled into the rough and I took the first hole from him in four. At the second hole he found the bunker and I was two up on him.

"You're a blooming Taylor," he remarked.

He won the third. I won the fourth and the fifth. We halved the sixth. At the seventh he took his iron where the merest tennis player would have used a cleek and he missed a two-foot putt. Then it suddenly struck me that he was doing it on purpose. He was deliberately losing to me for the sake of moral effect. I said nothing, but I watched him. On the eighth tee he missed the ball altogether.

"Blast!" he said. And I took the hole.

At the ninth he overran the green with the easiest pitch shot in the world. He pretended to be greatly annoyed and he used the filthiest

language imaginable. He used words I had never even heard, reviling the game, the caddies, the balls and me. It was well done ; it was a shade too well done for truth. No plus two man ever does it. Those are not the qualities that reduce a man's handicap to the glories of plus two. When a man is down to scratch his language ceases, as a rule, to be penal.

"I'm damned if I can understand it," he remarked, with the usual oaths of the man who is merely learning the game. "It's years since I've done such things as this."

"And it's years before you will again," I answered, and, to show him his transparency, I adopted his methods of play. I used the wrong clubs, I topped and sliced and fozzled till it nearly broke his heart to be obliged to go one better in order to lose the hole. It was magnificent, but it was not golf, and there was no moral effect to my credit when I found myself five up and four to go, because I knew he could have given me half a stroke and beaten me. He meant well but it missed. Still he stuck it out and said he would never play the God-forsaken game again ; anyone who liked could have his crimson clubs ; in future he meant to play marbles. These, of course, are the things that are invariably said—but not by plus two men.

We motored home.

"I must go back to town to-morrow," said Scott. "What are you going to do?"

I felt decidedly blank. It had done me good to have him there to grouse at. The gloom of the situation had been temporarily mitigated, and I feared loneliness now more than I feared God. When he had abandoned me I didn't quite know what I should do. I hadn't thought. Very probably I should drink if I got too much Bioscope.

"Mustn't do that, sonny," said Scott.

"Mustn't do what?"

"Bad for the liver," he went on. "Rotten bad. Go somewhere on a dirty old ship. Take hold of yourself by the neck. It's the only possible thing to do. Sign on as stoker and sweat the damned thing out of you. If the stink and dirt and the grub don't kill you, they'll probably put you right."

I wondered.

This was Scott's one allusion to Ursula, and his only piece of advice. His eloquence was confined to the calling by which he wrested from the unwilling earth the bread and the tobacco he deemed sufficient for his needs, and his habitual attitude never trespassed upon the toes of friendship. An unusual person, and his infrequent utterances compelled a certain deference. After he had gone, therefore, I considered

his suggestion. I was not greatly attracted to the peculiar hell of the stoke-hole, though I admitted, feebly, the logic of Scott's contention. He had got his idea from Genesis, I decided. He recalled the fact that Providence had created the remedy of sweat for the griefs of Adam.

I owed my life, probably, to Scott, who had clearly saved me from death, from a drunkard's doom ; but my life, at the moment, did not seem to be worth very much to me, saved though I was. It had become a profitless affair, merely involving me in pain. Why should I suffer it at all ?

For a day or two I wandered about, wavering and helpless, with distressful thoughts brewing in the dark kitchen of my soul. Then I established a great point. Well and truly I notched my stick.

One evening, as I was walking home in the dusk to Kemptown, I stumbled upon a crisis in the lives of other people.

I had come along the front from Hove. The tide was up, and a down-channel wind had brought up the spume and goodness of the sea, quickening my pulse. I felt less dead. I felt even a mild sensation of pleasure as I stopped to look at the lamplit effect of the pier. It was quite beautiful. Then, as I was turning away, I ran into a street row, a woman brawling with a man. For a

moment I was jammed in the crowd, an inquisitive, lustful crowd, hoping for a fight, and rejoicing in the absence of a policeman. The lady in the case had apparently just reached an oratorical climax ; her opinion of mankind in general, and of her companion in particular, had been hurtled in wild cries upon a listening world. I had heard something of it from afar. From her expression, I gathered that her opinion had been scathing and complete, leaving little if anything to the imagination. I looked at the man, the mirror and the butt of her verbal gifts. He was scowling ; his body was rigid, and he had a bloodshot eye. I saw the maddened message leap along the lines that link together brain and muscle, uniting thought with deed. I watched his impulses strangle his control. With an oath, unfamiliar to me, he struck her in the face, forgetting. Then he kicked her. The next moment, I imagine, I hit him. I was barely conscious of it, but I assume that it was so, because he then hit me, and after that I was fighting. I felt my weight in my arm, and I saw him go down. I saw him get up, and I hit again a bleeding man. I liked it. I kept on hitting. His blood clotted on my knuckles, and things became red and splendid. It was a crimson, strenuous, satisfying world. Twice he came through my guard ; the first time with a crook that found a good end on the side

of my neck, and again with a body blow that rattled my teeth.

Finally they pulled us apart, when the lady combined with her persecutor in a joint attack upon me, her champion.

"Chuck it, mister," said someone.

I did so, feeling, however, extraordinarily inclined to go on.

"You've done about enough for honour," smiled another man as I passed him. I felt that the point was debatable and that chivalry, possibly, had been incomplete. Galahad or Launcelot might not have left the thing where it was. I don't know. Don Quixote certainly would have done more. But the thing of such immense importance to me was that I had done something for myself: something fraught with psychic issues. I had established myself with myself again. I had emerged from coma. I had brought home to my pain-clouded consciousness the fact that the battle was a better thing than the bottle, that there was a joy in taking and in giving knocks, and, above all, in taking them gamely.

Of late I had not been game, and I became aware of it now. I had failed in sportsmanship. I had given in weakly, without one healthy kick against the pricks. I had not even clamoured for my rights. Well, I would. Fate, peradventure, might hit me, and hit me hard, but, for

as long as I could, I meant to hit back. I had decided against quiescence, against St. Paul. I had decided to fight.

An hour later, with my blood still tingling, I packed.

Two hours later I was on my way to London, and I was going there to demand Ursula.

This was the point I had established.

Sea and blood had put back into me something that had temporarily vanished from my character. My conduct of the last several weeks now seemed to me to be unthinkable. My whole attitude had been a mental squeal, but at last the ungrammatical sentence of my miserable decline had been mercifully punctuated by a good solid full stop I had pulled up.

When I got out of the train at Victoria I was once more a comparatively balanced person, and at twelve o'clock that night I was asleep, dreaming.

The following morning breakfast was a meal. Of late it had been a mere farinaceous mockery. There was comfort, too, in my subsequent pipe, also a novelty.

At five minutes to ten a cab deposited me in front of Ursula's house in Dean's Yard.

It was a roaring morning. There was pace in it, in the air, in the day, and in me. I was up and about again, doing something, doing some-

thing definite, in tune with the windy morning, a frolicsome morning that blew through the trees, and fluttered the surplice of a minor canon as he passed through the cloisters into the Abbey for matins. I overpaid the taxi, and the man called me Sir. "Good," I thought. "A chivalrous title." It promised well. I was on a chivalrous quest. I rang the bell, and a maid-servant opened the door. I asked for Ursula.

I waited for her in a beautifully quiet room that gave on Wren's twin towers, and I decided, on the whole, that he had done right to put them there. The Abbey without them, I reflected, would be incomplete, like a hungry monkey waiting for a nut. But I wished he had kept the Gothic idea. . . . The door opened behind me.

"Jerry!"

"Ursula!"

We stood looking at each other. Then I sat down, giving badly at the knees. I was not such a blade as I imagined. There was no breeze in that quiet room to lend me impetus; there were merely two distressed human personalities divided by a principle.

"Why did you—why did you come?" asked Ursula, regarding me piteously. I felt I had lost all power of conducting the interview.

"I want you," I muttered, as soon as I could speak.

"How *ill* you look," cried Ursula wretchedly, with her eyes on me.

She was as white as a ghost herself.

"I want you," I muttered again, wondering how often I should go on repeating it. But I could think of nothing else to say. I had become a stuttering nonentity, expressing my primitive needs in primitive language without veneer. "It's rot, rot!" I heard myself exclaim savagely, though I had not in the least intended to get angry.

Ursula leaned against a grand piano which was there. She put her hand on it, and when she took it away a moment later, I saw that her fingers had left a little misty mark, and I watched it evaporate. In moments of great emotion one is sometimes conscious of trifles, which, normally, one would never notice. I noticed, too, that she was still wearing my ring, though that, of course, was not a trifle. It brought home to me the incongruity of things.

"I give it up," I exclaimed, as I remembered all that my ring stood for. "I give it up. You beat me, utterly. You—kick me."

"Oh!" she gasped, with a little cry of pain.

"We belong," I muttered; "we belong. You know we do."

Her whole soul came into her eyes. I knew I was hurting her. I felt like a dog treading on

lilies. Still, I had a right to press her. I had a right to do what I was doing.

"Oh, my darling, if only I could make you understand," she cried, with her eyes floating in tears.

"A woman would understand," she added wistfully.

"Ah!" I thought, remembering.

So the other woman had been right, after all, and I knew that I had gained nothing by coming.

"Don't you—don't you trust me?" asked Ursula, in a voice that almost broke my heart.

Then I scarcely know what happened. In an almost unbearable wave of feeling I held out my arms to her, and the next moment she was sobbing with her cheek against mine.

"I'd go to hell for you," I choked. "I'd do any damned thing on earth for you." And I would have died for her, cheerfully. She could have anything from me I could give. Anything. I had given in. I would stand and wait.

"I only want you," she sobbed, "if you'll wait a little."

It was dreadful to hear her cry.

"And you look so ill, you do look so ill," she said brokenly.

"I'm all right," I muttered; "only bilious."

She shook her head. She knew well enough why I looked ill.

"It isn't just a whim; it isn't just caprice," she said, "all this."

I said nothing, but I wondered, rather grimly, how "all this" could be better described.

"You see, if I don't get right with myself we shan't be happy ever after, and we must, we must; mustn't we?" she asked imploringly.

"But when *will* you be right with yourself?" I questioned. "When will you know, really know?"

She wouldn't tell me. She *couldn't* tell me, she said. All she knew was that we must pay, pay to the uttermost farthing for "everything."

"Oh, Jerry," she begged, "won't you wait till I'm ready?"

Ready! And we had waited perhaps for millions of years as it was. I could have laughed at the irony of it. I saw myself living through æons of time waiting for the wheel to come again full circle. And this ghastly joke had been projected by a village parson and a casual bee operating in unison. Absorbed by this fantastic image I cursed every erotic scruple proceeding from the pulpit and the hive.

"Can't I see you at all, ever?" I asked, hoping against hope for a crumb. "Is it to be utter damnation and banishment?"

And this, or something like it, was, for a time,

to be my cheerless fate. My crumb went the same way as the rest of the miserable loaf.

"Just bear it, just bear it because I ask you, and because you love me," begged Ursula. "I'll tell you when I'm ready. I'll telegraph."

Telegraph!

"I'm on the telephone," I said grimly. "It's quicker."

She didn't laugh. I laughed alone, employing one side of my face for that purpose. I saw I should never dissuade her from following her instinct, and I said no more. She had spiked my guns and I was mute. There was nothing I could do now but wait as patiently as I could and be thankful that I had not lost her altogether. Moreover, I saw that the pain she was causing me hurt her far more than her own self-inflicted miseries and it behoved me to play the man under affliction.

So our one divine day had brought us to this. Payment must be made; a sacrifice must be offered in order that her gods might be propitiated, in order that her gods might ultimately bless us. That was what it amounted to. And here was I, a man in a billycock hat, helplessly subscribing to a code which defied analysis. I was doing it, too, against my will and against my judgment in my sober senses; I, a male of a ruling race. Neither did I see how by any

possibility I could resist. There was, literally, nothing whatever to be done. We were, both of us, to be offered up on the altar of this portentous Paganism.

"It's crass feminine lunacy," I muttered. "It isn't even Greek."

"What isn't Greek?" asked Ursula.

"You," said I grimly.

"But you said I was," smiled Ursula through her tears.

"Not your intellect," I answered. "Only your—only the rest of you."

"That's something," remarked Ursula, with a sound which was a mixture between a laugh and a sob.

Then we sat there clinging to each other like two lost babies, knowing that in a few moments I should get up and go away until some day she should telegraph to me to return. In the meantime one of us might die. A dozen catastrophies might occur that would put the golden moments for ever out of our reach. Yet if she had been weak about it now, if she had been conquered by my pain I think it would have been almost a disappointment to me. There was something rather fine about it, perhaps, after all. I began to wonder what would cause me actually to go; what would bring me to the point of definite departure. It seemed incredible that I should

cease, voluntarily, to hold her hand, stand up, open the door and go through it like an ordinary, everyday visitor. Yet the door was there for that purpose. The unreality of the idea was so strong that I turned my head to see if there really was a door.

Ursula did not speak. Perhaps she too was thinking the same thoughts. She would never ask me to go. I was certain of that. Still, it would become necessary for the situation to be terminated, somehow. It would be better for me to do it. If not we might be intruded upon. A housemaid would perhaps appear with a message from the cook. I felt I could not bear that. I wanted Ursula's flute-like voice to be the last thing I heard.

I looked at my watch, and I felt Ursula give a convulsive little clutch at me. It was just eleven, and a moment later Big Ben smote out eleven booming notes.

I sat there thinking helplessly. Then Scott's phrase came into my mind quite suddenly: "Take hold of yourself by the neck."

It reminded me that I was shilly-shallying still. I had shot my bolt, I had made my bid; I had seen with my eyes and heard with my ears; I had discovered what the situation actually was; I had subscribed to it and I was not meeting it fairly.

"Worm," I said to myself.

For at that very moment I was stroking Ursula's lenient hands instead of walking out of the house with a stiff upper lip, as, in the circumstances, a man who called himself a gentleman should by now be doing.

