THE SUPER.

Arghol crosses yard to the banks of the canal : sits down.

" Arghol ! "

" I am here."

His voice raucous and disfigured with a catarrh of lies in the fetid bankrupt atmosphere of life's swamp : clear and splendid among Truth's balsamic hills, shepherding his agile thoughts.

" Arghol ! "

It was like a child's voice hunting it's mother.

A note of primitive distress edged the thick bellow. The figure rushed without running. Arghol heeled over to the left. A boot battered his right hand ribs. These were the least damaged : it was their turn.

Upper lip shot down, half covering chin, his body reached methodically. At each blow, in muscular spasm, he made the pain pass out. Rolled and jumped, crouched and flung his grovelling Enceladus weight against it, like swimmer with wave.

The boot, and heavy shadow above it, went. The self-centred and elemental shadow, with whistling noise peculiar to it, passed softly and sickly into a doorway's brown light.

The second attack, pain left by first shadow, lashing him, was worse. He lost consciousness.

THE NIGHT.

His eyes woke first, shaken by rough moonbeams. A white, crude volume of brutal light blazed over him. Immense bleak electric advertisement of God, it crushed with wild emptiness of street.

The ice field of the sky swept and crashed silently. Blowing wild organism into the hard splendid clouds, some will cast it's glare, as well, over him.

The canal ran in one direction, his blood, weakly, in the opposite.

The stars shone madly in the archaic blank wilderness of the universe, machines of prey.

Mastodons, placid in electric atmosphere, white rivers of power. They stood in eternal black sunlight.

Tigers are beautiful imperfect brutes.

Throats iron eternities, drinking heavy radiance, limbs towers of blatant light, the stars poised, immensely distant, with their metal sides, pantheistic machines.

The farther, the more violent and vivid, Nature : weakness crushed out of creation ! Hard weakness, a flea's size, pinched to death in a second, could it get so far.

He rose before this cliff of cadaverous beaming force, imprisoned in a messed socket of existence.

Will Energy some day reach Earth like violent civilisation, smashing or hardening all? In his mind a chip of distant hardness, tugged at dully like a tooth, made him ache from top to toe.

But the violences of all things had left him so far intact.

HANP.

I.

Hanp comes out of hut, coughing like a goat, rolling a cigarette. He goes to where Arghol is lying. He stirs him with his foot roughly.

Arghol strains and stretches elegantly, face over shoulder, like a woman.

"Come, you fool, and have supper." Hanp walks back to hut, leaving him.

Arghol lies, hands clasped round his knees. This new kick has put him into a childish lethargy. He gets to his feet soon, and walks to hut. He puts his hand on Hanp's shoulder, who has been watching him, and kisses him on the cheek.

Hanp shakes him off with fury and passes inside hut.

Bastard violence of his half-disciple, metis of an apache of the icy steppe, sleek citizen, and his own dumbfounding soul.

Fungi of sullen violet thoughts, investing primitive vegetation. Hot words drummed on his ear every evening : abuse : question. Groping hands strummed toppling Byzantine organ of his mind, producing monotonous black fugue.

Harsh bayadere-shepherdess of Pamir, with her Chinese beauty : living on from month to month in utmost tent with wastrel, lean as mandrake root, red and precocious : with heavy black odour of vast Manchurian garden—deserts, and the disreputable muddy gold squandered by the unknown sun of the Amur.

His mind unlocked, free to this violent hand. It was his mind's one cold flirtation, then cold love. Excelling in beauty, marked out for Hindu fate of sovereign prostitution, but clear of the world, with furious vow not to return. The deep female strain succumbed to this ragged spirt of crude manhood, masculine with blunt wilfulness and hideous stupidity of the fecund horde of men, phalic wand-like cataract incessantly poured into God. This pip of icy spray struck him on the mouth. He tasted it with new pleasure, before spitting it out : acrid.

To be spat back among men. The young men foresaw the event.

They ate their supper at the door of the hut. An hour passed in wandering spacious silence.

"Was it bad to-night?" a fierce and railing question often repeated.

Arghol lay silent, his hands a thick shell fitting back of head, his face grey vegetable cave.

" Can't you kill him, in the name of God? A man has his hands, little else. Mote and speck, the universe illimitable!" Hanp gibed. " It is true he is a speck, but all men are. To you he is immense."

They sat, two grubby shadows, unvaccinated as yet by the moon's lymph, sickened by the immense vague infections of night.

" That is absurd. I have explained to you. Here I get routine, the will of the universe manifested with directness and persistence. Figures of persecution are accidents or adventures for some. Prick the thin near heart, like a pea, and the bubble puffs out. That would not be of the faintest use in my case."

Two small black flames, wavering, as their tongues moved, drumming out thought, with low earth-draughts and hard sudden winds dropped like slapping birds from climaxes in the clouds.

No Morris-lens would have dragged them from the key of vastness. They must be severe midgets, brain specks of the vertiginous, seismic vertebrae, slowly-living lines, of landscape.

" Self, sacred act of violence, is like murder on my face and hands. The stain won't come out. It is the one piece of property all communities have agreed it is illegal to possess. The sweetest-tempered person, once he discovers you are that sort of criminal, changes any opinion of you, and is on his guard. When mankind cannot overcome a personality, it has an immemorial way out of the difficulty. It becomes it. It imitates and assimlates that Ego until it is no longer one....This is success.

Between Personality and Mankind it is always a question of dog and cat ; they are diametrically opposed species. Self is the ancient race, the rest are the new one. Self is the race that lost. But Mankind still suspects Egotistic plots, and hunts Pretenders.

My uncle is very little of a relation. It would be foolish to kill him. He is an échantillon, acid advertisement slipped in letter-box : space's store-rooms dense with frivolous originals. I am used to him, as well."

Arghol's voice had no modulations of argument. Weak now, it handled words numbly, like tired compositor. His body was quite strong again and vivacious. Words acted on it as rain on a plant. It got a stormy neat brilliance in this soft shower. One flame balanced giddily erect, while other larger one swerved and sang with speech coldly before it.

They lay in a pool of bleak brown shadow, disturbed once by a rats plunging head. It seemed to rattle along, yet slide on oiled planes. Arghol shifted his legs mechanically. It was a hutch with low loft where they slept.

Beyond the canal, brute-lands, shuttered with stoney clouds, lay in heavy angels of sand. They were squirted in by twenty ragged streams ; legions of quails hopped parasitically in the miniature cliffs.

Arghol's uncle was a wheelwright on the edge of the town.

Two hundred miles to north the Arctic circle swept. Sinister tramps, it's winds came wandering down the high road, fatigued and chill, doors shut against them.

" First of all ; lily pollen of Ideal on red badge of your predatory category. Scrape this off and you lose your appetite. Obviously.—But I don't want in any case to eat Smith, because he is tough and distasteful to me. I am too vain to do harm, too superb ever to lift a finger when harmed.

A man eats his mutton chop, forgetting it is his neighbour ; drinks every evening blood of the Christs, and gossips of glory.

Existence ; loud feeble sunset, blaring like lumpish, savage clown, alive with rigid tinsel, before a misty door : announcing events, tricks and a thousand follies, to penniless herds, their eyes red with stupidity.

To leave violently slow monotonous life is to take header into the boiling starry cold. (For with me some guilty fire of friction unspent in solitariness, will reach the stars.)

Hell of those Heavens uncovered, whirling pit, every evening ! You cling to any object, dig your nails in earth, not to drop into it."

The night plunged gleaming nervous arms down into the wood, to wrench it up by the roots. Restless and rythimical, beyond the staring red rimmed doorway, giddy and expanding in drunken walls, its heavy drastic lights shifted.

Arghol could see only ponderous arabesques of red cloud, whose lines did not stop at door's frame, but pressed on into shadows within the hut, in tyrannous continuity. As a cloud drove eastward, out of this frame, its weight passed, with spiritual menace, into the hut. A thunderous atmosphere thickened above their heads.

Arghol, paler, tossed clumsily and swiftly from side to side, as though asleep.

He got nearer the door. The clouds had room to waste themselves. The land continued in dull form, one per cent. animal, these immense bird-amoebas. Nerves made the earth pulse up against his side and reverberate. He dragged hot palms along the ground, caressing its explosive harshness.

All merely exterior attack.

His face calm seismograph of eruptions in Heaven.

Head of black, eagerly carved, herculean Venus, of iron tribe, hyper barbarous and ascetic. Lofty tents, sonorous with October rains, swarming from vast bright doll-like Asiatic lakes.

Faces following stars in blue rivers, till sea-struck, thundering engine of red water.

Pink idle brotherhood of little stars, passed over by rough cloud of sea.

Cataclysm of premature decadence.

Extermination of the resounding, sombre, summer tents in a decade, furious mass of images left : no human.

Immense production of barren muscular girl idols, wood verdigris, copper, dull paints, flowers.

Hundred idols to a man, and a race swamped in hurricane of art, falling on big narrow souls of its artists.

Head heavy and bird-like, weighted to strike, living on his body, ungainly red Atlantic wave.

" To have read all the books of the town, Arghol, and to come back here to take up this lifeagain."

Coaxing : genuine stupefaction : reproach, a trap.

Arghol once more preceded him through his soul, unbenevolent. Doors opened on noisy blankness, coming through from calm, reeling noon-loudness beyond. Garrets waking like faces. A shout down a passage to show it's depth, horizon as well. Voice coming back with suddenness of expert pugilistics.

Perpetual inspector of himself.

" I must live, like a tree, where I grow. An inch to left or right would be too much.

In the town I felt unrighteous in escaping blows, home anger, destiny of here.

Selfishness, flouting of destiny, to step so much as an inch out of the bull's eye of your birth. (When it is obviously a bull's eye !)

A visionary tree, not migratory : visions from within.

A man with headache lies in deliberate leaden inanimation. He isolates his body, floods it with phlegm, sucks numbness up to his brain.

A soul wettest dough, doughest lead: a bullet. To drop down Eternity like a plummet.

Accumulate in myself, day after day, dense concentration of pig life. Nothing spent, stored rather in strong stagnation, till rid at last of evaporation and lightness characteristic of men. So burst Death's membrane through, slog beyond, not float in appalling distances.

Energy has been fixed on me from nowhere—heavy and astonished : resigned. Or is it for remote sin ! I will use it, anyway, as prisoner his bowl or sheet for escape : not as means of idle humiliation.

One night Death left his card. I was not familiar with the name he chose : but the black edge was deep. I flung it back. A thousand awakenings of violence.

Next day I had my knife up my sleeve as my uncle came at me, ready for what you recommend. But a superstition, habit, is there, curbing him mathematically : that of not killing me. I should know an ounce of effort more.—He loads my plate, even. He must have palpable reasons for my being alive."

A superb urchin watching some centre of angry commotion in the street, his companion kept his puffed slit eyes, generously cruel, fixed on him. God and Fate, constant protagonists, one equivalent to Police, his simple sensationalism was always focussed on. But God was really his champion. He longed to see God fall on Arghol, and wipe the earth with him. He egged God on : then egged on Arghol. His soft rigid face grinned with intensity of attention, propped contemplatively on hand.

Port—prowler, serf of the capital, serving it's tongue and gait within the grasp and aroma of the white, mat, immense sea. Abstract instinct of sullen seafarer, dry-salted in slow acrid airs, aerian flood not stopped by shore, dying in dirty warmth of harbour-boulevards.

His soul like ocean-town ; leant on by two skies. Lower opaque one washes it with noisy clouds : or lies giddily flush with street crevices, wedges of black air, flooding it with red emptiness of dead light.

It sends ships between its unchanging slight rock of houses periodically, slowly to spacious centre. Nineteen big ships, like nineteen nomad souls for its amphibious sluggish body, locked there.

II.

"What is destiny? Why yours to stay here, more than to live in the town or cross to America?"

"My dear Hanp, your geography is so up-to-date!

Geography doesn't interest me. America is geography.

I've explained to you what the town is like.

Offences against the discipline of the universe are registered by a sort of conscience, prior to the kicks. Blows rain on me. Mine is not a popular post. It is my destiny right enough: an extremely unpleasant one."

"It is not the destiny of a man like you to live buried in this cursed hole."

"Our soul is wild, with primitiveness of it's own. It's wilderness is anywhere —in a shop, sailing, reading psalms: it's greatest good our destiny.

Anything I possess is drunk up here on the world's brink, by big stars, and returned me in the shape of thought heavy as a mateorite. The stone of the stars will do for my seal and emblem. I practise with it, monotonous "putting," that I may hit Death when he comes."

"Your thought is buried in yourself."

"A thought weighs less in a million brains than in one. No one is conjuror enough to prevent spilling. Rather the bastard form infects the original. Famous men are those who have exchanged themselves against a thousand idiots. When you hear a famous man has died penniless and deseased, you say, "Well served." Part of life's arrangement is that the few best become these cheap scarecrows.

The process and condition of life, without any exception, is a grotesque degradation, and "souillure" of the original solitude of the soul. There is no help for it, since each gesture and word partakes of it, and the child has already covered himself with mire.

Anything but yourself is dirt. Anybody that is. I do not feel clean enough to die, or to make it worth while killing myself."

A laugh, packed with hatred, not hoping to carry, snapped like a fiddle-cord.

"Sour grapes! That's what it's all about! And you let yourself be kicked to death here out of spite.

Why do you talk to me, I should like to know? Answer me that?"

Disrespect or mocking is followed, in spiritualistic seances, with offended silence on part of the spooks. Such silence, not discernedly offended, now followed.

The pseudo-rustic Master, cavernously, hemicycally real, but anomalous shamness on him in these circumstances, poudre de riz on face of knights sleeping effigy, lay back indifferent, his feet lying, two heavy closed books, before the disciple.

Arghol was a large open book, full of truths and insults.

He opened his jaws wide once more in egotistic self castigation.

" The doctoring is often fouler than disease.

Men have a loathsome deformity called Self; affliction got through indiscriminate rubbing against their fellows : Social excrescence.

Their being is regulated by exigencies of this affliction. Only one operation can cure it : the suicide's knife.

Or an immense snuffling or taciturn parasite, become necessary to victim, like abortive poodle, all nerves, vice and dissatisfaction.

I have smashed it against me, but it still writhes, turbulent mess.

I have shrunk it in frosty climates, but it has filtered filth inward through me, dispersed till my deepest solitude is impure.

Mire stirred up desperately, without success in subsequent hygiene."

This focussed disciples' physical repulsion : nausea of humility added. Perfect tyrannic contempt: but choking respect, curiosity; consciousness of defeat. These two extremes clashed furiously. The contempt claimed it's security and triumph : the other sentiment baffled it. His hatred of Arghol for perpetually producing this second sentiment grew. This would have been faint without physical repulsion to fascinate him, make his murderous and sick.

He was strong and insolent with consciousness stuffed in him in anonymous form of vastness of Humanity: full of rage at gigantic insolence and superiority, combined with utter uncleanness and despicableness—all back to physical parallel—of his Master.

The more Arghol made him realize his congenital fatuity and cheapness, the more a contemptible matter appeared accumulated in the image of his Master, sunken mirror. The price of this sharp vision of mastery was contamination.

Too many things inhabited together in this spirit for cleanliness or health. Is one soul too narrow an abode for genius?

To have humanity inside you—to keep a doss-house ! At least impossible to organise on such a scale.

People are right who would disperse these impure monopolies ! Let everyone get his little bit, intellectual Ballam rather than Bedlam !

III.

In sluggish but resolute progress towards the City and centre, on part of young man was to be found cause of Arghol's ascendency in first place. Arghol had returned some months only from the great city of their world.

He showed Hanp picture postcards. He described the character of each scene. Then he had begun describing more closely. At length, systematically he lived again there for his questioner, exhausted the capital, put it completely in his hands. The young man had got there without going there. But instead of satisfying him, this developed a wild desire to start off at once. Then Arghol said :—

" Wait a moment."

He whispered something in his ear.

" Is that true? "

" Aye and more."

He supplemented his description with a whole life of comment and disillusion.—The young man felt now that he had left the city. His life was being lived for him.—But he forgot this and fought for his first city. Then he began taking a pleasure in destruction.

He had got under Arghol's touch.

But when he came to look squarely at his new possession, which he had exchanged for his city, he found it wild, incredibly sad, hateful stuff.

Somehow, however, the City had settled down in Arghol. He must seek it there, and rescue it from that tyrannic abode.—He could not now start off without taking this unreal image city with him. He sat down to invest it, Arghol its walls.

