

**NOTHING BUT THE**  
**TRUTH**  
**49 Classic Stories About Truth** *& Lies*

**Susan Ives, editor**



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## **All Is Truth**

Walt Whitman

O me, man of slack faith so long,  
Standing aloof, denying portions so long,  
Only aware to-day of compact all-diffused truth,  
Discovering to-day there is no lie or form of lie, and can be none,  
but grows as inevitably upon itself as the truth does upon itself,  
Or as any law of the earth or any natural production of the earth does.  
(This is curious and may not be realized immediately, but it must be realized,  
I feel in myself that I represent falsehoods equally with the rest,  
And that the universe does.)  
Where has fail'd a perfect return indifferent of lies or the truth?  
Is it upon the ground, or in water or fire? or in the spirit of man?  
or in the meat and blood?  
Meditating among liars and retreating sternly into myself, I see  
that there are really no liars or lies after all,  
And that nothing fails its perfect return, and that what are called  
lies are perfect returns,  
And that each thing exactly represents itself and what has preceded it,  
And that the truth includes all, and is compact just as much as  
space is compact,  
And that there is no flaw or vacuum in the amount of the truth—but  
that all is truth without exception;  
And henceforth I will go celebrate any thing I see or am,  
And sing and laugh and deny nothing.

## **Tell all the Truth but Tell it Slant**

Emily Dickinson

Tell all the Truth but tell it slant—  
Success in Circuit lies  
Too bright for our infirm Delight  
The Truth's superb surprise  
As Lightning to the Children eased  
With explanation kind  
The Truth must dazzle gradually  
Or every man be blind—

You are traveling on a road to a castle and come to  
a fork in the road where it splits into two paths.  
Standing at this fork in the road are two gatekeepers, one  
who always tells the truth, and one who always lies, but  
you don't know who is the truth-teller and who is the liar.  
You need to know which road leads to the castle.  
What question do you ask to find the road to the castle?

*Answer on page 386*

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## INTRODUCTION

The picture on page ii is of a bronze door at main entrance of the Library of Congress. The sculptor, Olin Warner, called it **Truth**

Truth is holding a long-handled mirror in her right hand and a serpent in her left. She appears to be staring at the snake; the snake seems to be looking into the mirror. (Or is it? Could it be staring at the woman? Or looking somewhere else? I can't tell.) What does it tell us about truth?

The *New York Times* of January 1, 1898 speculated that “perhaps he wished to signify by the two symbols the actual world, as the snake, reflected in learning and literature, the mirror, having in mind the dictum of Emerson that ‘things are of the snake.’”

The 1906 *Handbook of the Library of Congress* offers a different interpretation: “Truth [holds] a mirror and a serpent, the two signifying that in all literature, wisdom (of which the serpent is the emblem) and careful observation (typified by the mirror, with its accurate reflection of external objects) must be joined in order to produce a consistent and truthful impression upon the reader.”

So, here we have two respected critics, looking at the same three simple elements — the woman, the mirror, the snake — and delivering conflicting interpretations. Which version is true?

My first reaction was that the snake symbolizes deceit — it speaks with a forked tongue. The mirror reflects reality. The woman is forcing the serpent to look into the mirror to see the world reflected as it really is. The snake is bedazzled by truth.

But wait! If you look into the mirror nothing is reflected — nothing! Not the snake, nor the world beyond. It is smooth, blank glass.

Perhaps the mirror is a reference to 1 Corinthians 13:12, “For now we see through a glass, darkly.” The entire verse refers to our imperfect knowledge of the world: “For we know only in part, and we prophesy

*only in part.*" The mirror in Corinthians is incapable of reflecting the whole truth

Or perhaps the woman herself represents truth — maybe an image of the Greek *Aletheia* or the Roman *Veritas*. If so, are the mirror and the snake symbols of her office— symbols of truth— or are they symbols of un-truth that she has tamed and mastered?

And I haven't forgotten where the door is located: at the entrance to the Library of Congress. Surely this has something to do with wisdom and learning. Why couldn't the sculptor have put a book in the door to make the symbolism easy for us?

It is difficult to talk about truth. It is even difficult to talk about how we talk about truth. What seems at first to be simple — something is either true or untrue — quickly grows complex. Is there even such a thing as truth? Is there a universal truth? Is it knowable? Can my truth be different than your truth? Is the opposite of a truth a lie — or another truth? Are there situations when a lie is preferable to the truth? Or, as Emily Dickinson recommends in her poem on page iii, should we "*tell all the truth but tell it slant?*" Is truth "*told slant*" still truth?

Perhaps, as Walt Whitman claims in his poem, *everything is truth*.

\* \* \*

The nature of truth has challenged philosophers since the beginning of history. Wars have been fought over it. Fortunes won and lost, nations and religions founded, relationships destroyed and resurrected, reputations made and reputations ruined. Everything we think and do is influenced by our understanding of truth.

*All stories are stories about truth; these 49 classic stories by the world's greatest writers specifically explore the nature of truth – and lies.*

The first ten stories are fables and folk tales that recall how our earliest ancestors talked about truth and remind us how we were first introduced to the concept of truth when we were children. The last of these is a classic tale about an Inuit who told lies; following it is a Jack London story about an Inuit who told the truth.

The next section is about humbug: humorous stories about lies, frauds, jokes and pompous prigs pretending to know more than they really do. Here you'll find my favorite story in this anthology, *A Society*. Who knew that Virginia Woolf could be funny?

The next group of stories is about the intersection of religion and truth: eternal, immutable and absolute truth. John Greenleaf Whittier defends absolute truth; Leo Tolstoy questions it. In between are characters who find that their truths are not as straightforward



as they once believed.

The remainder of the stories illuminate different aspects of truth. Edgar Allen Poe, in *The Purloined Letter*, gives us not only a compelling mystery but also a perceptive analysis of the nature of truth. Anatole France's *Plutois* and Saki's *The Open Window* are both about imagination and truth. Edith Wharton, in *The Verdict*, and Henry James, in *The Tree of Knowledge*, explore artistic truth. Dostoyevsky's and Andrejev's stories are about insanity and truth, while Le Sage and Lawson give us examples of what can happen when we must relate an unpleasant truth. Both Bram Stoker and Guy de Maupassant address the un-truth that becomes a truth.

This is one thing I know is true: these stories will raise questions rather than provide answers. But that's just as it should be. As André Gide reminds us, "Believe those who seek the truth, doubt those who find it; doubt all, but do not doubt yourself."

### **"Truth," said a traveller**

Stephen Crane

"Truth," said a traveller,  
"Is a rock, a mighty fortress;  
Often have I been to it,  
Even to its highest tower,  
From whence the world looks black."

"Truth," said a traveller,  
"Is a breath, a wind,  
A shadow, a phantom;  
Long have I pursued it,  
But never have I touched  
The hem of its garment."

And I believed the second traveller;  
For truth was to me  
A breath, a wind,  
A shadow, a phantom,  
And never had I touched  
The hem of its garment.

Susan Ives,  
San Antonio, Texas  
10 December, 2009



## The Ape and the Two Travelers

Aesop

**T**wo men, one who always spoke the truth and the other who told nothing but lies, were traveling together and by chance came to the land of Apes. One of the Apes, who had raised himself to be king, commanded them to be seized and brought before him, that he might know what was said of him among men. He ordered at the same time that all the Apes be arranged in a long row on his right hand and on his left, and that a throne be placed for him, as was the custom among men.

After these preparations he signified that the two men should be brought before him, and greeted them with this salutation: "What sort of a king do I seem to you to be, O strangers?" The Lying Traveler replied, "You seem to me a most mighty king." "And what is your estimate of those you see around me?" "These," he made answer, "are worthy companions of yourself, fit at least to be ambassadors and leaders of armies." The Ape and all his court, gratified with the lie, commanded that a handsome present be given to the flatterer.

On this the truthful Traveler thought to himself, "If so great a reward be given for a lie, with what gift may not I be rewarded, if, according to my custom, I tell the truth?" The Ape quickly turned to him. "And pray how do I and these my friends around me seem to you?" "Thou art," he said, "a most excellent Ape, and all these thy companions after thy example are excellent Apes too." The King of the Apes, enraged at hearing these truths, gave him over to the teeth and claws of his companions.

## Truth and the Traveler

Aesop

A wayfaring man, traveling in the desert, met a woman standing alone and terribly dejected. He inquired of her, "Who art thou?" "My name is Truth," she replied. "And for what cause," he asked, "have you left the city to dwell alone here in the wilderness?" She made answer, "Because in former times, falsehood was with few, but is now with all men."

## The Boy Who Cried Wolf

Aesop

There was a Shepherd Boy who tended his sheep at the foot of a mountain near a dark forest. It was lonely for him, so he devised a plan to get a little company. He rushed down towards the village calling out "Wolf, Wolf," and the villagers came out to meet him. This pleased the boy so much that a few days after he tried the same trick, and again the villagers came to his help. Shortly after this a Wolf actually did come out from the forest. The boy cried out "Wolf, Wolf," still louder than before. But this time the villagers, who had been fooled twice before, thought the boy was again lying, and nobody came to his aid. So the Wolf made a good meal off the boy's flock.

## The Emperor's New Clothes

Hans Christian Andersen

Once upon a time there lived a vain Emperor whose only worry in life was to dress in elegant clothes. He changed clothes almost every hour and loved to show them off to his people.

Word of the Emperor's refined habits spread over his kingdom and beyond. Two scoundrels who had heard of the Emperor's vanity decided to take advantage of it. They introduced themselves at the gates of the palace with a scheme in mind.

"We are two very good tailors and after many years of research we have invented an extraordinary method to weave a cloth so light and fine that it looks invisible. As a matter of fact it is invisible to anyone who is too stupid and incompetent to appreciate its quality."

The chief of the guards heard the scoundrel's strange story and sent for the court chamberlain. The chamberlain notified the prime minister, who ran to the Emperor and disclosed the incredible news. The Emperor's curiosity got the better of him and he decided to see the two scoundrels.

"Besides being invisible, your Highness, this cloth will be woven in colors and patterns created especially for you." The emperor gave the two men a bag of gold coins in exchange for their promise to begin working on the fabric immediately.

"Just tell us what you need to get started and we'll give it to you." The two scoundrels asked for a loom, silk, gold thread and then pretended to begin working. The Emperor thought he had spent his money quite well: in addition to getting a new extraordinary suit, he would discover which of his subjects were ignorant and incompetent. A few days later, he called the old and wise prime minister, who was considered by everyone as a man with common sense.

"Go and see how the work is proceeding," the Emperor told

him, "and come back to let me know."

The prime minister was welcomed by the two scoundrels.

"We're almost finished, but we need a lot more gold thread. Here, Excellency! Admire the colors, feel the softness!" The old man bent over the loom and tried to see the fabric that was not there. He felt cold sweat on his forehead.

"I can't see anything," he thought. "If I see nothing, that means I'm stupid! Or, worse, incompetent!" If the prime minister admitted that he didn't see anything, he would be discharged from his office.

"What a marvelous fabric, he said then. "I'll certainly tell the Emperor." The two scoundrels rubbed their hands gleefully. They had almost made it. More thread was requested to finish the work.

Finally, the Emperor received the announcement that the two tailors had come to take all the measurements needed to sew his new suit.

"Come in," the Emperor ordered. Even as they bowed, the two scoundrels pretended to be holding large roll of fabric.

"Here it is your Highness, the result of our labour," the scoundrels said. "We have worked night and day but, at last, the most beautiful fabric in the world is ready for you. Look at the colors and feel how fine it is." Of course the Emperor did not see any colors and could not feel any cloth between his fingers. He panicked and felt like fainting. But luckily the throne was right behind him and he sat down. But when he realized that no one could know that he did not see the fabric, he felt better. Nobody could find out he was stupid and incompetent. And the Emperor didn't know that everybody else around him thought and did the very same thing.

The farce continued as the two scoundrels had foreseen it. Once they had taken the measurements, the two began cutting the air with scissors while sewing with their needles an invisible cloth.

"Your Highness, you'll have to take off your clothes to try on your new ones." The two scoundrels draped the new clothes on him and then held up a mirror. The Emperor was embarrassed but since none of his bystanders were, he felt relieved.

"Yes, this is a beautiful suit and it looks very good on me," the Emperor said trying to look comfortable. "You've done a fine job."

"Your Majesty," the prime minister said, "we have a request for you. The people have found out about this extraordinary fabric and they are anxious to see you in your new suit." The Emperor was doubtful showing himself naked to the people, but then he abandoned his fears. After all, no one would know about it except the ignorant and the incompetent.

"All right," he said. "I will grant the people this privilege." He

summoned his carriage and the ceremonial parade was formed. A group of dignitaries walked at the very front of the procession and anxiously scrutinized the faces of the people in the street. All the people had gathered in the main square, pushing and shoving to get a better look. An applause welcomed the regal procession. Everyone wanted to know how stupid or incompetent his or her neighbor was but, as the Emperor passed, a strange murmur rose from the crowd.

Everyone said, loud enough for the others to hear: "Look at the Emperor's new clothes. They're beautiful!"

"What a marvellous train!"

"And the colors! The colors of that beautiful fabric! I have never seen anything like it in my life!" They all tried to conceal their disappointment at not being able to see the clothes, and since nobody was willing to admit his own stupidity and incompetence, they all behaved as the two scoundrels had predicted.

A child, however, who had no important job and could only see things as his eyes showed them to him, went up to the carriage.

"The Emperor is naked," he said.

"Fool!" his father reprimanded, running after him. "Don't talk nonsense!" He grabbed his child and took him away. But the boy's remark, which had been heard by the bystanders, was repeated over and over again until everyone cried:

"The boy is right! The Emperor is naked! It's true!"

The Emperor realized that the people were right but could not admit to that. He thought it better to continue the procession under the illusion that anyone who couldn't see his clothes was either stupid or incompetent. And he stood stiffly on his carriage, while behind him a page held his imaginary mantle.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH



## **The Elephant And The Blind Men**

Traditional, from India

**O**nce upon a time, there lived six blind men in a village. One day the villagers told them, "Hey, there is an elephant in the village today."

They had no idea what an elephant is. They decided, "Even though we would not be able to see it, let us go and feel it anyway." All of them went where the elephant was. Everyone of them touched the elephant.

"Hey, the elephant is a pillar," said the first man who touched his leg.

"Oh, no! It is like a rope," said the second man who touched the tail.

"Oh, no! it is like a thick branch of a tree," said the third man who touched the trunk of the elephant.

"It is like a big hand fan" said the fourth man who touched the ear of the elephant.

"It is like a huge wall," said the fifth man who touched the belly of the elephant.

"It is like a solid pipe," Said the sixth man who touched the tusk of the elephant.

They began to argue about the elephant and everyone of them insisted that he was right. It looked like they were getting agitated. A wise man was passing by and he saw this. He stopped and asked them, "What is the matter?" They said, "We cannot agree to what the elephant is like." Each one of them told what he thought the elephant was like. The wise man calmly explained to them, "All of you are right. The reason every one of you is telling it differently because each one of you touched the different part of the elephant. So, actually the elephant has all those features what you all said."

"Oh!" everyone said. There was no more fight. They felt happy that they were all right.

The moral of the story is that there may be some truth to what someone says. Sometimes we can see that truth and sometimes not because they may have different perspective which we may not agree too. So, rather than arguing like the blind men, we should say, "Maybe you have your reasons."

## A Fable

### Mark Twain

Once upon a time an artist who had painted a small and very beautiful picture placed it so that he could see it in the mirror. He said, "This doubles the distance and softens it, and it is twice as lovely as it was before."

The animals out in the woods heard of this through the housecat, who was greatly admired by them because he was so learned, and so refined and civilized, and so polite and high-bred, and could tell them so much which they didn't know before, and were not certain about afterward. They were much excited about this new piece of gossip, and they asked questions, so as to get at a full understanding of it. They asked what a picture was, and the cat explained.

"It is a flat thing," he said; "wonderfully flat, marvelously flat, enchantingly flat and elegant. And, oh, so beautiful!"

That excited them almost to a frenzy, and they said they would give the world to see it. Then the bear asked:

"What is it that makes it so beautiful?"

"It is the looks of it," said the cat.

This filled them with admiration and uncertainty, and they were more excited than ever. Then the cow asked:

"What is a mirror?"

"It is a hole in the wall," said the cat. "You look in it, and there you see the picture, and it is so dainty and charming and ethereal and inspiring in its unimaginable beauty that your head turns round and round, and you almost swoon with ecstasy."

The ass had not said anything as yet; he now began to throw doubts. He said there had never been anything as beautiful as this before, and probably wasn't now. He said that when it took a whole basketful of sesquipedalian adjectives to whoop up a thing of beauty, it was time for suspicion.

It was easy to see that these doubts were having an effect upon the animals, so the cat went off offended. The subject was dropped

for a couple of days, but in the meantime curiosity was taking a fresh start, and there was a revival of interest perceptible. Then the animals assailed the ass for spoiling what could possibly have been a pleasure to them, on a mere suspicion that the picture was not beautiful, without any evidence that such was the case. The ass was not troubled; he was calm, and said there was one way to find out who was in the right, himself or the cat: he would go and look in that hole, and come back and tell what he found there. The animals felt relieved and grateful, and asked him to go at once—which he did.

But he did not know where he ought to stand; and so, through error, he stood between the picture and the mirror. The result was that the picture had no chance, and didn't show up. He returned home and said:

"The cat lied. There was nothing in that hole but an ass. There wasn't a sign of a flat thing visible. It was a handsome ass, and friendly, but just an ass, and nothing more."

The elephant asked:

"Did you see it good and clear? Were you close to it?"

"I saw it good and clear, O Hathi, King of Beasts. I was so close that I touched noses with it."

"This is very strange," said the elephant; "the cat was always truthful before—as far as we could make out. Let another witness try. Go, Baloo, look in the hole, and come and report."

So the bear went. When he came back, he said:

"Both the cat and the ass have lied; there was nothing in the hole but a bear."

Great was the surprise and puzzlement of the animals. Each was now anxious to make the test himself and get at the straight truth. The elephant sent them one at a time.

First, the cow. She found nothing in the hole but a cow.

The tiger found nothing in it but a tiger.

The lion found nothing in it but a lion.

The leopard found nothing in it but a leopard.

The camel found a camel, and nothing more.

Then Hathi was wroth, and said he would have the truth, if he had to go and fetch it himself. When he returned, he abused his whole subjectry for liars, and was in an unappeasable fury with the moral and mental blindness of the cat. He said that anybody but a near-sighted fool could see that there was nothing in the hole but an elephant.

#### MORAL, BY THE CAT

You can find in a text whatever you bring, if you will stand between it and the mirror of your imagination. You may not see your ears, but they will be there.

## The Mirror

Catulle Mendès

**T**here was once a kingdom where mirrors were unknown. They had all been broken and reduced to fragments by order of the queen, and if the tiniest bit of looking-glass had been found in any house, she would not have hesitated to put all the inmates to death with the most frightful tortures.

Now for the secret of this extraordinary caprice. The queen was dreadfully ugly, and she did not wish to be exposed to the risk of meeting her own image; and, knowing herself to be hideous, it was a consolation to know that other women at least could not see that they were pretty.

You may imagine that the young girls of the country were not at all satisfied. What was the use of being beautiful if you could not admire yourself?

They might have used the brooks and lakes for mirrors; but the queen had foreseen that, and had hidden all of them under closely joined flagstones. Water was drawn from wells so deep that it was impossible to see the liquid surface, and shallow basins must be used instead of buckets, because in the latter there might be reflections.

Such a dismal state of affairs, especially for the pretty coquettes, who were no more rare in this country than in others.

The queen had no compassion, being well content that her subjects should suffer as much annoyance from the lack of a mirror as she felt at the sight of one.

However, in a suburb of the city there lived a young girl called Jacinta, who was a little better off than the rest, thanks to her sweetheart, Valentin. For if someone thinks you are beautiful, and loses no chance to tell you so, he is almost as good as a mirror.

"Tell me the truth," she would say; "what is the color of my eyes?"

"They are like dewy forget-me-nots."

"And my skin is not quite black?"

"You know that your forehead is whiter than freshly fallen snow, and your cheeks are like blush roses."

"How about my lips?"

"Cherries are pale beside them."

"And my teeth, if you please?"

"Grains of rice are not as white."

"But my ears, should I be ashamed of them?"

"Yes, if you would be ashamed of two little pink shells among your pretty curls."

And so on endlessly; she delighted, he still more charmed, for his words came from the depth of his heart and she had the pleasure of hearing herself praised, he the delight of seeing her. So their love grew more deep and tender every hour, and the day that he asked her to marry him she blushed certainly, but it was not with anger. But, unluckily, the news of their happiness reached the wicked queen, whose only pleasure was to torment others, and Jacinta more than anyone else, on account of her beauty.

A little while before the marriage Jacinta was walking in the orchard one evening, when an old crone approached, asking for alms, but suddenly jumped back with a shriek as if she had stepped on a toad, crying: "Heavens, what do I see?"

"What is the matter, my good woman? What is it you see? Tell me."

"The ugliest creature I ever beheld."

"Then you are not looking at me," said Jacinta, with innocent vanity.

"Alas! yes, my poor child, it is you. I have been a long time on this earth, but never have I met anyone so hideous as you!"

"What! am I ugly?"

"A hundred times uglier than I can tell you."

"But my eyes—"

"They are a sort of dirty gray; but that would be nothing if you had not such an outrageous squint!"

"My complexion—"

"It looks as if you had rubbed coal-dust on your forehead and cheeks."

"My mouth—"

"It is pale and withered, like a faded flower."

"My teeth—"

"If the beauty of teeth is to be large and yellow, I never saw any so beautiful as yours."

"But, at least, my ears—"

"They are so big, so red, and so misshapen, under your coarse elf-locks, that they are revolting. I am not pretty myself, but I should die of shame if mine were like them." After this last blow, the old witch, having repeated what the queen had taught her, hobbled off, with a harsh croak of laughter, leaving poor Jacinta dissolved in tears, prone on the ground beneath the apple-trees.

\* \* \* \* \*

Nothing could divert her mind from her grief. "I am ugly—I am ugly," she repeated constantly. It was in vain that Valentin assured and reassured her with the most solemn oaths. "Let me alone; you are lying out of pity. I understand it all now; you never loved me; you are only sorry for me. The beggar woman had no interest in deceiving me. It is only too true—I am ugly. I do not see how you can endure the sight of me."

To undeceive her, he brought people from far and near; every man declared that Jacinta was created to delight the eyes; even the women said as much, though they were less enthusiastic. But the poor child persisted in her conviction that she was a repulsive object, and when Valentin pressed her to name their wedding-day—"I, your wife!" cried she. "Never! I love you too dearly to burden you with a being so hideous as I am." You can fancy the despair of the poor fellow so sincerely in love. He threw himself on his knees; he prayed; he supplicated; she answered still that she was too ugly to marry him.

What was he to do? The only way to give the lie to the old woman and prove the truth to Jacinta was to put a mirror before her. But there was no such thing in the kingdom, and so great was the terror inspired by the queen that no workman dared make one.

"Well, I shall go to Court," said the lover, in despair. "Harsh as our mistress is, she cannot fail to be moved by the tears and the beauty of Jacinta. She will retract, for a few hours at least, this cruel edict which has caused our trouble."

It was not without difficulty that he persuaded the young girl to let him take her to the palace. She did not like to show herself, and asked of what use would be a mirror, only to impress her more deeply with her misfortune; but when he wept, her heart was moved, and she consented, to please him.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What is all this?" said the wicked queen. "Who are these people? and what do they want?"

"Your Majesty, you have before you the most unfortunate lover on the face of the earth."

"Do you consider that a good reason for coming here to annoy me?"

"Have pity on me."

"What have I to do with your love affairs?"

"If you would permit a mirror—"

The queen rose to her feet, trembling with rage. "Who dares to speak to me of a mirror?" she said, grinding her teeth.

"Do not be angry, your Majesty, I beg of you, and deign to hear me. This young girl whom you see before you, so fresh and pretty, is the victim of a strange delusion. She imagines that she is ugly."

"Well," said the queen, with a malicious grin, "she is right. I never saw a more hideous object."

Jacinta, at these cruel words, thought she would die of mortification. Doubt was no longer possible, she must be ugly. Her eyes closed, she fell on the steps of the throne in a deadly swoon.

But Valentin was affected very differently. He cried out loudly that her Majesty must be mad to tell such a lie. He had no time to say more. The guards seized him, and at a sign from the queen the headsman came forward. He was always beside the throne, for she might need his services at any moment.

"Do your duty," said the queen, pointing out the man who had insulted her. The executioner raised his gleaming axe just as Jacinta came to herself and opened her eyes. Then two shrieks pierced the air. One was a cry of joy, for in the glittering steel Jacinta saw herself, so charmingly pretty—and the other a scream of anguish, as the wicked soul of the queen took flight, unable to bear the sight of her face in the impromptu mirror.



## The Ask Lad who made the Princess Say, “You’re a Liar!” Norwegian Folktale

**T**here was once a king who had a daughter, and she was such a liar that no one could equal her. So he made it known that the one who could lie so that he made her say, “You’re a liar!” would get both her and half the kingdom. There were many who tried, for everyone was too willing to have the princess and half the kingdom, but all of them fared badly.

Then there were three brothers who were bent upon trying their luck. The two eldest set out first, but they fared no better than the others. So the Ask Lad set out, and he met the princess in the stable. “Good day», he said, “It’s a pleasure to meet you”. “Good day,” she said, “It’s nice to meet you, too! You don’t have as big a barn as we do,” she said, “For when a shepherd stands at each end and blows on a ram’s horn, one can’t hear the other!”

“Oh, yes indeed!” said the boy. “Ours is much bigger, for when a cow is got with a calf at one end of it, she doesn’t bear it before she gets to the other.”

“You don’t say so!» said the princess. “Well, you haven’t such a big ox as we do. There you can see it! When a man sits on each horn, one can’t reach the other with a twelve-foot pole!”

“Pooh!” said the boy. “We have an ox so big that, when someone is sitting on each horn blowing a lure, one can’t hear the other.”

“Oh, indeed?” said the princess. “But you don’t have as much milk as we do, all the same,” she said. “For we milk into enormous troughs, and carry it in and pour it into big cauldrons, and curdle big cheese!”

“Oh, we milk into great cauldrons, and cart them in and pour it into huge brewing vats, and curdle cheeses as big as a house. And

then we have a gray mare to tread the cheese. But once it foaled in the cheese, and after we had been eating cheese for seven years, we came upon a big gray horse. I took a spruce tree and put it in for a backbone and no other back did the horse have as long as we had it. But that tree grew, and became so big that I climbed up to Heaven through it, and when I got there, one of the saints was sitting weaving a bristle rope of barley broth. All at once the spruce broke and I couldn't get down again, but the good saint lowered me down on one of the ropes, and I landed in a fox's den. And there sat my mother and your father patching shoes, and all at once my mother gave your father such a blow that the scurf flew off'im!"

"You're a liar!" said the princess. "My father never been scurvy in his life!"

## The Emperor and the Flower Seeds

### Traditional

**L**ong ago, in this very kingdom, there lived an Emperor who loved nature. Anything he planted burst into bloom. Up came flowers, bushes and even big fruit trees, as if by magic! Of everything in nature, he loved flowers most of all, and he tended his own garden every day.

But the Emperor was very old, and he needed to choose a successor to the throne. Who would his successor be? And how would the Emperor decide? As the Emperor loved flowers so much, he decided that flowers would help him choose. The next day, a proclamation was issued: "All men, women, boys, and girls throughout the land are to come to the palace." The news created great excitement throughout the land.

In a village not far from here, there lived a young girl named Serena. Serena had always wanted to visit the palace and see the Emperor, and so she decided to go. She was glad she went. How magnificent the palace was! It was made from gold and was studded with jewels of every color and type - diamonds, rubies, emeralds, opals and amethysts. How the palace gleamed and sparkled!

Serena felt that she had always known this place. She walked through the palace doors into the Great Hall where she was overwhelmed by all the people. It was so noisy. "The whole kingdom must be here!" she said to herself.

There then boomed the sound of at least 100 trumpets announcing the arrival of the Emperor. All fell silent. The Emperor entered, clutching what looked like a small box. How fine he looked - so noble and elegant! He circled the Great Hall, greeting each and every person and presenting something to each one. Serena was curious about the small box. "What was inside?" she wondered. "What was he giving to everyone?"

At last, the Emperor reached Serena. She curtsied and then watched as the Emperor reached into the small box and presented her with a flower seed. When Serena received the seed, she became the happiest girl of all.

Then the sound of trumpets filled the Great Hall once more, and all became silent. The Emperor announced: "Whoever can show me the most beautiful flowers in a year's time will succeed me to the throne!"

Serena left for home filled with wonder over the palace and the Emperor, clutching the flower seed carefully in her hand. She was certain she could grow the most beautiful flower. She filled a flower pot with rich soil, planted the seed carefully, and watered it every day. She couldn't wait to see it sprout, grow, and blossom into a magnificent flower! Days passed, but nothing grew in the pot. Serena was worried. She transferred the seed into a bigger pot; filled it with the best quality, richest soil she could find; and watered it twice a day, every day. Days, weeks and months passed, but still nothing happened. By and by the whole year passed.

Finally Spring came, and it was time to return once more to the palace. Serena was heartbroken that she had no flower to show the Emperor - not even a little sprout. She thought that everyone would laugh at her because all she had to show for the whole year's effort was a pot of lifeless soil! How could she face the Emperor with nothing?

Her friend stopped by on his way to the palace, holding a great big flower. "Serena! You're not going to the Emperor with an empty pot, are you?" said the friend. "Couldn't you grow a great big flower like mine!"

Serena's father, having overheard this, put his arm around Serena and consoled her. "It is up to you whether you go or not," said her father. "You did your best, Serena, and your best is good enough to present to the Emperor."

Even though she felt reluctant to go, Serena also knew she must not disrespect the Emperor's wishes. Besides, she also wanted to see the Emperor and the palace again! And so Serena traveled once more to the palace, holding the pot of soil in her hands.

The Emperor was happy to see the Great Hall filled with his subjects, all proudly displaying their beautiful flowers, all eagerly hoping to be chosen. How beautiful all the flowers were! Flowers were of every shape, size, and color. The Emperor examined each flower carefully and thoroughly, one by one. Serena, who was hiding in a corner with her head bowed down, wondered how he could choose, since they were all so lovely.

Finally, the Emperor came to Serena. Serena dared not look at the Emperor. "Why did you bring an empty pot?" the Emperor asked Serena.

"Your Majesty," said Serena. "I planted the seed you gave me and I watered it every day, but it didn't sprout. I put it in a better pot with better soil, but still it didn't sprout. I tended it all year long, but nothing grew. So today I brought an empty pot without a flower. It was the best I could do."

When the Emperor heard those words, a smile spread slowly over his face, and he took Serena by the hand. Serena was frightened. She wondered if she were in some sort of trouble.

The Emperor led her to the front of the Great Hall, and turning to the crowd, he exclaimed: "I have found my successor - the person worthy of ruling after me!"

Serena was puzzled. "But your Majesty," she said, "I have no flower, just this pot of lifeless earth."

"Yes, I expected that," said the Emperor. "From where everyone else got their seeds, I do not know. The seeds I gave everyone last year had all been roasted. It would have been impossible for any of them to grow. Serena, I admire your great courage and honesty to appear before me with the truth. I reward you with my entire kingdom. You will be the next Empress."

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

## Qasiagssaq, The Great Liar

### Traditional Eskimo Folktale

**Q**asiagssaq, men say, was a great liar. His wife was called Qigdlugsuk. He could never sleep well at night, and being sleepless, he always woke his fellow-villagers when they were to go out hunting in the morning. But he never brought home anything himself.

One day when he had been out as usual in his kayak, without even sight of a seal, he said:

"It is no use my trying to be a hunter, for I never catch anything. I may as well make up some lie or other."

And at the same moment he noticed that one of his fellow-villagers was towing a big black seal over to an island, to land it there before going out for more. When that seal had been brought to land, Qasiagssaq rowed round behind the man, and stole it, and towed it back home.

His wife was looking out for him, going outside every now and then to look if he were in sight. And thus it was that coming out, she caught sight of a kayak coming in with something in tow. She shaded her eyes with both hands, one above the other, and looked through between them, gazing eagerly to try if she could make out who it was. The kayak with its seal in tow came rowing in, and she kept going out to look, and at last, when she came out as usual, she could see that it was really and truly Qasiagssaq, coming home with his catch in tow.

"Here is Qasiagssaq has made a catch," cried his fellow-villagers. And when he came in, they saw that he had a great black seal in tow, with deep black markings all over the body. And the tow-line was thick with trappings of the finest narwhal tusk.

"Where did you get that tow-line?" they asked.

"I have had it a long time," he answered, "but have never used

it before to-day."

After they had hauled the seal to land, his wife cut out the belly part, and when that was done, she shared out so much blubber and meat to the others that there was hardly anything left for themselves. And then she set about cooking a meal, with a shoulder-blade for a lamp, and another for a pot. And every time a kayak came in, they told the newcomer that Qasiagssaq had got a big black seal.

At last there was but one kayak still out, and when that one came in, they told him the same thing: "Qasiagssaq has actually got a big seal."

But this last man said when they told him:

"I got a big black seal today, and hauled it up on an island. But when I went back to fetch it, it was gone."

The others said again:

"The tow-line which Qasiagssaq was using to-day was furnished with toggles of pure narwhal tusk."

Later in the evening, Qasiagssaq heard a voice calling in at the window:

"You, Qasiagssaq, I have come to ask if you will give back that tow-line."

Qasiagssaq sprang up and said:

"Here it is; you may take it back now."

But his wife, who was beside him, said:

"When Qasiagssaq does such things, one cannot but feel shame for him."

"Hrrrr!" said Qasiagssaq to his wife, as if to frighten her. And after that he went about as if nothing had happened.

One day when he was out in his kayak as usual, he said:

"What is the use of my being out here, I who never catch anything?"

And he rowed in towards land. When he reached the shore, he took off his breeches, and sat down on the ground, laying one knee across a stone. Then he took another stone to serve as a hammer, and with that he hammered both his knee-caps until they were altogether smashed.

And there he lay. He lay there for a long time, but at last he got up and went down to his kayak, and now he could only walk with little and painful steps. And when he came down to his kayak, he hammered and battered at that, until all the woodwork was broken to pieces. And then, getting into it, he piled up a lot of fragments of iceberg upon it, and even placed some inside his clothes, which were of ravens' skin. And so he rowed home.

But all this while two women had been standing watching him.



His wife was looking out for him as usual, shading her eyes with her hands, and when at last she caught sight of his kayak, and it came nearer, she could see that it was Qasiagssaq, rowing very slowly. And when then he reached the land, she said:

"What has happened to you now?"

"An iceberg calved."

And seeing her husband come home in such a case, his wife said to the others:

"An iceberg has calved right on top of Qasiagssaq, so that he barely escaped alive."

But when the women who had watched him came home, they said:

"We saw him today; he rowed in to land, and took off his breeches and hammered at his knee-caps with a stone; then he went down to his kayak and battered it to bits, and when that was done, he filled his kayak with ice, and even put ice inside his clothing."

But when his wife heard this, she said to him:

"When Qasiagssaq does such things, one cannot but feel shame for him."

"Hrrrr!" said Qasiagssaq, as if to frighten her.

After that he lay still for a long while, waiting for his knees to heal, and when at last his knees were well again, he began once more to go out in his kayak, always without catching anything, as usual. And when he had thus been out one day as usual, without catching anything, he said to himself again:

"What is the use of my staying out here?"

And he rowed in to land. There he found a long stone, laid it on his kayak, and rowed out again. And when he came in sight of other kayaks that lay waiting for seal, he stopped still, took out his two small bladder floats made from the belly of a seal, tied the harpoon line to the stone in his kayak, and when that was done, he rowed away as fast as he could, while the kayaks that were waiting looked on. Then he disappeared from sight behind an iceberg, and when he came round on the other side, his bladder float was gone, and he himself was rowing as fast as he could towards land. His wife, who was looking out for him as usual, shading her eyes with her hands, said then:

"But what has happened to Qasiagssaq?"

As soon as a voice could reach the land, Qasiagssaq cried:

"Now you need not be afraid of breaking the handles of your knives; I have struck a great walrus, and it has gone down under water with my two small bladder floats. One or another of those who are out after seal will be sure to find it."

He himself remained altogether idle, and having come into his house, did not go out again. And as the kayaks began to come in, others went down to the shore and told them the news:

"Qasiagssaq has struck a walrus."

And this they said to all the kayaks as they came home, but as usual, there was one of them that remained out a long time, and when at last he came back, late in the evening, they told him the same thing: "Qasiagssaq, it is said, has struck a walrus."

"That I do not believe, for here are his bladder floats; they had been tied to a stone, and the knot had worked loose."

Then they brought those bladder floats to Qasiagssaq and said:

"Here are your bladder floats; they were fastened to a stone, but the knot worked loose."

"When Qasiagssaq does such things, one cannot but feel shame for him," said his wife as usual.

"Hrrrr!" said Qasiagssaq, to frighten her.

And after that Qasiagssaq went about as if nothing had happened.

One day he was out in his kayak as usual at a place where there was much ice; here he caught sight of a speckled seal, which had crawled up on to a piece of the ice. He rowed up to it, taking it unawares, and lifted his harpoon ready to throw, but just as he was about to throw, he looked at the point, and then he laid the harpoon down again, saying to himself: "Would it not be a pity, now, for that skin, which is to be used to make breeches for my wife, to be pierced with holes by the point of a harpoon?"

So he lay alongside the piece of ice, and began whistling to that seal.\* And he was just about to grasp hold of it when the seal went down. But he watched it carefully, and when it came up again, he rowed over to it once more. Now he lifted his harpoon and was just about to throw, when again he caught sight of the point, and said to himself: "Would it not be a pity if that skin, which is to make breeches for my wife, should be pierced with holes by the point of a harpoon?" And again he cried out to try and frighten the seal, and down it went again, and did not come up any more.

Once he heard that there lived an old couple in another village, who had lost their child. So Qasiagssaq went off there on a visit. He came to their place, and went into the house, and there sat the old couple mourning. Then he asked the others of the house in a low voice:

"What is the trouble here?"

"They are mourning," he was told.

"What for?" he asked.

"They have lost a child; their little daughter died the other day."

"What was her name?"

"Nipisartángivaq," they said.

Then Qasiagssaq cleared his throat and said in a loud voice:

"To-day my little daughter Nipisartángivaq is doubtless crying at her mother's side as usual."

Hardly had he said this when the mourners looked up eagerly, and cried:

"Ah, how grateful we are to you!\* Now your little daughter can have all her things."

And they gave him beads, and the little girl's mother said:

"I have nothing to give you by way of thanks, but you shall have my cooking pot."

And when he was setting out again for home, they gave him great quantities of food to take home to his little girl. But when he came back to his own place, his fellow-villagers asked:

"Wherever did you get all this?"

"An umiak started out on a journey, and the people in it were hurried and forgetful. Here are some things which they left behind them."

Towards evening a number of kayaks came in sight; it was people coming on a visit, and they had all brought meat with them. When they came in, they said:

"Tell Qasiagssaq and his wife to come down and fetch up this meat for their little girl."

"Qasiagssaq and his wife have no children; we know Qasiagssaq well, and his wife is childless."

When the strangers heard this, they would not even land at the place, but simply said:

"Then tell them to give us back the beads and the cooking pot."

And those things were brought, and given back to them.

Then Qasiagssaq's wife said as usual:

"Now you have lied again. When you do such things, one cannot but feel shame for you."

"Hrrrr!" said Qasiagssaq, to frighten her, and went on as if nothing had happened.

Now it is said that Qasiagssaq's wife Qigdlugsuk had a mother who lived in another village, and had a son whose name was Ernilik. One day Qasiagssaq set out to visit them. He came to their place, and when he entered into the house, it was quite dark, because they had no blubber for their lamp, and the little child was crying, because it had nothing to eat. Qasiagssaq cleared his throat loudly and said:

"What is the matter with him?"

"He is hungry, as usual," said the mother.

Then said Qasiagssaq:

"How foolish I was not to take so much as a little blubber with me. Over in our village, seals are daily thrown away. You must come back with me to our place."

Next morning they set off together. When they reached the place, Qasiagssaq hurried up with the harpoon line in his hand, before his wife's mother had landed. And all she saw was that there was much carrion of ravens on Qasiagssaq's rubbish heap. Suddenly Qasiagssaq cried out:

"Ah! One of them has got away again!"

He had caught a raven in his snare. His wife cooked it, and their lamp was a shoulder-blade, and another shoulder-blade was their cooking pot, and when that meat was cooked, Qigdlugsuk's mother was given raven's meat to eat. Afterwards she was well fed by the other villagers there, and next morning when she was setting out to go home, they all gave her meat to take with her; all save Qasiagssaq, who gave her nothing.

And time went on, and once he was out as usual in his kayak, and when he came home in the evening, he said:

"I have found a dead whale; tomorrow we must all go out in the umiak and cut it up."

Next day many umiaks and kayaks set out to the eastward, and when they had rowed a long way in, they asked:

"Where is it?"

"Over there, beyond that little ness," he said.

And they rowed over there, and when they reached the place, there was nothing to be seen. So they asked again:

"Where is it?"

"Over there, beyond that little ness."

And they rowed over there, but when they reached the place, there was nothing to be seen. And again they asked:

"Where is it? Where is it?"

"Up there, beyond the little ness."

And again they reached the place and rowed round it, and there was nothing to be seen.

Then the others said:

"Qasiagssaq is lying as usual. Let us kill him."

But he answered:

"Wait a little; let us first make sure that it is a lie, and if you do not see it, you may kill me."

And again they asked:

"Where is it?"

"Yes . . . where was it now . . . over there beyond that little ness."

And now they had almost reached the base of that great fjord, and again they rounded a little ness farther in, and there was nothing to be seen. Therefore they said:

“He is only a trouble to us all: let us kill him.”

And at last they did as they had said, and killed him.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

## Nam-Bok The Liar

Jack London

“**B**idarka, is it not so? Look! A bidarka, and one man who drives clumsily with a paddle!”

Old Bask-Wah-Wan rose to her knees, trembling with weakness and eagerness, and gazed out over the sea.

“Nam-Bok was ever clumsy at the paddle,” she maundered, reminiscently, shading the sun from her eyes and staring across the silver-spilled water. “Nam-Bok was ever clumsy. I remember — —”

But the women and children laughed loudly, and there was a gentle mockery in their laughter, and her voice dwindled till her lips moved without sound.

Koogah lifted his grizzled head from his bone-carving and followed the path of her eyes. Except when wild yaws took it off its course, a bidarka was heading in for the beach. Its occupant was paddling with more strength than dexterity, and made his approach along the zig-zag line of most resistance. Koogah’s head dropped to his work again, and on the ivory tusk between his knees he scratched the dorsal fin of a fish the like of which never swam in the sea.

“It is doubtless the man from the next village,” he said, finally, “come to consult with me about the making of things on bone. And the man is a clumsy man. He will never know how.”

“It is Nam-Bok,” old Bask-Wah-Wan repeated. “Should I not know my son?” she demanded, shrilly. “I say, and I say again, it is Nam-Bok.”

“And so thou hast said these many summers,” one of the women chided, softly. “Ever when the ice passed out of the sea hast thou sat and watched through the long day, saying at each chance canoe, ‘This is Nam-Bok.’ Nam-Bok is dead, O Bask-Wah-Wan, and the dead do not come back.”

“Nam-Bok!” the old woman cried, so loud and clear that the

whole village was startled and looked at her.

She struggled to her feet and tottered down the sand. She stumbled over a baby lying in the sun, and the mother hushed its crying and hurled harsh words after the old woman, who took no notice. The children ran down the beach in advance of her, and as the man in the bidarka drew closer, nearly capsizing with one of his ill-directed strokes, the women followed. Koogah dropped his walrus tusk and went also, leaning heavily on his staff, and after him loitered the men in twos and threes.

The bidarka turned broadside and the ripple of surf threatened to swamp it, only a naked boy ran into the water and pulled the bow high up on the sand. The man stood up and sent a questioning glance along the line of villagers. A rainbow sweater, dirty and the worse for wear, clung loosely to his broad shoulders, and a red cotton handkerchief was knotted in sailor fashion about his throat. A fisherman's tam-o'-shanter on his close-clipped head, and dungaree trousers and heavy brogans, completed his outfit.

But he was, none the less, a striking personage to these simple fisher-folk of the great Yukon Delta, who all their lives had stared out on Bering Sea, and in that time had seen but two white men, the census enumerator and a lost Jesuit priest. They were a poor people, with neither gold in the ground nor valuable furs in hand, so the whites had passed them afar. Also, the Yukon, through the thousands of years, had shoaled that portion of the sea with the detritus of Alaska till vessels grounded out of sight of land. So the sodden coast, with its long inside reaches and huge mud-land archipelagoes, was avoided by the ships of men, and the fisher-folk knew not that such things were.

Koogaa the Bone-Scratcher, retreated backward in sudden haste, tripping over his staff and falling to the ground. "Nam-Bok!" he cried, as he scrambled wildly for footing. "Nam-Bok, who was blown off to sea, come back!"

The men and women shrank away, and the children scuttled off between their legs. Only Opee-Kwan was brave, as befitted the head man of the village. He strode forward and gazed long and earnestly at the newcomer.

"It is Nam-Bok," he said, at last, and at the conviction of his voice the women wailed apprehensively and drew farther away.

The lips of the stranger moved indecisively, and his brown throat writhed and wrestled with unspoken words.

"La, la, it is Nam-Bok," Bask-Wah-Wan croaked, peering up into his face. "Ever did I say Nam-Bok would come back."

"Ah, it is Nam-Bok come back." This time it was Nam-Bok himself



who spoke, putting a leg over the side of the bidarka and standing with one foot afloat and one ashore. Again his throat writhed and wrestled as he grapple after forgotten words. And when the words came forth they were strange of sound, and a spluttering of the lips accompanied the gutturals.

"Greeting, O brothers," he said, "brothers of old time before I went away with the off-shore wind."

He stepped out with both feet on the sand, and Opee-Kwan waved him back.

"Thou art dead, Nam-Bok," he said.

Nam-Bok laughed. "I am fat."

"Dead men are not fat," Opee-Kwan confessed. "Thou has fared well, but it is strange. No man may mate with the off-shore wind and come back on the heels of the years."

"I have come back," Nam-Bok answered, simply.

"Mayhap thou art a shadow, then, a passing shadow of the Nam-Bok that was. Shadows come back."

"I am hungry. Shadows do not eat."

But Opee-Kwan doubted, and brushed his hand across his brow in sore puzzlement. Nam-Bok was likewise puzzled, and as he looked up and down the line found no welcome in the eyes of the fisher-folk. The men and women whispered together. The children stole timidly back among their elders, and bristling dogs fawned up to him and sniffed suspiciously.

"I bore thee, Nam-Bok, and I gave thee suck when thou wast little," Bask-Wah-Wan whimpered, drawing closer; "and shadow though thou be, or no shadow, I will give thee to eat now."

Nam-Bok made to come to her, but a growl of fear and menace warned him back. He said something in a strange tongue which sounded like "Goddam," and added, "No shadow am I, but a man."

"Who may know concerning the things of mystery?" Opee-Kwan demanded, half of himself and half of his tribespeople. "We are, and in breath we are not. If the man may become shadow, may not the shadow become man? Nam-Bok was, but is not. This we know, but we do not know if this be Nam-Bok or the shadow of Nam-Bok."

Nam-Bok cleared his throat and made answer. "In the old time long ago, thy father's father, Opee-Kwan, went away and came back on the heels of the years. Nor was a place by the fire denied him. It is said"—he paused significantly, and they hung on his utterance—"it is said," he repeated, driving his point home with deliveration, "that Sipsip, his klooch, bore him two sons after he came back."

"But he had no doings with the off-shore wind," Opee-Kwan retorted. "He went away into the heart of the land, and it is in the

nature of things that a man may go on and on into the land."

"And likewise the sea. But that is neither here nor there. It is said . . . that thy father's father told strange tales of the things he saw."

"Ay, strange tales he told."

"I, too, have strange tales to tell," Nam-Bok stated, insidiously. And, as they wavered, "and presents, likewise."

He pulled from the bidarka a shawl, marvelous of texture and color, and flung it about his mother's shoulders. The women voiced a collective sigh of admiration, and old Bask-Wah-Wan ruffled the gay material and patted it and crooned in childish joy.

"He has tales to tell," Koogah muttered. "And presents," a woman seconded.

And Opee-Kwan knew that his people were eager, and further, he was aware himself of an itching curiosity concerning those untold tales. "The fishing has been good," he said, judiciously, "and we have oil in plenty. So come, Nam-Bok; let us feast."

Two of the men hoisted the bidarka on their shoulders and carried it up to the fire. Nam-Bok walked by the side of Opee-Kwan, and the villagers followed after, save those of the women who lingered a moment to lay caressing fingers on the shawl.

There was little talk while the feast went on, though many and curious were the glances stolen at the son of Bask-Wah-Wan. This embarrassed him—not because he was modest of spirit, however, but for the fact that the stench of the seal-oil had robbed him of his appetite, and that he keenly desired to conceal his feelings on the subject.

"Eat; thou art hungry," Opee-Kwan commanded, and Nam-Bok shut both his eyes and shoved his fist into the big pot of putrid fish.

"La, la, be not ashamed. The seal were many this year, and strong men are ever hungry." And Bask-Wah-Wan sopped a particularly offensive chunk of salmon into the oil and passed it fondly and dripping to her son.

In despair, when premonitory symptoms warned him that his stomach was not so strong as of old, he filled his pipe and struck up a smoke. The people fed on noisily and watched. Few of them could boast of intimate acquaintance with the precious weed, though now and again small quantities and abominable qualities were obtained in trade from the Esquimos to the northward. Koogah, sitting next to him, indicated that he was not averse to taking a draw, and between two mouthfuls, with the oil thick on his lips, sucked away at the amber stem. And thereupon Nam-Bok held his stomach with a shaky hand and declined the proffered return. Koogah could keep the pipe, he said, for he had intended so to honor him from the first.

And the people licked their fingers and approved of his liberality.

Opee-Kwan rose to his feet. "And now, O Nam-Bok, the feast is ended, and we would listen concerning the strange things you have seen."

The fisher-folk applauded with their hands, and gathered about them their work, prepared to listen. The men were busy fashioning spears and carving on ivory, while the women scraped the fat from the hides of the hair seal and made them pliable or sewed muclucs with threads of sinew. Nam-Bok's eyes roved over the scene, but there was not the charm about it that his recollection had warranted him to expect. During the years of his wandering he had looked forward to just this scene, and now that it had come he was disappointed. It was a bare and meager life, he deemed, and not to be compared to the one he had become used to. Still, he would open their eyes a bit, and his own eyes sparkled at the thought.

"Brothers," he began, with the smug complacency of a man about to relate the big things he has done, "it was late summer of many summers back, with much such weather as this promises to be, when I went away. You all remember the day, when the gulls flew low, and the wind blew strong from the land, and I could not hold my bidarka against it. I tied the covering of the bidarka about me, so that no water could get in, and all of the night I fought with the storm. And in the morning there was no land, only the sea, and the off-shore wind held me close in its arms and bore me along. Three such nights whitened into dawn and showed me no land, and the off-shore wind would not let me go.

"And when the fourth day came I was as a madman. I could not dip my paddle for want of food, and my head went round and round, what of the thirst that was upon me. But the sea was no longer angry, and the soft south wind was blowing, and as I looked about me I saw a sight that made me think I was indeed mad."

Nam-Bok paused to pick a silver of salmon lodged between his teeth, and the men and women, with idle hands and heads craned forward, waited.

"It was a canoe, a big canoe. If all the canoes I have ever seen were made into one canoe, it would not be so large."

There were exclamations of doubt, and Koogah, whose years were many, shook his head.

"If each bidarka were as a grain of sand," Nam-Bok defiantly continued, "and if there were as many bidarkas as there be grains of sand in this beach, still they would not make so big a canoe as this I saw on the morning of the fourth day. It was a very big canoe, and it was called a schooner. I saw this thing of wonder, this great

schooner, coming after me, and on it I saw men — —"

"Hold, O Nam-Bok!" Opee-Kwan broke in. "What manner of men were they—big men?"

"Nay, mere men like you and me."

"Did the big canoe come fast?"

"Ay."

"The sides were tall, the men short."

Opee-Kwan stated the premises with conviction. "And did these men dip with long paddles?"

Nam-Bok grinned. "There were no paddles," he said.

Mouths remained opened, and a long silence ensued. Opee-Kwan reached for Koogah's pipe for a couple of contemplative sucks. One of the younger women giggled nervously, and drew upon herself angry eyes.

"There were no paddles?" Opee-Kwan asked, softly, returning the pipe.

"The south wind was behind," Nam-Bok explained.

"But the wind-drift is slow."

"The schooner had wings—thus." He sketched a diagram of masts and sails in the sand, and the men crowded around and studied it. The wind was blowing briskly, and, and for more graphic elucidation he seized the corners of his mother's shawl and spread them out till it bellied like a sail. Bask-Wah-Wan scolded and struggled, but was blown down the beach for a score of feet and left breathless and stranded in a heap of driftwood. The men uttered sage grunts of comprehension, but Koogah suddenly tossed back his hoary head.

"Ho! ho!" he laughed. "A foolish thing, this big canoe! A most foolish thing! The plaything of the wind! Wheresoever the wind goes, it goes, too, No man who journeys therein may name the landing beach, for always he goes with the wind, and the wind goes everywhere, but no man knows where."

"It is so," Opee-Kwan supplemented, gravely. "With the wind, the going is easy, but against the wind a man striveth hard, and for that they had no paddles these men on the big canoe did not strive at all."

"Small need to strive," Nam-Bok cried, angrily. "The schooner went likewise against the wind."

"And what said you made the sch-sch-schooner go?", Koogah asked, tripping craftily over the strange word.

"The wind," was the impatient response.

"Then the wind made the sch-sch-schooner go against the wind." Old Koogah dropped an open leer to Opee-Kwan, and, the laughter

growing around him, continued: "The wind blows from the south and blows the schooner south. The wind blows against the wind. The wind blows one way and the other at the same time. It is very simple. We understand, Nam-Bok. We clearly understand."

"Thou art a fool!"

"Truth falls from my lips," Koogah answered, meekly. "I was over-long in understanding, and the thing was simple."

But Nam-Bok's face was dark, and he said rapid words which they had never heard before. Bone-scratching and skin-scraping were resumed, but he shut his lips tightly on the tongue that could not be believed.

"This sch-sch-schooner," Koogah imperturbably asked, "it was made of a big tree?"

"It was made of many trees," Nam-Bok snapped, shortly. "It was very big."

He lapsed into sullen silence again, and Opee-Kwan nudged Koogah, who shook his head with slow amazement and murmured, "It is very strange."

Nam-Bok took the bait. "That is nothing," he said, airily, "you should see the steamer. As the grain of sand is to the bidarka, as the bidarka is to the schooner, so the schooner is to the steamer. Further, the steamer is made of iron. It is all iron."

"Nay, nay, Nam-Bok," cried the head man; "how can that be? Always iron goes to the bottom. For behold, I received an iron knife in trade from the head man of the next village, and yesterday the iron knife slipped from my fingers and went down, down, into the sea. To all things there be law. Never was there one thing outside the law. This we know. And, moreover, we know that things of a kind have the one law, and that all iron has the one law. So unsay thy words, Nam-Bok, that we may yet honor thee."

"It is so," Nam-Bok persisted. "The steamer is all iron and does not sink."

"Nay, nay; this cannot be."

"With my own eyes I saw it."

"It is not in the nature of things."

"But tell me, Nam-Bok," Koogah interrupted, for fear the tale would go no further; "tell me the manner of these men in finding their way across the sea when there is no land by which to steer."

"The sun points out the path."

"But how?"

"At midday the head of the schooner takes a thing through which his eye looks at the sun, and then he makes the sun climb down out of the sky to the edge of the earth."

"Now, this be evil medicine!" cried Opee-Kwan, aghast at the sacrifice. The men held up their hands in horror and the women moaned. "This be evil medicine. It is not good to misdirect the great sun which drives away the night and gives us the seal, the salmon and warm weather."

"What if it be evil medicine?" Nam-Bok demanded, truculently. "I, too, have looked through the thing at the sun and made the sun climb down out of the sky."

Those who were nearest drew away from him hurriedly, and a woman covered the face of a child at her breast so that his eye might not fall upon it.

"But on the morning of the fourth day, O Nam-Bok," Koogah suggested; "on the morning of the fourth day when the sch-sch-schooner came after thee?"

"I had little strength left in me and could not run away. So I was taken on board, and water was poured down my throat and good food was given me. Twice, my brothers, you have seen a white man. These men were white and as many as have I fingers and toes. And when I saw they were full of kindness, I took heart, and I resolved to bring away with me report of all that I saw. And they taught me the work they did, and gave me good food and a place to sleep.

"And day after day we went over the sea, and each day the head man drew the sun down out of the sky and made it tell where we were. And when the waves were kind we hunted the fur seal, and I marveled much, for always did they fling the meat and the fat away and save only the skin."

Opee-Kwan's mouth was twitching violently, and he was about to make denunciation of such waste when Koogah kicked him to be still.

"After a weary time, when the summer was gone, and the bite of the frost come into the air, the head man pointed the nose of the schooner south. South and east we traveled for days upon days, with never the land in sight, and we were near to the village from which hailed the men — —"

"How did they know they were near?" Opee-Kwan, unable to contain himself longer, demanded. "There was no land to see." Nam-Bok glowered on him wrathfully. "Did I not say the head man brought the sun down out of the sky?"

Koogah interposed, and Nam-Bok went on.

"As I say, when we were near that village a great storm blew up, and in the night we were helpless, and knew not where we were — —"

"Thou has just said the head man knew — —"

"O peace, Opee-Kwan! Thou are a fool and cannot understand. As I say, when we were helpless in the night, when I heard, above the roar of the storm, the sound of the sea on the beach. And next we struck with a mighty crash and I was in the water swimming. It was a rock-bound coast, with one patch of beach in many miles, and the law was that I should dig my hands into the sand and draw myself clear of the surf. The other men must have pounded against the rocks, for none of them came ashore but the head man, and him I knew only by the ring on his finger.

"When day came, there being nothing of the schooner, I turned my face to the land and journeyed into it that I might get food and look upon the faces of people. And when I came to a house I was taken in and given to eat, for I had learned their speech, and the white men are ever kindly. And it was a house bigger than all the houses built by us and our fathers before us."

"It was a mighty house," Koogah said, masking his unbelief with wonder.

"And many trees went into the making of such a house," Opee-Kwan added, taking the cue.

"That is nothing." Nam-Bok shrugged his shoulders in belittling fashion.

"As our houses are to that house, so that house was to the houses I was yet to see."

"And they are not big men?" Opee-Kwan queried.

"Nay; mere men like you and me," Nam-Bok answered. "I had cut a stick that I might walk in comfort, and remembering that I was to bring report to you, my brothers, I cut a notch in that stick for each person who lived in that house. And I stayed there many days, and worked, for which they gave me money, a thing of which you know nothing, but which is very good.

"And one day I departed from that place to go farther into the land. And as I walked I met many people, and I cut smaller notches in the stick that there might be room for all. Then I came upon a strange thing. On the ground before me was a bar of iron, as big in thickness as my arm, and a long step away was another bar of iron—"

"Then wert thou a rich man," Opee-Kwan asserted; "for iron be worth more than anything else in the world. It would have made many knives."

"Nay, it was not mine."

"It was a find, and a find be lawful."

"Not so; the white had placed it there. And, further, these bars were so long that no man could carry them away—so long that as far



as I could see, there was no end to them."

"Nam-Bok, that is very much iron," Opee-Kwan cautioned.

"Ay, it was hard to believe with my own eyes upon it; but I could not gainsay my eyes. And as I looked I heard — —" He turned abruptly upon the head man. "Opee-Kwan, thou hast heard the sealion bellow in his anger. Make it plain in thy mind of as many sealions as there be waves to the sea, and make it plain that all these sealions be made into one sealion, and as that one sealion would bellow so bellowed the thing I heard."

The fisher-folk cried aloud in astonishment, and Opee-Kwan's jaw lowered and remained lowered.

"And in the distance I saw a monster like unto a thousand whales. It was one-eyed, and vomited smoke, and it snorted with exceeding loudness. I was afraid and ran with shaking legs along the path between the bars. But it came with the speed of the wind, this monster, and I leaped the iron bars, with its breath hot on my face — —"

Opee-Kwan gained control of his jaw again. "And — and then, O Nam-Bok?"

"Then it came by on the bars, and harmed me not, and when my legs could hold me up again it was gone from sight. And it is a very common thing in that country. Even the women and children are not afraid. Men make them to do work, these monsters."

"As we make our dogs do work?" Koogah asked, with skeptic twinkle in his eye.

"Ay, as we make our dogs do work."

"And how do they breed, these — these things?" Opee-Kwan questioned.

"They breed not at all. Men fashion them cunningly of iron, and feed them with stone, and give them water to drink. The stone becomes fire, and the water becomes steam, and the steam of the water is the breath of their nostrils, and — —"

"There, there, O Nam-Bok," Opee-Kwan interrupted. "Tell us of other wonders. We grow tired of this which we may not understand."

"You do not understand?" Nam-Bok asked, despairingly.

"Nay, we do not understand," the men and women wailed back. "We cannot understand."

Nam-Bok thought of a combined harvester, and of the machines wherein visions of living men were to be seen, and of the machines from which came the voices of men, and he knew his people could never understand.

"Dare I say I rode this iron monster through the land?" he asked, bitterly.



Opee-kwan threw up his hands, palms outward, in open incredulity. "Say on; say anything. We listen."

"Then did I ride the iron monster, for which I gave money —"

"Thou saidst it was fed with stone."

"And likewise, thou fool, I said money was a thing of which you know nothing. As I say, I rode the monster through the land, and through many villages, until I came to a big village on a salt arm of the sea. And the houses shoved their roofs among the stars in the sky, and the clouds drifted by them, and everywhere was much smoke. And the roar of that village was like the roar of the sea in storm, and the people were so many that I flung away my stick and no longer remembered the notches upon it."

"Hadst thou made small notches," Koogah reproved, "thou mightst have brought report."

Nam-Bok whirled upon him in anger. "Had I made small notches! Listen, Koogah, thou scratcher of bone! If I had made small notches, neither the stick, nor twenty sticks, could have bore them — nay, not all the driftwood of all the beaches between this village and the next. And if all of you, the women and children as well, were twenty times as many, and if you had twenty hands each, and in each hand a stick and a knife, still the notches could not be cut for the people I saw, so many were they and so fast did they come and go."

"There cannot be so many people in all the world," Opee-Kwan objected, for he was stunned and his mind could not grasp such magnitude of numbers.

"What dost thou know of all the world and how large it is?" Nam-Bok demanded.

"But there cannot be so many people in one place."

"Who are thou to say what can be and what cannot be?"

"It stands to reason there cannot be so many people in one place. Their canoes would clutter the sea till there was no room. And they could empty the sea each day of its fish and they would not all be fed."

"So it would seem," Nam-Bok made final answer; "yet it was so. With my own eyes I saw and flung my stick away." He yawned heavily and rose to his feet. "I have paddled far. The day has been long and I am tired. Now I will sleep, and tomorrow we will have further talk upon the things I have seen."

Bask-Wah-Wan, hobbling fearfully in advance, proud indeed, yet awed by her wonderful son, led him to her igloo, and stowed him away among the greasy, ill-smelling furs. But the men lingered by the fire, and a council was held wherein was there much whispering and low-voiced discussion.

An hour passed, and a second, and Nam-Bok slept and the talk went on. The evening sun dipped toward the northwest, and at eleven at night was nearly due north. Then it was that the head man and the bone-scratcher separated themselves from the council and aroused Nam-Bok. He blinked up into their faces and turned on his side to sleep again. Opee-Kwan gripped him by the arm and kindly but firmly shook his senses back to him.

"Come, Nam-Bok, arise!" he commanded. "It be time."

"Another feast?" Nam-Bok cried. "Nay, I am not hungry. Go on with the eating and let me sleep."

"Time to be gone!" Koogah thundered.

But Opee-Kwan spoke more softly. "Thou wast bidarka-mate with me when we were boys," he said. "Together we first chased the seal and drew the salmon from the traps. And thou didst drag me back to life, Nam-Bok, when the sea closed over me, and I was sucked down to the black rocks. Together we hungered and bore the chill of the frost, and together we crawled beneath the one fur and lay close to each other. And because of these things, and the kindness in which I stood to thee, it grieves me sore that thou shouldst return such a remarkable liar. We cannot understand, and our heads be dizzy with the things thou hast spoken. It is not good, and there has been much talk in the council. Wherefore we send thee away, that our heads may remain clear and strong, and be not troubled by the unaccountable things."

"These things thou speakest of be shadows," Koogah took up the strain. "From the shadow-world thou hast brought them, and to the shadow-world thou must return them. Thy bidarka be ready, and the tribespeople wait. They mey not sleep until thou art gone."

Nam-Bok was perplexed, but hearkened to the voice of the head man.

"If thou are Nam-Bok," Opee-Kwan was saying, "thou art a fearful and most wonderful liar; if thou art the shadow of Nam-Bok, then thou speakest of shadows, concerning which it is not good that living men have knowledge. This great village thou has spoken of we deem the village of shadows. Therein flutter the souls of the dead; for the dead be many and the living few. The dead do not come back. Never have the dead come back—save thou with thy wonder tales. It is not meet that the dead come back, and should we permit it great trouble might be our portion."

Nam-Bok knew is people well and was aware that the voice of the council was supreme. So he allowed himself to be led down to the water's edge, where he was put aboard his bidarka and a paddle thrust into his hand. A stray wildfowl honked somewhere

to seaward, and the surf broke limply and hollowly on the sand. A dim twilight brooded over land and water, and in the north the sun smoldered, vague and troubled, and draped about with blood-red mists. The gulls were flying low. The off-shore wind blew keen and chill, and the black-massed clouds behind it gave promise of bitter weather.

"Out of the sea thou camest," Opee-Kwan chanted, oracularly, "and back into the sea thou goest. Thus is balance achieved and all things brought to law."

Bask-Wah-Wan limped to the froth mark and cried, "I bless thee, Nam-Bok, for that thou has remembered me."

But Koogah, shoving Nam-Bok clear of the beach, tore the shawl from her shoulders and flung it into the bidarka.

"It is cold in the long nights," she wailed, "and the frost is prone to nip old bones."

"The thing is a shadow," the bone-scratcher answered, "and shadows cannot keep thee warm."

Nam-Bok stood up that his voice might carry. "O Bask-Wah-Wan, mother that bore me!" he called. "Hear to the words of Nam-Bok. There be room in his bidarka for two, and he would that thou come with him. For his journey is to where there are fish and oil in plenty. There the frost comes not and life is easy, and the things of iron do the work of men. Wilt thou come, O Bask-Wah-Wan?"

She debated a moment while the bidarka drifted swiftly from her, then raised her voice to a quavering treble. "I am old, Nam-Bok, and soon I shall pass down among the shadows. But I have no wish to go before my time. I am old, Nam-Bok, and I am afraid."

A shaft of light shot across the dim-lit sea and wrapped boat and man in a splendor of red and gold. Then a hush fell upon the fisher-folk, and the only sounds were the moan of the off-shore wind and the cries of the gulls flying low in the air.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

## **A Forfeited Right**

Ambrose Bierce

**T**he Chief of the Weather Bureau having predicted a fine day, a Thrifty Person hastened to lay in a large stock of umbrellas, which he exposed for sale on the sidewalk; but the weather remained clear, and nobody would buy. Thereupon the Thrifty Person brought an action against the Chief of the Weather Bureau for the cost of the umbrellas.

"Your Honor," said the defendant's attorney, when the case was called, "I move that this astonishing action be dismissed. Not only is my client in no way responsible for the loss, but he distinctly foreshadowed the very thing that caused it."

"That is just it, your Honour," replied the counsel for the plaintiff; "the defendant by making a correct forecast fooled my client in the only way that he could do so. He has lied so much and so notoriously that he has neither the legal nor moral right to tell the truth."

Judgment for the plaintiff.

## **At the Pole**

Ambrose Bierce

**A**fter a great expenditure of life and treasure a Daring Explorer had succeeded in reaching the North Pole, when he was approached by a Native Galeut who lived there.

"Good morning," said the Native Galeut. "I'm very glad to see you, but why did you come here?"

"Glory," said the Daring Explorer, curtly.

"Yes, yes, I know," the other persisted; "but of what benefit to

man is your discovery? To what truths does it give access which were inaccessible before?—facts, I mean, having a scientific value?”

“I’ll be Tom scatted if I know,” the great man replied, frankly; “you will have to ask the Scientist of the Expedition.”

But the Scientist of the Expedition explained that he had been so engrossed with the care of his instruments and the study of his tables that he had found no time to think of it.

## A Fatal Disorder

Ambrose Bierce

**A**Dying Man who had been shot was requested by officers of the law to make a statement, and be quick about it.

“You were assaulted without provocation, of course,” said the District Attorney, preparing to set down the answer.

“No,” replied the Dying Man, “I was the aggressor.”

“Yes, I understand,” said the District Attorney; “you committed the aggression—you were compelled to, as it were. You did it in self-defence.”

“I don’t think he would have hurt me if I had let him alone,” said the other. “No, I fancy he was a man of peace, and would not have hurt a fly. I brought such a pressure to bear on him that he naturally had to yield—he couldn’t hold out. If he had refused to shoot me I don’t see how I could decently have continued his acquaintance.”

“Good Heavens!” exclaimed the District Attorney, throwing down his note-book and pencil; “this is all quite irregular. I can’t make use of such an ante-mortem statement as that.”

“I never before knew a man to tell the truth,” said the Chief of Police, “when dying of violence.”

“Violence nothing!” the Police Surgeon said, pulling out and inspecting the man’s tongue—“it is the truth that is killing him.”

## Devil's Dictionary

Ambrose Bierce

**ACKNOWLEDGE**, v.t. To confess. Acknowledgement of one another's faults is the highest duty imposed by our love of truth.

**DEFAME**, v.t. To lie about another. To tell the truth about another.

**FIB**, n. A lie that has not cut its teeth. An habitual liar's nearest approach to truth: the perigee of his eccentric orbit.

*When David said: "All men are liars," Dave,  
Himself a liar, fibbed like any thief.  
Perhaps he thought to weaken disbelief  
By proof that even himself was not a slave  
To Truth; though I suspect the aged knave  
Had been of all her servitors the chief  
Had he but known a fig's reluctant leaf  
Is more than e'er she wore on land or wave.  
No, David served not Naked Truth when he  
Struck that sledge-hammer blow at all his race;  
Nor did he hit the nail upon the head:  
For reason shows that it could never be,  
And the facts contradict him to his face.  
Men are not liars all, for some are dead.*

**OBSTINATE**, adj. Inaccessible to the truth as it is manifest in the splendor and stress of our advocacy. The popular type and exponent of obstinacy is the mule, a most intelligent animal.

**PLATITUDE**, n. The fundamental element and special glory of popular literature. A thought that snores in words that smoke. The wisdom of a million fools in the diction of a dullard. A fossil sentiment in artificial rock. A moral without the fable. All that is mortal of a departed truth. A demi-tasse of milk-and-mortality. The Pope's-nose of a featherless peacock. A jelly-fish withering on the shore of the sea of thought. The cackle surviving the egg. A desiccated epigram.

**TRUTH**, n. An ingenious compound of desirability and appearance. Discovery of truth is the sole purpose of philosophy, which is the most ancient occupation of the human mind and has a fair prospect of existing with increasing activity to the end of time.

**TRUTHFUL**, adj. Dumb and illiterate.



## Homer and Humbug

Stephen Leacock

**T**he following discussion is of course only of interest to scholars. But, as the public schools returns show that in the United States there are now over a million scholars, the appeal is wide enough.

I do not mind confessing that for a long time past I have been very sceptical about the classics. I was myself trained as a classical scholar. It seemed the only thing to do with me. I acquired such a singular facility in handling Latin and Greek that I could take a page of either of them, distinguish which it was by merely glancing at it, and, with the help of a dictionary and a pair of compasses, whip off a translation of it in less than three hours.

But I never got any pleasure from it. I lied about it. At first, perhaps, I lied through vanity. Any scholar will understand the feeling. Later on I lied through habit; later still because, after all, the classics were all that I had and so I valued them. I have seen thus a deceived dog value a pup with a broken leg, and a pauper child nurse a dead doll with the sawdust out of it. So I nursed my dead Homer and my broken Demosthenes though I knew in my heart that there was more sawdust in the stomach of one modern author than in the whole lot of them. Observe, I am not saying which it is that has it full of it.

So, as I say, I began to lie about the classics. I said to people who knew no Greek that there was a sublimity, a majesty about Homer which they could never hope to grasp. I said it was like the sound of the sea beating against the granite cliffs of the Ionian Esophagus: or words to that effect. As for the truth of it, I might as well have said that it was like the sound of a rum distillery running a night shift on half time. At any rate this is what I said about Homer, and when I spoke of Pindar,—the dainty grace of his strophes,—and

Aristophanes, the delicious sallies of his wit, sally after sally, each sally explained in a note calling it a sally—I managed to suffuse my face with an animation which made it almost beautiful.