Up I jumped. Then I sat down again, abruptly.

"I can't go for a minute," I said, "my foot's asleep."

"So's mine," said Ursula, with a little wriggle.

Then without the least warning she threw her arms round me and said she could never let me go. She couldn't bear it, she said, she couldn't bear it after all.

For a moment I wavered and the scum of cowardice in me boiled to the surface, but in a few seconds I was my own man again, determined not to take advantage of her momentary weakness. It was up to me to play the game, to fight against even the promise of delicious peace.

"Hush, belovedest," I whispered. "You can bear it. We can both bear it if it will make you happier."

Her weakness was not what I wanted. It was not what she wanted to give me. We wanted each other in tune, finely, permanently in tune by her own standards without a hint of compromise.

"Say you love me," I said unsteadily. "Let me hear you say you love me and then I'll go."

"I love you, I love you," she answered in the sweetest voice I ever heard or ever hope to hear. "I love you—and I'm proving it. I'm not—kicking you."

Then I left her with her tears on my face, and I was in the wilderness outside.

I found myself in St. James's Park, wondering where I was going and what I was for. The land of promise was not to be thought of yet, and the pillar of cloud had not appeared. I saw no particular reason why it should.

A moment or so later the sorrows of a small boy obtruded upon my consciousness. So inconspicuous an atom was he that I very nearly walked over him. My friend stood, weeping, inadequate and helpless, in the waste space behind the Horse Guards. He had blue eyes, like Ursula's. Unlike her, however, he was employing, in the capacity of consoler, and gastronomically, his thumb. Violent distress had caused runnels to appear upon his countenance and by postulating the hue of these watersheds as natural, if not normal, it became clear that his origin was humble. His wardrobe also supported the truth of this hypothesis. Distress, however, is relative, and the sartorial deficiencies of my friend, merged in a greater calamity, had destroyed for him, temporarily, something of their true inwardness.

"I've lost," he said to me, introducing himself with a sob.

I became aware that I could still be touched by pathos. "Lost, are you?" I answered. "So am I, Tommy."

The fact appeared to interest him. His cerulean gaze centred upon me.

"Let us talk the matter over together," I suggested.

He agreed to this, and, uninvited, took my hand. I gathered that he was naturally a friendly person.

"How about a preliminary bun?" I remarked.

He thought well of the idea and, chatting affably, we went together to the hut where such hurtful joys are to be found.

I gave him a hint as to the colour of my resources and of my wishes in the matter of his entertainment.

"In your place," I said, "I should let myself go. A debauch in season hurts nobody."

But the full glory of the thing did not immediately burst upon him. It percolated slowly. The true immensity of a cataclysmic event is not always instantly perceived, be it for joy or for sorrow. Once, however, he had grasped my meaning, Ernest Mills displayed no apathy. One may say that he responded gamely to such hospitality as circumstances permitted me to afford him.

In his own picturesque idiom he made known his desires, and these he limited, with the natural modesty of a gentleman, to the tentative bun, and perhaps a casual pear-drop. I was obliged to explain that we were at cross purposes, and at length I succeeded in conveying to him the princely nature of the occasion.

Then I saw myself, as his eye dwelt upon me, become as a god. I watched his emotions merge from astonishment into adoration.

"Go ahead," I said encouragingly. "Tell 'em what you want."

He told them, or, rather, he told me. I became his mouthpiece, his interpreter, for the strain of the situation was beginning to tell upon his vocabulary. Pantomime, however, breathless gesture, remained to him. Point he could—and did. Urged on by me he shortly became the possessor of many magnificent parcels, treading the while the ladder of rapturous excess. The confectionery displayed before him he summed up under the simple generic title of "suckers," and language, I felt, could provide no word better chiselled to its purpose. My crowning effort as host and his as my guest was achieved by the purchase and acceptance of a "sucker" some two and a half feet long by three or three and a half inches in circumference. To me it suggested some bauble of the operatic stage, though its

purveyors assured me that it was a true sweetmeat or "sucker"; and such, indeed, it must have been, for Ernest Mills ate generously of it and breathed deep. The fact that he was still as jetsam, so to speak, upon the shores of society appeared no longer to cause him inconvenience. He acquired, in fact, an Aurelian calm. His code, however, permitted of a flattering curiosity with regard to my plans for the day, and, his interest in me becoming pronounced, I told him that I was of a mind to feed the ducks, provided he felt himself disposed to afford me the pleasure of his company. His engagements he found allowed of this and it became necessary to purchase a further parcel of buns, which we bought at par. Some of these we were obliged to lodge in my pockets, he and his pockets being already full. We then proceeded to sow discord among the ducks, towards whom the attitude of Ernest Mills was of a more athletic than philanthropic nature. He liked to hit them on the head with chunks of bun. The craving of their stomachs did not greatly interest him. Fowl were to him a mere vehicle for sport. His sporting instincts, indeed, shortly, were so stirred that a second visit to the bun hut became necessary. Even his interest in his gigantic "sucker" waned and not from any temporary gastric distress. The Nimrod in him had awakened, obliterating other appetites.

Tiring of bun and duck, a passion for yachting shook him, and this also I was able to assuage by the purchase of a schooner from a youthful person who proved to be open to an offer. Ernest Mills soon rose to great heights. He had smelt the sea and was now manœuvring his craft with the reckless abandon of a born pirate. I pandered to his maritime instincts for some time before I took him home. He lived in the Vauxhall Bridge Road, and his mother received him with a frenzied joy which expressed itself in spans upon the person of Ernest Mills. These he suffered with a dignity which argued established use and, on his part, fortitude of a high order, though, when it came to farewells, he yielded me up with sorrowful lament. This, though I regretted it, I quite understood, for I had myself that morning passed through a similar experience. I too had parted from a friend. When last I saw him he was standing loyal and affectionate, though torn asunder with grief, and I hoped I had left him with memories that might, in retrospect, cause him to know happiness.

He had ignored his mother's command to "Say good-bye to the gentleman, H'Ernest," being unable to steel himself to the technique of departure, but he managed a brave smile for me as I drove away, though he saw me mistily through tears as I saw him. In one hand, tightly

clasped, was his boat, in the other was his "sucker" and in his pocket there were pear-drops, bulls-eyes, and half a crown. He waved his boat at me in token of good fellowship and in his inarticulate gesture I read the words I knew it had not been vouchsafed to him ever to speak.

And then I sought the sea.

I took Scott's advice. I signed on as stoker in a dirty old ship and endeavoured to "sweat the damned thing" out of me. I shovelled coals. I laboured in the bowels of an ocean-going tramp with the foulest crowd of ruffians whose blasphemies ever scorched the hearing of the gently born. As a remedy it was drastic, and as a remedy it failed. My sorrows remained unstilled. From the point of view of alleviation I had accomplished nothing. I had merely added the art of stoking a ship's furnace to my various accomplishments. I had killed nothing but time.

I broke a rib in 'Frisco and practice put a polish on my "upper cut" in stoke-hole controversies. There was a chalk line drawn on the floor round the bunk where I slept with still lower forms of life, and the human variety respected it. While I waited in 'Frisco for my rib to heal I bethought me of an island under the line, and I decided to go there, but not in the capacity of stoker. I had had enough of that and I had found out that there was no real cure in it. It is one of the

things the brave young hero does in books, but nowhere else if he can help it. I was quite able to help it and when I went again into the stoke-hole it was with the sole object of distributing drink to those who exist chiefly for the purpose of consuming it. Once upon my island I decided that there was no particular object to be gained in coming away, and from the hour of my landing I became a "bond slave of the Isles of Vivien." I might have been one still had not a hurricane driven me out and scattered my effects, my money, and very nearly the remainder of my brains. I fetched up, in seafaring phrase, in a parlous state at the end of the nearest cable, where I waited, still a slave, for the financial apparatus to work me out of servitude. Until it did so I loitered by the lotus, where the luke-warm nights are heavenly in scent and temperature, and every day is a sunlit surprise ; I waited and watched the sea tossing on the reef outside the lagoon, and it was good. I did things that are not read about and saw things that are, and but for my hurricane the "ultramarine sink" might have had me for ever, and it very nearly did. I found in the lazy islands that the seductions of life are strong, and that many of them are cheaply and easily obtainable there by the palms where all things grow and bloom, with the exception of energy and consciences. Then my hurricane

ran into the middle of things and into me. In the general impetus I stampeded and made for the fighting line and the stars that had shone upon my father—and still shone on Ursula. But the “Isles of Vivien” almost had me; it had been a near shave and I only just managed to kick myself home, via Sydney, and I wavered even there. I was leaving colour and plenty, warmth and the drug of the air, for a drab grey street in a fog-ridden town where people worked and a woman avoided me and I avoided her; and I came back there so that I might work too. But nobody wanted either me or my work. The very porters at Waterloo seemed shy of earning a shilling, and then there were no cabs. I could barely contrive to get myself absorbed into the mere traffic of the streets, let alone the traffic of affairs and men. My own front door seemed half inclined to shut me out; it had stuck with the damp, they said, and I wished I had stuck in the Pacific. Everyone was friendly there; even the sharks make overtures; compared with the porters at Waterloo they were positively brothers.

Scott was glad to see me back, I think. He dined with me and I dined with him, and he told me that during my absence he had blossomed like the rose and now took a larger size in hats, owing to the fact that “silk,” in his belief, was imminent. This was partly due to his abilities, he considered.

He had rescued a frail duchess from the morasses of the Court wherein he earned his bread, and set her upon ground that, if not actually dry, was at least no more than damp, socially speaking; and he had contrived to lose a few rounds of golf to her friends in high places. He thought one way and another it would tell. She had been very grateful, likewise her friends.

“An ignoble trade,” he remarked.

“But suitable,” I replied.

“What about yours?” he enquired. “Going on with it?”

I told him I had returned with that object, and he thought well of the idea.

“Must do something,” he said.

I thought of the Pacific and wondered. No one did anything there and no one wanted to. Nature did it all. In this fell hemisphere Nature did nothing pleasant, and man did most things badly. It was decreed, apparently, that I should be one of those men; and I settled down, shortly, to my particular species of hard labour much hampered by my ghost. My ghost, I should explain, was the evolved and, I hoped, the final form of my original Bioscope. He profited and grew exceedingly by association, I found; the place of his birth lent him even more vigour and persistence than I had expected. At the first sight of Southampton Water up he bounced like a

mushroom without the mushroom's peculiar virtues of brevity and succulence. Still, I could cope with him. Once he had been in full command, as it were. He could beat me to my knees ; but nowadays I could sometimes manage to knock him right out of the ring. This was the case, generally, when I was well seconded by the inkpot, when the glory of composition was upon me. But there were times when my ghost could knock me right out, getting his own back badly. He never really left me alone for long. He was always after me. He developed the art of catching me unawares and bringing me up short with the very devil of a thump. If I were fool enough to lower my guard, if I happened to look through the windows of a train at a cottage with honeysuckle growing over the porch, he was on to me at once ; and once, when I heard the call of an unexpected cuckoo, I thought my ghost would punch me right over the ropes. Thus, I became in time an artful fighter of the defensive sort. I learnt what not to do. If I could avoid it I gave no openings. This meant a circumscribed existence between four walls from which all associations were rigidly excluded. I drank no claret. I avoided poached eggs. Once, when my landlady discovered a cherry jam for my use, she barely escaped with life, and a harmless fellow citizen passing beneath my window took

the jam badly upon the hat for which I was subsequently called upon to pay. I refurnished. I re-wall-papered. I obliterated as far as was possible all that could be suggestive of one sunny day in June, and I found the inkpot more serviceable than the stoke-hole in the matter of forgetfulness by means of labour. I laboured, I imagine, to my limit. Then I awoke one day with the feeling that my body was in other hands than mine and obeyed no longer the laws I had made for it. I lay on my back feeling very hot and very dirty, waiting for the doctor and wondering whether I had better be cremated or have an ordinary burying.

"What's the matter with you this time?" enquired he whom I had once mistaken for an antelope and tried to kill. "Stick out your tongue and let's have a look at you."

I let my tongue loll out at him; it had no kick in it and it felt like a sealskin jacket with the moth.

"My hat!" exclaimed the antelope.

I put my tongue back in its case and asked what was the matter with me.

He said he didn't know yet and he put a thermometer under that which had once been my tongue; then he began asking questions.

"How can I answer questions with this thing in my mouth?" I asked, as I removed it. "Don't

be quite foolish. I ordered you here because of your skill."

He saw the logic of my contention and remembered that he was a leech and not an interviewer.

"I shall have a different apothecary if you behave like this," I said.

He put the thermometer back in my mouth and looked out of the window, denying himself the pleasures of conversation while I sucked it. Then he took it out and said it was a hundred and three.

I said I was sure it wasn't more than half-past ten. My intention was to be jocular, to laugh, as it were, on the edge of the grave.

"Have you been drinking water?" he asked.

"There was only tea in it this morning," I answered. "Why?"

He didn't say why but he prodded my stomach and asked me if it hurt.

"Of course it hurts," I said, "when you do that to it. It's a gentleman's stomach and it isn't used to being knocked about. What's the matter with it?"

"Typhoid," he said.

"But that's very unpleasant indeed, isn't it?" I asked.

"Very," he said.

"Can't I have something else instead?"

He said he thought not.

"I'll pay you all the same," I said, "if you can make things a little easier for me. Can't you give me Croup or Nettlerash?"

But he wouldn't allow me to have anything else at all; he insisted upon my having Typhoid. So there I lay and had it but not without a fight first.

"Tell me what the disorder actually involves," I said, "before I submit my frame to the ravages of a bacillus."

He said it involved among other things the absence of solid food for quite six weeks.

I simply stared at the man.

"Is your brain deranged?" I asked.

He said not.

"But I am accustomed to solid food," I explained. "It is years and years since I was weaned. I eat solid food continually. Six weeks without a chop means death."

"And with a chop it means six hours," he remarked. "Take your choice."

