Once Aboard The Lugger

Arthur Stuart−Menteth Hutchinson

Table of Contents

Table of Contents

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ONCE ABOARD THE LUGGER—
THE HISTORY OF GEORGE AND HIS MARY

THE AUTHOR'S ADVERTISEMENT OF HIS NOVEL.

This book has its title from that dashing sentiment, “Once aboard the lugger and the girl is mine!” It is not to be read by those who in their novels would have the entertainment of characters that are brilliant or wealthy, noble of birth or admirable of spirit. Such have no place in this history. There is a single canon of novel−writing that we have sedulously kept before us in making this history, and that is the law which instructs the novelist to treat only of the manner of persons with whom he is well acquainted. Hence our characters are commonplace folks. We have the acquaintance of none other than commonplace persons, because none other than commonplace persons will have acquaintance with us.

And there are no problems in this history, nor is the reader to be tickled by any risks taken with nice deportment. This history may be kept upon shelves that are easily accessible. It is true that you will be invited to spend something of a night in a lady's bedroom, but the matter is carried through with circumspection and dispatch. There shall not be a blush.

Now, it is our purpose in this advertisement so clearly to give you the manner of our novel that without further waste of time you may forego the task of reading so little as a single chapter if you consider that manner likely to distress you. Hence something must be said touching the style.

We cannot see (to make a start) that the listener or the reader of a story should alone have the right to fidget as he listens or reads; to come and go at his pleasure; to interrupt at his convenience. Something of these privileges should be shared by the narrator; and in this history we have taken them. You may swing your legs or divert your attention as you read; but we too must be permitted to swing our legs and slide off upon matters that interest us, and that indirectly are relevant to the history. Life is not compounded solely of action. One cannot rush breathless from hour to hour. And, since the novel aims to ape life, the reader, if the aim be true, cannot rush breathless from page to page. We can at least warrant him he will not here.

These are the limitations of our history; and we admit them to be considerable. Upon the other hand, the print is beautifully clear.

* * * * *

As touching the title we have chosen, this was not come by at the cost of any labour. Taken, as we have told, from that dashing sentiment, “Once aboard the lugger and the girl is mine!” it is a label that might be applied to all novels. It is a generic title for all modern novels, since there is not one of these but in this form or that sets out the pursuit of his mistress by a man or his treatment of her when he has clapped her beneath hatches. This is a notable matter. The novelist writes under the influences and within the limitations of his age, and the modern novelist correctly mirrors modern life when he presents woman as for man's pursuit till he has her, and for what treatment he may will when he captures her. The position is deplorable, is productive of a million wrongs, and, happily, is slowly changing; but that it exists is clear upon the face of our social existence, and is even advertised between the sexes in love: “You are mine” the man says, and means it. “I am yours” the woman declares, and, fruit of generations of dependence, freely, almost involuntarily, gives herself.

But of this problem (upon which we could bore you to distraction) we are nothing concerned in our novel. Truly we offer you the pursuit of a girl; but my Mary would neither comprehend this matter nor wish to be other than her George's. From page 57 she waves to us; let us hurry along.

.... Who so will stake his lot,
Impelled thereto by nescience or whim,
Cupidity or innocence or not,
On Chance's colours, let men pray for him.
RALPH HODGSON.

BOOK I. Of George.

CHAPTER I. Excursions In A Garden.

I.

Mr. Christopher Marrapit is dozing in a chair upon the lawn; his darling cat, the Rose of Sharon, is sleeping on his lap; stiffly beside him sits Mrs. Major, his companion—that masterly woman.

As we approach to be introduced, it is well we should know something of Mr. Marrapit. The nervous business of adventuring into an assembly of strangers is considerably modified by having some knowledge of the first we shall meet. We feel more at home; do not rush upon subjects which are distasteful to that person, or of which he is ignorant; absorb something of the atmosphere of the party during our exchange of pleasantries with him; and, warmed by this feeling, with our most attractive charm of manner are able to push among the remainder of our new friends.

Unhappily, the friendly chatter of the neighbourhood, which should supply us with something of the character of a resident, is quite lacking at Paltley Hill in regard to Mr. Marrapit. Mr. Marrapit rarely moves out beyond the fine wall that encircles Herons' Holt, his residence; with Paltley Hill society rarely mixes. The vicar, with something of a frown, might tell us that to his divers parochial subscription lists Mr. Marrapit has consistently, and churlishly, refused to give a shilling. Professor Wyvern's son, Mr. William Wyvern, has been heard to say that Mr. Marrapit always reminded him “of one of the minor prophets—shaved.” Beyond this—and how little helpful it is!—Paltley Hill society can give us nothing.

In a lower social grade of the district, however, much might be learned. In the kitchens, the cottages, and the bar−parlours of Paltley Hill, Mr. Marrapit is considerably discussed. Nicely mannered as we are, servants' gossip concerning one in our own station of life is naturally distasteful to us. At the same time it is essential to our ease on being introduced that we should know something of this gentleman. Assuring ourselves, therefore, that we shall not be prejudiced by cheap chatter, let us hear what the kitchens, the cottages, and the bar−parlours have to say.

Let it, at least, be written down; we shall know how to value such stuff.

Material for this gossip, then, is brought into the kitchens, the cottages, and the bar−parlours by Mr. Marrapit's domestic staff.

Mrs. Armitage, his cook, has given tales of his “grimness” to the cottages where her comfortable presence is welcomed on Sunday and Thursday afternoons. She believes, however, that he must be a “religious gentleman,” because (so she says) “he talks like out of the Bible.”

This would seem to bear out Mr. William Wyvern's allusion to the minor prophet element of his character.

It is the habit of Clara and Ada, his maids, squeezing at the gate from positions dangerous to modesty into which their ardent young men have thrust them—it is their habit, thus placed, to excuse themselves from indelicate embraces by telling alarming tales of Mr. Marrapit's “carrying on” should they be late. He is a “fair old terror,” they say.

The testimony of Mr. Fletcher, his gardener, gloomy over his beer in the bar−parlours, seems to support the “stinginess” that the vicar has determined in Mr. Marrapit's character. Mr. Fletcher, for example, has lugubriously shown what has to be put up with when in the service of a man who had every inch of the grounds searched because a threepenny bit had been dropped. “It's 'ard—damn 'ard,” Mr Fletcher said on that occasion. “I'm a gardener, I am; not a treasure−'unter.” Murmurs of sympathy chorused endorsement of this view.

Finally there are the words of Frederick, son of Mrs. Armitage, and assistant to Fletcher, whose pleasure it is to set on end the touzled hair of the youth of Paltley Hill by obviously exaggerated stories of Mr. Marrapit's grim rule.

“'E's a tryant,” Frederick has said.

Such is an epitome of the kitchen gossip concerning Mr. Marrapit; it is wholesome to be away from such tattling, and personally to approach the lawn whereon its subject sits.

II.

This lawn, a delectable sight on this fine July afternoon, is set about with wire netting to a height of some six feet. By the energies of Mr. Fletcher and Frederick the sward is exquisitely trimmed and rolled; and their labours join with the wire netting to make the lawn a safe and pleasant exercise ground for Mr. Marrapit's cats.

Back in the days of Mr. Marrapit's first occupancy of Herons' Holt, this man was a mighty amateur breeder of cats, and a rare army of cats possessed. Regal cats he had, queenly cats, imperial neuter cats; blue cats, grey cats, orange cats, and white cats—cats for which nothing was too good, upon which too much money could not be spent nor too much love be lavished. Latterly, with tremendous wrenchings of the heart, he had disbanded this galaxy of cats. Changes in his household were partly the cause of this step. The coming of his nephew, George, had seriously upset the peaceful routine of existence which it was his delight to lead; and a reason even more compelling was the gradual alteration in his attitude towards his hobby. This man perceived that the fancier's eye with which he regarded his darlings was becoming so powerful as to render his lover's eye in danger of being atrophied. The fancier's eye was lit by the brain—delighted only in “points,” in perfection of specimen; the lover's eye was fed by the heart—glowed, not with pride over breed, but with affection for cats as cats. And Mr. Marrapit realised that for affection he was coming to substitute pride—that he was outraging the animals he loved by neglecting the less admirable specimens for those perfectly moulded; that even these perfect types he was abusing by his growing craze for breeding; polygamy in cats, he came to believe, desecrated and eventually destroyed their finer feelings.

Therefore—and the coming of his nephew George quickened his determination—Mr. Marrapit dispersed his stud (the word had become abhorrent to him), keeping only four exquisite favourites, of which the Rose of Sharon—that perfect orange cat, listed when shown at the prohibitive figure of 1000 pounds, envy and despair of every cat−lover in Great Britain and America—was apple of his eye, joy of his existence.

It was the resolve to keep but these four exquisite creatures that encompassed the arrival in Mr. Marrapit's household of Mrs. Major, now seated beside him upon the lawn—that masterly woman. The fine cat−house was pulled down, the attendant dismissed. A room upon the ground floor, having a southern aspect, was set apart as bed−chamber and exclusive apartment for the four favourites, and Mr. Marrapit sought about for some excellent person into whose care they might be entrusted. Their feeding, their grooming, constant attention to their wants and the sole care of their chamber, should be this person's duties, and it was not until a point some way distant in this history that Mr. Marrapit ceased daily to congratulate himself upon his selection.

Mrs. Major, that masterly woman, was a distressed gentlewoman. The death of her husband, a warehouse clerk, by acute alcoholic poisoning, seems to have given her her first chance of displaying those strong qualities which ultimately became her chief characteristic. And she was of those to whom plan of action comes instantly upon the arrival of opportunity. With lightning rapidity this woman welded chance and action; with unflagging energy and with dauntless perseverance used the powerful weapon thus contrived.

The case of her husband's death may be instanced. Her hysterical distress on the day of the funeral (a matter that would have considerably surprised the late Mr. Major) was exchanged on the following morning for acute physical distress resulting from the means by which, overnight, she had tried to assuage her grief. Noticing, as she dressed, the subdued and martyrlike air that her face wore, noticing also her landlady's evident sympathy with the gentle voice and manner which her racking head caused her to adopt, Mrs. Major saw at once the valuable aid to her future which the permanent wearing of these characteristics might be. From that moment she took up the role of distressed gentlewoman—advertised by tight−fitting black, by little sighs, and by precise, subdued voice,—and in this guise sought employment at an Agency. The agency sent her to be interviewed by Mr. Marrapit. Ushered into the study, she, in a moment of masterly inspiration, murmured “The sweet! Ah, the sweet!” when viciously scratched by the Rose of Sharon, and upon those words walked directly in to Mr. Marrapit's heart.

He required a lady—a *lady* (Mrs. Major smiled deprecatingly) who should devote herself to his cats. Did Mrs. Major like cats? Ah, sir, she adored cats; her late husband—Words, at the recollection, failed her. She faltered; touched an eye with her handkerchief; wanly smiled with the resigned martyrdom of a true gentlewoman.

As so−often in this life, the unspoken word was more powerful than mightiest eloquence. Mr. Marrapit is not to be blamed for the inference he drew. He pictured the dead Mr. Major a gentleman sharing with his wife a passion for cats; by memory of which fond trait his widow's devotion to the species would be yet further enhanced, would be hallowed.

There is the further thought in this connection that once more, as so often in this life, the unspoken word had

saved the lie direct. Once only, in point of fact, had Mrs. Major seen her late husband directly occupied with a cat, and the occasion had been the cause of their vacating their lodgings in Shepherd's Bush precisely thirty minutes later. Mr. Major, under influence of his unfortunate malady, with savage foot had sped the landlady's cat down a flight of stairs; and the landlady had taken the matter in peculiarly harsh spirit.

All this, however, lay deeply hidden beneath Mrs. Major's unspoken word. The vision of a gentle Mr. Major that Mr. Marrapit conjured sealed the liking he had immediately taken to Mrs. Major, and thus was she installed.

The masterly woman, upon this July afternoon, desisted from her crocheting; observed in the dozing figure beside her signs of movement; turned to it, ready for speech.

This she saw. From the reluctant rays of a passing sun a white silk handkerchief protected a nicely polished head—a little bumpy, fringed with soft white hair. Beneath the head a long face, sallow of hue; in either cheek a pit; between them a dominating nose carrying eyeglasses. A long, spare body in an alpaca coat; long thin legs; brown morocco slippers without heels—upon the lap the peerless Rose of Sharon.

“Time for the Rose to go in,” Mrs. Major softly suggested.

“The Rose,” said Mr. Marrapit, passing a hand gently over the creature's exquisite form, “is, I fear, still ailing. Her sleep is troubled; she shivers. Her appetite?”

“It is still poorly.” The expression was that of a true distressed gentlewoman.

“She has need,” Mr. Marrapit said, “of the most careful attention, of the most careful dieting. Tend her. Tempt her. Take her.”

“I will, Mr. Marrapit.” Mrs. Major gathered the Rose against her bosom. “You will not stay long? It is growing chilly.”

“I shall take a brief stroll. I am perturbed concerning the Rose.”

“Let me bring you a cap, Mr. Marrapit.”

“Unnecessary. Devote yourself, I pray, to the Rose. I am anxious. Nothing could console me should any evil thing come upon her. I am apprehensive. I look to you. I will take a stroll.”

Outside the wire fence Mr. Marrapit and Mrs. Major parted. The masterly woman glided swiftly towards the house; Mr. Marrapit, with bent head, passed thoughtfully along an opposite path.

And immediately the sleeping garden awoke to sudden activity.

III.

First to break covert was Frederick, Mr. Fletcher's assistant. Abnormally steeped in vice for one so young (this wretched boy was but fourteen), with the coolness of a matured evil−doer Frederick extinguished his cigarette−end by pressing it against his boot−heel; dropped it amongst other ends, toilsomely collected, in a tin box; placed the box in its prepared hole; covered this with earth and leaves; hooked a basket of faded weeds upon his arm, and so appeared in Mr. Marrapit's path with bent back, diligently searching.

Mr. Marrapit inquired: “Your task?”

“Weedin',” said Frederick.

“Weeding what?”

“Weeds,” Frederick told him, a little surprised.

Mr. Marrapit rapped sharply: “Say 'sir'.”

“Sir,” said Frederick, making to move.

Mr. Marrapit peered at the basket. “You have remarkably few.”

“There ain't never many,” Frederick said with quiet pride—“there ain't never many if you keep 'em down by always doin' your job.”

Mr. Marrapit pointed: “They grow thick at your feet, sir!”

In round−eyed astonishment Frederick peered low. “They spring up the minute your back's turned, them weeds. They want a weed destroyer what you pours out of a can.”

“You are the weed−destroyer,” Mr. Marrapit said sternly. “Be careful. It is very true that they spring up whenever *my* back is turned. Be careful.” He passed on.

“Blarst yer back,” murmured Frederick, bending his own to the task.

IV.

A few yards further Mr. Marrapit again paused. Against a laurel bush stood a pair of human legs, the seat of whose encasing trousers stared gloomily upwards at the sky. With a small twig he carried Mr. Marrapit tapped the seat. Three or four raps were necessary; slowly it straightened into line with the legs; from the abyss of the bush a back, shoulders, head, appeared.

Just as the ostrich with buried head believes itself hid from observation, so it was with Mr. Fletcher, needing peace, a habit to plunge head and shoulders into a bush and there remain—showing nothing against the sky−line. Long practice had freed the posture from irksomeness. As a young man Mr. Fletcher had been employed in a public tennis−court, and there had learned the little mannerism to which he now had constant resort. In those days the necessity of freeing himself from the constant annoyance of nets to be tightened, or of disputes between rival claims to courts to be settled, had driven him to devise some means of escape. It was essential to the safety of his post, upon the other hand, that he must never allow it to be said that he was constantly absent from his duties. Chance gave him the very means he sought. Bent double into a bush one day, searching a tennis ball, he heard his name bawled up and down the courts; he did not stir. Those who were calling him stumbled almost against his legs; did not observe him; passed on calling. Thereafter, when unduly pressed, it became Mr. Fletcher's habit to bury head and arms in a bush either until the hue and cry for him had lulled, or until exasperated searchers knocked against his stern; in the latter event he would explain that he was looking for tennis balls.

The habit had persisted. Whenever irritated or depressed (and this man's temperament caused such often to be his fate), he would creep to the most likely bush and there disappear as to his upper half. It is a fine thing in this turbulent life thus to have some quiet refuge against the snarlings of adversity.

Mr. Fletcher drew up now and faced Mr. Marrapit; in his hand a snail.

He said gloomily: “Another one”; held it towards his master's face.

Here is an example of how one deception leads to another. This was no fresh snail; often before Mr. Marrapit had seen it. To lend motive to his concealment Mr. Fletcher carried always with him this same snail; needing peace he would draw it from his pocket; plunge to consolation; upon discovery exhibit it as excuse.

“There is an abominable smell here,” said Mr. Marrapit.

Mr. Fletcher inhaled laboriously. “It's not for me to say what it is.”

“Adjust that impression. Yours is the duty. You are in charge here. What is it?”

“It's them damn cats.”

“You are insolent, sir. Your insolence increases. It grows unendurable.”

Mr. Fletcher addressed the snail. “He asts a question. I beg not to answer it. He insists. I tell him. I'm insolent.” He sighed; the tyranny of the world pressed heavily upon this man.

Mr. Marrapit advertised annoyance by clicks of his tongue: “You are insolent when you swear in my presence. You are insolent when you impute to my cats a fault that is not theirs.”

“I ain't blamin' the cats. It's natural to them. Whenever the wind sets this way I notice it. It's blamin' me I complain of. I don't draw the smell. I try to get away from it. It's 'ard—damn 'ard. I'm a gardener, I am; not a wind−shaft.”

Whenever Mr. Marrapit had occasion to speak with Mr. Fletcher, after the first few exchanges he would swallow with distinct effort. It was wrath he swallowed; and bitter as the pill was, rarely did he fail to force it down. Mr. Fletcher spoke to him as no other member of his establishment dared speak. The formula of dismissal would leap to Mr. Marrapit's mouth: knowledge of the unusually small wage for which Mr. Fletcher worked caused it to be stifled ere it found tongue. Thousands of inferiors have daily to bow to humiliations from their employers; it is an encouraging thought for this army that masters there be who, restrained by parsimony, daily writhe beneath impertinences from valuable, ill−paid servants.

Mr. Marrapit swallowed. He said: “To the smell of which I complain my cats are no party. It is tobacco. The air reeks of tobacco. I will not have tobacco in my garden.”

Twice, with a roaring sound, Mr. Fletcher inhaled. He pointed towards an elm against the wall: “It comes from over there.”

“Ascertain.”

The gardener plunged through the bushes; nosed laboriously; his inhalations rasped across the shrubs. “There's no smoking here,” he called.

“Someone, in some place concealed, indubitably smokes. Yourself you have noticed it. Follow the scent.”

Exertion beaded upon Mr. Fletcher's brow. He drew his hand across it; thrust a damp and gloomy face between the foliage towards his master.

"I'd like to know," he asked, "if this is to be one of my regular jobs for the future? Was I engaged to 'unt smells all day? It's 'ard−damn 'ard. I'm a gardener, I am; not a blood−'ound."

But Mr. Marrapit had passed on.

"Damn 'ard," Mr. Fletcher repeated; drew the snail from his pocket; plunged to consolation.

V.

A short distance down the garden Mr. Marrapit himself discovered the source of the smell that had offended him. Bending to the left he came full upon it where it uprose from a secluded patch of turf: from the remains of a pipe there mounted steadily through the still air a thin wisp of smoke.

Outraged, Mr. Marrapit stared; fuming, turned upon the step that sounded on the path behind him.

The slim and tall young man who approached was that nephew George, whose coming into Mr. Marrapit's household had considerably disturbed Mr. Marrapit's peace. Orphaned by the death of his mother, George had gone into the guardianship of his uncle while in his middle teens. The responsibility had been thrust upon Mr. Marrapit by his sister. Vainly he had writhed and twisted in fretful protest; she shackled him to her desire by tearful and unceasing entreaty. Vainly he urged that his means were not what she thought; she assured him—and by her will bore out the assurance—that with her George should go her money.

And the will, when read, in some degree consoled Mr. Marrapit for the sniffling encumbrance he took back with him to Herons' Holt after the funeral. It was a simple and trustful will—commended George into the keeping of her brother Christopher Marrapit; desired that George should be entered in her late husband's—the medical—profession; and for that purpose bequeathed her all to the said brother.

George was eighteen when Mr. Marrapit entered him at St. Peter's Hospital in mild pursuit of the qualification of the Conjoint Board of Surgeons and Physicians. "I am entering you," Mr. Marrapit had said, consulting notes he had prepared against the interview—"I am entering you at enormous cost upon a noble career which involves, however, a prolonged and highly expensive professional training. Your mother wished it."

Mr. Marrapit did not add that George's mother had expressly paid for it. This man had the knowledge that Youth would lose such veneration for Authority as it may possess were Authority to disclose the motives that prompt its actions.

He continued: "For me this involves considerable self−denial and patience. I do not flinch. From you it demands unceasing devotion to your books, your studies, your researches. You are no longer a boy: you are a man. The idle sports of youth must be placed behind you. Stern life must be sternly faced."

"I do not flinch," George had replied.

"For your personal expenses I shall make you a small allowance. You will live in my house. Your wants should be insignificant."

In a faint voice George squeezed in: "I have heard that one can work far better by living near the hospital in digs."

"Elucidate."

"Digs—lodgings. I have heard that one can work far better by living near the hospital in lodgings."

"Adjust that impression," Mr. Marrapit had told him. "You are misinformed."

George struggled: "I should have the constant companionship of men absorbed in the same work as myself. We could exchange views and notes in the evenings."

"In your books seek that companionship. With them compare your views. Let your notes by them be checked. They are infallible."

George said no more. At that moment the freedom of hospital as against the restraint of school, was a gallant steed upon which he outrid all other desires. The prospect of new and strange books in exchange for those he so completely abhorred, was an alluring delight. It is not until the bargain is complete that we discover how much easier to polish, and more comfortable to handle, are old lamps than new.

Mr. Marrapit had referred to his notes: "In regard to the allowance I shall make you. I earnestly pray no spur may be necessary to urge you at your tasks. Yet, salutary it is that spur should exist. I arrange, therefore, that in the deplorable event of your failing to pass any examination your allowance shall be diminished."

“Will it be correspondingly increased when I pass first shot?”

The fearful possibilities of this suggestion Mr. Marrapit had hesitated to accept. Speculation was abhorrent to this man. Visions of success upon success demanding increase upon increase considerably agitated him. Upon the other hand, the sooner these successes were won, the sooner, he reflected, would he be rid of this incubus, and, in the long−run, the cheaper. He nerved himself to the decision. “I agree to that,” he had said. “The compact is affirmed.”

It was a wretched compact for George.

But the sum had not yet been fixed. George, standing opposite his uncle, twisted one leg about the other; twined his clammy hands; put the awful question: “By how much will the allowance be increased or cut down?”

“By two pounds a quarter.”

George plunged: “So if I fail in my first exam. I shall get eleven pounds at the quarter? if I pass, fifteen?”

Horror widened Mr. Marrapit's eyes; shrilled his voice: “What is the colossal sum you anticipate?”

“I thought you said fifty−two pounds a year−a pound a week.”

“A monstrous impression. Adjust it. Four pounds a quarter is the sum. You will have no needs. It errs upon the side of liberality—I desire to be liberal.”

George twisted his legs into a yet firmer knot: “But two failures would wipe it bang out.”

“Look you to that,” Mr. Marrapit told him. “The matter is settled.”

But it was further pursued by George when outside the door.

“Simply to spite that stingy brute,” vowed he, “I'll pass all my exams, with such a rush that I'll be hooking sixteen quid a quarter out of him before he knows where he is. I swear I will.”

It was a rash oath. When Youth selects as weapon against Authority some implement that requires sweat in the forging Authority may go unarmed. The task of contriving such weapons is early abandoned. In three months George's hot resolve was cooled; in six it was forgotten; at the end of three years, after considerable fluctuation, his allowance stood at minus two pounds for the ensuing quarter.

Mr. Marrapit, appealed to for advance, had raved about his study with waving arms.

“The continued strain of renewing examination fees consequent on your callous failures,” he had said, “terrifies me. I am haunted by the spectre of ruin. The Bank of England could not stand it.”

Still George argued.

With a whirlwind of words Mr. Marrapit drove him from the study: “Precious moments fly even as you stand here. To your books, sir. In them seek solace. By application to them refresh your shattered pocket.”

Shamefully was the advice construed. George sought and found solace in his books by selling his Kirke, his Quain and his Stone to Mr. Schoole of the Charing Cross Road; his microscope he temporarily lodged with Mr. Maughan in the Strand; to the science of bridge he applied himself with a skill that served to supply his petty needs.

Notwithstanding, his career at St. Peter's was of average merit. George was now in the sixth year of his studies; and by the third part of his final examination, was alone delayed from the qualification which would bring him freedom from his uncle's irksome rule.

VI.

His attempt at this last examination had been concluded upon this July day that opens our history, and thus we return to Mr. Marrapit, to George, and to the line of smoke uprising from the tobacco.

Mr. Marrapit indicated the smouldering wedge.

George bent forward. “Tobacco,” he announced.

“My nose informed me. My eyes affirm. Yours?”

“I am afraid so.”

“My simple rule. In the vegetable garden you may smoke; here you may not. Is it so hard to observe?”

“I quite forgot myself.”

Mr. Marrapit cried: “Adjust that impression. You forgot me. Consistently you forget me. My desires, my interests are nothing to you.”

“It's a rotten thing to make a fuss about.”

“That is why I make a fuss. It *is* a rotten thing. A disgusting and a noisome thing. Bury it.”

Into a bed of soft mould George struck a sullen heel; kicked the tobacco towards the pit. Mr. Marrapit chanted over the obsequies: “I provide you with the enormous expanse of my vegetable garden in which to smoke. Yet upon my little acre you intrude. I am Naboth.”

Ahab straightened his back; sighed heavily. Naboth started against the prick of a sudden recollection:

“I had forgotten. Your examination?”

George half turned away. The bitterest moment of a sad day was come. He growled:

“Pipped.”

“*Pipped?*“

“Pilled.”

“*Pilled?*“

“Spun.”

“*Spun?*”

“Three months.”

Mr. Marrapit put his hands to his head: “I shall go mad. My brain reels beneath these conundrums. I implore English.”

The confession of defeat is a thousandfold more bitter when made to unkind ears. George paled a little; spoke very clearly: “I failed. I was referred for three months.”

“I am Job,” groaned Mr. Marrapit. “I expected this. The strain is unendurable. It is unnatural. The next chance shall be your last. What is the fee for re−examination?”

“Five guineas.”

“My God!” said Mr. Marrapit.

He tottered away up the path.

CHAPTER II. Excursions In Melancholy.

I.

Gloom brooded over Herons' Holt that evening. Gloom hung thickly about the rooms: blanketed conversation; veiled eyes that might have sparkled; choked appetites.

Nevertheless this was an atmosphere in which one member of the household felt most comfortable.

Margaret, Mr. Marrapit's only child, was nineteen; of sallow complexion, petite, pretty; with large brown eyes in which sat always a constant quest—an entreaty, a wistful yearning.

Hers was a clinging nature, readily responsive to the attraction of any stouter mind. Enthusiasm was in this girl, but it lay well−like— not as a spring. To stir it the influence of another was wanted; of itself, spontaneous, it could not leap. Aroused, there was no rush and surge of emotion—it welled, rose deeply; thickly, without ripple; crestless, flinging no intoxicating spume. Waves rush triumphant, hurtling forward the stick they support: the pool swells, leaving the stick quiescent, floating.

Many persons have this order of enthusiasm; it is a clammy thing to attract. A curate with a glimpse at Shelley's mind once roused Margaret's enthusiasm for the poet. It welled so suffocatingly about him that he came near to damning Shelley and all his works; threw up his hat when opportunity put out a beckoning finger and drew him elsewhere.

Margaret walked in considerable fear of her father; but she clung to him despite his oppressive foibles, because this was her nature. She loved church; incense; soft music; a prayer−book tastefully bound. She “wrote poetry.”

Warmed by the gloom that lay over Herons' Holt upon this evening, she sat brooding upon her cousin George's failure until a beautiful picture was hatched. He had gone to his room directly after dinner; during the meal had not spoken. She imagined him seated on his bed, hands deep in pockets, chin sunk, brow knitted, wrestling with that old devil despair. She knew that latterly he had worked tremendously hard. He had told her before the examination how confident of success he was, had revealed how much in the immediate prospect of freedom he gloried. She recalled his gay laugh as he had bade her good−bye on the first day, and the recollection stung her just as, she reflected, it must now be stinging him.... Only he must a thousand times more fiercely be feeling the burn of its venom....

Margaret moved impatiently with a desire to shake into herself a profounder sense of her cousin's misfortune. By ten she was plunged in a most pleasing melancholy.

II.

She was of those who are by nature morbid; who deceive themselves if they imagine they have enjoyment from the recreations that provoke lightness of heart in the majority. Only the surface of their spirits ripples under such breezes; to stir the whole, to produce the counterpart of a hearty laugh in your vigorous animal, a feast on melancholy must be provided. This is a quality that is common among the lower classes who find their greatest happiness in funerals. The sombre trappings; white handkerchiefs against black dresses; tears; the mystery of gloom—these trickle with a warm glow through all their senses. They are as aroused by grief, unpleasant to the majority, as the drunkard is quickened by wine, to many abhorrent.

Thus it was with Margaret, and to her the shroud of melancholy in which she was now wrapped brought an added boon—arrayed in it she was best able to make her verses. Not of necessity sad little verses; many of her brightest were conceived in profoundest gloom. With a pang at the heart she could be most merry—tinkling out her laughing little lines just as martyrs could breathe a calm because, rather than spite of, they were devilishly racked.

III.

But this was no hour for tinkling lines. A manuscript returned by the last post emphasised her gloom.

Kissing her father good−night, Margaret crept to her room, aching with desire to write.

She undressed, read a portion of the *Imitation*, then to her table by the open window.

Two hours brought relief. Margaret placed her poem in an envelope against its presentation to George in the morning, then from her window leaned.

From her thoughts at once George sped; they rushed across the sleeping fields to cling about the person of that Mr. William Wyvern who had spoken of Mr. Marrapit as reminding him of a minor prophet—shaved. This was Margaret's nightly practice, but to−night this girl was most exquisitely melancholy, and with melancholy her thoughts of her William were tinged. She had not seen him that day; and now she brooded upon the bitter happening that had forced all her meetings with her lover to be snatched—fugitive, secret.

For Mr. William Wyvern was not allowed at Herons' Holt. When love first sent its herald curiosity into William's heart, the young man had sought to relieve its restlessness by a visit ostensibly on George, really upon Margaret, and extremely ill−advised in that at his heels gambolled his three bull−terriers.

Korah, Dathan, and Abiram these were named, and they were abrupt dogs to a point reaching brusqueness.

At the door, as William had approached, beamed Mr. Marrapit; upon the drive the queenly Rose of Sharon sat; and immediately tragedy swooped.

The dogs sighted the Rose. Red−mouthed the shining pack flew at her. Dignity fell before terror: wildly, with streaming tail, she fled.

Orange was the cat, white the dogs: like some orange and snow−white ribbon magically inspired, thrice at enormous speed they set a belt about the house. With tremendous bounds the Rose kept before her pursuers—heavily labouring, horrid with thirsty glee. Impotent in the doorway moaned Mr. Marrapit, his dirge rushing up to a wail of grief each time the parti−coloured ribbon flashed before his eyes.

With Mr. Fletcher the end had come. Working indoors, aroused by the din, the gardener burst out past his master just as the ribbon fluttered into sight upon the completion of its fourth circuit. Like a great avalanche it poured against his legs; as falls the oak, so pressed he fell.

Each eager jaw snapped once. Korah bit air, Dathan the cat's right ear. She wrenched; freed; sprang high upon the porch to safety, blood on her coat.

Abiram put a steely nip upon Mr. Fletcher's right buttock.

William called off his dogs; stood aghast. Mr. Marrapit stretched entreating arms to his adored. Mr. Fletcher writhed prone.

The torn Rose slipped to Mr. Marrapit's bosom. Clasping her he turned upon William—“You shall pay for this blood!”

William stammered: “I'm very sorry, sir. If—”

“Never again enter my gates. I'll have your curs shot!”

Curs was unfortunate; the evil three were whelped of a mighty strain.

“If your fool of a man hadn't got in the way, the cat would have escaped,” William hotly cried. Indignant he turned. Banishment was nothing then; in time it came to be a bitter thing.

Mr. Marrapit had raged on to Mr. Fletcher, yet writhing.

“You hear that?” he had cried. “Dolt! You are responsible for this!” He touched the blood−flecked side, the abrased ear; clasped close the Rose; called for warm water.

Mr. Fletcher clapped a hand to his wound as shakily he rose.

“I go to rescue his cat!” he said; “I'm near worried to death by 'ounds. I'm a dolt. I'm responsible. It's 'ard,—damn 'ard. I'm a gardener, I am; not a dog muzzle.”

A dimness clouded Margaret's beautiful eyes as this bitter picture— she had watched it—was again reviewed. She murmured “Oh, Bill!”; stretched her soft arms to the night; moved her pretty lips in a message to her lover; snuggled between the sheets and made melancholy her bedfellow.

IV.

By seven she was up and in the fresh garden. George was before her.

She cried brightly: “Why, how early you are!” and ran to him—very pretty in her white dress: at her breast a rose, the poem fluttering in her hand.

“Yes; for once before you.”

George's tone did not give back her mood, purposely keyed high. She played on it again: “Turning a new

leaf?”

He drummed at the turf with his heel: “Yes—for to−day.” He threw out a hand towards her: “But in the same old book. I've had eight—nine years of it, and now there are three more months.”

“Poor George! But only three months, think how they will fly!”

He was desperately gloomy: “I haven't your imagination. Each single day of them will mean a morning—here; a night—here.”

“Oh, is it so hard?”

“Yes, now. It's pretty deadly now. You know, when I wasn't precisely killing myself with overwork, I didn't mind so much. When it was three or four years, anyway, before I could possibly be free, a few extra months or so through failing an exam, didn't trouble me. But this is different. I was right up against getting clear of all this”—he comprehended garden and house in a sweep of the hand—“counted it a dead certainty—and here I am pitched back again.”

“But, George, you did work so hard this time. It isn't as though you had to blame yourself.” She put a clinging hand into his arm. “You can suffer no—remorse. That is what makes failure so dreadful—the knowledge that things might have been otherwise if one had liked.”

George laughed quite gaily. Gloom never lay long upon this young man.

“You're a sweet little person,” he said. “You ought to be right, but you are wrong. When I didn't work I didn't mind failing. It's when I've tried that I get sick.”

Margaret's eyes brightened. There was melancholy here.

“Oh, I know what you mean. I know so well. I have felt that. You mean the—the haunting fear that you may never be able to succeed; that you have not the—the talent, the capacity.” She continued pleadingly: “Oh, you mustn't think that. You can—you *will* succeed next time, you know.”

“Rather!” responded George brightly.

Margaret was quite pained. She would have had him express doubt, despondently sigh; would have heartened him with her poem. The confident “rather!” jarred. She hurried from its vigour.

She asked: “What had you intended to do?”

“I was to have got a *locum tenens*. I think it would have developed into a permanency. A big, rough district up in Yorkshire with a man who keeps six horses going. His second assistant—a pal of mine—wants to chuck it.”

“Why?”

“Why? Oh, partly because he's fed up with it, partly because he wants a practice of his own.”

“Ah! ... But, George, don't you want a practice of your own? You don't want to be another man's assistant, do you?”

George laughed. “I can't choose, Margi. You know, if you imagine there are solid groups of people all over England anxiously praying for the arrival of a doctor, you must adjust that impression, as your father would say. These things have to be bought. I've got about three pounds, so I'm not bidding. They seldom go so cheap.”

Margaret never bantered. She had no battledore light enough to return an airy shuttlecock. Now, as always, when this plaything came buoyantly towards her she swiped it with heavy force clean out of the conversational field.

She said gravely: “Ah, I know what you mean. You mean that father ought to buy you a practice—ought to set you up when you are qualified. I can't discuss that, can I? It wouldn't be loyal.”

“Of course not. I don't ask you.”

They moved towards the sound of the breakfast bell.

“You think,” Margaret continued, “that father ought to buy you a practice because your mother left him money for the purpose?”

“I know she left him nearly five thousand pounds for my education and all that. I think I may have cost him three thousand, possibly four— *so* I think I am entitled to something, *but* I shan't get it, *therefore* I don't worry. My hump is gone; in three months I shall be gone. Forward: I smell bacon!”

Margaret smiled the wan smile of an invalid watching vigorous youth at sport. Firmly she banged the shuttlecock out of sight.

“How bright you are!” she told him. “Look, here is a little poem I wrote for you last night. It's about failure and success. Don't read it now.”

George was very fond of his cousin. “Oh, but I must!” he cried. “I think this was awfully nice of you. He's not down yet. Let's sit on this seat and read it together.”

“Oh, not aloud. It's a silly little thing—really.”

“Yes—aloud.”

He smoothed the paper. She pressed against him; thrilled as she regarded the written lines. George begged her read. She would not— well, she would. She paused. Modesty and pride gathered on her cheeks, tuned her voice low. She read:

“So you have tried—So you have known
The burning effort for success,
The quick belief in your own prowess and your skill,
The bitterness of failure, and the joy
Of sweet success.”

“'Burning effort,'“ George said. “That's fine!”

“I'm glad you like that. And 'quick belief'—you know what I mean?”

“Oh, rather.”

The poet warmed again over her words.

“So you have tried—
So you have known
The blind−eyed groping towards the goal
That flickers on the far horizon of Attempt,
Gleaming to sudden vividness, anon
Fading from sight.”

“Sort of blank verse, isn't it?” George asked.

“Well, sort of,” the poet allowed. “Not exactly, of course.”

“Of course not,” George agreed firmly.

Margaret breathed the next fine lines.

“So you have tried—
So you have known
The bitter−sweetness of Attempt,
The quick determination and the dread despair
That grapple and possess you as you strive
For imagery.”

George questioned: “Imagery...?”

“That verse is more for me than you,” the poet explained. “'For imagery'—to get the right word, you know.”

“Rather!” said George. “It does for me too—in exams, when one is floored, you know.”

“Yes,” Margaret admitted doubtfully. “Ye−es. Don't interrupt between the verses, dear.”

Now emotion swelled her voice.

“Success be yours!
May you achieve
To heights you do not dream you'll ever touch;
The power's to your hand, the road before you lies—
Forward! The gods not always frown; anon
They'll kindly smile.”

“Why, that's splendid!” George cried. He put a cousinly arm about the poet; squeezed her to him. “Fancy you writing that for me! What a sympathetic little soul you are—and how clever!”

Breathless she disengaged herself: “I'm so glad you like it. It's a silly little thing—but it's *real*, isn't it? Come, there's father.”

She paused against denial of the poem's silliness, affirmation of its truth; but George, moody beneath Mr. Marrapit's eye, glinting behind the window, had moved forward.

Margaret thrust the paper in her bosom, tucked in where heart might warm against heart's child. Constantly during breakfast her mind reverted to it, drummed its rare lines.

CHAPTER III. Upon Modesty In Art: And Should Be Skipped.

Yet Margaret had called her poem silly. Here, then, was mock−modesty by diffidence seeking praise. But this mock−modesty, which horribly abounds to−day, is only natural product of that furious modesty which has come to be expected in all the arts.

Modesty should have no place in true art. The author or the painter, the poet or the composer should be impersonal to his work. That which he creates is not his; it is a piece of the art to which he is servant, and as such (and such alone) he should regard it. His in the making and the moulding, thereafter it becomes the possession of the great whole to which it belongs. If it adorns that whole he may freely admire it; for he is impersonal to it.

Unquestionably (or unconsciously) we accept this principle in regard to human life. The child belongs not to the mother who conceived it but to the race of which it is an atom. It hinders or it betters the race. The race judges it. By the race it is honoured or condemned; and to it the mother becomes impersonal. As it bears itself among its fellows, so she judges it—as the artist's work bears itself in the great art it joins, so should he judge it. And if the mother joins in his fellows' praise of her child, and if she proclaims her pride in it, is she called wanting in modesty?—and if the artist joins in praise of his work, and if he freely names it good, must he then be vain, boastful? The race grants that the mother who gave it this specimen of its kind has a first right to show her pride—to the artist who gives a fair specimen to his art we should allow a like voice.

For in demanding modesty—in naming impersonality conceit—we have produced also mock−modesty; and because, as a people, we have little appreciation of the arts, hence little knowledge, hence no standard by which to judge, we continually mistake the one form of modesty for the other. Modesty we suspect to be mock−modesty, and mock−modesty we take to be pleasing humility.

Coming to literature alone, the author should be impersonal to his work and must not cry that the writer is no judge of his own labour. Letters is his trade; and just as the mason well knows whether the brick he has laid helps or hinders, beautifies or insults the house, so the writer should be full cognisant whether his work helps make or does mar the edifice called literature. Nor must the term literature be denied to the ruck of modern writing. All that is written to interest or to instruct goes to make the literature of our day. We have introduced new expressions just as we have contrived new expressions in architecture; and as in the latter case so in the former the bulk of these is ephemeral. Nevertheless they are a part of literature, and all efforts in them better or sully the pages which in our day we are adding to the book of literature. From this book the winds of cycles to come will blow all that is unworthy—only the stout leaves will endure; but, no less because you write for the supplement than if you have virtue sufficient for the bound volume, remember that in every form of writing there are standards of good, and that every line printed helps raise or does tarnish the letters of our day.

CHAPTER IV. Excursions In A Hospital.

I.

By the half−past nine train George went to town; an hour later was at St. Peter's.

From the bar of the Students' Club a throng of young men of his year loudly hailed him. He joined them; took with a laugh the commiserations on his failure; wrung the hands of those who had been successful.

The successful young gentlemen were standing drinks−each man his round. There was much smoke and much laughter. Amusing experiences were narrated. You gathered that all who had passed their examination had done so by sheer luck, by astonishing flukes. Not one had ever worked. Each had been “ragged” on a subject of which he knew absolutely nothing. To the brilliancy with which he had gulled or bluffed his examiner, to the diplomacy with which he had headed him off the matters of which he knew absolutely less than nothing−to these alone were his success due.

Such is ever Youth's account of battle with Age. Youth is a devil of a smart fellow, behind whom Age blunders along in the most ridiculous fashion. Later this young blood takes his place in the blundering ranks and then does learn that indeed he was right—Age knows nothing. For with years we begin to realise our ignorance, and the lesson is not complete when the grave slams the book. A few plumb the depths of their ignorance before death: these are able to speak—and these are the teachers of men. We get here one reason why giants are fewer in our day: with the growth of man's imaginings and his inventions there is more vanity to be forced through; the truths of life lie deeper hid; more phantasms arise to lure us from the quest of realities; the task of striking truth accumulates.

II.

Soon after midday the party broke up. Its members lunched early; visiting surgeons and physicians went their rounds at half−past one.

George strolled to the Dean's office.

A woebegone−looking youth in spectacles stood before the table; opposite sat the Dean. He looked up as George entered, and nodded: he was fond of George.

“Come along in,” he said; “I shan't be a minute.”

He turned to the sad youth. “Now your case, Mr. Carter,” he said, “is quite unique. In the whole records of the Medical School”—he waved at a shelf of fat volumes—“in the whole records of the Medical School we have nothing in the remotest degree resembling it. You have actually failed twice in—in—”

The Dean searched wildly among a litter of papers; baffled, threw out an emphasising hand, and repeated, “*Twice*! Other hospitals, Mr. Carter, may have room for slackers—we have not. We have a record and a reputation of which we are proud. You are in your second year. How old are you?”

A faint whisper said, “Nineteen.”

The Dean started. “Nineteen! Oh, dear me, dear me! this is worse than I thought—far worse. I am afraid, Mr. Carter, I shall have to write to your father.”

Guttural with emotion, Mr. Carter gasped: “I mean to work—indeed I do.”

Again the Dean frantically searched on his desk to discover the subject in which Mr. Carter had failed; again was unsuccessful. Deep thought ravelled his brow. His fingers drummed indecision on the table. It was a telling picture of one struggling between duty and kindliness—masterly as the result of long practice.

“Mr. Carter,” the Dean summed up, “I will consider your case more fully to−night. Against my better judgment I may perhaps decide not on this occasion to communicate with your father. But remember this. At the very outset of your career you have strained to breaking−point the confidence of your teachers. Only by stupendous efforts on your part can that confidence be restored. These failures, believe me, will dog you from now until you are qualified—nay, will dog your whole professional career. That will do.”

In a convulsion of relief and of agitation beneath this appalling prospect the dogged man quavered thanks; stumbled from the room.

III.

George laughed. “Same old dressing−down,” he said. “Don't you ever alter the formula?”

“It's very effective,” the Dean replied. “That's the sixth this morning. Unfortunately I couldn't remember in what subject that boy had failed; so he didn't get the best part—the part about that being the one subject of all others which, if failed in, predicted ruin.”

“It was biology in my case,” George told him. “I trembled with funk.”

“I think most of you do. It's fortunate that all you men when you first come up are afraid of your fathers. It gives us a certain amount of hold over you. If the thing were done properly, both at the 'Varsities and the hospitals, there would be a system of marks and reports just as at schools. You are only boys when you first come up, and you should be treated as boys; instead, you are left free and irresponsible. It ruins dozens of men every year.”

“Perhaps that's why I'm here now,” George responded. “You know I got ploughed?”

The Dean told George how sorry he had been to hear it. He questioned: “Bad luck, I suppose? I thought it was a sitter for you this time.”

“Yes, rotten luck.”

“It's unfortunate, you know. You would have got a house appointment. I'm afraid you will miss that mow. There will be a crowd of very hot men up with you in October, junior to you, who will get the vacancies. What will you do?”

George shrugged and laughed.

The Dean frowned; interpreted the shrug. “Well, you should care,” he said. “You ought to be looking around you. Won't your uncle help you to buy a partnership?”

“We are on worse terms than ever after this failure. Not he.”

“And you're not trying to be on good terms, I suppose?”

“Not I.”

“You are a remarkably silly young man. You want balance, Leicester, you want balance. It would be the making of you to have some serious purpose in life. You will run against something of the kind soon— you'll get engaged, perhaps, and then you'll regret your happy−go−lucky ways.” He fumbled amongst a pile of correspondence and drew out a letter. “Now, look here, I was thinking of you only a few moments ago. Here's a letter from a man who—who—where is it?—Ah, yes—If you could raise 400 pounds by the time you are qualified I could put you on to a splendid thing.”

“Not the remotest chance,” said George. “The serious purpose must wait. I—”

The Dean waved a hand that asked silence; consulted the letter. “This is from a man in practice at a place called Runnygate—one of these rising seaside resorts—Hampshire—great friend of mine. He's got money, and he's going to chuck it—doesn't suit his wife. I told him I'd find a purchaser if he would leave it with me. Merely nominal— only 400 pounds. He says that in a year or so there'll be a small fortune in the practice, because a company is taking the place over to develop it. You shall have first refusal. Come now, pull yourself together, Leicester.”

George laughed. He stood up. “Thanks, I refuse now. What on earth's the good?”

“Rubbish,” said the Dean. “Think over that serious interest in life. You never know your luck.”

George moved to the door. “I know my luck all right,” he laughed. “Never mind, I'm not grumbling with it.”

CHAPTER V. Upon Life: And May Be Missed.

In the ante−room, as it were, of a very short chapter, we must make ready to receive our heroine. She is about to spring dazzling upon our pages; will be our close companion through some moving scenes. We must collect ourselves, brush our hair, arrange our dress, prepare our nicest manner.

And as in ante−rooms there are commonly papers laid about to beguile the tedium, and as the faint rustle of our heroine's petticoats is warning that George's assertion that he knew his luck is immediately to be disproved, let us make a tiny little paper on the folly of such a statement.

For of his luck man has no glimmer of prescience. Day by day we rattle the box, throw the dice; but of how these will fall we have no knowledge. We only hope with the gambler's feverishness; and it is this very hazard that keeps us crowding and pushing to hold our place at the tables where fortune spins. Grow we sick of the game, sour with our luck, weary of the hazard, and relinquish we our place at the table, we are pushed back and out—elbowed, thrown, trampled.

We are all treasure−seekers set on a treasure−island in a boundless sea. Cruelly marooned we are—flung ashore without appeal, and here deserted until the ship that disembarked us suddenly swoops and the press−gang snatches us again aboard—again without heed to our desire. Whence the ship brought us we do not know, and whither it will carry us we do not know; there is none to prick a return voyage disclosing the ultimate haven, though pilots there be who pretend to the knowledge—we cannot test them.

But the marooners, when they land us, give us wherewith to occupy our thoughts. This is a treasure−island. Each man of us they land with a pick; the inhabitants tell us of the treasure, and, being acclimatised, we set to work to dig and delve. Some work in shafts already sunk, some seek to break new ground, but what the pick will next turn up no one knows.

And it is this uncertainty, this hazard, that keeps us hammer, hammer, hammering; that keeps us, some from brooding against the marooners, their wanton desertion of us, our ultimate fate at their hands; others from making ready against the return voyage as entreated by the pilots.

Certainly, when the pick strikes a pocket, we turn to carousing; cease cocking a timid eye at the horizon.

And now our heroine is beckoning.

CHAPTER VI. Magnificent Arrival Of A Heroine.

I.

Until three o'clock George sat in an operating theatre. An unimportant case was in process: occasionally, through the group of dressers, surgeons and nurses who filled the floor, George caught a glimpse of the subject. He watched moodily, too occupied with his thoughts—three more months of dependency—to take greater interest.

One other student was present. Peacefully he slumbered by George's side until the ring of a dropped forceps awakened him. Noting the cause, “Clumsy beast,” said this Mr. Franklyn; and to George: “Come on, Leicester; my slumber is broken. Let's go for a stroll up West.”

In Oxford Street a pretty waitress in a tea−shop drew Mr. Franklyn's eye; a drop of rain whacked his nose. He winked the eye; wiped the nose. “Tea,” said he; “it is going to rain.”

He addressed the pretty waitress: “I have no wish to seem inquisitive, but which table do you attend?”

The girl jerked her chin: “What's that to you?”

“So much,” Mr. Franklyn earnestly told her, “that, until I know, here, beautiful but inconvenient, in the doorway I stand.”

“Well, all of 'em.” She whisked away.

“You're badly snubbed, Franklyn,” George said. “This rain is nothing.”

A summer shower crashed down as he spoke; a mob of shoppers, breathless for shelter, drove them inwards.

“George,” said Mr. Franklyn, seating himself, “your base mind thinks I have designs on this girl. I grieve at so distorted a fancy. The child says prettily that she attends 'all of 'em.' It is a gross case of overwork into which I feel it my duty more closely to inquire.”

George laughed. “Do you always spend your afternoons like this?”

“As a rule, yes. I have been fifteen years at St. Peter's awaiting that day when through pure ennui the examiners will pass me. It will be a sad wrench to leave the dear old home.” He continued, a tinge of melancholy in his voice: “You know, I am the last of the old brigade. The medical student no longer riots. His name is no longer a byword; he is a rabbit. Alone, undismayed, I uphold the old traditions. I am, so to speak, one of the old aristocracy. Beneath the snug characteristics of the latter−day student—his sweet abhorrence of a rag, his nasty delight in plays which he calls 'hot−stuff,' his cigarettes and his chess−playing—beneath these my head, like Henley's, is bloody but unbowed. Forgive a tear.”

The shower ceased; the tea was finished; the pretty waitress was coyly singeing her modesty in the attractive candle of Mr. Franklyn's suggestions. George left them at the game; strolled aimlessly towards the Marble Arch; beyond it; to the right, and so into a quiet square.

Here comes my heroine.

II.

The hansom, as George walked, was coming towards him—smartly, with a jingle of bells; skimming the kerb. As it reached him (recall that shower) the horse slipped, stumbled, came on its knees.

Down came the shafts; out shot the girl.

The doors were wide; the impetus took her in her stride. One tiny foot dabbed at the platform's edge; the other twinkled—patent leather and silver buckle—at the step, missed it, plunged with a giant stride for the pavement.

“Mercy!” she cried, and came like a shower of roses swirling into George's arms.

Completely he caught her. About his legs whipped her skirts; against him pressed her panting bosom; his arms—the action was instinctive— locked around her; the adorable perfume of her came on him like breeze from a violet bed; her very cheek brushed his lips—since the first kiss it was the nearest thing possible to a kiss.

She twisted backwards. Modesty chased alarm across her face—caught, battled, overcame it; flamed triumphant.

Fright at her accident drove her pale; shame at the manner of her descent—leg to the knee and an indelicacy

of petticoats—agitated she had glimpsed it as she leapt—flushed her crimson from the line of her dress about her throat to the wave of her hair upon her brow.

She twisted back. “Oh, what must you think of me?” she gasped.

He simply could not say.

CHAPTER VII. Moving Passages With A Heroine.

I.

George could not say.

His senses were washed aswim by this torrent of beauty poured unexpected through eyes to brain. It surged the centres to violent commotion, one jostling another in a whirlpool of conflict. Out of the tumult alarm flashed down the wires to his heart—set it banging; flashed in wild message to his tongue—locked it.

The driver in our brains is an intolerable fellow in sudden crisis. He loses his head; distracted he pulls the levers, and, behold, in a moment the thing is irrevocably done; we are a coward legging it down the street, a murderer with bloody hand, a liar with false words suddenly pumped.

A moment later the driver is calm and aghast at the ruin he has contrived. Why, before God, did he pull the leg lever?—the arm lever?—the tongue lever? In an instant's action he has accomplished calamity; where sunshine laughed now darkness heaps; where the prospect smiled disaster now comes rolling up in thunder.

These are your crises. Again, as now with George, the driver becomes temporarily idiot—stands us oafishly silent, or perhaps jerks out some stupid words; remembers when too late the quip that would have fetched the laugh, the thrust that would have sped the wound. He is an intolerable fellow.

“Oh, what must you think of me?”

That pause followed while the driver in George's brain stood gapingly inactive; and then came laughter to him like a draught of champagne. For the girl put up her firm, round chin and laughed with a clear pipe of glee—a laugh to call a laugh as surely as a lark's note will set a hedge in song; and it called the laugh in George.

He said: “I am thinking the nicest things of you. But have you dropped from the skies?”

“From a *cab*,” she protested.

She turned to the road; back to George in dismay, for the catapult, its bullet shot, had bolted up the street—was gone from view.

“Oh!—I *was* in a cab?” she implored.

George said: “It *looked* like a cab. But a fairy−car, I think.”

A pucker of her brows darkened the quick mirth that came to her eyes. She cried: “Oh, don't joke. She will be killed.”

“You were not alone?”

“No—oh, no! What has happened to her?”

“We had better follow.”

She corrected his number. “Yes, I had better. Thank you so much for your help.” She took a step; faltered upon it with a little exclamation of pain; put a white tooth on her lip.

“You have hurt your foot?” George said.

“My ankle, I think. Oh dear!” and then again she laughed.

It came even then to George that certainly she would have made her fortune were she to set up a gloom−exorcising bureau—waiting at the end of a telephone wire ready to rush with that laugh to banish the imps of melancholy. Never had he heard so infectious a note of mirth.

“Oh, what must you think of me?” she ended. “I simply cannot help laughing, you know—and yet, oh dear!”

She put the tips of the fingers of a hand against her lower lip, gazed very anxiously up the road, and then again she gave that clear pipe of laughter.

“I can't help it,” she told him imploringly. “I simply cannot help laughing. It is funny, you know. She was scolding me—”

“*Scolding*!” George exclaimed.

That beauty should be scolded!

“Scolding—yes. Oh, I'm only a—well, scolding me, and I was wishing, *wishing* I could escape. And then suddenly out I shot. And then I look around and she's—” A wave of her hand expressed a disappearance that was by magic agency.

"But, *scolding*?" George said. "Need you trouble? She will be all right."

"Oh, I must. I live with her."

"Will she trouble about you?"

"I think she will return for me. Please, *please* go—would you mind?— to the corner, and see if there has been an accident."

From that direction a bicyclist approached. George hailed. "Is there a cab accident round the corner?"

The youth stared; called "Rats!"; passed.

George interpreted: "It means No. Do you think if you were to take my arm you could walk to the turning?"

Quite naturally she slipped a white glove around his elbow. The contact thrilled him. "No nice girl, you know, would do this," she said, "with a perfect stranger."

George bent his arm a little, the better to feel the pressure of those white fingers. "I am not really perfect," he told her.

She took his mood. "Nor I really nice," she joined. "In fact, I'm horrible—they tell me. But I think it is wise to follow, don't you?"

"Profoundly wise. Who says you are horrible?"

She gave no answer. Glancing, he saw trouble shade her eyes, tremble her lips.

That beauty should know distress!

Very slightly he raised his forearm so that the lock of his elbow felt her hand. He had no fine words. This George was no hero with exquisite ways. He was a most average young man, and nothing could he find but most painfully average words.

"I say, what's up?" he asked.

She spoke defiantly; but some stupid something that she hated yet could not repress trembled her lips, robbed her tone of its banter. "What's up?" she said. "Why, *you* would say something was up if you'd just been shot plump out of a cab, wouldn't you?"

"Yes, but you were laughing a minute ago." He looked down at her, but she turned her face. "Now, now, I believe—" He did not name his thought.

She looked up. Her pretty face was red. He saw little flutters of eyelids, flutters round the eyes, flutters at the mouth. "Oh," she said, "oh, yes, and I don't know why. I'm—I believe—" She tried to laugh, but the little flutterings clouded the smile like soft, dark wings flickering upon a sunbeam.

"I believe—it's ridiculous to a perfect—imperfect—stranger—I believe I'm nearly—crying."

And this inept George could only return: "I say—oh, I say, can I help you?"

She stopped; from his arm withdrew her hand. "Please—I think you had better go. Please go. Oh, I shall hate myself for behaving like this."

So unhappy she was that George immediately planned her a backdoor of excuse. "But you have no occasion to blame yourself," he told her. "You've had an adventure—naturally you're shaken a bit."

She was relieved to think he had misunderstood her agitation. "Yes, an adventure," she said, "that's it. And I haven't had an adventure for years, so naturally—But, please, I think you had better go. If my— my friend saw me with you like this she would be angry—oh, very angry."

"But why? She saw you fall. She saw me save you."

"You don't understand. She is not exactly my friend; she is my—my employer. I'm a mother's−help."

The mirth that never lay deep beneath those blue eyes of hers was sparkling up now; the soft, dark wings were fluttering no longer.

She continued: "A mother's−help. Doesn't that sound wretched? I'm terribly slow at learning the mother's−help rules, but I'm positive of this rule—mothers' helps may not shoot out of cabs and leave the mother; it's such little help—you must see that?"

"But you will be less help still if you stay here for ever with your hurt ankle—you must see that? I must stay with you or see you to your home."

When she answered, it was upon another change of mood. The soft, dark wings were fluttering again; and it was the banter of George's tone that had recalled them. For this was an adventure—and she had not known adventure for years; for these were flippant exchanges arising out of gay young hearts, and they recalled memories of days when such harmless bantering was of her normal life; for there had been sympathy in George's

stammering inquiries, and it recalled the time when she lived amidst sympathy and amidst love.

The soft, dark wings fluttered again: “I am very grateful to you for helping me,” she told him. “You must not think me ungrateful; only, I think you had better go. In my position I am not free to—to do as I like, talk where I will. You understand?” Her voice trembled a little, and she repeated: “You understand?”

George said, “I understand.”

II.

And that was all that passed upon this meeting. A cab swung round the opposite corner; pulled up with a rattle; turned towards them; was alongside. Within, a brow of thunder sat.

The cabman called, “I knowed you was all right, miss,” raised the trap, and cheerfully repeated the information to his fare: “I knowed she was all right, mum.”

The mum addressed gave no congratulation to his prescience. He shut the lid; winked at George; behind his hand communicated, “Not 'arf angry, she ain't.”

The girl ran forward; agitation bound up her hurt ankle. “Oh!” she cried, “I am so glad you are safe!”

The thunder−figure addressed said: “Please get in. I have had a severe shock.”

“This gentleman—” The girl half turned to George.

“Please get in—instantly.”

Scarlet the girl went. “Thank you very much,” she said to George; climbed in beside the cloud of wrath.

Her companion slammed the door; dabbed at George a bow that was like a sharp poke with a stick; called, “Drive on.”

George stepped into the road, held half a crown to the driver: “The address?”

The man stooped. With a tremendous wink answered, “Fourteen Palace Gardens, St. John's Wood.”

Away with a jingle.

CHAPTER VIII. Astonishing After−Effects Of A Heroine.

I.

George did not return to St. Peter's that afternoon; watched the cab from view; walked back to Waterloo; thence took train to Paltley Hill with mind awhirl.

Recovering from stunning shock the mind first sees a blur of events— formless, seething, inextricably tangled. Deep in this boiling chaos is one fact struggling more powerfully than the rest to cool and so to shape itself. It kicks a leg free here, there an arm, then another leg. Its exertions cause the whole more furiously to agitate—the brain is afire. Very suddenly this struggling fact jumps free. Laid hold of it is a cold spoon which, plunged back into the seething cauldron, arrests the turmoil of its contents.

Or again, recovering from sudden shock the mind first sees a great whirling, blinding cloud of dust which hides and wreathes about the sudden topple of masonry that has provoked it. Here the slowly emerging fact may be likened to a clear gangway through the ruin up which the fevered owner may walk to investigate the catastrophe's cause and extent.

So now with George. If not dazed by stunning shock, he was at least awhirl by set back of the swift sequence of events which suddenly had buffeted him; and it was not until strolling up from Paltley Hill railway station to Herons' Holt that one cooling fact emerged from which he might make an ordered examination of what had passed.

The address that the cabman had given him was this fact—14 Palace Gardens, St. John's Wood. Here was the gangway through the pile of disorder, and here George resolutely made a start of examining events in place of wildly beating about through the dust of aimless conjectures.

He visualised this Palace Gardens residence. A gloomy house, he suspected,—prison−like; its inhabitants warders, the girl their captive. A beautiful picture was thus presented to this ridiculous young man. For if the girl were indeed captive, warder−surrounded, how gratefully her heart must press towards him who was no turnkey! The more irksomely her captors held her, the more warmly would she remember him. Subconsciously he hoped for a rattle of chains, a scourging with whips. Every bond, every stroke would speed her spirit to the recollection of their meeting.

But this delectable picture soon faded. Love—and this ridiculous George vowed he was in love—love is a mental see−saw. The nicely−balanced mind is set suddenly oscillating: now up, commandingly above the world, intoxicated with the rush and the elevation; now down to depths made horribly deep by contrast, wretchedly jarred by the bump.

A new thought impelled a downward jolt of this kind. Failing a gloomy 14 Palace Gardens, supposing the girl to be happily situated, it was horribly improbable that she would give him a moment's thought. This was a most chilling idea. Shivering beneath the douche, George's mind ran back along the episode of their meeting to discover arguments that would build up the chains and the whips.

Memories banked high on either side. In search of his desire George gathered them haphazard, closely examined each.

It was an unsatisfactory business. Here was a memory. She had said so−and−so. Yes; but, damn it, that might mean anything. He flung it down; took another. She had said so−and−so. Yes; but, damn it, that might have meant nothing.

This was very disturbing. He must systematically go through the whole pile of memories—upon an ordered plan reconstruct each step of the episode.

At first attempt it was a wretched business. Never was builder set to work with bricks so impossible as the bricks of conversation with which this reconstruction must be done. Each that the girl had supplied might dovetail in as he would have it go; upon the other hand it fitted equally well when twisted into the form in which, for all he knew, she might have constructed it. The bricks George had himself supplied he found even more disconcerting—they were stupid, ugly, laughable. He shoved them in, and they grinned at him—mocked him. None the less he persevered—he must get his answer; he must see both what she had thought of him and if she

were likely still to be thinking of him. And at last the whole passage was reconstructed. He examined it, and once more down came the see−saw with a most shattering bump: he had made himself an idiot, and stood champion idiot if he believed she were likely to remember him.

With a crash George sent the whole pile flying. Let him wander blindly in the dust of imaginings rather than be tortured by the grim austerity of ordered facts. More than this, there was one most comfortable memory to which he desperately clung—that falter in her voice when she had said “You understand?” Whenever, during that evening, doubt stirred and bade him recognise himself for a fool, George flattened the ugly spectre with the arm he contrived out of this memory.

