

A Man's Life

Adams, Arthur H. (1872-1936)

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A Man's Life by author of "Tussock Land", "Galahad Jones", etc.
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Prologue

“Well,” sighed the nurse. “He's gone!”

She had seen so many deaths that the experience had become a commonplace in that big London hospital. She peered down at him with a professional scrutiny. Yes, another of them. Everybody died at last; they all came to it.

In this case, a fatal accident in a London street, there was nothing to be done. No hope at all . . . a cracked skull. The resident surgeon had looked at him, and passed on to his other duties. A matter of routine. The police must be called for identification.

“A cracked skull. Street accident. A hopeless case,” was the resident's report.

He was swiftly put to bed, unconscious. The nurses were busy. He might linger for a little time, but he would not awaken to any recognition of the world he was leaving, though there might possibly be a final flicker of the man's consciousness; the eyes might open and he would look at the white ceiling of the ward. White . . . just whiteness. All the amazing miracle of a human being in this world, dissolved into white; and after that, the utter dark.

The nurse looked at him. A man of sixty, perhaps, with clear-cut features. His clothes were good. Perhaps a gentleman. Some money in his pocket. She was somewhat curious; she wondered who he was.

“Well,” she said again to herself, “he's gone, poor thing!”

She was to be forgiven, with all her experience in the casualty ward, in thinking that the man was dead. True, she could see no sign of life in that still warm body. But the nurse was alive; and the living do not know what the dying think.

For in that final flash of Life there had surged into the man's consciousness one thing after the other that he had done or thought of since childhood. His whole life flashed up in disconnected scenes, pictures startlingly vivid leaping into his mind, and as abruptly dying. There was no order in these pictures. With the amazing speed of thought, whole stories and incidents leaped into being, and even trivial moods and subconscious phases, recaptured from his memory.

Though light travels with an inconceivable swiftness, the speed of thought is a million times swifter.

A Man's Life

The man in the bed found himself again. He was a boy at home, condemned to toil in his father's garden without respite. It was a hostile garden, horribly rectangular. It was laid out in squares and rows, and no weed was allowed to enter. It was his job to see to that. He hated the sight of the severely pruned plants condemned to their yearly toil. There were no untidy plots, no unevenness; the raspberry canes stood as stiffly as soldiers on parade, without an unlawful bud spoiling their terrible and tortured symmetry. The bushes were all in a formal pattern, just as his life was. Regularly the garden was manured; and how he loathed the smell of manure! Yet from it Life sprang with a terrifying zest. And the boy felt that Life had cut and pruned him, too. He could not look ahead: it seemed to him that he would always be a prisoner in that terrible garden.

His mother was kinder. She, by some strange dispensation, was allowed to scatter seeds anywhere, never quite sure what she was scattering, and allowing the plants—useless flowers, not ungainly vegetables—to follow their vagrant dispositions. That was what the world should be, a tangle of arrogant plants, springing even from the rectangular paths. And he felt the inhibitions of his personality so keenly that he looked forward to his future with a silent terror. He could not see over the trimmed hedges to the world without.

There was one escape—books. He read everything he could find. Night after night he would slip down to a library, bathing himself in wonderful beauty, only half understood, but letting strange and exciting worlds invade his soul. He read Schopenhauer and Nietzsche and Shakespeare; scientific books, adventures, poetry—anything that promised him knowledge. For he felt within him a strange and eager desire to understand everything. But the more he read the more he faltered. He used to look up at the backs of the volumes on the shelves. Some day he would know them all, every page in every book! He was not going to let Life beat him in his tremendous quest.

So night after night, having done his lessons —of what use were lessons?—he would look up with a sigh of discontent. He would never know all—everything! Life was too short for that. Of course, he told himself in self-pity that he would die young. Poets, he had read, oft-times died young: that was their luck; they did not have to face a grown-up world. But he felt within him so much that he could not express. How terrible for him—and for the world—if he died that night! Humanity would never know what it had lost. Other poets were growing all around him, threatening his supremacy, getting a start in the quest of Fame. If only he knew how to express himself, but his mind was all fluidity—images that he could not grasp,

eluding, tremendous and staggering wonders. Life wasn't large enough for him to express all that was in his soul.

That phase passed.

He was an undergraduate at his university. He and a fellow student were walking home from the night lectures. Some of the classes were held in the evening, for his university was then a minor one in a far part of the Empire. His friend was a divinity student. Both were terribly in earnest, both being young. They had been discussing God.

“It comes to this,” said the divinity student. “You deny that there is a God looking after this world, and all the souls in it?”

“I do deny that!” he said. “A lot God cares about us. We just happened to evolve, like the fishes and the snakes. We are only a chance happening in the universe, and we've just got to make the best of it. We're only animals that happened to develop sufficiently to be able to stand up and reason. A lot your God cares!”

His friend hotly protested.

“Well,” said he, “let us put it to the test!”

“How can you?” said his friend.

“Easily! Wait a minute! You'll soon see. I'm going to blaspheme God.”

The divinity student shuddered. “For God's sake, don't!” he muttered. “You don't know what you're doing!”

He laughed. “I'll show you—to prove there is no God—or at least a God who doesn't care anything about us or about the world!”

His friend almost shook. But he recovered himself. “It is my duty, though I'd hate to have anything happen—as I'm sure something will happen.”

“Nonsense!” said he; “I'll soon show you! Nobody is about. We're under the stars.”

“Don't be theatrical!” exclaimed the other. “What's the game?”

“Listen. I'm going to blaspheme God!”

“Well,” said the divinity student, almost inaudibly, “I'm game enough, anyhow. Nothing will happen to me.”

“Right! I'll stand out in the middle of the road. There's nobody about. You'll see!”

He could not help noticing that his friend had taken his place some yards away from him. He could not help cynically thinking that the divinity student, for all his daring, did not want to be involved in any cosmic cataclysm.

“Well, I'm going to blaspheme God! Are you ready?”

“Stop!” cried the student. “This may be murder!”

“It won't be murder. Nothing is going to happen!”

“My God, you don't know! Remember the miracles in the Bible! Our God is a

jealous God!”

“I've had enough of this,” said he. “Let's get it over!”

“Well, I've warned you!”

He stepped into the open and looked up at the stars. What did one do when one wanted to blaspheme. There ought to be some terrible words. But enough of that. Looking up at the immense array of distant worlds, locked in their places in the sidereal system, he uttered a curse—a silent curse against God. . . .

He waited, as his friend waited, for the thunderbolt.

Feeling foolish, he at last turned from that menacing expanse of callous worlds. He waited . . . and waited, with just a foolish little fear that perhaps, after all, something might happen.

In that interminable pause, he noted that his divinity friend had stealthily stepped back, leaving the blasphemer with a clear space around him. He did not want to take any risks; he might, after all, be involved in the forthcoming tragedy.

The sidereal system took no notice of these insignificant atoms in the universe. To the youth's surprise he had felt a faint tremor of expectation, which he soon dismissed with a foolish laugh. But his friend was not beaten.

“It might come in the night, in the middle of the night,” he whispered. “You never know. God is not theatrical: he may have other means to punish you.”

It was an inconclusive victory.

He was in China. (That flash had faded.) He and his friend, war-correspondents in the Boxer campaign, were marching through the flat plains in the environs of Peking. The Allies were making a surprise attack upon an enemy stronghold. They had marched all night through the immensity of the vast plain, the immemorial plain of that changeless civilization. The two correspondents were tired out. The adventure had become stale. Disregarding the strict injunctions to keep close to the body of troops— for there were troops of all nationalities in the expedition, and correspondents played a lone hand—his friend, an artist for a London paper, paused for a rest.

Idly they contemplated the huge stooks of kowliang. Suddenly he observed a movement in one of the stooks. The main body of allied troops had passed on.

“Hold on!” he said, “there is something in that stook! Might be chickens underneath those stalks!” (Chickens were the favourite form of loot.) “Wait till the stragglers pass!”

The troops passed. No one in sight! They cautiously approached. Yes, there was a tremor in that piled-up stook. Something living there! Quickly they pulled the outer sheaves away. Crouching as in a tent, was a Chinese—a girl, hidden, shivering with fear! She stared in utter anguish. These foreign devils would kill her— or worse! But such a beautiful young girl, evidently a daughter of a prosperous farmer, a girl of seventeen!

The correspondents looked at each other. These were the people who had been conquered, though why they did not know, except that this was war.

She did not move, keeping her black and beautiful eyes staring at these foreign devils, resigned to her horrible fate.

Without a word they looked again at each other.

“Thought there was somebody there?” said his friend.

“So did I—at first,” he said.

The correspondents replaced the stook, carefully covering up their secret posse, and went on.

“What fools we were!” he said, when they had covered another mile across that desolate plain. “Somebody else is sure to find her!”

“Yes!” muttered his mate.

For the rest of the day they regretted their chivalry.

He was a child. The family was going to the sea-side, a tremendous event in his little life. There was to be a picnic. There were six children in the family; and, as a special favour to mark the day, each child was allowed to choose a toy to take to the sands. There was only one thing in the world that he wanted for the excursion. He had prayed on going to bed that God would play fair with him. God could not always be depended upon in important matters. But on the day, before the departure, the toys arrived; and, sure enough, his mother had brought home all the presents. His was to be a beautiful spade. He wasn't allowed to see it inside its wrappings of brown paper; but he could feel it all over. Yes; God had not forgotten. But in his heart he knew that something would happen to the spade. Something always did to his toys. But there was no mistake this time: it was just the spade for which he had yearned a whole fortnight, though it seemed a year.

The other boys of the family were pleased with their presents, but he swelled with pride because he had got the finest of them all. But all the time he knew that something would happen to his spade. He could not help tearing a bit of the brown paper off the parcel, just to see if it was all right. It was. The digging part was all shiny black, and the handle was bright yellow. A wonderful spade! How he would dig and dig and dig in the sands with it! The others could have their presents; he didn't want any of them; he had his spade.

There was no one about in the back yard. He could not resist fondling it. And then the string around the paper came undone. The brown paper seemed to slip away. There was his spade! There could be no harm done; it was his, anyhow. Making sure that the other children were round at the side of the house, he took the spade and pretended that he was shovelling sand on the sea-shore, making glorious castles on the beach. He put his foot on the blade of the spade, just as he had seen the gardener do it. He dug into the soil. The spade crumpled up. It was only tin.

In his heart he cursed God. It was just the sort of thing that God did! And all the other children had their own toys to play with. His mother told him that it was his own fault. Toy spades were not meant for digging in heavy soil, but for sand.

He could not bear to look at the broken thing. He crept away round the side of the house. He cried bitterly. He wanted to be utterly alone in his misery. But even that was not permitted to him.

A voice spoke to him through the palings that divided his home from the next door house.

“Cry-baby!” said the voice.

He peered through the slits in the palings, indignant at being caught crying. Then

he climbed upon the cross-piece of the fence, and hoisted himself up, forgetting to wipe his eyes.

There was the little girl next door. He had often peered through the slits surreptitiously at her. She was always eating raspberries, greedy little thing. But he loved her with a passionate yearning. He had never dared to speak to her, of course. He was frightened of her. But now he didn't care what he did; his spade was broken.

Of course, being a boy, he wasn't going to tell the little girl of his trouble. She would only laugh at him, and call him "Cry-baby!" But he could not help looking at her. She was cramming raspberries into her mouth, munching even the yellow ones. But she had always gone away when he had looked at her; but now she came to the fence, and said, "Have some raspberries, little boy?"

He hesitated.

"Can't you climb the fence?" she taunted him.

He wasn't going to stand that. He would show her how he could climb! He managed to get to the top railing and looked down on her. He felt better that way.

"Here!" she said softly, and handed up her fistful of raspberries. He dropped some in his agitation, and she was cross. But he didn't care. He loved her, passionately, for ever. But the barrier that had been so miraculously broken down was soon closed. He never dared to speak to her again, though he imagined wonderful feats that he would perform, just for her.

One day he saw a lot of big carts taking away tables and beds and things; and he never saw her go.

He had lost his job. He had to go home that afternoon to tell his wife. He had tried every avenue for a month past. "Too old!" was the usual verdict. Younger men could do his work at half his salary. And he had felt so safe! Not the slightest warning. He had to tell his wife. When he came home, he waited, postponing his disclosure. During dinner he had been angry with the children, and his wife had noticed his irritation, and had been nice to him, guessing, as a wife subtly will, that he was in trouble. After dinner, he waited till the children had gone to bed. And his wife, that wonderful woman! had already guessed, though she did not know how serious it was.

So the two, together, sat talking of trivialities. Then quietly and curtly he told her. Ah! but what a wife he had found in this life! She made him tell her everything—the search for a job, any job, to carry on. And immediately her courage came, shaming him for his weakness. How often he had turned things over, seeking for a clue out of his trouble.

In the old days when they were newly married, and when the boy was only dreamed of, she and he would sit together in the big roomy armchair, talking and dreaming of their hopes. And now she was beside him—it was such a cosy fit for the two of them, though it needed some managing. And she was softly consoling him, and valiantly prophesying of the radiant future. Not a word of blame. How brave she was, how tender, feeling only for him! He could not fail. She was more than his wife; she was his comrade. They were together now, as they had never been together in their first night of mating.

But at the back of his brain there was a dull pang, as if he had been stunned by a crashing blow. The terrible thing was that he had failed her!

She did not cry. She was too brave for that. It was impossible that their little world could come crashing down. The children! Their lives had been too serene, as if Fate had overlooked them.

No matter! She was by his side. With her comfort and her confidence she soothed him, as she had soothed the children when they were babes.

Yet when he tried to seize and recapture the beauty of her, he could not recall the wonder of his wife. Other flashes of his past he could vividly recapture, but the picture of her came to him as through a mist. It seemed to him that she had so merged herself in him that the twain were one. He felt himself grasping at her vivid reality; he tried to stand apart from her, though not to judge her, but a mist intervened. He was half herself and half him. He could not stand outside. All he could do was to feel himself one twin-personality.

Clearer, though, came the picture of their first moment of meeting. It was on a tennis court. He was playing, and he noted a girl watching him. It was only vaguely that he saw her; just a beautiful girl with a wonderful figure. How gallantly he strove to play his match! He strove to perform feats at the net, hoping that she had noticed him. He could not help showing off. If only she had looked his way when he brought off that brilliant smash! But she had missed that fine stroke. Some man had diverted her attention from him. She wasn't looking at him! How could she laugh and chatter to those men? It was an agony for him to end the set. Surely she was not going? No; she had been persuaded by one of her girl friends to wait for tea. What luck!

But a greater piece of luck was in store for him. He came off the court, and another girl promptly introduced him to her.

He did not know till some time afterwards that the meeting had been deliberately arranged. A girl friend of hers had told her of the new member of the club. The friend had soon found that he had no interest in her, but she thought that they should meet.

Only a few conversational remarks were made. She seemed to like him.

And that night he told two of his chums that she—the girl at the tennis court, whose name he had not caught in the introduction—was the girl he meant to marry.

One of the two men laughed. “How do you know that she isn't engaged to marry somebody else?”

“Had she a ring on?” the other asked.

“I never looked,” he replied.

He did not even know on which finger a girl wore an engagement ring.

But, by a glorious chance, there was a dance three days later. They kissed. And she promised to marry him.

He was a youth, aimlessly walking down a back street in the dusk. He was mooning along with inchoate thoughts in his mind. Suddenly he was aware of a girl leaning over the back gate of one of a row of houses. She was looking at nothing across the road, with a quiet gaze, dreaming, too. She was more suddenly aware of him than he of her. He looked into her face, and noticed that her young breasts were soft against the top of the wicket gate. The night seemed suddenly to drop upon the road, like a theatre curtain noiselessly coming down upon the climax of a play.

He unconsciously slackened his pace. There was in her brooding eyes a dreamy look, a yearning pause, as if the world had quietly run down like an unwound clock. He half paused, and dared to look back.

She was looking quietly after him. There was no sound in the darkening street. His feet dragged him onward, away from her. He wanted to stop, to speak, though what could he say? He went on. It seemed to him, in that pause of time, that he could capture all that Woman meant, leaning there, in a quiet daze of content.

It was the first time he had become aware of Woman, her mystery, her weaving of magic ropes round the soul.

So he passed on. So she remained static, waiting to be aroused, content to wait till the one man in the world would startle her to womanhood.

Later that night, he came hurrying back past the gate, but the girl had withdrawn herself, and he was alone again.

He was in London, careless and care-free, a youth lured from overseas to conquer the big city. Everything was possible then. He would write splendid novels and pen exquisite poems. He lived in a dream, for in those days Chelsea was a dream. He had his friend, destined to become a famous painter. Together they would take London and use it as a footstool to fame. He was offered employment as a journalist, but with the superb gesture of Youth he refused such humdrum work. He was a poet: he must not lower his standard. He had done with the petty journalism of his birthplace. All or nothing! He would write plays. The world was waiting for him.

His friend held high his ideal of painting great pictures. It was all such tremendous fun. Who cared? With banners flaunting their entry into the metropolis, they pictured their splendid dreams.

But it was not long before London turned away from them. Nobody noticed them. In their lodgings they would await the post bumping into the letter-box. One of his short stories had come back again. What did they care? They soon discovered that cheques used to drop silently into the letter-box, while the thump at the door meant a disappointment. No matter! Out the articles and stories used to go, and sometimes they didn't come back.

Once a week—his friend with his black-and-white portfolio—they both would mount the horse-bus on the way to the city. How cheerful they were as they climbed up to the driver's seat! But they went warily. They soon found that some of the penny sections on the bus route were shorter than others. They would walk the lesser distances, and pick up another bus for the longer sections.

At Piccadilly they separated. The poet would offer his poems and stories to editor after editor, and his friend would graciously, and with a superb gesture, allow the art editors to criticize the illustrations for the magazines. Each would tackle those grudging fellows, making the rounds of the magazine city.

If his friend had sold a drawing, or the poet had later got a story accepted, they would meet at a teashop, and there would be a high tea. When they had thrown their pearls before swine, there was a fourpenny tea, and homeward they cursed the stony-hearted city. Sometimes they felt a tinge of fear. But Youth would win!

They owned the world.

One evening he was making his way through a sudden shower to his friend's lodgings. Amazingly enough, he had purchased an umbrella. It certainly kept his clothing dry, but a poet with an umbrella was an anachronism hardly to be borne. He hated to open it: it was terribly bourgeois. Still, there was an inward glow in the

mere fact of possessing an umbrella. It meant one more stride into prosperity.

Ahead of him was a girl scurrying across the wet road. Ah! Here was a use for his purchase! As the girl stepped from the pavement he opened his new umbrella and silently held it above her head. She glanced swiftly sideways, but took no apparent notice of her unexpected escort. She was trapped. Thus he walked silently but rapidly with her for the length of the side-street. Not a word was said. Was she pretty? He couldn't tell.

He had, at last, to speak. He asked her which way she was going. She showed him. Of course, he insisted on escorting her to her home. It was only a day later that he found out she had led him right round a square, having passed her dwelling without mentioning her mistake.

He met her, by appointment, the following night. They kissed in a sheltered corner in the still pouring rain. She was so soft and sweet! And how useful was that sheltering umbrella! She was in the choir of a close-by church. She had been going to practice. She missed many nights when she should have been at the church. She was all shyness and timidity. She feared her stern father.

One night her father discovered them together in the square. He fled.

For weeks he haunted that square, carefully peering round in case her father was prowling near. Then she disappeared. He never knew what had become of her.

He was in a rowing boat, with an elder boy, upon a great placid river. They were pulling slowly downstream between high cliffs. Both had guns. The face of the cliff was honey-combed with rabbit burrows. They could be easily seen among the tussocks, swarming like insects. The bluff seemed moving and alive. It was almost too easy to hit and hit. They came tumbling down into the river. It was glorious fun. They revelled in the slaughter. Sometimes a rabbit crumpled up and came bounding into the river; others just died after a shudder. It was delightful to see them die. It was so easy to pot them. The blood-lust was in their hearts. Something to kill, to kill! There was no skill in their shooting. They let the dead or dying bodies float past them.

At last they grew tired of their fun. It was so easy to pick them off. But it had been a glorious day.

He was a university boy, terribly shy. There was to be a dance. There was a girl in her first year at the university who was quite unlike the other girls. This girl had all the first-year students around her. The other girls were studious dull things, meant merely to be tormented in the classes. Girls should not go to a university. She had not shown any preference among her admirers, but it was rumoured that in the Latin class the professor was “sweet” on her. He wondered if she would let him—a lad in his first year—take her to the dance? It was a daring thing to do. So many other fellows liked her. He anxiously debated with himself whether he would venture to ask her. Then, one night, he called at her people's house. The girl opened the door, with a start of surprise. She invited him in. He blurted out his request. Would she allow him to take her to the dance?

“My dear boy,” she murmured, “I've been invited by lots of men; but it was very sweet of you! But won't you stay?”

He got out of the house precipitately. He had bought two tickets! He did not go to the dance.

He had heard of a woman whose husband had divorced her. A friend introduced him, and she invited him to her rooms where she lived alone. A divorced woman sounded to him delightfully dangerous. He had read of such women, in books. One day he met her in the street, and she suggested that he might come in and have a talk. There was nothing strange or terrible about her sitting-room, though he could not help seeing through the door ajar the tumbled bed-clothes of her bedroom. How delightfully Bohemian, he thought! He had read of such things. Now he was seeing Life. But he felt very uneasy. He was afraid that, perhaps, she might kiss him. He wouldn't have liked that. She was so much older than he was. She must have been quite twenty-four.

They sat and talked. He felt very nervous. He had never had a *tête-à-tête* with a grown woman.

Suddenly she put her arms around him and whispered strange words to him. He did not know what to do next. But gradually she pressed him to her. He could feel her warmth. She was playing with him. He did not like it. If only he could get out of that room! But he had to go through with it now. What a fool he had been to come at all! But she suddenly became playful. He liked that better. He was terribly frightened suddenly. What was he there for?

She was kissing him now, horrible kisses. He had kissed girls before, but this seemed to drain all his desire away. Yet he felt his heart beating hurriedly.

There she was, clasping him, holding him to her breast. There was a scent that he did not like.

Suddenly dominant, he seized her. His whole being was in a tumult.

"Wait!" she whispered.

But he would not let her go.

"You silly boy!" she said, trying to evade him.

"I want you!" he cried.

"But not in such a hurry," she laughed, triumphant. "I'll be back in a minute!"

It seemed a long minute, waiting.

He remembered the room wavering about him.

The first thing he was conscious of was a sudden coldness on his face. What was this? Water?

He had fainted. She was anxiously looking down upon him, infinitely tender.

"There, poor child," she murmured.

He thought he was back in his mother's arms.

She brought him a glass of milk, and he had to drink it.

When he was all right again she laughed tenderly, and murmured, "You silly kid."
He never went back.

He was with his girl-wife. They were inconceivably happy. The world was all golden, like the day. They had laughed, though shyly, at the contretemps of their voyage across the Pacific. His girl-wife had been seasick all the time. How brave she had been about it! She had insisted on dressing herself each day to go on deck, anywhere out of the cabin. She had to ask him to find her dainty garments for her. Exhausted as she was, she could not get at them.

But when at last they entered harbour she was once again herself. Passion came and reticence waned. All the world was theirs. And then that wonderful morning came. They had reached the rushing river in a world of radiance. She stood entranced with bloom, drinking in the beauty of the scene. The blue mists were rising around them, with wisps of white clouds tangled in the tall trees and the brilliant green of the cleared expanses. Across the little river there was a creaking narrow bridge.

“Let's cross!” she cried, and led the way. And then he failed her. He was afraid to look down at the swirling river below; he dared not follow her.

She had no fears. “Come on!” she cried. “You can't fall!”

He had to follow her; but he felt that he had failed her. But she laughed, and forgot his stupid fear. The world did not matter; these two were the world.

It had suddenly struck him that he was an old man.

He was walking down the street. He looked at the young girls passing him. He looked at them, yearningly, but—this was remarkable— they did not see him. He was invisible to all those young people. They looked straight through him. There was a camaraderie of the streets that did not include him. It seemed to him that he glided invisibly and noiselessly through the crowd. They made way for him, but only as one moves aside, as one would get out of the way of a dog. There was no recognition of the fact that he had passed them. Apparently there was nothing to interest them in his passing.

He had grown old. He had passed his manhood: he was no use. The chattering girls missed him altogether. He did not exist. It seemed to him that they averted their eyes as if he were a funeral that was passing. He was a corpse still surviving, but that did not matter. He was no use.

“I must be dead,” he said to himself. That is what being dead meant, being outside the gay, happy, chattering streams of girls and boys. That is Life, but he had passed on through Life. If only one girl had actually perceived him he would have been happy. Just a passing recognition that an old man had gone by.

He was at school, in the Headmaster's own room.

The Headmaster had just arrived from England; and there was an anxious time for the boys. There would be changes, of course. But it did not occur to him that he would be involved in the new order of things. And now he was anxiously awaiting the entrance of the ruler of the boys.

The Head had instituted a new order. For each class there had been appointed two monitors, who had the unpleasant, yet proud, duty of assuming leadership among their classmates. To the boy's consternation his name and that of another had been read out as monitors for his class. There was no doubt about Black's pre-eminence in his class. He was the leader of the gang that bullied him in the gymnasium class!

The Rector, plump and cheery, entered the room.

"Well," he began, "you're in the fourth, aren't you?"

"Yes, sir. I had to come. It's about this monitor business."

"You and Black are appointed for the fourth, aren't you? I'm glad you came. You're the first boy to see me about it. Naturally you want to talk over your duties and responsibilities with me? I am glad you take your new position so seriously. I attach a great deal of importance to the new system. It will impart a tone to the school."

"It isn't that, sir," he said. "I want to resign, sir."

"Indeed! What's the trouble?" The Head lit his pipe, adopting the pose of two comrades. "Well?"

"I'm not fit to be a monitor, sir."

"Indeed? But surely I am the proper person to decide that? I feel that Black and you are the most fitted for those duties. And now you decline to help me in my work of carrying on the discipline of the school?"

"I can't do it, sir. I couldn't boss the smallest boy in my class. They're not afraid of me."