I admitted of course that Virgil in spite of his genius had a hardness and a cold glitter which resembled rather the brilliance of a cut diamond than the soft grace of a flower. Certainly I admitted this: the mere admission of it would knock the breath out of anyone who was arguing.

From such talks my friends went away sad. The conclusion was too cruel. It had all the cold logic of a syllogism (like that almost brutal form of argument so much admired in the Paraphernalia of Socrates). For if:—

Virgil and Homer and Pindar had all this grace, and pith and these sallies,— And if I read Virgil and Homer and Pindar, And if they only read Mrs. Wharton and Mrs. Humphrey Ward Then where were they?

So continued lying brought its own reward in the sense of superiority and I lied more.

When I reflect that I have openly expressed regret, as a personal matter, even in the presence of women, for the missing books of Tacitus, and the entire loss of the Abacadabra of Polyphemus of Syracuse, I can find no words in which to beg for pardon. In reality I was just as much worried over the loss of the ichthyosaurus. More, indeed: I'd like to have seen it: but if the books Tacitus lost were like those he didn't, I wouldn't.

I believe all scholars lie like this. An ancient friend of mine, a clergyman, tells me that in Hesiod he finds a peculiar grace that he doesn't find elsewhere. He's a liar. That's all. Another man, in politics and in the legislature, tells me that every night before going to bed he reads over a page or two of Thucydides to keep his mind fresh. Either he never goes to bed or he's a liar. Doubly so: no one could read Greek at that frantic rate: and anyway his mind isn't fresh. How could it be, he's in the legislature. I don't object to this man talking freely of the classics, but he ought to keep it for the voters. My own opinion is that before he goes to bed he takes whiskey: why call it Thucydides?

I know there are solid arguments advanced in favour of the classics. I often hear them from my colleagues. My friend the professor of Greek tells me that he truly believes the classics have made him what he is. This is a very grave statement, if well founded. Indeed I have heard the same argument from a great many Latin and Greek scholars. They all claim, with some heat, that Latin and Greek have practically made them what they are. This damaging

charge against the classics should not be too readily accepted. In my opinion some of these men would have been what they are, no matter what they were.

Be this as it may, I for my part bitterly regret the lies I have told about my appreciation of Latin and Greek literature. I am anxious to do what I can to set things right. I am therefore engaged on, indeed have nearly completed, a work which will enable all readers to judge the matter for themselves. What I have done is a translation of all the great classics, not in the usual literal way but on a design that brings them into harmony with modern life. I will explain what I mean in a minute.

The translation is intended to be within reach of everybody. It is so designed that the entire set of volumes can go on a shelf twenty-seven feet long, or even longer. The first edition will be an *édition de luxe* bound in vellum, or perhaps in buckskin, and sold at five hundred dollars. It will be limited to five hundred copies and, of course, sold only to the feeble minded. The next edition will be the Literary Edition, sold to artists, authors, actors and contractors. After that will come the Boarding House Edition, bound in board and paid for in the same way.

My plan is to so transpose the classical writers as to give, not the literal translation word for word, but what is really the modern equivalent. Let me give an odd sample or two to show what I mean. Take the passage in the First Book of Homer that describes Ajax the Greek dashing into the battle in front of Troy. Here is the way it runs (as nearly as I remember), in the usual word for word translation of the classroom, as done by the very best professor, his spectacles glittering with the literary rapture of it.

"Then he too Ajax on the one hand leaped (or possibly jumped) into the fight wearing on the other hand, yes certainly a steel corselet (or possibly a bronze under tunic) and on his head of course, yes without doubt he had a helmet with a tossing plume taken from the mane (or perhaps extracted from the tail) of some horse which once fed along the banks of the Scamander (and it sees the herd and raises its head and paws the ground) and in his hand a shield worth a hundred oxen and on his knees too especially in particular greaves made by some cunning artificer (or perhaps blacksmith) and he blows the fire and it is hot. Thus Ajax leapt (or, better, was propelled from behind), into the fight."

Now that's grand stuff. There is no doubt of it. There's a wonderful movement and force to it. You can almost see it move, it goes so fast. But the modern reader can't get it. It won't mean to him what it meant to the early Greek. The setting, the costume,

the scene has all got to be changed in order to let the reader have a real equivalent to judge just how good the Greek verse is. In my translation I alter it just a little, not much but just enough to give the passage a form that reproduces the proper literary value of the verses, without losing anything of the majesty. It describes, I may say, the Directors of the American Industrial Stocks rushing into the Balkan War Cloud.—

Then there came rushing to the shock of war Mr. McNicoll of the C. P. R. He wore suspenders and about his throat High rose the collar of a sealskin coat. He had on gaiters and he wore a tie, He had his trousers buttoned good and high; About his waist a woollen undervest Bought from a sad-eyed farmer of the West. (And every time he clips a sheep he sees Some bloated plutocrat who ought to freeze), Thus in the Stock Exchange he burst to view, Leaped to the post, and shouted, "Ninety-two!"

There! That's Homer, the real thing! Just as it sounded to the rude crowd of Greek peasants who sat in a ring and guffawed at the rhymes and watched the minstrel stamp it out into "feet" as he recited it!

Or let me take another example from the so-called Catalogue of the Ships that fills up nearly an entire book of Homer. This famous passage names all the ships, one by one, and names the chiefs who sailed on them, and names the particular town or hill or valley that they came from. It has been much admired. It has that same majesty of style that has been brought to an even loftier pitch in the New York Business Directory and the City Telephone Book. It runs along, as I recall it, something like this,—

"And first, indeed, oh yes, was the ship of Homistogetes the Spartan, long and swift, having both its masts covered with cowhide and two rows of oars. And he, Homistogetes, was born of Hermogenes and Ophthalmia and was at home in Syncope beside the fast flowing Paresis. And after him came the ship of Preposterus the Eurasian, son of Oasis and Hyteria," . . . and so on endlessly.

Instead of this I substitute, with the permission of the New York Central Railway, the official catalogue of their locomotives taken almost word for word from the list compiled by their superintendent of works. I admit that he wrote in hot weather. Part of it runs:—

Out in the yard and steaming in the sun Stands locomotive engine number forty-one; Seated beside the windows of the cab Are Pat McGaw and Peter James McNab. Pat comes from Troy and Peter from Cohoes, And when they pull the throttle off she goes; And as she vanishes there comes to view Steam locomotive engine number forty-two. Observe her mighty wheels, her easy roll, With William J.

Macarthy in control. They say her engineer some time ago Lived on a farm outside of Buffalo Whereas his fireman, Henry Edward Foy, Attended School in Springfield, Illinois. Thus does the race of man decay or rot— Some men can hold their jobs and some can not.

Please observe that if Homer had actually written that last line it would have been quoted for a thousand years as one of the deepest sayings ever said. Orators would have rounded out their speeches with the majestic phrase, quoted in sonorous and unintelligible Greek verse, “some men can hold their jobs and some can not”: essayists would have begun their most scholarly dissertations with the words,—“It has been finely said by Homer that (in Greek) “some men can hold their jobs””: and the clergy in mid-pathos of a funeral sermon would have raised their eyes aloft and echoed “Some men can not”!

This is what I should like to do. I’d like to take a large stone and write on it in very plain writing,—

“The classics are only primitive literature. They belong in the same class as primitive machinery and primitive music and primitive medicine,” —and then throw it through the windows of a University and hide behind a fence to see the professors buzz!!

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

## The True History of the Hare and the Tortoise

Lord Dunsany

**F**or a long time there was doubt with acrimony among the beasts as to whether the Hare or the Tortoise could run the swifter. Some said the Hare was the swifter of the two because he had such long ears, and others said the Tortoise was the swifter because anyone whose shell was so hard as that should be able to run hard too. And lo, the forces of estrangement and disorder perpetually postponed a decisive contest.

But when there was nearly war among the beasts, at last an arrangement was come to and it was decided that the Hare and the Tortoise should run a race of five hundred yards so that all should see who was right.

"Ridiculous nonsense!" said the Hare, and it was all his backers could do to get him to run.

"The contest is most welcome to me," said the Tortoise, "I shall not shirk it."

O, how his backers cheered.

Feeling ran high on the day of the race; the goose rushed at the fox and nearly pecked him. Both sides spoke loudly of the approaching victory up to the very moment of the race.

"I am absolutely confident of success," said the Tortoise. But the Hare said nothing, he looked bored and cross. Some of his supporters deserted him then and went to the other side, who were loudly cheering the Tortoise's inspiring words. But many remained with the Hare. "We shall not be disappointed in him," they said. "A beast with such long ears is bound to win."

"Run hard," said the supporters of the Tortoise.

And "run hard" became a kind of catch-phrase which everybody repeated to one another. "Hard shell and hard living. That's what the country wants. Run hard," they said. And these words were

never uttered but multitudes cheered from their hearts.

Then they were off, and suddenly there was a hush.

The Hare dashed off for about a hundred yards, then he looked round to see where his rival was.

"It is rather absurd," he said, "to race with a Tortoise." And he sat down and scratched himself. "Run hard! Run hard!" shouted some.

"Let him rest," shouted others. And "let him rest" became a catch-phrase too.

And after a while his rival drew near to him.

"There comes that damned Tortoise," said the Hare, and he got up and ran as hard as could be so that he should not let the Tortoise beat him.

"Those ears will win," said his friends. "Those ears will win; and establish upon an incontestable footing the truth of what we have said." And some of them turned to the backers of the Tortoise and said: "What about your beast now?"

"Run hard," they replied. "Run hard."

The Hare ran on for nearly three hundred yards, nearly in fact as far as the winning-post, when it suddenly struck him what a fool he looked running races with a Tortoise who was nowhere in sight, and he sat down again and scratched.

"Run hard. Run hard," said the crowd, and "Let him rest."

"Whatever is the use of it?" said the Hare, and this time he stopped for good. Some say he slept.

There was desperate excitement for an hour or two, and then the Tortoise won.

"Run hard. Run hard," shouted his backers. "Hard shell and hard living: that's what has done it." And then they asked the Tortoise what his achievement signified, and he went and asked the Turtle. And the Turtle said, "It is a glorious victory for the forces of swiftness." And then the Tortoise repeated it to his friends. And all the beasts said nothing else for years. And even to this day, "a glorious victory for the forces of swiftness" is a catch-phrase in the house of the snail.

And the reason that this version of the race is not widely known is that very few of those that witnessed it survived the great forest-fire that happened shortly after. It came up over the weald by night with a great wind. The Hare and the Tortoise and a very few of the beasts saw it far off from a high bare hill that was at the edge of the trees, and they hurriedly called a meeting to decide what messenger they should send to warn the beasts in the forest.

They sent the Tortoise.



**Truthful Oratory,  
or What Our Speakers Ought to Say**  
Stephen Leacock

I

*The Real Thoughts Of A Distinguished Guest  
At The Fiftieth Anniversary Banquet Of A Society*

Mr. Chairman and gentlemen: If there is one thing I abominate more than another, it is turning out on a cold night like this to eat a huge dinner of twelve courses and know that I have to make a speech on top of it. Gentlemen, I just feel stuffed. That's the plain truth of it. By the time we had finished that fish, I could have gone home satisfied. Honestly I could. That's as much as I usually eat. And by the time I had finished the rest of the food, I felt simply waterlogged, and I do still. More than that. The knowledge that I had to make a speech congratulating this society of yours on its fiftieth anniversary haunted and racked me all through the meal. I am not, in plain truth, the ready and brilliant speaker you take me for. That is a pure myth. If you could see the desperate home scene that goes on in my family when I am working up a speech, your minds would be at rest on that point.

I'll go further and be very frank with you. How this society has lived for fifty years, I don't know. If all your dinners are like this, Heaven help you. I've only the vaguest idea of what this society is, anyway, and what it does. I tried to get a constitution this afternoon but failed. I am sure from some of the faces that I recognise around this table that there must be good business reasons of some sort for belonging to this society. There's money in it, — mark my words, — for some of you or you wouldn't be here. Of course I quite understand that the President and the officials seated here beside me come

merely for the self-importance of it. That, gentlemen, is about their size. I realized that from their talk during the banquet. I don't want to speak bitterly, but the truth is they are small men and it flatters them to sit here with two or three blue ribbons pinned on their coats. But as for me, I'm done with it. It will be fifty years, please heaven, before this event comes round again. I hope, I earnestly hope, that I shall be safely under the ground.

II

*The Speech That Ought To Be Made By A State Governor  
After Visiting The Fall Exposition Of An Agricultural Society*

Well, gentlemen, this Annual Fall Fair of the Skedink County Agricultural Association has come round again. I don't mind telling you straight out that of all the disagreeable jobs that fall to me as Governor of this State, my visit to your Fall Fair is about the toughest.

I want to tell you, gentlemen, right here and now, that I don't know anything about agriculture and I don't want to. My parents were rich enough to bring me up in the city in a rational way. I didn't have to do chores in order to go to the high school as some of those present have boasted that they did. My only wonder is that they ever got there at all. They show no traces of it.

This afternoon, gentlemen, you took me all round your live-stock exhibit. I walked past, and through, nearly a quarter of a mile of hogs. What was it that they were called—Tamworths—Berkshires? I don't remember. But all I can say, gentlemen, is,—phew! Just that. Some of you will understand readily enough. That word sums up my whole idea of your agricultural show and I'm done with it.

No, let me correct myself. There was just one feature of your agricultural exposition that met my warm approval. You were good enough to take me through the section of your exposition called your Midway Pleasance. Let me tell you, sirs, that there was more real merit in that than all the rest of the show put together. You apologized, if I remember rightly, for taking me into the large tent of the Syrian Dancing Girls. Oh, believe me, gentlemen, you needn't have. Syria is a country which commands my profoundest admiration. Some day I mean to spend a vacation there. And, believe me, gentlemen, when I do go,—and I say this with all the emphasis of which I am capable,—I should not wish to be accompanied by such a set of flatheads as the officials of your Agricultural Society.

And now, gentlemen, as I have just received a fake telegram, by arrangement, calling me back to the capital of the State, I must leave this banquet at once. One word in conclusion: if I had known as fully

as I do now how it feels to drink half a bucket of sweet cider, I should certainly never have come.

### III

#### *Truthful Speech Of A District Politician To A Ladies' Suffrage Society*

Ladies: My own earnest, heartfelt conviction is that you are a pack of cats. I use the word "cats" advisedly, and I mean every letter of it. I want to go on record before this gathering as being strongly and unalterably opposed to Woman Suffrage until you get it. After that I favour it. My reasons for opposing the suffrage are of a kind that you couldn't understand. But all men,—except the few that I see at this meeting,—understand them by instinct.

As you may, however, succeed as a result of the fuss that you are making,—in getting votes, I have thought it best to come. Also,—I am free to confess,—I wanted to see what you looked like.

On this last head I am disappointed. Personally I like women a good deal fatter than most of you are, and better looking. As I look around this gathering I see one or two of you that are not so bad, but on the whole not many. But my own strong personal predilection is and remains in favour of a woman who can cook, mend clothes, talk when I want her to, and give me the kind of admiration to which I am accustomed.

Let me, however, say in conclusion that I am altogether in sympathy with your movement to this extent. If you ever do get votes,—and the indications are that you will (blast you),—I want your votes, and I want all of them.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

## The Truth About Home Rails

A.A. Milne

**I**magine us, if you can, sitting one on each side of the fire, I with my feet on the mantelpiece, Margery curled up in the blue arm-chair, both of us intent on the morning paper. To me, by good chance, has fallen the sporting page; to Margery the foreign, political, and financial intelligence of the day.

"What," said Margery, "does it mean when it says— —" She stopped and spelt it over to herself again.

I put down my piece of the paper and prepared to explain. The desire for knowledge in the young cannot be too strongly encouraged, and I have always flattered myself that I can explain in perfectly simple language anything which a child wants to know. For instance, I once told Margery what "Miniature Rifle Shooting" meant; it was a head-line which she had come across in her paper. The explanation took some time, owing to Margery's preconceived idea that a bird entered into it somewhere; several times, when I thought the lesson was over, she said, "Well, what about the bird?" But I think I made it plain to her in the end, though maybe she has forgotten about it now.

"What," said Margery, "does it mean when it says "Home Rails Firm'?"

I took up my paper again. The Cambridge fifteen, I was glad to see, were rapidly developing into a first-class team, and — —

"Home Rails Firm,'" repeated Margery, and looked up at me.

My mind worked rapidly, as it always does in a crisis.

"What did you say?" I asked in surprise.

"What does "Home Rails Firm' mean?"

"Where does it say that?" I went on, still thinking at lightning speed.

"There. It said it yesterday too."

"Ah, yes." I made up my mind. "Well, *that*," I said—"I think *that* is something you must ask your father."

"I did ask him yesterday."

"Well, then—"

"He told me to ask Mummy."

Coward!

"You can be sure," I said firmly, "that what Mummy told you would be right," and I returned to my paper.

"Mummy told me to wait till *you* came."

Really, these parents! The way they shirk their responsibilities nowadays is disgusting.

"Home Rails Firm," said Margery, and settled herself to listen.

It is good that children should be encouraged to take an interest in the affairs of the day, but I do think that a little girl might be taught by her father (or if more convenient, mother) *which* part of a newspaper to read. Had Margery asked me the difference between a bunker and a banker, had she demanded an explanation of "ultimatum" or "guillotine," I could have done something with it; but to let a child of six fill her head with ideas as to the firmness or otherwise of Home Rails is hardly nice. However, an explanation had to be given.

"Well, it's like this, Margery," I said at last. "Supposing—well, you see, supposing—that is to say, if I——" and then I stopped. I had a sort of feeling—intuition, they call it—that I was beginning in the wrong way.

"Go on," said Margery.

"Perhaps I had better put it this way. Supposing you were to— — Well, we'd better begin further back than that. You know what— — No, I don't suppose you do know that. Well, if I—that is to say, when a man—you know, it's rather difficult to explain this, Margery."

"Are you explaining it now?"

"I'm just going to begin."

"Thank you, Uncle."

I lit my pipe slowly, while I considered again how best to approach the matter.

"Home Rails Firm," said Margery. "Isn't it a *funny* thing to say?"

It was. It was a very *silly* thing to say. Whoever said it first might have known what it would lead to.

"Perhaps I can explain it best like this, Margery," I said, beginning on a new tack. "I suppose you know what 'firm' means?"

"What does it mean?"

"Ah, well, if you don't know *that*," I said, rather pleased, "perhaps I had better explain that first. 'Firm' means that—that is to say, you

call a thing firm if it — well, if it doesn't — that is to say, a thing is firm if it can't *move*."

"Like a house?"

"Well, something like that. This chair, for instance," and I put my hand on her chair, "is firm because you can't shake it. You see, it's quite — — Hallo, what's that?"

"Oh, you bad Uncle, you've knocked the castor off again," cried Margery, greatly excited at the incident.

"This is too much," I said bitterly. "Even the furniture is against me."

"Go on explaining," said Margery, rocking herself in the now wobbly chair.

I decided to leave "firm." It is not an easy word to explain at the best of times, and when everything you touch goes and breaks itself it becomes perfectly impossible.

"Well, so much for that," I said. "And now we come to 'rails.' You know what rails are?"

"Like I've got in the nursery?"

This was splendid. I had forgotten these for the moment.

"Exactly. The rails your train goes on. Well then, "*Home Rails*" would be rails at *home*."

"Well, I've *got* them at home," said Margery in surprise. "I couldn't have them anywhere else."

"Quite so. Then "*Home Rails Firm*" would mean that — er — home rails were — er — firm."

"But mine aren't, because they wobble. You know they do."

"Yes, but — —"

"Well, why do they say "*Home Rails Firm*" when they mean "*Home Rails Wobble*"?"

"Ah, that's just it. The point is that when they say "*Home Rails Firm*," they don't mean that the rails *themselves* are firm. In fact, they don't mean at all what you think they mean. They mean something quite different."

"What *do* they mean?"

"I am just going to explain," I said stiffly.

. . . . .

"Or perhaps I had better put it this way," I said ten minutes later. "Supposing — — Oh, Margery, it *is* difficult to explain."

"I *must* know," said Margery.

"*Why* do you want to know so badly?"

"I want to know a million million times more than anything else in the whole world."

"Why?"

"So as I can tell Angela," said Margery.

I plunged into my explanation again. Angela is three, and I can quite see how important it is that she should be sound on the question.



## The First Newspaper

### *A Sort of Allegory*

Stephen Leacock

How likes it you, Master Brenton?" said the brawny journeyman, spreading out the news sheet on a smooth oaken table where it lay under the light of a leaded window.

"A marvellous fair sheet," murmured Brenton Caxton, seventh of the name, "let me but adjust my glasses and peruse it further lest haply there be still aught in it that smacks of error."

"It needs not," said the journeyman, "'tis the fourth time already from the press."

"Nay, nay," answered Master Brenton softly, as he adjusted his great horn-rimmed spectacles and bent his head over the broad damp news sheet before him. "Let us grudge no care in this. The venture is a new one and, meseems, a very parlous thing withal. 'Tis a venture that may easily fail and carry down our fortunes with it, but at least let it not be said that it failed for want of brains in the doing."

"*Fail quotha!*" said a third man, who had not yet spoken, old, tall and sour of visage and wearing a printer's leather apron. He had moved over from the further side of the room where a little group of apprentices stood beside the wooden presses that occupied the corner, and he was looking over the shoulder of Master Brenton Caxton.

"How can it do aught else? 'Tis a mad folly. Mark you, Master Brenton and Master Nick, I have said it from the first and let the blame be none of mine. 'Tis a mad thing you do here. See then," he went on, turning and waving his hand, "this vast room, these great presses, yonder benches and tools, all new, yonder vats of ink straight out of Flanders, how think you you can recover the cost

of all this out of yonder poor sheets? Five and forty years have I followed this mystery of printing, ever since thy grandfather's day, Master Brenton, and never have I seen the like. What needed this great chamber when your grandfather and father were content with but a garret place, and yonder presses that can turn off four score copies in the compass of a single hour,—'Tis mad folly, I say."

The moment was an interesting one. The speakers were in a great room with a tall ceiling traversed by blackened beams. From the street below there came dimly through the closed casements the sound of rumbling traffic and the street cries of the London of the seventeenth century. Two vast presses of such colossal size that their wooden levers would tax the strength of the stoutest apprentice, were ranged against the further wall. About the room, spread out on oaken chairs and wooden benches, were flat boxes filled with leaden type, freshly molten, and a great pile of paper, larger than a man could lift, stood in a corner.

The first English newspaper in history was going to press. Those who in later ages,—editors, printers, and workers—have participated in the same scene, can form some idea of the hopes and fears, the doubts and the difficulties, with which the first newspaper was ushered into the world.

Master Brenton Caxton turned upon the last speaker the undisturbed look of the eye that sees far across the present into the years to come.

"Nay, Edward," he said, "you have laboured over much in the past and see not into the future. You think this chamber too great for our purpose? I tell you the time will come when not this room alone but three or four such will be needed for our task. Already I have it in my mind that I will divide even this room into portions, with walls shrewdly placed through its length and breadth, so that each that worketh shall sit as it were in his own chamber and there shall stand one at the door and whosoever cometh, to whatever part of our task his business appertains, he shall forthwith be brought to the room of him that hath charge of it. Cometh he with a madrigal or other light poesy that he would set out on the press, he shall find one that has charge of such matters and can discern their true value. Or, cometh he with news of aught that happens in the realm, so shall he be brought instant to the room of him that recordeth such events. Or, if so be, he would write a discourse on what seemeth him some wise conceit touching the public concerns, he shall find to his hand a convenient desk with ink and quills and all that he needeth to set it straightway on paper; thus shall there be a great abundance of written matter to our hand so that not many days shall elapse after

one of our news sheets goes abroad before there be matter enough to fill another."

"Days!" said the aged printer, "think you you can fill one of these news sheets in a few days! Where indeed if you search the whole realm will you find talk enough in a single week to fill out this great sheet half an ell wide!"

"Ay, days indeed!" broke in Master Nicholas, the younger journeyman. "Master Brenton speaks truth, or less than truth. For not days indeed, but in the compass of a single day, I warrant you, shall we find the matter withal." Master Nicholas spoke with the same enthusiasm as his chief, but with less of the dreamer in his voice and eye, and with more swift eagerness of the practical man.

"Fill it, indeed," he went on. "Why, Gad Zooks! man! who knoweth what happenings there are and what not till one essays the gathering of them! And should it chance that there is nothing of greater import, no boar hunt of his Majesty to record, nor the news of some great entertainment by one of the Lords of the Court, then will we put in lesser matter, aye whatever comes to hand, the talk of his Majesty's burgesses in the Parliament or any such things."

"Hear him!" sneered the printer, "the talk of his Majesty's burgesses in Westminster, forsooth! And what clerk or learned person would care to read of such? Or think you that His Majesty's Chamberlain would long bear that such idle chatter should be bruited abroad. If you can find no worthier thing for this our news sheet than the talk of the Burgesses, then shall it fail indeed. Had it been the speech of the King's great barons and the bishops 'twere different. But dost fancy that the great barons would allow that their weighty discourses be reduced to common speech so that even the vulgar may read it and haply here and there fathom their very thought itself,—and the bishops, the great prelates, to submit their ideas to the vulgar hand of a common printer, framing them into mere sentences! 'Tis unthinkable that they would sanction it!"

"Aye," murmured Caxton in his dreaming voice, "the time shall come, Master Edward, when they will not only sanction it but seek it."

"Look you," broke in Master Nick, "let us have done with this talk? Whether there be enough happenings or not enough,"—and here he spoke with a kindling eye and looked about him at the little group of apprentices and printers, who had drawn near to listen, "if there be not enough, then will I make things happen. What is easier than to tell of happenings forth of the realm of which no man can know,—some talk of the Grand Turk and the war that he makes, or some happenings in the New Land found by Master Columbus.

Aye," he went on, warming to his words and not knowing that he embodied in himself the first birth on earth of the telegraphic editor,—“and why not. One day we write it out on our sheet ‘The Grand Turk maketh disastrous war on the Bulgars of the North and hath burnt divers of their villages.’ And that hath no sooner gone forth than we print another sheet saying, ‘It would seem that the villages be not burnt but only scorched, nor doth it appear that the Turk burnt them but that the Bulgars burnt divers villages of the Turk and are sitting now in his mosque in the city of Hadrian.’ Then shall all men run to and fro and read the sheet and question and ask, ‘Is it thus?’ And, ‘Is it thus?’ and by very uncertainty of circumstances, they shall demand the more curiously to see the news sheet and read it.”

“Nay, nay, Master Nick,” said Brenton, firmly, “that will I never allow. Let us make it to ourselves a maxim that all that shall be said in this news sheet, or ‘news paper,’ as my conceit would fain call it, for be it not made of paper (here a merry laugh of the apprentices greeted the quaint fancy of the Master), shall be of ascertained verity and fact indisputable. Should the Grand Turk make war and should the rumour of it come to these isles, then will we say ‘The Turk maketh war,’ and should the Turk be at peace, then we will say ‘The Turk it doth appear is now at peace.’ And should no news come, then shall we say ‘In good sooth we know not whether the Turk destroyeth the Bulgars or whether he doth not, for while some hold that he harasseth them sorely, others have it that he harasseth them not, whereby we are sore put to it to know whether there be war or peace, nor do we desire to vex the patience of those who read by any further discourse on the matter, other than to say that we ourselves are in doubt what be and what be not truth, nor will we any further speak of it other than this.’”

Those about Caxton listened with awe to this speech. They did not,—they could not know,—that this was the birth of the Leading Article, but there was something in the strangely fascinating way in which their chief enlarged upon his own ignorance that foreshadowed to the meanest intelligence the possibilities of the future.

Nicholas shook his head.

“‘Tis a poor plan, Master Brenton,” he said, “the folk wish news, give them the news. The more thou givest them, the better pleased they are and thus doth the news sheet move from hand to hand till it may be said (if I too may coin a phrase) to increase vastly its ‘circulation’ —”

“In sooth,” said Master Brenton, looking at Nicholas with a quiet expression that was not exempt from a certain slyness, “there I do

hold thou art in the wrong, even as a matter of craft or policie. For it seems to me that if our paper speaketh first this and then that but hath no fixed certainty of truth, sooner or later will all its talk seem vain, and no man will heed it. But if it speak always the truth, then sooner or later shall all come to believe it and say of any happening, "It standeth written in the paper, therefore it is so." And here I charge you all that have any part in this new venture," continued Master Brenton, looking about the room at the listening faces and speaking with great seriousness, "let us lay it to our hearts that our maxim shall be truth and truth alone. Let no man set his hand to aught that shall go upon our presses save only that which is assured truth. In this way shall our venture ever be pleasing to the Most High, and I do verily believe,"—and here Caxton's voice sank lower as if he were thinking aloud,— "in the long run, it will be mighty good for our circulation."

The speaker paused. Then turning to the broad sheet before him, he began to scan its columns with his eye. The others stood watching him as he read.

"What is this, Master Edward," he queried presently, "here I see in this first induct, or column, as one names it, the word King fairly and truly spelled. Lower down it standeth Kyng, and yet further in the second induct Kynge, and in the last induct where there is talk of His Majesty's marvelous skill in the French game of palm or tennis, lo the word stands Quhyngge! How sayeth thou?"

"Wouldst have it written always in but one and the same way?" asked the printer in astonishment.

"Aye, truly," said Caxton.

"With never any choice, or variation to suit the fancy of him who reads so that he who likes it written King may see it so, and yet also he who would prefer it written in a freer style, or Quhyngge, may also find it so and thus both be pleased."

"That will I never have!" said Master Brenton firmly, "dost not remember, friend, the old tale in the *fabula* of Aesopus of him who would please all men. Here will I make another maxim for our newspaper. All men we cannot please, for in pleasing one belike we run counter to another. Let us set our hand to write always without fear. Let us seek favour with none. Always in our news sheet we will seek to speak dutifully and with all reverence of the King his Majesty: let us also speak with all respect and commendation of His Majesty's great prelates and nobles, for are they not the exalted of the land? Also I would have it that we say nothing harsh against our wealthy merchants and burgesses, for hath not the Lord prospered them in their substances. Yea, friends, let us speak ever well of

the King, the clergy, the nobility and of all persons of wealth and substantial holdings. But beyond this" —here Brenton Coxton's eye flashed,— "let us speak with utter fearlessness of all men. So shall we be, if I may borrow a mighty good word from Tacitus his Annals, of a complete independence, hanging on to no man. In fact our venture shall be an independent newspaper."

The listeners felt an instinctive awe at the words, and again a strange prescience of the future made itself felt in every mind. Here for the first time in history was being laid down that fine, fearless creed that has made the independent press what it is.

Meantime Caxton continued to glance his eye over the news sheet, murmuring his comments on what he saw,— "Ah! vastly fine, Master Nicholas,—this of the sailing of His Majesty's ships for Spain,—and this, too, of the Doge of Venice, his death, 'tis brave reading and maketh a fair discourse. Here also this likes me, 'tis shrewdly devised," and here he placed his finger on a particular spot on the news sheet,— "here in speaking of the strange mishap of my Lord Arundel, thou useth a great S for strange, and setteth it in a line all by itself whereby the mind of him that reads is suddenly awakened, alarmed as it were by a bell in the night. 'Tis good. 'Tis well. But mark you, friend Nicholas, try it not too often, nor use your great letters too easily. In the case of my Lord Arundel, it is seemly, but for a mishap to a lesser person, let it stand in a more modest fashion."

There was a pause. Then suddenly Caxton looked up again.

"What manner of tale is this! What strange thing is here! In faith, Master Nicholas, whence hast thou so marvelous a thing! The whole world must know of it. Harken ye all to this!

"Let all men that be troubled of aches, spavins, rheums, boils, maladies of the spleen or humours of the blood, come forthwith to the sign of the Red Lantern in East Cheap. There shall they find one that hath a marvelous remedy for all such ailments, brought with great dangers and perils of the journey from a far distant land. This wonderous balm shall straightway make the sick to be well and the lame to walk. Rubbed on the eye it restoreth sight and applied to the ear it reviveth the hearing. 'Tis the sole invention of Doctor Gustavus Friedman, sometime of Gottingen and brought by him hitherwards out of the sheer pity of his heart for them that be afflicted, nor shall any other fee be asked for it save only such a light and tender charge as shall defray the cost of Doctor Friedman his coming and going."

Caxton paused and gazed at Master Nicholas in wonder. "Whence hadst thou this?"

Master Nicholas smiled.

"I had it of a chapman, or travelling doctor, who was most urgent that we set it forth straightway on the press."

"And is it true?" asked Caxton; "thou hast it of a full surety of knowledge?"

Nicholas laughed lightly.

"True or false, I know not," he said, "but the fellow was so curious that we should print it that he gave me two golden laurels and a new sovereign on the sole understanding that we should set it forth in print."

There was deep silence for a moment.

"He payeth to have it printed!" said Caxton, deeply impressed.

"Aye," said Master Nicholas, "he payeth and will pay more. The fellow hath other balms equally potent. All of these he would admonish, or shall I say advert, the public."

"So," said Caxton, thoughtfully, "he wishes to make, if I may borrow a phrase of Albertus Magnus, an advertisement of his goods."

"Even so," said Nicholas.

"I see," said the Master, "he payeth us. We advert the goods. Forthwith all men buy them. Then hath he more money. He payeth us again. We advert the goods more and still he payeth us. That would seem to me, friend Nick, a mighty good busyness for us."

"So it is," rejoined Nicholas, "and after him others will come to advert other wares until belike a large part of our news sheet,—who knows? the whole of it, perhaps, shall be made up in the merry guise of advertisements."

Caxton sat silent in deep thought.

"But Master Caxton"—cried the voice of a young apprentice, a mere child, as he seemed, with fair hair and blue eyes filled with the native candour of unsullied youth,— "is this tale true?"

"What sayest thou, Warwick?" said the master printer, almost sternly.

"Good master, is the tale of the wonderous balm true?"

"Boy," said Caxton, "Master Nicholas, hath even said, we know not if it is true."

"But didst thou not charge us," pleaded the boy, "that all that went under our hand into the press should be truth and truth alone?"

"I did," said Caxton thoughtfully, "but I spoke perhaps somewhat in overhaste. I see that we must here distinguish. Whether this is true or not we cannot tell. But it is paid for, and that lifts it, as who should say, out of the domain of truth. The very fact that it is paid for giveth it, as it were, a new form of merit, a verity altogether its own."

"Ay, ay," said Nicholas, with a twinkle in his shrewd eyes, "entirely its own."



"Indeed so," said Caxton, "and here let us make to ourselves another and a final maxim of guidance. All things that any man will pay for, these we will print, whether true or not, for that doth not concern us. But if one cometh here with any strange tale of a remedy or aught else and wishes us to make advertisement of it and hath no money to pay for it, then shall he be cast forth out of this officina, or office, if I may call it so, neck and crop into the street. Nay, I will have me one of great strength ever at the door ready for such castings."

A murmur of approval went round the group.

Caxton would have spoken further but at the moment the sound of a bell was heard booming in the street without.

"'Tis the Great Bell," said Caxton, "ringing out the hour of noon. Quick, all of you to your task. Lay me the forms on the press and speed me the work. We start here a great adventure. Mark well the maxims I have given you, and God speed our task."

And in another hour or so, the prentice boys of the master printer were calling in the streets the sale of the first English newspaper.



## The Petrified Man

Mark Twain

**N**ow, to show how really hard it is to foist a moral or a truth upon an unsuspecting public through a burlesque without entirely and absurdly missing one's mark, I will here set down two experiences of my own in this thing. In the fall of 1862, in Nevada and California, the people got to running wild about extraordinary petrifications and other natural marvels. One could scarcely pick up a paper without finding in it one or two glorified discoveries of this kind. The mania was becoming a little ridiculous. I was a brand-new local editor in Virginia City, and I felt called upon to destroy this growing evil; we all have our benignant, fatherly moods at one time or another, I suppose. I chose to kill the petrification mania with a delicate, a very delicate satire. But maybe it was altogether too delicate, for nobody ever perceived the satire part of it at all. I put my scheme in the shape of the discovery of a remarkably petrified man.

I had had a temporary falling out with Mr. — —, the new coroner and justice of the peace of Humboldt, and thought I might as well touch him up a little at the same time and make him ridiculous, and thus combine pleasure with business. So I told, in patient, belief-compelling detail, all about the finding of a petrified-man at Gravelly Ford (exactly a hundred and twenty miles, over a breakneck mountain trail from where — — lived); how all the savants of the immediate neighborhood had been to examine it (it was notorious that there was not a living creature within fifty miles of there, except a few starving Indians; some crippled grasshoppers, and four or five buzzards out of meat and too feeble to get away); how those savants all pronounced the petrified man to have been in a state of complete petrification for over ten generations; and then, with a seriousness that I ought to have been ashamed to assume, I stated that as soon

as Mr. — — heard the news he summoned a jury, mounted his mule, and posted off, with noble reverence for official duty, on that awful five days' journey, through alkali, sage brush, peril of body, and imminent starvation, to hold an inquest on this man that had been dead and turned to everlasting stone for more than three hundred years! And then, my hand being "in," so to speak, I went on, with the same unflinching gravity, to state that the jury returned a verdict that deceased came to his death from protracted exposure. This only moved me to higher flights of imagination, and I said that the jury, with that charity so characteristic of pioneers, then dug a grave, and were about to give the petrified man Christian burial, when they found that for ages a limestone sediment had been trickling down the face of the stone against which he was sitting, and this stuff had run under him and cemented him fast to the "bed-rock"; that the jury (they were all silver-miners) canvassed the difficulty a moment, and then got out their powder and fuse, and proceeded to drill a hole under him, in order to blast him from his position, when Mr. — —, "with that delicacy so characteristic of him, forbade them, observing that it would be little less than sacrilege to do such a thing."

From beginning to end the "Petrified Man" squib was a string of roaring absurdities, albeit they were told with an unfair pretense of truth that even imposed upon me to some extent, and I was in some danger of believing in my own fraud. But I really had no desire to deceive anybody, and no expectation of doing it. I depended on the way the petrified man was sitting to explain to the public that he was a swindle. Yet I purposely mixed that up with other things, hoping to make it obscure—and I did. I would describe the position of one foot, and then say his right thumb was against the side of his nose; then talk about his other foot, and presently come back and say the fingers of his right hand were spread apart; then talk about the back of his head a little, and return and say the left thumb was hooked into the right little finger; then ramble off about something else, and by and by drift back again and remark that the fingers of the left hand were spread like those of the right. But I was too ingenious. I mixed it up rather too much; and so all that description of the attitude, as a key to the humbuggery of the article, was entirely lost, for nobody but me ever discovered and comprehended the peculiar and suggestive position of the petrified man's hands.

As a satire on the petrification mania, or anything else, my petrified Man was a disheartening failure; for everybody received him in innocent good faith, and I was stunned to see the creature I had begotten to pull down the wonder-business with, and bring derision upon it, calmly exalted to the grand chief place in the

list of the genuine marvels our Nevada had produced. I was so disappointed at the curious miscarriage of my scheme, that at first I was angry, and did not like to think about it; but by and by, when the exchanges began to come in with the Petrified Man copied and guilelessly glorified, I began to feel a soothing secret satisfaction; and as my gentleman's field of travels broadened, and by the exchanges I saw that he steadily and implacably penetrated territory after territory, state after state, and land after land, till he swept the great globe and culminated in sublime and unimpeached legitimacy in the august London Lancet, my cup was full, and I said I was glad I had done it. I think that for about eleven months, as nearly as I can remember, Mr. — —'s daily mail-bag continued to be swollen by the addition of half a bushel of newspapers hailing from many climes with the Petrified Man in them, marked around with a prominent belt of ink. I sent them to him. I did it for spite, not for fun.

He used to shovel them into his back yard and curse. And every day during all those months the miners, his constituents (for miners never quit joking a person when they get started), would call on him and ask if he could tell them where they could get hold of a paper with the Petrified Man in it. He could have accommodated a continent with them. I hated — — in those days, and these things pacified me and pleased me. I could not have gotten more real comfort out of him without killing him.



## An Aphorism and a Lecture

Oliver Wendell Holmes

One of the boys mentioned, the other evening, in the course of a very pleasant poem he read us, a little trick of the Commons table- boarders, which I, nourished at the parental board, had never heard of. Young fellows being always hungry — — Allow me to stop dead short, in order to utter an aphorism which has been forming itself in one of the blank interior spaces of my intelligence, like a crystal in the cavity of a geode.

### Aphorism by the Professor

In order to know whether a human being is young or old, offer it food of different kinds at short intervals. If young, it will eat anything at any hour of the day or night. If old, it observes stated periods, and you might as well attempt to regulate the time of high-water to suit a fishing-party as to change these periods.

The crucial experiment is this. Offer a bulky and boggy bun to the suspected individual just ten minutes before dinner. If this is eagerly accepted and devoured, the fact of youth is established. If the subject of the question starts back and expresses surprise and incredulity, as if you could not possibly be in earnest, the fact of maturity is no less clear.

—Excuse me—I return to my story of the Commons table. Young fellows being always hungry, and tea and dry toast being the meager fare of the evening meal, it was a trick of some of the boys to impale a slice of meat upon a fork at dinner time and stick the fork holding it beneath the table, so that they could get it at tea time. The dragons that guarded this table of the Hesperides found out the trick at last and kept a sharp lookout for missing forks—they knew where to

find one if it was not in its place. Now the odd thing was that, after waiting so many years to hear of this college trick, I should hear it mentioned a *second time* within the same twenty-four hours by a college youth of the present generation. Strange, but true. And so it has happened to me and to every person, often and often, to be hit in rapid succession by these twinned facts or thoughts, as if they were linked like chain-shot.

I was going to leave the simple reader to wonder over this, taking it as an unexplained marvel. I think, however, I will turn over a furrow of subsoil in it. The explanation is, of course, that in a great many thoughts there must be a few coincidences, and these instantly arrest our attention. Now we shall probably never have the least idea of the enormous number of impressions which pass through our consciousness, until in some future life we see the photographic record of our thoughts and the stereoscopic picture of our actions. There go more pieces to make up a conscious life or a living body than you think for. Why, some of you were surprised when a friend of mine told you there were fifty-eight separate pieces in a fiddle. How many "swimming glands"—solid, organized, regularly formed, rounded disks, taking an active part in all your vital processes, part and parcel, each one of them, of your corporal being—do you suppose are whirled along like pebbles in a stream with the blood which warms your frame and colors your cheeks? A noted German physiologist spread out a minute drop of blood under the microscope, in narrow streaks, and counted the globules, and then made a calculation. The counting by the micrometer took him a *week*. You have, my full-grown friend, of these little couriers in crimson or scarlet livery, running on your vital errands day and night as long as you live, sixty-five billions five hundred and seventy thousand millions, errors excepted. Did I hear some gentleman say "Doubted"? I am the Professor; I sit in my chair with a petard under it that will blow me through the skylight of my lecture-room if I do not know what I am talking about and whom I am quoting.

Now, my dear friends, who are putting your hands to your foreheads and saying to yourselves that you feel a little confused, as if you had been waltzing until things began to whirl slightly round you, is it possible that you do not clearly apprehend the exact connection of all that I have been saying and its bearing on what is now to come? Listen, then. The number of these living elements in our body illustrates the incalculable multitude of our thoughts; the number of our thoughts accounts for those frequent coincidences spoken of; these coincidences in the world of thought illustrate those which we constantly observe in the world of outward

events, of which the presence of the young girl now at our table, and proving to be the daughter of an old acquaintance some of us may remember, is the special example which led me through this labyrinth of reflections, and finally lands me at the commencement of this young girl's story, which, as I said, I have found the time and felt the interest to learn something of, and which I think I can tell without wronging the unconscious subject of my brief delineation.

### A Short Lecture on Phrenology

*Read to the Boarders at Our Breakfast Table*

I shall begin, my friends, with the definition of a *pseudoscience*. A pseudoscience consists of a *nomenclature*, with a self-adjusting arrangement, by which all positive evidence, or such as favors its doctrines, is admitted, and all negative evidence, or such as tells against it, is excluded. It is invariably connected with some lucrative practical application. Its professors and practitioners are usually shrewd people; they are very serious with the public, but wink and laugh a good deal among themselves. The believing multitude consists of women of both sexes, feeble-minded inquirers, poetical optimists, people who always get cheated in buying horses, philanthropists who insist on hurrying up the millennium, and others of this class, with here and there a clergyman, less frequently a lawyer, very rarely a physician, and almost never a horse-jockey or a member of the detective police. I did not say that Phrenology was one of the pseudosciences.

A pseudoscience does not necessarily consist wholly of lies. It may contain many truths, and even valuable ones. The rottenest bank starts with a little specie. It puts out a thousand promises to pay on the strength of a single dollar, but the dollar is very commonly a good one. The practitioners of the pseudosciences know that common minds after they have been baited with a real fact or two, will jump at the merest rag of a lie, or even at the bare hook. When we have one fact found us, we are very apt to supply the next out of our own imagination. (How many persons can read Judges XV. 16 correctly the first time?) The pseudosciences take advantage of this. I did not say that it was so with Phrenology.

I have rarely met a sensible man who would not allow that there was *something* in Phrenology. A broad, high forehead, it is commonly agreed, promises intellect; one that is "villainous low," and has a huge hind-head back of it, is wont to mark an animal nature. I have as rarely met an unbiased and sensible man who really believed in the bumps. It is observed, however, that persons with what the

phrenologists call "good heads" are more prone than others toward plenary belief in the doctrine.

It is so hard to prove a negative that, if a man should assert that the moon was in truth a green cheese, formed by the coagulable substance of the Milky Way, and challenge me to prove the contrary, I might be puzzled. But if he offer to sell me a ton of this lunar cheese, I call on him to prove the truth of the caseous nature of our satellite before I purchase.

It is not necessary to prove the falsity of the phrenological statement. It is only necessary to show that its truth is not proved, and cannot be, by the common course of argument. The walls of the head are double, with a great air-chamber between them, over the smallest and most closely crowded "organs." Can you tell how much money there is in a safe, which also has thick double walls, by kneading its knobs with your fingers? So when a man fumbles about my forehead, and talks about the organs of *Individuality*, *Size*, etc., I trust him as much as I should if he felt of the outside of my strongbox and told me that there was a five-dollar or a ten-dollar bill under this or that particular rivet. Perhaps there is; *only he doesn't know anything about it*. But this is a point that I, the Professor, understand, my friends, or ought to, certainly, better than you do. The next argument you will all appreciate.

I proceed, therefore, to explain the self-adjusting mechanism of Phrenology, which is *very similar* to that of the pseudosciences. An example will show it most conveniently.

A— is a notorious thief. Messrs. Bumpus and Crane examine him and find a good-sized organ of Acquisitiveness. Positive fact for Phrenology. Casts and drawings of A— are multiplied, and the bump *does not lose* in the act of copying—I did not say it gained. — What do you look for so? (to the boarders).

Presently B— turns up, a bigger thief than A—. But B— has no bump at all over Acquisitiveness. Negative fact; goes against Phrenology. Not a bit of it. Don't you see how small Conscientiousness is? *That's* the reason B— stole.

And then comes C—, ten times as much a thief as either A— or B—; used to steal before he was weaned, and would pick one of his own pockets and put its contents in another, if he could find no other way of committing petty larceny. Unfortunately C— has a *hollow*, instead of a bump, over Acquisitiveness. Ah! but just look and see what a bump of Alimentiveness! Did not O— buy nuts and gingerbread, when a boy, with the money he stole? Of course you see why he is a thief, and how his example confirms our noble science.

At last comes along a case which is apparently a *settler*, for



there is a little brain with vast and varied powers—a case like that of Byron, for instance. Then comes out the grand reserve—reason which covers everything and renders it simply impossible ever to corner a phrenologist. “It is not the size alone, but the *quality* of an organ, which determines its degree of power.”

Oh! oh! I see. The argument may be briefly stated thus by the phrenologist: “Heads I win, tails you lose.” Well, that’s convenient. It must be confessed that Phrenology has a certain resemblance to the pseudosciences. I did not say it was a pseudoscience.

I have often met persons who have been altogether struck up and amazed at the accuracy with which some wandering Professor of Phrenology had read their characters written upon their skulls. Of course, the Professor acquires his information solely through his cranial inspections and manipulations. What are you laughing at? (to the boarders). But let us just *suppose*, for a moment, that a tolerably cunning fellow, who did not know or care anything about Phrenology, should open a shop and undertake to read off people’s characters at fifty cents or a dollar apiece. Let us see how well he could get along without the “organs.”

I will suppose myself to set up such a shop. I would invest one hundred dollars, more or less, in casts of brains, skulls, charts, and other matters that would make the most show for the money. That would do to begin with. I would then advertise myself as the celebrated Professor Brainey, or whatever name I might choose, and wait for my first customer—a middle-aged man. I look at him, ask him a question or two, so as to hear him talk. When I have got the hang of him, I ask him to sit down, and proceed to fumble his skull, dictating as follows:

## SCALE FROM 1 TO 10

LIST OF FACULTIES FOR CUSTOMER—PRIVATE NOTES FOR MY PUPIL:

*Each to be accompanied with a wink.*

Amativeness, 7\_\_\_\_\_Most men love the conflicting sex, and all men love to be told they do.

Alimentiveness, 8\_\_\_\_Don’t you see that he has burst off his lowest waistcoat button with feeding—hey?

Acquisitiveness, 8\_\_\_\_Of course. A middle-aged Yankee.

Approbativeness, 7+\_\_\_ Hat well brushed. Hair ditto. Mark the effect of that plus sign.

Self-esteem, 6 \_\_\_\_\_ His face shows that.

Benevolence, 9 \_\_\_\_\_ That'll please him.

Conscientiousness, 8 1/2\_ That fraction looks first rate.

Mirthfulness, 7 \_\_\_\_\_ Has laughed twice since he came in. That sounds well.

Ideality, 9

Form, Size, Weight,

Color, Locality,

Eventuality, etc., Average everything that can't be guessed.

etc. (4 to 6)

And so of other faculties.

Of course, you know, that isn't the way the phrenologists do. They go only by the bumps. What do you keep laughing so for (to the boarders)? I only said that is the way I should practise "Phrenology" for a living.

## A Society

Virginia Woolf

This is how it all came about. Six or seven of us were sitting one day after tea. Some were gazing across the street into the windows of a milliner's shop where the light still shone brightly upon scarlet feathers and golden slippers. Others were idly occupied in building little towers of sugar upon the edge of the tea tray. After a time, so far as I can remember, we drew round the fire and began as usual to praise men—how strong, how noble, how brilliant, how courageous, how beautiful they were—how we envied those who by hook or by crook managed to get attached to one for life—when Poll, who had said nothing, burst into tears. Poll, I must tell you, has always been queer. For one thing her father was a strange man. He left her a fortune in his will, but on condition that she read all the books in the London Library. We comforted her as best we could; but we knew in our hearts how vain it was. For though we like her, Poll is no beauty; leaves her shoe laces untied; and must have been thinking, while we praised men, that not one of them would ever wish to marry her. At last she dried her tears. For some time we could make nothing of what she said. Strange enough it was in all conscience. She told us that, as we knew, she spent most of her time in the London Library, reading. She had begun, she said, with English literature on the top floor; and was steadily working her way down to the Times on the bottom. And now half, or perhaps only a quarter, way through a terrible thing had happened. She could read no more. Books were not what we thought them. "Books," she cried, rising to her feet and speaking with an intensity of desolation which I shall never forget, "are for the most part unutterably bad!"

Of course we cried out that Shakespeare wrote books, and Milton and Shelley.

"Oh, yes," she interrupted us. "You've been well taught, I can see. But you are not members of the London Library." Here her sobs

broke forth anew. At length, recovering a little, she opened one of the pile of books which she always carried about with her — "From a Window" or "In a Garden," or some such name as that it was called, and it was written by a man called Benton or Henson, or something of that kind. She read the first few pages. We listened in silence. "But that's not a book," someone said. So she chose another. This time it was a history, but I have forgotten the writer's name. Our trepidation increased as she went on. Not a word of it seemed to be true, and the style in which it was written was execrable.

"Poetry! Poetry!" we cried, impatiently.

"Read us poetry!" I cannot describe the desolation which fell upon us as she opened a little volume and mouthed out the verbose, sentimental foolery which it contained.

"It must have been written by a woman," one of us urged. But no. She told us that it was written by a young man, one of the most famous poets of the day. I leave you to imagine what the shock of the discovery was. Though we all cried and begged her to read no more, she persisted and read us extracts from the Lives of the Lord Chancellors. When she had finished, Jane, the eldest and wisest of us, rose to her feet and said that she for one was not convinced.

"Why," she asked, "if men write such rubbish as this, should our mothers have wasted their youth in bringing them into the world?"

We were all silent; and, in the silence, poor Poll could be heard sobbing out, "Why, why did my father teach me to read?"

Clorinda was the first to come to her senses. "It's all our fault," she said. "Every one of us knows how to read. But no one, save Poll, has ever taken the trouble to do it. I, for one, have taken it for granted that it was a woman's duty to spend her youth in bearing children. I venerated my mother for bearing ten; still more my grandmother for bearing fifteen; it was, I confess, my own ambition to bear twenty. We have gone on all these ages supposing that men were equally industrious, and that their works were of equal merit. While we have borne the children, they, we supposed, have borne the books and the pictures. We have populated the world. They have civilized it. But now that we can read, what prevents us from judging the results? Before we bring another child into the world we must swear that we will find out what the world is like."

So we made ourselves into a society for asking questions. One of us was to visit a man-of-war; another was to hide herself in a scholar's study; another was to attend a meeting of business men; while all were to read books, look at pictures, go to concerts, keep our eyes open in the streets, and ask questions perpetually. We were

very young. You can judge of our simplicity when I tell you that before parting that night we agreed that the objects of life were to produce good people and good books. Our questions were to be directed to finding out how far these objects were now attained by men. We vowed solemnly that we would not bear a single child until we were satisfied.

Off we went then, some to the British Museum; others to the King's Navy; some to Oxford; others to Cambridge; we visited the Royal Academy and the Tate; heard modern music in concert rooms, went to the Law Courts, and saw new plays. No one dined out without asking her partner certain questions and carefully noting his replies. At intervals we met together and compared our observations. Oh, those were merry meetings! Never have I laughed so much as I did when Rose read her notes upon "Honour" and described how she had dressed herself as an Æthiopian Prince and gone aboard one of His Majesty's ships. Discovering the hoax, the Captain visited her (now disguised as a private gentleman) and demanded that honour should be satisfied. "But how?" she asked. "How?" he bellowed. "With the cane of course!" Seeing that he was beside himself with rage and expecting that her last moment had come, she bent over and received, to her amazement, six light taps upon the behind. "The honour of the British Navy is avenged!" he cried, and, raising herself, she saw him with the sweat pouring down his face holding out a trembling right hand. "Away!" she exclaimed, striking an attitude and imitating the ferocity of his own expression, "My honour has still to be satisfied!" "Spoken like a gentleman!" he returned, and fell into profound thought. "If six strokes avenge the honour of the King's Navy," he mused, "how many avenge the honour of a private gentleman?" He said he would prefer to lay the case before his brother officers. She replied haughtily that she could not wait. He praised her sensibility. "Let me see," he cried suddenly, "did your father keep a carriage?" "No," she said. "Or a riding horse?" "We had a donkey," she bethought her, "which drew the mowing machine." At this his face lighted. "My mother's name—" she added. "For God's sake, man, don't mention your mother's name!" he shrieked, trembling like an aspen and flushing to the roots of his hair, and it was ten minutes at least before she could induce him to proceed. At length he decreed that if she gave him four strokes and a half in the small of the back at a spot indicated by himself (the half conceded, he said, in recognition of the fact that her great grandmother's uncle was killed at Trafalgar) it was his opinion that her honour would be as good as new. This was done; they retired to a restaurant; drank two bottles of wine for which he insisted upon paying; and parted

with protestations of eternal friendship.

Then we had Fanny's account of her visit to the Law Courts. At her first visit she had come to the conclusion that the Judges were either made of wood or were impersonated by large animals resembling man who had been trained to move with extreme dignity, mumble and nod their heads. To test her theory she had liberated a handkerchief of bluebottles at the critical moment of a trial, but was unable to judge whether the creatures gave signs of humanity for the buzzing of the flies induced so sound a sleep that she only woke in time to see the prisoners led into the cells below. But from the evidence she brought we voted that it is unfair to suppose that the Judges are men.

Helen went to the Royal Academy, but when asked to deliver her report upon the pictures she began to recite from a pale blue volume, "O! for the touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still. Home is the hunter, home from the hill. He gave his bridle reins a shake. Love is sweet, love is brief. Spring, the fair spring, is the year's pleasant King. O! to be in England now that April's there. Men must work and women must weep. The path of duty is the way to glory—" We could listen to no more of this gibberish.

"We want no more poetry!" we cried.

"Daughters of England!" she began, but here we pulled her down, a vase of water getting spilt over her in the scuffle.

"Thank God!" she exclaimed, shaking herself like a dog. "Now I'll roll on the carpet and see if I can't brush off what remains of the Union Jack. Then perhaps—" here she rolled energetically. Getting up she began to explain to us what modern pictures are like when Castalia stopped her.

"What is the average size of a picture?" she asked. "Perhaps two feet by two and a half," she said. Castalia made notes while Helen spoke, and when she had done, and we were trying not to meet each other's eyes, rose and said, "At your wish I spent last week at Oxbridge, disguised as a charwoman. I thus had access to the rooms of several Professors and will now attempt to give you some idea—only," she broke off, "I can't think how to do it. It's all so queer. These Professors," she went on, "live in large houses built round grass plots each in a kind of cell by himself. Yet they have every convenience and comfort. You have only to press a button or light a little lamp. Their papers are beautifully filed. Books abound. There are no children or animals, save half a dozen stray cats and one aged bullfinch—a cock. I remember," she broke off, "an Aunt of mine who lived at Dulwich and kept cactuses. You reached the conservatory through the double drawing-room, and there, on the

hot pipes, were dozens of them, ugly, squat, bristly little plants each in a separate pot. Once in a hundred years the Aloe flowered, so my Aunt said. But she died before that happened—" We told her to keep to the point. "Well," she resumed, "when Professor Hobkin was out, I examined his life work, an edition of Sappho. It's a queer looking book, six or seven inches thick, not all by Sappho. Oh, no. Most of it is a defence of Sappho's chastity, which some German had denied, add I can assure you the passion with which these two gentlemen argued, the learning they displayed, the prodigious ingenuity with which they disputed the use of some implement which looked to me for all the world like a hairpin astounded me; especially when the door opened and Professor Hobkin himself appeared. A very nice, mild, old gentleman, but what could he know about chastity?" We misunderstood her.

"No, no," she protested, "he's the soul of honour I'm sure—not that he resembled Rose's sea captain in the least. I was thinking rather of my Aunt's cactuses. What could they know about chastity?"

Again we told her not to wander from the point,—did the Oxbridge professors help to produce good people and good books?—the objects of life.

"There!" she exclaimed. "It never struck me to ask. It never occurred to me that they could possibly produce anything."

"I believe," said Sue, "that you made some mistake. Probably Professor Hobkin was a gynecologist. A scholar is a very different sort of man. A scholar is overflowing with humour and invention—perhaps addicted to wine, but what of that?—a delightful companion, generous, subtle, imaginative—as stands to reason. For he spends his life in company with the finest human beings that have ever existed."

"Hum," said Castalia. "Perhaps I'd better go back and try again."

Some three months later it happened that I was sitting alone when Castalia entered. I don't know what it was in the look of her that so moved me; but I could not restrain myself, and, dashing across the room, I clasped her in my arms. Not only was she very beautiful; she seemed also in the highest spirits. "How happy you look!" I exclaimed, as she sat down.

"I've been at Oxbridge," she said.

"Asking questions?"

"Answering them," she replied.

"You have not broken our vows?" I said anxiously, noticing something about her figure.

"Oh, the vow," she said casually. "I'm going to have a baby, if that's what you mean. You can't imagine," she burst out, "how exciting, how beautiful, how satisfying—"

"What is?" I asked.

"To—to—answer questions," she replied in some confusion. Whereupon she told me the whole of her story. But in the middle of an account which interested and excited me more than anything I had ever heard, she gave the strangest cry, half whoop, half holloa—

"Chastity! Chastity! Where's my chastity!" she cried. "Help Ho! The scent bottle!"

There was nothing in the room but a cruet containing mustard, which I was about to administer when she recovered her composure.

"You should have thought of that three months ago," I said severely.

"True," she replied. "There's not much good in thinking of it now. It was unfortunate, by the way, that my mother had me called Castalia."

"Oh, Castalia, your mother—" I was beginning when she reached for the mustard pot.

"No, no, no," she said, shaking her head. "If you'd been a chaste woman yourself you would have screamed at the sight of me—instead of which you rushed across the room and took me in your arms. No, Cassandra. We are neither of us chaste." So we went on talking.

Meanwhile the room was filling up, for it was the day appointed to discuss the results of our observations. Everyone, I thought, felt as I did about Castalia. They kissed her and said how glad they were to see her again. At length, when we were all assembled, Jane rose and said that it was time to begin. She began by saying that we had now asked questions for over five years, and that though the results were bound to be inconclusive—here Castalia nudged me and whispered that she was not so sure about that. Then she got up, and, interrupting Jane in the middle of a sentence, said:

"Before you say any more, I want to know—am I to stay in the room? Because," she added, "I have to confess that I am an impure woman."

Everyone looked at her in astonishment.

"You are going to have a baby?" asked Jane.

She nodded her head.

It was extraordinary to see the different expressions on their faces. A sort of hum went through the room, in which I could catch



the words "impure," "baby," "Castalia," and so on. Jane, who was herself considerably moved, put it to us:

"Shall she go? Is she impure?"

Such a roar filled the room as might have been heard in the street outside.

"No! No! No! Let her stay! Impure? Fiddlesticks!" Yet I fancied that some of the youngest, girls of nineteen or twenty, held back as if overcome with shyness. Then we all came about her and began asking questions, and at last I saw one of the youngest, who had kept in the background, approach shyly and say to her:

"What is chastity then? I mean is it good, or is it bad, or is it nothing at all?" She replied so low that I could not catch what she said.

"You know I was shocked," said another, "for at least ten minutes."

"In my opinion," said Poll, who was growing crusty from always reading in the London Library, "chastity is nothing but ignorance—a most discreditable state of mind. We should admit only the unchaste to our society. I vote that Castalia shall be our President."

This was violently disputed.

"It is as unfair to brand women with chastity as with unchastity," said Poll. "Some of us haven't the opportunity either. Moreover, I don't believe Cassy herself maintains that she acted as she did from a pure love of knowledge."

"He is only twenty-one and divinely beautiful," said Cassy, with a ravishing gesture.

"I move," said Helen, "that no one be allowed to talk of chastity or unchastity save those who are in love."

"Oh, bother," said Judith, who had been enquiring into scientific matters, "I'm not in love and I'm longing to explain my measures for dispensing with prostitutes and fertilizing virgins by Act of Parliament."

She went on to tell us of an invention of hers to be erected at Tube stations and other public resorts, which, upon payment of a small fee, would safeguard the nation's health, accommodate its sons, and relieve its daughters. Then she had contrived a method of preserving in sealed tubes the germs of future Lord Chancellors "or poets or painters or musicians," she went on, "supposing, that is to say, that these breeds are not extinct, and that women still wish to bear children — —"

"Of course we wish to bear children!" cried Castalia, impatiently. Jane rapped the table.

"That is the very point we are met to consider," she said. "For

five years we have been trying to find out whether we are justified in continuing the human race. Castalia has anticipated our decision. But it remains for the rest of us to make up our minds."

Here one after another of our messengers rose and delivered their reports. The marvels of civilisation far exceeded our expectations, and, as we learnt for the first time how man flies in the air, talks across space, penetrates to the heart of an atom, and embraces the universe in his speculations, a murmur of admiration burst from our lips.

"We are proud," we cried, "that our mothers sacrificed their youth in such a cause as this!" Castalia, who had been listening intently, looked prouder than all the rest. Then Jane reminded us that we had still much to learn, and Castalia begged us to make haste. On we went through a vast tangle of statistics. We learnt that England has a population of so many millions, and that such and such a proportion of them is constantly hungry and in prison; that the average size of a working man's family is such, and that so great a percentage of women die from maladies incident to childbirth. Reports were read of visits to factories, shops, slums, and dockyards. Descriptions were given of the Stock Exchange, of a gigantic house of business in the City, and of a Government Office. The British Colonies were now discussed, and some account was given of our rule in India, Africa and Ireland. I was sitting by Castalia and I noticed her uneasiness.

"We shall never come to any conclusion at all at this rate," she said. "As it appears that civilization is so much more complex than we had any notion, would it not be better to confine ourselves to our original enquiry? We agreed that it was the object of life to produce good people and good books. All this time we have been talking of aeroplanes, factories, and money. Let us talk about men themselves and their arts, for that is the heart of the matter."

So the diners out stepped forward with long slips of paper containing answers to their questions. These had been framed after much consideration. A good man, we had agreed, must at any rate be honest, passionate, and unworldly. But whether or not a particular man possessed those qualities could only be discovered by asking questions, often beginning at a remote distance from the centre. Is Kensington a nice place to live in? Where is your son being educated—and your daughter? Now please tell me, what do you pay for your cigars? By the way, is Sir Joseph a baronet or only a knight? Often it seemed that we learnt more from trivial questions of this kind than from more direct ones. "I accepted my peerage," said Lord Bunkum, "because my wife wished it." I forget how many

titles were accepted for the same reason. "Working fifteen hours out of the twenty-four, as I do— —" ten thousand professional men began.

"No, no, of course you can neither read nor write. But why do you work so hard?" "My dear lady, with a growing family— —" "But why does your family grow?" Their wives wished that too, or perhaps it was the British Empire. But more significant than the answers were the refusals to answer. Very few would reply at all to questions about morality and religion, and such answers as were given were not serious. Questions as to the value of money and power were almost invariably brushed aside, or pressed at extreme risk to the asker. "I'm sure," said Jill, "that if Sir Harley Tightboots hadn't been carving the mutton when I asked him about the capitalist system he would have cut my throat. The only reason why we escaped with our lives over and over again is that men are at once so hungry and so chivalrous. They despise us too much to mind what we say."

"Of course they despise us," said Eleanor. "At the same time how do you account for this—I made enquiries among the artists. Now, no woman has ever been an artist, has she, Polls?"

"Jane - Austen - Charlotte - Brontë - George - Eliot," cried Poll, like a man crying muffins in a back street.

"Damn the woman!" someone exclaimed. "What a bore she is!"

"Since Sappho there has been no female of first rate— —" Eleanor began, quoting from a weekly newspaper.

"It's now well known that Sappho was the somewhat lewd invention of Professor Hobkin," Ruth interrupted.

"Anyhow, there is no reason to suppose that any woman ever has been able to write or ever will be able to write," Eleanor continued. "And yet, whenever I go among authors they never cease to talk to me about their books. Masterly! I say, or Shakespeare himself! (for one must say something) and I assure you, they believe me."

"That proves nothing," said Jane. "They all do it. Only," she sighed, "it doesn't seem to help us much. Perhaps we had better examine modern literature next. Liz, it's your turn."

Elizabeth rose and said that in order to prosecute her enquiry she had dressed as a man and been taken for a reviewer.

"I have read new books pretty steadily for the past five years," said she. "Mr. Wells is the most popular living writer; then comes Mr. Arnold Bennett; then Mr. Compton Mackenzie; Mr. McKenna and Mr. Walpole may be bracketed together." She sat down.

"But you've told us nothing!" we expostulated. "Or do you

mean that these gentlemen have greatly surpassed Jane-Elliot and that English fiction is— —where's that review of yours? Oh, yes, "safe in their hands."

"Safe, quite safe," she said, shifting uneasily from foot to foot. "And I'm sure that they give away even more than they receive."

We were all sure of that. "But," we pressed her, "do they write good books?"

"Good books?" she said, looking at the ceiling "You must remember," she began, speaking with extreme rapidity, "that fiction is the mirror of life. And you can't deny that education is of the highest importance, and that it would be extremely annoying, if you found yourself alone at Brighton late at night, not to know which was the best boarding house to stay at, and suppose it was a dripping Sunday evening—wouldn't it be nice to go to the Movies?"

"But what has that got to do with it?" we asked.

"Nothing—nothing—nothing whatever," she replied.

"Well, tell us the truth," we bade her.

"The truth? But isn't it wonderful," she broke off—"Mr. Chitter has written a weekly article for the past thirty years upon love or hot buttered toast and has sent all his sons to Eton— —"

"The truth!" we demanded.

"Oh, the truth," she stammered, "the truth has nothing to do with literature," and sitting down she refused to say another word.

It all seemed to us very inconclusive.

"Ladies, we must try to sum up the results," Jane was beginning, when a hum, which had been heard for some time through the open window, drowned her voice.

"War! War! War! Declaration of War!" men were shouting in the street below.

We looked at each other in horror.

"What war?" we cried. "What war?" We remembered, too late, that we had never thought of sending anyone to the House of Commons. We had forgotten all about it. We turned to Poll, who had reached the history shelves in the London Library, and asked her to enlighten us.

"Why," we cried, "do men go to war?"

"Sometimes for one reason, sometimes for another," she replied calmly. "In 1760, for example— —" The shouts outside drowned her words. "Again in 1797—in 1804—It was the Austrians in 1866—1870 was the Franco-Prussian—in 1900 on the other hand— —"

"But it's now 1914!" we cut her short.

"Ah, I don't know what they're going to war for now," she admitted.

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The war was over and peace was in process of being signed, when I once more found myself with Castalia in the room where our meetings used to be held. We began idly turning over the pages of our old minute books. "Queer," I mused, "to see what we were thinking five years ago." "We are agreed," Castalia quoted, reading over my shoulder, "that it is the object of life to produce good people and good books." We made no comment upon that. "A good man is at any rate honest, passionate and unworldly." "What a woman's language!" I observed. "Oh, dear," cried Castalia, pushing the book away from her, "what fools we were! It was all Poll's father's fault," she went on. "I believe he did it on purpose—that ridiculous will, I mean, forcing Poll to read all the books in the London Library. If we hadn't learnt to read," she said bitterly, "we might still have been bearing children in ignorance and that I believe was the happiest life after all. I know what you're going to say about war," she checked me, "and the horror of bearing children to see them killed, but our mothers did it, and their mothers, and their mothers before them. And they didn't complain. They couldn't read. I've done my best," she sighed, "to prevent my little girl from learning to read, but what's the use? I caught Ann only yesterday with a newspaper in her hand and she was beginning to ask me if it was 'true.' Next she'll ask me whether Mr. Lloyd George is a good man, then whether Mr. Arnold Bennett is a good novelist, and finally whether I believe in God. How can I bring my daughter up to believe in nothing?" she demanded.

"Surely you could teach her to believe that a man's intellect is, and always will be, fundamentally superior to a woman's?" I suggested. She brightened at this and began to turn over our old minutes again. "Yes," she said, "think of their discoveries, their mathematics, their science, their philosophy, their scholarship— " and then she began to laugh, "I shall never forget old Hobkin and the hairpin," she said, and went on reading and laughing and I thought she was quite happy, when suddenly she drew the book from her and burst out, "Oh, Cassandra, why do you torment me? Don't you know that our belief in man's intellect is the greatest fallacy of them all?" "What?" I exclaimed. "Ask any journalist, schoolmaster, politician or public house keeper in the land and they will all tell you that men are much cleverer than women." "As if I doubted it," she said scornfully. "How could they help it? Haven't we bred them and fed and kept them in comfort since the beginning of time so that

they may be clever even if they're nothing else? It's all our doing!" she cried. "We insisted upon having intellect and now we've got it. And it's intellect," she continued, "that's at the bottom of it. What could be more charming than a boy before he has begun to cultivate his intellect? He is beautiful to look at; he gives himself no airs; he understands the meaning of art and literature instinctively; he goes about enjoying his life and making other people enjoy theirs. Then they teach him to cultivate his intellect. He becomes a barrister, a civil servant, a general, an author, a professor. Every day he goes to an office. Every year he produces a book. He maintains a whole family by the products of his brain—poor devil! Soon he cannot come into a room without making us all feel uncomfortable; he condescends to every woman he meets, and dares not tell the truth even to his own wife; instead of rejoicing our eyes we have to shut them if we are to take him in our arms. True, they console themselves with stars of all shapes, ribbons of all shades, and incomes of all sizes—but what is to console us? That we shall be able in ten years' time to spend a weekend at Lahore? Or that the least insect in Japan has a name twice the length of its body? Oh, Cassandra, for Heaven's sake let us devise a method by which men may bear children! It is our only chance. For unless we provide them with some innocent occupation we shall get neither good people nor good books; we shall perish beneath the fruits of their unbridled activity; and not a human being will survive to know that there once was Shakespeare!"

"It is too late," I replied. "We cannot provide even for the children that we have."

"And then you ask me to believe in intellect," she said.

While we spoke, men were crying hoarsely and wearily in the street, and, listening, we heard that the Treaty of Peace had just been signed. The voices died away. The rain was falling and interfered no doubt with the proper explosion of the fireworks.