IV.

Arghol had fallen. His Thébaide had been his Waterloo.

He now sat up slowly.

" Why do I speak to you? "

It's not to you but myself.—I think it's a physical matter : simply to use one's mouth.

My thoughts to walk abroad and not always be stuffed up in my head : ideas to banjo this resounding body.

You seemed such a contemptible sort of fellow that there was some hope for you. Or to be clear, there was NOTHING to hope from your vile character.

That is better than little painful somethings !

I am amazed to find that you are like me.

I talk to you for an hour and get more disgusted with myself.

I find I wanted to make a naif yapping Poodle-parasite of you.—I shall always be a prostitute.

I wanted to make you my self ; you understand ?

Every man who wants to make another HIMSELF, is seeking a companion for his detached ailment of a self.

You are an unclean little beast, crept gloomily out of my ego. You are the world, brother, with its family objections to me.

Go back to our Mother and spit in her face for me !

I wish to see you no more here ! Leave at once. Here is money. Take train at once : Berlin is the place for your pestilential little carcass. Get out ! Here ! Go ! "

Amazement had stretched the disciple's face back like a mouth, then slowly it contracted, the eyes growing smaller, chin more prominent, old and clenched like a fist.

Arghol's voice rang coldly in the hut, a bell beaten by words.

Only the words, not tune of bell, had grown harder. At last they beat virulently.

When he had finished, silence fell like guillotine between them, severing bonds.

The disciple spoke with his own voice, which he had not used for some weeks. It sounded fresh, brisk and strange to him, half live garish salt fish.

His mouth felt different.

"Is that all?"

Arghol was relieved at sound of Hanp's voice, no longer borrowed, and felt better disposed towards him. The strain of this mock life, or real life, rather, was tremendous on his underworld of energy and rebellious muscles. This cold outburst was not commensurate with it. It was twitch of loud bound nerve only.

"Bloody glib-tongued cow! You think you can treat me that way!"

Hanp sprang out of the ground, a handful of furious movements : flung himself on Arghol.

Once more the stars had come down.

Arghol used his fists.

To break vows and spoil continuity of instinctive behaviour, lose a prize that would only be a trophy tankard never drunk from, is always fine.

Arghol would have flung away his hoarding and scraping of thought as well now. But his calm, long instrument of thought, was too heavy. It weighed him down, resisted his swift anarchist effort, and made him giddy.

His fear of death, anti-manhood, words coming out of caverns of belief—synthesis, that is, of ideal life—appalled him with his own strength.

Strike his disciple as he had abused him. Suddenly give way. Incurable self taught you a heroism.

The young man brought his own disgust back to him. Full of disgust : therefore disgusting. He felt himself on him. What a cause of downfall!

V.

The great beer-coloured sky, at the fuss, leapt in fête of green gaiety.

Its immense lines bent like whalebones and sprang back with slight deaf thunder.

The sky, two clouds, their two furious shadows, fought.

The bleak misty hospital of the horizon grew pale with fluid of anger.

The trees were wiped out in a blow.
The hut became a new boat inebriated with electric milky human passion, poured in.

It shrank and struck them ; struck, in its course, in a stirred up unmixed world, by tree, or house-side grown wave.

First they hit each other, both with blows about equal in force—on face and head.

Soul perched like aviator in basin of skull, more alert and smaller than on any other occasion. Mask stoic with energy : thought cleaned off slick—pure and clean with action. Bodies grown brain, black octopi.

Flushes on silk epiderm and fierce card-play of fists between : emptying of " hand " on soft flesh-table.

Arms of grey windmills, grinding anger on stone of the new heart.

Messages from one to another, dropped down anywhere when nobody is looking, reaching brain by telegraph : most desolating and alarming messages possible.

The attacker rushed in drunk with blows. They rolled, swift jagged rut, into one corner of shed : large insect scuttling roughly to hiding.

Stopped astonished.

Fisticuffs again : then rolled kicking air and each other, springs broken, torn from engine.

Hanp's punch wore itself out, soon, on herculean clouds, at mad rudder of boat on Arghol.

Then like a punch-ball, something vague and swift struck him on face, exhausted and white.

Arghol did not hit hard. Like something inanimate, only striking as rebound and as attacked.

He became soft, blunt paw of Nature, taken back to her bosom, mechanically ; slowly and idly winning.

He became part of responsive landscape : his friend's active punch key of the commotion.

Hanp fell somewhere in the shadow : there lay.

Arghol stood rigid.

As the nervous geometry of the world in sight relaxed, and went on with it's perpetual mystic invention, he threw himself down where he had been lying before.

A strong flood of thought passed up to his fatigued head, and at once dazed him. Not his body only, but being was out of training for action : puffed and exhilarated. Thoughts fell on it like punches.

His mind, baying mastiff, he flung off.

In steep struggle he rolled into sleep.

Two clear thoughts had intervened between fight and sleep.

Now a dream began valuing, with it's tentative symbols, preceding events.

A black jacket and shirt hung on nails across window : a gas jet turned low to keep room warm, through the night, sallow chill illumination : dirty pillows, black and thin in middle, worn down by rough head, but congested at each end.

Bed-clothes crawling over bed never-made, like stagant waves and eddies to be crept beneath.—Picture above pillow of Rosa Bonheur horses (trampling up wall like well fed toffyish insects. Books piled on table and chair, open at some page.

Two texts in Finnish. Pipes half smoked, collars : past days not effaced beneath perpetual tidyness, but scraps and souvenirs of their accidents lying in heaps.

His room in the city, nine feet by six, grave big enough for the six corpses that is each living man.

Appalling tabernacle of Self and Unbelief.

He was furious with this room, tore down jacket and shirt, and threw the window open.

The air made him giddy.

He began putting things straight.

The third book, stalely open, which he took up to shut, was the " Einige und Sein Eigenkeit."

Stirnir.

One of seven arrows in his martyr mind.

Poof ! he flung it out of the window.

A few minutes, and there was a knock at his door. It was a young man he had known in the town, but now saw for the first time, seemingly. He had come to bring him the book, fallen into the roadway.

" I thought I told you to go ! " he said.

The young man had changed into his present disciple.

Obliquely, though he appeared now to be addressing Stirnir.

" I thought I told you to go ! "

His visitor changed a third time.

A middle aged man, red cropped head and dark eyes, self-possessed, loose, free, student—sailor, fingering the book : coming to a decision. Stirnir as he had imagined him.

" Get out, I say. Here is money."

Was the money for the book?

The man flung it at his head ; its cover slapped him sharply.

" Glib tongued cow! Take that! "

A scrap ensued, physical experiences of recent fight recurring, ending in eviction of this visitor, and slamming of door.

" These books are all parasites. Poodles of the mind, Chows and King Charles ; eternal prostitute.

The mind, perverse and gorgeous.

All this Art life, posterity and the rest, is wrong. Begin with these."

He tore up his books.

A pile by door ready to sweep out.

He left the room, and went round to Café to find his friends.

" All companions of parasite Self. No single one a brother.

My dealings with these men is with their parasite composite selves, not with Them."

The night had come on suddenly. Stars like clear rain soaked chillily into him.

No one was in the street.

The sickly houses oozed sad human electricity.

He had wished to clean up, spiritually, his room, obliterate or turn into deliberate refuse, accumulations of Self.

Now a similar purging must be undertaken among his companions preparatory to leaving the city.

But he never reached the Café.

His dream changed ; he was walking down the street in his native town, where he now was, and where he knew no one but his school-mates, workmen, clerks in export of hemp, grain and wood.

Ahead of him he saw one of the friends of his years of study in Capital.

He did not question how he had got there, but caught him up. Although brusquely pitched elsewhere, he went on with his plan.

" Sir, I wish to know you! "

Provisional smile on face of friend, puzzled.

" Hallo, Arghol, you seem upset."

" I wish to make your acquaintance."

" But, my dear Arghol, what's the matter with you?

We already are very well acquainted."

" I am not Arghol.

" No ? "

The good-natured smug certitude offended him.

This man would never see anyone but Arghol he knew.—Yet he on his side saw a man, directly beneath his friend, imprisoned, with intolerable need of recognition.

Arghol, that the baffling requirements of society had made, impudent parasite of his solitude, had foregathered too long with men, and borne his name too variously, to be superseded.

He was not sure, if they had been separated surgically, in which self life would have gone out and in which remained.

" This man has been masquerading as me."

He repudiated Arghol, nevertheless.

If eyes of his friends-up-till-then could not be opened, he would sweep them, along with Arghol, into rubbish heap.

Arghol was under a dishonouring pact with all of them.

He repudiated it and him.

" So I am Arghol."

" Of course. But if you don't want ——— "

" That is a lie. Your foolish grin proves you are lying. Good day."

Walking on, he knew his friend was himself. He had divested himself of something.

The other steps followed, timidly and deliberately : odious invitation.

The sound of the footsteps gradually sent him to sleep.

Next, a Café ; he, alone, writing at table.

He became slowly aware of his friends seated at other end of room, watching him, as it had actually happened before his return to his uncles house. There he was behaving as a complete stranger with a set of men he had been on good terms with two days before.

" He's gone mad. Leave him alone," they advised each other.

As an idiot, too, he had come home ; dropped, idle and sullen, on his relative's shoulders.

VI.

Suddenly, through confused struggles and vague successions of scenes, a new state of mind asserted itself.

A riddle had been solved.

What could this be?

He was Arghol once more.

Was that a key to something? He was simply Arghol.

"I am Arghol."

He repeated his name—like sinister word invented to launch a new Soap, in gigantic advertisement—toilet-necessity, he, to scrub the soul.

He had ventured in his solitude and failed. Arghol he had imagined left in the city.—Suddenly he had discovered Arghol who had followed him, in Hanp. Always a deux!

Flung back to extremity of hut, Hanp lay for some time recovering. Then he thought. Chattel for rest of mankind, Arghol had brutalised him.

Both eyes were swollen pulp.

Shut in: thought for him hardly possible so cut off from visible world.

Sullen indignation at Arghol ACTING, he who had not the right to act. Violence in him was indecent; again question of taste.

How loathsome heavy body, so long quiet, flinging itself about: face strained with intimate expression of act of love.

Firm grip still on him; outrage.

"Pudeur," in races accustomed to restraint, is the most violent emotion, in all its developments. Devil redicule, heroism of vice, ideal, god of taste. Why has it not been taken for root of great Northern tragedy?

Arghols unweildly sensitiveness, physical and mental, made him a monster in his own eyes, among other things. Such illusion, imparted with bullet-like directness to a companion, falling on suitable soil, produced similar conviction.

This humility and perverse aseticism opposed to vigorous animal glorification of self.

He gave men one image with one hand, and at same time a second, its antidote with the other.

He watched results a little puzzled.

The conflict never ended.

Shyness and brutality, chief ingredients of their drama, fought side by side.

Hanp had been " ordered off," knocked about. Now he was going. Why? Because he had been sent off like a belonging.

Arghol had dragged him down : had preached a certain life, and now insolently set an example of the opposite.

Played with, debauched by a mind that could not leave passion in another alone.

Where should he go? Home. Good natured drunken mother, recriminating and savage at night.

Hanp had almost felt she had no right to be violent and resentful, being weak when sober. He caught a resemblance to present experiences in tipsy life stretching to babyhood.

He saw in her face a look of Arghol.

How disgusting she was, his own flesh. Ah ! That was the sensation ! Arghol, similarly disgusted through this family feeling, his own flesh : though he was not any relation.

Berlin and nearer city was full of Arghol. He was comfortable where he was.

Arghol had lived for him, worked : impaired his will. Even wheel-making had grown difficult, whereas Arghol acquitted himself of duties of trade quite easily.

WHOSE energy did he use?

Just now the blows had leapt in his muscles towards Arghol, but were sickened and did not seem hard. Would he never be able again to hit? Feel himself hard and distinct on somebody else ?

That mass, muck, in the corner, that he hated : was it hoarded energy, stolen or grabbed, which he could only partially use, stagnating ?

Arghol was brittle, repulsive and formidable through this sentiment.

Had this passivity been holy, with charm of a Saint's ?

Arghol was glutted with others, in coma of energy.

He had just been feeding on him—Hanp !

He REFUSED to act, almost avowedly to infuriate : prurient contempt.

His physical strength was obnoxious : muscles affecting as flabby fat would in another.

Energetic through self indulgence.

Thick sickly puddle of humanity, lying there by door.

Death, taciturn refrain of his being.

Preparation for Death.

Tip him over into cauldron in which he persistently gazed : see what happened !

This sleepy desire leapt on to young man's mind, after a hundred other thoughts—clown in the circus, springing on horses back, when the elegant riders have hopped, with obsequious dignity down gangway.

VII.

Bluebottle, at first unnoticed, hurtling about, a snore rose quietly on the air.

Drawn out, clumsy, self-centred ! It pressed inflexibly on Hanps nerve of hatred, sending hysteria gyrating in top of diaphragm, flooding neck.

It beckoned, filthy, ogling finger.

The first organ note abated. A second at once was set up : stronger, startling, full of loathsome unconsciousness.

It purred a little now, quick and labial. Then virile and strident again.

It rose and fell up centre of listener's body, and along swollen nerves, peachy, clotted tide, gurgling back in slimy shallows. Snoring of a malodorous, bloody, sink, emptying its water.

More acutely, it plunged into his soul with bestial regularity, intolerable besmirching.

Aching with disgust and fury, he lay dully, head against ground. At each fresh offence the veins puffed faintly in his temples.

All this sonority of the voice that subdued him sometimes : suddenly turned bestial in answer to his vision

" How can I stand it ! How can I stand it ! "

His whole being was laid bare : battened on by this noise. His strength was drawn raspingly out of him. In a minute he would be a flabby yelling wreck.

Like a sleek shadow passing down his face, the rigour of his discomfort changed, sly volte-face of Nature.

Glee settled thickly on him.

The snore crowed with increased loudness, glad, seemingly, with him ; laughing

that he should have at last learnt to appreciate it. A rare proper world if you understand it !

He got up, held by this foul sound of sleep, in dream of action. Rapt beyond all reflection, he would, martyr, relieve the world of this sound.

Cut out this noise like a cancer.

He swayed and groaned a little, peeping through patches of tumified flesh, boozer collecting his senses ; fumbled in pocket.

His knife was not there.

He stood still wiping blood off his face.

Then he stepped across shed to where fight had occurred.

The snore grew again : its sonorous recoveries had amazing and startling strength. Every time it rose he gasped, pressing back a clap of laughter.

With his eyes, it was like looking through goggles.

He peered round carefully, and found knife and two coppers where they had slipped out of his pocket a foot away from Arghol.

He opened the knife, and an ocean of movements poured into his body. He stretched and strained like a toy wound up.

He took deep breaths : his eyes almost closed. He opened one roughly with two fingers, the knife held stiffly at arms length.

He could hardly help plunging it in himself, the nearest flesh to him.

He now saw Arghol clearly : knelt down beside him.

A long stout snore drove his hand back. But the next instant the hand rushed in, and the knife sliced heavily the impious meat. The blood burst out after the knife.

Arghol rose as though on a spring, his eyes glaring down on Hanp, and with an action of the head, as though he were about to sneeze. Hanp shrank back, on his haunches. He over-balanced, and fell on his back.

He scrambled up, and Arghol lay now in the position in which he had been sleeping.

There was something incredible in the dead figure, the blood sinking down, a moist shaft, into the ground. Hanp felt friendly towards it.

There was only flesh there, and all our flesh is the same. Something distant, terrible and eccentric, bathing in that milky snore, had been struck and banished from matter.

Hanp wiped his hands on a rag, and rubbed at his clothes for a few minutes, then went out of the hut.

The night was suddenly absurdly peaceful, trying richly to please him with gracious movements of trees, and gay precessions of arctic clouds.

Relief of grateful universe.

A rapid despair settled down on Hanp, a galloping blackness of mood. He moved quickly to outstrip it, perhaps.

Near the gate of the yard he found an idle figure. It was his master. He ground his teeth almost in this man's face, with an agressive and furious movement towards him. The face looked shy and pleased, but civil, like a mysterious domestic.

Hanp walked slowly along the canal to a low stone bridge.

His face was wet with tears, his heart beating weakly, a boat slowed down.

A sickly flood of moonlight beat miserably on him, cutting empty shadow he could hardly drag along.

He sprang from the bridge clumsily, too unhappy for instinctive science, and sank like lead, his heart a sagging weight of stagnant hatred.