"But," said the Head, "you have another boy to help you. I don't want you to come to me in this matter. If your authority is questioned, you can call, if necessary, upon the physical assistance of Black. You're shirking your job, aren't you? You're afraid?"

"Yes, sir!"

"But aren't we all cowards, my boy? And did you think I didn't know you're one? That's a great discovery to make—that every boy, and most men, are cowards."

He flushed.

The Head smiled. "Black is a fine athletic type, but he doesn't know that he is also

a coward. Black is rather to be pitied, I think. You see, he has never had a chance to find himself out. You have. He has never had the opportunity to doubt himself—a fine athlete, well able to look after himself. You're really lucky to get these unpleasant things over like that when you're quite young. Well," he smiled, "I'll take your name off the list."

He paused.

"Oh, no, sir!" he said. "If you'll let me remain, I'll do my best and—"

"I knew it," said the Head. "You've got to go through it. It won't be easy; and you won't get much assistance from me. You've got your own codes. Stick to them!"

It wasn't easy. The class gave him trouble. But one day when he was being badgered, Black intervened, and rather contemptuously backed him up. He pulled through.

He was walking along the street, dreaming of the wonders he would do in the world. But suddenly he came out of his daze: a girl passing gave him a hesitant look. He swept his dream away; this was real. He turned his footsteps and lingered, letting her pass him. He swiftly scrutinized her: she was not a professional woman—but could you ever tell? He was frightened of that sort of girl. There seemed to him a fragrance about her; she was so young. But quietly she sidled up to a shop-window and peered in. The window was stocked with garden tools and fertilizers. It was with a start that she looked hurriedly and covertly up at him.

One of those girls, after all! But she had no sign of the professional habituées of the street. He took up his place beside her; and quietly she turned to meet his sidelong gaze. A girl of the street, but surely she was innocent, or almost so? Still carefully scrutinizing the bags of patent fertilizers, she smiled at him.

They were so young, both of them. He asked her about herself. She had come from the country, but did not say why.

She looked weary. Perhaps she was hungry. Yes; she would like something to eat and drink. Luckily he had some money in his pocket. They entered a teashop, and she told him some lies. He was almost as young as she. He asked her to meet him that night. Yes, she was tired; she had walked a long way. Her mother? Oh, she didn't matter; her mother wouldn't mind her staying out late. Not too late.

He had never taken out a girl for the night. He wondered vaguely where he could find a place. He was new to London, living in lodgings. It seemed to him a great adventure. He asked her if she knew of a place where they could go. She didn't know. She really did not know. He cursed himself for being so immature; but he had heard of a locality where they might try for a room. In the end he asked a railway porter, feeling himself utterly gauche. The porter directed them to an address where people who had missed a train could find accommodation for the night.

They found the little hotel. They rang the bell and he bravely led the way into a tiny, stuffy hall. On his inquiry a pasty-white man asked them to wait. All the time he was dreadfully afraid that the porter would ask where their luggage was. They sat down thankfully after their long walk. Nobody seemed to trouble about them. His spirits rose. But they did not talk much; they were frightened. It seemed such a long time for the porter to summon them. They entered a little room, very stuffy. It was too obvious to him that it was only a bedroom. There were no chairs.

It was horrible having to undress together; but he pretended to look out the dark window giving on to a blank wall. He determinedly turned his back on her. And

how he hated the sordidness and furniture, designed for only one purpose! Horrible!

She had slipped into the double bed. He wondered if it had been the first time, or the second.

He woke in the night. A clock was telling the time.

He roused her. He had had enough of it.

"I'm going to leave you," he said.

"By myself?" she gasped.

"It'll be all right," he tried to reassure her. "I've paid for the room and the breakfast. You needn't worry at all in the morning."

"But," she almost wailed, "you might stay. I'll be lonely by myself. Besides," she said softly, "I'm happy with you. I love you, you foolish boy. Didn't you know that? Please don't leave me now. If you don't want me, let's cuddle up and go to sleep. I love your eyes. And it is so nice to find such a dear boy. The others——!" She shuddered.

How beautiful she was, how happy with him!

"You can't go now, you dear?" she pleaded. "Just let me kiss you, and I'll put my arms round you? It would be horrible to wake up and find you gone, and have to get up and sneak out early in the morning? I know," she pleaded, "I'm not a professional girl at all. But I had no money. I've done it before, but not often. But I could really love you, you darling!"

He was adamant. He slipped out to the floor and began to dress. It did not take long.

"I hate you!" she muttered.

He kissed her, gave her some money for herself, and left the room. The sleepy porter looked his surprise as he opened the hall door.

The streets were empty. It was a long way to his lodgings. Everything was dead. The poor sweet thing, compelled to put up with such things! Never again, he said to himself. It must have been about three o'clock. He let himself in carefully, afraid that the other people might overhear him. Quickly he undressed and crept into his bed—and she, lonely in hers! How beautiful she was! Poor thing, she was not to blame at all. How could he blame her—she was only a child?

Merciful sleep came to him.

But early next morning he woke, with a terrible anxiety. She had promised to meet him again the day after in Trafalgar Square. Suppose anything had happened after he had crept out of that disreputable house? Suppose, later in the night some other man had found his way to her room? Suppose, unprotected, had taken her . . . murdered her? He shuddered with fright. He pictured it all with a penetrating vividness. Some drunken man making his way into the bedroom. If she had been

murdered, the police might identify him as the man who took her to that mean little place. What story could he tell, if anything had happened afterwards? The coward that he was, to leave her thus unprotected! Such a soft thing to be left so lonely! What a brute he had been! Who would believe that he had taken her to that place and left her in the night? But could the police identify him? You never knew!

So all that day and the following night he cursed himself for his callousness, with always the fear that he might be brought into the sordid affair.

On the day appointed he was waiting at Trafalgar Square an hour before the time. There were many policemen about: he wondered if they had already identified him. The hour dragged on, a long, long hour.

Somebody touched him on the shoulder. He swung round, with a start. It wasn't a constable; it was she!

Thank God!

But never again!

He was an elderly man, walking down a Dorset lane. He had discovered it himself. It was the longest day of the year, and the hottest. He was staying for one blessed week in that county of green fields and lovely lanes, walking briskly beneath the glorious sun. It was a genial pause in his brief holiday, that week in ancient Dorset. He had found paradise in a corner of England.

Soon, he told himself, he would be but part of that beauty of gentle death, beneath these gracious trees. He was marvellously happy, alone with the land from which his forefathers had gone forth. A pity to die! But what matter? One less on the crowded globe. He had lived, not fiercely, but honestly. He had been blessed with children and a wife above all wives. But he had company in his solitude: the foxgloves like an army with banners, incredibly blue forget-me-nots, and a streamlet that had oozed from damp mosses until it grew bolder and became a tinkling brook, hidden in ferns. Yes, he said to himself, he had had enough of Life: he had given it an honest trial, and was content. If only, though, his wife were with him now just for a pause to remember all the good that had come to him on his long way, and with just a parting sigh for all these good things to fade. But his children! They held his heart in thrall; and oh! for the boon of having his wife to close his tired eyes and leave him in peace!

He looked for no anticlimax of resurrection. These noble trees would in their turn crash to earth, and acorns would rebuild that leafy lane, until the sun went out. But the perfection of the day and the splendour of the sky and the beauty of the flowers he would forget in death, and be content.

One boon he had been given: he was hale and full of vibrant life; no lingering on the edge of the grave, please God! . . . If there was a God? No matter, if not. He wanted no after-life: he had had enough of life; he had lived to the utmost. There should be no opening of tombs for him and his people to begin Life over again, in no matter what realms of eternity and bliss that were reserved for him and his kind. When he died he passionately wanted to be dead—quite dead. He had run through the permitted gamut: he was content with the experiment that he had not arranged.

Enough of that! The sun looked down at the man, hale and calmly happy, loitering along, kin with the very white horse that stood beside the brook. Enough that he could feel the balm of the day, the longest day of the English summer. Would he ever see another?

He was a small boy in church. He had to kneel on bare knees. It was very dull, but he did not mind during the prayers. You could think all sorts of thoughts in church, and when you folded your hands you could make a lattice of your knitted fingers, and look through them when people did not know you were gazing at them. That evening he peered from his place, carefully exploring.

There, in a pew that was placed sideways on, he noticed a girl new to the church services. He felt a sudden thrill, she was so beautiful! He carefully widened his fingers. He could see her quite clearly through his hands, at his leisure. The pretty girl was quite unconscious of his keen scrutiny, utterly absorbed in her devotions. Who was she? How was it that he had never noticed her before? Was she only a chance comer to the services? He eagerly hoped not. He did not dare to glance in her direction during the singing of the hymn; but when he knelt again he was at liberty to dwell upon her beautiful face. He loved her devoutness.

The next prayer began. Eagerly he stared through his fingers at her. It seemed to him that invisibly he was kissing her. She was so earnest in her devotions. But as he gazed he suddenly saw her interlaced fingers open stealthily! She had discovered his secret; she was steadily gazing at him through the lattice of her crossed hands. She was peering at him with dark, beautiful eyes!

It was the first nascent thrill in his life. Her presence startled him. He had never seen so beautiful a girl before.

But could it be real? He must have imagined it. But in the last prayer, she deliberately dropped her delicate hands and solemnly spoke to him with her eyes. It was as if she was kissing him, though he had had no use before for kissing. He had kissed little girls in round games at parties, but he thought it rather silly. But how could he ever dare to imagine himself kissing her lips? It was a profanation.

No, it was real! As she rose to follow her mother out of the church she glanced interestedly round, with a provocation in her eyes. The daring of it! It was like a blinding flash of flame, searing him.

Who was she? Would she be there next Sunday at church? How had he never seen her before? Would she be in church next Sunday? But that would be a whole week! How could he bear those seven days and nights? And he was helpless, utterly helpless. He could not dare to ask any questions of his mother. He had to endure this amazing experience for a whole week; and perhaps she would not be there next Sunday. Or never?

It was an agonizing week. Every minute, it seemed, he was thinking of her, trying to recapture the memory of that revelation. He went to bed, hoping that he would

dream of her, and every morning he would count the days before Sunday came round. He had never before experienced anything so amazing in his life. One night he discovered that he had forgotten her face; he could not recall that perturbing glance. It seemed to him that hitherto he had never existed; all his life had gone as nothing; all that was to come was inextricably bound up with her; and he didn't even know who she was. He made clumsy efforts to discover her, hoping that someone might chance to mention her existence or her name; but he was working in the dark. A malign fate had snatched her from him. But God could not be so unmindful as to let her go away, now that he had found her?

His clumsy efforts failed to discover her identity; and then Fate amazingly befriended him. His mother happened to mention a woman's name "Oh, yes," she said, "that must have been Mrs. Trevel I saw in church last Sunday. They have taken that big house with the creepers over it, you know"

That was all. He knew the house, and on his way home from school he walked deliberately past it. Perhaps she was looking out for him? But there was no sign. But there was next Sunday. He would see her again! It was strange that nobody else in the family happened to mention her. How he would like to know her name! But he had to go cautiously; nobody must know that he loved her. Going to bed at night he lay awake thinking of her in a sensuous ecstasy.

He surprised his mother by offering to accompany her to church in the morning. But the girl was not there. Could she have gone away, or perhaps she was ill? It was maddening to be kept wondering about her. It would be so like God to get her run over and killed.

He eagerly set out for the evening service. He did not dare to look towards her pew until the first prayer came. Shielding his eyes he peered through his fingers and saw nothing but a big black hat that intervened.

As the congregation stood up he had his chance. She was looking, almost challenging, straight at him! But the glance she gave him was keenly critical. He felt that she had summed him up. He felt utterly abashed. But as she looked carelessly past him, he intent on her every feature, she absently seemed to touch her lips. It seemed to him as if she were kissing him.

Till that moment his adoration had been limitless but vague. It had been enough for such a wonderful being to exist in the world with himself; but now he could not think of anything but her lips. At the next opportunity he dared to face her, and make a sign on his own lips. It seemed to him that a message had secretly passed between them. These two souls shared an amazing secret.

Henceforth he lived for the Sunday services. He would gaze deliberately at her as she stood seemingly unconscious of his burning eyes; then she would let her eyes

flutter, like a bird in dipping flight, through his steady stare. And once he caught the delicious hint of a smile on her face. And then, one memorable day in church, she actually looked at him with a naked boldness, with eyes widely opened, a straight, penetrating, triumphant arrow of a glance that made him shiver with a delicious shame. In that cold church the air was sensuous with throbbing, passionate messages. And how dangerously delightful were those forbidden looks!

And yet he could not have divined what he wanted of her, except the cool touch of her lips. That would be sufficient for him in this world.

Cunningly he made it his habit to linger outside the church to watch her coming out; and he found that her way home was, for part of the road, also his. Devoutly he followed her, noting every insignificant detail of her walk, her figure, her gestures, waiting anxiously for the sound of her voice. It was just as he had imagined, a tinge of the contralto. But all the time he had not found an opportunity to speak to her, though every glance was the closest intercourse.

The impossible plans that he imagined, the romantic situations that he designed, seemed all in vain. Was she deliberately ignoring his presence? Was she torturing him for her own delight? So demure always, and so eager with her glances!

Then one evening—just like any other evening—her mother stopped on the way home from church to speak to his mother; and in the most casual manner the boy and the girl found themselves talking together! But what they said was quite prosaic.

“I've often seen you in church,” he began.

“Have you?” she innocently asked. “Whereabout do you sit?”

Foolishly he said, “Haven't you noticed me?”

All the romantic, passionate interchanges of their glances had gone for nothing. She hadn't even seen him before? The whole delicious adventure had meant nothing to her. It was all his stupid imagination. His wonderful world had crumbled to fragments. The invisible chain that had so closely bound them was broken—or, rather, it had never existed. He must begin all over again.

“I know so many boys like you,” she calmly murmured. “I rather like boys, but they are so rough. I like dogs, too. Don't you?”

Thus it was that these two, who in his mind were inextricably joined, haltingly talked. All the immense, tremendous things that he had to tell her dropped from his vacant mind. He insisted that she must have seen him in church, and located his seat for her information. But she was vague. She chattered on, telling him that she went to the High School, and that she was fifteen.

It was on that important occasion that by chance he learnt her name—Gipsy! What a wonderful name, worthy indeed of such a wonderful girl! How exactly it

suiting her! "Gipsy!"

But that rencounter was futile. He hated himself for his nervousness; and when the time came for them to part he felt a vast relief. Gipsy was not interested in him; she put him with all the other boys she had known. The world had come to an end.

There was one discovery, however, that consoled him. He learnt that he could see from his bedroom the house where Gipsy lived. That brought her nearer to him. He might even see the light in her window at night! Where she slept! Or where she could look across the intervening houses and dream of him!

He must find out! The next day he invented a pretext to pass her dwelling-place. Furtively he studied it. That must be her bedroom. And that night, going to bed, he extinguished his candle and gazed with a devout delight at the lit window across the dark. Soon the lights were extinguished, but he soon picked out the one window that must be hers. Reverently he gazed at it. He pictured her in her nightgown, but even his imagination was devout. But a shattering blow came; he learnt that Gipsy had gone away for a holiday—had been gone a week while he had been adoring another window. Eagerly he hoped that she would send him a letter, but none came.

Her fading image did not linger long in his mind, for just then he found Rosy. She was the idol of the schoolboys, the most popular girl in her school. She picked him out to adore her; and he was extremely proud of being chosen. He was not one of the athletic leaders, which made it all the more remarkable. She had all the boys she wanted. To be seen walking home from school with her was a proud distinction for him. She would wait for him down the street, and she allowed him, sometimes, to accompany her to her parents' house, though, of course, not daring to enter the gate. It was the public parade that she wanted.

She welcomed him; he was her favourite, envied by the other boys who kept out of her regal way. The younger ones looked up to him as a hero. There was an air of pride in his walk. He heard the rumour that he and Rosy were going to get married when they were grown up. But much more exciting was the news that Rosy had invited him to her birthday picnic. The image of Gipsy had swiftly faded from his memory. He had something nearer. How silly he had been over Gipsy. Why, he had never even kissed her; and Rosy, he told himself, would not mind at all being kissed. But would he dare?

He was filled with pride when he met her in the street; and carefully considered himself in the looking-glass secretly at home. Rosy had told him that she considered him the most handsome boy in the school. He believed her.

The seal was set upon his pride when Rosy invited him to her birthday picnic. Her parents were quite rich, and that, too, added to the flame she had kindled in him. The picnic was, he found, to be a large one; and several of his schoolboy friends

were included. He had hoped for a less pretentious affair; but he could easily keep her for himself. Arrived at their destination, the party broke off in pairs. But he was shy. Rosy seemed so sure of herself, disdainful of any assistance. The two soon found themselves alone in a shady nook. He did not altogether like this solitude, but she was so gay and happy. He wondered uneasily whether she had taken other boys to that place. He was beginning to be afraid. Afraid of her. Hitherto their intercourse had been conducted almost in public. He found it difficult to keep up the conversation. He had never been so close and so isolated with a girl before. There was something terrifying in these soft, fluffy things. It seemed to him that something predatory looked out of those pale blue eyes. Those slim fingers, so trustingly held in his rough hand seemed to him to have the coldness of handcuffs. And now he and one of those incalculable things of prey were shut in together, as in a cell, in a terrifying solitude.

If only they could turn back? If only some of the others would cheerfully invade their prison?

Rosy laughed gaily, with an excited tremor in her high voice.

He wished there were no girls in the world.

“Let's sit down?” said Rosy.

The light filtered through the green bush. Her eyes in the shade changed into the colour of a cat's.

He hesitated, but already she had chosen her seat.

“I suppose it's quite dry?” he hesitated.

“Of course, silly!” she purred, “if you sit close to me, here.”

He contrived to seat himself somewhat away from her. He glimpsed her eager look.

“Come on, don't be silly?” she insisted.

He waited, horribly afraid.

Then, after a dreadful silence, she gently put her hand in his. It lay there, in his palm, helpless, dead—an alien, terrible thing.

He did not know what to do with it.

“Can you tell fortunes?” she eagerly murmured. “Tell me mine!”

He mumbled that he didn't know how.

“Then I can,” she quickly said. “I'll tell yours.”

She laughed on a high note. She started to trace the lines on his palm. Her warm fingers, incredibly soft, weakened him: he felt himself bound and prisoned in her softness. She spun off a rigmarole of lines of Fate, and went on eagerly to tell of a dark man and a fair girl. He itched to get away, away from this feline thing. He would not have minded if she had cut off his captive hand and thrown it away.

He felt such a fool, too!

At last, almost angrily, she dropped his useless hand, and sat away from him, aloof. He saw her hard little profile. He caught her swift slanting glance at him. Why on earth had he ever slipped away from all the others? There was an uneasy feeling in his heart. He had been trapped, deliberately trapped.

He turned to see what his gaoler was doing: she was playing with a beetle.

He asserted himself. He was not going to be her slave. He felt aggrieved.

“You might be interested in a fellow,” he sulkily said. “What’s the good of coming to a picnic to play with a beetle?”

“It’s the only thing that I can play with,” she sharply said. Suddenly she melted. “Look!” she murmured, pointing to a pair of birds that twittered on a bush. “What are they doing?”

“They’re only birds,” he said.

“Look!” she insisted. “They’re actually making love to each other, kissing each other! The darlings!”

“Isn’t it time we got back to the picnic,” he hurriedly suggested.

“How could we?” she triumphantly asked. “They’re lost. And we’re lost. And a lot we care, anyway!”

He hurriedly made an effort to rise, but she pulled him down to her.

“Here’s a nice place to lie down, on these ferns,” she softly said, with a new warmth in her voice. “Look, there’s just room for us together. It was made for us—to kiss each other!”

She leaned over to him, and pulled him down by her side. She stretched her arms to him with a sudden eagerness.

“There’s plenty of room for both of us, darling boy!” she crooned.

He felt himself drowning in her eager gaze; but he resisted desperately her provocation. She seemed so soft, so weak, so fragile—and yet so terribly strong.

It was horrible. He hated her—hated himself. So this was what he had dreamed about! But he had not pictured it at all like this. It had been something beautiful, but this was dreadful, menacing.

She lifted her arms above her head, stretching herself, showing beneath her light dress her immature breasts. He heard her rapid heart-beats in the silence of the grove.

Suddenly she lifted her body and caught him in her arms, roughly pulling him down upon her.

“You haven’t kissed me!” she crooned. “You darling!”

But at the contact of her softness, the incredible softness of her body, he revolted. There was something horrible about it all. He was frightened of her, of everything.

“We'll be late!” he cried. “The others will be waiting for us. We'd better go!”

She uttered a bitter cry. “You fool!” she said savagely. She looked like a beast of prey.

“Come on!” he whispered. “They'll be looking for us, wondering where we are.”

He had got up from the ground. He was standing over her. All he wanted was to get out into the sunlight, to get away.

Reluctantly she rose. He did not even help her up. He hated her.

They made their way back to the picnic grounds, to be greeted meaningfully by the others. There was an undercurrent in their laughter. Had they, too—but he reassured himself. Rosy was the exception; she was older than the others; she knew more. The others were surely innocent? If not, why was the world made so beautiful?

How clean and sweet was his adored one, Gipsy! And he had almost forgotten her. If only he could find her again!

On the way back he eagerly strode ahead with another of the boys, carrying the baskets. It was good to be out of sight of the tired boys and girls. And at the leave-taking he merely shook Rosy's cold hand, and knew that in future he would only raise his hat to her when they met by chance in the street.

That night he lay sleepless in his tumbled bed. Why couldn't he have played the man, as was expected of him? He pictured himself, strong, triumphant, assured, kissing her hotly, her supple, immature figure in his arms, with his eager mouth pressed to her willing lips. What a fool he had been!

He was walking home after a game of bridge. It had been an exciting series of rubbers, and he had come away winning. They were good fellows all. Every week the four took turns to meet at each other's house; and they played frequently till long after midnight.

“Just one more rubber?” the gambler would persuasively say; and once past midnight they would go on and on.

After the last drink, and perhaps another, he came out into the silent street. The other two had different ways to go. He liked the walk home. The trams had long since stopped. He saw the darkened houses, with here and there a solitary light in a window, heard a fretful child being soothed by its mother, observed a doctor's car at a gate. All those insignificant lives would run through the brief gamut of existence, and be dead. They were almost dead now, unconscious of themselves. And after the night they would wake to take up in turn their dull tasks, almost as comatose as when they were sleeping in their beds. His own existence was as theirs, tedious harassments, disappointments mingled with happiness that was so terribly brief. Life was just a haphazard muddle, with no guiding beacon to point the way—if there was any way.

Half of the population of the globe lay in the dark, drugged with sleep, with no sentience, no knowledge of their hapless plight. He looked up at the vast, star-studded sky. Ah, there was order unseen by day! The Milky Way seemed to him an enormous breaking billow of foam that would thunder on the sands of Space, yet would never fall. That tremendous arch of Space hung relentlessly, held in the vault of night, brooding over this little immature world called the Earth. What were we doing in that immensity of the overarching sky. Here we were, for good or evil—and apparently the gods did not care—herded in a minor sphere, left to our own resources. We were merely scum that had casually formed on a cooling, insignificant planet. We were poorly housed in the suburbs of the galactic system. Our only home was a tiny, dying globe, only recently born, and soon—in the time-system of the universe—to die. Millions of years had passed by that minor mass of incandescence, a useless little smouldering globe, until the cold of Space had chilled it, and Life came forth—how and why?—and began to evolve, but to what end? All the enormous striving, through countless aeons, just to produce this make-shift being, Man! And now Man has just begun to evolve, and already his doom was irrevocably pronounced! There was, he thought, such an appalling waste of material used up in past ages to produce him. So the globe will have its brief flowering—just a short Spring—and the inexorable doom will be pronounced. But he saw in that

amazing efflorescence of stars in the sky no guiding sign, no goal in sight, shut in as in a prison in Space. It just happened; that was all! So it will happen to him, and to all of us.

Yet for this brief existence he was thankful. It was something, after all, that he had lived and died, though no memory would wake him to the realization of his mere passing through Time.

But how marvellous was the magnificence of the heavens above him; and how amazing it was that he, himself, should be permitted to ponder on the cosmic enigma. For that he should be thankful; and the beauty of the silver hordes of misty stars uplifted him.

But he wished he had not doubled that four spades call in the last rubber at bridge.

He was in China, an insignificant correspondent in the Boxer Rebellion. The Allies had broken the back of the revolt, and punishment was decreed. There had to be punishment, to leave a red mark upon the Chinese Empire and prevent the enemy saving their faces. That day the Allies had blown down the corners of the Chinese walled city, in punishment for the murder and mutilation of the white missionaries. A fine was exacted, too; and the order came that only officers would be allowed to enter the captured city until sundown. This was a veiled permission to officers to do a little private looting.

His friend and he had gained permission to enter, as correspondents ranked as officers. They set off eagerly, for it was rumoured that there was an enormous amount of silver and gold, and perhaps pearls, hidden in the city. They hastened to make their way within the smashed wall. They paid a call upon a defenceless mandarin. They had demanded entrance, and after passing through many walled courtyards they reached the central mansion. The owner came himself, in answer to their demands. He was a courteous Chinese gentleman, with manners most ingratiating and polished.

His poor hovel, he explained, contained only worthless articles, since he, himself, was abjectly poor. His apology was accepted, though not in such gracious terms. It was obviously impossible to discover any treasures at that hour; the owner had safely buried all his household gods. Against that perfect polish of manner it was difficult to go further; but in the wonderfully decorated room there were priceless souvenirs.

“Not much here,” said his friend. “What we're after is silver bricks and jewels; but there's no chance of finding them.”

“Well,” he said, “what about these trifles, to begin with! He'll never miss them!”

In pidgin-English he politely asked for a beautiful bronze Buddha, several trays and bowls, exquisitely beautiful. His friend and he quickly collected those ornaments and put them into their haversacks.

The Chinese gentleman politely shrugged his shoulders at the bad manners of the foreign devils, but acquiesced with a gracious charm as they stole his treasured ornaments. It was a shameful thing to do.

He picked up the courtly gentleman's Chinese pipe, perhaps his best, and put it into his haversack.