"My cook will have bought the Evening News," said Castalia, "and Ann will be spelling it out over her tea. I must go home."

"It's no good—not a bit of good," I said. "Once she knows how to read there's only one thing you can teach her to believe in—and that is herself."

"Well, that would be a change," sighed Castalia.

So we swept up the papers of our Society, and, though Ann was playing with her doll very happily, we solemnly made her a present of the lot and told her we had chosen her to be President of the Society of the future—upon which she burst into tears, poor little girl.

## The Coffee-House of Surat

Leo Tolstoy

**I**n the town of Surat, in India, was a coffee-house where many travellers and foreigners from all parts of the world met and conversed.

One day a learned Persian theologian visited this coffee-house. He was a man who had spent his life studying the nature of the Deity, and reading and writing books upon the subject. He had thought, read, and written so much about God, that eventually he lost his wits, became quite confused, and ceased even to believe in the existence of a God. The Shah, hearing of this, had banished him from Persia.

After having argued all his life about the First Cause, this unfortunate theologian had ended by quite perplexing himself, and instead of understanding that he had lost his own reason, he began to think that there was no higher Reason controlling the universe.

This man had an African slave who followed him everywhere. When the theologian entered the coffee-house, the slave remained outside, near the door, sitting on a stone in the glare of the sun, and driving away the flies that buzzed around him. The Persian having settled down on a divan in the coffee-house, ordered himself a cup of opium.

When he had drunk it and the opium had begun to quicken the workings of his brain, he addressed his slave through the open door: "Tell me, wretched slave," said he, "do you think there is a God, or not?"

"Of course there is," said the slave, and immediately drew from under his girdle a small idol of wood.

"There," said he, "that is the God who has guarded me from the day of my birth. Every one in our country worships the fetish tree, from the wood of which this God was made."



This conversation between the theologian and his slave was listened to with surprise by the other guests in the coffee-house. They were astonished at the master's question, and yet more so at the slave's reply.

One of them, a Brahmin, on hearing the words spoken by the slave, turned to him and said:

"Miserable fool! Is it possible you believe that God can be carried under a man's girdle? There is one God—Brahma, and he is greater than the whole world, for he created it. Brahma is the One, the mighty God, and in His honour are built the temples on the Ganges' banks, where his true priests, the Brahmins, worship him. They know the true God, and none but they. A thousand score of years have passed, and yet through revolution after revolution these priests have held their sway, because Brahma, the one true God, has protected them."

So spoke the Brahmin, thinking to convince every one; but a Jewish broker who was present replied to him, and said:

"No! the temple of the true God is not in India. Neither does God protect the Brahmin caste. The true God is not the God of the Brahmins, but of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. None does He protect but His chosen people, the Israelites. From the commencement of the world, our nation has been beloved of Him, and ours alone. If we are now scattered over the whole earth, it is but to try us; for God has promised that He will one day gather His people together in Jerusalem. Then, with the Temple of Jerusalem—the wonder of the ancient world—restored to its splendor, shall Israel be established a ruler over all nations."

So spoke the Jew, and burst into tears. He wished to say more, but an Italian missionary who was there interrupted him.

"What you are saying is untrue," said he to the Jew. "You attribute injustice to God. He cannot love your nation above the rest. Nay rather, even if it be true that of old He favored the Israelites, it is now nineteen hundred years since they angered Him, and caused Him to destroy their nation and scatter them over the earth, so that their faith makes no converts and has died out except here and there. God shows preference to no nation, but calls all who wish to be saved to the bosom of the Catholic Church of Rome, the one outside whose borders no salvation can be found."

So spoke the Italian. But a Protestant minister, who happened to be present, growing pale, turned to the Catholic missionary and exclaimed:

"How can you say that salvation belongs to your religion? Those only will be saved, who serve God according to the Gospel, in spirit and in truth, as bidden by the word of Christ."



Then a Turk, an office-holder in the custom-house at Surat, who was sitting in the coffee-house smoking a pipe, turned with an air of superiority to both the Christians.

"Your belief in your Roman religion is vain," said he. "It was superseded twelve hundred years ago by the true faith: that of Mohammed! You cannot but observe how the true Mohammed faith continues to spread both in Europe and Asia, and even in the enlightened country of China. You say yourselves that God has rejected the Jews; and, as a proof, you quote the fact that the Jews are humiliated and their faith does not spread. Confess then the truth of Mohammedanism, for it is triumphant and spreads far and wide. None will be saved but the followers of Mohammed, God's latest prophet; and of them, only the followers of Omar, and not of Ali, for the latter are false to the faith."

To this the Persian theologian, who was of the sect of Ali, wished to reply; but by this time a great dispute had arisen among all the strangers of different faiths and creeds present. There were Abyssinian Christians, Llamas from Thibet, Ismailians and Fire worshippers. They all argued about the nature of God, and how He should be worshipped. Each of them asserted that in his country alone was the true God known and rightly worshipped.

Every one argued and shouted, except a Chinaman, a student of Confucius, who sat quietly in one corner of the coffee-house, not joining in the dispute. He sat there drinking tea and listening to what the others said, but did not speak himself.

The Turk noticed him sitting there, and appealed to him, saying:

"You can confirm what I say, my good Chinaman. You hold your peace, but if you spoke I know you would uphold my opinion. Traders from your country, who come to me for assistance, tell me that though many religions have been introduced into China, you Chinese consider Mohammedanism the best of all, and adopt it willingly. Confirm, then, my words, and tell us your opinion of the true God and of His prophet."

"Yes, yes," said the rest, turning to the Chinaman, "let us hear what you think on the subject."

The Chinaman, the student of Confucius, closed his eyes, and thought a while. Then he opened them again, and drawing his hands out of the wide sleeves of his garment, and folding them on his breast, he spoke as follows, in a calm and quiet voice.

Sirs, it seems to me that it is chiefly pride that prevents men agreeing with one another on matters of faith. If you care to listen to me, I will tell you a story which will explain this by an example.

I came here from China on an English steamer which had been

round the world. We stopped for fresh water, and landed on the east coast of the island of Sumatra. It was midday, and some of us, having landed, sat in the shade of some cocoanut palms by the seashore, not far from a native village. We were a party of men of different nationalities.

As we sat there, a blind man approached us. We learned afterwards that he had gone blind from gazing too long and too persistently at the sun, trying to find out what it is, in order to seize its light.

He strove a long time to accomplish this, constantly looking at the sun; but the only result was that his eyes were injured by its brightness, and he became blind.

Then he said to himself:

"The light of the sun is not a liquid; for if it were a liquid it would be possible to pour it from one vessel into another, and it would be moved, like water, by the wind. Neither is it fire; for if it were fire, water would extinguish it. Neither is light a spirit, for it is seen by the eye; nor is it matter, for it cannot be moved. Therefore, as the light of the sun is neither liquid, nor fire, nor spirit, nor matter, it is—nothing!"

So he argued, and, as a result of always looking at the sun and always thinking about it, he lost both his sight and his reason. And when he went quite blind, he became fully convinced that the sun did not exist.

With this blind man came a slave, who after placing his master in the shade of a cocoanut tree, picked up a cocoanut from the ground, and began making it into a night-light. He twisted a wick from the fibre of the cocoanut: squeezed oil from the nut in the shell, and soaked the wick in it.

As the slave sat doing this, the blind man sighed and said to him: "Well, slave, was I not right when I told you there is no sun? Do you not see how dark it is? Yet people say there is a sun. . . . But if so, what is it?"

"I do not know what the sun is," said the slave. "That is no business of mine. But I know what light is. Here I have made a night-light, by the help of which I can serve you and find anything I want in the hut."

And the slave picked up the cocoanut shell, saying:

"This is my sun."

A lame man with crutches, who was sitting near by, heard these words, and laughed:

"You have evidently been blind all your life," said he to the blind man, "not to know what the sun is. I will tell you what it is. The sun

is a ball of fire, which rises every morning out of the sea and goes down again among the mountains of our island each evening. We have all seen this, and if you had had your eyesight you too would have seen it."

A fisherman, who had been listening to the conversation said:

"It is plain enough that you have never been beyond your own island. If you were not lame, and if you had been out as I have in a fishing-boat, you would know that the sun does not set among the mountains of our island, but as it rises from the ocean every morning so it sets again in the sea every night. What I am telling you is true, for I see it every day with my own eyes."

Then an Indian who was of our party, interrupted him by saying:

"I am astonished that a reasonable man should talk such nonsense. How can a ball of fire possibly descend into the water and not be extinguished? The sun is not a ball of fire at all, it is the Deity named Deva, who rides for ever in a chariot round the golden mountain, Meru. Sometimes the evil serpents Ragu and Ketu attack Deva and swallow him: and then the earth is dark. But our priests pray that the Deity may be released, and then he is set free. Only such ignorant men as you, who have never been beyond their own island, can imagine that the sun shines for their country alone."

Then the master of an Egyptian vessel, who was present, spoke in his turn.

"No," said he, "you also are wrong. The sun is not a Deity, and does not move only round India and its golden mountain. I have sailed much on the Black Sea, and along the coasts of Arabia, and have been to Madagascar and to the Philippines. The sun lights the whole earth, and not India alone. It does not circle round one mountain, but rises far in the East, beyond the Isles of Japan, and sets far, far away in the West, beyond the islands of England. That is why the Japanese call their country 'Nippon,' that is, 'the birth of the sun.' I know this well, for I have myself seen much, and heard more from my grandfather, who sailed to the very ends of the sea."

He would have gone on, but an English sailor from our ship interrupted him.

"There is no country," he said "where people know so much about the sun's movements as in England. The sun, as every one in England knows, rises nowhere and sets nowhere. It is always moving round the earth. We can be sure of this for we have just been round the world ourselves, and nowhere knocked up against the sun. Wherever we went, the sun showed itself in the morning and hid itself at night, just as it does here."

And the Englishman took a stick and, drawing circles on the

sand, tried to explain how the sun moves in the heavens and goes round the world. But he was unable to explain it clearly, and pointing to the ship's pilot said:

"This man knows more about it than I do. He can explain it properly."

The pilot, who was an intelligent man, had listened in silence to the talk till he was asked to speak. Now every one turned to him, and he said:

"You are all misleading one another, and are yourselves deceived. The sun does not go round the earth, but the earth goes round the sun, revolving as it goes, and turning towards the sun in the course of each twenty-four hours, not only Japan, and the Philippines, and Sumatra where we now are, but Africa, and Europe, and America, and many lands besides. The sun does not shine for some one mountain, or for some one island, or for some one sea, nor even for one earth alone, but for other planets as well as our earth. If you would only look up at the heavens, instead of at the ground beneath your own feet, you might all understand this, and would then no longer suppose that the sun shines for you, or for your country alone."

Thus spoke the wise pilot, who had voyaged much about the world, and had gazed much upon the heavens above.

"So on matters of faith," continued the Chinaman, the student of Confucius, "it is pride that causes error and discord among men. As with the sun, so it is with God. Each man wants to have a special God of his own, or at least a special God for his native land. Each nation wishes to confine in its own temples Him, whom the world cannot contain.

"Can any temple compare with that which God Himself has built to unite all men in one faith and one religion?

"All human temples are built on the model of this temple, which is God's own world. Every temple has its fonts, its vaulted roof, its lamps, its pictures or sculptures, its inscriptions, its books of the law, its offerings, its altars and its priests. But in what temple is there such a font as the ocean; such a vault as that of the heavens; such lamps as the sun, moon, and stars; or any figures

to be compared with living, loving, mutually-helpful men? Where are there any records of God's goodness so easy to understand as the blessings which God has strewn abroad for man's happiness? Where is there any book of the law so clear to each man as that written in his heart? What sacrifices equal the self-denials which loving men and women make for one another? And what altar can be compared with the heart of a good man, on which God Himself accepts the sacrifice?

“The higher a man’s conception of God, the better will he know Him. And the better he knows God, the nearer will he draw to Him, imitating His goodness, His mercy, and His love of man.

“Therefore, let him who sees the sun’s whole light filling the world, refrain from blaming or despising the superstitious man, who in his own idol sees one ray of that same light. Let him not despise even the unbeliever who is blind and cannot see the sun at all.”

So spoke the Chinaman, the student of Confucius; and all who were present in the coffee-house were silent, and disputed no more as to whose faith was the best.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

## Religions of Error

Ambrose Bierce

Hearing a sound of strife, a Christian in the Orient asked his Dragoman the cause of it. "The Buddhists are cutting Mohammedan throats," the Dragoman replied, with oriental composure.

"I did not know," remarked the Christian, with scientific interest, "that that would make so much noise."

"The Mohammedans are cutting Buddhist throats, too," added the Dragoman.

"It is astonishing," mused the Christian, "how violent and how general are religious animosities. Everywhere in the world the devotees of each local faith abhor the devotees of every other, and abstain from murder only so long as they dare not commit it. And the strangest thing about it is that all religions are erroneous and mischievous excepting mine. Mine, thank God, is true and benign."

So saying he visibly smugged and went off to telegraph for a brigade of cutthroats to protect Christian interests.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH



## The Proselytes

John Greenleaf Whittier

**T**he student sat at his books. All the day he had been poring over an old and time-worn volume; and the evening found him still absorbed in its contents. It was one of that interminable series of controversial volumes, containing the theological speculations of the ancient fathers of the Church. With the patient perseverance so characteristic of his countrymen, he was endeavoring to detect truth amidst the numberless inconsistencies of heated controversy; to reconcile jarring propositions; to search out the thread of scholastic argument amidst the rant of prejudice and the sallies of passion, and the coarse vituperations of a spirit of personal bitterness, but little in accordance with the awful gravity of the question at issue.

Wearied and baffled in his researches, he at length closed the volume, and rested his care-worn forehead upon his hand. "What avail," he said, "these long and painful endeavors, these midnight vigils, these weary studies, before which heart and flesh are failing? What have I gained? I have pushed my researches wide and far; my life has been one long and weary lesson; I have shut out from me the busy and beautiful world; I have chastened every youthful impulse; and at an age when the heart should be lightest and the pulse the freest, I am grave and silent and sorrowful," and the frost of a premature age is gathering around my heart. Amidst these ponderous tomes, surrounded by the venerable receptacles of old wisdom, breathing, instead of the free air of heaven, the sepulchral dust of antiquity, I have become assimilated to the objects around me; my very nature has undergone a metamorphosis of which Pythagoras never dreamed. I am no longer a reasoning creature, looking at everything within the circle of human investigation with a clear and self-sustained vision, but the cheated follower of metaphysical absurdities, a mere echo

of scholastic subtilty. God knows that my aim has been a lofty and pure one, that I have buried myself in this living tomb, and counted the health of this His feeble and outward image as nothing in comparison with that of the immortal and inward representation and shadow of His own Infinite Mind; that I have toiled through what the world calls wisdom, the lore of the old fathers and time-honored philosophy, not for the dream of power and gratified ambition, not for the alchemist's gold or life-giving elixir, but with an eye single to that which I conceived to be the most fitting object of a godlike spirit, the discovery of Truth,—truth perfect and unclouded, truth in its severe and perfect beauty, truth as it sits in awe and holiness in the presence of its Original and Source!

“Was my aim too lofty? It cannot be; for my Creator has given me a spirit which would spurn a meaner one. I have studied to act in accordance with His will; yet have I felt all along like one walking in blindness. I have listened to the living champions of the Church; I have pored over the remains of the dead; but doubt and heavy darkness still rest upon my pathway. I find contradiction where I had looked for harmony; ambiguity where I had expected clearness; zeal taking the place of reason; anger, intolerance, personal feuds and sectarian bitterness, interminable discussions and weary controversies; while infinite Truth, for which I have been seeking, lies still beyond, or seen, if at all, only by transient and unsatisfying glimpses, obscured and darkened by miserable subtilties and cabalistic mysteries.”

He was interrupted by the entrance of a servant with a letter. The student broke its well-known seal, and read, in a delicate chirography, the following words:—

*“DEAR ERNEST,—A stranger from the English Kingdom, of gentle birth and education, hath visited me at the request of the good Princess Elizabeth of the Palatine. He is a preacher of the new faith, a zealous and earnest believer in the gifts of the Spirit, but not like John de Labadie or the lady Schurmans.*

*“He speaks like one sent on a message from heaven, a message of wisdom and salvation. Come, Ernest, and see him; for he hath but a brief hour to tarry with us. Who knoweth but that this stranger may be commissioned to lead us to that which we have so long and anxiously sought for,—the truth as it is in God.*

*“ELEONORA.”*

“Now may Heaven bless the sweet enthusiast for this interruption of my bitter reflections!” said the student, in the earnest tenderness of impassioned feeling. “She knows how gladly I shall obey her summons; she knows how readily I shall forsake the dogmas of our

wisest schoolmen, to obey the slightest wishes of a heart pure and generous as hers."

He passed hastily through one of the principal streets of the city to the dwelling of the lady, Eleonora.

In a large and gorgeous apartment sat the Englishman, his plain and simple garb contrasting strongly with the richness and luxury around him. He was apparently quite young, and of a tall and commanding figure. His countenance was calm and benevolent; it bore no traces of passion; care had not marked it; there was a holy serenity in its expression, which seemed a token of that inward "peace which passeth all understanding."

"And this is thy friend, Eleonora?" said the stranger, as he offered his hand to Ernest. "I hear," he said, addressing the latter, "thou hast been a hard student and a lover of philosophy."

"I am but a humble inquirer after Truth," replied Ernest.

"From whence hast thou sought it?"

"From the sacred volume, from the lore of the old fathers, from the fountains of philosophy, and from my own brief experience of human life."

"And hast thou attained thy object?"

"Alas, no!" replied the student; "I have thus far toiled in vain."

"Ah! thus must the children of this world ever toil, wearily, wearily, but in vain. We grasp at shadows, we grapple with the fashionless air, we walk in the blindness of our own vain imaginations, we compass heaven and earth for our objects, and marvel that we find them not. The truth which is of God, the crown of wisdom, the pearl of exceeding price, demands not this vain-glorious research; easily to be entreated, it lieth within the reach of all. The eye of the humblest spirit may discern it. For He who respecteth not the persons of His children hath not set it afar off, unapproachable save to the proud and lofty; but hath made its refreshing fountains to murmur, as it were, at the very door of our hearts. But in the encumbering hurry of the world we perceive it not; in the noise of our daily vanities we hear not the waters of Siloah which go softly. We look widely abroad; we lose ourselves in vain speculation; we wander in the crooked paths of those who have gone before us; yea, in the language of one of the old fathers, we ask the earth and it replieth not, we question the sea and its inhabitants, we turn to the sun, and the moon, and the stars of heaven, and they may not satisfy us; we ask our eyes, and they cannot see, and our ears, and they cannot hear; we turn to books, and they delude us; we seek philosophy, and no response cometh from its dead and silent learning.

"It is not in the sky above, nor in the air around, nor in the earth

beneath; it is in our own spirits, it lives within us; and if we would find it, like the lost silver of the woman of the parable, we must look at home, to the inward temple, which the inward eye discovereth, and wherein the spirit of all truth is manifested. The voice of that spirit is still and small, and the light about it shineth in darkness. But truth is there; and if we seek it in low humility, in a patient waiting upon its author, with a giving up of our natural pride of knowledge, a seducing of self, a quiet from all outward endeavor, it will assuredly be revealed and fully made known. For as the angel rose of old from the altar of Manoah even so shall truth arise from the humbling sacrifice of self-knowledge and human vanity, in all its eternal and ineffable beauty.

"Seekest thou, like Pilate, after truth? Look thou within. The holy principle is there; that in whose light the pure hearts of all time have rejoiced. It is 'the great light of ages' of which Pythagoras speaks, the 'good spirit' of Socrates; the 'divine mind' of Anaxagoras; the 'perfect principle' of Plato; the 'infallible and immortal law, and divine power of reason' of Philo. It is the 'unbegotten principle and source of all light,' whereof Timmus testifieth; the 'interior guide of the soul and everlasting foundation of virtue,' spoken of by Plutarch. Yea, it was the hope and guide of those virtuous Gentiles, who, doing by nature the things contained in the law, became a law unto themselves.

"Look to thyself. Turn thine eye inward. Heed not the opinion of the world. Lean not upon the broken reed of thy philosophy, thy verbal orthodoxy, thy skill in tongues, thy knowledge of the Fathers. Remember that truth was seen by the humble fishermen of Galilee, and overlooked by the High Priest of the Temple, by the Rabbi and the Pharisee. Thou canst not hope to reach it by the metaphysics of Fathers, Councils, Schoolmen, and Universities. It lies not in the high places of human learning; it is in the silent sanctuary of thy own heart; for He, who gave thee an immortal soul, hath filled it with a portion of that truth which is the image of His own unapproachable light. The voice of that truth is within thee; heed thou its whisper. A light is kindled in thy soul, which, if thou carefully heeded it, shall shine more and more even unto the perfect day."

The stranger paused, and the student melted into tears. "Stranger!" he said, "thou hast taken a weary weight from my heart, and a heavy veil from my eyes. I feel that thou hast revealed a wisdom which is not of this world."

"Nay, I am but a humble instrument in the hand of Him who is the fountain of all truth, and the beginning and the end of all wisdom. May the message which I have borne thee be sanctified to thy well-being."

"Oh, heed him, Ernest!" said the lady. "It is the holy truth which has been spoken. Let us rejoice in this truth, and, forgetting the world, live only for it."

"Oh, may He who watcheth over all His children keep thee in faith of thy resolution!" said the Preacher, fervently. "Humble yourselves to receive instruction, and it shall be given you. Turn away now in your youth from the corrupting pleasures of the world, heed not its hollow vanities, and that peace which is not such as the world giveth, the peace of God which passeth all understanding, shall be yours. Yet, let not yours be the world's righteousness, the world's peace, which shuts itself up in solitude. Encloister not the body, but rather shut up the soul from sin. Live in the world, but overcome it: lead a life of purity in the face of its allurements: learn, from the holy principle of truth within you, to do justly in the sight of its Author, to meet reproach without anger, to live without offence, to love those that offend you, to visit the widow and the fatherless, and keep yourselves unspotted from the world."

"Eleonora!" said the humbled student, "truth is plain before us; can we follow its teachings? Alas! canst thou, the daughter of a noble house, forget the glory of thy birth, and, in the beauty of thy years, tread in that lowly path, which the wisdom of the world accounteth foolishness?"

"Yes, Ernest, rejoicingly can I do it!" said the lady; and the bright glow of a lofty purpose gave a spiritual expression to her majestic beauty. "Glory to God in the highest, that He hath visited us in mercy!"

"Lady!" said the Preacher, "the day-star of truth has arisen in thy heart; follow thou its light even unto salvation. Live an harmonious life to the curious make and frame of thy creation; and let the beauty of thy person teach thee to beautify thy mind with holiness, the ornament of the beloved of God. Remember that the King of Zion's daughter is all-glorious within; and if thy soul excel, thy body will only set off the lustre of thy mind. Let not the spirit of this world, its cares and its many vanities, its fashions and discourse, prevail over the civility of thy nature. Remember that sin brought the first coat, and thou wilt have little reason to be proud of dress or the adorning of thy body. Seek rather the enduring ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, the beauty and the purity of the altar of God's temple, rather than the decoration of its outward walls. For, as the Spartan monarch said of old to his daughter, when he restrained her from wearing the rich dresses of Sicily, 'Thou wilt seem more lovely to me without them,' so shalt thou seem, in thy lowliness and humility, more lovely in the sight of Heaven and in the eyes of the pure of

earth. Oh, preserve in their freshness thy present feelings, wait in humble resignation and in patience, even if it be all thy days, for the manifestations of Him who as a father careth for all His children."

"I will endeavor, I will endeavor!" said the lady, humbled in spirit, and in tears.

The stranger took the hand of each. "Farewell!" he said, "I must needs depart, for I have much work before me. God's peace be with you; and that love be around you, which has been to me as the green pasture and the still water, the shadow in a weary land."

And the stranger went his way; but the lady and her lover, in all their after life, and amidst the trials and persecutions which they were called to suffer in the cause of truth, remembered with joy and gratitude the instructions of the pure-hearted and eloquent William Penn.

## A Moral Little Tale

Lord Dunsany

**T**here was once an earnest Puritan who held it wrong to dance. And for his principles he labored hard, his was a zealous life. And there loved him all of those who hated the dance; and those that loved the dance respected him too; they said "He is a pure, good man and acts according to his lights."

He did much to discourage dancing and helped to close several Sunday entertainments. Some kinds of poetry, he said, he liked, but not the fanciful kind as that might corrupt the thoughts of the very young. He always dressed in black.

He was quite interested in morality and was quite sincere and there grew to be much respect on Earth for his honest face and his flowing pure-white beard.

One night the Devil appeared unto him in a dream and said "Well done."

"Avaunt," said that earnest man.

"No, no, friend," said the Devil.

"Dare not to call me "friend,"" he answered bravely.

"Come, come, friend," said the Devil. "Have you not put apart the couples that would dance? Have you not checked their laughter and their accursed mirth? Have you not worn my livery of black? O friend, friend, you do not know what a detestable thing it is to sit in hell and hear people being happy, and singing in theatres and singing in the fields, and whispering after dances under the moon," and he fell to cursing fearfully.

"It is you," said the Puritan, "that put into their hearts the evil desire to dance; and black is God's own livery, not yours."

And the Devil laughed contemptuously and spoke.

"He only made the silly colors," he said, "and useless dawns on hill-slopes facing South, and butterflies flapping along them as soon

as the sun rose high, and foolish maidens coming out to dance, and the warm mad West wind, and worst of all that pernicious influence Love."

And when the Devil said that God made Love that earnest man sat up in bed and shouted "Blasphemy! Blasphemy!"

"It's true," said the Devil. "It isn't I that send the village fools muttering and whispering two by two in the woods when the harvest moon is high, it's as much as I can bear even to see them dancing."

"Then," said the man, "I have mistaken right for wrong; but as soon as I wake I will fight you yet."

"O, no you don't," said the Devil. "You don't wake up out of this sleep."

And somewhere far away Hell's black steel doors were opened, and arm in arm those two were drawn within, and the doors shut behind them and still they went arm in arm, trudging further and further into the deeps of Hell, and it was that Puritan's punishment to know that those that he cared for on Earth would do evil as he had done.



## Something In It

Robert Louis Stevenson

**T**he natives told him many tales. In particular, they warned him of the house of yellow reeds tied with black sinnet, how any one who touched it became instantly the prey of Akaanga, and was handed on to him by Miru the ruddy, and hocussed with the kava of the dead, and baked in the ovens and eaten by the eaters of the dead.

"There is nothing in it," said the missionary.

There was a bay upon that island, a very fair bay to look upon; but, by the native saying, it was death to bathe there. "There is nothing in that," said the missionary; and he came to the bay, and went swimming. Presently an eddy took him and bore him towards the reef. "Oho!" thought the missionary, "it seems there is something in it after all." And he swam the harder, but the eddy carried him away. "I do not care about this eddy," said the missionary; and even as he said it, he was aware of a house raised on piles above the sea; it was built of yellow reeds, one reed joined with another, and the whole bound with black sinnet; a ladder led to the door, and all about the house hung calabashes. He had never seen such a house, nor yet such calabashes; and the eddy set for the ladder. "This is singular," said the missionary, "but there can be nothing in it." And he laid hold of the ladder and went up. It was a fine house; but there was no man there; and when the missionary looked back he saw no island, only the heaving of the sea. "It is strange about the island," said the missionary, "but who's afraid? my stories are the true ones." And he laid hold of a calabash, for he was one that loved curiosities. Now he had no sooner laid hand upon the calabash than that which he handled, and that which he saw and stood on, burst like a bubble and was gone; and night closed upon him, and the waters, and the meshes of the net; and he wallowed there like a fish.

"A body would think there was something in this," said the missionary. "But if these tales are true, I wonder what about my tales!"

Now the flaming of Akaanga's torch drew near in the night; and the misshapen hands groped in the meshes of the net; and they took the missionary between the finger and the thumb, and bore him dripping in the night and silence to the place of the ovens of Miru. And there was Miru, ruddy in the glow of the ovens; and there sat her four daughters, and made the kava of the dead; and there sat the comers out of the islands of the living, dripping and lamenting.

This was a dread place to reach for any of the sons of men. But of all who ever came there, the missionary was the most concerned; and, to make things worse, the person next him was a convert of his own.

"Aha," said the convert, "so you are here like your neighbors? And how about all your stories?"

"It seems," said the missionary, with bursting tears, "that there was nothing in them."

By this the kava of the dead was ready, and the daughters of Miru began to intone in the old manner of singing. "Gone are the green islands and the bright sea, the sun and the moon and the forty million stars, and life and love and hope. Henceforth is no more, only to sit in the night and silence, and see your friends devoured; for life is a deceit, and the bandage is taken from your eyes."

Now when the singing was done, one of the daughters came with the bowl. Desire of that kava rose in the missionary's bosom; he lusted for it like a swimmer for the land, or a bridegroom for his bride; and he reached out his hand, and took the bowl, and would have drunk. And then he remembered, and put it back.

"Drink!" sang the daughter of Miru.

"There is no kava like the kava of the dead, and to drink of it once is the reward of living."

"I thank you. It smells excellent," said the missionary. "But I am a blue-ribbon man myself; and though I am aware there is a difference of opinion even in our own confession, I have always held kava to be excluded."

"What!" cried the convert. "Are you going to respect a taboo at a time like this? And you were always so opposed to taboos when you were alive!"

"To other people's," said the missionary. "Never to my own."

"But yours have all proved wrong," said the convert.

"It looks like it," said the missionary, "and I can't help that. No reason why I should break my word."

"I never heard the like of this!" cried the daughter of Miru. "Pray, what do you expect to gain?"

"That is not the point," said the missionary. "I took this pledge for others, I am not going to break it for myself."

The daughter of Miru was puzzled; she came and told her mother, and Miru was vexed; and they went and told Akaanga. "I don't know what to do about this," said Akaanga; and he came and reasoned with the missionary.

"But there IS such a thing as right and wrong," said the missionary; "and your ovens cannot alter that."

"Give the kava to the rest," said Akaanga to the daughters of Miru. "I must get rid of this sea-lawyer instantly, or worse will come of it."

The next moment the missionary came up in the midst of the sea, and there before him were the palm trees of the island. He swam to the shore gladly, and landed. Much matter of thought was in that missionary's mind.

"I seem to have been misinformed upon some points," said he. "Perhaps there is not much in it, as I supposed; but there is something in it after all. Let me be glad of that."

And he rang the bell for service.

#### MORAL.

The sticks break, the stones crumble,  
The eternal altars tilt and tumble,  
Sanctions and tales dislimn like mist  
About the amazed evangelist.  
He stands unshook from age to youth  
Upon one pin-point of the truth.

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

## The Faith Cure Man

Paul Laurence Dunbar

**H**ope is tenacious. It goes on living and working when science has dealt it what should be its deathblow.

In the close room at the top of the old tenement house little Lucy lay wasting away with a relentless disease. The doctor had said at the beginning of the winter that she could not live. Now he said that he could do no more for her except to ease the few days that remained for the child.

But Martha Benson would not believe him. She was confident that doctors were not infallible. Anyhow, this one wasn't, for she saw life and health ahead for her little one.

Did not the preacher at the Mission Home say: "Ask, and ye shall receive?" and had she not asked and asked again the life of her child, her last and only one, at the hands of Him whom she worshipped?

No, Lucy was not going to die. What she needed was country air and a place to run about in. She had been housed up too much; these long Northern winters were too severe for her, and that was what made her so pinched and thin and weak. She must have air, and she should have it.

"Po' little lammie," she said to the child, "Mammy's little gal boun' to git well. Mammy gwine sen' huh out in de country when the spring comes, whaih she kin roll in de grass an' pick flowers an' git good an' strong. Don' baby want to go to de country? Don' baby want to see de sun shine?" And the child had looked up at her with wide, bright eyes, tossed her thin arms and moaned for reply.

"Nemmine, we gwine fool dat doctah. Some day we'll th'ow all his nassy medicine "way, an' he come in an' say: "Whaih's all my medicine?" Den we answeh up sma't like: "We done th'owed it out. We don' need no nassy medicine.' Den he look "roun' an' say: "Who dat I see runnin' roun' de flo' hyeah, a-lookin' so fat?" an' you up an'

say: "Hit's me, dat's who 'tis, mistah doctor man!" Den he go out an' slam de do' behin' him. Ain' dat fine?"

But the child had closed her eyes, too weak even to listen. So her mother kissed her little thin forehead and tiptoed out, sending in a child from across the hall to take care of Lucy while she was at work, for sick as the little one was she could not stay at home and nurse her.

Hope grasps at a straw, and it was quite in keeping with the condition of Martha's mind that she should open her ears and her heart when they told her of the wonderful works of the faith-cure man. People had gone to him on crutches, and he had touched or rubbed them and they had come away whole. He had gone to the homes of the bed-ridden, and they had risen up to bless him. It was so easy for her to believe it all. The only religion she had ever known, the wild, emotional religion of most of her race, put her credulity to stronger tests than that. Her only question was, would such a man come to her humble room. But she put away even this thought. He must come. She would make him. Already she saw Lucy strong, and running about like a mouse, the joy of her heart and the light of her eyes.

As soon as she could get time she went humbly to see the faith doctor, and laid her case before him, hoping, fearing, trembling.

Yes, he would come. Her heart leaped for joy.

"There is no place," said the faith curist, "too humble for the messenger of heaven to enter. I am following One who went among the humblest and the lowliest, and was not ashamed to be found among publicans and sinners. I will come to your child, madam, and put her again under the law. The law of life is health, and no one who will accept the law need be sick. I am not a physician. I do not claim to be. I only claim to teach people how not to be sick. My fee is five dollars, merely to defray my expenses, that's all. You know the servant is worthy of his hire. And in this little bottle here I have an elixir which has never been known to fail in any of the things claimed for it. Since the world has got used to taking medicine we must make some concessions to its prejudices. But this in reality is not a medicine at all. It is only a symbol. It is really liquefied prayer and faith."

Martha did not understand anything of what he was saying. She did not try to; she did not want to. She only felt a blind trust in him that filled her heart with unspeakable gladness.

Tremulous with excitement, she doled out her poor dollars to him, seized the precious elixir and hurried away home to Lucy, to whom she was carrying life and strength. The little one made a weak

attempt to smile at her mother, but the light flickered away and died into greyness on her face.

"Now mammy's little gal gwine to git well fu' sho'. Mammy done bring huh somep'n' good." Awed and reverent, she tasted the wonderful elixir before giving it to the child. It tasted very like sweetened water to her, but she knew that it was not, and had no doubt of its virtues.

Lucy swallowed it as she swallowed everything her mother brought to her. Poor little one! She had nothing to buoy her up or to fight science with.

In the course of an hour her mother gave her the medicine again, and persuaded herself that there was a perceptible brightening in her daughter's face.

Mrs. Mason, Caroline's mother, called across the hall: "How Lucy dis evenin', Mis' Benson?"

"Oh, I think Lucy air right peart," Martha replied. "Come over an' look at huh."

Mrs. Mason came, and the mother told her about the new faith doctor and his wonderful powers.

"Why, Mis' Mason," she said, "'pears like I could see de change in de child de minute she swallowed dat medicine."

Her neighbor listened in silence, but when she went back to her own room it was to shake her head and murmur: "Po' Marfy, she jes' ez blind ez a bat. She jes' go 'long, holdin' on to dat chile wid all huh might, an' I see death in Lucy's face now. Dey ain't no faif nur prayer, nur Jack-leg doctors nuther gwine to save huh."

But Martha needed no pity then. She was happy in her self-delusion.

On the morrow the faith doctor came to see Lucy. She had not seemed so well that morning, even to her mother, who remained at home until the doctor arrived. He carried a conquering air, and a baggy umbrella, the latter of which he laid across the foot of the bed as he bent over the moaning child.

"Give me some brown paper," he commanded.

Martha hastened to obey, and the priestly practitioner dampened it in water and laid it on Lucy's head, all the time murmuring prayers — or were they incantations? — to himself. Then he placed pieces of the paper on the soles of the child's feet and on the palms of her hands, and bound them there.

When all this was done he knelt down and prayed aloud, ending with a peculiar version of the Lord's prayer, supposed to have mystic effect. Martha was greatly impressed, but through it all Lucy lay and moaned.

The faith curist rose to go. "Well, we can look to have her out in a few days. Remember, my good woman, much depends upon you. You must try to keep your mind in a state of belief. Are you saved?"

"Oh, yes, suh. I'm a puffessor," said Martha, and having completed his mission, the man of prayers went out, and Caroline again took Martha's place at Lucy's side.

In the next two days Martha saw, or thought she saw, a steady improvement in Lucy. According to instructions, the brown paper was moved every day, moistened, and put back.

Martha had so far spurred her faith that when she went out on Saturday morning she promised to bring Lucy something good for her Christmas dinner, and a pair of shoes against the time of her going out, and also a little doll. She brought them home that night. Caroline had grown tired and, lighting the lamp, had gone home.

"I done brung my little lady bird huh somep'n nice," said Martha, "here's a lil' doll and de lil' shoes, honey. How's de baby feel?" Lucy did not answer.

"You sleep?" Martha went over to the bed. The little face was pinched and ashen. The hands were cold.

"Lucy! Lucy!" called the mother. "Lucy! Oh, Gawd! It ain't true! She ain't daid! My little one, my las' one!"

She rushed for the elixir and brought it to the bed. The thin dead face stared back at her, unresponsive.

She sank down beside the bed, moaning.

"Daid, daid, oh, my Gawd, gi' me back my chile! Oh, don't I believe you enough? Oh, Lucy, Lucy, my little lamb! I got you yo' gif'. Oh, Lucy!"

The next day was set apart for the funeral. The Mission preacher read: "The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, blessed be the name of the Lord," and some one said "Amen!" But Martha could not echo it in her heart. Lucy was her last, her one treasured lamb.



## Was it Heaven? Or Hell?

Mark Twain

### CHAPTER I

"You told a LIE?"

"You confess it — you actually confess it — you told a lie!"

### CHAPTER II

**T**he family consisted of four persons: Margaret Lester, widow, aged thirty six; Helen Lester, her daughter, aged sixteen; Mrs. Lester's maiden aunts, Hannah and Hester Gray, twins, aged sixty-seven. Waking and sleeping, the three women spent their days and night in adoring the young girl; in watching the movements of her sweet spirit in the mirror of her face; in refreshing their souls with the vision of her bloom and beauty; in listening to the music of her voice; in gratefully recognizing how rich and fair for them was the world with this presence in it; in shuddering to think how desolate it would be with this light gone out of it.

By nature — and inside — the aged aunts were utterly dear and lovable and good, but in the matter of morals and conduct their training had been so uncompromisingly strict that it had made them exteriorly austere, not to say stern. Their influence was effective in the house; so effective that the mother and the daughter conformed to its moral and religious requirements cheerfully, contentedly, happily, unquestionably. To do this was become second nature to them. And so in this peaceful heaven there were no clashings, no irritations, no fault-finding, no heart-burnings.

In it a lie had no place. In it a lie was unthinkable. In it speech was restricted to absolute truth, iron-bound truth, implacable and uncompromising truth, let the resulting consequences be what they might. At last, one day, under stress of circumstances, the darling of the house sullied her lips with a lie — and confessed it, with tears

and self-upbraidings. There are not any words that can paint the consternation of the aunts. It was as if the sky had crumpled up and collapsed and the earth had tumbled to ruin with a crash. They sat side by side, white and stern, gazing speechless upon the culprit, who was on her knees before them with her face buried first in one lap and then the other, moaning and sobbing, and appealing for sympathy and forgiveness and getting no response, humbly kissing the hand of the one, then of the other, only to see it withdrawn as suffering defilement by those soiled lips.

Twice, at intervals, Aunt Hester said, in frozen amazement: "You told a LIE?"

Twice, at intervals, Aunt Hannah followed with the muttered and amazed ejaculation:

"You confess it — you actually confess it — you told a lie!"

It was all they could say. The situation was new, unheard of, incredible; they could not understand it, they did not know how to take hold of it, it approximately paralyzed speech.

At length it was decided that the erring child must be taken to her mother, who was ill, and who ought to know what had happened. Helen begged, besought, implored that she might be spared this further disgrace, and that her mother might be spared the grief and pain of it; but this could not be: duty required this sacrifice, duty takes precedence of all things, nothing can absolve one from a duty, with a duty no compromise is possible.

Helen still begged, and said the sin was her own, her mother had had no hand in it — why must she be made to suffer for it?

But the aunts were obdurate in their righteousness, and said the law that visited the sins of the parent upon the child was by all right and reason reversible; and therefore it was but just that the innocent mother of a sinning child should suffer her rightful share of the grief and pain and shame which were the allotted wages of the sin.

The three moved toward the sick-room.

At this time the doctor was approaching the house. He was still a good distance away, however. He was a good doctor and a good man, and he had a good heart, but one had to know him a year to get over hating him, two years to learn to endure him, three to learn to like him, and four and five to learn to love him. It was a slow and trying education, but it paid. He was of great stature; he had a leonine head, a leonine face, a rough voice, and an eye which was sometimes a pirate's and sometimes a woman's, according to the mood. He knew nothing about etiquette, and cared nothing about it; in speech, manner, carriage, and conduct he was the reverse of conventional. He was frank, to the limit; he had opinions on all

subjects; they were always on tap and ready for delivery, and he cared not a farthing whether his listener liked them or didn't. Whom he loved he loved, and manifested it; whom he didn't love he hated, and published it from the housetops. In his young days he had been a sailor, and the salt-airs of all the seas blew from him yet. He was a sturdy and loyal Christian, and believed he was the best one in the land, and the only one whose Christianity was perfectly sound, healthy, full-charged with common sense, and had no decayed places in it. People who had an axe to grind, or people who for any reason wanted to get on the soft side of him, called him *The Christian* — a phrase whose delicate flattery was music to his ears, and whose capital T was such an enchanting and vivid object to him that he could SEE it when it fell out of a person's mouth even in the dark. Many who were fond of him stood on their consciences with both feet and brazenly called him by that large title habitually, because it was a pleasure to them to do anything that would please him; and with eager and cordial malice his extensive and diligently cultivated crop of enemies gilded it, beflowered it, expanded it to "*The ONLY Christian.*" Of these two titles, the latter had the wider currency; the enemy, being greatly in the majority, attended to that. Whatever the doctor believed, he believed with all his heart, and would fight for it whenever he got the chance; and if the intervals between chances grew to be irksomely wide, he would invent ways of shortening them himself. He was severely conscientious, according to his rather independent lights, and whatever he took to be a duty he performed, no matter whether the judgment of the professional moralists agreed with his own or not. At sea, in his young days, he had used profanity freely, but as soon as he was converted he made a rule, which he rigidly stuck to ever afterward, never to use it except on the rarest occasions, and then only when duty commanded. He had been a hard drinker at sea, but after his conversion he became a firm and outspoken teetotaler, in order to be an example to the young, and from that time forth he seldom drank; never, indeed, except when it seemed to him to be a duty — a condition which sometimes occurred a couple of times a year, but never as many as five times.

Necessarily, such a man is impressionable, impulsive, emotional. This one was, and had no gift at hiding his feelings; or if he had it he took no trouble to exercise it. He carried his soul's prevailing weather in his face, and when he entered a room the parasols or the umbrellas went up — figuratively speaking — according to the indications. When the soft light was in his eye it meant approval, and delivered a benediction; when he came with a frown he lowered the temperature ten degrees. He was a well-beloved man in the house of

his friends, but sometimes a dreaded one.

He had a deep affection for the Lester household and its several members returned this feeling with interest. They mourned over his kind of Christianity, and he frankly scoffed at theirs; but both parties went on loving each other just the same.

He was approaching the house — out of the distance; the aunts and the culprit were moving toward the sick-chamber.

### CHAPTER III

**T**he three last named stood by the bed; the aunts austere, the transgressor softly sobbing. The mother turned her head on the pillow; her tired eyes flamed up instantly with sympathy and passionate mother-love when they fell upon her child, and she opened the refuge and shelter of her arms.

"Wait!" said Aunt Hannah, and put out her hand and stayed the girl from leaping into them.

"Helen," said the other aunt, impressively, "tell your mother all. Purge your soul; leave nothing unconfessed."

Standing stricken and forlorn before her judges, the young girl mourned her sorrowful tale through the end, then in a passion of appeal cried out:

"Oh, mother, can't you forgive me? won't you forgive me? — I am so desolate!"

"Forgive you, my darling? Oh, come to my arms! — there, lay your head upon my breast, and be at peace. If you had told a thousand lies — "

There was a sound — a warning — the clearing of a throat. The aunts glanced up, and withered in their clothes — there stood the doctor, his face a thunder-cloud. Mother and child knew nothing of his presence; they lay locked together, heart to heart, steeped in immeasurable content, dead to all things else. The physician stood many moments glaring and glooming upon the scene before him; studying it, analyzing it, searching out its genesis; then he put up his hand and beckoned to the aunts. They came trembling to him, and stood humbly before him and waited. He bent down and whispered:

"Didn't I tell you this patient must be protected from all excitement? What the hell have you been doing? Clear out of the place?"

They obeyed. Half an hour later he appeared in the parlor, serene, cheery, clothed in sunshine, conducting Helen, with his arm about her waist, petting her, and saying gentle and playful things to her; and she also was her sunny and happy self again.

"Now, then," he said, "good-by, dear. Go to your room, and keep away from your mother, and behave yourself. But wait — put out your tongue. There, that will do — you're as sound as a nut!" He patted her cheek and added, "Run along now; I want to talk to these aunts."

She went from the presence. His face clouded over again at once; and as he sat down he said:

"You too have been doing a lot of damage — and maybe some good. Some good, yes — such as it is. That woman's disease is typhoid! You've brought it to a show-up, I think, with your insanities, and that's a service — such as it is. I hadn't been able to determine what it was before."

With one impulse the old ladies sprang to their feet, quaking with terror.

"Sit down! What are you proposing to do?"

"Do? We must fly to her. We — "

"You'll do nothing of the kind; you've done enough harm for one day. Do you want to squander all your capital of crimes and follies on a single deal? Sit down, I tell you. I have arranged for her to sleep; she needs it; if you disturb her without my orders, I'll brain you — if you've got the materials for it.

They sat down, distressed and indignant, but obedient, under compulsion. He proceeded:

"Now, then, I want this case explained. THEY wanted to explain it to me — as if there hadn't been emotion or excitement enough already. You knew my orders; how did you dare to go in there and get up that riot?"

Hester looked appealing at Hannah; Hannah returned a beseeching look at Hester — neither wanted to dance to this unsympathetic orchestra. The doctor came to their help. He said:

"Begin, Hester."

Fingering at the fringes of her shawl, and with lowered eyes, Hester said, timidly:

"We should not have disobeyed for any ordinary cause, but this was vital. This was a duty. With a duty one has no choice; one must put all lighter considerations aside and perform it. We were obliged to arraign her before her mother. She had told a lie."

The doctor glowered upon the woman a moment, and seemed to be trying to work up in his mind an understand of a wholly incomprehensible proposition; then he stormed out:

"She told a lie! DID she? God bless my soul! I tell a million a day! And so does every doctor. And so does everybody — including you — for that matter. And THAT was the important thing that

authorized you to venture to disobey my orders and imperil that woman's life! Look here, Hester Gray, this is pure lunacy; that girl COULDN'T tell a lie that was intended to injure a person. The thing is impossible — absolutely impossible. You know it yourselves — both of you; you know it perfectly well."

Hannah came to her sister's rescue:

"Hester didn't mean that it was that kind of a lie, and it wasn't. But it was a lie."

"Well, upon my word, I never heard such nonsense! Haven't you got sense enough to discriminate between lies! Don't you know the difference between a lie that helps and a lie that hurts?"

"ALL lies are sinful," said Hannah, setting her lips together like a vise; "all lies are forbidden."

The Only Christian fidgeted impatiently in his chair. He went to attack this proposition, but he did not quite know how or where to begin. Finally he made a venture:

"Hester, wouldn't you tell a lie to shield a person from an undeserved injury or shame?"

"No."

"Not even a friend?"

"No."

"Not even your dearest friend?"

"No. I would not."

The doctor struggled in silence awhile with this situation; then he asked:

"Not even to save him from bitter pain and misery and grief?"

"No. Not even to save his life."

Another pause. Then:

"Nor his soul?"

There was a hush — a silence which endured a measurable interval — then Hester answered, in a low voice, but with decision:

"Nor his soul?"

No one spoke for a while; then the doctor said:

"Is it with you the same, Hannah?"

"Yes," she answered.

"I ask you both — why?"

"Because to tell such a lie, or any lie, is a sin, and could cost us the loss of our own souls — WOULD, indeed, if we died without time to repent."

"Strange . . . strange . . . it is past belief." Then he asked, roughly: "Is such a soul as that WORTH saving?" He rose up, mumbling and grumbling, and started for the door, stumping vigorously along. At the threshold he turned and rasped out an admonition: "Reform!

Drop this mean and sordid and selfish devotion to the saving of your shabby little souls, and hunt up something to do that's got some dignity to it! RISK your souls! risk them in good causes; then if you lose them, why should you care? Reform!"

The good old gentlewomen sat paralyzed, pulverized, outraged, insulted, and brooded in bitterness and indignation over these blasphemies. They were hurt to the heart, poor old ladies, and said they could never forgive these injuries.

"Reform!"

They kept repeating that word resentfully. "Reform — and learn to tell lies!"

Time slipped along, and in due course a change came over their spirits. They had completed the human being's first duty — which is to think about himself until he has exhausted the subject, then he is in a condition to take up minor interests and think of other people. This changes the complexion of his spirits — generally wholesomely. The minds of the two old ladies reverted to their beloved niece and the fearful disease which had smitten her; instantly they forgot the hurts their self-love had received, and a passionate desire rose in their hearts to go to the help of the sufferer and comfort her with their love, and minister to her, and labor for her the best they could with their weak hands, and joyfully and affectionately wear out their poor old bodies in her dear service if only they might have the privilege.

"And we shall have it!" said Hester, with the tears running down her face. "There are no nurses comparable to us, for there are no others that will stand their watch by that bed till they drop and die, and God knows we would do that."

"Amen," said Hannah, smiling approval and endorsement through the mist of moisture that blurred her glasses. "The doctor knows us, and knows we will not disobey again; and he will call no others. He will not dare!"

"Dare?" said Hester, with temper, and dashing the water from her eyes; "he will dare anything — that Christian devil! But it will do no good for him to try it this time — but, laws! Hannah! after all's said and done, he is gifted and wise and good, and he would not think of such a thing. . . . It is surely time for one of us to go to that room. What is keeping him? Why doesn't he come and say so?"

They caught the sound of his approaching step. He entered, sat down, and began to talk.

Margaret is a sick woman," he said. "She is still sleeping, but she will wake presently; then one of you must go to her. She will be worse before she is better. Pretty soon a night-and-day watch must be set. How much of it can you two undertake?"



"All of it!" burst from both ladies at once.

The doctor's eyes flashed, and he said, with energy:

"You DO ring true, you brave old relics! And you SHALL do all of the nursing you can, for there's none to match you in that divine office in this town; but you can't do all of it, and it would be a crime to let you." It was grand praise, golden praise, coming from such a source, and it took nearly all the resentment out of the aged twin's hearts.

"Your Tilly and my old Nancy shall do the rest — good nurses both, white souls with black skins, watchful, loving, tender — just perfect nurses! — and competent liars from the cradle. . . . Look you! keep a little watch on Helen; she is sick, and is going to be sicker."

The ladies looked a little surprised, and not credulous; and Hester said:

"How is that? It isn't an hour since you said she was as sound as a nut."

The doctor answered, tranquilly:

"It was a lie."

The ladies turned upon him indignantly, and Hannah said:

"How can you make an odious confession like that, in so indifferent a tone, when you know how we feel about all forms of — "

"Hush! You are as ignorant as cats, both of you, and you don't know what you are talking about. You are like all the rest of the moral moles; you lie from morning till night, but because you don't do it with your mouths, but only with your lying eyes, your lying inflections, your deceptively misplaced emphasis, and your misleading gestures, you turn up your complacent noses and parade before God and the world as saintly and unsmirched Truth-Speakers, in whose cold-storage souls a lie would freeze to death if it got there! Why will you humbug yourselves with that foolish notion that no lie is a lie except a spoken one? What is the difference between lying with your eyes and lying with your mouth? There is none; and if you would reflect a moment you would see that it is so. There isn't a human being that doesn't tell a gross of lies every day of his life; and you — why, between you, you tell thirty thousand; yet you flare up here in a lurid hypocritical horror because I tell that child a benevolent and sinless lie to protect her from her imagination, which would get to work and warm up her blood to a fever in an hour, if I were disloyal enough to my duty to let it. Which I should probably do if I were interested in saving my soul by such disreputable means.

"Come, let us reason together. Let us examine details. When you two were in the sick-room raising that riot, what would you have



done if you had known I was coming?"

"Well, what?"

"You would have slipped out and carried Helen with you — wouldn't you?"

The ladies were silent.

"What would be your object and intention?"

"Well, what?"

"To keep me from finding out your guilt; to beguile me to infer that Margaret's excitement proceeded from some cause not known to you. In a word, to tell me a lie — a silent lie. Moreover, a possibly harmful one."

The twins colored, but did not speak.

"You not only tell myriads of silent lies, but you tell lies with your mouths — you two."

"THAT is not so!"

"It is so. But only harmless ones. You never dream of uttering a harmful one. Do you know that that is a concession — and a confession?"

"How do you mean?"

"It is an unconscious concession that harmless lies are not criminal; it is a confession that you constantly MAKE that discrimination. For instance, you declined old Mrs. Foster's invitation last week to meet those odious Higbys at supper — in a polite note in which you expressed regret and said you were very sorry you could not go. It was a lie. It was as unmitigated a lie as was ever uttered. Deny it, Hester — with another lie."

Hester replied with a toss of her head.

"That will not do. Answer. Was it a lie, or wasn't it?"

The color stole into the cheeks of both women, and with a struggle and an effort they got out their confession:

"It was a lie."

"Good — the reform is beginning; there is hope for you yet; you will not tell a lie to save your dearest friend's soul, but you will spew out one without a scruple to save yourself the discomfort of telling an unpleasant truth."

He rose. Hester, speaking for both, said; coldly:

"We have lied; we perceive it; it will occur no more. To lie is a sin. We shall never tell another one of any kind whatsoever, even lies of courtesy or benevolence, to save any one a pang or a sorrow decreed for him by God."

"Ah, how soon you will fall! In fact, you have fallen already; for what you have just uttered is a lie. Good-by. Reform! One of you go to the sick-room now."

## CHAPTER IV

**T**welve days later.

Mother and child were lingering in the grip of the hideous disease. Of hope for either there was little. The aged sisters looked white and worn, but they would not give up their posts. Their hearts were breaking, poor old things, but their grit was steadfast and indestructible. All the twelve days the mother had pined for the child, and the child for the mother, but both knew that the prayer of these longings could not be granted. When the mother was told — on the first day — that her disease was typhoid, she was frightened, and asked if there was danger that Helen could have contracted it the day before, when she was in the sick-chamber on that confession visit. Hester told her the doctor had poo-pooed the idea. It troubled Hester to say it, although it was true, for she had not believed the doctor; but when she saw the mother's joy in the news, the pain in her conscience lost something of its force — a result which made her ashamed of the constructive deception which she had practiced, though not ashamed enough to make her distinctly and definitely wish she had refrained from it. From that moment the sick woman understood that her daughter must remain away, and she said she would reconcile herself to the separation the best she could, for she would rather suffer death than have her child's health imperiled. That afternoon Helen had to take to her bed, ill. She grew worse during the night. In the morning her mother asked after her:

"Is she well?"

Hester turned cold; she opened her lips, but the words refused to come. The mother lay languidly looking, musing, waiting; suddenly she turned white and gasped out:

"Oh, my God! what is it? is she sick?"

Then the poor aunt's tortured heart rose in rebellion, and words came:

"No — be comforted; she is well."

The sick woman put all her happy heart in her gratitude:

"Thank God for those dear words! Kiss me. How I worship you for saying them!"

Hester told this incident to Hannah, who received it with a rebuking look, and said, coldly:

"Sister, it was a lie."

Hester's lips trembled piteously; she choked down a sob, and said:

"Oh, Hannah, it was a sin, but I could not help it. I could not endure the fright and the misery that were in her face."

"No matter. It was a lie. God will hold you to account for it."

"Oh, I know it, I know it," cried Hester, wringing her hands, "but even if it were now, I could not help it. I know I should do it again."

"Then take my place with Helen in the morning. I will make the report myself."

Hester clung to her sister, begging and imploring.

"Don't, Hannah, oh, don't — you will kill her."

"I will at least speak the truth."

In the morning she had a cruel report to bear to the mother, and she braced herself for the trial. When she returned from her mission, Hester was waiting, pale and trembling, in the hall. She whispered:

"Oh, how did she take it — that poor, desolate mother?"

Hannah's eyes were swimming in tears. She said:

"God forgive me, I told her the child was well!"

Hester gathered her to her heart, with a grateful "God bless you, Hannah!" and poured out her thankfulness in an inundation of worshiping praises.

After that, the two knew the limit of their strength, and accepted their fate. They surrendered humbly, and abandoned themselves to the hard requirements of the situation. Daily they told the morning lie, and confessed their sin in prayer; not asking forgiveness, as not being worthy of it, but only wishing to make record that they realized their wickedness and were not desiring to hide it or excuse it.

Daily, as the fair young idol of the house sank lower and lower, the sorrowful old aunts painted her glowing bloom and her fresh young beauty to the wan mother, and winced under the stabs her ecstasies of joy and gratitude gave them.

In the first days, while the child had strength to hold a pencil, she wrote fond little love-notes to her mother, in which she concealed her illness; and these the mother read and reread through happy eyes wet with thankful tears, and kissed them over and over again, and treasured them as precious things under her pillow.

Then came a day when the strength was gone from the hand, and the mind wandered, and the tongue babbled pathetic incoherences. This was a sore dilemma for the poor aunts. There were no love-notes for the mother. They did not know what to do. Hester began a carefully studied and plausible explanation, but lost the track of it and grew confused; suspicion began to show in the mother's face, then alarm. Hester saw it, recognized the imminence of the danger, and descended to the emergency, pulling herself resolutely together and plucking victor from the open jaws of defeat. In a placid and convincing voice she said:

"I thought it might distress you to know it, but Helen spent the night at the Sloanes'. There was a little party there, and, although

she did not want to go, and you so sick, we persuaded her, she being young and needing the innocent pastimes of youth, and we believing you would approve. Be sure she will write the moment she comes."

"How good you are, and how dear and thoughtful for us both! Approve? Why, I thank you with all my heart. My poor little exile! Tell her I want her to have every pleasure she can — I would not rob her of one. Only let her keep her health, that is all I ask. Don't let that suffer; I could not bear it. How thankful I am that she escaped this infection — and what a narrow risk she ran, Aunt Hester! Think of that lovely face all dulled and burned with fever. I can't bear the thought of it. Keep her health. Keep her bloom! I can see her now, the dainty creature — with the big, blue, earnest eyes; and sweet, oh, so sweet and gentle and winning! Is she as beautiful as ever, dear Aunt Hester?"

"Oh, more beautiful and bright and charming than ever she was before, if such a thing can be" — and Hester turned away and fumbled with the medicine-bottles, to hide her shame and grief.

## CHAPTER V

**A**fter a little, both aunts were laboring upon a difficult and baffling work in Helen's chamber. Patiently and earnestly, with their stiff old fingers, they were trying to forge the required note. They made failure after failure, but they improved little by little all the time. The pity of it all, the pathetic humor of it, there was none to see; they themselves were unconscious of it. Often their tears fell upon the notes and spoiled them; sometimes a single misformed word made a note risky which could have been ventured but for that; but at last Hannah produced one whose script was a good enough imitation of Helen's to pass any but a suspicious eye, and bountifully enriched it with the petting phrases and loving nicknames that had been familiar on the child's lips from her nursery days. She carried it to the mother, who took it with avidity, and kissed it, and fondled it, reading its precious words over and over again, and dwelling with deep contentment upon its closing paragraph:

"Mousie darling, if I could only see you, and kiss your eyes, and feel your arms about me! I am so glad my practicing does not disturb you. Get well soon. Everybody is good to me, but I am so lonesome without you, dear mamma."

"The poor child, I know just how she feels. She cannot be quite happy without me; and I — oh, I live in the light of her eyes! Tell her she must practice all she pleases; and, Aunt Hannah — tell her I can't hear the piano this far, nor hear dear voice when she sings: God

knows I wish I could. No one knows how sweet that voice is to me; and to think — some day it will be silent! What are you crying for?

"Only because — because — it was just a memory. When I came away she was singing, 'Loch Lomond.' The pathos of it! It always moves me so when she sings that."

"And me, too. How heartbreakingly beautiful it is when some youthful sorrow is brooding in her breast and she sings it for the mystic healing it brings. . . . Aunt Hannah?"

"Dear Margaret?"

"I am very ill. Sometimes it comes over me that I shall never hear that dear voice again."

"Oh, don't — don't, Margaret! I can't bear it!"

Margaret was moved and distressed, and said, gently:

"There — there — let me put my arms around you. Don't cry. There — put your cheek to mine. Be comforted. I wish to live. I will live if I can. Ah, what could she do without me! . . . Does she often speak of me? — but I know she does."

"Oh, all the time — all the time!"

"My sweet child! She wrote the note the moment she came home?"

"Yes — the first moment. She would not wait to take off her things."

"I knew it. It is her dear, impulsive, affectionate way. I knew it without asking, but I wanted to hear you say it. The petted wife knows she is loved, but she makes her husband tell her so every day, just for the joy of hearing it. . . . She used the pen this time. That is better; the pencil-marks could rub out, and I should grieve for that. Did you suggest that she use the pen?"

"Y — no — she — it was her own idea."

The mother looked her pleasure, and said:

"I was hoping you would say that. There was never such a dear and thoughtful child! . . . Aunt Hannah?"

"Dear Margaret?"

"Go and tell her I think of her all the time, and worship her. Why — you are crying again. Don't be so worried about me, dear; I think there is nothing to fear, yet."

The grieving messenger carried her message, and piously delivered it to unheeding ears. The girl babbled on unaware; looking up at her with wondering and startled eyes flaming with fever, eyes in which was no light of recognition:

"Are you — no, you are not my mother. I want her — oh, I want her! She was here a minute ago — I did not see her go. Will she come? will she come quickly? will she come now? . . . There are so

many houses . . . and they oppress me so . . . and everything whirls and turns and whirls . . . oh, my head, my head!" — and so she wandered on and on, in her pain, flitting from one torturing fancy to another, and tossing her arms about in a weary and ceaseless persecution of unrest.

Poor old Hannah wetted the parched lips and softly stroked the hot brow, murmuring endearing and pitying words, and thanking the Father of all that the mother was happy and did not know.

## CHAPTER VI

Daily the child sank lower and steadily lower towards the grave, and daily the sorrowing old watchers carried gilded tidings of her radiant health and loveliness to the happy mother, whose pilgrimage was also now nearing its end. And daily they forged loving and cheery notes in the child's hand, and stood by with remorseful consciences and bleeding hearts, and wept to see the grateful mother devour them and adore them and treasure them away as things beyond price, because of their sweet source, and sacred because her child's hand had touched them.

At last came that kindly friend who brings healing and peace to all. The lights were burning low. In the solemn hush which precedes the dawn vague figures flitted soundless along the dim hall and gathered silent and awed in Helen's chamber, and grouped themselves about her bed, for a warning had gone forth, and they knew. The dying girl lay with closed lids, and unconscious, the drapery upon her breast faintly rising and falling as her wasting life ebbed away. At intervals a sigh or a muffled sob broke upon the stillness. The same haunting thought was in all minds there: the pity of this death, the going out into the great darkness, and the mother not here to help and hearten and bless.

Helen stirred; her hands began to grope wistfully about as if they sought something — she had been blind some hours. The end was come; all knew it. With a great sob Hester gathered her to her breast, crying, "Oh, my child, my darling!" A rapturous light broke in the dying girl's face, for it was mercifully vouchsafed her to mistake those sheltering arms for another's; and she went to her rest murmuring, "Oh, mamma, I am so happy — I longed for you — now I can die."

Two hours later Hester made her report. The mother asked:

"How is it with the child?"

"She is well."

## CHAPTER VII

A sheaf of white crape and black was hung upon the door of the house, and there it swayed and rustled in the wind and whispered its tidings. At noon the preparation of the dead was finished, and in the coffin lay the fair young form, beautiful, and in the sweet face a great peace. Two mourners sat by it, grieving and worshipping — Hannah and the black woman Tilly. Hester came, and she was trembling, for a great trouble was upon her spirit. She said:

“She asks for a note.”

Hannah’s face blanched. She had not thought of this; it had seemed that that pathetic service was ended. But she realized now that that could not be. For a little while the two women stood looking into each other’s face, with vacant eyes; then Hannah said:

“There is no way out of it — she must have it; she will suspect, else.”

“And she would find out.”

“Yes. It would break her heart.” She looked at the dead face, and her eyes filled. “I will write it,” she said.

Hester carried it. The closing line said:

“Darling Mousie, dear sweet mother, we shall soon be together again. Is not that good news? And it is true; they all say it is true.”

The mother mourned, saying:

“Poor child, how will she bear it when she knows? I shall never see her again in life. It is hard, so hard. She does not suspect? You guard her from that?”

“She thinks you will soon be well.”

“How good you are, and careful, dear Aunt Hester! None goes near her who could carry the infection?”

“It would be a crime.”

“But you SEE her?”

“With a distance between — yes.”

“That is so good. Others one could not trust; but you two guardian angels — steel is not so true as you. Others would be unfaithful; and many would deceive, and lie.”

Hester’s eyes fell, and her poor old lips trembled.

“Let me kiss you for her, Aunt Hester; and when I am gone, and the danger is past, place the kiss upon her dear lips some day, and say her mother sent it, and all her mother’s broken heart is in it.”

Within the hour, Hester, raining tears upon the dead face, performed her pathetic mission.



## CHAPTER VIII

**A**nother day dawned, and grew, and spread its sunshine in the earth. Aunt Hannah brought comforting news to the failing mother, and a happy note, which said again, "We have but a little time to wait, darling mother, then we shall be together."

The deep note of a bell came moaning down the wind.

"Aunt Hannah, it is tolling. Some poor soul is at rest. As I shall be soon. You will not let her forget me?"

"Oh, God knows she never will!"

"Do not you hear strange noises, Aunt Hannah? It sounds like the shuffling of many feet."

"We hoped you would not hear it, dear. It is a little company gathering, for — for Helen's sake, poor little prisoner. There will be music — and she loves it so. We thought you would not mind."

"Mind? Oh no, no — oh, give her everything her dear heart can desire. How good you two are to her, and how good to me! God bless you both always!"

After a listening pause:

"How lovely! It is her organ. Is she playing it herself, do you think?" Faint and rich and inspiring the chords floating to her ears on the still air. "Yes, it is her touch, dear heart, I recognize it. They are singing. Why — it is a hymn! and the sacreddest of all, the most touching, the most consoling. . . . It seems to open the gates of paradise to me. . . . If I could die now. . . ."

Faint and far the words rose out of the stillness:

*Nearer, my God, to Thee,*

*Nearer to Thee,*

*E'en though it be a cross*

*That raiseth me.*

With the closing of the hymn another soul passed to its rest, and they that had been one in life were not sundered in death. The sisters, mourning and rejoicing, said:

"How blessed it was that she never knew!"

## CHAPTER IX

**A**t midnight they sat together, grieving, and the angel of the Lord appeared in the midst transfigured with a radiance not of earth; and speaking, said:

"For liars a place is appointed. There they burn in the fires of hell from everlasting unto everlasting. Repent!"

The bereaved fell upon their knees before him and clasped their



hands and bowed their gray heads, adoring. But their tongues clove to the roof of their mouths, and they were dumb.

"Speak! that I may bear the message to the chancery of heaven and bring again the decree from which there is no appeal."

Then they bowed their heads yet lower, and one said:

"Our sin is great, and we suffer shame; but only perfect and final repentance can make us whole; and we are poor creatures who have learned our human weakness, and we know that if we were in those hard straits again our hearts would fail again, and we should sin as before. The strong could prevail, and so be saved, but we are lost."

They lifted their heads in supplication. The angel was gone. While they marveled and wept he came again; and bending low, he whispered the decree.

## CHAPTER X

Was it Heaven? Or Hell?

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH

## The Purloined Letter

Edgar Allen Poe

*Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio. — Seneca*

At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18 — , I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend, C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book-closet, *au troisième*, No. 33 Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence; while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G — — , the Prefect of the Parisian police.

We gave him a hearty welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G.'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forbore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

"That is another one of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had the fashion of calling everything "odd" that was beyond his

comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visitor with a pipe, and rolled toward him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way I hope?"

"Oh, no; nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is very simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it because it is so excessively odd."

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair is so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you do talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little too self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha! — ha! ha! ha! — ho! ho! ho!" roared our visitor, profoundly amused, "oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!"

"And what, after all, is the matter on hand?" I asked.

"Why, I will tell you," replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady, and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. "I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold, were it known that I confided it to any one."

"Proceed," said I.

"Or not," said Dupin.

"Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; that beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession."

"How is this known?" asked Dupin.

"It is clearly inferred," replied the Prefect, "from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing out of the robber's possession — that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it."

"Be a little more explicit," I said.

"Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where such power is immensely valuable." The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

"Still I do not quite understand," said Dupin.

"No? Well; the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized."

"But this ascendancy," I interposed, "would depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare — "

"The thief," said G., "is the Minister D — — , who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document in question — a letter, to be frank — had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal boudoir. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavor to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D — — . His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognizes the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses, for some fifteen minutes, upon the public affairs. At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he has no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third person who stood at her elbow. The minister decamped; leaving his own letter — of no importance — upon the table."

"Here, then," said Dupin to me, "you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete — the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber."

"Yes," replied the Prefect; "and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me."

"Than whom," said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, "no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined."

"You flatter me," replied the Prefect; "but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained."

"It is clear," said I, "as you observe, that the letter is still in the possession of the minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs."

"True," said G.; "and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make a thorough search of the minister's hotel; and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design."

"But," said I, "you are quite *au fait* in these investigations. The parisian police have done this thing often before."

"Oh, yes; and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D — — Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed."

"But is it not possible," I suggested, "that although the letter may be in possession of the minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?"

"This is barely possible," said Dupin. "The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D — — is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document — its susceptibility of being produced at a moments notice — a point of nearly equal importance with its possession."

"Its susceptibility of being produced?" said I.

"That is to say, of being destroyed," said Dupin.

"True," I observed; "the paper is clearly then upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the minister, we may consider that as out of the question."

"Entirely," said the Prefect. "He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigidly searched for my own inspection."

"You might have spared yourself this trouble," said Dupin. "D — — , I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings, as a matter of course."

"Not altogether a fool," said G., "but then he is a poet, which I take to be only one removed from a fool."

"True," said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his meerschaum, "although I have been guilty of certain doggerel myself."

"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search."

"Why, the fact is, we took our time, and we searched everywhere. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the entire building, room by room; devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police-agent, such a thing as a "secret" drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a "secret" drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is so plain. There is a certain amount of bulk — of space — to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules. The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with the fine ling needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops."

"Why so?"

"Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way."

"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?" I asked.

"By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it. Besides, in our case, we were obliged to proceed without noise."

"But you could not have removed — you could not have taken to pieces all articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?"

"Certainly not; but we did better — we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and, indeed, the jointings of every description

of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the gluing — any unusual gap in the joints — would have sufficed to insure detection."

"I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bedclothes, as well as the curtains and carpets."

"That of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before."

"The two houses adjoining!" I exclaimed; "you must have had a great deal of trouble."

"We had; but the reward offered is prodigious."

"You included the grounds about the houses?"

"All the grounds are paved with brick. They give us comparatively little trouble. We examined the moss between the bricks, and found it undisturbed."

"You looked among D — —'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?"

"Certainly; we opened every package and parcel; we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers. We also measured the thickness of every book-cover, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope. Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation. Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles."

"You explored the floors beneath the carpets?"

"Beyond doubt. We removed every carpet, and examined the boards with the microscope."

"And the paper on the walls?"

"Yes."

"You looked into the cellars?"

"We did."

"Then," I said, "you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is not upon the premises, as you suppose."

"I fear you are right there," said the Prefect. "And now, Dupin,



what would you advise me to do?"

"To make a thorough research of the premises."

"That is absolutely needless," replied G — — . "I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the hotel."

"I have no better advice to give you," said Dupin. "You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?"

"Oh, yes!" — And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book, proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external, appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I have ever known the good gentleman before.

In about a month afterward he paid another visit, and found us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said:

"Well, but G., what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no such thing as overreaching the Minister?"

"Confound him, say I — yes; I made the re-examination, however, as Dupin suggested — but it was all labor lost, as I knew it would be."

"How much was the reward offered, did you say?" asked Dupin.

"Why, a very great deal — a very liberal reward — I don't like to say how much precisely; but one thing I will say, that I wouldn't mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day; and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done."

"Why, yes," said Dupin, drawlingly, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, "I really — think, G., you have not exerted yourself — to the utmost in the matter. You might — do a little more, I think, eh?"