THE SADDEST STORY

BY

FORD MADDOX HEUFFER.

Beati Immaculati.

I.

We had known the Ashburnhams for nine seasons, of the town of Nauheim, with an extreme intimacy—or rather, with an acquaintance—ship as loose and easy, and yet as close as a good glove's with your hand. My wife and I knew Captain and Mrs. Ashburnham as well as it was possible to know anybody, and yet, in another sense, we knew nothing at all about them. This is, I believe, a state of things only possible with English people, of whom till to-day, when I sit down to puzzle out what I know of this sad affair, I knew nothing whatever. Six months ago I had never been to England and, certainly, I had never sounded the depths of an English heart. I had known the shallows.

I don't mean to say that we were not acquainted with many English people. Living, as we perforce lived, in Europe; and being, as we perforce were, leisured Americans, which is as much as to say that were un-American—we were thrown very much into the society of the nicer English.

Paris, you see, was our home. Somewhere between Nice and Bordighera provided yearly winter quarters for us, and Nauheim always received us from July to September. You will gather from this statement that one of us had, as the saying is, a "heart"; and, from the statement that my wife is dead, that she, poor thing, was the sufferer.

Captain Ashburnham also had a heart. But whereas a yearly month or so at Nauheim tuned him up to exactly the right pitch for the rest of the twelve-month, the two months or so were only just enough to keep poor Florence alive from year to year. The reason for his heart was approximately polo, or too much hard sportsmanship in his youth. The reason for poor Florence's broken years may have been in the first instance congenital, but the immediate occasion was a storm at sea upon our first crossing to Europe, and the immediate reasons for our imprisonment in that continent were doctors' orders. They said that even the short Channel crossing might well kill the poor thing.

When we all first met, Captain Ashburnham, home on sick leave from India, to which he was never to return, was thirty-six and poor Florence thirty. Thus to-day, Florence would have been thirty-nine and Captain Ashburnham forty-two; whereas I am forty-five and Leonora thirty-seven. You will perceive therefore that our friendship has been a young middleaged affair, more particularly since we were all of us of quiet dispositions, the Ashburnhams being more particularly what in England it is the custom to call quite good people.

They were descended, as you will probably expect, from the Ashburnham who accompanied Charles I. to the scaffold, and, as you must also expect with this class of English people, you would never have noticed it. Mrs. Ashburnham was a Powys; Florence was a Hurlbirl of Stamford, Connecticut, where, as you know, they are more old-fashioned than ever the inhabitants of Cranford, England, could have been. I myself am a Lowell, of Philadelphia, Pa., where, it is historically true, there are more old English families than you would find in any six English counties taken together. I carry about with me indeed—as if it were the only thing that invisibly anchored me to any spot upon the globe—the title deeds of my farm which once covered the blocks between Chestnut and Walnut Streets and Sixteen to Twenty-sixth. These title deeds are upon wampum, the grant of an Indian chief to the first Dowell, who left Farnham in Surrey in company with William Penn. Florence's people as is often the case with the inhabitants of Connecticut, came from the neighbourhood of Fordingbridge, where the Ashburn ham's place is. From there, at this moment, I am actually writing.

You may well ask why I write. And yet my reasons are quite many. For it is not unusual in human beings who have witnessed the sack of a city or the falling to pieces of a people, to desire to set down what they have witnessed for the benefit of unknown heirs or of generations infinitely

remote; or, if you please just to get the sight out of their heads.

Someone has said that the death of a mouse from cancer is the whole sack of Rome by the Goths, and I swear to you that the breaking-up of our little four-square coteric was such another unthinkable event. Supposing that you should come upon us, all four sitting together at one of the little tables in front of the club house, let us say at Homburg, taking tea of an afternoon and watching the minature golf, you would have said, that as human affairs go we were an extraordinarily safe castle. We were, if you will, one of those things that seem the proudest and the safest of all the beautiful and safe things that God has permitted the mind of men to frame. Where better could one take refuge? Where better?

Permanance? Stability! I can't believe it's gone. I can't believe that that long tranquil life, which was just stepping a minuet, vanished in four crushing days at the end of nine years and six weeks. Upon my word, yes, our intimacy was like a minuet, simply because on every possible occasion and in every possible circumstance we knew where to go, which table we unanimously should choose and we could rise and go, all four together, without a signal from any one of us, always to the music of the Kur orchestra, always in the temperate sunshine, or if it rained, in discreet shelters. No indeed, it can't be gone. You can't kill a minuet de la cour. You may shut up the music-book; close the harpsichord; in the cupboard and presses the rats may destroy the white satin favours.

The mob may sack Versailles; the Trianon may fall, but surely the minuet—the minuet itself is dancing itself away into the furthest stars, even as our minuet of the Hessian bathing-places must be stepping itself still. Isn't there any heaven where old beautiful dances, old beautiful intimacies, prolong themselves? Isn't there any Nirvana pervaded by the faint thrilling of instruments that have fallen into the dust of wormwood, but that yet had frail, remulous, and everlasing souls?

No, by God it is false! It wasn't a minuet that we stepped; it was a prison—a prison full of screaming hysterics, tied down so that they might not outsound the rolling of our carriage-wheels as we went along the shaded avenues of the Taunus Wald.

And yet, I swear by the sacred name of my creator that it was true. It was true sunshine; the true music; the true plash of the fountains from the mouth of stone dolphins. For, if for me we were four people with the same tastes, with the same desires acting—or no not acting—sitting here and there unanimously, isn't that the truth? If for nine years I have possessed a goodly apple that is rotten at the core, and discover its rottenness only in nine years and six months less four days, isn't it true to say that for nine years I possessed a goodly apple?

So it may well be with Edward Ashburnham, with Leonora, his wife, and with poor dear Florence. And, if you come to think of it, isn't it a little odd that the physical rotteness of at least two pillars of our four-square house never presented itself to my mind as a menace to its security? It doesn't so present itself now though the two of them are actually dead. I don't know. . . .

I know nothing—nothing in the world—of the hearts of men. I only know that I am alone—horribly alone. No hearthstones will ever again witness, for me, friendly intercourse. No smoking-room will ever be other than peopled with incalculable simulacra amidst smoke-wreathes. Yet, in the name of God, what should I know if I don't know the life of the hearth and of the smoking-room, since my whole life has been passed in those places? The warm hearthside! —Well, there was Florence: I believe that for the twelve years her life lasted after the storm that irretrievably weakened her heart—I don't believe that for one minute she was out of my sight, except when she was safely tucked up in bed and I should be downstairs, talking to some good fellow or other in some lounge or smoking-room, or taking my final turn with a cigar before going to bed. I don't, you understand, blame Florence. But how can she have known what she knew all the time? How could she have got to know it? To know it so fully. Heavens! There doesn't seem to have been the actual time. It must have been when I was taking my baths, and my Sweedish exercises, being manicured.

Leading the life I did, of the sedulous, strained nurse, I had to do something to keep myself fit. It must have been then! Yet even that can't have been enough time to get the tremendously long conversations full of worldly wisdom that Leonora has reported to me since their deaths. And is it possible to imagine that during our prescribed walks in Nauheim and the neighbourhood she found time to carry on the protracted negociations which she did carry on between Edward Ashburnham and his wife? And isn't it incredible that during all that time Edward and Leonora never spoke a word to each other in private. What is one to think of humanity?

For I swear to you that they were the model couple. He was as devoted as it was possible to be without appearing fatuous. So well set up, with such honest blue eyes, such a touch of stupidity, such a warm good-heartedness! And she—so tall, so splendid in the saddle, so fair! Yes, Leonora was extraordinarily fair, and so extraordinarily the real thing that she seemed too good to be true. You don't, I mean, as a rule, get it all so superlatively together. To be the county family, to look the county family, to be so appropriately and perfectly wealthy; to be so perfect in manner—even just to the saving touch of insolence that seems

Head. **Frederick Etchells.**

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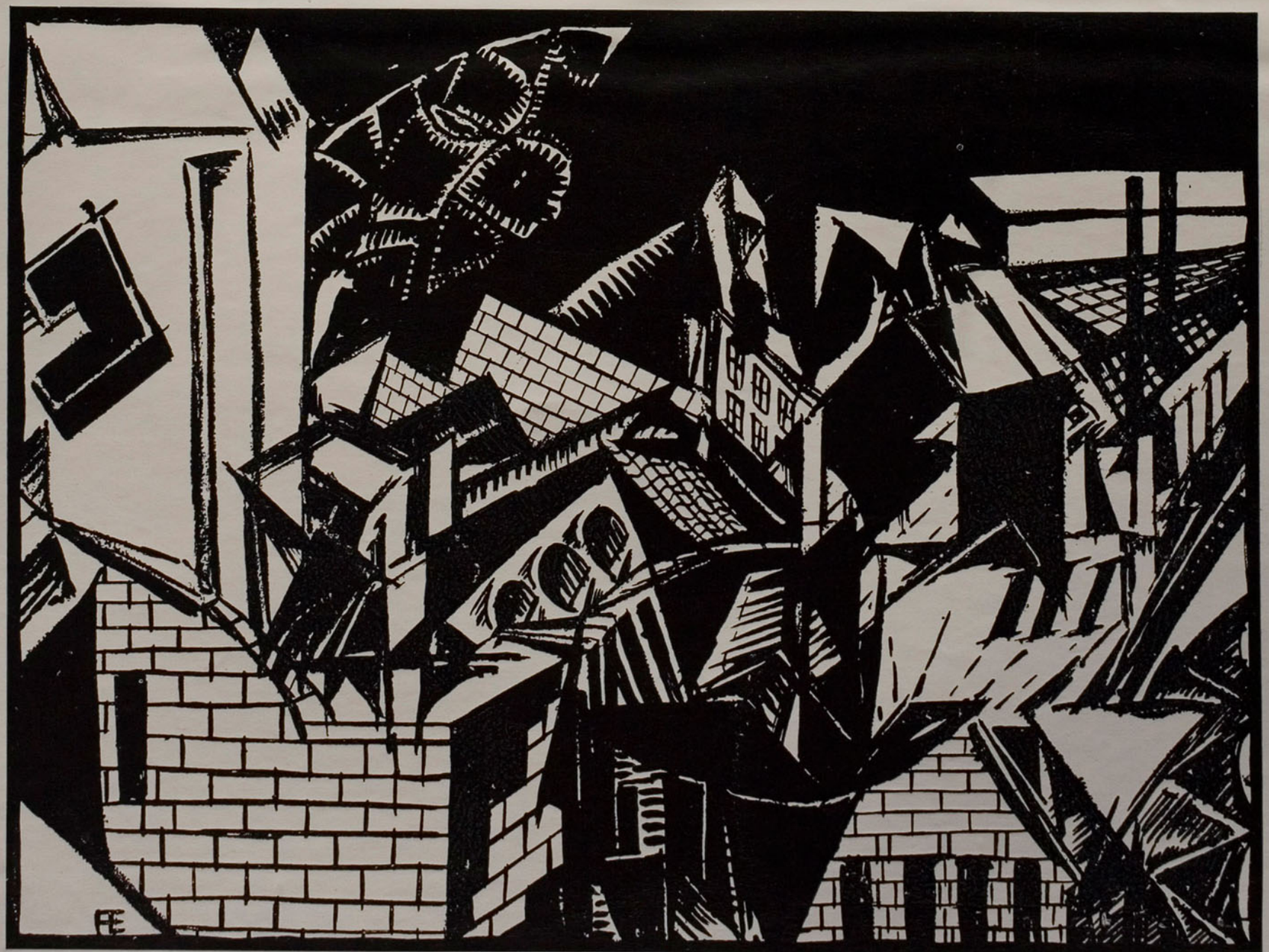
Patchopolis. Frederick Etchells.



Dieppe

Frederick Etchells.

to be necessary. To have all that and to be all that! No, it was too good to be true. And yet, only this afternoon, talking over the whole matter she said to me:—"Once I tried to have a lover but I was so sick at the heart, so utterly worn out that I had to send him away."

That struck me as the most amazing thing I had ever heard. She said "I was actually in a man's arms. Such a nice chap! Such a dear fellow! And I was saying to myself, fiercely, hissing it between my teeth as they say in novels—and really clenching them together: I was saying to myself; 'Now I'm in for it, and I'll really have a good time for once in my life; for once in my life!' It was in the dark, in a carriage, coming back from a hunt ball. Eleven miles we had to drive! And then suddenly the bitterness of the endless poverty, of the endless acting—it fell on me like a blight, it spoilt everything. Yes, I had to realise that I had been spoilt even for the good time when it came. And I burst out crying, and I cried and I cried for the whole eleven miles. Just imagine ME crying! And just imagine me making a fool of the poor dear chap like that. It certainly wasn't playing the game, was it now?"

I don't know; I don't know; was that last remark of hers the remark of a harlot, or is it what every decent woman, county family or not county family, thinks at the bottom of her heart? Or thinks all the time for the matter of that? Who knows?

Yet, if one doesn't know that at this hour and day, at this pitch of civilisation to which we have attained, after all the preachings of all the moralists, and all the teachings of all the mothers to all the daughters in saeculum saeculorum . . . but perhaps that is what all mothers teach all daughters, not with lips, but with the eyes, or with heart whispering to heart. And, if one doesn't know as much as that about the first thing in the world, what does one know and why is one here?

I asked Mrs. Ashburnham whether she had told Florence that and what Florence had said, and she answered:—"Florence didn't offer any comment at all. What could she say? There wasn't anything to be said. With the grinding poverty we had to put up with to keep up appearances, and the way the poverty came about—YOU know what I mean—any woman would have been justified in taking a lover and presents, too. Florence once said about a very similar position—she was a little too well-bred, too American, to talk about mine—that it was a case of perfectly open riding, and the woman could just act on the spur of the moment. She said it in American, of course, but that was the sense of it. I think her actual words were:—"That it was up to her to take it or leave it . . ."

I don't want you to think that I am writing Teddy Ashburnham down a brute. I don't believe he was. God knows, perhaps all men are like that. For as I've said, what do I know even of the smoking-room? Fellows come in and tell the most extraordinarily gross stories—so gross that they will positively give you a pain. And yet they'd be offended if you suggested that they weren't the sort of person you would trust you wife alone with. And very likely they'd be quite properly offended—that is, if you can trust anybody alone with anybody. But that sort of fellow obviously takes more delight in listening to or in telling gross stories—more delight than in anything else in the world.

They'll hunt languidly and dress languidly and dine languidly, and work without enthusiasm, and find it a bore to carry on three minutes conversation about anything whatever, and yet, when the other sort of conversation begins they'll laugh, and wake up and throw themselves about in their chairs. Then, if they so delight in the narration, how is it possible that they can be offended—and properly offended at the suggestion that they might make attempts upon your wife's honour? Or again: Edward Ashburnham was the cleanest looking sort of chap; an excellent magistrate, a first rate soldier, one of the best landlords, so they said in Hampshire, England. To the poor and to hopeless drunkards, as I myself have witnessed, he was like a painstaking guardian. And he never told a story that couldn't have gone into the columns of the "Field," more than once or twice in all the nine years of my knowing him. He didn't even like hearing them, he would fidget and get up and go out to buy a cigar or something of that sort. You would have said that he was just exactly the sort of chap that you could have trusted your wife with. And I trusted mine, and it was madness.

And yet again you have me. If poor Edward was dangerous because of the chastity of his expressions—and they say that that is always the hall-mark of a libertine—what about myself? For I solemnly avow that not only have I never so much as hinted at an impropriety in my conversation in the whole course of my life, and more than that, I will vouch for the cleanness of my thoughts and the absolute chastity of my life.

At what then does it all work out? Is the whole thing a folly and a mockery? Am I no better than a eunuch, or is the proper man—the man with the right to existence—a raging stallion forever, neighing after his neighbour's womenkind?

I don't know. And there is nothing to guide us. And if everything is so nebulous about a matter so elementary as as the morals of sex, what is there to guide us in the more subtle morality of all other personal contacts, associations and activities? Or are we meant to act on impulse alone? It is all a darkness.

II.

I don't know how it is best to put this thing down—whether it would be better to try and tell the story from the

beginning, as if it were a story, or whether to tell it from this distance of time, as it reached me from he lips of Leonora, or from those of Edward himself.