It was a lusty weapon.

But a fresh vexation that lies in wait for all new lovers tore him when he got to bed. In the darkness he set his mind solely to recalling the girl's face. The picture tantalisingly eluded him. Generalities he could recall. She was fair, very, very fair; her hair was shining golden; but how was it arranged? In desperation he squirmed off to her eyes—blue; no, grey; no, blue. Damn it, he would forget whether she were black or white in a minute. Her chin? Ah, he had that!—white and firm and round. And her nose?—small, and a trifle tip−tilted. And her mouth?—her mouth, oh, heaven, he could not fix her mouth! The distracted young man tossed upon his pillow and went elsewhere. Distinctly he could remember her little feet with those silver buckles, quite different from any other feet. And she held herself slim and supple. Held herself? Why, good heavens! she was tall, and he had been thinking of her as short! This was appalling! He might meet her and pass her by. He might ... he rushed into troubled slumber.

II.

The night gave him little rest. Whilst his body lay heavy, his brain, feverishly active, chased through the hours glimpses of the queen of his adventure. By early morning he was prodded into consciousness, and awaked to find himself instantly confronted with a terrible affair. Into his life, so he assured himself, had come a serious interest such as that which the Dean had hoped for him.

Here, lying abed with fresh morning smiling in through the open window, for the first time he looked forward, following the face he had pursued through his dreams, into the future. Its chambers he found ghastly barren. He visualised it as a vast unfurnished house. To the merry eye with which two days ago he had looked upon the world, the picture, had he then conjured it, would have given him no gloom. He would have thought it a fine thing, this empty house that was his own− —empty, but representing freedom.

The matter was different now. Into this empty house had danced the girl. Her gay presence discovered its barrenness. There was not a chair on which she could sit, not a dish in the larder.

George recalled that tight little practice at Runnygate that might be had for 400 pounds; went down to breakfast rehearsing a scene with his uncle; was moody through the meal.

III.

The breakfast dragged past its close. Mr. Marrapit spoke. “The moments fly,” he observed.

Margaret said earnestly: “Oh, yes, father.”

“I was addressing George.”

“Ur!” said George, suddenly aroused.

Mr. Marrapit looked at his watch; repeated his observation.

George read his meaning. “I thought of going up by the later train to− day,” he explained.

“A dangerous thought. Crush it.” Mr. Marrapit continued: “Margaret, Mrs. Major, I observe you have concluded”; and when the two had withdrawn addressed himself again to George: “A dangerous thought. You recall our conversation of the day before yesterday?”

“Perfectly.”

“Yet by later trains, by idleness, you deliberately imperil your future?”

George did not answer the question. This was the very opportunity for which he had wished. “I would like to talk about my future,” he said.

“I dare not dwell upon it,” replied Mr. Marrapit.

“I have to. I shall pass all right this time. I want to know—the fact is, sir, I know I have slacked in the past; I

am a man now, and I—I regret it. I fully realise my responsibilities. You may rely that I shall make a certainty of the October examination."

"Commendable," Mr. Marrapit criticised.

"I want to know what help I may expect when I qualify."

"I cannot tell you." Mr. Marrapit threw martyrdom into his tone. "I am so little," he said, "in your confidence. Your expectations when qualified may be enormous. I am not favoured with them." He sighed.

George said: "I mean what help I may expect from you."

The piece of toast rising to Mr. Marrapit's mouth slowly returned towards his plate: "Reiterate that. From *me*?"

"From you," said George.

The toast dropped from trembling fingers. "*I*?" Mr. Marrapit dragged the word to tremendous length. "I? Is it conceivable that you expect money from me?"

"I only ask."

"I only shudder. Might I inquire the amount?"

"The Dean told me of a practice I could have for 400 pounds."

"Tea!" exclaimed Mr. Marrapit on a gasp. "I must steady myself! Tea!" He paused; gulped a cup; with alarmed eyes stared at George.

The affair was going no better than George had expected. He remembered the face that was dear to him; nerved himself to continue. "I would pay it back," he said. "Will you lend me the 400 pounds?"

"I must have air!" Mr. Marrapit staggered to the window. "I reel before this sudden assault. For nine years at ruinous cost I have supported you. Must I sell my house? Am I never to be free? Must I totter always through life with you upon my bowed back? I am Sinbad."

"There's no need to exaggerate or make a scene."

"Did I impel the scene?"

"I only asked you a question," George reminded.

"You have aroused a spectre," Mr. Marrapit answered.

"Well, I may understand that I need expect nothing?"

"I dare not answer you. I am shaken. I tremble."

George rose. Though what hope he had possessed was driven by his uncle's attitude, he was as yet only upon the threshold of his love. Hence the refusal of what he suddenly desired for that love's sake was not so bitter an affair as afterwards it came to be. "This is ridiculous," he said; moved to the door.

"To me a tragedy," Mr. Marrapit declaimed from the window, "old as mankind; not therefore less bitter—the tragedy of ingratitude. At stupendous cost I have supported, educated, clothed you. You turn upon me for more. How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child! I am Lear."

George tried a thrust: "I always understood my mother left you ample for me."

"Adjust that impression. She left me less than a sufficiency—nothing approaching amplitude. To the best of my ability I have fulfilled my task. It has been hard. I do not complain. I do not ask you for repayment of any excess that may have been incurred. But I am embittered by yet further demands. I have been too liberal. Had I meted out strict justice as I have striven to mete out kindness, my grey hairs would not be speeding in poverty to the grave. I am Wolsey."

Upon Wolsey George slammed the door; started for the station.

IV.

Palace Gardens, St. John's Wood, was his aim. There could be no work, nor even thought of work, until again he had met his lady. Yet how to meet her cost him another of the wrestles with conjecture that had been his lot since the cab carried her away.

At first it was easy work. He would call, he decided, with polite inquiries; and as he pictured the scene his spirits rose. The thunder−figure that had poked a bow at him from the cab would come dragonish into the drawing−room where he waited. Her he would charm with the suavity of his manners; she would doff the dragon's skin; would say (he had read the scene in novels), "You would like to see Miss So−and− so?"

The girl would come in ....

With her appearance in his thoughts George's mind swung from coherent reasoning into a delectable phantasy ....

A sudden thought swept the filmy clouds−landed him with a bump upon hard rock. He was not supposed to know their address. How, to the dragon, could he explain the venal trick by which he had acquired it? Now he beheld a new picture. Himself in the drawing−room; to him the dragon; her first words, “How did you know where we lived?”; his miserable answer.

This was very unpleasant. As a red omnibus took him on towards St. John's Wood he decided that the meeting must be otherwise effected. The girl must sometimes go out. She had called herself a mother's− help; it suggested children; and, if children, doubtless her task to take them walking. Well, he would take up a post near to the house, and wait—just wait.

And then there came a final thought that struck him cold and staring. What if she did not live at the house?—was merely about to visit there when the accident befell the cab?

It was a sorely agitated young man that stepped off the 'bus and struck up Palace Gardens.

BOOK II. Of his Mary.

CHAPTER I. Excursions In The Memory Of A Heroine.

I.

AS that cab swung round the corner bearing away the nameless haunter of George's dreams, she to the red wrath beside her turned, and, “Oh, Mrs. Chater,” she said, “I hope you are not hurt!”

By a mercy Mrs. Chater was not hurt. By a special intervention of Providence she had escaped a fearful death. Whether she would ever recover from the shock was another matter. Whether the shock would prove to be that sudden strain on her heart which she had been warned would end fatally, might at any moment be proved. Much anybody, except her darling children, would care if she were brought home dead in this very cab. Never had she known a heart to act as hers was acting now— thumping as if it would burst, first quickly then slowly. Perhaps Miss Humfray would feel it, and give her opinion.

Where the girl now laid her small hand five infant Chaters had been nourished; the massive bosom was advertisement that they had done well. Beneath the mingled gusts of hysteria and of wrath it violently contracted and dilated; but the heart, terrificly though Mrs. Chater said it throbbed, lay too deep to be discerned.

The agitated woman panted, “Can it go on like that?”

“I'm afraid I hardly—” Miss Humfray shifted her hand.

“*Stupid!* Take off your glove!”

The white kid clung to the warm flesh. Nervous and clumsy the girl struggled with it.

“Miss *Humfray!* How slow you are! *Pull* it!”

Mrs. Chater grabbed the turned−back wrist. A crack answered the jerk, and the glove split away in her hand. “*There!* Not my fault. Next time, perhaps, you will buy gloves sufficiently large. Oh, my poor heart! Now, feel. *Press!*“

The girl bit her lip. Humiliation lumped in her throat. She pressed, as bid, into that heaving blouse; said she could feel it. It was not very violent, she. thought. Perhaps if Mrs. Chater lay back and closed her eyes—

“*I* was not able to jump out, you see,” said Mrs. Chater, sinking.

“Oh, you don't think I *jumped* out—and left you? I *wouldn't*. Besides, it is the most dangerous thing to do. That would have prevented me in any case. I was thrown. I thought I was going to be killed.”

“You were with a young man.”

“He caught me.”

The words came faintly. Nearly the girl was crying. That lump in her throat seemed to be squeezing tears from her eyes—silly tears. She did not want Mrs. Chater's sympathy, yet could not but reflect what disregard for her the utter absence of inquiry showed. Bitter thoughts yet more dangerously squeezed the tears. She was a paid *thing*, that was all—not even a servant. Mrs. Chater was on kindly terms with her servants—had experienced the servant problem and craftily evaded it by the familiarity that was too useful to produce contempt—knew her maids' young men, entered into their quarrels with their young men, read their young men's letters.

II.

Gazing through the cab window, pressed into her corner, the girl felt herself friendless, outcast, alone. Again she told herself that she did not want Mrs. Chater's sympathy; yet it was the studied withholding of it—studied or callous because so natural, the merest conventionalism, to have asked, “Were you hurt?”—that made her acutely feel her position.

A paradox, she thought, not to want a thing and yet to be wounded because it was not hers. A ridiculous paradox—and brightly she tried to smile at the silliness of it; blinking the tears that were swelling now, her face turned against the window towards the pavement.

A tall, slim girl was passing, holding the arm of a nice−looking little old man with a grey moustache and military air. The tall, slim girl was laughing down at him, and he looked to be chuckling merrily, just as—Her mind swung off, and the tears must be blinked again.

They reminded her, those two, of herself and her father. Such familiar friends as they looked so she had been

with Dad who idolised her and whom she had idolised. Just like that—arm in arm, joking, “ragging”— she used to walk with him round about the home in Ireland—the world to one another and none else in the world, except the mother who was so intimately and inseparably of them that years past her death they still spoke of her as if she were alive.

Thus, long after her death, it would be: “Dad, we can't go home by the hill; mother never lets Grizzle do that climb after a long day.” And: “Mary, your mother won't like you being so late; we must turn back.” And: “Mary, there's the pig by mother's almond tree; run and shoo him.”

Partly this refusal to recognise that, though dead, Mother was actually gone from them, no longer was sharing their little jokes and duties, was because death came with such steady, appreciable, unfrightening steps. First the riding stopped, and then the walks made shorter and shorter; then the strolls in the garden stopped, and then carrying the couch out under the trees—and none of them very fearful, because prepared: it was to be—almost the very day could have been named. Thus, when it came, though the blow swooped heavy, terrific, she never seemed actually to have left them.

“Well, now, dear dears,” she had said with a little smile and a little sigh, “we have been happy ... only a little way away....”

But with Dad it was different. Somehow, looking back on it, one had supposed that nothing would ever touch the cheery little man; that she and he would go on and on and on—well, till they grew very old together.

Nothing could ever touch him....

“What a wicked beauty, eh, Mary?” he had said when the man brought round the half−broken filly that its owner “funked.”

And she had laughed and said: “Yes, an angel in a temper—what a run you will have, Dad!” and had waved from the gate as the angel in a temper curveted away around the corner.

Nothing could ever touch him....

And then the man on a bicycle—with a dent in his hat, she noticed.

“If you can come quickly, missy. Top of the Three Finger field he lays.”

Bare−backed she had galloped Grizzle there, and as she sped could not for the life of her think of aught else than the dent in the man's hat; rode up Three Finger Lane wondering how it came there; approached the little group wondering why he did not push it out.

Just as she galloped up they took off their hats. Someone who had been on his knees stood upright—she saw the stain of wet earth where he had been kneeling; forgot the dented hat; wondered if he knew of the Marvel Cleaning Pad that had done so wonderfully with Dad's breeches when he took a toss last Friday.

Dad...! Of course...! It was to see Dad that she was here.

Somebody tried to dissuade her ... better wait till they brought him home ... could do no good—now.

“Why? Why not see him? Let me pass, Mr. Saunders.”

Well, the filly lay across him ... he had begged them not to move her because of the pain.... Better come away.

She pushed through them.... Yes, better perhaps not to have seen ... all crumpled up....

Recollecting, she could feel distinctly in her knees the creepy damp as the moisture of the marshy ground penetrated her skirts, bending over the twisted face.

III.

Thereafter a blank of days in which events must have occurred but to which memory brought no lamp until the faint crunch as the coffin touched the earth seven feet down....

Multitudinous papers after that. Wearying, sickening masses of documents; interminable writing of signature; interminable making of lists. And then the word LOT. “Lot I,” “Lot 2,” “Lot 50,” “Lot 200”—a hammerlike word to thump the brain at night, frightening sleep, producing grotesque nightmares, as “Lot 12, a polished oak coffin, finished plain, brass Handles.”

No! No! That was not to be sold!—leaden hands holding her down; stifling hands at her mouth to stay her shouting “Stop!”

Then sudden consciousness—only a dream! Bolt upright in bed staring into the darkness. A dream? How much of it a dream? Was it all a dream? The fevered brain would fetch her from her bed, groping to Dad's room, striking a match—no familiar form upon the bed; a big white ticket—“Lot 56.”

Back to the hot, crumpled couch, there, tossing, to lie attempting a grasp, a realisation of what it all meant....

IV.

A dark little office in Dublin.... So much the “Lots” had fetched, so much the balance at the bank; no investments, it was to be feared; no insurance, my dear Miss Humfray; so much the bills and other claims on the estate.... “Don't wish to be bothered with figures? Of course not, my dear.... And then we come to the balance—I'm afraid a few pounds, practically nothing....”

V.

On the steamer bound for Holyhead.... During the crossing the stifling weight that had benumbed her intellect ever since the man with the dent in his hat came riding up the drive seemed suddenly to lift. Whipped away perhaps by the edged wind that rushed past her from England to Ireland sinking in the sea—a wind to cut you to the bone; discovering sensation in every marrow; stinging her to clear thought.... That idyllic life with Mother and Dad—the world to one another and none else in the world beside—had been rather the creation of circumstance than of design. Dad's people were furious when he married Mother; in defiance of hers, Mother married Dad. Relations on either side had shrieked their disapproval of the match, then left the couple to their own adventures. A thing to laugh at in those days, but bringing now to the child that was left the realisation of not a support in the world.

Her mother's sisters had written after the funeral inviting her to come to them in England “while she looked about her.” She could recall every sentence of that letter. It had burned. Each word, each comma was fresh before her eyes as the cab jolted on to Palace Gardens.

“It would have been our pleasure constantly to have entertained you during your mother's life−time,” they had written, “but she wilfully flouted our desires at her marriage and thereafter utterly ignored us. The fault for the rift between us was of her making, not ours; we sent her an Easter card one year, and had no reply; though we have no doubt that your father, not that we would say a word against him now, influenced her against her better judgment. However....”

She had written back a hysterical letter.

“Your letter came just after I had returned from burying my dear, dear father, who worshipped my darling mother. If I were begging in the street, starving, dying, I would not touch a crumb or a penny of yours. You are wicked—yes, you are wicked to write to me as you have written....”

VI.

She could not stay in Ireland. Her only friends there lived about the dear home that was now no longer a home but a “desirable residence with some acres of garden and paddock.” Her only friends there were friends who had been shared with Mother and Dad—whose presence now would be constant reminder of that happy participation now lost. One and all offered her hospitality, but she must refuse. “No, no silly idea of being a burden to you, dear, dear Mrs. Sullivan—only I can't, can't live anywhere near where we used to live.”

Years before a great friend of hers had married an English clergyman; had written often to her from London of the numerous activities in which she was engaged—principal among them a kind of agency and home for gentlewomen. “Governesses, dear, and all that kind of thing ... poor girls, many of them, who have suddenly had to earn a living.”

The correspondence had died, as do so many, from the effects of undue urgency at the outset; but she had the address, and was certain there of welcome and of aid. “Poor girls who have suddenly had to earn a living.” The words took on a new meaning: she was of these.

From Euston she drove to the address. Her friend had gone. Yes, the present occupant remembered the name. The present occupant had been there two years; had taken over the lease from the former tenant because the lady was ill and had been ordered abroad. That was all the present occupant knew; saw her to the door; closed it behind her.

Alone in London. “Alone in London”—it had been one of Dad's jokes; he had written a burlesque on it, and they had played it one Christmas to roars of fun. O God! what a thing at which to laugh now that the realisation struck and one stood on the pavement in the dark with this great city roaring at one!

Cabmen, she had heard, were brutes; but the man who had brought her to the house must be appealed to.... Where could she get the cheapest lodging of some kind?

How did he know? What was she wanting to pay? ...

The great city roared at her. Her head swum a little. An idler or two took up a grinning stand: the thing looked like a cab−fare dispute.... What was she wanting to pay? ... Well, as little as possible. “I have never been in London before, and I don't know anybody. My friend here has gone. I have just arrived from Ireland.” She began to cry.

He from his box in a moment. “From Ireland!”

Why, he was from Ireland! ... Not likely she was from Connemara? ... She was? ... From Kinsloe? ... Why, he knew it well; he was from Ballydag!

He rolled his tongue around other names of the district; she knew them all; could almost have laughed at the silly fellow's delight.

Why, the honour it would be if she would come and let his missus make her up a bed! “Don't ye cry, missie. Don't ye take on like that. It's all right ye are now.” He put a huge, roughly great−coated arm about her—squeezed her, she believed; helped her into the cab.

VII.

Missus in the clean little rooms over the rattling mews was no less delighted. From Kinsloe? Why, missie saw that canary?—that was a present from Betty Murphy in Kinsloe, not three months before!

The canary, aroused by the attention paid it, trilled upward in a mounting ecstasy of shrillness that went up and up and up through her head ... louder and louder ... shriller and yet more shrill ... bird and cage became misty, swum around her.... Missus and Tim must have carried her to the bed in which she awoke.

VIII.

Friends in Ireland had given her the addresses of friends in London on whom she must call. She visited some houses; then in a sudden wild despair tore the list. Either these people were dense of comprehension or she clumsy of explanation. To make them realise her position she found impossible. They were warmly kind, sympathetic—cheery in that lugubrious fashion in which we are taught to be “bright” with the afflicted. But when she spoke of the necessity to find employment they would warmly cry, “Oh, but you must not think of that yet, Miss Humfray ... after all you have been through.... You must keep quiet for a little.”

One and all gave her the same words. An impulse took her to kick over the tea−table—anything to arouse these people from their stereotyped mood of sympathy with a girl suddenly bereaved,—and to cry, “But don't you *understand*? I am living over a mews—over a *mews* with twelve pounds and a few shillings, and then *nothing* —nothing at all.”

Wise, perhaps, had she indulged the outburst without the action; wiser had she written to some of the friends in Ireland, asked to go back to one of them for a while. But the dull grief beneath which she still lay benumbed prevented her from other course than tonelessly accepting the proffered sympathy; and the thought of returning to Ireland was impossible. She tore the list of London friends; appealed to Tim and Missus.

Tim was helpful. He had taken fares to an Agency in Norfolk Street—an Agency for “Disturbed Gentlewomen,” he called it; there took her one morning.

“Distressed Gentlewomen,” she found the brass plate to read—“The Norfolk Street Agency for Distressed Gentlewomen.”

A lymphatic−looking young woman, assisting the growth of a singularly stout face by sucking a sweet, and wearing brown holland sleeve protectors hooked up with enormous safety−pins, received her in the room marked “Enquiries”; put her into that labelled “Waiting.” Here were two copies of the *Christian Herald*, some emigration pamphlets, a carafe of water covered by an inverted tumbler dusty with disuse, and three elderly females—presumably gentlewomen, possibly distressed, but not advertising either condition.

In due time her turn for the room marked “Private”; interrogation by Miss Ram, a short, thin lady in black, who bowed more frequently than she spoke, possessing a range of inclinations of the head each of which had unmistakable meaning.

Position sought?—Oh, anything; governess, companion. Last situation? —None; she was inexperienced.

Capabilities?—Equally lacking, as discovered by a probing cross−examination. Salary required?—Oh, anything; whatever was usual; a *home*—that was the chief object in view.

Miss Ram entered the details in a severe−looking book with a long thin pen—could hold out but faint hopes. The applicants whom she was accustomed to suit were “in nine and ninety cases out of one hundred cases” accomplished in the domestic or scholastic arts. However. Yes, Miss Humfray should call every morning. Better still, stay in the waiting−room. Be On the Spot—that was the first requisite for success, as Miss Humfray would find whether in a situation or awaiting a situation; be On the Spot.

IX.

On the Spot. A nightmare week in the dingy waiting−room ... thoughts probing the mind, stabbing the heart.... Nine till one, a cup of tea and a roll at an A.B.C. shop, an aimless walk in the park; two till six, good−night to the stout young woman named Miss Porter in “Enquiries,” home to the rattling mews and to Missus.

On the Spot. Occasional interviews. “Miss Humfray, a lady will see you.” ... “Oh, too young—far too young.” ... “Thank you, that will do, Miss Humfray.” ... “Oh, not my style at all.” ... “Thank you, that will do, Miss Humfray.”

On the Spot. Fortunately On the Spot one day—a Mrs. Eyton−Eyton, as nursery governess, Streatham.

For a week very much On the Spot with Mrs. Eyton−Eyton. Nursery governess was a comprehensive word in the Eyton−Eyton vocabulary; covered every duty that in a nursery must be performed. One must do the nursery fire, sweep the nursery floor, bring up and carry down the nursery meals—servants, you see, object to waiting upon one whom, as Mrs. Eyton−Eyton with a careless laugh pointed out, they regard as one of themselves. Quickly the lesson was appreciated that while a servant must never be “put upon,” the same consideration need not be extended to a lady. Servants are rare in the market, young ladies cheap.

X.

The lesson of dependence, subserviency, Mary found harder in the learning; did not study it; therein reaped disaster.

She arrived on a Tuesday. Upon that day of the following week Mrs. Eyton−Eyton paid to the nursery one of her rare visits, beautifully gowned, the hired victoria waiting to take her a round of calls.

Lunch, delayed not to disturb the midday sleep of Masters Thomas and Richard Eyton−Eyton, was not cleared—Master Thomas still struggling with a plate of sago pudding.

Betwixt her children Mrs. Eyton−Eyton—beautifully gowned, hired victoria in waiting—took her seat; Mary hovered behind—and catastrophe swooped. Master Thomas grabbed for a glass of milk; Mary strove to restrain him. There was an awkward struggle, her elbow—or his—caught the plate of pudding, tipped the sticky mass into the silken lap of Mrs. Eyton−Eyton, beautifully gowned, hired victoria in waiting.

Infuriated, Mrs. Eyton−Eyton turned upon Mary. “Oh, you little fool!”

The rebuke that should have been taken with downcast eyes, murmured apologies, was otherwise received.

“Mrs. Eyton! How dare you call me a fool!”

Pause of blank amazement; sago−messed table−napkin in the scented hand; sago creeping down the silken skirt. That a nursery governess— not even a servant—should so presume!

“Miss Humfray! You forget yourself!”

“No!−No! It is you who forget yourself. How dare you speak to me like that!”

Another moment of utter bewilderment; small Eyton−Eytons gazing round− eyed; the girl white, heaving; the woman dully red. Then “Pack your boxes, Miss!”

XI.

She was upon the platform at Victoria Station, a porter asking commands for her box, before she realised what she had done. A few pounds in her purse, and infinitely worse off now than a week before. Then she had no “character”; now employment was to be sought with Mrs. Eyton−Eyton as her “last place.” She would not go back to Missus and Tim. Though they had tried to conceal it, secretly, she had seen, they were relieved when she left. They had not accommodation for her; latterly she had dispossessed of his bed a sailor son on leave from his ship.

She left her box in the cloak−room; turned down Wilton Road from the station; penetrated the narrow thoroughfares between Lupus Street and the river; secured a bedroom with Mrs. Japes at six shillings a week.

Miss Ram at the Agency would have no more to do with her; had received a furious letter from Mrs. Eyton−Eyton; showed in the ledger a cruel line of red ink ruled through the page that began “Name: Mary Humfray,” and ended “Salary:—”

“But I don't know a soul in London.”

“You had a very comfortable place. You threw it away. I have a reputation for reliable employees which I cannot afford to risk.”

A bow closed the interview.

XII.

It was her landlady's husband, an unshaven, shifty−looking horror, who dealt her, as it seemed to her then, the last furious blow.

Returning one evening after an aimless search for employment in shops that had earned her rude laughter for her utter inexperience and her presumption in supposing her services could be of any value, she found Mrs. Japes in convulsive tears, speechless.

What was the matter? Hysterical jerks of the head towards the stairs. Up to her room—the cause clear in her rifled box, its contents scattered across the floor, the little case in which with her pictures of Mother and Dad she kept her money gone.

A little raid by Mr. Japes, it appeared, in which Mrs. Japes's property had also suffered.... He had done it before ... a bad lot ... had done time ... the rent overdue and the brokers coming in ... she'd best go ... of course she could tell the police.

Of course she did not tell the police. The whole affair bewildered and frightened her.

To another lodging three streets away.... Initiation by the new landlady into the mysteries of pawnshops; gradual thinning of wardrobe.... Answering of advertisements found in the public library in Great Smith Street.... Long, feet−aching trudges to save omnibus fares.... Always the same outcome. ... Experience?—None. References? —None.... “Thank you; I'm afraid—I'm sure it's all right, but one has to be so careful nowadays. Good morning.” ... Always the same outcome.... The idea of writing to Ireland was hardly conceived. ... That life, those friends, seemed of a period that was dead, done, gone—ages and ages ago....

XIII.

Again it was a man who dealt the deeper blow—a gentlemanly−looking person of whom in Wilton Road one evening she asked the way to an address copied from the *Daily Telegraph*. Why, by an extraordinary coincidence he was going that way himself, to that very house!—flat, rather. Yes, it was his mother who was advertising for a lady−help. Might he show her the way? ... It would be very kind of him.

Through a maze of streets, he chatting pleasantly enough, though putting now and then curious little questions which she could not understand.... Hadn't he seen her at the Oxford one night? ... Assuredly he had not; what was the Oxford?

He laughed, evidently pleased. “Gad, you do keep it up!” he cried.

So to a great pile of flats; up a circular stair.

“You understand why I can't use the lift?” he said. “They're beastly particular here.”

She did not understand; supposed it was some question of expense. Thus to a door where he took out a latch−key.

It was then for the first moment that a sudden doubt, a horror, took her, trembling her limbs.

She looked up at the figures painted over the door.

“Why, it is the wrong number!” she cried.

He had turned the key. “Lord! you do keep it up!” he laughed, his hand suddenly about her arm.

Then she knew, and dragged back, sweating with the horror of the thing.

“Ah, let me go—let me go!”

“Oh, chuck it, you little ass!” His arm was about her waist now, dragging her; his face close.

With a sudden twist and thrust that took him by surprise she wrenched from his grasp; was a flight of stairs

away before he had recovered his wits; across the hall and running—shaking, hysterical—down the street.

XIV.

Thereafter men were a constant horror to her—adding a new and most savage beast to the wolves of noise, of desolation and of despair that bayed about her in this grinding city. Unable longer to face them, she went again to Miss Ram at the Agency—almost upon her knees, crying, trembling, pitching her tale from the man with the dent in his hat to the man in Wilton Road.

Miss Ram was moved to the original depths that lay beneath her grim exterior; had never realised the actual circumstances; would do what she could; no need to be frightened.

Two days later Mary was unpacking her box at 14 Palace Gardens. No sharpness, no slight now could prick her spirit; she had learned too well; she would not face those streets again.

That was eighteen months, close upon two years ago. Wounds were healing now; old−time brightness was coming back to laugh at present discomforts. It was only now and again—as now—that she, driven by some sudden stress, allowed her mind backwards to wander—bruising itself in those dark passages.

The cab stopped. She with a start came to the present; gulped a sob; was herself.

Mrs. Chater said: “Run in quickly and mix me a brandy−and−soda.”

CHAPTER II. Excursions In Vulgarity.

A violent dispute with the cabman set that disturbed heart yet more wildly thumping in Mrs. Chater's bosom; the sight of her husband uneasily mooning in the dining−room heated her wrath to wilder bubblings.

Mr. Chater—a 'oly dam' terror in Mincing Lane, if his office−boy may be quoted—was an astonishingly mild man in his own house.

He said brightly, noting with a shiver the gusty stress of his wife's deportment: “You *drove* up, my dear?—And quite right, too,” he hastily added, upon a sudden fear that his remark might be interpreted as reproach.

“How do you know?” Mrs. Chater's nose went into the brandy−and−soda.

“I saw you from the window,” her husband beamed. He repeated, “The window,” and nervously pointed at it. There was a strained atmosphere in the room, and he was a little frightened.

“*Oh!*” Out from the brandy−and−soda came the nose; down went the glass with an emphasising bang: “*Oh!*“

Mr. Chater gave a startled little jump. He saw, immediately he had spoken, the misfortune into which his admission had plunged him; the bang of the glass twanged his already apprehensive nerves, and he jerked out, “Certainly, my dear,” without any clear grasp as to what he was affirming.

“If you had been a *man*,” said Mrs. Chater, speaking with a slow and extraordinary bitterness—“if you had been a *man*, you would have come out and helped me.”

“But you had got out when I came to the window, my dear.”

“With the *cabman*, I mean.” Mrs. Chater fired the word with alarming ferocity. “With the *cabman*. Did you not see that violent brute insulting me?”

It was precisely because he had observed the episode that Mr. Chater had kept well behind the curtain; but he did not adduce the fact.

“I certainly did not,” he affirmed.

“Ah! I expect you took precious good care not to. You've done the same thing before. Never to my dying day shall I forget the figure you cut outside Swan and Edgar's last Christmas. Making me—”

Mr. Chater implored: “Oh, my dear, don't drag that up again!”

“But I *do* drag it up!” Mrs. Chater a little unnecessarily cried. “I *do* drag it up, and I shall always drag it up—making me a fool as you did! I was ashamed of you. I was—”

Mr. Chater nervously wiped his moist palms with his pocket handkerchief: “I've told you over and over again, my dear, that I never understood the circumstances. There was a great crowd, and I was very much pushed about. If I had known the circumstances—”

Mrs. Chater hurled back the word at him: “Circumstances!”

“My dear,” the agitated man replied, ticking off the points on soft fingers, “my dear, I had gone to the window of Swan and Edgar's, leaving you, as you expressly desired, to pay the man *yourself*. When I came *back* to you, what I gathered was that the man was entitled to a further *sixpence* and that you had no *change* .”

Mrs. Chater lashed herself with the recollection: “Nothing of the kind!” she burst. “Nothing of the kind! What did the man say to you when you asked what was the matter?”

“I quite forget.”

“You do not forget.”

“My dear, I really and truly do forget.”

“For the hundredth time, then, let me tell you. He said that if you pushed your ugly mug into it he would knock off your blooming head.”

“Did he say *mug?*” asked Mr. Chater, assuming the air of one who, knowing this at the time, would have committed a singularly ferocious murder.

“Well you know that he *did* say mug—*ugly* mug. Was *that* a thing for a man of spirit to take quietly? Was *that* a thing for a wife to hear bawled at her husband in the open street with the commissionaire grinning behind his hand? To my dying day I shall never forget my humiliation when you handed him sixpence.”

The unhappy husband murmured: “I do so wish you could, my dear.”

Mrs. Chater shook, handled her troops with the skill of a perfect tactician, and hurled in the attack upon another quarter.

She said: “Ah, now insult me! Insult me before Miss Humfray! That's right! *That's* right! That's what I'm accustomed to. We all have our cross to bear, as the vicar said last Sunday, and open insult from my husband is mine. I can't complain; I married you with my eyes open.”

Mrs. Chater revealed this secret of her girlhood in a voice which implied that most young women go through the ceremony with their eyes tightly closed, mixed a second brandy−and−soda for her shattered nerves, swallowed it with the air of one draining a poison flask by way of happy release from martyrdom, banged down the glass, and, before her amazed husband could open his lips, hammered in the attack from a third quarter.

“Little you would have cared,” cried she, “if a miracle had not saved my life this afternoon!”

Mr. Chater stood aghast. “My dearest! Saved you! From what?”

His dearest bitterly inquired: “What does it matter to you? You take no interest. If my battered corpse—” Swept to tremendous heights by the combined forces of her agitation, her imagination, and her two brandys−and−sodas, she rose, pointed though the window. “If my battered corpse had been carried up those steps by two policemen this very afternoon, what would you have done, I wonder?”

Mr. Chater, apprehension creeping among the roots of his hair, affirmed that he would have dropped dead in the precise spot at which he happened to be standing at the moment.

Mrs. Chater trumpeted “Never!”—dropped to her chair, and continued. “You would have been glad.” Her voice shook. “Glad—and in all this wide world only my Bob and my blessed lambs in the nursery would have wept o'er my body.”

Of so melancholy a character was the picture thus presented to her mind, augmenting her previous agitation, that the tumult within her welled damply through her eyes, with noisy distress through her lips.

Patting her distressed back, imploring her to calm, Mr. Chater begged some account of the catastrophe from which she had escaped.

Between convulsive sobs she told him, he bridging the hiatuses of emotion with “Oh−dear−oh−dears,” in which alarm and sympathy were nicely mingled.

Painting details with a masterly hand, “And there was I alone,” she concluded—“alone, at the mercy of a wild horse and a drunken cabman.”

“But Miss Humfray was with you?”

“Miss Humfray managed to jump out and leave me.”

Through all this scene—in one form or another a matter of daily occurrence, and therefore not to arouse interest—Mary had stood waiting its cessation and her orders. Mr. Chater turned upon her. Naturally disposed to be kind to the girl, he yet readily saw in his wife's statement a way of escape from the castigation he had been enduring. As the small boy who has been kicked by the bully will with delighted relief rush to the bully's aid when the kicks are at length turned to another, urging him on so that he may forget his first prey, so Mr. Chater, delighted at his fortune, eagerly joined in turning his wife's wrath to Mary's head. For self−preservation, at whatever cost to another, is the most compelling of instincts: its power great in proportion as we have allowed our fleshly impulses to master us. If, when they prompt, we coldly and impersonally regard them, find them unworthy and crush them back humiliated, they become in time disciplined—wither and die. In proportion as we permit them, upon the other hand, they come in time to drive us with a fierceness that cannot be checked.

Mr. Chater had disciplined no single impulse that came to him with his flesh.

In pious horror he turned upon the girl.

“Managed to jump out!” he exclaimed, speaking as one re−echoing a horror hardly to be believed.

“Managed to jump out! Miss Humfray, I would not have thought it of you!”

She cried: “Mr. Chater, I fell!”

Disregarding, and with a deeper note of pained reproach, he continued: “So many ties, I should have thought, would have bound you to my wife in such an emergency—the length of time you have been with us; the unremitting kindness she has shown you, treating you as one of ourselves, in sickness tending you, bountifully feeding and clothing you, going out of her way to make you happy. Oh, Miss Humfray!”

The strain on his invention paused him. Mrs. Chater, moved by this astonishing revelation of her love, assumed an air in keeping—an air of some pain but no surprise at such ingratitude. She warmed to this husband

who, if no hero in the matter of ferocious cabmen, could at least champion her upon occasion.

Mary cried: “But I did not jump out! Indeed I did not, Mr. Chater; I fell.”

Mrs. Chater said *“Fell!”* With sublime forbearance she added, “Never mind; the incident is past.”

“Mrs. Chater, you must know that I fell out. I was leaning out—you had asked me to see the name of the street—when the horse stumbled.”

“It is curious,” said Mrs. Chater, with a pained little smile, “that you managed to 'fall out' before the horse could recover and bolt.”

“Very, very curious,” Mr. Chater echoed.

How hateful they were, the girl felt. She broke out: “I—”

“Miss Humfray, that is enough. Help me upstairs. I will lie down.”

Mr. Chater jumped brightly to the bell. “My dear, do; I will send you a hot−water bottle.”

His wife recalled the shortcomings for which she had been taking him to task. “Send a fiddlestick,” she rapped; “on a boiling day like this!”

She took Mary's arm; leaning heavily, passed from the room.

CHAPTER III. Excursions In The Mind Of A Heroine.

Her mistress disrobed, head among pillows, slippered, coverleted, eau− de−Cologne on temples, with closed eyes inviting sleep to lull the tumults of the day. Mary climbed to her room.

About her mouth there was a ridiculous twitching; and as she watched it in the mirror she strove to wrap herself in the armour in which she had learned to take buffetings.

To be dispassionate was the salve she had schooled herself to use upon a wounded spirit—to regard this Mary with the comically twitching face whom now she saw in the glass as a second person whose sufferings might be coldly regarded and dissected.

It is a most admirable accomplishment. Nothing is so easy as to be philosophic upon the cares of another—nothing so easy as to wax impatient with an acquaintance who allows himself to be overridden by troubles and pains which appear to us of trifling moment. If, then, we can school ourselves to regard the figure that bears our name as one person, and our ego as another, we have at least a chance of chiding that figure out of all the fancied sufferings it may undergo.

With some success Mary had studied the art; now gave that Mary−in−the− glass who stood before her a healthy reproof.

“The ridiculous thing you did,” Mary−in−the−glass was told—“the ridiculous thing you did to make yourself miserable was to go thinking about—about Ireland.”

The mouth of Mary−in−the−glass ominously twitched.

“There you go again. And it is so absolutely forbidden to think about that. Whatever's the use of it?”

Mary−in−the−glass could adduce no reason, and must be prodded.

“Does it do you any good? Does it do *them* any good, do you suppose, to know that you can never think of them without making yourself unhappy?”

Mary−in−the−glass attempted a weak quibble; was instantly snapped.

“I'm not saying you are *never* to think of them. Goodness knows what I should do if I did not. It's all right to think of them when you are happy and they can share the happiness with you; but, when you choose to be idiotically miserable, that's the time you are not to go whining anywhere near them—understand? You only make them unhappy and make your troubles worse. Troubles! if you can't see the fun of Mrs. Chater, you must be a wretched sort of person. Her face when the cab brought her back! And trying to feel her heart! And her rage with that little worm of a Mr. Chater! Can't you see the fun of it instead of crying over it?”

Mary−in−the−glass could. The successive recollections induced the prettiest dimples on her face. She was at once forgiven.

Indeed, to snuggle back into her and to merge into her again was just now very desirable to the censorious Mary−outside−the−glass. For, merged in her sentimental and romantic personality, a most delectable line of thought could be pursued—a delectable line, since along this trail was to be encountered that stranger who had caught her in her wild ejection from the cab.

Sinking in a chair, Mary adventured upon it; she was instantly met.

Mary−outside−the−glass essayed her best to prevent the interview. “Poof!” Mary−outside−the−glass, that cold young person, sneered. “Poof! You little idiot! A stranger with whom you spoke for five minutes, whom you will never again see, and from whose recollections you have most certainly passed unless to be recalled as a joke—perhaps to some other girl!” (A nasty dig that, but they are monsters these Marys−outside−the−glass.) “Why, you must be a donkey to think about him! For goodness' sake come away before you make yourself too utterly ridiculous! You won't. Well, perhaps you will try to recall the figure you must have cut in his eyes? Do you remember what you must have looked like as you shot out of the cab like a sack of straw? Pretty sight, eh? And can you imagine the expression on your face as you banged into his arms? Charming you must have looked, mustn't you? And can you by any means realise the idiot you must have looked when Mrs. Chater came up and swept you off like an escaped puppy, recaptured and in for a whipping? Striking figure you cut, didn't you? You didn't happen to peep back through the little window at the back of the cab and see him laughing, I suppose? Ah, you should have looked....”

And so on. This was the attitude of that cold, calculating, dispassionate Mary−outside−the−glass. But Mary smothered the voice— would not hear a word of it. Completely she became Mary−in−the−glass, that sentimental young woman, and in that personality tripped along the path of thought where stood her stranger.

Delectably she relived the encounter. Paced down the street, took again his arm; without a fault recalled his words, without a check gave her replies; recalled the pitch of his voice to the nicest note, struck again the light in his eyes.

Now why? She had met other men; in Ireland had thrice wounded her tender heart by negations that had caused three suitors most desperate anguish. None had awakened in her a deeper interest; and yet here was a stranger—suddenly encountered, as suddenly left—who in her mind had appropriated a track which she was eager to make a well−beaten path. Why?

But Mary−in−the−glass, that sentimental young woman, was no prober of emotions. They veiled the hard business of commonplace life; and amid them mistily she now floated afar into dim features where her stranger, stranger no more, walked with her hand in hand.

There was attempt at first to construct an actual re−encounter. Mary− in−the−glass, that romantic young woman, very speciously pointed out that in London when once you see a man you may reasonably suppose that you will again meet him. For in London one does not aimlessly wander; one has some set purpose and traverses a thousand times the same streets, crossing daily at the same points as though upon the pursuit of a chalked line. Mary−in−the−glass, therefore, constructing a re− encounter, happened to be strolling along the scene of the accident, and lo! there was he!

Unhappily this vision was transient. Mary−outside−the−glass, that cold young woman, got in a word here that erased the picture. The square where the cab crashed was too far afield to take the children for their walk; holiday was a boon rarely granted and never granted at the particular hour of the catastrophe—the only time of day at which, according to the chalked−line theory, she might reasonably expect to find the stranger in the same spot.

But Mary did not brood long upon this melancholy obstacle; drove away Mary−outside−the−glass; became again Mary−in−the−glass. And they are impossible creatures these Marys−in−the−glass. They will approach an unbridged chasm across which no Mary−out−side could by any means adventure, and, floating the gulf, will deliriously roam in the fields beyond.

So now. And in that dream−world of the musing brain Mary with her stranger sublimely wandered. With her form and his she peopled all the favourite spots she knew; contrived others and strolled in them; introduced other persons, and marked their comment on her dear companion.

It was he whom she made to do mighty deeds in those misty fields; of herself hers were merely a girl's gentle fancies, held modest by her sex's natural desire to be loved for itself alone—not for big behaviour.

CHAPTER IV. Excursions In A Nursery.

The loud bang of a door was the gong that called Mary back from those pleasant fields. They whirled from her, leaving her in sudden realisation of the material.

She glanced at the clock.

“Goodness!” cried she, and fell to scattering her outdoor finery at a speed dangerous under any but the deftest fingers. Into a skirt of black and a simple blouse she slipped, and down, skimming the stairs, to where her charges bided their bedtime.

Opening the nursery door she paused upon the threshold with a little “Oh!” of surprise. There was a reek of cigar smoke; its origin between the lips of a burly young man who stood drumming a tune upon the window−pane.

Mr. Bob Chater turned at her entry. “I've been waiting for you a long time,” he said.

She asked, “Whatever for?” and in her tone there was a chill.

“Didn't I tell you yesterday that I was coming to see the kids tubbed?”

“I didn't think you meant it.”

Mr. Bob Chater laughed. “Well, now you see that I did. I've been looking forward to this all day.”

Plainly she was perturbed. She said: “Mr. Chater, I really would rather you did not, if you don't mind.”

“Well, but I do mind, d'you see? I mind very much indeed. It would be the bitterest disappointment.”

His playfulness sat ill upon him. This was a stout young man, black−eyed, dark−moustached, with a thick and heavy look about him.

She would not catch his mood. “I am sure when I ask you—”

“Well, you're jolly well wrong, you know,” he laughed; “'cause I ain't going.”

Mary flushed slightly; moved to the hearthrug where sat David and Angela, her small charges, watching, from their toys, the scene.

It occurred to Mr. Bob Chater that she was annoyed.

“I say, be decent to a fellow, Miss Humfray,” he said. “Look here, I hadn't seen the kids for two years when I came back yesterday. They hardly remember their kind big brother.” He addressed the small girl whose round eyes, moving from speaker to speaker since Mary had entered, were now upon him. “Do you, Angela?” he asked.

“I—hate—you,” Angela told him, in the slow utterance of one giving completest effect to a carefully weighed sentiment.

With equal impressiveness, David, seated beside her, lent his authority to the statement. “I—hate—you—too,” he joined.

Mr. Bob Chater laughed a little stupidly.

Mary cried: “Oh, Angela! Oh, David! How can you speak like that!”

“He is perfectly abom'able,” Angela said, unmoved. “He made Davie cry. He trod on Davie's beetle.”

The cracked corpse of a mechanical beetle, joy of David's heart, was produced in evidence; its distressed owner reddening ominously at this renewed recollection of the calamity.

Mary took the sad pieces tenderly. “Silly children! He never meant to break it. Oh, such silly children!”

Angela protested, “He did! He did! He put his foot over it while it was running, and stopped it. He told David to get it away if he could, and David bit his leg, and he said 'Damn you!' and crushed it crack.”

Mary whipped a glance at the murderer. She ignored the evidence. “To− morrow!” said she. “Why, what fun! To−morrow we'll play hospital like we did when Christabel broke her arm. We'll make Mr. Beetle just as well as ever he was before!”

“I'll be doctor!” cried David, transported into delight.

“Yes, and Angela nurse. Look, we'll put poor Mr. Beetle on the mantelpiece to−night, right out of the draughts. If he got a draught into that crack in his back, goodness knows what wouldn't happen. He must eat slops like Christabel did. *What* fun! Now, bed— *bustle!*“

Their adored Mary had restored confidence. They clung about her.

“It was a pure accident,” explained Mr. Bob Chater, gloomily watching this scene. “I'll buy you another

to−morrow."

"There!" Mary cried. "Think of that!"

David reflected upon it without emotion. He regarded his big brother sullenly; sullenly said, "I don't want another."

Mary cried brightly: "Rubbish! Come, kiss your brother good−night, and say 'thank you!' Both of you. Quick as lightning!"

They hung back.

Mary had obtained so complete a command of their affections that her word was the wise law which, ordinarily, they had come unquestioningly to accept. In their short lives David and Angela had experienced a procession of nurses, of nursery−governesses, of lady−helps, each one of whom received or gave her month's notice within a few weeks of arrival, and against whom they had conducted a sullen or a violent war. From the first it had been different with Miss Humfray. As was their custom (for this constant change tried tempers) upon the very day of her arrival they had met her with frank hostility, had declared mutiny at her first command. But her reception of this attitude they found a new and astonishing experience. She had not been shocked, had not been angry, had ventured no threat to tell their mother. Instead, at the outbreak of defiance, she went into the gayest and most infectious laughter, kissed them—and they had capitulated before they realised the event.

A second attempt at mutiny, made upon the following day, met with a reception equally novel. Again this pretty Miss Humfray had laughed, but this time had fully sympathised with their view of the point at issue and had made of the affair a most entrancing game. She, behold, was a pirate captain; they were the rebellious crew. In five minutes they had marooned her upon the desert island represented by the hearthrug; had rowed away with faces which, under her instructions, were properly stern; and only when she waved the white flag of truce had they taken her aboard again. Meanwhile the subject of the quarrel had been forgotten.

Never a dispute arose thereafter. They idolised this pretty Miss Humfray: whatsoever she said was clearly right.

Here, however, was a dangerous conflict of opinion. They hung back.

"Quickly," Mary repeated. "Kiss him, and say thank−you quickly, or there will be no story when you are in bed."

It was a terrific price to pay; their troubled faces mirrored the conflict of decision.

David found solution. In his slow, solemn voice, "You kiss him first," he said. Miss Humfray always took their medicine first, and David argued from the one evil necessity to this other.

Mr. Bob Chater laughed delightedly. "That's a brilliant idea!" he cried; came two strides towards Mary; put a hand upon her arm.

So sudden, so unexpected was his movement, that by the narrowest chance only did she escape his purpose. A jerk of her head, and he had mouthed at the air two inches from her face.

She shook her arm free. "Oh!" she cried; and in the exclamation there was that which would have given a nicer man pause.

Mr. Bob Chater was nothing abashed. A handsome face and a bold air had made conquests easy to him. It was an axiom of his that a girl who worked for her living by that fact proclaimed flirtation to be agreeable to her—at all events with such as he. Chance had so shaped affairs that this was the first time his theory had found disproof. He saw she was offended; so much the more tickling; conquest was thereby the more enticing.

He laughed; said he was only "rotting."

Mary did not reply. The command to kiss their brother went by default; she hurried her charges through the door to the adjoining night nursery.

When they were started upon undressing she came back.

"You're going to let me see you tub them?" Bob asked her.

Busy replacing toys in cupboards, she did not reply.

"You're not angry, are you?"

She gave him no answer.

Bob Chater discarded the laugh from his tone. "If you are angry, I'm very sorry. You must have known I was only fooling. It was only to make the kids laugh."

So far as was possible she kept her back to him.

The continued slight pricked him. His voice hardened. “When I have the grace to apologise, I think you might have the grace to accept it.”

Mary said in low tones: “If you meant only to make them laugh, of course I believe you. It is all right.”

“Good. Well, now, may I see them tubbed?”

“I have told you I would rather not.”

“Dash it all, Miss Humfray, you're rather unkind, aren't, you? Here have I been away nearly two years—I've been travelling on the Continent for the firm−you know that, don't you?”

She said she had heard Mr. and Mrs. Chater talking of it.

“Well, and yet you won't let me come near my darling little sister and my sweet little brother to tell 'em all about it?”

“But I'm not keeping you from them, Mr. Chater. You have had plenty of time.”

“Time! Why, I only got back yesterday!”

“You have been in here this afternoon.”

“Ah, they were shy. They're better when you are here.”

She had finished her task, and she turned to him. “Mr. Chater, you know I could not keep David and Angela from you even if I dreamed of doing such a thing. Only, I say I would rather you did not come in while I bath them, that is all.”

“Yes, but why?”

“Mrs. Chater would not like it for one thing, I feel sure.”

“Oh, that's all rot. Mother wouldn't mind—anyway, I do as I like in this house.”

From all she had heard of Mrs. Chater's beloved Bob, Mary guessed this to be true. Long prior to his arrival she had been prejudiced against him; acquaintance emphasised the prophetic impression.

“Another night, then,” she said.

He felt he was winning. No girl withstood him long.

“No, to−night. Another thing—I want to know you better. This arrangement is all new to me. There was a nurse here in your place when I went. I've hardly spoken to you. Have you ever been abroad?”

“No.”

“Well, I'll tell you—and the kids—some of my adventures while you're tubbing 'em. Lead on.”

She was at the night−nursery door. Evidently this man would not see her conventional reason for not wishing him at the tubbing. Angela had grown a biggish girl since he went away.

She said, “Please not to−night.”

“I'm jolly well coming,” he chuckled.

The lesson of dependence was wilfully forgotten. Mary agreed with Angela and David: she hated this Bob.

“No,” she said sharply, “you are not.”

He had thrown his cigar into the grate; taken out another; stooped to the hearth to scratch a match. His back was to her; to him all her tone conveyed was that a “rag” was on hand.

“We'll see,” he laughed; struck the match.

She stepped swiftly within the door; closed it.

Bob Chater laughed again; ran across.

The lock clicked as she turned the key.

“Let me in!” he cried, rattling the handle. “Let me in!”

The splash of water answered him.

He thumped the panel. “Open the door!”

“Now, Angela,” he heard her say, “quick as lightning with that chimmy.”

Bob's face darkened; he damned beneath his breath. Then with a laugh he turned away. “I'm going to have some fun with that girl,” he told himself; and on the way downstairs, her pretty face and figure in his mind, pleased himself with vicious anticipation.

CHAPTER V. Excursions At A Dinner−Table.

I.

Two distressing reasons combined to compel Mrs. Chater to give Mary place at the evening meal. There was the aggravating fact that mothers'−helps, just as if they were ordinary people, must be fed; there was also the contingency that servants most strongly objected to serving a special meal—even “on a tray”—to one who was not of the family, yet who had airs above the kitchen.

Except, then, when there were guests Miss Humfray must be accommodated at late dinner. Mrs. Chater considered it annoying, yet found in it certain comfortable advantages—as sympathy from friends: “Mustn't it be rather awkward sometimes, Mrs. Chater?” A plaintive shrug would illustrate the answer: “Well, it is, of course, very awkward sometimes; but one must put up with it. That class of person takes offence so easily, you know; and I always try to treat my lady−helps as well as possible.” “I'm sure you do, Mrs. Chater. How grateful they should be!” And this time a sad little laugh would illustrate: “Oh, one hardly expects gratitude nowadays, does one?”

Mary at dinner must observe certain rules, however. Certain dishes—a little out of season, perhaps, or classed as luxuries—were borne triumphantly past her by a glad parlour−maid acting upon a frown and a glance that Mrs. Chater signalled. Certain occasions, again, when private matters were to be discussed, were heralded by “Miss Humfray,” in an inflexion of voice that set Mary to fold her napkin and from the room.

The girl greeted these early dismissals with considerable relief. Dinner was to her a nightly ordeal whose atmosphere swept appetite sky−high—took the savour from meats, dried the throat.

II.

Descending to the dining−room upon this evening, her normal shrinking from the meal was considerably augmented. On the previous night—the first upon which Mr. Bob Chater's legs had partnered hers beneath the table—his eyes (like some bold gallant popping out on modesty whenever it dared peep from the doorway) had captured her glance each time she ventured look up from her plate. The episode of the nursery was equivalent to having slapped the gallant's face, and the re− encounter was proportionately uncomfortable.

Taking her place she was by sheer nervousness impelled to meet his gaze—so heavily freighted it was as to raise a sudden flush to her cheek. Her eyes fled round to Mrs. Chater, received a look that questioned the blush, drove it duskier; through an uncomfortable half−hour she kept her face towards her plate.

It was illuminative of the relations between husband and wife that Mrs. Chater carved; her husband dealt the sweets. The carving knife is the domestic sceptre of authority: when it is wielded by the woman, the man, you will find, is consort rather than king.

III.

Upon the previous evening Mr. Bob Chater had led the conversation. To− night he was indisposed for the position—would not take it despite his mother's desperate attempts to board the train of his ideas and by it be carried to scenes of her son's adventures. A dozen times she presented her ticket; as often Bob turned her back at the barrier.

It was a rare event this refusal of his to carry passengers. So loudly did he whistle as a rule as to attract all in the vicinity, convinced that there was an important train by which it would be agreeable to travel.

For Mr. Bob Chater was a loud young man, emanating a swaggering air that the term “side” well fitted. To have some conceit of oneself is an excellent affair. The possession is a keel that gives to the craft a dignified balance upon the stream of life—prevents it from being sailed too close to mud; helps maintain stability in sudden gale. Other craft are keelless—they are canoes; bobbing, unsteady, likely to capsize in sudden emergency; prone to drift into muddy waters; liable to be swept anywhither by any current. Others, again—and Mr. Bob Chater was of these—are over−freighted upon one quarter or another: they sail with a list. Amongst well−trimmed boats these learn in time not to adventure, since here they are greeted with ridicule or with contempt; yet among the keelless fleets they have a position of some authority; holding it on the same principle as that by which among beggars he

who has a coin—even though base—is accounted king.

Bob Chater's list was ego−wards. His mighty "I"—I am, I do, I say, I know, I think—bulged from him, hanging from his voice, his glance, his gesture, his walk. In it Mrs. Chater bathed; to be carried along in the train of his mighty "I" was delectable to her. But to−night she could not effect the passage.

A final effort she made to get aboard. "And in St. Petersburg!" she tempted. "I wonder if you ever saw the *Tsar* when you were in St. Petersburg?"

Bob drove her back: "St. Petersburg's a loathsome place."

Mrs. Chater tried to squeeze through. "So *gay*, they say."

Bob slammed the gate. "I wish you'd *tell* me something instead of expecting *me* to do all the talking. I want to hear all that's been going on here while I've been away, but I'm hanged if I can find out."

A little mortified, Mrs. Chater said: "I've hardly seen you, dear, except at meals"—then threw the onus for her son's lack of local gossip upon her husband. Addressing him, "You've been with Bob all the morning," she told him. "I wonder you haven't given him all the news. But, there! I suppose you've done nothing but question him about what business he's done!"

Mr. Chater, startled at the novelty of being drawn into table conversation while his son and his wife were present, dropped his spoon with a splash into his soup, wiped his coat, frowned at the parlour−maid, cleared his throat, and, to gain time to determine whether he had courage to say that which was burning within him, threw out an "Eh?" for his pursuing wife to Worry.

Mrs. Chater pounced upon it; shook it. "What I said was that I suppose you've been doing nothing but question poor Bob about what he has done for the firm while he's been away,"

Mr. Chater nerved himself to declare his mind. "There wasn't very much to question him about," he said.

His words—outcome of views forcibly expressed by his partners in Mincing Lane that morning—were the foolhardy action of one who pokes a tigress with a stick.

The tigress shook herself. "Now, I wonder what you mean by *that* ?" she challenged.

Mr. Chater dropped the stick; precipitantly fled. "Of course it was all new to Bob," he granted, throwing a bone.

Very much to his alarm the tigress ignored the bone; rushed after him. "All you seem to think about," cried she, "is making the boy slave. He's never had a proper holiday since he left school, and yet the very first time he goes off to see the world you must be fidgeting yourself to death all the time that he's not pushing the firm sufficiently; and immediately he comes back you must start cross−examining just as if he was an office−boy—not a word about his health or his pleasure. Oh, no! of course not!"

Squirming in misery, Mr. Chater remarked that he had his partners to consider. "I'm only too glad that Bob should enjoy himself—only too glad. But you must remember, my dear, that part of his expenses for this trip was paid for by the firm—the *firm*. He was to call on foreign houses—"

The tigress opened her mouth for fresh assault. Mr. Chater hurriedly thrust in a bone. "I don't say he hasn't done a great deal for us—not at all; I'd be the last to say that. What I say is that in duty to my partners I must take the first opportunity to ask him a few questions about it. Bob sees that himself; don't you, Bob?"

"Oh, do let's keep shop off the table," Bob snarled. "Fair sickens me this never getting away from the office."

"There you are!" Mrs. Chater cried. "There you are! Always business, business, business—that's what *I* complain of."

With astounding recklessness Mr. Chater mildly said: "My dear, you started it."

Mrs. Chater quivered: "Ah, put it on me! Put it on me! Somehow you always manage to do that. Miss Humfray, when you've *quite* finished your soup *then* perhaps Clarence can take the plates."

Mary's thoughts, to the neglect of her duty, had crept away beneath cover of these exchanges. Now she endured the disaster of amid silence clearing her plate with four pairs of eyes fixed upon her. Clarence removed the course; Mr. Chater, leaping as far as possible from the scene of his ordeal, broke a new topic.

He enticed tentatively: "I saw a funny bit in the paper this morning."

The tigress paused in the projection of another spring; sniffed suspiciously. "Oh!"

"About that young Lord Comeragh," Mr. Chater hurried on, delighted with his success. "He was up at Marlborough Street police−court this morning—at least his butler was; of course his lordship wouldn't go himself—charged with furiously driving his motorcar; and who do you think was in the car with him at the time?

Ah!”

Mrs. Chater, naming a young lady who nightly advertised a pretty leg from the chorus of a musical comedy, announced that she would not be surprised if that was the person. Being told that it was none other, and that Mr. Chater had heard in the City that morning that Lady Comeragh was taking proceedings and had named the nicely−legged young lady the cause of infidelity, became highly astonished and supremely diverted.

Conversation of a most delectable nature was by this means supplied. A pot of savoury gossip, flavoured with scandal, was upon the table; and Mary, lost to sight behind the cloud of steam that uprose as the three leaped about it, finished her dinner undisturbed.

A nod bade her leave before dessert. As she passed out the signaller spoke. “I want to see you,” Mrs. Chater said. “Wait for me in the drawing−room.”

The command was unusual, and Mary, waiting as bid, worried herself with surmises upon it. She prayed it did not mean she was to soothe Mr. Bob Chater's digestion with lullabies upon the piano; that it boded an unpleasant affair she was assured.

She did not err. Mrs. Chater came to her, dyspeptic−flushed, sternly browed.

“Miss Humfray, I have one thing to say to you, no more. No explanations, no excuses, please. I hear you have been trying to entertain my son in the nursery this evening. If that, or anything like it, occurs again—You understand?”

“Mrs. Chater—”

A massive hand signalled Stop. “I said 'not a word.' That is all. Good night.”

And Mary, crimson, to her room.

BOOK III. Of Glimpses at a Period of this History: of Love and of War.

CHAPTER I. Notes On The Building Of Bridges.

Within the limits of this short section of our story we shall cram two months of history, taking but a furtive peep or two at our personages as they plod through it.

This is well within our power, since the position of the novelist in regard to his characters may be compared with that of the destiny which in the largest comedy moves to and fro mankind its actors. As destiny moves its puppets, so the novelist moves his—upraising, debasing; favouring, tormenting; creating, wiping from the page.

And of the pair the novelist is the more just. Has villainy in a novel ever gone unpunished? Has virtue ever failed of its reward? Your novelist is of all autocrats the most zealous of right and wrong. Villain may through two−thirds of his career enjoy his wicked pleasures, exceedingly prosper despite his baseness; but ever above him the cold eye of his judge keeps watch, and in the end he is apportioned the most horrible deserts that any could wish. Virtue may by the gods be hounded and harried till the reader's heart is wrung. But spare your tears; before Finis is written, down swoops the judge; the dogs are whipped off; Virtue is led to fair pastures and there left smiling.

Contrasted with this autocrat of the printed page, the destiny whose comedy began with the world and is indefinitely continued makes sorry show. Here the wicked exceedingly flourish and keep at it to the end of their chapter; here virtue, battling with tremendous waves of adversity, is at last engulfed and miserably drowned. Truly, their fit rewards are apportioned, we are instructed, after death. But there is something of a doubt; the novelist, in regard to his characters, takes no risks.

Upon another head, moreover, the novelist shows himself the more kindly autocrat. There is his power, so freely exercised, to bridge time. Whereas destiny makes us to watch those in whom we are interested plod every inch and step of their lives−over each rut, through each swamp, up each hill,−the novelist, upon his characters coming to places dull or too difficult, immediately veils from us their weary struggles. Destiny will never grant such a boon: we must watch our friends even when they bore us, even when they cause us pain. Yet this boon is the commonest indulgence of the novelist−as it now (to become personal) is mine.

I bridge two months.

And you must imagine this bridge as indeed a short and airy passage across a valley, down into which the persons of our story must carefully climb, across which they must plod, and up whose far side they must laboriously scramble to meet us upon the level ground. For we are much in the position, we novel readers, of village children curiously watching a caravan of gipsies passing through their district. The gipsies (who stand for our characters) plod wearily away along a bend of dusty road. The children cease following, play awhile; then by a short−cut through the fields overtake the travellers as again they come into the straight.

So now with you and me. We have no need to follow our gipsies down the valley that takes two months in the traversing: we skip across the bridge.

But, leaning over, we may take a shot or two at them as here and there they come into view.

CHAPTER II. Excursions Beneath The Bridge.

I.

Thus we see the meeting again of George and Mary.

When the agitated young man on the day following the cab accident had alighted from the omnibus at the bottom of Palace Gardens he was opposite No. 14 by half−past ten; waiting till eleven; going, convinced she did not live there; returning, upon the desperate hope that indeed she did; waiting till twelve—and being most handsomely rewarded.

Her face signalled that she saw him, but her eyes gave no recognition —quickly were averted from him; the windows behind her had eyes, she knew.

My agitated George, who had made a hasty step at the red flag that fluttered on her cheeks, as hastily stepped away beneath the chill of her glance; in tremendous perturbation turned and fled; in tremendous perturbation turned and pursued. In Regent's Park he saw her produce a brilliant pair of scarlet worsted reins, gay with bells; heard her hiss like any proper groom as tandemwise she harnessed David and Angela, those restive steeds.

The equipage was about to start—she had cracked her whip, clicked her tongue—when with thumping heart, with face that matched the flaming reins, hat in hand he approached; spoke the driver.