I thought for a moment.

"Well?" he said, "which is it to be? My time's valuable."

"So is mine," I replied. "Order that chop."

"Do you authorise me to send you in some nurses?" he asked irrelevantly.

"Yes," I said, "if they can cook chops."

Then I explained what sort of nurses I preferred.

My preference was for those who wore pretty dresses ; blue dresses. I explained carefully the shade of blue I preferred. " I think it's called electric blue," I said.

He told me to lie still and not to be a bigger fool than I could help, while he went off to hunt up some nurses. He sent in two. One remained. She was a dear ; she was my day nurse. The other one was quite impossible ; her eyebrows alone were enough to ruin all her chances in life. Practically, she had no eyebrows, and what there were were quite flat and smudged in with a sort of pale melon colour. No one on earth could have stood it and she was obliged to go. Having Typhoid was bad enough in itself, but I couldn't stand those eyebrows as well—and she had flat feet. Her successor was even worse. She fell in love with me ; not that I blame the poor thing for that. It was natural enough that she should do so. As far as that went I had no quarrel with her ; she had my sympathy ; but as a nurse, or as anything, she had drawbacks of the widest range. She had hot hands, and her name was Suzan. She had also " a mission." I have always distrusted people who have " missions " ; there is generally something very wrong about them and I believe they only have " missions " because they can't have anything else. Suzan's " mission " was " never to lose

a case." This, of course, is absurd, for the simple reason that many cases should be, and deserve to be, lost. I was one. Why should Suzan struggle so to keep me alive and kicking? Why should she make it a personal matter? I much preferred that brief life should be my portion, but Suzan wouldn't hear of it, not merely from love of me but because she didn't want "to lose a case"—from mere professionalism. Needless to say she hardened her heart against my cry of chops, chops at any price. As time went on my hunger became unbearable and I humiliated myself before Suzan with the object of obtaining food in ways that I am ashamed to remember. I loathed her; she was a widow with hot hands and her name was Suzan, yet I offered to marry her on the spot if only she would procure me a pound of biscuits.

"Not a pound of flesh," I explained, "there need be no bother with Jews or cooking; just biscuits, fat oatmeal ones that I can chew for hours. I don't even tie you down to Huntley and Palmer's, I will accept Peak and Frean's as being within the bond."

But she wouldn't; she actually wouldn't.

"No, Mr. Coltover, I can't do it," she cried. "It would kill you."

I said I didn't mind that in the very least if only I could first be full. I said I would far

rather be dead than be as I was then. Death would be a blessed release, I argued. It would release me not only from hunger but from her as well. I should kill two birds with one pound of biscuits, so to speak. I did not believe I should be hungry in heaven. I remembered having been told stories about manna that had come all the way to the wilderness from heaven. I might get some when I was once there, and I explained all this to Suzan, carefully, but it only made her worse. She said I wasn't fit to die when I "carried on with them ideas."

"But you ought to be glad to think I'm going to be an angel," I said, "and all through you, perhaps."

I even went to the lengths of promising to put in a word for her with Peter if only she would kill me first with oatmeal biscuits, but this of course was merely a ruse. I never intended to say a word to Peter. Unfortunately, too, the ruse failed. Suzan would not be bribed; she seemed to think that she was quite capable of getting to heaven without any assistance from me. It may be so. Time, of course, will tell.

I was very angry with her when she denied me food. Her melting looks had not the smallest effect upon me and her endeavours to be pathetic made me furious.

"Go away," I said. "I don't like you. Send Nurse to me."

I called my day nurse "Nursie" because she was sweet and deserved to have a pet name; moreover, it irritated Suzan, and one of the few pleasures remaining to me now was to irritate Suzan.

Nursie was a dear, a perfect dear. It was she who had to wash me in the mornings and clean me up for the day. I used to be so sorry for her at first, but she washed me as if I were the merest doorstep. It was part of her job to wash me, so she washed me—beautifully. She never left the soap in my eyes or my ears and she always dried me properly. These are great qualities in a nurse; those who are still "in arms" will bear me out. Sometimes I was sulky and wouldn't be washed. I was a handful then. I put on all the airs and graces of the baby in the cradle, until poor Nursie was in despair at my tantrums. But she got the better of me. After I had sulked and refused to be washed twice she went out and bought a rattle with a bell on it, and the next time I was difficult she gave me the thing to play with, and she never said a word. After that I didn't sulk any more, and however ill I felt I always let her wash me in the mornings before the doctor came, and when she said, "Now the other arm," I always yielded up the other arm quite meekly and allowed her to smother it in soap, and slither it, dry it, and lay it back on the bed in its place all clean and smelly.

She was such a dear in every way that I did my best to give her no trouble. She had a nice voice and nice eyes and dimples and the prettiest smile possible without being maddening. When she came into the room it made one feel as if a lot of five-pound notes were dropping off the ceiling. She made one feel cheerful; and hers was the real true sort of cheerfulness; one felt there was no humbug about it. It was not that dreadful cheerfulness that clergymen sometimes have; it was never breezy or hearty; it never made one feel that there was a bazaar behind it or that it was the result of holy gladness. It was much more of an Ursula cheerfulness and it suited me admirably. We formed a Cabal, she and I, against Suzan. It was very unprofessional of her, of course, but awfully human of her and awfully good for me. She knew that. She knew a good deal about human nature, and she was quite as keen on not losing a case as Suzan was, but she wasn't quite such a fool as to say so. She studied my character and nursed me accordingly. She saw how I hated Suzan and she humoured me; when I slanged and raved at Suzan Nursie laughed and slanged her too; behind her back, of course. Suzan never humoured me, she bored me to extinction, and she irritated me beyond speech. Those hands! How I hated them, how I squirmed under them. She had

a fatal habit too, of administering nourishment at the wrong times ; for choice when I was at my sleepest. No sooner was I comfortably settled in a dream of green fields with larches and cuckoos and filagree *lingerie*, than this portentous ass of a woman would come and pound me back to earth and a wretched little mouthful of beef tea made out of horses.

Her presence did me injury ; it was both harmful and demoralising. It did harm to my sunny nature and deprived me of one more belief, my belief in night nurses.

Why couldn't she be different ? I wondered. Why was she as she was ? What had brought it about that all the qualities I most disliked should blend into that which was Suzan ? I was paying her well. She earned a most respectable wage and her victuals. For all I knew she may have had "beer money" too. She was just the sort of woman who would drink beer, quantities of it. And what was I getting out of it all ? I asked myself. Nothing. I was simply employing a person to annoy me. That was the long and the short of it. I was actually paying a person for having hot hands and being called Suzan ! The situation was ridiculous. I determined to end it. The end had been inevitable from the first.

The end came when she and Nursie "had

words," or rather when she "had words" with Nursie.

I complained to my medical attendant. I lodged a definite complaint.

"How do you expect me to recover with that woman about the place?" I asked him sternly. I liked saying "that woman." It sounded so scathing.

"Which woman?" enquired the antelope.
"Miss Desmond?"

He actually thought I meant Nursie.

"Good God, man!" I muttered. "You must be demented."

"No," he said. "I am not. I am in the full possession of my faculties."

"I mean Suzan," I said. "I desire her immediate removal."

"What for?" asked the antelope.

"I don't care in the least what for," I answered. "Merely remove her. After that do what you like with her."

"Why?" persisted the antelope.

"Because I hate her," I said, "and I won't have her here any longer. She is delaying my recovery and hastening my doom. Death itself I do not fear. If my days are numbered and my tale is told so much the worse for two insurance companies; and I will have that chop, but I will not have Suzan. I am quite firm. She won't

give me biscuits and she wants to marry me. Take her away. Give her to someone with leprosy—perhaps she'll catch it."

"If I remove her," said my medical attendant, "will you swear not to eat the soap?"

"I will give you every assurance," I answered. "Hungry though I am I will not touch a morsel, not a sud. You have my word."

"Very well," said the antelope, "she shall go."

"You're a good fellow," I answered, "a bad doctor but a good fellow."

So Suzan went. Somebody else had Suzan. She was very angry, Nursie said, and before she went she delivered herself of her real opinion of me. Evidently she had not been in love with me at all; that had been pure delusion on my part. She told Nursie I was no gentleman and she called me a beast. She said I was fractious and a fool to my own interests.

"What do you think of that?" asked Nursie, with a smile.

"How true," I said, "how true."

Then Nursie sat down to write to her young man, and I lay and congratulated myself on the absence of Suzan.

Shortly after her departure I began to get better. I mended in my insides and they said I shouldn't "perforate" now. It sounded a horrible thing to have been in danger of doing.

It made me feel like wire netting. I must have been awfully ill, I thought, but they said not, not very, and they showed me my temperature chart to prove it.

"Look at that," they said scornfully, as if it was the poorest thing in temperature charts ever known.

To me it seemed a dreadful sight ; it was the first time I had ever seen such a thing.

"Have I really done all that ?" I asked.

They said I had, unaided.

"But it looks like a mountain range," I gasped, "all over peaks. It looks like a bad map of the Alps."

They said it was a very good chart, indeed, as charts go ; an ordinary typical Typhoid chart.

"Like dozens of others, I suppose ?" I said to Nursie.

"Thousands of others," she laughed. "In fact, you've barely had Typhoid at all."

I hated this commonplace statement of the situation. They wouldn't let me be a hero for a minute. Whenever I tried to look pathetic and interesting and invalidish Nursie only laughed at me and pulled my leg. That was my one grievance against her. She never seemed to realise how awfully ill I really was. To hear her talk one might have supposed that Typhoid fever was scarcely a disorder at all. My idea was to

make them stare at the sheer horror of the thing and wonder if they really would be able to pull me through. But not a bit of it. They were as calm and placid as the outsides of houses. I might have been the merest case of measles instead of having been half starved for fear I should perforate. I knew in my inmost soul that I had been pretty bad, whatever they might say now, because for weeks past I had scarcely thought of Ursula and this was no sign of health. When I was in my proper mind I thought about her continually. Very few hours ever passed without a good dose of the Bioscope, however careful I might be, and it all began again now as the hordes of bacilli gradually withdrew from me. By now, too, I had practically given up all hope of ever seeing Ursula again. I was merely maddened by my conjectures of what her life with "the other man" might be. By now I almost presupposed the "other man." I wondered if she had "told" the other man. I pitied him, poor devil. If there was another man, I pitied him and I pitied her; for his existence, if he existed, made a lie of her. It made her a jilt, a common jilt, without respect for her body or her soul, however plausibly she might put the case to herself, by whatever sophistical devices she might excuse herself. By the common everyday standards of everyday men and women she was a jilt, and

nothing more. And then I would curse myself for thinking such thoughts and in spite of her silence, her almost inexplicable silence, all my loyalty would return in a wave and I ached for her.

Convalescence I discovered to be a sort of second growing-up ; childhood without the play. Attention is concentrated, so to speak, upon the building up of the body alone. After many weeks of inadequate diet one's body, as one knew it of old, has all but disappeared. One has been living upon it, eating it up from within. One has been, for the time being, a species of cannibal subsisting upon human flesh, one's own. Strange things, however, must be recorded upon the temperature chart before the reclothing of the skeleton can be undertaken. The temperature chart must cease to look like a bad map of the Alps and must become a level plain indicating a normal temperature before they will so much as give one a shred of chicken. There is no sudden leap from the weariness of slops to the wild excitement of baked meats ; things, for a time, are purely tentative. If, after a meal consisting of half a small sprat, a small hill is recorded upon the temperature chart, back one goes to milk and gravy. The little hill had indicated that all is not yet well below the belt ; the machinery there is not yet in a condition to deal with sausages and steaks and

the stuff that makes a man. But when the plain has remained a plain for days, when volcanic undulations have ceased, they come to one with a stupid little bit of chicken or a watery egg and say, "There, dinner at last!" and they tell one not to eat it up too fast. One doesn't really eat it at all. It goes. The process of gastronomy is barely involved. One feels like an enormous elephant who has been given half a bun, and one begins to count the hours until another wretched little morsel of nourishment appears. Tricks, one's keepers know, and they are not to be caught out by dodges, however ingenious. It is of no use to pretend that one has dropped one's dinner in the sheets and lost it in order to obtain some more; they expect that device and they are ready for it and for all of them. No lie is really fertile; Ananias himself would be unable to obtain a meal even by the exercise of his full faculties. And it is of no use to threaten or to lose one's temper. I tried. I told my doctor I would change him, I told Nursie I would give her the sack. I tried everything and I got the worst of it all round. Gradually, very gradually, one's meals begin to grow. One has two watery eggs where, formerly, there was but one, five grapes instead of three, and perhaps a really good whack of soup with things floating in it, things one can bite. Bite! Oh, the joy of a bit of meat; how

one rolls it round and round one's molars, how one engages it with the tongue !

Gradually, too, very gradually, one's arms and legs cease to look like broomsticks and take upon them again the shape of man. I was as proud of my new muscles now as ever I was at fourteen, and I used to double up my little arms and say "Feel 'em" for all the world as if I were back in the fourth form, and I lived for the day when I should, if necessary, be able to knock down a man, a real hairy man.

But in this second growing-up there was a dreadful difference : I knew what was before me this time ; this time there were none of the long, long thoughts of youth connected with the metamorphosis. I was a baby with a beard and the mind of a man.

When the barber came and shaved it off we found I had no cheeks. I was lantern-jawed. Nursie said she scarcely knew me and she looked quite sad, for her. As for me, I felt positively naked after the departure of the barber. I felt I was bordering on the indecent.

A time arrives in convalescence when one essays to walk. A red-letter day, when many false impressions are corrected and one's true position in space is made painfully clear. Upon this day they come with your dressing-gown and a pair of trousers and say you may get up, and then

they stand and look at you while you do it and catch you when you find you can't.

But food is the real business of convalescence. Other enthusiasms are, on the whole, discouraged. Life is narrowed down to the present tense.