So I shall just imagine myself for a fortnight or so at one side of the fireplace of a country cottage, with a sympathetic soul opposite me. And I shall go on talking, in a low voice while the sea sounds in the distance, and overhead the great black flood of wind polishes the bright stars. From time to time we shall get up and go to the door and look out at the bright moon and say:—"Why it is nearly as bright as in Provence!" And then we shall come back to the fireside, with just the touch of a sigh because we are not in that Provence where even the saddest stories are gay.

Consider the lamentable history of Peire Vidal. Two years ago Florence and I motored from Biarritz to Las Tours, which is in the Black Mountains. In the middle of a tortuous valley there rises up a pinnacle, and on the pinnacle are four castles—Las Tours, the Towers. And the immense mistral blew down that valley which was the way from France into Provence so that the silver grey olive leaves appeared like hair flying in the wind, and the tufts of rosemary crept into the iron rocks that they might not be torn up by the roots.

It was, of course, poor dear Florence who wanted to go to Las Tours. You are to imagine that, however, much her bright personality came from Stamford Connecticut, she was yet a graduate of Poughkeepsie. I never could imagine how she did it—the queer, chattery person that she was. With the faraway look in her eyes—which wasn't, however, in the least romantic—I mean that she didn't look as if she were seeing poetic dreams, or looking through you, for she hardly ever did look at you!—holding up one hand as if she wished to silence any objection—or any comment for the matter of that—she would talk. She would talk about William the Silent, about Gustave the Loquacious, about Paris frocks, about how the poor dressed in 1337, about Fantin Latour, about the Paris-Lyons-Mediterranee train-de-luxe, about whether it would be worth while to get off at Tarascon and go across the windswept suspension-bridge, over the Rhone, to take another look at Beaucaire.

We never did take another look at Beaucaire, of course—beautiful Beaucaire with the high, triangular white tower, that looked as thin as a needle and as tall as the Flatiron between Fifth and Broadway—Beaucaire with the grey walls on the top of the pinnacle surrounding an acre and a half of blue irises, beneath the tallness of the stone pines. What a beautiful thing the stone pine is . . .

No we never did go back anywhere. Not to Heidleberg, not to Hamblin, not to Verona, not to Mount Magnus—not so much as to Carassone itself. We talked of it, of course, but I guess Florence got all she wanted out of one look at a place. She had the seeing eye.

I haven't, unfortunately, so that the world is full of places to which I want to return—towns with the white sun upon them; stone pines against the blinking blue of the sky; corners of gables, all carved and painted with stags and scarlet flowers, and crowstepped gables with the little saint at the top; and grey and pink pallazzi and walled towns a mile or so back from the sea, on the Mediterranean, between Leghorn and Naples. Not one of them did we see more than once, so that the whole world for me is like spots of colour in an immense canvas. Perhaps if it weren't so I should have something to catch hold of now.

Is all this digession or isn't it digression? Again I don't know. You, the listener, sit opposite me. But you are so silent. You don't tell me anything. I am at any rate trying to get you to see what sort of life it was I led with Florence, and what Florence was like.

Well, she was bright; and she danced. She seemed to dance over the floors of castles and over seas, and over the salons of modistes, and over the plages of the Riviera—like a gay tremulous beam, reflected from water upon a ceiling. And my function in life was to keep that bright thing in existence. And it was almost as difficult as trying to catch with your hand that dancing reflection, and the task lasted for years.

Florence's aunts used to say that I must be the lazest man in Philadelphia. They had never been to Philadelphia and they had the New England conscience. You see, the first thing they said to me when I called in on Florence in the little ancient, colonial, wooden house beneath the high thin-leaved elms—the first question they asked me was, not how I did, but what did I do. And I did nothing. I suppose I ought to have done something, but I didn't see any call to do it. Why does one do things? I just drifted in and wanted Florence. First I had drifted in on Florence at a Browning tea, or something of the sort in Fourteenth Street, which was then still residential. I don't know why I had gone to New York; I don't know why I had gone to the tea. I don't see why Florence should have gone to that sort of spelling bee. It wasn't the place at which, even then, you expected to find a Poughkeepsie graduate. I guess Florence wanted to raise the culture of the Stuyesant crowd, and did it as she might have gone in slumming. Intellectual slumming, that was what it was. She always wanted to leave the world a little more elevated than she found it. Poor dear thing, I have heard her lecture Teddy Ashburnham by the hour on the difference between a Franz Hals and a Wouvermans, and why the Pre-Mycenaie statues were cubical with knobs on the top. I wonder what he made of it? Perhaps he was thankful.

I know I was. For do you understand my whole attentions, my whole endeavours were to keep poor dear Florence on to the topics like the finds at Gnossos and the mental

spirituality of Walter Pater. I had to keep her at it you understand or she might die. For I was solemnly informed that if she became excited over anything, or if her emotions were really stirred, her little heart might cease to beat. For twelve years I had to watch every word that any person uttered in any conversation, and I had to head it off what the English call "things"—off, love, poverty, crime, religion, and the rest of it. Yes, the first doctor that we had when she was carried off the ship at Havre assured me that this must be done. Good God, are all these fellows monstrous idiots, or is there a free-masonry between all of them from end to end of the earth? . . . That is what makes me think of that fellow Peire Vidal.

Because, of course, his story is culture, and I had to head her towards culture, and at the same time it's so funny and she hadn't got to laugh, and it's so full of love and she wasn't to think of love. Do you know the story? Las Tours of the Four Castles had for chatelaine Blanche Somebody-or-other who was called as a term of commendation, La Louve—the She-Wolf. And Peire Vidal, the Troubadour, paid his court to La Louve. And she wouldn't have anything to do with him. So, out of compliment to her—the things people do when they're in love!—he dressed himself up in wolf-skins and went up into the Black Mountains. And the shepherds of the Montagne Noire and their dogs mistook him for a wolf, and he was torn with the fangs and beaten with clubs. So they carried him back to Las Tours and La Louve wasn't at all impressed. They polished him up, and her husband remonstrated seriously with her. Vidal was, you see, a great poet, and it was not proper to treat a great poet with indifferenece.

So Peire Vidal declared himself Emperor of Jerusalem or somewhere, and the husband had to kneel down and kiss his feet though La Louve wouldn't. And Peire set sail in a rowing boat with four companions to redeem the Holy Sepulchre. And they struck on a rock somewhere, and, at great expense, the husband had to fit out an expedition to fetch him back. And Peire Vidal fell all over the lady's bed, while the husband, who was a most ferocious warrior, remonstrated some more about the courtesy that is due to great poets. But I suppose La Louve was the more ferocious of the two. Anyhow that is all that came of it. Isn't that a story?

You haven't an idea of the queer old fashionedness of Florence's aunts—the Misses Hurlbird, nor yet of her uncle. An extraordinarily lovable man, that Uncle John. Thin, gentle, and with a "heart" that made his life very much what Florence's afterwards became.

He didn't reside at Stamford; his home was in Waterbury, where the watches come from. He had a factory there which, in our queer American way, would change its functions almost from year to year. For nine months or so it would manufacture buttons out of bone. Then it would suddenly produce brass buttons for coachman's liveries. Then it would take a turn at embossed tin lids for candy boxes. The fact is that the poor old gentleman, with his weak and fluttering heart didn't want his factory to manufacture anything at all. He wanted to retire. And he did retire when he was seventy. But he was so worried at having all the street boys in the town point after him and exclaim: "There goes the laziest man in Waterbury!" that he tried taking a tour round the world. And Florence and a young man called Jimmy went with him. It appears from what Florence told me that Jimmy's function with Mr. Hurlbird was to avoid exciting topics for him. He had to keep him, for instance, out of political discussions. For the poor old man was a violent Democrat in days when you might travel the world over without finding anything but a Republican. Anyhow they went round the world.

I think an anecdote is about the best way to give you an idea of what the old gentleman was like. For it is perhaps important that you should know what the old gentleman was since, of course, he had a great deal of influence in forming the character of my poor dear wife.

Just before they set out from San Francisco for the South Seas old Mr. Hulbird said he must take something with him to make little presents to people he met on the voyage. And it struck him that the things to take for that purpose were oranges—because California is the orange country—and comfortable folding chairs. So he bought I don't know how many cases of oranges—the great cool Californian oranges and half-a-dozen folding chairs in a special case that he always kept in his cabin. There must have been half a cargo of fruit.

For, to every person on board the several steamers that they employed—to every person with whom he had so much as a nodding acquaintance, he gave an orange every morning. And they lasted him right round the girdle of this mighty globe of ours. When they were at North Cape, even, he saw on the horizon, poor dear thin man that he was, a lighthouse. "Hallo," he says, to himself, "these poor fellows must be very lonely. Let's take them some oranges." So he had a boatload of his fruit out and had humself rowed to the lighthouse on the horizon. The folding-chairs he lent to any lady that he came across and liked, or who seemed tired and invalidish on the ship. And so, guarded against his heart and, having his niece with him, he went round the world. . . .

He wasn't obtrusive about his heart. You wouldn't have known he had one. He only left it to the physical laboratory at Waterbury for the benefit of science, since he considered it to be quite an extraordinary kind of heart. And the joke of the matter was that, when at the age of eighty-four, just

five days after poor Florence, he died of bronchitis, there was found to be absolutely nothing the matter with that organ. It had certainly jumped or squeaked or something, just sufficiently to take in the doctors, but it appears that that was because of an odd formation of the lungs. I don't much understand about these matters.

I inherited his money because Florence died five days before him. I wish I hadn't. It was a great worry. I had to go out to Waterbury just after Florence's death, because the poor dear old fellow had left a good many charitable bequests and I had to appoint trustees. I didn't like the idea of their not being properly handled.

Yes, it was a great worry. And just as I had got things roughly settled I received the extraordinary cable from Ashburnham begging me to come back and have a talk with him. And immediately afterwards came one from Leonora saying, "Yes, please do come. You could be so helpful." It was as if he had sent the cable without consulting her and had afterwards told her. Indeed that was pretty much what had happened, except that he had told the girl, and the girl told the wife. I arrived, however, too late to be of any good, if I could have been of any good. And then I had my first taste of English life. It was amazing. It was overwhelming. I never shall forget the polished cob that Edward, beside me, drove, the animal's action, its high-stepping, its skin that was like satin. And the peace! And the red cheeks! And the beautiful old house.

Just near Branshaw Teleragh it was, and we descended on it from the high, clear, windswept waste of the New Forest. I tell you it was amazing to arrive there from Waterbury. And it came into my head—for Teddy Ashburnham, you remember had cabled to me to "come and have a talk" with him—that it was unbelievable that anything essentially calamitous could happen to that place and those people. I tell you it was the very spirit of peace. And Leonora, beautiful and smiling, with her coils of yellow hair stood on the toop doorstep, with a butler and footman and a maid or so behind her. And she just said: "So glad you've come," as if I'd run down to lunch from a town ten miles away, instead of having come half the world over at the call of two urgent telegrams.

The girl was out with the hounds I think.

And that poor devil beside me was in an agony. Absolute, hopeless, dumb agony such as passes the mind of man to imagine.

III.

It was a very hot summer, in August, 1904, and Florence had already been taking the baths for a month. I don't know how it feels to be a patient at one of those places. I never was a patient anywhere. I daresay the patients get a home feeling and some sort of anchorage in the spot. They seem to like the bath attendants, with their cheerful faces. their air of authority, their white linen. But, for myself, to be at Nauheim gave me a sense—what shall I say?—a sense almost of nakedness—the nakedness that one feels on the sea-shore or in any great open space. I had no attachments, no accumulations. In one's own home it is as if little, innate sympathies draw one to particular chairs that seem to enfold one in an embrace, or take one along particular streets that seem friendly when others may be hostile. And, believe me, that feeling is a very important part of life. I know it well, that have been for so long a wanderer upon the face of public resorts.

And one is too polished up. Heaven knows I was never an untidy man. But the feeling that I had when, whilst poor Florence was taking her morning bath, I stood upon the carefully swept steps of the Englisher Hof, looking at the carefully arranged trees in tubs upon the carefully arranged gravel, whilst carefully arranged people walked past in carefully calculated gaiety, at the carefully calculated hour; the reddish stone of the baths—or were they white half-timber chalets? Upon my word I have forgotten, I who was there so often. That will give you the measure of how much I was in the landscape. I could find my way blind-folded to the hot rooms, to the douche rooms, to the fountain in the centre of the quadrangle where the rusty waer gushes out. Yes, I could find my way blind-fold. I know the exact distances. From the Hotel Regina you took one hundred and eighty-seven paces, then, turning sharp, left-handed, four hundred and twenty took you straight down to the fountain. From the Englishcher Hol, starting on the side walk, it was ninety-seven paces, and the same four hundred and twenty, but turning left-handed this time.

And now you understand that, having nothing in the world to do—but nothing whatever! I fell into the habit of counting my footsteps. I would walk with Florence to the baths. And, of course, she entertained me with her conversation. It was, as I have said, wonderful what she could make conversation out of.

She walked very lightly, and her hair was very nicely done, and she dressed beautifully and very costily. Of course, she had money of her own, but I shouldn't have minded. And yet you know I can't remember a single one of her dresses. Or I can remember just one, a very simple one of blue figured silk—a Chinese pattern—very full in the skirts and broadening out over the shoulders. And her hair was copper coloured, and the heels of her shoes were exceedingly high, so that she tripped upon the points of her toes. And when she came to the door of the bathing place and, when it opened to receive her, she would look back at me with a little coquettish smile, so that her cheek appeared to be caressing her shoulder.

I seem to remember that, with that dress, she wore an immensely broad Leghorn hat—like the Chapeau de Paille of Rubens, only very white. The hat would be tied with a lightly knotted scarf of the same stuff as her dress. She knew how to give value to her blue eyes. And round her neck would be some simple pink, coral beads. And her complexion had a perfect clearness, a perfect smoothness. . . .

And, what the devil! For whose benefit did she do it? For that of the bath attendant? of the passers-by? I don't know. Anyhow it can't have been for me, for never, in all the years of her life, never on any possible occasion, or in any other place did she so smile tome, mockingly, invitingly. Ah, she was a riddle; but then, all other women are riddles. And it occurs to me that some way back I began a sentence that I have never finished . . . It was about the feeling that I had when I stood on the steps of my hotel every morning before starting out to fetch Florence back from the bath. Natty, precise, well brushed, conscious of being rather small amongst the long English, the lank Americans, the rotund Germans, and the obese Russian Jewesses. I should stand there tapping a cigarette on the outside of my case, surveying for a moment the world in the sunlight. But a day was to come when I was never to do it again alone. You can imagine, therefore, what the coming of the Ashburnhams meant for me.

I have forgotten the aspect of many things, but I shall never forget the aspect of the dining-room of the Hotel Excelsion on that evening—and on so many other evenings. Whole castles have vanished from my memory, whole cities that I have never visited again, but that white room, festooned with paper-maché fruits and flowers; the fall windows; the many tables; the black screen round the door with three golden cranes flying upward on each panel; the palm-tree in the centre of the room; the swish of the waiter's feet; the cold expensive elegance; the mien of the diners as they came in every evening—their air of earnestness as if they must go through a meal prescribed by the Kur authorities, and their air of sobriety as if they must seek not by any means to enjoy their meals—those things I shall not easily forget.

And then, one evening, in the twilight, I saw Edward Ashburnham lounge round the screen into the room. The head waiter, a man with a face all grey—in what subterranean nooks or corners do people cultivate those absolutely grey complexions?—went with the timorous deference of these creatures towards him and held out a grey ear to be whispered into. It was generally a disagreeable ordeal for newcomers, but Edward Ashburnham bore it like an Englishman and a gentleman. I could see his lips form a word of three syllables—remember I had nothing in the world to do but to notice these nicities—and immediately I knew that he must be Edward Ashburnham, Captain, Fourteenth Hussars, of Branshaw House, Branshaw Teleragh. I knew it because every evening just before dinner, whilst I waited in the hall I used by the courtesy of Monsieur Schontz, the proprietor, to inspect the little police reports that each guest was expected to sign upon taking a room.