Her steeds turned about; with wide, unblinking eyes, searched his face and hers.

“Your faces are very red,” Angela said. “Are you angry?”

“You have got very red faces,” David echoed. “Are you in a temper?”

Mary told them No; George said they were fine horses; felt legs; offered to buy them.

His words purchased their hearts, which were more valuable.

After the drive they would return to the stable, which was this seat, Mary told him; she could not stay to speak to him any longer. George declared he was the stable groom and would wait.

Away they dashed at handsome speed, right round the inner circle; returned more sedately, a little out of breath. There had been, moreover, an accident: leader, it appeared, had fallen and cut his knees.

“I shied at a motor,” David explained, proud of the red blood now that the agony was past.

George unharnessed them; dressed the wounds; scolded the coachman because no feed had been brought for the horses; promised that to−morrow he would bring some corn—bun corn.

“Will you come to−morrow?” Angela asked.

George glanced at Mary. “Yes,” he told them.

“Every to−morrow?”

“Every to−morrow.”

Tremendous joy. Well delighted, they ran to a new game.

Every to−morrow ran but to three: George and Mary had by then exchanged their histories. The pending examination was discussed, and Mary simply would not speak to him if, wasting his time, he came daily to idle with the children (so she expressed it). She would abandon the Park, she told him—would take her charges to a Square gardens of which they had the entry, where George might not follow.

George did not press the point. As he wrestled out the matter in the hours between their meetings she was a fresh incentive to work. But once a week he must be allowed to come: here he was adamant, and she gladly agreeable. Saturday mornings was the time arranged.

Mary had been fearful at this first re−encounter that it would be the last. The children would certainly tell their mother; Mrs. Chater would certainly make an end to the acquaintance.

“Ask them not to tell,” George had suggested.

Impossible to think of such a thing: it would be to teach them deceit.

“Well, I'll ask them.”

“But that would be just as bad. No—if they tell, it cannot be helped. And after all—”

“Well, after all...?”

“After all—what would it matter?”

George said: “It would matter to me—a lot.”

He glanced at her, but she was looking after Angela and David. He asked: “Wouldn't it matter to you?”

She flushed a little; answered, with her eyes still averted towards the children, “Why—why, of course I should mind. I mean—”

But there are meanings for which it is difficult to find clothes in which they may decently take the air; and here the wardrobe of Mary's mind stood wanting.

George enticed. “Do you mean you would be sorry not to—not to—”

He also found his wardrobe deficient.

Then Mary sent out her meaning, risking its decency. “Why, yes, I would be sorry not to see you again; why should I mind saying so? I have liked meeting you.” And, becoming timid at its appearance, she hurried after it a cloak that would utterly disguise it. “I meet so few people,” she said.

But George was satisfied; she had said she would mind—nay, even though she had not spoken it, her manner assured him that indeed she would regret not again meeting him. It was a thought to hug, a memory to spur his energies when they flagged over his studies; it was a brush to paint his world in lively colours.

Nor, as the future occurred, need either have had apprehension that the children would tell their mother and so set up an insurmountable barrier between them. A previous experience had warned Angela that it were wise to keep from her mother joys that were out of the ordinary run of events.

Returning homeward that day, a little in advance of Mary, she therefore addressed her brother upon the matter.

“Davie, I hope that man will come to−morrow.”

“I hope it, too.”

“We won't tell mother, Davie.”

“Why?”

“Because mother'll say No.”

“Why?”

“Because she *always* says No, stupid.”

“Why?”

“Oh, Davie, you *are* stupid! I don't know why; I only *know* . Don't you remember that lady that used to talk to Miss Humf'ay and play with us? Well, when we told mother, mother said No, didn't she? and the lady played with those abom'able red−dress children that make faces instead.”

“Will he play with the abom'able red−dress children that make faces if we tell mother?”

“Of *course* he will.”

“Why?”

“They always *do*, stupid.”

“Why?”

Angela ran back. “Oh, Miss Humf'ay, Davie is so *irrating!* He will say *Why* ....”

There is a lesson for parents in that conversation, I suspect.

II.

Leaning from our bridge we may content ourselves with a hurried shot at George, laboriously toiling at his books, sedulously attending his classes, with his Mary spending glorious Saturday mornings that, as they brought him nearer to knowledge of her, sent him from her yet more fevered; and, straining towards another point, we will focus for an instant upon Margaret his cousin, and Bill Wyvern, her adored.

Mr. William Wyvern had most vigorously whacked about among events since that evening when his Margaret had composed her verses for George. At that time a fellow−student with George at St. Peter's Hospital, he had now abandoned the profession and was started upon the literary career (as he named it) that long he had wished to follow. The change had been come by with little difficulty. Professor Wyvern— that eminent biologist whose fame was so tremendous that even now a normally forgetful Press yet continued to paragraph him while he spent in absent−minded seclusion the ebb of that life which at the flood had so mightily advanced knowledge—Professor Wyvern was too much attached to his son, too docile in the hands of his loving wife, to gainsay any wish that Bill might urge and that Mrs. Wyvern might support.

Bill achieved his end: the stories he had had printed in magazines, secretly shown to his proud mother, were now brought forth and chuckled over with glee by the Professor. The famous biologist struggled through one of the stories, vowed he had read them all, cheerily patted Bill's arm with his shaky old hand, and cheerfully abandoned the hope he had held of seeing his son a great surgeon.

It was Bill's burning ambition to obtain a post upon a paper. Not until later did he learn that it is the men outside the papers who must have a turn for stringing sentences; that those inside are machines, cutting and serving the material with no greater interest in it than has the cheesemonger in the cheese he weighs and deals. Meanwhile, the glimpse we may take of him shows Bill Wyvern urging along his pen until clean paper became magic manuscripts; living upon a billow of hope when the envelopes were sped, submerged beneath oceans of gloom when they were returned; trembling into Fleet Street deliciously to inhale the thick smell of printer's ink that came roaring up from a hundred basements; with goggle eyes venerating the men who with assured steps passed in and out the swing−doors of castles he burned to storm; snatching brief moments for the boisterous society of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, those rare bull−terriers; and finally, expending with his Margaret moments more protracted—stealthy meetings, for the most part—in Mr. Marrapit's shrubbery.

III.

But two more peeps from our bridge need we take, and then our characters will be ready to meet us upon the further side.

A glance from here will reveal to us Mrs. Major, that masterly woman, inscribing in her diary:

"*Getting on with Mr. M. Should sue. Precip. fat.*"

Fill out the abbreviations to which Mrs. Major, in her diary, was prone, and we have:

"*Getting on with Mr. Marrapit. Should succeed. Precipitancy fatal.*"

Succeed in what? To what would precipitancy of action be irreparable? Listen to a conversation that may enlighten us—spoken upon the lawn of Herons' Holt; Mr. Marrapit in his chair making a lap for the Rose of Sharon; Mrs. Major on a garden seat, crocheting.

A stealthy peep assuring her that his eyes were not closed, Mrs. Major nerved herself with a deep breath; with a long sigh let it escape in the form, "A year ago!"—dropped hands upon her lap and gazed wistfully at the setting sun. She had seen the trick very successfully performed upon the stage.

Mr. Marrapit turned his eyes upon her.

"You spoke, Mrs. Major?"

With an admirable start Mrs. Major appeared to gather in wandering fancies. "I fear I was thinking aloud, Mr. Marrapit. I beg pardon."

"Do not. There is no occasion. You said 'A year ago.'"

"Did I, Mr. Marrapit?"

"Certainly," said Mr. Marrapit.

A pause followed. The wistful woman felt that, were the thing to be done properly, the word lay with her companion. To her pleasure he continued:

"To−day, then, is an anniversary?"

"It is."

"Of a happy event, I trust?"

Mrs. Major clasped her hands; spoke with admirable ecstasy. "Oh, Mr. Marrapit, of a golden—golden page in my life."

"Elucidate," Mr. Marrapit commanded.

Mrs. Major put into a whisper:

"The day I came here."

Mr. Marrapit slowly moved his head towards her.

Her eyes were averted. "The time has passed swiftly," he said.

Mrs. Major breathed: "For me it has flown on—on—" She searched wildly for a metaphor. "On wings," she concluded.

Again there was a pause, and again Mrs. Major felt that for this passage to have fullest effect the word lay with Mr. Marrapit. But Mr. Marrapit, himself considerably perturbed, did not speak. The moments sped. Fearful

lest they should distance beyond recovery the sentiments she felt she had aroused, Mrs. Major hastened to check them.

She said musingly: “I wonder if they are right?”—sighed as though doubtful.

“To whom do you refer?”

“Why, the people who say that time flies when it is spent in pleasant company.”

“They are correct,” Mr. Marrapit affirmed.

“Oh, I do not doubt it for my part, Mr. Marrapit. I never knew what happiness was until I come here—came here. But if—” The masterly woman paused.

“Continue” Mr. Marrapit commanded.

The hard word was softly spoken. Mrs. Major's heart gave two little thumps; her plan clear before her, pushed ahead. “But if to you also, Mr. Marrapit, the time has seemed to fly, then—then Mr. Marrapit, my company has—has been agreeable to you?”

Certainly there was a softness in Mr. Marrapit's tones as he made answer.

“It has, Mrs. Major,” he said, “it has. Into my establishment you have brought an air of peace that had for some time been lacking. Prior to your arrival, I was often worried by household cares that should not fall upon a man.”

Earnestly Mrs. Major replied: “Oh, I *saw* that. I strove to lift them.”

“You have lifted them. You have attended not only my cats but my kitchen. I am now able often to enjoy such evenings as these. This peace around us illustrates the tranquillity you have brought—”

The tranquillity was at that moment disastrously shattered. A bed of shrubbery lay within a few feet of where they sat. What had appeared to be a gnarled stump in its midst now quivered, broadened, fell into a line with the straightening back of Mr. Fletcher.

Mr. Marrapit was startled and annoyed. “What are you doing there, sir?”

“Snailin',” said Mr. Fletcher gloomily; exhibited his snail.

“Snail elsewhere. Do not snail where I am.”

“I snails where there's snails.”

“Cease snailing. You must have been there hours.”

“What if I have? This garden's fair planted with snails.”

“Snail oftener. Depart.”

Mr. Fletcher moved a few steps; then turned. “I should like to ast if this is to be part of my regular job. First you says 'cease snailin',' then you says 'snail oftener,' then you says 'snail elsewhere.' Snails take findin'. They don't come to me; I has to go to them. It's 'ard— damn 'ard. I'm a gardener, I am; not a lettuce−leaf.”

He gloomily withdrew.

Mr. Marrapit's face was angrily twitching. The moment was not propitious for continuing her conversation, and with a little sigh Mrs. Major withdrew.

But it was upon that night that she inscribed in her diary:

“Getting on with Mr. M. Should suc. Precip. fat.”

IV.

A last peep, ere we hurry across the bridge, will disclose to us Mr. Bob Chater still pressing upon Mary the attentions which her position, in relation to his, made it so difficult for her to escape. Piqued by her attitude towards him, he was the more inflamed than ordinarily he would have been by the fair face and neat figure that were hers. Yet he made no headway; within a month of the date of his return to Palace Gardens was as far from conquest as upon that night in the nursery.

To a City friend, Mr. Lemuel Moss, dining at 14 Palace Gardens with him one night, he explained affairs.

“Dam' pretty girl, that governess of yours, or whatever she is,” said Mr. Moss, biting the end from a cigar in the smoking−room after dinner. “Lucky beggar you are, Bob. My mater won't have even a servant in the place that wouldn't look amiss in a monkey−house. Knows me too well, unfortunately,” and Mr. Moss, taking a squint at himself in the overmantel, laughed—well enough pleased.

Bob pointed out that there was not so much luck about it as Mr. Moss appeared to think. “Never seen such a stand−offish little rip in all my life,” he moodily concluded.

"What, isn't she—?"

Bob understood the unvoiced question. "Won't even let a chap have two minutes' talk with her," he said, "let alone anything else."

Mr. Moss stretched himself along the sofa; rejoined: "Oh, rats! Rats! You don't know how to manage 'em—that's what it is."

"I know as well as you, and a dashed sight better, I don't mind betting," Bob returned with heat. In some circles it is an aspersion upon a man's manliness to have it hinted that a petticoat presenting possibilities has not been ruffled.

"Well, it don't look much like it. I caught her eye in the passage when we were coming downstairs, and you don't tell me—not much!"

"Did you though?" Bob said. Himself he had never been so fortunate.

"No mistake about it. Why, d'you mean to say you've never got as far as that, even?"

"Tell you she won't look at me."

Mr. Moss laughed. Enjoyed the "score" over his host for a few moments, and then:

"Tell you what it is, old bird," said he, "you're going the wrong way about it. I know another case just the same. Chap out Wimbledon way. His people kept a girl—topper she was, too—dark. He was always messing round just like you are, and she was stand−offish as a nun. One night he came home early, a bit screwed—people out—girl in. Met her in the drawing−room. Almost been afraid to speak to her before. Had a bit of fizz on board him now—*you* know; didn't care a rip for anybody. Gave her a smacking great kiss, and, by Gad!—well, she *was* all right. Told him she'd always stood off up to then because she was never quite sure what he meant—afraid he didn't mean anything, and that she might get herself into no end of a row if she started playing around. Same with this little bit of goods, I'll lay."

Bob was interested. "Shouldn't be surprised if you're right," he said; and moodily cogitated upon the line of action prescribed.

Mr. Moss offered to bet that where girls were concerned he was never far wrong. "Slap−dash style is what they like," he remarked, and with a careless "It's all they understand" dismissed the subject.

It remained, however, in Bob's mind throughout the evening; sprang instantly when, after breakfast upon the following day, he caught a glimpse of Mary as he prepared for the City.

Standing for a moment in the hall, it occurred to him that this very evening offered the opportunity he sought. Mr. and Mrs. Chater were to dine at the house of a neighbour. The invitation had included Bob— fortunately he had refused it. Returning to the morning−room, "I shan't be in to−night," he told his mother.

"Then I needn't order any dinner for you?"

"No." He hung about irresolute, then lit a cigar, and between the puffs, "Shall you be late?" he asked carelessly.

"Sure to be," Mrs. Chater told him. "It's going to be a big bridge drive, you know. We shan't get back before midnight. Don't sit up for us, dear."

Bob inhaled a long breath from his cigar, exhaled it deliciously. The chance for the slap−dash style was at hand.

"Oh, I'll be later than you. Lemmy Moss has got a bachelors' party on. We're going to have a billiard match."

"That's capital then, dear. I shall let the servants go to Earl's Court—I've promised them a long time."

Bob whistled gaily as he mounted his 'bus for the City. The opportunity was surely exceptional.

At eight o'clock he returned; noiselessly let himself in.

The gas in the hall burned low. Beneath the library door gleamed a stronger light. Bob turned the handle.

Mary was curled in a big chair with a book. Certainly the opportunity was exceptional.

At the noise of his entry she sprang to her feet with a little cry. "Oh, dear!" she exclaimed: "what a fright you gave me!"

Bob pushed the door. He laughed. "Did I?"; came towards her. "Are you all alone? What a shame!"

"Minnie is in the kitchen, I think. Mrs. Chater said you wouldn't be in to−night."

"Why do you think I came?"

"I don't know."

"I came to see you."

She gave a nervous little laugh and made to pass him.

Bob fell back a pace, guarding the door. “Don't you think that was thoughtful of me?”

“I don't know what you mean. There was no need.”

“What! No need! You all alone like this when all the rest are enjoying themselves!”

“So was I. A long evening with a book.”

She had fallen back as he, speaking, had slowly advanced.

Now the great chair in which she had been seated was alone between them.

“Oh, books! Books are rot.” He stepped around the chair.

She fell back; was cornered between the hearth and a low table.

Bob dropped into the chair; boldly regarded her; his eyes as expressive of his slap−dash intentions as he could make them: “Look here, I want you to enjoy yourself for once. I'm going to take you to a music−hall or somewhere.”

He stretched a foot; touched her.

She drew back close against the mantelpiece, her agitation very evident.

“Well, don't that please you?”

“You know it is impossible.”

Bob paid no regard. This was that same diffidence with which the chap near Wimbledon had had to contend.

“We'll come out of the show early and have a bit of supper and be back before half−past eleven. Who's to know? Now, then?”

“It's very kind of you. I know you mean it kindly—”

“Of course I do—”

“But I'd rather not.”

“Are you afraid?”

She was desperately afraid. Her face, the shaking of her hand where it was pressed back against the wall, and the catch in her voice advertised her apprehension. She was afraid of this big young man confidently lolling before her.

She said weakly: “It would not be right.”

Bob sat up. “Is that all?” he laughed. His hands were upon the arms of the chair, and he made to pull himself up towards her.

She saw her mistake. “No,” she cried hurriedly—“no; I would not go with you in any case.”

A shadow flickered upon Bob's face. “What do you mean?”

“I mean what I say. Please let me pass.”

“I want to be friends with you. Why can't you let me?”

“Please let me pass. Mr. Chater.”

Bob lay back. He said with a laugh, “Well, I'm not stopping you, am I?”

She hesitated a moment. The passage between the table and the long chair was narrow. But truly he was not stopping her—so far as one might judge.

She took her skirts about her with her left hand; stepped forward; was almost past the chair before he moved.

Then he flung out a hand and caught her wrist, drawing her.

“Now!” he cried, and his voice was thick.

She gave a half−sound of dismay—of fear; tried to twist free. Bob laughed; pulled sharply on her arm. She was standing sideways to him— against the sudden strain lost her balance and half toppled across the chair.

As Bob reflected, when afterwards feeding upon the incident, had he not been as unprepared as she for her sudden stumble, he would have made—as he put it—a better thing of it. As it was, her face falling against his, he was but able to give a half kiss when she had writhed herself free and made across the room.

But that embrace of her had warmed Bob's passions. Springing up, he caught her as she fumbled with the latch; twisted her to him.

For a moment they struggled, he grasping her wrists and pressing towards her.

With the intention of encircling her waist he slipped his hold. But panic made her the quicker. Her outstretched arms held him at bay for a breathing space; then as he broke them down she dealt him a swinging blow upon the face that staggered him back a step, his hand to his cheek.

Mrs. Chater opened the door.

"Oh, he kissed me! He kissed me!" Mary cried.

Bob said very slowly, "You—infernal—little—liar."

Mrs. Chater glowered upon Mary with cruel eyes. "It was a fortunate thing," she said coldly, "that a headache brought me home. Go to your room, miss."

We may hurry across the bridge.

CHAPTER III. Excursions In Love.

I.

Saturday was the day immediately following this scene.

George, on a 'bus carrying him towards Regent's Park, was in spirit at one with the gay freshness that gave this September morning a spring− like air.

A week of torrid heat, in which London crawled, groaned, and panted, had been wiped from the memory by an over−night thunderstorm that burst the pent−up dams of heaven and loosed cool floods upon the staring streets. No misty drizzle nor gusty shower it had been, but a strong, straight, continuous downpour, seemingly impelled by tremendous pressure. Dusty roofs, dusty streets, dusty windows it had scoured and scrubbed and polished; torrents had poured down the gutters—whenever temporarily the pressure seemed to relax, the ears of wakeful Londoners were sung to by the gurgle and rush of frantic streams driving before them the collected debris of many days.

Upon this morning, in the result, a tempest might have swept the town and found never a speck of dust to drive before it. The very air had been washed and sweetened; and London's workers, scurrying to and from their hives, seemed also to have benefited by some attribute of the downpour that tinted cheeks, sparkled eyes, and, rejuvenating limbs, gave to them a new sprightliness of movement.

George, from his 'bus, caught many a bright eye under a jaunty little hat; gave each back its gleam from the depths of gay lightness that filled his heart. Nearing the Park he alighted; made two purchases. From a confectioner bun−corn for David and Angela, those ramping steeds; from a florist the reddest rose that an exhaustive search of stock could discover.

Mary had from him such a rose at their every meeting. She might not wear it back to Palace Gardens—it would not flourish beneath Mrs. Chater's curiosity; but while they were together she would tuck it in her bosom, and George tenderly would bear it home and set it in a vase before him to lend him inspiration as he worked.

It is almost certain that such a part is one for which flowers were especially designed.

II.

Those splendid steeds, David and Angela, having been duly exercised, groomed, and turned out to browse upon bun−corn, George rushed at once upon the matter that was singing within him.

Where he sat with his Mary they were sheltered from any but chance obtrusion. She had taken off her gloves, and George gave her hands, as they lay in her lap, a little confident pat. It was the tap of the baton with which the conductor calls together his orchestra—for this was a song that George was about to tune, very confident that the chords of both instruments that should give the notes were in a harmony complete.

He said: “Mary, do you know what I am going to talk about?”

She had been a little silent that morning, he had thought; did not answer now, but smiled.

He laid a hand upon both hers. “You must say 'yes.' You've got to say 'yes' about twenty times this morning, so start now. Do you know what I'm going to talk about?”

“Yes.”

“No objections this time?”

“Yes.”

He laughed; gave her hand a little smack of reproof. (You who have loved will excuse these lovers' absurdities.) “No, no; you are only to say 'yes' when I tell you. No objections to the subject this morning?”

His Mary told him “No.”

“Couldn't have a better morning for it, could we?”

She took a little catch at her breath.

George dropped the banter in his tone. “Nothing wrong to−day, is there, dear? Nothing up?”

How sadly wrong everything in truth was she had determined not to tell him until she more certainly knew its extent. She shook her head; reassuringly smiled.

“Well, that's all right—there couldn't be on a morning like this. Now we've got to begin at the beginning. Mary, I planned it all out last night—all this conversation. We've got to begin at the beginning—Do you know I've never told you yet that I love you? You knew it, though, didn't you, from the first, the very first? Tell me from when?”

“George, this is awfully foolish, isn't it?”

“Never mind. It's jolly nice. It's necessary, too. I've read about it. It's always done. Tell me from when you knew I loved you.”

“After last Saturday.”

“Oh, Mary! Much earlier than *that*! You must have!”

“Well, I thought perhaps you—you cared after that first day when you came here.”

“Not before that?”

She laughed. “Come, how *could* I? Why, I'd hardly seen you.”

“Well, I did, anyway,” George told her. “I loved you from the very minute you shot out of the cab that day. There! But even this isn't the proper thing. I've been promising myself all night to say four words to you—just four. Now I'm going to say them: Mary, I love you.”

She looked in his eyes for a moment, answering the signal that shone thence; and then she laughed that clear pipe of mirth which was so uniquely her own possession.

“Oh, I say, you mustn't do that,” George cried. He was really perturbed.

“I can't help it. You are so utterly foolish.”

“I'm not. It's the proper thing. I tell you I've planned it all out. I love you. I've never said it to you before. Now it's your turn.”

“But what on earth am I to say?”

“You've got to say that you love me.”

“You're making a farce of it.”

“No, I tell you I've planned it all out. I can't go on till you've said it.”

“You can't expect me to say: 'George, I love you.' It's ridiculous. It's like a funny story.”

“Oh, never mind what it's like. Do be serious, Mary. How can I be sure you love me if you won't tell me?”

For the first moment since its happening the thought of Bob Chater and of Mrs. Chater passed completely from Mary's mind. She looked around: there was no soul in sight. She listened: there was no sound. She clasped her fingers about his; leaned towards him, her face upturned....

He kissed her upon the lips....

“The plans,” said George after a moment, “have all gone fut. I never thought of that way.”

“It's much better,” Mary said.

“The other's not a patch upon it,” said George.

III.

You must conjecture of what lovers think when, following their first kiss, they sit silent. It is not a state that may be written down in such poor words as your author commands. For the touch of lips on lips is the key that turns the lock and gives admission to a world dimly conceived, yet found to have been wrongly conceived since conceived never to be so wonderful or so beautiful as it does prove. Nor, ever again, once the silence is broken and speech is found, has that world an aspect quite the same. For the door that divides this new world from the material world can never from the inside be closed. It is at first—for the space of that silence after the first kiss—pushed very close by those who have entered; but, soon after, the breath of every rushing moment blows it further and further ajar. Drab objects from the outer world drift across the threshold and obtrude their presence—vagabond tramps in a rose−garden, unpleasant, marring the surroundings, soiling the atmosphere. Cares drift in, worldly interests drift in; in drift smudgy, soiled, unpleasant objects brushing the door yet wider upon its hinges till it stands back to its furthest extent and the interior becomes at one with the outer world. The process is gradual, indiscernible. When completed the knowledge of what has been done dawns suddenly. One knocks against an intruder especially drab, starts into wakefulness to rub the bruise, and looking around exclaims, “And this is love!”

Well, it was love. But a rose−garden will not long remain beautiful if no care is taken of what may intrude.

If we but stand sentinel at the door, exercising a nice discretion, the garden may likely remain unsoiled, its air uncontaminated.

IV.

George said that though across the first portion of the scheme he had so laboriously planned he had been shot at lightning speed by the vehicle of Mary's action, its latter portion yet remained to be discussed. “We've got to marry, dearest—and as quick as quick. We can't go on like this—seeing each other once a week. No, not even if it were once a day. It's got to be always.”

“Always and always, dear,” Mary said softly.

Women are more intoxicated than men by the sudden atmosphere of that new world. The awe of it was still upon her. The light of love comes strongly to men, with the sensation of bright sunshine; to women as through stained glass windows, softly.

She continued: “Fancy saying 'always' and being glad to say it! I never thought I could. Do you know—will this frighten you?—I am one of those people who dread the idea of 'always.' I never could bear the idea of looking far, far ahead and not seeing any end. It frightened me. Ever since father died, I've been like that—even in little things, even in tangible things. When we go to the seaside in the summer I never can bear to look straight across the sea. That gives me the idea of always—of long, long miles and miles without a turn or a stop. I want to think every day, every hour, that what I am doing can't go on—mustchange. It suffocates me to think otherwise. I want to jump out, to scream.”

Then she gave that laugh that seldom failed to come to her relief, and said: “It's a sort of claustrophobia—isn't that the word?—on a universal scale. But why is it? And why am I suddenly changed now? Why does the thought of always, always, endless always with you, bring a sort of—don't laugh, dear—a sort of bliss, peace?”

This poor George of mine, who was no deep thinker, nevertheless had the reason pat. He said:

“I think because the past has all been unhappy and because this, you know, means happiness.”

She gave a little sigh; told him: “Yes, that's it—happiness.”

V.

And now they fell to making plans as mating birds build nests. Here a bit of straw and there a tuft of moss; here a feather, there a shred of wool—George would do this and George would do that; here the house would be and thus would they do in the house. Probabilities were outraged, obstacles vaulted.

Castles that are builded in the air spring into being quicker than Aladdin's palace—bricks and mortar, beams and stones are featherweight when handled in the clouds; every piece is so dovetailed, marked and numbered that like magic there springs before the eye the shining whole—pinnacled, turreted, embattled.

Disaster arrives when the work is completed. “There!” we say, standing back, a little flushed and out of breath with the excitement of the thing. “There! There's a place in which to live! Could any existence be more glorious?” And then we advance a step and lean against the walls to survey the surrounding prospect. It is the fatal action. The material body touches the aerial structure and down with a crash the castle comes—back we pitch into the foundations, and thwack, bump, thwack, comes the masonry tumbling about us, bruising, wounding.

VI.

George had built the castle. Mary had sat by twittering and clapping her hands for glee as higher and higher it rose. He knew for a fact, he told her, that his uncle had not expended upon his education much more than half the money left him for the purpose. He was convinced that by hook or by crook he could obtain the 400 pounds that would buy him the practice at Runnygate of which the Dean had told him. They would have a little house there—the town would thrive—the practice would nourish—in a year—why, in a year they would likely enough have to be thinking of getting a partner! And it would begin almost immediately! In three weeks the examination would be held. He could not fail to pass—then for the 400 pounds and Runnygate!

And then, unhappily, George leaned against this castle wall; provoked the crash.

“Till then, dear,” he said, “you will stay with these Chater people. I know you hate it; but it will be only a short time, a few weeks at most.”

Instantly her gay twittering ceased. Trouble drove glee from her eyes. Memory chased dreams from her brain.

Distress tore down the gay colours from her cheeks. She clasped her hands; from her seat half rose.

"Oh!" she cried; and again, "Oh! I had forgotten!"

"Forgotten? Forgotten what?"

"Dearest, I should have told you at the beginning, but I could not. I wanted to wait until I knew. I have not seen her yet this morning."

My startled George was becoming pale. "Knew what? Seen whom? What do you mean?"

She said, "No, I won't tell you. I won't spoil all this beautiful morning we have spent. I will wait till next week."

"Mary, what do you mean? Wait till next week? No. You must tell me now. How could I leave you like this, knowing you are in some trouble? What has happened? You must tell. You must. I insist."

"Ah, I will." Her agitation, as her mind cast back over the events of the previous night, was enhanced by the suddenness of the change from the sunshine in which she had been disporting to the darkness that now swept upon her. She was as a girl who, singing along a country lane, is suddenly confronted from the hedgeside by some ugly tramp.

She said, "You know that young Mr. Chater?"

Dark imaginings clouded upon George's brow. "Yes," he said. "Yes; well—?"

"Last night—" And then she gave him the history of events.

This simple George of mine writhed beneath it.

It was a poison torturing his system, twisting his brow, knotting his hands. Her presence, when she finished, did not stay his cry beneath his rackings: he was upon his feet. "By Gad," he cried, "I'll thrash the life out of him! The swine! By Gad, I'll kill him!"

She laid a hand upon his arm. "Georgie, dear," she pleaded. "Don't, don't take it like that. I haven't finished."

Roughly he turned upon her. "Well, what else? What else?"

"I haven't seen him since. He went away early this morning for the week−end. And I have not seen Mrs. Chater again either. I am to see her this afternoon. She sent me word to take the children as usual and that she would see me at three."

My poor George bitterly broke out: "Oh! Will she? That's kind of her! That's delightful of her! Are you going to see her?"

"Of course I shall see her."

"'Of course'! 'Of course'! I don't know what you mean by talking in that tone. You won't stay there another minute! That's what you'll tell her if you insist upon seeing her. If you had behaved properly you'd have walked out of the house there and then when it happened last night."

Spite of her trouble Mary could not forbear to laugh. "Dearest, how could I?"

But this furious young man could not see her point. His fine passion swept him above contingencies.

"Well, then, this morning," he laid down. "The first thing this morning you should have gone." He supplied detail: "Packed your box, and called a cab and gone."

His dictatory air drew from her another sad little laugh.

"Oh, George, dear," she cried, "gone where?"

It was a bucket of water dashed upon his flames, and for a moment they flickered beneath it—then roared again: "*Where? Anywhere!*"

"Oh!" she cried, "you are stupid! You don't see—you don't understand! Easy to say 'anywhere,' but where—*where*? I have no money. I have no friends—I—"

The knowledge of her plight and her outlook crowded upon her speech; broke her voice.

Her distracted George in a moment had her hands in his. "Oh, my dear," he cried, "what a fool I am! What a beast to storm like that! I was so wild. So mad. Of course you had to think before you moved. You were right, of course you were right. But, my darling, I'm right now. You see that, don't you? You can't stay a moment longer with those beasts."

And then he laughed grimly. "Especially," he added, "after what I'm going to do to Master Bob."

She too laughed. The thought of Bob learning manners beneath the tuition of those sinewy brown hands that were about hers was very pleasant to her. But it was a pleasure that must be denied—this she saw clearly as the result of weary tossings throughout the night; and now she set about the task of explaining it to George.

She said: “Oh, my dear, you're not right. Georgie, I can't go—if Mrs. Chater will let me stay I must stay.”

He tried to be calm, to understand these women, to understand his Mary. “But why?” he asked. “Why?”

“Dearest, because I must bridge over the time until you are ready to take me. You see that?”

“Of course. But why there? You can easily get another place.”

“Oh, easily! If you had been through it as I have been! The first thing they ask you for is a reference from your former situation. Think what a reference Mrs. Chater would give me!”

He would not agree. He plunged along in his blundering, man fashion: “In time you could get a place where they would not ask questions—or rather—yes, of course this is it. Tell them frankly all that happened. Who could see you and not believe you? Tell them everything. There must be some nice people in the world.”

“There may be. But they don't want helps or governesses—in my experience.” The little laugh she gave was sadly doleful.

He was still angry. “You can't generalise like that. There are thousands who would believe you and be glad to take you. Suppose you have to wait a bit—well, you have a little money that she must give you; and I—oh, curse my poverty!—I can borrow, and I can sell things.”

The help that a man would give a woman so often has lack of sympathy; he is unkind while meaning to be kind. George's obdurateness, coming when she was most in need of kisses, hurt her. Trouble welled in her eyes.

“I wouldn't do that,” she said. “For one thing, we want all our money. Why throw it away to get me out of a place in which I shall only be for a few weeks longer? Another thing—another thing—” She dragged a ridiculous handkerchief from her sleeve; dabbed her brimming eyes. “Another thing—I'm afraid to risk it. I'm afraid to be alone and looking for a place again. There—now you know. I'm a coward.”

She fell to sniffing and sobbing; and her wretched George, cursing himself for the grief he had evoked, cursing Bob Chater, cursing Mrs. Chater, cursing his uncle Marrapit, put his arms about her and drew her to him. She quivered hysterically, and he frantically moaned that he was a beast, a brute, unworthy; implored forgiveness; entreated calm; by squeezing her with his left arm and with his right hand dabbing her eyes with her handkerchief, screwed to a pathetic little damp ball, strove to stem the flood that alarmingly welled from them.

VII.

It was an awful position for any young man; and just as my poor George, distinguished in nothing, inept, bewildered, was in a mood murderous to the whole world save this anguished fairy, a wretched old gentleman must needs come sunning himself down the path, making for this seat with hobbling limbs.

He collapsed upon it, and then, glancing to his right, was struck with palpitations by sight of the heaving back of a young woman over whose shoulder glared at him with hideous ferocity the face of a young man.

“Dear me, dear me,” said he; “nothing wrong, sir, I trust?”

“Go away!” roared my distracted George.

“Eh?” inquired the old gentleman, horribly startled.

“Go away! Go away!”

The fire of those baleful eyes, of that bellowing voice, struck terror into the aged heart. He clutched his stick.

“Oh dear, oh dear,” said he; hobbled away at a speed dangerous to his life and limbs to seek protection of a park−keeper.

The sobs grew longer, less hysterical: changed into long “ohs” of misery; died away.

“There, there,” said George, patting, dabbing. “There, there.”

With a final frantic sniff she recovered her self−possession.

“I'm a little f—fool,” said she.

“I'm a brute,” said George.

The bitter knowledge nerved each to better efforts. Calm reigned.

Mary said, “Now you must listen and believe, dear.”

“Let me have your hand, then.”

She gave it with a little confiding, snuggling movement, and she continued: “You must believe, because I have thought it all out, whereas to you it is new. If I were a proper−spirited girl”—she rebuked his negation with a gesture—“if I were a proper−spirited girl I know I should leave Mrs. Chater at once—walk out and not care what I might suffer rather than stay where I had been insulted. Girls in books would do it. Oh, Georgie, this isn't books.

This is real. I have been through it, and I would die sooner than face it again. You know—I have told you—what it is like being alone in cheap lodgings in London. Afraid of people, dear. Afraid of men, afraid of women. I couldn't, could not go through it again. And after all−don't you see? —if Mrs. Chater will let me stay, what have I to mind? I shall be better off than before, if anything. Mrs. Chater has always been— well, sharp. She may be a little worse—there's nothing in that. But this Bob Chater, since he came, has been the worst part of it. And as things are now, his mother watchful and he—what shall I say? angry, ashamed—why, he will pay no further attention to me. Come, am I not right? Isn't it best?—if only she will let me stay."

"I don't like it," George said. "I don't like it."

"Dearest, nor I. But we can't, can't have what we like, and this will be the best of the nasty things. For so short a time, too. I'm quite bright about it. Am I not? Look at me."

George looked. Then he said, "All right, old girl."

She clapped her hands. "Only one thing more. You mustn't seek out—you mustn't touch the detestable Bob."

With the gloom of one relinquishing life's greatest prize George said, "I suppose I mustn't." He added, "I tell you what, though. You mustn't interfere with this. I'll save it up for him. The day I take you out and marry you I'll pull him out—and pay him."

They parted upon the promises that Mary would write that evening to tell him of the result of her interview with Mrs. Chater, and that, in the especial circumstances, he might come to see her in the Park for just two minutes on Monday morning.

And each went home, thinking, not of that portending interview with Mrs. Chater, but upon the love they had declared.

CHAPTER IV. Events And Sentiment Mixed In A Letter.

I.

At ten o'clock that night Mary took up her pen.

“First, my dear, to tell you that it is all right. I may stay. I had lunch with the children in the nursery, and just as we had finished a maid came to say that Mrs. Chater would see me in the study. Down I crawled, wishing that I was the heroine of a novel who would have passed firmly down the stairs and into the room, 'pale, but calm and serene.' Oh! I was pale enough, I feel sure. But as to serene!—my heart was flapping about just like a tin ventilator in a wind, and I was jumpy all over. You see what a coward am I.

“Mrs. Chater had grown since last I saw her. Of that I am convinced. She sat, enormous, thunder−browed, bolt upright in a straight chair. I stood and quivered. Books are all wrong, dear. In books the consciousness of virtue gives one complete self−possession in the face of any accusation, however terrible. In books it is the accuser of the innocent who is ill at ease. Oh, don't believe it! Mrs. Chater had the self−possession, I had the jim−jams.

“'I have not seen you since last night,' she said.

“I gave a kind of terrified little squeak. I had no words.

“'Your version of what happened I do not wish to hear,' she went on.

“This relieved me, because for the life of me I could not have told her had she wished to hear it. So I gave another little mouse−squeak.

“'My son has told me.' Her voice was like a deep bell. 'How you can reconcile your conduct with the treatment that you have received at my hands, here beneath my roof'—she was very dramatic at this point—'I do not know.'

“Nor did I—but not in the way she meant. I was thinking how ignoble was my meek attitude in light of what had happened. But you don't know what it was like, facing that woman and dreading the worse fate of being turned out into this awful London again. Another wretched little squeak slipped out of me, and she went on.

“'My boy,' said she, 'has implored me to overlook this matter. My boy has declared there were faults on both sides' (!!!!). 'If I acted rightly as a mother, what would I do?'

“I didn't tell her, Georgie. Could I tell her that if she acted rightly as a mother she would box her boy's fat ears until his nose bled? I couldn't. I squeaked instead.

“'If I acted rightly as a mother,' said she, 'I would send you away. I am not going to.'

“I squeaked.

“'I choose to believe that your behaviour in this matter was a slip. I believe the episode will be a lesson to you. That is all. Go.' I goed.”

II.

George, when he had read thus far, was broadly grinning. Obviously Mrs. Chater was not such a bad sort after all. If—as no doubt—she implicitly believed her son's version of the incident, then her attitude towards Mary was, on the whole, not so bad.

But his Mary, when she had written thus far, laid down her pen, put her pretty head upon the paper and wept.

“Oh, my dear!” she choked. “There, that will make you think it was all right. You shall never know—never—what really happened. Oh, Georgie, Georgie, come very quick and take me away! How can I go on living with these beasts? Oh, Georgie, be quick, be quick!”

Then this silly Mary with handkerchief, with india−rubber, and with pen−knife erased a stain of grief that had fallen upon her pretty story; sniffed back her tears; lifted again her pen.

Now she wrote in an eager scrawl; nib flying. Had her George not been so very ordinary a young man he must have perceived the difference between that first portion so neatly penned—parti−coloured words showing where the ink had dried while the poor little brain puzzled and planned at every syllable—and this where emotion sped the thoughts.

III.

“So that's all right” (she wrote), “and now we've only got to wait, a few, few weeks. Dearest, will they fly or will they drag? What does love do to time, I wonder—whip or brake?—speed or pull? Georgie mine, I feel I don't care. If the days fly I shall be riding in them— galloping to you, wind in the face; shouting them on; standing up all flushed with the swing and the rush of it; waving to the people we go thundering past and gazing along the road where soon I will see you— nearer and nearer and nearer.

“And if the days creep? Well, at first, after that picture, the thought seems melancholy, unbearable. But that is wrong. The realisation will not be unbearable. If they creep, why, then I shall lie in them, very comfortable, very happy; dreaming of you, seeing you, speaking with you, touching you. Yes, touching you. For, my dear, you are here in the room with me as I write. I look up just to my right, and there you are, Georgie mine; sitting on the end of my bed, smiling at me. You have not left me, my dear, since we parted on the seat this morning. Why, I cannot even write that it is only in imagination that I see you. For me it is not imagination. I do, do see you, Georgie mine. You are part of me, never to leave me.

“How new, how different, love makes life! Everything I do, everything I see, everything I hear has a new interest because it is something to share with you, something to save up and tell you. I am in trouble (you understand that I am not, shall never be again; this is only illustration—you must read it 'if I were in trouble'). I am in trouble, and you are sharing it with me, sympathising so that trouble is an unkind word for what is indeed but an opportunity acutely to feel the joy of loving and being loved. I am happy, and the happiness is a thousandfold increased because it comes to me warmed through you. I am amused, and it is something to tell you and to laugh at the more heartily by the compelling sound of your own laughter.

“Everything is new. Why, my very clothes are new. Look, here in my left hand is my handkerchief. Only a handkerchief this morning, and to other eyes still but a handkerchief. But to mine! Why, you have had it in your hand and indeed it speaks to me of you. Here you laid your arm, this was the side upon which you touched me as we sat together, here in my hair your fingers caressed me—each and all they are new— different from this morning.

“Are you thinking me silly when I write like this, or are you dreadfully bored with it? I can't help it, Georgie; love means so much more to us women than to you men. It is essentially different. When a man in love thinks of the woman he thinks of her as 'mine,' and that thrills him—possession. But when the woman thinks of him she thinks of herself as 'his,' and that moves every fibre of her, strikes every chord—capitulation. The man expresses love by saying 'You are mine'; the woman by 'I am yours.' That is how it is with me. I sing to myself that I am yours, yours, yours. I want you to have every bit of me. I want you to know every thought I have. If I had bad thoughts, I would tell them you. If I had desires, I would make them known and would not blush. I want you to see right into my very heart. I want to lay everything before you—to come to you bound and naked. That is what love is with women, dear. Some of us resist it, school it otherwise— but I do not think they are happy; not really happy. It is our nature to be as I have said, and to fight against nature is wearying work, leaving marks: it is to get tossed aside out of the sun.

“Are you thinking me unutterably tiresome and foolish?—but you will not think that; because you love me.

“Ah, let me write that again!−because you love me. And let me write this: I love you.

“My dear, is not that curious?—the precious joy of saying 'I love you,' and the constant yearning to hear it said. Not lovers alone have this joy and this desire. Mothers teach their babies to say 'I love you, mother,' and constantly and constantly they ask, 'Do you love me, baby? '—yes, and are not satisfied until they have the assurance. And babies, too, will get up suddenly from their toys to run to say, 'Mother, I *do* love you.'

“Why is it? Why is love so doubted that it must for ever be declared? So doubted that even those who do love must constantly be proclaiming the fact to the object of their affections, impelled either by the subconscious fear that that object mistrusts the devotion, or by the subconscious fear that they themselves are under delusion and must protest aloud—just as a child upon the brink of being frightened in the dark will say aloud, 'I'm not afraid!' Why is it?

“Actions are allowed to proclaim hate, deeds suffice to advertise sympathy, but love must be testified by bond. To what crimes must love have been twisted and contorted that it should come to such a pass? How often must it have been used as disguise to be now thus suspected?

“You never knew I thought of things like this, did you?

“My dear dear, I who am so frivolous think of yet deeper things. And I would speak of them to you tonight,

for I would have you know my heart and mind as, dearest (how dear to think!), you know my face. Yes, of deeper things. I suppose clever people would laugh at the religion my mother and father lived in, taught me, died in, and now is mine. They believed—and I believe—in what I have heard called the Sunday School God! the God who lives, who listens, and to whom I pray. I have read books attempting to shatter this belief—yes, and I think succeeding because written with a cunning appeal only to the intelligence of man. Can such a Being as God exist? they ask. And since man's intelligence can only grasp proved facts, proofs are heaped upon proof that He cannot. The impossibilities are heaped until man must—of his limitations—cry that it is impossible. But in my belief God is above the possibilities—not to be judged by them, not to be reduced to them. I suppose such a belief is Faith—implicit Faith—the Faith that we are told makes all things possible. Well, fancy, for the sake of having a 'religion' that comes into line with 'reason,' abandoning the sense of comfort that comes after prayer! Fancy receiving a 'reasoned' belief and paying for it the solace of entreating help in the smallest trouble and in the largest!

"Do you know, my dear dear, that I pray for you every night?—for your health, your happiness, and your success?

"Now you know a little more of me. Is there more to learn, I wonder? Not if I can make it clear.

"The candle is in a most melancholy condition: in the last stage of collapse. I have prodded it out from its socket with my knife and set it flabbily on a penny—so it must work to its very last drop of life. That will not be long delayed. I shall suddenly be plunged into darkness and must undress in the dark. I shall be smiling all the time I am undressing, my thoughts with you.

"At eleven—ten minutes' time—I am to be leaning from the window gazing at Orion as you too—so we agreed—will be gazing. Each will know the other has his thoughts, and we will say 'good−night.' How utterly foolish! How contemptibly absurd, common!—and how mystically delightful! You and I with Orion for the apex of eye's sight and our thoughts flying from heart to heart the base!

"Georgie mine, if we had never met could we have ever been so happy? Impossible! Impossible! Before I pray for you to−night, I thank God for you.

"I have kissed the corner where I shall just be able to squeeze in— good−night."

Such was her letter−disloyal to women in its exposure of those truths of women's love which are theirs by the heritage of ages, by their daily training from childhood upward, and against which they should most desperately battle; simple in its ideas of religion; silly in its baby sentiment.

Such was my Mary.

CHAPTER V. Beefsteak For 14 Palace Gardens.

I.

Friday was the night of the incident in the library between Bob Chater and Mary; Saturday the exchange of love in the Park between Mary and her George; Saturday evening the writing of Mary's letter; upon Monday George read it.

Now it was Monday morning, and precisely at ten o'clock three persons set out for the same seat in Regent's Park—the mind of each filled with one of the others, empty of all thought of the third.

Mary—accompanied by David and Angela—carried towards the seat the image of her George, but had no heed of Mr. Bob Chater's existence; she was the magnet that drew Bob, ignorant of George; George sped to his Mary and had no thought of Bob.

Our young men were handicapped in point of distance. Mary, with but a short half−mile to go, must easily be first to make the seat; Bob, coming to town from a week−end up the river, would occupy little short of an hour. George from Herons' Holt to that dear seat, allowed full seventy−five minutes.

II.

Upon the whole, Mr. Bob Chater had not enjoyed his week−end; ideally circumstanced, for once the attractions it offered had failed to allure.

Mr. Lemmy Moss, in the tiny riparian cottage he rented for the summer months, was the most excellent of hosts; Claude Avinger was widely known as a rattling good sort; the three young ladies who came down early on Sunday morning and had no foolish objections to staying indecorously late, were in face, figure and morals all that Bob, Lemmy, and Claude could desire. Yet throughout that day in the cushioned punt Bob won more pouts than smiles from the lady who fell to his guardianship.

Disgustedly she remarked to her friends on the home journey, “Fairly chucked myself at him, the deadhead ”—wherein, I apprehend, lay her mistake. For whether a man's assault upon a woman be dictated by love or desire, its vehemence is damped by acquiescence, spurred by rebuff. Doubtless for our lusty forefathers one−half the fascination of obtaining to wife the naked ladies who caught their eye lay in the tremendous excitement of snatching them from their tribes; while for the ladies, the joy of capture comprised a great proportion of the amorous delights.

The characteristics remain. Maidens are more decorously won to−day; their tribes do not defend them; but they do the fighting for themselves. The sturdier the defence they are able to make, the greater the joy of at length being won; while, for the suitor, the more pains he hath endured in process of conquest the more keenly doth he relish his captive.

So with Bob. The young lady fairly chucking herself at him in the punt he could not forbear to contrast with the enticing reserve of Mary. The more playfully (or desperately, poor girl) she chucked herself at him, the more did her charms cloy as against those of that other prize who so stoutly kept him at arm's−length. Nay, the more strenuously did she seek to entice his good offices, the more troubled was he to imagine why another of her sex should so slightingly regard him.

Thus, as the day wore on, was Bob thrice impelled towards Mary—by initial attraction of her beauty; by natural instinct to show himself master where, till now, he had been bested; and by the stabbings of his wounded vanity.

On Monday morning, then, he caught the ten o'clock train to town, hot in the determination immediately to see her and instantly to press his suit. He would try, he told himself, a new strategy. Bold assault had been proved ill−advised; for frontal attack must be substituted an advance more crafty. Its plan required no seeking. He would play—and, to a certain extent, would sincerely play—the part of penitent. He would apologise for Friday's lapse; would explain it to have been the outcome of sheer despair of ever winning her good graces.

As to where he would find her he had no doubts. Dozing one day over a book, he had not driven David and Angela from the room until they had forced upon him a wearisome account of the secluded seat they had

discovered in Regent's Park. His patience in listening was an example of the profit of casting one's bread upon the waters; for, making without hesitation for the seat, he discovered Mary.

III.

The children, as he approached, were standing before her. David had scratched his finger, and the three were breathlessly examining the wounded hand for traces of the disaster. Brightly Mary was explaining that the place of the wound was over the home of very big drops of “blug,” which could not possibly squeeze out of so tiny a window; when Angela, turning at footsteps, exclaimed: “Oh, dear, oh, dear, what *shall* we do? Here's Bob!”

Alarm drummed in Mary's heart: fluttered upon her cheeks. She had felt, as she told her George, so certain that from Bob she had now not even acknowledgment to fear, that this deliberate intrusion set her mind bounding into disordered apprehensions—stumbling among them, terrified, out of breath.

When he had raised his hat, bade her good morning, she could but sit dumbly staring at him−questioning, incapable of speech.

It was Angela that answered his salutation: “Oh, why *have* you come here? You spoil *everything*.”

“Hook!” said Bob.

David asked: “What's hook?”

“Run away.”

“Why?”

“Because I tell you to.”

“Why?”

Bob exclaimed: “Hasn't mother told you not to say 'Why' like that? Run away and play. I want to speak to Miss Humfray.”

David swallowed the rising interrogation; substituted instead an observant poke: “Miss Humfray doesn't want to speak to you. She hates you.”

The uncompromising directness of these brats, their gross ill−mannerliness, was a matter of which Bob made constant complaint to his mother. The belief that he observed a twitch at the corner of Mary's mouth served further to harden his tones.

He said: “Look here, you run away when I tell you, or I'll see you don't come out here any more.”

“Why?”

Bob swallowed. It was necessary before he spoke to clear his tongue of the emotions that surged upon it.

Angela, in the pause, entreated David: “Oh, don't keep saying 'Why?', David,” and before he could ask the reason she addressed Bob: “We won't go for you. If Miss Humf'ay tells us to go, *then* we will go.”

Bob looked at Mary. “I only want to speak to you for a minute.”

Amongst the slippery apprehensions in which she had taken flight Mary had struggled to the comfortable rock that Bob's appearance must have been chance, not deliberate—how should he have known where to seek them? Sure ground, too, was made by the belief that it were well to take the apology with which doubtless he had come—well to be on good terms.

Encouraged by these supports, “Shoo!” she cried to her charges. “Don't you hear what your brother asks?”

“Do *you* want us to go?”

“Oh, shoo! shoo!”

Laughing, they shoo'd.

Bob let them from earshot. “I want to say how sorry I am about Friday night.”

“I have forgotten all that.”

“I want to know that you have forgiven me.”

“I tell you I have forgotten it.”

“That is not enough. You can't have forgotten it.” He took a seat beside her; repeated: “You can't have forgotten it. How can you have forgotten a thing that only happened three days ago?”

“In the sense that I have wiped it out—I do not choose to remember it.”

“Well, I remember it. I cannot forget it. I behaved very badly. I want to know that you forgive me.”

She told him: “Yes, then—oh yes, yes.” His persistence alarmed her, set her again to flight among her apprehensions.

"Not when you say it like that."

Her breath came in jerks, responsive to the unsteady flutters of her heart. She made an effort for control; for the first time turned to him: "Mr. Chater, please go."

Her words pricked every force that had him there—desire, obstinacy, wounded vanity.

"Why do you say that?" he asked.

"You happened to be passing—"

"Nothing of the kind," he told her.

"You have come purposely?" One foothold that seemed safe was proving false.

"Of course. I tell you—why won't you believe me?—that I have been ashamed of myself ever since that night. At the first opportunity I have come straight to tell you so, I ought to be in the City. I could not rest until I had made my apology."

"Well, you have made it—I don't mean to say that sharply. I think—I think it is very nice of you to be so anxious, and I freely accept your apology. But don't you see that you are harming me by staying here? I beg you to go."

"How am I harming you? Am I so distasteful to you that you can't bear me near you?"

This was the personal note that of all her apprehensions had given Mary greatest alarm. "Surely you see that you are harming me—I mean hurting me—I mean, yes, getting me into trouble by staying like this with me. Mrs. Chater might have turned me off on Saturday—"

"I spoke for you."

"Yes." The words choked her, but she spoke them—"I am grateful to you for that. But if she found me talking to you again—especially if she knew you came here to see me, she would send me away at once. She told me so."

"How is she to know?"

"The children—"

"I'll take care of that."

"You can't prevent it. In any case—"

Bob said bitterly: "In any case! Yes, that's it. In any case you hate the sight of me."

She cried: "Oh, why will you speak like that? I mean that in any case it is not right. I promised."

Bob laughed. "If that's all, it is all right. You didn't promise for me."

"It makes no difference. You say you are sorry—I believe you are sorry. You can only show it one way. Mr. Chater, please leave me alone."

Her pretty appeal was fatal to her desire. It enhanced her graces. In both phrase and tone it was different from similar request in the petulant mouths of those ladies amongst whom Bob purchased his way. Dissatisfied, they would have said "Oh, chuck it! Do!" But "Mr. Chater, please leave me alone!"—that had the effect of moving Mr. Chater a degree closer along the seat.

He said: "You shan't have cause to blame me. Look here, you haven't asked me to explain my conduct on Friday."

"I don't wish you to."

"Don't you want to know?"

She shook her head.

"Aren't you curious?" His voice was low with a note of intensity. This was love−making, as he. knew the pursuit.

He went on: "I'm sure you're curious. Look here, I'm going to tell you."

"I'm going," she said; made to rise.

He caught her hand where it lay on her lap; pressed her down. "You're not. If you do I shall follow—but I won't let you," and he pressed again in advertisement.

Now she was alarmed—not for the result of this interview, but for its very present perils. Fear strangled her voice, but she said, "Let me go."

"You must hear me, then."

"I wish to go."

"You must stay to hear me." He believed a fierce assault would now win the heights. He released her hand; but she was still his prisoner, and he leant towards her averted head.

"I'm going to tell you why I behaved like that that night. It was because I could not contain myself any longer. You had always been so icy to me; kept me at arm's−length, barely let me speak to you; and all the time I was burning to tell you that I loved you—there, you know it now. On that night you were still cold when you might have been only barely civil and I could have contained myself. But you would not give me a word, and at last all that was in me for you burst out and I could not hold myself. It was unkind; it was frightening to you, perhaps; but was it a crime?—is it a crime to love?"

His flow checked, waiting an impulse from her.

She was but capable of a little "Oh!"—the crest of a gasp.

He misread her emotion. "Has it all been pretence, your keeping me from you like this? I believe it has. But now that you know you will be kind. Tell me. Speak."

Encouraged by her silence he took her hand.

That touch acted as a cold blast upon her fevered emotions. Now she was calm.

She shook off his hand. "Have you done?"

The tone more than the question warned him.

"Well?" he said; sullen wrath gathering.

"Well, never speak to me again."

"You won't be friends?"

"Friends! With you!"

Her meaning—that he had lost—stung him; her tone—that she despised him—was a finger in the wound.

He gripped her arm. "You little fool! How are you going to choose? If I want to be friends with you, how are you going to stop it? By God, if you want to be enemies it will be the worse for you. If I can't be friends with you at home, I'll get you turned out and I'll make you be friends outside."

She was trying to twist her arm from his grasp.

He gripped closer. "No, I don't mean that. I love you—that's why I talk so when you rebuff me. I'll not hurt you. We shall—I will be friends."

His right arm held her. He slipped his left around her, drew her to him, and with his lips had brushed her cheek before she was aware of his intention.

The insult swept her free of every thought but its memory. By a sudden motion she slipped from his grasp and to her feet; faced him.

"You beast!" she cried. "You beast!"

He half rose; made a half grab at her.

She stepped back a pace; something in her action reminded him of that stinging blow she had dealt him in the library; he dropped back to his seat and she turned and fled up the path whither Angela and David had toddled.

IV.

It was while Bob sat gazing after her, indeterminate, that he felt a hand from behind the seat upon his shoulder; looked up to see a tall young man, fresh faced, but fury−browed, regarding him.

"What's your name?" asked George.

"What the devil's that to do with you?"

The tone of the first question had been of passion restrained. The passion broke now from between George's clenched teeth, flamed in his eyes.

He tightened his grip upon the other's shoulder so that he pinched the flesh.

"A lot to do with me," he cried. "Is it Chater?"

"What if it is? Let me go, damn you!"

"Let you go! I've been itching for you for weeks! What have you been saying to Miss Humfray?"

"Damn you! Take off your hand! She's a friend of yours, is she?"

My furious George choked: "Engaged to me." Further bit upon his passion he could not brook. He brought his free hand down with a crash upon the face twisted up at him; relaxed his hold; ran round the seat− —those brown hands clenched.

If Bob Chater at no time had aching desire for a brawl, he was at least no coward: here the events he had suffered well sufficed to whip his blood to action. He sprang to his feet, was upon them as George, sideways to

him, came round the arm of the seat; lunged furiously and landed a crack upon the cheekbone that spun George staggering up the path.

It was a good blow, a lusty blow—straight from the shoulder and with body and leg work behind it; a blow that, happier placed, might well have won the battle.

A ring upon Bob's finger cut the flesh he struck, and he gave a savage “Ha!” of triumph as he saw George go spinning and the red trickle come breaking down his cheek.

A great ridge in the gravel marked the thrust of foot with which George stayed his stagger, from which he impelled the savage spring that brought him within striking distance.

There was no science. This was no calmly prepared fight with cool brains directing attack, searching weak points, husbanding strength, deft in defence. Here was only the animal instinct to get close and wound; to grapple and wound again.

George it was that provoked this spirit. Till now he had not seen this flushed face before him. But he had for many days conjured it up in his fancy—sharpening upon it the edge of his wrath, bruising himself against the wall of wise conduct that kept him from meeting and visiting upon it the distress his Mary had endured.

Now that he saw it in the flesh (and it was not unlike his conception), he came at it with the impulse of one who, straining against a rope, rushes headlong forward when a knife parts the bond.

The impulse thus given more than countered the greater bulk and reach that should have told in Bob's scale. Bob felt his wits and his courage simultaneously deserting him before the pell−mell of blows that came raining against his guard. Whensoever he effected a savage smash that momentarily checked the fury, it served but to bring back this seemingly demented young man with a new rush and ardour.

Bob gave step by step, struck short−arm, felt the faint saltness of blood upon his lips, staggered back before a tremendous hit between the eyes, stumbled, tripped, fell.

“Get up!” George bellowed; waited till Bob came rushing, and sent him reeling again with a broken tooth that cut the brown knuckles.

Bob lacked not courage and had proved it, for he was sorely battered. But the pluck in him was whipped and now venom alone bade him make what hurt he could.

His heavy stick was leaning against the seat. He seized it; swung it high; crashed a blow that must have split the head it aimed.

George slipped aside; the blow missed. He poised himself as Bob, following the impulse, went staggering by; put all his weight behind a crashing hit and sent him spinning prone with a blow that was fittingly final to the exhibition of lusty knocks.

Bob propped himself on one arm, rose to his feet; glared; hesitated— then fell to brushing his knees.

It was a masterly white flag.

“Had enough?” George panted. “Had enough? Are you whipped, you swine?”

Bob assiduously brushed.

“When you're better, let me know,” George cried; turned and hurried up the path whither Mary had disappeared.

The forced draught of fury, pain, and exertion sent Bob's breath roaring in and out in noisy blasts—now long and laboured, now spasmodic quick.

He examined his bill of health and damage. Face everywhere tender to the touch; clothes dust−covered and torn; both knees of trousers rent; silk hat stove in when in a backward rush he had set his foot upon it. His tongue discovered a broken tooth, his handkerchief a bleeding nose, his fingers blood upon his chin, trickling to his shirt front.

So well as might be he brushed his person; straightened his hat; clapped handkerchief to his mouth; past staring eyes, grinning faces, hurried out of the Park to bury himself in a cab.

V.

From a window Mrs. Chater saw the bruised figure of her darling boy alight; with palpitating heart rushed to greet him.

“Bob! My boy! My boy! What has happened?”

Her boy brushed past; bounded to his room. Laboriously, sick with fear, the devoted mother toiled in

pursuit—found him in his room tearing off his coat.

"My boy! My boy!"

Her boy bellowed: "*Hot water!*"

Can a mother's tender care cease towards the child she bare?

Oh! needless to ask such a question, you for whom is pictured this devoted woman plunging at breakneck speed for the bathroom, screaming as she runs: "Susan! Kate! Jane! Jane! Kate! Susan!"

Doors slammed, cries echoed, stairs shook, as trembling servants rushed responsive.

Crashing of cans, rushing of water, called them to the bathroom.

"Oh, m'am! What is it?"

Water flew in sprays as the agonised mother tested its temperature with her hands; cans rattled as she kicked them from where, in dragging one from the shelf, the others had clattered about her feet.

Jane, Kate, and Susan clustered in alarm about the door: "Oh, m'am! M'am! Whatever is it?"

Mrs. Chater gave no reply. Her can full, she plunged through them. This way and that they dodged to give her passage; dodge for dodge, demented, hysterical, she gave them—slopping boiling water on to agonised toes; bursting through at last; thundering up the stairs.

The three plunged after her: "Oh, m'am! M'am! Whatever is it?"

The devoted woman paused at the head of the stairs; screamed down orders: "Sticking−plaster! Lint! Cotton−wool! Mr. Bob has had an accident! Hot−water bottles! Ice! Doctor! Go for the doctor, one of you!"

A figure with battered face above vest and pants bounded from its room. "No!" Bob roared. "No!"

"No!" Mrs. Chater echoed, not knowing to what the negative applied, but hysterically commanding it.

"No!" screamed the agitated servants, one to another.

"No! no doctor!" bellowed Bob; grabbed the can from his mother; shot back to his room.

"No doctor!" Mrs. Chater screamed to the white−faced pack upon the stairs; fled after him.

"My boy! Tell me!"

Her boy raised his dripping face from the basin. "For God's sake shut the door!" he roared.

She did. "Tell me!" she trembled.

"It's that damned girl."

"That girl?"

"Miss Humfray!"

"Miss Humfray! Done that to you! Oh, your poor face! Your poor face!"

"No!—no! Do be quiet, mother! Some infernal man she goes about with in the Park! I spoke to him and he set on me!"

"The infamous creature! The wicked, infamous girl! A bad girl, I knew it!—"

Agitated tapping at the door: "The cotton−wool m'am." "Sticking−plaster, m'am." "'Ot bottle, m'am."

"Go away!" roared Bob. "Go away! O−oo, my face!" He hopped in wrath and pain. "Send those damned women away!"

Mrs. Chater rushed to the door. Passing, she for the first time caught full sight of her son's face now that the hot water had exposed its wreck. "Oh, your eyes! Your poor eyes! They're closing up!"

Bob staggered to the mirror; discovered the full horror of his marred beauty. "Curse it!" he groaned and gave an order.

Mrs. Chater flew to the telephone.

In the office of Mr. Samuel Hock, purveyor of meat, by appointment, to the Prince of Wales, the telephone bell sharply rang. Mr. Hock stepped to the receiver, listened, then bellowed an order into the shop:

"One of beefsteak to 14 Palace Gardens, sharp!"

CHAPTER VI. A Cab For 14 Palace Gardens.

I.

With tremendous strides, with emotion roaring in and out his nostrils in gusty blasts of fury, my passionate George encompassed the Park this way and that until he came at length upon his trembling Mary.