"How? — in what way?"

"Why — puff, puff — you might — puff, puff — employ counsel in the matter, eh? — puff, puff, puff. Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy?"

"No; hang Abernethy!"

"To be sure! hang him and welcome. But, once upon a time, a certain rich miser conceived the design of spunging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician, as that of an imaginary individual.

“‘We will suppose,’ said the miser, “that his symptoms are such and such; now, doctor, what would you have directed him to take?”

“‘Take!’ said Abernethy, “why, take advice, to be sure.”

“But,” said the Prefect, a little discomposed, “I am perfectly willing to take advice, and to pay for it. I would really give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid me in the matter.”

“In that case,” replied Dupin, opening a drawer, and producing a check-book, “you may as well fill me up a check for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter.”

I was astonished. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed startling from their sockets; then apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket-book; then, unlocking an escritoire, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

“The Parisian police,” he said, “are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G — — detailed to us his mode of searching the premises at the Hotel D — — , I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation — so far as his labors extended.”

“So far as his labors extended?” said I.

“Yes,” said Dupin. “The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it.”

I merely laughed — but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

“The measures, then,” he continued, “were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow for the matter in hand; and many a school-boy is a better

reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of "even and odd" attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that number is even or odd. If the guess is right, the guesser wins one; if wrong, he loses one. The boy to whom I allude won all the marbles of the school. Of course he had some principle of guessing; and this lay in mere observation and admeasurement of the astuteness of his opponents. For example, an arrant simpleton is his opponent, and, holding up his closed hand, asks, "Are they even or odd?" Our school-boy replies, "Odd," and loses; but upon the second trial he wins, for he then says to himself: "The simpleton had them even upon the first trial, and his amount of cunning is just sufficient to make him have them odd upon the second; I will therefore guess odd;" — he guesses odd and wins. Now, with a simpleton a degree above the first, he would have reasoned thus: "This fellow finds that in the first instance I guessed odd, and, in the second, he will propose to himself, upon the first impulse, a simple variation from even to odd, as did the first simpleton; but then a second thought will suggest that this is too simple a variation, and finally he will decide upon putting it even as before. I will therefore guess even;" — he guesses even, and wins. Now this mode of reasoning in the school-boy, whom his fellows termed "lucky," — what, in its last analysis, is it?"

"It is merely," I said, "an identification of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent."

"It is," said Dupin; "and, upon inquiring of the boy by what means he effected the thorough identification in which his success consisted, I received answer as follows: 'When I wish to find out how wise, or how stupid, or how good, or how wicked is any one, or what are his thoughts at the moment, I fashion the expression of my face, as accurately as possible, in accordance with the expression of his, and then wait to see what thoughts or sentiments arise in my mind or heart, as if to match or correspond with the expression.' This response of the school-boy lies at the bottom of all the spurious profundity which has been attributed to Rochefoucault, to La Bougive, to Machiavelli, and to Campanella."

"And the identification," I said, "of the reasoner's intellect with that of his opponent, depends, if I understand you aright, upon the accuracy with which the opponent's intellect is admeasured."

"For its practical value it depends upon this," replied Dupin; "and the Prefect and his cohort fail so frequently, first, by default of this identification, and, secondly, by ill-admeasurement, or rather

through non-admeasurement, of the intellect with which they are engaged. They consider only their own ideas of ingenuity; and, in searching for any thing hidden, advert only to the modes in which they would have hidden it. They are right in this much — that their own ingenuity is a faithful representative of that of the mass; but when the cunning of the individual felon is diverse in character from their own, the felon foils them, of course. This always happens when it is above their own, and very usually when it is below. They have no variation of principle in their investigations; at best, when urged by some unusual emergency — by some extraordinary reward — they extend or exaggerate their old modes of practice, without touching their principles. What, for example, in this case of D — — , has been done to vary the principle of action? What is all this boring, and probing, and sounding, and scrutinizing with the microscope, and dividing the surface of the building into registered square inches — what is it all but an exaggeration of the application of the one principle or set of principles of search, which are based upon the one set of notions regarding human ingenuity, to which the Prefect, in the long routine of his duty, has been accustomed? Do you not see he has taken it for granted that all men proceed to conceal a letter, not exactly in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg, but, at least, in some out-of-the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see also, that such *recherchés* nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted by ordinary intellects; for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed — a disposal in this *recherché* manner, — is, in the very first instance, presumable and presumed; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers; and where the case is of importance — or, what amounts to the same thing in the political eyes, when the reward is of magnitude, — the qualities in question have never been known to fail. You will now understand what I mean in suggesting that, had the purloined letter been hidden anywhere within the limits of the Prefect's examination — in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the Prefect — its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister is a fool, because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect feels; and he is merely guilty of a *non distributio medii* in thence inferring that all poets are fools."

"But is this really the poet?" I asked. "There are two brothers, I know; and both have attained reputation in letters. The minister I believe has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician, and no poet."

"You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As a poet and as a mathematician, he would reason well; as a mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect."

"You surprise me," I said, "by these opinions, which have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested ideas of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as the reason par excellence."

"*Il y a à parier,*" replied Dupin, quoting from Chamfort, "*que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue, est une sottise, car elle a convenue au plus grand nombre.*"\* The mathematicians, I grant you, have done their best to promulgate the popular error to which you allude, and which is none the less an error for its promulgation as truth. With an art worthy a better cause, for example, they have insinuated the term 'analysis' into application to algebra. The French are the originators of this particular deception; but if a term is of any importance — if words derive any value from applicability — then 'analysis' conveys 'algebra' about as much as, in Latin, '*ambitus*' implies 'ambition,' '*religio*' 'religion,' or '*homines honesti*' a set of honorable men."

"You have a quarrel on hand, I see," said I, "with some of the algebraists of Paris; but proceed."

"I dispute the availability, and thus the value, of that reason which is cultivated in any especial form other than the abstractly logical. I dispute, in particular, the reason educed by mathematical study. The mathematics are the science of form and quantity; mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity. The great error lies in supposing that even the truths of what is called pure algebra are abstract or general truths. And this error is so egregious that I am confounded at the universality with which it has been received. Mathematical axioms are not axioms of general truth. What is true of relation — of form and quantity — is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example. In this latter science it is very usually untrue that the aggregated parts are equal to the whole. In chemistry also the axiom fails. In the consideration of motive it fails; for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value when united, equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only

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\* It is likely that every public idea, every received convention, is nonsense, because it agreed to the largest number.

truths within the limits of relation. But the mathematician argues from his finite truths, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability — as the world indeed imagines them to be. Bryant, in his very learned *Mythology*, mentions an analogous source of error, when he says that ‘although the pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually, and make inferences from them as existing realities.’ With the algebraists, however, who are pagans themselves, the ‘pagan fables’ are believed, and the inferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory as through an unaccountable addling of the brains. In short, I never yet encountered the mere mathematician who would be trusted out of equal roots, or one who did not clandestinely hold it as a point of his faith that  $x^2 + px$  was absolutely and unconditionally equal to  $q$ . Say to one of these gentlemen, by way of experiment, if you please, that you believe occasions may occur when  $x^2 + px$  is not altogether equal to  $q$ , and, having made him understand what you mean, get out of his reach as speedily as convenient, for beyond doubt, he will endeavor to knock you down.

“I mean to say,” continued Dupin, while I merely laughed at his last observations, “that if the Minister had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this check. I knew him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold intrigant. Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary political modes of action. He could not fail to be anticipate — and events have proved he did not fail to anticipate — the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as ruses, to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G — —, in fact, did finally arrive — the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of political action in searches for articles concealed — I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary nooks of concealment. He could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the



Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to simplicity, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so very self-evident."

"Yes," said I, "I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions."

"The material world," continued Dupin, "abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the *vis inertiae*, for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true in the former, than a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent momentum is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed, and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again: have you ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop doors, are the most attractive of attention?"

"I have never given the matter a thought," I said.

"There is a game of puzzles," he resumed, "which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word — the name of town, river, state, or empire — any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

"But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D — — ; upon the fact that the document must always have been at hand, if he intended to use it to good

purpose; and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary's ordinary search — the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all.

"Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the Ministerial hotel. I found D — — at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of ennui. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive — but that is only when nobody sees him.

"To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

"I paid especial attention to a large writing-table near where he sat, and upon which lay confusedly, some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

"At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery filigree card-rack of pasteboard, that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon, from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantelpiece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six visiting cards and a solitary letter. The last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle — as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless, had been altered, or stayed, in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D — — cipher very conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D — —, the minister, himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the uppermost divisions of the rack.

"No sooner had I glanced at this letter than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read to us so minute a description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D — — cipher; there it was small and read, with the ducal arms of the S — — family. Here, the address, to the minister, was diminutive and feminine; there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided; the size alone formed a point of correspondence. But, then, the radicalness of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the true methodical habits of D — —,



and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document; — these things, together with the hyper-obtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visitor, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect.

"I protracted my visit as long as possible, and, while I maintained a most animated discussion with the minister, upon a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In examination, I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack; and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more chafed than seemed necessary. They presented the broken appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient. It was clear to me that the letter had been turned, as a glove, inside out, re-directed and re-sealed. I bade the minister good-morning, and took my departure at once, leaving a gold snuff-box upon the table.

"The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus engaged, however, a large report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a terrified mob. D — — rushed to a casement, threw it open, and looked out. In the meantime I stepped to the card-rack, took the letter, put it in my pocket, and replaced it by a facsimile, (so far as regards externals) which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings — imitating the D — — cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread.

"The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behavior of a man with a musket. He had fired it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the fellow was suffered to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D — — came from the window, whither I had followed him immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterward I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a man in my own pay."

"But what purpose had you," I asked, "in replacing the letter by a facsimile? Would it not have been better, at the first visit, to have seized it openly, and departed?"

"D — — ," replied Dupin, "is a desperate man, and a man of nerve. His hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted to his interests. Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the Ministerial presence alive. The good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. You know my political prepossessions. In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers — since, being unaware that the letter is not in his possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his political destruction. His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about the *facilis descensus Averni*; but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani said of singing, it is far more easy to get up than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy — at least no pity — for him who descends. He is that *monstrum horrendum*, an unprincipled man of genius. I confess, however, that I should like very well to know the precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the Prefect terms "a certain personage," he is reduced to opening the letter which I left for him in the card-rack."

"How? did you put any thing particular in it?"

"Why — it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank — that would have been insulting. D — — , at Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to give him a clew. He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words —

" — — — *Un dessein si funeste,  
S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.*"

*They are to be found in Crébillon's Atrée."*

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\* *If such a sinister design isn't worthy of Atreus, it is worthy of Thyestes.*

## Putois

Anatole France

I

**T**his garden of our childhood, said Monsieur Bergeret, this garden that one could pace off in twenty steps, was for us a whole world, full of smiles and surprises.

"Lucien, do you recall Putois?" asked Zoe, smiling as usual, the lips pressed, bending over her work.

"Do I recall Putois! Of all the faces I saw as a child that of Putois remains the clearest in my remembrance. All the features of his face and his character are fixed in my mind. He had a pointed cranium..."

"A low forehead," added Mademoiselle Zoe.

And the brother and sister recited alternately, in a monotonous voice, with an odd gravity, the points in a sort of description:

"A low forehead."

"Squinting eyes."

"A shifty glance."

"Crow's-feet at the temples."

"The cheek-bones sharp, red and shining."

"His ears had no rims to them."

"The features were devoid of all expression."

"His hands, which were never still, alone expressed his meaning."

"Thin, somewhat bent, feeble in appearance..."

"In reality he was unusually strong."

"He easily bent a five-franc piece between the first finger and the thumb..."

"Which was enormous."

"His voice was drawling..."

"And his speech mild."

Suddenly Monsieur Bergeret exclaimed: "Zoe! We have forgotten 'Yellow hair and sparse beard.' Let us begin all over again."

Pauline, who had listened with astonishment to this strange recital, asked her father and aunt how they had been able to learn by heart this bit of prose, and why they recited it as if it were a litany.

Monsieur Bergeret gravely answered:

"Pauline, what you have heard is a text, I may say a liturgy, used by the Bergeret family. It should be handed down to you so that it may not perish with your aunt and me. Your grandfather, my daughter, your grandfather, Eloi Bergeret, who was not amused with trifles, thought highly of this bit, principally because of its origin. He called it 'The Anatomy of Putois.' And he used to say that he preferred, in certain respects, the anatomy of Putois to the anatomy of Quaresmeprenant. 'If the description by Xenomanes,' he said, 'is more learned and richer in unusual and choice expressions, the description of Putois greatly surpasses it in clarity and simplicity of style.' He held this opinion because Doctor Ledouble, of Tours, had not yet explained chapters thirty, thirty-one, and thirty-two of the fourth book of Rabelais."

"I do not understand at all," said Pauline.

"That is because you did not know Putois, my daughter. You must understand that Putois was the most familiar figure in my childhood and in that of your Aunt Zoe. In the house of your grandfather Bergeret we constantly spoke of Putois. Each believed that he had seen him."

Pauline asked:

"Who was this Putois?"

Instead of replying, Monsieur Bergeret commenced to laugh, and Mademoiselle Bergeret also laughed, her lips pressed tight together. Pauline looked from one to the other. She thought it strange that her aunt should laugh so heartily, and more strange that she should laugh with and in sympathy with her brother. It was indeed singular, as the brother and sister were quite different in character.

"Papa, tell me what was Putois? Since you wish me to know, tell me."

"Putois, my daughter, was a gardener. The son of honest market-gardeners, he set up for himself as nurseryman at Saint-Omer. But he did not satisfy his customers and got in a bad way. Having given up business, he went out by the day. Those who employed him could not always congratulate themselves."

At this, Mademoiselle Bergeret, laughing, rejoined;

"Do you recall, Lucien, when our father could not find his ink, his pens, his sealing-wax, his scissors, he said: 'I suspect Putois has been here?'"

"Ah!" said Monsieur Bergeret, "Putois had not a good reputation."

"Is that all?" asked Pauline.

"No, my daughter, it is not all. Putois was remarkable in this, that while we knew him and were familiar with him, nevertheless—"

"—He did not exist," said Zoe.

Monsieur Bergeret looked at his sister with an air of reproach.

"What a speech, Zoe! and why break the charm like that? Do you dare say it, Zoe? Zoe, can you prove it? To maintain that Putois did not exist, that Putois never was, have you sufficiently considered the conditions of existence and the modes of being? Putois existed, my sister. But it is true that his was a peculiar existence."

"I understand less and less," said Pauline, discouraged.

"The truth will be clear to you presently, my daughter. Know then that Putois was born fully grown. I was still a child and your aunt was a little girl. We lived in a little house, in a suburb of Saint-Omer. Our parents led a peaceful, retired life, until they were discovered by an old lady named Madame Cornouiller, who lived at the manor of Montplaisir, twelve miles from town, and proved to be a great-aunt of my mother's. By right of relationship she insisted that our father and mother come to dine every Sunday at Montplaisir, where they were excessively bored. She said that it was the proper thing to have a family dinner on Sunday and that only people of common origin failed to observe this ancient custom. My father was bored to the point of tears at Montplaisir. His desperation was painful to contemplate. But Madame Cornouiller did not notice it. She saw nothing, My mother was braver. She suffered as much as my father, and perhaps more, but she smiled."

"Women are made to suffer," said Zoe.

"Zoe, every living thing is destined to suffer. In vain our parents refused these fatal invitations. Madame Cornouiller came to take them each Sunday afternoon. They had to go to Montplaisir; it was an obligation from which there was absolutely no escape. It was an established order that only a revolt could break. My father finally revolted and swore not to accept another invitation from Madame Cornouiller, leaving it to my mother to find decent pretexts and varied reasons for these refusals, for which she was the least capable. Our mother did not know how to pretend."

"Say, Lucien, that she did not like to. She could tell a fib as well as any one."

"It is true that when she had good reasons she gave them rather than invent poor ones. Do you recall, my sister, that one day she said at table: 'Fortunately, Zoe has the whooping-cough; we shall not have to go to Montplaisir for some time?'"

"That was true!" said Zoe.

"You got over it, Zoe. And one day Madame Cornouiller said to my mother: Dearest, I count on your coming with your husband to dine Sunday at Montplaisir.' Our mother, expressly bidden by her husband to give Madame Cornouiller a good reason for declining, invented, in this extremity, a reason that was not the truth. "I am extremely sorry, dear Madame, but that will be impossible for us. Sunday I expect the gardener.'

"On hearing this, Madame Cornouiller looked through the glass door of the salon at the little wild garden, where the prickwood and the lilies looked as though they had never known the pruning-knife and were likely never to know it. "You expect the gardener! What for?"

"To work in the garden.'

"And my mother, having involuntarily turned her eyes on this little square of weeds and plants run wild, that she had called a garden, recognized with dismay the improbability of her excuse.

"This man,' said Madame Cornouiller, "could just as well work in your garden Monday or Tuesday. Moreover, that will be much better.' One should not work on Sunday.'

"He works all the week.'

"I have often noticed that the most absurd and ridiculous reasons are the least disputed: they disconcert the adversary. Madame Cornouiller insisted, less than one might expect of a person so little disposed to give up. Rising from her armchair, she asked:

"What do you call your gardener, dearest?"

"Putois,' answered my mother without hesitation.

"Putois was named. From that time he existed. Madame Cornouiller took herself off, murmuring: "Putois! It seems to me that I know that name. Putois! Putois! I must know him. But I do not recollect him. Where does he live?"

"He works by the day. When one wants him one leaves word with this one or that one.'

"Ah! I thought so, a loafer and a vagabond—a good-for-nothing. Don't trust him, dearest.'

"From that time Putois had a character."

## II

Messieurs Goubin and Jean Marteau having arrived, Monsieur Bergeret put them in touch with the conversation.

"We were speaking of him whom my mother caused to be born gardener at Saint-Omer and whom she christened. He existed from that time on."

"Dear master, will you kindly repeat that?" said Monsieur Goubin, wiping the glass of his monocle.

"Willingly," replied Monsieur Bergeret. "There was no gardener. The gardener did not exist. My mother said: 'I am waiting for the gardener.' At once the gardener was. He lived."

"Dear master," said Monsieur Goubin, "how could he live since he did not exist?"

"He had a sort of existence," replied Monsieur Bergeret.

"You mean an imaginary existence," Monsieur Goubin replied, disdainfully.

"Is it nothing then, but an imaginary existence?" exclaimed the master. "And have not mythical beings the power to influence men! Consider mythology, Monsieur Goubin, and you will perceive that they are not real beings but imaginary beings that exercise the most profound and lasting influence on the mind. Everywhere and always, beings who have no more reality than Putois have inspired nations with hatred and love, terror and hope, have advised crimes, received offerings, made laws and customs. Monsieur Goubin, think of the eternal mythology. Putois is a mythical personage, the most obscure, I grant you, and of the lowest order. The coarse satyr, who in olden times sat at the table with our peasants in the North, was considered worthy of appearing in a picture by Jordaens and a fable by La Fontaine. The hairy son of Sycorax appeared in the noble world of Shakespeare. Putois, less fortunate, will be always neglected by artists and poets. He lacks bigness and the unusual style and character. He was conceived by minds too reasonable, among people who knew how to read and write, and who had not that delightful imagination in which fables take root. I think, Messieurs, that I have said enough to show you the real nature of Putois."

"I understand it," said Monsieur Goubin. And Monsieur Bergeret continued his discourse.

"Putois was. I can affirm it. He was. Consider it, gentlemen, and you will admit that a state of being by no means implies substance, and means only the bonds attributed to the subject, expresses only a relation."

"Undoubtedly," said Jean Marteau; "but a being without attributes is a being less than nothing. I do not remember who at one time said, 'I am that I am.' Pardon my lapse of memory. One cannot remember everything. But the unknown who spoke in that fashion was very imprudent. In letting it be understood by this thoughtless observation that he was deprived of attributes and denied all relations, he proclaimed that he did not exist and thoughtlessly suppressed himself. I wager that no one has heard of him since." —



"You have lost," answered Monsieur Bergeret.

"He corrected the bad effect of these egotistical expressions by employing quantities of adjectives, and he is often spoken of, most often without judgment."—"I do not understand," said Monsieur Goubin.—"It is not necessary to understand," replied Jean Marteau. And he begged Monsieur Bergeret to speak of Putois.—"It is very kind of you to ask me," said the master.—"Putois was born in the second half of the nineteenth century, at Saint-Omer. He would have been better off if he had been born some centuries before in the forest of Arden or in the forest of Brocéliande. He would then have been a remarkably clever evil spirit."—

"A cup of tea, Monsieur Goubin," said Pauline.—

"Was Putois, then, an evil spirit?" said Jean Marteau.—

"He was evil," replied Monsieur Bergeret; "he was, in a way, but not absolutely. It was true of him as with those devils that are called wicked, but in whom one discovers good qualities when one associates with them. And I am disposed to think that injustice has been done Putois. Madame Cornouiller, who, warned against him, had at once suspected him of being a loafer, a drunkard, and a robber, reflected that since my mother, who was not rich, employed him, it was because he was satisfied with little, and asked herself if she would not do well to have him work instead of her gardener, who had a better reputation, but expected more. The time had come for trimming the yews. She thought that if Madame Eloi Bergeret, who was poor, did not pay Putois much, she herself, who was rich, would give him still less, for it is customary for the rich to pay less than the poor. And she already saw her yews trimmed in straight hedges, in balls and in pyramids, without her having to pay much. "I will keep an eye open," she said, "to see that Putois does not loaf or rob me. I risk nothing, and it will be all profit. These vagabonds sometimes do better work than honest laborers. She resolved to make a trial, and said to my mother: 'Dearest, send me Putois. I will set him to work at Mont-plaisir.' My mother would have done so willingly. But really it was impossible. Madame Cornouiller waited for Putois at Montplaisir, and waited in vain. She followed up her ideas and did not abandon her plans. When she saw my mother again, she complained of not having any news of Putois. 'Dearest, didn't you tell him that I was expecting him?'—'Yes! but he is strange, odd.'—'Oh, I know that kind. I know your Putois by heart. But there is no workman so crazy as to refuse to come to work at Montplaisir. My house is known, I think. Putois must obey my orders, and quickly, dearest. It will be sufficient to tell me where he lives; I will go and find him myself.' My mother answered that she did not know where



Putois lived, that no one knew his house, that he was without hearth or home. 'I have not seen him again, Madame. I believe he is hiding.' What better could she say?"

Madame Cornouiller heard her distrustfully; she suspected her of misleading, of removing Putois from inquiry, for fear of losing him or making him ask more. And she thought her too selfish. "Many judgments accepted by the world that history has sanctioned are as well founded as that."—"That is true," said Pauline.—"What is true?" asked Zoe, half asleep.—"That the judgments of history are often false. I remember, papa, that you said one day: "Madame Roland was very ingenuous to appeal to the impartiality of posterity, and not perceive that, if her contemporaries were ill-natured monkeys, their posterity would be also composed of ill-natured monkeys."—"Pauline," said Mademoiselle Zoe severely, "what connection is there between the story of Putois and this that you are telling us?"—"A very great one, my aunt."—"I do not grasp it."—

Monsieur Bergeret, who was not opposed to digressions, answered his daughter: "If all injustices were finally redressed in the world, one would never have imagined another for these adjustments. How do you expect posterity to pass righteous judgment on the dead? How question them in the shades to which they have taken flight? As soon as we are able to be just to them we forget them. But can one ever be just? And what is justice? Madame Cornouiller, at least, was finally obliged to recognize that my mother had not deceived her and that Putois was not to be found. However, she did not give up trying to find him. She asked all her relatives, friends, neighbors, servants, and tradesmen if they knew Putois, Only two or three answered that they had never heard of him. For the most part they believed they had seen him.

"'I have heard that name,' said the cook, 'but I cannot recall his face.'—'Putois! I must know him,' said the street-sweeper, scratching his ear. 'But I cannot tell you who it is.' The most precise description came from Monsieur Blaise, receiver of taxes, who said that he had employed Putois to cut wood in his yard, from the 19th to the 28d of October, the year of the comet. One morning, Madame Cornouiller, out of breath, dropped into my father's office. 'I have seen Putois. Ah! I have seen him.'—'You believe it?'—'I am sure. He was passing close by Monsieur Tenchant's wall. Then he turned into the Rue des Abbesses, walking quickly. I lost him.'—'Was it really he?'—'Without a doubt. A man of fifty, thin, bent, the air of a vagabond, a dirty blouse.'—'It is true,'" said my father, "'that this description could apply to Putois.'—'You see! Besides, I called him. I cried: "Putois!" and he turned around.'—'That is the method,' said my

father, "that they employ to assure themselves of the identity of evil-doers that they are hunting for."—"I told you that it was he! I know how to find him, your Putois. Very well! He has a bad face. You had been very careless, you and your wife, to employ him. I understand physiognomy, and though I only saw his back, I could swear that he is a robber, and perhaps an assassin. The rims of his ears are flat, and that is a sign that never fails."—"Ah! you noticed that the rims of his ears were flat?"—"Nothing escapes me. My dear Monsieur Bergeret, if you do not wish to be assassinated with your wife and your children, do not let Putois come into your house again. Take my advice: have all your locks changed."—"Well, a few days afterward, it happened that Madame Cornouiller had three melons stolen from her vegetable garden. The robber not having been found, she suspected Putois. The gendarmes were called to Montplaisir, and their report confirmed the suspicions of Madame Cornouiller. Bands of marauders were ravaging the gardens of the countryside. But this time the robbery seemed to have been committed by one man, and with singular dexterity. No trace of anything broken, no footprints in the damp earth. The robber could be no one but Putois. That was the opinion of the corporal, who knew all about Putois, and had tried hard to put his hand on that bird. The *Journal of Saint-Omer* devoted an article to the three melons of Madame Cornouiller, and published a portrait of Putois from descriptions furnished by the town. 'He has,' said the paper, 'a low forehead, squinting eyes, a shifty glance, crow's-feet, sharp cheek-bones, red and shining. No rims to the ears. Thin, somewhat bent, feeble in appearance, in reality he is unusually strong. He easily bends a five-franc piece between the first finger and the thumb.' There were good reasons for attributing to him a long series of robberies committed with surprising dexterity. The whole town was talking of Putois. One day it was learned that he had been arrested and locked up in prison. But it was soon recognized that the man that had been taken for him was an almanac seller named Rigobert. As no charge could be brought against him, he was discharged after fourteen months of detention on suspicion. And Putois remained undiscoverable. Madame Cornouiller was the victim of another robbery, more audacious than the first. Three small silver spoons were taken from her sideboard. She recognized in this the hand of Putois, had a chain put on the door of her bedroom, and was unable to sleep....

About ten o'clock in the evening, Pauline having gone to her room, Mademoiselle Bergeret said to her brother: "Do not forget to relate how Putois betrayed Madame Cornouiller's cook."—"I was thinking of it, my sister," answered Monsieur Bergeret. "To

omit it would be to lose the best of the story. But everything must be done in order. Putois was carefully searched for by the police, who could not find him. When it was known that he could not be found, each one considered it his duty to find him; the shrewd ones succeeded. And as there were many shrewd ones at Saint-Omer and in the suburbs, Putois was seen simultaneously in the streets, in the fields, and in the woods. Another trait was thus added to his character. He was accorded the gift of ubiquity, the attribute of many popular heroes. A being capable of leaping long distances in a moment, and suddenly showing himself at the place where he was least expected, was honestly frightening. Putois was the terror of Saint-Omer. Madame Cornouiller, convinced that Putois had stolen from her three melons and three little spoons, lived in a state of fear, barricaded at Montplaisir. Bolts, bars, and locks did not reassure her. Putois was for her a frightfully subtle being who could pass through doors. Trouble with her servants redoubled her fear. Her cook having been betrayed, the time came when she could no longer hide her misfortune. But she obstinately refused to name her betrayer." — "Her name was Gudule," said Mademoiselle Zoe. — "Her name was Gudule, and she believed that she was protected from danger by a long, forked bead that she wore on her chin. The sudden appearance of a beard protected the innocence of that holy daughter of the king that Prague venerates. A beard, no longer youthful, did not suffice to protect the virtue of Gudule. Madame Cornouiller urged Gudule to tell her the man. Gudule burst into tears, but kept silent. Prayers and menaces had no effect. Madame Cornouiller made a long and circumstantial inquiry. She adroitly questioned her neighbors and tradespeople, the gardener, the street-sweeper, the gendarmes; nothing put her on the track of the culprit. She tried again to obtain from Gudule a complete confession. 'In your own interest, Gudule, tell me who it is.' Gudule remained mute. All at once a ray of light flashed through the mind of Madame Cornouiller: 'It is Putois!' The cook cried, but did not answer. 'It is Putois! Why did I not guess it sooner? It is Putois! Miserable! miserable! miserable!' and Madame Cornouiller remained convinced that it was Putois. Everybody at Saint-Omer, from the judge to the lamplighter's dog, knew Gudule and her basket. At the news that Putois had betrayed Gudule, the town was filled with surprise, wonder, and merriment....

With this reputation in the town and its environs he remained attached to our house by a thousand subtle ties. He passed before our door, and it was believed that he sometimes climbed the wall of our garden. He was never seen face to face. At any moment we would recognize his shadow, his voice, his footsteps. More than

once we thought we saw his back in the twilight, at the corner of a road. To my sister and me he gradually changed in character. He remained mischievous and malevolent, but he became childlike and very ingenuous. He became less real and, I dare say, more poetical. He entered in the artless Cycle of childish traditions. He became more like Croquemitaine, like Père Fouettard, or the sand man who closes the children's eyes when evening comes.

It was not that imp that tangled the colts' tails at night in the stable. Less rustic and less charming, but equally and frankly roguish, he made ink mustaches on my sister's dolls. In our bed, before going to sleep, we listened; he cried on the roofs with the cats, he howled with the dogs, he filled the mill hopper with groans, and imitated the songs of belated drunkards in the streets. What made Putois ever-present and familiar to us, what interested us in him, was that the remembrance of him was associated with all the objects about us. Zoe's dolls, my school books, in which he had many times rumpled and besmeared the pages; the garden wall, over which we had seen his red eyes gleam in the shadow; the blue porcelain jar that he cracked one winter's night, unless it was the frost; the trees, the streets, the benches—everything recalled Putois, the children's Putois, a local and mythical being. He did not equal in grace and poetry the dullest satyr, the stoutest fawn of Sicily or Thessaly. But he was still a demigod. He had quite a different character for our father; he was symbolical and philosophical. Our father had great compassion for men. He did not think them altogether rational; their mistakes, when they were not cruel, amused him and made him smile. The belief in Putois interested him as an epitome and a summary of all human beliefs. As he was ironical and a joker, he spoke of Putois as if he were a real being. He spoke with so much insistence sometimes, and detailed the circumstances with such exactness, that my mother was quite surprised and said to him in her open-hearted way: 'One would say that you spoke seriously, my friend: you know well, however...' He replied gravely: 'All Saint-Omer believes in the existence of Putois. Would I be a good citizen if I deny him? One should look twice before setting aside an article of common faith.' Only a perfectly honest soul has such scruples. At heart my father was a Gassendiste. He keyed his own particular sentiment with the public sentiment, believing, like the countryside, in the existence of Putois, but not admitting his direct responsibility for the theft of the melons and the betrayal of the cook. Finally, he professed faith in the existence of a Putois, to be a good citizen; and he eliminated Putois in his explanations of the events that took place in the town. By doing so in this instance, as in all others, he was an

honorable and a sensible man.

"As for our mother, she reproached herself somewhat for the birth of Putois, and not without reason. Because, after all, Putois was the child of our mother's invention, as Caliban was the poet's invention. Without doubt the faults were not equal, and my mother was more innocent than Shakespeare. However, she was frightened and confused to see her little falsehood grow inordinately, and her slight imposture achieve such a prodigious success, that, without stopping, extended all over town and threatened to extend over the world. One day she even turned pale, believing that she would see her falsehood rise up before her. That day, a servant she had, new to the house and the town, came to say to her that a man wished to see her. He wished to speak to Madame. "What man is it?"—"A man in a blouse. He looks like a laborer."—"Did he give his name?"—"Yes, Madame."—"Well! what is his name?"—"Putois."—"He told you that was his name?"—"Putois, yes, Madame."—"He is here?"—"Yes, Madame. He is waiting in the kitchen."—"You saw him?"—"Yes, Madame."—"What does he want?"—"He did not say. He will only tell Madame."—"Go ask him."

"When the servant returned to the kitchen Putois was gone. This meeting of the new servant with Putois was never cleared up. But from that day I think my mother commenced to believe that Putois might well exist and that she had not told a falsehood after all."



## The Open Window

Saki (H.H. Munro)

“My aunt will be down presently, Mr. Nuttel,” said a very self-possessed young lady of fifteen; “in the meantime you must try and put up with me.”

Framton Nuttel endeavoured to say the correct something which should duly flatter the niece of the moment without unduly discounting the aunt that was to come. Privately he doubted more than ever whether these formal visits on a succession of total strangers would do much towards helping the nerve cure which he was supposed to be undergoing.

“I know how it will be,” his sister had said when he was preparing to migrate to this rural retreat; “you will bury yourself down there and not speak to a living soul, and your nerves will be worse than ever from moping. I shall just give you letters of introduction to all the people I know there. Some of them, as far as I can remember, were quite nice.”

Framton wondered whether Mrs. Sappleton, the lady to whom he was presenting one of the letters of introduction, came into the nice division.

“Do you know many of the people round here?” asked the niece, when she judged that they had had sufficient silent communion.

“Hardly a soul,” said Framton. “My sister was staying here, at the rectory, you know, some four years ago, and she gave me letters of introduction to some of the people here.”

He made the last statement in a tone of distinct regret.

“Then you know practically nothing about my aunt?” pursued the self-possessed young lady.

“Only her name and address,” admitted the caller. He was wondering whether Mrs. Sappleton was in the married or widowed state. An undefinable something about the room seemed to suggest masculine habitation.

"Her great tragedy happened just three years ago," said the child; "that would be since your sister's time."

"Her tragedy?" asked Framton; somehow in this restful country spot tragedies seemed out of place.

"You may wonder why we keep that window wide open on an October afternoon," said the niece, indicating a large French window that opened on to a lawn.

"It is quite warm for the time of the year," said Framton; "but has that window got anything to do with the tragedy?"

"Out through that window, three years ago to a day, her husband and her two young brothers went off for their day's shooting. They never came back. In crossing the moor to their favourite snipe-shooting ground they were all three engulfed in a treacherous piece of bog. It had been that dreadful wet summer, you know, and places that were safe in other years gave way suddenly without warning. Their bodies were never recovered. That was the dreadful part of it." Here the child's voice lost its self-possessed note and became falteringly human. "Poor aunt always thinks that they will come back some day, they and the little brown spaniel that was lost with them, and walk in at that window just as they used to do. That is why the window is kept open every evening till it is quite dusk. Poor dear aunt, she has often told me how they went out, her husband with his white waterproof coat over his arm, and Ronnie, her youngest brother, singing "Bertie, why do you bound?" as he always did to tease her, because she said it got on her nerves. Do you know, sometimes on still, quiet evenings like this, I almost get a creepy feeling that they will all walk in through that window - "

She broke off with a little shudder. It was a relief to Framton when the aunt bustled into the room with a whirl of apologies for being late in making her appearance.

"I hope Vera has been amusing you?" she said.

"She has been very interesting," said Framton.

"I hope you don't mind the open window," said Mrs. Sappleton briskly; "my husband and brothers will be home directly from shooting, and they always come in this way. They've been out for snipe in the marshes to-day, so they'll make a fine mess over my poor carpets. So like you men-folk, isn't it?"

She rattled on cheerfully about the shooting and the scarcity of birds, and the prospects for duck in the winter. To Framton it was all purely horrible. He made a desperate but only partially successful effort to turn the talk on to a less ghastly topic; he was conscious that his hostess was giving him only a fragment of her attention, and her eyes were constantly straying past him to the open window and



the lawn beyond. It was certainly an unfortunate coincidence that he should have paid his visit on this tragic anniversary.

"The doctors agree in ordering me complete rest, an absence of mental excitement, and avoidance of anything in the nature of violent physical exercise," announced Framton, who laboured under the tolerably wide-spread delusion that total strangers and chance acquaintances are hungry for the least detail of one's ailments and infirmities, their cause and cure. "On the matter of diet they are not so much in agreement," he continued.

"No?" said Mrs. Sappleton, in a voice which only replaced a yawn at the last moment. Then she suddenly brightened into alert attention - but not to what Framton was saying.

"Here they are at last!" she cried. "Just in time for tea, and don't they look as if they were muddy up to the eyes!"

Framton shivered slightly and turned towards the niece with a look intended to convey sympathetic comprehension. The child was staring out through the open window with dazed horror in her eyes. In a chill shock of nameless fear Framton swung round in his seat and looked in the same direction.

In the deepening twilight three figures were walking across the lawn towards the window; they all carried guns under their arms, and one of them was additionally burdened with a white coat hung over his shoulders. A tired brown spaniel kept close at their heels. Noiselessly they neared the house, and then a hoarse young voice chanted out of the dusk: "I said, Bertie, why do you bound?"

Framton grabbed wildly at his stick and hat; the hall-door, the gravel-drive, and the front gate were dimly-noted stages in his headlong retreat. A cyclist coming along the road had to run into the hedge to avoid an imminent collision.

"Here we are, my dear," said the bearer of the white mackintosh, coming in through the window; "fairly muddy, but most of it's dry. Who was that who bolted out as we came up?"

"A most extraordinary man, a Mr. Nuttel," said Mrs. Sappleton; "could only talk about his illnesses, and dashed off without a word of good-bye or apology when you arrived. One would think he had seen a ghost."

"I expect it was the spaniel," said the niece calmly; "he told me he had a horror of dogs. He was once hunted into a cemetery somewhere on the banks of the Ganges by a pack of pariah dogs, and had to spend the night in a newly dug grave with the creatures snarling and grinning and foaming just above him. Enough to make anyone their nerve."

Romance at short notice was her speciality.



## The Woman Who Told The Truth

Saki (H.H. Munro)

There was once (said Reginald) a woman who told the truth. Not all at once, of course, but the habit grew upon her gradually, like lichen on an apparently healthy tree. She had no children—otherwise it might have been different. It began with little things, for no particular reason except that her life was a rather empty one, and it is so easy to slip into the habit of telling the truth in little matters. And then it became difficult to draw the line at more important things, until at last she took to telling the truth about her age; she said she was forty-two and five months—by that time, you see, she was veracious even to months. It may have been pleasing to the angels, but her elder sister was not gratified. On the Woman's birthday, instead of the opera-tickets which she had hoped for, her sister gave her a view of Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, which is not quite the same thing. The revenge of an elder sister may be long in coming, but, like a South-Eastern express, it arrives in its own good time.

The friends of the Woman tried to dissuade her from over-indulgence in the practice, but she said she was wedded to the truth; whereupon it was remarked that it was scarcely logical to be so much together in public. (No really provident woman lunches regularly with her husband if she wishes to burst upon him as a revelation at dinner. He must have time to forget; an afternoon is not enough.) And after a while her friends began to thin out in patches. Her passion for the truth was not compatible with a large visiting-list. For instance, she told Miriam Klopstock EXACTLY how she looked at the Ilexes' ball. Certainly Miriam had asked for her candid opinion, but the Woman prayed in church every Sunday for peace in our time, and it was not consistent.

It was unfortunate, everyone agreed, that she had no family; with

a child or two in the house, there is an unconscious check upon too free an indulgence in the truth. Children are given us to discourage our better emotions. That is why the stage, with all its efforts, can never be as artificial as life; even in an Ibsen drama one must reveal to the audience things that one would suppress before the children or servants.

Fate may have ordained the truth-telling from the commencement and should justly bear some of the blame; but in having no children the Woman was guilty, at least, of contributory negligence.

Little by little she felt she was becoming a slave to what had once been merely an idle propensity; and one day she knew. Every woman tells ninety per cent, of the truth to her dressmaker; the other ten per cent, is the irreducible minimum of deception beyond which no self-respecting client trespasses. Madame Draga's establishment was a meeting-ground for naked truths and overdressed fictions, and it was here, the Woman felt, that she might make a final effort to recall the artless mendacity of past days. Madame herself was in an inspiring mood, with the air of a sphinx who knew all things and preferred to forget most of them. As a War Minister she might have been celebrated, but she was content to be merely rich.

"If I take it in here, and—Miss Howard, one moment, if you please—and there, and round like this—so—I really think you will find it quite easy."

The Woman hesitated; it seemed to require such a small effort to simply acquiesce in Madame's views. But habit had become too strong. "I'm afraid," she faltered, "it's just the least little bit in the world too" —

And by that least little bit she measured the deeps and eternities of her thralldom to fact. Madame was not best pleased at being contradicted on a professional matter, and when Madame lost her temper you usually found it afterwards in the bill.

And at last the dreadful thing came, as the Woman had foreseen all along that it must; it was one of those paltry little truths with which she harried her waking hours. On a raw Wednesday morning, in a few ill-chosen words, she told the cook that she drank. She remembered the scene afterwards as vividly as though it had been painted in her mind by Abbey. The cook was a good cook, as cooks go; and as cooks go she went.

Miriam Klopstock came to lunch the next day. Women and elephants never forget an injury.

## Simon's Papa

Guy de Maupassant

**N**oon had just struck. The school-door opened and the youngsters streamed out tumbling over one another in their haste to get out quickly. But instead of promptly dispersing and going home to dinner as was their daily wont, they stopped a few paces off, broke up into knots and set to whispering.

The fact was that that morning Simon, the son of La Blanchotte, had, for the first time, attended school.

They had all of them in their families heard of La Blanchotte; and although in public she was welcome enough, the mothers among themselves treated her with compassion of a some what disdainful kind, which the children had caught without in the least knowing why.

As for Simon himself, they did not know him, for he never went abroad, and did not play around with them through the streets of the village or along the banks of the river. So they loved him but little; and it was with a certain delight, mingled with astonishment that they gathered in groups this morning, repeating to each other this sentence, concocted by a lad of fourteen or fifteen who appeared to know all about it, so sagaciously did he wink: "You know Simon — well, he has no papa."

La Blanchotte's son appeared in his turn upon the threshold of the school.

He was seven or eight years old, rather pale, very neat, with a timid and almost awkward manner.

He was making his way back to his mother's house when the various groups of his schoolfellows, perpetually whispering, and watching him with the mischievous and heartless eyes of children bent upon playing a nasty trick, gradually surrounded him and ended by inclosing him altogether. There he stood amid them,

surprised and embarrassed, not understanding what they were going to do with him. But the lad who had brought the news, puffed up with the success he had met with, demanded:

"What do you call yourself?"

He answered: "Simon."

"Simon what?" retorted the other.

The child, altogether bewildered, repeated: "Simon."

The lad shouted at him: "You must be named Simon something! That is not a name—Simon indeed!"

And he, on the brink of tears, replied for the third time:

"I am named Simon."

The urchins began laughing. The lad triumphantly lifted up his voice: "You can see plainly that he has no papa."

A deep silence ensued. The children were dumfounded by this extraordinary, impossibly monstrous thing—a boy who had not a papa; they looked upon him as a phenomenon, an unnatural being, and they felt rising in them the hitherto inexplicable pity of their mothers for La Blanchotte. As for Simon, he had propped himself against a tree to avoid falling, and he stood there as if paralyzed by an irreparable disaster. He sought to explain, but he could think of no answer for them, no way to deny this horrible charge that he had no papa. At last he shouted at them quite recklessly: "Yes, I have one."

"Where is he?" demanded the boy.

Simon was silent, he did not know. The children shrieked, tremendously excited. These sons of toil, nearly related to animals, experienced the cruel craving which makes the fowls of a farmyard destroy one of their own kind as soon as it is wounded. Simon suddenly spied a little neighbor, the son of a widow, whom he had always seen, as he himself was to be seen, quite alone with his mother.

"And no more have you," he said, "no more have you a papa."

"Yes," replied the other, "I have one."

"Where is he?" rejoined Simon.

"He is dead," declared the brat with superb dignity, "he is in the cemetery, is my papa."

A murmur of approval rose amid the scape-graces, as if the fact of possessing a papa dead in a cemetery made their comrade big enough to crush the other one who had no papa at all. And these rogues, whose fathers were for the most part evil-doers, drunkards, thieves, and ill-treaters of their wives hustled each other as they pressed closer and closer to Simon as though they, the legitimate ones, would stifle in their pressure one who was beyond the law.

The lad next Simon suddenly put his tongue out at him with a waggish air and shouted at him:

"No papa! No papa!"

Simon seized him by the hair with both hands and set to work to demolish his legs with kicks, while he bit his cheek ferociously. A tremendous struggle ensued between the two boys, and Simon found himself beaten, torn, bruised, rolled on the ground in the middle of the ring of applauding little vagabonds. As he arose, mechanically brushing his little blouse all covered with dust with his hand, some one shouted at him:

"Go and tell your papa."

He then felt a great sinking in his heart. They were stronger than he, they had beaten him and he had no answer to give them, for he knew it was true that he had no papa. Full of pride he tried for some moments to struggle against the tears which were suffocating him. He had a choking fit, and then without cries he began to weep with great sobs which shook him incessantly. Then a ferocious joy broke out among his enemies, and, just like savages in fearful festivals, they took one another by the hand and danced in a circle about him as they repeated in refrain:

"No papa! No papa!"

But suddenly Simon ceased sobbing. Frenzy overtook him. There were stones under his feet; he picked them up and with all his strength hurled them at his tormentors. Two or three were struck and ran away yelling, and so formidable did he appear that the rest became panic-stricken. Cowards, like a jeering crowd in the presence of an exasperated man, they broke up and fled. Left alone, the little thing without a father set off running toward the fields, for a recollection had been awakened which nerved his soul to a great determination. He made up his mind to drown himself in the river.

He remembered, in fact, that eight days ago a poor devil who begged for his livelihood had thrown himself into the water because he had no more money. Simon had been there when they fished him out again, and the sight of the fellow, who had seemed to him so miserable and ugly, had then impressed him—his pale cheeks, his long drenched beard, and his open eyes being full of calm. The bystanders had said:

"He is dead."

And some one had added:

"He is quite happy now."

So Simon wished to drown himself also because he had no father, just as the wretched being did who had no money.

He reached the water and watched it flowing. Some fishes were

rising briskly in the clear stream and occasionally made little leaps and caught the flies on the surface. He stopped crying in order to watch them, for their feeding interested him vastly. But, at intervals, as in the lulls of a tempest, when tremendous gusts of wind snap off trees and then die away, this thought would return to him with intense pain:

"I am about to drown myself because I have no papa."

It was very warm and fine weather. The pleasant sunshine warmed the grass; the water shone like a mirror; and Simon enjoyed for some minutes the happiness of that languor which follows weeping, desirous even of falling asleep there upon the grass in the warmth of noon.

A little green frog leaped from under his feet. He endeavored to catch it. It escaped him. He pursued it and lost it three times following. At last he caught it by one of its hind legs and began to laugh as he saw the efforts the creature made to escape. It gathered itself up on its large legs and then with a violent spring suddenly stretched them out as stiff as two bars.

Its eyes stared wide open in their round, golden circle, and it beat the air with its front limbs, using them as though they were hands. It reminded him of a toy made with straight slips of wood nailed zig-zag one on the other, which by a similar movement regulated the exercise of the little soldiers fastened thereon. Then he thought of his home and of his mother, and overcome by great sorrow he again began to weep. His limbs trembled; and he placed himself on his knees and said his prayers as before going to bed. But he was unable to finish them, for such hurried and violent sobs overtook him that he was completely overwhelmed. He thought no more, he no longer heeded anything around him but was wholly given up to tears.

Suddenly a heavy hand was placed upon his shoulder, and a rough voice asked him:

"What is it that causes you so much grief, my fine fellow?"

Simon turned round. A tall workman, with a black beard and hair all curled, was staring at him good-naturedly. He answered with his eyes and throat full of tears:

"They have beaten me because—I—I have no papa—no papa."

"What!" said the man smiling, "why, everybody has one."

The child answered painfully amid his spasms of grief:

"But I—I—I have none."

Then the workman became serious. He had recognized La Blanchotte's son, and although a recent arrival to the neighborhood he had a vague idea of her history.

"Well," said he, "console yourself, my boy, and come with me



home to your mother. She will give you a papa."

And so they started on the way, the big one holding the little one by the hand. The man smiled afresh, for he was not sorry to see this Blanchotte, who by popular report was one of the prettiest girls in the country-side—and, perhaps, he said to himself, at the bottom of his heart, that a lass who had erred once might very well err again.

They arrived in front of a very neat little white house.

"There it is," exclaimed the child, and he cried: "Mamma."

A woman appeared, and the workman instantly left off smiling, for he at once perceived that there was no more fooling to be done with the tall pale girl, who stood austere at her door as though to defend from one man the threshold of that house where she had already been betrayed by another. Intimidated, his cap in his hand, he stammered out:

"See, Madame, I have brought you back your little boy, who had lost himself near the river."

But Simon flung his arms about his mother's neck and told her, as he again began to cry:

"No, mamma, I wished to drown myself, because the others had beaten me—had beaten me—because I have no papa."

A burning redness covered the young woman's cheeks, and, hurt to the quick, she embraced her child passionately, while the tears coursed down her face. The man, much moved, stood there, not knowing how to get away. But Simon suddenly ran to him and said:

"Will you be my papa?"

A deep silence ensued. La Blanchotte, dumb and tortured with shame, leaned against the wall, her hands upon her heart. The child, seeing that no answer was made him, replied:

"If you do not wish it, I shall return to drown myself."

The workman took the matter as a jest and answered laughing:

"Why, yes, I wish it certainly."

"What is your name, then," went on the child, "so that I may tell the others when they wish to know your name?"

"Philip," answered the man.

Simon was silent a moment so that he might get the name well into his memory; then he stretched out his arms, quite consoled, and said:

"Well, then, Philip, you are my papa."

The workman, lifting him from the ground, kissed him hastily on both cheeks, and then strode away quickly.

When the child returned to school next day he was received with a spiteful laugh, and at the end of school, when the lads were on the point of recommencing, Simon threw these words at their heads as

he would have done a stone: "He is named Philip, my papa."

Yells of delight burst out from all sides.

"Philip who? Philip what? What on earth is Philip? Where did you pick up your Philip?"

Simon answered nothing; and immovable in faith he defied them with his eye, ready to be martyred rather than fly before them. The schoolmaster came to his rescue and he returned home to his mother.

For a space of three months, the tall workman, Philip, frequently passed by La Blanchotte's house, and sometimes made bold to speak to her when he saw her sewing near the window. She answered him civilly, always sedately, never joking with him, nor permitting him to enter her house. Notwithstanding this, being, like all men, a bit of a coxcomb, he imagined that she was often rosier than usual when she chatted with him.

But a fallen reputation is so difficult to recover, and always remains so fragile that, in spite of the shy reserve La Blanchotte maintained, they already gossiped in the neighborhood.

As for Simon, he loved his new papa much, and walked with him nearly every evening when the day's work was done. He went regularly to school and mixed in a dignified way with his schoolfellows without ever answering them back.

One day, however, the lad who had first attacked him said to him:

"You have lied. You have not a papa named Philip."

"Why do you say that?" demanded Simon, much disturbed.

The youth rubbed his hands. He replied:

"Because if you had one he would be your mamma's husband."

Simon was confused by the truth of this reasoning; nevertheless he retorted:

"He is my papa all the same."

"That can very well be," exclaimed the urchin with a sneer, "but that is not being your papa altogether."

La Blanchotte's little one bowed his head and went off dreaming in the direction of the forge belonging to old Loizon, where Philip worked.

This forge was entombed in trees. It was very dark there, the red glare of a formidable furnace alone lit up with great flashes five blacksmiths, who hammered upon their anvils with a terrible din. Standing enveloped in flame, they worked like demons, their eyes fixed on the red-hot iron they were pounding; and their dull ideas rising and falling with their hammers.

Simon entered without being noticed and quietly plucked his

friend by the sleeve. Philip turned round. All at once the work came to a standstill and the men looked on very attentively. Then, in the midst of this unaccustomed silence, rose the little slender pipe of Simon:

"Philip, explain to me what the lad at La Michande has just told me, that you are not altogether my papa."

"And why that?" asked the smith.

The child replied in all innocence:

"Because you are not my mamma's husband."

No one laughed. Philip remained standing, leaning his forehead upon the back of his great hands, which held the handle of his hammer upright upon the anvil. He mused. His four companions watched him, and, like a tiny mite among these giants, Simon anxiously waited. Suddenly, one of the smiths, voicing the sentiment of all, said to Philip:

"All the same La Blanchotte is a good and honest girl, stalwart and steady in spite of her misfortune, and one who would make a worthy wife for an honest man."

"That is true," remarked the three others. The smith continued:

"Is it the girl's fault if she has fallen? She had been promised marriage, and I know more than one who is much respected to-day and has sinned every bit as much."

"That is true," responded the three men in chorus.

He resumed:

"How hard she has toiled, poor thing, to educate her lad all alone, and how much she has wept since she no longer goes out, save to church, God only knows."

"That also is true," said the others.

Then no more was heard save the roar of the bellows which fanned the fire of the furnace. Philip hastily bent himself down to Simon:

"Go and tell your mamma that I shall come to speak to her."

Then he pushed the child out by the shoulders. He returned to his work and in unison the five hammers again fell upon their anvils. Thus they wrought the iron until nightfall, strong, powerful, happy, like Vulcans satisfied. But as the great bell of a cathedral resounds upon feast days above the jingling of the other bells, so Philip's hammer, dominating the noise of the others, clanged second after second with a deafening uproar. His eye on the fire, he plied his trade vigorously, erect amid the sparks.

The sky was full of stars as he knocked at La Blanchotte's door. He had his Sunday blouse on, a fresh shirt, and his beard was trimmed. The young woman showed herself upon the threshold and

said in a grieved tone:

"It is ill to come thus when night has fallen, Mr. Philip."

He wished to answer, but stammered and stood confused before her.

She resumed:

"And you understand quite well that it will not do that I should be talked about any more."

Then he said all at once:

"What does that matter to me, if you will be my wife!"

No voice replied to him, but he believed that he heard in the shadow of the room the sound of a body falling. He entered very quickly; and Simon, who had gone to his bed, distinguished the sound of a kiss and some words that his mother said very softly. Then he suddenly found himself lifted up by the hands of his friend, who, holding him at the length of his herculean arms, exclaimed to him:

"You will tell your school-fellows that your papa is Philip Remy, the blacksmith, and that he will pull the ears of all who do you any harm."

On the morrow, when the school was full and lessons were about to begin, little Simon stood up quite pale with trembling lips:

"My papa," said he in a clear voice, "is Philip Remy, the blacksmith, and he has promised to box the ears of all who do me any harm."

This time no one laughed any longer, for he was very well known, was Philip Remy, the blacksmith, and he was a papa of whom anyone in the world would be proud.

## The Gipsy Prophecy

Bram Stoker

**I** really think," said the Doctor, "that, at any rate, one of us should go and try whether or not the thing is an imposture."

"Good!" said Considine. "After dinner we will take our cigars and stroll over to the camp."

Accordingly, when the dinner was over, and the La Tour finished, Joshua Considine and his friend, Dr Burleigh, went over to the east side of the moor, where the gipsy encampment lay. As they were leaving, Mary Considine, who had walked as far as the end of the garden where it opened into the laneway, called after her husband:

"Mind, Joshua, you are to give them a fair chance, but don't give them any clue to a fortune—and don't you get flirting with any of the gipsy maidens—and take care to keep Gerald out of harm."

For answer Considine held up his hand, as if taking a stage oath, and whistled the air of the old song, "The Gipsy Countess." Gerald joined in the strain, and then, breaking into merry laughter, the two men passed along the laneway to the common, turning now and then to wave their hands to Mary, who leaned over the gate, in the twilight, looking after them.

It was a lovely evening in the summer; the very air was full of rest and quiet happiness, as though an outward type of the peacefulness and joy which made a heaven of the home of the young married folk. Considine's life had not been an eventful one. The only disturbing element which he had ever known was in his wooing of Mary Winston, and the long-continued objection of her ambitious parents, who expected a brilliant match for their only daughter. When Mr. and Mrs. Winston had discovered the attachment of the young barrister, they had tried to keep the young people apart by sending their daughter away for a long round of visits, having made

her promise not to correspond with her lover during her absence. Love, however, had stood the test. Neither absence nor neglect seemed to cool the passion of the young man, and jealousy seemed a thing unknown to his sanguine nature; so, after a long period of waiting, the parents had given in, and the young folk were married.

They had been living in the cottage a few months, and were just beginning to feel at home. Gerald Burleigh, Joshua's old college chum, and himself a sometime victim of Mary's beauty, had arrived a week before, to stay with them for as long a time as he could tear himself away from his work in London.

When her husband had quite disappeared Mary went into the house, and, sitting down at the piano, gave an hour to Mendelssohn.

It was but a short walk across the common, and before the cigars required renewing the two men had reached the gipsy camp. The place was as picturesque as gipsy camps—when in villages and when business is good—usually are. There were some few persons round the fire, investing their money in prophecy, and a large number of others, poorer or more parsimonious, who stayed just outside the bounds but near enough to see all that went on.

As the two gentlemen approached, the villagers, who knew Joshua, made way a little, and a pretty, keen-eyed gipsy girl tripped up and asked to tell their fortunes. Joshua held out his hand, but the girl, without seeming to see it, stared at his face in a very odd manner. Gerald nudged him:

"You must cross her hand with silver," he said. "It is one of the most important parts of the mystery." Joshua took from his pocket a half-crown and held it out to her, but, without looking at it, she answered:

"You have to cross the gipsy's hand with gold."

Gerald laughed. "You are at a premium as a subject," he said. Joshua was of the kind of man—the universal kind—who can tolerate being stared at by a pretty girl; so, with some little deliberation, he answered:

"All right; here you are, my pretty girl; but you must give me a real good fortune for it," and he handed her a half sovereign, which she took, saying:

"It is not for me to give good fortune or bad, but only to read what the Stars have said." She took his right hand and turned it palm upward; but the instant her eyes met it she dropped it as though it had been red hot, and, with a startled look, glided swiftly away. Lifting the curtain of the large tent, which occupied the centre of the camp, she disappeared within.

"Sold again!" said the cynical Gerald. Joshua stood a little amazed,

and not altogether satisfied. They both watched the large tent. In a few moments there emerged from the opening not the young girl, but a stately looking woman of middle age and commanding presence.

The instant she appeared the whole camp seemed to stand still. The clamor of tongues, the laughter and noise of the work were, for a second or two, arrested, and every man or woman who sat, or crouched, or lay, stood up and faced the imperial looking gipsy.

"The Queen, of course," murmured Gerald. "We are in luck tonight." The gipsy Queen threw a searching glance around the camp, and then, without hesitating an instant, came straight over and stood before Joshua.

"Hold out your hand," she said in a commanding tone.

Again Gerald spoke, sotto voce: "I have not been spoken to in that way since I was at school."

"Your hand must be crossed with gold."

"A hundred percent at this game," whispered Gerald, as Joshua laid another half sovereign on his upturned palm.

The gipsy looked at the hand with knitted brows; then suddenly looking up into his face, said:

"Have you a strong will—have you a true heart that can be brave for one you love?"

"I hope so; but I am afraid I have not vanity enough to say 'yes'."

"Then I will answer for you; for I read resolution in your face—resolution desperate and determined if need be. You have a wife you love?"

"Yes," emphatically.

"Then leave her at once—never see her face again. Go from her now, while love is fresh and your heart is free from wicked intent. Go quick—go far, and never see her face again!"

Joshua drew away his hand quickly, and said, "Thank you!" stiffly but sarcastically, as he began to move away.

"I say!" said Gerald, "you're not going like that, old man; no use in being indignant with the Stars or their prophet—and, moreover, your sovereign—what of it? At least, hear the matter out."

"Silence, ribald!" commanded the Queen, "you know not what you do. Let him go—and go ignorant, if he will not be warned."

Joshua immediately turned back. "At all events, we will see this thing out," he said. "Now, madam, you have given me advice, but I paid for a fortune."

"Be warned!" said the gipsy. "The Stars have been silent for long; let the mystery still wrap them round."

"My dear madam, I do not get within touch of a mystery every day, and I prefer for my money knowledge rather than ignorance. I

can get the latter commodity for nothing when I want any of it."

Gerald echoed the sentiment. "As for me I have a large and unsaleable stock on hand."

The gipsy Queen eyed the two men sternly, and then said: "As you wish. You have chosen for yourself, and have met warning with scorn, and appeal with levity. On your own heads be the doom!"

"Amen!" said Gerald.

With an imperious gesture the Queen took Joshua's hand again, and began to tell his fortune.

"I see here the flowing of blood; it will flow before long; it is running in my sight. It flows through the broken circle of a severed ring."

"Go on!" said Joshua, smiling. Gerald was silent.

"Must I speak plainer?"

"Certainly; we commonplace mortals want something definite. The Stars are a long way off, and their words get somewhat dulled in the message."

The gipsy shuddered, and then spoke impressively. "This is the hand of a murderer—the murderer of his wife!" She dropped the hand and turned away.

Joshua laughed. "Do you know," said he, "I think if I were you I should prophesy some jurisprudence into my system. For instance, you say "this hand is the hand of a murderer." Well, whatever it may be in the future—or potentially—it is at present not one. You ought to give your prophecy in such terms as "the hand which will be a murderer's", or, rather, "the hand of one who will be the murderer of his wife". The Stars are really not good on technical questions."

The gipsy made no reply of any kind, but, with drooping head and despondent mien, walked slowly to her tent, and, lifting the curtain, disappeared.

Without speaking the two men turned homewards, and walked across the moor. Presently, after some little hesitation, Gerald spoke.

"Of course, old man, this is all a joke; a ghastly one, but still a joke. But would it not be well to keep it to ourselves?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, not tell your wife. It might alarm her."

"Alarm her! My dear Gerald, what are you thinking of? Why, she would not be alarmed or afraid of me if all the gipsies that ever didn't come from Bohemia agreed that I was to murder her, or even to have a hard thought of her, whilst so long as she was saying 'Jack Robinson.'"

Gerald remonstrated. "Old fellow, women are superstitious—far more than we men are; and, also they are blessed—or cursed—with



a nervous system to which we are strangers. I see too much of it in my work not to realize it. Take my advice and do not let her know, or you will frighten her."

Joshua's lips unconsciously hardened as he answered: "My dear fellow, I would not have a secret from my wife. Why, it would be the beginning of a new order of things between us. We have no secrets from each other. If we ever have, then you may begin to look out for something odd between us."

"Still," said Gerald, "at the risk of unwelcome interference, I say again be warned in time."

"The gipsy's very words," said Joshua. "You and she seem quite of one accord. Tell me, old man, is this a put-up thing? You told me of the gipsy camp—did you arrange it all with Her Majesty?" This was said with an air of bantering earnestness. Gerald assured him that he only heard of the camp that morning; but he made fun of every answer of his friend, and, in the process of this raillery, the time passed, and they entered the cottage.

Mary was sitting at the piano but not playing. The dim twilight had waked some very tender feelings in her breast, and her eyes were full of gentle tears. When the men came in she stole over to her husband's side and kissed him. Joshua struck a tragic attitude.

"Mary," he said in a deep voice, "before you approach me, listen to the words of Fate. The Stars have spoken and the doom is sealed."

"What is it, dear? Tell me the fortune, but do not frighten me."

"Not at all, my dear; but there is a truth which it is well that you should know. Nay, it is necessary so that all your arrangements can be made beforehand, and everything be decently done and in order."

"Go on, dear; I am listening."

"Mary Considine, your effigy may yet be seen at Madame Tussaud's. The *juris-imprudent* Stars have announced their fell tidings that this hand is red with blood—your blood. Mary! Mary! my God!" He sprang forward, but too late to catch her as she fell fainting on the floor.

"I told you," said Gerald. "You don't know them as well as I do."

After a little while Mary recovered from her swoon, but only to fall into strong hysterics, in which she laughed and wept and raved and cried, "Keep him from me—from me, Joshua, my husband," and many other words of entreaty and of fear.

Joshua Considine was in a state of mind bordering on agony, and when at last Mary became calm he knelt by her and kissed her feet and hands and hair and called her all the sweet names and said all the tender things his lips could frame. All that night he sat by her bedside and held her hand. Far through the night and up to the early

morning she kept waking from sleep and crying out as if in fear, till she was comforted by the consciousness that her husband was watching beside her.

Breakfast was late the next morning, but during it Joshua received a telegram which required him to drive over to Withering, nearly twenty miles. He was loth to go; but Mary would not hear of his remaining, and so before noon he drove off in his dog-cart alone.

When he was gone Mary retired to her room. She did not appear at lunch, but when afternoon tea was served on the lawn under the great weeping willow, she came to join her guest. She was looking quite recovered from her illness of the evening before. After some casual remarks, she said to Gerald: "Of course it was very silly about last night, but I could not help feeling frightened. Indeed I would feel so still if I let myself think of it. But, after all these people may only imagine things, and I have got a test that can hardly fail to show that the prediction is false—if indeed it be false," she added sadly.

"What is your plan?" asked Gerald.

"I shall go myself to the gipsy camp, and have my fortune told by the Queen."

"Capital. May I go with you?"

"Oh, no! That would spoil it. She might know you and guess at me, and suit her utterance accordingly. I shall go alone this afternoon."

When the afternoon was gone Mary Considine took her way to the gipsy encampment. Gerald went with her as far as the near edge of the common, and returned alone.

Half-an-hour had hardly elapsed when Mary entered the drawing-room, where he lay on a sofa reading. She was ghastly pale and was in a state of extreme excitement. Hardly had she passed over the threshold when she collapsed and sank moaning on the carpet. Gerald rushed to aid her, but by a great effort she controlled herself and motioned him to be silent. He waited, and his ready attention to her wish seemed to be her best help, for, in a few minutes, she had somewhat recovered, and was able to tell him what had passed.

"When I got to the camp," she said, "there did not seem to be a soul about, I went into the centre and stood there. Suddenly a tall woman stood beside me. 'Something told me I was wanted!' she said. I held out my hand and laid a piece of silver on it. She took from her neck a small golden trinket and laid it there also; and then, seizing the two, threw them into the stream that ran by. Then she took my hand in hers and spoke: 'Naught but blood in this guilty place,' and turned away. I caught hold of her and asked her to tell me more. After some hesitation, she said: 'Alas! alas! I see you lying

at your husband's feet, and his hands are red with blood'."

Gerald did not feel at all at ease, and tried to laugh it off. "Surely," he said, "this woman has a craze about murder."

"Do not laugh," said Mary, "I cannot bear it," and then, as if with a sudden impulse, she left the room.

Not long after Joshua returned, bright and cheery, and as hungry as a hunter after his long drive. His presence cheered his wife, who seemed much brighter, but she did not mention the episode of the visit to the gypsy camp, so Gerald did not mention it either. As if by tacit consent the subject was not alluded to during the evening. But there was a strange, settled look on Mary's face, which Gerald could not but observe.

In the morning Joshua came down to breakfast later than usual. Mary had been up and about the house from an early hour; but as the time drew on she seemed to get a little nervous and now and again threw around an anxious look.

Gerald could not help noticing that none of those at breakfast could get on satisfactorily with their food. It was not altogether that the chops were tough, but that the knives were all so blunt. Being a guest, he, of course, made no sign; but presently saw Joshua draw his thumb across the edge of his knife in an unconscious sort of way. At the action Mary turned pale and almost fainted.

After breakfast they all went out on the lawn. Mary was making up a bouquet, and said to her husband, "Get me a few of the tea-roses, dear."

Joshua pulled down a cluster from the front of the house. The stem bent, but was too tough to break. He put his hand in his pocket to get his knife; but in vain. "Lend me your knife, Gerald," he said. But Gerald had not got one, so he went into the breakfast room and took one from the table. He came out feeling its edge and grumbling. "What on earth has happened to all the knives—the edges seem all ground off?" Mary turned away hurriedly and entered the house.

Joshua tried to sever the stalk with the blunt knife as country cooks sever the necks of fowl—as schoolboys cut twine. With a little effort he finished the task. The cluster of roses grew thick, so he determined to gather a great bunch.

He could not find a single sharp knife in the sideboard where the cutlery was kept, so he called Mary, and when she came, told her the state of things. She looked so agitated and so miserable that he could not help knowing the truth, and, as if astounded and hurt, asked her:

"Do you mean to say that you have done it?"

She broke in, "Oh, Joshua, I was so afraid."

He paused, and a set, white look came over his face. "Mary!" said

he, "is this all the trust you have in me? I would not have believed it."

"Oh, Joshua! Joshua!" she cried entreatingly, "forgive me," and wept bitterly.

Joshua thought a moment and then said: "I see how it is. We shall better end this or we shall all go mad."

He ran into the drawing-room.

"Where are you going?" almost screamed Mary.

Gerald saw what he meant—that he would not be tied to blunt instruments by the force of a superstition, and was not surprised when he saw him come out through the French window, bearing in his hand a large Ghourka knife, which usually lay on the centre table, and which his brother had sent him from Northern India. It was one of those great hunting-knives which worked such havoc, at close quarters with the enemies of the loyal Ghourkas during the mutiny, of great weight but so evenly balanced in the hand as to seem light, and with an edge like a razor. With one of these knives a Ghourka can cut a sheep in two.

When Mary saw him come out of the room with the weapon in his hand she screamed in an agony of fright, and the hysterics of last night were promptly renewed.

Joshua ran toward her, and, seeing her falling, threw down the knife and tried to catch her.

However, he was just a second too late, and the two men cried out in horror simultaneously as they saw her fall upon the naked blade.

When Gerald rushed over he found that in falling her left hand had struck the blade, which lay partly upwards on the grass. Some of the small veins were cut through, and the blood gushed freely from the wound. As he was tying it up he pointed out to Joshua that the wedding ring was severed by the steel.

They carried her fainting to the house. When, after a while, she came out, with her arm in a sling, she was peaceful in her mind and happy. She said to her husband:

"The gipsy was wonderfully near the truth; too near for the real thing ever to occur now, dear."

Joshua bent over and kissed the wounded hand.

## The Test

W.W. Jacobs

Pebblesea was dull, and Mr. Frederick Dix, mate of the ketch *Starfish*, after a long and unsuccessful quest for amusement, returned to the harbor with an idea of forgetting his disappointment in sleep. The few shops in the High Street were closed, and the only entertainment offered at the taverns was contained in glass and pewter. The attitude of the landlord of the “Pilots’ Hope,” where Mr. Dix had sought to enliven the proceedings by a song and dance, still rankled in his memory.

The skipper and the hands were still ashore and the ketch looked so lonely that the mate, thinking better of his idea of retiring, thrust his hands deep in his pockets and sauntered round the harbor. It was nearly dark, and the only other man visible stood at the edge of the quay gazing at the water. He stood for so long that the mate’s easily aroused curiosity awoke, and, after twice passing, he edged up to him and ventured a remark on the fineness of the night.

“The night’s all right,” said the young man, gloomily.

“You’re rather near the edge,” said the mate, after a pause.

“I like being near the edge,” was the reply.

Mr. Dix whistled softly and, glancing up at the tall, white-faced young man before him, pushed his cap back and scratched his head.

“Ain’t got anything on your mind, have you?” he inquired.

The young man groaned and turned away, and the mate, scenting a little excitement, took him gently by the coat-sleeve and led him from the brink. Sympathy begets confidence, and, within the next ten minutes, he had learned that Arthur Heard, rejected by Emma Smith, was contemplating the awful crime of self-destruction.

“Why, I’ve known ‘er for seven years,” said Mr. Heard; “seven years, and this is the end of it.”

The mate shook his head.

"I told 'er I was coming straight away to drown myself," pursued Mr. Heard. "My last words to 'er was, "When you see my bloated corpse you'll be sorry.'"

"I expect she'll cry and carry on like anything," said the mate, politely.

The other turned and regarded him. "Why, you don't think I'm going to, do you?" he inquired, sharply. "Why, I wouldn't drown myself for fifty blooming gells."

"But what did you tell her you were going to for, then?" demanded the puzzled mate.

"Cos I thought it would upset 'er and make 'er give way," said the other, bitterly; "and all it done was to make 'er laugh as though she'd 'ave a fit."

"It would serve her jolly well right if you did drown yourself," said Mr. Dix, judiciously. "It 'ud spoil her life for her."

"Ah, and it wouldn't spoil mine, I s'pose?" rejoined Mr. Heard, with ferocious sarcasm.

"How she will laugh when she sees you tomorrow," mused the mate. "Is she the sort of girl that would spread it about?"

Mr. Heard said that she was, and, forgetting for a moment his great love, referred to her partiality for gossip in the most scathing terms he could muster. The mate, averse to such a tame ending to a promising adventure, eyed him thoughtfully.

"Why not just go in and out again," he said, seductively, "and run to her house all dripping wet?"

"That would be clever, wouldn't it?" said the ungracious Mr. Heard. "Starting to commit suicide, and then thinking better of it. Why, I should be a bigger laughing-stock than ever."

"But suppose I saved you against your will?" breathed the tempter; "how would that be?"