As they looked guiltily back, for thieves were thieves, the charming old gentleman shook hands with himself, with his wide sleeves statuesque, and bowed humbly to these superior beings.

“Come on!” cried his friend. “We can take what we like till sundown. Better hurry!”

Here and there in the city were officers hurrying in their quest for stolen goods. Suddenly they found a group of officers entering a Chinese bank. They eagerly followed. It was asserted that there were thousands of pounds worth of silver in the immense building. The correspondent with him had heard that silver was to be found for the picking up. Officers were running to the rumoured treasure; and they met, coming out, men with heavy haversacks. Deeper and deeper they penetrated the underground tunnels. Men with empty bags were hurrying on, and others came staggering back with heavy loads of treasure, jostling each other in the alleys through which a dim light filtered. They followed a side alley and paused, gazing eagerly at a vast matting cylinder, towering up. His friend grabbed a pike with a red tassel on its haft, and eagerly prodded the circular mass. A clink of metal answered!

Hurriedly he enlarged the gap made in the matting, and a shower of coins almost buried him. He picked up a handful of coins that gleamed in the semi-darkness. They were Chinese cash, tokens of insignificant value, hundreds of which were worth no more than a penny, the currency of the extremely poor, not worth carrying away in a cart.

They looked at each other with comic disgust.

But where such coins were there would be more valuable money. They were on the trail of incalculable riches. From a tunnel, men came staggering with heavy sacks.

“I say,” said his friend, “if you could only have a look at yourself!”

“What's the matter with me?” he asked in surprise.

“Well, old man, isn't it time for us to take a pull on ourselves? There's plenty of loot about, but . . . don't you think it's time we came to ourselves? We've gone crazy, haven't we? I'm just as bad as you are. All for money; but is it worth it? Let's pull ourselves up! It's quite time. We've stripped ourselves until we're mad. All the loot we'll get if we keep on won't make up for this madness. Hang it all, let's get back to sanity! We've let everything go. We're just beasts. Let's get away while we can, before this rotten game gets us!”

There was nothing more to say. He and his friend left the half-demented looters to their gains. They got back to camp with comparatively clean hands. But they had been perilously near to stripping themselves of common decency.

He and his elder brother had been sent with a message. He was seven years old. They had found their way to the street in which the house was, but it was a very long street. Such a long street for such tired legs!

Up and down they went, but they could not find the house. So, as the errand was an important one, he and his elder brother determined to inquire at every gate. There were no numbers on the houses, and the indications given by their mother were not helpful. His elder brother suggested that he should call at every house on his side of the street while he would call at the houses opposite.

Their lack of identification had caused several of the householders to resent having had to open front doors for, apparently, no purpose. But the boys went steadily on, never missing a house. But he thought grown-up people were very unkind; for he was becoming dreadfully tired.

At last he came to a house, set back from the street and sheltered by big trees. It looked to him a very long way to the front door; and he was getting more and more tired. But he heard from the closed door the cheerful sounds of a piano and a woman's voice singing. He felt glad, for there had been no music and no welcome at the other houses. He wouldn't have minded sitting down to rest.

He pulled the bell. Someone glanced out of a window. Then, very quietly, the front door was opened, and a young lady stared at him.

But how funnily she was dressed! He saw that she hadn't finished dressing. She was wearing a sort of wrapper and had no stockings on her legs, and no shoes. She looked surprised at him, and laughed when he gave his message. There was something about the house and the woman that vaguely frightened him. He wanted to run away without making his inquiry, but it wouldn't have been fair to his elder brother if he shirked his job.

The young lady, however, did not seem dangerous, though he seemed to scent something unusual. She could not help him in his quest.

He turned, after thanking her, but she beckoned to him and asked if he'd like some milk and a bit of nice cake?

Without waiting for his response, she called to a woman inside, and two came out with eager smiles to the verandah. The other woman told him to sit down on the step of the verandah; and she tried to help him to remember what the house was like.

“What a pretty boy!” said one of the girls. “You must be dreadfully tired, walking all that way. You must come in while I get you some cake and a glass of milk.”

So he went in, and the women—there were other women there, all such pretty

young ladies, but not doing anything at all.

Impulsively they petted him, and he liked it, but he did not care for the perfumes that he smelt. His mother never had any scents like that. But why weren't they dressed when they weren't going to bed? Hadn't they any proper clothes to put on?

But they were so kind to him; and one of them kissed him—such soft kisses—not like the hard little pecks which his aunts always gave him, and which he quickly wiped off when they weren't looking.

They wanted him to stay; but he suddenly remembered that his bigger brother would be wondering where he was.

But as he came away he felt that there was something secret, something wrong, in that warm, scented, untidy house behind the trees.

He never told his big brother about it.

Gipsy had come back! He had seen her in church. She was peering at him between her interlaced fingers.

They met, desperately casual, coming out of church. It was his mother who had instinctively felt that there was something between them, and who had stopped to welcome Gipsy back from her trip to Australia.

They talked.

“So you're a 'varsity man now?” Gipsy eagerly began. She seemed more mature, while he felt that he was still a boy.

“And you're going to be a lawyer?”

He was delighted. She had found out all about him. But a constraint severed them. He could not pick up their acquaintance again so easily. Gipsy seemed a new personality, supremely confident of herself, while he still felt an awkward boy, despite his entrance to the university. Her trip had brought her into bud. He eagerly but secretly scanned her rounder figure. It seemed to him that the soul of a dormant woman had stirred within Gipsy. She seemed to be secretly proud that her womanhood had budded. She had almost grown up. He felt with an almost humiliating awe that she had passed him in the race. He was years younger than this assured wonderful thing.

As they walked, she bent upon him her half-troubled, considering glance.

“It's a pity,” she murmured, “you're going into law. It's a pity. I thought you'd be—something different.”

“Well, Law is a fine profession, isn't it?”

“It's all right,” she indifferently agreed, “when you get on and make money; but it's so commonplace. Every boy I know is going to be a lawyer.”

“Well, that's what my father wants me to be,” he sturdily replied. “You can't always do what you'd like in the world.”

“But you're different,” she ventured. “I always thought you'd be different.”

“What?”

“Oh, an artist, or a novelist, or a poet—something wonderful! Something famous!”

He looked at her, stunned. Fancy her guessing that he had it in him to be all that, and more! In that moment her conviction of his future seemed the easiest thing in the world.

“But you write things, stories and verses, even now?”

“You knew that, too?” He was awestruck at her uncanny instinct. And he felt for the first time afraid of woman's restlessly prying mind. Ah, but he wasn't going to

divulge all that he had in his heart. He had his secrets. She gave him a glorious smile.

“My poet!” she exclaimed with her low chuckling ripple.

“I shall be the greatest poet in New Zealand!” he boasted.

“Only that?” she lightly jeered. “This little out-of-the-way place? There's all the world to conquer, isn't there?”

“Yes,” he gravely said.

She drew back; it seemed to him as if she had lighted a fuse unwittingly that might burn them both. He felt that he could do great things. And so could she. His fine egoism and hers let loose on the world, with incalculable youth to back them, might achieve wonderful things. What a mate she would be for him, and he for her! For he had heard that she was studying art—had, indeed, already painted pictures exhibited in the picture galleries. What might these two do together with their mated arts?

It seemed to him that intangible, invisible antennae wavered from him to her and back.

“I'd like to have a real talk with you some day,” she said shyly. “I'd like to tell you about my visit. But we never seem to meet, except by chance. I've been back for a fortnight. You don't come to church now.”

He told her he was too busy with his studies at the university.

“That's curious,” she said, “because my favourite walk—I love walking—is past the university gates.”

He quickly, suspiciously, asked: “By yourself?”

“Sometimes.”

“Dull, isn't it?”

She smiled with bright eyes. “It needn't be!”

He felt that she was luring him, playing him as an angler does with a hooked fish. But how urgently he wanted to see her again, to talk with her once more. Eagerly he asked when she took those solitary walks.

Airily she answered: “Any fine afternoon, perhaps.”

“What time”—he felt himself the dominating male—“to-morrow?”

She slowly considered, wondering. He waited. She was slipping away from him, as she had so often slipped away, from promise or dull fact.

“How can I say?” she smiled, looking down sideways to the pavement, and running the tip of her parasol along a crack in the pavement. “It all depends whether I'm in the mood or not—to-morrow.”

“Oh, well! I'll be going for a walk down to the harbour,” said he determinedly. “I'll be there; and I rather like solitary walks.”

It was a challenge.

She shrugged her shoulders. She felt, it seemed to him, that she would like to shake him.

They parted sullenly.

An eternity of a day and a night had to be dragged through somehow before he found himself loitering at the street corner of her house, nervously posted at a strategic corner commanding a view of her gate. She kept him waiting; and three times he made up his mind to desert his post. He decided that he would give her another ten minutes—though he had already given her twice that time.

She came! She dawdled down the front path, like a moth fluttering idly in the afternoon. It seemed to him that there was an exuberance in her movements that made her appear almost as if she were dancing. Yet she approached; all the time she was drifting to him.

She was astonished when she looked down at his shadow.

“I'm so glad you remembered,” he was foolish enough to say.

“But I don't understand?” she wondered. “Of course, I don't mind you just meeting me; it's such a nice day for a walk, isn't it?”

“But you promised?” he insisted.

“Did I?” She was astonished at his pertinacity. “I happened to be here,” she murmured “And it is really such a nice day. Oh, well; but I'd rather be by myself.”

It had begun all wrong. He had built up a marvellous approach for their talk, but he had nothing to say. They walked on in silence, lagging on their way.

“I'm going to Paris,” she suddenly, almost casually, said. “My father is taking me to the best students' school in Paris, and I'm going to be an artist.”

But she was a girl, he thought. Girls don't count. It's men who do all the great things in the world. And he felt it wasn't fair for such an opportunity to be given to a girl.

“But, after all,” she said, “a great poet is much more wonderful than an artist. Me? I only draw a bit, but you—!”

They wandered on, drawn together. She had warmed to him. She made him point out to her the windows of the rooms where he worked. They verged towards the shore of the harbour. A gaunt, monstrous dredge was wheezily sucking up the mud of the shallow foreshore and pouring it through a long, snake-like pipe into the reclamation area. It occurred to him that she was not caring much whither they went. Was she, too, preoccupied with him in her thoughts?

They paused on a little bridge crossing a culvert that had been a stream. They paused, and talked. Every trifle was strangely and portentously significant to him,

content with her presence. The bloom of her, the nearness of her, the darkness of her half-shaded eyes, the soft grace of her swaying figure, balancing herself even when she was still, entranced him. He had forgotten that they were no longer walking. She was leaning against the frail railing of the bridge. How beautiful was her slim figure! But there was a false note in the picture. She was acting a part, but a perfect part. She was all female, deliberately parading herself for the admiration in his eyes. She called him with the voice of her physical beauty. He was dizzy with her nearness. And he knew that she was, for that amazing moment, passionately in love with him.

She was toying with a ring on her finger, a silver ring, curiously wrought.

“How pretty it looks!” he murmured.

“Would you like to have it?” she carelessly asked. “It's only a cheap little thing.”

He knew that she wanted him to take it. She handed it to him. It was warm from her skin. And suddenly he sensed an overwhelming impression of the soft warmth of her body, of all her mysterious seductive body. He flushed awkwardly, ashamed at the desecration of his daring thought.

He tried the ring on his little finger; but how small it was! It would not fit. How wonderful to have such thin fingers.

“I like your hands,” Gipsy said. “They're capable—not like mine.”

She daintily spread her tapering fingers upon his workmanlike hand. The warm touch of naked hand to hand almost dizzied him.

“Give it back!” she suddenly, dictatorially, said.

He could not.

“You must! It's mine!”

A daring desire came to him. “No, I'm going to keep it. For always!”

“Really?” she laughed, her slow, soft, warm laugh. “It's no use to you. It's mine now! That's not fair! It's no value now. I'll throw it into the stream. Well, take it, there!”

He eagerly put it into his pocket, and felt that it was safe. It seemed to him that he had wrested it by main force from her. They stood gazing at each other, both curious.

“We'll be late,” Gipsy sighed. The moment that he had meant to kiss her had fled.

Together they turned homeward. Why hadn't he kissed her then?

“It's mean of you,” she said, reviving. “Give me back my ring!”

“No!” he valiantly muttered.

Gipsy peremptorily demanded her ring. “Give it to me, at once! How dare you?”

He hotly protested. That ring had bound them together, for ever.

“You've stolen it!” she insisted.

They grew angry. Sullenly he took it from his pocket. She snatched it.

Why had he been so silly as to give the ring back? He felt all through his being that she had almost passionately desired him to keep it.

He was looking down upon the scaffold.

He had had the luck to be one of the representatives of the two daily newspapers in the town to be permitted to witness the hanging of a notorious murderer. Everything was in readiness for the appearance of the central figure. It was the first execution he was to see in his journalistic life. It was an important job for him—one of the most responsible he had been permitted to handle.

He was very young to write the story of the hanging; but he felt that he had had a good claim upon his paper. He had been detailed to what had at first been merely regarded as a featureless murder; and little interest was taken by the public and the press. He went day after day to attend the trial. Apparently there were no sensational details brought out in the first hearing; but suddenly the interest quickened. The chief witness for the prosecution, after having given his evidence, was arrested and indicted, mainly upon the testimony he had given in court.

When his editor had sent for him the evening before, he felt that his chance of writing up a really good murder case had been taken from him. Some more experienced journalist would be put on to such a responsible job. But, to his surprise, his editor played fair.

“You've handled the court case, my boy,” he said; “and you've done it very well. Of course, I would have given it to the senior reporter if I had seen how it was going to turn out; but if you want to see a hanging—it's something that doesn't happen very often—and you feel up to it, here's your pass to the gaol for to-morrow morning. But I want the job thoroughly done, and if you break down—well, it will go against you. Your duty is never to let your paper down.”

He had taken assignments for his paper with a careless joy; but this was, he thought, a very hard job to tackle. But he'd got his chance. It wasn't every junior reporter that had the luck.

He woke in the night, and found the rope round his neck.

Hangings, he knew, were the only really punctual arrangements in the world; but he was in ample time, waiting outside the gaol for admittance. To his surprise it was his equally young rival on the other paper whom he met at the gaol. He, too, was getting his chance.

They were admitted through cold stone corridors, and came out on a platform five feet above the scaffold, dreadfully close. A representative of other papers, an old man, was waiting. Eagerly he and his rival mentally pictured the scene, thinking of head-lines, with every salient detail set in place.

The noose was slowly swinging above the trapdoor. Then came slowly up the

steps to the platform the clergyman, saying the prayers for the dead, two warders and the pinioned condemned man. He had expected the murderer to raise his eyes for a moment to the blue sky above the walls; but he was disappointed. It was always done on the melodramatic stage. He stood stolid. Drugged, perhaps?

Eagerly the two reporters asked if the man had made any confession. No; he was carrying his secret away from the world. Details! That was what he was eager about. He mustn't miss the slightest gesture. For a moment he thought of taking notes in his sheaf of copy-paper, but there was no time for that. He wondered what was passing in the murderer's mind. But he must come back to reality. In a few moments, perhaps, he would be only a lump of flesh, slowly swinging. Would there be a last shudder? But his face would be covered by the cap.

The dreadful business went swiftly on.

Then the man began to speak. He was going to confess!

Yes! In broken English he began. The journalist had no time to look at the prisoner. He had to get down that speech, word for word, made harder by the alien tongue. Hurriedly and almost automatically the two pressmen took their shorthand notes, glancing swiftly down to see any gesture. Yes; he told the truth, very near to the facts of the case, as they had been known, but with startling force. Yes, it was thus that he had killed the old couple, for a few pounds. He even detailed the final bludgeoning.

He ceased. A signal was given. He stood erect while the cap was adjusted. The lever was pulled; the body dropped beneath the platform; the rope quivered; the body swung, a dead thing, to and fro. The hangman slipped down below—to hang on to the legs—to make sure.

He wondered, as they waited for the swinging to subside, whether in that dreadful moment of death all his past life had flashed into his quickened brain, seeing forgotten scenes, taking part in incidents when he was a boy, when he was a man, scenes of gaiety and mourning, trivial flashes of fun, miseries which until that last moment he had utterly forgotten?

How could anyone tell? How might it be for every man when at his last dying throes? He, himself, for all he knew, might experience a lifetime, just on the point of death, in which he might call up all that had been of worth, or triviality, that had accompanied him from birth to the end. But how would he know? How could he tell? The time would be so short—just as short as the drop of the murderer's body. Thought, he said to himself, is a million times as swift as the speed of light. A million scenes and thoughts might speed through his own brain in the last flicker of Life. But he would never know, or knowing he could never recall.

Those thoughts, that take so long to set forth, sped through his brain as the body

dropped. It was gently swinging from the opening of the trap. He gave a critical look at the Thing, covered with the grey hood. The next thing to do was to get his stuff ready for the early special edition of his paper—and, if possible, to beat his rival in the matter of time.

But there was a blessed pause. For regulations insist on a gaol being kept locked for the period of one hour—probably to make quite sure that no rescue could be attempted. The two reporters were led into a gloomy room, lit by electric light, to write their stories of the horror, for the waiting ghouls outside.

Opposite, with the big bare table between the two reporters, they set steadily to work to build up their separate stories. But as he reached the notes of the all-important confession, he had some difficulty in translating it. His shorthand had played him false. He must have been very shaky as he took the story down.

He looked across at his rival, equally busy with his notes.

The other reporter looked up, too.

“I say,” he said, “how does the confession go on after he got to the place where he knocked at the door?”

“That's just where I've got to,” said the other reporter. “And I'm not too clear about that part. I hope your notes are easier to make out than mine?”

They studied their notes; but each found gaps, important gaps, in the narrative. At last his confrère looked up. “We'd better make one job of the confession, and patch it up somehow, eh?”

“Something's slipped in my shorthand. Can't even guess what,” he said.

“Same here,” sighed his rival.

“Well,” he said, “the other journalist took no notes. He was just looking on. We two are the only persons who know exactly how he told his story. Nobody can contradict us if we make a composite yarn of it. Anyhow, that is our official story.”

“Right!” The two reporters grinned. “And,” said he, “we can put in some really artistic touches in his story, a bit of pathos and all that stuff; and we'll play up well and good with his broken English. Hang it all, we'll give him a really beautiful confession, full of colour and pathos!”

He was abjectly waiting in the beautiful, artistic room in Chelsea. He was making his first call upon her. He was only a youth.

Through some of his artistic friends he had been introduced to a sweet, beautiful girl. He had heard of her loveliness long before he was permitted to meet her, and he had despaired of ever knowing her. He was only a young man, gauche, and unsure of himself. It was at a students' costume ball that he was introduced to a beautiful demoiselle, a lovely picture from the Middle Ages. He had one dance with her, afraid almost to touch her, she was so delicately beautiful. He felt himself a mere outsider in that gay and sophisticated gathering. He was nervously tongue-tied, feeling solitary in the happy, easy-going throng of strangers.

But she seemed as shy as he was. His few remarks were halting, and it appeared to him that she was more concerned with her costume than with any of the partners who were privileged to dance with her. But perhaps he might be permitted to take her home. He wanted to know her, to break through the reserve that held her as well as him. Everybody was gay and happy, though he noticed that she always kept her poise. At last she graciously granted him a dance, but he was tongue-tied with nervousness; and after the waltz he led her to her seat with a sense of utter failure. He had wanted so much to know her; and he felt that an occasion like this would not recur. How else to meet her?

As he had sadly expected, her parents took her home in their carriage. They were the most important guests at the gathering. But he determined to see her again. There had been a shy liking in her beautiful eyes, meant for him, he was sure. Well, there was nothing for him to do but to call upon her.

Yes, she replied in a formal little note, she would be glad to see him at her home on the following day.

He was shown up to the drawing-room through a beautiful hall. There were etchings by well-known masters. He had never been in such an artistic home before. It seemed almost too refined. And a fear came that he was out of place in such surroundings.

She came into the big drawing-room, with a shy smile. He shook hands—her hands were cool and shapely—and they sat down on “period” chairs, rather uncomfortably. She was to him a grande dame receiving a stranger guest. Their talk was desultory, appallingly impersonal. She was so sweet, too sweet! He felt himself crude and immature. She was a frail hot-house flower in her perfect milieu, aloof and delicate.

How could he approach her, he sitting on his chair, she gracefully on a couch

which seemed too beautiful to desecrate, even though she occupied it? Suddenly he found he had nothing to say. If only the door between her aloofness and his shyness could be broken down, and the two could become companionable!

There were dreadful silences. Then, apparently desperate, she sat down on the piano stool and asked him if he could sing. He couldn't. But he asked her to do so—to fill in the dreadful pause. She sang sweetly, and he took the opportunity to scrutinize her gracefulness without her notice. But the song ended, and again he felt himself lacking in words.

If only he could approach her, she sitting alone on the piano stool, idly turning over the music!

But he was a man and she was a girl; and there was nothing to help him to approach. He was glued to the beautiful frail chair on which he sat. Why couldn't he spring up and have her warm and eager in his arms? How soft and sweet she would be!

He even wished that her mother would come in—if anybody would come in. Someone did; it was the maid with afternoon tea. He made a pretence of sipping it and passing cakes. He recalled the period dance and his two dances with her. Yes. That subject died in the dreadful silence.

He made it a briefest of calls, though it had seemed an eternity. She was graceful in her adieu. She was always in on Wednesday afternoons. She would be delighted. He promised, and shook her soft, delicate hand.

It had been a horrible failure. He had been conquered by politeness.

But, once he had left the house, he felt that he could have triumphantly taken her in his arms and made her coldness vanish.

He did not mention his defeat to his friends.

He sent a little note asking if he could call again, and received a reply as colourless as his own letter. But he meant to go through with it.

She was waiting idly at the piano as he was shown in by the maid. And immediately he felt that they were two prisoners in separate cells, with iron bars between them. They chatted in a dismal aloofness, never reaching out to touch. She was so softly desirable, but there were so many inhibitions surrounding them. The maid brought in tea; and they talked nothings, chiefly art. Once again she sat at the piano, and he ventured to look at her slim, beautiful fingers trailing over the keys. If only he could close his eager hand over hers, and hold it for a mad second. But he couldn't.

Why couldn't something happen? There was no allure in her eyes. It seemed to him that she, too, was just as unhappy as he. The cold etchings stared at them aloofly: they seemed as lifeless as these two within the room.

She was surrounded by an atmosphere into which he could not intrude. And he knew—and she knew—that he was only an impecunious young poet, while she was the daughter of a rich man. But there was the one compelling bond between them: they were both young. He was miserably tongue-tied; but what was worse, he dared not even look into her eyes. He avoided her few direct glances.

If only he could knock over one of the tables, with knick-knacks rare and precious, in the confusion he might manage to break the bars that separated them; and he would take her into his arms. But there was no avenue leading them to each other. She lived in a realm utterly remote from his, a secluded little life, while he had his way to make in the world.

As they parted, glad to escape from the silence of the room, he ventured to press her soft hand, but there was no response.

That was all.

He was on the links with his friend. The wide area of green invited them. Once more he was eager to be the victor, feeling confident that this time he would win. If only he could avoid the stupid mistakes he had made again and again just in sight of victory. They were silent as they stepped on to the first tee. He *must* keep his head down! His friend had to give him half a stroke a hole, a tremendous handicap, but he felt no disgrace. A game was a game, and it was only rarely that he could keep up with that steady, methodical player.

The night before he had carefully studied his faults, unknown to his opponent, who did not need such aids. He had grown up with the game, and was a difficult man to beat. The least bit of carelessness was avidly taken advantage of. He *must* be careful of his back swing. On the greens he was a little better than his friend; and there was a thirty feet putt that flopped into the hole which would always remain in his memory, perhaps when he was dying. And there was the long hole, where stroke followed stroke, with only a few yards between the two balls, lying nicely in the middle of the fairway. They halved it in bogey; and the world was wonderful to play with. For the first nine holes he kept the advantage—his friend was a bit off his game—while he brought off some amazing (to him) mashie shots to the green. They stayed put. But he knew the doggedness of his rival: there were no desperate adventures. Every shot was calculated. There was nothing between them. How long could he hold the precarious advantage? But the luck stayed with him. There was a lovely little stream, or a horrible dirty ditch (the alternative description depended upon whether you got over or not.) The tee shots were correctly played, though his had been the longer ball. His opponent topped the ball; it hit the bridge, jumped out, slithered along the banks of the stream and flopped into the deep water. “Hard luck!” he said; but in his heart he rejoiced. But he, also, had to get over the stream. Would it be better to play short, and make sure of getting the green? No! He must risk it. Head down, slow swing back and follow through. He was on the green! But he took three putts and just won the hole. It had nevertheless been a glorious shot. He would remember it all his life, and could picture in his mind exactly how he had played it, though he inwardly doubted whether he could do it again. But there was all the unknown still ahead, and he must never stray from the fairway in the remaining holes to come. He was only two up now. Could he hold the slight advantage?

Only one good hole and the match would be won. His friend was tense and silent, determined to win. Approaching the last green, over the river, they were square again. It all depended upon the last approach. Both were on the outside of the green.

His opponent just missed the hole. It depended on his putt. The world stood still for those two men. He must get his putt down. He studied the lie of the land. He putted. It was going in! No, it would miss the hole! The distance was right, but it could not hole. No; at the last inch it rimmed the cup and decided, not without hesitation, to go down!

He hardly heard his friend's felicitations, for he was congratulating himself, inwardly.

Then to the club house, hoping that he would not swank. Then the drink, the hot shower, with the cold douche afterwards, and the change of clothes, and the grateful dallying with the cups of tea.

Then home with the story of his victory. A man can feel above himself in his own home. But there was, as always when he won, a slackening of pride. He had to capture his wife and tell her the full story of the epic fight; but as she did not play the game, her applause was meek and perfunctory. Often he felt that was the one thing lacking in an otherwise perfect wife.

He was coming back from school, by a track that led up the hill through a belt of native bush. It was a short cut to his home. He was thinking of nothing. He started from his reverie when he saw a girl approaching him at a lonely by-path. She was older than he, and he took in with a quick glance her budding breasts. She was, even at that distance, alluring, though he could not have said why.