Save for that first blow where Bob's ring had marked his cheek he had suffered but little in the fight—sufficiently, notwithstanding, coupled with his colossal demeanour, for Mary's eyes to discover that something was amiss.

She came to him; cried at a little distance: “Oh, dearest, I—I could not meet you at the seat.”

Then she saw more clearly. She asked: “What has happened?” and stood with quivering lip recording the flutters of her heart.

George took one hand; patted it between both his. For the moment his boiling anger cooled beneath grim relish of his news. “I've pretty well killed that Chater swine,” he said.

“Mr. Chater?—you've met Mr. Chater?”

Now emotion boiled again in her turbulent George. He said: “I saw you run from him. I saw—what had he been doing?”

“Oh, Georgie!”

“Well, never mind. I'd rather not hear. I've paid him for it, whatever it was.”

“You fought? Oh, and your face—and your hand bleeding too!”

Tears stood in this ridiculous Mary's eyes. Women so often cry at the wrong moment. They should more closely study their men in the tremendous mannish crises that come to some of us. This was no moment for tears; it was an hour to be Amazon. To be hard−eyed. To count the scalps brought home by the brave—in delight to squeal over them; in pride to clap the hands and jump for joy at such big behaviour.

My Mary erred in every way. Her moistening eyes annoyed George.

“Oh, don't make a fuss about that, Mary,” he cried irritably. “It's nothing. Master Bob won't be able to see for a month.”

“Oh, George, why did you do it?”

Then the tremendous young man flamed. “Why did I do it? 'Pon my soul, Mary, I simply don't understand you sometimes. You've made me stand by and see you insulted for a month, and then I see him catch hold of you, and you run, and I go and thrash him, and you say, 'Why did you do it?' *Do* it? *Do* it? Why, good Lord, what would you have had me do—apologise for you?”

She turned away, dropped his hand.

My unfortunate George groaned aloud: sprang to her. “Mary, darling, dearest, you know I didn't mean that.”

She kept her face from him; her pretty shoulders heaved.

He cried in misery, striving to see her face: “What a brute I am! What a brute! Mary, Mary, you know I didn't mean that.”

She gasped: “You ge−get angry so quick.”

“I know, I know. I'm not fit—I couldn't help—Mary, do look up.”

She swallowed a sob; gave him her little hand.

He squeezed it, squeezed it as it were between his love for her and the tremendous passion that was consuming him. Contrition at his sharp words to her hammered the upper plate, wrath at the manner of her reception of his news was anvil beneath. The poor fingers horribly suffered.

There are conditions of the male mind—and this George was in the very heart of one—when softness in a woman positively goads to fury. The mind is in an itching fever, and—like a bull against a gate−post— requires hard, sharp corners against which to rub and ease the irritation. Comes the lord and master home sulky or in fury, the wise wife will meet him with a demeanour so spiked that he may scratch his itching at every turn. To be soft and yielding is the most fatal conduct; it is to send the lumbering bull crashing through the gate−post into the lane to seek solace away from the home paddock.

Unversed in these homely recipes, this simple Mary had at least the wit not to cry “Oh!” in pain and move her hand. They found a seat, and for good five minutes this turbulent George sat and threshed in his wrath like a hooked shark—this little hand the rope that held him. Soon its influence was felt. His tuggings and boundings grew weaker. The venom oozed out of him.

He uncovered the crushed fingers; raising, pressed them to his lips.

He groaned. “Now you know me at last.”

She patted those brown hands; did not speak.

“You know the awful temper I've got,” he went on. “Uncontrollable— angry even with you—foul brute—”

“But I annoyed you, Georgie.”

He flung out an accusatory hand against himself. “How? By being sweet and loving! Why, what a brute I must be!”

She told him: “You shan't call yourself names. In fact, you mustn't. Because that is calling me names too. We belong, Georgie.”

The pretty sentiment tickled him. Gloom flew from his brow before sunshine that took its place. He laughed. “You're a dear, dear old thing.”

She gave a whimsical look at him. “I ought to have said at once what I am going to say now: Did you hurt him much?”

“I bashed him!” George said, revelling in it. “I fairly bashed him!”

She snuggled against this tremendous fellow.

II.

It was a park−keeper who, from that opium drug of sweet silence with which lovers love to dull their senses, recalled them to the urgency for action.

The park−keeper led David by one hand, Angela by the other, whence he had found them wandering. Disappointment that their owner was a protected lady instead of a nicely−shaped nursemaid whom by this introduction he might add to his recreations, delivered him of stern reproof at the carelessness which had let these children go astray.

“I would very much like to know,” he concluded, “what their ma would say.”

“My plump gentleman,” said George pleasantly, “meet me at this trysting−place at noon to−morrow, and your desire shall be gratified.”

The park−keeper eyed him; thought better of the bitter words he had contemplated; contented himself with: “Funny, ain't yer?”

“Screaming,” said George. “One long roar of mirth. Hundreds turned away nightly. Early doors threepence extra. Bring the wife.”

The park−keeper withdrew with a morose air.

III.

And now my George and his Mary turned upon the immediate future. Conning the map of ways and means and roads of action, a desolate and almost horrifying country presented itself. No path that might be followed offered pleasant prospects. All led past that ogre's castle at 14 Palace Gardens; at the head of each stood the ogress shape of Mrs. Chater, gnashing for blood and bones over the disaster to her first−born. She must be faced.

George flared a torch to light the gloom: “But why should you go near her, dearest? Let me do it. I'll take the children back. I'll see her. I'll get your boxes.”

Even the sweetest women trudge through life handicapped by the preposterous burden of wishing to do what their sad little minds hold right. It is a load which, too firmly strapped, makes them dull companions on the highway.

Mary said: “It wouldn't be *right*, dear. The children are in my charge; how could I send them back to their mother in the care of a strange man? And it wouldn't be right to myself, either. It would look as if I admitted myself in the wrong. No; I must, must face her.”

George's torch guttered; gave gloom again. He tried a second: “Well, I'll come with you. That's a great idea. She won't dare say much while I'm there.”

“Oh, it wouldn't be *right*, Georgie. You oughtn't to come to the house—to see her—after what you've done to the detestable Bob. No, I'll go alone and I'll go now. You shall come as far as the top of the road and there wait.”

“And then?” George asked.

This was to research the map for rest−houses and for fortunes that might be won after the ogre castle had been passed.

Mary conned and peered until the strain squeezed a little moisture in her eyes. “I don't know,” she said faintly.

Her bold George had to know. “It won't be for very long, dear old girl. You must find another situation. Till then a lodging. I know a place where a man I know used to have digs. A jolly old landlady. I'll raise some money—I'll borrow it.”

Mary tried to brighten. “Yes, and I'll go to that agency again. I must, because I shall have no character, you see. I'll tell her everything quite truthfully, and I think she'll be nice.”

“It's no good waiting,” George said. His voice had the sound of a funeral bell.

Mary arose slowly, white. She said: “Come along.”

With a tumbril rumble in their ears, the children dancing ahead, they started for Palace Gardens.

IV.

The groans and curses of her adored Bob, his bulgy mouth and shutting eyes, his tender nose and the encrimsoned water where he had layed his wounds—these had so acted upon Mrs. Chater's nerves, plunged her into such vortex of hysteria, that the manner of her reception of Mary was true reflection of her fears, nothing dissembled.

Withdrawing her agitated face from the dining−room window as Mary and the children approached, she bounded heavily to the door; flung it ajar; collapsed to her knees upon the mat; clasped David and Angela to that heaving bosom.

“Safe!” she wailed. “Safe! Thank God, my little lambs are safe!”

Distraught she swayed and hugged; kissed and moaned again.

David pressed away. “You smell like whisky, mummie,” he said.

It was a dash of icy water on a fainting fit; wonderfully it strung the demented woman's senses. She pushed her little lambs from her; fixed Mary with awful eye.

“So you've come back—*Miss?*“

Mary quivered.

“I wonder you dared. I wonder you had the boldness to face me after your wicked behaviour. You've got nothing to say for yourself. I'm not surprised—”

Mary began: “Mrs. Chater, I—”

“Oh, how can you? How can you dare defend yourself? Never, never in all my born days have I met with such ingratitude; never have I been deceived like this. I took you in. I felt sorry for you. I fed you, clothed you, cared for you, treated you as one of my own family; and this is my reward. There you stand, unable to say a word—”

“If you think, Mrs. Chater—”

“Don't *speak*! I won't hear you. Here have I day after day been entrusting my beloved lambs to your care, and heaven alone knows what risks they have run. My boy—my Bob, who would die rather than get a living soul into trouble—sees you with this man you have been going about with. He does his duty to me, his mother, and to my precious lambs, his brother and sister, by reproving you, and you set this man —this low hired bully—upon him to murder him. I'll have the law on the coward. I'll punish him and I'll punish you, miss. No wonder you were frightened when my Bob caught you. No wonder.”

“That is untrue, Mrs. Chater.”

“Don't *speak!*“

“I will speak. I shall speak. It is untrue.”

“You dare—”

“It is a lie. Yes, I don't mind what I say when you speak to me like that. It is a wicked lie.”

“Girl—!”

“If your son told you he caught me with the man who thrashed him as he deserved, he told you a lie. He never saw me with him. He followed me into the Park this morning and tried to repeat what he did on Friday night. He

is a coward and a cad. The man to whom I am engaged caught him at it and thrashed him as he deserved. There! Now you know the truth!”

Very white, my ridiculous Mary pressed her hand to her panting breast; stopped, choked by the wild words that came tumbling up into her mouth.

Very red, swelling and panting in turkey−cock fury, Mrs. Chater, towering, swallowed and gasped, breathless before this vixenish attack.

But she was the first to find speech; and incoherently she stormed as at a scratching do those persons whose true selves lie beneath a tissue film of polish.

She bubbled and panted: “Oh, you wicked girl!—oh, you wicked girl!— oh, you wicked girl!—bold as brass−calling me a liar—*me* —and my battered boy—engaged indeed!—I'll have the law and the police and the judges—my solicitors—libel and assault, and slander and attempted murder—boxes searched—my precious lambs to hear their mother spoken to like this—get out of the hat−rack, David, and go upstairs this instant—Angela, don't stand there—if I wasn't a lady I'd box your ears, miss—only a week ago didn't I give you a black silk skirt of mine?—and fed you like a princess, with a soft feather pillow too, because you said the bolster made your head ache—servants to wait on you hand and foot—and this is my reward—how I keep my hands off you heaven only knows—but you shall suffer, miss—oh, yes you shall—I'll give you in charge—I'll call a policeman.”

She turned towards the kitchen stairs; screamed “Susan! Kate! Jane! Susan!”

Small need to bellow. Around the staircase corner three white−capped heads—Kate holding back Susan, Susan restraining Jane, Jane holding Kate—had been with delighted eyes and straining ears bathing in this rare scene. With glad unanimity they broke their restraint one upon the other; crushed pell−mell, hustling up the narrow stairs.

Mrs. Chater plumped back into a chair; with huge hands fanned her heated face. “Fetch a policeman!”

They plunged for the door.

Bob's swollen countenance came over the banisters. He roared “Stop!”

Kate, Jane and Susan swung between the conflicting authorities.

“Call a policeman! Summon a constable! Fetch an officer!” In gusty breaths from behind Mrs. Chater's hands, working like a red paddle−wheel, came the commands.

“Stop!” roared Bob; and to enforce pushed forward the battered face till it stuck out flat over the hall.

His alarmed mother screamed: “Bob, you'll fall over the banisters!”

The two kept up a battledore and shuttlecock of agitated conversation.

“Well, stop those women!” Bob cried; “for God's sake, stop them, mother! What on earth are you thinking of?”

“I'll give her in charge!”

“You can't, you can't. Oh, my God, what a house this is!”

“She called me a liar!”

“You can't charge her for that.”

“She half murdered you!”

“She never touched me. Why don't you do as I told you? Why don't you send her away?”

“Mercy, Bob! you'll fall and kill yourself!”

“Do as I say, then! Do as I say!”

“Well, put back your head! Put back your head.”

“Do as I say, then!”

Mrs. Chater stopped the paddle−wheel; rose to her feet. Bob's ghastly face drew in to safer limits. She addressed Mary: “Again my boy has interceded for you. Oh, how you must feel!” She addressed the maids: “Is her box packed?”

They chorused “Yes”; pointed, and Mary saw her tin box, corded, set against the wall.

“Call a cab,” Mrs. Chater commanded; and as the whistle blew she turned again upon Mary.

“Now, miss, you may go. I pack you off as you deserve. But before you go—”

The battered face shot out again above the banisters: “Pay her her wages and send her away, mother. Do, for goodness' sake, send her away!”

“Wages! Certainly not! Mercy! Your head again! Go back, Bob!”

The maddened, pain−racked Bob bellowed: “Oh, stop it! stop it! I shall go mad in a minute. She is entitled to her wages. Pay her.”

“I won't!”

“Well, I will. Susan! Susan, come up here and take this money. How much is it?”

“She is not to be paid,” Mrs. Chater trumpeted.

“She is to be paid,” bawled her son. “Do you want an action brought against you? Oh, my God, what a house this is!”

“My boy! You will fall! Very well, I'll pay her.” Mrs. Chater turned to Mary. “Again and yet again my son intercedes for you, miss. Oh, how you must feel!” She grabbed around her dress for her pocket; found a purse; produced coins; banged them upon the table. “There!”

And now my Mary, who had stood upright breasting these successive surges, spoke her little fury.

With a hand she swept the table, sending the coins flying this way and that—with them a card salver, a vase, a pile of prayer−books. With her little foot she banged the floor.

“I would not touch your money—your beastly money. You are contemptible and vulgar, and I despise you. Mr. Chater, if you are a man you will tell your mother why you were thrashed. Do you dare to say you interfered because you found me with someone? Do you dare?”

With masterly strategy Bob drove home a flank attack. To have affirmed he did dare might lead to appalling outburst from this little vixen. He said very quietly, as though moved by pity: “Please do not make matters worse by blustering, Miss Humfray.” He sighed: “I bear you no ill−will.”

My poor Mary allowed herself to be denuded of self−possession. His words put her control to flight; left her exposed. Tears started in her eyes. She made a little rush for the stairs. “Oh, you coward!” she cried. “You coward! I will make you say the truth.”

Would she have clutched the skirts of his dressing−gown, forgetting the proper modesty of a nice maiden, and dragged him down the stairs? Would she indelicately have pursued him to his very bedroom, and there, regardless of his scanty dress, have assaulted him?

Bob believed she would. It is so easy for the world's heroines to remain calm against attack. My Mary was made of commoner stuff—the wretched, baser clay of which not I, but my neighbours, not you, but your acquaintances, are made.

Bob believed she would. He cried, “Send her away! Why the devil don't you send her away?”; gathered his skirts; fled for the safety of a locked door.

Mrs. Chater believed she would. Mrs. Chater plunged across the hall; stood, an impassable and panting guardian, upon the lowermost step. Her outstretched arm stayed Mary; a voice announced, “The cab'm.”

My Mary stood a moment; little fists clenched, flashing eyes; blinked against the premonition of a rush of tears; then, as they came, turned for the door.

“Go!” trumpeted Mrs. Chater. “Go!”

Mary was upon the mat when Angela and David made a little rush; caught her skirts. The alarming scenes had hurtled in sequence too rapid and too violent to be by the children understood. But a scrap here and a scrap there they had caught, retained, correctly interpreted; and the whole, though it supplied no reason, told clearly that their adored Mary was going from them.

“You're coming back soon, aren't you?” David cried.

“You're not going away, are you, Miss Humf'ay?” implored Angela.

Mrs. Chater shrilled: “Children, come away. Come here at once.”

Mary dropped one knee upon the mat; caught her arms about the children. She pressed a cool face against each side her wet and burning countenance, gave kisses, and upon the added stress of this new emotion choked: “Good−bye, little ducklings!”

“Oh, darling, *darling* Miss Humf'ay, we *will* be good if you'll stay!” They felt this was the desperate threat that so often followed their misdemeanours put into action.

She held them, hugging them. “It isn't that. You have been good.”

“Then you said you would stay for ever and ever if we were good.”

“Not ever and ever; I said—I said perhaps a fairy prince would come to take me. Didn't I?”

This was the romance that forbade tears. But David had doubts. He regarded the hansom at the door: “That's a cab, not a carriage. Fairy princes don't come in cabs.”

“The prince is waiting. Kiss me, darling Davie. Angie, dear, dear Angle, kiss me.”

She rose. Mrs. Chater had come from the stairs, now laid hands upon the small people and dragged them back from the pretty figure about which they clung.

They screamed, “Let me go!”

David roared; dropped prone upon the mat to kick and howl: “Take away your *hand*, mother!”

Angela gasped: “Oh, comeback, comeback, darling Miss Humf'ay!”

With a glare of defiance into Mrs. Chater's stormy eyes, my Mary stooped over David.

“David!” The calm ring of the tones he had learned to obey checked his clamour, his plunging kicks. She stooped; kissed him. “Be good as gold,” she commanded. “Promise.”

“Good as gold—yes—p'omise,” David choked.

Angela was given, and gave, the magic formula. Mary stepped back. Susan slammed the door.

With quivering lips my Mary walked to the cab.

“Drive down the street,” she choked; lay back against the cushions; gave herself to shaking sobs.

V.

Her George met her a very few yards down the street. He gave an order to the cabman and sat beside her.

It was not long before her grief was hushed. She dried her eyes; nestled against this wonderful fellow who, as love had now constituted her world, was the solace against every trouble that could come to her, the shield against any power that might arise to do her hurt.

They debated the position and found it desperate; discussed the immediate future to discover it threatening. Yet the gloom was irradiated by the glowing light of the prospective future; the rumbling of present fears was lost in the tinkling music of their voices, striking notes from love.

The cab twisted this way and that; clattered over Battersea Bridge, down the Park, to the right past the Free Library, and so into Meath Street and to the clean little house of the landlady whom George knew.

To her, in the tiny sitting−room, the story was told.

It appeared that she had never yet taken a lady lodger. In her street ladies were regarded with suspicion; that no petticoats were ever to be fetched across the threshold was a rule to which each medical student who engaged her rooms must first subscribe.

None the less she was here acquiescent. She knew George well; had for him an affection above that which commonly she entertained for the noisy young men who were her means of livelihood. Mary should pay for the little back bedroom that Mr. Thornton had; and, free of charge, should have use of the sitting−room rented by Mr. Grainger. There would be no lodgers until the medical schools reopened in October.

So it was settled—and together in the sitting−room where Mrs. Pinking made them a little lunch again they debated the immediate future. It was three weeks before George's examination was due. Again he declared himself confident that, when actually he had passed, his uncle would not refuse the 400 pounds which meant the world to them—which meant the tight little practice at Runnygate. But the intervening weeks were meanwhile to be faced. Mary must have home. At the Agency she must pour forth her tale and seek new situation till they could be married. If the Agency failed them—They shuddered.

Revolving desperate schemes for the betterment of this position into which with such alarming suddenness they had been thrust, George took his leave. He would have tarried, but his Mary was insistent that his work must not be interfered with. Upon its successful exploitation everything now depended.

Brightly she kissed her George good−bye. He was not to worry about her. She was to be shut from his mind. To−morrow she would go to the Agency. He might lunch with her, and, depend upon it, she would greet him with great news.

So they parted.

BOOK IV. In which this History begins to rattle.

CHAPTER I. The Author Meanders Upon The Enduring Hills; And The Reader Will Lose Nothing By Not Accompanying Him.

In pursuit of our opinion that the novel should hark back to its origin and be as a story that is told by mouth to group of listeners, here we momentarily break the thread.

It is an occasion for advertisement.

As when the personal narrator, upon resumption of his history, will at a point declare, “Now we come to the exciting part,” so now do I.

Heretofore we have somewhat dragged. We have been as host and visitor at tea in the drawing−room. Guests have arrived; to you I have introduced them, and after the shortest spell they have taken their leave.

My Mary and my George—favoured guests—have sat with us through our meal; but how fleeting our converse with those others—with Mr. William Wyvern, with Margaret, with Mrs. Major and with Mr. Marrapit! I grant you cause to grumble at their introduction, so purposeless has been their part. I grant you they have been as the guests at whose arrival, disturbing the intimate chatter, impatient glances are exchanged; at whose departure there is shuffle of relief.

Well, I promise you we shall now link our personages and set our history bounding to its conclusion. We have collected them; now to switch on the connection and set them acting one against the other until the sparks do fly; watching those sparks shall be your entertainment.

The switch which thus sets active the play of forces I shall call circumstance. If it has been long delayed, I have the precedent of all the story of human life as my excuse. For we are the children of circumstance. We move each in our little circle by a stout hedge encompassed. Circumstance suddenly will break the wall: some fellow man or woman is flung against us, and immediately the quiet ambulation of our little circle is for some conflict sharp exchanged. To−day we are at peace with the world, to−morrow warring with all mankind.

I say with all mankind, because so narrow and so selfish is our outlook upon life that one single man or woman—a dullard neighbour or a silly girl—who may interfere with us, throws into turmoil our whole existence. Walls of impenetrable blackness shut out. all life save only this intruder and ourself; that other person becomes our world— engaging our complete faculties.

Deeper misfortune cannot be conceived. It is through allowing such occurrences to crush us that brows are wrinkled before their time; nerves broken−edged while yet they should be firmly strung; death reached ere yet the proper span of life is lived.

For these unduly wrinkled brows, too early broken nerves, too soon encountered graves, civilised man has agreed upon an excuse. He names it the strain of life in modern conditions. There is no body in this plea. It is not the conditions that matter; it is our manner of receiving those conditions. Bend to them and they will crush; face them and they become of no avail; allow them to be the Whole of life, and immediately they are given so great a weight that to withstand them is impossible; regard them in their proper proportion to the scheme of things, and they become of airy nothingness.

For if we regulate each to its right importance all that surrounds us, not forgetting that since life is transient time is the only ultimate standard of value, how unutterably insignificant must small human troubles appear in their relation to the whole scheme of things, to the enduring hills, the immense seas, vast space.

Gain strength from strength. Compare vexations encompassed by the artifice of man with the tremendous life that is mothered by nature.

Gain strength from strength. Set troubles against the enduring hills, misfortunes against the immense seas, perplexities against vast space, torments against the stout trees. Learn to take tribute of strength from every object that is built of strength—the strength of solidity that a stout beam may give, the strength of beauty that from a picture or a statuary irradiates.

Gain strength from strength. It is a first principle of warfare to band undisciplined troops with tried regiments, to shoulder recruits with veterans. The horse−breaker will set the timid colt in harness with the steady mare. Thus is stiffening and a sense of security imparted to the weaker spirit; timidity oozes and is burned by the steady flame of courage that from the stronger emanates. In the heat of that flame latent strength warms and kindles in the

weaker.

Gain strength from strength. Seek intercourse with the minds that are above you; if not to be encountered, they are to be purchased in books. Avoid communion with the small minds below you and of your level.

No man, nor book, nor thing can be touched without virtue passing thence into you. See to it that who or what you touch gives you strength, not weakness; uplifts, not debases. The aspiring athlete does not seek to match his strength against inferiors. These give him−—easy victory. Contact with them is for him effortless; they tend to draw him to their plane. Rather, being wise, he shuns them to pit his prowess against such as can give him best, from whom he may learn, out of whom he will take virtue, by whom he will be raised to all that is best in him. Gain strength from strength. The attributes strength and weakness are as infectious as the plague. Make your bed so that you may lie with strength and catch his affection.

I do not pretend that these are thoughts which influenced the persons of my history. My unthinking George and my simple Mary would care nothing for such things. Sight of the enduring hills would evoke in my George the uttered belief that they would be an infernal sweat to climb; sound of the immense seas if in anger would move my Mary to prayer for all those in peril on the wave, if in lapping tranquillity to sentimental thoughts of her George. But they had laughter and they had love. Adversity can make little fight against those lusty weapons.

And now we have an exquisite balcony scene and rare midnight alarms for your delectation.

CHAPTER II. An Exquisite Balcony Scene; And Something About Sausages.

I.

On that day when George left his Mary at the little lodgings in Meath Street, Battersea, Bill Wyvern returned to Paitley Hill after absence from home for a week upon a visit.

His Margaret was his first thought upon his arrival. Letters between the pair were, by the sharpness of Mr. Marrapit's eye, compelled to be exchanged not through the post but by medium of a lovers' postal box situate in the hole of a tree in that shrubbery of Herons' Holt where they were wont by stealth to meet. Thus when Bill, upon this day of his return, scaled the tremendous wall and groped among the bushes, he saw the trysting bower innocent of his love—then searched and found a letter.

A sad little note for lover's heart. Mr. Marrapit, it said, abed of a chill, prevented Margaret meeting her Bill that afternoon. Her father must be constantly ministered; impossible to say when she would be released. She heard him calling, she must fly to him. With fondest love. No time for more.

II.

The lines chilled Bill's heart. His was a fidgety and nervous love that took fright at shadow of doubt. The week that had divided him from Margaret was the longest period they had not embraced since their discovery one of another. Was it not possible, he tortured himself, that loss of his presence had blurred his image in her heart? Countless heroes of his own stories who thus had suffered rose to assure him that possible indeed it was. The more he brooded upon it the more probable did it become.

Bedtime found him desolated. In apprehension he paced his room. The thought of sleep with this devil of doubt to thump his pillow was impossible. Leaning from his window he gazed upon the stars and groaned; dropped eyes to the lawn, silvered in moonlight, and started beneath the prick of a sudden thought. It was a night conceived for lovers' tryst. He would seek his Margaret's open window, whistle her from her bed, and bring this damned doubt of her to reality or knock the ghostly villain dead.

It was an inspiriting thought, and Bill started to whistle upon it until he remembered the demeanour in which he would have sent forth one of his own heroes upon such a mission. “Dark eyes gleaming strangely from a pale, set face,” he would have written. Bill's eyes were of a clearest, childlike blue which interfered a little with the proper conception of the role he was to play; but blanketing his spirits in melancholy he stepped from his room and passed down the stairs.

That favoured bull−terrier Abiram, sleeping in the hall, drummed a tattoo of welcome upon the floor.

“Chuck it,” said Bill morosely.

The “faithful hound” that gives solace to the wounded heart is a pretty enough thing in stories; Abiram had had no training for the part. This dog associated his master not with melancholy that needed caressing but with wild “rags” that gave and demanded tremendous spirits.

Intelligence, however, showed the wise creature that the tone of that command meant he was to be excluded from whatever wild rag might be now afoot. It was not to be borne. Therefore, to lull suspicion, Abiram ceased his drumming; rose when Bill had passed; behind him crept stealthily; and upon the door being opened bounded around his master's legs and into the moonlight with a joyous yelp.

Fearful of arousing Korah and Dathan in their kennels to tremendous din if he bellowed orders, Bill hissed commands advising Abiram to return indoors under threat of awful penalties.

Abiram frisked and skipped upon the lawn like a young lamb.

Bill changed commands for missiles.

Abiram, entering into the thing with rare spirit, caught, worried, and killed each clod of earth hurled at him, then bounded expectant forward for the next sacrifice that would be thrown for his delight in this entrancing game.

“Very well,” spoke Bill between his teeth. “Very well. You jolly well come, my boy. Wait till you get near

enough for me to catch you, that's all."

Beneath this understanding they moved forward across the lawn and down the road; Abiram sufficiently in the rear to harass rats that might be going about their business, without himself being in the zone of his master's strength.

Heaving a sigh burthened with fond memory as he passed the wall of Herons' Holt where it gave upon the secret meeting−place in the shrubbery, Bill skirted the grounds; for the second time in his life passed through the gate and up the drive.

III.

Well he knew his adored's window. From the shrubbery she had pointed it him. Now with a bang of the heart he observed that the bottom sash stood open so that night breezes, mingling freely with the perfumes of her apartment, unhindered could bear in to her his tremulous love−signals.

He set a low whistle upon the air. It was not louder, he felt, than the agitated banging of his heart that succeeded it.

Again he whistled, and once again. There was a rustling from within.

"Margaret!" he softly called. "Margaret!"

She appeared. The blessed damosel leaned out. About her yearning face the long dark hair abundantly fell; her pretty bed−gown, unbuttoned low, gave him glimpse of snowy bosom, beautifully rounded.

"Oh, Bill!" she cried, stretching her arms.

Then, glancing downwards at her person, she stepped back swiftly. Reappearing, the soft round of her twin breasts was not to view.

She had buttoned up her night−dress.

"Oh, Bill!"

"Oh, Margaret!"

"*Wow!*" spoke Abiram in nerve−shattering welcome. "*Wow!* "

The blessed damosel fled. Bill plunged a kick. Abiram took the skirt of it; waddled away across the lawn, his waving stern expressing pleasure at having at once shown his politeness by bidding a lady good evening, and at being, like true gentleman, well able to take a hint.

Bill put upon the breeze:

"It's all right. He's gone."

No answer. Shuddering with terror lest that hideous *wow!* had disturbed the house the blessed damosel lay trembling abed, the coverings pressed about her straining ears.

"He's gone," Bill strained again, his larynx torn with the rasp of whispers that must penetrate like shouts and yet speed soft−shod. "He's gone!"

Margaret put a white leg to the ground—listened; drew forth its companion—listened; glimpsed her white legs; shuddered at such immodesty with a man so close; veiled them to their toes with her bed−gown; listened; stepped again to the window.

"Oh, Bill!"

"Oh, Margaret!"

"Has anyone heard, do you think?"

"My darling, not a soul. It sounded loud to us. Oh, Margaret—"

"Hush! Yes?"

"Do you know why I am come?"

"Hush!—no."

"I thought—from your note—that you didn't care to see me again. I thought−being away like that—that you found you didn't−love me after all. Oh, I was tortured, Margaret. Oh—!"

"Hush! Listen!"

"Damn!" said Bill.

The blessed damosel poked her beautiful head again into the night. "It's all right. I thought I heard a sound. We must be careful."

"Oh, Margaret, I was tortured—racked. I had to come to you. Tell me I was wrong in thinking—"

“Oh, Bill, Bill, I—”

This girl was well−nigh in a swoon of delicious excitement. Emotion took her and must be gulped ere she found voice. She stretched her arms down towards him.

“Oh, Bill, I thought so, too.”

A steely pang struck at his heart. “You thought you didn't love me after all?”

“No, no, no.”

Emotion dragged her from the window to her waist. Her long hair cascaded down to him so that the delicious tips, kissing his face, might by his lips be kissed.

“No, no,” she breathed; “I thought the same of you. I thought you might have found—”

“Yes?”

“Hush!”

“Damn!” said Bill.

She reappeared; again her tresses trickled to him. “It's all right. I thought you might have found you didn't love me after all. Dearest, not hearing from you—”

In sympathy of spirit Bill groaned: “What could I do?”

She clasped her hands in a delicious ecstasy. “I know, I know. But you know how foolish I am. I felt—oh, Bill, forgive me!—I felt that, if you had really cared, a way of sending me a message might have been found. Of course, it was impossible. And there was more than that. When we parted last week, I thought you seemed not to care very much—”

“Oh, Margaret!”

“I know, I know. I know now how foolish I was, but that is what I thought—and, Bill, it tortured me. I've not been able to sleep at nights. That is how I was awake just now.”

“Margaret, I believe you're crying.”

“I'm so—so happy now.”

“Oh, so am I! Aren't you glad I came, Margaret?”

She murmured, “Oh, Bill!”; gave him a smile that pictured her answer.

Mutually they gazed for a space, drinking delight.

Her thirst quenched, Margaret said:

“Bill, those nights, those terrible nights when I have been doubtful of you, filled me with thoughts that shaped into a poem last night.”

“A poem to me?”

“About us. Shall I read it?—now that the doubt is all over.”

He begged her read.

She was a space from his sight; then, bending down to him, in her hand paper of palest heliotrope, whispered to him by light of the beautiful moon:

“Our meeting! Do you remember, dear,
How Nature knew we met?
Twilight soft with a gentle breeze
Bearing scent of the slumbering seas;
Music sweet—'twas a nightingale,
Trilling and sobbing from laugh to wail—
Golden sky that was flecked with red
(Ribands of rose on a golden bed).
Ah, love! when first we met!”

She paused. “It was raining as a matter of fact, dearest,” she whispered, “and just after breakfast. But you know what I mean. That is the imagery of it—as it seemed to me.”

Bill said: “And to me; a beautiful imagery.”

She smiled in the modest pride of authorship: “Oh, it's nothing, really. You know how these things come. To you in prose, to me in song. One has to set them down.”

“One is merely the instrument,” Bill said.

“Yes, the instrument.” She hugged the phrase. “The *instrument* . How cleverly you put things!”

Bill disavowed the gift. Margaret breathed, “Oh, you do; I have so often noticed it.” Bill again denied.

IV.

Conventionality demanded this little exchange of them, and to−day the empress sway of conventionality is rarely rebelled. Even, as here, when treading the path of love, the journey must constantly be stopped while handfuls of the sweet−smelling stuff are tossed about our persons. Neglect the duty and you must walk alone. For to neglect conventionality is like going abroad without clothes; the naked man appears. Now, nothing can be more utterly horrid to our senses than a stark woman or stark man walking down the street. We should certainly pull aside the blind to have a peep, and the more we could see of the nakedness the further would we crane our heads (provided no one was by to watch); but to go out and chat, to be seen in company with the naked creature, is another matter. We would sooner chop off our legs. So with the conventions. The fewer of them you wear, the more naked (that is to say, real) do you become. Eyes will poke at you round the blinds, but you must walk quickly past the gate, please. If you will not go through the machine and come out a nice smooth sausage, well, you must remain original flesh and gristle; but you will smell horrid in nice noses.

Is it not warming, as you read this, to know perfectly well that you are not one of the sausages?

V.

When they had sufficiently daubed themselves, Margaret asked:

“Shall I read the next verse? That was the imagery of our meeting; this of our parting.”

Bill gulped. This man was fondling the scented tresses that trickled about his face; speech was a little difficult.

She put her page beneath the moon; gave her voice to its rapture:

“Our parting! Do you remember, dear,
How Nature our folly knew?
Mournful swish of the sobbing rain;
Distant surge of the Deep in pain;
Whispering wail of the wandering wind,
Seeking, sobbing, a rest to find;
Fitful gleam from a troubled sky
(Nature weeping to see love die).
Ah, love, when last we met!

“It was a perfect day, really,” she said. “Very hot, and just before lunch, do you remember? But there, again, it is the *imagery* of it as it seemed to our inner selves. It comes to one, and one is the *instrument*.”

Bill's voice was hoarse. “Margaret, come down to me,” he said.

“I dare not.”

“You must. I must touch you—kiss you. You must come down!”

“Bill, I dare not; I should be heard.”

He bitted his next words as they came galloping up. Dare he give them rein? And then again he bathed in the ecstasy of the scene. The black square of the open window; the scented roses that framed it; the silver night that lit its picture—her dusky face between her streaming hair, her white arms, bare to where the pushed−back sleeves gave them to the soft breeze to kiss, the soft outline of her breast where the press of her weight drew close her gown.

It was not to be borne. The bitted words lashed from his hold. He gasped:

“Then I am coming up!”

Was she aghast at him? he asked himself. He stood half−checked while her steady eyes left his face, roamed from him—contrasting, as ashamed he felt, the purity of the still night with the clamour of his turbulent passions—and settled on an adjacent flowerbed.

At last she spoke, very calmly.

“There is a potting−box just there,” she said. “If you turned it on end you could reach the window, and then—”

The box gave him two feet of reach. He jumped for the ledge—caught it; pulled; fetched the curve of an arm over the sill.

Then between earth and paradise he hung limp; for a sudden horror was in his Margaret's eyes.

She put upon his brow a hand that pressed him back; gave words to her pictured alarm: “A step upon the gravel!”

'Twixt earth and window, with dangling legs and clutching arms, in muscle−racking pain he hung.

Truly a step, and then another step.

And then a very tornado of sound beat furiously upon the trembling night; with it a flash; from it the pattering of a hundred bullets.

Someone had discharged a gun.

As Satan was hurled, so, plumb out of the gates of Paradise, Bill fell. And now the still air was lashed into a fury of sound−waves, tearing this way and that in twenty keys; now the sleeping garden was torn by rushing figures, helter−skelter for life and honour.

Sounds!—the melancholy bellow of that gardener, Mr. Fletcher, as the recoil of the bell−mouthed blunderbuss he had fired hurled him prone upon the gravel; the dreadful imprecations of Bill striving to clear his leg of the potting−box through whose side it had plunged; piercing screams of Mrs. Major from a ground−floor room; shrills of alarm from Mr. Marrapit; *gurr−r−ing* yelps from Abiram in ecstasy of man−hunt.

Rushing figures!—Bill, freed from his box, at top speed towards the shrubbery; Mr. Fletcher, up from his fall, with tremendous springs bounding across the lawn; Abiram in hurtling pursuit.

More sounds!—panic screams from Mr. Fletcher, heavily labouring; the protest of a window roughly raised; from George's head, thrust into the night: “Yi! Yi! Yi! Hup, then! Good dog! Sock him! Sock him! Yi! Yi! Yi!”

We must seek the fuse that touched off this hideous turbulence.

CHAPTER III. Alarums And Excursions By Night.

I.

We are going into a lady's bedroom, but I promise you the thing shall be nicely done: there shall not be a blush.

It was midnight when Bill Wyvern projected the scheme whose execution we have followed through sweetness to disaster. Two hours earlier the Marrapit household had sought its beds.

It was Mr. Marrapit's wise rule that each member of his establishment should pass before him as he or she sought their chambers. Night is the hour when the thoughts take on unbridled licence; and he would send his household to sleep each with some last admonition to curb fantastic wanderings of the mind.

Upon this night Mr. Marrapit was himself abed of the chill that Margaret had mentioned in her note to Bill. But the review was not therefore foregone. Upon his back, night−capped head on pillow propped, he lay as the minute−hand of his clock ticked towards ten.

His brow ruffled against a sound without his door. He called:

“Mrs. Armitage!”

“Sir?” spoke Mrs. Armitage through the oak.

“Breathe less stertorously.”

Mrs. Armitage, his cook, waiting outside upon the mat, gulped wrath; respirated through open mouth.

The clock at Mr. Marrapit's elbow gave the first chime of ten. Instantly Mrs. Armitage tapped.

“Enter,” said Mr. Marrapit.

She waddled her stout figure to him. Behind her Clara and Ada, those trim maids, took place.

Mr. Marrapit addressed her. “To−morrow, Mrs. Armitage, arouse your girls at six. Speed them at their toilet; set them to clean your flues.” He glanced at a tablet taken from beneath his pillow. “At 4.6 this afternoon I smelt soot.”

“The flues were cleaned this morning, sir.”

“Untrue. Your girls were late. Prone in suffering upon my couch, my ears tell me all that is accomplished in every part of the house. Ten minutes after your girls descended I heard the kitchen fire roar. I suspect paraffin.”

Mrs. Armitage wriggled to displace the blame. “I rose them at six, sir. They sleep that heavy and they take that long to dressing, it's a wonder to me they ever do get down.”

Mr. Marrapit addressed the sluggards. “Shun the enervating couch. Spring to the call. Cleanliness satisfied, adorn not the figure; pursue the duties. Ponder this. Seek help to effect it. Contrive a special prayer. To your beds.”

They left him; upon the mat encountered Frederick, and him, in abandon of relief, dug vitally with vulgar thumbs.

II.

Squirming, Frederick, the gardener's boy, advanced to the bedside.

Mr. Marrapit sternly regarded him: “Recite your misdeeds.”

“I've done me jobs, sir.”

“Prostrated, I cannot check your testimony. One awful eye above alone can tell. Upon your knees this night search stringently your heart. Bend.”

Frederick inclined his neck until his forehead was upon the coverlet. Mr. Marrapit scanned the neck.

“Behind the ears are stale traces. Cleanse abundantly. To your bed.”

Without the door Frederick encountered Mr. Fletcher. “You let me catch you reading abed to−night,” Mr. Fletcher warned him.

“Cleanse yer blarsted ear−'oles,” breathed Frederick, pushing past.

III.

Mr. Fletcher moved in to the presence.

“Is all securely barred, bolted and shuttered?” Mr. Marrapit asked.

“It's all right.”

“I am apprehensive. This is the first night I have not accompanied you upon your round. Colossal responsibility lies upon you. Should thieves break through and steal, upon your head devolves the crime.”

Wearily Mr. Fletcher repeated: “It's all right.”

Mr. Marrapit frowned: “You do not inspire confidence. Sleep films your eye. I shudder for you. Women and children are in your care this night. The maids, Mrs. Armitage, Mrs. Major, my daughter, the young life of Frederick, are in your hands. What if rapine and murder, concealed in the garden, are loosed beneath my roof this night?”

Mr. Fletcher passed a fist across his brow; spoke wearily: “It's all right, Mr. Marrapit. I can't say more; I can't do more. I tell you again it's all right.”

“Substantiate. Adduce evidence.”

Mr. Fletcher raised an appealing hand: “How can I prove it? My word's a good word, ain't it? I tell you the doors are locked. I can't bring 'em up to show you, can I? I'm a gardener, I am.”

“By zeal give proof. Set your alarum−clock so that twice in the night you may be roused. Gird then yourself and patrol. But lightly slumber. Should my bell sound in your room spring instantly to my bedside. To your couch.”

Battling speech, Mr. Fletcher moved to the door. At the threshold protest overcame him. He gave it vent: “I should like to ast if I was engaged to work by night as well as day? Can't I even have me rest? 'Ow many nights am I to patrol the house? It's 'ard—damn 'ard. I'm a gardener, I am; not a watchdog.”

“Away, insolence.”

Insolence, upon the stairs, morosely descending, drew aside to give room to Margaret and George.

Margaret parted her lips at him in her appealing smile. “Oh, Mr. Fletcher,” in her pretty way she said, “you locked me out. Indeed you did.” She smiled again; tripped towards Mr. Marrapit's door.

Mr. Fletcher stayed George, following. “Mr. George, did you shut up secure behind Miss Margaret?”

George reassured him; questioned his earnestness.

Mr. Fletcher pointed through a window that gave upon the garden. “I've the 'orrors on me to−night,” he said. “According to Master there's rapine lurking in them bushes. Mr. George, what'll I do if there's rapine beneath this roof to−night?”

“Catch it firmly by the back of the neck and hold its head in a bucket of water,” George told him.

Mr. Fletcher passed, pondering the suggestion. “Only something to do with rats after all,” he cogitated with wan smile of relief.

IV.

Margaret, at her father's bedside, luxuriously mouthed the fine phrases of the Book of Job which nightly she read him. Her chapter finished, she inquired: “Shall I read on?”

“Does Job continue?”

“No, father. The next begins, 'Then answered Bildad, the Shuite.'“

George coughed upon the threshold.

“Terminate,” said Mr. Marrapit. “Bildad is without.”

“Oh, father, George is not!”

“He torments me. He is Bildad. Terminate. To your bed.”

She pressed a warm kiss upon Job's brow; took on her soft cheek the salute of his thin lips. “You have everything, dear father?”

“Prone on my couch I lack much. I am content. You are a good girl, Margaret.”

“Oh, father!” She tripped from the room in a warmth of satisfaction.

The rough head of Bildad the Shuite came round the door; spoke “Good night.”

“Approach,” said Job. Bildad's legs came over the mat. “You seek your room? But not your couch?”

“I'm going to bed, if that's what you mean,” George told him.

Mr. Marrapit groaned. “Spurn it. Shun sloth. In the midnight oil set the wick of knowledge. Burn it, trim it,

tend it."

George withdrew to his room; set the midnight pipe in his mouth; leaning from his window sped his thoughts to Battersea.

V.

One member of the house remained to be sent to sleep. Mrs. Major put a soft knuckle to the door; came at the call; whispered "I thought I might disturb you."

"You never disturb me, Mrs. Major."

A little squeak sprung from the nutter in the masterly woman's heart.

"You sigh, Mrs. Major?"

"Oh, Mr. Marrapit, I can't bear to see you lying there. The"—she paused against an effort, then took the aspirate in a masterly rush— "the house is not the same without you."

"Your sympathy is very consoling to me, Mrs. Major."

"Oh, Mr. Marrapit!" She plunged a shaft that should try him: "I wish I had the right to give you more."

"Your position in this house gives you free access to me, Mrs. Major. Regard your place as one of my own circle. Do not let deference stifle intercourse."

The masterly woman hove a superb sigh. "If you knew how I feel your kindness, Mr. Marrapit. Truly, as I say to myself every night, fair is my lot and goodly is my—" Icy dismay took her. Was the missing word "hermitage" or "heritage"? With masterly decision she filled the blank with a telling choke; keyed her voice to a brilliant suggestion of brightness struggling with tears: "The sweetling cats are safely sleeping. I have come straight from them. Ah, how they miss you! How well they know you suffer!"

"They do?" A tremble of pleasure was in Mr. Marrapit's voice.

"They does—do." Mrs. Major recited their day, gave their menu. "I must not tarry," she concluded; "you need rest. Good night, Mr. Marrapit. Good night."

"Good night, Mrs. Major."

Mr. Marrapit put out his candle.

VI.

And now in every room, save one, Sleep drew her velvet fingers down recumbent forms; pressed eyelids with her languorous kiss; upon her warm breast pillowed willing heads; about her bedfellows drew her Circe arms.

Mrs. Major's room was that single exception, and it is that masterly woman's apartment we now shall penetrate.

Hurrying to semi−toilet; again assuring herself that the key was turned; peering a last time for lurking ravishers beneath the bed, Mrs. Major then fumbled with keys before her box—threw up the lid.

Down through a pile of garments plunged her arm. Her searching fingers closed about her quest and a very beautiful smile softened her face—a smile of quiet confidence and of trust.

In greater degree than men, women have this power of taking strength from the mere contact of an inanimate object. A girl will smile all through her sleep because, hand beneath pillow, her fingers are about a photograph or letter; no need, as with Mrs. Major there was no need, even to see the thing that thus inspires. The pretty hand will delve to recesses of a drawer, and the thrill that brings the smile will run up from, it may be, a Bible, a diary, or a packet of letters touched. Dependent since Eden, woman is more emotionally responsive to aught that gives aid than is man; for man is accustomed to battle for his prizes, not to receive them.

Mrs. Major drew up, that smile still upon her face, and the moon through uncurtained window gave light upon the little joy she fetched from the depths of her trunk.

"Old Tom Gin."

The neck of Old Tom's bottle clinked against a glass; Old Tom gurgled generously; passed away through the steady smile he had inspired.

* * * * *

Mrs. Major set a carafe of water upon a little table; partnered it with Old Tom; reclined beside the pair on a comfortable seat; closed her eyes.

At intervals, as the hand crept between eleven and twelve of the clock, she would open them; when she did so

diluted Old Tom in the glass fell lower, full−bodied Old Tom in the bottle marched steadily behind.

The further Old Tom crept downwards from the neck of his captivity, with the greater circumspection did Mrs. Major open her eyes. Considerable practice had told this masterly woman that Old Tom must be commanded with a steady will: else he took liberties. Eyes suddenly opened annoyed Old Tom, and he would set the furniture ambulating round the room in a manner at once indecorous in stable objects and calculated to bewilder the observer. Therefore, upon setting down her glass, this purposeful woman would squarely fix the bureau that stood opposite her, would for a moment keep her gaze upon it with a sternness that forbade movement, then gently would close her eyes. When Old Tom must be again interviewed she would lift the merest corner of an eyelid; catch through it the merest fraction of the bureau; determine from the behaviour of this portion the stability of the whole.

Thus if the corner she sighted showed indecorous propensities—as, swelling and receding, fluttering in some ghostly breeze, or altogether disappearing from view,—she would drop her lid and wait till she might catch it more seemly. This effected, she would work from that fixed point, inch by inch, until the whole bureau was revealed—swaying a little, perhaps, but presently quiescent.

When, and not until, it was firmly anchored she would slowly start her eye in review around the other objects of her apartment. If the wash− stand had tendency to polka with the bed, or the wardrobe unnaturally to stretch up its head through the ceiling, Mrs. Major would march her gaze steadily back to the bureau, there to take fresh strength and start again. When all was orderly—then Old Tom.

Masterly in all things, this woman was most masterly in her cups.

VII.

Into Mr. Marrapit's dreams there came a whistle.

He pushed at Sleep; she crooned to him and he snuggled against her.

Upon his brain there rapped a harsh *Wow*!

He wriggled from his bedfellow; she put an arm about him, drew him to her.

Now there succeeded a steady wash of sound—rising, falling, murmuring persistent against his senses.

He turned his back upon Sleep. She crooned; he wriggled from her. Seductively she followed; he kicked a leg and jarred her, threw an arm and hurt her. Disgusted, she slipped from bed and left him, leaving a chilly space where she had warmly lain.

Mr. Marrapit shivered; felt for Sleep; found her gone; with a start sat upright.

The breakwater gone, that wash of sound which had lapped around his senses rushed in upon them. Lingering traces of the touch of Sleep still offered resistance—a droning hum. The wash surged over, poured about him—*VOICES*!

Mr. Marrapit violently cleared his throat. The voices continued. Violently again. They still continued. Tremendously a third time. They yet continued. From this he argued that they could not be very close to his door. Intently he listened, then located them—they came from the garden. He felt for the bell−push that carried to Mr. Fletcher's room; put his thumb upon it; steadily pressed.

Sleep toyed no tricks in Mr. Fletcher's bed. Like some wanton mistress discovered in the very act of betrayal, she at the first tearing clamour of the electric bell bounded from the sheets, scuttled from the room.

“Rapine!” cried Mr. Fletcher; plunged his head beneath the bedclothes and wrestled in prayer.

The strident gong faltered not nor failed. Steady and penetrating it dinned its hideous call. Mr. Fletcher waited for screams. None came. He pushed the sheet between his chattering teeth, listened for cudgelling and heavy falls. None came. That bell had single possession of the night. The possibility that only patrolling was required of him nerved him to draw from his concealment. He lit a candle; into trousers pushed his quivering legs; upon tottering limbs passed up the stairs to Mr. Marrapit's room.

“Judas!” Mr. Marrapit greeted him.

Mr. Fletcher sighed relief: “I thought it was rapine.”

“You have betrayed your trust. You are Iscariot.”

“I come when you rung.”

“Silence. I have heard voices.”

“God help us,” Mr. Fletcher piously groaned; the candle in his shaking hand showered wax.

"Blasphemer! He will not help the craven. Gird yourself."

"I'll call Mr. George."

"Refrain. I will attend to that. Gird yourself. Take the musket from the hall. It is loaded. Patrol!"

"I don't want the musket."

"Be not overbold. Outside you may be at their mercy."

"*Outside!*"

"Assuredly."

"Me patrol outside!"

"That is your task. Forward!"

By now Mr. Marrapit had risen; swathed himself in a dressing−gown. Sternly he addressed Mr. Fletcher: "As you this night quit yourself so will I consider the question of your dismissal. If blood is spilt this night it will be upon your head."

Mr. Fletcher trembled. "That's just it. It's 'ard—damn 'ard—"

"Forward, Iscariot." Mr. Marrapit drove Judas before him; in the hall took down the gun and pressed it into the shaking hands. He drew the bolts, impelled Iscariot outward, and essayed to close the door.

Mr. Fletcher clutched the handle. Mr. Marrapit pushed; hissed through the crack: "Away! Search every nook. Penetrate each fastness. Use stealth. Track, trace, follow!"

Discarding entreaty, Mr. Fletcher put hoarse protest through the slit of aperture that remained: "I should like to ast if I was engaged for this, Mr. Marrapit," he panted. "I'm a gardener, I am—"

"I recognise that. To your department. With your life forefend it."

Mr. Marrapit fetched the door against the lintel; in the brief moment he could hold it close slid the lock.

VIII.

No tremor of fear or of excitement ruffled this remarkable man. Calm in the breezes of life he was calm also in its tempests. This is a natural corollary. As a man faces the smaller matters of his life so he will face its crises. Each smallest act accomplished imprints its stamp upon the pliable mass we call character; our manner of handling each tiniest common−place of our routine helps mould its form; each fleeting thought helps shape the mould.

The process is involuntary and we are not aware of its working. Character is not made by tremendous thumps, but by the constant patterings of minutest touches. The athlete does not build his strength by enormous exertions, but by consistent and gentle training. Huge strains at spasmodic intervals, separated by periods in which he lies fallow in sloth, add nothing to his capacity for endurance; it is by the tally of each minute of his preparation that you may read how he will acquit himself against the test. Thus also with the shaping of character, and thus was Mr. Marrapit, collected in minor affairs, mighty in this crisis.

IX.

Turning from the door he marched steadily across the hall towards the stairs to arouse George.

At the lowermost step a movement on the landing above made him pause. He was to be spared the trouble. Placing the candle upon a table he looked up. He spoke. "George!"

"Wash it?" said a voice. "Wash it?"

"Wash nothing," Mr. Marrapit commanded. "Who is this?"

The answer, starting low, ascended a shrill scale: "Wash it? Wash it? Wash it?"

"Silence!" Mr. Marrapit answered. "Descend!"

He craned upwards. The curl−papered head of Mrs. Major poked at him over the banisters.

"Darling," breathed Mrs. Major. "Darling—*um!*"

"Mrs. Major! What is this?"

"Thash what *I* want to know," said Mrs. Major coquettishly. "Wash it? Wash *ish* it?"

"You are distraught, Mrs. Major. Have no fear. To your room."

The curl−papered head waggled. Mrs. Major beamed. "Darling. Darling— um!"

"Exercise control," Mr. Marrapit told her. "Banish apprehension. There are thieves; but we are alert."

The head withdrew. Mrs. Major gave a tiny scream: "Thieves!" She took a brisk little run down the short

flight which gave from where she stood; flattened against the wall that checked her impulse; pressed carefully away from it; stood at the head of the stairs facing Mr. Marrapit.

He gazed up. “I fear you have been walking in your sleep, Mrs. Major.”

Mrs. Major did not reply. She pointed a slippered toe at the stair below her; swayed on one leg; dropped to the toe; steadied; beamed at Mr. Marrapit; and in a high treble coquettishly announced, “*One* !”

Mr. Marrapit frowned: “Retire, Mrs. Major.”

Mrs. Major plumped another step, beamed again: “*Two*!”

“You dream. Retire.”

Mrs. Major daintily lifted her skirt; poised again. The projected slipper swayed a dangerous circle. Mrs. Major alarmingly rocked. That infamous Old Tom presented three sets of banisters for her support; she clutched at one; it failed her; “Three four five six seven eight nine ten—*darling*!” she cried; at breakneck speed plunged downwards, and with the “*Darling*!” flung her arms about Mr. Marrapit's neck.

Back before the shock, staggering beneath the weight, Mr. Marrapit went with digging heels. They could not match the pace of that swift blow upon his chest. Its backward speed outstripped them. With shattering thud he plumped heavily to his full length upon the floor; Mrs. Major pressed him to earth.

But that shock was a whack on the head for Old Tom that temporarily quieted him. “What has happened?” Mrs. Major asked, clinging tightly.

Mr. Marrapit gasped: “Release my neck. Remove your arms.”

“Where are we?”

“You are upon my chest. I am prone beneath you. Release!”

“It's all dark,” Mrs. Major cried; gripped firmer.

“It is not dark. I implore movement. Our juxtaposition unnaturally compromises us. It is abhorrent.”

Mrs. Major opened the eyes she had tightly closed during that staggering journey and that shattering fall. She loosed her clutch; got to her knees; thence tottered to a chair. That infamous Old Tom raised his head again; tickled her brain with misty fingers.

Mr. Marrapit painfully rose. He put a sympathetic hand upon the seat of his injury; with the other took up the candle. He regarded Mrs. Major; suspiciously sniffed the air, pregnant with strange fumes; again regarded his late burden.

Upon her face that infamous Old Tom set a beaming smile,

“Follow me, Mrs. Major,” Mr. Marrapit commanded; turned for the dining−room; from its interior faced about upon her.

With rare dignity the masterly woman slowly arose; martially she poised against the hat−rack; with stately mien marched steadily towards him.

Temporarily she had the grip of Old Tom—was well aware, at least, of his designs upon her purity, and superbly she combated him.

With proud and queenly air she drew on—Mr. Marrapit felt that the swift suspicion which had taken him had misjudged her.

Mrs. Major reached the mat. Old Tom gave a playful little twitch of her legs, and she jostled the doorpost.

With old−world courtesy she bowed apology to the post. “Beg pardon,” she graciously murmured; stood swaying.

X.

Step by step with her as she had crossed the hall, Mr. Fletcher, recovering from the coward fear in which he shivered outside the door, had crept forward along the path around the house. As Mrs. Major stood swaying upon the threshold of the dining−room he reached the angle; peered round it; in horror sighted Bill's figure pendant from Margaret's window.

Thrice the bell−mouth of his gun described a shivering circle; tightly he squeezed his eyelids—pressed the trigger.

BANG!

Mr. Marrapit bounded six inches—hardly reached the earth again when, with a startled scream, Mrs. Major was upon him, again her arms about his neck.

And now shriek pursued shriek, tearing upwards through her throat. Old Tom had loosed the ends of all her nerves. Like bolting rabbit in young corn the tearing discharge of that gun went madly through them, and lacerated she gave tongue.

Stifled by the bony shoulder that pressed against his face, Mr. Marrapit went black. He jerked his head free, put up his face, and giving cry for cry, shrilled, “George! George! George!”

The din reached George where from his window he leaned, crying on Abiram in the man−hunt across the garden. He drew in his head, bounded down the stairs. Over Mrs. Major's back, bent inwards from the toes to the rock about which she clung, Mr. Marrapit's empurpled face stared at him.

Upon George's countenance the sight struck a great grin; his legs it struck to dead halt.

Mrs. Major's shrieks died to moans.

“Action!” Mr. Marrapit gasped. “Remove this creature!”

George put a hand upon her back. It shot a fresh shriek from her; she clung closer.

“Pantaloon!” Mr. Marrapit strained. “Crush that grin! Action! Remove this woman! She throttles me! The pressure is insupportable. I am Sinbad.”

George again laid hands. Again Mrs. Major shrieked; tighter clung.

Mr. Marrapit, blacker, cried, “Zany!”

“Well, what the devil can I do?” George asked, hopping about the pair; Mrs. Major's back as responsive to his touch as the keys of a piano to idle fingers.

“You run to and fro and grin like a dog,” Mr. Marrapit told him. “Each time you touch her she screams, grips me closer. I shall be throttled. Use discretion. Add to mine your assurance of her safety. She is not herself.”

George chuckled. “She's not. She's tight as a drum.”

“Liar!” moaned Mrs. Major.

“Intoxicated?” Mr. Marrapit asked.

“Blind.”

Sharp words will move where entreaty cannot stir.

Mrs. Major relaxed her hold; spun round. “Monster” and “Perjurer" rushed headlong to her lips. “Ponsger!” she cried; tottered back against the sofa; was struck by it at the bend of her knees; collapsed upon it. Her head sunk sideways; she closed her eyes.

“You can see for yourself,” George said.

Mr. Marrapit sniffed: “My nose corroborates.”

“Ponsger!” the prone figure wailed.

Mr. Marrapit started: “Mrs. Major!”

She opened her eyes: “Call me Lucy. Darling−*um!*” She began to snore.

“Abhorrent!” Mr. Marrapit pronounced.

Whisperings without made him step to the door. White figures were upon the stairs. “To your beds!” he cried.

“Oh, whatever is it, sir?” Mrs. Armitage panted.

“Away! You outrage decency.” Mr. Marrapit set a foot upon the stairs. The affrighted figures fled before him.

George, when his uncle returned, was peering through the blind. “Who the devil loosed off that gun? It is immaterial. All events are buried beneath this abhorrent incident. The roof of my peace has crashed about me.” Mr. Marrapit regarded the prone figure. “Her inspirations grate upon me; her exhalations poison the air. Rouse her. Thrust her to her room.”

“You'll never wake her now till she's slept it off.”

“Let us then essay to carry her. She cannot remain here. My shame shall not be revealed, nor hers uncovered.”

George began: “To−morrow—”

“To−morrow I speed her from my gates. My beloved cats have been in the care of this swinish form. They have been in jeopardy. I tremble at their escape. To−morrow she departs.”

A sudden tremendous idea swept over George, engulfing speech.

With no word he moved to the sofa; grasped the prone figure; put it upon its weak legs. They gave beneath it. “You must take her feet,” he said.

Averting his gaze, Mr. Marrapit took the legs that Old Tom had devitalised. The procession moved out; staggered up the stairs.

Heavy was the burden; bursting with vulgar laughter was George; but that huge idea that suddenly had come to him swelled his muscles, lent him strength.

He heaved the form upon the bed.

On the dressing−table a candle burned. By its light Mr. Marrapit discovered Old Tom's bottle, two fingers of the villain yet remaining.

He beat his breast. “Extinguish that light. I to my room. Seek Fletcher. He patrols the garden for malefactors. In the morning I will see you. Before this disaster my chill is sped. You are of my flesh. Cleave unto me. In our bosoms let this abhorrent sore be buried. Seek Fletcher.”

The distraught man tottered to his room.

XI.

George went slowly down the stairs, bathing in the delicious thrills of unfolding the wrappings from about his great idea. He had yet had time but to feel its shape and hug it as a child will feel and hug a doll packed in paper. Now he stripped the coverings, and his pulses thumped as he saw how fine was it. Almost unconscious to his actions he unbarred the door; stepped into the thin light; was not aroused until, treading upon Mr. Fletcher's musket, his idea was suddenly jolted from him.

Here the gun that gave the echoes; where the hand that started it?

A hoarse cry came to him: “Mr. George! Mr. George!”

He looked along the sound. Above a hedge below the lawn an apple−tree raised its branches. Within them he could espy a dark mass that as he approached took form. Mr. Fletcher.

The grass hushed George's footsteps. Rounding the hedge he came upon the little drama that gave that note of dread to Mr. Fletcher's calls.

Beneath the gardener's armpits one branch of the apple−tree passed; behind his knees another. Between them hung his heavy seat. Whitely a square of it peered downwards; melancholy upon the sward lay the lid of corduroy that should have warmed the space. For ten paces outwards from the tree−trunk there stretched a pitted path. Abiram, as George came, turned at this path's extremity; set his sloe eye upon the dull white patch in Mr. Fletcher's stern; hurled forward up the track; sprang and snapped jaws an inch below the mark as Mr. Fletcher mightily heaved.

A lesser dog would have yapped bafflement, fruitlessly scratched upwards from hind legs. Abiram was perfect dog of the one breed of dog that is in all things perfect. Silently he plodded back; turned; ran; leapt again. Again Mr. Fletcher heaved, and again the fine jaws snapped an inch beneath the pallid square of flesh.

As once more uncomplaining he turned, Abiram sighted George; ruffled. George spoke his name. Abiram wagged that short tail that marked his Champion Victor Wild blood, shook the skull that spoke to the same mighty strain.

This dog expected in his human friends that same devotion to duty which is the governing trait of his breed. His shake implied, “No time for social niceties, sir. I have a job in hand.”

“Call 'im off, Mr. George,” Mr. Fletcher implored. “Call 'im—*ur!* “— he heaved upward as Abiram again sprang—“off,” he concluded, sinking once more as the bull−terrier trotted up the little path.

It was a fascinating scene. “You're quite safe,” George told him.

“Safe! I'm *tired!* I can't keep on risin' and fallin' ail night. It's 'ard—damn 'ard. I'm a gardener, I am; not a—*ur!*“ He heaved again.

George told him: “You do it awfully well, though; so neat.”

“Call 'im off,” Mr. Fletcher moaned. “He'll have me in a minute. He's 'ad a bit off of me calf; he's 'ad a piece out of me trousers. He'll go on. He's a methodical dog—*ur!*“

George took a step; caught Abiram's collar. “How on earth did you get up there?”

“Jumped.”

“Jumped! You couldn't jump up there!”

Mr. Fletcher took a look to see that Abiram was securely held; then started to wriggle to a pose of greater comfort. “I'd jump a house with that 'orror after me,” he said bitterly. By intricate squirmings he laid a hand upon the cold patch of flesh that gazed starkly downwards from his stern. “If I ain't got hydrophobia I've got frost−bite,” he moaned. “Cruel draught I've had through this 'ole. Take 'im off, Mr. George.”

George was scarcely listening. His thoughts had returned to the delicious task of fingering his great idea.