The head waiter piloted him immediately to a vacant table, three away from my own—the table that the Grenfalls of Falls River N. J. had just vacated. It struck me that that was not a very nice table for the newcomers, since the sunlight, low though it was, shone straight down upon it, and the same idea seemed to come at the same moment into Captain Ashburnham's head. His face hitherto had in the wonderful English fashion, expressed nothing whatever. Nothing. There was in it neither joy nor despair; neither hope nor fear; neither boredom nor satisfaction. He seemed to perceive no soul in that crowded room; he might have been walking in a jungle. I never came across such a perfect expression before, and I never shall again. It was insolence and not insolence; it was modesty and not modesty. His hair was fair, extraordinarily, ordered in a wave, running from the left temple to the right; his face was a light brick-red, perfectly uniform in tint, his yellow moustache was as stiff as a tooth brush, and I verily believe that he had had his black smoking jacket thickened a little over the shoulder-blades so as to give himself the air of the slightest possible stoop. It would be like him to do that; that was the sort of thing he thought about. Martingales, Chiffney bits, boots; where you got the best soap, the best brandy, the name of the chap who road a plater down the Khyber cliffs; the spreading power of number three shot before a charge of number four powder . . . by heavens, I never heard him talk of anything else. Not in all the years that I knew him did I hear him talk of anything but these subjects. Oh yes, once he told me that I could buy my special shade of blue ties cheaper from a firm in Burlington Arcade than from my own people in New York. And I have brought my ties from that firm ever since. Otherwise I should not remember the name of the Burlington Arcade. I wonder what it looks like. I have never seen it. I imagine it to be two immense rows of pillars, like those of the Forum at Rome, with Edward Ashburnham striding down between them. But it probably isn't in the least like that. Once also he advised me to buy Caledonian Deferred, since they were due to rise. And I did buy them and they did rise. But of how he got the knowledge I haven't the faintest idea. It seemed to drop out of the blue sky.

And that was absolutely all that I knew of him until a month ago—that and the profusion of his cases, all of pigskin and stamped with his initials E. F. A. There were gun cases, and collar cases, and shirt cases, and letter cases, and cases each containing four bottles of medicine; and hat cases and helmet cases. It must have needed a whole herd of the

Gadrene Swine to make up his outfit. And, if I ever penetrated into his private room it would be to see him standing with his coat and waistcoat off and the immensely long line of his perfectly elegant trousers from waist to boot heel. And he would have a slightly reflective air, and he would be just opening one kind of case and just closing another.

Good God, what did they all see in him; for what there was of him, inside and outside; though they said he was a good soldier. Yet Leonora adored him with a passion that was like an agony, and hated him with an agony that was as bitter as the sea. How could he rouse anything like a sentiment, in anybody?

What did he even talk to them about—when they were under four eyes?—Ah, well, suddenly, as if by a flash of inspiration, I know. For all good soldiers are sentimentalists—all good soldiers of that type. Their profession for one thing is full of the big words, courage, loyalty, honour, constancy. And I have given a wrong impression of Edward Ashburnham if I have made you think that literally never in the course of our nine years of intimacy did he discuss what he would have called "the graver things."

Even before his final outburst to me, at times, very late at night, say, he has blurted out something that gave an insight into the sentimental view of he cosmos that was his. He would say how much the society of a good woman could do towards redeeming you, and he would say that constancy was the finest of the virtues. He said it very shily, of course, but still as if the statement admitted of no doubt.

Constancy! Isn't that the queer thought? And yet, I must add that poor dear Edward was a great reader—he would pass hours lost in novels of a sentimental type—novels in which typewriter girls married Marquises, and governesses, Earls. And in his books, as a rule, the course of true love ran as smooth as buttered honey. And he was fond of poetry, of a certain type—and he could even read a hopelessly sad love story. I have seen his eyes filled with tears at reading of a hopeless parting. And he loved, with a sentimental yearning, all children, puppies, and the feeble generally.

So, you see, he would have plenty to gurgle about to a woman—with that and his sound common-sense about martingales and his—still sentimental—experiences as a county magistrate, and with his intense, optimistic belief that the woman he was making love to at he moment was the one he was destined, at last, to be enternally constant to . . . Well, I fancy he could put up a pretty good deal of talk when there was no man around to make him feel shy.

And I was quite astonished, during his final burst out to me—at the very end of things, when the poor girl was on her way to that fatal Brindisi, and he was trying to persuade himself and me that he had never really cared for her—I was quite astonished to observe how literary and how just his expressions were. He talked like quite a good book—a book not in the least cheaply sentimental. You see, I suppose he regarded me not so much as a man. I had to be regarded as a woman or a solicitor. Anyhow, it burst out of him on that horrible night. And then, next morning he took me over to the Assizes and I saw how, in a perfectly calm and business-like way he set to work to secure a verdict of not guilty for a poor girl, the daughter of one of his tenants, who had been accused of murdering her baby. He spent two hundred pounds on her defence . . . Well, that was Edward Ashburnham.

I had forgotten about his eyes. They were as blue as the sides of a certain type of box of matches. When you looked at them carefully you saw that they were perfectly honest, perfectly straight-forward, perfectly, perfectly stupid. But the brick pink of his complexion, running perfectly level to the brick pink of his inner eye-lids gave them a curious, sinister expression—like a mosaic of blue porcelain set in pink china. And that chap, coming into a room snapped up the gaze of every woman in it, as dexterously as a conjuror pockets billiard balls. It was most amazing.

You know the man on the stage who throws up sixteen balls at once and they all drop into pockets all over his person, on his shoulders, on his heels, on the inner side of his sleeves; and he stands perfectly still and does nothing. Well it was like that. He had rather a rough, hoarse voice.

And, there he was, standing by the table. I was looking at him, with my back to the screen. And, suddenly, I saw two distinct expressions flicker across his immobile eyes. How the deuce did they do it, those unflinching blue eyes with the direct gaze? For the eyes themselves never moved, gazing over my shoulder towards the screen. And the gaze was perfectly level and perfectly direct, and perfectly unchanging. I suppose that the lids really must have rounded themselves a little, and perhaps the lips moved a little too, as if he should be saying:—"There you are my dear." At any rate the expression was that of pride, the satisfaction of the possessor. I saw him once afterwards, for a moment, gaze upon the sunny fields of Branshaw and say:—"All this is my land!"

And then again, the gaze was perhaps more direct, harder if possible—hardy, too. It was a measuring look; a challenging look. Once when we were at Wiesbaden watching him play in a polo match against the Bonner Hussaren, I saw the same look come into his eyes, balancing the possibilities, looking over the ground.

The German Captain, Count Idigon von Lelöffel was right up by their goal posts, coming with the ball in an easy canter in that tricky German fashion. The rest of the field were just anywhere. It was only a scratch sort of affair. Ashburham was quite close to the rails, not five yards from us,

and I heard him saying to himself: "Might just be done!" And he did it. Goodness! he swung that pony round with all its four legs spread out, like a cat dropping off a roof . . .

Well, it was just that look that I noticed in his eyes: "It might," I seem even now to hear him muttering to himself, "just be done."

I looked round over my shoulder, and saw tall, smiling brilliantly and buoyant—Leonora. And, little and fair, and as radiant as the track of sunlight along the sea—my wife.

That poor wretch! to think that he was at that moment in a perfect devil of a fix, and there he was, saying at the back of his mind: "It might just be done." It was like a chap in the middle of the eruption of a volcano, saying that he might just manage to bolt into the tumult and set fire to a haystack. Madness? Predistination? Who the devil knows?

Mrs. Ashburnham exhibited at that moment more gaiety than I have ever since known her to show. There are certain classes of English people—the nicer ones when they have been to many spas who seem to make a point of becoming much more than usually animated when they are introduced to my compatriots. I have noticed this after. Of course, they must first have accepted the Americans. But, that once done they seem to say to themselves: "Hallo, these women are so bright. We aren't going to be outdone in brightness." And for the time being they certainly aren't. But it wears off. So it was with Leonora—at least, until she noticed me. She began, Leonora did—and perhaps it was that that gave me the idea of a touch of insolence in her character, for she never afterwards did any one single thing like it—she began by saying in quite a loud voice and from quite a distance:

"Don't stop over by that stuffy old table, Teddy. Come and sit by these nice people!"

And that was an extraordinary thing to say. Quite extraordinary. I couldn't for the life of me refer to total strangers as nice people. But, of course, she was taking a line of her own in which I at any rate—and no one else in the room, for she too had taken the trouble to read through the list of guests—counted any more than so many clean, bull terriers. And she sat down rather brilliantly at a vacant table, beside ours—one that was reserved for the Guggenheimers. And she just sat absolutely deaf to the remonstrances of the head waiter with his face like a grey ram's. That poor chap was doing his steadfast duty too. He knew that the Guggenheimers of Chicago after they had stayed there a month and had worried the poor life out of him would give him two dollars fifty and grumble at the tipping system. And he knew that Teddy Ashburnham and his wife would give him no trouble whatever, except what the smiles of Leonora might cause in his apparently unimpressionable bosom—though you never can tell what may go on behind even a not quite spotless plastron!—And every week Edward Ashburnham would give him a solid, sound, golden English sovereign. Yet this stout fellow was intent on saving that table for the Guggenheimers, of Chicago. It ended in Florence saying:

"Why shouldn't we all eat out of the same trough—that's a nasty New York saying. But I'm sure we're all nice quiet people, and there can be four seats at our table. It's round."

Then came as it were an appreciative gurgle from the Captain, and I was perfectly aware of a slight hesitation—a quick sharp motion in Mrs. Ashburnham, as if her horse had checked. But she put it at the fence all right, rising from the seat she had taken and sitting down opposite me, as it were, all in one motion.

I never thought that Leonora looked her best in evening dress. She seemed to get it too clearly cut, there was no ruffling. She always affected black and her shoulders were too classical. She seemed to stand out of her corsage as a white marble bust might out of black Wedgwood vase. I don't know.

I loved Leonora always and, to-day, I would very cheerfully lay down my life, what is left of it, in her service. But I am sure I never had the beginnings of a trace of what is called the sex instinct towards her.

And I suppose—no I am certain that she never had it towards me. As far as I am concerned I think it was those white shoulders that did it. I seemed to feel when I looked at them that, if ever I should press my lips upon them, they would be slightly cold—not icily, not without a touch of human heat, but, as they say of baths, with the chill off. I seemed to feel chilled at the end of my lips when I looked at her . . .

No, Leonora always appeared to me at her best in a blue tailor-made. Then her glorious hair wasn't deadened by anything in the world. Certain women's lines guide your eyes to their necks, their eyelashes, their lips, their breasts. But Leonora's seemed to conduct your gaze always to her wrist. And the wrist was at its best in a black or a dog-skin glove, and there was always a gold circlet with a little chain supporting a very small golden key to a dispatch box. Perhaps it was that in which she locked up her heart and her feelings.

Anyhow, she sat down opposite me and then, for the first time, she paid any attention to my existence. She gave me, suddenly, yet deliberately, one long stare. Her eyes, too, were blue and dark, and the eyelids were so arched that they gave you the whole round of the irises. And it was a most remarkable, a most moving glance, as if for a moment a lighthouse had looked at me. I seemed to perceive the swift questions chasing each other through the brain that was

behind them. I seemed to hear the brain ask and the eyes answer with all the simpleness of a woman who was a good hand at taking in qualities of a horse—as indeed she was. "Stands well, has plenty of room for his oats behind the girth. Not so much in the way of shoulders," and so on. And so her eyes asked: "Is this man trustworthy in money matters; is he likely to try to play the lover; is he likely to let his women be troublesome? Is he above all likely to babble about my affairs?"

And suddenly, into those cold, slightly defiant, almost defensive china blue orbs, there came a warmth, a tenderness, a friendly recognition . . . Oh, it was very charming and very touching—and quite mortifying. It was the look of a mother to her son, of a sister to her brother. It implied trust; it implied the want of any necessity for barriers. By God, she looked at me as if I were an invalid—as any kind woman may look at a poor chap in a bath chair. And, yes, from that day forward she always treated me and not Florence as if I were the invalid. Why, she would run after me with a rug upon chilly days. I suppose therefore that her eyes had made a favourable answer. Or perhaps it wasn't a favourable answer. And then Florence said: "And so the whole round table is begun." Again Edward Ashburnham gurled slightly in his throat; but Leonora shivered a little, as if a goose had walked over her grave. And I was passing her the nickel-silver basket of rolls. Avanti! . . .

So began those nine years of uninterrupted tranquility. They were characterised by an extraordinary want of any communicativeness on the part of the Ashburnhams, to which we on our part replied by leaving out quite as extraordinarily, and nearly as completely, the personal note. Indeed, you may take it that what characterised our relationships more than anything else was an atmosphere of taking everything for granted. The given proposition was, that we were all "good people." We took for granted that we all liked beef underdone, but not too underdone; that both men preferred a good liqueur brandy after lunch; that both women drank a very light Rhine wine qualified with Fachingen water—that sort of thing.

It was also taken for granted that we were both sufficiently well off to afford anything that we could reasonably want in the way of amusements fitting to our station—that we could take motor cars and carriages by the day; that we could give each other dinners and dine our friends, and we could indulge if we liked in economy. Thus, Florence was in the habit of having the "Daily Telegraph" sent to her every day from London. She was always an Angle-maniac, was Florence; the Paris edition of the "New York Herald" was always good enough for me. But when we discovered that the Ashburnham's copy of that London paper followed them from England, Leonora and Florence decided between them to suppress one subscription one year and the other the next. Similarly it was the habit of the Grand Duke of Nassau Schwerin, who came yearly to the baths to dine once with about eighteen families of regular Kur guests. In return he would give a dinner to all the eighteen at once. And, since these dinners were rather expensive—you had to take the Grand Duke and a good many of his suite, and any members of the diplomatic bodies that might be there—Florence and Leonora, putting their heads together, didn't see why we shouldn't give the Grand Duke his dinner together. And so we did. I don't suppose the Serenity minded that economy, or even noticed it. At any rate our joint dinner to the Royal Personage gradually assumed the aspect of a yearly function. Indeed, it grew larger and larger, until it became a sort of closing function for the season, at any rate as far as we were concerned.

I don't in the least mean to say that we were the sort of persons who aspired to "mix" with royalty." We didn't; we hadn't any claims; we were just "good people." But the Grand Duke was a pleasant, affable sort of royalty, like the late King Edward VII, and it was pleasant to hear him talk about the races and, very occasionally, as a bonne bouche, about his nephew, the Emperor; or to have him pause for a moment in his walk to ask after the progress of our cures, or to be benignantly interested in the amount of money we had put on Lelöffel's hunter for the Frankfurt Welter Stakes.

But upon my word, I don't know how we put in our time. How does one put in one's time? How is it possible to have achieved nine years and to have nothing what ever to show for it? Nothing whatever you understand. Not so much as a bone penholder, carved to resemble a chessman, with a hole in the top through which you could see four views of Nauheim. And, as for experience, as for knowledge of one's fellow beings—nothing either. Upon my word I couldn't tell you offhand whether the lady who sold the so expensive violets at the bottom of the road that leads to the station was cheating me or no; I can't tell whether the porter who carried our traps across the station at Leghorn was a thief or no when he said that the regular tariff was a lire a parcel. The instances of honesty that one comes across in this world are just as amazing as the instances of dishonesty. One ought to have acquired the habit of being able to know something about one's fellow beings. But one doesn't.

I think the modern civilised habit—the modern English habit of taking everyone for granted is a good deal to blame for this. I have observed this matter long enough to know the queer, subtle, thing that it is; to know how the faculty, for what it is worth, never lets you down.

Mind, I am not saying that this is not the most desirable type of life in the world; that it is not an almost unreasonably high standard. For it is really nauseating, when you detest it, to have to eat every day several slices of thin, tepid pink

Dancers. W. Roberts.

Religion. W. Roberts.

india-rubber, and it is disagreeable to have to drink brandy when you would prefer to be cheered up by warm, sweet Kummel. And it is nasty to have to take a cold bath in the morning when what you want is really a hot one at night. And it stirs a little of the faith of your fathers that is deep down within you to have to have it taken for granted that you are an Episcopalian, when really you are an old-fashioned Philadelphia Quaker.

But these things have to be done; it is the cock that the whole of this society owes to Aesulapius.

And the odd, queer thing is that the whole collection of rules applies to anybody—to the anybodies that you meet in hotels, in railway trains, to a less degree perhaps in steamers, but even, in the end, upon steamers.

You meet a man or a woman and, from tiny and intimate sounds, from the slightest of movements, you know at once whether you are concerned with good people or with those who won't do. You know, that is to say, whether they will go rigidly through with the whole programme, from the underdone beef to the Anglicanism. It won't matter whether they be short or tall; whether the voice squeak like a marionette or rumbles like a town bull's; it won't, for the matter of that, matter whether they are Germans, Austrians, French, Spanish, or even Brazilians—they will be the Germans or Brazilians who take a cold bath every morning and who move, roughly speaking, in diplomatic circles.