Their ways converged. There was no one near them. The twilight was beginning to fall.

As she slowly sauntered towards him, she gave him a quick, meaning glance; there was magic in the encounter. The whole world seemed a-hush, expectant of some tremendous event. Hers was a look of half shrinking boldness, as if she feared a repulse. He felt a thrill of delicious weakness trembling through him. Something was about to happen.

As he neared her she paused. They were looking at each other furtively.

She spoke in a voice that thrilled him, a contralto warm and positive, asking him her way. Should she take the road or the bush track?

The bush track was his way. In that brief minute the world did not exist. And as they stood, so near that he could see the rise and fall of her bosom, there seemed to be an emanation stealing from her personality into his. It assumed the quality of a call, soft but compelling. She seemed to him as she gently swayed on doubtful feet, like a moth newly alighted, still trembling from tired wings.

He dared not shatter by the noise of a word the strange sense of miraculous intimacy. They had known each other in some other sphere, remote and strange.

The girl did not seem to find his intent silence strange. She waited, drinking in and savouring the moment to the utmost, sure of herself and of her sex, warming herself deliciously in his enveloping nearness.

At last he forced himself to face her with lifted head. He was staring deep into the half-veiled eyes with a compelling sense of mastery. He was a man, and she was only a girl. She returned his deep gaze until there flowered on her beautiful face a smile of certainty trembling on her lips.

“You'd better take that track,” he said, though he wanted nothing but to remain for ever without moving.

“This way?” she murmured, as if to speak above a whisper might shatter a dream. “I thought the other way was best.” She flashed him a surer glance. “But I'm not in any particular hurry. The other way looks nicer, doesn't it?”

“It's steeper,” he said. “I must be going. Unless—?”

“Yes?” she eagerly helped. “It's a lonely track, isn't it?”

She reluctantly turned on her way. Why shouldn't he go with her? There would be nobody there to pilot her, and they might go together into the shadows. There was no one near. He could kiss her in the growing twilight.

"Thank you," she murmured reluctantly, and as she turned into the track, she looked back and was gone. Their ways parted. She had passed on, and he might never see her again.

But he could catch her up, if he hurried. Ah! he knew a short cut that would by a detour bring him out to the road she must have taken. It meant a run to catch her up. But he could do it.

He would find her. There was only one exit to gain the road higher up. What a fool he had been to refrain! Always uncertain of himself, always missing his destination!

But not this time. He still had his chance. He must see her again, to watch the slow smile dawn on her lips, with a message that meant everything in the world.

Almost madly he made his way to the outlet where he could meet her once more. He had a hundred things to say to her; but he had been a fool, and had let her go. But she shouldn't escape him, after all. And she was just as eager to meet him again.

She was a long time emerging from the track. He ventured some distance down. She might have rested on the way. But she would soon appear. Well, there was nothing for it now but to go back by the track on which she had set off. He went farther and farther down, but there was no sign of her, or of anybody that he could question. He came at last to the place where they had first met. She was nowhere about. She must have ventured only a little way along the bush, and, as he did not follow her, had turned back. He anxiously waited about for nearly an hour, but she did not return.

Perhaps she had met another boy, who wasn't such a fool. He went home utterly miserable, aching for her. He had fled from temptation like a frightened child. He cursed himself. If only he had been dominant and reckless! But he was but a makeshift of a man, missing through hesitation all the great things in the world.

For weeks afterwards he felt like one who had lost everything he held dear in his life.

He never saw her again. No matter what sort of girl she was—and he knew what sort of girl she was, though only vaguely—he wanted her as he had wanted nothing else in his life.

He was a man: a first-year student at the university. In his home he was still regarded by his father as a boy, but once within the precincts of the gaunt grey building he was free from the family. His pen had brought him into prominence in his first year. Owing to a keen rivalry between two well-known undergraduates for the secretaryship of the debating society, the Council decided in the cause of peace to pick neither of these applicants. To his surprise he was approached by the seniors. He was enraptured: he felt as if he were a made man.

As secretary he found himself the target of both the rival bodies; but his arrogant youth brought him unexpected support. The first-year boys formed a bodyguard about him, noisily challenging the crude ideals of the conservative third-year men. It was Youth against Age. In the enthralling debates his party of youth usually won, chiefly by mere noise. He was already a personality in that flux of Youth. But publicity had its perils even in the university.

He contributed, of course, to the university magazine, and had poured humour upon the various faculties; but though these young students liked to read his articles, he sailed too closely when he attacked the medical students. They did not take his humour lightly, but he was too much wrapped up in big phrases to notice that he might offend. And all he looked forward to was the issue of the forthcoming article. He was, that day, waiting to see how his tirade of youthful humour would go down. He made his way to the university early, ready for congratulations. As he entered the gates a class-mate hurried up to him, with an affected carelessness.

“If I were you,” he said, “you'd better make yourself scarce.”

“Whatever for?”

“I shouldn't tell you; but there's trouble. The Meds are furious about that article of yours. Pretty good stuff, I call it. It was time the Meds were shown up. They never could stand a joke, unless it was preserved bones. I wouldn't go into the undergrads' room, anyway.”

He was utterly surprised. Fancy the Meds taking his harmless jokes so seriously! But already he felt himself under observation of curious eyes; and with a nod of thanks to his friend, he made his way to the undergraduates' room. He could not help noticing that there were many students hanging about the door. He pushed his way in, and felt that the atmosphere was hostile. The greetings he met with seemed to him reserved.

The room was thronged with medical students. He paused, on his guard. He looked about for a friendly glance. Nobody seemed to want to speak to him. He felt the gaze of the room like a cold douche.

A big fellow advanced to him, with a copy of the magazine in his hand. "Did you write this about us?" he demanded.

"He can't deny it!"

"He'd better not, anyhow!"

He faced them, inwardly trembling. "Of course I wrote it. Where's the harm?"

There was a shout of anger.

"I wrote it!" he repeated when he could be heard above the noise.

"Then I've got something to say to you," said a member of the first eleven. "You've got to apologize. You've got to take it back!"

"It was only . . . only fun," he replied as steadily as he could.

But already the hostility in that crowded room was affecting him, like a poisonous gas. His heart was thumping. It was only with a tremendous effort that he stared at his enemies. "Don't you fellows see it was only a joke?"

But this was not the time for humour. Suddenly he was away from all the tumult. He saw Life as Literature. Humanity was the curious beast behind the bars. He could prod it with a pen, and he could make the beasts feel his goad. But the furious beasts had got loose, and there were no bars between him and them. A pen, however pointed, was but a poor defence against an angry beast.

"We're going to make you apologize, publicly," said the big fellow.

"But it was all fun! Surely you can't take a thing like that seriously?"

"Can't we?" said another voice. "You'll soon see!"

The crowd swayed threateningly at him. There was no escape. But what could he do? What punishment was the mob preparing?

"Make him write out a public apology!"

Did they think they could play false with his pride in writing? "No," he shouted. "I'll write more! You'll see! You pack of bullies!"

"Bullies, are we?" snarled a voice. "Well, pick your man, pick any one of us, the smallest of us, and we'll play fair!"

Something seemed to slip within him. He knew that he couldn't fight. He was physically afraid. He had found that out long ago, at school. He didn't dare to shape up to the smallest boy.

The mob sensed his weakness, his cowardice.

"So you won't fight?" sneered his tormentor. "Well, you'll have to sign your name over an apology."

"I'll write that I exaggerated a bit!"

"That won't do for us. Better be quick about it, too!"

"I won't do it!" he almost shrieked.

A silence fell. What were they going to do next?

The leader of the medical men sighed. "Then there's nothing but the river!"

"The river!" he echoed faintly. They were going to duck him in the river. It was only a shallow stream, but the humiliation!

"Come on! We'll duck him!"

The public disgrace, the ignominy! How could he ever survive it? It would be always remembered.

He almost collapsed. "Very well," he muttered weakly, "I'll write anything you want me to."

They put the pen in his hand—not his, it seemed, a cold hand—and he wrote shakily the apology demanded.

Quickly the piece of paper was pinned firmly to the notice-board. He did not lift his eyes to it.

The others, possibly afraid of the affair, averted their faces as the room gradually emptied. He remained inert, and with an effort came out into the sunlight. He wondered why the sun was still shining. The other undergraduates kept away from him.

But after his first lecture he sent in his resignation of secretary of the Debating Society and of his other positions.

He heard from one of the fellows that both notices were immediately removed from the board. But the pins had been driven deep.

That night, going home, he felt himself an utter coward. Why hadn't he stood up to them, and let them kill him if they liked? He should have refused to surrender—and what was a ducking, after all? Suppose they had done their worst. It would have been a dramatic end.

It was all forgotten within a month, and he soon regained his position as a leader of the undergrads. Nothing is final in Life until Life has gone out.

He was a very little boy playing in an enormous garden. Through the garden ran a little stream grown over with strawberries which he and his brothers were forbidden to pick until they were ripe. He was lying down on the bridge with a stick in his hand when somehow he reached too far over, and fell into the bed of the stream. It was a dreadful sensation, falling. When he scrambled out he was covered with blood.

He screamed and clambered up the bank. His mother ran out and carried him into the house. He was so glad to be in her arms. She stanchd the blood with a towel, but the blood would keep on pouring down his face. He could not help feeling a hero, despite the pain. This amazing thing had happened to him, not to his brothers; and his mother was crying. It must have been a wonderful thing to make his mother cry. He was so glad that it was not his father who had picked him up. Mothers were so nice to little boys when they got hurt. It hurt very much, but his mother put him to bed, in the daytime, with bandages all over his face. But he felt cruelly disappointed when she said she need not ask the doctor to come. It would have been so glorious to have a doctor come and fuss over him. He loved, now that the pain was going, being nursed by his mother. And all the other children envied him, lying in bed while the sun was up; and he had all sorts of nice things to eat. But what he liked best was to show the other children the awful mark over his eye. None of them had ever had such a big cut. It was discovered that there had been a broken bottle in the stream, and that was how he had gashed himself. He felt tremendously important. Nobody else in the world had had such a cut.

He was glad that his father was away then, for he would have told him to be a man, and not to make a fuss. He had to be brave. Well, he was. His mother had told him so.

And because he had been such a good boy he was taken to a wonderful place where there were all sorts of exciting things to see. There were funny little houses, with curtains made of pretty-coloured beads that chattered when you opened the door, and pretty ladies in beautiful bright yellow overcoats; and you could go inside the curtains and there was a funny smell that reminded one of the Chinamen who came to the door, in a funny sort of trot, with baskets full of all sorts of vegetables.

He had always known it as the Chinese camp. They all lived together and were very nice. He heard that they picked up gold—tiny specks of gold—out of ugly holes; and his mother had a ring that was admired very much because it was made out of the first bit of gold that had been found on the diggings.

And then the Chinamen began to pull down their funny little houses, and pack up

all their bundles; and he heard that they and their pretty yellow wives were leaving because there was no more gold to find there, and they were going away to another place. How he would have liked to go with them!

And then his mother told his brothers that they were going away too. And there was such a bustle packing up, and he had to leave all his toys, because there wasn't room in the coach, and besides, they would get much more lovely toys in the town.

Anyhow, it was all awfully exciting. They had never known any other place than what they called *The Diggings*. They were going to stay in a big town. But first, all the things had to be packed in the coach, with bundles strapped on everywhere, and just room for the six children and their mother. His father had gone off the week before, to find a house in the town. It was such a tight pack in the coach with its team of six horses. The driver was such a tall big man. And then they were off, rattling past the Chinese town, and away out on to the winding roads over hills and fording the wide gravelly rivers, until it grew too exciting to look out and see the coach going through the river with nothing but water rushing past up to the middle of the wheels.

And how they were bumped and bumped and bumped! And then it got dark, and still the coach—with a fresh lot of horses—went on and on and on. He went to sleep in his mother's arms, but she had to nurse all the others, too. And they snuggled down where they could; and in the night he wakened and saw the stars out late.

Then the morning came, and there was another lot of nice big shiny horses waiting, and a new driver with a big black beard climbed up to the box-seat—not so nice as the other driver—and the coach went on and on again. All through the day they went: and there were other drivers, and other people climbed in and climbed out, until at last they looked out at the top of a hill, where they saw millions of lights twinkling at them, and his mother said: “Thank God! We're here at last!”

And that night, in a great big house—he had never seen such a huge house before—he did not remember being put to bed at all.

He had taken the plunge. He was going to conquer Sydney, the siren city of the South, the Athens of Australia. Four days' steaming across the Pacific had brought him to that centre of art and letters, and he saw the gaunt cliffs of the Heads open to receive him. New Zealand was merely a materialistic paddock for mutton and beef and butter. No hope for him there: he needed a wider arena. His grey-headed editor had always told him he would be called to Sydney.

He soon found friends, a coterie of artists and poets and musicians, though he deemed musicians merely players, since he could not even whistle in tune. His companions welcomed him to Belle's Cafe, in a tiny arcade in the heart of the city. This was the sacred home of all the arts, and of a three-course dinner for sixpence. But those dinners were flavoured with splendid optimism and gallant hope.

He was accepted as one of the crowd; but he was quite new to his environment. He had to learn to smoke cigarettes, for everyone did. He arrived at an opportune moment, for Bardsley had had a glorious slice of luck. Bardsley had actually sold a second-hand piano (whether it was his own piano or somebody else's no one was rude enough to inquire). There was an opportune orgie on the profits. But the newcomer found himself a stranger in the company. He was so uncouth, so puritanical, so mean. He felt utterly ashamed when his new friends discovered that he possessed a savings bank book.

He set out the following day to find his way about the city. Idling by, he looked up and saw a name, the name of a weekly paper known throughout Australia, and beyond. He had actually had a cheque sent him in New Zealand for an accepted poem. For a week he had been too awed to cash it; he would have liked to have kept it for the rest of his life.

A week later he dared to enter those sacred, though gloomy, precincts. There was no one to stop him. The editor's door was half open, possibly to entice reluctant poets to enter. He dared not disturb the great man, who was running through galley proofs. The room was cluttered with slips of copy.

"Sit down!" said the editor, oblivious to the fact that there were no chairs. Daring to interrupt the lean, long man, he announced himself.

"Oh, you?" he muttered. "Thought you'd be over soon. Good stuff that of yours—that poem. Sorry I hadn't got a gold mine to pay you what it was worth. Journalist? Yes. Good training, journalism, teaches you to cut out adjectives. Poets do run to adjectives."

His eyes raced down the proof, pounced on a paragraph that had seventeen words and made it seven. " 'Toeing and heeling,' that's my eternal job. If anybody

submitted the Ten Commandments for insertion I'd have to shorten them by half to get them into my columns. But some of those old chaps knew their job. The journalist who wrote the story of Ruth would suit my paper. That's just the length I want for my short stories. But there are too many 'begats' in the Old Testament."

He sighed and grabbed another proof slip.

He felt that he was disturbing the editor. "Hadn't I better look in, sir, when you're not so busy."

"I'm always busy. I'm always being disturbed. That's what an editor is for. Good-bye!"

Gipsy had returned! She had not forgotten him. But she had travelled over the world, while he had been condemned to remain in that out-of-the-way corner of the globe. But, of course, his boyish infatuation was gone. She had changed, surely? Yet in some strange way she and he were linked.

She met him in the city, by chance, and was politely delighted to see him.

“You must come and see me,” this mature young woman said. “It is you, isn't it? I recognized you even beneath your disguise—your moustache. But you've still got your dimple and you're still able to blush! Oh, I like it. It's so long since I've met a man who could blush! Come and see me soon. I'm staying with my married sister.”

She gave him the address, and asked him to call the next evening. But he had to do a concert that evening. He was a musical critic now—knowing really nothing about music. “Well, the next evening?”

Why not, he said, take her to the concert?

“You *are* in a hurry!” she laughed happily.

“They send me two tickets, you know,” he replied importantly.

The evening came. He called at her sister's place. It was a strange woman—Gipsy in evening dress—who received him. He had forgotten her beauty in her new rôle. He felt himself an ignorant boor beside her. After the concert he suggested that they might walk back, as the evening was so warm and still. When he took her by a back street he felt sure she knew why; but it was thrilling that she didn't mind.

She let him see. “I'm in your charge to-night. You're responsible for me.”

What a woman she was, complex, subtle, polished, alluring, provocative—and he had wasted his boyish love on a mere girl at whom he used to peer in church. They talked eagerly and disconnectedly, seeking contact after so many years. With her, he felt he was the dominant one now.

He took her, for all her wariness, by a surprise kiss. He held her roughly, and she resisted. But he had kissed her for all her struggles. Suddenly she became inert—so suddenly that he had a dreadful fear she had fainted. But in that sudden slackening of her muscles she smiled weakly. He saw in her eyes no sign of anger, no trace of anything except a quiet demureness.

Then she shook herself free from him. She had gone far from his contaminating touch. Only the quick rise and fall of her breast remained of the warm contact.

“You had better take me home,” she said in a most matter-of-fact voice, “they'll be waiting supper for us.”

Her equanimity shocked him. He was shaking all over. But as they turned, she let her deep eyes dwell on him with a slow, considering smile. Her gaze rested on his

face like a wafted kiss.

She must have been surprised next. For he did not attempt to crush her to him in a fierce embrace. All he did was to take her listless hand.

“You're such a nice boy,” she murmured. “Don't spoil it all, please! How you'll laugh, if you remember this when you're older. You hadn't even looked at my hand!”

She held up her fingers: there was a ring—he supposed an engagement ring, though he wasn't sure on which finger a girl wears an engagement ring.

“You ought to be more observant,” she smiled. “Though this isn't really an engagement ring, it may be when I get back to England. Now don't look pained. We may meet again, who knows?”

There was something infinitely comforting, he found, in holding a girl's hand.

“You baby!” she almost crooned.

So, swinging hands, they walked quickly to the house.

But as Gipsy entered the brightly lit hall, she became another woman. She was all vivacity and warmth.

He felt himself a man, striding home.

He was at the university, passing his examinations with ease, for he had found out the trick of preparing for them. But the urge to write overcame him. Those were the early days of the Gilbert and Sullivan operas. He had the joy of seeing his satirical verses in the newspaper. To his surprise he suddenly discovered that there were people in the world who were ready to pay for what he had considered his fun. Once he got three guineas for a political skit. It was amazing!

He called upon the editor who had printed his work, and was asked to dine at his house. After dinner the editor talked. So he wanted to write! He explained that he was only a sub-editor, and admitted with a quiet smile that his chief instrument was a large pair of scissors. He was a little man, with tired eyes. He wore, even at that interview, after the meal, a green shade over his eyes. He had been, he confessed, all his life a journalist. He solemnly warned him against the profession—if, he doubted, it was a profession. There was no chance for journalism in the country, except the routine of providing news. He recounted the fate of this and that bright young man who had gone jauntily into journalism with the same high hopes that had sustained him, and had ended up as a shipping reporter or as a mere sub-editor.

“But you're studying law, aren't you?” he ended hopefully. “Now, that's a profession, if you like! My boy, stick to it. You're lucky to have the chance!”

“But it's so dull!”

“Dull?” The little, bent, half-bald man blinked at him. “My boy, drop all this and tuck yourself into a profession. Journalism isn't a profession. Youth is wanted—only youth. One gets along all right for a good long time, but when you're old there is nothing left for you. Stick to a profession, my boy. I wish I had your chance!”

He left him in the suburban cottage, the little, weary, kindly man who had to get through his proofs sometime before midnight.

The stage had an immense interest for him. He used to call upon the stage manager of visiting companies, and write local verses in the topical songs, for a ticket in the stalls. It was a thrilling moment for him when the comedian put his gags into his song.

If the audience but knew that among the crowd there was the real author of the concluding verses! *The Mikado* was a turning-point of his life. Gilbert's brilliant versification enraptured him. There was nothing else then for him to do but to write a comic opera better than *The Mikado*. But there was no composer in his town. Yet he completed a tremendous three-act comic opera; then, failing to find a composer, he studied counterpoint, and tried to set his songs to music, of which he knew nothing.

Then by chance he heard of a New Zealand composer, and eagerly sent his script to him. The composer was a young musician, recently returned from Leipzig. Here was the ideal conjunction of genius. What eager and rapturous letters they interchanged! What wonderful suggestions! What grandiose schemes! What writings and re-writings, and flat refusals to re-write his cherished gems! How fine it was to call oneself a collaborateur! But the great comic opera died in its glorious youth. It was hopefully offered to stage-managers, who never bothered to read it. It masqueraded under five successive titles. And it was torn up without the least regret—for were not his friend and he already engaged on a still more wonderful work?

Then he travelled to the city in which his collaborateur lived, and they met! Both were terribly disappointed; but they found that first appearances had lied to them. They had met like lovers long estranged, silent, abashed, critical. But that night—which lasted into the dawn—their first impressions melted in the ardour of Youth. They slept in the same room; and he was awakened by someone whistling the refrain of the great chorus in the second act!

He was a young man in the early thirties playing tennis at his suburban club. During a game, hotly contested, he happened to glance up among the spectators and noticed a girl sitting, watching. She was a visitor, not dressed for playing. She looked sweet: he vaguely wondered who she was. Yes, she was beautiful. Whoever was she? He hoped that someone would introduce her. It wasn't often that such a radiant creature graced the club's courts. Subconsciously he felt that she was interested in him. He cautiously glanced at her companions, watching the game. She looked up. Yes, she was wonderfully attractive. He would certainly find out about her. When crossing over, he saw that she was sitting beside a girl whom he knew rather well. Good! She might even introduce him to her.

Once he thought she was talking of him to her girl friend. She seemed interested, but was evidently no player. There were plenty of girls who played well, but none so attractive. He was afraid to scan her features during the game. He brought off several good shots, and he played up for her. He swanked at the net. He felt that he must make an impression on her. He hoped that she was interested in him. If only the game would end and her friend would introduce him!

He made the winning volley, and the four players moved to the seats. His partner and himself had to pass by the two girls. Would her friend introduce them? No; she was not looking. Yes, she was!

They were introduced! Of course, he did not catch her name, but he would soon find out. But suppose she was only a chance visitor to the club? He might never see her again. But the gods were kind. Her girl friend asked him to afternoon tea. They talked. She had a charming voice. She was beautiful, but more. It was her figure that delighted him, tall, slender, and moving with a lissom grace.

The trio talked—mere nothings—but all the while he was registering her on his brain. But, no! That was too commonplace a word: she was all charm and sweetness. Her smile was slow and almost grave—no gauche girl. Her friend took her away. He played no more tennis.

That night he spoke to two men he knew. He said: "I've seen the girl I'm going to marry. Met her to-day!"

"But," said one of them, "how do you know?"

"I know! The moment I saw her!"

"That's all very well," said the other man, "but probably she's engaged to be married. Hadn't she got an engagement ring on?"

"I never looked," he said, feeling rather a fool. "I say, on which finger does a girl put her engagement ring?"

He didn't know. He knew that a married woman wore her marriage ring on her left hand . . . but was it the third or second finger?

But there was a dance to which he had been invited, two days later; it was quite possible that she might be there. He determined to go.

He had found out, by inquiry, the finger on which a girl puts her engagement ring. His quest would be ended then. But of course she would be engaged for every dance. He had determined not to dance with any other girl until he had danced with her. It seemed a sacrilege. He stood in the hall, wondering what she would look like in evening dress; but in his heart he knew. He was waiting about when a friend came up to him.

“Hullo!” he said genially, “not dancing? Come have a drink!”

“No thanks,” he said. “I've got something on much more interesting!”

“Really,” said his friend; “that's new for you. I've never heard of *you* being interested in any girl. I'm going to wait to find out who she is!”

“There!” he said. “Excuse me, I've got my partner.”

The other man drew in his breath. “I see!” He turned away.

They danced, she divinely. They did not talk, though their hearts were talking. They woke to the cessation of the music. Without a word he led her outside. The world was full of stars. They sat down on some steps and talked. The music began again. He took her in his arms, and drew her to him.

That dance had sealed them for life.

The two brothers, himself and an elder brother, were in the heart of the mountains. What made it so thrilling was that his father had taken them away from school, though it wasn't holiday time. They had a thorough bush training, for their father had often to go exploring, right away from anywhere. The boys had to do all the jobs of camp life, gathering sticks for the big fires at night, darning their own socks, and washing up the tin tea things; and, most thrilling of all, banging the suspended iron crowbar when the men had to come in to dinner. They learnt to put up tents and dig the trenches around them, to carry off the rain. For the reason of these trips they had but a vague idea, but it had something to do with things called theodolites.

But this trip was much easier, for they were in the heart of the Australian Alps of New Zealand, but not close up to the snow. The three, their father and the two boys, had to ride for days, crossing wide shingle-beds through which, half a mile away, the other cliffs could be seen. They had come to a river that had become swollen by a stream higher up, and the two horses—the two boys on one horse, and their father on his—had to ford the rushing ice-cold water. They sat tight, pushing across the slippery shingle. Their knees were wet as they struggled after their father, always, as they learnt, crossing a ford with the horses' heads pointing upstream. The water was dreadfully cold, and the river pushed at them all the way over; but it was thrilling when they looked back to see how brave they had been.

The next day they were at a mountain station, beside a big lake, and they heard from the station hands of a deserted hut up a gully. A deserted hut! What an eerie place it must be! One of the men told him that a murderer had lived there, and had been shot dead by Maori. The brothers shuddered with delight.

They slipped out to discover the hut. It was much farther away than they had expected, and the track was steep and rough; but at last, dead-weary, they discovered the place. It did look dreadfully lonely. They cautiously peered in, but the openings for windows were blocked up. Suddenly there was a noise inside! The murderer? No; it was only a big rat. Casting anxious glances at the hut, they looked around. They found a bar of iron, and worked the door gradually open; then with a big push it fell down. They waited, in case there was Something inside. A boy had to be pretty brave to go into the deep darkness; but they decided, after a talk in hushed voices, that there was really nothing to be afraid of, if they both went in together. They spoke in whispers; then they boldly entered the hut, and found nothing but a litter of barbed wire and an old horse-collar and other bits of rubbish. But they retrieved some rusty nails. It was terribly disappointing, but what an adventure it had been!