“Take 'im off, Mr. George,” Mr. Fletcher implored.

George passed a handkerchief under Abiram's collar; tugged for the gate; there dispatched the dog down the road.

Abiram shook his head; trotted with dejected stern. A job had been left unfinished.

XII.

Hallooing safety to the apple−tree, too preoccupied to inquire further into the reason for the gun and the presence of Bill's dog, George turned for the house.

Awakening birds carolled his presence. They hymned the adventures of the day that Dawn, her handmaiden, came speeding, silver−footed, perfume−bearing, fresh from her dewy bath, to herald.

George put up an answering pipe. For him also the day was adventure−packed and must lustily be hymned. Entering Mr. Marrapit's study he drew the blinds; upon a telegraph form set Mary's name and her address; pondered; then to these words compressed his great idea:

“*Go agency this morning. Get name on books. Meet you there. Think can get you situation here. George.*“

“Immediately the office opens,” said George; trod up to his room.

CHAPTER IV. Mr. Marrapit Takes A Nice Warm Bath.

I.

As Mr. Marrapit had said, the disaster of the night had sped his complaint.

He appeared at breakfast. No word was spoken. He ate nothing.

Once only gave he sign of interest. Midway through the meal muffled sounds came to the breakfast party. Scufflings in the hall struck an attentive light in Mr. Marrapit's eyes; slam of the front door jerked him in his seat; wheels, hoofs along the drive drew his gaze to the window. A cab rolled past—a melancholy horse; a stout driver, legs set over a corded box; a black figure, bolt upright, handkerchief to eyes.

The vision passed. Mr. Marrapit gazed upwards; his thin lips moved.

Vulgar curiosity shall not tempt us to pry into the demeanour with which, an hour earlier, this man had borne himself in the study with Mrs. Major. Of that unhappy woman's moans, of her explanations, of the tears that poured from her eyes—bloodshot in a head most devilishly racked by Old Tom—we shall not speak.

Margaret stretched her hand for more bread. Despite the moving scenes in which during the night she had travelled with her Bill, her appetite was nothing affected. With her meals her sentimentality was upon the friendliest terms. This girl was most gnawed by hunger when by emotion she was most torn.

She stretched for a third slice.

Mr. Marrapit cleared his throat. The sound shot her. She caught his eye and the glance pierced her. Her outstretched hand dropped upon the cloth, toyed with crumbs.

Mr. Marrapit said: “I perceive you are finished?”

Margaret murmured: “Yes.” Her voice had a tremulous note. It is a bitter thing to lose a slice of bread−and−butter for which the whole system imperatively calls.

“Withdraw,” Mr. Marrapit commanded.

She put a lingering glance upon the loaf; wanly glided from the room.

II.

As she closed the door George prepared for his great idea. He drank deeply of a cup of tea; drew down his cuffs; pondered them. They were covered in pencilled notes, evolved by desperate work all that morning, to aid him when the hour was at hand.

He absorbed Note I; spoke: “I am afraid last night's events very much distressed you, sir—”

“They are interred. Do not resurrect them.”

George hurried to Note 2. “My sympathies with you—”

“Let the dead bury the dead. Mourn not the past.”

George skipped to Note 3. “What I am concerned about is the cats.”

“You are?”

“Oh, sir, indeed I am. I am not demonstrative. Perhaps you have not guessed my fondness for the cats?”

“I have not.”

“Believe me, it is a deep affection. When I saw that unhappy woman tigh—under the influence of spirits, what was my first thought?”

“Supply the answer.”

George took another glimpse at Note 3. “What was my first thought?” he repeated. “Was it distress at sight of a woman so forgetful of her modesty? No. Was it sympathy for the cruel deception that had been practised upon you? Forgive me, sir, it was not.” (He glanced at his notes.) “What, then?”

He paused brightly.

“It is your conundrum,” said Mr. Marrapit. “Solve it.”

George raised an impressive hand. “What, then? It was the thought of the risks that the cats I so loved had run whilst beneath the care of this woman.”

Mr. Marrapit's groan inspirited George. He was on the right track. He took Note 4. “I asked myself, Who is

responsible for the jeopardy in which these creatures have been placed? Heaven knows, I said, what they may not have suffered. This woman may have neglected their food, she may have neglected their comforts. In a drunken fit she might have poisoned them, beat them, set furious dogs upon them."

Mr. Marrapit writhed in anguish.

George acted as Note 4 bade him. He dropped his voice. "Let us trust, sir," he said, "that none of these things has taken place."

"Amen," Mr. Marrapit murmured. "Amen."

George's voice took a sterner note. "But, I asked myself, Who is responsible for those horrors that might have been, that may have been?"

Mr. Marrapit dropped his head upon his hands. He murmured: "I am. Peccavi."

George rose in noble calm. He read Note 5; gave it with masterly effect: "No, sir. I am."

"You!"

"I! I have not slept since I leftyou, sir. I have paced my room and" (he read a masterly note) "remorse has paced with me, step by step, hour by hour. Did I help my uncle, I asked myself, when he was selecting this Mrs. Major? No. Was I by his right hand to counsel and advise him? No. Has not my training at hospital, my intercourse with ten thousand patients, taught me to read faces like an open book? It has. Should not I then have been by his side to help him when he selected a woman for the post of caring for our−forgive me, sir, I said 'our'—caring for our cats? I should. I asked myself how I could make amends. Only by begging my uncle's forgiveness for my indifference and by imploring him to let me help him in the choice of the next woman he selects."

A masterly pause he followed with an appeal sent forth in tones of rare beauty: "Oh, sir, I do beg your forgiveness; I do implore you let me make amends by helping you in your next choice."

Mr. Marrapit wiped moist eyes. "I had not suspected in you this profundity of feeling."

George said brokenly: "I have given you no reason."

Mr. Marrapit replied on a grim tone: "Assuredly you have not."

George glanced at Note 6; fled from the danger zone.

"Where I fear the mistake was made in Mrs. Major," he hurried, "was that she was not a perfect lady. Our—forgive me for saying 'our'—our cats are refined cats, cats of gentle birth, of inherent delicacy. Their attendant should be of like breeding. She should be refined, her birth should be gentle, her feelings delicate. She should be a lady."

"You are right," Mr. Marrapit said. "As sea calleth to sea, as like calleth to like, so would an ebb and flow of sympathy be set in motion between my cats and an attendant delicately born. Is that your meaning?"

George murmured in admiration: "In beautiful words that is my meaning." He paused. Now the bolt was to be shot, and he nerved himself against the strain. He fired: "I have a suggestion."

"Propound."

No further need for notes. George pushed back his cuffs; gulped the agitation that swelled dry and suffocating in his mouth. "This is my suggestion. Because I have had experience in the reading of faces; because I wish to make recompense for my share in the catastrophe of Mrs. Major's presence; because—"

"You are drowning beneath reasons. Cease bubbling. Strike to the surface."

George had not been drowning. He had been creeping gingerly from stepping−stone to stepping−stone. The endeavour had been to come as close as possible to the big rock upon which he intended to spring. The less the distance of the leap the more remote the chance of slipping down the rock and being whirled off in swift water. It is a method of progression by which, in the race of existence, many lives are lost. The timid will hobble from stone to stone, landing at each forward point more and yet more shaky in the knees. The torrent roars about them. Sick they grow and giddy; stepping−stones are green and slimy; the effort of balancing cannot be unduly prolonged.

Ere ever they feel themselves ready for the leap they slip, go whirling and drowning downstream past the stepping−stones that are called Infirmity of Purpose. Or they may creep close enough the rock, only to find they have delayed over their hobbling progression until the rock is already so crowded by others who have been bolder over the stones as to show no foothold remaining. They leap and fall back.

We are all gifted with strength sufficient for that spring; but disaster awaits him who scatters his energies in a

hundred hesitating little scrambles.

Now George sprang; poised upon that last “because.”

“And because—I wish—” He sprang—“Therefore I suggest that I should go to town to−day and search every agency until I find you a lady I think suitable.”

The thud of his landing knocked the breath out of him. In terror he lay lest Mr. Marrapit's answering words should have the form of desperate fellows who would hurl him from his hold, throw him back.

“I agree,” Mr. Marrapit said.

George was drawn to his feet. He could have whooped for joy.

“I agree. I have misjudged you. In this matter I lay my trust in you. Take it, tend it, nurse it; cherish it so that it may not be returned to me cold and dead. Speed forth.”

“Have I a free hand?” George asked.

“Emphatically no. Every effort must be made to keep down expenses. Here are two shillings. Render account. As to salary—”

George burst out: “Oh, she'll come for anything.”

Mr. Marrapit started. “She? Whom?”

George threw a blanket to hide the hideous blunder. “Told of such a home as this is,” he explained, “a true lady would come for anything.”

The blunder sank, covered. “I earnestly pray that may be so,” Mr. Marrapit said. “I doubt. Rapacity and greed stalk the land. Mrs. Major had five−and−twenty pounds per annum. I will not go above that figure.”

George told him: “Rely upon me. But, by a free hand I meant a free hand as to engaging what I may think a suitable person.”

“Emphatically no. You are the lower court. Sift sheep from goats. Send sheep here to me. I am the tribunal. I will finally select.”

The refusal placed a last obstacle in the path of George's scheme, but he did not demur. Primarily he dared not. To demur might raise again that blunder he had let escape when he had said, “She'll come for anything”; this time it might rage around and not be captured. All might be wrecked. Secondly he felt there to be no great need for protest. The confidence of having won thus far gave him courage against this final difficulty.

“Trust me, sir,” he said.

Very soberly he paced from the room; gently closed the door; with the tread of one bearing a full heart heavily moved up the stairs.

He reached his room; ripped off sobriety. “Oh, Mary!” he exultantly cried, “if I can get you down here, old girl!”

Mr. Marrapit, meanwhile, stepped to the room where his cats lived; lovingly toyed with his pets; took the Rose of Sharon a walk in the garden. He was in pleasant mood. Great had been the distress of the night, but this man had enjoyed a luxurious warm bath—in crocodile's tears.

CHAPTER V. Miss Porter Swallows A Particularly Large Sweet.

I.

Mary in the little Battersea lodgings was at breakfast when her George's telegram arrived. She puckered over its mystery; shaped events this way and that, but could make of them no keyhole that the message would fit and unlock.

She flew among the higher improbabilities: George, she conjectured, had misrepresented this stony−hearted uncle; last night had told all to Mr. Marrapit, and Mr. Marrapit had warmed to her and bade him fetch her to Herons' Holt. She ripped George's description of his uncle from about the old man; dressed Mr. Marrapit in snowy locks and a benign smile; pictured him coming down the steps with outstretched hand to greet her. She heard him say, “My daughter”; she saw him draw George to her, lock their hands; she heard him murmur, “Bless you, my children.”

This was a romantic young woman. A poached egg was allowed to grow cold as she trembled over her delectable fancies.

But a glance at the telegram pulled her from these delicious flights; bumped her to earth. “*Think can get you situation here.* “ “Situation” drove the fatherly air from Mr. Marrapit; once more rehabilitated him as her George presented him—grim and masterly.

Further conjecture altogether drove Mr. Marrapit from the picture. What situation could be offered her in the Marrapit household? Why should “here” mean Herons' Holt? It must mean at a house in the district.

Upon the magic carpet of this new thought my Mary was whirled again in an imaged paradise. She would be near her George.

High in these clouds she ran to her bedroom for her hat; but with it there descended upon her head a new thought that again sent her toppling earthwards. Characterless, and worse than characterless, how was she to get any such delightful post? My Mary started up the street for the Agency, blinking tears.

At Battersea Bridge a new thought came sweeping. She clutched on to it; held it fast. Into her tread it put a spring; to her chin gave a brave tilt. If everything failed, if of the telegram nothing came, why, at least she had the telegram!—was making for the Agency under a direct command from her George. The thought swelled her with confidence and comfort. How warm a thing it was to feel that she did not face the world alone! Her George's arm was striking for her, her George's hand was pointing a terse command. “Go to Agency.” She was obeying him; she belonged to him.

II.

Mary had intended to wait outside the Agency until her George should arrive and explain his mysterious message. But she was scarcely at the building when Miss Ram, also arriving, accosted her—took her upstairs. Miss Ram quite naturally regarded the meeting as evidence that Mary had come for help. Mary, in a flutter as to George's intentions, could but meekly follow.

In the room marked “Private,” settled at her table, Miss Ram icily opened the interview. “I have heard from Mrs. Chater. I did not expect to see you again.”

Mary began: “I don't know what you have heard—”

Miss Ram stretched for a letter.

“Oh, I don't wish to,” Mary cried; put out a hand that stayed the action. “To hear all she says would again begin it all. It would be like her voice. It would be like being with her again. Please, please, Miss Ram, don't tell me.”

“You have your own version?”

“I have the truth.” Mary pointed at the letter−file. “The truth isn't there. Mrs. Chater isn't capable of the truth. She cannot even recognise the truth when she hears it.”

In yet more freezing tones Miss Ram replied: “She is an old and valued client.”

“You only know her in this office,” Mary told her. “You don't know her in her home.”

"I have suited her with other young ladies. I have heard of her from them."

"And they have spoken well of her?"

"Discounting the prejudice of a late employee, they have spoken well."

"Was her son there with them?"

"They have not told me so."

"Ah!" said Mary; sat back in her chair.

"Then your version is about the son?"

Mary nodded. Recollection put a silly lump in her throat.

Miss Ram said: "Miss Humfray, when I received that letter from Mrs. Chater, I said I would have no more to do with you. I told Miss Porter I would not see you. Why, out of all my ladies, do you come back to me characterless from your situations? I will listen to your story. Make it very brief. Don't exaggerate. I have sat in this chair for seventeen years. I can distinguish in a minute between facts and spleen. You desire to tell your version?"

"I must," Mary said. "What I'd like to do would be to get up and say, 'If you doubt me, I'll not trouble to convince you.' I'd like to walk out and leave you and face anything rather than 'explain.' Why should I 'explain' to anybody? But I'm not going to walk out. I haven't the pluck. I know what it is like to be alone out there." She gave a little choke. "I've learnt that much, anyway." She went on. "I'll just tell you, that's all. I don't want your sympathy; I only want your sense of justice."

"I like your spirit," Miss Ram said. It was a quality she rarely found in her applicants. "Go on."

Then Mary told. She phrased bluntly. Her recital was after the manner of the fireworks called "Roman candles." These, when lit, pour out fire and smoke in a rather weak−kneed dribble. They must be held tightly. When tensely enough constricted, of fire and smoke there is little, but at intervals out there pops an exceedingly luminous ball of flame.

My Mary kept the pressure of pride upon her throat. There was no dribble of emotion. Only the facts popped out—hard and dry, and to Miss Ram intensely illuminative. Mary did not mention George's name. She concluded her narrative with jerky facts relative to the scene in the Park. "Then I ran away," she said, "and a friend of mine came up. He had seen. And he thrashed him. When I got back to Mrs. Chater's her son had arrived—battered. He told his mother that he had seen me with a man and had interfered. That the man assaulted him. That's all."

"The miserable hound!" pronounced Miss Ram with extraordinary ferocity.

From a drawer in her desk she took a manuscript book, bound in limp leather, tied with blue ribbon. Herein were contained the remarkable thoughts which from time to time had come to this woman during her seventeen years' occupancy of the chair in which she sat. Upon the flyleaf was inscribed "Aphorisms: by Eugenie Ram." It was her intent to publish this darling work when beneath each letter of the alphabet twelve aphorisms were written.

"The miserable hound!" cried she, when the full tale of Mr. Bob Chater's vileness was told; drew "Aphorisms" towards her and wrote in hot blood.

Then looked at Mary. "*L,*" she read, "*L. Lust. Lust is the sound meat of natural instinct gone to carrion. Men eat meat, wolves eat carrion. Some men are wolf−men*—Hand me the dictionary, Miss Humfray. Two r's in carrion. I *thought* so. Thank you."

She replaced "Aphorisms." "My dear, I will do what I can for you," she told Mary. "I *do* believe you. Go into the interview room. I hear a step."

III.

That step was George's. Abashed in this home of women he shuffled uneasily in the passage, then put a hesitating knuckle upon "Enquiries."

From within a violent movement was followed by a strange guttural sound. George entered.

With scarlet face and watery eyes, Miss Porter—the stout young woman who presided over this department, and whose habit it was to suck sweets the better to beguile the tedium of her duties—gazed at him; made guttural sounds. The start of George's knock had caused this girl to swallow a particularly large sweet, and its downward passage was inflicting upon her considerable pain.

Her face was an alarming sight. "I'm afraid—" George began.

“Pardon!” gasped Miss Porter, driving the sweet with a tremendous swallow. “Pardon!”

“Not at all,” George pleasantly said. “Not at all. I called with reference to a lady−help.”

The grinding sweet forbade the pleasant dalliance

Miss Porter could have wished with this handsome young man. In a brave spasm (this girl was in great suffering), “I will tell the Principal,” she said; trod heavily to Miss Ram's door.

Fate is an abominable trickster; loves to tease us. With one hand it gave Miss Porter a delectable male; with the other prevented her enjoying him. Furthermore, it prematurely deprived her of a fine sweet.

Reappearing and holding the door ajar: “Miss Ram will see you,” she murmured. Tears were in this girl's eyes; the bolted sweet was still paining her very much indeed.

IV.

In two clever bows Miss Ram without a word greeted George; indicated a chair.

George sat down. “I want,” he began—“that is, my uncle wants, a lady−help—”

“Name, please,” rapped Miss Ram, opening the ledger.

George gave it; stretched a leg to indicate a confidence he did not feel; pitched his voice to aid the presentment. “When I say lady−help—”

“Address, please,” said Miss Ram with a pistol−snap.

George withdrew the signs of confidence with a jerk. He gave the information. Then waited Miss Ram to give him a lead. He had twice been shot; was in no desire again to expose his person.

Miss Ram fixed her small black eyes upon him. She said nothing. The intrusion of a young man into matters essentially domestic she strongly disapproved. Under “D” in “Aphorisms” this woman had a trenchant note touching this matter. “*D. Domesticity. Domesticity*,” said this note, “*is the offspring of all the womanly virtues. The virtues impregnate the woman, and domesticity is the resultant child. Absence of a single womanly trait aborts or debilitates the offspring. Men have nothing whatever to do with it, and nothing is more abominable than a man who meddles with domestic matters.*“

The rays of Miss Ram's disconcerting eye pushed George steadily backwards from the rock of such small confidence as remained to him. Assailed by the inquiring bows with which she now interrogated his further purpose, he slipped from it, plunged wildly into the sea of what he required, and for five minutes beat this way and that, hurling the splash of broken sentences at Miss Ram's unbending countenance.

Beginning a description of Mr. Marrapit's household, he floundered thence to a description of the required lady's duties; abandoning that unfinished, splashed to a description of the manner of person for whom he sought.

It was his object to paint a character and appearance as near to his Mary's as he could master; to induce Miss Ram to suggest her as likely candidate for the post. He could not introduce his Mary to his uncle unless she came under the auspices of some recognised institution.

So he floundered on.

Miss Ram did not move. His struggles grew less; he caught at haphazard words; flung them desperately; at last relapsed; sat sweating.

Miss Ram poked him with a questioning bow. He did not stir.

With a further bow she accepted his defeat; handed him a pink paper. “Now, kindly fill up this form. State precisely what you require. Write clearly, please.”

George obeyed. Miss Ram studied the answers to her printed interrogations; opened her ledger. “I have several suitable ladies.” She started to read a list. “Miss Minna Gregor; aged 25; daughter of the late Humphrey Gregor, stockbroker; three years' character from Mrs. Mountsaffron of Charles Street, to whom she was lady−help and from whom an excellent reference may be obtained.”

“Too old,” said George.

Miss Ram frowned; returned to the ledger. “Miss Ellen Hay; aged 20; daughter of Lieutenant Hay, late R.N. For two years with Mrs. Hoyle−Hoyle of Knightsbridge.”

George squeaked, “Too young.” He had not anticipated this ordeal.

Miss Ram read on. At the fifteenth name George was in desperate agitation. His list of objections was exhausted. Each protest had narrowed his field.

“This is the last upon my books,” Miss Ram severely told him. “She fills all your requirements. None of your objections applies. You will certainly engage her.”

“I feel sure I shall,” George brightly said. If this was the last name it must be Mary.

“I am glad to hear that,” Miss Ram announced. “You are hard to please. This is a most admirable young woman.”

George leaned forward with an expectant smile. Miss Ram read: “Miss Rosa Brump—”

George's smile died. An “Eh?” was startled out of him.

“Brump,” said Miss Ram testily. “Brump. B−r−u−m−p, *Brump*.”

George said “Oh!”; ran a finger around the inside of his collar.

Miss Ram read on, emphasising the Brumps with the suggestion of a ball bouncing from rock to rock:

“Miss Rosa *Brump*; aged 21; daughter of the late Selwyn Agburn *Brump*, barrister−at−law. Companion to Miss Victoria Shuttle of Shuttle Hall, Shuttle, Lines, until that lady's death. The late Miss Shuttle dying suddenly, Miss *Brump* has no reference from her. What that reference would have been, however, is clearly evidenced by the fact that in her will Miss Shuttle bequeathed 'to my faithful companion Rosa *Brump*,' her terra−cotta bust of the late Loomis Shuttle, Esq., J.P., inventor of the Shuttle liquid manure.”

Miss Ram wagged a finger at George. “That speaks for itself,” she said.

George did not answer. He was in a confusion of fear. This terrible woman would force Miss Brump upon him. He was powerless in her hands. He was in chains.

“Does it not?” poked Miss Ram.

“Rather,” said George. “Oh, rather.”

“Very good. I congratulate your uncle upon obtaining this estimable young woman. She should call here in a few minutes. You can then make final arrangements. Meanwhile, this form—”

George hurled himself free from this hypnotic panic. Anything must be done to shake off this intolerable Brump.

“One moment,” he said. “I had forgotten—”

“Well?”

“What colour is Miss Brump's hair?”

“Her *what?*“

“Hair. Her hair.”

“How extraordinary! Brown.”

George effected an admirable start. He echoed: “*Brown?* Oh, not brown?”

“Certainly. Brown.”

George mournfully shook his head. “Oh, dear! How unfortunate! I'm afraid Miss Brump will not suit, Miss Ram. My uncle—extraordinary foible—has a violent objection to brown hair. He will not have it in the house.”

“Unheard of!” Miss Ram snapped. “Unheard of!”

George rubbed together his sweating palms; blundered on. “None the less a fact,” he said impressively. He dropped his voice. “It is a very sad story. He had fifteen brothers—”

“Fifteen!”

“I assure you, yes. All were black−haired except one, who was brown— the first brown−haired child in the history of the house. 'Bantam' they used to call him when they were girls and boys together— 'Bantam.'“

“*Girls*! You said brothers!”

“Ah, yes. Girls as well. Twelve, twelve girls.”

“Twelve girls and fifteen boys!”

“I assure you, yes. A record. As I was saying, the brown−haired child, he took to drink. It is most painful. Died in a madhouse. My uncle, head of the family, reeled beneath the stigma—reeled. Vowed from that day that he would never let a brown−haired person cross his threshold.”

George wiped his streaming face; sat back with a sigh. Miss Brump was buried.

Miss Ram's next words caused him to start in his seat.

“But your hair is brown.”

My contemptible George, all his lies now rushing furious upon him, put his hand to his head; withdrawing it, gazed at the palm with the air of one looking for a stain.

“How about *that*?” rapped Miss Ram.

George gave a wan smile. “It is my misfortune,” he said simply—“my little cross. We all have our burdens in

this life, Miss Ram. Pardon me if I do not care to dwell upon mine."

With a bow Miss Ram indicated sympathy; decorously closed the subject.

George gave a little sigh. With a simulation of brightness he proceeded: "You are sure you have no other lady?"

"I have one," said Miss Ram. "She would not suit."

"May I be allowed to judge?"

Miss Ram turned to the ledger. "'Miss Mary Humfray.'"

George started. "It is nothing," he explained. "One of those shivers; that is all."

Miss Ram bowed. "'Miss Mary Humfray; aged 21; only child of the late Colonel Humfray, Indian Army; references from former employer not good, but with extenuating circumstances.'"

"I think she might suit," George said. "She—she—" he groped wildly —"she is the daughter of a colonel."

"So were four others."

George wiped his brow. "The—the *only* daughter."

"You consider that a merit?"

"My uncle would. He has curious ideas. He is himself an only child."

Miss Ram stared. George had the prescience of trouble, but could not find it. "Oh, yes," he said, "oh, yes."

"Fifteen brothers and twelve sis—"

George saw the gaping pit; sprang from it. "*Has* an only child," he corrected. "*Has*, not *is*."

Miss Ram glared, continued: "What of the absence of character?"

"I imagine the fact of being an only child would override that. You said there were extenuating circumstances?"

"There are. I personally would speak for the young lady."

Excitement put George upon his feet. "I thank you very much, Miss Ram. I feel that this lady will suit."

"You have asked nothing about her. With the others you were unusually particular."

"I act greatly by instinct. It is a family trait. Something seems to assure me in this case."

Miss Ram gazed searchingly at George; answered him upon an interested note. "Indeed!" she spoke. "Remarkable. Pray pardon me." She drew "Aphorisms" from its drawer; hesitated a moment; with flowing pen wrote beneath "I."

She turned towards George. "Pray pardon me," she repeated. "What you tell me of acting by instinct greatly interests me as a student of character. In this little volume here I—allow me." She emphasised with a quill−pen. "*I. Instinct. Instinct is the Almighty's rudder with which He steers our frail barques upon the tempestuous sea of life at moments when otherwise we should be quite at a loss. Some of us answer quickly to this mysterious helm and for example something seems to tell them in the middle of the night that the house is on fire, and they get up and find it is. Let those who don't answer quickly beware!*"

"That's awfully well put," said George. "Awfully well."

For the first time Miss Ram smiled. "You would wish to interview the young lady?" she asked. "Fortunately she is present. Kindly step to the Interview Room."

She led the way. With thundering pulses George followed. His Mary rose. Miss Ram introduced them.

George rolled his tongue in a dry mouth; passed it over dry lips. He had no words.

"Have you no questions?" Miss Ram asked severely.

For a third time since he had entered this building, panic broke damply upon George's brow. He blew his nose; in a very faint voice asked: "Your age is twenty−one?"

Upon an agitated squeak his Mary told him: "Yes."

"Ah!" In desperation he paused: caught Miss Ram's awful eye; was goaded to fresh plunge. "Ah, one−and−twenty?"

In a tiny squeak Mary replied: "Yes."

He shuffled in desperation. "When will you be twenty−two?"

"In February."

"Ah! February." This was awful. "February."

Miss Ram's eye stabbed him again.

"February. Then you must be twenty−one now?"

"*Tch−tch!*" sounded Miss Ram.

"Twenty−one," George stammered. "Twenty−one—"

From the other room at that moment Miss Porter called.

"I am required," said Miss Ram, "elsewhere. I will return in a moment." She passed out; closed the door.

V.

"My darling!" cried George.

"Georgie!"

They embraced.

He held her to him; kissed the soft gold hair.

On a movement in the next room his Mary wriggled free. "Tell me."

"By Gad, it's been awful! Did you hear me in that room?"

She nodded, laughing at him. He kissed the smiles.

"Oh, do be careful! Let *go*, George; let *go*. I couldn't hear what you said. But you were hours—*hours*."

"Years," said George. "Years. Aeons of time. I have aged considerably. I thought it would never end. It was appalling."

She clasped her pretty hands. "But tell me, George. Do tell me. I don't understand *anything*. What has *happened?*"

"Give me time," George told her. "I am not the same George. The light− hearted George of yore is dead under Miss Ram's chair. I am old and seamed with care."

"George, *do, do* tell me! Don't fool."

"I'm not fooling. I can't fool. You don't realise what I have been through. You have no heart. I can't fool. When I was a child I thought as a child; I did childish things. But now that I have been through Miss Ram's hands my bright boyhood is sapped. I am old and stricken in years."

"Oh, Georgie, *do, do* tell me!"

This ridiculous George gave a boyish laugh; clasped his Mary again; squeezed her to him till she gasped. "I've got you, Mary!" he said. He kissed the gold hair. "I've got you. I'm going to see you every day. You're coming down to live at Herons' Holt."

Then he told her.

VI.

Miss Ram returned; directed at George a bow that Was one huge note of interrogation.

"Quite satisfactory," George replied. "I am sure my uncle will agree."

"There is, of course," objected Miss Ram, "the unfortunate matter of references."

George took a frank air. "Miss Ram, I am quite willing to take your personal assurances on that matter. On behalf of my uncle I accept them."

"I will send a written statement of the matter," said Miss Ram. Her air was dogged.

"I most solemnly assure you that is unnecessary."

Miss Ram killed him with a bow. "It is my custom. I have the reputation of seventeen years to sustain."

George quailed.

"Your uncle," Miss Ram exclaimed, "will also wish to see Miss Humfray. She shall go this afternoon."

"Not this afternoon," George told her. "No. To−morrow. He could not see her to−day."

"Very well. To−morrow. To−night I will write the references to him. Kindly pay the fee to Miss Porter in the office. Good morning!"

She pushed him off with a stabbing bow. He fled.

VII.

In that delectable interview during Miss Ram's absence George had arranged with his Mary that this was a day to be celebrated. She should not proceed instantly to be weighed by Mr. Marrapit; let that ordeal be given to the morrow. This splendid day should splendidly end; tremendous gaiety should with a golden clasp fasten the golden hours of the morning. In the afternoon he had a lecture and clinical demonstrations. Like a horse he would work

till half−past six. At seven he would meet his Mary in Sloane Square.

So it was. At that hour George from the top of his 'bus spied his Mary upon the little island in the Square. He sprang down and his first action was to show a fat and heavy sovereign, pregnant with delights, lying in his palm.

“Borrowed,” said George. “One pound sterling. Twenty shillings net. And every penny of it is going to fly.”

He called a hansom, and they smoothly rolled to Earl's Court.

When sovereigns are rare possessions, how commanding an air the feel of one imparts! Mary watched her George with pride. How masterful was he! How deferential the head waiter at the restaurant in the Exhibition became! The man was putting them off with an inner table. Her George by a look and a word had him in a minute to right−abouts, and one of the coveted tables upon the verandah was theirs. Waiters flocked about. With such an air did George command the cheapest wine upon the list that the waiter, whose lip ordinarily would have curled at such an order, hastened to its execution with dignity of task, deference of service.

They ate robustly through the menu: faltered not nor checked at a single dish. They passed remarks upon their neighbours. At intervals George would say, “Isn't this fine, Mary?”; or his Mary would say, “Oh, Georgie, isn't this splendid?” And the other would answer, “Rather!”

A meal and a conversation to make your proper lovers shudder! There was no nibbling at and toying with food; there was no drinking and feasting from the light of one another's eyes. When George felt thirsty he would put his nose in the cheap claret and keep it there till mightily refreshed; such hungry yearnings as his Mary felt she satisfied with knife and fork. These were very simple children and exceedingly healthy.

But while his Mary's tongue ached with a cold, cold ice, George was in the pangs of mental arithmetic. As the bill stood, that pregnant sovereign had given birth to all the delights of which it was capable; was shattered and utterly wrecked in child−bed.

A waiter came bustling. There was just time. George leant across. “Mary, when I ask you if you'll have coffee, say you prefer it outside—it's cheaper there.”

“Coffee, sir?”

“Special coffee,” George ordered nonchalantly. “Yes, two. One moment. Would you rather have your coffee outside near the band, Mary?”

His Mary was splendid. She looked around the room, she looked into the cool night—and there her eye longer lingered. “It's cooler outside,” she said. “I think it would be nicer outside, if you don't mind.”

“All right.”

“Sure you don't mind?”

“Oh, no; no, not a bit. Bill, waiter.”

The waiter bowed low over his munificent tip; dropped it into a jingling pocket. George gathered his miserable change; slid it silently to where it lay companionless; with his Mary passed into the warm night.

In the Empress Gardens they found a hidden table; here sipped coffee, and here were most dreadfully common. Mary's hand crept into her George's; they spoke little. The warm night breeze gently kissed their faces; the band stirred deepest depths; they set their eyes upon the velvety darkness that lay beyond the lights, and there pictured one another in a delectable future. Mary saw a very wonderful George; now and then glimpsed a very happy little Mary in a wonderful home. George also saw a happy little Mary in a wonderful home, but he more clearly followed a very wonderful George, magnificently accomplishing the mighty things that made the little Mary happy.

* * * * *

George kissed his Mary upon the doorstep of the Battersea lodgings; caught the last train to Paltley Hill; and as he walked home from the station the scented hedges murmured to him with his Mary's voice.

CHAPTER VI. The Girl Comes Near The Lugger.

I.

At breakfast upon the following day George set forth the result of his labours; with urgent eloquence extolled the virtues of this Miss Humfray.

Before Mr. Marrapit's plate lay an open envelope; upon the back George could read the inscription “Norfolk Street Agency for Distressed Gentlewomen.”

What had Miss Ram said of his Mary? The thought that she had written a reference which at the last moment would dash into dust this mighty scheme, was as a twisting knife in George's vitals. Every time that Mr. Marrapit stretched his hand for the letter the agitated young man upon a fresh impulse would dash into defiant eulogy of his darling; and so impetuous was the rush of his desperate words that at the beat of every new wave Mr. Marrapit would withdraw his startled hand from the letter; frown at George across the coffee−pot.

At last: “Sufficient,” he announced. “Curb zeal. Mount discretion. Satisfy the demands of appetite. You have not touched food. Tasks he before you. Do not starve the brain. I am tired of your eulogies of this person. For twenty−one minutes you have been hurling advertisements at me. I am a hoarding.”

The bill−sticker pushed a piece of bacon into a dry mouth; sat with goggling eyes.

The hoarding continued: “I have here this person's reference. It is good.”

“Down shot the piece of bacon; convulsively bolted like Miss Porter's sweet.

“Good!” cried George.

“I said good. For faulty articulation I apologise.”

“I know, I heard. I meant that I am pleased.”

“Strive to express the meaning. The person arrives for inspection at mid−day. For your assistance I tender thanks. The incident is now closed. Do you labour at hospital to−day?”

George had determined to be at the fount of news. In town, uncertain, he could have applied himself to nothing. He said:

“No, here; I work here to−day.”

“To your tasks,” commanded Mr. Marrapit.

II.

George went to his room, but his tasks through that morning lay neglected.

Impossible to work. He was in a position at which at one time or another most of us are placed. He was upon one end of a balanced see−saw, and he was blindfolded so that it was impossible to see what might happen upon the other extremity. Suddenly he might be swung up to highest delight; suddenly he might be dashed earthwards to hit ground with a jarring thud. The one eventuality or the other was certain; but he must sit blindfold and helpless—unable to affect the balance by an ounce. Here is the position in which all of us are made cowards. Bring the soldier into action, and his blood will run hot enough to make him intoxicated and insensible to fear; hold him in reserve, and courage will begin to ooze. Give us daylight in which we may see aught that threatens us, and likely enough we shall have desperate courage sufficient to rush in and grapple; it is in the darkness that uncertainty sets teeth chattering. More prayers are said, and with more devotion, at night than in the morning. We creep and crawl and squirm to heaven when the uncertainty of the night has to be faced; but we can get along well enough, thank you, when we spring out of bed with the courage of morning.

George could not work until he knew whether he was to be swung high or thrown low. He paced his room; glimpsed his watch; tremendously smoked—and groaned aloud as, at every turn, he would receive the buffets of recollection of some important point upon which he had omitted to school his Mary.

In those desperate moments he decided finally that Margaret should not be told that Mary and he were so much more than strangers. Supposing all went well, and his Mary came to Herons' Holt, her safety and his would certainly be imperilled by giving the key of their secret to his cousin. It was a hard resolve. About the beautiful romance of the thing Margaret's nature would have crooned as a mother over her suckling. She would have

mothered it, cherished it, given them a hundred opportunities of exchanging for clasps and whispers the chilly demeanour they must bear one to another. But the pleasure must be foregone. My George had the astonishing sense to know that the animal instinct in Margaret's nature would outride the romance. Twice the countless years that separate us from the gathering of our first instincts may pass, and this the strongest of them—the abhorrence of secrecy−will never be uprooted. When all life was a ferocious struggle for life, secrecy—and it would have been the secret of a store of food—was inimical to the existence of the pack: it was opposed to the first of the slowly forming laws of nature. There must be equality of opportunity that all might equally be tested. Thus it was that a secret hoard of food, when come upon, instantly was noised abroad by the discoverer, and its possessor torn to death; and thus it is to−day that a secret once beyond the persons immediately concerned is carried from mouth to mouth till the world has it, and its first possessors take the violence of discovery.

For a reason that was almost similar George negatived the impulse which bade him meet his Mary at the station, walk with her to the house, and leave her before the gates. For, supposing again that she were accepted and came to Herons' Holt, this suspicious meeting would come flying to Mr. Marrapit upon the breezes that whirl in and out of every cranny and nook in small communities. Towns are blind and deaf; villages have peeping eyes, straining ears, loose mouths, that pry and listen and whisper.

Almost upon the hour of twelve there came to the agitated young man's ears a ring that could be none other than hers.

He tip−toed to the banisters; peered below. His Mary was ushered in.

While she stood behind the maid who tapped on Mr. Marrapit's door, she glanced up. George had a glimpse of her face; waved encouragement from the stairhead.

The maid stood aside. His Mary passed in to the ogre's den.

III.

Clad in a dressing−gown, Mr. Marrapit was standing against the fireplace. My trembling Mary settled just clear of the closing door; took his gaze. He put his eye upon her face; slowly travelled it down her person; rested it upon her little shoes; again brought it up; again carried it down; this time left it at her feet.

The gaze seemed to burn her stockings. She shuffled; little squirms of fright nudged her. She glanced at her feet, fearful of some hideous hole in her shoes.

“I am—” she jerked.

Then Mr. Marrapit spoke: “I see you are. Discontinue.”

The command was shot at her. Trembling against the shock she could only murmur: “Discontinue?”

“Assuredly. Discontinue. Refrain. Adjust.”

“Discontinue...?” With difficulty she articulated the word, then put after it on a little squeak: ”... What?”

“It,” rapped Mr. Marrapit.

“I am afraid—”

“I quake in terror.”

“I don't understand.”

“Pah!” Mr. Marrapit exclaimed. “You said 'I am.' Were you not about to say 'I am standing on the polished boards'?”

“No.”

“I believed that was in your mind. Let it now enter your mind. You are on the polished boards. You have high heels. I quake in terror lest they have left scratch or blemish. Adjust your position.”

Mary stepped to the carpet. She was dumb before this man.

Mr. Marrapit bent above the polished flooring where she had stood. “There is no scratch,” he announced, “neither is there any blemish.” He resumed his post against the fireplace and again regarded her: “You are young.”

“I am older really.”

“Elucidate that.”

“I mean—I am not inexperienced.”

“Why say one thing and mean another? Beware the habit. It is perilous.”

“Indeed it is not my habit.”

“It is your recreation, then. Do not indulge it. Continue.”

“I am young, but I have had experience. I think if you were to engage me I would give you satisfaction.”

“Adduce grounds.”

“I would try in every way to do as you required. I understand I am to look after cats.”

“Where?”

“Here.”

“Abandon that impression. I have not said so.”

“No, I mean if you engage me.”

“Again you say one thing and mean another. I am suspicious. It is a habit.”

“Oh, *indeed* it is not.”

“Then if a recreation, a recreation to which you are devoted. You romp in it. Twice within a minute you have gambolled.”

My Mary blinked tears. Since rising that morning, her nerves had been upon the stretch against this interview. She had schooled herself against all possibilities so as to win into the house of her dear George, yet at every moment she seemed to fall further from success.

“You ca−catch me up so,” she trembled.

Mr. Marrapit expanded upwards. “Catch you up! A horrible accusation. The table is between us.”

“You mis−misunderstand me.” She silenced a little sniff with a dab of her handkerchief. She looked very pretty. Mr. Marrapit placed beside her the mental image of Mrs. Major; and at every point she had the prize. He liked the soft gold hair; he liked the forlorn little face it enframed; he liked the slim little form. His cats, he suspected, would appreciate those nice little hands; he judged her to have nice firm legs against which his cats could rub. Mrs. Major's, he apprehended, would have been bony; not legs, but shanks.

Mary made another dab at her now red little nose. The silence increased her silly fright. “You mis−misunderstand me,” she repeated.

With less asperity Mr. Marrapit told her: “I cannot accept the blame. You wrap your meanings. I plunge and grope after them. Eluding me, I am compelled to believe them wilfully thrown. Strive to let your yea be yea and your nay nay. With circumspection proceed.”

Mary gathered her emotion with a final little sniff. “I like ca−cats.”

“I implore you not to accuse me of misunderstanding you. A question is essential. You do not always pronounce 'cats' in two syllables?”

“Oh, no.”

“Satisfactory. You said 'ca−cats.' Doubtless under stress of emotion. Proceed.”

Mary sniffed; proceeded. “I like ca−cats—cats. If you were to engage me I am sure your cats would take to me.”

“I admit the possibility. I like your appearance. I like your voice. Had you knowledge of the acute supersensitiveness of my cats you would understand that they will appreciate those points. I do not require in you veterinary knowledge; I require sympathetic traits. I do not engage you to nurse my cats—though, should mischance befall, that would come within your duties,—but to be their companion, their friend. You are a lady; themselves ancestral they will appreciate that. I understand you are an orphan; there also a bond links you with them. All cats are orphans. It is the sole unfortunate trait of their characters that they are prone to forget their offspring. In so far as it is possible to correct this failing amongst my own cats, I have done my best. Amongst them the sanctity of the marriage tie is strictly observed. The word stud is peculiarly abhorrent to me. Polygamy is odious. There is a final point. Pray seat yourself.”

Mary took a chair. Mr. Marrapit, standing before her, gazed down upon her. From her left he gazed, then from her right. He returned to the fireplace.

“It is satisfactory,” he said. “You have a nice lap. That is of first importance. The question of wages has been settled. Arrive to−morrow. You are engaged.”

BOOK V. Of Mr. Marrapit upon the Rack: of George in Torment.

CHAPTER I. Prosiness Upon Events: So Uneventful That It Should Be Skipped.

If we write that Mary's first month at Herons' Holt was uneventful, we use the term as a figure of speech that must be taken in its accepted sense; not read literally. For it is impossible that life, in whatever conditions, can be eventless. The dullest life is often with events the most crowded. In dulness we are thrown back upon our inner selves, and that inner self is of a construction so sensitive that each lightest thought is an event that leaves an impression.

In action, in gaiety, in intercourse we put out an unnatural self to brunt the beat of events. We are upon our guard. There are eyes watching us, and from their gaze we by instinct fend our inner self just as by instinct we fend our nakedness.

Overmuch crowded with such events, the inner self is prone to shrivel, to fade beneath lack of nutriment; and it may happen that in time the unnatural self will take its place, will become our very self.

That is gravely to our disadvantage. Overmuch in action, the man of affairs may win the admiration of a surface−seeing world; may capture the benefits of strong purpose, of wealth, and of position. But he is in danger of utterly losing the fruits that only by the inner, the original, and true self can be garnered.

Life presents for our pursuit two sets of treasures. The one may be had by the labours of the hands; the other by exercise of the intellect—the true self. And at once this may be said: that the treasures heaped by the hands soil the hands, and the stain sinks deep. The stain enters the blood and, thence oozing, pigments every part of the being—the face, the voice, the mind, the thoughts. For we cannot labour overlong in the fields without besweating the brow; and certainly we cannot ceaselessly toil after the material treasures of life without gathering the traces of that labour upon our souls. It stains, and the stain is ugly.

Coming to treasures stored by exercise of the intellect, the true self, these also put their mark upon the possessor; but the action is different and the results are different. Here the pigment that colours the life does not come from without but distils from within. Man does not stoop to rend these treasures from the earth; he rises to them. They do not bow; they uplift. They are not wrenched in trampling struggle from the sties where men battle for the troughs; they are absorbed from the truths of life that are as breezes upon the little hills. They are in the face of Nature and in Nature's heart; they are in the written thoughts of men whose thoughts rushed upward like flames, not dropped like plummet−stones—soared after truth and struck it to our understanding, not made soundings for earthy possessions showing how these might be gained.

Yet it is not to be urged that the quest of material treasures is to be despised, or that life properly lived is life solely dreaming among truths. The writer who made the story of the Israelites sickening of manna, wrapped in legend the precept that man to live must work for life. We are not living if we are not working. We cannot have strength but we win meat to make strength.

No; my protest is against the heaping of material treasure to the neglect of treasure stored by the true self. Material treasure is not ours. We but have the enjoyment of it while we can defend it from the forces that constantly threaten it. Misfortune, sorrow, sickness— these are ever in leash against us; may at any moment be slipped. Misfortune may whirl our material treasures from us; sorrow or sickness may canker them, turn them to ashes in the mouth. They are not ours; we hold them upon sufferance. But the treasures of the intellect, the gift of being upon nodding terms with truth, these are treasures that are our impregnable own. Nothing can filch them, nothing canker them: they are our own—imperishable, inexhaustible; never wanting when called upon; balm to heal the blows of adversity, specific against all things malign. Cultivate the perception of beauty, the knowledge of truth; learn to distinguish between the realities of life and the dross of life; and you have a great shield of fortitude of which certainly man cannot rob you, and against which sickness, sorrow, or misfortune may strike tremendous blows without so much as bruising the real you.

And it is in the life that is called uneventful that there is the most opportunity for storing these treasures of the intellect. Perhaps there is also the greater necessity. In the dull round of things we are thrown in upon ourselves, and by every lightest thought and deed either are strengthening that inner self or are sapping it. Either we are reading the thoughts of men whose thoughts heap a priceless store within us, or we are reading that

which—though we are unaware— vitiates and puts further and further beyond our grasp the truths of life; either we are watching our lives and schooling them to feed upon thoughts and deeds that will uplift them, or we are neglecting them, and allowing them to browse where they will upon the rank weeds of petty spites, petty jealousies, petty gossipings and petty deeds. In action we may have no time to waste over this poisonous herbage; but in dulness most certainly we do have the temptation—and as we resist or succumb so shall we conduct ourselves when the larger events of life call us into the lists.

CHAPTER II. Margaret Fishes; Mary Prays.

I.

Mary's first month at Herons' Holt was uneventful: need not be recorded. We are following the passage of the love 'twixt her and George; and within the radius of Mr. Marrapit's eye love durst not creep. She saw little of her George. They were most carefully circumspect in their attitude one to another, and conscience made their circumspection trebly stiff. There are politenesses to be observed between the inmates of a house, but my Mary and my George, in terror lest even these should be misconstrued, studiously neglected them.

The aloofness troubled Margaret. This girl wrapped her sentiment about Mary; delighting in one who, so pretty, so young, so gentle−voiced, must face life in an alien home. The girls came naturally together, and it was not long before Margaret bubbled out her vocation.

The talk was upon books. Margaret turned away her head; said in the voice of one hurrying over a commonplace: “I write, you know.”

She tingled for the “Do you?” from her companion, but it did not come, and this was very disappointing.

She stole a glance at Mary, sitting with a far−away expression in her eyes (the ridiculous girl had heard an engine whistle; knew it to be the train that was taking her George to London). Margaret stole a glance at Mary; repeated louder: “I write, you know.”

It fetched the delicious response. Mary started: “Do you?”

Margaret said hurriedly: “Oh, nothing worth speaking of.”

Mary said: “Oh!”; gave her thoughts again to the train.

It was wretched of her. “Poems,” said Margaret, and stressed the word “*Poems*.”

Mary came flying back from the train. “Oh, how interesting that is!”

At once Margaret drew away. “Oh, it is nothing,” she said, “nothing.” She put her eyes upon the far clouds; breathed “Nothing” in a long sigh.

From this it was not a far step to reading, with terrible reluctance, her poems to Mary; nor from this again was it other than an obvious step to telling of Bill. Her pretty verses were so clearly written at some heart which throbbed responsive, that Mary must needs put the question. It came after a full hour's reading—the poet sitting upon her bed in a litter of manuscripts, Mary in a low chair before her.

In a tremulous voice the poet concluded the refrain of an exquisite verse:

“Beat for beat, your heart, my darling,
Beats with mine.
Skylarks carol, quick responsive,
Love divine.”

The poet gave a little gulp; laid down her paper.

Mary also gulped. From both their pretty persons emotion welled in a great flood that filled the room.

“I'm sure that is written *to* somebody,” Mary breathed.

Margaret nodded. This girl was too ravished with the grip of the thing to be capable of words.

Mary implored: “Oh, do tell me!”

Then Margaret told the story of Bill—with intimate details and in the beautiful phrases of the poet mind she told it, and the flooding emotion piled upwards to the very roof.

Love has rightly been pictured as a naked babe. Men together will examine a baby—if they must—with a bashful diffidence that pulls down the clothes each time the infant kicks; women dote upon each inch of its chubby person. And so with love. Men will discuss their love— if they must—with the most prudish decorum; women undress it.

It becomes essential, therefore, that what Margaret said to Mary must not be discovered.

When she had ceased she put out a hand for the price of her confidence: “And have you—are you—I know practically nothing about you, Mary, dear. *Do* tell me, are *you* in love?”

Bang went the gates of Mary's emotion. Here was awful danger. She laughed. “Oh, I've no time to fall in love,

have I?”

Margaret sighed her sympathy; then gazed at Mary.

Mary read the gaze aright. These were women, and they read one another by knowledge of sex. Mary knew Margaret's gaze to be that of an archer sighting at his mark, estimating the chances of a hit. She saw the arrow that was to come speeding at her breast; gathered her emotions so that she should not flinch at the wound.

Margaret twanged the bow−string. “No time to fall in love?” she murmured. She fitted the shaft; let fly. “Do you like George, dear?”

Mary stooped to her shoe−laces. Despite her preparations the arrow had pierced, and she hid her face to hide the blood.

“George?” said she, head to floor.

“Yes, George. Do you like George?”

My Mary sat up, brazen. “George? Oh, you mean your cousin? I daresay he's very nice. Practically I've never even spoken to him since I've been here.”

“I know. Of course he's very busy just now. Do you think you would like him if you did know him?”

It was murderous work. Mary was beginning to quiver beneath the arrows; was in terror lest she should betray the secret. A desperate kick was necessary. She wildly searched for a foothold; found it; kicked:

“I'm sure I shouldn't like him.”

The poet softly protested: “Oh why, Mary?”

“He's clean−shaven.”

“And you don't like a—”

“I can't stand a—”

“But if he had a—”

“Oh, if he had a—Margaret, I hear Mr. Marrapit calling. I must fly.” She fled.

Upon a sad little sigh the poet moved to her table; drew heliotrope paper towards her; wrote:

“Why are your hearts asunder, ye so fair?”

A thought came to her then, and she put her pen in her mouth; pursued the idea. That evening she walked to the gate and met George upon his return. After a few paces, “George,” she asked, “do you like Mary?”

George was never taken aback. “Mary? Mary who?”

“Miss Humfray.”

“Oh, is her name Mary?”

“Of course it is.” Margaret slipped her arm through George's; gazed up at him. “Do you like her, George?”

“Like whom?”

“Why, Mary—Miss Humfray.”

“Oh, I think she's a little better than Mrs. Major—in some ways. If that's what you mean.”

Margaret sighed. Such mulish indifference was a dreadful thing to this girl. But she had set her heart on this romance.

“George, dear, I wish you would do something for me.”

“Anything.”

“How nice you are! Will you grow a moustache?”

She anxiously awaited the answer. George took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes. He did not speak.

She asked him: “What is the matter?”

He said brokenly: “You know not what you ask. I cannot grow a moustache. It is my secret sorrow, my little cross. There is only one way. It is by pushing up the hairs from inside with the handle of a tooth−brush and tying a knot to prevent them slipping back. You have to do it every morning, and I somehow can never remember it.”

Margaret slipped her arm free; without a word walked to the house.

She was hurt. This girl had the artistic temperament, and the artistic temperament feels things most dreadfully. It even feels being kept waiting for its meals.

II.

George followed the pained young woman into the house; set down in the hall the books he carried; left the

house again; out through the gate, and so, whistling gaily along roads and lanes, came to the skirts of an outlying copse. By disused paths he twisted this way and that to approach, at length, a hut that once was cottage, whose dilapidated air advertised long neglect.

It was a week after Mary's arrival at Herons' Holt that, quite by chance, George had stumbled upon this hut. He had taken his books into the copse, had somehow lost his way in getting out, and through thick undergrowth had plumped suddenly upon the building. Curiosity had taken him within, shown him an outer and an inner room, and, in the second, a sight that had given him laughter; for he discovered there sundry empty bottles labelled “Old Tom,” a glass, an envelope addressed to Mrs. Major. It was clear that in this deserted place— somehow chanced upon—the masterly woman had been wont, safe from disturbance, to meet the rascal who, taken to Herons' Holt on that famous night, had so villainously laid her by the heels.

Nothing more George had thought of the place until the morning of this day when, leaving for hospital, his Mary had effected a brief whispered moment to tell him that Mr. Marrapit had thought her looking pale, had told her to take a long walk that afternoon. Immediately George gave her directions for the hut; there he would meet her at five o'clock; there not the most prying eye could reach them.

Now he approached noiselessly; saw his pretty Mary, back towards him, just within the threshold of the open door. It was their first secluded meeting since she had come to Herons' Holt.

Upon tip−toe George squirmed up to her; hissed “I have thee, girl”; sprang on his terrified Mary; hugged her to him.

“The first moment together in Paltley Hill!” he cried. “The first holy kiss!”

His Mary wriggled. “George! You frightened me nearly out of my life. It's not holy. You're hurting me awfully.”

“My child, it is holy. Trust in me.”

“George, you *are* hurting.”

“Scorn that. It is delicious!”

He let her from his arms; but he held her hands, and for a space, looking at one another, they did not speak. Despite he was in wild spirits, despite her roguishness, for a space they did not speak. His hands were below hers and about hers. The contact of their palms was the junction whence each literally could feel the other's spirit being received and pouring inwards. The metals were laid true, and without hitch or delay the delectable thrill came pouring; above, between their eyes, on wires invisible they signalled its safe arrival.

They broke upon a little laugh that was their utmost expression of the intoxication of this draught of love, just as a man parched with thirst will with a little sigh put down the glass that has touched him back to vigour. Dumb while they drank, their innate earthiness made them dumb before effort to express the spiritual heights to which they had been whirled. In that moment when, spirit mingling with spirit through the medium of what we call love, all our baseness is driven out of us, we are nearest heaven. But our vocabulary being only fitted for the needs about us, we have no words to express the elevation. Debase love and we can speak of it; let it rush upwards to its apotheosis and we must be dumb.

With a little laugh they broke.

“Going on all right, old girl?” George asked.

“Splendidly.”

“Happy?”

She laughed and said: “I will give the proper answer to that. How can I be other than happy, oh, my love, when daily I see your angel form?”

“I forgot that. Yes, you're a lucky girl in that way—very, very lucky. Beware lest you do not sufficiently prize your treasure. Cherish it, tend it, love it.”

“Oh, don't fool, George. Whenever we have two minutes together you waste them in playing the goat. Georgie, tell me—about your exam.”

“To−morrow.”

She was at once serious. “To−morrow?”

“To−morrow I thrust my angel form into the examination room. To−morrow my angel voice trills in the examiners' ears.”

“I thought you had a paper first, before the viva?”

“Do not snap me up, girl. I speak in metaphors. To−morrow my angel hand glides my pen over the paper. On Thursday my angel tongue gives forth my wisdom with the sound of a tinkling cymbal.”

“The paper to−morrow, the viva on Thursday?”

He bowed his angel head.

“George, don't, *don't* fool. Are you nervous? Will you pass?”

“I shall rush, I shall bound. I shall hurtle through like a great boulder.”

“*Georgie!* Will you?”

He dropped his banter. “I believe I shall, old girl. I really think I shall. I've simply sweated my life out these weeks—all for you.”

She patted his hand. “Dear old George! How I shall think of you! And then?”

“Then—why, then, we'll marry! Mary, I shall hear the result immediately after the viva. Then I shall rush back here and tackle old Marrapit at once. If he won't give me the money I think perhaps he'll lend it, and then we'll shoot off to Runnygate and take up that practice and live happily ever after.”

With the brave ardour of youth they discussed the delectable picture; arranged the rooms they had never seen; planned the daily life of which they had not the smallest experience.

Twice in our lives we can play at Make−Believe—once when we are children, once when we are lovers. And these are the happiest times of our lives. We are not commoners then; we are emperors. We touch the sceptre and it is a magic wand. We rule the world, shaping it as we will, dropping from between our fingers all the stony obstacles that would interfere with its plasticity. Between childhood and love, and between love and death, the world rules us and bruises us. But in childhood, and again in love, we rule the world.

So they ruled their world.

III.

That night Mary prayed her George might pass his examination—a prayer to make us wise folk laugh. The idea of our conception of the Divinity deliberately thrusting into George's mind knowledge that he otherwise had not, the idea of the Divinity deliberately prompting the examiners to questions that George could answer—these are ludicrous to us in our wisdom. We have the superiority of my simple Mary in point of intelligence; well, let us hug that treasure and make the most of it. Because we miss the sense of confidence with which Mary got from her knees; passed into her dreams. With our fine intellects we should lie awake fretting such troubles. These simple, stupid Marys just hand the tangle on and sleep comforted. They call it Faith.

Yes, but isn't it grand to be of that fine, brave, intellectual, hard− headed, business−like stamp that trusts nothing it cannot see and prove? Rather!

CHAPTER III. Barley Water For Mr. Marrapit.

I.

Up the drive George came bounding with huge strides. The fires of tremendous joy that roared within him impelled him to enormous energy.

Upon the journey from Waterloo to Paltley Hill he could with difficulty restrain himself from leaping upon the seat; bawling “I've passed! I've passed! I'm qualified!” He could not sit still. He fidgeted, wriggled; thrust his head first from one window, then from the other. Every foot of the line was well known to him. To each familiar landmark his spirit bellowed: “Greeting! When last you saw me I was coming up in a blue funk. Now! Oh, good God, now—” and he would draw in, stride the carriage, and thrust his head from the other window.

His four fellow−passengers regarded him with some apprehension. They detected signs of lunacy in the young man; kept a nervous eye cocked upon the alarm cord; at the first stopping place with one accord arose and fled. One, signing herself “Lady Shareholder,” had her alarming experience in her daily−paper upon the following morning.

At his station George leapt for the platform a full minute before the train had stopped. Up the lanes he sent his bursting spirits flying in shrill whistlings and gay hummings; slashed stones with his stick; struck across the fields and took gates and stiles in great spread−eagled vaults.

So up the drive, stones still flying, whistlings still piping.

II.

Upon the lawn he espied Mr. Marrapit and his Mary. She, on a garden seat, was reading aloud from the *Times*; Mr. Marrapit, on a deep chair stretched to make lap for the Rose of Sharon, sat a little in advance of her.

George approached from Mr. Marrapit's flank; soft turf muffled his strides. The warm glow of kindliness towards all the world, which his success had stoked burning within him, put a foreign word upon his tongue. He sped it on a boisterous note:

“Uncle!” he cried. “Uncle, I've passed!”

Mary crushed the *Times* between her hands; bounded to her feet. “Oh!” she cried. “Hip! hur—!”

She bit the final exclamation; dropped to her seat. Mr. Marrapit had twisted his eye upon her.

“You are in pain?” he asked.

“No—oh, no.”

“You have a pang in the hip?”

“Oh no—no.”

“But you bounded. You cried 'hip'! Whose hip?”

“I was startled.”

“Unsatisfactory. The brain, not the hip, is the seat of the emotion. Elucidate.”

“I don't know why I said 'hip.' I was startled. Mr. George startled me.”

“Me also he startled. I did not shout hip, thigh, leg nor knee. Control the tongue.”

He turned to George. “Miss Humfray's extraordinary remark has projected this dilatory reception of your news. I beg you repeat it.”

Sprayed upon between mortification and laughter at the manner of his greeting, George's enthusiasm was a little damped. But its flame was too fierce to be hurt by a shower. Now it roared again. “I've passed!” he cried. “I'm qualified!”

“I tender my felicitations. Accept them. Leave us, Miss Humfray. This is a mighty hour. Take the Rose. Give her cream. Let her with us rejoice.”

Mary raised the cat. She faced about so that she directly shut Mr. Marrapit from his nephew; with her dancing eyes spoke her happiness to her George; passed down the lawn.

III.

Mr. Marrapit drew in the lap he had been making. He sat upright. “Again, accept my felicitations,” he said. “They are yours. Take them.”

With fitting words George took them. Mr. Marrapit continued: “It is a mighty hour. Through adversity we have won to peace, through perils to port, through hurts to harbour.”

He paused.

“You mean—” George said, groping.

“Do not interpose. It is a mighty hour. Let this scene sink into our minds and march with us to the grave. Here upon the lawn we stand. Westward the setting sun. Creeping towards us the lengthening shadows. Between us the horrid discord which has so long reigned no longer stands. It is banished by a holy peace. The past is dead. My trust is ended. The vow which I swore unto your mother I have steadfastly kept. I would nourish you, I declared, until you were a qualified physician. You are a qualified physician. I have nourished you. Frequently in the future, upon a written invitation, I trust you will visit this home in which your youth has been spent. When do you leave?”

The query towards which Mr. Marrapit had been making through his psalm came to George with a startling abruptness that was disconcerting. He had not anticipated it. He jerked: “When do I—leave?”

“Certainly. The hour of your departure, unduly deferred by idleness and waywardness upon which we will not dwell, is now at hand. When does it fall? Not to−night, I trust? A last night you will, I hope, spend beneath my roof. To−morrow, perchance? What are your plans?”

George flamed. “You're in a mighty hurry to get rid of me.”

Mr. Marrapit cast upward his eyes. He groaned:

“Again I am misunderstood. All my life I have been misunderstood.” He became stern. “Ingrate! Is it not patent to you that my desire is not to stand in your way? You have earned manhood, freedom, a charter to wrest money from the world. I might stay you. I do not. I bid you Godspeed.”

George remembered his weighty purpose. Making for it, he became humble. “I am sorry,” he said. “I see what you mean. I appreciate your kindness. You ask what are my plans. I have come specially to lay them before you.”

Mr. Marrapit clutched the seat of his chair with the action of one waiting a dentist's torture. He had a premonition that support of some kind would be necessary. “Proceed,” he said.

George said: “My plans—” He swallowed. “My plans—” Again he swallowed. His plans were red−hot within him, but he sought despairingly for one that would not at the very outset turn Mr. Marrapit into screams. “My plans—” he stammered.

“My God!” Mr. Marrapit groaned. “My God! What is coming?”

George said on a rush: “These are my plans. I intend to marry—”

Mr. Marrapit gave a faint little bark.

“Then—then—” said George, floundering. “After that—then—I intend to marry—I—”

“Bigamy,” Mr. Marrapit murmured. “Bigamy.”

“Not twice. I am nervous. I intend to marry. I want to buy a little seaside practice that is for sale.”

Mr. Marrapit repeated the faint little bark. He was lying back, eyes half closed, face working upon some inward stress.

“Those are my plans,” George summarised: “to marry and buy this practice.”

A considerable pause followed. The workings of Mr. Marrapit's face ceased; he opened his eyes, sat up. “When?” he asked.

“At once.”

“This practice—”

“I have it in my eye.”

“Immaterial. Have you it in your pocket?”

“You mean the price?”

“I mean the money wherewith to finance these appalling schemes.”

“Not exactly. It is about that I wish to speak to you.”

“To *me*?“

“Yes. I wanted to ask—”

“You intend to ask me for money?”

“I want to suggest—”

“How much?”

“Four—five hundred pounds.”

“Great heaven!” Mr. Marrapit wildly fingered the air. Margaret, at the end of the lawn, crossed his vision. He called huskily: “Margaret!”

She tripped to him. “Father! What is it?”

“Barley water!” Mr. Marrapit throated. “Barley water!”

While she was upon her errand no—words passed between the two. Mr. Marrapit took the glass from her in shaking hands. “Leave us,” he said. He drank of his barley water; placed the glass upon the bench beside him; gave George a wan smile. “I am stricken in years,” he said. “I have passed through a trance or conscious nightmare. You will have had experience of such affections of the brain. I thought”—the hideous memory shook him—“I thought you asked me for five hundred pounds.”