The final stage may be said to begin with the nerve-shattering event of the bath-chair. It has been in the air, so to speak, for days ; at last it is at the door and when one sees it against the background of a gargantuan motor 'bus one blanches and fetches the breath. The white-headed old gentleman who steers appears to be quite inadequate in the capacity of pilot, the traffic seems so tremendous that even Nursie walking by the side of the fell contrivance is not enough to restore an able-bodied confidence. One closes the eyes and sweats with fear, and one hopes, audibly, that the white-headed old gentleman will take no sporting risks at crossings. Thus the occupant. Outside is Nursie, proud and smiling at this triumphant vindication of her skill ; for Typhoid is the nurse's job above all others. It is she who kills or cures you ; the doctor plays second fiddle. He merely comes in the morning to see if one has perforated during the night. If one has, he signs a death certificate and says it's rough luck ; if one hasn't he comes again the next morning and charges one another

seven and six. But Nursie, bless her heart, has to stick it all the time and watch like a cat to see that one doesn't get hold of a stray crust and chew it and die of it, to say nothing of laughing one out of the sulks and keeping one going generally, and, of course, pretending that she never by any chance has a headache or feels a bit off colour herself.

On my second outing I ordered the white-headed man to convey me to the Park. On the first outing I had merely known fear and had barely been capable of coherent speech, so strange the world had seemed, and I had been drawn once round an interminable square. But this second time I gave an order, never dreaming that it would be obeyed. I was merely "trying it on." I had become so accustomed during the course of my scourge to obey and to be ordered what to do and what not to do that I had practically lost the art of telling anyone to do anything. I was servile. When the white-headed man actually touched his greasy hat and did as I desired I almost touched my hat to him in return, so debased by disease was I. It was weeks before I became really haughty.

The second day out was not a great success. The smell of the turf in the Park was delicious, so were the green things and the sky, but the smell had a sting in it, it twanged on an accom-

modating nerve and my ghost took a most un-sportsmanlike advantage.

"Smelt that smell before, eh, my boy?" he remarked. "Remember a field with a stream running through it?"

I was glad to be indoors again among the paraphernalia of disease, among the cushions and the bottles and the other impedimenta of illness. That evening I had an Alp. The thermometer and the temperature chart recorded the matter to a split degree.

"Out too soon," remarked Nursie as she drew the Alp upon the chart; and for some days I was not allowed out again.

I had no complaint to make. On the whole I preferred it. My ghost was, comparatively, in abeyance as long as I hugged the thermometer and felt ill, but in the open air he was infinitely more in his element. Still, the open air could not be avoided; both Nursie and the antelope insisted upon it, and in due time I was taken forth again, and again I had an Alp. Then Nursie and the antelope put their heads together. I was becoming a puzzle to them at last. I could see that things were not going as they anticipated at all. The antelope punched me in the stomach again and frowned. He and Nursie began to think I was not quite such a common or garden case, after all. I was presenting difficulties; I became

a thing to ponder over. I baffled them. They were obliged to climb down from their scornful heights and their respect for me increased. They cocked their eyes at me and looked puzzled.

One day in particular I gave them a genuine fright. I really believe they thought it was all up, all over bar the hearse and the rattle of the earth on my nice new coffin. It was the day I saw Ursula. Alps! Up and down, hills and valleys. I made them fairly stare at last.

We were meandering along through the Park, making for Knightsbridge, Nursie, the perambulator, the white-headed one, and I sitting swathed inside, being good and growing up like a little gentleman. As we debouched from one of the by-paths into the Row, there, within two yards of me, was Ursula. Ursula! dressed in a blue serge frock, sitting on a penny chair just like an ordinary mortal being. Everything inside me promptly stopped. The thump of my life hit me behind my ribs—and we passed on. She didn't see me, and we passed on. The next time Nursie looked at me—well, I was hurried home, hurried home as fast as the white-headed could do it, and there at home I lay and begat Alps. But every afternoon I begged and begged for air. I knew exactly where I wanted to be walked.

“Up and down the Row,” I said, “up and down the Row.”

But they wouldn't hear of it. I might as well have asked for the Wars of the Roses. They treated me as if I were a lunatic instead of as a grown-up man with civic rights. I took the view of one who paid taxes and was therefore entitled to an airing in a Park that was sustained by the said taxes. I took a strictly forensic view. Nursie's view was purely clinical.

"Your temperature at this minute is over a hundred and two," she said, with the thermometer in her hand.

"Then take me out and cool me," I replied.

"If I took you out I should kill you," she said.

I was obliged to drop my clamour for the Row.

"You've always said the Row was such a poisonous place," remarked Nursie. "Why have you grown so fond of it all of a sudden?"

I said I had grown fond of it lately, and that when I said it was poisonous I referred to the end by the Achilles statue where all the traffic was. I did not tell her that Ursula had been sitting far down the Row, much nearer to the gilded Albert, but I said that was the part I liked, provided, of course, that Albert was not actually approached. The only thing I wanted to approach was Ursula.

"Well, you can't go out with such a temperature as this," said Nursie, "so there's an end of it."

"Why can't I go out if I choose to?" I demanded, with justifiable heat.

"Because you'll die," answered Nursie, in a voice that plainly said "Shut up."

"There's nothing original in that," I grumbled. "Some day you'll die too."

But this sort of thing didn't impress her in the least. She took no notice. All she did was to sponge me with eau-de-Cologne and water, and give my pillows a shake.

It was almost a month before I could get them to allow me out again, then, suspicions or no suspicions, I ordered the whole cavalcade to the Row. I asserted myself.

I had never undertaken not to look at Ursula if I saw her. I had entered into no bond. A cat may look at a king, I argued, and I intended to look at Ursula if I got the chance. But she was not there to be looked at, neither was there a subsequent Alp, so the next day and the next I went to the Row again. I contracted the Row habit. I became a habitué.

"Are you looking for anyone?" enquired Nursie once, as I peered about with a roving eye.

"Looking for anyone? Gracious, no," I answered, all innocence.

"You ought to be picking up better than you are, after all this time," she remarked one day.

Then they tried to make me go away to the sea.

I said I wouldn't go away to the sea. I said I loathed the sea. To hear me talk one would have thought I really meant it. I had my reasons for preferring London, and on the advice of Scott they gave up trying to persuade me to leave it.

"Let the stubborn fool alone," said he.

So they let me alone and I drugged myself daily with the Row. In time I grew up and walked and the perambulator was no more. Nursie took me for my airings without it. She was so delighted to have done with the contrivance and all it implied that she very nearly bought me an indiarubber ball and a wooden horse. Nowadays, too, she sometimes hummed little tunes to herself as we ambled about the Park; always the Park. She was engaged to a man in the Navy, who was away on the China station, but it struck me once or twice that she was not always entirely happy about it. Once she even hinted darkly that her engagement was a mistake, and I was up in arms for the absent sailor man immediately.

"Nonsense," I said. "Some day he'll be an admiral all over gold lace and you and he will be frightful swells."

I think she would have liked to be more confidential about him, but I discouraged the topic. I felt I was the last person in the world to be discussing other people's love affairs, after having made such a hopeless muddle of my own. So she

looked out of the window and said quite fatuous things about the weather.

The days slipped on. One day I was a little better, the next day I was a little worse. I knew that Ursula was alive and that was something. I had ceased, mercifully, to be hungry. I was, in fact, nothing like hungry enough, they said, and I became the unwilling receptacle of nourishing foods that failed to nourish. I destroyed, one by one, the advertised reputation of many things in tins and bottles. I gave the lie to a score of body-building specifics with their own trademarks legitimately stamped upon them. I saw to it that I had "no other." I asked for the thing itself as directed by its purveyors to do. I accepted no substitutes for the particular lie of the moment; my chemist and my grocer, respectively, provided me with the genuine article; yet, metaphorically speaking, I languished like the lily, and once I overheard the antelope say something to Nursie about a decline. They didn't know I was listening. All he said to me was, "Why the devil don't you put on weight, damn you?" and all I said to him was, "Swear not at all, for thou canst not add one cubit to thy stature."

He growled and plied me with bottled oxen, together with the oily extracts of the codfish.

One day I saw Ursula again.

Nursie had ceased, by now, to oppose my passion for the Row ; we went there daily as a matter of course. It was a part of the day's plan, the only interesting part, as far as I was concerned. Nursie was still invaluable at crossings ; but for her I should invariably have hugged the shore. Her courage was tremendous. Places where all the cabs and 'busses in London seethed and boiled, where even policemen swore, left her untouched and cool as she piloted me across. She warded off calamity and was a friend, and her memory is green, as green as the Park where I saw Ursula again.

This time, as before, she did not see me, and this time it was Nursie and I who were sitting on the penny chairs. Ursula was walking—alone, and she *looked* lonely !

I saw her come all down the Row towards us. She walked right past us with her eyes fixed straight in front of her, and I believe she was thinking of me.

I looked at her eyes first, then I looked at her hands. She had taken off her gloves and I could see them. I saw my ring still on her finger ; that was all I wanted to see. The signet side was turned outwards now towards the world, and it showed the world that a man had got her, and it showed me that I was the man. I should have been glad if I could have shouted, I should

like to have yelled Alleluia and battle cries, but I was unable to do anything of the sort. I was unable to do anything at all. No one on earth could have mistaken me for the warrior I really felt. Not even a very drunken man could have allowed himself to be deceived so far. The best I could manage in the way of a demonstration was a gasp. I then proceeded to slide slowly but surely from the chair to the footpath in the last faded thinness of understanding. Shortly after this I was taken home by Nursie in a cab. A cab was indicated, as the antelope would have said, by a curious palsy that took me in the knees when on the restoration of my senses I essayed to move on foot. Nursie said nothing. She kept on saying nothing, and at tea time she forgot the toast. She was evidently afraid that I was in for some more Alps. She took my temperature in silence, in a silence that was only broken when she pronounced the word "normal," which means no Alps. She appeared to be puzzled; evidently she was expecting Alps after my exhibition in the Park. All I remembered about the Park myself was Ursula's hand with my ring upon it—and no other ring! Could it be possible that there was no other man? My ghost promptly reminded me of the falsity of this line of reasoning, as he had reminded me before.

"You're talking rot again, my dear chap," he said, "deluding yourself."

"Why?" I asked, with my confidence diminished by his tone.

"Well, look at her," he proceeded; "in a word, a miracle."

"Exactly," I said.

"A miracle without," he remarked drily; "what price within?"

"Ideals within," I replied, loyal to Ursula.

"Rot!" he scoffed. "Within there is a shrine where ideals should be but are not. That's where you were had, where all of you are had."

"Liar," I muttered.

"Scalps," he continued, "fill the shrine, packed in tight and stamped on to make room for more."

"But my ring——" I began.

"They *like* rings. That proves nothing," he replied. "What's a ring? Your day is done. You were barely worth the scalping when she scalped you. You offered no pursuit. You fell down and begged for the knife—and you got it."

There was a good deal of this sort of thing for the next few days. My ghost had come into his own again and I saw that it would be necessary in future to avoid the Park.

If I chanced the Park again, I argued, I might,

quite conceivably, give myself away without knowing it. I had had two warnings now. I had publicly disgraced myself twice, and there must be no third time. If an unintentional gasp did happen to reach Ursula's pretty ears, or if the spectacle of me in contact with the road did by chance happen to catch her eye, wherever should I be? My moral condition would be piteous and abominable. The smallest risk of such a catastrophe must be avoided; therefore, I foreswore the Row and when I walked it was in mean streets where it was inconceivable that she would be.

It was just about this time that Nursie began to droop. She had been in constant attendance upon me now for several months and it was clear to anyone that she wanted a change. It was scarcely surprising, I thought, that she should be beginning to fly distress-signals, though I contemplated the idea of her departure with dismay. Still, I suggested it. I even ordered her to go. I sacked her without a smile, but she refused to be turned out. She refused to leave me, until in her opinion, I was in a fit condition to be left. All she could consent to do for the benefit of her own health was to allow herself rather more time in the open air. She frankly detested the back streets where nowadays I insisted upon taking my airings. She said she

preferred the Park, so to the Park she went for little walks by herself, and she always came back the better for them ; they were doing her good, she said, and I noticed that she was always more gay and animated when she returned than she had been before she started, but I was afraid it was only a compromise, after all. She was obviously not herself. How far the strain of nursing me was responsible for her condition, or how much of it was due to the natural doubts of a lady who had promised her hand to a sailor, I was unable to tell. In the meantime I did what I could to cheer her up. I invented stories of men I had never known who had had unusually quick promotion in the service ; men who had become Admirals almost before they knew it. I invented one man whose achievements made me proud of him ; the things that man did were wonderful, and I told Nursie that he was just such another chap as hers. I said their careers would in all probability be similar. But she was not really heartened up. In fact, she had become almost apathetic. She had certainly developed an interest in cricket and in books which I had written, but she was not herself ; the spring had all gone out of her.

One day, after one of her little walks, she came home looking very white. She had given out at last, she said, and she must go away at once.

Naturally I could not oppose her. I urged her, in fact, to go, though what I should do without her I simply did not know. The mere thought gave me a pain in my solar plexus and I knew I was marked down for further Alps. I knew I should never get another Nursie. I should get another Suzan who wouldn't understand me in the least, and I knew what that meant—merely a living death. The whole outlook, in fact, became grey and dreadful, and Nursie, to my astonishment, didn't seem to give it a thought. She didn't seem to care in the very least. Once she had decided to go she became a changed woman. I could scarcely believe she was the same creature who had watched every blink of my eye and mothered me for months. Here was something new and I couldn't make head or tail of it. Whatever could explain this entire change of front? There must be some reason for it, I imagined, but no reason suggested itself and I was forced to the conclusion that even level-headed Nursie had her errant moments and that this was one. This sudden and complete loss of interest in me and in her normal work was, I supposed, one of the tangents that may occur in the female circle when least expected. I understood her going, perfectly; there was a sound reason for it; but the manner of her going baffled me entirely; her interest in me seemed absolutely

to have ceased ; she packed up her things, collected odds and ends of books and thimbles in a manner so dispassionate and perfunctory that to look at her one might have supposed she had only been in the place for a couple of weeks instead of for a slice out of a lifetime. In this frosty atmosphere our own little private store of jokes and associations shrivelled up and ceased to exist ; all the geniality was frozen out and at last I came to the conclusion that I had been nothing more than " a case " to Nursie all the time ; she had simply been " nursing " me ; she had had nothing but a professional interest in me from the very beginning, and her manner now, at the end, proved it quite conclusively. She had ceased to be my nurse and she had become again, therefore, the merest stranger. The real woman was to be found in the stranger and not in the nurse. But what an actress ! When the time really came for her to go, however, and the cab was at the door, the whole atmosphere changed again ; once more she was " Nursie." She actually cried and she kissed my hand. I simply couldn't understand it.