But the inconvenient—well, hang it all, I will say it—the damnable nuisence of the whole thing is, that with all the taking for granted, you never really get an inch deeper than the things I have catalogued.

I can give you a rather extraordinary instance of this. I can't remember whether it was in our first year—the first year of us four at Nauheim, because, of course, it would have been the fourth year of Florence and myself—but it must have been in the first or second year. And that gives the measure at once of the extraordinariness of our discussion and of the swiftness with which intimacy had grown up between us. On the one hand we seemed to start out on the expedition so naturally and with so little preparation, that it was as if we must have made many such excursions before; and our intimacy seemed so deep . . .

Yet the place to which we went was obviously one to which Florence at least would have wanted to take us quite early, so that you would almost think we should have gone there together at the beginning of our intimacy. Florence was singularly expert as a guide to archeological exceptions, and there was nothing she liked so much as taking people round ruins and showing you the window from which someone looked down upon the murder of someone else. She only did it once; but she did it quite magnificently. She could find her way, with the sole help of Baedeker, as easily about any old monument as she could about any American city where the blocks were all square and the streets all numbered, so that you can go perfectly easily from Twenty-Fourth to Thirtieth.

Now it happens that fifty minutes away from Nauheim, by a good train, is the ancient city of M——, upon a great pinnacle of basalt, girt with a triple road running sideways up its shoulder like a scarf. And at the top there is a castle —not a square castle like Windsor—but a castle all slate gables and high peaks, with gilt weathercocks flashing bravely—the castle of St. Elizabeth of Hungary. It has the disadvantage of being in Prussia; and it is always disagreeable to go into that country; but it is very old, and there are many double-spired churches, and it stands up like a pyramid out of the green valley of the Lahn. I don't suppose the Ashburnhams wanted especially to go there, and I didn't especially want to go there myself. But, you understand, there was no objection.

(To be continued.)

INDISSOLUBLE MATRIMONY

BY

REBECCA WEST.

When George Silverton opened the front door he found that the house was not empty for all its darkness. The spitting noise of the striking of damp matches and mild, growling exclamations of annoyance told him that his wife was trying to light the dining-room gas. He went in and with some short, hostile sound of greeting lit a match and brought brightness into the little room. Then, irritated by his own folly in bringing private papers into his wife's presence, he stuffed the letters he had brought from the office deep into the pockets of his overcoat. He looked at her suspiciously, but she had not seen them, being busy in unwinding her orange motor-veil. His eyes remained on her face to brood a little sourly on her moving loveliness, which he had not been sure of finding : for she was one of those women who create an illusion alternately of extreme beauty and extreme ugliness. Under her curious dress, designed in some pitifully cheap and worthless stuff by a successful mood of her indiscreet taste—she had black blood in her—her long body seemed pulsing with some exaltation. The blood was coursing violently under her luminous yellow skin, and her lids, dusky with fatigue, drooped contentedly over her great humid black eyes. Perpetually she raised her hand to the mass of black hair that was coiled on her thick golden neck, and stroked it with secretive enjoyment, as a cat licks its fur. And her large mouth smiled frankly, but abstractedly, at some digested pleasure.

There was a time when George would have looked on this riot of excited loveliness with suspicion. But now he knew it was almost certainly caused by some trifle—a long walk through stinging weather, the report of a Socialist victory at a by-election, or the intoxication of a waltz refrain floating from the municipal band-stand across the flats of the local recreation ground. And even if it had been caused by some amorous interlude he would not have greatly cared. In the ten years since their marriage he had lost the quality which would have made him resentful. He now believed that quality to be purely physical. Unless one was in good condition and responsive to the messages sent out by the flesh Evadne could hardly concern one. He turned the bitter thought over in his heart and stung himself by deliberately gazing unmoved upon her beautiful joyful body.

"Let's have supper now!" she said rather greedily.

He looked at the table and saw she had set it before she went out. As usual she had been in an improvident hurry : it was carelessly done. Besides, what an

absurd supper to set before a hungry solicitor's clerk! In the centre, obviously intended as the principal dish, was a bowl of plums, softly red, soaked with the sun, glowing like jewels in the downward stream of the incandescent light. Besides them was a great yellow melon, its sleek sides fluted with rich growth, and a honeycomb glistening on a willow-pattern dish. The only sensible food to be seen was a plate of tongue laid at his place.

"I can't sit down to supper without washing my hands!"

While he splashed in the bathroom upstairs he heard her pull in a chair to the table and sit down to her supper. It annoyed him. There was no ritual about it. While he was eating the tongue she would be crushing honey on new bread, or stripping a plum of its purple skin and holding the golden globe up to the gas to see the light filter through. The meal would pass in silence. She would innocently take his dumbness for a sign of abstraction and forbear to babble. He would find the words choked on his lips by the weight of dullness that always oppressed him in her presence. Then, just about the time when he was beginning to feel able to formulate his obscure grievances against her, she would rise from the table without a word and run upstairs to her work, humming in that uncanny, negro way of hers.

And so it was. She ate with an appalling catholicity of taste, with a nice child's love of sweet foods, and occasionally she broke into that hoarse beautiful croon. Every now and then she looked at him with too obvious speculations as to whether his silence was due to weariness or uncertain temper. Timidly she cut him an enormous slice of the melon, which he did not want. Then she rose abruptly and flung herself into the rocking chair on the hearth. She clasped her hands behind her head and strained backwards so that the muslin stretched over her strong breasts. She sang saftly to the ceiling.

There was something about the fantastic figure that made him feel as though they were not properly married.

"Evadne?"

"'S?"

"What have you been up to this evening?"

"I was at Milly Stafordale's."

He was silent again. That name brought up the memory of his courting days. It was under the benign eyes of blonde, plebeian Milly that he had wooed the distracting creature in the rocking chair.

Ten years before, when he was twenty-five, his firm had been reduced to hysteria over the estates of an extraordinarily stupid old woman, named Mrs. Mary Ellerker. Her stupidity, grappling with the complexity of the sources of the vast

income which rushed in spate from the properties of four deceased husbands, demanded oceans of explanations even over her weekly rents. Silverton alone in the office, by reason of a certain natural incapacity for excitement, could deal calmly with this marvel of imbecility. He alone could endure to sit with patience in the black-panelled drawing-room amidst the jungle of shiny mahogany furniture and talk to a mass of darkness, who rested heavily in the window-seat and now and then made an idiotic remark in a bright, hearty voice. But it shook even him. Mrs. Mary Ellerker was obscene. Yet she was perfectly sane and, although of that remarkable plainness noticeable in most oft-married women, in good enough physical condition. She merely presented the loathsome spectacle of an ignorant mind, contorted by the artificial idiocy of coquetry, lack of responsibility, and hatred of discipline, stripped naked by old age. That was the real horror of her. One feared to think how many women were really like Mrs. Ellerker under their armour of physical perfection or social grace. For this reason he turned eyes of hate on Mrs. Ellerker's pretty little companion, Milly Stafordale, who smiled at him over her embroidery with wintry northern brightness. When she was old she too would be obscene.

This horror obssessed him. Never before had he feared anything. He had never lived more than half-an-hour from a police station, and, as he had by some chance missed the melancholy clairvoyance of adolescence, he had never conceived of any horror with which the police could not deal. This disgust of women revealed to him that the world is a place of subtle perils. He began to fear marriage as he feared death. The thought of intimacy with some lovely, desirable and necessary wife turned him sick as he sat at his lunch. The secret obscenity of women! He talked darkly of it to his friends. He wondered why the Church did not provide a service for the absolution of men after marriage. Wife desertion seemed to him a beautiful return of the tainted body to cleanliness.

On his fifth visit to Mrs. Ellerker he could not begin his business at once. One of Milly Stafordale's friends had come in to sing to the old lady. She stood by the piano against the light, so that he saw her washed with darkness. Amazed, of tropical fruit. And before he had time to apprehend the sleepy wonder of her beauty, she had begun to sing. Now he knew that her voice was a purely physical attribute, built in her as she lay in her mother's womb, and no index of her spiritual values. But then, as it welled up from the thick golden throat and clung to her lips, it seemed a sublime achievement of the soul. It was smouldering contralto such as only those of black blood can possess. As she sang her great black eyes lay on him with the innocent shamelessness of a young animal, and he remembered hopefully that he was good looking. Suddenly she stood in silence, playing with her heavy black plait. Mrs. Ellerker broke into silly thanks. The girl's mother, who had been playing the accompaniment, rose and stood rolling up her music. Silverton, sick with excitement, was introduced to them. He noticed that the mother was a little darker than the conventions permit. Their name was Hannan—Mrs. Arthur Hannan and Evadne. They moved lithely and quietly out of the room, the girl's eyes still lingering on his face.

The thought of her splendour and the rolling echoes of her voice disturbed him all night. Next day, going to his office, he travelled with her on the horse-car that bound his suburb to Petrick. One of the horses fell lame, and she had time to tell him that she was studying at a commercial college. He quivered with distress. All the time he had a dizzy illusion that she was nestling up against him. They parted shyly. During the next few days they met constantly. He began to go and see them in the evening at their home—a mean flat crowded with cheap glories of bead curtains and Oriental hangings that set off the women's alien beauty. Mrs. Hannan was a widow and they lived alone, in a wonderful silence. He talked more than he had ever done in his whole life before. He took a dislike to the widow, she was consumed with fiery subterranean passions, no fit guardian for the tender girl.

Now he could imagine with what silent rapture Evadne had watched his agitation. Almost from the first she had meant to marry him. He was physically attractive, though not strong. His intellect was gently stimulating like a mild white wine. And it was time she married. She was ripe for adult things. This was the real wound in his soul. He had tasted of a divine thing created in his time for dreams out of her rich beauty, her loneliness, her romantic poverty, her immaculate youth. He had known love. And Evadne had never known anything more than a magnificent physical adventure which she had secured at the right time as she would have engaged a cab to take her to the station in time for the cheapest excursion train. It was a quick way to light-hearted living. With loathing he remembered how in the days of their engagement she used to gaze purely into his blinking eyes and with her unashamed kisses incite him to extravagant embraces. Now he cursed her for having obtained his spiritual revolution on false pretences. Only for a little time had he had his illusion, for their marriage was hastened by Mrs. Hannan's sudden death. After three months of savage mourning Evadne flung herself into marriage, and her excited candour had enlightened him very soon.

That marriage had lasted ten years. And to Evadne their relationship was just the same as ever. Her vitality needed him as it needed the fruit on the table before him. He shook with wrath and a sense of outraged decency.

"O George!" She was yawning widely.

"What's the matter?" he said without interest.

"It's so beastly dull."

"I can't help that, can I?"

"No." She smiled placidly at him. "We're a couple of dull dogs, aren't we? I wish we had children."

After a minute she suggested, apparently as an alternative amusement, "Perhaps the post hasn't passed."

As she spoke there was a rat-tat and the slither of a letter under the door. Evadne picked herself up and ran out into the lobby. After a second or two, during which she made irritating inarticulate exclamations, she came in reading the letter and stroking her bust with a gesture of satisfaction.

"They want me to speak at Longton's meeting on the nineteenth," she purred.

"Longton? What's he up to?"

Stephen Longton was the owner of the biggest iron works in Petrick, a man whose refusal to adopt the livery of busy oafishness thought proper to commercial men aroused the gravest suspicions.

"He's standing as Socialist candidate for the town council."

". . . Socialist!" he muttered.

He set his jaw. That was a side of Evadne he considered as little as possible. He had never been able to assimilate the fact that Evadne had, two years after their marriage, passed through his own orthodox Radicalism to a passionate Socialism, and that after reading enormously of economics she had begun to write for the Socialist press and to speak successfully at meetings. In the jaundiced recesses of his mind he took it for granted that her work would have the lax fibre of her character: that it would be infected with her Oriental crudities. Although once or twice he had been congratulated on her brilliance, he mistrusted this phase if her activity as a caper of the sensualist. His eyes blazed on her and found the depraved, over-sexed creature, looking milder than a gazeller, holding out a hand-bill to him.

"They've taken it for granted!"

He saw her name—his name—

MRS. EVADNE SILVERTON.

It was at first the blaze of stout scarlet letters on the dazzling white ground that made him blink. Then he was convulsed with rage.

"Georgie dear!"

She stepped forward and caught his weak body to her bosom. He wrenched himself away. Spiritual nausea made him determined to be a better man than her.

"A pair of you! You and Longton —!" he snarled scornfully. Then, seeing her startled face, he controlled himself.

"I thought it would please you," said Evadne, a little waspishly.

"You mustn't have anything to do with Longton," he stormed.

A change passed over her. She became ugly. Her face was heavy with intellect, her lips coarse with power. He was at arms with a Socialist lead. Much he would have preferred the bland sensualist again.

" Why ? "

" Because—his lips stuck together like blotting-paper—he's not the sort of man my wife should—should— "

With movements which terrified him by their rough energy, she folded up the bills and put them back in the envelope.

" George. I suppose you mean that he's a bad man." He nodded.

" I know quite well that the girl who used to be his typist is his mistress." She spoke it sweetly, as if reasoning with an old fool. " But she's got consumption. She'll be dead in six months. In fact, I think it's rather nice of him. To look after her and all that."

" My God! He leapt to his feet, extending a shaking forefinger. As she turned to him, the smile dying on her lips, his excited weakness wrapped him in a paramnesic illusion : it seemed to him that he had been through all this before—a long, long time ago. " My God, you talk like a woman off the streets! "

Evadne's lips lifted over her strong teeth. With clever cruelty she fixed his eyes with hers, well knowing that he longed to fall forward and bury his head on the table in a transport of hysterical sobs. After a moment of this torture she turned away, herself distressed by a desire to cry.

" How can you say such dreadful, dreadful things! " she protested, chokingly.

He sat down again. His eyes looked little and red, but they blazed on her. " I wonder if you are," he said softly.

" Are what? " she asked petulantly, a tear rolling down her nose.

" You know," he answered, nodding.

" George, George, George! " she cried.

" You've always been keen on kissing and making love, haven't you, my precious? At first you startled me, you did! I didn't know women were like that." From that morass he suddenly stepped on to a high peak of terror. Amazed to find himself sincere, he cried—" I don't believe good women are! "

" Georgie, how can you be so silly! exclaimed Evadne shrilly. " You know quite well I've been as true to you as any woman could be." She sought his eyes with a liquid glance of reproach. He averted his gaze, sickened at having put himself in the wrong. For even while he degraded his tongue his pure soul fainted with loathing of her fleshliness.

" I—I'm sorry."

Too wily to forgive him at once, she showed him a lowering profile with down-cast lids. Of course, he knew it was a fraud : an imputation against her chastity was no more poignant than a reflection on the cleanliness of her nails—rude and spiteful, but that was all. But for a time they kept up the deception, while she cleared the table in a steely silence.

" Evadne, I'm sorry. I'm tired." His throat was dry. He could not bear the discord of a row added to the horror of their companionship. " Evadne, do forgive me—I don't know what I meant by —"

" That's all right, silly ! " she said suddenly and bent over the table to kiss him. Her brow was smooth. It was evident from her splendid expression that she was pre-occupied. Then she finished clearing up the dishes and took them into the kitchen. While she was out of the room he rose from his seat and sat down in the armchair by the fire, setting his bull-dog pipe alight. For a very short time he was free of her voluptuous presence. But she ran back soon, having put the kettle on and changed her blouse for a loose dressing-jacket, and sat down on the arm of his chair. Once or twice she bent and kissed his brow, but for the most part she lay back with his head drawn to her bosom, rocking herself rhythmically. Silverton, a little disgusted by their contact, sat quite motionless and passed into a doze. He revolved in his mind the incidents of his day's routine and remembered a snub from a superior. So he opened his eyes and tried to think of something else. It was then that he became conscious that the rhythm of Evadne's movement was not regular. It was broken as though she rocked in time to music. Music? His sense of hearing crept up to hear if there was any sound of music in the breaths she was emitting rather heavily every now and them. At first he could hear nothing. Then it struck him that each breath was a muttered phrase. He stiffened, and hatred flamed through his veins. The words came clearly through her lips. . . . " The present system of wage-slavery . . ."

" Evadne ! " He sprang to his feet. " You're preparing your speech ! "

She did not move. " I am," she said.