George said defiantly: “I did.”

Mr. Marrapit frantically reached for the barley water; feverishly gulped. “I shall have a stroke,” he cried. “My hour is at hand.”

My poor George flung himself on a note of appeal. “Oh, I say, uncle, don't go on like that! You don't know what this means to me.”

“I do not seek to know. I am too fully occupied with its consequences to myself; it means a stroke. I feel it coming. My tomb yawns.”

George gripped together his hands; paced a few strides; returned. “Oh, for heaven's sake, don't go on like that! Won't you listen to me? Is it impossible to speak with you as man to man? If you refuse what I ask, you have only to say no.”

“You promise that?”

“Of course; of course.”

“I say it now, then. No.”

“But you haven't heard me.”

“Unnecessary.”

The tortured young man raised his voice.

“It is necessary! You shall! You must!”

“Barley water!” Mr. Marrapit gasped. “Barley water! I am going to be murdered.”

“Oh, this is insupportable!” George cried.

“I endorse that. A double death threatens me. I shudder between a stroke and a blow. I shall be battered to death on my own lawn.”

“If you would only listen to me,” George implored. “Why can we never be natural when we meet?”

“Search your heart for the answer,” Mr. Marrapit told him. “It is because your demands are unnatural.”

“You haven't heard them. Listen. I am on the threshold of my career. I am sure you will not ruin it. The real price of this practice is 650 pounds—the value of a year and a half's income; that is the usual custom. I am offered it for four hundred. Then I want to marry and to have a little balance with which to start—say 100 pounds for that. That makes 500 pounds altogether. I implore you to lend—lend, not give—that sum. I will pay you back 50 pounds at the end of the first year and a hundred a year afterwards. Interest too. I don't know much about these things. Any interest you like. We would get a solicitor to draw up an agreement. Say you will lend the money. I feel sure you will.”

“You delude yourself by that assurance.”

“Oh, wait before you refuse. My prospects are so bright if only you will help me. I have no one else to whom I can turn. It is only a loan I ask.”

“It is refused.”

George stamped away, hands to head. The poor boy was in agony. Then returned:

“I won't believe you. You will not be so heartless. Think over what I have said. Tell me to−night—to−morrow.”

“My answer would be the same.”

“You absolutely refuse to lend me the money?”

“I refuse. It is against my principles.”

My frantic George clutched at a shimmering hope. “Against your principles to lend? Do you mean that you will give—give me 500 pounds?”

“Barley water!” Mr. Marrapit gasped. He drank; gasped: “Give 500 pounds! You are light−headed!”

“Then lend it!” George supplicated on a last appeal. “Make any conditions you please, and I will accept them. Uncle, think of when you were a young man. Remember the time when you were on the threshold of your career. Think of when you were engaged as I am now engaged. Imagine your feelings if you had been prevented marrying. You won't stand in my way? The happiest life is before me if you will only give your aid. Otherwise—otherwise—oh, I say, you won't refuse?”

“I implore you to close this distressing scene.”

“Will you lend me the money?”

“My principles prevent me.”

“Then damn your principles!” George shouted. “Damn your principles!”

While he had been battering his head against this brick wall he had been saved pain by the hope that a last chance would carry him through. Now that he realised the futility of the endeavour, the stability of the wall, he had time to feel the bruising he had suffered—the bitterness of failure and of all that failure meant. The hurts combined to make him roar with pain, and he shouted furiously again: “Damn your principles!”

“Barley water!” throated Mr. Marrapit on a note of terror. He reached for the glass. It was empty.

He struggled to his feet; got the chair between George and himself; cried across it: “Beware how you touch me.”

“Oh, I'm not going to touch you. You needn't be afraid.”

“I have every need. I am afraid. Keep your distance. You are not responsible for your actions.”

“You needn't be afraid, I tell you. It is too ridiculous.”

“I repeat I have need. Keep your distance. My limbs tremble as one in a palsy.” Mr. Marrapit gripped the chair−back; his shudders advertised his distress.

“I only want to say this,” George declaimed, “that if you refuse what I ask, you are refusing what is lawfully mine. My mother left you 4000 pounds for my education. At the outside you have spent three. The 500 pounds is mine. I have a right to it.”

“Keep your distance, sir.”

My furious George took three steps forward.

“Can you answer what I say?” he shouted.

Mr. Marrapit gave a thin cry: turned, and with surprising bounds made across the lawn. A slipper shot from his foot. He alighted upon a stone; bounded heavenwards with a shrill scream; and hopping, leaping, shuffling, made the corner of the house.

George swung on his heel. It occurred to him to visit Bill Wyvern.

CHAPTER IV. The Rape Of The Rose.

I.

Bill was away from home, the maid who answered the door told George; Mrs. Wyvern was out; the Professor was in his study.

George found the great biologist warming his chilly old bones in a vast armchair before a fire.

With a twinkling of his sky−blue eyes that spoke to pleasant temper, the Professor greeted George; nodded him into an opposite seat.

“I am reading a letter,” he announced. This man spoke very slowly, never abbreviated; had now an air of child−like happiness. “It is a letter from Bill.”

George said: “Ah, what is Bill doing? I've not seen him for days.”

Professor Wyvern chuckled away and fumbled with clumsy old fingers among the closely−written sheets on his lap. One he selected and inclined towards George. Its upper half was thickly lettered in heavy red type, prominent among which there bawled forth in wavy capitals, thickly underscored:

“THE DAILY.” EVERYBODY'S PAPER. PRICE 1/2d.

“Hot stuff!” George cried. “Is old Bill on the staff of the *Daily* ?”

“Old Bill is on the staff of the *Daily*,” the Professor returned with more chuckling. “You have heard of it?”

“Well, it's advertised everywhere. You can't get away from it. First number out to−morrow, isn't it?”

“Yes, it is. I think it will be a very terrible production—a very horrible production indeed. But I am an annual subscriber because of Bill, and I have written a short article for the first issue also because of Bill. Bill says” (the Professor fumbled again; ran his nose twice up and down each sheet; finally struck the passage) “Bill says, 'You were a brick, dear old governor, to send that article. It is a most thundering scoop for the *Daily*, and made the Boss most awfully bucked up with me. You are a brick, dear old Governor.”

A little tear rolled out of Professor Wyvern's silly old eye, and he blew his nose in a series of terrific thunder−claps.

“There!” he said. “You see how pleased Bill is with himself. I am afraid he uses the most terrible expressions in his letters, but he does not use them when he is writing his stories. He is a clever boy, and I am very proud of him. Now let me tell you.” He fell to nosing the sheets again. “All this first part is about his dogs. '... if Abiram and Dathan start scrapping, just hoof Abiram—it's his fault.'“

The Professor looked up at George. “I would more readily kick a police constable than I would kick Abiram,” he said. “I must tell Hocken all this.”

He continued, “'... see that Korah is kept short of meat for a bit ... when they are exercising, for goodness' sake don't let them be taken down Windmill Lane. There is a collie there that they have got a grudge against and will tear to bits if they catch.'“

The Professor paused. “Oh, dear! oh, dear! I must give all this part to Hocken to keep. Ah! Now here is about his work. They have engaged him at four pounds a week. He does not know exactly what he is. Not a sub−editor. Not a reporter. He thinks they will put him on to what he calls 'special jobs,' or he may have to do what he calls 'ferret round' and find jobs for himself. The understanding is that he is only on probation. If he does anything very good they will put him on the permanent staff; if not, he is liable to go at a week's notice. Then he says, 'Tell all this to George, and give him my love. He was up for his exam—'“

Professor Wyvern broke off. “Dear me!” he cried; “oh, dear me, I have forgotten! You have been up for your examination?”

George nodded.

Kindly old Professor Wyvern misinterpreted the lack of enthusiasm. “When I was a medical student,” he said, “I failed dozens of times in my final examination—dozens. It's no criterion of knowledge, you know: it is just luck. Never let examination failure dishearten you. Go along happily, George, and take your chance when it comes.”

“It's come,” George said, beaming; recollection of his splendid success temporarily overshadowed recollection

of his tragic failure.

"You have qualified?"

"Yes."

The Professor's sky−blue eyes danced with glee. He struggled on to his tottery old legs; before George could save him the exertion, had hobbled over the hearth−rug and was wringing his hand in tremendous pleasure.

"Well done, George!" he bubbled. "Well done! Well done! It is the most splendid news. I have not had such a happy day for a long time. Qualified! Well, that is splendid! Splendid!"

He fell back into his chair, panting with his excitement. "Ring that bell, George. We must celebrate this."

A maid appeared. "Susan," said the Professor, "bring up a small bottle of champagne and two glasses. Mr. George has passed his examination. Be very quick, Susan."

Susan was very quick. The cork popped; the glasses foamed and fizzed. "Now we will have one glass each," the Professor said. "I think, it will kill me at this hour, and if my wife catches me she will send me to bed; so we must be very quick. Now, this is your health, George. God bless you and good luck!"

He drained his glass like the brave old boy that he was; and when his eyes had done streaming, and he had finished gasping and choking, bade Susan hurry away the signs of the dreadful deed before her mistress should catch her.

"And now tell me your plans, George. Which road to Harley Street, eh?"

Then George poured into those kindly old ears all the tragic story— the girl he was going to marry; the practice he was going to buy; the wrecker who had wrecked his fair ships ere ever he had put to sea.

There were in the Professor's nature no sympathies that enabled him even to comprehend miserliness in any degree. Made aware of the taint in Mr. Marrapit, he became red and furious in his abhorrence of it. With snorts and fumes he punctuated the recital; when it closed, burst out: "Why, but it is yours! the money is yours. It is misappropriation." "That's just what I say." "Well, he must be made to give it you." George laughed grimly. "I say that, too. But how?"

"Are you certain of your facts, George?" "I've been to Somerset house and seen my mother's will."

"Legally, then—we'll get it out of him by law." "I've thought of that," George said. "I don't think it is possible. Look, the passage runs like this. I have it word for word. 'To my brother Christopher Marrapit 4000 pounds, and I desire him to educate in the medical profession my son George.' Not even 'with which I desire him,' you see. I don't think there's any legal way of getting the money I want— the five hundred."

II.

For full ten minutes Professor Wyvern made no answer. He stared in the fire, and every now and again one of his little chuckles set his bent old shoulders bobbing. Upon a longer chuckle they waggled for a space; then he turned to George. "Not legally; well, then, what about illegally, George?"

George did not comprehend.

"A very bad notion has come into my head," the Professor continued. "I ought to be ashamed of it, but I am not. I think it would be very funny. I think your uncle would deserve it. I am sure it would be very funny, and I think it would be proper and justifiable."

"Go on," George said. "Tell me."

The Professor's old shoulders bobbed about again. "No, I will not tell you," he said. "I will not be a party to it; because if my wife found out she would send me to bed and keep me there. But I will tell you a little story, George. If it sets up a train of action that you like to follow—well, I think it will be very funny. Only, don't tell me."

"I say, this is mysterious. Tell me the story."

"Yes, I will. This is the story. When I was a student in Germany we had a professor called Meyer. He wore a wig because he was quite bald. He was very sensitive about his baldness and would have no one know— but we knew. Upon one afternoon there was a great violinist who was coming to play at our town. All the professors announced that for this occasion they would postpone the lectures they should then have given, so that their classes might attend the concert. But this Professor Meyer said that he would not postpone his lecture. It was a link in a series, you understand—not to be missed,—so his class, of which I was one; were very furious. We told him that we were entitled to a holiday this day since all had it, but he would not hear us. We were very angry, for

this holiday was our right. Now, also, one week before the concert the burgomaster of our town was to give a great banquet to the celebration of the centenary of a famous citizen. Here our Professor Meyer was to make a speech. Well, when he remained adamant, determined to give us no holiday, we had a great meeting, and thus we arranged to procure the holiday that was ours by right. Our plot was justified by his mulishness. He should lose the thing he most cherished—he should lose his wig two days before his banquet with the burgomaster. One of us would take his wig, seizing him as by night he walked to his rooms. Before his distress we should be most sympathetic, offering every aid. Perchance he would encourage our efforts by offer of the prize we most desired. The plot worked, with no misadventure, to a brilliant triumph. We took the wig. We enveloped him in our sympathy. 'Search out and restore my wig,' said he, 'and you shall have your holiday.' Then we found his wig and we enjoyed the holiday that was our right. That is the story," Professor Wyvern ended.

Mystification clouded George's face. He pushed out a leg, stared at the toe. He stared at the fire; at the Professor, chuckling and rubbing his hands, he stared. His brain twisted the story this way and that, striving to dovetail it into his own circumstances.

In such a process the eyes are the mouth of the machine whence the completed manufacture sends forth its sparkling. But while the mechanism twists and turns the fabrics there is no sparkle—the eyes are clouded in thought, as we say.

The eyes that George turned upon toe, upon fire, and upon Professor Wyvern, were dull and lack−lustre. The machine worked unproductive; there was a cog that required adjustment, a lever that wanted a pull.

George sought the foreman machinist; said slowly: "But I don't see how the story helps me?"

"Well, you must think over it," Professor Wyvern told him. "I dare not tell you any more. I must be no party to the inference that can be drawn. But do you not see that the thing our Professor cherished most was his wig? Now, Bill has told me that the thing your uncle cherishes above all price is—"

Click went the machine; round buzzed the wheels; out from George's eyes shot the sparkles. He jumped to his feet, his face red. "Is his cat!" he cried. "His Rose of Sharon! I see it! I see it! By Gad, I'll do it! Look here now—"

"No, I will not," the Professor said. "I do not wish to know anything about it. I hear my wife's step."

"I understand. All right. But don't tell a soul—not even Bill."

"I cannot tell, because I do not know. But I suspect it is something very funny," and the Professor burst into a very deep "Ho! ho! ho!"

"My dearest," said Mrs. Wyvern at the door, "whatever can you be laughing at so loudly?"

"Ho! ho! ho! ho!" boomed the Professor, belling like a bloodhound. "It is something very funny."

Mrs. Wyvern kissed the thin hairs on the top of his mighty head. "Dear William, I do trust it was not one of those painful stories of your young days."

George stayed to dinner. By nine he left the house. He did not make for home. Striking through lanes he climbed an ascending field, mounted a stile, and here, with an unseeing eye upon Herons' Holt twinkling its bedroom lights in the valley below, he smoked many pipes, brooding upon his scheme.

III.

It was not a melancholy process. Every now and again a crack of laughter jerked him; once he took his pipe from his mouth and put up a ringing peal of mirth that sent a brace of bunnies, flirting near his feet, wildly scampering for safety. Long he brooded....

A church clock gave him eleven. At ten he had been too deeply buried. Now his head was pushed clear from the burrow in which he had been working, and the sound caught his attention. No light now pricked Herons' Holt upon the dusky chart stretched beneath him. Its occupants were abed.

"I'll do it to−night!" cried George. "I'll do it at once!"

He drew on his pipe. A full cloud of smoke came. The pipe was well alight, and caution bidding him that it were well to bide a while so that sleep might more cosily warm the beds of the household, he determined that he would have out his last smoke as plotter: his next would be smoked as doer of the deed.

He rehearsed his plan. A knife would slip back the catch of the window behind which the Rose of Sharon lay. Possessing himself of her person he would speed to that tumbled hut in the copse. There she might lie in safety for the night: neither hut nor copse was in any man's road. Upon the morrow, when the hideous circumstance had

been discovered, he would bear himself as events seemed to demand. He would be boundless in his sympathy, a leader in the search. If the idea of reward did not occur to Mr. Marrapit, he must suggest it. Unlikely that in the first moment of loss, when the Rose would still seem to be near, the reward would approach the figure at which he aimed. That was for his cunning to contrive. But obviously it would be impossible permanently to keep the Rose in the hut. To−morrow, when pretending to search for her he could guard the place where she lay; but he could not always be sentinel. The countryside would be scoured; no stone left unturned, no spinney unbeaten.

As he saw the matter, the plan would be to get somewhere down the railway line on pretext of a clue, taking the Rose of Sharon with him; for the success of the whole scheme depended upon his concealing the cat until Mr. Marrapit should be upon his bended knees in his distress, in deepest despair as to the Rose's recovery, and hence would be transported to deepest gratitude when it was restored to his arms. George told himself he must be prepared against the eventuality of his uncle failing to offer in public reward so large a sum as 500 pounds. That did not greatly distress. Best indeed if that sum were offered, but, failing it, it was upon Mr. Marrapit's gratitude that George ultimately reckoned. Surely when he “found” the cat it would be Mr. Marrapit's natural reply to give in exchange the sum he had that afternoon so violently refused. At the least, he could not refuse to lend it.

Early in his brooding George had decided he must not tell his Mary. First, it would be cruel to set her upon the rack of acting a part before Mr. Marrapit, before the household, before every questioner she must encounter; second—second, my ignoble George had doubts as to in what spirit his Mary would regard this plot did he make her partner in it. That it was wholly justifiable he personally would have contended before archangels. This miserly uncle was keeping from him money that was as incontestably his own as the being which also his mother had given him. Before all the angelic host he would thus have protested−without stammer, without blush; with the inspiration of righteousness, with the integrity of innocence. But to protest his cause before his Mary was another matter. There might be no occasion to protest; his Mary might see eye to eye with him in the matter. She might; but it was an eventuality he did not care to try against a test. His Mary was a girl—and girls are in their conduct narrowed by scruples that do not beset men. His Mary—and this it was that would make a test so violent—his Mary was his Mary, and well he knew, and loved, the little heart so delicately white as instantly to discover the finest specks of sootiness—if specks there were—in any breeze that might cross its surface.

No, he would not tell his Mary. When the thing was done—when he, the black−hearted rogue, had the little saint safe in the toils she would find so delicious, then—then he would tell her, would silence her frightened squeals—if she squealed—by his intention to pay back the money, whether won as reward (which was improbable) or earned as token of gratitude (which was highly likely). He had only asked to borrow, and it should only be a loan.

Across the dark fields in spirit he kissed his little saint. ... Of course—of course—one must admit these brutal things—of course the scheme might fail. Anything might happen to crash it about his ears. That was a deadly, dismal thought, but he flattened it from sight with that lusty hammer that gay youth uses—“I shan't be any worse off if it does fail.”

The smoke came through his pipe in burning whiffs. He shook it bowl downwards. Ashes and sparks fell in a shower. The pipe was done.

Whoop! forrard! The game was afoot.

IV.

A moon as clear as that which shone when Bill stole to Herons' Holt to woo his blessed damosel, gave a clear light to George as now he approached the house. He took his way across the fields, and his progression was that of no stealthy−footed conspirator. Two miles of downward−sloping land lay between the stile whereon he had brooded and the home that his plottings were to disturb. In buoyant spirits—for this was action, and action makes lusty appeal to youth—he trotted or galloped as the descent was easy or sharply inclined; the low hedges he took in great sprawling jumps, the ditches in vast giant strides— arms working as balance−pole, humming as he ran.

Upon the lawn he became more cautious. But the moon showed Herons' Holt sleepy−eyed−blinds drawn.

The cats' parlour, back of the house, gave upon a little strip of turf that kept away the kitchen garden. George drew his knife; approached the window. Now he was a criminal indeed.

To slip the catch was easy work; between upper and lower sash there was clear space. George inserted his pen−knife. Tip of blade grated against catch; a little pressure—an answering movement; a little more—and, *click*,

the trick was done!

Now he raised the sash, and now he is in the room. Glimmer of a match shows him the sleeping−baskets; its steadier flame discloses the Rose, snugly curled, a little free of her silken coverlet.

Wake, now, Rose—as an older school of novelists would have addressed you. Wake, Rose! Wake, pretty Rose! Queenly Rose, awake! Wake precious, virgin Rose! Squeal! scratch! bite! Claw those wicked hands descending into your pure bed! Spring like spotless maiden aroused to find ravisher at her couch! Spring, Rose, spring! Squawking news of outrage to all the house, bound wildly, Rose, about this room that else you shall not see until through searing perils you have passed! Spring! Rose, spring!

Not Rose!

II.

The ravisher's hands descended upon her person—she only purred. They passed about her warm and exquisite form—she purred the more. They tickled her as they laid hold—she stretched a leg; purred with fuller note. Perchance this virgin cat dreamed of some gallant young Tom wooing her bed; perchance these ticklings had their deliciously transfigured place in her visions; perchance—she only purred.

Now George tucked her beneath his arm. Legs dangled wretchedly; gallant young Tom leapt from her dreams and she awoke. She stirred. George had a foot upon the window−sill, and the night air ruffled her downy coat. She was pressed against bony ribs; a rough arm squeezed her wretchedly; long, poky fingers tortured her flank; her legs draggled dismally. She voiced protest in a plaintive, piercing, long− drawn *"Mi−aow!"*

Clout!

Ah, Rose! Pretty, foolish Rose—as our older school again would have written—why did you entertain sensuous dreams when you should have been stirring?

"Mi−aow!"

Clout!

Too late, Rose! Too late! That beauteous head—that prize−winning head which from kittenhood upwards has known none other than caress, is now a mark for battering bumps if you do but open those perfect jaws—those prize−winning jaws. Too late, Rose! Too late! Do not cry now, Rose! The ravisher has you. His blood congeals in terror at your plaintive cry. In his brutish panic he will answer it with thuds. Too late, Rose! Too late!

"Mi−aow!"

Clout!

Ah, Rose, Rose!

He is outside now. "Shut up, you fat idiot!" he hisses. Squeezing her yet more villainously with one arm, with the other he draws down the sash. Through the gate, into the lane, over the stream, down the ride, into the copse—up to the hut.

The outer door hangs grinningly upon its hinges. The door going to the inner room has a working latch; George kicks it open; elbows it to behind him; drops the Rose with jarring plump; strikes a match. There is the dusty pile of Old Tom bottles, there the little heap of bracken upon which Mrs. Major doubtless had reclined while with Old Tom she talked. Excellent!

The match goes out. He lights another. The Rose is standing forlornly at his feet. While the match lasts he lifts her to the bracken bed; presses her down; backs out; closes the door.

His watch, put beneath the moon, tells him it is upon one o'clock. He pulls to the outer door; wedges beneath it a stump of wood that keeps it firmly shut; makes for home.

In an hour he is sleeping the dreamless, childlike slumber that comes to those who, setting their hand to the plough, have manfully laboured a full day's work.

CHAPTER V. Horror At Herons' Holt.

I.

Sleep does not necessarily shun the bed of the wicked. She is a wanton mistress, and will cuddle where her fancy chances, careless whether vice or virtue is her bedfellow; coy when most eagerly supplicated, seductive when least desired.

George, steeped in crime, snuggled warmly to her until aroused by a rude shaking.

Night−capped and dressing−gowned, white−faced and trembling, awful in grief Mr. Marrapit stood near him.

“Get up! The Rose of Sharon is lost.”

“Impossible!”

“I tell you it is so. Up!”

George pushed a shaking leg out of bed. He was had unawares. As a sleeper pitched sleeping into the sea, so from unconsciousness he was hurled plump into the whirlpool of events. And as the sleeper thus immersed would gulp and sink and kick, so now he blinked, shivered, and gasped.

He repeated: “Impossible!”

“I tell you it is so. I have eyes; I have been to her room.” Mr. Marrapit's voice rose in a wailing cry. “I have been to her room. Gone! Gone!”

George put out the other leg—crime−steeped legs that quivered. He had looked for a space between awaking and meeting his uncle in which to prepare his plans, rehearse his words. This abrupt rousing stampeded his senses. He quavered “Wher—where can she be?”

Mr. Marrapit flung up his arms. “Oh, my God! If I knew that would I be here? Up! Up! Join the searchers in the garden.”

George pushed a criminal leg into his trousers. Conscience made thumbs of his fingers, trembled his joints. He hopped frantically, thrusting with the other foot.

“Dance!” Mr. Marrapit moaned bitterly. “Dance! That is right! Why do you not sing also? This is nothing to you! Dance on! Dance on!”

George cannoned the wash−stand. “It *is* something to me. I can hardly believe it!”

“Is sorrow expressed in a gavotte? Grief in a hornpipe?”

“I'm not dancing. My damned bags are stuck!”

Mr. Marrapit wrung his hands. “Discard them! Discard them! Must decency imperil the Rose?”

With a tremendous kick George thrust in past the obstruction.

“They're on now—my slippers—coat—what shall I do?”

“Join the searchers. Scour the grounds. Search every shrub. Climb every tree.”

The agonised man led downstairs. “I found the window open,” he moaned. “Night by night, year in year out, I have shut it. Impossible that I forgot. If I forgot, the Rose is in the garden or in the vicinity. If I did not forget, the window was forced—the Rose was stolen. A detective shall decide.”

George grew quite cold. Employment of a detective had not occurred to him. They were at the front door. He put a hand on Mr. Marrapit's arm. “Oh, not a detective. Don't get a detective.”

“If need be I will get forty detectives. I will blacken the countryside with detectives.”

George grew quite hot. “Uncle, let us keep this private. Leave it with me. Rely on me. I will find your cat.”

“Into the garden,” cried Mr. Marrapit. “Join the searchers. They have failed once. Lead, animate, encourage.”

“And you won't get a detective?”

Mr. Marrapit did not reply. He had opened the hall door; Mr. Fletcher in the middle distance approached moodily.

Mr. Marrapit thrust out a hand. “Back! Back!” he cried hoarsely.

Wearily Mr. Fletcher gave answer. “It's no use, Mr. Marrapit. It's no good saying 'back.' I've been back. I've been back and I've been front and I've been both sides. I've looked here, I've looked there; I've looked up, I've looked down. I'm giddy with looking.” He approached; stood before them. Woe heavily draped herself about this

man.

"Oh, easily discouraged!" Mr. Marrapit cried.

"Oh, infirm of purpose! Back, faint−heart! Do not say die."

Faint−heart mopped a streaming brow. "But I do say die. I do say die, Mr. Marrapit, and I damn well shall die if I go creepin' and crawlin' and hissin' much longer. It's 'ard—damn 'ard. I'm a gardener, I am; not a cobra."

Mr. Marrapit slammed the door. George hurried out of sight; in the kitchen garden sat down to think. He was frightened. Thus far the plot had not worked well. Detectives!

He gave an hour to the search he was ostensibly conducting; when he again entered the house was more easy−minded. Employed in meditation that hour gave him back his coolness of the night. Rudely awakened, given no time in which firmly to plant his feet, securely to get a purchase with his hands before the storm burst, he had been whirled along helpless and bewildered before Mr. Marrapit's gusty agony. Instead of resisting the torrent, directing its course, he had been caught where it surged fiercest, hurled down−stream. In the vulgar simile of his reflections he was rotting the whole show.

But now he had steadied himself. He girded his loins against the part he had to play; with new determination and confidence entered the house.

II.

There was no breakfast at Herons' Holt that morning. When George, dressed, bathed and shaved, sought out his uncle, it was to find Mr. Marrapit in the study.

The distracted man was pacing the floor, a closely written sheet of paper in his hands. He turned upon George.

"In the hour of my travail I am also beneath the burden of earlier griefs. Yesterday a disastrous scene took place between us. Oaths rasped from your lips."

"Forget that, sir. Forget it."

"That is my desire. Misery wails through the corridors. In her presence let us bury private differences. In this appalling catastrophe every help is required. You have youth, manhood; you should be invaluable."

George declared: "I mean to be. I will not rest until the Rose is restored."

This was perfectly true, as he was to discover.

"Commendable," Mr. Marrapit pronounced. Now that this volunteer was enlisted, Mr. Marrapit discarded supplication, resumed mastery. "While you have searched," he said, "I have schemed." He indicated the paper he carried. "These are my plans. Peruse them."

George read; returned the paper. "If these arrangements do not restore the Rose," he declared, "nothing will. I see you do not mention my name. I fear you doubted my assistance. I think I will join the—the— —"—he glanced at the paper—"the *extra−mural* searchers. I know the countryside well. I can go far and fast."

Mr. Marrapit agreed. "Summon the household," he commanded.

George called Margaret; the two carried out the order.

In a semicircle the household grouped about their master; from Mrs. Armitage at the one horn to George at the other they took their places—Mrs. Armitage, Clara, Ada, Mr. Fletcher, Frederick, Mary, Margaret, George.

Paper in hand Mr. Marrapit regarded them. He pointed at Frederick.

"That boy is sucking a disgusting peppermint. Disgorge."

Glad of relief, all eyes went upon the infamous youth. He purpled, struggled, gulped, swallowed—from his eyes tears streamed.

"Stiffneck!" Mr. Marrapit thundered. "Disgorge, I said. You are controlled by appetite; your belly is your god."

"Well, I ain't 'ad no breakfast," Stiffneck answered fiercely. Like Miss Porter upon a similar occasion this boy was in great pain.

"And no breakfast shall you have until the Rose is restored. Heartless! How can you eat while she, perhaps, does starve?" The angry man addressed the group. "These are the plans for her recovery. Give ear. You, vile boy, will rush to the dairy and order to be sent at once as much milk as Mrs. Armitage will command you. Mrs. Armitage, you with your maids—Fletcher, you with that boy, are the *intramural* workers, the workers within the walls. George, Margaret, Miss Humfray− —*extra−mural*. Mrs. Armitage, with milk let every bowl and saucer be filled. Fletcher, at intervals of thirty feet along the wall let these be placed. If our wanderer is near she will be

attracted. Margaret, with Miss Humfray to the village. Collect an army of village boys. Describe our Rose. Set them to scour the countryside for her. Yourselves join that search. Let the call of 'Rose! Rose!' echo through every lane. George, you also will scour far and wide. Upon your way despatch to me a cab from the station. I drive to the post− office to telephone for a detective. I have not yet decided which detective. It is a momentous matter." He flung out both hands. "To your tasks! Let zeal, let love for our lost one spur each to outvie the efforts of another. Fletcher, raise the window. That pungent boy has poisoned the air."

They trooped from him.

CHAPTER VI A Detective At Herons' Holt.

I.

Bolt Buildings, Westminster, is a colossal red structure reared upon the site of frightened−looking little houses which fell beneath the breaker's hammer coincident with the falling in of their lease. Here you may have a complete floor of rooms at from three to five hundred a year; or, high under the roof, you may rent a single room for forty−five pounds.

Mr. David Brunger, Private Detective and Confidential Inquiry Agent, appeared on the books of the Bolt Buildings management as lessee of one of these single rooms. The appearance of his quarters as presented to the visitor had, however, a more pretentious aspect.

Shot to the topmost floor in the electric lift, passing to the left and up five stairs in accordance with the lift boy's instructions, the intending client would be faced by three doors. Upon the first was inscribed:

DAVID BRUNGER (Clerks).

Upon the middle door:

DAVID BRUNGER (Private).

And upon the third:

DAVID BRUNGER (Office).

These signs of large staff and flourishing business were in keeping with the telling advertisements which Mr. David Brunger from time to time caused to appear in the Press.

“Watch your wife,” said these advertisements, adding in smaller type that had the appearance of a whisper: “David Brunger will watch her.” “What keeps your husband late at office?” they continued. “David Brunger will find out. Confidential inquiry of every description promptly and cheaply carried out by David Brunger's large staff of skilled detectives (male and female). David Brunger has never failed. David Brunger has restored thousands of pounds' worth of stolen property, countless missing relatives. David Brunger, 7 Bolt Buildings, Strange Street, S.W. Tel. 0000 West.”

In London, with its myriad little eddies of crime and matrimonial infelicity, there is a neat sum to be made out of detective work. Scotland Yard wolfs the greater part of these opportunities; there are established names that absorb much of the remainder. In the surplus, however, there is still a livelihood for the David Brungers. For if the Brungers do not go nosing after silken petticoats covering aristocratic but wanton legs; if the Brungers do not go flying across the Continent, nose to ground, notebook in hand, after the fine linen worn by my lord who is making holiday with something fair and frail under the quiet name of Mr. and Mrs. Brown; if the Brungers are not employed to draggle silken petticoats and fine linen through the Divorce Court, there is work for them among humbler washing baskets. Jealous little shop−keepers have erring little wives, and common little wives have naughty little husbands: these come to your Brungers. And if, again, the Brungers do not dog the footsteps of your fifty−thousand−pound men, your embezzlement−over−a−period−of−ten−years men, your cheque−forging men—if the Brungers are invited to do no dogging after these, there are pickings for them in less flashy crimes. Hiding in cupboard work while the sweated little shop− assistant slips a marked shilling from the till, hiding in basement work while a trembling little figure creeps down and pilfers the stock—these are the pranks that come to your Brungers.

II.

While Mr. Marrapit at Herons' Holt was addressing to his household grouped about him his orders relative to the search for the Rose of Sharon, Mr. David Brunger at Bolt Buildings was entering the door marked “DAVID BRUNGER (Private).”

A telephone, a gas stove, a roll−top desk, an office chair, an armchair, a tiny deal table and a wooden−seated chair comprised the furniture of the apartment.

“For myself, I like severity and simplicity of surroundings,” Mr. David Brunger in the office chair would tell a client in the armchair. “For *myself*—” and he would waggle his head towards the side walls with an air that

seemed to imply prodigal luxury in the fittings of “(Clerks)” and “(Office).”

Entering the room Mr. Brunger unlocked the roll−top desk; discovered the stump of a half−smoked cigarette; lit it and began to compare the day's racing selections of “Head Lad,” who imparted stable secrets to one tipster's organ, with those of “Trainer,” who from the knowledge of his position very kindly gave one horse snips to another.

At ten o'clock the large staff of trained detectives (male and female), mentioned in Mr. Brunger's advertisements, came pouring up the stairs, knocked at the door and filed into the room. Its name was Issy Jago, a Jewish young gentleman aged seventeen, whose appearance testified in the highest manner to the considerable thrift he exercised in the matter of hair−dressers and toilet soap.

Mr. Issy Jago sat himself on the wooden−seated chair before the small deal table; got to work upon his finger−nails with the corner of an omnibus ticket; proceeded to study the police court reports in the *Daily Telegraph*.

It was his duty, whenever he noted plaintiffs or defendants to whom Mr. David Brunger's services might be of benefit, to post to them Mr. David Brunger's card together with a selection of entirely unsolicited testimonials composed and dictated by Mr. Brunger for the occasion.

Also his duty to receive clients.

When a knock was heard at “DAVID BRUNGER (Clerks)” Mr. Issy Jago would slip through from “DAVID BRUNGER (Private)” to the tiny closet containing the cistern into which the door marked “DAVID BRUNGER (Clerks)” opened. Sliding through this door in such a manner as to give the client no glimpse of the interior, he would inform the visitor, with a confidential wink, “Fact is we have a client in there —a very well−known personage who does not wish it to be known that he is consulting us.” The impressed caller would then be conducted into “DAVID BEUNGER (Private).”

Between “DAVID BRUNGER (Private)” and “DAVID BRUNGER (Office),” on the other hand, there was no communication. Indeed there was no room behind “(Office)”: the door gave on to the roof. When, therefore, a hesitating client chose to knock at “(Office)” Mr. Issy Jago, emerging from “(Private),” would give the whispered information: “Fact is there's a very important private consultation going on in there— Scotland Yard consulting us.” And the impressed client would forthwith be led into “DAVID BRUNGER (Private).”

In either event, the client trapped, Mr. Issy Jago would skip into “(Clerks)” and sit on the cistern till Mr. Brunger's bell summoned him.

For the privilege of adding to the dignity of his single apartment by having his name inscribed upon the cistern cupboard and upon the emergency exit to the roof, Mr. Brunger paid thirty shillings extra per annum.

III.

By half−past ten Mr. Brunger was occupied in composing an unsolicited testimonial to be sent to the wife of a green−grocer in the Borough who, on the previous day, had summoned her husband for assault at Lambeth Police−Court.

“I had suspicions but no proof of my 'usband's infidelity,” dictated Mr. Brunger, pacing the floor, “until I enlisted your services. I must say—”

At that moment the telephone bell rang. Mr. Brunger ceased dictation; took up the receiver.

“Are you David Brunger, the private detective?” a voice asked.

“We are,” replied Mr. Brunger in the thin treble he used on first answering a call. “Who are you, please?”

“I am Mr. Christopher Marrapit of Herons' Holt, Paltley Hill, Surrey. I—”

“One moment,” piped Mr. Brunger. “Is it confidential business?”

“It is most urgent business. I—”

“One moment, please. In that case the private secretary must take your message.”

Mr. Brunger laid down the receiver; took a turn across the room; approached the telephone; in a very deep bass asked, “Are you there?”

The frantic narrative that was poured into his ears he punctuated with heavy, guttural “Certainly's,” “Yes's,” “We comprehend's,” “We follow you's.” Then: “Mr. David Brunger himself? I'm afraid that is impossible, sir. Mr. Brunger has his hands very full just now. He is closeted with Scotland Yard. At this moment, sir, the Yard is consulting him ...'m...'m. Well, I'll see, sir, I'll see. I doubt it. I very much doubt it. But hold the line a minute, sir.”

In his capacity of Mr. David Brunger's private secretary, Mr. David Brunger drank from the carafe of water on

the mantelpiece to clear his tortured throat.

In his capacity of the great detective and confidential inquiry agent himself, he then stepped to the telephone and, after exhibiting a power of invention relative to startling crimes in hand that won even the admiration of Mr. Issy Jago, announced that he would be with Mr. Marrapit at three o'clock.

"It may be a big job, Issy," he remarked, relighting the stump of cigarette, "or it may be a little job. But what I say and what I do is, *impress your client. Impress your client*, Issy. Let that be your maxim through life. And if I catch you again takin' a draw at my cigarette when my back's turned, as I see you just now, I'll damn well turn you inside out and chuck you through that door. So you watch it. You've made this smoke taste 'orrid−'orrid. No sauce, now; no sauce."

IV.

By two o'clock the results of Mr. Marrapit's colossal scheme began to pour in.

The bowls of milk, gleaming along the wall of Herons' Holt, drew every stray cat within a radius of two miles. Beneath, each armed with a clothes−prop, toiled Mr. Fletcher and Frederick under the immediate generalship of Mr. Marrapit.

Throughout the morning cats bounded, flickered and disappeared upon the wall. Fat cats, thin cats; tom cats, tabby cats; white cats, black cats, yellow cats, and grey cats; young cats and old cats. As each appeared, Mr. Marrapit, first expectant then moaning, would wave his assistants to the assault. Up would go the clothes−prop of Mr. Fletcher or Frederick; down would go the stranger cat. It was exhausting work.

At two−thirty the village boys who had been searching were mustered at the gate. Each bore a cat. Some carried two. Leaving his clothes−prop lancers, Mr. Marrapit hurried down the drive to hold review.

"Pass," he commanded, "in single file before me."

They passed. "Dolt! Dolt!" groaned Mr. Marrapit, writhing in the bitterness of crushed hope as each cat was held towards him. "Dolt and pumpkin−head! How could that wretched creature be my Rose?"

How, indeed, when at that moment the Rose of Sharon in the ruined hut was lapping milk taken her by George in a lemonade bottle, her infamous captor smoking on the threshold?

Precisely at three o'clock Mr. David Brunger arrived. Conducted to the room whence the Rose had disappeared, the astute inquiry agent was there closeted with Mr. Marrapit for half an hour. At the end of that time Mr. Marrapit appeared on the lawn. His face was white, his voice, when he spoke, hollow and trembling. He called to the clothes−prop lancers:

"Cease. Cease. Withdraw the milk. The Rose of Sharon is not strayed. She is stolen!"

"Thenk Gord!" said Frederick. "Thenk Gord! I've pretty well busted myself over this game."

Mr. Fletcher said nothing; drew his snail from his pocket; plunged head downwards in a bush. Woe sat heavy upon him; beneath the indignity and labour of thrusting at stranger cats with a clothes−prop this man had grievously suffered.

V.

The Rose was stolen. That was Mr. Brunger's discovery after examination of the window−latch where George's knife had marked it, the sill where George's boots had scratched it. Outside the great detective searched for footmarks—they had been obliterated by heavy rainfall between the doing of the hideous deed and its discovery. Upon the principle of impressing his client, however, Mr. Brunger grovelled on the path with tape measure and note−book; measured every pair of boots in the house; measured the window; measured the room; in neat little packets tied up specimens of the gravel, specimens of the turf, specimens of hair from the Rose of Sharon's coat, picked from her bed.

It was six o'clock when he had concluded. By then George had returned; the three held council in the study. Addressing Mr. Marrapit, Mr. Brunger tapped his note−book and his little packages. "We shall track the culprit, never fear, Mr. Marrapit," he said. "My impression is that this is the work of a gang—a *gang*."

"Precisely my impression," George agreed.

Mr. Brunger took the interruption with the gracious bow of one who condescends to accept a pat on the back from an inferior. Mr. Marrapit twisted his fingers in his thin hair; groaned aloud.

"A *gang*," repeated Mr. Brunger, immensely relishing the word. "We detectives do not like to speak with

certainty until we have clapped our hands upon our men; we leave that for the amateurs, the bunglers— the *quacks* of our profession." The famous confidential inquiry agent tapped the table with his forefinger and proceeded impressively. "But I will say this much. Not only a gang, but a desperate gang, a dangerous, stick−at−nothing gang."

Mr. Marrapit writhed. The detective continued: "What are our grounds for this belief?" he asked. "What are our *data*?"

He looked at George. George shook his head. Easy enough, and useful, to acquiesce in the idea of a gang, but uncommonly hard to support the belief. He shook his head.

Mr. Brunger was disappointed; a little at sea, he would have clutched eagerly at any aid. However, "impress your client." He continued: "These are our data. We have a valuable cat—a cat, sir, upon which the eyes of cat−breeders are enviously fixed. Take America—you have had surprising offers from America for this cat, sir, so you told me?"

"Eight hundred pounds," Mr. Marrapit groaned.

"Precisely. Observe how our data accumulate. We have dissatisfaction among breeders at home because you will not employ this cat as, in their opinion, for the good of the breed, she should be employed."

Mr. Marrapit moaned: "Polygamy is abhorrent to me."

"Precisely. Our data positively pile about us. We have a thousand enthusiasts yearning for this cat. We have your refusal to sell or to— to—" Mr. Brunger allowed a hiatus delicately to express his meaning. "Then depend upon it, sir, we have a determination to secure this cat by foul means since fair will not avail. We have a conspiracy among unscrupulous breeders to obtain this valuable cat, and hence, sir, we have a gang—a *gang*."

Mr. Marrapit put his anguish of mind into two very deep groans.

"Keep calm, my dear sir," Mr. Brunger soothed. "We shall return your cat. We have our data." He continued: "Now, sir, there are two ways of dealing with a *gang*. We can capture the *gang* or we can seduce the *gang*—by offering a reward."

George jumped in his chair. "Anything wrong?" Mr. Brunger inquired.

"Your—your extraordinary grasp of the case astonishes me," George exclaimed.

"Experience, sir, experience," said Mr. Brunger airily. Addressing Mr. Marrapit, "We must put both methods to work," he continued. "I shall now go to town, look up the chief breeders and set members of my trained staff to track them. Also I must advertise this reward. With a cat of such value we cannot use half measures. Shall we say one hundred pounds to start with?"

"Barley water!" gasped Mr. Marrapit. "Barley water!"

George sprang to the sideboard where always stood a jug of Mr. Marrapit's favourite refreshment. Mr. Marrapit drank, agitation rattling the glass against his teeth.

"Think what it means to you, sir," persuaded Mr. Brunger, a little alarmed at the effects of his proposal.

The detective's tone had a very earnest note, for he was thinking with considerable gratification what the hundred pounds would mean to himself. On previous occasions he had urged rewards from his clients, put Mr. Issy Jago in the way of securing them, and paid that gentleman a percentage.

"Think what it means to you," he repeated. "What is a hundred pounds or thrice that sum against the restoration of your cat? Come, what is it, sir?"

"Ruin," answered Mr. Marrapit, gulping barley water. "Ruin."

Mr. Brunger urged gravely: "Oh, don't say that, sir. Think what our dumb pets are to us. I've got a blood−'ound at home myself that I'd give my life for if I lost—gladly. Surely they're more to us, our faithful friends, than mere—mere—"

"Pelf," supplied George, on a thin squeak that was shot out by the excitement of seeing events so lustily playing his hand.

"Mere pelf," adopted Mr. Brunger.

Mr. Marrapit gulped heavily at the barley water; set his gaze upon a life−size portrait in oils of his darling Rose; with fine calm announced: "If it must be, it must be."

With masterly celerity Mr. Brunger drew forward pen and paper; scribbled; in three minutes had Mr. Marrapit's signed authority to offer one hundred pounds reward.

He put the document in his pocket; took up his hat. "To−morrow," he said after farewells, "I or one of my

staff will return to scour the immediate neighbourhood. It has been done, you tell me, but only by amateurs. The skilled detective, sir, will see a needle where the amateur cannot discern a haystack."

VI.

He was gone. His last words had considerably alarmed George. No time was to be lost. All was working with a magic expediency, but the Rose must not be risked in the vicinity of one of these needle−observing detectives. She must be hurried away.

"Uncle," George said, "I did not say it while the detective was here— I do not wish to raise your hopes; but I believe I have a clue. Do not question me," he added, raising a hand in terror lest Mr. Marrapit should begin examination. "I promise nothing. My ideas may be wholly imaginary. But I believe—I believe—oh, I believe I have a clue."

Mr. Marrapit rushed for the bell. "Recall the detective! You should have spoken. I will send Fletcher in pursuit."

George seized his uncle's arm. "On no account. That is why I did not speak before. I am convinced I can do better alone."

"You do not convince me. You are an amateur. We must have the skilled mind. Let me ring."

George was in terror. "No, no; do you not see it may be waste of time? Let me at least make sure, then I will tell the detective. Meanwhile let him pursue other clues. Why send the trained mind on what may be a goose−chase?"

The argument had effect. Mr. Marrapit dropped into a chair.

George explained. To follow the clue necessitated, he said, instant departure—by train. He would write fullest details; would wire from time to time if necessary. His uncle must trust him implicitly. The detective must not be told until he gave the word.

Eager to clutch at any hope, Mr. Marrapit clutched at this. George was given money for expenses; at eight o'clock left the house. There had been no opportunity for words with his Mary. She did not even know that Mr. Marrapit had refused the money that was to mean marriage and Runnygate; she had not even danced with her George upon his success in his examination. Leaving the household upon his desperate clue, George could do no more than before them all bid her formal farewell. At half−past eight he is cramming the peerless Rose of Sharon into a basket taken from Mr. Fletcher's outhouses; at nine the villain is tramping the railway platform, in agony lest his burden shall mi−aow; at ten the monster is at Dippleford Admiral; at eleven the traitor is asleep in the bedroom of an inn, the agitated Rose uneasily slumbering upon his bed.

CHAPTER VII. Terror At Dippleford Admiral.

I.

“Impress your client,” was the maxim of Mr. David Brunger. “Make a splash and keep splashing,” was that of Mr. Henry T. Bitt, editor of Fleet Street's new organ, the *Daily*.

Muddy pools were Mr. Bitt's speciality. His idea of the greatest possible splash was some stream, pure and beautiful to the casual eye, into which he could force his young men and set them trampling the bottom till the thick, unpleasant mud came clouding up whence it had long lain unsuspected. There was his splash, and then he would start to keep splashing. By every art and device the pool would be flogged till the muddy water went flying broadcast, staining this, that, and the other fair name to the nasty delight of Mr. Bitt's readers. Scandal was Mr. Bitt's chief quest. Army scandal, navy scandal, political scandal, social scandal—these were the courses that Mr. Bitt continuously strove to serve up to his readers. Failing them—if disappointingly in evidence on every side was the integrity and the honour for which Mr. Bitt raved and bawled when in the thick of splashing a muddy pool,—then, argued Mr. Bitt, catch hold of something trivial and splash it, flog it, placard it, into a sensational and semi−mysterious bait that would set the halfpennies rising like trout in an evening stream.

Bringing these principles−indeed they won him his appointment—to the editorship of the *Daily*, Mr. Bitt was set moody and irritable by the fact that he had no opportunity to exercise them over the first issue of the paper.

But while preparing for press upon the second night the chance came. There was no scandal, no effective news; but there was matter for a sensational, semi−mysterious “leading story” in a tiny little scrap of news dictated by Mr. David Brunger, laboriously copied out a dozen times by Mr. Issy Jago and left by that gentleman at the offices of as many newspapers.

Seven sub−editors “spiked” it, three made of it a “fill−par.,” one gave it a headline and sent it up as an eight−line “news−par.”; one, in the offices of the *Daily*, read it, laughed; spoke to the news−editor; finally carried it up to Mr. Bitt.

Mr. Bitt's journalistic nose gave one sniff. The thing was done. Some old idiot was actually offering the ridiculously large sum of one hundred pounds for the recovery of a cat. Here, out of the barren, un−newsy world, suddenly had sprung a seed that should grow to a forest. The very thing. The *Daily* was saved.

Away sped a reporter; and upon the following morning, bawling from the leading position of the principal page of the *Daily*, introducing a column and a quarter of leaded type, these headlines appeared:

COUNTRY HOUSE OUTRAGE.
VALUABLE CAT STOLEN.
SENSATIONAL STORY.
HUGE REWARD.
CHANCE FOR AMATEUR DETECTIVES.

All out of Mr. Issy Jago's tiny little paragraph.

Daily readers revelled in it. It appeared that a gang of between five and a dozen men had surrounded the lonely but picturesque and beautiful country residence of Mr. Christopher Marrapit at Herons' Holt, Paltley Hill, Surrey. Mr. Marrapit was an immensely wealthy retired merchant now leading a secluded life in the evening of his days. First among the costly art and other treasures of his house he placed a magnificent orange cat, “The Rose of Sharon,” a winner whenever exhibited. The gang, bursting their way into the house, had stolen this cat, despite Mr. Marrapit's heroic defence, leaving the unfortunate gentleman senseless and bleeding on the hearth−rug. Mr. Marrapit had offered 100 pounds reward for the recovery of his pet; and the *Daily*, under the heading “Catchy Clues,” proceeded to tell its readers all over the country how best they might win this sum.

All out of Mr. Issy Jago's tiny little paragraph.

II.

Daily readers revelled in it. Upon three of their number it had a particular effect.

Bill Wyvern had not been at the *Daily* office that night. Employed during the day, he had finished his work at

six; after a gloomy meal had gone gloomily to bed. This man was on probation. His appointment to a permanent post depended upon his in some way distinguishing himself; and thus far, as, miserable, he reflected, he utterly had failed. The “copy” he had done for the first issue of the *Daily* had not been used; on this day he had been sent upon an interview and had obtained from his subject a wretched dozen words. These he had taken to the news−editor; and the news−editor had treated them and him with contempt.

“But that's all he would say,” poor Bill had expostulated.

“All he would say!” the news−editor sneered. “Here, Mathers, take this stuff and make a quarter−col. interview out of it.”

Thus it was in depressed mood that Bill on the following morning opened his *Daily*.

The flaring “Country House Outrage” hit his eye; he read; in two minutes his mood was changed. A sensation at Paltley Hill! At Mr. Marrapit's! Here was his chance! Who better fitted than he to work up this story? Fortunately he knew Mr. Henry T. Bitt's private address; had the good sense to go straight to his chief.

A cab took him to the editor's flat in Victoria Street. Mr. Bitt was equally enthusiastic.

“Hot stuff,” said Mr. Bitt. “You've got your chance; make a splash. Go to the office and tell Lang I've put you on to it. Cut away down to the scene of the outrage and stay there as our Special Commissioner till I wire you back. Serve it up hot. Make clues if you can't find 'em. Hot, mind. H−O−T.”

III.

Professor Wyvern was the second reader upon whom the sensational story had particular effect.

Through breakfast the Professor eyed with loving eagerness the copy of the *Daily* that lay folded beside his plate.

At intervals, “I have made a very good breakfast, now,” he would say. “Now I will try to find what Bill has written in this terrible paper.”

But thrice Mrs. Wyvern lovingly checked him. “Dear William, no. You have hardly touched your sole. You must finish it, dear, every scrap, before you look at the paper. You have been eating such good breakfasts lately. Now, please, William, finish it first.”

“It is as big as a shark,” the Professor grumbles, making shots with his trembling fork.

“Dear William, it is a very small sole.”

At last he has finished. A line catches his eye as he unfolds the *Daily*, and he chuckles: “Oh, dear! This is a very horrible paper. 'Actress and Stockbroker—Piccadilly by night.'“

“Dear William, we only want to read what Bill has written. An interview, he tells us, with—”

Dear William waggles his naughty old head over the actress and the stockbroker; shaky fingers unfold the centre pages; nose runs up one column and down another, then suddenly starts back burnt by the flaring “Country House Outrage.”

“Dearest! Dearest! Whatever is the matter?”

But dearest is speechless. Dearest can only cough and choke and splutter in convulsions of mirth over some terrific joke of which he will tell Mrs. Wyvern no more than: “He has done it. Oh, dear! oh, dear! He has done it. Oh, dear! This will be very funny indeed!”

IV.

It will be seen that two out of the three readers particularly interested in Mr. Bitt's splash were agreeably interested. Upon the third the effect was different.

It was George's first morning in the little inn at Dippleford Admiral. An unaccustomed weight upon his legs, at which thrice he sleepily kicked without ridding himself of it, at length awoke him.

He found the morning well advanced; the disturbing weight that had oppressed him he saw to be a hairy object, orange of hue. Immediately his drowsy senses awoke; took grip of events; sleep fled. This object was the Rose of Sharon, and at once George became actively astir to the surgings of yesterday, the mysteries of the future.

Pondering upon them, he was disturbed by a knock that heralded a voice: “The paper you ordered, mister; and when'll you be ready for breakfast?”

“Twenty minutes,” George replied; remembered the landlady had overnight told him she was a little deaf; on a louder note bawled: “Twenty minutes, Mrs. Pinner!”

Mrs. Pinner, after hesitation, remarked: “Ready now? Very well, mister”; pushed a newspaper beneath the door; shuffled down the stairs.

In the course of his brief negotiations with Mrs. Pinner upon the previous evening, George, in response to the proud information that the paper−boy arrived at nine o'clock every morning on a motor bicycle, had bellowed that he would have the *Daily*. For old Bill's sake he had ordered it; with friendly curiosity to see Bill's new associations he now withdrew his legs from beneath the Rose of Sharon; hopped out of bed; opened the paper.

Upon “Country House Outrage” George alighted plump; with goggle eyes, scalp creeping, blood freezing, read through to the last “Catchy Clue”; aghast sank upon his bed.

It had got into the papers! Among all difficult eventualities against which he had made plans this had never found place. It had got into the papers! The cat's abduction was, or soon would be, in the knowledge of everyone. This infernal reward which with huge joy he had heard offered, was now become the goad that would prick into active search for the Rose every man, woman, or child who read the story. It had got into the papers! He was a felon now; fleeing justice; every hand against him. Discovery looked certain, and what did discovery mean? Discovery meant not only loss of the enormous stake for which he was playing—his darling Mary,—but it meant—“Good God!” groaned my miserable George, “it means ruin; it means imprisonment.”

Melancholy pictures went galloping like wild nightmares through this young man's mind. He saw himself in the dock, addressed in awful words by the judge who points out the despicable character of his crime; he saw himself in hideous garb labouring in a convict prison; he saw himself struck off the roll at the College of Surgeons; he saw himself—“Oh, Lord!” he groaned, “I'm fairly in the cart!”

Very slowly, very abject, he peeled off his pyjamas; slid a white and trembling leg into his bath.

But the preposterous buoyancy of youth! The cold water that splashed away the clamminess of bed washed, too, the more vapoury fears from George's brain; the chilly splashings that braced his system to a tingling glow braced also his mind against the pummellings of his position. Drying, he caught himself whistling; catching himself in such an act he laughed ruefully to think how little ground he had for good spirits.

But the whistling prevailed. This ridiculous buoyancy of youth! What luckless pigs are we who moon and fret and grow besodden with the waters of our misfortunes! This cheeky corkiness of youth! Shove it under the fretted sea of trouble, and free it will twist, up it will bob. Weight it and drop it into the deepest pool; just when it should be drowned, pop! and it is again merrily bobbing upon the surface.

It is a sight to make us solemn−souled folk disgustingly irritated. We are the Marthas—trudging our daily rounds, oppressed with sense of the duties that must be done, with the righteous feeling of the hardness of our lot; and these light−hearts, these trouble−shirkers, this corkiness of youth, exasperate us enormously. But the grin is on their side.

The whistling prevailed. By the time George was dressed he had put his position into these words—these feather−brained, corky, preposterous words: “By gum!” said George, brushing his hair, “by gum! I'm in a devil of a hole!”

The decision summed up a cogitation that showed him to be in a hole indeed, but not in so fearsome a pit as he had at first imagined. He had at first supposed that within a few minutes the earth would be shovelled in on him and he buried. Review of events showed the danger not to be so acute. On arrival the previous night, after brief parley with Mrs. Pinner he had gone straight to his room, bearing the Rose tight hid in her basket. No reason, then, for suspicion yet to have fallen upon him. He must continue to keep the Rose hid. It would be difficult, infernally difficult; but so long as he could effect it he might remain here secure. The beastly cat must of course be let out for a run. That was a chief difficulty. Well, he must think out some fearful story that would give him escape with the basket every morning.

V.

Breakfast was laid in a little sitting−room over the porch, adjoining his bedroom. George pressed the poor Rose into her basket; carried it in.

Mrs. Pinner was setting flowers on the table. George carried the basket to the window; placed it on a chair; sat upon it. With his right hand he drummed upon the lid. It was his purpose to inspire the Rose with a timid wonder at this drubbing that should prevent her voicing a protest against cramped limbs.

“Some nice tea and a bit of fish I'm going to bring you up, mister,” Mrs. Pinner told him.

Recollecting her deafness, and in fear lest she should approach the basket, George from the window bellowed: “Thank you, Mrs. Pinner. But I won't have tea, if you please. Won't have tea. I drink milk— *milk* . A lot of milk. I'm a great milk−drinker.”

The Rose wriggled. George thumped the basket. “As soon as you like, Mrs. Pinner. As quick as you like!”

Mrs. Pinner closed the door; the Rose advertised her feelings in a long, penetrating mi−aow. In an agony of strained listening George held his breath. But Mrs. Pinner heard nothing; moved steadily downstairs. He wiped his brow. This was the beginning of it.

When Mrs. Pinner reappeared, jug of milk and covered dish on a tray, George's plan, after desperate searchings, had come to him.

He gave it speech. “I want to arrange, Mrs. Pinner—”

“If you wait till I've settled the tray, mister, I'll come close to you. I'm that hard of hearing you wouldn't believe.”

George sprang from the basket; approached the table. His life depended upon keeping a distance between basket and Pinner.

“I want to arrange to have this room as a private sitting−room.”

It had never been so used before, but it could be arranged, Mrs. Pinner told him. She would speak to her 'usband about terms.

“And I want to keep it very private indeed, I don't want anyone to enter it unless I am here.” George mounted his lie and galloped it, blushing for shame of his steed. “The fact is, Mrs. Pinner, I'm an inventor. Yes, an inventor. Oh, yes, an inventor.” The wretched steed was stumbling, but he clung on; spurred afresh. “An inventor. And I have to leave things lying about—delicate instruments that mustn't be disturbed. Awfully delicate. I shall be out all day. I shall be taking my invention into the open air to experiment with it. My invention—“ He waved his hand at the basket.

Mrs. Pinner quite understood; was impressed. “Oh, dear, yes, mister. To be sure. An inventor; fancy that, now!” She gazed at the basket. “And the invention is in there?”

“Right in there,” George assured her.

“You'll parding my asking, mister; but your saying you have to take it in the open hair—is it one of them hairships, mister?”

“Well, it *is*,” George said frankly. This was a useful idea and he approved it. “It *is.* It's an airship.”

“Well, I never did!” Mrs. Pinner admired, gazing at the basket. “A hairship in there!”

“*Mi−aow!*” spoke the Rose—penetrating, piercing.

Mrs. Pinner cocked her head on one side; looked under the table. “I declare I thought I heard a cat,” she puzzled. “In this very room.”

George felt perfectly certain that his hair was standing bolt upright on the top of his head, thrusting at right angles to the sides. He forced his alarmed face to smile: “A cock crowing in the yard, I think, Mrs. Pinner.”

Mrs. Pinner took the explanation with an apologetic laugh. “I'm that hard o' hearing you never would believe. But I could ha' sworn. Ill not keep you chattering, sir.” She raised the dish cover.

A haddock was revealed. A fine, large, solid haddock from which a cloud of strongly savoured vapour arose.

George foresaw disaster. That smell! that hungry cat! Almost he pushed Mrs. Pinner to the door. “That you, thank you. I have everything now. I will ring if—”

“*Mi−aow!*“

“Bless my soul!” Mrs. Pinner exclaimed. “There is a cat”; dropped on hands and knees; pushed her head beneath the sofa.

George rushed for the basket. Wreaking his craven alarm upon the hapless prisoner, he shook it; with a horrible bump slammed it upon the floor; placed his foot upon it.

Mrs. Pinner drew up, panting laboriously. “Didn't you hear a cat, mister?”

George grappled the crisis. “I did not hear a cat. If there were a cat I should have heard it. I should have felt it. I abominate cats. I can always tell when a cat is near me. There is no cat. Kindly leave me to my breakfast.”

Poor Mrs. Pinner was ashamed. “I'm sure I do beg you parding, mister. The fact is we've all got cats fair on the brain this morning. In this here new paper, mister, as perhaps you've seen, and they're giving us a free copy every day for a week, there's a cat been stole, mister. A hundred pounds reward, and as the paper says, the cat may

be under your very nose. We're all a 'unting for it, mister."

She withdrew. George crossed the room; pressed his head, against the cold marble of the mantelpiece. His brows were burning; in the pit of his stomach a sinking sensation gave him pain. "All a 'unting for it! all a 'unting for it!"

When the Rose had bulged her flanks with the complete haddock, when, responsive to a "Stuff your head in that, you brute," the patient creature had lapped a slop−bowl full of milk, George again imprisoned her; rushed, basket under arm, for open country.

Mr. Pinner in the bar−parlour, as George fled through, was reading from a paper to a stable hand, a servant girl, and a small red−headed Pinner boy: "It may be in John o' Groats," he read, "or it may be in Land's End." He thumped the bar. "'Ear that! Well, it may be in Dippleford Admiral."

It was precisely because it was in Dippleford Admiral that his young inventor lodger fled through the bar without so much as a civil "good morning."

* * * * *

At the post−office, keeping a drumming foot on the terrified Rose, George sent a telegram to Mr. Marrapit.

"Think on track. Must be cautious. Don't tell Brunger."

He flung down eightpence halfpenny; fled in the direction of a wood that plumed a distant hill. Fear had this man.

CHAPTER VIII. Panic At Dippleford Admiral.

I.

George left Dippleford Admiral that night.

He left at great speed. There was no sadness of farewell. There was no farewell.

Returning at seven o'clock to his sitting−room at the inn, melancholy beneath a hungry and brooding day in the woods with the Rose tethered to a tree by the length of two handkerchiefs, he ordered supper— milk, fish, and chops.

Mrs. Pinner asked him if that would be all. She and 'usband were going to a chapel meeting; the servant girl was out; there would only be a young man in the bar.

George took the news gratefully. His nerves had been upon the stretch all day. It was comforting to think that for a few hours he and this vile cat would have the house to themselves.

Immediately Mrs. Pinner left the room he greedily fell to upon the chops. All day he had eaten nothing: the Rose must wait. Three parts of a tankard of ale was sliding at a long and delectable draught down upon his meal when the slam of a door, footsteps and a bawling voice in the yard told him that Mrs. Pinner and 'usband had started, chatting pleasantly, for their chapel meeting.

The dish cleared, George arranged his prisoner's supper; stepped to the basket to fetch her to it. As he lifted her splendid form there came from behind him an exclamation, an agitated scuffling.

In heart−stopping panic George dropped the cat, jumped around. The red−headed Pinner boy, whom that morning he had seen in the bar−parlour, was scrambling from beneath the sofa, arms and legs thrusting his flaming pate at full−speed for the door.

“Stop!” George cried, rooted in alarm.

The red−headed Pinner boy got to Ms feet, hurled himself at the door handle.

“Stop!” roared George, struggling with the stupefaction that gripped him. “Stop, you young devil!”

The red−headed Pinner boy twisted the handle; was half through the door as George bounded for him.

“Par−par!” screamed the flaming head, travelling at immense speed down the passage. “Par−par! It ain't a hairship. It's a cat!”