" You'll soon be well now," she said brokenly, " and you won't even miss me."

She must be mad, I thought, or had become, perhaps, very anæmic and unhinged. How could I help missing her after all those months together

and after all the thousand things she had done for me? I wondered if she had thought what it would be like for me when she had gone. All I could do, though, was to thank her and thank her, and I hoped she would be happy and get well in that part of Kent to which it had pleased God to call her for the purpose of renewing her health and where her relations resided. I promised to write to her and tell her how I was getting on and she said how glad she would be to hear from me. Then she went away and I was left alone. That afternoon a housemaid gave me my tea. She was one of the most unpleasant housemaids I have ever known. She flounced. She was that sort. She had a cock of the head that said, "I'm as good as you are and don't you forget it. Here's your tea and be damned to you."

Oh! for Nursie's quiet footsteps. Nursie never banged the door and rattled the tea-cups; but she was far away in Kent by now and I was getting an Alp fast. I made a long arm for the thermometer and found I was 99° already. There was no one to care how hot I became; my death from spontaneous combustion would have affected no one but the undertaker and the fire brigade. No new nurse arrived for me. Nothing arrived, not even a circular. Nothing at all occurred to indicate that I had the least hold

upon the affection or the affairs of men—or women. I merely became hotter and hotter. The housemaid with ideas above her station had left the tea where it stood and I had drunk every drop of it long ago. I was so thirsty that I had even drunk up the milk, and I had come to loathe milk during the course of my disorder. But I would have drunk a whole cow now, gladly.

I sat and brooded over my approaching end.

Then, as if I had not enough to bear, a piano began to play next door, with the loud pedal down all the time. I thought I might have been spared that. It played a vulgar tune in three time and the tune was voice-ridden with a vulgar voice; a woman's voice. I saw the whole picture. I knew the woman wore a tea-gown made of something pink and probably inflammable, and it was splashed with stout; there were stains on it and on her; hooks, buttons, and virtue were all three missing. Her face was puffy with evil lines and there were chemicals in her hair, and vine-leaves too; she would be wearing a sham diamond ring on her first finger, and oh! that devouring voice. I buried my ears in my hands to shut out the sound. One way and another I felt I was in about as bad a way as an average man can be and I began to consider seriously again the merits of the leap in the dark that might be productive

of better conditions. In any case I should probably die soon ; and there seemed to be no object in lingering on in this increasing heat. Hell itself could scarcely be much hotter. Besides, I might not go to Hell. I had heard of people who had gone straight to Heaven. I thought I was as good an all-round man as Elijah, for example, any day. All that Elijah had done, as far as I remembered, was to keep birds. I had kept dogs, and my dogs had been properly fed and looked after. He had not looked after his birds at all ; he had expected them to look after him and feed him. I had never expected my dogs to feed me. In fact, under analysis, Heaven became more and more of a probability and less and less remote every minute. I thought of all the shillings and even half-crowns I had put into the plate on Sunday and the times and times I had remained on my knees through the whole terror of the Litany. I had done it frequently, through sheer goodness, and not merely because the parental eye was strong upon me. Elijah had done none of these things. Surely they counted, or what's a Heaven for ? I determined to give the matter fuller consideration when I could think more clearly ; at the moment, partly from bodily heat and partly because of the jingle-jangle next door, I was scarcely able to think at all.

Then I looked up and saw what seemed to be Ursula.

"Oh no, you don't," I said to myself.

I had seen apparitions before, antelopes and lizards and purple elephants, so I waited for the apparition to turn into a snake. They do, sometimes. I knew a man once who assured me he had seen a pink hyæna playing a tambourine.

I waited to see what would happen now.

"Jerry!" cried that which seemed to be Ursula.

It was puzzling. It had Ursula's own little catch in its voice, the little catch that always seemed to cut my name in half and make it sound delicious.

"Jerry!"

This was no snake, surely. Speech was a new departure. So I said "Hullo!" purely experimentally.

Then I saw the apparition's eyes fill with tears.

"I've come to nurse you," she said brokenly.

I thought that out before I continued the conversation. Ursula couldn't have known I was ill. She had never seen me falling out of my perambulator in the Park. I said as much.

"How did you know I was ill?" I asked sceptically, coming to the root of the matter.

"Your nurse told me," sobbed the apparition, "in the Park."

In the Park! My nurse! Then, in a flash, I knew it was really Ursula and I saw the whole duplicity of Nursie and all her little walks. She had been searching and searching for Ursula. She had guessed; she had found Ursula and told her!

And then I realised what Nursie's tears had meant when she had said good-bye, and I understood why she had gone. I understood why she had always been so much more cheerful when she came home after those little walks of hers. Ursula had not been found and it had meant a little longer with me, another day, perhaps. And when she had found Ursula—

So Nursie too had counted the hours, and I had never known; much worse than that . . . I had put the poor Admiral to bed, as it were, so unintentionally, so unconsciously. Poor Nursie! I pictured her down in Kent, crying her eyes out, perhaps, because her little plot, such a loyal one, had succeeded so well. What a penalty, what a price to pay for the possession of a great big wonderful heart!

Then the pillar of cloud moved on through the wilderness towards the land of promise and Ursula's arms were round me; Ursula's cheek was pressed against mine and she mothered me as Nursie never, never could.

Then the trying housemaid came in again, ostensibly for the tea things. She swished her

sale-bought skirts and flounced. But not for long. A woman was there with a steely eye; with every flounce it glittered more.

"Be good enough to make less noise," said Ursula. "This gentleman is very ill."

Disdain became associated with the flounces and a tea-cup ended its useful career.

"Did you hear me?" asked Ursula.

"I ain't deaf," replied the flounces.

"But rude," remarked Ursula icily.

Exit the flounces associated with disdain.

That night it was Ursula who shook up my pillows, and it was Ursula's cool hand that summoned sleep, and it was Ursula in the morning at whom the doctor stared.

"Good heavens!" he remarked, in his abandoned way.

"Good morning," said Ursula sweetly.

"What's this?" he asked.

"My wife," I answered.

He bowed.

"Introduce me," he said.

"Miss Ursula Moore-Lantry—my leech," said I.

He smiled. I may say he grinned, but it was the proper kind of grin. I was at some pains to make sure of this, and I had been ready with a boot.

"The heavens fall," he murmured.

"They open," I corrected.

"I retire," said he. "I may say," he continued, "that it is a thousand pities this didn't happen months ago."

I frowned at the silly man to make him stop, for I saw that Ursula was wretched with self-reproach.

"The fact is," I remarked, "you've absolutely bungled my case from the very beginning, and now you're searching about for a specious excuse, you miserable fellow. Be off with you. I don't believe I've ever had Typhoid at all."

He came no more. Subsequently, I sent him a modest cheque in response to a dilatory bill, and with it I forwarded a case of port that couldn't kill him if he drank it in buckets by the side of the bin—for I was grateful.

Ursula had come back to me. The magic of that wonderful June day was an almost unbelievable reality once more. Once more we "walked down the primrose path to the sound of flutes."

It was the day following Ursula's return and we were sitting in my room together. Together! Ursula looked like a blush rose still and after one of the best nights that has ever been vouchsafed to me, a night of sleep and godlike dreams, I felt that I too was looking my best.

"You look older though, dearest," remarked Ursula, scrutinising me critically. "I suppose that's through me," she added mournfully.

We had not spoken of her absence yet. That dark tale had not yet been unfolded. So far it had been all sufficient to be together without speech. Mere presence met all needs. Moreover, Ursula was "nursing" me, and she took a most professional view of her office. I was "bossed" in the most peremptory way. She had lost the amateur touch with which I had associated her "nursing" entirely. This was not the same woman who had bathed my bump upon a day gone by. I commented upon her increased skill.

"For part of the time I've been a nurse, you see," said Ursula calmly, "in a hospital."

"You? Why?" I demanded somewhat astonished.

"Because I hated it," said Ursula briefly.

"Then why on earth did you do it?" I asked.

"That was how I paid," she answered.

"Paid for what?"

"You," said Ursula simply. "And don't you see how much more secure it makes things now?" she asked.

"No, I don't," I answered, "and I never did. The house might fall upon us at any moment. An earthquake would bust up you and me and your logic in five seconds if it wanted to. What's to stop it? How have you made an earthquake less remote?"

"I *feel* I have, that's all," said Ursula. "No

earthquake would be such a brute after all this. I know, I *know* now that we are going to 'be happy ever after'!"

"And how much of it are we going to get?" I enquired with some disregard for grammar and an undeniable scepticism.

"We shall die when we are about ninety-six," said Ursula, "on the same day; and we shall meet again in heaven directly afterwards and go on there."

"Topping," I agreed. "But who told you all this? Upon what hypothesis do you base your arguments? Suppose," I said, "suppose I had perished of typhoid fever or from other causes that have made death quite possible during your absence from me? Where would you and your logic have been then?"

"But you *didn't* perish, dearest," replied Ursula, "neither did I, so that proves I'm right."

"All the same," I continued, "I personally was quite contented with things as they were. To me it seems that your strange desire for the stake has deprived us of a useful period of life."

"Still, you must admit— What I mean, is this," continued Ursula. "I caught a hint, somehow, that day. I mean . . . it seemed to me that it would be so awfully fine if we came through. It was so good that it was worth

making it even better. I was quite sure of you, you see. It was me I was frightened about. I think I wanted to prove to myself that I could be worthy of you."

"And now you think you are?"

"Yes, rather. Don't you think I am, now?"

"If I may say so without adding to your already abnormal stock of vanity, I thought you were worthy of me before," I replied.

"Well, I thought not," said Ursula. "At all events, those are the emotions that were awakened in me through knowing you."

"I take it then to be thus," I said. "Had you found that your twin soul resided in the person of some outcast less dowered with charm and natural gifts than I, you would not have perpetrated this crusade in the matter of salvation. Had the gentleman been by profession a sweep, say, or a duke, you would have accepted the condition of soot or a coronet without remorse and have let it go at that?"

"I don't know," said Ursula. "It would have depended upon the sweep or the duke, I suppose. I can only tell you what you awakened, you being you."

"I see. It all goes to prove that I am an exceptional person. I always feared it. My fascination must be extraordinary."

"It is," replied Ursula. "That's why I love you so."

"That's why you could leave me sweltering in woe and misery?"

"Yes," said Ursula. "Exactly."

"I must be a sort of natural King," I said.

"Mine," said Ursula. "You delivered me from evil."

"It still confuses me," I remarked, "for through you, and unlike you, I have been delivered not *from* but *up* to evil. Surely I should have profited by this torture even as you have done. That is to say, if your theories are sound. But are they sound?"

"Yes," said Ursula promptly. "And you *have* profited, even though you do chaff me and pretend you haven't."

I chaffed her, yes. But behind my chaff there was a wild delight. We *could* chaff each other. A principle and a respect for principle may be revealed in banter; banter, indeed, may express it best. Men have died with a laugh on their lips before now, and upon analysis the laugh has yielded up the ingredients of tragedy. We chaffed each other because we knew what lay behind the chaff. The gaiety revealed; it did not hide.

"In your penitentiary ardour," I continued, "you might easily have been even more foolish

than you were. How, specifically, have you improved by this tampering with the fiery furnace?"

"As if I could be specific," laughed Ursula.

"You'll have to be," I said. "You'll jolly well have to do what you are told in the presence of your King. I order you to give me proofs of your quality."

"Well then, King darling, I will," cooed Ursula. "My temper has improved, for one thing. Obviously. Just think of the things I let you say to me. Isn't that a proof that I'm perfectly sweet and livable with?"

"You were before," I said.

"I'm even more so now. I *never* lose my temper. I've learnt now not to. I've suffered since I saw you. I've suffered *for* you. That's the whole point," she said.

"Thank heaven your ordeals have not ruined your complexion," I remarked, as I kissed the part that seemed most pink. "Go on talking to me."

"Do you really suppose we haven't advanced, both of us?" questioned Ursula. "Really, *really*, I'm nicer and more tolerant. Your tantrums will never distress me now. I shall never throw the mutton at you now, however trying you are."

"But I never am," I said. "And you don't

seem better tempered at all. You still appear to me to be of the stuff that shrews are made of."

"Oh! How I should like to shake you!" cried Ursula.

"Ah! What about that temper?" I remarked. "It's even *worse* than it was."

"It isn't, it isn't," exclaimed this sweet exponent of ethics. "For instance, if I had met a small boy whistling in the street and worrying me in the dim ages before I had you to think about, I should probably have boxed his ears and pushed him into the gutter. Anyhow, I should have wanted to."

"But why not? You would have been quite right," I exclaimed. "Wouldn't you hit him on the head and shunt him into the gutter now?"

"No," said Ursula firmly. "I wouldn't. I should give him sixpence to make him feel even happier—and it would make me feel happier too."

"But, my dear, you would be wrong. You would be condoning a vice. The gutter is the proper place for such a boy. My own instinct would be to crucify him. I should most certainly hit him and correct him even as I myself was corrected and hit—and am still, sometimes, more subtly. I should make him realise that the world is not for little boys, but for heroes, for fine splendid fellows like me."