And how hungry they were before they got back to the station!

But after a big dinner they set out for further adventures. They wandered down to the stream that rippled into the lake. Flitting over a pool, there were gorgeous dragon-flies, big, wonderful fellows that stayed still in the air with their gauzy wings buzzing, suddenly to disappear. But dragon-flies weren't very exciting. They looked about disconsolately. The stream invited them to paddle, though they had been strictly enjoined not to bathe in the lake. No; it was too cold. But what should they do?

The stream, instead of going straight down into the lake—as it wanted to do—ran parallel for many, many yards beside it, instead of making its way through a big sandhill. Why not cut a straight way through? But could they do it? They had all the afternoon before them. So they set to work with their hands as spades, and scooped out great handfuls of sand at a curve where the stream had almost decided to cut a straighter channel. It was hard work, but so exciting. Gradually the sand was scooped away, at first only shifting the dry sand; but it occurred to them that they might make use of the current. They made a bank across part of the stream, and let the force of the water beat against the obstacle. It seemed impossible, but they worked frenziedly, scooping out to begin with only a little ditch, and coaxing the trickle of water along. At last they had cut right through the big sandbank, but it was only a tiny rivulet, only a little drain. They might do it! But was there time before the sun went down, with the great barrage of the canal still to remove? A bank was thrown out on the other side, and the water came lapping up to the remaining obstruction. The rivulet had grown to a tiny stream, carrying away the sand from the banks with an ever increasing force. Then came the glorious moment when the stream broke through the barrier, with a greater and greater force behind their puny efforts.

They stood silent, watching their vast engineering work, elated with a great work done, changing the forces of Nature!

That was what they would do when they were grown up, build mighty bridges and shake down vast mountains! What a splendid thing was Life!

He was working hard for a forthcoming examination at the university, but that night at home he found himself curiously restless. He could not remain in his little apartment. He felt that he wanted the world's room. He was cramped and confined by walls. He took his hat and silently slipped from the house. Walking rapidly, swung along by the tremendous urge of his chaotic thoughts—or half-thoughts—he had no consciousness of direction or locality.

Suddenly awakening, he looked up through the still air and discovered a great tumult in the sky. Though the night was calm about him, up there in the height the great clouds swung along, buffeting the leaning moon. Billow after billow of cloud broke over her, but recurrently she emerged triumphant.

Then, like a sudden stunning blow, a cosmic echo of the turmoil of the ether entered into his soul. A dew from the confines of cold Space descended in benediction upon him, slipping silently into every vein, thrilling him with a mystical exaltation, and awaking every cell in his brain to a glorious Godlike comprehension. Of what? He knew not; but he felt within himself the consciousness that he was one with the moon and the clouds, one with the patient earth, one with sidereal Space. At that amazing moment he was in glorious communion with every soul living or dead.

It was only when he had dragged himself home, physically wearied and mentally exhausted, that he knew himself the anointed and consecrated disciple of poetry. Desperately he tried to recapture in halting verse the immense impression of that blinding but illuminating flash. A clumsy poem upon the moon was the pitiful result of his travail. In the morning he clearly recognized its crudeness. His soul had dabbled in forbidden things. But he had been elected to the choir of the universe. He still had his task to learn; but now he saw the way that he must travel.

That great moment had been his benediction. And through his life such moments came, vibrations from the souls that everywhere crowded close upon him. He felt himself consecrated.

But the task was still unapproached. For three days he was unable to work. He could not write. Had he exhausted his little talent? His brief illumination had guttered out, and left him blindly groping in the darkness. He was no better than the rest of humanity, voiceless and stale. But at the end of that blank period he wrote a strange poem on mother-love—a subject utterly alien to his thoughts or experience.

Months afterwards, when he saw it in print, he stared amazed at the strange birth that he had fathered. He could not remember how or why he had felt the urge to produce it.

They were married, and settled down. The honeymoon was only a memory. He was busy every night with his typewriter, working on a new play. It was going to be better than his last. He was perfectly content to see his wife reading a novel, or doing a bit of fancy work. That quiet evening—and all those quiet evenings, one after another, satisfied him. They were a happily married couple.

Sometimes when the play wouldn't come right he would suggest a game of bezique.

But suddenly one night his young wife, with a fretful gesture, swept the carefully packed cards off the table!

"I can't stand it!" she cried. "Night after night you sit there at your typewriter, or play that dull game, and if this is what marriage is like, I'm sorry I ever married!"

"My dear!" he cried, "whatever's the matter?" For a moment he thought that she had gone mad. "But, my darling——!" he began.

"Don't 'darling' me!" she said. "I'm fed up with this sort of life. These awful evenings! You're all right, working out your plots and doing your writing, but what is there in it for me? Night after night the same! Silly cards, just us two, all the long evenings, without any excitements. We might as well be dead. And you sit there and look at me as if I'd gone mad!"

He was astonished, utterly astonished. He had thought how easily they had settled down, and how happy they were going to be!

"It's just like being dead, and sometimes in the long evenings I'd like to cry or break things. And some night I will! We're not alive; we're dead and buried, and we'll be dead all the rest of our lives. For goodness' sake can't we do something, go somewhere, meet some friends, go to a dance or a theatre? And there you sit looking at me as if I had gone mad, when all I want is a little gaiety, something to get through these long, long evenings."

"But," he began, "I'm plugging away on my typewriter——"

"If you're not careful, I'll smash the thing. Tap-tap-tap! It's getting on my nerves; and I never knew I had any nerves. Is this what I'll have to put up with all the rest of my life?"

It took him some time to put his side to her. He was writing a play. . . .

"I'd rather see the thing burnt to ashes than go on like this for ever."

He felt antagonism burning fiercely within him. She had no right to flare up like that. She had married him, and if she couldn't put up with the dull evenings—though they were not dull to him, working as he was most of the time—then they had come to a crisis in their married life. She had no right to suggest that the play wasn't of

any importance, when she knew how much he was building on its success.

“Well,” he said icily, “if you want to go out to-night, why don't you?”

His wife had risen. “I'll go!” She was daring him. Well, he didn't care. She swept to the door, but did not bang it, as he had subconsciously anticipated. He waited. He heard nothing. Then he heard the dull noise of the hall door. She had really gone? No; he would find her waiting in the hall, eager to make it up, if only he would be the first to give in.

He waited. Silence. He began to get anxious—not seriously, of course. His wife wasn't an hysterical girl—not likely to do any harm. Although, all the same . . . !

But he had his pride. He wasn't going after her, if she had really gone.

No, he wasn't going to follow her. But he wished he knew whether she had gone out or not. That was the worst of women: they did inexplicable things.

But he could not stand the suspense any longer. Even if she was just waiting for him to follow and appeal to her to come back, it would be all right. But she shouldn't do that sort of thing.

He tip-toed to the shut door. She had gone!

He ran upstairs to her room, knocked, but got no answer. He opened the door, ready to receive her and apologize. But she wasn't there.

So! She had really gone out? But where to? Where was she likely to go? Her mother? No: she had more pride than that. Gone to one of her girl friends. She had many girl friends. But he could not give her away by telephoning for her. Who could it be? No: there was nothing to be done, except wait.

He was profoundly upset. Now that he looked back, she had been curiously irritable of late, with sudden moods that nothing could account for—and unstable. She had not been as she was some months before. Nothing to notice, until this had happened. Her health . . . he wondered. He did not know much about these matters, but he had read . . . all sorts of things when people got married.

Suppose, he shuddered . . . if it were that?

Nonsense! He was only frightening himself over her. But it was no use worrying over anything like that; the one and only thing now was to find her and bring her back—if she would come back. Where was she, now? What was she doing? And there he was, like a fool, standing there, and there was nothing he could possibly do. She had gone, and he would have to wait up until she came home. Home? That was it! Was their house a home? Was he the husband that he should have been? There were times when they had nearly quarrelled—tiffs they called them, at which they laughed happily afterwards.

But it was half-past ten, and she wasn't home. Surely she wouldn't do anything rash? No; she was so full of life and happiness. Ah, if only she would telephone him

to say she was coming back?

It was terrible, not knowing what to do. If she only knew how she was torturing him! Perhaps she was laughing at him. But no; she was too loyal to hurt him consciously. But she had her pride, too. And he had always liked her pride.

He wandered about the house, went into her bedroom, saw everything was as usual, except that her hat had gone. Well, he would have to wait up till she came home, no matter how late. It was terrible, though, to think of her away. No; she wouldn't do anything rash, though he wasn't quite sure.

What was that? Her key in the front door? Yes! Yes! He rushed to open the door. No; she did not come back a penitent; she came back with a laugh, her delightful gay laugh!

“Hullo!” she cried. “Still up, old thing? Thought you'd have been asleep before this. Had a wonderful time in the city. I'll do it again. It was such fun!”

He had been expecting subconsciously a tearful penitent.

“Where did you go?” he anxiously asked. He wasn't going to hector her.

“You poor old dear!” she smiled, feeling his arms about her. “It wasn't much of a time. Had a look at the shops—and, by the bye, there's a lovely jacket in Jones's window that, if you still love me, I'd like so much to have? Then I had a solitary supper at Johnston's. And what made it awful was that nobody seemed to see anything curious in a girl like me being by herself at that time of night. Nobody followed me in the street. Nothing! No adventures, though I'd have dearly loved to bring home a hectic story. It was, old thing, the dullest evening I have ever had, even our evenings at bezique are more exciting.”

“I'll try . . .” he said.

“Don't be silly, old dear. But it was rather exciting, the things that didn't happen. I'm afraid that as an adventuress I'm not a success. But really, it is really dull for me, just sitting about while you work. And you won't forget that jacket. I'd better get it in the morning—I have to go to town—in case it's sold!”

He was in his first year at the university, with all the world to win. At first he had been a solitary youth, writing his immature verses, without a guide; but he had heard of a brilliant girl who was also an author. It had never occurred to him that there might be some other literary aspirants in that university town. He made himself known to that angular young person. She had no charm; but it was rumoured that she was exceedingly clever, wrote stories and verse and had a devastating wit.

A third ambitious member of the coterie was the dour son of a Scotch professor. He had no graces; but was rumoured to have written clever theses. The three drifted together by degrees, and at last the tremendous idea came to them to form a literary club. Their meetings were an oasis in the materialism that surrounded them. They decided to meet once a week to read in turn their stories and discuss literature. They had the ambition to become the literary focus of the city; and the rules were framed, after fierce discussions, to keep the club stringently select. Several literary aspirants were formally invited to submit a composition, an essay or a poem, but they were unanimously rejected.

Even in New Zealand there was a literary tradition at that time, in spite of the materialism of a raw young colony. There was Domett, the "Waring" of Browning, with his great untidy epic of the romantic Maori race, seen through the soft English rain-film in his eyes. But he was remembered only as a politician. It was this fine tradition that the club of three decided to carry on.

Enthusiastically they held the first meeting in the girl's tiny room. The other member wrote vast blank verse poems on philosophical themes. He ended as a university professor who produced five children, but no poems.

The third, the girl, was a genius. Thin and gaunt, she had worked her way from the poorest beginnings to distinction in the university. Her short stories and verse were marked with a humour quite unfeminine, and a profound and penetrating psychology that shocked him. She was no prude.

Those nights were thrilling. There, in that obscure little cottage they discussed tremendous themes, sex predominating. It used to be after midnight before they reluctantly broke up. The girl had a man's brain, a finer brain than the other two. She easily became the leader. They were her admirers, prophesying a brilliant future for her. And he felt a little itch in his mind that she should have become their leader. A mere girl, and they were men! It hurt, but they did their best not to show it.

Then the club broke up. He had to go to another city; and that night she provided a delightful supper, cooked by herself, as a farewell. And in the other city he awaited

the stir that would be created by her great novel, brilliant thesis, or fine drama. And in the few letters they exchanged, for Youth is careless of friends, she seemed utterly care-free.

It was only a year afterwards, in a roundabout way, that he heard she had died by her own hand.

She was the most brilliant chemical student at the university. The professor had made her his chief assistant. She had, in her research work, made a brilliant discovery, found among her papers.

There was no apparent cause for her suicide. She had given no sign of any breakdown in her mind, except, perhaps, that she had been too closely engaged on her work. Her knowledge of chemistry had enabled her to compound a poison that had left no disturbing traces on her dead features. The analyst, called to diagnose the cause of her death, was unable to identify the poison.

She had meticulously arranged her end.

She gave a luncheon to her girl friends, on the pretext of going away for a holiday—not a health-trip; farewell letters to all her friends—one to him; complete information posted on the morning of the day to the medical man and to the police; careful arrangements to ensure the early discovery of the body. She was found as if asleep on her made bed in a room heavy with the perfume of white roses, with which she had decked herself. Her diary was left for the use of her professor, clearly written, without any sign of a tremor in her writing; a letter to the press—not disclosed to the public—analysing her mental state with extreme precision, and scribbled sentences and brief records of her last minutes.

There was no hint or suggestion of any love-affair.

He was in his last year at the university, studying for law. Only his final degree of LL.B. had to be gained, and he would be a barrister—or a solicitor, or both. But it was a dreary outlook for him. His mother wisely counselled him to stick to his profession: there was something solid about it. He could write his poetry and his stories while waiting for his opportunity in the law. But he hated the dullness of the law. What he wanted to do was to write, just to write and keep on writing. It would surely get him somewhere. Well, there was only six months' work ahead, and then he could make up his mind, or, rather, have it made up for him.

It was in the vacation that the god from the machine entered. His uncle, the doyen of journalists in New Zealand, who had had the opportunity to become the editor of an important Sydney journal, but who preferred to remain in the country that had made him, happened to pay a visit to his sister, his mother. If the boy wanted to get into journalism here was his chance. But his uncle warned him of the trials and difficulties ahead. Composing poems and writing satirical skits did not figure in the editor's mind. It was hard work ahead, dull and monotonous—most of it. And the rewards were few, and, at that, hardly worth winning. His uncle put the position clearly. An author was not a journalist: and he wanted only to be an author. His talents, such as they were, were literary and not journalistic. But if he felt that he must give up his law studies, so near to their end, his uncle would give him the chance of getting into journalism on his paper.

He did not hesitate for a moment. All that had gone before he renounced cheerfully, secure in his hopes. So it was settled. He left his home for the capital city; and a few months afterwards his kindly tuition in journalism was ended by his uncle's death.

He found his uncle's successor, however, just as genial and kind. Had he met with disappointments he might have returned to the Law; but he was in the hey-day of his presumptuous youth, and he revelled in his new work. The thirty shillings upon which he began what he believed would be a famous career, soon became two pounds ten shillings. He was already a millionaire. He owned fabulous wealth, which he could draw and draw upon by merely writing a cheque payable to Youth. Every morning he jingled his money in his pocket, bulging with ambition.

He would do things; he would conquer the subservient earth. He tossed the world into the air and caught it on the bounce. He looked down upon the little city—to him, then, a vast metropolis—with all the world beneath him. Absolutely sure of himself—though with an occasional douche of fact to keep him sane—vividly conscious of every cell in his body and brain, he had sternly to refrain from shouting

to the sharp, keen sunlight and the gusts of wind that thrilled him with aliveness.

But what if Death, naturally envious, should snatch him now? That thought became a shudder; but he laughed it off. Death had no threats for him, for was he not Death's conqueror?

And this gallant adventurer into Life was merely a junior reporter, hurrying to his office, thence to the Law Courts to record the names of petty offenders in the dock.

Every morning on his way to the police court he passed a grey-eyed, demure little girl going to the office where she worked. He had vaguely observed her at a certain street corner. For a few mornings he and she happened to pass almost at the same spot. He wondered if she had noticed the coincidence—if it was a coincidence. Almost to the minute the two must have heard the post office booming the ninth hour as they passed and went on their separate ways. He wondered if she was wondering, too. He had been in the city for only a month; but that passing place was to him the most important moment of the weekday. He hardly liked to stare at her, but when he did, she instantly appeared unconscious of his presence. And never as they passed did she glance at him. Yet there was something, divined in his heart, that had interested her, though her eyes always promptly dropped as he directly approached her. He was too ashamed to glance back; but he wanted to know whether she had become, or was becoming, interested in him.

But day after day the little comedy was played out, without his having any opportunities to become known to her. It seemed so stupid for them to pass like that, each so interested, and nothing to happen. It was obvious to him that she was not the sort of girl to give him any apparent sign, even if he was beginning to appeal to her. But weeks went on, and they were no nearer than on the first day on which he had noted her, and she him. Her eyes were just as modestly lowered for the few steps that took him past her. She seemed so remote, so inaccessible. The affair was becoming ridiculous. It seemed as if it would peter out from sheer futility; yet he could not—or would not—take another and longer route to the police court. That seemed to him a token of failure; but it exasperated him that she could be so extremely modest.

He imagined—he was good at imagining—that perhaps at their corner a horse might fall, and that he could pick it up, with her eyes at last upon him. But the cab-horses were unduly careful for weeks. It was becoming unbearable. Any other man would have accosted her, and have done with it, even if she insulted him. Several times he had followed her—a street block away—but he had never dared to catch up with her. She entered a solicitor's office, but never looked back.

He imagined many things of her. He had never seen her with men, nor did she ever loiter within his sight. But there must be an end to what was then a suspense in

this absurd comedy.

Surely there was not another girl so modest in the world? But he subconsciously knew that she was widely awake and aware of his morning passing, and of him. If only he knew the right approach to her? He made tentative inquiries to learn who she might be; but he was afraid to follow up the few clues that led to her. She might think that he was intruding upon her. He dared not startle her, because he felt that if he pursued her she would vanish.

One afternoon, however, he was strolling down the street with a fellow-reporter, when he noticed her—not at their meeting-place.

His companion lifted his hat to her, and the two passed on.

“Who's that girl?” he asked. “I've seen her about often.”

“Oh, her?” said his friend. “Don't you know? She's about the hottest piece in the town. Thought everybody knew that. Where have you been not to have noticed her. Plays up with every chap she can get in tow with. Hot! A little devil! Anyhow, she's a good deal too hot for me—and I'm not very particular. She's the girl who—”

And he mentioned a scandal, whether true or not, that had been blown all over the town.

What a fool he had been!

Such news travels fast. The next morning she laughed up into his face, but he strode furiously past her, well aware that she was enjoying what she thought was a good joke.

He was dining in the mess of a British battleship. He was among good fellows, all friends of his. He had voyaged with them for three months round Australia, a journalist selected to join the ship.

He had gone on board feeling overawed by his companions, very raw in the midst of so much gold lace. Luckily an old dog of a special correspondent had taken a liking to him, and had tutored him in his new rôle. He became the old man's pupil with wise maxims of the King's Navy.

“Ship”—not “boat.” Don't occupy the armchairs of the officers' mess—officers had their turn of work to do—he hadn't, except in the privacy of the correspondents' quarters. “Don't slouch on deck: the bluejackets had to run when moving about—bad for the ship's morale.” The Captain was It. Correspondents had to be invisible. The correspondents were mere luggage, visitors who did not belong. These useful tips were generously given him by the old hand. At first they were all intruders. One should not talk to a bluejacket. Yet there was a real friendly feeling when once the officers accepted you. It did not matter where you belonged, if you were a good fellow and simple, ready to tell a yarn or listen to one.

He found himself one of the mess, not a mere hanger-on. Neglect of these simple clues sometimes meant the sudden departure of a correspondent at the next port. More important correspondents than he had had to leave the ship.

As the voyage progressed he found unexpected kindnesses shown to him; help in the technicalities of the tour; and the handicap of a mere landsman gradually disappeared. Once he ventured to suggest an innovation that came before the Captain. Promptly to the notice of the mess the suggestion came, and it was published there. He felt that he had sensed the feeling of the ship's company. Thereafter he could do nothing wrong; indeed the officers went out of their way to help and thank him. Yet he had no good stories to tell; he was no raconteur.

And now that the voyage was nearing its end it was his chance to cement that goodly ship's company. The ship was entering harbour, and on its arrival his duty to his group of newspapers would end.

At the mess that night he craved permission of the President to “pass the wine.” The port circulated; and then he had to make his speech, his farewell speech. He chose an absurd pretext for the cheerful function. He gravely protested that he was “leaving the service,” on the ground, entirely trivial, that the bar was closed at ten-thirty instead of midnight.

There was a chorus of encouragement as he sat down. Then he received one of the surprises of his life. When he persisted in his intention, amid a chorus of objections,

to “leave the service” that night, he was stunned by shouts of “No! No! You're coming on with us!”

Then arose the President of the Mess again, saying that the Captain, the ship's officers, and the men, had decided to keep him on board for the return to the other side of the globe. Refusals were overwhelmed by the unanimous vote of the mess. It was a moment that he would never forget. Such a triviality might seem of no account, but the occasion was one to remember till his death.

Always diffident and doubtful, he felt himself accepted by a class that was remote from his ordinary life. Such a little thing, but to him it meant a lot!

He had come down the Pei-ho River from Peking to civilization, a very sick man. He was glad to board the solitary steamer for Chefoo, his next port of call. From the camps of the desolated plain he had happily drifted down the muddy Pei-ho, in the guise of an American wounded, carefully concealed under the mattress of a makeshift ambulance. The military guard of mixed nationals were only too glad to let the Peking carts go without a search.

He was conveying his own modest amount of loot and his friend's rich treasures. He had been given the passage to safeguard his friend's loot. One piece of loot proved rather trouble-some on the sampan: it was a mettlesome white Tibet pony. At the first stop, a British post, he was invited by the young officer in charge to dine with him. It was a chance for the lieutenant to hear the Peking news, mostly mere rumours; for he had been stuck on that desolate mud-bank ever since he arrived in China—a miserable man. No fun; no loot. And now the show was almost over. If only he had been once within the almost mythical walls of the capital.

Naturally the talk had been of loot; and he brought out from his souvenirs several beautiful bronze buddhas. Quite casually, after a good and respectable dinner, on a looted table, he displayed his curios, and offered his host his pick. Of course the young British officer refused any gift, but his reluctance soon melted. He had his opportunity to take toll of the precious things being drained out of Peking. They parted good friends. But if he had not paid his customary toll passing down the river, he would have found himself stripped of all his possessions. There were two ways of doing things, the polite and the necessary. That young officer, and the others that succeeded the first at each toll-post, took their share.

There was one of the American soldiers whose condition grew gradually worse. He was obviously sinking as they made a mud-bank. There was no hope for him. The doctor at the preceding stage had said he would die that night. He did. Reverently he was borne ashore, and the grave was dug in the moonlight, with two lanterns for the work.

The officer in charge grew anxious. He had to read the prayers for the dead; and where had he put his little Bible? He searched hastily, but in vain.

“Anybody got a Bible?” he asked. A quick search through the packs showed no result. Anyhow, the war was over. But the dead man was properly and with reverence buried. In the dark of the evening a pack of cards was solemnly produced, and the lieutenant said some brief, halting prayers. Later that night the pack was utilized for its usual services.

But now he was on board the vessel, homeward bound. Into the little saloon he

went and heard an almost forgotten sound—the sound of children's laughter. A mother was leaving Tientsin for England with her three daughters, now that the stress of war was over.

He felt, however, strangely miserable. The mother looked at him and kindly asked him if he minded the noise that her brood was making?

“Not at all!” he eagerly replied. “It's the first time for months since I've heard the laughter of children.”

But suddenly he found himself with a headache. He was glad to be at sea again. But the headache persisted. The English lady was kind, offering remedies, and keeping the children quiet. Soon, however, he had to go to his bunk. He learned that on the short trip to Chefoo no doctor was carried on the ship. He lay shivering and wretched. There were visions of the kindly lady, but they were blurred in pain.

In his mind he felt that he had to remember something—something to be done at Chefoo, something important. . . . What was it? He could not grasp it. Ah! a cable! He was to call for a cable at Chefoo. On the morning when the ship entered the harbour he shuddered. The bay was full of ice-floes, and there was a heavy sea on. For a time the captain dared not risk a sampan alongside. That cable!

There was a doctor at Chefoo, he was told. That made it imperative for him to land. At last he got ashore. Thankfully he dragged his body on lagging feet along; he had only one idea in his burning mind, to get that cable. He vaguely noted a doctor's sign on a door . . . yes, but what he had to do was to see the Chinese cable office. He could not find it. There was nobody to ask. And the Chinese he met knew nothing. Suddenly he saw that brass plate again. How had he got there? But he was almost reeling with exhaustion. He found a bell beside the door. The door opened. A Chinese led him, almost exhausted, to a room. He sank down into a chair. An Englishman entered.

“Ah, you're from Peking, you lucky dog!” he heard him say.

He felt the doctor, through a blur, look keenly at him. “It's a doctor you want, not a cable office!” said the other. “Which will you have, brandy or whisky? Whisky! That'll be the last whisky you'll have for a month!”

When he looked around he felt that he was still at sea. That gentle rocking . . . No; he was being carried smoothly along in a palanquin with four Chinese in uniform. There were glimpses of a huddled Chinese city below, and the ice on the water, and then, thankful oblivion.

There were three selves in that strange bed. He fretfully wondered why they could not have put the other two selves in other beds. But there were three—three of himself. They were quite distinct—as distinct as the Chinese servant and a new person who bent over him and disappeared and came back in sudden flashes. But he

didn't mind that, nor the tears that fell down over his face. It was stupid of them to put the three of him in one bed. The place looked big enough. The room was comfortable enough, with an irritating design on the walls. The three of them in the bed puzzled over the design. It was like a puzzle that had to be solved, or else something terrible would happen. But if only the third Me would stop crushing against him. He tried to argue with him, but the other Two were against him. There was that face bending over him at times. Sometimes there was a light in the room, and then there would be a vague white light pouring into the room through a big window. There were white things outside. He was afraid of them; for when he tried to talk to the other Two, they combined to smother him, pressing brutishly upon him; but he felt vaguely that he was the Important One—the others were cringing things. If only he was strong enough he would push them out of the bed! They ought to sleep on the floor. And when he grew strong enough he would make them.