"It would be all right if I cared to run the risk," said the other, "but I don't. I should look well struggling in the water while you was diving in the wrong places for me, shouldn't I?"

"I wasn't thinking of such a thing," said Mr. Dix, hastily; "twenty strokes is about my mark—with my clothes off. My idea was to pull you out."

Mr. Heard glanced at the black water a dozen feet below. "How?" he inquired, shortly.

"Not here," said the mate. "Come to the end of the quay where the ground slopes to the water. It's shallow there, and you can tell her that you jumped in off here. She won't know the difference."

With an enthusiasm which Mr. Heard made no attempt to share, he led the way to the place indicated, and dilating upon its manifold

advantages, urged him to go in at once and get it over.

"You couldn't have a better night for it," he said, briskly. "Why, it makes me feel like a dip myself to look at it."

Mr. Heard gave a surly grunt, and after testing the temperature of the water with his hand, slowly and reluctantly immersed one foot. Then, with sudden resolution, he waded in and, ducking his head, stood up gasping.

"Give yourself a good soaking while you're about it," said the delighted mate.

Mr. Heard ducked again, and once more emerging stumbled towards the bank.

"Pull me out," he cried, sharply.

Mr. Dix, smiling indulgently, extended his hands, which Mr. Heard seized with the proverbial grasp of a drowning man.

"All right, take it easy, don't get excited," said the smiling mate, "four foot of water won't hurt anyone. If—Here! Let go o' me, d'ye hear? Let go! If you don't let go I'll punch your head."

"You couldn't save me against my will without coming in," said Mr. Heard. "Now we can tell 'er you dived in off the quay and got me just as I was sinking for the last time. You'll be a hero."

The mate's remarks about heroes were mercifully cut short. He was three stone lighter than Mr. Heard, and standing on shelving ground. The latter's victory was so sudden that he over-balanced, and only a commotion at the surface of the water showed where they had disappeared. Mr. Heard was first up and out, but almost immediately the figure of the mate, who had gone under with his mouth open, emerged from the water and crawled ashore.

"You—wait—till I—get my breath back," he gasped.

"There's no ill-feeling, I 'ope?" said Mr. Heard, anxiously. "I'll tell everybody of your bravery. Don't spoil everything for the sake of a little temper."

Mr. Dix stood up and clinched his fists, but at the spectacle of the dripping, forlorn figure before him his wrath vanished and he broke into a hearty laugh.

"Come on, mate," he said, clapping him on the back, "now let's go and find Emma. If she don't fall in love with you now she never will. My eye! You are a picture!"

He began to walk towards the town, and Mr. Heard, with his legs wide apart and his arms held stiffly from his body, waddled along beside him. Two little streamlets followed.

They walked along the quay in silence, and had nearly reached the end of it, when the figure of a man turned the corner of the houses and advanced at a shambling trot towards them.



"Old Smith!" said Mr. Heard, in a hasty whisper. "Now, be careful. Hold me tight."

The new-comer thankfully dropped into a walk as he saw them, and came to a standstill with a cry of astonishment as the light of a neighboring lamp revealed their miserable condition.

"Wot, Arthur!" he exclaimed.

"Halloa," said Mr. Heard, drearily.

"The idea o' your being so sinful," said Mr. Smith, severely. "Emma told me wot you said, but I never thought as you'd got the pluck to go and do it. I'm surprised at you."

"I ain't done it," said Mr. Heard, in a sullen voice; "nobody can drownd themselves in comfort with a lot of interfering people about."

Mr. Smith turned and gazed at the mate, and a broad beam of admiration shone in his face as he grasped that gentleman's hand.

"Come into the 'ouse both of you and get some dry clothes," he said, warmly.

He thrust his strong, thick-set figure between them, and with a hand on each coat-collar propelled them in the direction of home. The mate muttered something about going back to his ship, but Mr. Smith refused to listen, and stopping at the door of a neat cottage, turned the handle and thrust his dripping charges over the threshold of a comfortable sitting-room.

A pleasant-faced woman of middle age and a pretty girl of twenty rose at their entrance, and a faint scream fell pleasantly upon the ears of Mr. Heard.

"Here he is," bawled Mr. Smith; "just saved at the last moment."

"What, two of them?" exclaimed Miss Smith, with a faint note of gratification in her voice. Her gaze fell on the mate, and she smiled approvingly.

"No; this one jumped in and saved 'im," said her father.

"Oh, Arthur!" said Miss Smith. "How could you be so wicked! I never dreamt you'd go and do such a thing—never! I didn't think you'd got it in you."

Mr. Heard grinned sheepishly. "I told you I would," he muttered.

"Don't stand talking here," said Mrs. Smith, gazing at the puddle which was growing in the centre of the carpet; "they'll catch cold. Take 'em upstairs and give 'em some dry clothes. And I'll bring some hot whisky and water up to 'em."

"Rum is best," said Mr. Smith, herding his charges and driving them up the small staircase. "Send young Joe for some. Send up three glasses." They disappeared upstairs, and Joe appearing at that moment from the kitchen, was hastily sent off to the "Blue Jay"



for the rum. A couple of curious neighbors helped him to carry it back, and, standing modestly just inside the door, ventured on a few skilled directions as to its preparation. After which, with an eye on Miss Smith, they stood and conversed, mostly in head-shakes.

Stimulated by the rum and the energetic Mr. Smith, the men were not long in changing. Preceded by their host, they came down to the sitting-room again; Mr. Heard with as desperate and unrepentant an air as he could assume, and Mr. Dix trying to conceal his uneasiness by taking great interest in a suit of clothes three sizes too large for him.

"They was both as near drowned as could be," said Mr. Smith, looking round; "he ses Arthur fought like a madman to prevent 'imself from being saved."

"It was nothing, really," said the mate, in an almost inaudible voice, as he met Miss Smith's admiring gaze.

"Listen to 'im," said the delighted Mr. Smith; "all brave men are like that. That's wot's made us Englishmen wot we are."

"I don't suppose he knew who it was he was saving," said a voice from the door.

"I didn't want to be saved," said Mr. Heard, defiantly.

"Well, you can easy do it again, Arthur," said the same voice; "the dock won't run away."

Mr. Heard started and eyed the speaker with same malevolence.

"Tell us all about it," said Miss Smith, gazing at the mate, with her hands clasped. "Did you see him jump in?"

Mr. Dix shook his head and looked at Mr. Heard for guidance. "N—not exactly," he stammered; "I was just taking a stroll round the harbor before turning in, when all of a sudden I heard a cry for help—"

"No you didn't," broke in Mr. Heard, fiercely.

"Well, it sounded like it," said the mate, somewhat taken aback.

"I don't care what it sounded like," said the other. "I didn't say it. It was the last thing I should 'ave called out. I didn't want to be saved."

"P'r'aps he cried 'Emma,'" said the voice from the door.

"Might ha' been that," admitted the mate. "Well, when I heard it I ran to the edge and looked down at the water, and at first I couldn't see anything. Then I saw what I took to be a dog, but, knowing that dogs can't cry 'help!'—"

"Emma," corrected Mr. Heard.

"Emma," said the mate, "I just put my hands up and dived in. When I came to the surface I struck out for him and tried to seize him from behind, but before I could do so he put his arms round my neck

like—like—”

“Like as if it was Emma’s,” suggested the voice by the door.

Miss Smith rose with majestic dignity and confronted the speaker. “And who asked you in here, George Harris?” she inquired, coldly.

“I see the door open,” stammered Mr. Harris—“I see the door open and I thought—”

“If you look again you’ll see the handle,” said Miss Smith.

Mr. Harris looked, and, opening the door with extreme care, melted slowly from a gaze too terrible for human endurance.

“We went down like a stone,” continued the mate, as Miss Smith resumed her seat and smiled at him. “When we came up he tried to get away again. I think we went down again a few more times, but I ain’t sure. Then we crawled out; leastways I did, and pulled him after me.”

“He might have drowned you,” said Miss Smith, with a severe glance at her unfortunate admirer. “And it’s my belief that he tumbled in after all, and when you thought he was struggling to get away he was struggling to be saved. That’s more like him.”

“Well, they’re all right now,” said Mr. Smith, as Mr. Heard broke in with some vehemence. “And this chap’s going to ‘ave the Royal Society’s medal for it, or I’ll know the reason why.”

“No, no,” said the mate, hurriedly; “I wouldn’t take it, I couldn’t think of it.”

“Take it or leave it,” said Mr. Smith; “but I’m going to the police to try and get it for you. I know the inspector a bit.”

“I can’t take it,” said the horrified mate; “it—it—besides, don’t you see, if this isn’t kept quiet Mr. Heard will be locked up for trying to commit suicide.”

“So he would be,” said the other man from his post by the door; “he’s quite right.”

“And I’d sooner lose fifty medals,” said Mr. Dix. “What’s the good of me saving him for that?”

A murmur of admiration at the mate’s extraordinary nobility of character jarred harshly on the ears of Mr. Heard. Most persistent of all was the voice of Miss Smith, and hardly able to endure things quietly, he sat and watched the tender glances which passed between her and Mr. Dix. Miss Smith, conscious at last of his regards, turned and looked at him.

“You could say you tumbled in, Arthur, and then he would get the medal,” she said, softly.

“Say!” shouted the overwrought Mr. Heard. “Say I tum—”

Words failed him. He stood swaying and regarding the company

for a moment, and then, flinging open the door, closed it behind him with a bang that made the house tremble.

The mate followed half an hour later, escorted to the ship by the entire Smith family. Fortified by the presence of Miss Smith, he pointed out the exact scene of the rescue without a tremor, and, when her father narrated the affair to the skipper, whom they found sitting on deck smoking a last pipe, listened undismayed to that astonished mariner's comments.

News of the mate's heroic conduct became general the next day, and work on the ketch was somewhat impeded in consequence. It became a point of honor with Mr. Heard's fellow-townsmen to allude to the affair as an accident, but the romantic nature of the transaction was well understood, and full credit given to Mr. Dix for his self-denial in the matter of the medal. Small boys followed him in the street, and half Pebblesea knew when he paid a visit to the Smith's, and discussed his chances. Two nights afterwards, when he and Miss Smith went for a walk in the loneliest spot they could find, conversation turned almost entirely upon the over-crowded condition of the British Isles.

The Starfish was away for three weeks, but the little town no longer looked dull to the mate as she entered the harbor one evening and glided slowly towards her old berth. Emma Smith was waiting to see the ship come in, and his taste for all other amusements had temporarily disappeared.

For two or three days the course of true love ran perfectly smooth; then, like a dark shadow, the figure of Arthur Heard was thrown across its path. It haunted the quay, hung about the house, and cropped up unexpectedly in the most distant solitudes. It came up behind the mate one evening just as he left the ship and walked beside him in silence.

"Halloa," said the mate, at last.

"Halloa," said Mr. Heard. "Going to see Emma?"

"I'm going to see Miss Smith," said the mate.

Mr. Heard laughed; a forced, mirthless laugh.

"And we don't want you following us about," said Mr. Dix, sharply. "If it'll ease your mind, and do you any good to know, you never had a chance. She told me so."

"I sha'n't follow you," said Mr. Heard; "it's your last evening, so you'd better make the most of it."

He turned on his heel, and the mate, pondering on his last words, went thoughtfully on to the house.

Amid the distraction of pleasant society and a long walk, the matter passed from his mind, and he only remembered it at nine

o'clock that evening as a knock sounded on the door and the fallow face of Mr. Heard was thrust into the room.

"Good-evening all," said the intruder.

"Evening, Arthur," said Mr. Smith, affably.

Mr. Heard with a melancholy countenance entered the room and closed the door gently behind him. Then he coughed slightly and shook his head.

"Anything the matter, Arthur?" inquired Mr. Smith, somewhat disturbed by these manifestations.

"I've got something on my mind," said Mr. Heard, with a diabolical glance at the mate—"something wot's been worrying me for a long time. I've been deceiving you."

"That was always your failing, Arthur—deceitfulness," said Mrs. Smith. "I remember—"

"We've both been deceiving you," interrupted Mr. Heard, loudly. "I didn't jump into the harbor the other night, and I didn't tumble in, and Mr. Fred Dix didn't jump in after me; we just went to the end of the harbor and walked in and wetted ourselves."

There was a moment's intense silence and all eyes turned on the mate. The latter met them boldly.

"It's a habit o' mine to walk into the water and spoil my clothes for the sake of people I've never met before," he said, with a laugh.

"For shame, Arthur!" said Mr. Smith, with a huge sigh of relief.

"Ow can you?" said Mrs. Smith.

"Arthur's been asleep since then," said the mate, still smiling. "All the same, the next time he jumps in he can get out by himself."

Mr. Heard, raising his voice, entered into a minute description of the affair, but in vain. Mr. Smith, rising to his feet, denounced his ingratitude in language which was seldom allowed to pass unchallenged in the presence of his wife, while that lady contributed examples of deceitfulness in the past of Mr. Heard, which he strove in vain to refute. Meanwhile, her daughter patted the mate's hand.

"It's a bit too thin, Arthur," said the latter, with a mocking smile; "try something better next time."

"Very well," said Mr. Heard, in quieter tones; "I dare you to come along to the harbor and jump in, just as you are, where you said you jumped in after me. They'll soon see who's telling the truth."

"He'll do that," said Mr. Smith, with conviction.

For a fraction of a second Mr. Dix hesitated, then, with a steady glance at Miss Smith, he sprang to his feet and accepted the challenge. Mrs. Smith besought him not to be foolish, and, with a vague idea of dissuading him, told him a slanderous anecdote concerning Mr. Heard's aunt. Her daughter gazed at the mate with proud confidence,

and, taking his arm, bade her mother to get some dry clothes ready and led the way to the harbor.

The night was fine but dark, and a chill breeze blew up from the sea. Twice the hapless mate thought of backing out, but a glance at Miss Smith's profile and the tender pressure of her arm deterred him. The tide was running out and he had a faint hope that he might keep afloat long enough to be washed ashore alive. He talked rapidly, and his laugh rang across the water. Arrived at the spot they stopped, and Miss Smith looking down into the darkness was unable to repress a shiver.

"Be careful, Fred," she said, laying her hand upon his arm.

The mate looked at her oddly. "All right," he said, gayly, "I'll be out almost before I'm in. You run back to the house and help your mother get the dry clothes ready for me."

His tones were so confident, and his laugh so buoyant, that Mr. Heard, who had been fully expecting him to withdraw from the affair, began to feel that he had under-rated his swimming powers. "Just jumping in and swimming out again is not quite the same as saving a drowning man," he said, with a sneer.

In a flash the mate saw a chance of escape.

"Why, there's no satisfying you," he said, slowly. "If I do go in I can see that you won't own up that you've been lying."

"He'll 'ave to," said Mr. Smith, who, having made up his mind for a little excitement, was in no mind to lose it.

"I don't believe he would," said the mate. "Look here!" he said, suddenly, as he laid an affectionate arm on the old man's shoulder. "I know what we'll do."

"Well?" said Mr. Smith.

"I'll save you," said the mate, with a smile of great relief.

"Save me?" said the puzzled Mr. Smith, as his daughter uttered a faint cry. "How?"

"Just as I saved him," said the other, nodding. "You jump in, and after you've sunk twice—same as he did—I'll dive in and save you. At any rate I'll do my best; I promise you I won't come ashore without you."

Mr. Smith hastily flung off the encircling arm and retired a few paces inland. "'Ave you—ever been—in a lunatic asylum at any time?" he inquired, as soon as he could speak.

"No," said the mate, gravely.

"Neither 'ave I," said Mr. Smith; "and, what's more, I'm not going."

He took a deep breath and stood simmering. Miss Smith came forward and, with a smothered giggle, took the mate's arm and

squeezed it.

"It'll have to be Arthur again, then," said the latter, in a resigned voice.

"Me?" cried Mr. Heard, with a start.

"Yes, you!" said the mate, in a decided voice. "After what you said just now I'm not going in without saving somebody. It would be no good. Come on, in you go."

"He couldn't speak fairer than that, Arthur," said Mr. Smith, dispassionately, as he came forward again.

"But I tell you he can't swim," protested Mr. Heard, "not properly. He didn't swim last time; I told you so."

"Never mind; we know what you said," retorted the mate. "All you've got to do is to jump in and I'll follow and save you—same as I did the other night."

"Go on, Arthur," said Mr. Smith, encouragingly. "It ain't cold."

"I tell you he can't swim," repeated Mr. Heard, passionately. "I should be drowned before your eyes."

"Rubbish," said Mr. Smith. "Why, I believe you're afraid."

"I should be drowned, I tell you," said Mr. Heard. "He wouldn't come in after me."

"Yes, he would," said Mr. Smith, passing a muscular arm round the mate's waist; "'cos the moment you're overboard I'll drop 'im in. Are you ready?"

He stood embracing the mate and waiting, but Mr. Heard, with an infuriated exclamation, walked away. A parting glance showed him that the old man had released the mate, and that the latter was now embracing Miss Smith.

## Telling Mrs. Baker

Henry Lawson

**M**ost Bushmen who hadn't 'known Bob Baker to speak to', had 'heard tell of him'. He'd been a squatter, not many years before, on the Macquarie river in New South Wales, and had made money in the good seasons, and had gone in for horse-racing and racehorse-breeding, and long trips to Sydney, where he put up at swell hotels and went the pace. So after a pretty severe drought, when the sheep died by thousands on his runs, Bob Baker went under, and the bank took over his station and put a manager in charge.

He'd been a jolly, open-handed, popular man, which means that he'd been a selfish man as far as his wife and children were concerned, for they had to suffer for it in the end. Such generosity is often born of vanity, or moral cowardice, or both mixed. It's very nice to hear the chaps sing 'For he's a jolly good fellow', but you've mostly got to pay for it twice—first in company, and afterwards alone. I once heard the chaps singing that I was a jolly good fellow, when I was leaving a place and they were giving me a send-off. It thrilled me, and brought a warm gush to my eyes; but, all the same, I wished I had half the money I'd lent them, and spent on 'em, and I wished I'd used the time I'd wasted to be a jolly good fellow.

When I first met Bob Baker he was a boss-drover on the great north-western route, and his wife lived at the township of Solong on the Sydney side. He was going north to new country round by the Gulf of Carpentaria, with a big mob of cattle, on a two years' trip; and I and my mate, Andy M'Culloch, engaged to go with him. We wanted to have a look at the Gulf Country.

After we had crossed the Queensland border it seemed to me that the Boss was too fond of going into wayside shanties and town pubs. Andy had been with him on another trip, and he told me that



the Boss was only going this way lately. Andy knew Mrs Baker well, and seemed to think a deal of her. "She's a good little woman," said Andy. "One of the right stuff. I worked on their station for a while when I was a nipper, and I know. She was always a damned sight too good for the Boss, but she believed in him. When I was coming away this time she says to me, 'Look here, Andy, I'm afraid Robert is drinking again. Now I want you to look after him for me, as much as you can—you seem to have as much influence with him as any one. I want you to promise me that you'll never have a drink with him.'"

"And I promised," said Andy, "and I'll keep my word." Andy was a chap who could keep his word, and nothing else. And, no matter how the Boss persuaded, or sneered, or swore at him, Andy would never drink with him.

It got worse and worse: the Boss would ride on ahead and get drunk at a shanty, and sometimes he'd be days behind us; and when he'd catch up to us his temper would be just about as much as we could stand. At last he went on a howling spree at Mulgatown, about a hundred and fifty miles north of the border, and, what was worse, he got in tow with a flash barmaid there—one of those girls who are engaged, by the publicans up country, as baits for chequemen.

He went mad over that girl. He drew an advance cheque from the stock-owner's agent there, and knocked that down; then he raised some more money somehow, and spent that—mostly on the girl.

We did all we could. Andy got him along the track for a couple of stages, and just when we thought he was all right, he slipped us in the night and went back.

We had two other men with us, but had the devil's own bother on account of the cattle. It was a mixed-up job all round. You see it was all big runs round there, and we had to keep the bullocks moving along the route all the time, or else get into trouble for trespass. The agent wasn't going to go to the expense of putting the cattle in a paddock until the Boss sobered up; there was very little grass on the route or the travelling-stock reserves or camps, so we had to keep travelling for grass.

The world might wobble and all the banks go bung, but the cattle have to go through—that's the law of the stock-routes. So the agent wired to the owners, and, when he got their reply, he sacked the Boss and sent the cattle on in charge of another man. The new Boss was a drover coming south after a trip; he had his two brothers with him, so he didn't want me and Andy; but, anyway, we were full up of this trip, so we arranged, between the agent and the new Boss, to get most of the wages due to us—the Boss had drawn some of our stuff and spent it.



We could have started on the back track at once, but, drunk or sober, mad or sane, good or bad, it isn't Bush religion to desert a mate in a hole; and the Boss was a mate of ours; so we stuck to him.

We camped on the creek, outside the town, and kept him in the camp with us as much as possible, and did all we could for him.

"How could I face his wife if I went home without him?" asked Andy, "or any of his old mates?"

The Boss got himself turned out of the pub where the barmaid was, and then he'd hang round the other pubs, and get drink somehow, and fight, and get knocked about. He was an awful object by this time, wild-eyed and gaunt, and he hadn't washed or shaved for days.

Andy got the constable in charge of the police station to lock him up for a night, but it only made him worse: we took him back to the camp next morning and while our eyes were off him for a few minutes he slipped away into the scrub, stripped himself naked, and started to hang himself to a leaning tree with a piece of clothes-line rope. We got to him just in time.

Then Andy wired to the Boss's brother Ned, who was fighting the drought, the rabbit-pest, and the banks, on a small station back on the border. Andy reckoned it was about time to do something.

Perhaps the Boss hadn't been quite right in his head before he started drinking—he had acted queer some time, now we came to think of it; maybe he'd got a touch of sunstroke or got brooding over his troubles—anyway he died in the horrors within the week.

His brother Ned turned up on the last day, and Bob thought he was the devil, and grappled with him. It took the three of us to hold the Boss down sometimes.

Sometimes, towards the end, he'd be sensible for a few minutes and talk about his 'poor wife and children'; and immediately afterwards he'd fall a-cursing me, and Andy, and Ned, and calling us devils. He cursed everything; he cursed his wife and children, and yelled that they were dragging him down to hell. He died raving mad. It was the worst case of death in the horrors of drink that I ever saw or heard of in the Bush.

Ned saw to the funeral: it was very hot weather, and men have to be buried quick who die out there in the hot weather—especially men who die in the state the Boss was in. Then Ned went to the public-house where the barmaid was and called the landlord out. It was a desperate fight: the publican was a big man, and a bit of a fighting man; but Ned was one of those quiet, simple-minded chaps who will carry a thing through to death when they make up their minds. He gave that publican nearly as good a thrashing as he

deserved. The constable in charge of the station backed Ned, while another policeman picked up the publican. Sounds queer to you city people, doesn't it?

Next morning we three started south. We stayed a couple of days at Ned Baker's station on the border, and then started on our three-hundred-mile ride down-country. The weather was still very hot, so we decided to travel at night for a while, and left Ned's place at dusk. He parted from us at the homestead gate. He gave Andy a small packet, done up in canvas, for Mrs Baker, which Andy told me contained Bob's pocket-book, letters, and papers. We looked back, after we'd gone a piece along the dusty road, and saw Ned still standing by the gate; and a very lonely figure he looked. Ned was a bachelor. "Poor old Ned," said Andy to me. "He was in love with Mrs Bob Baker before she got married, but she picked the wrong man—girls mostly do. Ned and Bob were together on the Macquarie, but Ned left when his brother married, and he's been up in these God-forsaken scrubs ever since. Look, I want to tell you something, Jack: Ned has written to Mrs Bob to tell her that Bob died of fever, and everything was done for him that could be done, and that he died easy—and all that sort of thing. Ned sent her some money, and she is to think that it was the money due to Bob when he died. Now I'll have to go and see her when we get to Solong; there's no getting out of it, I'll have to face her—and you'll have to come with me."

"Damned if I will!" I said.

"But you'll have to," said Andy. "You'll have to stick to me; you're surely not crawler enough to desert a mate in a case like this? I'll have to lie like hell—I'll have to lie as I never lied to a woman before; and you'll have to back me and corroborate every lie."

I'd never seen Andy show so much emotion.

"There's plenty of time to fix up a good yarn," said Andy. He said no more about Mrs Baker, and we only mentioned the Boss's name casually, until we were within about a day's ride of Solong; then Andy told me the yarn he'd made up about the Boss's death.

"And I want you to listen, Jack," he said, "and remember every word—and if you can fix up a better yarn you can tell me afterwards. Now it was like this: the Boss wasn't too well when he crossed the border. He complained of pains in his back and head and a stinging pain in the back of his neck, and he had dysentery bad,—but that doesn't matter; it's lucky I ain't supposed to tell a woman all the symptoms. The Boss stuck to the job as long as he could, but we managed the cattle and made it as easy as we could for him. He'd just take it easy, and ride on from camp to camp, and rest. One night I rode to a town off the route (or you did, if you like) and got some

medicine for him; that made him better for a while, but at last, a day or two this side of Mulgatown, he had to give up. A squatter there drove him into town in his buggy and put him up at the best hotel. The publican knew the Boss and did all he could for him—put him in the best room and wired for another doctor. We wired for Ned as soon as we saw how bad the Boss was, and Ned rode night and day and got there three days before the Boss died. The Boss was a bit off his head some of the time with the fever, but was calm and quiet towards the end and died easy. He talked a lot about his wife and children, and told us to tell the wife not to fret but to cheer up for the children's sake. How does that sound?"

I'd been thinking while I listened, and an idea struck me.

"Why not let her know the truth?" I asked. "She's sure to hear of it sooner or later; and if she knew he was only a selfish, drunken blackguard she might get over it all the sooner."

"You don't know women, Jack," said Andy quietly. "And, anyway, even if she is a sensible woman, we've got a dead mate to consider as well as a living woman."

"But she's sure to hear the truth sooner or later," I said, "the Boss was so well known."

"And that's just the reason why the truth might be kept from her," said Andy. "If he wasn't well known—and nobody could help liking him, after all, when he was straight—if he wasn't so well known the truth might leak out unawares. She won't know if I can help it, or at least not yet a while. If I see any chaps that come from the North I'll put them up to it. I'll tell M'Grath, the publican at Solong, too: he's a straight man—he'll keep his ears open and warn chaps. One of Mrs Baker's sisters is staying with her, and I'll give her a hint so that she can warn off any women that might get hold of a yarn. Besides, Mrs Baker is sure to go and live in Sydney, where all her people are—she was a Sydney girl; and she's not likely to meet any one there that will tell her the truth. I can tell her that it was the last wish of the Boss that she should shift to Sydney."

We smoked and thought a while, and by-and-by Andy had what he called a "happy thought". He went to his saddle-bags and got out the small canvas packet that Ned had given him: it was sewn up with packing-thread, and Andy ripped it open with his pocket-knife.

"What are you doing, Andy?" I asked.

"Ned's an innocent old fool, as far as sin is concerned," said Andy. "I guess he hasn't looked through the Boss's letters, and I'm just going to see that there's nothing here that will make liars of us."

He looked through the letters and papers by the light of the fire. There were some letters from Mrs Baker to her husband, also a

portrait of her and the children; these Andy put aside. But there were other letters from barmaids and women who were not fit to be seen in the same street with the Boss's wife; and there were portraits—one or two flash ones. There were two letters from other men's wives too.

"And one of those men, at least, was an old mate of his!" said Andy, in a tone of disgust.

He threw the lot into the fire; then he went through the Boss's pocket-book and tore out some leaves that had notes and addresses on them, and burnt them too. Then he sewed up the packet again and put it away in his saddle-bag.

"Such is life!" said Andy, with a yawn that might have been half a sigh.

We rode into Solong early in the day, turned our horses out in a paddock, and put up at M'Grath's pub. until such time as we made up our minds as to what we'd do or where we'd go. We had an idea of waiting until the shearing season started and then making Out-Back to the big sheds.

Neither of us was in a hurry to go and face Mrs Baker. "We'll go after dinner," said Andy at first; then after dinner we had a drink, and felt sleepy—we weren't used to big dinners of roast-beef and vegetables and pudding, and, besides, it was drowsy weather—so we decided to have a snooze and then go. When we woke up it was late in the afternoon, so we thought we'd put it off till after tea. "It wouldn't be manners to walk in while they're at tea," said Andy—"it would look as if we only came for some grub."

But while we were at tea a little girl came with a message that Mrs Baker wanted to see us, and would be very much obliged if we'd call up as soon as possible. You see, in those small towns you can't move without the thing getting round inside of half an hour.

"We'll have to face the music now!" said Andy, "and no get out of it." He seemed to hang back more than I did. There was another pub. opposite where Mrs Baker lived, and when we got up the street a bit I said to Andy—

"Suppose we go and have another drink first, Andy? We might be kept in there an hour or two."

"You don't want another drink," said Andy, rather short. "Why, you seem to be going the same way as the Boss!" But it was Andy that edged off towards the pub. when we got near Mrs Baker's place. "All right!" he said. "Come on! We'll have this other drink, since you want it so bad."

We had the drink, then we buttoned up our coats and started across the road—we'd bought new shirts and collars, and spruced up a bit. Half-way across Andy grabbed my arm and asked—

"How do you feel now, Jack?"

"Oh, I'M all right," I said.

"For God's sake!" said Andy, "don't put your foot in it and make a mess of it."

"I won't, if you don't."

Mrs Baker's cottage was a little weather-board box affair back in a garden. When we went in through the gate Andy gripped my arm again and whispered—

"For God's sake stick to me now, Jack!"

"I'll stick all right," I said—"you've been having too much beer, Andy."

I had seen Mrs Baker before, and remembered her as a cheerful, contented sort of woman, bustling about the house and getting the Boss's shirts and things ready when we started North. Just the sort of woman that is contented with housework and the children, and with nothing particular about her in the way of brains. But now she sat by the fire looking like the ghost of herself. I wouldn't have recognised her at first. I never saw such a change in a woman, and it came like a shock to me.

Her sister let us in, and after a first glance at Mrs Baker I had eyes for the sister and no one else. She was a Sydney girl, about twenty-four or twenty-five, and fresh and fair—not like the sun-browned women we were used to see. She was a pretty, bright-eyed girl, and seemed quick to understand, and very sympathetic. She had been educated, Andy had told me, and wrote stories for the Sydney 'Bulletin' and other Sydney papers. She had her hair done and was dressed in the city style, and that took us back a bit at first.

"It's very good of you to come," said Mrs Baker in a weak, weary voice, when we first went in. "I heard you were in town."

"We were just coming when we got your message," said Andy. "We'd have come before, only we had to see to the horses."

"It's very kind of you, I'm sure," said Mrs Baker.

They wanted us to have tea, but we said we'd just had it. Then Miss Standish (the sister) wanted us to have tea and cake; but we didn't feel as if we could handle cups and saucers and pieces of cake successfully just then.

There was something the matter with one of the children in a back-room, and the sister went to see to it. Mrs Baker cried a little quietly.

"You mustn't mind me," she said. "I'll be all right presently, and then I want you to tell me all about poor Bob. It's seeing you, that saw the last of him, that set me off."

Andy and I sat stiff and straight, on two chairs against the wall,

and held our hats tight, and stared at a picture of Wellington meeting Blucher on the opposite wall. I thought it was lucky that that picture was there.

The child was calling 'mumma', and Mrs Baker went in to it, and her sister came out. "Best tell her all about it and get it over," she whispered to Andy. "She'll never be content until she hears all about poor Bob from some one who was with him when he died. Let me take your hats. Make yourselves comfortable."

She took the hats and put them on the sewing-machine. I wished she'd let us keep them, for now we had nothing to hold on to, and nothing to do with our hands; and as for being comfortable, we were just about as comfortable as two cats on wet bricks.

When Mrs Baker came into the room she brought little Bobby Baker, about four years old; he wanted to see Andy. He ran to Andy at once, and Andy took him up on his knee. He was a pretty child, but he reminded me too much of his father.

"I'm so glad you've come, Andy!" said Bobby.

"Are you, Bobby?"

"Yes. I wants to ask you about daddy. You saw him go away, didn't you?" and he fixed his great wondering eyes on Andy's face.

"Yes," said Andy.

"He went up among the stars, didn't he?"

"Yes," said Andy.

"And he isn't coming back to Bobby any more?"

"No," said Andy. "But Bobby's going to him by-and-by."

Mrs Baker had been leaning back in her chair, resting her head on her hand, tears glistening in her eyes; now she began to sob, and her sister took her out of the room.

Andy looked miserable. "I wish to God I was off this job!" he whispered to me.

"Is that the girl that writes the stories?" I asked.

"Yes," he said, staring at me in a hopeless sort of way, "and poems too."

"Is Bobby going up among the stars?" asked Bobby.

"Yes," said Andy—"if Bobby's good."

"And auntie?"

"Yes."

"And mumma?"

"Yes."

"Are you going, Andy?"

"Yes," said Andy hopelessly.

"Did you see daddy go up amongst the stars, Andy?"

"Yes," said Andy, "I saw him go up."

"And he isn't coming down again any more?"

"No," said Andy.

"Why isn't he?"

"Because he's going to wait up there for you and mumma, Bobby."

There was a long pause, and then Bobby asked—

"Are you going to give me a shilling, Andy?" with the same expression of innocent wonder in his eyes.

Andy slipped half-a-crown into his hand. 'Auntie' came in and told him he'd see Andy in the morning and took him away to bed, after he'd kissed us both solemnly; and presently she and Mrs Baker settled down to hear Andy's story.

"Brace up now, Jack, and keep your wits about you," whispered Andy to me just before they came in.

"Poor Bob's brother Ned wrote to me," said Mrs Baker, "but he scarcely told me anything. Ned's a good fellow, but he's very simple, and never thinks of anything."

Andy told her about the Boss not being well after he crossed the border.

"I knew he was not well," said Mrs Baker, "before he left. I didn't want him to go. I tried hard to persuade him not to go this trip. I had a feeling that I oughtn't to let him go. But he'd never think of anything but me and the children. He promised he'd give up droving after this trip, and get something to do near home. The life was too much for him—riding in all weathers and camping out in the rain, and living like a dog. But he was never content at home. It was all for the sake of me and the children. He wanted to make money and start on a station again. I shouldn't have let him go. He only thought of me and the children! Oh! my poor, dear, kind, dead husband!" She broke down again and sobbed, and her sister comforted her, while Andy and I stared at Wellington meeting Blucher on the field of Waterloo. I thought the artist had heaped up the dead a bit extra, and I thought that I wouldn't like to be trod on by horses, even if I was dead.

"Don't you mind," said Miss Standish, "she'll be all right presently," and she handed us the 'Illustrated Sydney Journal'. This was a great relief,—we bumped our heads over the pictures.

Mrs Baker made Andy go on again, and he told her how the Boss broke down near Mulgatown. Mrs Baker was opposite him and Miss Standish opposite me. Both of them kept their eyes on Andy's face: he sat, with his hair straight up like a brush as usual, and kept his big innocent grey eyes fixed on Mrs Baker's face all the time he was speaking. I watched Miss Standish. I thought she was the prettiest girl I'd ever seen; it was a bad case of love at first sight, but she was



far and away above me, and the case was hopeless. I began to feel pretty miserable, and to think back into the past: I just heard Andy droning away by my side.

"So we fixed him up comfortable in the waggonette with the blankets and coats and things," Andy was saying, "and the squatter started into Mulgatown.... It was about thirty miles, Jack, wasn't it?" he asked, turning suddenly to me. He always looked so innocent that there were times when I itched to knock him down.

"More like thirty-five," I said, waking up.

Miss Standish fixed her eyes on me, and I had another look at Wellington and Blucher.

"They were all very good and kind to the Boss," said Andy. "They thought a lot of him up there. Everybody was fond of him."

"I know it," said Mrs Baker. "Nobody could help liking him. He was one of the kindest men that ever lived."

"Tanner, the publican, couldn't have been kinder to his own brother," said Andy. "The local doctor was a decent chap, but he was only a young fellow, and Tanner hadn't much faith in him, so he wired for an older doctor at Mackintyre, and he even sent out fresh horses to meet the doctor's buggy. Everything was done that could be done, I assure you, Mrs Baker."

"I believe it," said Mrs Baker. "And you don't know how it relieves me to hear it. And did the publican do all this at his own expense?"

"He wouldn't take a penny, Mrs Baker."

"He must have been a good true man. I wish I could thank him."

"Oh, Ned thanked him for you," said Andy, though without meaning more than he said.

"I wouldn't have fancied that Ned would have thought of that," said Mrs Baker. "When I first heard of my poor husband's death, I thought perhaps he'd been drinking again—that worried me a bit."

"He never touched a drop after he left Solong, I can assure you, Mrs Baker," said Andy quickly.

Now I noticed that Miss Standish seemed surprised or puzzled, once or twice, while Andy was speaking, and leaned forward to listen to him; then she leaned back in her chair and clasped her hands behind her head and looked at him, with half-shut eyes, in a way I didn't like. Once or twice she looked at me as if she was going to ask me a question, but I always looked away quick and stared at Blucher and Wellington, or into the empty fireplace, till I felt that her eyes were off me. Then she asked Andy a question or two, in all innocence I believe now, but it scared him, and at last he watched his chance and winked at her sharp. Then she gave a little gasp and shut



up like a steel trap.

The sick child in the bedroom coughed and cried again. Mrs Baker went to it. We three sat like a deaf-and-dumb institution, Andy and I staring all over the place: presently Miss Standish excused herself, and went out of the room after her sister. She looked hard at Andy as she left the room, but he kept his eyes away.

"Brace up now, Jack," whispered Andy to me, "the worst is coming."

When they came in again Mrs Baker made Andy go on with his story.

"He—he died very quietly," said Andy, hitching round, and resting his elbows on his knees, and looking into the fireplace so as to have his face away from the light. Miss Standish put her arm round her sister. "He died very easy," said Andy. "He was a bit off his head at times, but that was while the fever was on him. He didn't suffer much towards the end—I don't think he suffered at all.... He talked a lot about you and the children." (Andy was speaking very softly now.) "He said that you were not to fret, but to cheer up for the children's sake.... It was the biggest funeral ever seen round there."

Mrs Baker was crying softly. Andy got the packet half out of his pocket, but shoved it back again.

"The only thing that hurts me now," says Mrs Baker presently, "is to think of my poor husband buried out there in the lonely Bush, so far from home. It's—cruel!" and she was sobbing again.

"Oh, that's all right, Mrs Baker," said Andy, losing his head a little. "Ned will see to that. Ned is going to arrange to have him brought down and buried in Sydney." Which was about the first thing Andy had told her that evening that wasn't a lie. Ned had said he would do it as soon as he sold his wool.

"It's very kind indeed of Ned," sobbed Mrs Baker. "I'd never have dreamed he was so kind-hearted and thoughtful. I misjudged him all along. And that is all you have to tell me about poor Robert?"

"Yes," said Andy—then one of his "happy thoughts" struck him. "Except that he hoped you'd shift to Sydney, Mrs Baker, where you've got friends and relations. He thought it would be better for you and the children. He told me to tell you that."

"He was thoughtful up to the end," said Mrs Baker. "It was just like poor Robert—always thinking of me and the children. We are going to Sydney next week."

Andy looked relieved. We talked a little more, and Miss Standish wanted to make coffee for us, but we had to go and see to our horses. We got up and bumped against each other, and got each other's hats, and promised Mrs Baker we'd come again.

"Thank you very much for coming," she said, shaking hands with us. "I feel much better now. You don't know how much you have relieved me. Now, mind, you have promised to come and see me again for the last time."

Andy caught her sister's eye and jerked his head towards the door to let her know he wanted to speak to her outside.

"Good-bye, Mrs Baker," he said, holding on to her hand. "And don't you fret. You've—you've got the children yet. It's—it's all for the best; and, besides, the Boss said you wasn't to fret." And he blundered out after me and Miss Standish.

She came out to the gate with us, and Andy gave her the packet.

"I want you to give that to her," he said; "it's his letters and papers. I hadn't the heart to give it to her, somehow."

"Tell me, Mr M'Culloch," she said. "You've kept something back—you haven't told her the truth. It would be better and safer for me to know. Was it an accident—or the drink?"

"It was the drink," said Andy. "I was going to tell you—I thought it would be best to tell you. I had made up my mind to do it, but, somehow, I couldn't have done it if you hadn't asked me."

"Tell me all," she said. "It would be better for me to know."

"Come a little farther away from the house," said Andy. She came along the fence a piece with us, and Andy told her as much of the truth as he could.

"I'll hurry her off to Sydney," she said. "We can get away this week as well as next." Then she stood for a minute before us, breathing quickly, her hands behind her back and her eyes shining in the moonlight. She looked splendid.

"I want to thank you for her sake," she said quickly. "You are good men! I like the Bushmen! They are grand men—they are noble! I'll probably never see either of you again, so it doesn't matter," and she put her white hand on Andy's shoulder and kissed him fair and square on the mouth. "And you, too!" she said to me. I was taller than Andy, and had to stoop. "Good-bye!" she said, and ran to the gate and in, waving her hand to us. We lifted our hats again and turned down the road.

I don't think it did either of us any harm.

## Gil Blas

*The Archbishop is afflicted with a stroke of apoplexy.  
How Gil Blas gets into a dilemma, and how he gets out.*

Alain-Rene LeSage

While I was thus rendering myself a blessing first to one and then to the other, Don Ferdinand de Leyva was making his arrangements for leaving Grenada. I called on that nobleman before his departure, to thank him once more for the advantageous post he had procured me. My expressions of satisfaction were so lively, that he said — My dear Gil Blas, I am delighted to find you in such good humour with my uncle the archbishop. I am absolutely in love with him, answered I. His goodness to me has been such as I can never sufficiently acknowledge. Less than my present happiness could never have made me amends for being at so great a distance from Don Caesar and his son. I am persuaded, replied he, that they are both of them equally chagrined at having lost you. But possibly you are not separated for ever; fortune may some day bring you together again. I could not hear such an idea started without being moved by it. My sighs would find vent; and I felt at that moment so strong an affection for Don Alphonso, that I could willingly have turned my back on the archbishop and all the fine prospects that were opening to me, and have gone back to the castle of Leyva, had but a mortification taken place in the back of the scarecrow which had frightened me away. Don Ferdinand was not insensible to the emotions that agitated me, and felt himself so much obliged by them, that he took his leave with the assurance of the whole family always taking an anxious interest in my fate.

Two months after this worthy gentleman had left us, in the luxuriant harvest of my highest favour, a lowering storm came suddenly over the episcopal palace; the archbishop had a stroke of apoplexy. By dint of immediate applications and good nursing, in a

few days there was no bodily appearance of disease remaining. But his reverend intellects did not so easily recover from their lethargy. I could not help observing it to myself in the very first discourse that he composed. Yet there was not such a wide gap between the merits of the present and the former ones, as to warrant the inference that the sun of oratory was many degrees advanced in its post-meridian course. A second homily was worth waiting for; because that would clearly determine the line of my conduct. Alas, and well-a-day! when that second homily came, it was a knock-down argument. Sometimes the good prelate moved forward, and sometimes he moved backwards; sometimes he mounted up into the garret; and sometimes dipped down into the cellar. It was a composition of more sound than meaning, something like a superannuated schoolmaster's theme, when he attempts to give his boys more sense than he possesses of his own, or like a capuchin's sermon, which only scatters a few artificial flowers of paltry rhetoric over a barren desert of doctrine.

I was not the only person whom the alteration struck. The audience at large, when he delivered it, as if they too had been pledged to watch the advances of dotage, said to one another in a whisper all round the church — Here is a sermon, with symptoms of apoplexy in every paragraph. Come, my good Coryphaeus of the public taste in homilies, said I then to myself prepare to do your office. You see that my lord archbishop is going very fast — you ought to warn him of it, not only as his bosom friend, on whose sincerity he relies, but lest some blunt fellow should anticipate you, and bolt out the truth in an offensive manner. In that case you know the consequence; you would be struck out of his will, where no doubt you have a more convertible bequest than the licentiate Sédillo's library.

But as reason, like Janus, looks at things with two faces, I began to consider the other side of the question; the hint seemed difficult to wrap up so as to make it palatable. Authors in general are stark mad on the subject of their own works, and such an author might be more testy than the common herd of the irritable race: but that suspicion seemed illiberal on my part, for it was impossible that my freedom should be taken amiss, when it had been forced upon me by so positive an injunction. Add to this, that I reckoned upon handling the subject skilfully, and cramming discretion down his throat like a high-seasoned epicurean dish. After all my pro and con, finding that I risked more by keeping silence than by breaking it, I determined to venture on the delicate duty of speaking my mind.

Now there was but one difficulty; a difficulty indeed! how to open the business. Luckily the orator himself extricated me from

that embarrassment, by asking what they said of him in the world at large, and whether people were tolerably well pleased with his last discourse. I answered that there could be but one opinion about his homilies; but that it should seem as if the last had not quite struck home to the hearts of the audience, like those which had gone before. Do you really mean what you say, my friend? replied he, with a sort of wriggling surprise. Then my congregation are more in the temper of Aristarchus than of Longinus! No, may it please your grace, rejoined I, quite the contrary. Performances of that order are above the reach of vulgar criticism: there is not a soul but expects to be saved by their influence. Nevertheless, since you have made it my duty to be sincere and unreserved, I shall take the liberty of just stating that your last discourse is not written with quite the overpowering eloquence and conclusive argument of your former ones. Does not your grace feel just as I do on the subject?

This ignorant and stupid frankness of mine completely blanned my master's cheek; but he forced a fretful smile, and said — Then, good Master Gil Blas, that piece does not exactly hit your fancy? I did not mean to say that, your grace, interrupted I, looking very foolish. It is very far superior to what any one else could produce, though a little below par with respect to your own works in general. I know what you mean, replied he. You think I am going down hill, do not you? Out with it at once. It is your opinion that it is time for me to think of retiring? I should never have had the presumption, said I, to deliver myself with so little reserve, if it had not been your grace's express command. I act in entire obedience to your grace's orders; and I most obsequiously implore your grace not to take offence at my boldness. I were unfit to live in a Christian land! interrupted he, with stammering impatience; I were unfit to live in a Christian land if I liked you the less for such a Christian virtue as sincerity. A man who does not love sincerity sets his face against the distinguishing mark between a friend and a flatterer. I should have given you infinite credit for speaking what you thought, if you had thought anything that deserved to be spoken. I have been finely taken in by your outside shew of cleverness, without any solid foundation of sober judgment!

Though completely unhorsed, and at the enemy's mercy, I wanted to make terms of decent capitulation, and to go unmolested into winter quarters: but let those who think to appease an exasperated author, and especially an author whose ear has been long attuned to the music of his own praises, take warning by my fate. Let us talk no more on the subject, my very young friend, said he. You are as yet scarcely in the rudiments of good taste, and utterly

incompetent to distinguish between gold and tinsel. You are yet to learn that I never in all my life composed a finer homily than that unfortunate one which had not the honour of your approbation. The immortal part of me, by the blessing of heaven on me and my congregation, is less weighed down by human infirmity than when the flesh was stronger. We all grow wiser as we grow older, and I shall in future select the people about me with more caution; nor submit the castigation of my works but to a much abler critic than yourself. Get about your business! pursued he, giving me an angry shove by the shoulders out of his closet; go and tell my treasurer to pay you a hundred ducats, and take my priestly blessing in addition to that sum. God speed you, good Master Gil Blas! I heartily pray that you may do well in the world! There is nothing to stand in your way, but the want of a little better taste.

## The Tree of Knowledge

Henry James

I

It was one of the secret opinions, such as we all have, of Peter Brench that his main success in life would have consisted in his never having committed himself about the work, as it was called, of his friend Morgan Mallow. This was a subject on which it was, to the best of his belief, impossible with veracity to quote him, and it was nowhere on record that he had, in the connexion, on any occasion and in any embarrassment, either lied or spoken the truth. Such a triumph had its honour even for a man of other triumphs—a man who had reached fifty, who had escaped marriage, who had lived within his means, who had been in love with Mrs Mallow for years without breathing it, and who, last but not least, had judged himself once for all. He had so judged himself in fact that he felt an extreme and general humility to be his proper portion; yet there was nothing that made him think so well of his parts as the course he had steered so often through the shallows just mentioned. It became thus a real wonder that the friends in whom he had most confidence were just those with whom he had most reserves. He couldn't tell Mrs Mallow—or at least he supposed, excellent man, he couldn't—that she was the one beautiful reason he had never married; any more than he could tell her husband that the sight of the multiplied marbles in that gentleman's studio was an affliction of which even time had never blunted the edge. His victory, however, as I have intimated, in regard to these productions, was not simply in his not having let it out that he deplored them; it was, remarkably, in his not having kept it in by anything else.

The whole situation, among these good people, was verily a marvel, and there was probably not such another for a long way from the spot that engages us—the point at which the soft declivity

of Hampstead began at that time to confess in broken accents to Saint John's Wood. He despised Mallow's statues and adored Mallow's wife, and yet was distinctly fond of Mallow, to whom, in turn, he was equally dear. Mrs Mallow rejoiced in the statues—though she preferred, when pressed, the busts; and if she was visibly attached to Peter Brench it was because of his affection for Morgan. Each loved the other moreover for the love borne in each case to Lancelot, whom the Mallows respectively cherished as their only child and whom the friend of their fireside identified as the third—but decidedly the handsomest—of his godsons. Already in the old years it had come to that—that no one, for such a relation, could possibly have occurred to any of them, even to the baby itself, but Peter. There was luckily a certain independence, of the pecuniary sort, all round: the Master could never otherwise have spent his solemn *Wanderjahre* in Florence and Rome, and continued by the Thames as well as by the Arno and the Tiber to add unpurchased group to group and model, for what was too apt to prove in the event mere love, fancy-heads of celebrities either too busy or too buried—too much of the age or too little of it—to sit. Neither could Peter, lounging in almost daily, have found time to keep the whole complicated tradition so alive by his presence. He was massive but mild, the depositary of these mysteries—large and loose and ruddy and curly, with deep tones, deep eyes, deep pockets, to say nothing of the habit of long pipes, soft hats and brownish greyish weather-faded clothes, apparently always the same.

He had 'written', it was known, but had never spoken, never spoken in particular of that; and he had the air (since, as was believed, he continued to write) of keeping it up in order to have something more—as if he hadn't at the worst enough—to be silent about. Whatever his air, at any rate, Peter's occasional unmentioned prose and verse were quite truly the result of an impulse to maintain the purity of his taste by establishing still more firmly the right relation of fame to feebleness. The little green door of his domain was in a garden-wall on which the discolored stucco made patches, and in the small detached villa behind it everything was old, the furniture, the servants, the books, the prints, the immemorial habits and the new improvements. The Mallows, at Carrara Lodge, were within ten minutes, and the studio there was on their little land, to which they had added, in their happy faith, for building it. This was the good fortune, if it was not the ill, of her having brought him in marriage a portion that put them in a manner at their ease and enabled them thus, on their side, to keep it up. And they did keep it up—they always had—the infatuated sculptor and his wife, for



whom nature had refined on the impossible by relieving them of the sense of the difficult. Morgan had at all events everything of the sculptor but the spirit of Phidias—the brown velvet, the becoming *beretto*, the ‘plastic’ presence, the fine fingers, the beautiful accent in Italian and the old Italian factotum. He seemed to make up for everything when he addressed Egidio with the ‘*tu*’ and waved him to turn one of the rotary pedestals of which the place was full. They were tremendous Italians at Carrara Lodge, and the secret of the part played by this fact in Peter’s life was in a large degree that it gave him, sturdy Briton as he was, just the amount of “going abroad” he could bear. The Mallows were all his Italy, but it was in a measure for Italy he liked them. His one worry was that Lance—to which they had shortened his godson—was, in spite of a public school, perhaps a shade too Italian. Morgan meanwhile looked like somebody’s flattering idea of somebody’s own person as expressed in the great room provided at the Uffizi Museum for the general illustration of that idea by eminent hands. The Master’s sole regret that he hadn’t been born rather to the brush than to the chisel sprang from his wish that he might have contributed to that collection.

It appeared with time at any rate to be to the brush that Lance had been born; for Mrs Mallow, one day when the boy was turning twenty, broke it to their friend, who shared, to the last delicate morsel, their problems and pains, that it seemed as if nothing would really do but that he should embrace the career. It had been impossible longer to remain blind to the fact that he was gaining no glory at Cambridge, where Brench’s own college had for a year tempered its tone to him as for Brench’s own sake. Therefore why renew the vain form of preparing him for the impossible? The impossible—it had become clear—was that he should be anything but an artist.

“Oh dear, dear!” said poor Peter.

“Don’t you believe in it?” asked Mrs Mallow, who still, at more than forty, had her violet velvet eyes, her creamy satin skin and her silken chestnut hair.

“Believe in what?”

“Why in Lance’s passion.”

“I don’t know what you mean by ‘believing in it’. I’ve never been unaware, certainly, of his disposition, from his earliest time, to daub and draw; but I confess I’ve hoped it would burn out.”

“But why should it,” she sweetly smiled, “with his wonderful heredity? Passion is passion—though of course indeed *you*, dear Peter, know nothing of that. Has the Master’s ever burned out?”

Peter looked off a little and, in his familiar formless way, kept up for a moment, a sound between a smothered whistle and a subdued

hum. "Do you think he's going to be another Master?"

She seemed scarce prepared to go that length, yet she had on the whole a marvellous trust. "I know what you mean by that. Will it be a career to incur the jealousies and provoke the machinations that have been at times almost too much for his father? Well—say it may be, since nothing but clap-trap, in these dreadful days, *can*, it would seem, make its way, and since, with the curse of refinement and distinction, one may easily find one's self begging one's bread. Put it at the worst—say he *has* the misfortune to wing his flight further than the vulgar taste of his stupid countrymen can follow. Think, all the same, of the happiness—the same the Master has had. He'll *know*."

Peter looked rueful. "Ah but *what* will he know?"

"Quiet joy!" cried Mrs Mallow, quite impatient and turning away.

## II

He had of course before long to meet the boy himself on it and to hear that practically everything was settled. Lance was not to go up again, but to go instead to Paris where, since the die was cast, he would find the best advantages. Peter had always felt he must be taken as he was, but had never perhaps found him so much of that pattern as on this occasion. "You chuck Cambridge then altogether? Doesn't that seem rather a pity?"

Lance would have been like his father, to his friend's sense, had he had less humour, and like his mother had he had more beauty. Yet it was a good middle way for Peter that, in the modern manner, he was, to the eye, rather the young stock-broker than the young artist. The youth reasoned that it was a question of time—there was such a mill to go through, such an awful lot to learn. He had talked with fellows and had judged. "One has got, today," he said, "don't you see? To know."

His interlocutor, at this, gave a groan. "Oh hang it, *don't* know!"

Lance wondered. "'Don't'? Then what's the use—?"

"The use of what?"

"Why of anything. Don't you think I've talent?"

Peter smoked away for a little in silence; then went on: "It isn't knowledge, it's ignorance that—as we've been beautifully told—is bliss."

"Don't you think I've talent?" Lance repeated.

Peter, with his trick of queer kind demonstrations, passed his arm round his godson and held him a moment. "How do I know?" "Oh," said the boy, "if it's your own ignorance you're defending—!"

Again, for a pause, on the sofa, his godfather smoked. "It isn't. I've the misfortune to be omniscient."

"Oh well," Lance laughed again, "if you know *too* much—!"

"That's what I do, and it's why I'm so wretched."

Lance's gaiety grew. "Wretched? Come, I say!"

"But I forgot," his companion went on—"you're not to know about that. It would indeed, for you too, make the too much. Only I'll tell you what I'll do." And Peter got up from the sofa. "If you'll go up again I'll pay your way at Cambridge." Lance stared, a little rueful in spite of being still more amused. "Oh

Peter! You disapprove so of Paris?"

"Well, I'm afraid of it."

"Ah I see!"

"No, you don't see—yet. But you will—that is you would. And you mustn't."

The young man thought more gravely. "But one's innocence, already—!"

"Is considerably damaged? Ah that won't matter," Peter persisted—"we'll patch it up here."

"Here? Then you want me to stay at home?"

Peter almost confessed to it. "Well, we're so right—we four together—just as we are. We're so safe. Come, don't spoil it."

The boy, who had turned to gravity, turned from this, on the real pressure of his friend's tone, to consternation. "Then what's a fellow to be?"

"My particular care. Come, old man"—and Peter now fairly pleaded—"I'll look out for you."

Lance, who had remained on the sofa with his legs out and his hands in his pockets, watched him with eyes that showed suspicion. Then he got up. "You think there's something the matter with me—that I can't make a success." "Well, what do you call a success?"

Lance thought again. "Why the best sort, I suppose, is to please one's self. Isn't that the sort that, in spite of cabals and things, is—in his own peculiar line—the Master's?"

There were so much too many things in this question to be answered at once that they practically checked the discussion, which became particularly difficult in the light of such renewed proof that, though the young man's innocence might, in the course of his studies, as he contended, somewhat have shrunk, the finer essence of it still remained. That was indeed exactly what Peter had assumed and what above all he desired; yet perversely enough it gave him a chill. The boy believed in the cabals and things, believed in the peculiar line, believed, to be brief, in the Master. What happened a

month or two later wasn't that he went up again at the expense of his godfather, but that a fortnight after he had got settled in Paris this personage sent him fifty pounds.

He had meanwhile at home, this personage, made up his mind to the worst; and what that might be had never yet grown quite so vivid to him as when, on his presenting himself one Sunday night, as he never failed to do, for supper, the mistress of Carrara Lodge met him with an appeal as to—of all things in the world—the wealth of the Canadians. She was earnest, she was even excited. "Are many of them *really* rich?"

He had to confess he knew nothing about them, but he often thought afterwards of that evening. The room in which they sat was adorned with sundry specimens of the Master's genius, which had the merit of being, as Mrs Mallow herself frequently suggested, of an unusually convenient size. They were indeed of dimensions not customary in the products of the chisel, and they had the singularity that, if the objects and features intended to be small looked too large, the objects and features intended to be large looked too small. The Master's idea, either in respect to this matter or to any other, had in almost any case, even after years, remained undiscoverable to Peter Brench. The creations that so failed to reveal it stood about on pedestals and brackets, on tables and shelves, a little staring white population, heroic, idyllic, allegoric, mythic, symbolic, in which 'scale' had so strayed and lost itself that the public square and the chimney-piece seemed to have changed places, the monumental being all diminutive and the diminutive all monumental; branches at any rate, markedly, of a family in which stature was rather oddly irrespective of function, age and sex. They formed, like the Mallows themselves, poor Brench's own family—having at least to such a degree the note of familiarity. The occasion was one of those he had long ago learnt to know and to name—short flickers of the faint flame, soft gusts of a kinder air. Twice a year regularly the Master believed in his fortune, in addition to believing all the year round in his genius. This time it was to be made by a bereaved couple from Toronto, who had given him the handsomest order for a tomb to three lost children, each of whom they desired to see, in the composition, emblematically and characteristically represented.

Such was naturally the moral of Mrs Mallow's question: if their wealth was to be assumed, it was clear, from the nature of their admiration, as well as from mysterious hints thrown out (they were a little odd!) as to other possibilities of the same mortuary sort, what their further patronage might be; and not less evident that should the Master become at all known in those climes nothing would be

more inevitable than a run of Canadian custom. Peter had been present before at runs of custom, colonial and domestic—present at each of those of which the aggregation had left so few gaps in the marble company round him; but it was his habit never at these junctures to prick the bubble in advance. The fond illusion, while it lasted, eased the wound of elections never won, the long ache of medals and diplomas carried off, on every chance, by everyone but the Master; it moreover lighted the lamp that would glimmer through the next eclipse. They lived, however, after all—as it was always beautiful to see—at a height scarce susceptible of ups and downs. They strained a point at times charmingly, strained it to admit that the public was here and there not too bad to buy; but they would have been nowhere without their attitude that the Master was always too good to sell. They were at all events deliciously formed, Peter often said to himself, for their fate; the Master had a vanity, his wife had a loyalty, of which success, depriving these things of innocence, would have diminished the merit and the grace. Anyone could be charming under a charm, and as he looked about him at a world of prosperity more void of proportion even than the Master's museum he wondered if he knew another pair that so completely escaped vulgarity.

"What a pity Lance isn't with us to rejoice!" Mrs Mallow on this occasion sighed at supper.

"We'll drink to the health of the absent," her husband replied, filling his friend's glass and his own and giving a drop to their companion; "but we must hope he's preparing himself for a happiness much less like this of ours this evening—excusable as I grant it to be!—than like the comfort we have always (whatever has happened or has not happened) been able to trust ourselves to enjoy. The comfort," the Master explained, leaning back in the pleasant lamplight and firelight, holding up his glass and looking round at his marble family, quartered more or less, a monstrous brood, in every room—"the comfort of art in itself!"

Peter looked a little shyly at his wine. "Well—I don't care what you may call it when a fellow doesn't—but Lance must learn to *sell*, you know. I drink to his acquisition of the secret of a base popularity!" "Oh yes, *he* must sell," the boy's mother, who was still more, however, this seemed to give out, the Master's wife, rather artlessly allowed.

"Ah," the sculptor after a moment confidently pronounced, "Lance *will*. Don't be afraid. He'll have learnt."

"Which is exactly what Peter," Mrs Mallow gaily returned—"why in the world were you so perverse, Peter?—wouldn't, when

he told him, hear of."

Peter, when this lady looked at him with accusatory affection—a grace on her part not infrequent—could never find a word; but the Master, who was always all amenity and tact, helped him out now as he had often helped him before. "That's his old idea, you know—on which we've so often differed: his theory that the artist should be all impulse and instinct. *I* go in of course for a certain amount of school. Not too much—but a due proportion. There's where his protest came in," he continued to explain to his wife, "as against what *might*, don't you see? be in question for Lance."

"Ah well"—and Mrs Mallow turned the violet eyes across the table at the subject of this discourse—"he's sure to have meant of course nothing but good. Only that wouldn't have prevented him, if Lance *had* taken his advice, from being in effect horribly cruel."

They had a sociable way of talking of him to his face as if he had been in the clay or—at most—in the plaster, and the Master was unfailingly generous. He might have been waving Egidio to make him revolve. "Ah but poor Peter wasn't so wrong as to what it may after all come to that he *will* learn."

"Oh but nothing artistically bad," she urged—still, for poor Peter, arch and dewy.

"Why just the little French tricks," said the Master: on which their friend had to pretend to admit, when pressed by Mrs Mallow, that these æsthetic vices had been the objects of his dread.

### III

"**I** know now," Lance said to him the next year, "why you were so much against it." He had come back supposedly for a mere interval and was looking about him at Carrara Lodge, where indeed he had already on two or three occasions since his expatriation briefly reappeared. This had the air of a longer holiday. "Something rather awful has happened to me. It *isn't* so very good to know."

"I'm bound to say high spirits don't show in your face," Peter was rather ruefully forced to confess. "Still, are you very sure you do know?"

"Well, I at least know about as much as I can bear." These remarks were exchanged in Peter's den, and the young man, smoking cigarettes, stood before the fire with his back against the mantel. Something of his bloom seemed really to have left him.

Poor Peter wondered. "You're clear then as to what in particular I wanted you not to go for?"

"In particular?" Lance thought. "It seems to me that in particular

there can have been only one thing."

They stood for a little sounding each other. "Are you quite sure?"

"Quite sure I'm a beastly duffer? Quite—by this time."

"Oh!"—and Peter turned away as if almost with relief.

"It's *that* that isn't pleasant to find out."

"Oh I don't care for 'that,'" said Peter, presently coming round again. "I mean I personally don't."

"Yet I hope you can understand a little that I myself should!"

"Well, what do you mean by it?" Peter sceptically asked.

And on this Lance had to explain—how the upshot of his studies in Paris had inexorably proved a mere deep doubt of his means. These studies had so waked him up that a new light was in his eyes; but what the new light did was really to show him too much. "Do you know what's the matter with me? I'm too horribly intelligent. Paris was really the last place for me. I've learnt what I can't do."

Poor Peter stared—it was a staggerer; but even after they had had, on the subject, a longish talk in which the boy brought out to the full the hard truth of his lesson, his friend betrayed less pleasure than usually breaks into a face to the happy tune of "I told you so!" Poor Peter himself made now indeed so little a point of having told him so that Lance broke ground in a different place a day or two after. "What was it then that—before I went—you were afraid I should find out?" This, however, Peter refused to tell him—on the ground that if he hadn't yet guessed perhaps he never would, and that in any case nothing at all for either of them was to be gained by giving the thing a name. Lance eyed him on this an instant with the bold curiosity of youth—with the air indeed of having in his mind two or three names, of which one or other would be right. Peter nevertheless, turning his back again, offered no encouragement, and when they parted afresh it was with some show of impatience on the side of the boy. Accordingly on their next encounter Peter saw at a glance that he had now, in the interval, divined and that, to sound his note, he was only waiting till they should find themselves alone. This he had soon arranged and he then broke straight out. "Do you know your conundrum has been keeping me awake? But in the watches of the night the answer came over me—so that, upon my honour, I quite laughed out. Had you been supposing I had to go to Paris to learn *that*? Even now, to see him still so sublimely on his guard, Peter's young friend had to laugh afresh. "You won't give a sign till you're sure? Beautiful old Peter!" But Lance at last produced it. "Why, hang it, the truth about the Master."

It made between them for some minutes a lively passage, full of wonder for each at the wonder of the other. "Then how long have



you understood—”

“The true value of his work? I understood it,” Lance recalled, “as soon as I began to understand anything. But I didn’t begin fully to do that, I admit, till I got *là-bas*.”

“Dear, dear!”—Peter gasped with retrospective dread.

“But for what have you taken me? I’m a hopeless muff—that I *had* to have rubbed in. But I’m not such a muff as the Master!” Lance declared.

“Then why did you never tell me—?”

“That I hadn’t, after all”—the boy took him up—“remained such an idiot? Just because I never dreamed *you* knew. But I beg your pardon. I only wanted to spare you. And what I don’t now understand is how the deuce then for so long you’ve managed to keep bottled.” Peter produced his explanation, but only after some delay and with a gravity not void of embarrassment. “It was for your mother.”

“Oh!” said Lance.

“And that’s the great thing now—since the murder *is* out. I want a promise from you. I mean”—and Peter almost feverishly followed it up—“a vow from you, solemn and such as you owe me here on the spot, that you’ll sacrifice anything rather than let her ever guess—”

“That *I’ve* guessed?”—Lance took it in. “I see.” He evidently after a moment had taken in much. “But what is it you’ve in mind that I may have a chance to sacrifice?”

“Oh one has always something.”

Lance looked at him hard. “Do you mean that *you’ve* had—?” The look he received back, however, so put the question by that he found soon enough another. “Are you really sure my mother doesn’t know?” Peter, after renewed reflection, was really sure. “If she does she’s too wonderful.”

“But aren’t we all too wonderful?”

“Yes,” Peter granted—“but in different ways. The thing’s so desperately important because your father’s little public consists only, as you know then,” Peter developed—“well, of how many?”

“First of all,” the Master’s son risked, “of himself. And last of all too. I don’t quite see of whom else.”

Peter had an approach to impatience. “Of your mother, I say—*always*.”

Lance cast it all up. “You absolutely feel that?”

“Absolutely.”

“Well then with yourself that makes three.”

“Oh *me!*”—and Peter, with a wag of his kind old head, modestly excused himself. The number’s at any rate small enough for any



individual dropping out to be too dreadfully missed. Therefore, to put it in a nutshell, take care, my boy—that's all—that *you're* not!"

"I've got to keep on humbugging?" Lance wailed.

"It's just to warn you of the danger of your failing of that that I've seized this opportunity."

"And what do you regard in particular," the young man asked, "as the danger?"

"Why this certainty: that the moment your mother, who feels so strongly, should suspect your secret—well," said Peter desperately, "the fat would be on the fire."

Lance for a moment seemed to stare at the blaze. "She'd throw me over?"

"She'd throw *him* over."

"And come round to us?"

Peter, before he answered, turned away. "Come round to *you*." But he had said enough to indicate—and, as he evidently trusted, to avert—the horrid contingency.

#### IV

Within six months again, none the less, his fear was on more occasions than one all before him. Lance had returned to Paris for another trial; then had reappeared at home and had had, with his father, for the first time in his life, one of the scenes that strike sparks. He described it with much expression to Peter, touching whom (since they had never done so before) it was the sign of a new reserve on the part of the pair at Carrara Lodge that they at present failed, on a matter of intimate interest, to open themselves—if not in joy then in sorrow—to their good friend. This produced perhaps practically between the parties a shade of alienation and a slight intermission of commerce—marked mainly indeed by the fact that to talk at his ease with his old playmate Lance had in general to come to see him. The closest if not quite the gayest relation they had yet known together was thus ushered in. The difficulty for poor Lance was a tension at home—begotten by the fact that his father wished him to be at least the sort of success he himself had been. He hadn't 'chucked' Paris—though nothing appeared more vivid to him than that Paris had chucked him: he would go back again because of the fascination in trying, in seeing, in sounding the depths—in learning one's lesson, briefly, even if the lesson were simply that of one's impotence in the presence of one's larger vision. But what did the Master, all aloft in his senseless fluency, know of impotence, and what vision—to be called such—had he in all his blind life ever had? Lance, heated and indignant,

frankly appealed to his godparent on this score.

His father, it appeared, had come down on him for having, after so long, nothing to show, and hoped that on his next return this deficiency would be repaired. *The thing*, the Master complacently set forth was—for any artist, however inferior to himself—at least to ‘do’ something. “What can you do? That’s all I ask!” *He* had certainly done enough, and there was no mistake about what he had to show. Lance had tears in his eyes when it came thus to letting his old friend know how great the strain might be on the ‘sacrifice’ asked of him. It wasn’t so easy to continue humbugging—as from son to parent—after feeling one’s self despised for not grovelling in mediocrity. Yet a noble duplicity was what, as they intimately faced the situation, Peter went on requiring; and it was still for a time what his young friend, bitter and sore, managed loyally to comfort him with. Fifty pounds more than once again, it was true, rewarded both in London and in Paris the young friend’s loyalty; none the less sensibly, doubtless, at the moment, that the money was a direct advance on a decent sum for which Peter had long since privately prearranged an ultimate function. Whether by these arts or others, at all events, Lance’s just resentment was kept for a season—but only for a season—at bay. The day arrived when he warned his companion that he could hold out—or hold in—no longer. Carrara Lodge had had to listen to another lecture delivered from a great height—an infliction really heavier at last than, without striking back or in some way letting the Master have the truth, flesh and blood could bear.

“And what I don’t see is,” Lance observed with a certain irritated eye for what was after all, if it came to that, owing to himself too; “what I don’t see is, upon my honour, how *you*, as things are going, can keep the game up.”

“Oh the game for me is only to hold my tongue,” said placid Peter. “And I have my reason.”

“Still my mother?”

Peter showed a queer face as he had often shown it before—that is by turning it straight away. “What will you have? I haven’t ceased to like her.”

“She’s beautiful—she’s a dear of course,” Lance allowed; “but what is she to you, after all, and what is it to you that, as to anything whatever, she should or she shouldn’t?”

Peter, who had turned red, hung fire a little. “Well—it’s all simply what I make of it.”

There was now, however, in his young friend a strange, an adopted insistence. “What are you after all to *her*?”

“Oh nothing. But that’s another matter.”

"She cares only for my father," said Lance the Parisian.

"Naturally—and that's just why."

"Why you've wished to spare her?"

"Because she cares so tremendously much."

Lance took a turn about the room, but with his eyes still on his host. "How awfully—always—you must have liked her!" "Awfully. Always," said Peter Brench.

The young man continued for a moment to muse—then stopped again in front of him. "Do you know how much she cares?" Their eyes met on it, but Peter, as if his own found something new in Lance's, appeared to hesitate, for the first time in an age, to say he did know. "*I've* only just found out," said Lance. "She came to my room last night, after being present, in silence and only with her eyes on me, at what I had had to take from him: she came—and she was with me an extraordinary hour."

He had paused again and they had again for a while sounded each other. Then something—and it made him suddenly turn pale—came to Peter. "*She does* know?"

"She does know. She let it all out to me—so as to demand of me no more than "*that*", as she said, of which she herself had been capable. She has always, always known," said Lance without pity.

Peter was silent a long time; during which his companion might have heard him gently breathe, and on touching him might have felt within him the vibration of a long low sound suppressed. By the time he spoke at last he had taken everything in. "Then I do see how tremendously much."

"Isn't it wonderful?" Lance asked.

"Wonderful," Peter mused.

"So that if your original effort to keep me from Paris was to keep me from knowledge—!" Lance exclaimed as if with a sufficient indication of this futility.

It might have been at the futility Peter appeared for a little to gaze. "I think it must have been—without my quite at the time knowing it—to keep *me*!" he replied at last as he turned away.



## The Verdict

Edith Wharton

I had always thought Jack Gisburn rather a cheap genius — though a good fellow enough — so it was no great surprise to me to hear that, in the height of his glory, he had dropped his painting, married a rich widow, and established himself in a villa on the Riviera. (Though I rather thought it would have been Rome or Florence.)