"My idea was to prove to you how wonderfully I can control my temper now," said Ursula.

"I am glad indeed to hear it," I replied, "for I cannot control mine."

Then I ceased to tease her. Whatever she had achieved, whatever she had done had been done with a high motive. The highest. I knew that. Her trials had been deliberately undertaken in order that her ideal might be preserved and beautified, and, as she gave me the text of her self-denying ordinance, of her sustained efforts, I began to feel very small indeed. She had "played the man under affliction" and I had not. There had been times, she told me, when she had almost broken down; times when loneliness and good works and virtue had not been their own reward. One of her hardest trials had been the thought that I was suffering, but she had struggled on, sustained by the promise of the years to come, the years to be spent with me. She had never once doubted me and she had denied herself much. She had toiled on with nothing but the bravery of her own unsullied soul to help her, sure of the ultimate reward. Then "Nursie" had appeared like a bolt from the blue with a heart-breaking story of my tragic plight. It was a plight so undreamed of by Ursula that all question of continuing in the rigid path of weary absence had evaporated. Her "duty"

now was clearly to be with me. Duty and desire had joined their hands, and the clutch of their hands was firm ; there was no question of putting ourselves asunder any more.

And thus my bride returned to me with a moral beauty glowing round her. She had preserved her simplicity intact.

“ You *don't* think I'm posing, Jerry, do you ? ” she asked anxiously. “ You don't think I look like that dreadful picture of 'The Soul's Awakening,' do you ? I'm not like the lid of a chocolate box, am I ? ”

As soon as I could speak, as soon as I contrived to swallow, temporarily, the lump that persisted in blocking up my throat, I opened my own dog-eared pages. I was not proud of them ; they were not pretty reading. Their perusal occupied some time, but I was faithful. I exposed them all.

“ But I don't care *what* you've done or what you've been,” cried Ursula. “ You are you. And I expect you've made things sound much worse than they really are. You're so honest.”

Ursula, of course, was a born listener. It may be that I painted in the high lights with a tendency to over colour, and from a holy desire not to understate my misdeeds ; or it may have been due to Ursula's extraordinary gift for listening. I don't know.

“ In any case I drove you to it, whatever

you've done," she said. "It was all through me."

I grasped at this kind straw.

"Still, it would have been pleasanter to be able, now, to say that what I have done was *for* you and not *through* you," I admitted.

"But you never really forgot me," said Ursula.

"Never, worse luck. But I tried."

"But you didn't succeed," said Ursula with a conceited little smile. "And you never will. I won't ever let you."

"You came back in the nick of time," I remarked. "Last night I . . ."

"Oh, I know, I know! Don't, don't tell me! I saw it in your face as I came in," cried Ursula miserably. "Couldn't you *really* have borne it without me any longer, Jerry?"

I didn't speak, and Ursula regarded me with distressed, deep eyes. She took my silence for an admission, a confession. The tribute escaped her. She was distressed beyond measure.

"It's a dangerous thing to play with souls," I said, after a moment.

"It's been trouble enough to save one's own, at all events," sighed Ursula. "But I believe I have. And yours is mine, after all."

We said no more about my mental wanderings of the night before. I did not enlarge upon my

speculations concerning the character of the prophet Elijah, and I did not actually tell Ursula that, like the ironical Tishbite, I too had desired to live no longer. The desire to live had invaded me again, and it expressed itself in a strange irresponsibility. I didn't much care what I said or what I did. It was so good and so tremendous to wish to do anything at all. I wanted to play. We did play. We played silly little games together at which I cheated brazenly for the sheer joy of playing the fool, and Ursula was even worse. She outdid me altogether. In fertility of invention she beat me out of hand. It was her idea to flick cherry-stones at passing cabs. This caused me intense amusement. First one had to eat the cherry with its stalk foremost, and if one could tie a knot in the stalk with one's tongue, one was allowed two shots out of the window subsequently instead of one. The rules of the game soon became most complex. If one hit the roof of the cab it counted one. If one hit the driver it counted two. If the driver was nice looking (Ursula was the judge of his beauty) it counted three, because he would probably be conceited, Ursula said, and deserved to be well scored off for putting on side. If one hit a pedestrian by mistake one had to put a penny in the pool and the pool subsequently was to be given

to the first small boy whom Ursula caught whistling.

"In fact, it's a very nice game with a beautiful object," said Ursula. "Apart from helping you to keep up your poor spirits and to get well quickly and run away with me, it will be so nice for the small boy who gets the pool."

"But perhaps we shan't hit pedestrians and then there won't be a pool," I objected.

"But we must," cried Ursula. "We must have a pool, and the end justifies the means."

"You think it is a game for the gentry?" I asked.

"Quite," said Ursula. "A beautiful game for them. In fact, only the gentry can play it properly. You have to *be* gentry before you can; because, *being* gentry, you know you oughtn't to play it. It's bad manners; and it's your shot."

"And what happens if we get fined forty bob?" I asked, as I hit a policeman.

"We shan't," said Ursula, "because if any one sees us and looks angry I shall go downstairs and paint a large cross on the front door and then they'll think we've got plague and keep away."

I accepted these arguments as being satisfactory, and we played the game with growing skill during my convalescence. Many small boys benefited and it never became necessary for Ursula to paint a cross on the front door.

We put the past out of our minds in this all-sufficing present. We had come into our own again, Ursula said. Our never-ending honeymoon had begun, and, as befitted persons in our state, we were as light hearted as two swallows in the sun. Nothing was too trivial to amuse us, though we found we could be serious if the occasion or the topic offered. Mostly, however, we were quite childish and we renewed our youth and I renewed my health. And all the time we made plans for the future.

"Tell me," I said one day, "tell me: when we are married are we going to have family prayers?"

"Good gracious, no, certainly not!" cried Ursula. "Not unless we have a family."

"And in that case?" I enquired.

"In that case it would be necessary," she answered, after a pause.

"Why?"

"Why? Oh, partly because of the children. And I think, perhaps, servants stop longer in that sort of house."

As a mere concession to domestic comfort I was, on the whole, prepared to make it, dreadful though it would be to read the Bible on an empty stomach to persons so incapable of understanding it as the cook and the housemaids and the girl who cleaned the steps. I suggested to Ursula

that it would really be ridiculous to expect a cook with adenoids to listen to the imagery of Ecclesiastes or the magnificent prose of Isaiah. It would be lost upon her ; the poor woman would be unable to make anything of it. It would mean nothing at all to her that " the silver cord be loosened " or " the golden bowl be broken." She would probably think that the golden bowl had some reference to kitchen utensils or family plate. I suggested that cook would find far more food for thought in the terrible and impressive poetry of the Police News, in blood-curdling crime ; she would find far more food for thought in that sort of thing than in the Scriptures. I maintained that the thought should be chosen to fit the mind, as it was obviously out of the question to choose the mind to fit the thought. Cooks, I believed to all intents and purposes to be mindless when removed from their professional environment, therefore I argued, that given a cook with short breath and other failings indicating a limited mental outlook, family worship should be conducted upon purely primitive lines. I suggested a page of the Police News followed by a simple hymn. I threw in the hymn because it would mean nothing, probably, either way. Few hymns have any meaning but sometimes they have nice tunes and it would be pleasant for me to hear Ursula sing. Cook,

with her adenoids and short breath would, of course, be unable to sing; but she could listen. It could do her no harm and one would feel that one had done one's best for her.

"But how do you know she'll have short breath?" asked Ursula.

I said I didn't know. I took it for granted. For all I knew she might have something infinitely worse. It was more than likely. One never knew. A cook might have almost anything. She would probably deserve it, whatever she had. She might have dropsy and some day she might drop down dead—stiff, stark and cold.

"But what has all this got to do with family prayers?" asked Ursula.

"Nothing whatever," I replied. "Why should it have?"

"That was the topic under discussion," said Ursula.

"Any topic may become exhausted," I remarked. "One can't always be talking about the same thing."

Ursula began to hum to herself quietly. I bore about twenty bars of it bravely, then I spoke.

"Let us talk about something else now," I said. "When shall we have this wedding of ours?"

She instantly ceased to be musical; this

showed me I knew something about human nature.

"We'll have it whenever you like," she said, with considerable sparkle. "I think, perhaps, you'd better get well first."

"So I will," I remarked. "Give me a month in your society and I'm your bridegroom."

"A month from to-day," she reflected. "All right."

She ate a few chocolates and thought the matter over; then she smoked a cigarette.

"The first for months and months," she remarked.

"The first wedding?" I cried, upsetting a small table in my rage.

"The first cigarette," replied Ursula coolly; "and I've a jolly good mind to divorce you," she added, "for saying that."

"I deserve it," I answered; "but don't divorce me, at least not yet. Wait a year or two; things may turn out better than we anticipate. Let us cling to our faith, and each other."

"It would have been prettier to say our faith *in* each other," remarked Ursula.

"Ah, I'm out of practice," I said. "These little flatteries have to be thought out, even if they do appear to fall from the lip with unpremeditated art."

"I don't suppose many women would under-

stand you in the very least," remarked Ursula, in reply to this. "Those who didn't think you were quite callous would think you were intoxicated. Very few women would think you were sane and very few would love you; but those who did——"

"Well?" said I, "don't leave off at the most interesting part. Go on."

"Those who did would be lucky," concluded Ursula.

"You please me," I remarked. "Administer further sops to my vanity."

"No, let's talk about the wedding," said Ursula. "Bother your vanity."

"Very well," I agreed. "Now, in the matter of bridesmaids."

"No bridesmaids," said Ursula promptly.

"Not that sort of wedding at all."

"Oh, are we going to have a clergyman or a——"

"I should rather like to have one," said Ursula.

"After all, it is pleasanter to be married by a gentleman, isn't it?"

"They can be hired practically anywhere," I said, "and very cheaply. I dislike the idea of having a bishop or anything top hole, because it looks like swagger, and they don't really marry one any better than a common curate, after all."

"I don't want anything swagger," exclaimed Ursula. "Surely you know that."

"One never knows a woman," I interrupted.

"There is one person I should rather like to have, though," she continued, "unless he's gone to his fathers."

"The matter is in your own hands entirely," I said. "If I have a preference it would be for some chap in an Oxford hood."

"How funny," remarked Ursula. "Now I think the Cambridge hood is ever so much prettier. I always think scarlet and black go so well together."

"They do," I answered. "In fact, that is the hood worn by the Masters of Arts who have graduated at the University of Oxford."

"Oh!" said Ursula. Merely "Oh!"

"And who is your clergyman friend?" I asked.

"Guess," said Ursula.

"Good Lord! not that 'weak as water' man!"

"Yes, and we must tell him everything, *everything*, or it wouldn't be fair."

The proposition took my fancy; there was humour in it. I agreed off-hand.

"And we'll have a honeymoon in that jolly little cottage again," said Ursula.

"But, my dear," I remarked, "we cannot go to the cottage newly married, slick from the

village church. The little old lady might stare ; she might say all sorts of things ; little old ladies do."

"H'm ! our sin has found us out," remarked Ursula with considerable humour.

"That is the chief argument against all sin," I said. "It recoils."

So the cottage was unwillingly abandoned ; the parson Ursula insisted upon retaining. The one was taken and the other left, so to speak, and, three weeks later, we knocked at the vicarage door in order to discuss the matter with the man of God.

We were shown into his study. It was not such a good room as mine, though he had an undeniable eye for a wall-paper, and one or two rather good prints. His college was B.N.C. I had rather expected it to be Keble.

"Nice piano," remarked Ursula. "And he's got some Brahms ; evidently musical. Surely that isn't whisky ?" she said severely, as her eye fell on a serviceable, workmanlike decanter.

"I hope it is," I sighed. "Weak as water," I added with a wink.

"He keeps it for the poor," said Ursula shortly, taking the point well. I hoped he also kept it for the needy. I felt I needed it very badly after my awful walk from the station.

In a moment or two he came in through a window leading into the garden,

"How do you do?" said Ursula promptly, shaking hands with him. One of Ursula's charms is that she always knows exactly what she wants; she always comes straight to the point. She did so now.

"We want you to marry us," she said to the parson, "in your church."

"Oh," said he. "Won't you—won't you sit down—first?" That "first" was delicious.

Then he smiled. So did Ursula.

"I'm a little precipitate, perhaps," she remarked.

"Well, I won't say that, but—you know *my* name, I presume," he remarked.

"No," said Ursula, "I don't; I haven't the least idea."

"My point was," he explained, "that it would be necessary for me to know yours, if we are to have dealings of the sort you describe."

"Oh," said Ursula, "I see."

Then she turned to me. "There's no reason why we shouldn't mention our names, Jerry, is there?" she asked.

"On the contrary there seems to be every reason why we should," I replied.

"Yes," said Ursula, "I think so too. My name is Ursula Moore-Lantry," she remarked, turning to the parson, "and this is Mr. Gerard Coltover. I daresay you know his name."

The parson bowed. "I do," he said. "And

have you walked all the way here from the station, Miss Moore-Lantry ? ” he asked.

“ Yes,” I said. “ It must be two miles, quite.”

“ May I offer you . . . ” he began.

“ Oh no, thank you,” said Ursula. “ But I daresay Mr. Coltover will.”

“ Whisky, Mr. Coltover ? ” asked this excellent priest.

“ Thank you,” I replied.

“ Now I want to know,” he began, as he sat down, “ I want to know why you two Cockneys wish to be married in my little Norman church.”

“ Well, that’s just exactly what we’ve come to tell you,” said Ursula. “ We like your church. We came to it one Sunday, ages ago, and we’ve had dreadful times ever since.”

“ That seems to be a better reason for avoiding it,” remarked the parson, “ than for coming back.”

“ Pure sentiment,” said Ursula cheerfully.

Then she told him the whole story.