Then, one morning, he found that One of the Others had gone. There were only two selves in bed, himself and the other self. He tried to frame a prayer to Someone for giving him this amazing grateful relief. Only two of Us in that big bed! It was delightful. He didn't care whither the intruder had gone. He hoped something had happened to him. That he would not come back again. But now the Other One became irksome to him. Surely they could put him away somewhere? And gradually he felt that the Other Self was withdrawing. He seemed loth to go, but he was beginning to feel himself the stronger. The Other was a slave. Some day he would get rid of him, and the big bed would be his altogether! It was no use his pleading to allow him to remain. He meant to murder him soon.

And, at last, he found one morning that there was only Himself in bed. And the inexplicable relief! He looked up and saw the face that had hovered over him quite clearly. It was a face that he did not recognize, though he vaguely remembered having seen glimpses of him.

It was, he was told, another doctor, who had been driven down from the interior, with all his pupils butchered, his church razed to the ground, and he himself miraculously escaped from the hatred of the mob. He had found him in the only White hotel; for the first doctor had been stricken seriously ill at the same time; and the Chinese servant taken to be a nurse, a male nurse, who knew nothing about nursing.

Then he lay resting, exhausted, but alive. One fine Australian, in the cable service, had found him down with enteric fever, and had given all his attention to him. The convalescence was long and dreary, with only the doctor and his friend to cheer him, and nothing to see through the window but the ice-floes in the harbour; and it was a delight to see an ocean-going sampan pass across the sea.

One day, however, the doctor frowned. His temperature had gone up again. The doctor was anxious. What had caused this set-back, now that he was getting along so nicely? He did not tell the doctor the cause: he knew it well. He had started thinking of a poem that he had been composing before his illness. How easy it was for him now to write long, resonant, beautiful lines! The poem was the best he had ever written—or so he told himself. Long after, it was published, and he liked it best of all—as did some of the critics.

But he wondered often whether in his last moments of life the three selves would come back and wrangle over the narrow bed in some strange hospital; and the doctor would seem to him incredibly stupid not to diagnose his final pangs, when he, himself, knew that the trouble was merely the three selves fighting to possess the tired and broken body.

He was in an obscure hall in the suburbs, being pushed and pulled about by a large, forbidding-looking lady. He had met her by appointment that afternoon. The preliminaries had been difficult; for he had had to proceed stealthily. Nobody was to know. If his father had found out this intrigue, the consequences would have been terrible. His father would have utterly refused to countenance such proceedings, but his mother aided him.

The bare room was drearily lit from a window in the roof of the dusty and dingy building. He had looked guiltily behind him as he approached the building, or barn. Nobody must see him enter. And he would have had to take the same careful precautions when he slipped out into the grey, dismal back street.

He had come by appointment to learn the waltz—the new waltz that had rapidly spread round the world. He was in the top class of his school. But in these grim surroundings he felt himself a miserable being. But it was imperatively necessary for him to learn the new dance, for a girl was to be at the function. Not any girl, of course—The girl.

The stout lady seemed filled with an irrepressible vivacity. He watched her with utter dismay: the waltz seemed incomprehensibly difficult to his clumsy and halting movements. He perspired, made mistakes, grew gloomy, and wondered if, after all, the waltz was necessary. But everybody, he had heard, was dancing the new dance. He felt all feet. But his teacher made him go over and over the first movements with a patience that was sheer doggedness. But he could not catch the rhythm.

This was his third lesson in the art; and he had to be perfect in five lessons, costing him a guinea for the course. But a gleam of hope had entered into him: the task might be possible, after all.

He knew, however, that it would be much more difficult when he had to dance with other partners at the ball—especially when he had to dance with Her. What if he forgot his steps? He would be publicly shamed. But he was determined to dance with the girl. He would have to trust himself to her.

Every spare moment he was to be found in his bedroom carefully trying the steps. All his energies were engaged for the supreme test, now only two days ahead. If only he knew some other girl who could coach him!

The dance was an adult one, mixed with juveniles. He was just seventeen. He had not been able to afford the price, out of his scholarship grant, of a dress suit. His father would not help, and his mother was unable, though she made desperate efforts to borrow the essential garb. Well, he would pass all right in his dark navy suit, as the dance was not a real ball. The other youths, he knew, would be properly

attired. Their fathers knew the correct thing for such a function. The important thing was to manage the new dance and to meet and dance with the girl.

His mother had to invent a pretext for him to get out that night at all. He slipped out without his father's knowledge, excited with the promise of the opportunity of meeting her. Surely she would not look down upon him!

The first dance was easy: it was one that he knew well; but the supreme test was the second dance, a waltz. As the band began to play he suddenly forgot everything he had so laboriously learnt; but the blank pause passed and he found himself swept into the rhythm of the waltz. He was managing, after all! He was too preoccupied with his feet to talk to his partner; but, after all, it wasn't so difficult when you had a good partner. But his delight swiftly ended.

"Don't you think we'd better sit the rest out? The room is so crowded, isn't it? I always like to look on in the first dance, don't you?"

"Why, yes!" he found himself miserably saying. "Let's look on and see who's there?"

They sat out the rest of the dance; and he desperately asked his partner to give him the third, which wasn't a waltz. She was gracious.

All through his preoccupations he had been keenly watching for The girl. He could not pick her out. What if she hadn't come, after all. But she had promised to be there. After the dance had finished he scanned the dancers with a growing disappointment. She had not come! Was she ill? Killed in an accident? A thousand terrible things had happened to her? For she had promised to be there. There was no sign of her.

Suddenly in the throng between the dances he saw a beautiful being, surrounded by young men and middle-aged. It took him a second glance to recognize her. But surely that radiant thing wasn't she? He had never imagined her so attractive before. All his memories of her were outshone by this new vision of young girlhood. His dreams of her, his memories of her, had been shattered and lost. This was a new being, a strange, seductive thing, almost inconceivable. She did not belong to earth; she seemed to float in a vision, chattering, smiling, conscious of her charm. Grown-up she was, a woman of the world, not to be approached by a youth in a navy blue suit. How could he dare approach her? What could he say to this modern young woman, so much in demand by her throng of prospective partners? He was awed by the daintiness of her. And for the first time he knew that she had shoulders.

It needed her bright, careless nod of recognition, as she stood besieged by a crowd of suitors, before he dared to approach her. She bestowed two dances upon him, shakily pencilling his initials upon her almost filled programme. Her air of joyous excitement seemed not for him but for the whole room. He attempted to speak to

her, but the crush about her prevented anything more than a formal word.

He did his duty with the rest of the girls, but all the time he was aching for his dance to come. He had carefully reserved the dance due before his dance, in order to be ready to find her. When he put his arm round her waist in the correct manner that he had laboriously acquired, he was surprised, almost shocked. Hitherto his only experience of corsets was with the almost cast-iron things called “stays.” The things that his mother and his aunts wore. But this strange softness into which, it seemed, his hand sank, this delicate trellis of ribbons that seemed as deliciously supple and yielding as her skin, seemed to him almost a desecration. He had in that instance to revise his whole conception of Woman to fit in with this new revelation of her figure.

What he said during that dance, whether he said anything at all, he could not afterwards remember. Mentally he felt it to be of the highest importance to count his steps; but with this beautiful yet aloof being he seemed carried in ecstasy over the floor without the necessity of thought of his feet. He had no feet. He was almost in a drowse throughout the dance. It was as if he held her naked in his arms, as if the twain were only one figure, only one soul. Her gleaming, faintly perfumed shoulders—incredibly white—seemed to invite his glance. She had come in a dream like this to him. All this he had guessed at, had known, before. Yet the realization was incredibly sweeter.

One more dip into semi-consciousness came—his second dance with her. Then there was nothing left except to watch her. He saw her eyes close in the dance. He saw her in the arms of grown-up, confident, practised partners. He sensed the whispers that they murmured into her ear. He felt a shudder of repulsion against their hateful proximity; he seemed to see, almost, the imprint of their coarse, gloved hands on her bare skin.

Then, when a dance came for which he had no partner, he was glad to leave the stuffy ballroom for a stroll by himself in the cool garden. It was delightful out there. As he paused moodily among the trees, cursing his inexperienced youth that passionately prevented him from seizing her from those grown-up thieves of her beauty, he heard in a shadowed corner a couple whispering. Ah! if only he had had the pluck to have asked her to sit out one of her dances with him, that couple, so carefully hidden from intruders, might have been she and he!

If it had only been! Why hadn't he asked her to come out into the garden—with him? But would she? It would have been a liberty. What had she and he in common?

From the shadow behind a tree he heard a woman's low, provocative, challenging laugh, and immediately afterwards a man's quick, eager reply. He turned away

from—no doubt—two lovers hidden in the shadow. The woman gave a little gasp; there was a laughing struggle . . . perhaps a kiss; and then the woman sighed, and he heard the words, “Don't! . . . Oh, well! You darling, I must!”

He could not move, else he would have disclosed his place in the shadow. He hoped they would have done with their flirting, so that he could get away and leave them. He was no spy. But as he carefully withdrew he heard again the girl's voice.

It was *her* voice! He could not but remember that low contralto that had so gaily laughed, with the murmur after.

He had wondered why he had not seen her in the ballroom just before. Kissed by a man, and eager for more! He must make sure. He hurried back to the ballroom. She wasn't there. But of course there was no other laugh like hers. He knew its every inflexion.

He waited near the doorway until the next dance began. Yes, she was returning with her partner—a red-faced man of thirty—gaily chatting, but excited. The man's eyes were alive with triumph; but her face was calm and subdued. Could a girl be kissed like that, and not proclaim it to the world in flaming cheeks?

Yes.

So he had to reconstruct his theory of women. They were not ethereal beings, to write poetry about. They could desecrate their beauty. They so easily descended from their heights—if, indeed, they ever troubled to climb them. They wore masks, hiding qualities that did not exist. What this girl needed was too evident now. She wanted to be kissed by a man who had taken too many drinks.

How he hated all women!

He was visiting his mother, for in all likelihood the last time. The elements that made his father, his volcanic tempers, his energies, his terrible rectitude, had consumed him before he had reached a real old age. He had possessed all the virtues in excess, and was therefore a lonely man. He had never shaved his face, though in his youth he had had no need to do so, as his life had been passed on the goldfields of Otago, where life was in the rough. When he was sent to the city he refused to remove his thin whiskers, on the ground that shaving meant two extravagances—money and loss of time. His wife dealt with his fierce rectitude by the woman's way. She let the tempest blow over, and cunningly found a way round her husband's ukases.

The house was one of rages and ruses. He was a strict disciplinarian. He issued his orders and they were obeyed, but his wife tempered the wind for her smarting children. He was explosive, dangerous to flout. At certain seasons he had to make an exploring expedition into the bush, almost every year. There was a railway official who helped the family. The father's departure was a flurry of rages, shouting instructions and threats as he rushed down the garden path, running back for something forgotten, or to give some fresh instruction, cuffing whichever of the children happened to be nearest. Then he would trot down the road, laden with bulky parcels, shouting back his last injunctions to one and all. And when he had disappeared round the turn of the road, there was a sigh of relief from the mother, and the children—a lusty brood of six—whooped with joy, though not too loud, for he had been known to return for some part of his baggage.

Once he had missed his train, and came trudging back from the station to find a household shouting with hilarious joy, and doing all the things that he had told them not to do but leaving the commanded things undone. And thereafter one of the boys had been stationed in a hidden look-out, to make sure that he would not return.

Yet the father was the soul of honour. "As you make your bed, so you must lie on it," was his stern code. Because he was a light sleeper—though he slumbered in his big armchair throughout the evenings—he was awake every day with the dawn, and he insisted on every one of the boys being wakened at that time, to go out with shivering fingers to weed the garden. The garden was his pride: he lived for it; and his henchmen were slaves to weeds and gravel paths.

Once the dispirited group of boys took a solemn oath—their father being away that day—that when each and all of the family grew up they would never have a garden. Asphalt was much less trouble.

Yet this tyrant, who suffered vilely from indigestion, was a brilliant scientist and

explorer, with many exploits in discovery to his credit. At his observatory, given him by the New Zealand Government, he had done valuable work.

But he had no hobbies. Cards and other indoor games he refused to play, because he considered them a dreadful waste of time. Yet in all his dealings with life he was honourable to an extreme degree. He would scorn to take advantage of the slightest opportunity that came his way. But he had no graces, no delicacy. White was to him the purest white, and black was just black. There was no give-and-take in any of his dealings. He stuck to his bond.

From that volcano of violence the children fled, one after another, as soon as they could safely leave the rough nest. Each seized his opportunity to make his way in the world. And with the departure of one, those remaining had to take on harder tasks. There were less hands for the work. So it was that each found a job in some other city, happy to be freed from their bondage. Thus in the father's middle age he found the family scattered, with but himself and his wife and daughter. The enforced loneliness brought about a milder mood; and he mellowed into a peaceful quietude, a man utterly honest, a man who had never done a mean thing, a man who had hardly any friends—nor wanted any—but who carried his creed of straightforwardness to his grave. His only vice was his rectitude.

And now he was with his mother in her pleasant home in New Zealand. He had not seen her for many years. She had aged, but had borne her years well. Left by his father, who had always been careful of his expenditure, a sufficient income was hers to keep her in comfort, with her garden to potter about in, and with many old friends for company. Children and grandchildren gathered round her every year for the holidays. Peace and contentment marked her old age.

Yet when he arrived, for probably his last visit, he felt that a stranger received him with warmth which he could not reciprocate. She had become a stranger after all these years. He, her child, could not conceive or remember his mother in the period of her young married life. He felt the long space of time between; he could not reach back in his memory as she could. She was a dear old lady, with her serene sense of humour still surviving, but he felt that she was overawed by him. He was a polite, and, he hoped, a dear friend of long past times; but she was still timid of this grown man. Always subservient to her husband through her long life, she was now subservient to her son. Every wish was eagerly gratified; and there was a pathetic air of eagerness in the small services that she rendered. She felt herself left out of the stream of the long sequence of living; she had become lost in this new world of descendants. Her one delight was to receive the grandchildren as the horde descended upon her every Christmas. For him she hesitatingly had her special likings, though he had long outgrown them. She called back the old days of her

young married life, forgotten by himself.

That he had once been a new-born son seemed to him to border upon the miraculous. That forgotten life had gone from his ken. And there were times when he had to get away from that old house and the ageing mother within it. She hovered tremulously about him, meek as she always had been to her husband, and now meek to her son. She never made a direct request: she ventured hesitatingly on any suggestion.

He trod warily throughout his stay; but the gap between them was too wide to be bridged: the long years lay between them.

And always he was hating the final farewell. He said nothing about the length of his stay; and his mother would never have dared to question him as to his comings and goings. Yet she knew—and feared—the final farewell. It had to be got through—and the quicker the better. So, one morning, he abruptly said he was going to leave that afternoon.

That had been her increasing fear ever since his arrival. The definite decision almost staggered her. She pleaded with him to wait for the next steamer to Australia, but that would have meant another fortnight. He could not have stood another fortnight, with the same end in sight. He hardly dared to look at her. She seemed a stricken woman. But he set to work to pack up; there was a berth he had reserved in case of such a contingency, and he telegraphed for it.

His mother's tears flowed: in that moment she felt that she was looking at her son as one dead. She would never see him again.

She had borne him, nurtured him, loved him as baby, child, and grown man: and now she was looking at him for the last time.

Leaning over the edge from the upper deck, he saw her infinitely little and bent, with the tears glistening on her cheeks. They hurried her into her taxi.

Thank goodness, the scene was over. He was glad, glad, that he would never have to repeat it.

When the steamer lost the city on the hills, he turned to the companionship of talk and Bridge. He had to live. He had his own children, for whom he had done so little. Henceforth his life would be for his brood, but they too would break away, and live their own lives. Love goes down the generations, never can it work back.

She had come on board at Gibraltar. It was the regular Friday night dance. He saw her sitting on a deck chair behind the front rows. She was a foreigner, speaking with a delicate accent. Nobody except himself had taken any notice of her. He surprised her by asking for a dance. The moment she was in his arms he knew that she was a dancer born. She slid into his arms, clinging as if she was being rescued from drowning.

Neither spoke: there was no need for her to speak, for she spoke in her rhythm with the music. At the end of the dance, and the two encores, he waited, listening to her low, ecstatic voice. She was so slight and lissom. The band struck up, and he was about to look about for another partner, when she crept into his arms again, without waiting for anyone else. Perhaps it was the custom of her country. She told him later that she did not even know what her nationality was. The last place she had come from was Switzerland, but she spoke English charmingly. He had to relinquish her at last, after insisting on having some more dances with her later.

That was going to be difficult, he saw; for there was already a crowd around her, begging for dances. He had discovered her, and he did not miss the first available opportunity to engage her.

She smiled when he suggested, after the dance, that they might go for a stroll on the top deck. There were no other passengers in sight. They went to the stern, leaning over, talking in murmurs, and looking down at the brilliant balls of phosphorescence like drowned stars, of every colour from scarlet to mauve and bronze and gold. He kissed her, of course; but she did not seem to mind. He anticipated a fervour for the following nights.

A rival had appeared at the dance; and there was seen, on the deserted deck, a hesitating figure who dared not approach the pair. There was something, he could not but feel, almost pathetic in that vaguely seen middle-aged man. She let him kiss her before he took her down to her cabin: there might be waylayers on the way. He saw to that.

But as he went to his cabin he knew that he had had his one day. She was too elusive for him to keep.

He said to his fellows in the bar: "I shan't see her to-morrow!"

Games were in full swing in the morning; and three young men asked her to join in a four at deck-tennis. She had never heard of the game before; and for the first few points she caught the quoit in her hand, instead of spinning it back over the net. But in a few minutes she had got the knack; and all through the day she found partners, and they discovered that she was already an expert player. She was lithe as

an animal, anticipating every stroke. The men passengers formed an audience for her all the days. She seemed quite unconscious of her feline attraction. She was never alone. But she showered her favours indiscriminately among the young men. The girls and women she did not trouble to notice. She could have led a revolt on board the ship, and every man would have followed her. Yet she seemed so unconscious of her abject minions, caring not whom she played with, intent on the game. Her triumphant low laugh drew everyone. The married women she did not even see.

In every generation there are such beings born, destined to wreck homes and thrones, and to go gaily on to other victims. She was like one of the great courtesans of history, playing on a humble stage her devastating part, almost unconscious of her power. Her antennae drew everybody on the ship. Yet she was only a young girl, a nobody in the world. What would be her future? Her stage was too small. She was utterly ignorant of her tremendous powers if the chance came to her to exercise them. She had no favourites, but every woman on board secretly feared and openly hated her, and only breathed freely when she left the ship. Where was she now? Her address, eagerly sought for by the young men on board, was quite vague. She had wanted none of them.

He was awakened early by the nurse, bringing in a cup of tea to his bedroom. But in his disturbed sleep that morning he had vaguely felt that something was happening. Now he knew! In a moment he was wide awake. He looked at the trim nurse apprehensively. She smiled.

“Everything is going all right,” she said importantly. The nurse seemed to him to have changed overnight from a mere girl to this strange official being in her uniform. “The patient woke at five, when it began, but she wouldn't wake you, sir. She thought that you might as well have your sleep, especially as you could do nothing.”

“But, nurse, how is she? All right?”

“Of course. Don't get up, sir. There's nothing for you to do.”

There it was! The husband could do nothing. He was nothing. The whole business was in his wife's room. But the nurse relented.

“Just to say good morning!”

His wife looked up at him strangely, with a gasp of pain.

The nurse noticed it. “You must go, sir!”

His wife tried to smile. The bravery of these creatures! They had to go through it, while the husband was only a looker-on. Not fair. Nature never is fair.

“You must go, sir,” insisted the nurse, suddenly changed from a mere ordinary girl into a tyrant. He waved his hand to his wife and wondered . . . ? Women do die in child-birth, even in good hands. He remembered taking the doctor aside when he had paid his formal visit and earnestly insisting that if there was any choice which he had to save—the child or the mother—it must be the mother.

What was a baby, after all? It was his wife he wanted, safe from the perilous passage between life and death. And he could do nothing to help. He had been pushed out of the dreadful business by a mere nurse, whom he had seen only for a few minutes, a stranger delivered into this awful terror in a house that she had never seen before. But how business-like she seemed. To her it was a mere routine. He felt less apprehensive as he thought of all the other babies being born at that moment.

But he could not help. The women had to manage the business by themselves. A husband—no, a father!—was useless in this grim business. If only he could alleviate her agonies!

One thing he could do. It was to telephone to the doctor. But the nurse would not allow him to inform the doctor too soon. The important thing was to have him on the spot. The nurse had arranged all that.

He had dressed hurriedly—in case . . . Something might be needed. He tried to

read the paper. Impossible! "Births, deaths and marriages." What did it matter about deaths and marriages? Mere incidentals; but this was an ordeal with a thousand chances against her. It was no use trying to calm him . . . that dreadful moaning in the next room! How she must be suffering!

He wandered out into the garden. Would she ever see the garden again? What could he do? Nothing, absolutely nothing. He dared not linger near the house. A dozen times he went to the front gate to see if the doctor's car was in sight. He had left; but suppose an accident happened to him?

He was back in the house again. He might be wanted suddenly. The doctor was waiting in the living-room, when from the floor above the nurse sharply called. The doctor rushed upstairs.

What had happened? What on earth was going on there? A murmur of voices came from the bedroom. It was no use saying that delivering a child was a routine business. What was wrong, up there? And he had to wait, shut off, useless. If only *he* could have borne those pains! A blankness swept over him. He knew nothing.

After an eternity the doctor came down, looking grave. A complication. Very serious.

The doctor telephoned for another nurse. Then up the stairs he rushed again. It was a bad case. That moaning! That horrible moaning, weak and growing weaker! She would die! She would die before she had really lived. That silly quarrel that they had had only a week ago! How could he have been so mean and unkind?

There was a noise of hurrying in the bedroom; quick steps; the torment was still going on. What would the doctor say when he came down. Which would die? Both?

At last the doctor came wearily downstairs, and he was told that the baby had been delivered, but it was doubtful if the mother would live. The doctor telephoned for a specialist, who came. Another wait, with his mind distracted. Still waiting. The specialist came out into the garden. It was a question of life and death, with death the nearer. But she might pull through. There were similar cases, but usually it was the case of either the mother or the baby dying.

Another nurse appeared. She hurried upstairs. The first nurse met her on the landing. He could not help overhearing what the new nurse said to the other.

"Why did they bring me to a fatal case?" she said.

He was stunned. He felt the world like a weight upon him. So he was to lose his wife? And they had been married only a little over a year. If only he could have called Time back? How happy they had been when they knew they were going to have a child! It meant the crown of their lives. And now their whole existence had been shattered.

He wandered miserably out into the garden. He vaguely wondered whether the

coffin would go through the narrow gate. . . .

All that day there was no change. Her life hovered through the night. She was still alive. The baby! He had not thought of it at all. He had forgotten it in the greater agony. For two hours he had not even seen it. He did not ask its sex.

The fight was going on, and on. And, with the following dawn, the doctor collapsed into an armchair, after thirty hours of stress.

Both patients made a good recovery; but there was a tall white weed which was in flower that he remembered all his life. As the years came round he used to go to that patch of white blossom and thank God for his wife and child's deliverance.

Where he sat in the train he was opposite the pair. Nobody, he felt sure, had noticed them. Indeed, it was some time before he saw that the young girl's eyes were slowly welling with tears; and she dared not use her handkerchief in case the other passengers might discover that she was weeping.

She was just a simple girl, commonly dressed in cheap finery, with no attraction except her youth, uneducated and raw. Some little shop-girl or factory hand, in grievous trouble. Her seat was in the corner of the compartment. He would not have noticed her at all, had it not been for her stealthy brushing of her eyelids when the tears brimmed over. She had quite ordinary eyes. Indeed, a quiet, ordinary, unattractive girl. But she was utterly miserable.

Her companion, a youth of about her age, sat beside her. He made no attempt to console her. He was a dull-minded fellow, with a brutish, narrow brow, obviously uncomfortable, but afraid to attract attention to himself by speaking to her. Just a simple young lout, who had taken the girl out for an outing. And they were returning—to what?

He imagined them as having set out for an excursion in the country that morning, full of glee and happiness; they must have had a happy time among the trees, kissing each other, no doubt, without a thought of shame. The day had gone on, and they withdrew from the heat of the sun into the shade, grateful after their rambles.

And now they were coming back, she utterly ashamed of herself, and he trying to preserve his decorum after what had happened that evening. He stared defiantly at the passengers opposite, trying to pretend that the girl was nothing to him. That was it; she was nothing to him now. There were plenty of other girls that he could go out with. And this one was snivelling quietly in her corner of the train. What had she done? She had been weak when she should have been strong! She had acquiesced, knowing, of course, that she had done wrong; but the bleak realization and the terrible fear had gripped her. There was, she felt, no help from him. Probably she had not known him long; she had seen no harm in an excursion into the country with him. And now the world was black about her, and the tears were being furtively wiped away by that grimy rag of a handkerchief. It was quite sopped. She must have been crying for a long time before they caught their return train.

What could she say when she got home? How could she pretend that this picnic was as other jaunts? How could she face her mother: her mother had sharp eyes? No; she must not let her mother guess—ever. She knew, but vaguely, what might happen. What was she to do? The thing was done.

And the lout, not much older than she, was stolidly looking ahead, with no glance

for her. He, too, perhaps, had been caught in the cunning net of callous Nature. But he was obviously uneasy behind that blank mask. He pretended that she was merely another passenger in the train, a chance happening. For a while he preserved his aloofness and his stolidity, but once he happened to look at her and felt ashamed of her tears. People might notice. That man opposite was looking at them. Well, better make the best of it. He turned for the first time and whispered to her. He was obviously bothered by her fuss. He tried to cheer her up, telling her that it was nothing. But she was too dejected to reply, and had recourse to that flimsy, damp, crumpled, dirty rag. He tried to make her smile. He whispered defiantly. But she was brave. She smiled a wintry smile, though her tears had still to be mopped up.

He, who had unobtrusively watched the pair, got out at the terminus, and they disappeared into the crowds.

The poor thing!

He was alone on the deck of the liner, leaning over the railings. He was utterly miserable. He had taken official part in the committee for the ship's voyage; he had done his various duties. They must have liked him; he was, to them, a genial fellow-passenger, without a care in the world, making the trip like the other excursionists.