George dashed.

“Par−par! Par−par! It's a cat!” The redheaded Pinner boy took the first short flight of stairs in a jump; rounded for the second.

George lunged over the banisters; gripped close in the flaming hair; held fast.

For a full minute in silence they poised—red−headed Pinner boy, on tip−toe as much as possible to ease the pain, in acute agony and great fear; George wildly seeking the plan that must be followed when he should release this fateful head.

Presently, with a backward pull that most horribly twisted the red−headed face: “If you speak a word I'll pull your head off,” George said. “Come up here.”

The pitiful procession reached the sitting−room. “Sit down there,” George commanded. “If you make a sound I shall probably cut your head clean off. What do you mean by hiding in my room?”

Between gusty pain and terror: “I thought it was a hairship.”

“Oh!” George paced the room. What did the vile boy think now? “Oh, well, what do you think it is now?”

“I believe it's the cat wot's in the piper.”

“Oh, you do, do you?” Yes, this was a very horrible position indeed. “Oh, you do, do you? Now, you listen to me, my lad: unless you want your head cut right off you sit still without a sound.”

The red−headed Pinner boy sat quite still; wept softly. Life, at the moment, was a bitter affair for this boy.

II.

George paced. The hideous nightmares of the morning had returned now— snorting, neighing, trampling iron−shod; stampeding in hideous irresistible rushes. This was the beginning of the end. He was discovered—his'

secret out.

Flight—immediate flight—that was the essential course. Par−par, thanks to sweet heaven, was at a chapel meeting. The thing could be done. A timetable upon the mantelpiece told him that a down−train left the station at 8.35. It was now eight. Better a down−train than an up. The further from London the less chance of this infernal *Daily* with its Country House Outrage. Examining the time−table he determined upon Temple Colney—an hour's run. He had been there once with Bill.

But what of this infernal red−headed Pinner boy? In agony wrestling with the question, George every way ran into the brick wall fact that there was no method of stopping the vile boy's mouth. The red head must be left behind to shriek its discovery to par−par. All that could be done was to delay that shriek as long as possible.

George packed his small hand−bag; placed upon the table money to pay his bill; lifted the crime−stained basket; addressed the red−headed Pinner boy:

“Stop that sniffling. Take that bag. You are to come with me. If you make a sound or try to run away you know what will happen to you. What did I tell you would happen?”

“Cut me 'ead off.”

“Right off. Right off—*slish*! Give me your hand; come on.”

Through a side door, avoiding the bar, they passed into the street. Kind night gave them cloaks of invisibility; no one was about. In a few minutes they had left the bold village street, were in timid lanes that turned and twisted hurrying through the high hedges.

Half a mile upon the further side of the station George that morning had passed a line of haystacks. Now he made for it, skirting the railway by a considerable distance.

The red−headed Pinner boy, exhausted by the pace of their walk, not unnaturally nervous, spoke for the first time: “Ain't you going to the station, mister?”

“Station? Certainly not. Do you think I am running away?”

The red−headed Pinner boy did not answer. This boy was recalling in every detail the gruesome story, read in a paper, of a bright young lad who had been foully done to death in a wood.

George continued: “I shall be back with you at the inn this evening, and I shall ask your father to give you a good thrashing for hiding in my room.”

In an earnest prayer the red−headed Pinner boy besought God that he might indeed be spared to receive that thrashing.

III.

They reached the haystack. George struck a match; looked at his watch. In seven minutes the train was due.

The ladder George had noticed that morning was lying along the foot of a stack. Uprearing it against one partially demolished, “Put down that bag,” he commanded. “Up with you!”

Gustily sniffing in the huge sighs that advertised his terror, the red−headed Pinner boy obeyed. George drew down the ladder. “Stop up there; I shall be back in five minutes. If you move before then—”

He left the trembling boy out of his own agitated fear to fill the unspoken doom. He walked slowly away in the direction opposite from the station until the haystack was merged and lost in the blackness that surrounded it. Then, doubling back, he made for the road; pounded along it at desperate speed.

Most satisfactorily did that bounding, lurching, stumbling run along the dark, uneven lane punish this crime−steeped George. Well he realised, before he had sped a hundred yards, that guilt lashes with a double thong. She had scourged him mentally; now with scorpions she physically lashed him. As it had been racked throbbed that left arm encircling the basket wherein in wild fear the Rose clung to ease the dreadful bruisings that each oscillation gave her; as it were a ton−weight did that hand−bag drag his right arm, thud his thigh; as he were breathing fire did his tearing respirations sear his throat; as a great piston were driving in his skull did the blood hammer his temples.

Topping a low rise he sighted the station lights below. Simultaneously, from behind a distant whistle there sprang to his ears the low rumble of the coming train.

This history is not to be soiled with what George said at the sound. With the swiftness and the scorching of flame his dreadful commination leapt from the tortured Rose, terrified in her basket, to the red−headed Pinner boy wrestling in prayer upon the haystack—from the roughness of the lane that laboured his passage to the speed of

the oncoming train that hammered at his fate.

He hurled himself down the rise; with his last breath gasped for a ticket; upon a final effort projected himself into the train; went prone upon a seat. He was away!

* * * * *

It was when George was some fifteen minutes from Temple Colney that the red−headed Pinner boy, bolstered up with prayer, commended his soul to God; slipped with painful thud from the haystack; pelted for Par−par.

CHAPTER IX. Disaster At Temple Colney.

I.

Three days have passed.

That somewhat pale and haggard−looking young man striding, a basket beneath his arm, up the main street of Temple Colney is George. The villagers stop to stare after him; grin, and nudge into one another responsive grins, at his curious mannerisms. He walks in the exact centre of the roadway, as far as he can keep from passers−by on either side. Approached by anyone, he takes a wide circle to avoid that person. Sometimes a spasm as of fear will cross his face and he will violently shake the basket he carries. Always he walks with giant strides. Every morning he shoots out of the inn where he is staying as though sped on the blast of some ghostly current of air; every evening, returning, he gives the impression of gathering himself together on the threshold, then goes bolting in at whirlwind speed. He is a somewhat pale and haggard young man.

The villagers know him well. He is the young hairship inventor who has a private sitting−room at the Colney Arms. Certain of them, agog to pry his secret, followed him as he set out one day. They discovered nothing. For hours they followed; but he, glancing ever over his shoulder, pounded steadily on, mile upon mile—field, lane, high road, hill and dale. He never shook them off though he ran; they never brought him to standstill though indomitably they pursued. Towards evening the exhausted procession came thundering up the village street.

It was a very pale and haggard young man that bolted into the Colney Arms that night.

II.

Three days had passed.

If George had the *Daily* to curse for the miserable life of secrecy and constant agony of discovery that he was compelled to lead, he had it also to bless that his discovery by the red−headed Pinner boy had not long ago led to his being run to earth. In its anxiety to cap the satisfactory splash it was making over this Country House Outrage, the *Daily* had overstepped itself and militated against itself. Those “Catchy Clues” were responsible. So cunningly did they inspire the taste for amateur detective work, so easy did they make such work appear, that Mr. Pinner, having thrashed silence into his red−headed son, kept that son's discovery to himself. As he argued it—laboriously pencilling down “data” in accordance with the “Catchy Clue" directions,—as he argued it—if he communicated his knowledge to the *Daily* or to the local police, if he put them—(the word does not print nicely) on the scent, ten to one they would capture the thief and secure the reward. No, Mr. Pinner intended to have the reward himself. Therefore he hoarded his secret; brooded upon it; dashed off hither and thither as the day's news brought him a Catchy Clue that seemed to fit his data.

But of this George knew nothing. Steeped in crime this miserable young man dragged out his awful life at Temple Colney: nightmares by night, horrors by day.

Every morning with trembling fingers he opened his *Daily*; every morning was shot dead by these lines or their equivalent:

COUNTRY HOUSE OUTRAGE.
FRESH CLUE.
CAT SEEN.
SENSATIONAL STORY.

After much groaning and agony George would force himself to know the worst; after swearing furiously through the paragraphs of stuffing with which Mr. Bitt's cunning young man skilfully evaded the point, would come at last upon the “fresh clue” and read with a groan of relief that, so far as the truth were concerned, it was no clue at all.

But the strain was horrible. All Temple Colney read the *Daily* ; eagerly debated its “Catchy Clues.”

Yet George could not see, he told himself, that he would better his plight by seeking fresh retreat. If the *Daily* were to be believed, all the United Kingdom read it and discussed its Catchy Clues. He decided it were wiser to remain racked at Temple Colney rather than try his luck, and perhaps be torn to death, elsewhere.

Twice he had been moved to abandon his awful enterprise—in the train fleeing from the red−headed Pinner boy; pounding across country pursued by curious inhabitants of Temple Colney. On these occasions this miserable George had been minded to cry defeated to the circumstances that struck at him, to return to Herons' Holt with the cat whilst yet he might do so without gyves on his wrists.

But thought of his dear Mary hunted thought of this craven ending. “I'll hang on!” he had cried, thumping the carriage seat: “I'll hang on! I'll hang on! I'll hang on!” he had thumped into the table upon his weary return to the inn on the day he had been followed.

He had cause for hope. When, on his second morning at Temple Colney, the *Daily* had struck him to white agony by its newest headlines; cooling, he was able to find comfort in the news it gave to the world. “On the advice of the eminent detective, Mr. David Brunger, who has the case in hand, the reward has been raised to 125 pounds.”

“Whoop!” cried George, spirits returning.

III.

Three days had passed.

Rain began to fall heavily on this afternoon. Usually—even had there been floods—George did not return to the inn until seven o'clock. The less he was near the abode of man the safer was his vile secret. But to−day, when the clouds told him a steady downpour had set in, he put out for his lodging before three. He was in high spirits. Success was making him very bold. At Temple Colney, thus far, no breath of suspicion had paled his cheek; at Herons' Holt events were galloping to the end he would have them go. That morning the *Daily* had announced the raising of the reward to 150 pounds. True, the *Daily* added that Mr. Marrapit had declared, absolutely and finally, that he would not go one penny beyond this figure. George laughed as he read. In four days his uncle had raised the offer by fifty pounds; at this rate—and the rate would increase as Mr. Marrapit's anguish augmented —the 500 pounds would soon be reached. And then! And then!

Through the pouring rain George whistled up the village street, whistled up the stairs, whistled into the sitting—room. Then stopped his tune. The buoyant notes of triumph dwindled to a tuneless squeak, to a noiseless breathing—Bill Wyvern, seated at a table, sprung to meet him.

“What ho!” cried Bill. “They told me you wouldn't be in before seven! What ho! Isn't this splendid?”

George said in very hollow voice: “Splendid!” He put the basket on a chair; sat on it; gave Bill an answering, “What ho!” that was cheerful as rap upon a coffin lid.

“Well, how goes it?” Bill asked eagerly.

George put out a hand. “Don't come over here, dear old fellow. I'm streaming wet. Sit down there. How goes what?”

“Why, the clue—your clue to this cat?”

“Oh, the clue—the clue. Yes, I'll tell you all about that. Just wait here a moment.” He rose with the basket; moved to the door.

“What on earth have you got in that basket?” Bill asked.

“Eggs,” George told him impressively. “Eggs for my uncle.”

“You must have a thundering lot in a basket that size.”

“Three or four hundred,” George said. “Three or four hundred eggs.”

He spoke in the passionless voice of one in a dream. Indeed he was in a dream. This horrible contingency had so set him whirling that of clear thought he was incapable. Moving to his bedroom he thrust the basket beneath the bed; came out; locked the door; took the key; returned to Bill.

Bill came over and slapped him on the back. “Expect you're surprised to see me?” he cried. “Isn't this ripping, old man?”

“Stunning!” said George. “Absolutely stunning.” He sank on a chair.

Bill was perplexed. “You don't look best pleased, old man. What's up?”

This was precisely what George wished to know. Terror of hearing some hideous calamity stayed him from putting the question. He gave a pained smile. “Oh, I'm all right. I'm a bit fagged, that's all. The strain of this search, you know, the—”

“I know!” cried Bill enthusiastically. “I *know*. You've been splendid, old man. Finding out a clue like this and

pluckily carrying it through all by yourself. By Jove, it's splendid of you!—especially when you've no reason to do much for your uncle after the way in which he's treated you. I admire you, George. By Gad, I *do* admire you!"

"Not at all!" George advised him. "By no means, old fellow." He wiped his brow; his mental suffering was considerable.

"I say, I can see you're pretty bad, old man," Bill continued. "Never mind, I'm here to help you now. That's what I've come for."

George felt that something very dreadful indeed was at hand. "How did you find out where I was?" he asked.

"From old Marrapit."

"Marrapit? Why, but my uncle won't let you come within a mile of him."

"Ah! that's all over now." A very beautiful look came into Bill's eyes; tenderness shaded his voice: "George, old man, if I can track down the hound who has stolen this cat your uncle has practically said that he will agree to my engagement with Margaret."

George tottered across the room; pressed his head against the cold window−pane. Here was the calamity. He had thought of taking Bill into his confidence—how do so now?

"I say, you do look bad, old man," Bill told him.

"I'm all right. Tell me all about it."

"Well, it's too good—too wonderful to be true. Everything is going simply splendidly with me. I'm running this cat business for the *Daily*—my paper, you know. It's made a most frightful splash and the editor is awfully bucked up with me. I'm on the permanent staff, six quid a week—eight quid a week if I find this cat. I'm working it from Herons' Holt, you know. I'm—"

George turned upon him. "Are you 'Our Special Commissioner at Paltley Hill'?"

"Rather! Have you been reading it? Pretty hot stuff, isn't it? I say, George, wasn't it lucky I chucked medicine! I told you I was cut out for this kind of thing if only I could get my chance. Well, I've got my chance; and by Gad, old man, if I don't track down this swine who's got the cat, or help to get him tracked down, I'll—I'll—" The enthusiastic young man broke off—"Isn't it great, George?"

My miserable George paced the room. "Great!" he forced out. "Great!" This was the infernal Special Commissioner whom daily he had yearned to strangle. "Great! By Gad, there are no words for it!"

"I knew you'd be pleased. Thanks awfully—*awfully*. Well, I was telling you. Being down there for the paper I simply had to interview Marrapit. I plucked up courage and bearded him. He's half crazy about this wretched cat. I found him as meek as a lamb. Bit snarly at first, but when he found how keen I was, quite affectingly pleasant. I've seen him every day for the last four days, and yesterday he said what I told you—I came out with all about Margaret and about my splendid prospects, and, as I say, he practically said that if I could find the cat he'd be willing to think of our engagement."

"But about finding out where I was? How did you discover that?"

"Well, he told me. Told me this morning." Bill shuffled his legs uncomfortably for a moment, then plunged ahead. "Fact is, old man, he's a bit sick with you. Said he'd only had one telegram from you from Dippleford Admiral and one letter from here. Said it was unsatisfactory—that it was clear you were incapable of following up this clue of yours by yourself. You don't mind my telling you this, do you, old man? You know what he is."

George gave the bitter laugh of one who is misunderstood, unappreciated. "Go on," he said, "go on." He was trembling to see the precipice over which the end of Bill's story would hurl him.

"Well, as I said—that it was clear you could not carry through your clue by yourself. So I was to come down and help you. That was about ten o'clock, and I caught the mid−day train—I've been here since two. Well, Brunger—the detective chap, you know—Marrapit was going to send him on here at once—"

This was the precipice. George went hurtling over the edge with whirling brain: "Brunger coming down here?" he cried.

"Rather! Now, we three together, old man—"

"When's he coming?" George asked. He could not hear his own voice—the old nightmares danced before his eyes, roared their horrors in his ears.

Bill looked at the clock. "He ought to be here by now. He ought to have arrived—"

The roaring confusion in George's brain went to a tingling silence; through it there came footsteps and a man's voice upon the stairs.

As the tracked criminal who hears his pursuer upon the threshold, as the fugitive from justice who feels upon his shoulder the sudden hand of arrest, as the poor wretch in the condemned cell when the hangman enters—as the feelings of these, so, at this sound, the emotions of my miserable George.

A dash must be made to flatten this hideous doom. Upon a sudden impulse he started forward. “Bill! Bill, old man, I want to tell you something. You don't know what the finding of this cat means to me. It—”

“I do know, old man,” Bill earnestly assured him. “You're splendid, old man, splendid. I never dreamt you were so fond of your uncle. Old man, it means even more to me—it means Margaret and success. Here's Brunger. We three together, George. Nothing shall stop us.”

IV.

The sagacious detective entered. George gave him a limp, damp hand.

“You don't look well,” Mr. Brunger told him, after greetings.

“Just what I was saying,” Bill joined.

Indeed, George looked far from well. Round−shouldered he sat upon the sofa, head in hands—a pallid face beneath a beaded brow staring out between them.

“It's the strain of this clue, Mr. Brunger,” Bill continued. “He's on the track!”

“You are?” cried the detective.

“Right on,” George said dully. “Right on the track.”

“Is it a gang?”

“Two,” George answered in the same voice. “Two gangs.”

The sagacious detective thumped the table. “I said so. I knew it. I told you so, Mr. Wyvern. But *two*, eh? *Two* gangs. That's tough. One got the cat and the other after it, I presume?”

“No,” said George. He was wildly thinking; to the conversation paying no attention.

“No? But, my dear sir, one of 'em *must* have the cat?”

George started to the necessities of the immediate situation; wondered what he had said; caught at Mr. Brunger's last word. “The cat? Another gang has got the cat.”

“What, three gangs!” the detective cried.

“Three gangs,” George affirmed.

“Two gangs you said at first,” Mr. Brunger sharply reminded him.

My miserable George dug his fingers into his hair. “I meant three—I'd forgotten the other.”

“Don't see how a man can forget a whole *gang*,” objected the detective. He stared at George; frowned; produced his note−book. “Let us have the facts, sir.”

As if drawn by the glare fixed upon him, George moved from the sofa to the table.

“Now, the facts,” Mr. Brunger repeated. “Let's get these gangs settled first.”

George took a chair. He had no plan. He plunged wildly. “Gang A, gang B, gang C, gang D—”

Mr. Brunger stopped short in the midst of his note.

“Why, that's *four* gangs!”

The twisting of George's legs beneath the table was sympathetic with the struggles of his bewildered mind. He said desperately, “Well, there *are* four gangs.”

The detective threw down his pencil. “You're making a fool of me!” he cried. “First you said two gangs, then three gangs—”

“You're making a fool of yourself,” George answered hotly. “If you knew anything about gangs you'd know they're always breaking up— quarrelling, and then rejoining, and then splitting again. If you can't follow, don't follow. Find the damned gangs yourself. You're a detective—I'm not. At least you say you are. You're a precious poor one, seems to me. You've not done much.”

In his bewilderment and fear my unfortunate George had unwittingly hit upon an admirable policy. Since first Mr. Marrapit had called Mr. Brunger it had sunk in upon the Confidential Inquiry Agent that indeed he was a precious poor detective. In the five days that had passed he had not struck upon the glimmer of a notion regarding the whereabouts of the missing cat. This was no hiding in cupboard work, no marked coin work, no following the skittish wife of a greengrocer work. It was the real thing—real detective work, and it had found Mr. Brunger most lamentably wanting. Till now, however, none had suspected his perplexity. He had impressed his client—had

bounced, noted, cross−examined, measured; and during every bounce, note, cross−examination and measurement fervently had prayed that luck—or the reward—would help him stumble upon something he could claim as outcome of his skill. George's violent attack alarmed him; he drew in his horns.

“Ah! don't be 'ot,” he protested. “Don't be 'ot. Little misunderstanding, that's all. I follow you completely. Four gangs— *I* see. *Four* gangs. Now, sir.”

It was George's turn for fear. “Four gangs—quite so. Well, what do you want me to tell you?”

“Start from the beginning, sir.”

George started—plunged head−first. For five minutes he desperately gabbled while Mr. Brunger's pencil bounded along behind his splashing; words. Every time the pencil seemed to slacken, away again George would fly and away in pursuit the pencil would laboriously toil.

“Four gangs,” George plunged along. “Gang A, gang B, gang C, gang D. Gang A breaks into the house and steals the cat. Gang B finds it gone and tracks down gang C.”

“Tracks gang A, surely,” panted Mr. Brunger. “Gang A had the cat.”

“Gang B didn't know that. I tell you this is a devil of a complicated affair. Gang B tracks down gang C and finds gang D. They join. Call 'em gang B−D. Gang A loses the cat and gang C finds it. Gang C sells it to gang B−D, which is run by an American, as I said.”

“Did you?” gasped Mr. Brunger without looking up.

“Certainly. Gang B−D hands it over to gang A by mistake, and gang A makes off with it. Gang C, very furious because it is gang A's great rival, starts in pursuit and gets it back again. Then gang B−D demands it, but gang A refuses to give it up.”

“Gang C!” Mr. Brunger panted. “Gang C had got it from gang A.”

“Yes, but gang A got it back again. Gang B−D—Look here,” George broke off, “that's perfectly clear about the gangs, isn't it?”

“Perfectly,” said Mr. Brunger, feeling that his reputation was gone unless he said so. “Wants a little studying, that's all. Most extraordinary story I ever heard of.”

“I'm dashed if I understand a word of it,” Bill put in. “Who *are* these gangs?”

George rose: “Bill, old man, I'll explain that another time. The fact is, we're wasting time by sitting here. I was very near the end when you two arrived. The cat is here—quite near here.”

The detective and Bill sprang to their feet. George continued: “It's going to change hands either tonight or to−morrow. If you two will do just as I tell you and leave the rest to me, we shall bring off a capture. To−morrow evening I will explain everything.”

The detective asked eagerly; “Is it a certainty?”

“Almost. It will be touch and go; but if we miss it this time it is a certainty for the immediate future. I swear this, that if you keep in touch with me you will be nearer the cat than you will ever get by yourselves.”

Sincerity shone in his eyes from these words. The detective and Bill were fired with zeal.

“Take command, sir!” said Mr. Brunger.

“All right. Come with me. I will post you for the night. We have some distance to go. Don't question me. I must think.”

“Not a question,” said the detective: he was, indeed, too utterly bewildered.

George murmured “Thank heaven!”; took his hat; led the way into the street. In dogged silence the three tramped through the rain.

V.

George led for the Clifford Arms, some two miles distant. For the present he had but one object in view. He must get rid of Bill and this infernal detective; then he must speed the cat from Temple Colney.

As he walked he pushed out beyond the primary object of ridding himself of his companions; sought the future. In the first half−mile he decided that the game was up. He must deliver the Rose to his uncle immediately without waiting for the reward to be further raised. To hang on for the shadow would be, he felt, to lose the substance that would stand represented by Mr. Marrapit's gratitude.

But this preposterous buoyancy of youth! The rain that beat upon his face cooled his brow; seemed to cool his brain. Before the first mile was crossed he had vacillated from his purpose. When he said to his followers “Only

another half−mile," his purpose was changed.

This preposterous corkiness of youth! It had lifted him up from the sea of misfortune in which he had nigh been drowned, and now he was assuring himself that, given he could hide the Rose where a sudden glimmering idea suggested, he would be safer than ever before. The two men who were most dangerous to him—the detective and the *Daily's* Special Commissioner at Paltley Hill, now slushing through the mud behind—were beneath his thumb. If he could keep them goose−chasing for a few days or so—!

The turn of a corner brought them in view of the Clifford Arms. George pointed: "I want you to spend the night there and to stay there till I come to−morrow. A man is there whom you must watch—the landlord."

"One of the gangs?" Mr. Brunger asked, hoarse excitement in his voice.

"Gang B—leader. Don't let him suspect you. Just watch him."

"Has he got the cat?"

With great impressiveness George looked at the detective, looked at Bill. Volumes of meaning in his tone: "*Not yet!*" he said.

Bill cried: "By Gad!" The detective rubbed his hands in keen anticipation.

They entered the inn. Bill gave a story of belated tourists. A room was engaged. In a quarter of an hour George was speeding back to Temple Colney.

At the post−office he stopped; purchased a letter−card; held his pen a while as he polished the glimmering idea that now had taken form; then wrote to his Mary:—

"My dearest girl in all the world,—You've never had a line from me all this time, but you can guess what a time I've been having. Dearest darling, listen and attend. This is most important. Our future depends upon it. Meet me to−morrow at 12.0 at that tumbled−down hut in the copse on the Shipley Road where we went that day just before my exam. Make any excuse to get away. You must be there. And don't tell a soul.

"Till to−morrow, my darling little Mary.—G."

He posted the card.

BOOK VI. Of Paradise Lost and Found.

CHAPTER I. Mrs. Major Bids For Paradise.

I.

Impossible to tell how far will spread the ripples from the lightest action that we may toss into the sea of life.

Life is a game of consequences. A throws a stone, and the widening ripples wreck the little boats of X and Y and Z who never have even heard of A. Every day and every night, every hour of every day and night, ripples from unknown splashes are setting towards us—perhaps to swamp us, perhaps to bear us into some pleasant stream. One calls it luck, another fate. “This is my just punishment,” cries one. “By my good works I have merited this,” exclaims another; but it is merely the ripple from some distant splash—merely consequences. Consequences.

A sleepy maid in Mr. City Merchant's suburban mansion leaves the dust−pan on the stairs after sweeping. That is the little action she has tossed into the sea of life, and the ripples will wreck a boat or two now snug and safe in a cheap and happy home many miles away. Mr. City Merchant trips over the dustpan, starts for office fuming with rage, vents his spleen upon Mr. City Clerk—dismisses him.

Mr. City Clerk seeks work in vain; the cheap but happy home he shares with pretty little Mrs. City Clerk and plump young Master City Clerk is abandoned for a dingy lodging. Grade by grade the lodging they must seek grows dingier. Now there is no food. Now they are getting desperate. Now pneumonia lays erstwhile plump Master City Clerk by the heels and carries him off—consequences, consequences; that is one boat wrecked. Now Mr. City Clerk is growing mad with despair; Mrs. City Clerk is well upon the road that Master City Clerk has followed. Mr. City Clerk steals, is caught, is imprisoned—consequences, consequences; another boat wrecked. Mrs. City Clerk does not hold out long, follows Master City Clerk—consequences, consequences. Three innocent craft smashed up because the housemaid left the dustpan on the stairs.

II.

Impossible to tell how far will speed the ripples from the lightest action that we may toss into the sea of life. Solely and wholly because George abducted the Rose of Sharon, Miss Pridham, who keeps the general drapery in Angel Street, Marylebone Road, sold a pair of green knitted slippers, each decorated with a red knitted blob, that had gazed melancholy from her shop window for close upon two years.

It was Mrs. Major who purchased them.

Since that terrible morning on which, throat and mouth parched, head painfully throbbing through the overnight entertainment of Old Tom, Mrs. Major had been driven from Mr. Marrapit's door, this doubly distressed gentlewoman had lived in retirement in a bed−sitting−room in Angel Street. She did not purpose immediately taking another situation. This woman had sipped the delights of Herons' Holt; her heart was there, and for a month or two, as, sighing over her lot, she determined, she would brood in solitude upon the paradise she had lost before challenging new fortunes.

The ripples of the abduction of the Rose reached her. This was a masterly woman, and instanter she took the tide upon the flood.

Mrs. Major was not a newspaper reader. The most important sheet of the *Daily*, however, she one day carried into her bed−sitting−room wrapped about a quartern of Old Tom. It was the day when first “Country House Outrage” shouted from the *Daily's* columns.

Idly scanning the report her eye chanced upon familiar names. A common mind would have been struck astonished and for some hours been left fluttering. Your masterly mind grasps at once and together a solution and its possibilities. Without pause for thought, without even sniff of the new quartern of Old Tom, Mrs. Major sought pen and paper; wrote with inspired pen to Mr. Marrapit:

“I do not even dare begin 'Dear Mr. Marrapit.' I have forfeited the right even to address you; but in the moment of your great tribulation something stronger than myself makes me take up my pen—”

Here Mrs. Major paused; read what she had written; without so much as a sigh tore the sheet and started afresh. That “something stronger than myself makes me” she felt to be a mistake. Something decidedly stronger

than herself sat in the quartern bottle a few inches from her nose, and it occurred to her that a cruel mind might thus interpret her meaning. She tore the sheet. This was a masterly woman.

"I dare not even begin 'Dear Mr. Marrapit.' I have forfeited the right even to address you; but in the moment of your tribulation I feel that I must come forward with my sympathy. Oh, Mr. Marrapit, may I say with my aid? I feel I could help you if only I might come to dear, dear Herons' Holt. When I think of my angel darling Rose of Sharon straying far from the fold my heart bleeds. Oh, Mr. Marrapit, I cannot rest, I cannot live, while my darling is wandering on the hillside, or is stolen, and I am unable to search for her. Oh, Mr. Marrapit, think of me, I implore you, not as Mrs. Major, but as one whom your sweet darling Rose loved. If the Rose is anywhere near Herons' Holt, she would come to me if I called her, I feel sure, more readily than she would come to anyone else except yourself, and you are not strong enough to search as I would search. Oh, Mr. Marrapit, let me come to Herons' Holt in this terrible hour. Do not speak to me, do not look at me, Mr. Marrapit. I do not ask that. I only beg on my bended knees that you will let me lay myself at night even in the gardener's shed, so that I may be there to tend my lamb when she is found, and by day will be able to search for her. That is all I ask.

"Of myself I will say nothing. I will not force upon you the explanations of that dreadful night which you would not take from my trembling lips. I will not tell you that, maddened by the toothache, I was advised to hold a little drop of spirit in the tooth, and that, never having touched anything but water since I and my dear little brother promised my dying mother we would not, the spirit went to my head and made me as you saw me. I will not write any of those things, Mr. Marrapit; only, oh, Mr. Marrapit, I implore you to let me come and look for my Rose. Nor will I tell you how fondly, since I left you, I have thought of all your nobility of character and of your goodness to me, Mr. Marrapit. Wronged, I bear no resentment. I have received too much kindness at your hands. Ever since I left you I have thought of none but the Rose and you. Shall I prove that? I will, Mr. Marrapit—"

Here again Mrs. Major paused; thoughtfully scratched her head with her penholder. Like authors more experienced, her emotions had driven her pen to a point demanding a special solution which was not immediately forthcoming. She had galloped into a wood. How to get out of it?

Mrs. Major scratched thoughtfully; gazed at Old Tom; gazed round the room; on a happy inspiration gazed from the window. Miss Pridham's general drapery was immediately opposite. A bright patch of green in the window caught Mrs. Major's eye. She recognised it as the knitted slippers she had once or twice noticed in passing.

The very thing! Laying down her pen the masterly woman popped across to Miss Pridham's; in two minutes, leaving that lady delighted and one−and−eleven−three the richer, was back with the green knitted slippers with the red knitted blobs.

She took up her pen and continued:

"Ever since I left I have thought of none but the Rose and you. Shall I prove that? I will, Mr. Marrapit. Oh, Mr. Marrapit, I make so bold as to send you in a little parcel a pair of woollen slippers that I have knitted for you."

Mrs. Major examined them. Such sun as creeps into Angel Street, Marylebone Road, jealous of rival brightness had filched their first delicate tint of green, had stolen the first passionate scarlet of the red blobs. She continued:

"They are a little faded because on every stitch a bitter tear has fallen. Yes, Mr. Marrapit, my tears of sorrow have rained upon these slippers as I worked. Oh, Mr. Marrapit, they are not damp, however. Every evening since they were finished I have had my little fire lighted and have stood the slippers up against the fender; and then, sitting on the opposite side of the hearth, just as I used to sit for a few minutes with you after we had brought in the darling cats, I have imagined that your feet were in the slippers and have imagined that I am back where I have left my bleeding heart. I never meant to dare send them to you, Mr. Marrapit, but in this moment of your tribulation I make bold to do so. Do not open the parcel, Mr. Marrapit, if you would rather not. Hurl it on the fire and let the burning fiery furnace consume them, tears and all. But I feel I must send them, whatever their fate.

"Oh, Mr. Marrapit, let me come to Herons' Holt to find my darling Rose!—then without a word I will creep away and die.—LUCY MAJOR."

III.

Upon the following morning there sped to Mrs. Major from Herons' Holt a telegram bearing the message

“Come.”

Frantic to clutch at any straw that might bring to him this Rose, Mr. Marrapit eagerly clutched at Mrs. Major. He felt there to be much truth, in her contention that his Rose, if secreted near by, would come quicker at her call than at the call of another. His Rose had known and loved her for a full year. His Rose, refined cat, did not take quickly to strangers, and had not—he had noticed it—given herself to Miss Humfray. Therefore Mr. Marrapit eagerly clutched at Mrs. Major.

As to the remainder of her letter—it considerably perturbed him. Had he misjudged this woman, whom once he had held estimable? All the delectable peace of his household during her reign, as contrasted with the turmoil that now had taken its place, came back to him and smote his heart. He opened the slippers, noted the tear−stains. Had he misjudged her? What more likely than her story of the racking tooth that must be lulled with a little drop of spirit? Had he misjudged her? But as against that little drop of spirit, how account for the vast and empty bottle of Old Tom found in her room? Had he misjudged her?

In much conflict of mind this man paced the breakfast room, a green knitted slipper with red knitted blob in either hand.

It was thus that Margaret, entering, found him.

With a soft little laugh, “Oh, father!” she cried, “what have you got there?”

Mr. Marrapit raised the green knitted slippers with the red knitted blobs. “A contrite heart,” he answered. “A stricken and a contrite heart.”

He resumed his pacing. Margaret squeezed round the door which happily she had left ajar; fled breakfastless. Quick at poetic image though she was, the symbol of a contrite heart in a pair of green knitted slippers with red knitted blobs was not clear to this girl. In her father it alarmed her. This great sorrow was perchance turning his brain.

Mr. Marrapit laid the slippers upon his dressing−table; that afternoon greeted Mrs. Major with a circumspect reserve. Combining the vast and empty bottle of Old Tom with the fact that never had his judgment of man or matter failed him, he determined that Mrs. Major was guilty. But not wilfully guilty. Tempted to drown pain, she had succumbed; but the slippers were the sign of a contrite heart.

The masterly possessor of the contrite heart betrayed no signs of its flutterings and its exultant boundings at being once more in paradise. This was a masterly woman, and, masterly, she grasped at once her position—without hesitation started to play her part.

In Mr. Marrapit's study she stood humbly before him with bowed head; did not speak. Her only sounds were those of repressed emotion as Mr. Marrapit recited the history of the abduction. The white handkerchief she kept pressed against her chin punctuated the story with sudden little dabs first to one eye then the other. Little sniffs escaped her; little catches of the breath; tiny little moans.

She choked when he had finished: “Let me see—my darling's—bed.”

Mr Marrapit led the way. Above the silk−lined box whence George had snatched the Rose, the masterly woman knelt. She fondled the silken coverlet; her lips moved. Suddenly she dashed her handkerchief to her eyes; with beautiful moans fled hurriedly to the bedroom that had been allotted her.

It was an exquisitely touching sight. Mr. Marrapit, greatly moved, went to his room; took out the green knitted slippers with the red knitted blobs. Had he misjudged this woman?

Ten minutes later he again encountered Mrs. Major. Now she was girt against the weather and against exercise. Beneath her chin were firmly knotted the strings of her sober bonnet; a short skirt hid nothing of the stout boots she had donned; her hand grasped the knob of a bludgeon−like umbrella.

The masterly woman had removed all traces of her emotion. In a voice humble yet strong, “I start to search, Mr. Marrapit,” she said. “I will find the Rose if she is to be found.”

So deep sincerity was in her speech, so strong she seemed, so restful in this crisis, that Mr. Marrapit, watching her stride the drive, again fell to pacing and cogitation—had he misjudged her? Almost unconsciously he moved upstairs to his room; drew those green slippers with red blobs from their drawer.

IV.

Had Mr. Marrapit doubted the sincerity of Mrs. Major's search, assuredly he would have misjudged her. In her diary that night the masterly woman inscribed:

"*Am here; must stick.*"

Her best chance of sticking, as well she knew, lay in finding the Rose. Could she but place that creature's exquisite form in Mr. Marrapit's arms, she felt that her reward would be to win back to the paradise from which Old Tom had driven her.

Therefore most strenuously she scoured the countryside; pried into houses; popped her head into stable doors. This woman nothing spared herself; in the result, at the end of two days, was considerably dejected. For it was clear to her that the Rose had not strayed, but had been stolen; was not concealed in the vicinity of Herons' Holt, but had been spirited to the safety of many miles. She was driven to accept Mr. Brunger's opinion—the Rose had been stolen by some eager and unscrupulous breeder to be used for gross purposes.

It was upon the evening of the second day in paradise that this woman settled upon this gloomy conclusion. Gloomy it was, and desperately, sitting in her bedroom that night, the masterly woman battled for some way to circumvent it. To that entry made in her diary on the night of her arrival she had added two further sentences:

"Hate that baby−faced Humfray chit."

"Certain cannot stick unless find cat."

Opening her diary now she gazed upon these entries; chewed them. They were bitter to the taste. To agony at what she had lost was added mortification at seeing another in her place; and rankling in this huge wound was the poison of the knowledge that she could not win back. Circumstances were too strong. The cat was not to be found, and—stabbing thought—"certain cannot stick unless find cat."

This way and that the masterly woman twisted in search of a means to circumvent her position. It might be done by accomplishing the overthrow of this baby−faced chit. If the baby−faced chit could be made to displease Mr. Marrapit and be turned out, it would surely be possible, being ready at hand, to take her place. But how could the baby−faced chit be made to err?

This way and that Mrs. Major twisted and could find no means. Always she was forced back to the brick−wall fact—salvation lay only in finding the cat. That would accomplish everything. She would have succeeded where the baby−faced chit had failed; she would have proved her devotion; she, would have earned, not a doubt of it, the reward of re−entry into paradise that Mr. Marrapit in his gratitude would more than offer—would press upon her.

But the cat was not to be found.

Beating up against the desperate barrier of that thought, Mrs. Major groaned aloud as she paced the room, threw up her arms in her despair. The action caused her to swerve; with hideous violence she crashed her stockinged foot against the leg of the wash−stand.

Impossible to tell how far will spread the ripples of the lightest action we may toss upon the sea of life. The stunning agony in this woman's toes, as, hopping to the bed, she sat and nursed them, with the swiftness of thought presented to her a solution of her difficulty that struck her staring with excitement.

Her first thought in her throbbing pain was of remedy for the bruise. "Bruise" brought involuntarily to her mind the picture of a chemist's shop in the Edgware Road, not far from Angel Street, whose window she had seen filled with little boxes of "Bruisine," the newest specific for abrasions. Thence her thoughts, by direct passage, jumped to the time when last she had noticed the shop—she had been returning from a stroll by way of Sussex Gardens. And it was while mentally retracing that walk down Sussex Gardens that Mrs. Major lit plump upon the solution of her difficulty. She had noticed, let out for a run from No. 506, an orange cat that was so precisely the image of the Rose of Sharon that she had stopped to stroke it for dear memory's sake. Often since then she had spoken to it; every time had been the more struck by its extraordinary resemblance to the Rose. She had reflected that, seen together, she could not have told them apart.

Mrs. Major forgot the throbbing of her abrased toes. Her brows knitted by concentration of thought, very slowly the masterly woman concluded her disrobing. Each private garment that she stripped and laid aside marked a forward step in the indomitable purpose she had conceived. As her fingers drew the most private from her person, leaving it naked, so from her plan did her masterly mind draw the last veil that filmed it, leaving it clear. When the Jaeger nightdress fell comfortably about her, her purpose too was presentable and warm.

Every day and every night, every hour of every day and night, ripples from unknown splashes are setting towards us. From this masterly woman, in process of toilet, ripples were setting towards a modest and unsuspecting cat lying in sweet slumber at 506 Sussex Gardens, off the Edgware Road.

For the masterly woman had thus determined—she would have that cat that was the Rose's second self. The

Rose was in the hands of some villain breeder and would never be returned; small fear of discovery under that head. This cat was the Rose's second self; differences that Mr. Marrapit might discover, lack of affection that he might notice, could be attributed to the adventures through which the Rose had passed since her abduction. Under this head, indeed, Mrs. Major did not anticipate great difficulty. Similar cats are more similar than similar dogs. They have not, as dogs have, the distinguishing marks of character and demonstrativeness. In any event, as the masterly woman assured herself, she ran no peril even if her plot failed. She would say she had found the cat, and if Mr. Marrapit were convinced it was not his Rose—well, she had made a mistake, that was all.

V.

Upon the morrow, playing her hand with masterly skill, Mrs. Major sought interview with Mr. Marrapit. With telling dabs of her pocket handkerchief at her eyes, with telling sniffs of her masterly nose, she expressed the fear that she had outstayed his kindness in receiving her. He had granted her request—he had let her come to Herons' Holt; but two days had passed and she had not found his Rose. True, if she had longer she could more thoroughly search; but as an honest woman she must admit that she had been given her chance, had failed.

Upon a wailing note she ended: “I must go.”

“Cancel that intention,” Mr. Marrapit told her. Her honesty smote this man. Had he misjudged her?

She smothered a sniff in her handkerchief: “I must go. I must go. I have seen that you regard me with suspicion. Oh, you have reason, I know; but I cannot bear it.”

“Remove that impression,” spoke Mr. Marrapit. He *had* misjudged this woman; he was convinced of it.

Mrs. Major gave her answer in the form of two smothered sniffs and a third that, eluding her handkerchief, escaped free and loud—a telling sniff that advertised her distress; wrung Mr. Marrapit's emotions.

He continued: “Mrs. Major, at a future time we will discuss the painful affair to which you make reference. At present I am too preoccupied by the calamity that has desolated my hearth. Meanwhile, I suspend judgment. I place suspicion behind me. I regard you only as she whom my Rose loved.”

“Do you wish me to stay a little longer?” asked Mrs. Major, trembling.

“That is my wish. Continue to prosecute your search.”

Trembling yet more violently Mrs. Major said: “I will stay. I had not dared to suppose I might stop more than two days. I brought nothing with me. May I go to London to get clothes? I will return to−morrow morning.”

“Why not to−night?”

“Early to−morrow would be more convenient. I have other things to do in London.”

“To−morrow, then,” Mr. Marrapit agreed.

At the door Mrs. Major turned. Her great success at this interview emboldened her to a second stroke. “There is one other thing I would like to say, if I dared.”

“Be fearless.”

She plunged. “If Heaven should grant that I may find the Rose, I implore you not to distress me by offering me the reward you are holding out. I could not take it. I know you can ill afford it. Further than that, to have the joy of giving you back your Rose would be reward enough for me. And to know that she was safe with you, though I—I should never see her again, that would make me happy till the end of my days.”

Her nobility smote Mr. Marrapit. Cruelly, shamefully, he *had* misjudged her. Her handkerchief pressed to her eyes, very gently Mrs. Major closed the door; very soberly mounted the stairs.

Out of earshot, she walked briskly to her room; drew forth her diary; in a bold hand inscribed:

“*Absolutely certain shall stick.*“

The masterly woman lunched in town.

CHAPTER II. Mrs. Major Finds The Lock.

I.

By six o'clock Mrs. Major had all ready for her adventure. In the little room at Angel Street she deposited a newly purchased basket; at eight o'clock started for Sussex Gardens.

Twice, while passing down the terrace at about nine, she had seen the cat she now pursued let out for what was doubtless its nightly run.

On each occasion she had observed the same order of events, and she judged them to be of regular occurrence. Out from No. 506 had stepped a tall man, long−haired, soft−hatted, poetically bearded. Behind him had followed the cat. The cat had trotted across the road to the gardens; the tall man had walked slowly round the enclosure. Returning, he had called. The cat had walked soberly forth from the railings and the pair had re−entered the house.

II.

Matters fell this night precisely as the sapient woman had conjectured. Shortly before nine she took up position against the railings in a dark patch that marked the middle point between two lamps, some doors above 506. No tremor agitated her form; in action this woman was most masterly.

A church clock struck a full clear note, another and another. The after−humming of the ninth had scarcely died when the blackness that lay beneath the fanlight of 506 was split by a thin rod of yellow light. Instantly this widened, served for a moment to silhouette a tall figure, then vanished as the door slammed. The tall figure stepped on to the pavement; a cat at its feet trod sedately across the road. The tall figure turned; in a moment was meditatively pacing the pavement opposite where Mrs. Major stood.

Mrs. Major gave him twenty yards. Then she hurried along the railings to where the cat had tripped. Six feet inwards, delicately scratching the soil beneath a bush, she espied it.

The masterly woman pressed her face between the rails; stretched a snapping finger and thumb; in an intense voice murmured, “Tweetikins puss!”

Tweetikins puss continued thoughtfully to turn the soil. This was a nicely mannered cat.

“Tweety little puss!” cooed Mrs. Major. “Tweety pussikins! puss, puss!”

Tweety pussikins turned to regard her. Mrs. Major moistened her finger and thumb; snapped frantically. “Puss, puss—tweety pussy!”

Tweety pussy advanced till the snapping fingers were within an inch of its nose.

“Pussikins, pussikins!” implored Mrs. Major.

Pussikins very deliberately seated itself; coiled its fine tail about its feet; regarded Mrs. Major with a sphinx−like air.

Mrs. Major pressed till the iron railings cut her shoulders. She stretched the forefinger of her extended arm; at great peril of slipping forward and rasping her nose along the rails effected to scratch the top of the sphinx's head.

“Puss, puss! Tweety, *tweety* puss!”

By not so much as a blink did tweety puss stir a muscle.

Mrs. Major was in considerable pain. Her bent legs were cramped; the railings bit her shoulder; her neck ached: “Tweety little puss! Tweety puss! Puss! *Drat* the beast!”

In great physical agony and in heightening mental distress—since time was fleeting and the cat as statuesque as ever,—Mrs. Major again dratted it twice with marked sincerity and a third time as a sharp sound advertised the splitting of a secret portion of her wear against the tremendous strain her unnatural position placed upon it. Unable longer to endure the pain of her outstretched arm, she dropped her hand to earth; with a masterly effort resumed her smiling face and silky tone. Repeating her endearing cooings, she scratched the soil, enticing to some hidden mystery.

The demon of curiosity impelled this cat's doom. For a moment it eyed the scratching fingers; then stretched forward its head to investigation.

The time for gentle methods was gone. Mrs. Major gripped the downy scruff of the doomed creature's neck;

dragged the surprised animal forward; rudely urged it through the railings; tucked it beneath her cloak; sped down the road in the same direction that the tall figure had taken.

But where the tall figure had turned round the gardens Mrs. Major kept straight. Along a main street, into a by−street, round a turning, across a square, up a terrace, over the Edgware Road—so into the bed−sitting−room at Angel Street.

III.

Speeding by train to Herons' Holt upon the following morning, beside her the basket wherein lay the key that was to open paradise, Mrs. Major slightly altered her plans. It had been her intention at once to burst upon Mr. Marrapit with her prize—at once to put to desperate test whether or no he would accept it as the Rose. But before Paltley Hill was reached the masterly woman had modified this order. The cat she had abducted was so much the facsimile of the Rose that for the first time it occurred to her that, like the Rose, it might be valuable, and that a noisy hue and cry might be raised upon its loss.

If this so happened, and especially if Mr. Marrapit were doubtful that the cat was his Rose, it would be dangerous to let him know that she had made her discovery in London. Supposing he heard that a London cat, similar to the Rose in appearance, were missing, and remembered that this cat—of which from the first he had had doubts—was filched from London? That might turn success into failure. The chances of such events were remote, but the masterly woman determined to run no risks. She decided that on arrival at

Paltley Hill she would conceal her cat; on the morrow, starting out from Herons' Hill to renew her search, would find it and with it come bounding to the house.

As to where she should hide it she had no difficulty in determining. She knew of but one place, and she was convinced she could not have known a better. The ruined hut in the copse off the Shipley Road, whither in the dear, dead days beyond recall she had stolen for Old Tommish purposes, was in every way safe and suitable. None visited there at ordinary times; now that the country−side was no longer being searched for the Rose save by herself, it was as safe as ever. She would leave her cat there this day and night.

Upon this determination the remarkable woman acted; before proceeding to Herons' Holt secured her cat in that inner room of the hut where, but a few days previously, the Rose herself had lain.

When she reached the house a maid told her that Mr. Marrapit was closeted with young Mr. Wyvern.

IV.

During the afternoon Mrs. Major visited her cat, taking it milk. That evening, Mary and Margaret being elsewhere together, she was able to enjoy a quiet hour with Mr. Marrapit.

He was heavily depressed: “A week has passed, Mrs. Major. Something tells me I never again will see my Rose. This day I have sent young Mr. Wyvern and Mr. Brunger after my nephew George. The clue he claims to know is my last chance. I have no faith in it. Put not your trust—“ Mr. Marrapit allowed a melancholy sigh to conclude his sentence. This man had suffered much.

Mrs. Major clasped her hands. “Oh, do not give up hope, Mr. Marrapit. Something tells me you *will* see her—soon, very soon.”

Mr. Marrapit sighed. “You are always encouraging, Mrs. Major.”

“Something tells me that I have reason to be, Mr. Marrapit. Last night I dreamed that the Rose was found.” The encouraging woman leaned forward; said impressively, “I dreamed that I found her.”

Mr. Marrapit did not respond to her tone. Melancholy had this man in leaden grip. “I lose hope,” he said. “Man is born unto trouble as the sparks fly upward. Do not trust in dreams.”

“Oh, but I *do*!” Mrs. Major said with girlish impulsiveness. “I *do*. I always have. My dreams so often come true. Do not lose hope, Mr. Marrapit.” She continued with a beautiful air of timidity: “Oh, Mr. Marrapit, I know I am only here on sufferance, but your careworn air emboldens me to suggest—it might keep your poor mind from thinking—a game of backgammon such as we used to play before—” She sighed.

“I should like it,” Mr. Marrapit answered.

Mrs. Major arranged the board; drew Mr. Marrapit's favourite chair to the table; rattled the dice. After a few moves, “Oh, you're not beating me as you used to,” she said archly.

“I am out of practice,” Mr. Marrapit confessed.

Mrs. Major paused in the act of throwing her dice. “Out of practice! But surely Miss Humfray plays with you?”

“She does not.”

Mrs. Major gave a sigh that suggested more than she dared say.

She sighed again when the game was concluded. Mr. Marrapit sat on. “Quite like old times,” Mrs. Major murmured. “Good night, Mr. Marrapit; and don't lose hope. Remember my dream.”

“Quite like old times,” Mr. Marrapit murmured.

The masterly woman ascended the stairs rubbing her hands.

V.

Mrs. Major ate an excellent breakfast upon the following morning. She was upon the very threshold of winning into paradise, but not a tremor of nervousness did she betray or feel. This was a superb woman.

At eleven she left the house and took a walk—rehearsing the manner in which she had arranged to burst in upon Mr. Marrapit with the cat, checking again the arguments with which she would counter and lull any doubts he might raise.

At twelve she entered the hut.

Mrs. Major was in the very act of leaving the building, the cat beneath her arm, when a sound of voices and footsteps held her upon the threshold. She listened; the sounds drew near. She closed the door; the sounds, now loud, approached the hut. She ran to the inner room; a hand was laid upon the outer latch. She closed the door; applied her eye to a crack; George and Mary entered.

CHAPTER III. Mrs. Major Gets The Key.

George carried a basket. He laid it upon the floor. Then he turned and kissed his Mary. He put his arms about her; held her to him for a moment in a tremendous hug; pressed his lips to hers; held her away, drinking love from her pretty eyes; again kissed her and again hugged.

She gasped: “I shall crack in half in a minute if you will be so ridiculous.”

He laughed; let her free. He led to the tottering bench that stood across the room, sat her there, and taking her little gloved hand patted it between his.

“Fine, Mary,” he said, “to see you again! Fine! It seems months!”

“Years,” Mary whispered, giving one of the patting hands a little squeeze. “Years. And you never sent me a line. I've not had a word with you since you came up on the lawn that day and said you had passed your exam. You simply *bolted* off, you know.”

“You got my letter, though, this morning?” George said. He dropped her hand; fumbled in his pocket for his pipe. He was becoming a little nervous at the matter before him.

Mary told him: “Well, that was *nothing*. It was such a *frantic* letter! What is all the mystery about?”

“I'll tell you the whole story.” George got from the bench and began to pace, filling his pipe.

With a tender little smile Mary watched her George's dear face. Then, as he still paced, lit his pipe, gustily puffed, but did not speak, a tiny troubled pucker came between her eyes. There was a suspicion of a silly little tremor in her voice when at last she asked: “Anything wrong, old man?”

George inhaled a vast breath of smoke; let it go in a misty cloud. With a quick action he laid his pipe upon the table; sprang to her side. His right arm he put about her, in his left hand he clasped both hers. “Nothing wrong,” he cried brightly; “not a bit wrong. Mary, it's a game, a plot, a dickens of a game.”

“Well, tell me,” she said, beaming.

“It wants your help.”

“Well, tell me, tell me, stupid.”

“You will help?”

“Of course, if I can. Oh, do tell me, Georgie!”

“I'll show you, that's quicker.”

He sprang to the basket; unstrapped the lid; threw it back. A most exquisite orange head upreared. A queenly back arched. A beautiful figure stepped forth.

“*George!*” Mary cried. “George! *The Rose!* You've found her!”

George gave a nervous little crack of laughter. “I never lost her.”

“Never lost her! No, but she's been—”

“I've had her all the time!”

“*All the—*”

“I took her!”

“You *took* her! *You*—took her! Oh, George, speak sense! Whatever can you mean?” Mary had jumped to her feet when first the Rose stepped forth; now was close to her George—face a little white, perplexed; hands clasped.

He cried: “Sweetest dove of a Mary, don't talk like that. Sit down and I'll tell you.”

“But what have you done?—what have you *done?*“

The true woman was in that question. How they jostle us, these women, with their timid little flutterings when we are trying to put a case before them in our manlike way!—first spoiling their palate with all the sugar, so that they may not taste the powder.

“I'll tell you what I've done if you'll only sit down.”

She went to the seat.

“Now laugh, Mary. You simply must laugh. I can't tell you while you look like that. Laugh, or I shall tickle you.”

She laughed merrily—over her first bewilderment. “But, Georgie, it's something fearful that you've done, isn't

it?”

He sat beside her; took her hands. “It's terrific. Look here. From the beginning. When I told old Marrapit I'd passed my exam. I asked for that 500 pounds—you know—to start us.”

She nodded.

“He refused. He got in an awful state at the bare idea. I asked him to lend it—he got worse. Mary, he simply would not give or advance a penny: you know what that meant?”

The dejected droop of her mouth gave answer.

“Well, then, I concocted a plot. Old Wyvern helped me—Professor Wyvern, you know. I thought that if I took his cat, his beloved Rose, and lay low with her for a bit, he would—”

“Oh, *George!*“

“Well?”

“Nothing—finish.”

“—He would be certain to offer a reward. And I guessed he wouldn't mind what he paid. So I thought I'd take the cat and hang on till he offered L500, or till I thought he'd be so glad to get the Rose back that he'd do what I want out of pure gratitude. Then I'd bring it back and get the money—say I'd found it, you see, and—and—wait a bit— for heaven's sake don't speak yet.” George saw his Mary was bursting with words; as he judged the look in her eyes they were words he had reason to fear. Shirking their hurt, he hurried along. “Don't speak yet. Get the money, and then we'd save up and pay him back and then tell him. There!”

She burst out: “But, George—how *could* you? Oh, it's wrong—it's *awful!* Why, do you know what people would call you? They'd say you're a—yes, they'd say you're a—”

He snatched the terrible word from her lips with a kiss.

“They'd say I was a fool if I let Marrapit do me out of what is my own. That's the point, Mary. It's my money. I'm only trying to get what is my own. I felt all along you would see that; otherwise—” He hesitated. He was in difficulties. Manlike, he suddenly essayed to shoot the responsibility upon the woman. “—Otherwise I wouldn't have done it,” he ended.

His Mary had the wit to slip from the net, to dig him a vital thrust with the trident: “If you thought that, why didn't you tell me?”

The thrust staggered him; set him blustering: “Tell you! Tell you! How could I tell you? I did it on the spur of the moment.”

“You could have written. Oh, Georgie, it's wrong. It *is* wrong.”

He took up the famous sex attack. “Wrong! Wrong! That's just like a woman to say that! You won't listen to reason. You jump at a thing and shut your eyes and your ears.”

“I *will* listen to reason. But you haven't *got* any reason. If you had, why didn't you tell me before you did it?”

He continued the sex assault; flung out a declamatory hand. “There you go! Why didn't I tell you? I've told you why. I tell you I did it on the spur of the moment—”

But she still struggled. “Yes, that's just it. You didn't think. Now that you are thinking you must see it in its proper light. You *must* see it's wrong.”

“I don't. I don't in the least.”

“Well, why are you getting in such a state about it?”

“I'm not getting in a state!”

“You are.” His Mary fumbled at her waist−belt. “You are. You're— saying—all sorts—of—things. You—said—I—was—just—like—a— woman.” Out came this preposterous Mary's pocket handkerchief; into it went Mary's little nose.

George sprang to her. “Oh, Mary! Oh, I say, don't cry, old girl!”

The nose came out for a minute, a very shiny little nose. “I can't help crying. This is an—an *awful* business.” The shiny little nose disappeared again.

George tried to pull away the handkerchief, tried to put his face against hers. A bony little shoulder poked obstinately up and prevented him. He burst out desperately. “Oh, damn! Oh, what a beast I am! I'm always making you cry. Oh, damn! Oh, Mary! I can't do anything right. I've had an awful time these days—and I was longing to see you,—and now I've called you names and been a brute.”

His Mary gulped the tears that were making the shiny little nose every minute more shiny. Never could she

bear to hear her George accuse himself. Upon a tremendous sniff, “You haven't been a brute,” she said, ”—a bit. It's my—my fault for annoying you when I don't properly understand. Perhaps I don't understand.”

He put an arm about her. “You don't, Mary. Really and truly you don't. Let me tell you. Don't say a word till I've done. I'll tell you first why I've brought the Rose here. You see, I can't keep her anywhere else. I'm being chased about all over England. Bill and that infernal detective are after me now, and I simply must hide the beastly cat where it will be safe. Well, it's safest here—here, right under their noses, where nobody will ever look because everyone thinks it miles away by now. I can't stop near it, because I must be away on this clue they think I've got—especially now I've got mixed up with the detectives: see? So I want you just to come up from the house every day and feed the cat. You'll be perfectly safe, and it can't be for very long. You would do that, wouldn't you? Oh, Mary, think what it means to us!”

She polished the shiny little nose: “I'd do anything that would help you. But, Georgie, it's not *right*; it's *wrong*. Oh, it is wrong! I don't care *what* you say.”

“But you haven't heard what I've got to say.”

“I have. I've been listening for hours.”

“No, no, Mary. No, I haven't explained yet. You're too serious about it. It isn't a bit serious. It's only a frightful rag. And nobody will suffer, because he'll get his money back. And, think—think what it means. Now, do listen!”

She listened, and her George poured forth a flood of arguments that were all mixed and tangled with love. She could not separate the two. This argument that he was right was delectably sugared with the knowledge that the thing was done for her; that delicious picture of the future, when it was swallowed, proved to be an argument in favour of his purpose. Love and argument, argument and love—she could not separate them, and they combined into a most exquisite sweetmeat. The arm her George had about her was a base advantage over her. How doubt her George was right when against her she could feel his heart! How be wiser than he when both her hands were in that dear brown fist?

She was almost won when with a “So there you are!” he concluded. She had been won if she had much longer remained beneath the drug of his dear, gay, earnest words.

But when he ceased she came to. The little awakening sigh she gave was the little fluttering sigh of a patient when the anesthetic leaves the senses clear.

She looked at her George. Horrible to dim the sparkling in those dear eyes, radiant with excitement, with love. Yet she did it. The goody− goody little soul of her put its hands about the little weakness of her and held it tight.

She said: “I do, *do* see what you mean, Georgie. But I do, *do* think it's wrong.”

And then the little hands and the brown fist changed places. For she put one hand below the fist, and with the other patted as she gave her little homily—goody−goody little arguments, Sunday−school little arguments, mother−and−child little arguments. And very timidly she concluded: “You are not angry, Georgie, are you?”

This splendid George of hers gave her a tremendous kiss. “You're a little saint; you're a little idiot; you're a little angel; you're a little goose,” he told her. “But I love you all the more for it, although I'd like to shake you. I *would* like to shake you, Mary. You're ruining the finest joke that ever was tried; and you're ruining our only chance of marrying; and goodness only knows what's going to happen now.”

She laughed ever so happily. It was intoxicating to bend this dear George; intoxicating to have the love that came of bending him.

“But I *am* right, am I not?” she asked.

George said: “Look here, saint and goose. I'm simply not going to chuck the thing and all our happiness like this. I'll make a bargain. Saint and goose, we'll say you are right, but you shall have one night to think over it. One night. And this afternoon you will go to Professor Wyvern and tell him everything and hear what he thinks about it—what an outsider thinks: see? Yes, that's it. Don't even spend a night over it. Have a talk with Professor Wyvern, and if you still think I ought to chuck it, write to me at once, and to−morrow I'll come down and creep in unto my uncle with the cat, and say: 'Uncle, I have sinned.' There, Mary, that's agreed, isn't it?”

“That's agreed,” she joined. “Yes, that's fair.”

He looked at his watch. “I must cut. I must catch the one−thirty train. I must calm Bill and the 'tec. in case you—Mary, *do* weigh whatever Wyvern says, won't you?”

She promised; gave her George her hope that the Professor would make her see differently.

“That's splendid of you!” George cried. “Saint and goose, that's sweet of you. Mary, I'm sure he will. Look

here, I must fly; come half−way to the station. The cat's all right here. Pop up and feed her this afternoon."

They pressed the door behind them; hurried down the path.

It was precisely as they turned from the lane into the high−road, that Mrs. Major, a cat beneath her arm, went bounding wildly through the copse towards Herons' Holt.

CHAPTER IV. George Has A Shot At Paradise.

I.

Two hours after George, leaving his Mary near Paltley Hill railway station, had got back to his inn at Temple Colney, a very agitated young man booked from Temple Colney to Paltley Hill and was now speeding between them in the train.

He had the carriage to himself. Sometimes he sat, hands deep in pockets, legs thrust before him, staring with wide and frightened eyes at the opposite seat. Sometimes he paced wildly from door to door, chin sunk on breast, in his eyes still that look of frantic apprehension. Sometimes he would snatch from his pocket a telegram; glare at it; pucker his brows over it; groan over it.

George was this feverish young man.

On his table in his room at the inn he had found this telegram awaiting him. He had broken the envelope, had read, and immediately a tickling feeling over his scalp had sent a dreadful shiver through his frame:

"*Return at once. Cat found.—Marrapit.*"

He had plumped into a chair.

For a space the capacity for thought was gone. In his brain was only a heavy drumming that numbed. Beneath the window a laden cart went thumping by—thump, thump; thump, thump—cat found; cat found. The cart drubbed away and was lost. Then the heavy ticking of the clock edged into his senses—tick, tock; tick, tock—cat found; cat found.

Then thought came.

Cat found!—then all was lost. Cat found!—then some damned prowling idiot had chanced upon the hut.

This miserable George had felt certain that Professor Wyvern's arguments would overcome his Mary's scruples. That little meeting with his Mary had made him the more desperately anxious for success so that he might win her and have her. And now—cat found!—all over. Cat found! His pains for nothing!

Then came the support of a hope, and to this, hurrying back to the station, speeding now in the train, most desperately he clung. The Rose, he struggled to assure himself, had not been found at all. It was impossible that anyone had been to the hut. Some idiot had found a cat that answered to the Rose's description, and had telegraphed the discovery to his uncle; or someone had brought a cat to his uncle and his uncle was himself temporarily deluded.

Wildly praying that this might be so, George leaped from the train at Paltley Hill; went rushing to the hut. Outside, for full ten minutes he dared not push the door. What if he saw no Rose? What if all were indeed lost?

He braced himself; pushed; entered.

At once he gave a whoop, and another whoop, and a third. He snapped his fingers; cavorted through the steps of a wild dance that considerably alarmed the noble cat that watched him.

For there was the Rose!

II.

When George had indulged his transports till he was calmer, he took a moment's swift thought to decide his action.

Since someone was bouncing a spurious Rose on his uncle, he must delay, he decided, no longer—must dash in with the true Rose at once. Surely his uncle's delight would be sufficient to arouse in him the gratitude that would produce the sum necessary for Runnygate!