"The height of his glory" — that was what the women called it. I can hear Mrs. Gideon Thwing — his last Chicago sitter — deploring his unaccountable abdication. "Of course it's going to send the value of my picture way up; but I don't think of that, Mr. Rickham — the loss to Art is all I think of." The word, on Mrs. Thwing's lips, multiplied its rs as though they were reflected in an endless vista of mirrors. And it was not only the Mrs. Thwings who mourned. Had not the exquisite Hermia Croft, at the last Grafton Gallery show, stopped me before Gisburn's 'Moon-dancers' to say, with tears in her eyes: "We shall not look upon its like again?"

Well! — even through the prism of Hermia's tears I felt able to face the fact with equanimity. Poor Jack Gisburn! The women had made him — it was fitting that they should mourn him. Among his own sex fewer regrets were heard, and in his own trade hardly a murmur. Professional jealousy? Perhaps. If it were, the honour of the craft was vindicated by little Claude Nutley, who, in all good faith, brought out in the Burlington a very handsome "obituary" on Jack — one of those showy articles stocked with random technicalities that I have heard (I won't say by whom) compared to Gisburn's painting. And so — his resolve being apparently irrevocable — the discussion gradually died out, and, as Mrs. Thwing had predicted, the price of 'Gisburns' went up.

It was not till three years later that, in the course of a few weeks'

idling on the Riviera, it suddenly occurred to me to wonder why Gisburn had given up his painting. On reflection, it really was a tempting problem. To accuse his wife would have been too easy — his fair sitters had been denied the solace of saying that Mrs. Gisburn had “dragged him down.” For Mrs. Gisburn — as such — had not existed till nearly a year after Jack’s resolve had been taken. It might be that he had married her — since he liked his ease — because he didn’t want to go on painting; but it would have been hard to prove that he had given up his painting because he had married her.

Of course, if she had not dragged him down, she had equally, as Miss Croft contended, failed to “lift him up” — she had not led him back to the easel. To put the brush into his hand again—what a vocation for a wife! But Mrs. Gisburn appeared to have disdained it — and I felt it might be interesting to find out why.

The desultory life of the Riviera lends itself to such purely academic speculations; and having, on my way to Monte Carlo, caught a glimpse of Jack’s balustraded terraces between the pines, I had myself borne thither the next day.

I found the couple at tea beneath their palm-trees; and Mrs. Gisburn’s welcome was so genial that, in the ensuing weeks, I claimed it frequently. It was not that my hostess was “interesting”: on that point I could have given Miss Croft the fullest reassurance. It was just because she was not interesting — if I may be pardoned the bull — that I found her so. For Jack, all his life, had been surrounded by interesting women: they had fostered his art, it had been reared in the hot-house of their adulation. And it was therefore instructive to note what effect the “deadening atmosphere of mediocrity” (I quote Miss Croft) was having on him.

I have mentioned that Mrs. Gisburn was rich; and it was immediately perceptible that her husband was extracting from this circumstance a delicate but substantial satisfaction. It is, as a rule, the people who scorn money who get most out of it; and Jack’s elegant disdain of his wife’s big balance enabled him, with an appearance of perfect good-breeding, to transmute it into objects of art and luxury. To the latter, I must add, he remained relatively indifferent; but he was buying Renaissance bronzes and eighteenth-century pictures with a discrimination that bespoke the amplest resources.

“Money’s only excuse is to put beauty into circulation,” was one of the axioms he laid down across the Sevres and silver of an exquisitely appointed luncheon-table, when, on a later day, I had again run over from Monte Carlo; and Mrs. Gisburn, beaming on him, added for my enlightenment: “Jack is so morbidly sensitive to every form of beauty.”

Poor Jack! It had always been his fate to have women say such things of him: the fact should be set down in extenuation. What struck me now was that, for the first time, he resented the tone. I had seen him, so often, basking under similar tributes — was it the conjugal note that robbed them of their savour? No — for, oddly enough, it became apparent that he was fond of Mrs. Gisburn — fond enough not to see her absurdity. It was his own absurdity he seemed to be wincing under — his own attitude as an object for garlands and incense.

"My dear, since I've chucked painting people don't say that stuff about me — they say it about Victor Grindle," was his only protest, as he rose from the table and strolled out onto the sunlit terrace.

I glanced after him, struck by his last word. Victor Grindle was, in fact, becoming the man of the moment — as Jack himself, one might put it, had been the man of the hour. The younger artist was said to have formed himself at my friend's feet, and I wondered if a tinge of jealousy underlay the latter's mysterious abdication. But no — for it was not till after that event that the rose Dubarry drawing-rooms had begun to display their 'Grindles.'

I turned to Mrs. Gisburn, who had lingered to give a lump of sugar to her spaniel in the dining-room.

"Why has he chucked painting?" I asked abruptly.

She raised her eyebrows with a hint of good-humoured surprise.

"Oh, he doesn't have to now, you know; and I want him to enjoy himself," she said quite simply.

I looked about the spacious white-panelled room, with its *famille-verte* vases repeating the tones of the pale damask curtains, and its eighteenth-century pastels in delicate faded frames.

"Has he chucked his pictures too? I haven't seen a single one in the house."

A slight shade of constraint crossed Mrs. Gisburn's open countenance. "It's his ridiculous modesty, you know. He says they're not fit to have about; he's sent them all away except one — my portrait — and that I have to keep upstairs."

His ridiculous modesty — Jack's modesty about his pictures? My curiosity was growing like the bean-stalk. I said persuasively to my hostess: "I must really see your portrait, you know."

She glanced out almost timorously at the terrace where her husband, lounging in a hooded chair, had lit a cigar and drawn the Russian deerhound's head between his knees.

"Well, come while he's not looking," she said, with a laugh that tried to hide her nervousness; and I followed her between the marble Emperors of the hall, and up the wide stairs with terracotta nymphs

poised among flowers at each landing.

In the dimmest corner of her boudoir, amid a profusion of delicate and distinguished objects, hung one of the familiar oval canvases, in the inevitable garlanded frame. The mere outline of the frame called up all Gisburn's past!

Mrs. Gisburn drew back the window-curtains, moved aside a jardiniere full of pink azaleas, pushed an arm-chair away, and said: "If you stand here you can just manage to see it. I had it over the mantel-piece, but he wouldn't let it stay."

Yes — I could just manage to see it — the first portrait of Jack's I had ever had to strain my eyes over! Usually they had the place of honour — say the central panel in a pale yellow or rose Dubarry drawing-room, or a monumental easel placed so that it took the light through curtains of old Venetian point. The more modest place became the picture better; yet, as my eyes grew accustomed to the half-light, all the characteristic qualities came out — all the hesitations disguised as audacities, the tricks of prestidigitation by which, with such consummate skill, he managed to divert attention from the real business of the picture to some pretty irrelevance of detail. Mrs. Gisburn, presenting a neutral surface to work on — forming, as it were, so inevitably the background of her own picture — had lent herself in an unusual degree to the display of this false virtuosity. The picture was one of Jack's 'strongest,' as his admirers would have put it — it represented, on his part, a swelling of muscles, a congesting of veins, a balancing, straddling and straining, that reminded one of the circus-clown's ironic efforts to lift a feather. It met, in short, at every point the demand of lovely woman to be painted 'strongly' because she was tired of being painted 'sweetly' — and yet not to lose an atom of the sweetness.

"It's the last he painted, you know," Mrs. Gisburn said with pardonable pride. "The last but one," she corrected herself—"but the other doesn't count, because he destroyed it."

"Destroyed it?" I was about to follow up this clue when I heard a footstep and saw Jack himself on the threshold.

As he stood there, his hands in the pockets of his velveteen coat, the thin brown waves of hair pushed back from his white forehead, his lean sunburnt cheeks furrowed by a smile that lifted the tips of a self-confident moustache, I felt to what a degree he had the same quality as his pictures — the quality of looking cleverer than he was. His wife glanced at him deprecatingly, but his eyes travelled past her to the portrait.

"Mr. Rickham wanted to see it," she began, as if excusing herself. He shrugged his shoulders, still smiling.



"Oh, Rickham found me out long ago," he said lightly; then, passing his arm through mine: "Come and see the rest of the house."

He showed it to me with a kind of naive suburban pride: the bath-rooms, the speaking-tubes, the dress-closets, the trouser presses — all the complex simplifications of the millionaire's domestic economy. And whenever my wonder paid the expected tribute he said, throwing out his chest a little: "Yes, I really don't see how people manage to live without that."

Well — it was just the end one might have foreseen for him. Only he was, through it all and in spite of it all — as he had been through, and in spite of, his pictures — so handsome, so charming, so disarming, that one longed to cry out: "Be dissatisfied with your leisure!" as once one had longed to say: "Be dissatisfied with your work!"

But, with the cry on my lips, my diagnosis suffered an unexpected check.

"This is my own lair," he said, leading me into a dark plain room at the end of the florid vista. It was square and brown and leathery: no "effects"; no bric-a-brac, none of the air of posing for reproduction in a picture weekly — above all, no least sign of ever having been used as a studio.

The fact brought home to me the absolute finality of Jack's break with his old life.

"Don't you ever dabble with paint any more?" I asked, still looking about for a trace of such activity.

"Never," he said briefly.

"Or watercolor — or etching?"

His confident eyes grew dim, and his cheeks paled a little under their handsome sunburn.

"Never think of it, my dear fellow — any more than if I'd never touched a brush."

And his tone told me in a flash that he never thought of anything else.

I moved away, instinctively embarrassed by my unexpected discovery; and as I turned, my eye fell on a small picture above the mantel-piece — the only object breaking the plain oak panelling of the room.

"Oh, by Jove!" I said.

It was a sketch of a donkey — an old tired donkey, standing in the rain under a wall.

"By Jove — a Stroud!" I cried.

He was silent; but I felt him close behind me, breathing a little quickly.

"What a wonder! Made with a dozen lines — but on everlasting foundations. You lucky chap, where did you get it?"

He answered slowly: "Mrs. Stroud gave it to me."

"Ah — I didn't know you even knew the Strouds. He was such an inflexible hermit."

"I didn't — till after. . . . She sent for me to paint him when he was dead."

"When he was dead? You?"

I must have let a little too much amazement escape through my surprise, for he answered with a deprecating laugh: "Yes — she's an awful simpleton, you know, Mrs. Stroud. Her only idea was to have him done by a fashionable painter — ah, poor Stroud! She thought it the surest way of proclaiming his greatness — of forcing it on a purblind public. And at the moment I was the fashionable painter."

"Ah, poor Stroud — as you say. Was that his history?"

"That was his history. She believed in him, gloried in him — or thought she did. But she couldn't bear not to have all the drawing-rooms with her. She couldn't bear the fact that, on varnishing days, one could always get near enough to see his pictures. Poor woman! She's just a fragment groping for other fragments. Stroud is the only whole I ever knew."

"You ever knew? But you just said —"

Gisburn had a curious smile in his eyes.

"Oh, I knew him, and he knew me — only it happened after he was dead."

I dropped my voice instinctively. "When she sent for you?"

"Yes — quite insensible to the irony. She wanted him vindicated — and by me!"

He laughed again, and threw back his head to look up at the sketch of the donkey. "There were days when I couldn't look at that thing — couldn't face it. But I forced myself to put it here; and now it's cured me — cured me. That's the reason why I don't dabble any more, my dear Rickham; or rather Stroud himself is the reason."

For the first time my idle curiosity about my companion turned into a serious desire to understand him better.

"I wish you'd tell me how it happened," I said.

He stood looking up at the sketch, and twirling between his fingers a cigarette he had forgotten to light. Suddenly he turned toward me.

"I'd rather like to tell you — because I've always suspected you of loathing my work."

I made a deprecating gesture, which he negated with a good-humored shrug.

"Oh, I didn't care a straw when I believed in myself — and now it's an added tie between us!"

He laughed slightly, without bitterness, and pushed one of the deep arm-chairs forward. "There: make yourself comfortable — and here are the cigars you like."

He placed them at my elbow and continued to wander up and down the room, stopping now and then beneath the picture.

"How it happened? I can tell you in five minutes — and it didn't take much longer to happen. . . . I can remember now how surprised and pleased I was when I got Mrs. Stroud's note. Of course, deep down, I had always felt there was no one like him-only I had gone with the stream, echoed the usual platitudes about him, till I half got to think he was a failure, one of the kind that are left behind. By Jove, and he was left behind-because he had come to stay! The rest of us had to let ourselves be swept along or go under, but he was high above the current — on everlasting foundations, as you say.

"Well, I went off to the house in my most egregious mood — rather moved, Lord forgive me, at the pathos of poor Stroud's career of failure being crowned by the glory of my painting him! Of course I meant to do the picture for nothing — I told Mrs. Stroud so when she began to stammer something about her poverty. I remember getting off a prodigious phrase about the honour being mine — oh, I was princely, my dear Rickham! I was posing to myself like one of my own sitters.

"Then I was taken up and left alone with him. I had sent all my traps in advance, and I had only to set up the easel and get to work. He had been dead only twenty-four hours, and he died suddenly, of heart disease, so that there had been no preliminary work of destruction — his face was clear and untouched. I had met him once or twice, years before, and thought him insignificant and dingy. Now I saw that he was superb.

"I was glad at first, with a merely aesthetic satisfaction: glad to have my hand on such a 'subject.' Then his strange lifelikeness began to affect me queerly — as I blocked the head in I felt as if he were watching me do it. The sensation was followed by the thought: if he were watching me, what would he say to my way of working? My strokes began to go a little wild — I felt nervous and uncertain.

"Once, when I looked up, I seemed to see a smile behind his close grayish beard — as if he had the secret, and were amusing himself by holding it back from me. That exasperated me still more. The secret? Why, I had a secret worth twenty of his! I dashed at the canvas furiously, and tried some of my bravura tricks. But they failed me, they crumbled. I saw that he wasn't watching the showy

bits — I couldn't distract his attention; he just kept his eyes on the hard passages between. Those were the ones I had always shirked, or covered up with some lying paint. And how he saw through my lies!

"I looked up again, and caught sight of that sketch of the donkey hanging on the wall near his bed. His wife told me afterward it was the last thing he had done — just a note taken with a shaking hand, when he was down in Devonshire recovering from a previous heart attack. Just a note! But it tells his whole history. There are years of patient scornful persistence in every line. A man who had swum with the current could never have learned that mighty up-stream stroke. . . .

"I turned back to my work, and went on groping and muddling; then I looked at the donkey again. I saw that, when Stroud laid in the first stroke, he knew just what the end would be. He had possessed his subject, absorbed it, recreated it. When had I done that with any of my things? They hadn't been born of me — I had just adopted them. . . .

"Hang it, Rickham, with that face watching me I couldn't do another stroke. The plain truth was, I didn't know where to put it — I had never known. Only, with my sitters and my public, a showy splash of color covered up the fact — I just threw paint into their faces. . . . Well, paint was the one medium those dead eyes could see through — see straight to the tottering foundations underneath. Don't you know how, in talking a foreign language, even fluently, one says half the time not what one wants to but what one can? Well — that was the way I painted; and as he lay there and watched me, the thing they called my "technique" collapsed like a house of cards. He didn't sneer, you understand, poor Stroud — he just lay there quietly watching, and on his lips, through the gray beard, I seemed to hear the question: "Are you sure you know where you're coming out?"

"If I could have painted that face, with that question on it, I should have done a great thing. The next greatest thing was to see that I couldn't — and that grace was given me. But, oh, at that minute, Rickham, was there anything on earth I wouldn't have given to have Stroud alive before me, and to hear him say: "It's not too late — I'll show you how"?

"It was too late — it would have been, even if he'd been alive. I packed up my traps, and went down and told Mrs. Stroud. Of course I didn't tell her that — it would have been Greek to her. I simply said I couldn't paint him, that I was too moved. She rather liked the idea — she's so romantic! It was that that made her give me the

donkey. But she was terribly upset at not getting the portrait — she did so want him “done’ by some one showy! At first I was afraid she wouldn’t let me off — and at my wits’ end I suggested Grindle. Yes, it was I who started Grindle: I told Mrs. Stroud he was the ‘coming’ man, and she told somebody else, and so it got to be true. . . . And he painted Stroud without wincing; and she hung the picture among her husband’s things. . . .”

He flung himself down in the arm-chair near mine, laid back his head, and clasping his arms beneath it, looked up at the picture above the chimney-piece.

“I like to fancy that Stroud himself would have given it to me, if he’d been able to say what he thought that day.”

And, in answer to a question I put half-mechanically — “Begin again?” he flashed out. “When the one thing that brings me anywhere near him is that I knew enough to leave off?”

He stood up and laid his hand on my shoulder with a laugh. “Only the irony of it is that I am still painting — since Grindle’s doing it for me! The Strouds stand alone, and happen once — but there’s no exterminating our kind of art.”



## The Dream of a Ridiculous Man

### Fyodor Dostoyevsky

#### Chapter I

I am a ridiculous person. Now they call me a madman. That would be a promotion if it were not that I remain as ridiculous in their eyes as before. But now I do not resent it, they are all dear to me now, even when they laugh at me - and, indeed, it is just then that they are particularly dear to me. I could join in their laughter—not exactly at myself, but through affection for them, if I did not feel so sad as I look at them. Sad because they do not know the truth and I do know it. Oh, how hard it is to be the only one who knows the truth! But they won't understand that. No, they won't understand it.

In old days I used to be miserable at seeming ridiculous. Not seeming, but being. I have always been ridiculous, and I have known it, perhaps, from the hour I was born. Perhaps from the time I was seven years old I knew I was ridiculous. Afterwards I went to school, studied at the university, and, do you know, the more I learned, the more thoroughly I understood that I was ridiculous. So that it seemed in the end as though all the sciences I studied at the university existed only to prove and make evident to me as I went more deeply into them that I was ridiculous. It was the same with life as it was with science. With every year the same consciousness of the ridiculous figure I cut in every relation grew and strengthened. Everyone always laughed at me. But not one of them knew or guessed that if there were one man on earth who knew better than anybody else that I was absurd, it was myself, and what I resented most of all was that they did not know that. But that was my own fault; I was so proud that nothing would have ever induced me to tell it to anyone. This pride grew in me with the years; and if it had happened that I allowed myself to confess to anyone that I was ridiculous, I believe

that I should have blown out my brains the same evening. Oh, how I suffered in my early youth from the fear that I might give way and confess it to my schoolfellows. But since I grew to manhood, I have for some unknown reason become calmer, though I realized my awful characteristic more fully every year. I say "unknown", for to this day I cannot tell why it was. Perhaps it was owing to the terrible misery that was growing in my soul through something which was of more consequence than anything else about me: that something was the conviction that had come upon me that nothing in the world mattered. I had long had an inkling of it, but the full realization came last year almost suddenly. I suddenly felt that it was all the same to me whether the world existed or whether there had never been anything at all: I began to feel with all my being that there was nothing existing. At first I fancied that many things had existed in the past, but afterwards I guessed that there never had been anything in the past either, but that it had only seemed so for some reason. Little by little I guessed that there would be nothing in the future either. Then I left off being angry with people and almost ceased to notice them. Indeed this showed itself even in the pettiest trifles: I used, for instance, to knock against people in the street. And not so much from being lost in thought: what had I to think about? I had almost given up thinking by that time; nothing mattered to me. If at least I had solved my problems! Oh, I had not settled one of them, and how many there were! But I gave up caring about anything, and all the problems disappeared.

And it was after that that I found out the truth. I learnt the truth last November—on the third of November, to be precise— and I remember every instant since. It was a gloomy evening, one of the gloomiest possible evenings. I was going home at about eleven o'clock, and I remember that I thought that the evening could not be gloomier. Even physically. Rain had been falling all day, and it had been a cold, gloomy, almost menacing rain, with, I remember, an unmistakable spite against mankind. Suddenly between ten and eleven it had stopped, and was followed by a horrible dampness, colder and damper than the rain, and a sort of steam was rising from everything, from every stone in the street, and from every by-lane if one looked down it as far as one could. A thought suddenly occurred to me, that if all the street lamps had been put out it would have been less cheerless, that the gas made one's heart sadder because it lighted it all up. I had had scarcely any dinner that day, and had been spending the evening with an engineer, and two other friends had been there also. I sat silent—I fancy I bored them. They talked of something rousing and suddenly they got excited over it. But they



did not really care, I could see that, and only made a show of being excited. I suddenly said as much to them. "My friends," I said, "you really do not care one way or the other." They were not offended, but they laughed at me. That was because I spoke without any not of reproach, simply because it did not matter to me. They saw it did not, and it amused them.

As I was thinking about the gas lamps in the street I looked up at the sky. The sky was horribly dark, but one could distinctly see tattered clouds, and between them fathomless black patches. Suddenly I noticed in one of these patches a star, and began watching it intently. That was because that star had given me an idea: I decided to kill myself that night. I had firmly determined to do so two months before, and poor as I was, I bought a splendid revolver that very day, and loaded it. But two months had passed and it was still lying in my drawer; I was so utterly indifferent that I wanted to seize a moment when I would not be so indifferent—why, I don't know. And so for two months every night that I came home I thought I would shoot myself. I kept waiting for the right moment. And so now this star gave me a thought. I made up my mind that it should certainly be that night. And why the star gave me the thought I don't know.

And just as I was looking at the sky, this little girl took me by the elbow. The street was empty, and there was scarcely anyone to be seen. A cabman was sleeping in the distance in his cab. It was a child of eight with a kerchief on her head, wearing nothing but a wretched little dress all soaked with rain, but I noticed her wet broken shoes and I recall them now. They caught my eye particularly. She suddenly pulled me by the elbow and called me. She was not weeping, but was spasmodically crying out some words which could not utter properly, because she was shivering and shuddering all over. She was in terror about something, and kept crying, "Mammy, mammy!" I turned facing her, I did not say a word and went on; but she ran, pulling at me, and there was that note in her voice which in frightened children means despair. I know that sound. Though she did not articulate the words, I understood that her mother was dying, or that something of the sort was happening to them, and that she had run out to call someone, to find something to help her mother. I did not go with her; on the contrary, I had an impulse to drive her away. I told her first to go to a policeman. But clasping her hands, she ran beside me sobbing and gasping, and would not leave me. Then I stamped my foot and shouted at her. She called out "Sir! sir! . . ." but suddenly abandoned me and rushed headlong across the road. Some other passerby appeared there, and she evidently flew from me to him.

I mounted up to my fifth storey. I have a room in a flat where there are other lodgers. My room is small and poor, with a garret window in the shape of a semicircle. I have a sofa covered with American leather, a table with books on it, two chairs and a comfortable arm-chair, as old as old can be, but of the good old-fashioned shape. I sat down, lighted the candle, and began thinking. In the room next to mine, through the partition wall, a perfect Bedlam was going on. It had been going on for the last three days. A retired captain lived there, and he had half a dozen visitors, gentlemen of doubtful reputation, drinking vodka and playing stoss with old cards. The night before there had been a fight, and I know that two of them had been for a long time engaged in dragging each other about by the hair. The landlady wanted to complain, but she was in abject terror of the captain. There was only one other lodger in the flat, a thin little regimental lady, on a visit to Petersburg, with three little children who had been taken ill since they came into the lodgings. Both she and her children were in mortal fear of the captain, and lay trembling and crossing themselves all night, and the youngest child had a sort of fit from fright. That captain, I know for a fact, sometimes stops people in the Nevsky Prospect and begs. They won't take him into the service, but strange to say (that's why I am telling this), all this month that the captain has been here his behavior has caused me no annoyance. I have, of course, tried to avoid his acquaintance from the very beginning, and he, too, was bored with me from the first; but I never care how much they shout the other side of the partition nor how many of them there are in there: I sit up all night and forget them so completely that I do not even hear them. I stay awake till daybreak, and have been going on like that for the last year. I sit up all night in my arm-chair at the table, doing nothing. I only read by day. I sit—don't even think; ideas of a sort wander through my mind and I let them come and go as they will. A whole candle is burnt every night. I sat down quietly at the table, took out the revolver and put it down before me. When I had put it down I asked myself, I remember, "Is that so?" and answered with complete conviction, "It is." That is, I shall shoot myself. I knew that I should shoot myself that night for certain, but how much longer I should go on sitting at the table I did not know. And no doubt I should have shot myself if it had not been for that little girl.

## Chapter II

**Y**ou see, though nothing mattered to me, I could feel pain, for instance. If anyone had stuck me it would have hurt me. It was the same morally: if anything very pathetic

happened, I should have felt pity just as I used to do in old days when there were things in life that did matter to me. I had felt pity that evening. I should have certainly helped a child. Why, then, had I not helped the little girl? Because of an idea that occurred to me at the time: when she was calling and pulling at me, a question suddenly arose before me and I could not settle it. The question was an idle one, but I was vexed. I was vexed at the reflection that if I were going to make an end of myself that night, nothing in life ought to have mattered to me. Why was it that all at once I did not feel a strange pang, quite incongruous in my position. Really I do not know better how to convey my fleeting sensation at the moment, but the sensation persisted at home when I was sitting at the table, and I was very much irritated as I had not been for a long time past. One reflection followed another. I saw clearly that so long as I was still a human being and not nothingness, I was alive and so could suffer, be angry and feel shame at my actions. So be it. But if I am going to kill myself, in two hours, say, what is the little girl to me and what have I to do with shame or with anything else in the world? I shall turn into nothing, absolutely nothing. And can it really be true that the consciousness that I shall completely cease to exist immediately and so everything else will cease to exist, does not in the least affect my feeling of pity for the child nor the feeling of shame after a contemptible action? I stamped and shouted at the unhappy child as though to say—not only I feel no pity, but even if I behave inhumanly and contemptibly, I am free to, for in another two hours everything will be extinguished. Do you believe that that was why I shouted that? I am almost convinced of it now. I seemed clear to me that life and the world somehow depended upon me now. I may almost say that the world now seemed created for me alone: if I shot myself the world would cease to be at least for me. I say nothing of its being likely that nothing will exist for anyone when I am gone, and that as soon as my consciousness is extinguished the whole world will vanish too and become void like a phantom, as a mere appurtenance of my consciousness, for possibly all this world and all these people are only me myself.

I remember that as I sat and reflected, I turned all these new questions that swarmed one after another quite the other way, and thought of something quite new. For instance, a strange reflection suddenly occurred to me, that if I had lived before on the moon or on Mars and there had committed the most disgraceful and dishonorable action and had there been put to such shame and ignominy as one can only conceive and realize in dreams, in nightmares, and if, finding myself afterwards on earth, I were able to retain the memory

of what I had done on the other planet and at the same time knew that I should never, under any circumstances, return there, then looking from the earth to the moon—should I care or not? Should I feel shame for that action or not? These were idle and superfluous questions for the revolver was already lying before me, and I knew in every fibre of my being that it would happen for certain, but they excited me and I raged. I could not die now without having first settled something. In short, the child had saved me, for I put off my pistol shot for the sake of these questions. Meanwhile the clamor had begun to subside in the captain's room: they had finished their game, were settling down to sleep, and meanwhile were grumbling and languidly winding up their quarrels. At that point, I suddenly fell asleep in my chair at the table—a thing which had never happened to me before. I dropped asleep quite unawares.

Dreams, as we all know, are very queer things: some parts are presented with appalling vividness, with details worked up with the elaborate finish of jewelry, while others one gallops through, as it were, without noticing them at all, as, for instance, through space and time. Dreams seem to be spurred on not by reason but by desire, not by the head but by the heart, and yet what complicated tricks my reason has played sometimes in dreams, what utterly incomprehensible things happen to it! My brother died five years ago, for instance. I sometimes dream of him; he takes part in my affairs, we are very much interested, and yet all through my dream I quite know and remember that my brother is dead and buried. How is it that I am not surprised that, though he is dead, he is here beside me and working with me? Why is it that my reason fully accepts it? But enough. I will begin about my dream. Yes, I dreamed a dream, my dream of the third of November. They tease me now, telling me it was only a dream. But does it matter whether it was a dream or reality, if the dream made known to me the truth? If once one has recognized the truth and seen it, you know that it is the truth and that there is no other and there cannot be, whether you are asleep or awake. Let it be a dream, so be it, but that real life of which you make so much I had meant to extinguish by suicide, and my dream, my dream—oh, it revealed to me a different life, renewed, grand and full of power!

Listen.

### Chapter III

I have mentioned that I dropped asleep unawares and even seemed to be still reflecting on the same subjects. I suddenly dreamt that I picked up the revolver and aimed it straight

at my heart—my heart, and not my head; and I had determined beforehand to fire at my head, at my right temple. After aiming at my chest I waited a second or two, and suddenly my candle, my table, and the wall in front of me began moving and heaving. I made haste to pull the trigger.

In dreams you sometimes fall from a height, or are stabbed, or beaten, but you never feel pain unless, perhaps, you really bruise yourself against the bedstead, then you feel pain and almost always wake up from it. It was the same in my dream. I did not feel any pain, but it seemed as though with my shot everything within me was shaken and everything was suddenly dimmed, and it grew horribly black around me. I seemed to be blinded, and it benumbed, and I was lying on something hard, stretched on my back; I saw nothing, and could not make the slightest movement. People were walking and shouting around me, the captain bawled, the landlady shrieked—and suddenly another break and I was being carried in a closed coffin. And I felt how the coffin was shaking and reflected upon it, and for the first time the idea struck me that I was dead, utterly dead, I knew it and had no doubt of it, I could neither see nor move and yet I was feeling and reflecting. But I was soon reconciled to the position, and as one usually does in a dream, accepted the facts without disputing them.

And now I was buried in the earth. They all went away, I was left alone, utterly alone. I did not move. Whenever before I had imagined being buried the one sensation I associated with the grave was that of damp and cold. So now I felt that I was very cold, especially the tips of my toes, but I felt nothing else.

I lay still, strange to say I expected nothing, accepting without dispute that a dead man had nothing to expect. But it was damp. I don't know how long a time passed—whether an hour or several days, or many days. But all at once a drop of water fell on my closed left eye, making its way through the coffin lid; it was followed a minute later by a second, then a minute later by a third—and so on, regularly every minute. There was a sudden glow of profound indignation in my heart, and I suddenly felt in it a pang of physical pain. "That's my wound," I thought; "that's the bullet . . ." And drop after drop every minute kept falling on my closed eyelid. And all at once, not with my voice, but with my entire being, I called upon the power that was responsible for all that was happening to me:

"Whoever you may be, if you exist, and if anything more rational than what is happening here is possible, suffer it to be here now. But if you are revenging yourself upon me for my senseless suicide by the hideousness and absurdity of this subsequent existence, then

let me tell you that no torture could ever equal the contempt which I shall go on dumbly feeling, though my martyrdom may last a million years!"

I made this appeal and held my peace. There was a full minute of unbroken silence and again another drop fell, but I knew with infinite unshakable certainty that everything would change immediately. And behold my grave suddenly was rent asunder, that is, I don't know whether it was opened or dug up, but I was caught up by some dark and unknown being and we found ourselves in space. I suddenly regained my sight. It was the dead of night, and never, never had there been such darkness. We were flying through space far away from the earth. I did not question the being who was taking me; I was proud and waited. I assured myself that I was not afraid, and was thrilled with ecstasy at the thought that I was not afraid. I do not know how long we were flying, I cannot imagine; it happened as it always does in dreams when you skip over space and time, and the laws of thought and existence, and only pause upon the points for which the heart yearns. I remember that I suddenly saw in the darkness a star. "Is that Sirius?" I asked impulsively, though I had not meant to ask questions.

"No, that is the star you saw between the clouds when you were coming home," the being who was carrying me replied.

I knew that it had something like a human face. Strange to say, I did not like that being, in fact I felt an intense aversion for it. I had expected complete non-existence, and that was why I had put a bullet through my heart. And here I was in the hands of a creature not human, of course, but yet living, existing. "And so there is life beyond the grave," I thought with the strange frivolity one has in dreams. But in its inmost depth my heart remained unchanged. "And if I have got to exist again," I thought, "and live once more under the control of some irresistible power, I won't be vanquished and humiliated."

"You know that I am afraid of you and despise me for that," I said suddenly to my companion, unable to refrain from the humiliating question which implied a confession, and feeling my humiliation stab my heart as with a pin. He did not answer my question, but all at once I felt that he was not even despising me, but was laughing at me and had no compassion for me, and that our journey had an unknown and mysterious object that concerned me only. Fear was growing in my heart. Something was mutely and painfully communicated to me from my silent companion, and permeated my whole being. We were flying through dark, unknown space. I had for some time lost sight of the constellations familiar to my eyes. I knew



that there were stars in the heavenly spaces the light of which took thousands or millions of years to reach the earth. Perhaps we were already flying through those spaces. I expected something with a terrible anguish that tortured my heart. And suddenly I was thrilled by a familiar feeling that stirred me to the depths: I suddenly caught sight of our sun! I knew that it could not be our sun, that gave life to our earth, and that we were an infinite distance from our sun, but for some reason I knew in my whole being that it was a sun exactly like ours, a duplicate of it. A sweet, thrilling feeling resounded with ecstasy in my heart: the kindred power of the same light which had given me light stirred an echo in my heart and awakened it, and I had a sensation of life, the old life of the past for the first time since I had been in the grave.

"But if that is the sun, if that is exactly the same as our sun," I cried, "where is the earth?"

And my companion pointed to a star twinkling in the distance with an emerald light. We were flying straight towards it.

"And are such repetitions possible in the universe? Can that be the law of Nature? . . . And if that is an earth there, can it be just the same earth as ours . . . just the same, as poor, as unhappy, but precious and beloved for ever, arousing in the most ungrateful of her children the same poignant love for her that we feel for our earth?" I cried out, shaken by irresistible, ecstatic love for the old familiar earth which I had left. The image of the poor child whom I had repulsed flashed through my mind.

"You shall see it all," answered my companion, and there was a note of sorrow in his voice.

But we were rapidly approaching the planet. It was growing before my eyes; I could already distinguish the ocean, the outline of Europe; and suddenly a feeling of a great and holy jealousy glowed in my heart.

"How can it be repeated and what for? I love and can love only that earth which I have left, stained with my blood, when, in my ingratitude, I quenched my life with a bullet in my heart. But I have never, never ceased to love that earth, and perhaps on the very night I parted from it I loved it more than ever. Is there suffering upon this new earth? On our earth we can only love with suffering and through suffering. We cannot love otherwise, and we know of no other sort of love. I want suffering in order to love. I long, I thirst, this very instant, to kiss with tears the earth that I have left, and I don't want, I won't accept life on any other!"

But my companion had already left me. I suddenly, quite without noticing how, found myself on this other earth, in the bright

light of a sunny day, fair as paradise. I believe I was standing on one of the islands that make up on our globe the Greek archipelago, or on the coast of the mainland facing that archipelago. Oh, everything was exactly as it is with us, only everything seemed to have a festive radiance, the splendor of some great, holy triumph attained at last. The caressing sea, green as emerald, splashed softly upon the shore and kissed it with manifest, almost conscious love. The tall, lovely trees stood in all the glory of their blossom, and their innumerable leaves greeted me, I am certain, with their soft, caressing rustle and seemed to articulate words of love. The grass glowed with bright and fragrant flowers. Birds were flying in flocks in the air, and perched fearlessly on my shoulders and arms and joyfully struck me with their darling, fluttering wings. And at last I saw and knew the people of this happy land. That came to me of themselves, they surrounded me, kissed me. The children of the sun, the children of their sun—oh, how beautiful they were! Never had I seen on our own earth such beauty in mankind. Only perhaps in our children, in their earliest years, one might find, some remote faint reflection of this beauty. The eyes of these happy people shone with a clear brightness. Their faces were radiant with the light of reason and fullness of a serenity that comes of perfect understanding, but those faces were gay; in their words and voices there was a note of childlike joy. Oh, from the first moment, from the first glance at them, I understood it all! It was the earth untarnished by the Fall; on it lived people who had not sinned. They lived just in such a paradise as that in which, according to all the legends of mankind, our first parents lived before they sinned; the only difference was that all this earth was the same paradise. These people, laughing joyfully, thronged round me and caressed me; they took me home with them, and each of them tried to reassure me. Oh, they asked me no questions, but they seemed, I fancied, to know everything without asking, and they wanted to make haste to smooth away the signs of suffering from my face.

## Chapter IV

**A**nd do you know what? Well, granted that it was only a dream, yet the sensation of the love of those innocent and beautiful people has remained with me for ever, and I feel as though their love is still flowing out to me from over there. I have seen them myself, have known them and been convinced; I loved them, I suffered for them afterwards. Oh, I understood at once even at the time that in many things I could not understand them at all; as an up-to-date Russian progressive and contemptible Petersburger, it struck me as inexplicable that, knowing so much,



they had, for instance, no science like our. But I soon realized that their knowledge was gained and fostered by intuitions different from those of us on earth, and that their aspirations, too, were quite different. They desired nothing and were at peace; they did not aspire to knowledge of life as we aspire to understand it, because their lives were full. But their knowledge was higher and deeper than ours; for our science seeks to explain what life is, aspires to understand it in order to teach others how to love, while they without science knew how to live; and that I understood, but I could not understand their knowledge. They showed me their trees, and I could not understand the intense love with which they looked at them; it was as though they were talking with creatures like themselves. And perhaps I shall not be mistaken if I say that they conversed with them. Yes, they had found their language, and I am convinced that the trees understood them. They looked at all Nature like that—at the animals who lived in peace with them and did not attack them, but loved them, conquered by their love. They pointed to the stars and told me something about them which I could not understand, but I am convinced that they were somehow in touch with the stars, not only in thought, but by some living channel. Oh, these people did not persist in trying to make me understand them, they loved me without that, but I knew that they would never understand me, and so I hardly spoke to them about our earth. I only kissed in their presence the earth on which they lived and mutely worshipped them themselves. And they saw that and let me worship them without being abashed at my adoration, for they themselves loved much. They were not unhappy on my account when at times I kissed their feet with tears, joyfully conscious of the love with which they would respond to mine. At times I asked myself with wonder how it was they were able never to offend a creature like me, and never once to arouse a feeling of jealousy or envy in me? Often I wondered how it could be that, boastful and untruthful as I was, I never talked to them of what I knew—of which, of course, they had no notion—that I was never tempted to do so by a desire to astonish or even to benefit them.

They were as gay and sportive as children. They wandered about their lovely woods and copses, they sang their lovely songs; their fair was light—the fruits of their trees, the honey from their woods, and the milk of the animals who loved them. The work they did for food and raiment was brief and not laborious. They loved and begot children, but I never noticed in them the impulse of that cruel sensuality which overcomes almost every man on this earth, all and each, and is the source of almost every sin of mankind on earth. They rejoiced at the arrival of children as new beings to share

their happiness. There was no quarrelling, no jealousy among them, and they did not even know what the words meant. Their children were the children of all, for they all made up one family. There was scarcely any illness among them, though there was death; but their old people died peacefully, as though falling asleep, giving blessings and smiles to those who surrounded them to take their last farewell with bright and lovely smiles. I never saw grief or tears on those occasions, but only love, which reached the point of ecstasy, but a calm ecstasy, made perfect and contemplative. One might think that they were still in contact with the departed after death, and that their earthly union was not cut short by death. They scarcely understood me when I questioned them about immortality, but evidently they were so convinced of it without reasoning that it was not for them a question at all. They had no temples, but they had a real living and uninterrupted sense of oneness with the whole of the universe; they had no creed, but they had a certain knowledge that when their earthly joy had reached the limits of earthly nature, then there would come for them, for the living and for the dead, a still greater fullness of contact with the whole of the universe. They looked forward to that moment with joy, but without haste, not pining for it, but seeming to have a foretaste of it in their hearts, of which they talked to one another.

In the evening before going to sleep they liked singing in musical and harmonious chorus. In those songs they expressed all the sensations that the parting day had given them, sang its glories and took leave of it. They sang the praises of nature, of the sea, of the woods. They liked making songs about one another, and praised each other like children; they were the simplest songs, but they sprang from their hearts and went to one's heart. And not only in their songs but in all their lives they seemed to do nothing but admire one another. It was like being in love with each other, but an all-embracing, universal feeling.

Some of their songs, solemn and rapturous, I scarcely understood at all. Though I understood the words I could never fathom their full significance. It remained, as it were, beyond the grasp of my mind, yet my heart unconsciously absorbed it more and more. I often told them that I had had a presentiment of it long before, that this joy and glory had come to me on our earth in the form of a yearning melancholy that at times approached insufferable sorrow; that I had had a foreknowledge of them all and of their glory in the dreams of my heart and the visions of my mind; that often on our earth I could not look at the setting sun without tears. . . that in my hatred for the men of our earth there was always a yearning anguish: why could I

not hate them without loving them? why could I not help forgiving them? and in my love for them there was a yearning grief: why could I not love them without hating them? They listened to me, and I saw they could not conceive what I was saying, but I did not regret that I had spoken to them of it: I knew that they understood the intensity of my yearning anguish over those whom I had left. But when they looked at me with their sweet eyes full of love, when I felt that in their presence my heart, too, became as innocent and just as theirs, the feeling of the fullness of life took my breath away, and I worshipped them in silence.

Oh, everyone laughs in my face now, and assures me that one cannot dream of such details as I am telling now, that I only dreamed or felt one sensation that arose in my heart in delirium and made up the details myself when I woke up. And when I told them that perhaps it really was so, my God, how they shouted with laughter in my face, and what mirth I caused! Oh, yes, of course I was overcome by the mere sensation of my dream, and that was all that was preserved in my cruelly wounded heart; but the actual forms and images of my dream, that is, the very ones I really saw at the very time of my dream, were filled with such harmony, were so lovely and enchanting and were so actual, that on awakening I was, of course, incapable of clothing them in our poor language, so that they were bound to become blurred in my mind; and so perhaps I really was forced afterwards to make up the details, and so of course to distort them in my passionate desire to convey some at least of them as quickly as I could. But on the other hand, how can I help believing that it was all true? It was perhaps a thousand times brighter, happier and more joyful than I describe it. Granted that I dreamed it, yet it must have been real. You know, I will tell you a secret: perhaps it was not a dream at all! For then something happened so awful, something so horribly true, that it could not have been imagined in a dream. My heart may have originated the dream, but would my heart alone have been capable of originating the awful event which happened to me afterwards? How could I alone have invented it or imagined it in my dream? Could my petty heart and fickle, trivial mind have risen to such a revelation of truth? Oh, judge for yourselves: hitherto I have concealed it, but now I will tell the truth. The fact is that I . . . corrupted them all!

## Chapter V

**Y**es, yes, it ended in my corrupting them all! How it could come to pass I do not know, but I remember it clearly. The dream embraced thousands of years and left in me

only a sense of the whole. I only know that I was the cause of their sin and downfall. Like a vile trichina, like a germ of the plague infecting whole kingdoms, so I contaminated all this earth, so happy and sinless before my coming. They learnt to lie, grew fond of lying, and discovered the charm of falsehood. Oh, at first perhaps it began innocently, with a jest, coquetry, with amorous play, perhaps indeed with a germ, but that germ of falsity made its way into their hearts and pleased them. Then sensuality was soon begotten, sensuality begot jealousy, jealousy—cruelty . . . Oh, I don't know, I don't remember; but soon, very soon the first blood was shed. They marvelled and were horrified, and began to be split up and divided. They formed into unions, but it was against one another. Reproaches, upbraidings followed. They came to know shame, and shame brought them to virtue. The conception of honour sprang up, and every union began waving its flags. They began torturing animals, and the animals withdrew from them into the forests and became hostile to them. They began to struggle for separation, for isolation, for individuality, for mine and thine. They began to talk in different languages. They became acquainted with sorrow and loved sorrow; they thirsted for suffering, and said that truth could only be attained through suffering. Then science appeared. As they became wicked they began talking of brotherhood and humanitarianism, and understood those ideas. As they became criminal, they invented justice and drew up whole legal codes in order to observe it, and to ensure their being kept, set up a guillotine. They hardly remembered what they had lost, in fact refused to believe that they had ever been happy and innocent. They even laughed at the possibility of this happiness in the past, and called it a dream. They could not even imagine it in definite form and shape, but, strange and wonderful to relate, though they lost all faith in their past happiness and called it a legend, they so longed to be happy and innocent once more that they succumbed to this desire like children, made an idol of it, set up temples and worshipped their own idea, their own desire; though at the same time they fully believed that it was unattainable and could not be realized, yet they bowed down to it and adored it with tears! Nevertheless, if it could have happened that they had returned to the innocent and happy condition which they had lost, and if someone had shown it to them again and had asked them whether they wanted to go back to it, they would certainly have refused. They answered me:

“We may be deceitful, wicked and unjust, we know it and weep over it, we grieve over it; we torment and punish ourselves more perhaps than that merciful Judge Who will judge us and whose

Name we know not. But we have science, and by the means of it we shall find the truth and we shall arrive at it consciously. Knowledge is higher than feeling, the consciousness of life is higher than life. Science will give us wisdom, wisdom will reveal the laws, and the knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness."

That is what they said, and after saying such things everyone began to love himself better than anyone else, and indeed they could not do otherwise. All became so jealous of the rights of their own personality that they did their very utmost to curtail and destroy them in others, and made that the chief thing in their lives. Slavery followed, even voluntary slavery; the weak eagerly submitted to the strong, on condition that the latter aided them to subdue the still weaker. Then there were saints who came to these people, weeping, and talked to them of their pride, of their loss of harmony and due proportion, of their loss of shame. They were laughed at or pelted with stones. Holy blood was shed on the threshold of the temples. Then there arose men who began to think how to bring all people together again, so that everybody, while still loving himself best of all, might not interfere with others, and all might live together in something like a harmonious society. Regular wars sprang up over this idea. All the combatants at the same time firmly believed that science, wisdom and the instinct of self-preservation would force men at last to unite into a harmonious and rational society; and so, meanwhile, to hasten matters, "the wise" endeavoured to exterminate as rapidly as possible all who were "not wise" and did not understand their idea, that the latter might not hinder its triumph. But the instinct of self-preservation grew rapidly weaker; there arose men, haughty and sensual, who demanded all or nothing. In order to obtain everything they resorted to crime, and if they did not succeed—to suicide. There arose religions with a cult of non-existence and self-destruction for the sake of the everlasting peace of annihilation. At last these people grew weary of their meaningless toil, and signs of suffering came into their faces, and then they proclaimed that suffering was a beauty, for in suffering alone was there meaning. They glorified suffering in their songs. I moved about among them, wringing my hands and weeping over them, but I loved them perhaps more than in old days when there was no suffering in their faces and when they were innocent and so lovely. I loved the earth they had polluted even more than when it had been a paradise, if only because sorrow had come to it. Alas! I always loved sorrow and tribulation, but only for myself, for myself; but I wept over them, pitying them. I stretched out my hands to them in despair, blaming, cursing and despising myself. I told them that all this was my doing, mine alone; that it

was I had brought them corruption, contamination and falsity. I besought them to crucify me, I taught them how to make a cross. I could not kill myself, I had not the strength, but I wanted to suffer at their hands. I yearned for suffering, I longed that my blood should be drained to the last drop in these agonies. But they only laughed at me, and began at last to look upon me as crazy. They justified me, they declared that they had only got what they wanted themselves, and that all that now was could not have been otherwise. At last they declared to me that I was becoming dangerous and that they should lock me up in a madhouse if I did not hold my tongue. Then such grief took possession of my soul that my heart was wrung, and I felt as though I were dying; and then . . . then I awoke.

It was morning, that is, it was not yet daylight, but about six o'clock. I woke up in the same arm-chair; my candle had burnt out; everyone was asleep in the captain's room, and there was a stillness all round, rare in our flat. First of all I leapt up in great amazement: nothing like this had ever happened to me before, not even in the most trivial detail; I had never, for instance, fallen asleep like this in my arm-chair. While I was standing and coming to myself I suddenly caught sight of my revolver lying loaded, ready - but instantly I thrust it away! Oh, now, life, life! I lifted up my hands and called upon eternal truth, not with words, but with tears; ecstasy, immeasurable ecstasy flooded my soul. Yes, life and spreading the good tidings! Oh, I at that moment resolved to spread the tidings, and resolved it, of course, for my whole life. I go to spread the tidings, I want to spread the tidings—of what? Of the truth, for I have seen it, have seen it with my own eyes, have seen it in all its glory.

And since then I have been preaching! Moreover I love all those who laugh at me more than any of the rest. Why that is so I do not know and cannot explain, but so be it. I am told that I am vague and confused, and if I am vague and confused now, what shall I be later on? It is true indeed: I am vague and confused, and perhaps as time goes on I shall be more so. And of course I shall make many blunders before I find out how to preach, that is, find out what words to say, what things to do, for it is a very difficult task. I see all that as clear as daylight, but, listen, who does not make mistakes? An yet, you know, all are making for the same goal, all are striving in the same direction anyway, from the sage to the lowest robber, only by different roads. It is an old truth, but this is what is new: I cannot go far wrong. For I have seen the truth; I have seen and I know that people can be beautiful and happy without losing the power of living on earth. I will not and cannot believe that evil is the normal condition of mankind. And it is just this faith of mine that they laugh



at. But how can I help believing it? I have seen the truth—it is not as though I had invented it with my mind, I have seen it, seen it, and the living image of it has filled my soul for ever. I have seen it in such full perfection that I cannot believe that it is impossible for people to have it. And so how can I go wrong? I shall make some slips no doubt, and shall perhaps talk in second-hand language, but not for long: the living image of what I saw will always be with me and will always correct and guide me. Oh, I am full of courage and freshness, and I will go on and on if it were for a thousand years! Do you know, at first I meant to conceal the fact that I corrupted them, but that was a mistake—that was my first mistake! But truth whispered to me that I was lying, and preserved me and corrected me. But how establish paradise—I don't know, because I do not know how to put it into words. After my dream I lost command of words. All the chief words, anyway, the most necessary ones. But never mind, I shall go and I shall keep talking, I won't leave off, for anyway I have seen it with my own eyes, though I cannot describe what I saw. But the scoffers do not understand that. It was a dream, they say, delirium, hallucination. Oh! As though that meant so much! And they are so proud! A dream! What is a dream? And is not our life a dream? I will say more. Suppose that this paradise will never come to pass (that I understand), yet I shall go on preaching it. And yet how simple it is: in one day, in one hour everything could be arranged at once! The chief thing is to love others like yourself, that's the chief thing, and that's everything; nothing else is wanted—you will find out at once how to arrange it all. And yet it's an old truth which has been told and retold a billion times—but it has not formed part of our lives! The consciousness of life is higher than life, the knowledge of the laws of happiness is higher than happiness—that is what one must contend against. And I shall. If only everyone wants it, it can be arranged at once.

And I tracked down that little girl . . . and I shall go on and on!

NOTHING BUT THE TRUTH



## The Beggar

Anton Chekhov

**"K**IND sir, be so good as to notice a poor, hungry man. I have not tasted food for three days. I have not a five-kopeck piece for a night's lodging. I swear by God! For five years I was a village schoolmaster and lost my post through the intrigues of the Zemstvo. I was the victim of false witness. I have been out of a place for a year now."

Skvortsov, a Petersburg lawyer, looked at the speaker's tattered dark blue overcoat, at his muddy, drunken eyes, at the red patches on his cheeks, and it seemed to him that he had seen the man before.

"And now I am offered a post in the Kaluga province," the beggar continued, "but I have not the means for the journey there. Graciously help me! I am ashamed to ask, but . . . I am compelled by circumstances."

Skvortsov looked at his goloshes, of which one was shallow like a shoe, while the other came high up the leg like a boot, and suddenly remembered.

"Listen, the day before yesterday I met you in Sadovoy Street," he said, "and then you told me, not that you were a village schoolmaster, but that you were a student who had been expelled. Do you remember?"

"N-o. No, that cannot be so!" the beggar muttered in confusion. "I am a village schoolmaster, and if you wish it I can show you documents to prove it."

"That's enough lies! You called yourself a student, and even told me what you were expelled for. Do you remember?"

Skvortsov flushed, and with a look of disgust on his face turned away from the ragged figure.

"It's contemptible, sir!" he cried angrily. "It's a swindle! I'll hand you over to the police, damn you! You are poor and hungry, but that

does not give you the right to lie so shamelessly!"

The ragged figure took hold of the door-handle and, like a bird in a snare, looked round the hall desperately.

"I . . . I am not lying," he muttered. "I can show documents."

"Who can believe you?" Skvortsov went on, still indignant. "To exploit the sympathy of the public for village schoolmasters and students—it's so low, so mean, so dirty! It's revolting!"

Skvortsov flew into a rage and gave the beggar a merciless scolding. The ragged fellow's insolent lying aroused his disgust and aversion, was an offence against what he, Skvortsov, loved and prized in himself: kindness, a feeling heart, sympathy for the unhappy. By his lying, by his treacherous assault upon compassion, the individual had, as it were, defiled the charity which he liked to give to the poor with no misgivings in his heart. The beggar at first defended himself, protested with oaths, then he sank into silence and hung his head, overcome with shame.

"Sir!" he said, laying his hand on his heart, "I really was . . . lying! I am not a student and not a village schoolmaster. All that's mere invention! I used to be in the Russian choir, and I was turned out of it for drunkenness. But what can I do? Believe me, in God's name, I can't get on without lying—when I tell the truth no one will give me anything. With the truth one may die of hunger and freeze without a night's lodging! What you say is true, I understand that, but . . . what am I to do?"

"What are you to do? You ask what are you to do?" cried Skvortsov, going close up to him. "Work—that's what you must do! You must work!"

"Work. . . . I know that myself, but where can I get work?"

"Nonsense. You are young, strong, and healthy, and could always find work if you wanted to. But you know you are lazy, pampered, drunken! You reek of vodka like a pothouse! You have become false and corrupt to the marrow of your bones and fit for nothing but begging and lying! If you do graciously condescend to take work, you must have a job in an office, in the Russian choir, or as a billiard-marker, where you will have a salary and have nothing to do! But how would you like to undertake manual labour? I'll be bound, you wouldn't be a house porter or a factory hand! You are too genteel for that!"

"What things you say, really . . ." said the beggar, and he gave a bitter smile. "How can I get manual work? It's rather late for me to be a shopman, for in trade one has to begin from a boy; no one would take me as a house porter, because I am not of that class . . . . And I could not get work in a factory; one must know a trade, and I know

nothing."

"Nonsense! You always find some justification! Wouldn't you like to chop wood?"

"I would not refuse to, but the regular woodchoppers are out of work now."

"Oh, all idlers argue like that! As soon as you are offered anything you refuse it. Would you care to chop wood for me?"

"Certainly I will. . ."

"Very good, we shall see. . . . Excellent. We'll see!" Skvortsov, in nervous haste; and not without malignant pleasure, rubbing his hands, summoned his cook from the kitchen.

"Here, Olga," he said to her, "take this gentleman to the shed and let him chop some wood."

The beggar shrugged his shoulders as though puzzled, and irresolutely followed the cook. It was evident from his demeanor that he had consented to go and chop wood, not because he was hungry and wanted to earn money, but simply from shame and *amour propre*, because he had been taken at his word. It was clear, too, that he was suffering from the effects of vodka, that he was unwell, and felt not the faintest inclination to work.

Skvortsov hurried into the dining-room. There from the window which looked out into the yard he could see the woodshed and everything that happened in the yard. Standing at the window, Skvortsov saw the cook and the beggar come by the back way into the yard and go through the muddy snow to the woodshed. Olga scrutinized her companion angrily, and jerking her elbow unlocked the woodshed and angrily banged the door open.

"Most likely we interrupted the woman drinking her coffee," thought Skvortsov. "What a cross creature she is!"

Then he saw the pseudo-schoolmaster and pseudo-student seat himself on a block of wood, and, leaning his red cheeks upon his fists, sink into thought. The cook flung an axe at his feet, spat angrily on the ground, and, judging by the expression of her lips, began abusing him. The beggar drew a log of wood towards him irresolutely, set it up between his feet, and diffidently drew the axe across it. The log toppled and fell over. The beggar drew it towards him, breathed on his frozen hands, and again drew the axe along it as cautiously as though he were afraid of its hitting his golosh or chopping off his fingers. The log fell over again.

Skvortsov's wrath had passed off by now, he felt sore and ashamed at the thought that he had forced a pampered, drunken, and perhaps sick man to do hard, rough work in the cold.

"Never mind, let him go on . . ." he thought, going from the

dining-room into his study. "I am doing it for his good!"

An hour later Olga appeared and announced that the wood had been chopped up.

"Here, give him half a rouble," said Skvortsov. "If he likes, let him come and chop wood on the first of every month. . . . There will always be work for him."

On the first of the month the beggar turned up and again earned half a rouble, though he could hardly stand. From that time forward he took to turning up frequently, and work was always found for him: sometimes he would sweep the snow into heaps, or clear up the shed, at another he used to beat the rugs and the mattresses. He always received thirty to forty kopecks for his work, and on one occasion an old pair of trousers was sent out to him.

When he moved, Skvortsov engaged him to assist in packing and moving the furniture. On this occasion the beggar was sober, gloomy, and silent; he scarcely touched the furniture, walked with hanging head behind the furniture vans, and did not even try to appear busy; he merely shivered with the cold, and was overcome with confusion when the men with the vans laughed at his idleness, feebleness, and ragged coat that had once been a gentleman's. After the removal Skvortsov sent for him.

"Well, I see my words have had an effect upon you," he said, giving him a rouble. "This is for your work. I see that you are sober and not disinclined to work. What is your name?"

"Lushkov."

"I can offer you better work, not so rough, Lushkov. Can you write?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then go with this note to-morrow to my colleague and he will give you some copying to do. Work, don't drink, and don't forget what I said to you. Good-bye."

Skvortsov, pleased that he had put a man in the path of rectitude, patted Lushkov genially on the shoulder, and even shook hands with him at parting.

Lushkov took the letter, departed, and from that time forward did not come to the back-yard for work.

Two years passed. One day as Skvortsov was standing at the ticket-office of a theatre, paying for his ticket, he saw beside him a little man with a lambskin collar and a shabby cat's-skin cap. The man timidly asked the clerk for a gallery ticket and paid for it with kopecks.

"Lushkov, is it you?" asked Skvortsov, recognizing in the little man his former woodchopper. "Well, what are you doing? Are you

getting on all right?"

"Pretty well. . . . I am in a notary's office now. I earn thirty-five roubles."

"Well, thank God, that's capital. I rejoice for you. I am very, very glad, Lushkov. You know, in a way, you are my godson. It was I who shoved you into the right way. Do you remember what a scolding I gave you, eh? You almost sank through the floor that time. Well, thank you, my dear fellow, for remembering my words."

"Thank you too," said Lushkov. "If I had not come to you that day, maybe I should be calling myself a schoolmaster or a student still. Yes, in your house I was saved, and climbed out of the pit."

"I am very, very glad."

"Thank you for your kind words and deeds. What you said that day was excellent. I am grateful to you and to your cook, God bless that kind, noble-hearted woman. What you said that day was excellent; I am indebted to you as long as I live, of course, but it was your cook, Olga, who really saved me."

"How was that?"

"Why, it was like this. I used to come to you to chop wood and she would begin: 'Ah, you drunkard! You God-forsaken man! And yet death does not take you!' and then she would sit opposite me, lamenting, looking into my face and wailing: 'You unlucky fellow! You have no gladness in this world, and in the next you will burn in hell, poor drunkard! You poor sorrowful creature!' and she always went on in that style, you know. How often she upset herself, and how many tears she shed over me I can't tell you. But what affected me most—she chopped the wood for me! Do you know, sir, I never chopped a single log for you—she did it all! How it was she saved me, how it was I changed, looking at her, and gave up drinking, I can't explain. I only know that what she said and the noble way she behaved brought about a change in my soul, and I shall never forget it. It's time to go up, though, they are just going to ring the bell."

Lushkov bowed and went off to the gallery.



## The Liar

Henry James

I

**T**he train was half an hour late and the drive from the station longer than he had supposed, so that when he reached the house its inmates had dispersed to dress for dinner and he was conducted straight to his room. The curtains were drawn in this asylum, the candles were lighted, the fire was bright, and when the servant had quickly put out his clothes the comfortable little place became suggestive—seemed to promise a pleasant house, a various party, talks, acquaintances, affinities, to say nothing of very good cheer. He was too occupied with his profession to pay many country visits, but he had heard people who had more time for them speak of establishments where “they do you very well.” He foresaw that the proprietors of Stayes would do him very well. In his bedroom at a country house he always looked first at the books on the shelf and the prints on the walls; he considered that these things gave a sort of measure of the culture and even of the character of his hosts. Though he had but little time to devote to them on this occasion a cursory inspection assured him that if the literature, as usual, was mainly American and humorous the art consisted neither of the water-color studies of the children nor of ‘goody’ engravings. The walls were adorned with old-fashioned lithographs, principally portraits of country gentlemen with high collars and riding gloves: this suggested—and it was encouraging—that the tradition of portraiture was held in esteem. There was the customary novel of Mr. Le Fanu, for the bedside; the ideal reading in a country house for the hours after midnight. Oliver Lyon could scarcely forbear beginning it while he buttoned his shirt.

Perhaps that is why he not only found every one assembled in the hall when he went down, but perceived from the way the move to

dinner was instantly made that they had been waiting for him. There was no delay, to introduce him to a lady, for he went out in a group of unmatched men, without this appendage. The men, straggling behind, sidled and edged as usual at the door of the dining-room, and the *denouement* of this little comedy was that he came to his place last of all. This made him think that he was in a sufficiently distinguished company, for if he had been humiliated (which he was not), he could not have consoled himself with the reflection that such a fate was natural to an obscure, struggling young artist. He could no longer think of himself as very young, alas, and if his position was not so brilliant as it ought to be he could no longer justify it by calling it a struggle. He was something of a celebrity and he was apparently in a society of celebrities. This idea added to the curiosity with which he looked up and down the long table as he settled himself in his place.

It was a numerous party—five and twenty people; rather an odd occasion to have proposed to him, as he thought. He would not be surrounded by the quiet that ministers to good work; however, it had never interfered with his work to see the spectacle of human life before him in the intervals. And though he did not know it, it was never quiet at Stayes. When he was working well he found himself in that happy state—the happiest of all for an artist—in which things in general contribute to the particular idea and fall in with it, help it on and justify it, so that he feels for the hour as if nothing in the world can happen to him, even if it come in the guise of disaster or suffering, that will not be an enhancement of his subject. Moreover there was an exhilaration (he had felt it before) in the rapid change of scene—the jump, in the dusk of the afternoon, from foggy London and his familiar studio to a centre of festivity in the middle of Hertfordshire and a drama half acted, a drama of pretty women and noted men and wonderful orchids in silver jars. He observed as a not unimportant fact that one of the pretty women was beside him: a gentleman sat on his other hand. But he went into his neighbors little as yet: he was busy looking out for Sir David, whom he had never seen and about whom he naturally was curious.

Evidently, however, Sir David was not at dinner, a circumstance sufficiently explained by the other circumstance which constituted our friend's principal knowledge of him—his being ninety years of age. Oliver Lyon had looked forward with great pleasure to the chance of painting a nonagenarian, and though the old man's absence from table was something of a disappointment (it was an opportunity the less to observe him before going to work), it seemed a sign that he was rather a sacred and perhaps therefore an impressive relic. Lyon



looked at his son with the greater interest—wondered whether the glazed bloom of his cheek had been transmitted from Sir David. That would be jolly to paint, in the old man—the withered ruddiness of a winter apple, especially if the eye were still alive and the white hair carried out the frosty look. Arthur Ashmore's hair had a midsummer glow, but Lyon was glad his commission had been to delineate the father rather than the son, in spite of his never having seen the one and of the other being seated there before him now in the happy expansion of liberal hospitality.

Arthur Ashmore was a fresh-colored, thick-necked English gentleman, but he was just not a subject; he might have been a farmer and he might have been a banker: you could scarcely paint him in characters. His wife did not make up the amount; she was a large, bright, negative woman, who had the same air as her husband of being somehow tremendously new; a sort of appearance of fresh varnish (Lyon could scarcely tell whether it came from her complexion or from her clothes), so that one felt she ought to sit in a gilt frame, suggesting reference to a catalogue or a price-list. It was as if she were already rather a bad though expensive portrait, knocked off by an eminent hand, and Lyon had no wish to copy that work. The pretty woman on his right was engaged with her neighbor and the gentleman on his other side looked shrinking and scared, so that he had time to lose himself in his favorite diversion of watching face after face. This amusement gave him the greatest pleasure he knew, and he often thought it a mercy that the human mask did interest him and that it was not less vivid than it was (sometimes it ran its success in this line very close), since he was to make his living by reproducing it. Even if Arthur Ashmore would not be inspiring to paint (a certain anxiety rose in him lest if he should make a hit with her father-in-law Mrs. Arthur should take it into her head that he had now proved himself worthy to *aborder* her husband); even if he had looked a little less like a page (fine as to print and margin) without punctuation, he would still be a refreshing, iridescent surface. But the gentleman four persons off—what was he? Would he be a subject, or was his face only the legible door-plate of his identity, burnished with punctual washing and shaving—the least thing that was decent that you would know him by?

This face arrested Oliver Lyon: it struck him at first as very handsome. The gentleman might still be called young, and his features were regular: he had a plentiful, fair moustache that curled up at the ends, a brilliant, gallant, almost adventurous air, and a big shining breastpin in the middle of his shirt. He appeared a fine satisfied soul, and Lyon perceived that wherever he rested his friendly eye there fell

an influence as pleasant as the September sun—as if he could make grapes and pears or even human affection ripen by looking at them. What was odd in him was a certain mixture of the correct and the extravagant: as if he were an adventurer imitating a gentleman with rare perfection or a gentleman who had taken a fancy to go about with hidden arms. He might have been a dethroned prince or the war-correspondent of a newspaper: he represented both enterprise and tradition, good manners and bad taste. Lyon at length fell into conversation with the lady beside him—they dispensed, as he had had to dispense at dinner-parties before, with an introduction—by asking who this personage might be.

“Oh, he’s Colonel Capadose, don’t you know?” Lyon didn’t know and he asked for further information. His neighbor had a sociable manner and evidently was accustomed to quick transitions; she turned from her other interlocutor with a methodical air, as a good cook lifts the cover of the next saucepan. “He has been a great deal in India—isn’t he rather celebrated?” she inquired. Lyon confessed he had never heard of him, and she went on, “Well, perhaps he isn’t; but he says he is, and if you think it, that’s just the same, isn’t it?”

“If *you* think it?”

“I mean if he thinks it—that’s just as good, I suppose.”

“Do you mean that he says that which is not?”

“Oh dear, no—because I never know. He is exceedingly clever and amusing—quite the cleverest person in the house, unless indeed you are more so. But that I can’t tell yet, can I? I only know about the people I know; I think that’s celebrity enough!”

“Enough for them?”

“Oh, I see you’re clever. Enough for me! But I have heard of you,” the lady went on. “I know your pictures; I admire them. But I don’t think you look like them.”

“They are mostly portraits,” Lyon said; “and what I usually try for is not my own resemblance.”

“I see what you mean. But they have much more color. And now you are going to do some one here?”

“I have been invited to do Sir David. I’m rather disappointed at not seeing him this evening.”

“Oh, he goes to bed at some unnatural hour—eight o’clock or something of that sort. You know he’s rather an old mummy.”

“An old mummy?” Oliver Lyon repeated.

“I mean he wears half a dozen waistcoats, and that sort of thing. He’s always cold.”

“I have never seen him and never seen any portrait or photograph of him,” Lyon said. “I’m surprised at his never having had anything

done—at their waiting all these years.”

“Ah, that’s because he was afraid, you know; it was a kind of superstition. He was sure that if anything were done he would die directly afterwards. He has only consented to-day.”

“He’s ready to die then?”

“Oh, now he’s so old he doesn’t care.”

“Well, I hope I shan’t kill him,” said Lyon. “It was rather unnatural in his son to send for me.”

“Oh, they have nothing to gain—everything is theirs already!” his companion rejoined, as if she took this speech quite literally. Her talkativeness was systematic—she fraternized as seriously as she might have played whist. “They do as they like—they fill the house with people—they have *carte blanche*.”

“I see—but there’s still the title.”

“Yes, but what is it?”

Our artist broke into laughter at this, whereat his companion stared. Before he had recovered himself she was scouring the plain with her other neighbor. The gentleman on his left at last risked an observation, and they had some fragmentary talk. This personage played his part with difficulty: he uttered a remark as a lady fires a pistol, looking the other way. To catch the ball Lyon had to bend his ear, and this movement led to his observing a handsome creature who was seated on the same side, beyond his interlocutor. Her profile was presented to him and at first he was only struck with its beauty; then it produced an impression still more agreeable—a sense of undimmed remembrance and intimate association. He had not recognized her on the instant only because he had so little expected to see her there; he had not seen her anywhere for so long, and no news of her ever came to him. She was often in his thoughts, but she had passed out of his life. He thought of her twice a week; that may be called often in relation to a person one has not seen for twelve years. The moment after he recognized her he felt how true it was that it was only she who could look like that: of the most charming head in the world (and this lady had it) there could never be a replica. She was leaning forward a little; she remained in profile, apparently listening to some one on the other side of her. She was listening, but she was also looking, and after a moment Lyon followed the direction of her eyes. They rested upon the gentleman who had been described to him as Colonel Capadose—rested, as it appeared to him, with a kind of habitual, visible complacency. This was not strange, for the Colonel was unmistakably formed to attract the sympathetic gaze of woman; but Lyon was slightly disappointed that she could let *him* look at her so long without giving him a glance. There was nothing

between them to-day and he had no rights, but she must have known he was coming (it was of course not such a tremendous event, but she could not have been staying in the house without hearing of it), and it was not natural that that should absolutely fail to affect her.

She was looking at Colonel Capadose as if she were in love with him—a queer accident for the proudest, most reserved of women. But doubtless it was all right, if her husband liked it or didn't notice it: he had heard indefinitely, years before, that she was married, and he took for granted (as he had not heard that she had become a widow) the presence of the happy man on whom she had conferred what she had refused to *him*, the poor art-student at Munich. Colonel Capadose appeared to be aware of nothing, and this circumstance, incongruously enough, rather irritated Lyon than gratified him. Suddenly the lady turned her head, showing her full face to our hero. He was so prepared with a greeting that he instantly smiled, as a shaken jug overflows; but she gave him no response, turned away again and sank back in her chair. All that her face said in that instant was, "You see I'm as handsome as ever." To which he mentally subjoined, "Yes, and as much good it does me!" He asked the young man beside him if he knew who that beautiful being was—the fifth person beyond him. The young man leaned forward, considered and then said, "I think she's Mrs. Capadose."

"Do you mean his wife—that fellow's?" And Lyon indicated the subject of the information given him by his other neighbor.

"Oh, is *he* Mr. Capadose?" said the young man, who appeared very vague. He admitted his vagueness and explained it by saying that there were so many people and he had come only the day before. What was definite to Lyon was that Mrs. Capadose was in love with her husband; so that he wished more than ever that he had married her.

"She's very faithful," he found himself saying three minutes later to the lady on his right. He added that he meant Mrs. Capadose.

"Ah, you know her then?"

"I knew her once upon a time—when I was living abroad."

"Why then were you asking me about her husband?"

"Precisely for that reason. She married after that—I didn't even know her present name."

"How then do you know it now?"

"This gentleman has just told me—he appears to know."

"I didn't know he knew anything," said the lady, glancing forward.

"I don't think he knows anything but that."

"Then you have found out for yourself that she is faithful. What

do you mean by that?"

"Ah, you mustn't question me—I want to question you," Lyon said. "How do you all like her here?"

"You ask too much! I can only speak for myself. I think she's hard."

"That's only because she's honest and straightforward."

"Do you mean I like people in proportion as they deceive?"

"I think we all do, so long as we don't find them out," Lyon said. "And then there's something in her face—a sort of Roman type, in spite of her having such an English eye. In fact she's English down to the ground; but her complexion, her low forehead and that beautiful close little wave in her dark hair make her look like a glorified *contadina*."

"Yes, and she always sticks pins and daggers into her head, to increase that effect. I must say I like her husband better: he is so clever."

"Well, when I knew her there was no comparison that could injure her. She was altogether the most delightful thing in Munich."

"In Munich?"

"Her people lived there; they were not rich—in pursuit of economy in fact, and Munich was very cheap. Her father was the younger son of some noble house; he had married a second time and had a lot of little mouths to feed. She was the child of the first wife and she didn't like her stepmother, but she was charming to her little brothers and sisters. I once made a sketch of her as Werther's Charlotte, cutting bread and butter while they clustered all round her. All the artists in the place were in love with her but she wouldn't look at 'the likes' of us. She was too proud—I grant you that; but she wasn't stuck up nor young ladyish; she was simple and frank and kind about it. She used to remind me of Thackeray's Ethel Newcome. She told me she must marry well: it was the one thing she could do for her family. I suppose you would say that she *has* married well."

"She told *you*?" smiled Lyon's neighbor.

"Oh, of course I proposed to her too. But she evidently thinks so herself!" he added.