It was in the Indian Ocean, a calm, beautiful tropical night, with strange stars in the enormous arching sky. He had had a last turn with a fellow-passenger, a good chap; and he had given him a cheery "good night."

How he wanted the loving presence of his wife—wanted her just then more than he had ever wanted her. He had so many things to tell her, to explain; but, of course, that was impossible. She would have guessed: she knew him through and through. She was more than a wife; she had always been more than that.

And now he was going to leave her—without a word, a sign. He would vanish—better so. No explanations. She, with her deep intuition, would understand.

His journey had been a terrible mistake. He was going to record his failure. He was too old for the task fitted to him. His wife believed in him overmuch. That tender care, that deep and abiding love—these things counted tremendously; but, after all, she would be the better for his disappearance. She had mated with a failure. Oh, no; he had not been a failure before; but now he saw no way out—except this. She would marry again, he hoped; marry well. She was so much younger than he. And so full of life.

So he walked the deck, the only passenger about. He moved to the stern and looked over at the star-dust of the phosphorescence churned up by the screws. But the darling children, the loving children, his wife . . . ah! his wife!

Nobody about. Easy to end like this. Amazingly easy. Just leap the rails and disappear. Likely enough his body would never be found. No trouble about coffins and graves. No expense.

Well . . . why didn't he do it? What a weak thing a man can be! Leap overboard! That was his firm determination. What a fool he was!

He shuddered. He walked quickly down to his little cabin, the coward! He undressed and crept into his bunk. . . .

Next morning he wondered why he had been such a fool, with all the world waiting for him; and his return—successful or not—to where he belonged, his wife, his children, his home, his job!

Sheer cowardice!

But he must not be alone on deck late at night when everybody was in bed.

That mood might come again.

They were children, his brothers and himself, on the back lawn, ready to send the balloon up. For the past week they had made trial ascents; but this balloon was five feet high, an enormous thing.

It had been an absorbing work to cut out the sections of tissue paper, with one of the children inside and two others outside, pasting the strips. Then the open ring of light wire had to be pasted firmly on, with cross-wires to keep the rags in their proper place. And now at last, after waiting for a still atmosphere, the ascent was to be made. The whole family and the neighbours were present.

They had hit upon a neat expedient to inflate the balloon with hot air. They fixed up a tin plate, with rags soaked with kerosene, and on top they put a drain-pipe as a funnel. On the cross-wires was the bundle of soaked rags, to be lit only as the balloon was tugging to get aloft.

They had had many failures. It had been a wonder that their father had allowed them to “fool with” such dangerous things; but he must have been secretly proud of the children's cleverness, though he would never admit it.

The balloon was already inflated with hot air. The children could feel the pull of the balloon. The youngest was jumping about with glee, until he had to be cuffed for getting in the way. Then it was his task to put a match to the rags—a responsible post, full of thrills. The balloon was tugging to get away. Would it rise?

They let go, and after a slight period of swaying it rose beautifully above the row of trees. His brothers and himself were too thrilled to speak. Yes; it would clear the trees, rising majestically and, caught by a slight stream in the air, it sailed over the house next door.

The two ponies were already saddled. He and his elder brother hurriedly mounted and made off, following the course of the white globe. They rode, helter-skelter, after the balloon, though it easily outdistanced the ponies. But already the hot air had cooled inside, and it began to descend. By good luck it fell into a shrub in the bush; and he managed to retrieve it without harm. Then triumphantly they rode home with their precious balloon, hardly injured.

It was with a secret pride that he had watched the course of the balloon. If only he might mount thus into the air, and ride the clouds! He felt himself a monarch, and wondered if ever he might mount the air as their toy had done.

The game, unfortunately, came to an abrupt end. One evening the balloon fell, after a wonderful course, upon the shingled roof of the largest church in the town, just as the devout were entering.

The stern providence that ruled their lives, their father, had a difficult explanation

to make to the town authorities; and henceforth they had to confine their games to the earth.

But the glory of the exploit! He and his brothers were supermen! And his stern father was just like a child, playing with the toys.

He was at Oxford, in the vacation. He had newly come to England, with his sister.

He saw her first, in a roundabout, at a fair. As she whirled past on a wooden horse he caught a flash of a laughing face. She was leaning out, mad with happiness. Each time she came round she gave him her laugh of raillery.

He was glad that his sister was with friends, eager to enjoy other fun. He stood anxiously waiting for the roundabout to slow down. He excitedly hoped that she would stop where he stood. The chances were that she would have to get off on the other side. But all things happen to youth; and he was very young.

The roundabout was slowing down. Would it stop near him?

She slid from her wooden charger, alighting just opposite him. The excitement of the whirl through the air had brought the bright colour to her face. It was as if the gods had flung her into his arms.

She had evidently bought several tickets for the roundabout. She gave him her gaze, and motioned him to mount the wooden charger vacant by her side. No word had been spoken; but Youth needs none. Still without a word, though with a smile, she invited him, dared him. He mounted by her side, and the machine started. It was as if he was being whirled through space, he and she alone in the universe. His mind was in a tumult. He hoped that the ride would never end. Once he lifted his gaze to the ring of spectators, and picked out his sister, looking horrified. But the next time she had disappeared, to join the rest of the party. He didn't care. Youth never cares.

The roundabout slowed down, but he was ready with the fare for his joy-ride with this unknown girl. When, at last, the stock of tickets had been exhausted, he helped her to the ground.

“What'll we do next?” she eagerly asked.

“Do?” he laughed excitedly, “we'll do everything!”

“But your friends? They'll be missing you?”

“I'll find my way home somehow,” he said; “but not till the show is over!”

“We might go for a walk,” she suggested. “I only got on the roundabout for the fun of it.” Then she suddenly recollected that she was walking from the crowd with a youth whom she did not know.

He didn't care who or what she was. Why should he? He was bound nowhere.

It was late before he returned to his friends that night. He had promised to meet her again, if he could get away from his friends. He managed it.

In the morning, in spite of his sister's objections, he met her early. She had promised to show him the river. Eagerly he scanned her smiling face: she was more than pretty, with an air of good breeding. He could not make her out. He had been

told to wait at a lock where she would meet him. He had found his way to the spot; and he noticed a winsome girl approaching in a gay, flimsy dress. For a moment he thought how much nicer it would have been if she had been his girl. But it was! Instead of the hoyden he had met on the roundabout it was a demure and almost aloof nymph. And her voice was cool and refined. But there was no coldness in her welcome of him. She obviously approved of his flannels, though not audibly.

He helped her into the boat. They did not hurry: the whole day was theirs. Her sunshade lit her features with a cool glow. They drifted down the river, with only an occasional spell at the sculls. He felt content to drift in that balmy day; but she knew where she and he were going. Her voice, soft and correct, lulled him with Oxford chatter. She let him know that she knew important undergraduates. But she never let him lose the feeling that this was peculiarly their day. He had no idea of their progress, except that she was alone with him. She aloofly alluded to the occasion of their meeting. It had been a mad impulse to get upon the roundabout. A common amusement, of course; but it was the vacation. So what was a girl to do? She was sure that nobody knew her in that stupid fair.

He pulled the skiff beneath a shady grove of willows, and they disembarked on the green bank. As he helped her to the shore he kissed her. She did not protest, as he had thought she would. She sank into his eager arms, yearning up to him, and as he took kiss and kiss, she pressed her soft body against him in a passionate clasp. Her lips yielded softly to his. She was trembling as he released her; but suddenly she became serious.

“You know,” she said, “we've got such a long way to go. I want you to see my Oxford, the Oxford that nobody knows but myself, the Oxford when the boys have all gone away. I want this to be a day that you'll always remember, and I, too. But we must go on.”

She lay in the boat, relaxed. He could not help eagerly recalling the pressure of her body against his. He imagined her limbs below that light, fragile dress. Her eyes were dreamy and tired.

It was with a start of surprise that she recalled him from his thoughts.

“We have to get out here, for our walk,” she said. “I hope you are a good walker? We'll come back another way from here. There is so much to see.”

“Yes,” he laughingly replied. “I have to see you yet.”

She luxuriated in his devotion. He knew that she loved him, but for how long? But there was all the day before them.

They set out for their long walk. He told her of his life, of his home on the other side of the world, of his ambitions; and she eagerly kept step with his words.

They came to an old inn, and in a little summer-house they had their light lunch;

and the elderly woman who waited on them, having seen that the table was set, discreetly retired. It was the claims of hunger that first they had to satisfy; but at the end of the meal she stretched herself on the seat and laid her head on his knees, looking up at him with a longing sigh. He lifted her to him, and felt the soft pressure of her lips.

She lightly fingered his face with tender touches, as if he was a baby to soothe; and in her dark blue eyes he saw a passionate desire. But when he clutched her to him, feeling her breasts against him, she broke the dangerous spell with a laugh.

He laughed, too. He felt that she loved to delay over her love-making. It was too beautiful for haste. She was all tenderness, welling over with desire; but, he felt, content to delay their passionate kiss.

As he lifted her to his breast he took savage toll of her beauty; and within her he felt the trembling of her exquisite passion.

“No more!” she faintly sighed. “We must get on!”

Reluctantly they rose, paid for their lunch, and set out again. She was a good walker he soon found; but from sheer happiness she swayed as they went their way, as if she were stepping on the clouds.

Then they felt the exquisite delight of a delicious tiredness. They relapsed into quiet, content to take stride by stride with each other. The dusk was slowly falling. The day was fading in perfect beauty.

They found themselves in a desolation of green sward, the world dying about them. Their steps slackened, and they paused. It seemed to him that the whole world was waiting for the consummation of their love. The dusk touched him like stealing fingers from the growing shadows. She swayed, almost imperceptibly towards him, tired out as if she were about to fall from fatigue. In that momentous moment he caught her like a wild animal, feeling her heart beating against his heart.

He kissed her on her willing lips, on her eyes, on her neck. And with what seemed the last strength in her body she returned his mad kisses, her breasts crushed against him. She was like a creature of the wild clamouring for completion with her mate.

Then suddenly she slipped from his slackening embrace, and her knees gave beneath her, and she slid to the grass. But he was kneeling over her, nearer and nearer until the two forms on the grass were almost one. She lay relaxed beneath him, he feeling the quick pulsations of her breast.

But, in his triumph, he made a great effort and steeled himself from his capture. There flashed into his mind the ignoble thing he was about to do. It wasn't fair. Men are never fair to women. Where was that marvellous day if it was to end like this, a mere brutal advantage, spoiling all the beauty of the hours. She looked no longer eager; she was merely his prey. No; he could not do it.

He saw the apprehension in her half-closed, dreamy eyes, yet her sex, inexorable, claimed her. She was his prey by right of strength. She in her weakness yet asked for his conquest. All the more he must refrain: he was the stronger.

“We had better be getting along?” he forced himself to say. But she still craved for the completion of their love. Roughly he helped her to her feet, still swaying in her dream. And she was brave. She laughed, almost lightly.

“It must be very late,” she murmured; “but the boat isn't far from this. Why, that is the willow tree where we tied it up!”

He let her lean on his arm, and suddenly, her apprehensions gone, she laughed.

He helped her into the skiff, and she sank down gratefully on the stern seat. It was in silence that he rowed her back to the starting point.

They parted, tired out; but she would not let him take her home. He did not ask any questions, but they agreed to meet again the next morning.

That night he could not sleep. What a fool he had been! She was willing; she was all acquiescence; and now she must be despising him. He never expected that she would meet him at one of the colleges, the appointed place. But when he arrived she was quietly waiting for him, with a happy smile. She led him to her favourite spots, happy as a child.

Extraordinary! She had lived all her life in Oxford, and had never been to London. And he was going back to London. Why shouldn't she come to London, for a whole day. She was eager for the trip. Yes, it could easily be arranged. (All the time he knew really nothing of her life. His few searching questions she lightly parried.) At last the day came, and he was waiting on the station platform, fearing that he might miss her. She had told him she would wear the same dress, so that he could easily pick her out in the crowd. Or was it, that the dress was her only good one?

But there she was, excited and gay. He took her into his charge. Whatever she wanted he would do. She had never been on a bus. So they climbed on the top of one, and together saw the throngs and the sights of the city. She was like a child in her glee. Passing Kensington Gardens she insisted on going in. The chestnuts were lifting their white candelabra on every tree. They sat down in the Sunk Garden, a blaze of formal vividness. Tiring of the gardens, they had a happy lunch in a little teashop; and the rest of the day they wandered about, like children in an enchanted garden. She was thrilled by everything. She had to catch her train back at half-past nine.

He led her up a dreary street, where board and lodging were advertised everywhere. He was new, then, to London; but everything was new and exciting to her.

With many doubts he scanned the rows of forbidding houses. What a fool he had

been not to have picked out some nice place? But there were no nice places. He felt her slight shiver as they wandered along. She seemed suddenly subdued, perhaps tired out.

Well, he had to go through with it. He asked her to wait while he inquired. Yes, they could have a room—not for the night, because they had to catch a train that evening.

“Not staying the night, sir?” said the porter. “Yes, sir.”

He felt it necessary to order drinks. She took ginger ale.

The door was discreetly shut.

He had her in his arms, kissing her. She sighed happily. They talked inconsequently. He felt that the adventure had reached its climax; but his mind went back to that embrace in the woods. That was romance, under the sky, alone with Nature. How beautiful she had been. A shiver shook him. Romance? Where was it? In this mean little room in a frowsy assignation house? He looked sideways at her. She seemed so sweet, but afraid. It was her moment, but she dallied, making shy advances, kissing him with a tired passion.

Then it suddenly struck him it was dreadful that their delightful day should end in this furtive, businesslike affair. He felt that there, in the other little rooms with the tawdry sofas, this sort of thing was going on. The two were just like the others. The room smelt of tobacco smoke, but he had not lit a cigarette.

Romance? No! She lifted her arms to him like a slave. Was she, too, tired and dejected? The glamour had gone. Oh, to be back under the willows with the clean stream flowing past!

“Look here,” he suddenly forced himself to say; “it's a horrible place, this. Would you mind if we cleared out?”

“Now?”

“Yes, dear!”

“Well . . . yes.” She tried to smile. “It's horrible here, let's get out into the street, dear.”

He felt immediately relieved.

“Come on, then,” he urged.

She laughed gaily. He recalled that she had not smiled since they had entered the house.

“But you've paid for the room, you poor dear,” she laughed.

“I've had enough of it, too!” he said. “There's all London to explore yet, until your train goes!”

“Come on, then!”

He kissed her almost perfunctorily; and her response seemed tired.

Out again into the crowded streets, she revived. She saw everything through a veil of happiness and romance. But they had to hurry. She must not miss her train. But on the way to the station she felt like a criminal unexpectedly reprieved. All London became hers.

Thank God, it had ended happily! The last he saw of her was a radiant being, as happy as Life permits.

He was in the private office of the theatrical magnate. He had written and re-written the script of his Maori comic opera through weary months; and now he had brought it to Sydney. It was bound to be accepted, of course, but there were many bad hours when he could not conceive of its having any merit at all. He was only a youth, but compact of ambitions. He had sent the script to the principal theatrical manager of Australia, who had asked him to call at the theatre. And now he was in his luxurious office. He was not disappointed by his reception, but found himself confronted by the entrepreneur's celebrated stare. Beneath that steely glance, penetrating and grim, he felt that he was only a worm, and that his creation was a mere childish exploit. He did not know that the manager had perfected that ice-cold gaze throughout a lifetime of dealing with recalcitrant "stars," dipsomaniac tenors and chorus girls. And now that stare was fixed on him, a mere youth. He could hardly prevent himself from shivering.

"Well, my boy," the manager began, "I've read your comic opera. Plenty of ideas in it, but ideas are cheap. What you lack is technique. Any practical experience on the stage? No?"

He confessed his incompetence.

"I knew it," said the manager. "You can't write for the stage unless you belong to it. But I'll tell you what I'm prepared to do. I want a secretary. How much are you getting on your paper in New Zealand?"

He told him.

"Well," said the manager, "suppose I give you £200 a year, for two years?"

"But what will my duties be, sir? I don't know anything about a secretary's job."

The manager waved a plump hand. "Whatever I want you to do."

"But suppose I couldn't do it, sir?"

"That would be my look out, wouldn't it?"

"I could learn?"

"Look at it this way," the manager said. "You want to write plays, and I'll give you the chance of acquiring practical knowledge of the stage. It's a chance that doesn't come to everyone, let me tell you. Your stuff is no good as it is; nobody would touch it; but I could pull it together, and you could re-write it; and if you make it good enough I'll put it on."

He gasped with delight.

"But, of course, your play would be my property," the entrepreneur added.

"I shouldn't get anything out of it, sir?"

"No." The manager scrutinized him coolly. "But you'd get your name on it; and

that's very important, isn't it?"

It was—to him. But he did not think it was quite fair.

"It's quite fair," said the manager. "I'm letting you into stage technique, my boy, and I pay you while you're learning. Four hundred pounds is pretty liberal payment for author's rights."

It was.

He saw. That was how things were done. He merely provided the raw material; but always there were other people, higher up, whose services were more commercially valuable than his.

He did not fall to the temptation: he jumped.

Then he entered a world quite new to him, tawdry and magnificent. He was a lonely youth, aloof from the chorus girls. To them he was always "Mister." Two of them marked the newcomer. But he was still an embryo in this new world. He shrank from the jovial companionship of the wings. He never took them out to supper. He was polite, and rather scared. But his position laid him open to assaults from the company. The girls found out that he could be useful.

"I say, how's the 'governor' to-night? In a good temper? Because it's no use my seeing him about that new part if he's worried."

He would indicate the state of the "governor's" liver.

He was allotted a dim and dusty office hidden in a corner of the huge building, reached by steep stairs. Here he wrote day after day, isolated, unvisited, and lonely, revising his opera. Here he altered scripts, read plays, and put in scenes to fill a gap in a pantomime. Slowly he was learning what the public likes, and it hurt him to find out how many things it didn't want.

The "governor" had his definite theory of the drama—a theory proved by his long record of theatrical success. Everything, every stage device, every scene, every trick that had succeeded would succeed again, with a little alteration.

"Stick to the old things," the manager would remark in his genial moments. "This stuff of yours is clever—too clever. It won't 'get over.' Too subtle, too literary. No, my boy, the situations that 'went' ten years ago are the situations that the audience wants to-day. They like to recognize them, though they mustn't have it rubbed in that these things have been done over and over again. It makes them comfortable. Better be safe than original."

And he would sadly blue-pencil what he felt was his choicest work. The "governor" was right; yet he was not quite convinced. There must be some way of using the old conventions of the stage to say something new.

He found that he was not a success at his job. He was too unsophisticated to get into touch with his employer, who lived in a world of horse-racing and clubs and

sport. His young employee was an unpractical dreamer, still writing poems.

It was at their secret rendezvous in the bush that they met every fine Sunday afternoon. It was a cleft in the sandstone rocks, shaded from the bright sunlight by the eucalypts, with a view looking over the little cove in the harbour, with the water as placid as glass below. Nobody but themselves had ever been there before, except a little tribe of aboriginals who once were the denizens of the shore. But now the white men had placed a vast city around that peerless harbour; and the bush was retreating from the onset of civilization. But on the Cremorne side was an area of habitations, though just outside the fences the bush remained untouched.

They were lovers. Every Sunday afternoon they met at the fringe of the bush, she coming from one direction, he from the other. They did not kiss when greeting each other: that was to come when no one should see. With what pride he helped her from rock to rock until they looked down at their hiding-place. They had to climb round a tier of rocks and then descend. How eagerly he helped her down, and how beautiful she looked! She never knew—or did she?—when he was to kiss her first. In that niche between the rocks only the sky saw that kiss. But every Sunday afternoon her kisses, and his, grew more entrancing. They had their stupid misunderstandings, but how easily the tangles were unravelled, heart to heart!

But they had come thither not merely to love and kiss: there was serious business ahead. He brought, every Sunday week, the latest instalment of the “great” novel he was writing—the novel that was to make him famous. How eager she was to listen to what was coming in the next paragraph, though too often the suspense was no mystery to her; she was so alert and understanding. Kisses had to take second place until the end of the chapter.

And, when the chapter had closed, how eager she was to wonder whether his Galahad would really do the things that he had typewritten! She was no literary critic; but she sensed, far more keenly than he, the implications he had too crudely put down. There would be arguments and discussions; and how proud she was when she gave a woman's touch, infinitely more delicate than he could have done, to a paragraph. She had her own feelings, warmer and finer. And sometimes she made him alter a scene.

“You're only a man!” she would arrogantly say, with pity for his gross lack of intuition.

Then they would argue; but the argument would end in a long kiss, much more engrossing than any literary discussion.

They had their quarrels, too. He would say things that he knew would hurt her, and she would retort with things she didn't mean to say. For while he knew in his

heart that this beautiful thing was the girl he meant to marry, how could he blurt out the truth without being sure that she would have him? If she was only flirting with him, as other girls had done, then he would retreat within himself, and they would remain only friends.

But how sure he was that he loved her, wanted her, needed only her, the one girl in his world!

It was this conviction that he dared not avow. He had to wait until he knew her—herself, the sweetest thing that had entered his life. In his long walks, thinking of her, he had again and again pictured her married to him—his wife! There was no caution in his mind. He was afire for her; but he had met other girls by whom he had been deceived. He and she were such friends that he feared, sometimes, they were too good friends to mate. And then the thought of her in his arms, utterly his, swept over him like a burning fire. What else did the whole world matter if she would become his?

But between them still stood that barrier, apparently impassable. She was, he deemed, too proud to become his wife, proud of her warm, beautiful girlhood; and what could he offer in return? He knew that she was made of infinitely finer and tenderer stuff than he. Yet he must have her, snatch her from the rest of the world.

Again and again he ventured to approach the decision. He was sure that she liked him, loved him, perhaps; but what right had he to take her away from her happy girlhood. It was a tremendous responsibility for him. Suppose he was not good enough for her? He anxiously wondered if he should dare to ask her.

But to blurt it out, crudely? They were so happy as they were.

But what was the use of worrying any longer? The thing had to be settled. Delay might be dangerous. There were others in the field.

In his long walks home from her parents' house, striding along, late, for the last good-byes lengthened deliciously at parting, he at last decided to chance it. He shut his mind sternly against failure. He must have her!

So there, in that cleft in the rocks, he had come that Sunday afternoon to ask her.

It had been one of their usual meetings. There had been kisses, passionate kisses; but he waited. Let him get it over, though he could not bear to think of leaving her with the irrevocable “No” in his mind!

He would not ask her straight out.

There had been a pause, a long pause; then quietly he said, “You know that you're going to marry me?”

That was that! He had said it.

She, the adorable, looked up at him, and her cheeks faintly flushed.

“You don't mean it?” she said incredulously. “You don't mean it, dear?”

The world didn't matter. Nothing mattered, for he had her in his arms, and everything was right.

“But you never really proposed,” she laughed. “You should have asked me, shouldn't you?”

It was late before they left the shelter of the bush. They had so much to say, a thousand things, what she had thought and what he had thought, and all the little quarrels that seemed so stupid now that they were engaged. But they had been engaged from the moment they had met, though neither of them had guessed it.

He was on his way to Peking. He had had a long and exciting voyage to reach Hong Kong, afraid always that the relief of the Legations might be brought about before he reached the scene of operations. In tramp steamers he made his way to Taku, relieved to find that the Boxers were still holding out, and that the Allies were slowly advancing up the muddy banks of the Pei-ho. He was a war correspondent, having to make his way up the river by what means he could. Correspondents were not welcomed officially; but in Tientsin he found a fellow-adventurer, who offered him, for a consideration, a half share in a Chinese river sampan. It was a desolated country that they passed through, with the dead bodies of Chinese drifting down the stream to the sea, with clouds of flies buzzing above them.

At last they reached the head of navigation waters, and that evening they tied up by the bund. The Allies had not captured the capital, though its fate was certain. The main thing for his fellow-adventurer and himself was to catch up with the composite forces of the Allies before Peking fell—if it was to fall. Transport was the difficulty. Eighteen miles lay between them and the capital, a route deep-trodden in the mud through which the relieving forces had had to plunge. But transport was waiting for them. From the dark an American straggler emerged to the light of a lantern. He had ponies for sale, excellent ponies, guaranteed to overtake any of the armies ahead. Ponies were apparently quite cheap. The ruling rate was a few shillings and a glass of whisky apiece. They selected two for the arduous journey ahead. But half an hour later the owners of those ponies came out of the darkness and took them away. The obliging stranger had merely raided the pony lines. This went on through the night, and in the morning they found that there was only one pony left. With the dawn coming in they were able to make out the survivor. It looked forlorn. Its price, they learned, was a dollar, Mexican, and it was possibly worth it. But soon the horse-dealing became more animated; and after a deal of chaffering he managed to obtain an ancient crock for his friend and a mule for himself. A Peking cart followed the dismal train with their luggage.

Miserably they plodded along through the mud, utterly dispirited. Then suddenly the track became a dozen tracks, and there, rounding a group of miserable huts, stood the massive, ancient walls of Peking! And the flags of all the Allies drooped over the old, almost mythical, bastions. It was a sight of historic mediaeval splendour, a world forgotten by the passing of the ages.

Entrance was easy; the breach in the massive wall was gay with the flags of all the nations. They passed through, and turned in the direction of the British Legation, followed by the impassive Chinese. These foreign devils would in their turn pass,

and the city would relapse once more into her opium-dream.

His friend and he found themselves watched curiously by smart officers. It occurred to him that their little cavalcade was nothing but a disreputable crew, mud-spattered, dirty, unwashed and forlorn, with tattered clothing and ugly and unkempt mounts. But he had in his satchel a letter of introduction from the Governor of Hong Kong to Lady Macdonald. They rode up to the entrance of the Legation, but a glance at the military officers in full uniform perturbed him. He looked at his tattered entourage uneasily. Making an excuse, he suggested that his friend had better wait until he had delivered his letter. The truth was that he did not care to take him with him.