" Damn it, you shan't speak ! "

" Damn it, I will ! "

" Evadne, you shan't speak ! If you do I swear to God above I'll turn you out into the streets—." She rose and came towards him. She looked black and dangerous. She trod softly like a cat with her head down. In spite of himself, his tongue licked his lips in fear and he cowered a moment before he picked up a knife from the table. For a space she looked down on him and the sharp blade.

" You idiot, can't you hear the kettle's boiling over? "

He shrank back, letting the knife fall on the floor. For three minutes he stood

there controlling his breath and trying to still his heart. Then he followed her into the kitchen. She was making a noise with a basinful of dishes.

"Stop that row."

She turned round with a dripping dish-cloth in her hand and pondered whether to throw it at him. But she was tired and wanted peace: so that she could finish the rough draft of her speech. So she stood waiting.

"Did you understand what I said then? If you don't promise me here and now—"

She flung her arms upwards with a cry and dashed past him. He made to run after her upstairs, but stumbled on the threshold of the lobby and sat with his ankle twisted under him, shaking with rage. In a second she ran downstairs again, clothed in a big cloak with black bundle clutched to her breast. For the first time in their married life she was seized with a convulsion of sobs. She dashed out of the front door and banged it with such passion that a glass pane shivered to fragments behind her.

"What's this? What's this?" he cried stupidly, standing up. He perceived with an insane certainty that she was going out to meet some unknown lover. "I'll come and tell him what a slut you are!" he shouted after her and stumbled to the door. It was jammed now and he had to drag at it.

The night was flooded with the yellow moonshine of midsummer: it seemed to drip from the lacquered leaves of the shrubs in the front garden. In its soft clarity he could see her plainly, although she was now two hundred yards away. She was hastening to the north end of Sumatra Crescent, an end that curled up the hill like a silly kitten's tail and stopped abruptly in green fields. So he knew that she was going to the young man who had just bought the Georgian Manor, whose elm-trees crowned the hill. Oh, how he hated her! Yet he must follow her, or else she would cover up her adulteries so that he could not take his legal revenge. So he began to run—silently, for he wore his carpet slippers. He was only a hundred yards behind her when she slipped through a gap in the hedge to tread a field-path. She still walked with pride, for though she was town-bred, night in the open seemed not at all fearful to her. As he shuffled in pursuit his carpet slippers were engulfed in a shining pool of mud: he raised one with a squelch, the other was left. This seemed the last humiliation. He kicked the other one off his feet and padded on in his socks, snuffling in anticipating of a cold. Then physical pain sent him back to the puddle to pluck out the slippers; it was a dirty job. His heart battered his breast as he saw that Evadne had gained the furthest hedge and was crossing the stile into the lane that ran up to the Manor gates.

"Go on, you beast!" he muttered, "Go on, go on!" After a scamper he climbed the stile and thrust his lean neck beyond a mass of wilted hawthorn bloom that crumbled into vagrant petals at his touch.

The lane mounted yellow as cheese to where the moon lay on his iron tracery of the Manor gates. Evadne was not there. Hardly believing his eyes he hobbled over into the lane and looked in the other direction. There he saw her disappearing round the bend of the road. Gathering himself up to a run, he tried to think out his bearings. He had seldom passed this way, and like most people without strong primitive instincts he had no sense of orientation. With difficulty he remembered that after a mile's mazy wanderings between high hedges this lane sloped suddenly to the bowl of heather overhung by the moorlands, in which lay the Petrick reservoirs, two untamed lakes.

"Eh! she's going to meet him by the water!" he cursed to himself. He remembered the withered ash tree, seared by lightning to its root, that stood by the road at the bare frontier of the moor. "May God strike her like that," he prayed," "as she fouls the other man's lips with her kisses. O God! let me strangle her. Or bury a knife deep in her breast." Suddenly he broke into a lolloping run. "O my Lord, I'll be able to divorce her. I'll be free. Free to live alone. To do my day's work and sleep my night's sleep without her. I'll get a job somewhere else and forget her. I'll bring her to the dogs. No clean man or woman in Petrick will look at her now. They won't have her to speak at that meeting now!" His throat swelled with joy, he leapt high in the air.

"I'll lie about her. If I can prove that she's wrong with this man they'll believe me if I say she's a bad woman and drinks. I'll make her name a joke. And then —"

He flung wide his arms in ecstasy: the left struck against stone. More pain than he had thought his body could hold convulsed him, so that he sank on the ground hugging his aching arm. He looked backwards as he writhed and saw that the hedge had stopped; above him was the great stone wall of the county asylum. The question broke on him—was there any lunatic in its confines so slavered with madness as he himself? Nothing but madness could have accounted for the torrent of ugly words, the sea of uglier thoughts that was now a part of him. "O God, me to turn like this!" he cried, rolling over full-length on the grassy bank by the roadside. That the infidelity of his wife, a thing that should have brought out the stern manliness of his true nature, should have discovered him as lecherous-lipped as any pot-house lounger, was the most infamous accident of his married life. The sense of sin descended on him so that his tears flowed hot and bitterly. "Have I gone to the Unitarian chapel every Sunday morning and to the Ethical Society every evening for nothing?" his spirit asked itself in its travail. "All those Browning lectures for nothing . . ." He said the Lord's Prayer several times and lay for a minute quietly crying. The relaxation of his muscles brought him a sense of rest which seemed forgiveness falling from God. The tears dried on his cheeks. His calmer consciousness heard the sound of rushing waters mingled with the beating of blood in his ears. He got up and scrambled round the turn of the road that brought him to the withered ash-tree.

He walked forward on the parched heatherland to the mound whose scarred

sides, heaped with boulders, tufted with mountain grasses, shone before him in the moonlight. He scrambled up to it hurriedly and hoisted himself from ledge to ledge till he fell on his knees with a squeal of pain. His ankle was caught in a crevice of the rock. Gulping down his agony at this final physical humiliation he heaved himself upright and raced on to the summit, and found himself before the Devil's Cauldron, filled to the brim with yellow moonshine and the fiery play of summer lightning. The rugged crags opposite him were a low barricade against the stars to which the mound where he stood shot forward like a bridge. To the left of this the long Lisbech pond lay like a trailing serpent; its silver scales glittered as the wind swept down from the vaster moorlands to the east. To the right under a steep drop of twenty feet was the Whimsey pond, more sinister, shaped in an unnatural oval, sheltered from the wind by the high ridge so that the undisturbed moonlight lay across it like a sharp-edged sword.

He looked about for some sign of Evadne. She could not be on the land by the margin of the lakes, for the light blazed so strongly that each reed could be clearly seen like a black dagger stabbing the silver. He looked down Lisbech and saw far east a knot of red and green and orange lights. Perhaps for some devilish purpose Evadne had sought Lisbech railway station. But his volcanic mind had preserved one grain of sense that assured him that, subtle as Evadne's villainy might be, it would not lead her to walk five miles out of her way to a terminus which she could have reached in fifteen minutes by taking a train from the station down the road. She must be under cover somewhere here. He went down the gentle slope that fell from the top of the ridge to Lisbech pond in a disorder of rough heather, unhappy patches of cultivated grass, and coppices of silver birch, fringed with flaming broom that seemed faintly tarnished in the moonlight. At the bottom was a roughly hewn path which he followed in hot aimless hurry. In a little he approached a riot of falling waters. There was a slice ten feet broad carved out of the ridge, and to this narrow channel of black shining rock the floods of Lisbech leapt some feet and raced through to Whimsey. The noise beat him back. The gap was spanned by a gaunt thing of paint-blistered iron, on which he stood dizzily and noticed how the wide step that ran on each side of the channel through to the other pond was smeared with sinister green slime. Now his physical distress reminded him of Evadne, whom he had almost forgotten in contemplation of these lonely waters. The idea of her had been present but obscured, as sometimes toothache may cease active torture. His blood lust set him on and he staggered forward with covered ears. Even as he went something caught his eye in a thicket high up on the slope near the crags. Against the slender pride of some silver birches stood a gnarled hawthorn tree, its branches flattened under the stern moorland winds so that it grew squat like an opened umbrella. In its dark shadows, faintly illumined by a few boughs of withered blossom, there moved a strange bluish light. Even while he did not know what it was it made his flesh stir.

The light emerged. It was the moonlight reflected from Evadne's body. She was clad in a black bathing dress, and her arms and legs and the broad streak of flesh laid bare by a rent down the back shone brilliantly white, so that she seemed

like a grotesquely patterned wild animal as she ran down to the lake. Whirling her arms above her head she trampled down into the water and struck out strongly. Her movements were full of brisk delight and she swam quickly. The moonlight made her the centre of a little feathery blur of black and silver, with a comet's tail trailing in her wake.

Nothing in all his married life had ever staggered Silverton so much as this. He had imagined his wife's adultery so strongly that it had come to be. It was now as real as their marriage ; more real than their courtship. So this seemed to be the last crime of the adulteress. She had dragged him over those squelching fields and these rough moors and changed him from a man of irritations, but no passions, into a cold designer of murderous treacheries, so that he might witness a swimming exhibition! For a minute he was stunned. Then he sprang down to the rushy edge and ran along in the direction of her course, crying—" Evadne! Evadne! " She did not hear him. At last he achieved a chest note and shouted—" Evadne! come here! " The black and silver feather shivered in mid-water. She turned immediately and swam back to shore. He suspected sullenness in her slowness, but was glad of it, for after the shock of this extraordinary incident he wanted to go to sleep. Drowsiness lay on him like lead. He shook himself like a dog and wrenched off his linen collar, winking at the bright moon to keep himself awake. As she came quite near he was exasperated by the happy, snorting breaths she drew, and strolled a pace or two up the bank. To his enragement the face she lifted as she waded to dry land was placid, and she scrambled gaily up the bank to his side.

" O George, why did you come! " she exclaimed quite affectionately, laying a damp hand on his shoulder.

" O damn it, what does this mean! " he cried, committing a horrid tenor squeak. " What are you doing? "

" Why, George," she said," " I came here for a bathe."

He stared into her face and could make nothing of it. It was only sweet surfaces of flesh, soft radiances of eye and lip, a lovely lie of comeliness. He forgot this present grievance in a cold search for the source of her peculiar hatefulness. Under this sick gaze she pouted and turned away with a peevish gesture. He made no sign and stood silent, watching her saunter to that gaunt iron bridge. The roar of the little waterfall did not disturb her splendid nerves and she drooped sensuously over the hand-rail, sniffing up the sweet night smell ; too evidently trying to abase him to another apology.

A mosquito whirred into his face. He killed it viciously and strode off towards his wife, who showed by a common little toss of the head that she was conscious of his coming.

" Look here, Evadne! " he panted. " What did you come here for? Tell me the truth and I promise I'll not—I'll not— "

" Not WHAT, George? "

" O please, please tell me the truth, do Evadne! " he cried pitifully.

" But, dear, what is there to carry on about so? You went on so queerly about my meeting that my head felt fit to split, and I thought the long walk and the dip would do me good." She broke off, amazed at the wave of horror that passed over his face.

His heart sank. From the loose-lipped hurry in the telling of her story, from the bigness of her eyes and the lack of subtlety in her voice, he knew that this was the truth. Here was no adulteress whom he could accuse in the law courts and condemn into the street, no resourceful sinner whose merry crimes he could discover. Here was merely his good wife, the faithful attendant of his hearth, relentless wrecker of his soul.

She came towards him as a cat approaches a displeased master, and hovered about him on the stone coping of the noisy sluice.

" Indeed! " he found himself saying sarcastically. " Indeed! "

" Yes, George Silverton, indeed! " she burst out, a little frightened. " And why shouldn't I? I used to come here often enough on summer nights with poor Mamma— "

" Yes! " he shouted. It was exactly the sort of thing that would appeal to that weird half-black woman from the back of beyond. " Mamma! " he cried tauntingly, " Mamma! "

There was a flash of silence between them before Evadne, clutching her breast and balancing herself dangerously on her heels on the stone coping, broke into gentle shrieks. " You dare talk of my Mamma, my poor Mamma, and she cold in her grave! I haven't been happy since she died and I married you, you silly little misery, you! " Then the rage was suddenly wiped off her brain by the perception of a crisis.

The trickle of silence overflowed into a lake, over which their spirits flew, looking at each other's reflection in the calm waters : in the hurry of their flight they had never before seen each other. They stood facing one another with dropped heads, quietly thinking.

The strong passion which filled them threatened to disintegrate their souls as a magnetic current decomposes the electrolyte, so they fought to organise their sensations. They tried to arrange themselves and their lives for comprehension, but beyond sudden lyric visions of old incidents of hatefulness—such as a smarting quarrel of six years ago as to whether Evadne had or had not cheated the railway company out of one and eightpence on an excursion ticket—the past was intangible. It trailed behind this intense event as the pale hair trails behind the burning comet. They were pre-occupied with the moment. Quite often George had found a mean pleasure in the thought that by never giving Evadne a child he had cheated her out of one form of experience, and now he paid the price for this unnatural pride of

sterility. For now the spiritual offspring of their intercourse came to birth. A sublime loathing was between them. For a little time it was a huge perilous horror, but afterwards, like men aboard a ship whose masts seek the sky through steep waves, they found a drunken pride in the adventure. This was the very absolute of hatred. It cheapened the memory of the fantasias of irritation and ill-will they had performed in the less boring moments of their marriage, and they felt dazed, as amateurs who had found themselves creating a masterpiece. For the first time they were possessed by a supreme emotion and they felt a glad desire to strip away, restraint and express it nakedly. It was ecstasy ; they felt tall and full of blood.

Like people who, bewitched by Christ, see the whole earth as the breathing body of God, so they saw the universe as the substance and the symbol of their hatred. The stars trembled overhead with wrath. A wind from behind the angry crags set the moonlight on Lisbech quivering with rage, and the squat hawthorn-tree creaked slowly like the irritation of a dull little man. The dry moors, parched with harsh anger, waited thirstily and, sending out the murmur of rustling mountain grass and the cry of wakening fowl, seemed to huddle closer to the lake. But this sense of the earth's sympathy slipped away from them and they loathed all matter as the dull wrapping of their flame-like passion. At their wishing matter fell away and they saw sarcastic visions. He saw her as a toad squatting on the clean earth, obscuring the stars and pressing down its hot moist body on the cheerful fields. She felt his long boneless body coiled round the roots of the lovely tree of life. They shivered fastidiously. With an uplifting sense of responsibility they realised that they must kill each other.

A bird rose over their heads with a leaping flight that made it seem as though its black body was bouncing against the bright sky. The foolish noise and motion precipitated their thoughts. They were broken into a new conception of life. They perceived that God is war and his creatures are meant to fight. When dogs walk through the world cats must climb trees. The virgin must snare the wanton, the fine lover must put the prude to the sword. The gross man of action walks, spurred on the bloodless bodies of the men of thought, who lie quiet and cunningly do not tell him where his grossness leads him. The flesh must smother the spirit, the spirit must set the flesh on fire and watch it burn. And those who were gentle by nature and shrank from the ordained brutality were betrayers of their kind, surrendering the earth to the seed of their enemies. In this war there is no discharge. If they succumbed to peace now, the rest of their lives would be dishonourable, like the exile of a rebel who has begged his life as the reward of cowardice. It was their first experience of religious passion, and they abandoned themselves to it so that their immediate personal qualities fell away from them. Neither his weakness nor her prudence stood in the way of the event.

They measured each other with the eye. To her he was a spidery thing against the velvet blackness and hard silver surfaces of the pond. The light soaked her bathing dress so that she seemed, against the jagged shadows of the rock cutting, as though she were clad in a garment of dark polished mail. Her knees were bent so clearly, her toes gripped the coping so strongly. He understood very clearly that

if he did not kill her instantly she would drop him easily into the deep riot of waters. Yet for a space he could not move, but stood expecting a degrading death. Indeed, he gave her time to kill him. But she was without power too, and struggled weakly with a hallucination. The quarrel in Sumatra Crescent with its suggestion of vast and unmentionable antagonisms; her swift race through the moon-drenched countryside, all crepitant with night noises: the swimming in the wine-like lake: their isolation on the moor, which was expressedly hostile to them, as nature always is to lonely man: and this stark contest face to face, with their resentments heaped between them like a pile of naked swords—these things were so strange that her civilised self shrank back appalled. There entered into her the primitive woman who is the curse of all women: a creature of the most utter femaleness, useless, save for childbirth, with no strong brain to make her physical weakness a light accident, abjectly and corruptingly afraid of man. A squaw, she dared not strike her lord.