When the ladies left the table the host as usual bade the gentlemen draw together, so that Lyon found himself opposite to Colonel Capadose. The conversation was mainly about the 'run,' for it had apparently been a great day in the hunting-field. Most of the gentlemen communicated their adventures and opinions, but Colonel Capadose's pleasant voice was the most audible in the chorus. It was a bright and fresh but masculine organ, just such a voice as, to Lyon's sense, such a 'fine man' ought to have had. It appeared from

his remarks that he was a very straight rider, which was also very much what Lyon would have expected. Not that he swaggered, for his allusions were very quietly and casually made; but they were all too dangerous experiments and close shaves. Lyon perceived after a little that the attention paid by the company to the Colonel's remarks was not in direct relation to the interest they seemed to offer; the result of which was that the speaker, who noticed that *he* at least was listening, began to treat him as his particular auditor and to fix his eyes on him as he talked. Lyon had nothing to do but to look sympathetic and assent—Colonel Capadose appeared to take so much sympathy and assent for granted. A neighboring squire had had an accident; he had come a cropper in an awkward place—just at the finish—with consequences that looked grave. He had struck his head; he remained insensible, up to the last accounts: there had evidently been concussion of the brain. There was some exchange of views as to his recovery—how soon it would take place or whether it would take place at all; which led the Colonel to confide to our artist across the table that *he* shouldn't despair of a fellow even if he didn't come round for weeks—for weeks and weeks and weeks—for months, almost for years. He leaned forward; Lyon leaned forward to listen, and Colonel Capadose mentioned that he knew from personal experience that there was really no limit to the time one might lie unconscious without being any the worse for it. It had happened to him in Ireland, years before; he had been pitched out of a dogcart, had turned a sheer somersault and landed on his head. They thought he was dead, but he wasn't; they carried him first to the nearest cabin, where he lay for some days with the pigs, and then to an inn in a neighboring town—it was a near thing they didn't put him under ground. He had been completely insensible—without a ray of recognition of any human thing—for three whole months; had not a glimmer of consciousness of any blessed thing. It was touch and go to that degree that they couldn't come near him, they couldn't feed him, they could scarcely look at him. Then one day he had opened his eyes—as fit as a flea!

"I give you my honour it had done me good—it rested my brain." He appeared to intimate that with an intelligence so active as his these periods of repose were providential. Lyon thought his story very striking, but he wanted to ask him whether he had not shammed a little—not in relating it, but in keeping so quiet. He hesitated however, in time, to imply a doubt—he was so impressed with the tone in which Colonel Capadose said that it was the turn of a hair that they hadn't buried him alive. That had happened to a friend of his in India—a fellow who was supposed to have died of jungle

fever—they clapped him into a coffin. He was going on to recite the further fate of this unfortunate gentleman when Mr. Ashmore made a move and every one got up to adjourn to the drawing-room. Lyon noticed that by this time no one was heeding what his new friend said to him. They came round on either side of the table and met while the gentlemen dawdled before going out.

“And do you mean that your friend was literally buried alive?” asked Lyon, in some suspense.

Colonel Capadose looked at him a moment, as if he had already lost the thread of the conversation. Then his face brightened—and when it brightened it was doubly handsome. “Upon my soul he was chucked into the ground!”

“And was he left there?”

“He was left there till I came and hauled him out.”

“*You* came?”

“I dreamed about him—it’s the most extraordinary story: I heard him calling to me in the night. I took upon myself to dig him up. You know there are people in India—a kind of beastly race, the ghouls—who violate graves. I had a sort of presentiment that they would get at him first. I rode straight, I can tell you; and, by Jove, a couple of them had just broken ground! Crack—crack, from a couple of barrels, and they showed me their heels, as you may believe. Would you credit that I took him out myself? The air brought him to and he was none the worse. He has got his pension—he came home the other day; he would do anything for me.”

“He called to you in the night?” said Lyon, much startled.

“That’s the interesting point. Now *what was it*? It wasn’t his ghost, because he wasn’t dead. It wasn’t himself, because he couldn’t. It was something or other! You see India’s a strange country—there’s an element of the mysterious: the air is full of things you can’t explain.”

They passed out of the dining-room, and Colonel Capadose, who went among the first, was separated from Lyon; but a minute later, before they reached the drawing-room, he joined him again. “Ashmore tells me who you are. Of course I have often heard of you—I’m very glad to make your acquaintance; my wife used to know you.”

“I’m glad she remembers me. I recognized her at dinner and I was afraid she didn’t.”

“Ah, I daresay she was ashamed,” said the Colonel, with indulgent humour.

“Ashamed of me?” Lyon replied, in the same key.

“Wasn’t there something about a picture? Yes; you painted her portrait.”



"Many times," said the artist; "and she may very well have been ashamed of what I made of her."

"Well, I wasn't, my dear sir; it was the sight of that picture, which you were so good as to present to her, that made me first fall in love with her."

"Do you mean that one with the children—cutting bread and butter?"

"Bread and butter? Bless me, no—vine leaves and a leopard skin—a kind of Bacchante."

"Ah, yes," said Lyon; "I remember. It was the first decent portrait I painted. I should be curious to see it to-day."

"Don't ask her to show it to you—she'll be mortified!" the Colonel exclaimed.

"Mortified?"

"We parted with it—in the most disinterested manner," he laughed. "An old friend of my wife's—her family had known him intimately when they lived in Germany—took the most extraordinary fancy to it: the Grand Duke of Silberstadt-Schreckenstein, don't you know? He came out to Bombay while we were there and he spotted your picture (you know he's one of the greatest collectors in Europe), and made such eyes at it that, upon my word—it happened to be his birthday—she told him he might have it, to get rid of him. He was perfectly enchanted—but we miss the picture."

"It is very good of you," Lyon said. "If it's in a great collection—a work of my incompetent youth—I am infinitely honoured."

"Oh, he has got it in one of his castles; I don't know which—you know he has so many. He sent us, before he left India—to return the compliment—a magnificent old vase."

"That was more than the thing was worth," Lyon remarked.

Colonel Capadose gave no heed to this observation; he seemed to be thinking of something. After a moment he said, "If you'll come and see us in town she'll show you the vase." And as they passed into the drawing-room he gave the artist a friendly propulsion. "Go and speak to her; there she is—she'll be delighted."

Oliver Lyon took but a few steps into the wide saloon; he stood there a moment looking at the bright composition of the lamp-lit group of fair women, the single figures, the great setting of white and gold, the panels of old damask, in the centre of each of which was a single celebrated picture. There was a subdued lustre in the scene and an air as of the shining trains of dresses tumbled over the carpet. At the furthest end of the room sat Mrs. Capadose, rather isolated; she was on a small sofa, with an empty place beside her. Lyon could not flatter himself she had been keeping it for him; her



failure to respond to his recognition at table contradicted that, but he felt an extreme desire to go and occupy it. Moreover he had her husband's sanction; so he crossed the room, stepping over the tails of gowns, and stood before his old friend.

"I hope you don't mean to repudiate me," he said.

She looked up at him with an expression of unalloyed pleasure. "I am so glad to see you. I was delighted when I heard you were coming."

"I tried to get a smile from you at dinner—but I couldn't."

"I didn't see—I didn't understand. Besides, I hate smirking and telegraphing. Also I'm very shy—you won't have forgotten that. Now we can communicate comfortably." And she made a better place for him on the little sofa. He sat down and they had a talk that he enjoyed, while the reason for which he used to like her so came back to him, as well as a good deal of the very same old liking. She was still the least spoiled beauty he had ever seen, with an absence of coquetry or any insinuating art that seemed almost like an omitted faculty; there were moments when she struck her interlocutor as some fine creature from an asylum—a surprising deaf-mute or one of the operative blind. Her noble pagan head gave her privileges that she neglected, and when people were admiring her brow she was wondering whether there were a good fire in her bedroom. She was simple, kind and good; inexpressive but not inhuman or stupid. Now and again she dropped something that had a sifted, selected air—the sound of an impression at first hand. She had no imagination, but she had added up her feelings, some of her reflections, about life. Lyon talked of the old days in Munich, reminded her of incidents, pleasures and pains, asked her about her father and the others; and she told him in return that she was so impressed with his own fame, his brilliant position in the world, that she had not felt very sure he would speak to her or that his little sign at table was meant for her. This was plainly a perfectly truthful speech—she was incapable of any other—and he was affected by such humility on the part of a woman whose grand line was unique. Her father was dead; one of her brothers was in the navy and the other on a ranch in America; two of her sisters were married and the youngest was just coming out and very pretty. She didn't mention her stepmother. She asked him about his own personal history and he said that the principal thing that had happened to him was that he had never married.

"Oh, you ought to," she answered. "It's the best thing."

"I like that—from you!" he returned.

"Why not from me? I am very happy."

"That's just why I can't be. It's cruel of you to praise your state.

But I have had the pleasure of making the acquaintance of your husband. We had a good bit of talk in the other room."

"You must know him better—you must know him really well," said Mrs. Capadose.

"I am sure that the further you go the more you find. But he makes a fine show, too."

She rested her good gray eyes on Lyon. "Don't you think he's handsome?"

"Handsome and clever and entertaining. You see I'm generous."

"Yes; you must know him well," Mrs. Capadose repeated.

"He has seen a great deal of life," said her companion.

"Yes, we have been in so many places. You must see my little girl. She is nine years old—she's too beautiful."

"You must bring her to my studio some day—I should like to paint her."

"Ah, don't speak of that," said Mrs. Capadose. "It reminds me of something so distressing."

"I hope you don't mean when *you* used to sit to me—though that may well have bored you."

"It's not what you did—it's what we have done. It's a confession I must make—it's a weight on my mind! I mean about that beautiful picture you gave me—it used to be so much admired. When you come to see me in London (I count on your doing that very soon) I shall see you looking all round. I can't tell you I keep it in my own room because I love it so, for the simple reason— —" And she paused a moment.

"Because you can't tell wicked lies," said Lyon.

"No, I can't. So before you ask for it— —"

"Oh, I know you parted with it—the blow has already fallen," Lyon interrupted.

"Ah then, you have heard? I was sure you would! But do you know what we got for it? Two hundred pounds."

"You might have got much more," said Lyon, smiling.

"That seemed a great deal at the time. We were in want of the money—it was a good while ago, when we first married. Our means were very small then, but fortunately that has changed rather for the better. We had the chance; it really seemed a big sum, and I am afraid we jumped at it. My husband had expectations which have partly come into effect, so that now we do well enough. But meanwhile the picture went."

"Fortunately the original remained. But do you mean that two hundred was the value of the vase?" Lyon asked.

"Of the vase?"

"The beautiful old Indian vase—the Grand Duke's offering."

"The Grand Duke?"

"What's his name?—Silberstadt-Schreckenstein. Your husband mentioned the transaction."

"Oh, my husband," said Mrs. Capadose; and Lyon saw that she colored a little.

Not to add to her embarrassment, but to clear up the ambiguity, which he perceived the next moment he had better have left alone, he went on: "He tells me it's now in his collection."

"In the Grand Duke's? Ah, you know its reputation? I believe it contains treasures." She was bewildered, but she recovered herself, and Lyon made the mental reflection that for some reason which would seem good when he knew it the husband and the wife had prepared different versions of the same incident. It was true that he did not exactly see Everina Brant preparing a version; that was not her line of old, and indeed it was not in her eyes to-day. At any rate they both had the matter too much on their conscience. He changed the subject, said Mrs. Capadose must really bring the little girl. He sat with her some time longer and thought—perhaps it was only a fancy—that she was rather absent, as if she were annoyed at their having been even for a moment at cross-purposes. This did not prevent him from saying to her at the last, just as the ladies began to gather themselves together to go to bed: "You seem much impressed, from what you say, with my renown and my prosperity, and you are so good as greatly to exaggerate them. Would you have married me if you had known that I was destined to success?"

"I did know it."

"Well, I didn't"

"You were too modest."

"You didn't think so when I proposed to you."

"Well, if I had married you I couldn't have married *him*—and he's so nice," Mrs. Capadose said. Lyon knew she thought it—he had learned that at dinner—but it vexed him a little to hear her say it. The gentleman designated by the pronoun came up, amid the prolonged handshaking for good-night, and Mrs. Capadose remarked to her husband as she turned away, "He wants to paint Amy."

"Ah, she's a charming child, a most interesting little creature," the Colonel said to Lyon. "She does the most remarkable things."

Mrs. Capadose stopped, in the rustling procession that followed the hostess out of the room. "Don't tell him, please don't," she said.

"Don't tell him what?"

"Why, what she does. Let him find out for himself." And she passed on.

"She thinks I swagger about the child—that I bore people," said the Colonel. "I hope you smoke." He appeared ten minutes later in the smoking-room, in a brilliant equipment, a suit of crimson foulard covered with little white spots. He gratified Lyon's eye, made him feel that the modern age has its splendor too and its opportunities for costume. If his wife was an antique he was a fine specimen of the period of color: he might have passed for a Venetian of the sixteenth century. They were a remarkable couple, Lyon thought, and as he looked at the Colonel standing in bright erectness before the chimney-piece while he emitted great smoke-puffs he did not wonder that Everina could not regret she had not married *him*. All the gentlemen collected at Stayes were not smokers and some of them had gone to bed. Colonel Capadose remarked that there probably would be a smallish muster, they had had such a hard day's work. That was the worst of a hunting-house—the men were so sleepy after dinner; it was devilish stupid for the ladies, even for those who hunted themselves—for women were so extraordinary, they never showed it. But most fellows revived under the stimulating influences of the smoking-room, and some of them, in this confidence, would turn up yet. Some of the grounds of their confidence—not all of them—might have been seen in a cluster of glasses and bottles on a table near the fire, which made the great salver and its contents twinkle sociably. The others lurked as yet in various improper corners of the minds of the most loquacious. Lyon was alone with Colonel Capadose for some moments before their companions, in varied eccentricities of uniform, straggled in, and he perceived that this wonderful man had but little loss of vital tissue to repair.

They talked about the house, Lyon having noticed an oddity of construction in the smoking-room; and the Colonel explained that it consisted of two distinct parts, one of which was of very great antiquity. They were two complete houses in short, the old one and the new, each of great extent and each very fine in its way. The two formed together an enormous structure—Lyon must make a point of going all over it. The modern portion had been erected by the old man when he bought the property; oh yes, he had bought it, forty years before—it hadn't been in the family: there hadn't been any particular family for it to be in. He had had the good taste not to spoil the original house—he had not touched it beyond what was just necessary for joining it on. It was very curious indeed—a most irregular, rambling, mysterious pile, where they every now and then discovered a walled-up room or a secret staircase. To his mind it was essentially gloomy, however; even the modern additions, splendid as they were, failed to make it cheerful. There was some story about

a skeleton having been found years before, during some repairs, under a stone slab of the floor of one of the passages; but the family were rather shy of its being talked about. The place they were in was of course in the old part, which contained after all some of the best rooms: he had an idea it had been the primitive kitchen, half modernized at some intermediate period.

"My room is in the old part too then—I'm very glad," Lyon said. "It's very comfortable and contains all the latest conveniences, but I observed the depth of the recess of the door and the evident antiquity of the corridor and staircase—the first short one—after I came out. That panelled corridor is admirable; it looks as if it stretched away, in its brown dimness (the lamps didn't seem to me to make much impression on it), for half a mile."

"Oh, don't go to the end of it!" exclaimed the Colonel, smiling.

"Does it lead to the haunted room?" Lyon asked.

His companion looked at him a moment. "Ah, you know about that?"

"No, I don't speak from knowledge, only from hope. I have never had any luck—I have never stayed in a dangerous house. The places I go to are always as safe as Charing Cross. I want to see—whatever there is, the regular thing. *Is there a ghost here?*"

"Of course there is—a rattling good one."

"And have you seen him?"

"Oh, don't ask me what *I've* seen—I should tax your credulity. I don't like to talk of these things. But there are two or three as bad—that is, as good!—rooms as you'll find anywhere."

"Do you mean in my corridor?" Lyon asked.

"I believe the worst is at the far end. But you would be ill-advised to sleep there."

"Ill-advised?"

"Until you've finished your job. You'll get letters of importance the next morning, and you'll take the 10.20."

"Do you mean I will invent a pretext for running away?"

"Unless you are braver than almost any one has ever been. They don't often put people to sleep there, but sometimes the house is so crowded that they have to. The same thing always happens—ill-concealed agitation at the breakfast-table and letters of the greatest importance. Of course it's a bachelor's room, and my wife and I are at the other end of the house. But we saw the comedy three days ago—the day after we got here. A young fellow had been put there—I forget his name—the house was so full; and the usual consequence followed. Letters at breakfast—an awfully queer face—an urgent call to town—so very sorry his visit was cut short. Ashmore and his wife

looked at each other, and off the poor devil went."

"Ah, that wouldn't suit me; I must paint my picture," said Lyon. "But do they mind your speaking of it? Some people who have a good ghost are very proud of it, you know."

What answer Colonel Capadose was on the point of making to this inquiry our hero was not to learn, for at that moment their host had walked into the room accompanied by three or four gentlemen. Lyon was conscious that he was partly answered by the Colonel's not going on with the subject. This however on the other hand was rendered natural by the fact that one of the gentlemen appealed to him for an opinion on a point under discussion, something to do with the everlasting history of the day's run. To Lyon himself Mr. Ashmore began to talk, expressing his regret at having had so little direct conversation with him as yet. The topic that suggested itself was naturally that most closely connected with the motive of the artist's visit. Lyon remarked that it was a great disadvantage to him not to have had some preliminary acquaintance with Sir David—in most cases he found that so important. But the present sitter was so far advanced in life that there was doubtless no time to lose. "Oh, I can tell you all about him," said Mr. Ashmore; and for half an hour he told him a good deal. It was very interesting as well as very eulogistic, and Lyon could see that he was a very nice old man, to have endeared himself so to a son who was evidently not a gusher. At last he got up—he said he must go to bed if he wished to be fresh for his work in the morning. To which his host replied, "Then you must take your candle; the lights are out; I don't keep my servants up."

In a moment Lyon had his glimmering taper in hand, and as he was leaving the room (he did not disturb the others with a good-night; they were absorbed in the lemon-squeezer and the soda-water cork) he remembered other occasions on which he had made his way to bed alone through a darkened country-house; such occasions had not been rare, for he was almost always the first to leave the smoking-room. If he had not stayed in houses conspicuously haunted he had, none the less (having the artistic temperament), sometimes found the great black halls and staircases rather 'creepy': there had been often a sinister effect, to his imagination, in the sound of his tread in the long passages or the way the winter moon peeped into tall windows on landings. It occurred to him that if houses without supernatural pretensions could look so wicked at night, the old corridors of Stayes would certainly give him a sensation. He didn't know whether the proprietors were sensitive; very often, as he had said to Colonel Capadose, people enjoyed the impeachment. What determined him

to speak, with a certain sense of the risk, was the impression that the Colonel told queer stories. As he had his hand on the door he said to Arthur Ashmore, "I hope I shan't meet any ghosts."

"Any ghosts?"

"You ought to have some—in this fine old part."

"We do our best, but *que voulez-vous?*" said Mr. Ashmore. "I don't think they like the hot-water pipes."

"They remind them too much of their own climate? But haven't you a haunted room—at the end of my passage?"

"Oh, there are stories—we try to keep them up."

"I should like very much to sleep there," Lyon said.

"Well, you can move there to-morrow if you like."

"Perhaps I had better wait till I have done my work."

"Very good; but you won't work there, you know. My father will sit to you in his own apartments."

"Oh, it isn't that; it's the fear of running away, like that gentleman three days ago."

"Three days ago? What gentleman?" Mr. Ashmore asked.

"The one who got urgent letters at breakfast and fled by the 10.20. Did he stand more than one night?"

"I don't know what you are talking about. There was no such gentleman—three days ago."

"Ah, so much the better," said Lyon, nodding good-night and departing. He took his course, as he remembered it, with his wavering candle, and, though he encountered a great many gruesome objects, safely reached the passage out of which his room opened. In the complete darkness it seemed to stretch away still further, but he followed it, for the curiosity of the thing, to the end. He passed several doors with the name of the room painted upon them, but he found nothing else. He was tempted to try the last door—to look into the room of evil fame; but he reflected that this would be indiscreet, since Colonel Capadose handled the brush—as a *raconteur*—with such freedom. There might be a ghost and there might not; but the Colonel himself, he inclined to think, was the most mystifying figure in the house.

## II

Lyon found Sir David Ashmore a capital subject and a very comfortable sitter into the bargain. Moreover he was a very agreeable old man, tremendously puckered but not in the least dim; and he wore exactly the furred dressing-gown that Lyon would have chosen. He was proud of his age but ashamed of his infirmities, which however he greatly exaggerated and which did not prevent him from sitting there as submissive as if portraiture in



oils had been a branch of surgery. He demolished the legend of his having feared the operation would be fatal, giving an explanation which pleased our friend much better. He held that a gentleman should be painted but once in his life—that it was eager and fatuous to be hung up all over the place. That was good for women, who made a pretty wall-pattern; but the male face didn't lend itself to decorative repetition. The proper time for the likeness was at the last, when the whole man was there—you got the totality of his experience. Lyon could not reply that that period was not a real compendium—you had to allow so for leakage; for there had been no crack in Sir David's crystallization. He spoke of his portrait as a plain map of the country, to be consulted by his children in a case of uncertainty. A proper map could be drawn up only when the country had been travelled. He gave Lyon his mornings, till luncheon, and they talked of many things, not neglecting, as a stimulus to gossip, the people in the house. Now that he did not 'go out,' as he said, he saw much less of the visitors at Stayes: people came and went whom he knew nothing about, and he liked to hear Lyon describe them. The artist sketched with a fine point and did not caricature, and it usually befell that when Sir David did not know the sons and daughters he had known the fathers and mothers. He was one of those terrible old gentlemen who are a repository of antecedents. But in the case of the Capadose family, at whom they arrived by an easy stage, his knowledge embraced two, or even three, generations. General Capadose was an old crony, and he remembered his father before him. The general was rather a smart soldier, but in private life of too speculative a turn—always sneaking into the City to put his money into some rotten thing. He married a girl who brought him something and they had half a dozen children. He scarcely knew what had become of the rest of them, except that one was in the Church and had found preferment—wasn't he Dean of Rockingham? Clement, the fellow who was at Stayes, had some military talent; he had served in the East, he had married a pretty girl. He had been at Eton with his son, and he used to come to Stayes in his holidays. Lately, coming back to England, he had turned up with his wife again; that was before he—the old man—had been put to grass. He was a taking dog, but he had a monstrous foible.

"A monstrous foible?" said Lyon.

"He's a thumping liar."

Lyon's brush stopped short, while he repeated, for somehow the formula startled him, "A thumping liar?"

"You are very lucky not to have found it out."

"Well, I confess I have noticed a romantic tinge —"



"Oh, it isn't always romantic. He'll lie about the time of day, about the name of his hatter. It appears there are people like that."

"Well, they are precious scoundrels," Lyon declared, his voice trembling a little with the thought of what Everina Brant had done with herself.

"Oh, not always," said the old man. "This fellow isn't in the least a scoundrel. There is no harm in him and no bad intention; he doesn't steal nor cheat nor gamble nor drink; he's very kind—he sticks to his wife, is fond of his children. He simply can't give you a straight answer."

"Then everything he told me last night, I suppose, was mendacious: he delivered himself of a series of the stiffest statements. They stuck, when I tried to swallow them, but I never thought of so simple an explanation."

"No doubt he was in the vein," Sir David went on. "It's a natural peculiarity—as you might limp or stutter or be left-handed. I believe it comes and goes, like intermittent fever. My son tells me that his friends usually understand it and don't haul him up—for the sake of his wife."

"Oh, his wife—his wife!" Lyon murmured, painting fast.

"I daresay she's used to it."

"Never in the world, Sir David. How can she be used to it?"

"Why, my dear sir, when a woman's fond!—And don't they mostly handle the long bow themselves? They are connoisseurs—they have a sympathy for a fellow-performer."

Lyon was silent a moment; he had no ground for denying that Mrs. Capadose was attached to her husband. But after a little he rejoined: "Oh, not this one! I knew her years ago—before her marriage; knew her well and admired her. She was as clear as a bell."

"I like her very much," Sir David said, "but I have seen her back him up."

Lyon considered Sir David for a moment, not in the light of a model. "Are you very sure?"

The old man hesitated; then he answered, smiling, "You're in love with her."

"Very likely. God knows I used to be!"

"She must help him out—she can't expose him."

"She can hold her tongue," Lyon remarked.

"Well, before you probably she will."

"That's what I am curious to see." And Lyon added, privately, "Mercy on us, what he must have made of her!" He kept this reflection to himself, for he considered that he had sufficiently betrayed his state of mind with regard to Mrs. Capadose. None the less it occupied him

now immensely, the question of how such a woman would arrange herself in such a predicament. He watched her with an interest deeply quickened when he mingled with the company; he had had his own troubles in life, but he had rarely been so anxious about anything as he was now to see what the loyalty of a wife and the infection of an example would have made of an absolutely truthful mind. Oh, he held it as immutably established that whatever other women might be prone to do she, of old, had been perfectly incapable of a deviation. Even if she had not been too simple to deceive she would have been too proud; and if she had not had too much conscience she would have had too little eagerness. It was the last thing she would have endured or condoned—the particular thing she would not have forgiven. Did she sit in torment while her husband turned his somersaults, or was she now too so perverse that she thought it a fine thing to be striking at the expense of one's honour? It would have taken a wondrous alchemy—working backwards, as it were—to produce this latter result. Besides these two alternatives (that she suffered tortures in silence and that she was so much in love that her husband's humiliating idiosyncrasy seemed to her only an added richness—a proof of life and talent), there was still the possibility that she had not found him out, that she took his false pieces at his own valuation. A little reflection rendered this hypothesis untenable; it was too evident that the account he gave of things must repeatedly have contradicted her own knowledge. Within an hour or two of his meeting them Lyon had seen her confronted with that perfectly gratuitous invention about the profit they had made off his early picture. Even then indeed she had not, so far as he could see, smarted, and—but for the present he could only contemplate the case.

Even if it had not been interfused, through his uneradicated tenderness for Mrs. Capadose, with an element of suspense, the question would still have presented itself to him as a very curious problem, for he had not painted portraits during so many years without becoming something of a psychologist. His inquiry was limited for the moment to the opportunity that the following three days might yield, as the Colonel and his wife were going on to another house. It fixed itself largely of course upon the Colonel too—this gentleman was such a rare anomaly. Moreover it had to go on very quickly. Lyon was too scrupulous to ask other people what they thought of the business—he was too afraid of exposing the woman he once had loved. It was probable also that light would come to him from the talk of the rest of the company: the Colonel's queer habit, both as it affected his own situation and as it affected his wife, would be a familiar theme in any house in which he was in the habit

of staying. Lyon had not observed in the circles in which he visited any marked abstention from comment on the singularities of their members. It interfered with his progress that the Colonel hunted all day, while he plied his brushes and chatted with Sir David; but a Sunday intervened and that partly made it up. Mrs. Capadose fortunately did not hunt, and when his work was over she was not inaccessible. He took a couple of longish walks with her (she was fond of that), and beguiled her at tea into a friendly nook in the hall. Regard her as he might he could not make out to himself that she was consumed by a hidden shame; the sense of being married to a man whose word had no worth was not, in her spirit, so far as he could guess, the canker within the rose. Her mind appeared to have nothing on it but its own placid frankness, and when he looked into her eyes (deeply, as he occasionally permitted himself to do), they had no uncomfortable consciousness. He talked to her again and still again of the dear old days—reminded her of things that he had not (before this reunion) the least idea that he remembered. Then he spoke to her of her husband, praised his appearance, his talent for conversation, professed to have felt a quick friendship for him and asked (with an inward audacity at which he trembled a little) what manner of man he was. "What manner?" said Mrs. Capadose. "Dear me, how can one describe one's husband? I like him very much."

"Ah, you have told me that already!" Lyon exclaimed, with exaggerated ruefulness.

"Then why do you ask me again?" She added in a moment, as if she were so happy that she could afford to take pity on him, "He is everything that's good and kind. He's a soldier—and a gentleman—and a dear! He hasn't a fault. And he has great ability."

"Yes; he strikes one as having great ability. But of course I can't think him a dear."

"I don't care what you think him!" said Mrs. Capadose, looking, it seemed to him, as she smiled, handsomer than he had ever seen her. She was either deeply cynical or still more deeply impenetrable, and he had little prospect of winning from her the intimation that he longed for—some hint that it had come over her that after all she had better have married a man who was not a by-word for the most contemptible, the least heroic, of vices. Had she not seen—had she not felt—the smile go round when her husband executed some especially characteristic conversational caper? How could a woman of her quality endure that day after day, year after year, except by her quality's altering? But he would believe in the alteration only when he should have heard *her* lie. He was fascinated by his problem and yet half exasperated, and he asked himself all kinds of questions.

Did she not lie, after all, when she let his falsehoods pass without a protest? Was not her life a perpetual complicity, and did she not aid and abet him by the simple fact that she was not disgusted with him? Then again perhaps she *was* disgusted and it was the mere desperation of her pride that had given her an inscrutable mask. Perhaps she protested in private, passionately; perhaps every night, in their own apartments, after the day's hideous performance, she made him the most scorching scene. But if such scenes were of no avail and he took no more trouble to cure himself, how could she regard him, and after so many years of marriage too, with the perfectly artless complacency that Lyon had surprised in her in the course of the first day's dinner? If our friend had not been in love with her he could have taken the diverting view of the Colonel's delinquencies; but as it was they turned to the tragical in his mind, even while he had a sense that his solicitude might also have been laughed at.

The observation of these three days showed him that if Capadose was an abundant he was not a malignant liar and that his fine faculty exercised itself mainly on subjects of small direct importance. "He is the liar platonic," he said to himself; "he is disinterested, he doesn't operate with a hope of gain or with a desire to injure. It is art for art and he is prompted by the love of beauty. He has an inner vision of what might have been, of what ought to be, and he helps on the good cause by the simple substitution of a *nuance*. He paints, as it were, and so do I!" His manifestations had a considerable variety, but a family likeness ran through them, which consisted mainly of their singular futility. It was this that made them offensive; they encumbered the field of conversation, took up valuable space, converted it into a sort of brilliant sun-shot fog. For a fib told under pressure a convenient place can usually be found, as for a person who presents himself with an author's order at the first night of a play. But the supererogatory lie is the gentleman without a voucher or a ticket who accommodates himself with a stool in the passage.

In one particular Lyon acquitted his successful rival; it had puzzled him that irrepressible as he was he had not got into a mess in the service. But he perceived that he respected the service—that august institution was sacred from his depredations. Moreover though there was a great deal of swagger in his talk it was, oddly enough, rarely swagger about his military exploits. He had a passion for the chase, he had followed it in far countries and some of his finest flowers were reminiscences of lonely danger and escape. The more solitary the scene the bigger of course the flower. A new acquaintance, with the Colonel, always received the tribute of a

bouquet: that generalization Lyon very promptly made. And this extraordinary man had inconsistencies and unexpected lapses—lapsés into flat veracity. Lyon recognized what Sir David had told him, that his aberrations came in fits or periods—that he would sometimes keep the truce of God for a month at a time. The muse breathed upon him at her pleasure; she often left him alone. He would neglect the finest openings and then set sail in the teeth of the breeze. As a general thing he affirmed the false rather than denied the true; yet this proportion was sometimes strikingly reversed. Very often he joined in the laugh against himself—he admitted that he was trying it on and that a good many of his anecdotes had an experimental character. Still he never completely retracted nor retreated—he dived and came up in another place. Lyon divined that he was capable at intervals of defending his position with violence, but only when it was a very bad one. Then he might easily be dangerous—then he would hit out and become calumnious. Such occasions would test his wife's equanimity—Lyon would have liked to see her there. In the smoking-room and elsewhere the company, so far as it was composed of his familiars, had an hilarious protest always at hand; but among the men who had known him long his rich tone was an old story, so old that they had ceased to talk about it, and Lyon did not care, as I have said, to elicit the judgment of those who might have shared his own surprise.

The oddest thing of all was that neither surprise nor familiarity prevented the Colonel's being liked; his largest drafts on a sceptical attention passed for an overflow of life and gaiety—almost of good looks. He was fond of portraying his bravery and used a very big brush, and yet he was unmistakably brave. He was a capital rider and shot, in spite of his fund of anecdote illustrating these accomplishments: in short he was very nearly as clever and his career had been very nearly as wonderful as he pretended. His best quality however remained that indiscriminate sociability which took interest and credulity for granted and about which he bragged least. It made him cheap, it made him even in a manner vulgar; but it was so contagious that his listener was more or less on his side as against the probabilities. It was a private reflection of Oliver Lyon's that he not only lied but made one feel one's self a bit of a liar, even (or especially) if one contradicted him. In the evening, at dinner and afterwards, our friend watched his wife's face to see if some faint shade or spasm never passed over it. But she showed nothing, and the wonder was that when he spoke she almost always listened. That was her pride: she wished not to be even suspected of not facing the music. Lyon had none the less an importunate vision of a veiled

figure coming the next day in the dusk to certain places to repair the Colonel's ravages, as the relatives of kleptomaniacs punctually call at the shops that have suffered from their pilferings.

"I must apologize, of course it wasn't true, I hope no harm is done, it is only his incorrigible— —" Oh, to hear that woman's voice in that deep abasement! Lyon had no nefarious plan, no conscious wish to practise upon her shame or her loyalty; but he did say to himself that he should like to bring her round to feel that there would have been more dignity in a union with a certain other person. He even dreamed of the hour when, with a burning face, she would ask *him* not to take it up. Then he should be almost consoled—he would be magnanimous.

Lyon finished his picture and took his departure, after having worked in a glow of interest which made him believe in his success, until he found he had pleased every one, especially Mr. and Mrs. Ashmore, when he began to be sceptical. The party at any rate changed: Colonel and Mrs. Capadose went their way. He was able to say to himself however that his separation from the lady was not so much an end as a beginning, and he called on her soon after his return to town. She had told him the hours she was at home—she seemed to like him. If she liked him why had she not married him or at any rate why was she not sorry she had not? If she was sorry she concealed it too well. Lyon's curiosity on this point may strike the reader as fatuous, but something must be allowed to a disappointed man. He did not ask much after all; not that she should love him to-day or that she should allow him to tell her that he loved her, but only that she should give him some sign she was sorry. Instead of this, for the present, she contented herself with exhibiting her little daughter to him. The child was beautiful and had the prettiest eyes of innocence he had ever seen: which did not prevent him from wondering whether she told horrid fibs. This idea gave him much entertainment—the picture of the anxiety with which her mother would watch as she grew older for the symptoms of heredity. That was a nice occupation for Everina Brant! Did she lie to the child herself, about her father—was that necessary, when she pressed her daughter to her bosom, to cover up his tracks? Did he control himself before the little girl—so that she might not hear him say things she knew to be other than he said? Lyon doubted this: his genius would be too strong for him, and the only safety for the child would be in her being too stupid to analyze. One couldn't judge yet—she was too young. If she should grow up clever she would be sure to tread in his steps—a delightful improvement in her mother's situation! Her little face was not shifty, but neither was her father's big one: so that



proved nothing.

Lyon reminded his friends more than once of their promise that Amy should sit to him, and it was only a question of his leisure. The desire grew in him to paint the Colonel also—an operation from which he promised himself a rich private satisfaction. He would draw him out, he would set him up in that totality about which he had talked with Sir David, and none but the initiated would know. They, however, would rank the picture high, and it would be indeed six rows deep—a masterpiece of subtle characterisation, of legitimate treachery. He had dreamed for years of producing something which should bear the stamp of the psychologist as well as of the painter, and here at last was his subject. It was a pity it was not better, but that was not *his* fault. It was his impression that already no one drew the Colonel out more than he, and he did it not only by instinct but on a plan. There were moments when he was almost frightened at the success of his plan—the poor gentleman went so terribly far. He would pull up some day, look at Lyon between the eyes—guess he was being played upon—which would lead to his wife's guessing it also. Not that Lyon cared much for that however, so long as she failed to suppose (as she must) that she was a part of his joke. He formed such a habit now of going to see her of a Sunday afternoon that he was angry when she went out of town. This occurred often, as the couple were great visitors and the Colonel was always looking for sport, which he liked best when it could be had at other people's expense. Lyon would have supposed that this sort of life was particularly little to her taste, for he had an idea that it was in country-houses that her husband came out strongest. To let him go off without her, not to see him expose himself—that ought properly to have been a relief and a luxury to her. She told Lyon in fact that she preferred staying at home; but she neglected to say it was because in other people's houses she was on the rack: the reason she gave was that she liked so to be with the child. It was not perhaps criminal to draw such a bow, but it was vulgar: poor Lyon was delighted when he arrived at that formula. Certainly some day too he would cross the line—he would become a noxious animal. Yes, in the meantime he was vulgar, in spite of his talents, his fine person, his impunity. Twice, by exception, toward the end of the winter, when he left town for a few days' hunting, his wife remained at home. Lyon had not yet reached the point of asking himself whether the desire not to miss two of his visits had something to do with her immobility. That inquiry would perhaps have been more in place later, when he began to paint the child and she always came with her. But it was not in her to give the wrong name, to pretend, and Lyon could see that she had the

maternal passion, in spite of the bad blood in the little girl's veins.

She came inveterately, though Lyon multiplied the sittings: Amy was never entrusted to the governess or the maid. He had knocked off poor old Sir David in ten days, but the portrait of the simple-faced child bade fair to stretch over into the following year. He asked for sitting after sitting, and it would have struck any one who might have witnessed the affair that he was wearing the little girl out. He knew better however and Mrs. Capadose also knew: they were present together at the long intermissions he gave her, when she left her pose and roamed about the great studio, amusing herself with its curiosities, playing with the old draperies and costumes, having unlimited leave to handle. Then her mother and Mr. Lyon sat and talked; he laid aside his brushes and leaned back in his chair; he always gave her tea. What Mrs. Capadose did not know was the way that during these weeks he neglected other orders: women have no faculty of imagination with regard to a man's work beyond a vague idea that it doesn't matter. In fact Lyon put off everything and made several celebrities wait. There were half-hours of silence, when he plied his brushes, during which he was mainly conscious that Everina was sitting there. She easily fell into that if he did not insist on talking, and she was not embarrassed nor bored by it. Sometimes she took up a book—there were plenty of them about; sometimes, a little way off, in her chair, she watched his progress (though without in the least advising or correcting), as if she cared for every stroke that represented her daughter. These strokes were occasionally a little wild; he was thinking so much more of his heart than of his hand. He was not more embarrassed than she was, but he was agitated: it was as if in the sittings (for the child, too, was beautifully quiet) something was growing between them or had already grown—a tacit confidence, an inexpressible secret. He felt it that way; but after all he could not be sure that she did. What he wanted her to do for him was very little; it was not even to confess that she was unhappy. He would be superabundantly gratified if she should simply let him know, even by a silent sign, that she recognized that with him her life would have been finer. Sometimes he guessed—his presumption went so far—that he might see this sign in her contentedly sitting there.

### III

At last he broached the question of painting the Colonel: it was now very late in the season—there would be little time before the general dispersal. He said they must make the most of it; the great thing was to begin; then in the autumn,



with the resumption of their London life, they could go forward. Mrs. Capadose objected to this that she really could not consent to accept another present of such value. Lyon had given her the portrait of herself of old, and he had seen what they had had the indelicacy to do with it. Now he had offered her this beautiful memorial of the child—beautiful it would evidently be when it was finished, if he could ever satisfy himself; a precious possession which they would cherish for ever. But his generosity must stop there—they couldn't be so tremendously 'beholden' to him. They couldn't order the picture—of course he would understand that, without her explaining: it was a luxury beyond their reach, for they knew the great prices he received. Besides, what had they ever done—what above all had *she* ever done, that he should overload them with benefits? No, he was too dreadfully good; it was really impossible that Clement should sit. Lyon listened to her without protest, without interruption, while he bent forward at his work, and at last he said: "Well, if you won't take it why not let him sit for me for my own pleasure and profit? Let it be a favour, a service I ask of him. It will do me a lot of good to paint him and the picture will remain in my hands."

"How will it do you a lot of good?" Mrs. Capadose asked.

"Why, he's such a rare model—such an interesting subject. He has such an expressive face. It will teach me no end of things."

"Expressive of what?" said Mrs. Capadose.

"Why, of his nature."

"And do you want to paint his nature?"

"Of course I do. That's what a great portrait gives you, and I shall make the Colonel's a great one. It will put me up high. So you see my request is eminently interested."

"How can you be higher than you are?"

"Oh, I'm insatiable! Do consent," said Lyon.

"Well, his nature is very noble," Mrs. Capadose remarked.

"Ah, trust me, I shall bring it out!" Lyon exclaimed, feeling a little ashamed of himself.

Mrs. Capadose said before she went away that her husband would probably comply with his invitation, but she added, "Nothing would induce me to let you pry into *me* that way!"

"Oh, you," Lyon laughed—"I could do you in the dark!"

The Colonel shortly afterwards placed his leisure at the painter's disposal and by the end of July had paid him several visits. Lyon was disappointed neither in the quality of his sitter nor in the degree to which he himself rose to the occasion; he felt really confident that he should produce a fine thing. He was in the humour; he was charmed with his *motif* and deeply interested in his problem. The

only point that troubled him was the idea that when he should send his picture to the Academy he should not be able to give the title, for the catalogue, simply as 'The Liar.' However, it little mattered, for he had now determined that this character should be perceptible even to the meanest intelligence—as overtopping as it had become to his own sense in the living man. As he saw nothing else in the Colonel today, so he gave himself up to the joy of painting nothing else. How he did it he could not have told you, but it seemed to him that the mystery of how to do it was revealed to him afresh every time he sat down to his work. It was in the eyes and it was in the mouth, it was in every line of the face and every fact of the attitude, in the indentation of the chin, in the way the hair was planted, the moustache was twisted, the smile came and went, the breath rose and fell. It was in the way he looked out at a bamboozled world in short—the way he would look out for ever. There were half a dozen portraits in Europe that Lyon rated as supreme; he regarded them as immortal, for they were as perfectly preserved as they were consummately painted. It was to this small exemplary group that he aspired to annex the canvas on which he was now engaged. One of the productions that helped to compose it was the magnificent Moroni of the National Gallery—the young tailor, in the white jacket, at his board with his shears. The Colonel was not a tailor, nor was Moroni's model, unlike many tailors, a liar; but as regards the masterly clearness with which the individual should be rendered his work would be on the same line as that. He had to a degree in which he had rarely had it before the satisfaction of feeling life grow and grow under his brush. The Colonel, as it turned out, liked to sit and he liked to talk while he was sitting: which was very fortunate, as his talk largely constituted Lyon's inspiration. Lyon put into practice that idea of drawing him out which he had been nursing for so many weeks: he could not possibly have been in a better relation to him for the purpose. He encouraged, beguiled, excited him, manifested an unfathomable credulity, and his only interruptions were when the Colonel did not respond to it. He had his intermissions, his hours of sterility, and then Lyon felt that the picture also languished. The higher his companion soared, the more gyrations he executed, in the blue, the better he painted; he couldn't make his flights long enough. He lashed him on when he flagged; his apprehension became great at moments that the Colonel would discover his game. But he never did, apparently; he basked and expanded in the fine steady light of the painter's attention. In this way the picture grew very fast; it was astonishing what a short business it was, compared with the little girl's. By the fifth of August it was pretty well finished: that was the

date of the last sitting the Colonel was for the present able to give, as he was leaving town the next day with his wife. Lyon was amply content—he saw his way so clear: he should be able to do at his convenience what remained, with or without his friend’s attendance. At any rate, as there was no hurry, he would let the thing stand over till his own return to London, in November, when he would come back to it with a fresh eye. On the Colonel’s asking him if his wife might come and see it the next day, if she should find a minute—this was so greatly her desire—Lyon begged as a special favour that she would wait: he was so far from satisfied as yet. This was the repetition of a proposal Mrs. Capadose had made on the occasion of his last visit to her, and he had then asked for a delay—declared that he was by no means content. He was really delighted, and he was again a little ashamed of himself.

By the fifth of August the weather was very warm, and on that day, while the Colonel sat straight and gossiped, Lyon opened for the sake of ventilation a little subsidiary door which led directly from his studio into the garden and sometimes served as an entrance and an exit for models and for visitors of the humbler sort, and as a passage for canvases, frames, packing-boxes and other professional gear. The main entrance was through the house and his own apartments, and this approach had the charming effect of admitting you first to a high gallery, from which a crooked picturesque staircase enabled you to descend to the wide, decorated, encumbered room. The view of this room, beneath them, with all its artistic ingenuities and the objects of value that Lyon had collected, never failed to elicit exclamations of delight from persons stepping into the gallery. The way from the garden was plainer and at once more practicable and more private. Lyon’s domain, in St. John’s Wood, was not vast, but when the door stood open of a summer’s day it offered a glimpse of flowers and trees, you smelt something sweet and you heard the birds. On this particular morning the side-door had been found convenient by an unannounced visitor, a youngish woman who stood in the room before the Colonel perceived her and whom he perceived before she was noticed by his friend. She was very quiet, and she looked from one of the men to the other. “Oh, dear, here’s another!” Lyon exclaimed, as soon as his eyes rested on her. She belonged, in fact, to a somewhat importunate class—the model in search of employment, and she explained that she had ventured to come straight in, that way, because very often when she went to call upon gentlemen the servants played her tricks, turned her off and wouldn’t take in her name.

“But how did you get into the garden?” Lyon asked.

"The gate was open, sir—the servants' gate. The butcher's cart was there."

"The butcher ought to have closed it," said Lyon.

"Then you don't require me, sir?" the lady continued.

Lyon went on with his painting; he had given her a sharp look at first, but now his eyes lighted on her no more. The Colonel, however, examined her with interest. She was a person of whom you could scarcely say whether being young she looked old or old she looked young; she had at any rate evidently rounded several of the corners of life and had a face that was rosy but that somehow failed to suggest freshness. Nevertheless she was pretty and even looked as if at one time she might have sat for the complexion. She wore a hat with many feathers, a dress with many bugles, long black gloves, encircled with silver bracelets, and very bad shoes. There was something about her that was not exactly of the governess out of place nor completely of the actress seeking an engagement, but that savored of an interrupted profession or even of a blighted career. She was rather soiled and tarnished, and after she had been in the room a few moments the air, or at any rate the nostril, became acquainted with a certain alcoholic waft. She was unpracticed in the *h*, and when Lyon at last thanked her and said he didn't want her—he was doing nothing for which she could be useful—she replied with rather a wounded manner, "Well, you know you *'ave 'ad me!*"

"I don't remember you," Lyon answered.

"Well, I daresay the people that saw your pictures do! I haven't much time, but I thought I would look in."

"I am much obliged to you."

"If every you should require me, if you just send me a postcard — —"

"I never send postcards," said Lyon.

"Oh well, I should value a private letter! Anything to Miss Geraldine, Mortimer Terrace Mews, Notting 'ill — —"

"Very good; I'll remember," said Lyon.

Miss Geraldine lingered. "I thought I'd just stop, on the chance."

"I'm afraid I can't hold out hopes, I'm so busy with portraits," Lyon continued.

"Yes; I see you are. I wish I was in the gentleman's place."

"I'm afraid in that case it wouldn't look like me," said the Colonel, laughing.

"Oh, of course it couldn't compare—it wouldn't be so 'andsome! But I do hate them portraits!" Miss Geraldine declared. "It's so much bread out of our mouths."

"Well, there are many who can't paint them," Lyon suggested, comfortingly.

"Oh, I've sat to the very first—and only to the first! There's many that couldn't do anything without me."

"I'm glad you're in such demand." Lyon was beginning to be bored and he added that he wouldn't detain her—he would send for her in case of need.

"Very well; remember it's the Mews—more's the pity! You don't sit so well as *us*!" Miss Geraldine pursued, looking at the Colonel. "If *you* should require me, sir —"

"You put him out; you embarrass him," said Lyon.

"Embarrass him, oh gracious!" the visitor cried, with a laugh which diffused a fragrance. "Perhaps *you* send postcards, eh?" she went on to the Colonel; and then she retreated with a wavering step. She passed out into the garden as she had come.

"How very dreadful—she's drunk!" said Lyon. He was painting hard, but he looked up, checking himself: Miss Geraldine, in the open doorway, had thrust back her head.

"Yes, I do hate it—that sort of thing!" she cried with an explosion of mirth which confirmed Lyon's declaration. And then she disappeared.

"What sort of thing—what does she mean?" the Colonel asked.

"Oh, my painting you, when I might be painting her."

"And have you ever painted her?"

"Never in the world; I have never seen her. She is quite mistaken."

The Colonel was silent a moment; then he remarked, "She was very pretty—ten years ago."

"I daresay, but she's quite ruined. For me the least drop too much spoils them; I shouldn't care for her at all."

"My dear fellow, she's not a model," said the Colonel, laughing.

"Today, no doubt, she's not worthy of the name; but she has been one."

"*Jamais de la vie!* That's all a pretext."

"A pretext?" Lyon pricked up his ears—he began to wonder what was coming now.

"She didn't want you—she wanted me."

"I noticed she paid you some attention. What does she want of you?"

"Oh, to do me an ill turn. She hates me—lots of women do. She's watching me—she follows me."

Lyon leaned back in his chair—he didn't believe a word of this. He was all the more delighted with it and with the Colonel's bright, candid manner. The story had bloomed, fragrant, on the spot. "My dear Colonel!" he murmured, with friendly interest and commiseration.

"I was annoyed when she came in—but I wasn't startled," his sitter continued.

"You concealed it very well, if you were."

"Ah, when one has been through what I have! To-day however I confess I was half prepared. I have seen her hanging about—she knows my movements. She was near my house this morning—she must have followed me."

"But who is she then—with such a *toupet*?"

"Yes, she has that," said the Colonel; "but as you observe she was primed. Still, there was a cheek, as they say, in her coming in. Oh, she's a bad one! She isn't a model and she never was; no doubt she has known some of those women and picked up their form. She had hold of a friend of mine ten years ago—a stupid young gander who might have been left to be plucked but whom I was obliged to take an interest in for family reasons. It's a long story—I had really forgotten all about it. She's thirty-seven if she's a day. I cut in and made him get rid of her—I sent her about her business. She knew it was me she had to thank. She has never forgiven me—I think she's off her head. Her name isn't Geraldine at all and I doubt very much if that's her address."

"Ah, what is her name?" Lyon asked, most attentive. The details always began to multiply, to abound, when once his companion was well launched—they flowed forth in battalions.

"It's Pearson—Harriet Pearson; but she used to call herself Grenadine—wasn't that a rum appellation? Grenadine—Geraldine—the jump was easy." Lyon was charmed with the promptitude of this response, and his interlocutor went on: "I hadn't thought of her for years—I had quite lost sight of her. I don't know what her idea is, but practically she's harmless. As I came in I thought I saw her a little way up the road. She must have found out I come here and have arrived before me. I daresay—or rather I'm sure—she is waiting for me there now."

"Hadn't you better have protection?" Lyon asked, laughing.

"The best protection is five shillings—I'm willing to go that length. Unless indeed she has a bottle of vitriol. But they only throw vitriol on the men who have deceived them, and I never deceived her—I told her the first time I saw her that it wouldn't do. Oh, if she's there we'll walk a little way together and talk it over and, as I say, I'll go as far as five shillings."

"Well," said Lyon, "I'll contribute another five." He felt that this was little to pay for his entertainment.

That entertainment was interrupted however for the time by the Colonel's departure. Lyon hoped for a letter recounting the fictive

sequel; but apparently his brilliant sitter did not operate with the pen. At any rate he left town without writing; they had taken a rendezvous for three months later. Oliver Lyon always passed the holidays in the same way; during the first weeks he paid a visit to his elder brother, the happy possessor, in the south of England, of a rambling old house with formal gardens, in which he delighted, and then he went abroad—usually to Italy or Spain. This year he carried out his custom after taking a last look at his all but finished work and feeling as nearly pleased with it as he ever felt with the translation of the idea by the hand—always, as it seemed to him, a pitiful compromise. One yellow afternoon, in the country, as he was smoking his pipe on one of the old terraces he was seized with the desire to see it again and do two or three things more to it: he had thought of it so often while he lounged there. The impulse was too strong to be dismissed, and though he expected to return to town in the course of another week he was unable to face the delay. To look at the picture for five minutes would be enough—it would clear up certain questions which hummed in his brain; so that the next morning, to give himself this luxury, he took the train for London. He sent no word in advance; he would lunch at his club and probably return into Sussex by the 5.45.

In St. John's Wood the tide of human life flows at no time very fast, and in the first days of September Lyon found unmitigated emptiness in the straight sunny roads where the little plastered garden-walls, with their incommunicative doors, looked slightly Oriental. There was definite stillness in his own house, to which he admitted himself by his pass-key, having a theory that it was well sometimes to take servants unprepared. The good woman who was mainly in charge and who cumulated the functions of cook and housekeeper was, however, quickly summoned by his step, and (he cultivated frankness of intercourse with his domestics) received him without the confusion of surprise. He told her that she needn't mind the place being not quite straight, he had only come up for a few hours—he should be busy in the studio. To this she replied that he was just in time to see a lady and a gentleman who were there at the moment—they had arrived five minutes before. She had told them he was away from home but they said it was all right; they only wanted to look at a picture and would be very careful of everything. "I hope it is all right, sir," the housekeeper concluded. "The gentleman says he's a sitter and he gave me his name—rather an odd name; I think it's military. The lady's a very fine lady, sir; at any rate there they are."

"Oh, it's all right," Lyon said, the identity of his visitors being



clear. The good woman couldn't know, for she usually had little to do with the comings and goings; his man, who showed people in and out, had accompanied him to the country. He was a good deal surprised at Mrs. Capadose's having come to see her husband's portrait when she knew that the artist himself wished her to forbear; but it was a familiar truth to him that she was a woman of a high spirit. Besides, perhaps the lady was not Mrs. Capadose; the Colonel might have brought some inquisitive friend, a person who wanted a portrait of *her* husband. What were they doing in town, at any rate, at that moment? Lyon made his way to the studio with a certain curiosity; he wondered vaguely what his friends were "up to." He pushed aside the curtain that hung in the door of communication—the door opening upon the gallery which it had been found convenient to construct at the time the studio was added to the house. When I say he pushed it aside I should amend my phrase; he laid his hand upon it, but at that moment he was arrested by a very singular sound. It came from the floor of the room beneath him and it startled him extremely, consisting apparently as it did of a passionate wail—a sort of smothered shriek—accompanied by a violent burst of tears. Oliver Lyon listened intently a moment, and then he passed out upon the balcony, which was covered with an old thick Moorish rug. His step was noiseless, though he had not endeavoured to make it so, and after that first instant he found himself profiting irresistibly by the accident of his not having attracted the attention of the two persons in the studio, who were some twenty feet below him. In truth they were so deeply and so strangely engaged that their unconsciousness of observation was explained. The scene that took place before Lyon's eyes was one of the most extraordinary they had ever rested upon. Delicacy and the failure to comprehend kept him at first from interrupting it—for what he saw was a woman who had thrown herself in a flood of tears on her companion's bosom—and these influences were succeeded after a minute (the minutes were very few and very short) by a definite motive which presently had the force to make him step back behind the curtain. I may add that it also had the force to make him avail himself for further contemplation of a crevice formed by his gathering together the two halves of the *portiere*. He was perfectly aware of what he was about—he was for the moment an eavesdropper, a spy; but he was also aware that a very odd business, in which his confidence had been trifled with, was going forward, and that if in a measure it didn't concern him, in a measure it very definitely did. His observation, his reflections, accomplished themselves in a flash.

His visitors were in the middle of the room; Mrs. Capadose



clung to her husband, weeping, sobbing as if her heart would break. Her distress was horrible to Oliver Lyon but his astonishment was greater than his horror when he heard the Colonel respond to it by the words, vehemently uttered, "Damn him, damn him, damn him!" What in the world had happened? Why was she sobbing and whom was he damning? What had happened, Lyon saw the next instant, was that the Colonel had finally rummaged out his unfinished portrait (he knew the corner where the artist usually placed it, out of the way, with its face to the wall) and had set it up before his wife on an empty easel. She had looked at it a few moments and then—apparently—what she saw in it had produced an explosion of dismay and resentment. She was too busy sobbing and the Colonel was too busy holding her and reiterating his objurgation, to look round or look up. The scene was so unexpected to Lyon that he could not take it, on the spot, as a proof of the triumph of his hand—of a tremendous hit: he could only wonder what on earth was the matter. The idea of the triumph came a little later. Yet he could see the portrait from where he stood; he was startled with its look of life—he had not thought it so masterly. Mrs. Capadose flung herself away from her husband—she dropped into the nearest chair, buried her face in her arms, leaning on a table. Her weeping suddenly ceased to be audible, but she shuddered there as if she were overwhelmed with anguish and shame. Her husband remained a moment staring at the picture; then he went to her, bent over her, took hold of her again, soothed her. "What is it, darling, what the devil is it?" he demanded.

Lyon heard her answer. "It's cruel—oh, it's too cruel!"

"Damn him—damn him—damn him!" the Colonel repeated.

"It's all there—it's all there!" Mrs. Capadose went on.

"Hang it, what's all there?"

"Everything there oughtn't to be—everything he has seen—it's too dreadful!"

"Everything he has seen? Why, ain't I a good-looking fellow? He has made me rather handsome."

Mrs. Capadose had sprung up again; she had darted another glance at the painted betrayal. "Handsome? Hideous, hideous! Not that—never, never!"

"Not *what*, in heaven's name?" the Colonel almost shouted. Lyon could see his flushed, bewildered face.

"What he has made of you—what you know! *He* knows—he has seen. Every one will know—every one will see. Fancy that thing in the Academy!"

"You're going wild, darling; but if you hate it so it needn't go."

"Oh, he'll send it—it's so good! Come away—come away!" Mrs.

Capadose wailed, seizing her husband.

"It's so good?" the poor man cried.

"Come away—come away," she only repeated; and she turned toward the staircase that ascended to the gallery.

"Not that way—not through the house, in the state you're in," Lyon heard the Colonel object. "This way—we can pass," he added; and he drew his wife to the small door that opened into the garden. It was bolted, but he pushed the bolt and opened the door. She passed out quickly, but he stood there looking back into the room. "Wait for me a moment!" he cried out to her; and with an excited stride he re-entered the studio. He came up to the picture again, and again he stood looking at it. "Damn him—damn him—damn him!" he broke out once more. It was not clear to Lyon whether this malediction had for its object the original or the painter of the portrait. The Colonel turned away and moved rapidly about the room, as if he were looking for something; Lyon was unable for the instant to guess his intention. Then the artist said to himself, below his breath, "He's going to do it a harm!" His first impulse was to rush down and stop him; but he paused, with the sound of Everina Brant's sobs still in his ears. The Colonel found what he was looking for—found it among some odds and ends on a small table and rushed back with it to the easel. At one and the same moment Lyon perceived that the object he had seized was a small Eastern dagger and that he had plunged it into the canvas. He seemed animated by a sudden fury, for with extreme vigor of hand he dragged the instrument down (Lyon knew it to have no very fine edge) making a long, abominable gash. Then he plucked it out and dashed it again several times into the face of the likeness, exactly as if he were stabbing a human victim: it had the oddest effect—that of a sort of figurative suicide. In a few seconds more the Colonel had tossed the dagger away—he looked at it as he did so, as if he expected it to reek with blood—and hurried out of the place, closing the door after him.

The strangest part of all was—as will doubtless appear—that Oliver Lyon made no movement to save his picture. But he did not feel as if he were losing it or cared not if he were, so much more did he feel that he was gaining a certitude. His old friend *was* ashamed of her husband, and he had made her so, and he had scored a great success, even though the picture had been reduced to rags. The revelation excited him so—as indeed the whole scene did—that when he came down the steps after the Colonel had gone he trembled with his happy agitation; he was dizzy and had to sit down a moment. The portrait had a dozen jagged wounds—the Colonel literally had hacked it to death. Lyon left it where it was, never touched it, scarcely

looked at it; he only walked up and down his studio, still excited, for an hour. At the end of this time his good woman came to recommend that he should have some luncheon; there was a passage under the staircase from the offices.

"Ah, the lady and gentleman have gone, sir? I didn't hear them."

"Yes; they went by the garden."

But she had stopped, staring at the picture on the easel. "Gracious, how you *'ave* served it, sir!"

Lyon imitated the Colonel. "Yes, I cut it up—in a fit of disgust."

"Mercy, after all your trouble! Because they weren't pleased, sir?"

"Yes; they weren't pleased."

"Well, they must be very grand! Blessed if I would!"

"Have it chopped up; it will do to light fires," Lyon said.

He returned to the country by the 3.30 and a few days later passed over to France. During the two months that he was absent from England he expected something—he could hardly have said what; a manifestation of some sort on the Colonel's part. Wouldn't he write, wouldn't he explain, wouldn't he take for granted Lyon had discovered the way he had, as the cook said, served him and deem it only decent to take pity in some fashion or other on his mystification? Would he plead guilty or would he repudiate suspicion? The latter course would be difficult and make a considerable draft upon his genius, in view of the certain testimony of Lyon's housekeeper, who had admitted the visitors and would establish the connection between their presence and the violence wrought. Would the Colonel proffer some apology or some amends, or would any word from him be only a further expression of that destructive petulance which our friend had seen his wife so suddenly and so potently communicate to him? He would have either to declare that he had not touched the picture or to admit that he had, and in either case he would have to tell a fine story. Lyon was impatient for the story and, as no letter came, disappointed that it was not produced. His impatience however was much greater in respect to Mrs. Capadose's version, if version there was to be; for certainly that would be the real test, would show how far she would go for her husband, on the one side, or for him, Oliver Lyon, on the other. He could scarcely wait to see what line she would take; whether she would simply adopt the Colonel's, whatever it might be. He wanted to draw her out without waiting, to get an idea in advance. He wrote to her, to this end, from Venice, in the tone of their established friendship, asking for news, narrating his wanderings, hoping they should soon meet in town and not saying a word about the picture. Day followed day, after

the time, and he received no answer; upon which he reflected that she couldn't trust herself to write—was still too much under the influence of the emotion produced by his 'betrayal.' Her husband had espoused that emotion and she had espoused the action he had taken in consequence of it, and it was a complete rupture and everything was at an end. Lyon considered this prospect rather ruefully, at the same time that he thought it deplorable that such charming people should have put themselves so grossly in the wrong. He was at last cheered, though little further enlightened, by the arrival of a letter, brief but breathing good-humour and hinting neither at a grievance nor at a bad conscience. The most interesting part of it to Lyon was the postscript, which consisted of these words: "I have a confession to make to you. We were in town for a couple of days, the 1st of September, and I took the occasion to defy your authority—it was very bad of me but I couldn't help it. I made Clement take me to your studio—I wanted so dreadfully to see what you had done with him, your wishes to the contrary notwithstanding. We made your servants let us in and I took a good look at the picture. It is really wonderful!" 'Wonderful' was non-committal, but at least with this letter there was no rupture.

The third day after Lyon's return to London was a Sunday, so that he could go and ask Mrs. Capadose for luncheon. She had given him in the spring a general invitation to do so and he had availed himself of it several times. These had been the occasions (before he sat to him) when he saw the Colonel most familiarly. Directly after the meal his host disappeared (he went out, as he said, to call on *his* women) and the second half-hour was the best, even when there were other people. Now, in the first days of December, Lyon had the luck to find the pair alone, without even Amy, who appeared but little in public. They were in the drawing-room, waiting for the repast to be announced, and as soon as he came in the Colonel broke out, "My dear fellow, I'm delighted to see you! I'm so keen to begin again."

"Oh, do go on, it's so beautiful," Mrs. Capadose said, as she gave him her hand.

Lyon looked from one to the other; he didn't know what he had expected, but he had not expected this. "Ah, then, you think I've got something?"

"You've got everything," said Mrs. Capadose, smiling from her golden-brown eyes.

"She wrote you of our little crime?" her husband asked. "She dragged me there—I had to go." Lyon wondered for a moment whether he meant by their little crime the assault on the canvas; but

the Colonel's next words didn't confirm this interpretation. "You know I like to sit—it gives such a chance to my *bavardise*. And just now I have time."

"You must remember I had almost finished," Lyon remarked.

"So you had. More's the pity. I should like you to begin again."

"My dear fellow, I shall have to begin again!" said Oliver Lyon with a laugh, looking at Mrs. Capadose. She did not meet his eyes—she had got up to ring for luncheon. "The picture has been smashed," Lyon continued.

"Smashed? Ah, what did you do that for?" Mrs. Capadose asked, standing there before him in all her clear, rich beauty. Now that she looked at him she was impenetrable.

"I didn't—I found it so—with a dozen holes punched in it!"

"I say!" cried the Colonel.

Lyon turned his eyes to him, smiling. "I hope *you* didn't do it?"

"Is it ruined?" the Colonel inquired. He was as brightly true as his wife and he looked simply as if Lyon's question could not be serious. "For the love of sitting to you? My dear fellow, if I had thought of it I would!"

"Nor you either?" the painter demanded of Mrs. Capadose.

Before she had time to reply her husband had seized her arm, as if a highly suggestive idea had come to him. "I say, my dear, that woman—that woman!"

"That woman?" Mrs. Capadose repeated; and Lyon too wondered what woman he meant.

"Don't you remember when we came out, she was at the door—or a little way from it? I spoke to you of her—I told you about her. Geraldine—Grenadine—the one who burst in that day," he explained to Lyon. "We saw her hanging about—I called Everina's attention to her."

"Do you mean she got at my picture?"

"Ah yes, I remember," said Mrs. Capadose, with a sigh.

"She burst in again—she had learned the way—she was waiting for her chance," the Colonel continued. "Ah, the little brute!"

Lyon looked down; he felt himself coloring. This was what he had been waiting for—the day the Colonel should wantonly sacrifice some innocent person. And could his wife be a party to that final atrocity? Lyon had reminded himself repeatedly during the previous weeks that when the Colonel perpetrated his misdeed she had already quitted the room; but he had argued none the less—it was a virtual certainty—that he had on rejoining her immediately made his achievement plain to her. He was in the flush of performance; and even if he had not mentioned what he had done she would

have guessed it. He did not for an instant believe that poor Miss Geraldine had been hovering about his door, nor had the account given by the Colonel the summer before of his relations with this lady deceived him in the slightest degree. Lyon had never seen her before the day she planted herself in his studio; but he knew her and classified her as if he had made her. He was acquainted with the London female model in all her varieties—in every phase of her development and every step of her decay. When he entered his house that September morning just after the arrival of his two friends there had been no symptoms whatever, up and down the road, of Miss Geraldine's reappearance. That fact had been fixed in his mind by his recollecting the vacancy of the prospect when his cook told him that a lady and a gentleman were in his studio: he had wondered there was not a carriage nor a cab at his door. Then he had reflected that they would have come by the underground railway; he was close to the Marlborough Road station and he knew the Colonel, coming to his sittings, more than once had availed himself of that convenience. "How in the world did she get in?" He addressed the question to his companions indifferently.

"Let us go down to luncheon," said Mrs. Capadose, passing out of the room.

"We went by the garden—without troubling your servant—I wanted to show my wife." Lyon followed his hostess with her husband and the Colonel stopped him at the top of the stairs. "My dear fellow, I *can't* have been guilty of the folly of not fastening the door?"

"I am sure I don't know, Colonel," Lyon said as they went down. "It was a very determined hand—a perfect wild-cat."

"Well, she *is* a wild-cat—confound her! That's why I wanted to get him away from her."

"But I don't understand her motive."

"She's off her head—and she hates me; that was her motive."

"But she doesn't hate me, my dear fellow!" Lyon said, laughing.

"She hated the picture—don't you remember she said so? The more portraits there are the less employment for such as her."

"Yes; but if she is not really the model she pretends to be, how can that hurt her?" Lyon asked.

The inquiry baffled the Colonel an instant—but only an instant. "Ah, she was in a vicious muddle! As I say, she's off her head."

They went into the dining-room, where Mrs. Capadose was taking her place. "It's too bad, it's too horrid!" she said. "You see the fates are against you. Providence won't let you be so disinterested—painting masterpieces for nothing."

"Did *you* see the woman?" Lyon demanded, with something like a sternness that he could not mitigate.

Mrs. Capadose appeared not to perceive it or not to heed it if she did. "There was a person, not far from your door, whom Clement called my attention to. He told me something about her but we were going the other way."

"And do you think she did it?"

"How can I tell? If she did she was mad, poor wretch."

"I should like very much to get hold of her," said Lyon. This was a false statement, for he had no desire for any further conversation with Miss Geraldine. He had exposed his friends to himself, but he had no desire to expose them to any one else, least of all to themselves.

"Oh, depend upon it she will never show again. You're safe!" the Colonel exclaimed.

"But I remember her address—Mortimer Terrace Mews, Notting Hill."

"Oh, that's pure humbug; there isn't any such place."

"Lord, what a deceiver!" said Lyon.

"Is there any one else you suspect?" the Colonel went on.

"Not a creature."

"And what do your servants say?"

"They say it wasn't *them*, and I reply that I never said it was. That's about the substance of our conferences."

"And when did they discover the havoc?"

"They never discovered it at all. I noticed it first—when I came back."

"Well, she could easily have stepped in," said the Colonel. "Don't you remember how she turned up that day, like the clown in the ring?"

"Yes, yes; she could have done the job in three seconds, except that the picture wasn't out."

"My dear fellow, don't curse me!—but of course I dragged it out."

"You didn't put it back?" Lyon asked tragically.

"Ah, Clement, Clement, didn't I tell you to?" Mrs. Capadose exclaimed in a tone of exquisite reproach.

The Colonel groaned, dramatically; he covered his face with his hands. His wife's words were for Lyon the finishing touch; they made his whole vision crumble—his theory that she had secretly kept herself true. Even to her old lover she wouldn't be so! He was sick; he couldn't eat; he knew that he looked very strange. He murmured something about it being useless to cry over spilled milk—he tried to turn the conversation to other things. But it was a horrid effort



and he wondered whether they felt it as much as he. He wondered all sorts of things: whether they guessed he disbelieved them (that he had seen them of course they would never guess); whether they had arranged their story in advance or it was only an inspiration of the moment; whether she had resisted, protested, when the Colonel proposed it to her, and then had been borne down by him; whether in short she didn't loathe herself as she sat there. The cruelty, the cowardice of fastening their unholy act upon the wretched woman struck him as monstrous—no less monstrous indeed than the levity that could make them run the risk of her giving them, in her righteous indignation, the lie. Of course that risk could only exculpate her and not inculcate them—the probabilities protected them so perfectly; and what the Colonel counted on (what he would have counted upon the day he delivered himself, after first seeing her, at the studio, if he had thought about the matter then at all and not spoken from the pure spontaneity of his genius) was simply that Miss Geraldine had really vanished for ever into her native unknown. Lyon wanted so much to quit the subject that when after a little Mrs. Capadose said to him, "But can nothing be done, can't the picture be repaired? You know they do such wonders in that way now," he only replied, "I don't know, I don't care, it's all over, *n'en parlons plus!*" Her hypocrisy revolted him. And yet, by way of plucking off the last veil of her shame, he broke out to her again, shortly afterward, "And you *did* like it, really?" To which she returned, looking him straight in his face, without a blush, a pallor, an evasion, "Oh, I loved it!" Truly her husband had trained her well. After that Lyon said no more and his companions forbore temporarily to insist, like people of tact and sympathy aware that the odious accident had made him sore.

When they quitted the table the Colonel went away without coming upstairs; but Lyon returned to the drawing-room with his hostess, remarking to her however on the way that he could remain but a moment. He spent that moment—it prolonged itself a little—standing with her before the chimney-piece. She neither sat down nor asked him to; her manner denoted that she intended to go out. Yes, her husband had trained her well; yet Lyon dreamed for a moment that now he was alone with her she would perhaps break down, retract, apologize, confide, say to him, "My dear old friend, forgive this hideous comedy—you understand!" And then how he would have loved her and pitied her, guarded her, helped her always! If she were not ready to do something of that sort why had she treated him as if he were a dear old friend; why had she let him for months suppose certain things—or almost; why had she come to his studio day after day to sit near him on the pretext of her child's portrait, as



if she liked to think what might have been? Why had she come so near a tacit confession, in a word, if she was not willing to go an inch further? And she was not willing—she was not; he could see that as he lingered there. She moved about the room a little, rearranging two or three objects on the tables, but she did nothing more. Suddenly he said to her: “Which way was she going, when you came out?”

“She—the woman we saw?”

“Yes, your husband’s strange friend. It’s a clew worth following.” He had no desire to frighten her; he only wanted to communicate the impulse which would make her say, “Ah, spare me—and spare *him*! There was no such person.”

Instead of this Mrs. Capadose replied, “She was going away from us—she crossed the road. We were coming towards the station.”

“And did she appear to recognise the Colonel—did she look round?”

“Yes; she looked round, but I didn’t notice much. A hansom came along and we got into it. It was not till then that Clement told me who she was: I remember he said that she was there for no good. I suppose we ought to have gone back.”

“Yes; you would have saved the picture.”

For a moment she said nothing; then she smiled. “For you, I am very sorry. But you must remember that I possess the original!”

At this Lyon turned away. “Well, I must go,” he said; and he left her without any other farewell and made his way out of the house. As he went slowly up the street the sense came back to him of that first glimpse of her he had had at Stayes—the way he had seen her gaze across the table at her husband. Lyon stopped at the corner, looking vaguely up and down. He would never go back—he couldn’t. She was still in love with the Colonel—he had trained her too well.