“ And during all the time we didn’t meet,” she concluded. “ We just left off where we began and now we’re going to begin again. Do you understand ? ”

He seemed to understand rather well. He got up from his chair and walked about the room with his hands clasped behind his back and his eyes bent on the floor—sometimes on the ceiling.

"That's fine," he ejaculated. "That's awfully fine. It's one of the finest things I've ever heard. You gave up each other for a principle."

"Well, no," I explained, "not exactly that. Personally, I have no principles and I loathed the whole transaction."

"But you subscribed to it," he remarked.

"I had to," I said feebly. "But I was like a lion in a den of Daniels." I said this because I thought it sounded clever.

"Of course he subscribed to it," said Ursula, "or it wouldn't have been done. He isn't *only* a slow bowler. You understand why I want you to marry us, don't you?" she asked.

"I think so," he answered. "Pure sentiment."

"Pure sentiment; exactly," said Ursula.

"I shall be intensely proud and glad," said he.

The matter appeared to be settled.

"How I hated you that Sunday night," remarked Ursula reflectively. "Didn't I hate him, Jerry?"

"You did," I answered. "You called him a——"

Then I thought better of it.

"Oh, do tell me what she called me," laughed the parson.

"Don't, Jerry," cried Ursula.

"It may have been a bounder or it may

have been a Nonconformist, or even both," I began.

"Jerry! you're inventing every word of it," interrupted Ursula, blushing her best sunset blush, while the parson laughed and laughed.

"Romance so seldom comes my way," he cried, "you must forgive me for enjoying myself in its company; and you'll stay to lunch, won't you?"

"That depends," began Ursula.

"On the lunch?" enquired the parson.

"On the trains," proceeded Ursula, "and if you hadn't interrupted me I should have said so."

"Oh, do stay and laugh with me," begged the parson. "Bachelor clergymen in rural districts are terribly hung up for laughter sometimes."

"We can always get a special train," I said to Ursula. "It merely means pressing a button. Lunch is such an important meal to me in my weak state that I feel I ought not to miss it."

Ursula is always reasonable. She saw the force of the argument at once and said she would remain. "Besides, I'm hungry myself," she added.

So we stayed to lunch, and a very good lunch it was.

"For one who preaches abstinence you think I do myself pretty well, eh, Mr. Coltover?" remarked the parson.

"Well, yes," I replied. "You do."

I was occupied with a cup of Turkish coffee that was by no means as weak as water. To be perfectly honest, it was nicely laced with old brandy. It was pretty drinking. The parson himself kept me in countenance. He was, in fact, a man to know.

"Your cook understands how to send things up," remarked Ursula. "That cold beef was for kings."

"I am my own cook," said the parson.

Ursula put down her knife and fork and frankly stared at him. "Well, I'm—astonished," she said.

"My housemaid comes in by the day," continued the parson, "and since I became my own cook I've doubled my congregation."

"You remarkable man," said Ursula, still staring at him.

The parson leaned over and whispered to her. "And I abominate cooking," he said with a chuckle.

"I'm thankful you're going to marry me," said Ursula enthusiastically.

"He isn't," I interpolated. "That's what I'm going to do."

"I mean I'm thankful I know such a man," said Ursula.

"My blushes," said the parson.

"I *shall* restore that porch," said Ursula suddenly.

"What porch?" asked the parson.

"Yours," said Ursula. "That crumbly one."

He beamed. "I had a feeling we should save it," he said, "I had a feeling."

He sipped his coffee and looked like a picture. Probably he was saying a little prayer to himself about his porch.

"I am a little puzzled," he remarked, presently, "just a little puzzled and perplexed."

"Puzzled? Why?" asked Ursula.

"About this wedding of yours," he said.

"Surely it's all plain sailing now," cried Ursula, in dismay.

"Plain sailing. Well, now, that's the question," remarked the parson. "It occurs to me that it might be thought a little odd, perhaps, if I were to marry, publicly, in my church, two people who—dear, dear! You see, you have been married, as it were, before. You are—dear, dear! You have pretended to be married persons here, already. Do you follow me?"

"Gracious, Jerry," cried Ursula, "we've forgotten the little old lady."

And so we had. We hadn't given her a thought.

"Exactly," said the parson. "And I think perhaps you should remember her."

"You mean she might come into the church while it was going on?" said Ursula.

"Quite so," said the parson, "and there would be the banns."

"Just suppose she forbade them," remarked Ursula. "Wouldn't it be dramatic? I should love it if she did."

"In putting the case to you I am thinking only of your own feelings," said the parson, with just the suspicion of a frown.

"I know you are," said Ursula, "and I am as grateful to you as I can be, but you haven't got my deplorable sense of fun."

"A special licence will remove the difficulty connected with the banns," I remarked, "and 'baking day' would remove the little old lady. Her faith in human nature is not in jeopardy."

The parson smiled again. "In that case, no," he said, "in that case, no."

So it really looked as if we were to be married at last and I wondered if it would be kind or barbarous to write and tell poor Nursie down in Kent. In the end I wrote. Her reply was like her, sweet, dignified and charming, and I knew that what I had told her had not been altogether a blundering mistake; at all events, I hoped it had not.

One day Ursula told me all about her meeting with Nursie in the Park. Nursie had come up

to her looking awfully shy and sweet, Ursula said, and had asked if she might speak to her.

"Of course you may," said Ursula.

"I think I am nursing a friend of yours who has typhoid fever," began Nursie.

But Ursula could think of no friend of hers who had typhoid fever; then Nursie had told her my name and Ursula had almost jumped out of her skin. It had never occurred to her that I could ever be ill like that, she said. I looked so sunburnt.

Then Nursie told her how ill I really was, and how anxious they were about me. She said the doctor and Mr. Scott thought there was a woman in the case. Nursie, of course, offered no opinion of her own upon the point until Ursula asked her upon what grounds she could possibly imagine that all this affected her. Then Nursie told her what the result had been when I had seen her in the Park, twice, accidentally, and she told her I was always talking in my sleep about somebody named Ursula whose chief charm was that she always understood, and who "belonged."

This affecting story had reduced Ursula to tears in which Nursie sympathetically joined, and Nursie had said that Ursula ought to be ashamed of herself if she waited another moment, ashamed of herself. "In fact, she absolutely gave herself away," said Ursula. Then they had

arranged between them that Ursula should come and nurse me and take Nursie's place that very day, and they kissed each other and had each gone home to pack, one with a comparatively light heart, one with a very heavy one ; each with dear, kindly, womanly ones.

Since then they had written to each other quite often.

"Which shows," said Ursula, "what a brick she really is."

This view I was fully prepared to accept.

My growth, nowadays, was quite surprising. I gave up all medicines, all decoctions in bottles and tins, and I ate everything I wanted with the appetite of a man on a raft.

"And all through me," said Ursula, "through my mere presence. What a very unusual woman I must be."

I admitted it. I said that her complexion, taken in either sense, was remarkable.

"Yes, and how often do you see such a figure?" asked Ursula cheekily.

"Seldom," I replied. "Strictly speaking, I have seen it only once."

Ursula blushed. She also remarked that it was time to put her figure into new frocks and things—into a trousseau.

"And you must have one as well," she said. "I'm not going to have one if you don't."

So I had a trousseau too, not because I wanted clothes, but because Ursula thought it would be "nice" to buy it. We dealt with hers first so that I might have a little longer time in which to grow to my proper dimensions. I was still somewhat diminished and undersized from my recent scourge. I had regained Paradise but I had not yet regained my weight. I had lost that.

Ursula I found to be a born shopper, and in me she found a man who knew the meaning of pleats and gussets and that intangible thing expressed by the word "chic." So we bought and bought and it was all very splendid and hilarious. I loved the shops. I loved being in them with Ursula. If she liked a thing she had it. That was the principle on which she purchased.

"Otherwise there could be no shops," she said.

The one great thing about her was that she bought nothing I disliked; almost always we agreed. This may have been because our taste was excellent, or because we were in love with each other. The fact remains.

"Clothes," remarked Ursula, "are bought to be looked at as much as to be worn."

"Then give me my head," I suggested.

"I will whenever I possibly can," said Ursula.

"You shall always have your say."

And I had my say. Sometimes we both said

rather more than the young ladies in the shops seemed to be accustomed to, for there was no false modesty about Ursula. She would discuss a garment as naturally as she would discuss a chop. If she wanted my opinion she asked for it and she received it.

"How do you like this?" she would ask, holding up a cambric cloud of a somewhat intimate description. "Do you think you'd like me in it?"

If I thought not, I said so and we would choose others. In time I became more critical and my views more pronounced; and this was due to an increasing familiarity with, and a greater knowledge of, the *lingerie* that Ursula loved and purchased in such enormous quantities. One could not avoid learning, and I would back myself now to buy *lingerie* with anybody. Sometimes, out of sheer good spirits, we would pretend to have a little row about some garment or other, and the young ladies wouldn't know where to look because we bickered so. One felt on these occasions that their sympathy was entirely with Ursula. I seemed to appear to them either as a lean, gaunt autocrat, or as an imbecile, which I preferred and rather enjoyed. I found that a good way to establish a reputation for lunacy among young ladies who serve in shops is to confuse *crêpe-de-chine* with nun's veiling. That settles your hash

instantly ; after that they regard you as unbalanced. I liked them to think I was mad. I encouraged the belief. It made things interesting. Sometimes I used to see them nudge each other and look on Ursula with pity ; once or twice I overheard their conversation.

"Poor young thing," they said, "to marry a fellow like him. He's a peach, I *don't* think."

A peach in this connection I took to be the symbol of all the qualities of evil.

But sometimes the pendulum would swing the other way. I found I could control it to some extent.

There were devices by which I could produce smiles in my favour ; deference to the young ladies was one ; then they would address me as Sir, and abase themselves ; and their demeanour, generally, would express their belief that I was being quite thrown away upon such an one as Ursula. The shops, as shops, were amazingly civil. This, I supposed, was because Ursula ordered everything in dozens. Men in frock-coats followed us about with bent backs and clockwork smiles wherever we went.

"This is regal," I said to Ursula.

"This is shopping," said Ursula to me, and there was that in her eye which told me she was one of those to whom a remnant sale would mean much.

“What about boots?” asked Ursula one day.
“I’m in the mood for them.”

Now women know little or nothing of boots; they know, if it is possible, less about boots than cigars. The very fact that their boots are described as “footwear” is a proof of the awful depths of their ignorance. You will find, as a rule, that a really well-shod woman has had a good deal to do with men. In many respects it may not have improved her; not infrequently the result may be, in many ways, quite lamentable. She may, for instance, have learned, under masculine tuition, to elevate the horse and gun beyond their true spheres of usefulness, and in the doing of her back hair there may be a most masculine suggestion; probably, too, she will, upon occasion, be seen in public in a hard felt hat, or even a silk topper, all of which things are to be regretted. The one great redeeming quality about such a woman is that she will be almost certain to tread the world with elegance and ease; and this one virtue arising from her intercourse with man in the plural goes far towards justifying the defects with which by her associations with him she has been visited. She knows a good boot. It is only fair to Ursula to say at once that she knew the true inwardness of a welted sole; but then she knew the true inwardness of a cooked one. Ursula was an exceptional person or this

history of her moods and tenses would not have been undertaken. Still, in the matter of boots she could learn much from me and she did. She learned that the first object of all boots is to protect the feet from climatic inclemency and not to decorate them only—a hard lesson. She learned that this may be accomplished without the sacrifice of symmetry; in fact, after a morning spent with me in Jermyn Street, her hat, so to speak, was in her hand; in me she recognised her master and her head was bowed to the happy yoke.

Women like a man who understands their clothes. They may dress for each other—they usually do—and it is quite a fallacy to suppose that they dress for men; still, they do like a man who has a feminine touch or two about him.

“A man who has a medal with three clasps and understands the cut of a skirt is God’s last word in men,” said Ursula. “You are that man.”

When the time came to buy my own trousseau I went warily.

True, Ursula was my heart’s delight, the very blossom of my days, but for all that she might have unbelievable ideas in the matter of gent’s clothing. I had yet to discover. The very nicest women may fail terribly with neckties and they may know no more of trousers beyond the fact that they are customary. That which is

actually worn, and how, may escape them altogether. Frequently it does. They see man as a blur, pleasing or unpleasing, as the case may be, but they are usually incapable of close analysis, sartorially speaking. For all I knew Ursula might think I procured my clothing from the Stores, much as I procured my tobacco or my note-paper. She might never have heard of Poole. Poole might convey no more to her than Aristotle. Less. Aristotle she sometimes knows as a philosopher of Latin origin. With Aristotle she may be on the way, as it were. Not so with Poole or Cooling & Lawrence. So, when she demanded a finger in my trousseau pie, I began its creation carefully. I tried her first with a mackintosh.

"Burberry, of course," she remarked in a tone that ruled out much, and my terror largely died.

I achieved a beauty. The points of a mackintosh were known to her, instinctively, I supposed.

In the matter of hosiery, too, I found her to be sound. When she rejected the socks that were "selling" I knew her for a woman in a thousand.

"The things that are 'selling' are the things one doesn't buy," she remarked to the man who was serving me, and I very nearly cheered. There are women in existence, and nice women too, who would have made me buy socks that looked like summer blouses. It was a relief to find I was

not called upon to make a firework of my feet.

By the time I had bought a cap and a couple of hats I felt she was indeed my life companion, and the captain of my soul. She knew as much about my hats as she did about her own. She out-Lincolned Bennet. Coats, too, she knew, and waistcoats. After ten minutes' acquaintance with my own Mr. Lawrence he was showing her all the patterns, quite regardless of me, and I had owed him hundreds in my time. She might have been buying her own trousseau instead of mine. At last things got to such a pitch that I felt bound to intervene. I asked for Mr. Nordwald.

"After all," I said, "I am to wear the things." But they took not the least notice. I might not have been there.

Fortunately "madame" was invariably right, down to the very buttons on a cuff. Mr. Cooling, too, thoroughly approved of her and of me.