The illusion passed like a moment of faintness and left her enraged at having forgotten her superiority even for an instant. In the material world she had a thousand times been defeated into making prudent reservations and practising unnatural docilities. But in the world of thought she had maintained unfalteringly her masterfulness in spite of the strong yearning of her temperament towards voluptuous surrenders. That was her virtue. Its violation whipped her to action and she would have killed him at once, had not his moment come a second before hers. Sweating horribly, he had dropped his head forward on his chest: his eyes fell on her feet and marked the plebeian moulding of her ankle, which rose thickly over a crease of flesh from the heel to the calf. The woman was coarse in grain and pattern.

He had no instinct for honourable attack, so he found himself striking her in the stomach. She reeled from pain, not because his strength overcame hers. For the first time her eyes looked into his candidly open, unveiled by languor or lust: their hard brightness told him how she despised him for that unwarlike blow. He cried out as he realised that this was another of her despicable victories and that the whole burden of the crime now lay on him, for he had begun it. But the rage was stopped on his lips as her arms, flung wildly out as she fell backwards, caught him about the waist with abominable justness of eye and evil intention. So they fell body to body into the quarrelling waters.

The feathery confusion had looked so soft, yet it seemed the solid rock they struck. The breath shot out of him and suffocation warmly stuffed his ears and nose. Then the rock cleft and he was swallowed by a brawling blackness in which whirled a vortex that flung him again and again on a sharp thing that burned his shoulder. All about him fought the waters, and they cut his flesh like knives. His pain was past belief. Though God might be war, he desired peace in his time, and he yearned for another God—a child's God, an immense arm coming down from the hills and lifting him to a kindly bosom. Soon his body would burst for breath, his agony would smash in his breast bone. So great was his pain that his consciousness was strained to apprehend it, as a too tightly stretched canvas splits and rips.

Suddenly the air was sweet on his mouth. The starlight seemed as hearty as a cheer. The world was still there, the world in which he had lived, so he must be safe. His own weakness and loveableness induced enjoyable tears, and there was a delicious moment of abandonment to comfortable whining before he realised that the water would not kindly buoy him up for long, and that even now a hostile current clasped his waist. He braced his flaccid body against the sucking blackness and flung his head back so that the water should not bubble so hungrily against the cords of his throat. Above him the slime of the rock was sticky with moonbeams, and the leprous light brought to his mind a newspaper paragraph, read years ago, which told him that the dawn had discovered floating in some oily Mersey dock, under walls as infected with wet growth as this, a corpse whose blood-encrusted finger-tips were deeply cleft. On the instant his own finger-tips seemed hot with blood and deeply cleft from clawing at the impregnable rock. He screamed gaspingly and beat his hands through the strangling flood. Action, which he had always loathed and dreaded, had broken the hard mould of his self-possession, and the dry dust of his character was blown hither and thither by fear. But one sharp fragment of intelligence which survived this detrition of his personality perceived that a certain gleam on the rock about a foot above the water was not the cold putrescence of the slime, but certainly the hard and merry light of a moon-ray striking on solid metal. His left hand clutched upwards at it, and he swung from a rounded projection. It was, his touch told him, a leaden ring hanging obliquely from the rock, to which his memory could visualise precisely in some past drier time when Lisbech sent no flood to Whimsey, a waterman mooring a boat strewn with pale-bellied perch. And behind the stooping waterman he remembered a flight of narrow steps that led up a buttress to a stone shelf that ran through the cutting. Unquestionably he was safe. He swung in a happy rhythm from the ring, his limp body trailing like a caterpillar through the stream to the foot of the steps, while he gasped in strength. A part of him was in agony, for his arm was nearly dragged out of its socket and a part of him was embarrassed because his hysteria shook him with a deep rumbling chuckle that sounded as though he meditated on some unseemly joke ; the whole was pervaded by a twilight atmosphere of unenthusiastic gratitude for his rescue, like the quietly cheerful tone of a Sunday evening sacred concert. After a minute's deep breathing he hauled himself up by the other hand and prepared to swing himself on to the steps.

But first, to shake off the wet worsted rags, once his socks, that now stuck uncomfortably between his toes, he splashed his feet outwards to midstream. A certain porpoise-like surface met his left foot. Fear dappled his face with goose flesh. Without turning his head he knew what it was. It was Evadne's fat flesh rising on each side of her deep-furrowed spine through the rent in her bathing dress.

Once more hatred marched through his soul like a king : compelling service by his godhead and, like all gods, a little hated for his harsh lieu on his worshipper. He saw his wife as the curtain of flesh between him and celibacy, and solitude and all those delicate abstentions from life which his soul desired. He saw her as the invisible worm destroying the rose of the world with her dark secret love. Now

he knelt on the lowest stone step watching her wet seal-smooth head bobbing nearer on the waters. As her strong arms, covered with little dark points where her thick hairs were clotted with moisture, stretched out towards safety he bent forward and laid his hands on her head. He held her face under water. Scornfully he noticed the bubbles that rose to the surface from her protesting mouth and nostrils, and the foam raised by her arms and her thick ankles. To the end the creature persisted in turmoil, in movement, in action. . . .

She dropped like a stone. His hands, with nothing to resist them, slapped the water foolishly and he nearly overbalanced forward into the steam. He rose to his feet very stiffly. "I must be a very strong man," he said, as he slowly climbed the steps. "I must be a very strong man," he repeated, a little louder, as with a hot and painful rigidity of the joints he stretched himself out at full length along the stone shelf. Weakness closed him in like a lead coffin. For a little time the wetness of his clothes persisted in being felt : then the sensation oozed out of him and his body fell out of knowledge. There was neither pain nor joy nor any other reckless ploughing of the brain by nerves. He knew unconsciousness, or rather the fullest consciousness he had ever known. For the world became nothingness, and nothingness which is free from the yeasty nuisance of matter and the ugliness of generation was the law of his being. He was absorbed into vacuity, the untamed substance of the universe, round which he conceived passion and thought to circle as straws caught up by the wind. He saw God and lived.

In Heaven a thousand years are a day. And this little corner of time in which he found happiness shrank to a nut-shell as he opened his eyes again. This peace was hardly printed on his heart, yet the brightness of the night was blurred by the dawn. With the grunting carefulness of a man drunk with fatigue, he crawled along the stone shelf to the iron bridge, where he stood with his back to the roaring sluice and rested. All things seemed different now and happier. Like most timid people he disliked the night, and the commonplace hand which the dawn laid on the scene seemed to him a sanctification. The dimmed moon sank to her setting behind the crags. The jewel lights of Lisbech railway station were weak, cheerful twinklings. A steaming bluish milk of morning mist had been spilt on the hard silver surface of the lake, and the reeds no longer stabbed it like little daggers, but seemed a feathery fringe, like the pampas grass in the front garden in Sumatra Crescent. The black crags became brownish, and the mist disguised the sternness of the moor. This weakening of effects was exactly what he had always thought the extinction of Evadne would bring the world. He smiled happily at the moon.

Yet he was moved to sudden angry speech. "If I had my time over again," he said, "I wouldn't touch her with the tongs." For the cold he had known all along he would catch had settled in his head, and his handkerchief was wet through.

He leaned over the bridge and looked along Lisbech and thought of Evadne. For the first time for many years he saw her image without spirits, and wondered without indignation why she had so often looked like the cat about to steal the cream. What was the cream? And did she ever steal it? Now he would never

know. He thought of her very generously and sighed over the perversity of fate in letting so much comeliness.

" If she had married a butcher or a veterinary surgeon she might have been happy," he said, and shook his head at the glassy black water that slid under the bridge to that boiling sluice.

A gust of ague reminded him that wet clothes clung to his fevered body and that he ought to change as quickly as possible, or expect to laid up for weeks. He turned along the path that led back across the moor to the withered ash tree, and was learning the torture of bare feet on gravel when he cried out to himself : " I shall be hanged for killing my wife." It did not come as a trumpet-call, for he was one of those people who never quite hear what is said to them, and this deafishness extended in him to emotional things. It stole on him clamly, like a fog closing on a city. When he first felt hemmed in by this certainty he looked over his shoulder to the crags, remembering tales of how Jacobite fugitives had hidden on the moors for many weeks. There lay at least another day of freedom. But he was the kind of man who always goes home. He stumbled on, not very unhappy, except for his feet. Like many people of weak temperament he did not fear death. Indeed, it had a peculiar appeal to him ; for while it was important, exciting, it did not, like most important and exciting things try to create action. He allowed his imagination the vanity of painting pictures. He saw himself standing in their bedroom, plotting this last event, with the white sheet and the high lights of the mahongany wardrobe shining ghostly at him through the darkness. He saw himself raising a thin hand to the gas bracket and turning on the tap. He saw himself staggering to their bed while death crept in at his nostrils. He saw his corpse lying in full daylight, and for the first time knew himself certainly, unquestionably dignified.

He threw back his chest in pride : but at that moment the path stopped and he found himself staggering down the mound of heatherland and boulders with bleeding feet. Always he had suffered from sore feet, which had not exactly disgusted but, worse still, disappointed Evadne. A certain wistfulness she had always evinced when she found herself the superior animal had enraged and himiliated him many times. He felt that sting him now, and flung himself down the mound cursing. When he stumbled up to the withered ash tree he hated her so much that it seemed as though she were alive again, and a sharp wind blowing down from the moor terrified him like her touch.

He rested there. Leaning against the stripped grey trunk, he smiled up at the sky, which was now so touched to ineffectiveness by the dawn that it looked like a tent of faded silk. There was the peace of weakness in him, which he took to be spiritual, because it had no apparent physical justification : but he lost it as his dripping clothes chilled his tired flesh. His discomfort reminded him that the phantasmic night was passing from him. Daylight threatened him : the daylight in which for so many years he had worked in the solicitor's office and been snubbed and ignored. " ' The garish day,' " he murmured disgustedly, quoting the blasphemy of some hymn writer. He wanted his death to happen in this phantasmic night.

So he limped his way along the road. The birds had not yet begun to sing, but the rustling noises of the night had ceased. The silent highway was consecrated to his proud progress. He staggered happily like a tired child returning from a lovely birthday walk : his death in the little bedroom, which for the first time he would have to himself, was a culminating treat to be gloated over like the promise of a favourite pudding for supper. As he walked he brooded dozingly on large and swelling thoughts. Like all people of weak passions and enterprise he loved to think of Napoleon, and in the shadow of the great asylum wall he strutted a few steps of his advance from murder to suicide, with arms crossed on his breast and thin legs trying to strut massively. He was so happy. He wished that a military band went before him, and pretended that the high hedges were solemn lines of men, stricken in awe to silence as their king rode out to some nobly self-chosen doom. Vast he seemed to himself, and magnificent like music, and solemn like the Sphinx. He had saved the earth from corruption by killing Evadne, for whom he now felt the unremorseful pity a conqueror might bestow on a devastated empire. He might have grieved that his victory brought him death, but with immense pride he found that the occasion was exactly described by a text. " He saved others, Himself He could not save." He had missed the stile in the field above Sumatra Crescent and had to go back and hunt for it in the hedge. So quickly had his satisfaction borne him home.

The field had the fantastic air that jerry-builders give to land poised on the knife-edge of town and country, so that he walked in romance to his very door. The unmarred grass sloped to a stone-hedge of towers of loose brick, trenches and mounds of shining clay, and the fine intentful spires of the scaffording round the last unfinished house. And he looked down on Petrick. Though to the actual eye it was but a confusion of dark distances through the twilight, a breaking of velvety perspectives, he saw more intensely than ever before its squalid walls and squalid homes where mean men and mean women enlaced their unwholesome lives. Yet he did not shrink from entering for his great experience : as Christ did not shrink from being born in a stable. He swaggered with humility over the trodden mud of the field and the new white flags of Sumatra Crescent. Down the road before him there passed a dim figure, who paused at each lamp post and raised a long wand to behead the yellow gas-flowers that were now wilting before the dawn : a ghostly herald preparing the world to be his deathbed. The Crescent curved in quiet darkness, save for one house, where blazed a gas-lit room with undrawn blinds. The brightness had the startling quality of a scream. He looked in almost anxiously as he passed, and met the blank eyes of a man in evening clothes who stood by the window shaking a medicine. His face was like a wax mask softened by heat : the features were blurred with the suffering which comes from the spectacle of suffering. His eyes lay unshiftingly on George's face as he went by and he went on shaking the bottle. It seemed as though he would never stop.

In the hour of his grandeur George was not forgetful of the griefs of the little human people, but interceded with God for the sake of this stranger. Everything was beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

His own little house looked solemn as a temple. He leaned against the lamp-post at the gate and stared at its empty windows and neat bricks. The disorder of the shattered pane of glass could be overlooked by considering a sign that this house was a holy place : like the Passover blood on the lintel. The propriety of the evenly drawn blind pleased him enormously. He had always known that this was how the great tragic things of the world had accomplished themselves : quietly. Evadne's raging activity belonged to trivial or annoying things like spring-cleaning or thunder-storms. Well, the house belonged to him now. He opened the gate and went up the asphalt path, sourly noticing that Evadne had as usual left out the lawn-mower, though it might very easily have rained, with the wind coming up as it was. A stray cat that had been sleeping in the tuft of pampas grass in the middle of the lawn was roused by his coming, and fled insolently close to his legs. He hated all wild homeless things, and bent for a stone to throw at it. But instead his fingers touched a slug, which reminded him of the feeling of Evadne's flesh through the slit in her bathing dress. And suddenly the garden was possessed by her presence : she seemed to amble there as she had so often done, sowing seeds unwisely and tormenting the last days of an ailing geranium by insane transplantation, exclaiming absurdly over such mere weeds as morning glory. He caught the very clucking of her voice . . . The front door opened at his touch.

The little lobby with its closed doors seemed stuffed with expectant silence. He realised that he had come to the theatre of his great adventure. Then panic seized him. Because this was the home where he and she had lived together so horribly, he doubted whether he could do this splendid momentous thing, for here he had always been a poor thing with the habit of failure. His heart beat in him more quickly than his raw feet could pad up the oil-clothed stairs. Behind the deal door at the end of the passage was death. Nothingness! It would escape him, even the idea of it would escape him if he did not go to it at once. When he burst at last into its presence he felt so victorious that he sank back against the door waiting for death to come to him without turning on the gas. He was so happy. His death was coming true.

But Evadne lay on his deathbed. She slept there soundly, with her head flung back on the pillows so that her eyes and brow seemed small in shadow, and her mouth and jaw huge above her thick throat in the light. Her wet hair straggled across the pillow on to a broken cane chair covered with her tumbled clothes. Her breast, silvered with sweat, shone in the ray of the street lamp that had always disturbed their nights. The counterpane rose enormously over her hips in rolls of glazed linen. Out of mere innocent sleep her sensuality was distilling a most drunken pleasure.

Not for one moment did he think this a phantasmic appearance. Evadne was not the sort of woman to have a ghost.

Still leaning against the door, he tried to think it all out : but his thoughts came brokenly, because the dawnlight flowing in at the window confused him by its pale glare and that lax figure on the bed held his attention. It must have been that when he laid his murderous hands on her head she had simply dropped below the

surface and swum a few strokes under water as any expert swimmer can. Probably he had never even put her into danger, for she was a great lusty creature and the weir was a little place. He had imagined the wonder and peril of the battle as he had imagined his victory. He sneezed exhaustingly, and from his physical distress realised hiw absurd it was ever to have thought that he had killed her. Bodies like his do not kill bodies like hers.

Now his soul was naked and lonely as though the walls of his body had fallen in at death, and the grossness of Evadne's sleep made him suffer more unlovely a destitution than any old beggarwoman squatting by the roadside in the rain. He had thought he had had what every man most desires : one night of power over a woman for the business of murder or love. But it had been a lie. Nothing beautiful had ever happened to him. He would have wept, but the hatred he had learnt on the moors obstructed all tears in his throat. At least this night had given him passion enough to put an end to it all.

Quietly he went to the window and drew down the sash. There was no fire-place, so that sealed the room. Then he crept over to the gas bracket and raised his thin hand, as he had imagined in his hour of vain glory by the lake.

He had forgotten Evadne's thrifty habit of turning off the gas at the main to prevent leakage when she went to bed.

He was beaten. He undressed and got into bed : as he had done every night for ten years, and as he would do every night until he died. Still sleeping, Evadne caressed him with warm arms.