He was ushered at last inside the Legation and found himself in a throng of glittering uniforms and gold lace. He had intruded upon an English garden-party, with orderlies handing round afternoon tea and cakes on the lawn. With their lives in their hands only a few days before, and their fate, in all likelihood, a dreadful death, the English had with magical swiftness relapsed into their ancient habits. The hostess was holding court with polite chatter: there was, he could see, only one thing missing: there was no strawberry jam.

After some slight difficulty he was allowed to meet his hostess; he presented his letter, and was graciously received; but he slipped away, or, rather, slunk, from the glittering assembly.

He had mentioned the name of that famous Australian, *The Times* correspondent; and the host had sent him a guide to his residence. He found Dr. Morrison at the door of his looted residence. He accosted him. He had no letter of introduction, but at the mention of Australia, he was instantly invited to come in.

“Where are you staying?” asked Dr. Morrison.

“Nowhere.”

“Then you'll stay with me, for as long as you like.”

That was one Australian to another.

He was a very small boy.

He woke that morning in his cot with a vague feeling of unrest. Something was pressing upon his mind. It worried him. But there were no signs of anything unusual. What was wrong?

All that morning he tried to recall what he had done—or left undone. But he brushed his childish preoccupation aside. There were great things ahead. His father was taking him and one of his brothers on an expedition for the day. It was a wonderful morning. The surveyor's party were on horseback, and the instruments were in a light cart with the two boys. It was wonderful to be going over the plains, with the snow-capped mountains looking down upon them. The keen wind was setting all that immense area of tussocks sighing in the breeze. There was a lark high in the bright sky, singing, singing, as if the bird was all compact of song. But what he best loved, when the luncheon-hour had come, was to lie on his back among the tussocks—soft, silver and golden tufts—and let the wind blow over his face. He did not know where they were going—his father often used to make these little journeys—but it was a joy to be alive. The ugly preoccupation in his mind had been blown away by the wind: he was perfectly happy. If only he might lie and watch the tiny cloudlets drift past, as he would like to drift through the years of his life.

After lunch, his father, who was a boy on these expeditions, found a deep depression in the level plain, an old dried up river bed perhaps, and let the two boys play in the shingle while he took his observations.

They were pretending that they were the only people on earth, and they were making another world, all made of tussocks, when the feeling that he had tried to brush away, ever since he woke, came back! He knew now what he had done.

The previous night he had been very tired, and had gone to bed half asleep. But just when he was dropping off he remembered that he had not said his prayers. But bed was so nice that he laid himself down, intending to get up and kneel down later.

Yes, he had gone to bed without saying the little prayer, taught him by his mother, asking God to protect him through the dark night until morning came. And he had missed his prayer! He was sorely afraid.

He looked up from his play in the gravel, to the sky. He felt that at any moment a lightning flash would burn up in one awful pain the sacrilege that he had committed. He looked fearfully around. There was only himself and his brother in that hole in the ground. Of course, he couldn't tell his bigger brother that he was afraid. His brother might laugh at him and call him a baby.

But the curious thing was that, so far, nothing dreadful had happened, though you never knew when it might! Most likely, God was letting him go on, pretending that He hadn't noticed he had not said his prayers the night before. God might be waiting for him any minute now! God didn't forgive little boys who didn't say their prayers. But what could he do? God could see right down into that gravelly hole, and into his sinful heart. He had better do something, to show that he had repented and would never, never do such a terrible thing again.

He was in a frenzy of fright. He would have to act quickly. God might have forgotten him for a few minutes, because God had so many important things to do. Ah! He had a scheme! He invented a new game in that big hole full of gravel. He cunningly suggested that his elder brother should hide in one of the holes, and that he would try to find him.

His brother was at first half-hearted: he was playing a game of his own and didn't want to be bothered; but at last he was persuaded to hide. So that was all right! He watched his brother disappear round a bluff, and then, with a convulsive shudder, he threw himself on his knees, and said the little prayer he had missed.

God wouldn't mind, he anxiously told himself, if he repeated the forgotten prayer.

...

Anxiously he got to his feet. Everything was all right. He wasn't an unkind God, after all!

He was taking her for a ride on the top of the bus. It was one of the horse-buses that bustled through the narrow streets of Sydney. It was a long time ago.

It was her dearest delight, for she was only five years old. She was his cousin, full of childish prattle, looking up from her seat on the front of the bus, chattering with excitement and joy.

He had just come to Sydney, and she had taken the edge off his loneliness. Her mother and she lived in a boarding house; and her mother was glad to let her go out with him. He had never been interested in children before: he was rather afraid of them; but gradually her sweetness and her vivid joy of life warmed him to the beautiful imp of happiness. But most she loved to climb upon the old horse-bus, wriggling with joy, alive to her warm little fingertips.

It was an initiation for him to talk back to her wonderful child-world. She warmed him almost to humanity, for he was an arid and diffident youth, very serious about Life.

He used to drop in at her mother's boarding house after dinner, and see her bathed in the tin tub on the floor, with such exciting splashes on the bath mat. And how perfect she was, in her delicate and rosy beauty. Some day, he hoped, he would have a child like that; but, of course, there were more serious things yet to do than to think of marriage and fatherhood.

And when she had been tucked up in the little bed, her mother and he had many a long talk. He was, perhaps, too engrossed in his ideas; and he was at that period a confirmed agnostic. He was just the right age for agnosticism. His deep studies of agnostic books filled him with a dreary conviction of the nothingness after death. Many an evening, when his little cousin was sound asleep, they talked of religion. To his surprise he found that the child's mother was deeply religious. Here, then, was a field for him to win someone to the true faith, which was no faith. They argued, but he was a better informed antagonist; and he was delighted to see that she was gradually coming his way. There would be, he thought and believed, one person that he had saved from the pernicious belief in Christianity. Oh, he was fully armed! Indeed, he wished that his fair antagonist had proved a sturdier foe. But the good work must go on.

One night her mother telephoned him to come round to her house. The child was feverish; her mother was alarmed. He hurried to her. Some childish ailment, no doubt. He would bring her some chocolates on the morrow. The child seemed better when she was tucked up in bed, but she looked flushed. She went off to sleep at last; and then he began again with his arguments. Before he left he suggested that a

doctor should be called, but there seemed no real necessity. It was true that there was a measles epidemic throughout the city.

But he was awakened towards midnight by a call for him to come round. The child was worse, much worse. He sought everywhere for a nurse; but the measles epidemic had depleted the supply of nurses available; yet by good luck he found one. She urged a doctor at once. He looked grave.

She died that morning, early. He looked down with tears at the mite, so beautiful and cold, and it took all his bravery to comfort her mother. The thing had been done so brutally. Such a beautiful soul she had, such sweetness and loveliness! To take *her*—and leave the rest of the callous world! The thing was so final, so cruel. So for hours he had to sit with her mother, talking, talking, to prevent her collapsing. But he had to do more than that: he had to recant. For he saw, too clearly, that all his arguments about the dread finality of death had not touched the mother at all. In her hour of despair she clutched desperately and despairingly at her only hope—the hope of seeing her child again—the hope that he had so calmly and so cleverly, as he thought, demolished in her heart.

For now she needed not argument, but comfort, even if it was unreal. She had swung back to the only creed that will satisfy a mother. So he recanted, brushed aside his logic, and gave her the food for which her soul longed. He talked confidently of the Heaven in which he had no longer believed; he pictured the sweet child in God's kindly lap, consoled for all eternity.

But as he tried to comfort the distraught mother, he felt within him a sudden relief. Of course, he was all wrong! What a fool he had been, torturing the mother with his cruel, devastating arguments. He saw himself as a callous wretch who had deliberately and wantonly tried to snatch from a grieving woman her faith. He found that there was one creed for a mother whose child had died, and another for the workaday world.

On the day before the burial he accompanied her mother to the cemetery. The day was serene. The cemetery looked out at the Pacific Ocean, from which every day a new sun emerges.

Death should be beautiful, but Life crowds it close with its squalid business. The city of the dead was governed by the same rules that govern the metropolis of the living. The sites for graves, as the sites for houses, varied in price. The best outlook, the first to be enriched by the glory of the rising sun, or a corner lot on the main highway, commanded the higher price. And such a price! Congestion naturally puts up the cost. But in the back lots graves were quite cheap. And there was the matter of soil. Certain soils, so the attendant remarked, “came high.” Only the very rich could lie there.

He chose a plot marked only by a number. On each side there were swellings, bare and bleak, of other newly made graves, strewn with cheap dried flowers. And unwittingly they walked on month-old, bare little graves.

“How desolate they look!” the mother sighed. “Their mothers could not have cared for them long! Not even fresh flowers!”

He had a swift, disconcerting vision. He saw the mother and himself making regular pilgrimages to the little grave. For a few days they would make this their regular routine; then a day would be missed; then twice a week—for it was a long journey—just to revive the fading flowers or to put new ones in their place; then every Sunday. Flowers would keep almost fresh for a whole week if put in pots of water. Then one Sunday would be missed, and the flowers would add to the scent that permeated the dead city. Then something would happen, and perhaps a whole month would be missed. It was such a long way to go: it took up so much time. Then there were always other claims. The poor mite! They would remember her all the same, though they need not go out except on the anniversary of her death. And even the anniversaries would be missed, but the mother would suddenly remember the date. But after that . . . and after that . . .

Yet memories last longer than flowers. And they could talk together of the dear little mite, and laugh at her funny sayings, and let Life go on.

He was sitting at the family dining-table. The boys had been warned by their mother that they must not interrupt the conversation between the visitor and their father. Visitors were rare in the household; for the father was an aloof and uncompanionable man. The anxious mother had drilled the family to behave in his presence.

The dinner began well. There was some talk of local politics.

Apropos of the political situation the guest suddenly remarked, "Did you see that clever skit in the paper this afternoon?" And finding that his host had not seen it the visitor proceeded to praise it highly.

The father showed his interest. He sent one of the boys to get the issue, and handed the paper to the guest. It was a slight topical hit at a certain politician. It was in verse. His father adjusted his glasses, which were usually lost on his bald forehead. He read the verses aloud and brought out the meaning approvingly.

The composition had been written by his son, who felt himself growing redder and redder as the verses were declaimed with zest.

"Good!" remarked the father. "I wonder who wrote that," and suggested several well-known writers.

He glanced anxiously at his mother. He saw that she was trembling with pride. But he sent an appealing silent entreaty to her not to reveal the secret. Of course, she had read it before he had sent it to the journal.

His father and his guest wondered who the new satirist might be. But in the middle of the discussion he muttered an incoherent excuse and fled from the dinner-table. His father had to suppress his righteous anger in the presence of his guest. Why couldn't his son behave himself? But the incident passed.

At the departure of the visitor his mother let out the secret. It was more than she could do to keep silence.

His father was furious. "What do you mean by making a fool of me at my own dinner-table?" he snorted. "And that's the sort of son I'm blessed with!"

He was taking his youngest daughter to her first evening pantomime. She was all excitement, pretending that she was grown up, like her mother. Flushed with gaiety, she was wearing her best party-dress. She had been to other parties, but this was a special one, because her father was taking her by herself. All the day she had been talking of it, running about like a drop of quicksilver.

And now they had started off on the great adventure. She had slipped her hot little tingling hand into his as they boarded the ferry-boat for the city. She felt very proud; and she was chattering all the way. She paid her ferry fare with a gallant gesture.

Through the crowd she tugged him, though they were quite early for the show. He waited with her at the tram-stop, waited quite a long time. She wondered why he didn't get into the tram; but he seemed to miss tram after tram. She was quivering with excitement.

Suddenly a taxi rolled up, but she was looking at the trams.

"Come on!" he said. "Here's our taxi!"

He felt the convulsive tremor of her fingers.

"Oh, Dad!" she cried. "You're not going to take a taxi? I've never been in a taxi before."

"But you've been in a car before?"

"Oh, yes, often," she said with a fine scorn, "but that is quite different. Are we *really* going in a taxi?"

He helped her in, and they started.

The moment she was inside and the door shut she jumped to see the taximeter.

"You mustn't joggle about," he protested. "You're a lady being taken to the theatre at night, and you must sit back nicely on the cushions."

"Oh, but, Daddy, I must see what the thing says to find out how long we've been already. Look! there it goes in that funny little notice thing. It's jumped another sixpence! Ooh! I wonder if we'll get there before that sixpence has run out? Don't they go fast, Dad?"

For a moment she sank back into the cab, but up she was again to see how long the sixpence-worth was lasting.

"It's going a roundabout way, Dad," she exclaimed. "We'll never get there before another sixpence jumps up! No; I really believe we'll just do it! Oh, there's another taxi blocking us! We'll never do it!"

The taxi swung round with a lordly sweep, and drew up at the glittering entrance of the theatre.

“There!” she cried. “We did it, Dad! Quick, before it gets any farther!”

She sighed ecstatically, all quivering with happiness. The door was opened by a gorgeous man in uniform; and from the taxi, as from the Fairy Princess's pumpkin coach, with footmen in attendance, she stepped daintily out; and a moment later she and her father strode regally into the palace of delights.

It was one of those grey mornings when he woke with the bleak conviction that his life had come to a dead end. He was twenty-two. He would not see her again. The parting had been final: they would never come together any more. She had laughed at him. They had come closer, swung round in a swift circle and had been flung violently apart, each to travel by diverse paths. If only he had kissed her before the quarrel began? She had laughed at him; she had refused him as a grown-up worshipper.

He had come down to the office, though there was very little for him to do that Saturday. He tried to do some work: it would make him forget their quarrel. There was the long afternoon to get through; and all the other long afternoons in his life. Well, there was an important article to tackle, but how could he do it in his state of misery.

He was relieved when he heard a step on the narrow little stairs. Anybody was welcome.

She stepped daintily into the dusty office, glorifying its muddle by her radiant presence.

“Well,” she began lightly, without a trace of embarrassment, “so this is where you work? I’ve never been in a newspaper office before. How dirty and grimy the room is!”

He stumbled to his feet, hotly flushing. (Why was he always flushing, like a frightened child?) “You here? What’s happened?”

“Happened? Nothing. Nothing ever does happen to me, worse luck,” she laughed. “I was passing—with nothing to do—when I thought that you might be in, slaving at one of your articles.”

He recovered himself sufficiently to offer her his chair. He was trying desperately to adjust his conception of her, after that unhappy kiss of the night before. And here she was unarmed and close, friendly and unperturbed. How could she be so cool and sweet?

She carefully took the swinging chair, and noted how closely she filled it.

He watched her, glowering and sulky.

“Well,” she smiled, jauntily swinging back in the chair, and deliberately affording him his first intimate view of her silk stockings. “Here I am, and what are you going to do with me this really fine afternoon? I suppose you’ve got to sit here in this awful little hole, and write—or whatever you do? But, of course, I’m interrupting you in your strenuous labours. And you can’t write while I’m bothering you?”

The confiding glance she gave him, the trust she had in him, staggered him! The

universe had been utterly destroyed not twelve hours ago; and here it was newly created! She had actually forgotten that there had been a last night. She had brushed it into nothingness.

She was only a child, after all! A kiss didn't matter.

He could hardly believe his luck. "I'll tell you what," he said. "I'm not really on duty until five. Suppose we go for a walk?"

"Yes," she said, absently scribbling her large, florid initials on the copy-paper on the table, "we're bound to be interrupted here. Where can we go?"

Audaciously he suggested a little train journey into the country. She was delighted.

"And, of course, you'll behave?" she smiled.

He solemnly promised.

It was a proud youth who took the tickets and helped her in. To be thus publicly in possession of such a bewitching being, to watch the covert glances of the men in the carriage, to sniff the incense of their frank admiration—these made the brief journey a sheer delight. On leaving the station they wandered across the paddocks to the banks of the broad, slow-flowing river. Neither made the slightest allusion to the previous night. He absorbed her mere presence with a hungry delight.

He let her run on, a child unchecked. It seemed as if she had never seen the country before. She made little impetuous dartings from the track; she fluttered here and hovered there, and her exclamations were ecstatic. Then from the river bank she led him, daringly, into the shelter of the tall reeds; and once hidden from view, she sat down on a bed of downtrodden, dry rushes. He hesitated for a moment before he sank down at her side. The spikes of the rushes above them seemed to him a ring of bayonets protecting them from all the world, with only the white clouds in the blue sky to overlook them.

Suddenly he became conscious of their solitude. She, too, must have felt that they were utterly alone. But she quickly recovered, with the least little shrug; and from her flowed a rush of inconsequent chatter. He was amazed to find into how many forms her fluid personality could flow. Now she was in a teasing mood, chaffing him, provoking him; and he had no riposte to her swift sword. Once she touched him, and he seized her hand. She let him have it, since she had not offered it. She looked down at it curiously, with seemingly but faint interest, as it lay lax in his hot fingers.

He attempted to bring back the mood that had fled; but she would have none of it. She lifted her hand, picked up a bulrush and laughingly tickled his nostrils with it. The child she was! He had had enough of the game. He tried to stand up; but she pulled him down, and he was afire with the touch of the curve of her breast on his

shoulder. He shut his eyes to taste the wonder of that delight.

When he opened his eyes she had moved away. She was sitting up, demure, withdrawn. There was a perplexity, almost a peevishness in her face.

“Let's go back,” she suddenly insisted. “We'll miss our train.”

“There's another, anyhow.”

“It's time we went.”

She gathered herself together to rise. The boy was a fool!

But, was he? Her gaze was full on him, devouring him. She yielded to him with a quiet sigh. He kissed her, and she softly acquiesced. Then she drew back her head and gave him a long triumphant look. And, with a soft laugh of happiness and fire, she put her arms about him and held him close and long.

“You dear! You're really a dear boy!” she sighed, content.

Maddened by the touch of her warmth, he tried to kiss her bare neck; but with a swift, feline movement she eluded him, bent sideways, and was on her feet, slightly swaying, with the grace of a cat.

“Quick! We must go!” she breathlessly whispered.

“No!” he cried, at her feet.

“Come on!” she laughed gaily. “I'll race you!”

Before he could scramble to his feet among the rushes she was away, running up the bank.

Angered, humiliated, he refused to chase her. But she looked provocatively back, chuckling at his sulkiness. He trudged after her. Only when she reached the road did she wait for him. They walked to the station in silence, and were ill at ease while waiting for the train.

On their journey back they hardly spoke. And when they parted she politely thanked him for a pleasant afternoon.

Years afterwards he made a poem out of the incident.

He was tramping across the hills to meet her. He had told his mother that he was going for a walk that evening. He wanted exercise. He was young, and there was a girl. He had seen her in the street, had approached her. She knew him by sight in that little town. Because he was only a youth and she was only a girl just free from school, there was no need of introduction. Youth has those glorious privileges. They spoke. It appeared she knew someone who knew him: that was enough. She was interested in him. He felt that.

They met soon. He walked home with her, and at a dark corner he kissed her. But no: it was she who kissed him, with a warmth and a rapture that staggered him.

The next evening their walk led purposely to the hills that came close to the huddled town. She came to him and was instantly in his arms. They kissed: rapturous kisses. She was all eager warmth. They sat down on a slope of grass. He was staggered by her eagerness, her fervid embrace. He had not even dreamed of such things. It seemed to him that she was the stronger in her passion, stronger in her nascent imaginings of sex.

For weeks he did not see her again.

Then she sent him a message. She had to stay at home, to mind a baby; on that night her aunt and uncle were going into the town, and would not be back till very late. So, why shouldn't he come across the hills to the little house and spend the evening with her?

He eagerly assented, though he was scared of the adventure.

He was glad that he met nobody on the way. As he looked down from the track leading to the little settlement in the bush, he marked down the house from the careful directions given by her. But he did not dare to approach the bungalow directly. He had to wait about until he was certain that her aunt and her uncle had left the house. He was early, in case he missed the way. Luckily there was nobody about in that tiny cross-roads hamlet. He had been given careful directions by her.

At last he saw the uncle and aunt depart, himself watching from behind a shed. He had to wait an interval for the agreed-upon signal, a candle shining in a window to the east. It must be admitted that he was very much afraid. Anything might happen to her relatives.

This, that should have been a gallant adventure of eager Youth, seemed to him, as he awaited the dénouement, an anxious and mean little affair. To see a girl . . . but what a wonderful, passionate girl! Perhaps it was worth it. But if things went awry, if she were caught by some unsuspected trap or some manoeuvre of Fate, there would be a scandal. But it was worth it. Yes! The memories of her caresses

stimulated him to a pale courage.

But, when he saw the little light gleam in the darkness at the side of the house, he hesitated. Suppose they were caught? There would be a scandal in the locality. He was staying with his mother, and was well known in the place. It would be mad of him to go on.

Suppose . . . ? Suppose? There were all sorts of possibilities. Some visitor might approach the house; or there might be other people calling by chance. You never knew!

But that gleam in the darkness lured him on with the memories of her caresses on the hillside. He tried to feel brave, but his heart was thumping. The light was still there. He looked up and down the road, which was utterly deserted. The people in that hollow kept early hours.

No use waiting about. Better start. The light beckoned him.

She answered his gentle knock, pulled him in and shut the door. It occurred to him that the adroit manoeuvre had been previously practised. There must have been others? No: she was just a schoolgirl.

He was safe inside. He saw her in a dressing-gown. The first thing she did was to lock the door. And then she dropped her dressing-gown from her rounded shoulders and he saw her in her nightdress. Behind he glimpsed the tumbled bed.

"It's all right," she whispered as she noted the direction of his eyes. "You see, I had to look after the child." She softly pointed to the child in her cot. "I'm supposed to be in bed. So I had to undress before they went out." She laughed wickedly. "I'm sound asleep, you know! But how do you like my nightdress? I made it myself—just for you. You dear, you haven't kissed me, and oh, how I want you to!"

"Sure it is all right?" he anxiously asked. "No chance of them coming back, or anything happening to them?"

She came to him with a confident smile. "Everything is all right, now you're here. But you haven't kissed me, dear?" she whispered. Then she had her arms around him, close, close, warm and trembling with a woman's passion. No schoolgirl this! It was the first time in his life that he had felt himself embracing a girl without her clothes on. The softness of her, the utter surrender of herself!

So women were like this! He felt himself almost dizzy as she caressed him. That embrace was but the prelude. She would not let him go, though he struggled in her toils. There was only the thin nightdress between them. She looked up at him at last, lax and deliciously sad. She was limp with her passion; and he had to support her.

Into a big armchair he drew her, and they nestled down, she with her flaccid body in his arms and her head on his shoulder. How limp she was! But for her warmth through that flimsy nightdress, she might have been dead. So they sat there, he

afraid to wake her from her dream.

She woke at last; and instantly she was another woman. She stood up and looked about. The baby had not wakened. Then, with a sigh, she wrapped her cloak around her, and set about making the tea.

“Two cups!” she gaily laughed. “If they find two cups there'll be trouble. So we'll both drink out of the same cup, turn and turn about. But you mustn't drink out of the same side. It's unlucky. And look!” She uncovered their dainty little supper, and graciously waited on him.

The night was getting on. Soon her relatives would be back, but they would have plenty of time yet. He was afraid of their early return, but she laughed happily at his fear.

Then he recalled the warmth and softness of her body, almost as with a thirst. As she was putting the tea things away he jumped up; and she looked round startled, but eager. He came to her, waiting. She knew he wanted her to remain standing like that. He took the wrap off her passive form, and then gently removed her dainty, thin nightdress, delicately refraining from touching her flesh.

She never moved, proud of her beauty of body. She seemed a queen in her loveliness.

It was the first time that he had seen a woman naked.

She knew it. Ecstatically she stood, drinking in his adoration.

“Am I beautiful?” she proudly whispered; and then, after a pause, she shuddered, and cried, “I'm cold, cold!”

He brought her her cloak, leaving her nightdress in a froth of lace on the floor.

“And now,” she sighed, “you must go! You must go!”

He was strolling in Kensington Gardens, sauntering down the Broad Walk. Everywhere in the Gardens was Life. Lovers were meeting; nursemaids checked the children in their charge, reproofing them in the midst of their eager chatter; little boys on scooters swept past, giving the right traffic signals with a conscious pride; old ladies gazed out at the trees, with no thoughts in their feeble minds; a group of children excitedly pointed out a squirrel on the branch of a tree; a horde of small boys were coming home from catching inconspicuous wiggles, heroically dredged by muslin scoops from the edges of the Round Pond; old, old gentlemen played with tiny toy yachts, pretending that they were amusing their grandchildren. Shrill shouts came from the children's playing grounds. The trees were patiently waiting for their first leaves to fall.

There was Life everywhere in that green oasis. And he was nearly through with Life. Not that he felt he needed to die just yet: he had many tasks to finish, though it did not matter at all if the current of Life was failing or if it was suddenly switched off. Anyhow, he had to go. But one boon he craved: that he might see her, his wife, again. Another boon he ventured to ask was that he should not linger to become a nuisance to his family. Still he knew, when he was worried and ill, that his wife would soothe him by her love. Strange that she loved him so, and that his children regarded him with pride and affection.

His footsteps had unconsciously led him to the Sunk Garden, that glorious formal garden, so bright month by month with changing colours that it seemed as if in the night a busy corps of elves rolled up the banners of blue and purple, and unfurled new glories of gold and crimson.

He had lived his life through; and it was a well-filled one. He had seen the world and its splendours; he had travelled all the oceans; he had met many races. He was not a sympathetic man. He did not give himself, except to his own—most of all to his wife. They were lovers still.

Few, he thought, had had such a deep and abiding sense of his passage through the world. The chances that he had had—and missed! Yet he did not regret his foolishnesses. His life could have been no other. But he had always avoided a groove—or, rather, blind chance had pushed him out of his rut. Always there was a beacon ahead which he must reach, no matter if, before he drew near, the light had gone out.

When disaster came he looked back and saw his mistake—too late. He had dreamed through Life, and Reality blankly confronted him.

He had no regrets; he had had a square deal. Life had treated him fairly; and he

left behind mementoes of himself, his children: they would carry on. It is not the beginning or the end of life that matters, it is the span between.

He gazed at the perfect beauty of the Sunk Garden, with the birds perched on the edges of the bronze, and the water-lilies and the glorious masses of pure and gorgeous colour. That was a picture he would take with him, perhaps. But there would be no coming back.

The nurse in the London hospital looked down at the old dead man—his body still warm, but his life extinct.

“Well,” she sighed. “He's gone!”