"I congratulate you, sir," he remarked as he opened the door for us, "and may you be extremely happy." There seemed so little doubt of this that I felt the sentiment should be fittingly celebrated.

"Kettner's is the place," I said.

"And I haven't tasted champagne since I can remember," remarked Ursula, with meaning and intent.

I caught her meaning and intent, and I caught a waiter, too, simultaneously.

"Wine list, waiter," I said.

"Wine list, waiter, *please*," said Ursula, under her breath, to me.

"Please," I added, for the benefit of the waiter.

"They may wear their dress suits for lunch," she remarked, "but that in itself is no reason for not treating them as gentlemen."

"None whatever," I replied. "If you prefer it I won't even tip him."

But I did, nevertheless. I would have tipped the devil himself that day. No cabman received less than double fare from me, and I took no change out of a shilling even if I did no more than walk over a perfectly clean crossing belonging to a man with a broom. I was the pride of the poor and needy.

"It's the proper spirit in which to buy trousseaux, n'est ce pas?" remarked Ursula, giving my arm a squeeze.

"Il est," I replied in good Blackheath French, and I very nearly kissed her in the middle of Regent Street.

On the day before our wedding we remembered that I had never given her an engagement ring.

"Now that we are doing things in the traditional style I think I ought to have one, don't you?" said Ursula.

We found ourselves completely at one in the matter, so we took a cab to Bond Street forthwith. Secretly we were both thoroughly enjoying the traditional style. There was an old-fashioned Toryism about it that appealed to us without in any way destroying "the essentials," as Ursula called them.

In Bond Street they showed us trays of glinting miracles.

"Not even Solomon in all his glory was arrayed in one of these," remarked Ursula.

"Which one will you be arrayed in?" I enquired. "That is the point at issue."

"Sapphires suit me," said Ursula.

"Sapphires!" said I to the man.

"About what price, sir?" he asked.

"I am going to be married," I replied.

"Thank you, sir," he said.

"This one, I think," said Ursula, later in the afternoon.

"What is the very most you can charge for it?" I asked.

Even with all the impetus of Israel behind him the man said he felt he could not charge more than sixty-eight guineas for it.

"It seems too little," said Ursula, "with all that gold. Surely you must be guilty of an unintentional mis-statement."

But he said not. He said he felt Barabbas

himself could charge no more. The bargain therefore was concluded.

"Kindly engrave the words 'St. Pancras' upon the inside of it, if you will be so good," I said.

"That will be five shillings extra, sir," he observed.

I begged him to make it five-and-sixpence, but he laughed the idea to scorn. He wouldn't hear of it.

"Saints are going cheap to-day," remarked Ursula casually, as she put on her gloves.

I then suggested that my own signet ring should be restored to me.

"Certainly not," cried Ursula. "Do you want to kill me outright?"

I assured her that I had no such intention. If anything, the contrary.

"I couldn't wash my hands properly without it," she said; "but if you like I'll give you another one."

I agreed to the proposal as a man on the eve of securing his marriage lines should agree to such a proposal, and we stopped the cab at another jewellers.

"We must distribute our custom or we shall disorganise the trade," remarked Ursula.

"I want a signet ring for this gentleman, if you please," she said to the new Hebrew. "A gold one with a crystal middle."

The Hebrew endeavoured to bow, but nature intervened, bringing his manners up short, so to speak. You can't be a jeweller for nothing. It seems to take you round the stomach and the neck.

"We are selling a great number in this line, madame," he began, producing some anklets.

"But this gentleman is not a Sultan," remarked Ursula with a countenance I envied and decided, if possible, to imitate. "Something less effusive, if you will be so good."

We instantly became as dirt. Pity for our condition was expressed upon the Hebrew's lineaments. His momentary enthusiasm set like the tropic sun. It was, and it was not.

"There are so many other emporiums," observed Ursula kindly; "it seems almost a shame to trouble you."

The observation undoubtedly heartened him. It restored his vitality to some extent, but we felt we no longer saw the real man. He was playing a part, a part unworthy of him, as he showed us coldly mere pieces of gold.

"Sweet," remarked Ursula, taking up a ring. He agreed that it was so.

"I did not refer to the ring," said Ursula.

Possibly the Hebrew suffered in the ensuing pause, but if so his punishment was just.

"This one, then," said Ursula at length, "and

will you please have the words 'Jerry from Ursula' engraved inside it in a not too flamboyant manner?"

He gave us to understand that it should be done and we left the shop.

"We can buy the wedding ring somewhere else," remarked Ursula very distinctly as I opened the door for her, "when you get the diamond brooches for the bridesmaids."

I hoped the Hebrew suffered yet again, when this choice thrust reached home. I turned to catch his eye and I think he was in pain, but of this no Gentile can be sure.

Notwithstanding the traditional way of doing things, the triune kiss beneath the shadow of a star was Ursula's poetic conception of the true marriage service still. The weary function in a draughty church was the mere concession of a sensitive soul to a hide-bound social state that precludes the fine open-air draughts of heaven from its rites.

"If it *must* be solemnised between four walls," said Ursula, referring to marriage, "at least let the walls be Gothic. I could not be married in any place that was not hundreds of years old," said she. "It would be a dreadful memory if one could only look back on red bricks. I suppose we shall be able to look back on Roman cement. Our church is so extremely ancient."

"It fits in with the marriage tradition," I remarked. "Roman cement sticks like Old Harry; it is the true marriage of stone with stone."

By the open window of my bachelor room on my last bachelor night we sat and talked the stars into their beds.

"Do you remember everything?" said Ursula.

"Yes," I said.

"And forgive me everything?"

"Everything," I answered. "But you ought to be forgiving me."

"But I'm not," said Ursula. "Whatever should I have become, I wonder, if I hadn't met you? You've been my sheet anchor."

"Too far away from the ship," I suggested.

"But belonging to it none the less," she answered.

She crinkled her bewitching little nose and thought it out.

"What a thing friendship is,
World without end,"

she said presently. "And how I do love you. It must be five minutes since you've kissed me and I don't think it's right."

"It's scandal," I agreed. "A scandal to be nipped instantly in the bud."

"Oh!" she cried breathlessly, a few moments later. "There isn't a bud left on the poor tree."

"Don't be too sure of that," I replied. "You may find metaphor misleading."

"It is rather," she admitted presently, in her own bewitching way.

"Good night, belovedest." Then she rose with the pink dawn bathing her in sunbeams from the springing east.

"Look," I said, holding her back, "look: 'East towards the sun.' Remember?"

"Don't I just," she answered. "And I *have* travelled East, ever since."

In my own wanderings, I reflected, there had been a decided smack of the unutterable West. West three points by you-be-damned, as it were.

"But never mind that," said Ursula, "you're due East now and the West has really improved you."

Then she kissed me again and went to her own room.

When we met again over some most unnaturally early coffee she told me that the "going-away dress" she wore covered a multitude of—

"Sins," I interrupted with ante-meridian humour.

"Symbols," she announced. "I've washed my sins away."

The symbols proved to be a motley enough collection but were of value in that they were said to promote good luck. They included a

pair of borrowed stockings, a piece of her grandmother's lace and "a rag of something blue."

This was the traditional style with a vengeance, and I proffered further articles of attire with the object of carrying out the idea as completely as it could be done.

"I've got an old pair of braces that might help," I suggested. But these Ursula refused. She thought that she had done enough, one way and another, to achieve her object.

"You've simply glutted yourself with imagery, you little hypocrite," I remarked, "and I believe you hanker after the full orchestral effects. I believe in your soul you actually regret the *congetti* and the rice, and the bridesmaids and the shoe that might have hit me on the head and smashed my beautiful new hat. Don't you?"

"No, upon my word, I don't," said Ursula in the living tones of George Washington. "I feel no regrets whatever, except—well, perhaps I might have had a few regrets in the matter of bridesmaids."

"What in the name of slavery d'you want them creatures for?" I asked.

"I don't want them, as it happens, and being what I am. I said *might*," replied Ursula. "There is no denying it, you know; there might be a really holy joy in standing there with six

single girls behind one in much cheaper frocks. Think of it! If I had six unmarried enemies that's how I'd pay them out. I'd choose their frocks and I'd mix up their complexions till they squirmed."

"You're a nice sort of bride," I remarked.

"That's why you're marrying me," purred Ursula, with a baby's smile. "What's an enemy like, Jerry?"

"Topping," I answered. "It's the next best thing to a friend. Finish up that coffee and come along and be married. I'm not going to give you lessons in philosophy on your wedding-day."

"But surely that is the very day I need them most," she remarked.

I picked her up and kissed her, carried her downstairs, and deposited her in a large motor and buried her in furs.

"O-oh, delicious," she murmured. "Wasn't the bath water cold this morning!"

The luggage was up behind us and I let the motor go. Once more we were bound for the horizons where I was once a boy.

"And you're so excited that you look like a boy still," remarked Ursula.

"It's the morning air," I said.

"It isn't," said Ursula, "it's me."

"Don't be conceited about it," said I.

"I'm not," said Ursula. "I'm delighted,"

and then very softly she murmured, "*Ich liebe dich*" in my ear.

That dash through the clean, sweet air as the world was waking up was a fine preliminary—to anything. How the wind sang past us! How the Daimler ate up the miles between us and the altar rails, and what an impetus had brought us to its steps! What a gust from the unfathomable! Law, law had done it, rigid law; the law that governs battles, dynasties and language, constellations, life and death and time. . . . And then this great immensity was inadequately boiled down into the feeble little marriage service where not one fine and furious thought can find a foothold, from which all profundity and all imagination are ruled out, out! and indecencies substituted. I felt it ought to ring with sounding words. The best that can be said for it is that it is soon over.

"But not too soon," said Ursula. "Oh, for my stars! Pff! that church. How could we allow those things to be said over us and call it sacred?"

"Be fair," I answered. "We never called it that. We did it for the *Morning Post*, and what you thought was sentiment."

"And for the parson," added Ursula. "He was awfully happy!"

"Then perhaps we haven't quite wasted our time," said I.

No one had obtruded upon us while, in the eyes of men, we were being made man and wife. The little old lady evidently was safe at her baking. Not even a child was there to mutilate the air with vivats when we showed ourselves, married, to the world. A sparrow had hopped about the chancel in a friendly way during the proceedings but with no sustained interest in them. Personally I merely waited for them to end. To me they meant nothing. I felt they were all wrong, in spite of the Roman cement for which I saw Ursula searching. I also saw her become very red once or twice, and just before she was called upon to say "I will" she carefully removed a small piece of white cotton thread from my coat sleeve. Her "I will," might have had as much reference to that as to her vows to love, honour and obey me. She knew, and I knew too, that I wanted no vows of that sort from her. Except when the marriage service made her blush her bearing suggested a happy, contented girl, polite, but at the moment somewhat bored. "All this is merely by the way," it seemed to say. "This is merely a little ceremony that must be put up with because it is decreed by dull persons like my aunts; but it isn't the real thing at all."

"You could write a better marriage service

than that, Jerry," she remarked to me as we went into the vestry to sign the register and pay queer fees for the outrage on our feelings.

"Borrow would have been the man to do it," I answered. "He'd have put some mystery and some fresh air into it."

"Do you think so?" asked Ursula. "I don't know much about Borrow. Say some."

"There's night and day, brother, both sweet things; sun, moon and stars, brother, all sweet things; there's likewise a wind on the heath. Life is very sweet, brother; who would wish to die?"

"How beautiful!" cried Ursula. "Did Borrow write that? Then, of course, he would have been the man."

"The man for what?" enquired the parson.

"The man to write a marriage service," said Ursula. "It has not been satisfactorily accomplished yet."

The parson pursed his lips. Of course he pursed his lips. How was it possible that he should understand the likes of us?

"All the same you *ought* to understand," remarked Ursula. "You understand Brahms and lots of subtle things."

He looked at her with a narrow eye. Up to a point he followed her but beyond that point she was remote.

"I saw you were not happy in the church," he said, as he took off his surplice and kissed the cross on his stole. "I thought you were aloof and untouched."

"I was," said Ursula frankly. "But I'm afraid you——"

"Ah, I am no psychologist," he remarked with a glance at me. "We black-coated gentry get into grooves, I daresay, and we don't see far beyond our noses."

"I'm not quarrelling with *you*," said Ursula gently. "You've been much too kind and I'm far too grateful for that."

"But I have my limitations," he said, with a little smile. "Have I not? But someone does understand you," he continued with another glance at me.

"He was created for that purpose," remarked Ursula.

I saw the parson lift his eyebrows. "That is not in the marriage service," he observed.

"No," said Ursula. "I wish it was."

He took the little thrust like a gentleman. He felt the prick, though he was not quite equal to such rapier play. He bowed, as if to say, "I bow myself back into my limitations."

A few moments later the throb of the car announced that the first chapter of our partnership had opened; the stored-up energy of petrol beat

the air in lieu of bells, and the vicar in Christ smiled his benediction upon two children of the world made one by his good offices. And the vicar concealed somewhere in the folds of his cassock, and somewhat furtively, an old shoe.

"I have no fear for you dear people," he said. "Your union, I feel sure, will be blessed of God, and my prayers will be made for your peace. You must come and see me sometimes. Will you?"

We gave him our promises as we shook hands with him and Ursula thanked him affectionately for all he had done.

"You will always be a splendid memory," she said.

Then the wheels slid along the road, and the vicar's old shoe plopped well aimed and securely into the car with its last little message of friendly intent as we took the long hill.

Ursula leaned against me with a contented little sigh. "Stop when we reach that big tree," she said, pointing to the horizon. "The view from there will be beautiful."

The daylight blazed in our eyes. The gradient led us East, due East towards the sun. From the summit of the hill we saw the valley below us shimmering through the haze, its secrets as yet unknown. Hand in hand we stood together

on the hill surveying from the highest point the land through which we were to travel, ready to accept its perils with a will, eager to explore its hidden mysteries.

THE END