Previously, when he had reflected upon the plan he should follow on restoring the cat, he had been a little alarmed at the difficulties he foresaw. Chief among them was the fact that his uncle, and the detective, and heaven knew who else besides, would require a plausible and circumstantial story of how the Rose had been found—might wish to prosecute the thief. How to invent this story had caused George enormous anxiety. He shuddered whenever he thought upon it; had steadily put it behind him till the matter must be faced.

But this and all other difficulties he now sent flying. The relief of freedom from the badgering he had endured

since he abducted the Rose; the enormous relief of finding that the Rose was not, after all, gone from the hut; the tearing excitement of the thought that he had his very fingers upon success—these combined to make him reckless of truth and blind to doubts. He relied upon his uncle's transports of delight on recovering the Rose—he felt that in the delirious excitement of that joy everything must go well and unquestioned with him who had brought it about. As to his Mary's scruples—time enough for them when the matter was done.

This was George's feeling at the end of his rapid cogitation. A heartless chuckle he gave as he thought of Bill and Mr. Brunger at the inn, closely dogging the landlord; then he seized the cat and in a second was bounding through the copse to Herons' Holt as Mrs. Major, a short space ago, had bounded before him.

CHAPTER V. Of Twin Cats: Of Ananias And Of Sapphira.

I.

The maid who opened the door told George that the master awaited him in the study.

Nothing of George's excitement had left him during the rush down to the house. His right arm tucked about the cat he carried, with his left hand impulsively he pushed open the door; with a spring eagerly entered.

Even as he stepped over the threshold the bubbling words that filled his mouth melted; did not shape. In the atmosphere of the apartment there was that sinister element of some unseen force which we detect by medium of the almost atrophied sense that in dogs we call instinct. As dogs will check and grow suspicious in the presence of death that they cannot see, but feel, so my George checked and was struck apprehensive by the sudden sensation of an invisible calamity.

The quick glance he gave increased the sudden chill of his spirits. He saw Mr. Marrapit standing against the mantelshelf—dressing−gowned, hands behind back, face most intensely grim; his glance shifted and he froze, for it rested upon Mrs. Major—hidden by a table from the waist downwards, prim, bolt upright in a chair, face most intensely grim; his eyes passed her and now goggled in new bewilderment, for they took in his Mary—seated upon the extreme edge of the sofa, a white tooth upon lower lip, face most intensely woebegone.

George stood perfectly still.

Like the full, deep note of a huge bell, Mr. Marrapit's voice came booming through the fearful atmosphere.

“Well?” boomed Mr. Marrapit.

The cat beneath George's arm wriggled.

Boom and wriggle touched George back to action from the fear into which the invisible something and the fearful panorama of faces had struck him.

After all—let have happened what might have happened—he had the cat!

He swung the creature round into his hands; outstretched it. He took a step forward. “Uncle!” he cried, “uncle, I have found the Rose!”

“Hem!” said Mrs. Major on a short jerk.

From Mary there came a violent double sniff.

George stood perfectly still; the unseen horror he felt to be rushing upon him, but it remained invisible. With considerably less confidence he repeated:

“The Rose, uncle.”

“Hem!” said Mrs. Major on a yet shorter jerk; from Mary a double sniff yet more violent.

Mr. Marrapit raised a white hand.

“Hark!” said Mr. Marrapit.

Alarmed, his nerves unstrung, with straining ears George listened. The tense atmosphere made him ajump for outward sounds.

“Hark!” boomed Mr. Marrapit; lowered the warning hand; at George directed a long finger. “Are you not afraid that you will hear upon the threshold the footsteps of the young men who will come in, wind you up, and carry you out?”

“What on earth—?” George asked.

Mr. Marrapit poked the extended finger towards him. “Ananias!” he boomed. He poked at my quivering Mary. “Sapphira!”

“Hem!” said Mrs. Major. “Hem!”

George recovered. “Is this a joke?” he asked. “I tell you—look for yourself—I have found the Rose.”

Mr. Marrapit stooped to Mrs. Major's lap, hidden by the table. With a most queenly creature in his arms he stood upright. “Here is the Rose,” said he.

Instantly George forgot all that had immediately passed. Instantly he remembered that a bogus Rose was what he fully expected to see. Instantly fear fled. Instantly assurance returned.

In a full and confident note, “Uncle,” he said, “you have been deceived!”

His words let loose a torrent upon him.

Mr. Marrapit with one arm clasped to his breast the cat he had raised from Mrs. Major's lap. Alternately raising and lowering the other hand, his white hair seeming to stream, his eyes flashing, he took on, to George's eyes, the appearance of an enraged prophet bellowing over the cities of the Plain.

"I *have* been deceived!" he cried. "You are right. Though you have the forked tongue of an adder, yet you speak truly. I have been deceived. Woe is me for I have been most wickedly deceived by those who eat of my bread, who lie beneath my roof. I have cherished vipers in my bosom, and they have stung me. Bitterly have I been deceived."

He paused. A low moan from Mrs. Major, handkerchief to eyes, voiced the effect of his speech upon her; in racking sniffs Mary's emotion found vent. But upon George the outburst had a cooling result—he was certain of his ground.

He said solidly: "That's all rot."

"Rot!" cried Mr. Marrapit.

"Yes, rot. You work yourself up into such a state when you get like this, that you don't know what you're talking about—vipers and all that kind of thing. When you've calmed down and understand things, perhaps you'll be sorry. I tell you you've been deceived. That's not the Rose you've got hold of. This is the Rose. Someone has made a fool of you. Someone—"

Between two violent sniffs, "Oh, George, don't, don't!" came from his Mary.

Startled, George checked.

"Monster, be careful," said Mr. Marrapit. "Beware how much deeper you enmire yourself in the morass of your evil. Put down that miserable creature you hold. I place Mrs. Major's Rose beside it. Look upon them."

George looked. With staring eyes he gazed upon the two cats. With arched tails they advanced to exchange compliments, and the nearer they stood together the less Rose−like became the cat he had brought into the room. For the cat that Mr. Marrapit had produced—Mrs. Major's cat, as he called it—was the Rose herself; could be none other, and none other (when thus placed alongside) could be she.

Struck unconscious to his surroundings by this appalling spectacle, George slowly stooped towards the cats as though hypnotised by the orange coats. His eyes goggled further from his head; the blood went thumping in his temples. He was aghast and horror−struck with the stupefaction that comes of effort to disbelieve the eyes. But he did disbelieve his eyes. How possibly trust them when from the Rose's very bed he had taken the Rose herself and held her till now when he produced her? He did disbelieve his eyes.

He gave Mrs. Major's cat a careless pat. By an effort throwing a careless tone into his voice, "A very good imitation," he said. "Not at all unlike the Rose!"

Mr. Marrapit became an alarming sight. He intook an enormous breath that swelled him dangerously. He opened his lips and the air rushed out with roaring sound. Again he inspired, raised his clenched hands above his head, stood like some great tottering image upon the brink of internal explosion.

As upon a sudden thought, he checked the bursting words that threatened from his lips; allowed his pent−up breath to escape inarticulate; to his normal size and appearance shrank back when it was gone.

With an air of ebbing doubt, "Not at all unlike?" he questioned.

George replied briskly. He forced himself to take confidence, though every moment made yet more difficult the struggle to disbelieve what his eyes told him. "Not at all unlike," he affirmed. "Very similar, in fact. Yes, I should say very similar indeed."

Still in the same tone of one who is being reluctantly convinced, Mr. Marrapit again played Echo's part: "Very similar indeed? You grant that?"

"Certainly," George admitted frankly. "Certainly. I do not wonder you were mistaken."

"Nor I," Mr. Marrapit smoothly replied. "Indeed, in Mrs. Major's cat I detect certain signs which my Rose has long borne but which she has no longer, if the cat you bring is she?"

"Eh?" said George.

"Certain signs," Mr. Marrapit repeated, with the smoothness of flowing oil, "which I recollect in my Rose. The mark, for example, where her left ear was abrased by Mr. Wyvern's blood−thirsty bull−terrier."

George stooped to the cats. Pointing, he cried triumphantly: "Yes, and there is the mark!"

"Yes," Mr. Marrapit pronounced mildly. "Yes, but you are now looking at Mrs. Major's cat."

“Hem!” said Mrs. Major. “Hem!”

Like one who has stepped upon hot iron George started back, stared aghast. A further “hem,” with which a chuckle was mixed, came from Mrs. Major; from my collapsed Mary upon the edge of the sofa a sniff that was mingled groan and sob.

George put a hand to his head. This young man's senses were ajostle and awhirl. Well he remembered that mark which by disastrous blunder he had indicated on Mrs, Major's cat; vainly he sought it on his own. Yet his was the Rose. Was this a nightmare, then, and no true thing? He put his hand to his head.

“Looking at Mrs. Major's cat,” repeated Mr. Marrapit, his tone smooth as the trickle of oil.

George fought on. “Quite so. Quite so. I know that. That is what makes it so extraordinary—that this cat which you call Mrs. Major's and think is the Rose should have the very mark that our Rose had.”

“But our Rose has not—if that is she.”

“Ah! not now,” George said impressively. “Not now. It healed. Healed months ago. Don't you remember my saying one morning, 'The Rose's ear is quite healed now'?”

“I do not, sir,” snapped Mr. Marrapit, with alarming sharpness.

“Oh!” said George. “Oh!”

“Hem!” fired Mrs. Major. “Hem! Hem!”

“That tail,” spoke Mr. Marrapit, a sinister hardness now behind the oiliness. “Mark those tails.”

George marked. To this young man's disordered mind the room took on the appearance of a forest of waving tails.

“Well?” rapped Mr. Marrapit. “You note those tails? Mrs. Major's cat has a verdant tail, a bush−like tail. Yours has a rat tail. Do you recollect my pride in the luxuriousness of the Rose's tail?”

George blundered along the path he had chosen. “Formerly,” he said, “not latterly. Latterly, if you remember, there was a remarkable falling off in the Rose's tail. Her tail moulted. It shed hairs. I remember worrying over it. I remember—”

A voice from the sofa froze him. “Oh, George, don't, don't!” moaned his Mary.

Recovering his horror, he turned stiffly upon her. “If you mean me, Miss Humfray, you forget yourself. I do not understand you. Kindly recollect that I have another name.”

The hideous frown he bent upon his Mary might well have advertised the sincerity of his rebuke. He faced Mr. Marrapit, blundered on. “I remember noticing how thin the Rose's tail was getting.” He gathered confidence, pushed ahead. “You have forgotten those little points, sir. Upset by your loss you have jumped at the first cat like the Rose that you have seen.” He took new courage, became impressive. “You are making a fearful mistake, sir—an awful mistake. A mistake at which you will shudder when you look back—”

“Incredible!”

Mr. Marrapit, swelling as a few moments earlier he had swollen, this time burst to speech. He raised his clenched fists; in immense volume of sound exploded. “Incredible!”

George misinterpreted; was shaken, but hurried on. “It is. I admit it. It is an incredible likeness. But look again, sir.”

Mr. Marrapit gave instead a confused scream.

Alarmed, George made as if to plunge on with further protests. “George! George!” from his Mary checked him. Furious, he turned upon her; and in that moment Mr. Marrapit, recovering words, turned to Mrs. Major.

“As you have restored my treasure to my house, Mrs. Major, so now silence this iniquitous man by telling him what you have told me. I implore speed. Silence him. Utterly confound him. Stop him from further perjury before an outraged Creator rains thunderbolts upon this roof.”

With a telling “Hem!” the masterly woman cleared for action. “I will, Mr. Marrapit,” she bowed. She murmured “Rosie, Rosie, ickle Rosie!” The cat Mr. Marrapit had lifted from her lap sprang back to that enticing cushion.

Gently stroking its queenly back, to the soft accompaniment of its majestic purr, in acid−tipped accents she began to speak.

She pointed at the cat that now sat at George's crime−steeped boots. “When I was out this morning I found that cat in a little copse on the Shipley Road. At first I thought it was our darling Rose. Suddenly I heard voices. I did not wish to be seen, because, dear Mr. Marrapit, if it was the Rose I had found, I wanted to bring it to you

alone—to be the first to make you happy. So I slipped into a disused hut that stands there. Footsteps approached the door and I went into an inner room."

Mrs. Major paused; shot a stabbing smile at George.

And now my miserable George realised. Now, visible at last, there rushed upon him, grappled him, strangled him, the sinister something whose presence he had scented on entering the apartment. No sound came from this stricken man. He could not speak, nor move, nor think. Rooted he remained; dully gazed at the thin lips whence poured the flood that engulfed and that was utterly to wreck him.

The masterly woman continued. She indicated the rooted figure in the middle of the room, the collapsed heap upon the sofa's edge. "Those two entered. He had a basket. Oh, what were my feelings when out of it he took our darling Rose!"

For the space of two minutes the masterly woman advertised the emotions she had suffered by burying her face in the Rose's coat; rocking gently.

Emerging, she gulped her agitation; proceeded. "I need not repeat again all the dreadful story I heard, Mr. Marrapit? Surely I need not?"

"You need not," Mr. Marrapit told her. "You need not."

With a masterly half−smile, expressive of gratitude through great suffering, Mrs. Major thanked him. "Indeed," she went on, "I did not hear the whole of it. It was so dreadful, I was so horrified, that I think I fainted. Yes, I fainted. But I heard them discuss how he had stolen the Rose so they might marry on the reward when it was big enough. He had kept the darling till then; now it was her turn to take charge of it—"

Mrs. Major ceased with a jerk, drew in her legs preparatory to flight.

For the rooted figure had sprung alarmingly to life. George would not have his darling Mary blackened. He took a stride to Mrs. Major; his pose threatened her. "That's untrue!" he thundered.

"Ho!" exclaimed Mrs. Major. "Ho! A liar to my face! Ho!"

"And you are a liar," George stormed, "when you say—"

"Silence!" commanded Mr. Marrapit. "Do not anger heaven yet further. Can you still deny—?"

"No!" George said very loudly. "No! No! I deny nothing. But that woman's a liar when she says Miss Humfray discussed the business with me, or that it was Miss Humfray's turn to take the damned cat. Miss Humfray knew nothing about it till I told her. When she heard she said it was wrong and tried to make me take the cat back to you."

In his wrath George had advanced close to Mrs. Major. He stretched a violent finger to an inch from her nose. "That's true, isn't it? Have the grace to admit that."

Indomitable of purpose, the masterly woman pressed back her head as far as the chair would allow, tightened her lips.

The violent finger followed. "Say it's true!" George boiled.

His Mary implored: "Oh, George, don't, don't!"

The furious young man flamed on to her. "Be quiet!"

Mr. Marrapit began a sound. The furious young man flamed to him: "You be quiet, too!" He thrust the dreadful finger at Mrs. Major. "Now speak the truth. Had Miss Humfray anything to do with it?"

This tremendous George had temporary command of the room. The masterly woman for once quailed. "I didn't hear that part," she said.

George drew in the fearful finger. "That's as good as the truth—from you." He rounded upon Mr. Marrapit. "You understand that. This has been my show."

"A blackguard show," pronounced Mr. Marrapit. "A monstrous and an impious show. A—"

"I don't want to hear that. Whatever it is you are the cause of it. If you had done your duty with my mother's money—"

A figure passed the open French windows along the path. Mr. Marrapit shouted "Fletcher!" The gardener entered.

"But you've betrayed your trust," George shouted. He liked the fine phrase and repeated it. "You've betrayed your trust!"

Mr. Marrapit assumed his most collected air. "Silence. Silence, man of sin. Leave the house. Return thanks where thanks are due if I do not hound the law upon you. Take that girl. That miserable cat take. Hence!"

Mary got to her feet, put a hand on her George's arm. “Do come, dear.”

The wild young man shook her off. “I'll go when it pleases me!” he shouted at Mr. Marrapit.

“You shall be arrested,” Mr. Marrapit returned. He addressed Mary. “Place that cat in that basket Carry it away.”

George stood, heaving, panting, boiling for effective words, while his Mary did as bade. Awful visions of her George, fettered between policemen, trembled her pretty fingers. At last she had the basket strapped, raised it.

“Come, George,” she said; and to Mr. Marrapit, “I'm so sorry, Mr. Marrapit. I—”

It gave her furious George a vent. “Sorry! What are you sorry about? What have you done?” He roared over to Mrs. Major: “What other lies have you been telling?” He lashed himself at Mr. Marrapit. “Set the law on me? I jolly well hope you will. It will all come out then how you've behaved—how you've treated me. How you've betrayed—”

“Fletcher,” Mr. Marrapit interrupted, “remove that man. Take him out. Thrust him from the house.”

“Me?” said Mr. Fletcher. “Me thrust him? I'm a gardener, I am; not a—”

“Duty or dismissal,” pronounced Mr. Marrapit. “Take choice.” He turned to the window. “Come, Mrs. Major.”

George dashed for him. “You're not going till I've done with you!”

Violence was in his tone, passion in his face.

Alarmed, “Beware how you touch me!” called Mr. Marrapit; caught Mr. Fletcher, thrust him forward. “Grapple him!” cried Mr. Marrapit.

Mr. Fletcher was violently impelled against George; to save a fall clutched him. “Don't make a scene, Mr. George,” he implored.

George pushed him away. Mr. Fletcher trod back heavily upon Mr. Marrapit's foot. Mr. Marrapit screamed shrilly, plunged backwards into a cabinet, overturned it, sat heavily upon its debris.

A laugh overcame George's fury. He swung on his heel; called “Come" to his Mary; stalked from the house.

As they passed through the gate, “Oh, Georgie!” his Mary breathed. “Oh, Georgie!”

He raged on to her: “What on earth made you say you were sorry? You've no spirit, Mary! No spirit!”

The tremendous young man stalked ahead with huge strides.

* * * * *

In deep melancholy, sore beneath the correction Mr. Marrapit had heaped upon him, Mr. Fletcher wandered from the study; turned as he reached the path. “Me grapple him!” said Mr. Fletcher. “Me a craven! Me thrust him from the house! It's 'ard—damn 'ard. I'm a gardener, I am; not a Ju−jitsu.”

CHAPTER VI. Agony In Meath Street.

I.

Silent, gloom−ridden, my sniffing Mary, my black−browed George laboured to the station. Silent they sat upon a bench waiting the London train.

George bought his Mary a piece of chocolate from the automatic machine; she was a forlorn picture as with tiny nibbles she ate it, tears in her pretty eyes. In the restaurant George bought himself a huge cigar. This man was a desperate spectacle as with huge puffs he smoked, hands deep in pockets, legs thrust straight, brows horribly knitted.

They had no words.

The train came in. George found an empty compartment; helped his poor Mary to a corner; roughly dumped the cat−basket upon the rack; moodily plumped opposite his Mary.

They had no words.

It was as the train moved from the third stop that Mary, putting a giant sniff upon her emotions, asked her George: “Wher—where are we going, dear?”

It was not until the fifth stop that George made answer. “Those Battersea digs,” he told her.

They had no words.

At Queen's Road station gloomily they alighted; silently laboured to the house of Mrs. Pinking.

George answered her surprise. “Miss Humfray will have these rooms again, Mrs. Pinking, if you will be so kind; and I—” He checked. “Could you let us have some tea, Mrs. Pinking? Afterwards I'll have a talk with you. We've got into a—We're very tired. If you could just let us have some tea, then I'll explain.”

In silence they ate and drank. George was half turned from the table, gloomily gazing from the window. Tiny sniffs came from his Mary; he had no words for her; looked away.

But presently there was a most dreadful choking sound. He sprang around. Most painfully his Mary was spluttering over a cup of tea. With trembling hands she put down the cup; her face was red, convulsively working.

George half rose to her. “Don't cry, darling Mary−kins. Don't cry.”

She set down the cup; swallowed; gasped, “I'm not crying—I'm la−laughing,” and into a pipe of gayest mirth she went.

Gloom gathered its sackcloth skirts; scuttled from the room.

George roared with laughter; rocked and roared again. When he could get a catch upon his mirth there was the clear pipe of his Mary's glee, clear, compelling, setting him off again. When she would gasp for breath there was her dear George, head in those brown hands, shaking with tremendous laughter—and she must start again.

She gasped: “George! If you could have seen yourself standing there telling those awful stories—!”

He gasped: “When I mistook the cats—!”

She gasped: “Mr. Marrapit's face—!”

He gasped: “Mrs. Major's—!”

The exhaustion of their mirth gave them pause at last. George wiped his running eyes; Mary tremendously blew her little nose, patted her gold hair where it eagerly straggled.

“I feel better after that,” George said.

She told him, “So do I—heaps. It's no good being miserable over what is past, is it, dear?”

“Not a bit; not the slightest. Come and sit on the sofa and let's see where we are.” She put that golden head upon his manly shoulder; he fetched his right arm about her; she nursed her hands upon the brown fist that came into her lap; that other brown hand he set upon the three.

Together they viewed their prospects—gloomy pictures.

“But we're fairly in the cart,” George summed up. “We are, you know.”

His ridiculous Mary gave him that lovers' ridiculous specific. “We've got each other,” she told him, snuggling to him.

George kissed her. He fumbled in his pockets. “I've got just about three pounds—over from what Marrapit

gave me for the clue−hunting. I say, Mary, it's pretty awful."

She snuggled the closer.

Early evening, tip−toeing through the window, was drawing her dusky hangings about the room when at length George withdrew the brown hands; stirred.

II.

Upon a little sigh Mary let go the string that held the dreams she had been dreaming. Like a great gay bundle of many−coloured toy balloons suddenly released, they soared away. She came to the desperate present; noted her George filling his pipe.

He got upon his legs; paced the floor, puffing.

It was his characteristic pose when he was most tremendous. She watched this tremendous fellow adoringly.

He told her: "I've settled it all, Marykins. I've fixed it all up. We'll pull through right as rain." He caught the admiring glance in his Mary's eye; inhaled and gusted forth a huge breath of smoke; repeated the fine sentence. "We'll pull through right as rain."

"Dear George!" she softly applauded.

He pushed ahead. "There's this locum tenens I was going to take up in the North. I haven't offed that yet—haven't refused it, I mean. Well, I shall take it. The screw's pretty rotten, but up in the North—in the North, you know—well, it's not like London. It's cheap— frightfully cheap. You can live on next to nothing—"

She pushed out the irritating, practical, womanish side of her. " *Can* you? How do you *know*, Georgie?"

We men hate these pokes at our knowledge; women will not understand generalisations. George jerked back: "How do I *know*? Oh, don't interrupt like that, Mary. Everybody knows that living is cheap in the North—in the *North*."

"Of course," she excused herself. "Of course, dear, I see."

"Well, where was I? Frightfully cheap, so the screw won't matter. I'll take the job, dearest. I'll take it for next month. And—listen—we'll marry and go up there together and live in some ripping little rooms. There!"

She was flaming pink; could only breathe: "Georgie, *dear!*"

He stopped his pacing to give her a squeezing hug, a kiss upon the top of the gold hair. Then he went through the steps of a wild dance. "Marry!" he cried. "Marry, old girl, and let everybody go hang! We'll have to work it through a registrar. I'm not quite sure how it's done, but I'll find out tomorrow. I know you both have to have been resident in the place for a week or so—I'll fix all that. Then we'll peg along up in the North; and we'll look out for whatever turns up, and we'll save, and in time we'll buy a practice just like Runnygate."

Now he sat beside his Mary again; with a tremendous brush painted in more details of this entrancing picture. Every doubt, every difficulty he threw to tomorrow—that glad sea in which youth casts its every trouble. Was he sure he still had the refusal of this locum?—rather! but he would make certain, tomorrow. Was he sure they both could live upon the salary?−rather! he would prove it to−morrow. Could they really get married at a registrar's within a few days?−rather! he'd fix that up to−morrow. As to the money necessary for the marriage, necessary to tide over the days till the locum was taken up, why, he knew he could borrow that—from the Dean or from Professor Wyvern—to− morrow.

They were upon the very crest and flood of their delight when George noted the gathering dusk.

"I say, it's getting late!" he exclaimed. "I must fix it up with Mrs. Pinking. We've made no arrangement with her yet."

Mary agreed: "Yes, dear." She went on, pretty eyes shining, face aglow: "Oh, Georgie, think of the last time you brought me here! I had nothing to expect but going out to work again; and you weren't qualified. And now—now, although we've lost our little Runnygate home" (she could not stop a tiny sigh), "we're actually going to be married in a few days! Georgie, I shan't sleep for hoping everything will turn out all right to−morrow."

"It will," George told her. "It will. Right as rain, old girl."

Her great sigh of contentment advertised the drink she took of that sparkling future. "Think of us being together always in a week or so— belonging! Where will you stay till then? Quite close. Get a room quite close, Georgie?"

He stared at her. "Why, you old goose, I'm not going."

She echoed him: "Not going?"

"Of course not. I'm going to get a bedroom here, and we'll have all our meals and everything in here. We're not going to part again, Marykins. Not much!"

That maddening handicap beneath which the sweetest women trudge shackled Mary, deluged this joy.

"Oh, Georgie!" she said; and again trembled, "Oh, Georgie!"

My impulsive George scented the damp. "Well?" he asked. "Well? Whatever's—?"

"Oh, Georgie, you can't have a room here. We can't have all our meals together here?"

He realised the trouble. He broke out: "Why ever not? Why ever—?"

"It wouldn't be *right*! Georgie, it *wouldn't* be right!"

Her impulsive George choked for words. "Not right! 'Pon my soul, Mary, I simply don't understand you sometimes. Not *right! Why* isn't it right?"

It was so difficult to tell. "You don't understand, dear—"

"No, I'm damned if I do. I'm sorry, Mary, but you are so funny, you women. It's so exasperating after the—the devil of a day I've had. Just when I've fixed up everything you turn round and"—he threw out an angry hand—"*Why* isn't it right?"

This poor little Mary clung to her little principles. "Don't you see? we're engaged, dear; and being engaged, we oughtn't to live alone like this. People would—"

He began to rave. Certainly he had had a devil of a day; and this was a maddening buffet.

"People!" he cried. "People! People! You're always thinking of people, you women! Who's to know? Who on earth's to know?"

The instinct of generations of training gave her the instinctive reply in the instinctive sweet little tone: "We should know, Georgie," she said.

He flung up his arms: "Oh, good God!"

He swallowed his boiling irritation; laughed 'spite himself; went to his Mary. "Mary, don't be such an utter, utter goose. It's too, too ridiculous."

She took his kiss; but she held her stupid little ground.

"It wouldn't be right, Georgie, *really*!"

Her George clanged the bell with a furious stroke that brought Mrs. Pinking in panic up the stairs. Holding himself very straight, speaking in sentences short and hard, paying to his Mary no smallest attention, he made the arrangements. Miss Humfray would take on her bedroom again. By the week. If Mrs. Pinking would be so kind as to allow them the same terms. He thanked her. That was settled, then. He would look in in the morning. He would say good night, Mrs. Pinking.

Mrs. Pinking gave him good night; busied herself with the tea−things.

Her presence enabled this brutal George to preserve his stony bearing; denied his pretty Mary opportunity to melt him with her tears.

Hard as flint, "Well, good night," he said to her. "I'll look in to−morrow morning."

Upon a little sniff, "Good night," she whispered; strangled an "Oh, George! George!"

She followed him to the door. He was down the stairs before she could command her voice for: "Where shall you go, George?"

With the reckless fury of one who sets forth to plunge into the river, he called back, "I? I? Oh, *anywhere—anywhere*. Who cares where *I* go?"

The hall door slammed.

* * * * *

Late into that night while a young woman sobbed her pretty eyes out upon a pillow in a back room of Meath Street, Battersea, a young man, who furiously had been pacing London, paced and repaced the street from end to end, gazing the windows of the house where she lay. This young man muttered, gesticulated, groaned. "Oh, damn!" was his song. "Oh, Mary! Oh, what a cursed brute I am!"

It was a bitter ending to a fearful day.

CHAPTER VII. Mr. William Wyvern In Meath Street.

I.

George spent the night—such of it as remained after his bitter moanings outside his Mary's lodging—with the Mr. Franklyn who had accompanied him on that little “stroll up west” that had terminated in the cab adventure nearly three months before. Of all his student friends who would give him a bed, Mr. Franklyn, because in a way associated with his Mary, had come most prominently into his mind. That same association gave him a lead from which to pour out his reply to Mr. Franklyn's rallying, as they sat at supper, upon his gloom.

“You remember that day after the July exam, when we went up west together?” he began.

Mr. Franklyn remembered; in some gloom shook his head over the recollection. “That waitress you left me with in the shop,” said Mr. Franklyn sadly, “she—”

“Oh, hang the waitress! Listen, Franklyn, After I left you I turned up past the Marble Arch—” He proceeded with some account of the love between him and his Mary; skipped all details relating to the cat; came to the impending marriage; sought advice upon the prospects of a man marrying on a locum's earnings.

Mr. Franklyn listened with great sympathy. “It's a rum thing you should be placed like that, George,” he said. “I'm in just the same position.”

George exclaimed eagerly—in love, youth warms to a companion—“You are!”

“Well, not exactly,” Mr. Franklyn admitted. “Very nearly. I've got myself into a brute of a fix over a girl in the lager−beer garden at Earl's Court. She—”

George bounced from the table, seized his hat. “Who cares a damn about your lager−beer girls?” he shouted; slammed from the house.

It was then, while Mr. Franklyn laboriously indited a letter in reply to one received from the lager−beer girl's mother, that George paced Meath Street.

II.

At breakfast with Mr. Franklyn upon the following morning, he was in brighter trim—apologised for his over−night abruptness; apologised for the hasty meal he was making; announced that he was off to see his Mary.

As he lit his pipe, “I'll see you at hospital this morning some time, old chap,” he said. “I shall dash in to fix up with the Dean about taking Bingham's place in that practice up in Yorkshire.”

Mr. Franklyn prodded for another slice of bacon. “You can't, old chap,” he remarked. “That's filled.”

George shouted: “Filled! What do you mean?”

“Why, taken—gone. Simpson's got it—ten days ago.”

An icy chill smote my poor George. After the dreadful loss of Runnygate everything had depended upon this appointment with its salary considerably above the average.

“Simpson! Simmy got it!” he shouted. “What the blazes does Simmy mean by taking it? He knew I was after it.”

“My good lad, you never came near the place after you'd qualified. If Simmy hadn't taken it someone else would. Bingham was in a hurry.”

Blankly George stared before him. At length, “I suppose there are several other jobs going?” he asked.

“None on the Dean's list,” said Mr. Franklyn. “I was looking at it last night.”

Beneath this new distress George postponed the burning desire to clasp his Mary in his arms and beg forgiveness. He hurried to hospital; made for the Dean's office. Here disaster was confirmed. Simpson had already taken the Yorkshire place; the Dean had no other posts on his lists. “Only this Runnygate practice,” he said. “I haven't seen you since you qualified. Can you raise the price?”

George, rising and making for the door, could only shake his head. There was something at his throat that forbade speech. Runnygate and all that Runnygate meant—the dear little home, the tight little practice, the tremendous future—was a bitter picture now that it was so utterly lost; now that even this place in Yorkshire was also gone.

He shook his head.

"Great pity!" the Dean told him. "I've kept it for you. Lawrence, the man who's leaving it, is coming to see me at five this evening. I shall have to help him find another purchaser."

III.

The infernal something in George's throat gripped the harder as he took his way to his Mary. He cursed himself for that hideous cat enterprise. Had he never undertaken it, had he continued instead to entreat and implore, there was always the chance that his uncle would have relented and advanced the money sufficient for Runnygate.

As things were, he stood for ever damned in his uncle's eyes; further, by his folly he had encompassed his darling Mary's ejection from a home where she might comfortably have stayed till he was in position to marry her; further, he had just missed the assistantship which, to his present frame of mind, seemed the sole post in the world that would give him sufficient upon which to call his Mary wife.

The desperate thoughts augmented his fearful remorse at his treatment of her overnight. Arrived at Meath Street, admitted by Mrs. Pinking, he bounded up the stairs, tremendous in his agony of love.

His Mary had her pretty nose pressed flat against the window. With dim eyes she had been gazing for her George in the opposite direction from that he had approached.

He closed the door behind him.

"Mary!" he called, arms outstretched.

Into them she flung herself.

They locked in a hug so desperate as only love itself could have borne.

He poured out his remorse; beside him on the sofa she patted those brown hands. He told his gloomy tale; she patted the more lovingly— assured him that, if the Yorkshire place had failed, something equally good would turn up.

But he was in desperate despondency. "It's all that infernal cat, Mary," he groaned; she kissed that knotted forehead.

He asked her: "By the way, where's that other brute?—the beast we brought here with us?"

She peered low. "I've just fed the poor thing."

Attracted by her movement, that orange cat which had wrought the fearful disaster came forth from beneath the table.

"G−r−r−r!" George growled; stamped his foot.

The orange cat again took shelter.

"Ah, don't frighten it, dear," Mary told him. "It's done no harm."

George rose. He was too tremendously moved to contain himself while seated. "Done no harm!" he cried. He took a step to the window. "Done no—" He stopped short. "Oh, Lord! I say, Mary! Oh, Lord! here's Bill!"

Mary fluttered to his side; saw Bill Wyvern disappear beneath the porch of the door.

A knock; shuffling in the passage; footsteps up the stairs.

"By Gad! I'd forgotten all about old Bill," George said.

Then Bill entered.

CHAPTER VIII. Abishag The Shunamite In Meath Street.

I.

The most tremendous crises between man and man commonly begin with exchange of the customary banalities. Charlotte Corday gave Marat *"Bonsoir, citoyen,"* ere she drove her knife. This was no cloak to hide her purpose. We are so much creatures of convention that the man who sets out, hell in breast, to avenge himself upon another, cannot forbear to give him greeting before ever he comes upon the matter between them.

George, involuntarily straightening his back as he remembered how desperately he had hoodwinked this Bill, had upon a fool's errand packed him to that inn, as involuntarily passed him the customary words.

"Hullo, Bill!" he said. "How on earth did you know I was here?"

He awaited the burst of reproach; the torrent of fury.

These did not come. About Bill's mouth, as from George to Mary he glanced, there were the lines of amusement; no menace lay in his clear blue eyes.

"Went to look for you at the hospital," Bill replied. "Met that man Franklyn, and he told me you very probably were here."

George pushed ahead with the banalities. "Surprised to see Miss Humfray here?" he asked. "You met her, of course, at my uncle's while− —while"—this was dangerous ground, and he hurried over it—"while I was away," he said quickly; blew his nose.

Bill told him: "Yes. Not a bit surprised." The creases of amusement became more evident. He shook Mary's hand.

"Ah!" George said. "Um! Quite so. Sit down, Bill."

They took seats. Constraint was upon these people; each sat upon the extreme edge of the chair selected.

After a pause, "You've been to Herons' Holt, then?" George remarked.

"Yesterday. Yesterday night."

"Ah! Yesterday. Thursday, so to speak. Um! Margaret quite well?"

"Quite."

The deadly pause came on again. Mary looked appealing to her George. George, his right boot in a patch of sunlight, earnestly was watching it as, twisting it this way and that, the polish caught the rays.

It lay with herself to make a thrust through this fearful silence. Upon a timid little squeak she shot out: "Mr. Marrapit quite well?"

"Quite," Bill told her. "Quite. A little bit—" He checked; again the silence fell.

Mary no longer could endure it. Impulsively leaning forward, arms outstretched, hands clasped, "Oh, Mr. Wyvern!" she cried. "You're *not* angry with George, *are* you? He *couldn't* help sending you to that inn, *could* he?"

Constraint fled. "Of course I'm not," Bill declared. "Not a bit. I've come here to congratulate you both. I—"

George sprang forward; grasped Bill's hand. "Good old buck!" he cried. "Good old Bill! I'm awfully sorry, Bill. You're a stunner, Bill. Isn't he a stunner, Mary?"

"He *is* a stunner," Mary agreed.

The stunner, red beneath this praise, warmly returned George's grip. When they released, "I say, George, you *are* an ass, you know," he said. "Why on earth didn't you tell me what you were up to?"

"You weren't there, old man, when it began. You were in London. How on earth was I to know your paper would come plunging into the business?" The memory of the pains that paper had caused him swept all else from George's mind. Indignation seized him. "It was a scandalous bit of work, Bill. 'Pon my soul it's simply shameful that a newspaper can go and interfere in a purely private matter like that. Yes, it is, Mary. Don't you interrupt. Bill understands. I don't blame you, Bill; you were doing your duty. I blame the editor. What did he want to push into it for? I tell you that paper drove me up and down the country till I was pretty well dead. It's all very well for you to grin, Bill."

"I'm not grinning."

"You are grinning." George threw a bitter note into his declamations. "Of course, you can afford to grin. What was agony to me was hot stuff for you. I expect you've made your reputation over this show. Everything's turned out all right for you—"

Bill took that bitter note. "Rather!" he broke in. "Rather! I pulled it off, didn't I? I found the rotten cat, didn't I? I wasn't made a fool of for two days in a country inn, was I? I've not got the sack all through you, have I?"

George instantly forgot his personal sorrows. "Oh, I say, Bill, you haven't, have you?"

Bill, not expecting the interruption, confessed a little lamely: "No, I haven't. I *haven't*—as it turns out. But I might have—if it wasn't for—" He paused a moment; sadly said, "Anyway, just as I thought I'd got her, I've lost Margaret again."

In those fierce days when her Bill was the Daily Special Commissioner, Margaret had confided in Mary the promise Mr. Marrapit had made should Bill find the cat. Now Mary was filled with sympathy. "Oh, Mr. Wyvern!" she cried, "I *am* sorry! What has happened? How do you know? Do tell us everything of when you went to Herons' Holt last night."

Bill took a chair. He said gloomily: "There's not much to tell. I felt I couldn't wait at that infernal inn any longer, so I left the detective in charge, went to the inn where we'd found George, didn't see him, and came back to Herons' Holt. I saw old Marrapit for about two minutes in the hall. He foamed at me all about George, foamed out that I was one of George's friends, and foamed me out of the door before I could get in a word. Said I never was to come near the place again. I asked him about Margaret, and he had a kind of fit—a kind of fit."

George said softly: "I know what you mean, old man."

"A kind of fit," Bill gloomily repeated. Then he struck one clenched fist into the palm of the other hand. "And hang it!" he cried, "I've won her! According to the bargain old Marrapit made with me, I've won her. If it had not been for me you wouldn't have taken the cat to that hut in the wood, and if you hadn't taken it there Marrapit wouldn't have it *now*. It's through me he got it, isn't it?"

"Bill," George told him, "it is. You rotted my show all right. No mistake about that."

It was a fearful situation as between these two young men. In silence, in gloom, they gazed each upon the ground.

Bill took a glance at George's face; turned hurriedly from the despair there stamped; set his eyes upon my pretty Mary. He gave a sigh.

"But, George, old man, you've come out of it the better," he said. "You've lost the money you wanted, but you've got your—you've got Miss Humfray. I've lost my—I've lost Margaret."

In great melancholy George rose; crossed to his Mary; sat upon the arm of her chair; caressed her pretty shoulders.

"You don't know what you're talking about, Bill. Bill, we're in a most fearful hole. We haven't got a sou, and I've got no work. You're doing well. You're making money. You're bound to get Margaret in time. As for us—"

Bill was deeply stirred. "I say, I am sorry," he told them. He sat up very straight. "Look here, don't get down on your luck. Come out and have lunch with me and tell me just how you're fixed. If a small loan will do you any good I'm certain my guv'nor will stand it. He likes you awfully, George. Come on. I shan't see you again otherwise for some time. I'm off on another Special Commissioner job for the *Daily*, you know."

George gave a slight shudder. "Oh? Thank goodness, I'm not the object of it this time. What is it?"

"What is it? Why, you've seen the *Daily* this morning, haven't you?"

"I'll never open the infernal thing again."

Bill did not heed the aspersion. "It's really rather funny, you know," he went on. "Look here." He tugged at his pocket; produced a *Daily*.

A pencil dislodged by the paper fell to the ground; rolled beneath the table.

Bill stooped after it. The cat that lay there, disturbed, walked forth—arching its proud orange back.

II.

With eyes that goggled tremendously Bill stared at it; with a finger that shook he pointed at it; turned his head to George. "George," he asked, "whose cat is that?"

George looked at Mary; gave a bitter little laugh. "I suppose it's ours," he replied. "Eh, Mary?"

A sad little smile his Mary gave, "I suppose it is," she agreed.

From one to the other Bill looked, suspicion in those goggling eyes.

"You *suppose* it is?" he emphasised. Again he swiftly looked from George to Mary; again stared at the splendid orange form. "George," he said sharply—"George, what is that cat's name?"

George regarded him with a whimsical smile. "Bill, you old duffer, you don't think it's the Rose, do you?"

Yet more sharply than before Bill spoke. "George, is that cat's name Abishag?"

"*Abishag?* What an awful—"

Bill turned from him with an impatient gesture. He called to the cat, "Abishag! Abishag!"

With upreared tail the fine creature trotted to him.

"Good Lord!" George broke out. "Is that *your* cat, Bill?"

Bill turned upon him. "*My* cat! You know thundering well it's not my cat."

"But it knows you, Mr. Wyvern," Mary told him wonderingly.

There was sorrow, a look of pity in this young man's eyes as reproachfully he regarded my Mary.

He swung round upon George. "George, you've made a fool of me once—"

"I don't know what on earth's the matter with you," George told him.

With knitted brows Bill for a moment searched his face. "I ask you point−blank," he said slowly. "Did you steal this cat, George?"

George struck the stern young man upon the back. "Is *that* what you're driving at, you old ass? Stole it! D'you suppose I'll ever *touch* a cat again? That's the infernal cat Mrs. Major left in that hut when she hooked off the Rose. Marrapit told you, didn't he?"

Into a chair Bill collapsed—legs thrust straight before him, head against the cushioned back. He gasped. "George, this is a licker, a fair licker." Enormously this staggered man swelled as he inhaled a tremendous breath; upon a vast sigh he let it go. "That cat—" he said. He got to his legs and paced the room; astonished, Mary and George regarded him. "That cat—I'll bet my life that's the cat!"

III.

My Mary was trembling before this fearful agitation. For support she took her George's hand. "Oh, Mr. Wyvern!" she cried, "whatever is it? Have we got into another awful trouble through those dreadful, *dreadful* cats?"

"Look at the *Daily*," Bill said. "Look at the *Daily*. George, give me a cigarette. I must smoke. This is an absolute licker."

My frightened Mary jumped for the paper where it had fallen; spread it upon the table; opened it. "Oh, George!" she cried. "Oh, George!"; pressed a pretty finger upon these flaming words:

ANOTHER CAT OUTRAGE.
AMAZING STORY.
MR. VIVIAN HOWARD'S FAMOUS PET
STOLEN WHILE BACK TURNED.
"DAILY" OFFER.
500 POUNDS FOR OUR READERS.

My Mary's golden head, my George's head of brown, pressed and nudged as with bulging eyes they read the crisp, telling paragraphs that followed in a column of leaded type.

Readers of the *Daily*, it appeared, would be astonished to learn that the abduction of Mr. Marrapit's famous cat, the Rose of Sharon— concerning the recovery of which all hope had now been abandoned—had been followed by a similar outrage of a nature even more sensational, more daring.

Mr. Vivian Howard, the famous author and dramatist, whose new novel, "Amy Martin," *Daily* readers need not be reminded, was to start in the *Daily* as a feuilleton on Monday week, had been robbed of his famous cat "Abishag the Shunamite."

The whole reading public were well aware of Mr. Howard's devotion to this valuable pet. Scarcely a portrait of Mr. Howard was extant that did not show Abishag the Shunamite by his side.

It was a melancholy coincidence that in the interview granted to the *Daily* by Mr. Howard last Saturday he had told that Abishag had sat upon his table while every single word of the manuscript of "Amy Martin" was penned. He had admitted that she was his mascot. Without her presence he could not compose a line. *Daily*

readers would imagine, then, Mr. Howard's prostration at his appalling loss.

The occurrence had taken place on Monday night. As *Daily* readers were well aware, Mr. Howard had for some weeks been staying at the house of his widowed mother in Sussex Gardens. Nightly at nine it had been his custom to stroll round the gardens before settling down for three hours' work upon “Amy Martin.” During his stroll Abishag would slip into the gardens, meeting her master upon his completion of the circuit.

According to this practice, Mr. Howard, on Monday night, had followed his usual custom. He believed he might possibly have walked a little slower than usual as he was pondering deeply over his final revise of the proof of “Amy Martin.” Otherwise his programme was identical with its usual performance. But upon his return the cat was not to be found.

Theories, suggestions, investigations that had already been made, followed. The *Daily* abundantly proved that the cat had not strayed but had been deliberately stolen by someone well acquainted with Mr. Howard's nightly promenade; pointed out that this second outrage showed that no one possessing a valuable cat was safe from the machinations of a desperate gang; asked, Where are the police? and concluded with the pica sub−head:

“DAILY” OFFER.

The *Daily*, it appeared, on behalf of the whole reading public of Great Britain, the Colonies, America, and the many Continental countries into whose tongues Mr. Howard's novels had been translated, offered 500 pounds to the person who would return, or secure the return of, Abishag the Shunamite, and thus restore peace to the heart of England's premier novelist, whose new story, “Amy Martin,” would start in the *Daily* on Monday week.

A sketch−map of Sussex Gardens, entitled “Scene of the Outrage,” showed, by means of dotted lines, (A) Route taken by Mr. Vivian Howard; (B) Route into Gardens taken by cat; (C) Supposed route taken by thief.

Mr. Henry T. Bitt had achieved a mammoth splash.

IV.

The golden head and the head of brown lifted simultaneously from the paper; stared towards Bill, pacing, smoking.

Tremendous possibilities flickered in George's mind; made his voice husky. “Bill,” he asked, “do you believe that cat is this Abishag— Vivian Howard's Abishag?”

Bill nodded absently. This man's thoughts were afar—revolving this situation he had named “licker.” “Look at the description,” he said. “Look at the cat. It knows its name, doesn't it? I've seen a life−size painting of Abishag. It's a cert.”

George dropped upon the sofa; his thoughts, too, rushed afar.

Tremendous possibilities danced a wild jig in his Mary's pretty head; trembled her voice. “Oh, Mr. Wyvern!” she appealed, “what does it mean? What does it mean—for us?”

“It's a licker,” Bill told her. “It's a fair licker.”

Mary dropped by her George's side; to his her thoughts rushed.

Presently Bill threw away his cigarette; faced George. He said slowly: “Mrs. Major must have stolen this cat, George. But how did she get it? She's been at Herons' Holt the last week.”

Mary gave a little jump. “Oh, Mr. Wyvern, she went up to town on Monday till Tuesday.”

Bill struck a hand upon the table. “That fixes it. By gum, that fixes it! I tell you what it is, George. I tell you what it is. I believe— yes, I believe she'd seen this cat before, knew it was like the Rose, and meant to have palmed it off on old Marrapit herself so as to get him to take her back. Margaret told me all about her getting the sack. I bet my life that's it. By gum, *what* a splash for the *Daily!*” And upon this fine thought the young man stood with sparkling eyes.

George timidly touched the castles he had been building: “Bill, where do I—where do Mary and I come in?”

Bill clapped his hands together. “Why, my good old buck, don't you see?−don't you realise?−you get this L500. Just do you, eh?”

“Runnygate!” George burst out with a violent jerk; clasped his Mary in an immense hug.

“Runnygate!” came thickly from his Mary, face squashed against this splendid fellow.

When they unlocked my blushing Mary suddenly paled: “Oh, but you, Mr. Wyvern—you found it really.”

“Not much,” Bill declared. “Not likely. You found it. I couldn't have the reward, anyway. I'm one of the staff.” He repeated the fine words: “One of the *staff*.”

She made to thank him. “Besides,” he interrupted her, “I'll make a lot out of it. I'm doing awfully well. The chief was awfully pleased with the way I ran that Rose of Sharon job. Of course this is twice as big a splash, because Vivian Howard's mixed up in it. Look what a boost it is for our new serial—look what a tremendous ad. it is for the paper! Directly Howard came to us the editor dropped the Rose like a hot coal; plumped for this and put me in charge. Now I've pulled it off, just think how bucked up he'll be! It's a licker, George—a licker all round.”

“Bill,” George said, “I can't speak about it. My head's whirling. I believe it's a dream.”

Indeed this George had rushed through so much in the past hours, was now suddenly come upon so much, that the excitement, as he attempted realisation, was of stunning effect. He sat white, head in hands.

“Jolly soon show you!” Bill cried. “Come to the office straight away. Bring the cat. I was to meet the chief and Vivian Howard there at twelve.”

George sprang to his feet; ruddy again of face. “Come on!” he cried. “Bill, if it isn't his Abishag, if there's any hitch, I'll—I'll—oh, Mary, don't build too highly on this, old girl!”

“Shall I come, Georgie?”

George hesitated. “Better not. Better not, if you don't mind. I couldn't bear to see your face if Vivian Howard says it isn't the cat.”

White−faced, between tears and smiles, his Mary waved from the window as George, cat under arm, turned the corner with Bill.

CHAPTER IX. Excursions In A Newspaper Office.

I.

Silent, white and stern of face, occupied with immense thoughts, the young men sat as the cab they had found outside Battersea Park station sped them towards Fleet Street.

They were upon the Embankment, rattling beneath Hungerford Bridge, when from the tangle of his plans Bill at last drew a thread; weaved it to words. “George, we mustn't tell the chief anything about your being mixed up with the other cat outrage—the Rose. It might be awkward.”

George shifted the hand that firmly held Abishag on the seat between them; squeezed that fine creature's head to him with his arm; with his handkerchief wiped his sweating palms.

“It's *going* to be awkward,” he said—“damned awkward! I see that. Oh, Bill!”

He groaned. This young man was in desperate agitation.

“Buck up,” Bill told him. “This is a cert. Safe as houses.”

“All very well for you, Bill. I seem to have been living one gigantic lie all the past week.”

“Well, you have, you know,” Bill granted. “By gum, you have! But you aren't now. You didn't steal *this* cat. You found it just as anyone else might have found it. All I tell you is: Don't say anything about the Rose. Don't open your mouth, in fact. Leave the gassing to me.”

It was upon this repeated injunction that my poor George tottered up the stairs of the *Daily* office, cat in arm, in Bill's wake.

II.

Bill rapped upon Mr. Bitt's door; poked in his head at the answering call; motioned my trembling George to wait; stepped over the threshold.

Mr. Bitt sat behind a broad table; before him, deep in an armchair, smoking a cigarette, lay Mr. Vivian Howard.

“Ah! Wyvern,” spoke Mr. Bitt. “Mr. Howard, this is Mr. Wyvern, one of my brightest young men. From to−day he takes in hand this business.”

Mr. Vivian Howard did not rise; stretched a white hand to Bill. This man had an appreciation of the position he had won. This man stood for English literature. Within a wide estimate of public opinion, and within that immense estimate of him that was his own, this man stood for literature. In a manner worthy of his proud standing this man comported himself. The talents that were his belonged to the nation, and very freely he gave them to the people. This man did not deny himself to the crowd as another might have denied himself. Of him it never could be said that he missed opportunity to let the public feed upon him. This man made such opportunities. Where excitement was, there this man, pausing between his novels, would step in. If a murder−trial had the public attention this man would write upon that trial; if interest were fixed upon a trade dispute this man would by some means draw that interest upon himself. Nothing was too small for this man. Walking the public places he did not shrink from recognition; he gladly permitted it. Not once but many times, coming upon a stranger reading one of his novels, he had announced himself; autographed the copy. This man's character was wholly in keeping with his gifts.

Yet beautifully he could preserve the dignity that was his right. Preserving it now, he gave his hand to Bill but did not move his position.

“It is a great pleasure to me to meet you, sir,” Bill told him.

“You have only lately joined the ranks of journalism, Mr. Bitt tells me,” Mr. Vivian Howard graciously replied. “It is the stepping−stone to literature. Never forget that. Never lose sight of that. I shall watch your career with the greatest interest.”

Mr. Bitt broke in a trifle impatiently: “Well, well, we must keep to business just now. Mr. Howard will kindly give us a daily interview, Wyvern, until the feuilleton starts, or until the cat is found. You'd better—”

Bill took a pace back; faced them both. “No need,” he cried in bursting words. “The cat is found!”

The cigarette dropped from Mr. Vivian Howard's lip to his waistcoat. He brushed at it violently; burnt his fingers; brushed again; swore with a ferocity that would have astonished his admirers; sprang to his feet amid a little shower of sparks and cloud of ash. “Found!” he exclaimed; jabbed a burnt finger in his mouth and thickly repeated, “Found!”

Mr. Bitt simultaneously rose. “Found?” cried Mr. Bitt. “What the—”

“I have the finder here,” Bill told them; stepped to the door.

On legs that shook my agitated George advanced.

Mr. Vivian Howard drew forth his suffering finger with a loud pop; made three hasty strides to George; took the cat. “Abishag!” he cried in ecstasy, “Abishag!”

In very gloomy tones Mr. Bitt announced that he was bust. “Well, I'm bust!” he said. “I'm bust. It *is* your cat, eh?”

Mr. Vivian Howard nodded the head he was bending over his Abishag.

Bill signalled to George a swift wink. George drew a handkerchief; wiped from his face the beaded agony.

Mr. Bitt dropped heavily into his seat. “Of course I'm very glad, Mr. Howard,” he announced stonily. “*Very* glad. At the same time—at the same *time*—” He turned upon George with a note that was almost savage. “You, sir!” he cried.

George started painfully.

“How the—How did you come to find this cat?”

George forced his pocket handkerchief into his trousers pocket; rammed it down; cleared his throat; ran a finger round the inside of his collar; cleared again; said nothing.

Bill hurried to the rescue. “Like this, sir. Let me tell you. This gentleman was at Paltley Hill, a place on the South−Western. He used to live there. He found the cat in a deserted kind of hut, took charge of it. I happened to meet him and brought him along. By Jove, sir, only published this morning and found within a few hours! It's pretty good, isn't it?”

Mr. Bitt spoke with great disgust. “Pretty *good!*” he cried bitterly. “Pretty *good!*” He had no fit words in which to express his feeling. “Kindly step in there a moment,” he addressed George.

George trembled into the adjoining room indicated; closed the door.

Mr. Bitt turned to Mr. Vivian Howard. “It will always be a great pleasure to me,” he told the great novelist, “to think that the *Daily* was the means of restoring your cat.”

“I never shall forget it,” Mr. Vivian Howard assured him. The famous author placed himself upon the couch, caressed Abishag the Shunamite upon his lap. “Never shall forget it. It was more than good of you, Mr. Bitt, to take up the matter and offer so handsome a reward. It was public−spirited.”

Mr. Bitt's deprecatory little laugh had a rueful note.

He nerved himself to step upon the delicate ground that lay between him and his purpose. This man had not known Mr. Vivian Howard sufficiently long to put to him directly that the reward was offered, and gladly agreed to by Mr. Howard, for purposes of respective self−advertisement agreeable at once to the paper and to the man who stood for English literature. He nerved himself:

“When you say public−spirited, Mr. Howard, you use the right term. I do not attempt to deny that I fully appreciated that this reward for your cat, and the interview you agreed to give us, would greatly benefit our paper. Why should I deny it? We editors must be business men first, nowadays; journalists afterwards. But I do ask you to believe me, Mr. Howard, that in offering this reward, in arousing this interest, I had in view also a matter that has been my aim since I was at College.”

Mr. Bitt's college was Rosa Glen College, 156 Farmer Road, Peckham; but he preferred the briefer designation.

“The aim,” he continued, gathering courage as he detected in Mr. Vivian Howard's face a look which seemed to show that the famous author was advancing upon the delicate ground to meet him, “the aim of attracting the people to good literature.”

Mr. Vivian Howard, as standing for that literature, took the implied compliment with a bow. “I congratulate you, Mr. Bitt.”

“Now, the *Daily* is young,” Mr. Bitt earnestly continued. “The *Daily* has yet to make its way. If your 'Amy Martin' starts in normal circumstances a week hence, it will mean that this contribution to our highest literature

will fall only to a comparatively small circle of people. But if—but if, as I had hoped, we had morning by morning attracted more and more readers by the great interest taken in your loss, 'Amy Martin' would then have introduced our best fiction to a public twice or thrice as large as our present circulation represents."

"You mean—?" the great author inquired.

"I mean," Mr. Bitt told him, "that for this reason I cannot but regret that the excitement aroused should disappear with our issue of to− morrow. I mean, Mr. Howard, that for the reason I have named I do think it is almost our *duty*—our *duty*, for the reason I have named—to conceal the cat's recovery for—er—for a day or so."

Mr. Bitt blew his nose violently to conceal his agitation. This man was now in the precise centre of the delicate ground; was in considerable fear that it might open and swallow him.

But Mr. Vivian Howard's reply made that ground of rock−like solidity.

"As you put the matter, Mr. Bitt, I must say I agree. It would be false modesty on my part to pretend I do not recognise the worth of 'Amy Martin,' and the desirability of introducing it as widely as possible. Certainly that could best have been accomplished by Abishag not having been recovered so soon. But as it is—I do not see what can be done. You do not, of course, suggest deliberate deception of the public?"

"Certainly *not!*" cried Mr. Bitt with virtuous warmth. Since this was precisely what he did suggest and most earnestly desired, he repeated his denial: "Certainly *not*! At the same time—"

"One moment," Mr. Vivian Howard interrupted. "This cat was obviously stolen by someone and placed in the hut where it was found. Very well. We prosecute. We prosecute, and I could give you every morning my views on the guilt or otherwise—"

Mr. Bitt shook his head. "I had thought of that. It won't do. It won't do, Mr. Howard. For one thing, a rigorous prosecution and sentence might create bad feeling against the paper. You have no idea how curious the public is in that way. For another, you, as the injured party, ought not to comment; and certainly I could not publish your views. The matter would be *sub judice* directly arrest was made; and I once got into very serious trouble over a *sub judice* matter—very serious trouble indeed. I shall not touch the law, Mr. Howard. It is unwise. At the same time, I think the thief should be made to suffer— be given a thorough fright. Now, if we inform the public that practically our Special Commissioner has his hand on the cat—which will be perfectly true—and is almost certain as to the identity of the thief—if we keep this up for the few days necessary for the publication of those magnificent articles of yours on 'What my Loss means to Me,' we shall be accomplishing three excellent objects. We shall be terrifying an evil−doer—we may take it for granted he reads the *Daily*; we shall be giving the public those articles which most certainly ought not to be lost to literature; and we shall be widening the sphere of influence of 'Amy Martin.'"

Mr. Vivian Howard did not hesitate. "It is impossible to override your arguments, Mr. Bitt. I think we shall be doing *right*."

Mr. Bitt concealed his immense joy. "I am convinced of it, Mr. Howard," he said. "*Convinced*. The modern editor and the man of letters of your standing have enormous responsibilities."

Impelled by the virtuous public duty they were performing, the two men silently grasped hands.

CHAPTER X. A Perfectly Splendid Chapter.

Mr. Bitt turned to Bill; indicated the door behind which my poor George was wrestling in prayer. “The only difficulty is with that chap in there. He knows the cat is found! How can we—”

“If you will leave that to me, sir,” Bill told him, “I think I can arrange it without difficulty.”

“Or danger?” added Mr. Vivian Howard, who, standing for English literature, would not lightly imperil his integrity.

“Or the least danger,” Bill affirmed. “He's a kind of friend of mine— did I mention that, sir? I'll fix it up in a minute.”

He stepped briskly to George; closed the door behind him.

George said faintly: “Say it quick, Bill. Quick.”

“You've got it, old man. Got it.”

George rose to his feet; stretched his arms aloft; wildly waved them. The tremendous shout for which he opened his mouth was stayed upon his lips by Bill's warning finger. He hurled himself on a couch; rolled in ecstasy.

Rapidly Bill outlined the proposals. Then he struck a heavy hand upon George's shoulder. “And I've got it too!” he cried in an exultant whisper. “I've got it too! I've got Margaret!”

“Margaret! However—?”

“Like this. Plain as a fiddle−stick. To−morrow, when we get out this story about practically having our hand on the thief, I shall go bang down to Marrapit with the paper and tell him I know it was Mrs. Major who took the cat. You can imagine the state that'll put 'em both in. Then—then, my boy, I shall say 'Let Margy and me carry on and fix it up forthwith, and I'll promise Mrs. Major shall never hear a word more about the matter.' He'll agree like a shot. The chief's not going to prosecute, you see; so neither Mrs. Major nor you ever will hear a word more. George, we've done it! Done it! You've got your Mary and I've got my Margy!”

With swelling bosoms, staring eyes, upon this tremendous happening the two young men clasped hands; stood heavily breathing. These men were glimpsing heaven.

When they unlocked, George said: “There's one thing, Bill. Go in and tell that precious pair they can hold over the discovery till they please and that I shall never breathe a word. But tell 'em this: I don't agree unless I have my cheque right away.”

Bill advised no stipulations.

George stood firm: “I don't care a snap, Bill. I will have it now. I've been badgered about quite enough. I want to feel safe. I'll either lose it all or have it all. No more uncertainty. Anything might happen during the week, for all I know.”

Bill took the message.

Upon immediate payment Mr. Bitt at first stuck. “He might turn back on us, or start blackmailing us. He may have stolen the cat himself for all we know.”

“All the more likely, in that case, to keep his mouth shut,” commented Mr. Vivian Howard. Despite he stood for literature, this man had strong business instincts.

Bill urged compliance. He knew this finder of the cat; would speak for him as for himself.

Mr. Bitt put a quill into his inkstand; took George's name; wrote a slip; handed it to Bill. “Take that to the cashier, Wyvern. He'll give you the cheque. Clear your friend out. Eh? No—no need for me to see him again. Of course you must get his story of how he found the cat, to use when the 'What my Loss means to Me' articles run out. Then come back and we'll fix up to−morrow's account.”

A cabman drove to St. Peter's Hospital a seemingly insane young man, who bounded into the cab with a piece of paper in his hand; who sang and rattled his heels upon the foot−board, shouted to passers−by; who paid with two half−crowns; who bounded, paper still fluttering in hand, up the steps of the Dean's entrance with a wild and tremendous whoop.

George had scarcely explained to the Dean an incoherent story of L500 won through a newspaper competition, when the Mr. Lawrence, M.R.C.S., L.R.C.P., whose practice was at Runnygate, arrived.

Informally the purchase was at once arranged; a further meeting settled. George bolted to another cab; drove to Meath Street by way of the florist near Victoria Station; took aboard an immense basket of flowers.

At the house he gathered the flowers beneath his arm; on the way upstairs shifted them to his hands; flung wide the door.

His Mary, white, a tooth on a trembling lip, her pretty hands clasped, was before him. In a great whirling shower he flung the blossoms about her; then took her in his arms.

“Runnygate, Mary! Darling old girl, Runnygate!”

He kissed his Mary.

Last Shots from the Bridge.

If you had patience for another peep from the bridge that I can build, you might catch a glimpse or so.

Bending over you might see Bill seated at the editor's table of the editor's room of a monstrously successful monthly magazine of most monstrous fiction that Mr. Bitt's directors have started; Margaret, that sentimental young woman, by her husband's side is correcting the proofs of a poem signed “Margaret Wyvern.” It is of the most exquisite melancholy.

Bending over you might see George upon one of the summer evenings when, his duties through, he is taking his Mary for a drive in the country behind that rising seaside resort Runnygate. They are plunging along in a tremendous dogcart drawn by an immense horse. George is fully occupied with his steed; Mary, peeping at constant intervals through the veil that hides the clear blue eyes and the ridiculous little turned−up nose of her baby, at every corner says: “Oh, George! Georgie, do be careful! We were on *one* wheel then, I *know* we were!” But along the level the wind riots at her pretty curls as she sits up very straight and very proud, smiling at this splendid fellow beside her.

Bending over you might see the garden of Herons' Holt, Mr. Fletcher leading from the house the fat white pony and tubby wide car which Mrs. Marrapit, formerly Mrs. Major, has prevailed upon her husband to buy. The pony has all the docile qualities of a blind sheep, but Mr. Fletcher is in great terror of it. When, while being groomed, it suddenly lifts its head, Mr. Fletcher drops his curry−comb and retires from the stall at great speed. “It's 'ard,” says Mr. Fletcher—“damn 'ard. I'm a gardener, I am; not a 'orse−breaker.”

THE END.