## What Is Truth?

Maurice Baring

Sitting opposite me in the second-class carriage of the express train which was crawling at a leisurely pace from Moscow to the south was a little girl who looked as if she were about twelve years old, with her mother. The mother was a large fair-haired person, with a good-natured expression. They had a dog with them, and the little girl, whose whole face twitched every now and then from St. Vitus' dance, got out at nearly every station to buy food for the dog. On the same side of the carriage, in the opposite corner, another lady (thin, fair, and wearing a pince-nez) was reading the newspaper. She and the mother of the child soon made friends over the dog. That is to say, the dog made friends with the strange lady and was reproved by its mistress, and the strange lady said: "Please don't scold him. He is not in the least in my way, and I like dogs." They then began to talk.

The large lady was going to the country. She and her daughter had been ordered to go there by the doctor. She had spent six weeks in Moscow under medical treatment, and they had now been told to finish this cure with a thorough rest in the country air. The thin lady asked her the name of her doctor, and before ascertaining what was the disease in question, recommended another doctor who had cured a friend of hers, almost as though by miracle, of heart disease. The large lady seemed interested and wrote down the direction of the marvellous physician. She was herself suffering, she said, from a nervous illness, and her daughter had St. Vitus' dance. They were so far quite satisfied with their doctor. They talked for some time exclusively about medical matters, comparing notes about doctors, diseases, and remedies. The thin lady said she had been cured of all her ills by aspirin and cinnamon.

In the course of the conversation the stout lady mentioned her

husband, who, it turned out, was the head of the gendarmerie in a town in Siberia, not far from Irkutsk. This seemed to interest the thin lady immensely. She at once asked what were his political views, and what she herself thought about politics.

The large lady seemed to be reluctant to talk politics and evaded the questions for some time, but after much desultory conversation, which always came back to the same point, she said:—

“My husband is a Conservative; they call him a ‘Black Hundred,’ but it’s most unfair and untrue, because he is a very good man and very just. He has his own opinions and he is sincere. He does not believe in the revolution or in the revolutionaries. He took the oath to serve the Emperor when everything went quietly and well, and now, although I have often begged him to leave the Service, he says it would be very wrong to leave just because it is dangerous. ‘I have taken the oath,’ he says, ‘and I must keep it.’”

Here she stopped, but after some further questions on the part of the thin lady, she said: “I never had time or leisure to think of these questions. I was married when I was sixteen. I have had eight children, and they all died one after the other except this one, who was the eldest. I used to see political exiles and prisoners, and I used to feel sympathy for them. I used to hear about people being sent here and there, and sometimes I used to go down on my knees to my husband to do what he could for them, but I never thought about there being any particular idea at the back of all this.” Then after a short pause she added: “It first dawned on me at Moscow. It was after the big strike, and I was on my way home. I had been staying with some friends in the country, and I happened by chance to see the funeral of that man Bauman, the doctor, who was killed. I was very much impressed when I saw that huge procession go past, all the men singing the funeral march, and I understood that Bauman himself had nothing to do with it. Who cared about Bauman? But I understood that he was a symbol. I saw that there must be a big idea which moves all these people to give up everything, to go to prison, to kill, and be killed. I understood this for the first time at that funeral. I cried when the crowd went past. I understood there was a big idea, a great cause behind it all. Then I went home.

“There were disorders in Siberia: you know in Siberia we are much freer than you are. There is only one society. The officials, the political people, revolutionaries, exiles, everybody, in fact, all meet constantly. I used to go to political meetings, and to see and talk with the Liberal and revolutionary leaders. Then I began to be disappointed because what had always struck me as unjust was that one man, just because he happened to be, say, Ivan Pavlovitch,

should be able to rule over another man who happened to be, say, Ivan Ivanovitch. And now that these Republics were being made, it seemed that the same thing was beginning all over again—that all the places of authority were being seized and dealt out amongst another lot of people who were behaving exactly like those who had authority before. The arbitrary authority was there just the same, only it had changed hands, and this puzzled me very much, and I began to ask myself, ‘Where is the truth?’”

“What did your husband think?” asked the thin lady.

“My husband did not like to talk about these things,” she answered. “He says, ‘I am in the Service, and I have to serve. It is not my business to have opinions.’”

“But all those Republics didn’t last very long,” rejoined the thin lady.

“No,” continued the other; “we never had a Republic, and after a time they arrested the chief agitator, who was the soul of the revolutionary movement in our town, a wonderful orator. I had heard him speak several times and been carried away. When he was arrested I saw him taken to prison, and he said ‘Good-bye’ to the people, and bowed to them in the street in such an exaggerated theatrical way that I was astonished and felt uncomfortable. Here, I thought, is a man who can sacrifice himself for an idea, and who seemed to be thoroughly sincere, and yet he behaves theatrically and poses as if he were not sincere. I felt more puzzled than ever, and I asked my husband to let me go and see him in prison. I thought that perhaps after talking to him I could solve the riddle, and find out once for all who was right and who was wrong. My husband let me go, and I was admitted into his cell.

“‘You know who I am,’ I said, ‘since I am here, and I am admitted inside these locked doors?’ He nodded. Then I asked him whether I could be of any use to him. He said that he had all that he wanted; and like this the ice was broken, and I asked him presently if he believed in the whole movement. He said that until the 17th of October, when the Manifesto had been issued, he had believed with all his soul in it; but the events of the last months had caused him to change his mind. He now thought that the work of his party, and, in fact, the whole movement, which had been going on for over fifty years, had really been in vain. ‘We shall have,’ he said, ‘to begin again from the very beginning, because the Russian people are not ready for us yet, and probably another fifty years will have to go by before they are ready.’

“I left him very much perplexed. He was set free not long afterwards, in virtue of some manifesto, and because there had

been no disorders in our town and he had not been the cause of any bloodshed. Soon after he came out of prison my husband met him, and he said to my husband: 'I suppose you will not shake hands with me?' And my husband replied: 'Because our views are different there is no reason why both of us should not be honest men,' and he shook hands with him."

The conversation now became a discussion about the various ideals of various people and parties holding different political views. The large lady kept on expressing the puzzled state of mind in which she was.

The whole conversation, of which I have given a very condensed report, was spread over a long time, and often interrupted. Later they reached the subject of political assassination, and the large lady said:—

"About two months after I came home that year, one day when I was out driving with my daughter in a sledge the revolutionaries fired six shots at us from revolvers. We were not hit, but one bullet went through the coachman's cap. Ever since then I have had nervous fits and my daughter has had St. Vitus' dance. We have to go to Moscow every year to be treated. And it is so difficult. I don't know how to manage. When I am at home I feel as if I ought to go, and when I am away I never have a moment's peace, because I cannot help thinking the whole time that my husband is in danger. A few weeks after they shot at us I met some of the revolutionary party at a meeting, and I asked them why they had shot at myself and my daughter. I could have understood it if they had shot at my husband. But why at us? He said: 'When the wood is cut down, the chips fly about.' And now I don't know what to think about it all.

"Sometimes I think it is all a mistake, and I feel that the revolutionaries are posing and playing a part, and that so soon as they get the upper hand they will be as bad as what we have now; and then I say to myself, all the same they are acting in a cause, and it is a great cause, and they are working for liberty and for the people. And, then, would the people be better off if they had their way? The more I think of it the more puzzled I am. Who is right? Is my husband right? Are they right? Is it a great cause? How can they be wrong if they are imprisoned and killed for what they believe? Where is the truth, and what is truth?"

## The Mark on the Wall

Virginia Woolf

Perhaps it was the middle of January in the present that I first looked up and saw the mark on the wall. In order to fix a date it is necessary to remember what one saw. So now I think of the fire; the steady film of yellow light upon the page of my book; the three chrysanthemums in the round glass bowl on the mantelpiece. Yes, it must have been the winter time, and we had just finished our tea, for I remember that I was smoking a cigarette when I looked up and saw the mark on the wall for the first time. I looked up through the smoke of my cigarette and my eye lodged for a moment upon the burning coals, and that old fancy of the crimson flag flapping from the castle tower came into my mind, and I thought of the cavalcade of red knights riding up the side of the black rock. Rather to my relief the sight of the mark interrupted the fancy, for it is an old fancy, an automatic fancy, made as a child perhaps. The mark was a small round mark, black upon the white wall, about six or seven inches above the mantelpiece.

How readily our thoughts swarm upon a new object, lifting it a little way, as ants carry a blade of straw so feverishly, and then leave it.... If that mark was made by a nail, it can't have been for a picture, it must have been for a miniature—the miniature of a lady with white powdered curls, powder-dusted cheeks, and lips like red carnations. A fraud of course, for the people who had this house before us would have chosen pictures in that way—an old picture for an old room. That is the sort of people they were—very interesting people, and I think of them so often, in such queer places, because one will never see them again, never know what happened next. They wanted to leave this house because they wanted to change their style of furniture, so he said, and he was in process of saying that in his opinion art should have ideas behind it when we were torn

asunder, as one is torn from the old lady about to pour out tea and the young man about to hit the tennis ball in the back garden of the suburban villa as one rushes past in the train.

But as for that mark, I'm not sure about it; I don't believe it was made by a nail after all; it's too big, too round, for that. I might get up, but if I got up and looked at it, ten to one I shouldn't be able to say for certain; because once a thing's done, no one ever knows how it happened. Oh! dear me, the mystery of life; The inaccuracy of thought! The ignorance of humanity! To show how very little control of our possessions we have—what an accidental affair this living is after all our civilization—let me just count over a few of the things lost in one lifetime, beginning, for that seems always the most mysterious of losses—what cat would gnaw, what rat would nibble—three pale blue canisters of book-binding tools? Then there were the bird cages, the iron hoops, the steel skates, the Queen Anne coal-scuttle, the bagatelle board, the hand organ—all gone, and jewels, too. Opals and emeralds, they lie about the roots of turnips. What a scraping paring affair it is to be sure! The wonder is that I've any clothes on my back, that I sit surrounded by solid furniture at this moment. Why, if one wants to compare life to anything, one must liken it to being blown through the Tube at fifty miles an hour—landing at the other end without a single hairpin in one's hair! Shot out at the feet of God entirely naked! Tumbling head over heels in the asphodel meadows like brown paper parcels pitched down a shoot in the post office! With one's hair flying back like the tail of a race-horse. Yes, that seems to express the rapidity of life, the perpetual waste and repair; all so casual, all so haphazard....

But after life. The slow pulling down of thick green stalks so that the cup of the flower, as it turns over, deluges one with purple and red light. Why, after all, should one not be born there as one is born here, helpless, speechless, unable to focus one's eyesight, groping at the roots of the grass, at the toes of the Giants? As for saying which are trees, and which are men and women, or whether there are such things, that one won't be in a condition to do for fifty years or so. There will be nothing but spaces of light and dark, intersected by thick stalks, and rather higher up perhaps, rose-shaped blots of an indistinct color—dim pinks and blues—which will, as time goes on, become more definite, become—I don't know what....

And yet that mark on the wall is not a hole at all. It may even be caused by some round black substance, such as a small rose leaf, left over from the summer, and I, not being a very vigilant housekeeper—look at the dust on the mantelpiece, for example, the dust which, so they say, buried Troy three times over, only fragments of pots utterly



refusing annihilation, as one can believe.

The tree outside the window taps very gently on the pane.... I want to think quietly, calmly, spaciouly, never to be interrupted, never to have to rise from my chair, to slip easily from one thing to another, without any sense of hostility, or obstacle. I want to sink deeper and deeper, away from the surface, with its hard separate facts. To steady myself, let me catch hold of the first idea that passes.... Shakespeare.... Well, he will do as well as another. A man who sat himself solidly in an arm-chair, and looked into the fire, so— A shower of ideas fell perpetually from some very high Heaven down through his mind. He leant his forehead on his hand, and people, looking in through the open door,—for this scene is supposed to take place on a summer's evening—But how dull this is, this historical fiction! It doesn't interest me at all. I wish I could hit upon a pleasant track of thought, a track indirectly reflecting credit upon myself, for those are the pleasantest thoughts, and very frequent even in the minds of modest mouse-colored people, who believe genuinely that they dislike to hear their own praises. They are not thoughts directly praising oneself; that is the beauty of them; they are thoughts like this:

"And then I came into the room. They were discussing botany. I said how I'd seen a flower growing on a dust heap on the site of an old house in Kingsway. The seed, I said, must have been sown in the reign of Charles the First. What flowers grew in the reign of Charles the First?" I asked—(but, I don't remember the answer). Tall flowers with purple tassels to them perhaps. And so it goes on. All the time I'm dressing up the figure of myself in my own mind, lovingly, stealthily, not openly adoring it, for if I did that, I should catch myself out, and stretch my hand at once for a book in self-protection. Indeed, it is curious how instinctively one protects the image of oneself from idolatry or any other handling that could make it ridiculous, or too unlike the original to be believed in any longer. Or is it not so very curious after all? It is a matter of great importance. Suppose the looking glass smashes, the image disappears, and the romantic figure with the green of forest depths all about it is there no longer, but only that shell of a person which is seen by other people—what an airless, shallow, bald, prominent world it becomes! A world not to be lived in. As we face each other in omnibuses and underground railways we are looking into the mirror that accounts for the vagueness, the gleam of glassiness, in our eyes. And the novelists in future will realize more and more the importance of these reflections, for of course there is not one reflection but an almost infinite number; those are the depths they will explore, those the

phantoms they will pursue, leaving the description of reality more and more out of their stories, taking a knowledge of it for granted, as the Greeks did and Shakespeare perhaps—but these generalizations are very worthless. The military sound of the word is enough. It recalls leading articles, cabinet ministers—a whole class of things indeed which as a child one thought the thing itself, the standard thing, the real thing, from which one could not depart save at the risk of nameless damnation. Generalizations bring back somehow Sunday in London, Sunday afternoon walks, Sunday luncheons, and also ways of speaking of the dead, clothes, and habits—like the habit of sitting all together in one room until a certain hour, although nobody liked it. There was a rule for everything. The rule for tablecloths at that particular period was that they should be made of tapestry with little yellow compartments marked upon them, such as you may see in photographs of the carpets in the corridors of the royal palaces. Tablecloths of a different kind were not real tablecloths. How shocking, and yet how wonderful it was to discover that these real things, Sunday luncheons, Sunday walks, country houses, and tablecloths were not entirely real, were indeed half phantoms, and the damnation which visited the disbeliever in them was only a sense of illegitimate freedom. What now takes the place of those things I wonder, those real standard things? Men perhaps, should you be a woman; the masculine point of view which governs our lives, which sets the standard, which establishes Whitaker's Table of Precedency, which has become, I suppose, since the war half a phantom to many men and women, which soon—one may hope, will be laughed into the dustbin where the phantoms go, the mahogany sideboards and the Landseer prints, Gods and Devils, Hell and so forth, leaving us all with an intoxicating sense of illegitimate freedom—if freedom exists....

In certain lights that mark on the wall seems actually to project from the wall. Nor is it entirely circular. I cannot be sure, but it seems to cast a perceptible shadow, suggesting that if I ran my finger down that strip of the wall it would, at a certain point, mount and descend a small tumulus, a smooth tumulus like those barrows on the South Downs which are, they say, either tombs or camps. Of the two I should prefer them to be tombs, desiring melancholy like most English people, and finding it natural at the end of a walk to think of the bones stretched beneath the turf.... There must be some book about it. Some antiquary must have dug up those bones and given them a name.... What sort of a man is an antiquary, I wonder? Retired Colonels for the most part, I daresay, leading parties of aged labourers to the top here, examining clods of earth and stone, and

getting into correspondence with the neighboring clergy, which, being opened at breakfast time, gives them a feeling of importance, and the comparison of arrow-heads necessitates cross-country journeys to the county towns, an agreeable necessity both to them and to their elderly wives, who wish to make plum jam or to clean out the study, and have every reason for keeping that great question of the camp or the tomb in perpetual suspension, while the Colonel himself feels agreeably philosophic in accumulating evidence on both sides of the question. It is true that he does finally incline to believe in the camp; and, being opposed, indites a pamphlet which he is about to read at the quarterly meeting of the local society when a stroke lays him low, and his last conscious thoughts are not of wife or child, but of the camp and that arrowhead there, which is now in the case at the local museum, together with the foot of a Chinese murderess, a handful of Elizabethan nails, a great many Tudor clay pipes, a piece of Roman pottery, and the wine-glass that Nelson drank out of—proving I really don't know what.

No, no, nothing is proved, nothing is known. And if I were to get up at this very moment and ascertain that the mark on the wall is really—what shall we say?—the head of a gigantic old nail, driven in two hundred years ago, which has now, owing to the patient attrition of many generations of housemaids, revealed its head above the coat of paint, and is taking its first view of modern life in the sight of a white-walled fire-lit room, what should I gain?—Knowledge? Matter for further speculation? I can think sitting still as well as standing up. And what is knowledge? What are our learned men save the descendants of witches and hermits who crouched in caves and in woods brewing herbs, interrogating shrew-mice and writing down the language of the stars? And the less we honour them as our superstitions dwindle and our respect for beauty and health of mind increases.... Yes, one could imagine a very pleasant world. A quiet, spacious world, with the flowers so red and blue in the open fields. A world without professors or specialists or house-keepers with the profiles of policemen, a world which one could slice with one's thought as a fish slices the water with his fin, grazing the stems of the water-lilies, hanging suspended over nests of white sea eggs.... How peaceful it is down here, rooted in the centre of the world and gazing up through the grey waters, with their sudden gleams of light, and their reflections—if it were not for Whitaker's Almanack—if it were not for the Table of Precedency!

I must jump up and see for myself what that mark on the wall really is—a nail, a rose-leaf, a crack in the wood?

Here is nature once more at her old game of self-preservation.

This train of thought, she perceives, is threatening mere waste of energy, even some collision with reality, for who will ever be able to lift a finger against Whitaker's Table of Precedency? The Archbishop of Canterbury is followed by the Lord High Chancellor; the Lord High Chancellor is followed by the Archbishop of York. Everybody follows somebody, such is the philosophy of Whitaker; and the great thing is to know who follows whom. Whitaker knows, and let that, so Nature counsels, comfort you, instead of enraging you; and if you can't be comforted, if you must shatter this hour of peace, think of the mark on the wall.

I understand Nature's game—her prompting to take action as a way of ending any thought that threatens to excite or to pain. Hence, I suppose, comes our slight contempt for men of action—men, we assume, who don't think. Still, there's no harm in putting a full stop to one's disagreeable thoughts by looking at a mark on the wall.

Indeed, now that I have fixed my eyes upon it, I feel that I have grasped a plank in the sea; I feel a satisfying sense of reality which at once turns the two Archbishops and the Lord High Chancellor to the shadows of shades. Here is something definite, something real. Thus, waking from a midnight dream of horror, one hastily turns on the light and lies quiescent, worshipping the chest of drawers, worshipping solidity, worshipping reality, worshipping the impersonal world which is a proof of some existence other than ours. That is what one wants to be sure of.... Wood is a pleasant thing to think about. It comes from a tree; and trees grow, and we don't know how they grow. For years and years they grow, without paying any attention to us, in meadows, in forests, and by the side of rivers—all things one likes to think about. The cows swish their tails beneath them on hot afternoons; they paint rivers so green that when a moorhen dives one expects to see its feathers all green when it comes up again. I like to think of the fish balanced against the stream like flags blown out; and of water-beetles slowly raiding domes of mud upon the bed of the river. I like to think of the tree itself:—first the close dry sensation of being wood; then the grinding of the storm; then the slow, delicious ooze of sap. I like to think of it, too, on winter's nights standing in the empty field with all leaves close-furled, nothing tender exposed to the iron bullets of the moon, a naked mast upon an earth that goes tumbling, tumbling, all night long. The song of birds must sound very loud and strange in June; and how cold the feet of insects must feel upon it, as they make laborious progresses up the creases of the bark, or sun themselves upon the thin green awning of the leaves, and look straight in front of them

with diamond-cut red eyes.... One by one the fibres snap beneath the immense cold pressure of the earth, then the last storm comes and, falling, the highest branches drive deep into the ground again. Even so, life isn't done with; there are a million patient, watchful lives still for a tree, all over the world, in bedrooms, in ships, on the pavement, lining rooms, where men and women sit after tea, smoking cigarettes. It is full of peaceful thoughts, happy thoughts, this tree. I should like to take each one separately—but something is getting in the way.... Where was I? What has it all been about? A tree? A river? The Downs? Whitaker's Almanack? The fields of asphodel? I can't remember a thing. Everything's moving, falling, slipping, vanishing.... There is a vast upheaval of matter. Someone is standing over me and saying—

"I'm going out to buy a newspaper."

"Yes?"

"Though it's no good buying newspapers.... Nothing ever happens. Curse this war; God damn this war!... All the same, I don't see why we should have a snail on our wall."

Ah, the mark on the wall! It was a snail.



## The Wisdom of the King

William Butler Yeats

**T**he High-Queen of the Island of Woods had died in childbirth, and her child was put to nurse with a woman who lived in a hut of mud and wicker, within the border of the wood. One night the woman sat rocking the cradle, and pondering over the beauty of the child, and praying that the gods might grant him wisdom equal to his beauty. There came a knock at the door, and she got up, not a little wondering, for the nearest neighbors were in the dun of the High-King a mile away; and the night was now late. "Who is knocking?" she cried, and a thin voice answered, "Open! for I am a crone of the grey hawk, and I come from the darkness of the great wood." In terror she drew back the bolt, and a grey-clad woman, of a great age, and of a height more than human, came in and stood by the head of the cradle. The nurse shrank back against the wall, unable to take her eyes from the woman, for she saw by the gleaming of the firelight that the feathers of the grey hawk were upon her head instead of hair. But the child slept, and the fire danced, for the one was too ignorant and the other too full of gaiety to know what a dreadful being stood there. "Open!" cried another voice, "for I am a crone of the grey hawk, and I watch over his nest in the darkness of the great wood." The nurse opened the door again, though her fingers could scarce hold the bolts for trembling, and another grey woman, not less old than the other, and with like feathers instead of hair, came in and stood by the first. In a little, came a third grey woman, and after her a fourth, and then another and another and another, until the hut was full of their immense bodies. They stood a long time in perfect silence and stillness, for they were of those whom the dropping of the sand has never troubled, but at last one muttered in a low thin voice: "Sisters, I knew him far away by the redness of his heart under his silver

skin"; and then another spoke: "Sisters, I knew him because his heart fluttered like a bird under a net of silver cords "; and then another took up the word: "Sisters, I knew him because his heart sang like a bird that is happy in a silver cage." And after that they sang together, those who were nearest rocking the cradle with long wrinkled fingers; and their voices were now tender and caressing, now like the wind blowing in the great wood, and this was their song:

*Out of sight is out of mind:  
Long have man and woman-kind,  
Heavy of will and light of mood,  
Taken away our wheaten food,  
Taken away our Altar stone;  
Hail and rain and thunder alone,  
And red hearts we turn to grey,  
Are true till Time gutter away.*

When the song had died out, the crone who had first spoken, said: "We have nothing more to do but to mix a drop of our blood into his blood." And she scratched her arm with the sharp point of a spindle, which she had made the nurse bring to her, and let a drop of blood, grey as the mist, fall upon the lips of the child; and passed out into the darkness. Then the others passed out in silence one by one; and all the while the child had not opened his pink eyelids or the fire ceased to dance, for the one was too ignorant and the other too full of gaiety to know what great beings had bent over the cradle.

When the crones were gone, the nurse came to her courage again, and hurried to the dun of the High-King, and cried out in the midst of the assembly hall that the Sidhe, whether for good or evil she knew not, had bent over the child that night; and the king and his poets and men of law, and his huntsmen, and his cooks, and his chief warriors went with her to the hut and gathered about the cradle, and were as noisy as magpies, and the child sat up and looked at them.

Two years passed over, and the king died fighting against the Fer Bolg; and the poets and the men of law ruled in the name of the child, but looked to see him become the master himself before long, for no one had seen so wise a child, and tales of his endless questions about the household of the gods and the making of the world went hither and thither among the wicker houses of the poor. Everything had been well but for a miracle that began to trouble all men; and all women, who, indeed, talked of it without ceasing. The feathers of the grey hawk had begun to grow in the child's hair, and though, his nurse cut them continually, in but a little while they would be more numerous than ever. This had not been a matter of great moment, for



miracles were a little thing in those days, but for an ancient law of Eri that none who had any blemish of body could sit upon the throne; and as a grey hawk was a wild thing of the air which had never sat at the board, or listened to the songs of the poets in the light of the fire, it was not possible to think of one in whose hair its feathers grew as other than marred and blasted; nor could the people separate from their admiration of the wisdom that grew in him a horror as at one of unhuman blood. Yet all were resolved that he should reign, for they had suffered much from foolish kings and their own disorders, and moreover they desired to watch out the spectacle of his days; and no one had any other fear but that his great wisdom might bid him obey the law, and call some other, who had but a common mind, to reign in his stead.

When the child was seven years old the poets and the men of law were called together by the chief poet, and all these matters weighed and considered. The child had already seen that those about him had hair only, and, though they had told him that they too had had feathers but had lost them because of a sin committed by their forefathers, they knew that he would learn the truth when he began to wander into the country round about. After much consideration they decreed a new law commanding every one upon pain of death to mingle artificially the feathers of the grey hawk into his hair; and they sent men with nets and slings and bows into the countries round about to gather a sufficiency of feathers. They decreed also that any who told the truth to the child should be flung from a cliff into the sea.

The years passed, and the child grew from childhood into boyhood and from boyhood into manhood, and from being curious about all things he became busy with strange and subtle thoughts which came to him in dreams, and with distinctions between things long held the same and with the resemblance of things long held different. Multitudes came from other lands to see him and to ask his counsel, but there were guards set at the frontiers, who compelled all that came to wear the feathers of the grey hawk in their hair. While they listened to him his words seemed to make all darkness light and filled their hearts like music; but, alas, when they returned to their own lands his words seemed far off, and what they could remember too strange and subtle to help them to live out their hasty days. A number indeed did live differently afterwards, but their new life was less excellent than the old: some among them had long served a good cause, but when they heard him praise it and their labour, they returned to their own lands to find what they had loved less lovable and their arm lighter in the battle, for he had taught them how little

a hair divides the false and true; others, again, who had served no cause, but wrought in peace the welfare of their own households, when he had expounded the meaning of their purpose, found their bones softer and their will less ready for toil, for he had shown them greater purposes; and numbers of the young, when they had heard him upon all these things, remembered certain words that became like a fire in their hearts, and made all kindly joys and traffic between man and man as nothing, and went different ways, but all into vague regret.

When any asked him concerning the common things of life; disputes about the mear of a territory, or about the straying of cattle, or about the penalty of blood; he would turn to those nearest him for advice; but this was held to be from courtesy, for none knew that these matters were hidden from him by thoughts and dreams that filled his mind like the marching and counter-marching of armies. Far less could any know that his heart wandered lost amid throngs of overcoming thoughts and dreams, shuddering at its own consuming solitude.

Among those who came to look at him and to listen to him was the daughter of a little king who lived a great way off; and when he saw her he loved, for she was beautiful, with a strange and pale beauty unlike the women of his land; but Dana, the great mother, had decreed her a heart that was but as the heart of others, and when she considered the mystery of the hawk feathers she was troubled with a great horror. He called her to him when the assembly was over and told her of her beauty, and praised her simply and frankly as though she were a fable of the bards; and he asked her humbly to give him her love, for he was only subtle in his dreams. Overwhelmed with his greatness, she half consented, and yet half refused, for she longed to marry some warrior who could carry her over a mountain in his arms. Day by day the king gave her gifts; cups with ears of gold and findrinny wrought by the craftsmen of distant lands; cloth from over sea, which, though woven with curious figures, seemed to her less beautiful than the bright cloth of her own country; and still she was ever between a smile and a frown; between yielding and withholding. He laid down his wisdom at her feet, and told how the heroes when they die return to the world and begin their labour anew; how the kind and mirthful Men of Dea drove out the huge and gloomy and misshapen People from Under the Sea; and a multitude of things that even the Sidhe have forgotten, either because they happened so long ago or because they have not time to think of them; and still she half refused, and still he hoped, because he could not believe that a beauty so much like wisdom could hide a common heart.

There was a tall young man in the dun who had yellow hair, and was skilled in wrestling and in the training of horses; and one day when the king walked in the orchard, which was between the foss and the forest, he heard his voice among the salley bushes which hid the waters of the foss. "My blossom," it said, "I hate them for making you weave these dingy feathers into your beautiful hair, and all that the bird of prey upon the throne may sleep easy o' nights"; and then the low, musical voice he loved answered: "My hair is not beautiful like yours; and now that I have plucked the feathers out of your hair I will put my hands through it, thus, and thus, and thus; for it casts no shadow of terror and darkness upon my heart." Then the king remembered many things that he had forgotten without understanding them, doubtful words of his poets and his men of law, doubts that he had reasoned away, his own continual solitude; and he called to the lovers in a trembling voice. They came from among the salley bushes and threw themselves at his feet and prayed for pardon, and he stooped down and plucked the feathers out of the hair of the woman and then turned away towards the dun without a word. He strode into the hall of assembly, and having gathered his poets and his men of law about him, stood upon the dais and spoke in a loud, clear voice: "Men of law, why did you make me sin against the laws of Eri? Men of verse, why did you make me sin against the secrecy of wisdom, for law was made by man for the welfare of man, but wisdom the gods have made, and no man shall live by its light, for it and the hail and the rain and the thunder follow a way that is deadly to mortal things? Men of law and men of verse, live according to your kind, and call Eocha of the Hasty Mind to reign over you, for I set out to find my kindred." He then came down among them, and drew out of the hair of first one and then another the feathers of the grey hawk, and, having scattered them over the rushes upon the floor, passed out, and none dared to follow him, for his eyes gleamed like the eyes of the birds of prey; and no man saw him again or heard his voice. Some believed that he found his eternal abode among the demons, and some that he dwelt henceforth with the dark and dreadful goddesses, who sit all night about the pools in the forest watching the constellations rising and setting in those desolate mirrors.



## The Man Who Found the Truth

Leonid Andreyev

### Chapter I

I was twenty-seven years old and had just maintained my thesis for the degree of Doctor of Mathematics with unusual success, when I was suddenly seized in the middle of the night and thrown into this prison. I shall not narrate to you the details of the monstrous crime of which I was accused—there are events which people should neither remember nor even know, that they may not acquire a feeling of aversion for themselves; but no doubt there are many people among the living who remember that terrible case and “the human brute,” as the newspapers called me at that time. They probably remember how the entire civilised society of the land unanimously demanded that the criminal be put to death, and it is due only to the inexplicable kindness of the man at the head of the Government at the time that I am alive, and I now write these lines for the edification of the weak and the wavering.

I shall say briefly: My father, my elder brother, and my sister were murdered brutally, and I was supposed to have committed the crime for the purpose of securing a really enormous inheritance.

I am an old man now; I shall die soon, and you have not the slightest ground for doubting when I say that I was entirely innocent of the monstrous and horrible crime, for which twelve honest and conscientious judges unanimously sentenced me to death. The death sentence was finally commuted to imprisonment for life in solitary confinement.

It was merely a fatal linking of circumstances, of grave and insignificant events, of vague silence and indefinite words, which gave me the appearance and likeness of the criminal, innocent though I was. But he who would suspect me of being ill-disposed toward my strict judges would be profoundly mistaken. They were

perfectly right, perfectly right. As people who can judge things and events only by their appearance, and who are deprived of the ability to penetrate their own mysterious being, they could not act differently, nor should they have acted differently.

It so happened that in the game of circumstances, the truth concerning my actions, which I alone knew, assumed all the features of an insolent and shameless lie; and however strange it may seem to my kind and serious reader, I could establish the truth of my innocence only by falsehood, and not by the truth.

Later on, when I was already in prison, in going over in detail the story of the crime and the trial, and picturing myself in the place of one of my judges, I came to the inevitable conclusion each time that I was guilty. Then I produced a very interesting and instructive work; having set aside entirely the question of truth and falsehood on general principles, I subjected the facts and the words to numerous combinations, erecting structures, even as small children build various structures with their wooden blocks; and after persistent efforts I finally succeeded in finding a certain combination of facts which, though strong in principle, seemed so plausible that my actual innocence became perfectly clear, exactly and positively established.

To this day I remember the great feeling of astonishment, mingled with fear, which I experienced at my strange and unexpected discovery; by telling the truth I lead people into error and thus deceive them, while by maintaining falsehood I lead them, on the contrary, to the truth and to knowledge.

I did not yet understand at that time that, like Newton and his famous apple, I discovered unexpectedly the great law upon which the entire history of human thought rests, which seeks not the truth, but verisimilitude, the appearance of truth—that is, the harmony between that which is seen and that which is conceived, based on the strict laws of logical reasoning. And instead of rejoicing, I exclaimed in an outburst of naive, juvenile despair: “Where, then, is the truth? Where is the truth in this world of phantoms and falsehood?” (See my “Diary of a Prisoner” of June 29, 18—.)

I know that at the present time, when I have but five or six more years to live, I could easily secure my pardon if I but asked for it. But aside from my being accustomed to the prison and for several other important reasons, of which I shall speak later, I simply have no right to ask for pardon, and thus break the force and natural course of the lawful and entirely justified verdict. Nor would I want to hear people apply to me the words, “a victim of judicial error,” as some of my gentle visitors expressed themselves, to my sorrow. I repeat, there was no error, nor could there be any error in a case in which

a combination of definite circumstances inevitably lead a normally constructed and developed mind to the one and only conclusion.

I was convicted justly, although I did not commit the crime—such is the simple and clear truth, and I live joyously and peacefully my last few years on earth with a sense of respect for this truth.

The only purpose by which I was guided in writing these modest notes is to show to my indulgent reader that under the most painful conditions, where it would seem that there remains no room for hope or life—a human being, a being of the highest order, possessing a mind and a will, finds both hope and life. I want to show how a human being, condemned to death, looked with free eyes upon the world, through the grated window of his prison, and discovered the great purpose, harmony, and beauty of the universe—to the disgrace of those fools who, being free, living a life of plenty and happiness, slander life disgustingly.

Some of my visitors reproach me for being “haughty”; they ask me where I secured the right to teach and to preach; cruel in their reasoning, they would like to drive away even the smile from the face of the man who has been imprisoned for life as a murderer.

No. Just as the kind and bright smile will not leave my lips, as an evidence of a clear and unstained conscience, so my soul will never be darkened, my soul, which has passed firmly through the defiles of life, which has been carried by a mighty will power across these terrible abysses and bottomless pits, where so many daring people have found their heroic, but, alas! fruitless, death.

And if the tone of my confessions may sometimes seem too positive to my indulgent reader, it is not at all due to the absence of modesty in me, but it is due to the fact that I firmly believe that I am right, and also to my firm desire to be useful to my neighbor as far as my faint powers permit.

Here I must apologize for my frequent references to my “Diary of a Prisoner,” which is unknown to the reader; but the fact is that I consider the complete publication of my “Diary” too premature and perhaps even dangerous. Begun during the remote period of cruel disillusion, of the shipwreck of all my beliefs and hopes, breathing boundless despair, my note book bears evidence in places that its author was, if not in a state of complete insanity, on the brink of insanity. And if we recall how contagious that illness is, my caution in the use of my “Diary” will become entirely clear.

O, blooming youth! With an involuntary tear in my eye I recall your magnificent dreams, your daring visions and outbursts, your impetuous, seething power—but I should not want your return, blooming youth! Only with the greyness of the hair comes clear

wisdom, and that great aptitude for unprejudiced reflection which makes of all old men philosophers and often even sages.

## Chapter II

Those of my kind visitors who honour me by expressing their delight and even—may this little indiscretion be forgiven me!—even their adoration of my spiritual clearness, can hardly imagine what I was when I came to this prison. The tens of years which have passed over my head and which have whitened my hair cannot muffle the slight agitation which I experience at the recollection of the first moments when, with the creaking of the rusty hinges, the fatal prison doors opened and then closed behind me forever.

Not endowed with literary talent, which in reality is an indomitable inclination to invent and to lie, I shall attempt to introduce myself to my indulgent reader exactly as I was at that remote time.

I was a young man, twenty-seven years of age—as I had occasion to mention before—unrestrained, impetuous, given to abrupt deviations. A certain dreaminess, peculiar to my age; a self-respect which was easily offended and which revolted at the slightest insignificant provocation; a passionate impetuosity in solving world problems; fits of melancholy alternated by equally wild fits of merriment—all this gave the young mathematician a character of extreme unsteadiness, of sad and harsh discord.

I must also mention the extreme pride, a family trait, which I inherited from my mother, and which often hindered me from taking the advice of riper and more experienced people than myself; also my extreme obstinacy in carrying out my purposes, a good quality in itself, which becomes dangerous, however, when the purpose in question is not sufficiently well founded and considered.

Thus, during the first days of my confinement, I behaved like all other fools who are thrown into prison. I shouted loudly and, of course, vainly about my innocence; I demanded violently my immediate freedom and even beat against the door and the walls with my fists. The door and the walls naturally remained mute, while I caused myself a rather sharp pain. I remember I even beat my head against the wall, and for hours I lay unconscious on the stone floor of my cell; and for some time, when I had grown desperate, I refused food, until the persistent demands of my organism defeated my obstinacy.

I cursed my judges and threatened them with merciless vengeance. At last I commenced to regard all human life, the



whole world, even Heaven, as an enormous injustice, a derision and a mockery. Forgetting that in my position I could hardly be unprejudiced, I came with the self-confidence of youth, with the sickly pain of a prisoner, gradually to the complete negation of life and its great meaning.

Those were indeed terrible days and nights, when, crushed by the walls, getting no answer to any of my questions, I paced my cell endlessly and hurled one after another into the dark abyss all the great valuables which life has bestowed upon us: friendship, love, reason and justice

In some justification to myself I may mention the fact that during the first and most painful years of my imprisonment a series of events happened which reflected themselves rather painfully upon my psychic nature. Thus I learned with the profoundest indignation that the girl, whose name I shall not mention and who was to become my wife, married another man. She was one of the few who believed in my innocence; at the last parting she swore to me to remain faithful to me unto death, and rather to die than betray her love for me—and within one year after that she married a man I knew, who possessed certain good qualities, but who was not at all a sensible man. I did not want to understand at that time that such a marriage was natural on the part of a young, healthy, and beautiful girl. But, alas! we all forget our natural science when we are deceived by the woman we love—may this little jest be forgiven me! At the present time Mme. N. is a happy and respected mother, and this proves better than anything else how wise and entirely in accordance with the demands of nature and life was her marriage at that time, which vexed me so painfully.

I must confess, however, that at that time I was not at all calm. Her exceedingly amiable and kind letter in which she notified me of her marriage, expressing profound regret that changed circumstances and a suddenly awakened love compelled her to break her promise to me—that amiable, truthful letter, scented with perfume, bearing the traces of her tender fingers, seemed to me a message from the devil himself.

The letters of fire burned my exhausted brains, and in a wild ecstasy I shook the doors of my cell and called violently:

“Come! Let me look into your lying eyes! Let me hear your lying voice! Let me but touch with my fingers your tender throat and pour into your death rattle my last bitter laugh!”

From this quotation my indulgent reader will see how right were the judges who convicted me for murder; they had really foreseen in me a murderer.

My gloomy view of life at the time was aggravated by several other events. Two years after the marriage of my fiancée, consequently three years after the first day of my imprisonment, my mother died — she died, as I learned, of profound grief for me. However strange it may seem, she remained firmly convinced to the end of her days that I had committed the monstrous crime. Evidently this conviction was an inexhaustible source of grief to her, the chief cause of the gloomy melancholy which fettered her lips in silence and caused her death through paralysis of the heart. As I was told, she never mentioned my name nor the names of those who died so tragically, and she bequeathed the entire enormous fortune, which was supposed to have served as the motive for the murder, to various charitable organizations. It is characteristic that even under such terrible conditions her motherly instinct did not forsake her altogether; in a postscript to the will she left me a considerable sum, which secures my existence whether I am in prison or at large.

Now I understand that, however great her grief may have been, that alone was not enough to cause her death; the real cause was her advanced age and a series of illnesses which had undermined her once strong and sound organism. In the name of justice, I must say that my father, a weak-charactered man, was not at all a model husband and family man; by numerous betrayals, by falsehood and deception he had led my mother to despair, constantly offending her pride and her strict, unbribable truthfulness. But at that time I did not understand it; the death of my mother seemed to me one of the most cruel manifestations of universal injustice, and called forth a new stream of useless and sacrilegious curses.

I do not know whether I ought to tire the attention of the reader with the story of other events of a similar nature. I shall mention but briefly that one after another my friends, who remained my friends from the time when I was happy and free, stopped visiting me. According to their words, they believed in my innocence, and at first warmly expressed to me their sympathy. But our lives, mine in prison and theirs at liberty, were so different that gradually under the pressure of perfectly natural causes, such as forgetfulness, official and other duties, the absence of mutual interests, they visited me ever more and more rarely, and finally ceased to see me entirely. I cannot recall without a smile that even the death of my mother, even the betrayal of the girl I loved did not arouse in me such a hopelessly bitter feeling as these gentlemen, whose names I remember but vaguely now, succeeded in wresting from my soul.

“What horror! What pain! My friends, you have left me alone! My friends, do you understand what you have done? You have left me alone. Can you conceive of leaving a human being alone? Even a

serpent has its mate, even a spider has its comrade—and you have left a human being alone! You have given him a soul—and left him alone! You have given him a heart, a mind, a hand for a handshake, lips for a kiss—and you have left him alone! What shall he do now that you have left him alone?”

Thus I exclaimed in my “Diary of a Prisoner,” tormented by woeful perplexities. In my juvenile blindness, in the pain of my young, senseless heart, I still did not want to understand that the solitude, of which I complained so bitterly, like the mind, was an advantage given to man over other creatures, in order to fence around the sacred mysteries of his soul from the stranger’s gaze.

Let my serious reader consider what would have become of life if man were robbed of his right, of his duty to be alone. In the gathering of idle chatterers, amid the dull collection of transparent glass dolls, that kill each other with their sameness; in the wild city where all doors are open, and all windows are open—passers-by look wearily through the glass walls and observe the same evidences of the hearth and the alcove. Only the creatures that can be alone possess a face; while those that know no solitude—the great, blissful, sacred solitude of the soul—have snouts instead of faces.

And in calling my friends “perfidious traitors” I, poor youth that I was, could not understand the wise law of life, according to which neither friendship, nor love, nor even the tenderest attachment of sister and mother, is eternal. Deceived by the lies of the poets, who proclaimed eternal friendship and love, I did not want to see that which my indulgent reader observes from the windows of his dwelling—how friends, relatives, mother and wife, in apparent despair and in tears, follow their dead to the cemetery, and after a lapse of some time return from there. No one buries himself together with the dead, no one asks the dead to make room in the coffin, and if the grief-stricken wife exclaims, in an outburst of tears, “Oh, bury me together with him!” she is merely expressing symbolically the extreme degree of her despair—one could easily convince himself of this by trying, in jest, to push her down into the grave. And those who restrain her are merely expressing symbolically their sympathy and understanding, thus lending the necessary aspect of solemn grief to the funeral custom.

Man must subject himself to the laws of life, not of death, nor to the fiction of the poets, however beautiful it may be. But can the fictitious be beautiful? Is there no beauty in the stern truth of life, in the mighty work of its wise laws, which subjects to itself with great disinterestedness the movements of the heavenly luminaries, as well as the restless linking of the tiny creatures called human beings?

## Chapter III

Thus I lived sadly in my prison for five or six years. The first redeeming ray flashed upon me when I least expected it.

Endowed with the gift of imagination, I made my former fiancée the object of all my thoughts. She became my love and my dream.

Another circumstance which suddenly revealed to me the ground under my feet was, strange as it may seem, the conviction that it was impossible to make my escape from prison.

During the first period of my imprisonment, I, as a youthful and enthusiastic dreamer, made all kinds of plans for escape, and some of them seemed to me entirely possible of realization. Cherishing deceptive hopes, this thought naturally kept me in a state of tense alarm and hindered my attention from concentrating itself on more important and substantial matters. As soon as I despaired of one plan I created another, but of course I did not make any progress—I merely moved within a closed circle. It is hardly necessary to mention that each transition from one plan to another was accompanied by cruel sufferings, which tormented my soul, just as the eagle tortured the body of Prometheus.

One day, while staring with a weary look at the walls of my cell, I suddenly began to feel how irresistibly thick the stone was, how strong the cement which kept it together, how skillfully and mathematically this severe fortress was constructed. It is true, my first sensation was extremely painful; it was, perhaps, a horror of hopelessness.

I cannot recall what I did and how I felt during the two or three months that followed. The first note in my diary after a long period of silence does not explain very much. Briefly I state only that they made new clothes for me and that I had grown stout.

The fact is that, after all my hopes had been abandoned, the consciousness of the impossibility of my escape once for all extinguished also my painful alarm and liberated my mind, which was then already inclined to lofty contemplation and the joys of mathematics.

But the following is the day I consider as the first real day of my liberation. It was a beautiful spring morning (May 6) and the balmy, invigorating air was pouring into the open window; while walking back and forth in my cell I unconsciously glanced, at each turn, with a vague interest, at the high window, where the iron grate outlined its form sharply and distinctly against the background of the azure, cloudless sky.

“Why is the sky so beautiful through these bars?” I reflected

as I walked. "Is not this the effect of the aesthetic law of contrasts, according to which azure stands out prominently beside black? Or is it not, perhaps, a manifestation of some other, higher law, according to which the infinite may be conceived by the human mind only when it is brought within certain boundaries, for instance, when it is enclosed within a square?"

When I recalled that at the sight of a wide open window, which was not protected by bars, or of the sky, I had usually experienced a desire to fly, which was painful because of its uselessness and absurdity—I suddenly began to experience a feeling of tenderness for the bars; tender gratitude, even love. Forged by hand, by the weak human hand of some ignorant blacksmith, who did not even give himself an account of the profound meaning of his creation; placed in the wall by an equally ignorant mason, it suddenly represented in itself a model of beauty, nobility and power. Having seized the infinite within its iron squares, it became congealed in cold and proud peace, frightening the ignorant, giving food for thought to the intelligent and delighting the sage!

## Chapter IV

**I**n order to make the further narrative clearer to my indulgent reader, I am compelled to say a few words about the exclusive, quite flattering, and, I fear, not entirely deserved, position which I occupy in our prison. On one hand, my spiritual clearness, my rare and perfect view of life, and the nobility of my feelings, which impress all those who speak to me; and, on the other hand, several rather unimportant favours which I have done to the Warden, have given me a series of privileges, of which I avail myself, rather moderately, of course, not desiring to upset the general plan and system of our prison.

Thus, during the weekly visiting days, my visitors are not limited to any special time for their interviews, and all those who wish to see me are admitted, sometimes forming quite a large audience. Not daring to accept altogether the assurances made somewhat ironically by the Warden, to the effect that I would be "the pride of any prison," I may say, nevertheless, without any false modesty, that my words are treated with proper respect, and that among my visitors I number quite a few warm and enthusiastic admirers, both men and women. I shall mention that the Warden himself and some of his assistants honour me by their visits, drawing from me strength and courage for the purpose of continuing their hard work. Of course I use the prison library freely, and even the archives of the prison; and if the Warden politely refused to grant my request for an exact

plan of the prison, it is not at all because of his lack of confidence in me, but because such a plan is a state secret....

Our prison is a huge five-story building. Situated in the outskirts of the city, at the edge of a deserted field, overgrown with high grass, it attracts the attention of the wayfarer by its rigid outlines, promising him peace and rest after his endless wanderings. Not being plastered, the building has retained its natural dark red colour of old brick, and at close view, I am told, it produces a gloomy, even threatening, impression, especially on nervous people, to whom the red bricks recall blood and bloody lumps of human flesh. The small, dark, flat windows with iron bars naturally complete the impression and lend to the whole a character of gloomy harmony, or stern beauty. Even during good weather, when the sun shines upon our prison, it does not lose any of its dark and grim importance, and is constantly reminding the people that there are laws in existence and that punishment awaits those who break them.

My cell is on the fifth story, and my grated window commands a splendid view of the distant city and a part of the deserted field to the right. On the left, beyond the boundary of my vision, are the outskirts of the city, and, as I am told, the church and the cemetery adjoining it. Of the existence of the church and even the cemetery I had known before from the mournful tolling of the bells, which custom requires during the burial of the dead.

Quite in keeping with the external style of architecture, the interior arrangement of our prison is also finished harmoniously and properly constructed. For the purpose of conveying to the reader a clearer idea of the prison, I will take the liberty of giving the example of a fool who might make up his mind to run away from our prison. Admitting that the brave fellow possessed supernatural, Herculean strength and broke the lock of his room—what would he find? The corridor, with numerous grated doors, which could withstand cannonading—and armed keepers. Let us suppose that he kills all the keepers, breaks all the doors, and comes out into the yard—perhaps he may think that he is already free. But what of the walls? The walls which encircle our prison, with three rings of stone?

I omitted the guard advisedly. The guard is indefatigable. Day and night I hear behind my doors the footsteps of the guard; day and night his eye watches me through the little window in my door, controlling my movements, reading on my face my thoughts, my intentions and my dreams. In the daytime I could deceive his attention with lies, assuming a cheerful and carefree expression on my face, but I have rarely met the man who could lie even in his sleep. No matter how much I would be on my guard during the day, at night



I would betray myself by an involuntary moan, by a twitch of the face, by an expression of fatigue or grief, or by other manifestations of a guilty and uneasy conscience. Only very few people of unusual will power are able to lie even in their sleep, skillfully managing the features of their faces, sometimes even preserving a courteous and bright smile on their lips, when their souls, given over to dreams, are quivering from the horrors of a monstrous nightmare—but, as exceptions, these cannot be taken into consideration. I am profoundly happy that I am not a criminal, that my conscience is clear and calm.

“Read, my friend, read,” I say to the watchful eye as I lay myself down to sleep peacefully. “You will not be able to read anything on my face!”

And it was I who invented the window in the prison door.

I feel that my reader is astonished and smiles incredulously, mentally calling me an old liar, but there are instances in which modesty is superfluous and even dangerous. Yes, this simple and great invention belongs to me, just as Newton’s system belongs to Newton, and as Kepler’s laws of the revolution of the planets belong to Kepler.

Later on, encouraged by the success of my invention, I devised and introduced in our prison a series of little innovations, which were concerned only with details; thus the form of chains and locks used in our prison has been changed.

The little window in the door was my invention, and, if any one should dare deny this, I would call him a liar and a scoundrel.

I came upon this invention under the following circumstances: One day, during the roll call, a certain prisoner killed with the iron leg of his bed the Inspector who entered his cell. Of course the rascal was hanged in the yard of our prison, and the administration light mindedly grew calm, but I was in despair—the great purpose of the prison proved to be wrong since such horrible deeds were possible. How is it that no one had noticed that the prisoner had broken off the leg of his bed? How is it that no one had noticed the state of agitation in which the prisoner must have been before committing the murder?

By taking up the question so directly I thus approached considerably the solution of the problem; and indeed, after two or three weeks had elapsed I arrived simply and even unexpectedly at my great discovery. I confess frankly that before telling my discovery to the Warden of the prison I experienced moments of a certain hesitation, which was quite natural in my position of prisoner. To the reader who may still be surprised at this hesitation, knowing me to be a man of a clear, unstained conscience, I will answer by a

quotation from my "Diary of a Prisoner," relating to that period:

"How difficult is the position of the man who is convicted, though innocent, as I am. If he is sad, if his lips are sealed in silence, and his eyes are lowered, people say of him: 'He is repenting; he is suffering from pangs of conscience.'

"If in the innocence of his heart he smiles brightly and kindly, the keeper thinks: 'There, by a false and feigned smile, he wishes to hide his secret.'

"No matter what he does, he seems guilty—such is the force of the prejudice against which it is necessary to struggle. But I am innocent, and I shall be myself, firmly confident that my spiritual clearness will destroy the malicious magic of prejudice."

And on the following day the Warden of the prison pressed my hand warmly, expressing his gratitude to me, and a month later little holes were made in all doors in every prison in the land, thus opening a field for wide and fruitful observation.

The entire system of our prison life gives me deep satisfaction. The hours for rising and going to bed, for meals and walks are arranged so rationally, in accordance with the real requirements of nature, that soon they lose the appearance of compulsion and become natural, even dear habits. Only in this way can I explain the interesting fact that when I was free I was a nervous and weak young man, susceptible to colds and illness, whereas in prison I have grown considerably stronger and that for my sixty years I am enjoying an enviable state of health. I am not stout, but I am not thin, either; my lungs are in good condition and I have saved almost all my teeth, with the exception of two on the left side of the jaw; I am good natured, even tempered; my sleep is sound, almost without any dreams. In figure, in which an expression of calm power and self-confidence predominates, and in face, I resemble somewhat Michelangelo's "Moses"—that is, at least what some of my friendly visitors have told me.

But even more than by the regular and healthy regime, the strengthening of my soul and body was helped by the wonderful, yet natural, peculiarity of our prison, which eliminates entirely the accidental and the unexpected from its life. Having neither a family nor friends, I am perfectly safe from the shocks, so injurious to life, which are caused by treachery, by the illness or death of relatives—let my indulgent reader recall how many people have perished before his eyes not of their own fault, but because capricious fate had linked them to people unworthy of them. Without changing my feeling of love into trivial personal attachments, I thus make it free for the broad and mighty love for all mankind; and as mankind is



immortal, not subjected to illness, and as a harmonious whole it is undoubtedly progressing toward perfection, love for it becomes the surest guarantee of spiritual and physical soundness.

My day is clear. So are also my days of the future, which are coming toward me in radiant and even order. A murderer will not break into my cell for the purpose of robbing me, a mad automobile will not crush me, the illness of a child will not torture me, cruel treachery will not steal its way to me from the darkness. My mind is free, my heart is calm, my soul is clear and bright.

The clear and rigid rules of our prison define everything that I must not do, thus freeing me from those unbearable hesitations, doubts, and errors with which practical life is filled. True, sometimes there penetrates even into our prison, through its high walls, something which ignorant people call chance, or even Fate, and which is only an inevitable reflection of the general laws; but the life of the prison, agitated for a moment, quickly goes back to its habitual rut, like a river after an overflow. To this category of accidents belong the above-mentioned murder of the Inspector, the rare and always unsuccessful attempts at escape, and also the executions, which take place in one of the remotest yards of our prison.

There is still another peculiarity in the system of our prison, which I consider most beneficial, and which gives to the whole thing a character of stern and noble justice. Left to himself, and only to himself, the prisoner cannot count upon support, or upon that spurious, wretched pity which so often falls to the lot of weak people, disfiguring thereby the fundamental purposes of nature.

I confess that I think, with a certain sense of pride, that if I am now enjoying general respect and admiration, if my mind is strong, my will powerful, my view of life clear and bright, I owe it only to myself, to my power and my perseverance. How many weak people would have perished in my place as victims of madness, despair, or grief? But I have conquered everything! I have changed the world. I gave to my soul the form which my mind desired. In the desert, working alone, exhausted with fatigue, I have erected a stately structure in which I now live joyously and calmly, like a king. Destroy it—and to-morrow I shall begin to build a new structure, and in my bloody sweat I shall erect it! For I must live!

Forgive my involuntary pathos in the last lines, which is so unbecoming to my balanced and calm nature. But it is hard to restrain myself when I recall the road I have travelled. I hope, however, that in the future I shall not darken the mood of my reader with any outbursts of agitated feelings. Only he shouts who is not confident of the truth of his words; calm firmness and cold simplicity are

becoming to the truth.

P.S.—I do not remember whether I told you that the criminal who murdered my father has not been found as yet.

## Chapter V

Deviating from time to time from the calm form of a historical narrative I must pause on current events. Thus I will permit myself to acquaint my readers in a few lines with a rather interesting specimen of the human species which I have found accidentally in our prison.

One afternoon a few days ago the Warden came to me for the usual chat, and among other things told me there was a very unfortunate man in prison at the time upon whom I could exert a beneficent influence. I expressed my willingness in the most cordial manner, and for several days in succession I have had long discussions with the artist K., by permission of the Warden. The spirit of hostility, even of obstinacy, with which, to my regret, he met me at his first visit, has now disappeared entirely under the influence of my discussion. Listening willingly and with interest to my ever pacifying words he gradually told me his rather unusual story after a series of persistent questions.

He is a man of about twenty-six or twenty-eight, of pleasant appearance, and rather good manners, which show that he is a well-bred man. A certain quite natural unrestraint in his speech, a passionate vehemence with which he talks about himself, occasionally a bitter, even ironical laughter, followed by painful pensiveness, from which it is difficult to arouse him even by a touch of the hand — these complete the make-up of my new acquaintance. Personally to me he is not particularly sympathetic, and however strange it may seem I am especially annoyed by his disgusting habit of constantly moving his thin, emaciated fingers and clutching helplessly the hand of the person with whom he speaks.

K. told me very little of his past life.

"Well, what is there to tell? I was an artist, that's all," he repeated, with a sorrowful grimace, and refused to talk about the "immoral act" for which he was condemned to solitary confinement.

"I don't want to corrupt you, grandpa—live honestly," he would jest in a somewhat unbecoming familiar tone, which I tolerated simply because I wished to please the Warden of the prison, having learned from the prisoner the real cause of his sufferings, which sometimes assumed an acute form of violence and threats. During one of these painful minutes, when K.'s will power was weak, as a result of insomnia, from which he was suffering, I seated myself on

his bed and treated him in general with fatherly kindness, and he blurted out everything to me right there and then.

Not desiring to tire the reader with an exact reproduction of his hysterical outbursts, his laughter and his tears, I shall give only the facts of his story.

K.'s grief, at first not quite clear to me, consists of the fact that instead of paper or canvas for his drawings he was given a large slate and a slate pencil. (By the way, the art with which he mastered the material, which was new to him, is remarkable. I have seen some of his productions, and it seems to me that they could satisfy the taste of the most fastidious expert of graphic arts. Personally I am indifferent to the art of painting, preferring live and truthful nature.) Thus, owing to the nature of the material, before commencing a new picture, K. had to destroy the previous one by wiping it off his slate, and this seemed to lead him every time to the verge of madness.

"You cannot imagine what it means," he would say, clutching my hands with his thin, clinging fingers. "While I draw, you know, I forget entirely that it is useless; I am usually very cheerful and I even whistle some tune, and once I was even incarcerated for that, as it is forbidden to whistle in this cursed prison. But that is a trifle—for I had at least a good sleep there. But when I finish my picture—no, even when I approach the end of the picture, I am seized with a sensation so terrible that I feel like tearing the brain from my head and trampling it with my feet. Do you understand me?"

"I understand you, my friend, I understand you perfectly, and I sympathise with you."

"Really? Well, then, listen, old man. I make the last strokes with so much pain, with such a sense of sorrow and hopelessness, as though I were bidding good-bye to the person I loved best of all. But here I have finished it. Do you understand what it means? It means that it has assumed life, that it lives, that there is a certain mysterious spirit in it. And yet it is already doomed to death, it is dead already, dead like a herring. Can you understand it at all? I do not understand it. And, now, imagine, I—fool that I am—I nevertheless rejoice, I cry and rejoice. No, I think, this picture I shall not destroy; it is so good that I shall not destroy it. Let it live. And it is a fact that at such times I do not feel like drawing anything new, I have not the slightest desire for it. And yet it is dreadful. Do you understand me?"

"Perfectly, my friend. No doubt the drawing ceases to please you on the following day—"

"Oh, what nonsense you are prating, old man! (That is exactly what he said. "Nonsense.") How can a dying child cease to please you? Of course, if he lived, he might have become a scoundrel, but

when he is dying— No, old man, that isn't it. For I am killing it myself. I do not sleep all night long, I jump up, I look at it, and I love it so dearly that I feel like stealing it. Stealing it from whom? What do I know? But when morning sets in I feel that I cannot do without it, that I must take up that cursed pencil again and create anew. What a mockery! To create! What am I, a galley slave?"

"My friend, you are in a prison."

"My dear old man! When I begin to steal over to the slate with the sponge in my hand I feel like a murderer. It happens that I go around it for a day or two. Do you know, one day I bit off a finger of my right hand so as not to draw any more, but that, of course, was only a trifle, for I started to learn drawing with my left hand. What is this necessity for creating! To create by all means, create for suffering—create with the knowledge that it will all perish! Do you understand it?"

"Finish it, my friend, don't be agitated; then I will expound to you my views."

Unfortunately, my advice hardly reached the ears of K. In one of those paroxysms of despair, which frighten the Warden of our prison, K. began to throw himself about in his bed, tear his clothes, shout and sob, manifesting in general all the symptoms of extreme mortification. I looked at the sufferings of the unfortunate youth with deep emotion (compared with me he was a youth), vainly endeavouring to hold his fingers which were tearing his clothes. I knew that for this breach of discipline new incarceration awaited him.

"O, impetuous youth," I thought when he had grown somewhat calmer, and I was tenderly unfolding his fine hair which had become entangled, "how easily you fall into despair! A bit of drawing, which may in the end fall into the hands of a dealer in old rags, or a dealer in old bronze and cemented porcelain, can cause you so much suffering!" But, of course, I did not tell this to my youthful friend, striving, as any one should under similar circumstances, not to irritate him by unnecessary contradictions.

"Thank you, old man," said K., apparently calm now. "To tell the truth you seemed very strange to me at first; your face is so venerable, but your eyes. Have you murdered anybody, old man?"

I deliberately quote the malicious and careless phrase to show how in the eyes of light-minded and shallow people the stamp of a terrible accusation is transformed into the stamp of the crime itself. Controlling my feeling of bitterness, I remarked calmly to the impertinent youth:

"You are an artist, my child; to you are known the mysteries of

the human face, that flexible, mobile and deceptive masque, which, like the sea, reflects the hurrying clouds and the azure ether. Being green, the sea turns blue under the clear sky and black when the sky is black, when the heavy clouds are dark. What do you want of my face, over which hangs an accusation of the most cruel crime?"

But, occupied with his own thoughts, the artist apparently paid no particular attention to my words and continued in a broken voice:

"What am I to do? You saw my drawing. I destroyed it, and it is already a whole week since I touched my pencil. Of course," he resumed thoughtfully, rubbing his brow, "it would be better to break the slate; to punish me they would not give me another one—"

"You had better return it to the authorities."

"Very well, I may hold out another week, but what then? I know myself. Even now that devil is pushing my hand: "Take the pencil, take the pencil.'"

At that moment, as my eyes wandered distractedly over his cell, I suddenly noticed that some of the artist's clothes hanging on the wall were unnaturally stretched, and one end was skillfully fastened by the back of the cot. Assuming an air that I was tired and that I wanted to walk about in the cell, I staggered as from a quiver of senility in my legs, and pushed the clothes aside. The entire wall was covered with drawings!

The artist had already leaped from his cot, and thus we stood facing each other in silence. I said in a tone of gentle reproach:

"How did you allow yourself to do this, my friend? You know the rules of the prison, according to which no inscriptions or drawing on the walls are permissible?"

"I know no rules," said K. morosely.

"And then," I continued, sternly this time, "you lied to me, my friend. You said that you did not take the pencil into your hands for a whole week."

"Of course I didn't," said the artist, with a strange smile, and even a challenge. Even when caught red-handed, he did not betray any signs of repentance, and looked rather sarcastic than guilty. Having examined more closely the drawings on the wall, which represented human figures in various positions, I became interested in the strange reddish-yellow color of an unknown pencil.

"Is this iodine? You told me that you had a pain and that you secured iodine."

"No. It is blood."

"Blood?"

"Yes."

I must say frankly that I even liked him at that moment.

"How did you get it?"

"From my hand."

"From your hand? But how did you manage to hide yourself from the eye that is watching you?"

He smiled cunningly, and even winked.

"Don't you know that you can always deceive if only you want to do it?"

My sympathies for him were immediately dispersed. I saw before me a man who was not particularly clever, but in all probability terribly spoiled already, who did not even admit the thought that there are people who simply cannot lie. Recalling, however, the promise I had made to the Warden, I assumed a calm air of dignity and said to him tenderly, as only a mother could speak to her child:

"Don't be surprised and don't condemn me for being so strict, my friend. I am an old man. I have passed half of my life in this prison; I have formed certain habits, like all old people, and submitting to all rules myself, I am perhaps overdoing it somewhat in demanding the same of others. You will of course wipe off these drawings yourself—although I feel sorry for them, for I admire them sincerely—and I will not say anything to the administration. We will forget all this, as if nothing had happened. Are you satisfied?"

He answered drowsily:

"Very well."

"In our prison, where we have the sad pleasure of being confined, everything is arranged in accordance with a most purposeful plan and is most strictly subjected to laws and rules. And the very strict order, on account of which the existence of your creations is so short lived, and, I may say, ephemeral, is full of the profoundest wisdom. Allowing you to perfect yourself in your art, it wisely guards other people against the perhaps injurious influence of your productions, and in any case it completes logically, finishes, enforces, and makes clear the meaning of your solitary confinement. What does solitary confinement in our prison mean? It means that the prisoner should be alone. But would he be alone if by his productions he would communicate in some way or other with other people outside?"

By the expression of K.'s face I noticed with a sense of profound joy that my words had produced on him the proper impression, bringing him back from the realm of poetic inventions to the land of stern but beautiful reality. And, raising my voice, I continued:

"As for the rule you have broken, which forbids any inscription or drawing on the walls of our prison, it is not less logical. Years will pass; in your place there may be another prisoner like you—and he may see that which you have drawn. Shall this be tolerated?"

Just think of it! And what would become of the walls of our prison if every one who wished it were to leave upon them his profane marks?"

"To the devil with it!"

This is exactly how K. expressed himself. He said it loudly, even with an air of calmness.

"What do you mean to say by this, my youthful friend?"

"I wish to say that you may perish here, my old friend, but I shall leave this place."

"You can't escape from our prison," I retorted, sternly.

"Have you tried?"

"Yes, I have tried."

He looked at me incredulously and smiled. He smiled!

"You are a coward, old man. You are simply a miserable coward."

I—a coward! Oh, if that self-satisfied puppy knew what a tempest of rage he had aroused in my soul he would have squealed for fright and would have hidden himself on the bed. I—a coward! The world has crumbled upon my head, but has not crushed me, and out of its terrible fragments I have created a new world, according to my own design and plan; all the evil forces of life—solitude, imprisonment, treachery, and falsehood—all have taken up arms against me, but I have subjected them all to my will. And I who have subjected to myself even my dreams—I am a coward?

But I shall not tire the attention of my indulgent reader with these lyrical deviations, which have no bearing on the matter. I continue.

After a pause, broken only by K.'s loud breathing, I said to him sadly:

"I—a coward! And you say this to the man who came with the sole aim of helping you? Of helping you not only in word but also in deed?"

"You wish to help me? In what way?"

"I will get you paper and pencil."

The artist was silent. And his voice was soft and timid when he asked, hesitatingly:

"And—my drawings—will remain?"

"Yes; they will remain."

It is hard to describe the vehement delight into which the exalted young man was thrown; naive and pure-hearted youth knows no bounds either in grief or in joy. He pressed my hand warmly, shook me, disturbing my old bones; he called me friend, father, even "dear old phiz" (!) and a thousand other endearing and somewhat naive names. To my regret our conversation lasted too long, and, notwithstanding the entreaties of the young man, who would not



part with me, I hurried away to my cell.

I did not go to the Warden of the prison, as I felt somewhat agitated. At that remote time I paced my cell until late in the night, striving to understand what means of escaping from our prison that rather foolish young man could have discovered. Was it possible to run away from our prison? No, I could not admit and I must not admit it. And gradually conjuring up in my memory everything I knew about our prison, I understood that K. must have hit upon an old plan, which I had long discarded, and that he would convince himself of its impracticability even as I convinced myself. It is impossible to escape from our prison.

But, tormented by doubts, I measured my lonely cell for a long time, thinking of various plans that might relieve K.'s position and thus divert him from the idea of making his escape. He must not run away from our prison under any circumstances. Then I gave myself to peaceful and sound sleep, with which benevolent nature has rewarded those who have a clear conscience and a pure soul.

By the way, lest I forget, I shall mention the fact that I destroyed my "Diary of a Prisoner" that night. I had long wished to do it, but the natural pity and faint-hearted love which we feel for our blunders and our shortcomings restrained me; besides, there was nothing in my "Diary" that could have compromised me in any way. And if I have destroyed it now it is due solely to my desire to throw my past into oblivion and to save my reader from the tediousness of long complaints and moans, from the horror of sacrilegious cursings. May it rest in peace!

## Chapter VI

**H**aving conveyed to the Warden of our prison the contents of my conversation with K., I asked him not to punish the young man for spoiling the walls, which would thus betray me, and I, to save the youth, suggested the following plan, which was accepted by the Warden after a few purely formal objections.

"It is important for him," I said, "that his drawings should be preserved, but it is apparently immaterial to him in whose possession these drawings are. Let him, then, avail himself of his art, paint your portrait, Mr. Warden, and after that the portraits of the entire staff of your officials. To say nothing of the honour you would show him by this condescension—an honour which he will surely know how to appreciate—the painting may be useful to you as a very original ornament in your drawing room or study. Besides, nothing will prevent us from destroying the drawings if we should not care for



them, for the naive and somewhat selfish young man apparently does not even admit the thought that anybody's hand would destroy his productions."

Smiling, the Warden suggested, with a politeness that flattered me extremely, that the series of portraits should commence with mine. I quote word for word that which the Warden said to me:

"Your face actually calls for reproduction on canvas. We shall hang your portrait in the office."

The zeal of creativeness—these are the only words I can apply to the passionate, silent agitation in which K. reproduced my features. Usually talkative, he now maintained silence for hours, leaving unanswered my jests and remarks.

"Be silent, old man, be silent—you are at your best when you are silent," he repeated persistently, calling forth an involuntary smile by his zeal as a professional.

My portrait would remind you, my indulgent reader, of that mysterious peculiarity of artists, according to which they very often transmit their own feelings, even their external features, to the subject upon which they are working. Thus, reproducing with remarkable likeness, the lower part of my face, where kindness and the expression of authoritativeness and calm dignity are so harmoniously blended, K. undoubtedly introduced into my eyes his own suffering and even his horror. Their fixed, immobile gaze; madness glimmering somewhere in their depth; the painful eloquence of a deep and infinitely lonely soul—all that was not mine.

"Is this I?" I exclaimed, laughing, when from the canvas this terrible face, full of wild contradictions, stared at me. "My friend, I do not congratulate you on this portrait. I do not think it is successful."

"It is you, old man, you! It is well drawn. You criticise it wrongly. Where will you hang it?"

He grew talkative again like a magpie, that amiable young man, and all because his wretched painting was to be preserved for some time. O impetuous, O happy youth! Here I could not restrain myself from a little jest for the purpose of teaching a lesson to the self-confident youngster, so I asked him, with a smile:

"Well, Mr. Artist, what do you think? Am I murderer or not?"

The artist, closing one eye, examined me and the portrait critically. Then whistling a polka, he answered recklessly: "The devil knows you, old man!"

I smiled. K. understood my jest at last, burst out laughing and then said with sudden seriousness:

"You are speaking of the human face but do you know that there is nothing worse in the world than the human face? Even when it

tells the truth, when it shouts about the truth, it lies, it lies, old man, for it speaks its own language. Do you know, old man, a terrible incident happened to me? It was in one of the picture galleries in Spain. I was examining a portrait of Christ, when suddenly—Christ, you understand, Christ—great eyes, dark, terrible suffering, sorrow, grief, love—well, in a word—Christ. Suddenly I was struck with something; suddenly it seemed to me that it was the face of the greatest wrongdoer, tormented by the greatest unheard-of woes of repentance— Old man, why do you look at me so! Old man!”

Nearing my eyes to the very face of the artist, I asked him in a cautious whisper, as the occasion required, dividing each word from the other:

“Don’t you think that when the devil tempted Him in the desert He did not renounce him, as He said later, but consented, sold Himself—that He did not renounce the devil, but sold Himself. Do you understand? Does not that passage in the Gospels seem doubtful to you?”

Extreme fright was expressed on the face of my young friend. Forcing the palms of his hands against my chest, as if to push me away, he ejaculated in a voice so low that I could hardly hear his indistinct words:

“What? You say Jesus sold Himself? What for?”

I explained softly:

“That the people, my child, that the people should believe Him.”

“Well?”

I smiled. K.’s eyes became round, as if a noose was strangling him. Suddenly, with that lack of respect for old age which was one of his characteristics, he threw me down on the bed with a sharp thrust and jumped away into a corner. When I was slowly getting up from the awkward position into which the unrestraint of that young man had forced me—I fell backward, with my head between the pillow and the back of the bed—he cried to me loudly:

“Don’t you dare! Don’t you dare get up, you Devil.”

But I did not think of rising to my feet. I simply sat down on the bed, and, thus seated, with an involuntary smile at the passionate outburst of the youth, I shook my head good naturedly and laughed.

“Oh, young man, young man! You yourself have drawn me into this theological conversation.”

But he stared at me stubbornly, wide eyed, and kept repeating:

“Sit there, sit there! I did not say this. No, no!”

“You said it, you, young man—you. Do you remember Spain, the picture gallery! You said it and now you deny it, mocking my clumsy old age. Oh!”

K. suddenly lowered his hands and admitted in a low voice:

"Yes. I said it. But you, old man—"

I do not remember what he said after that—it is so hard to recall all the childish chatter of this kind, but unfortunately too light-minded young man. I remember only that we parted as friends, and he pressed my hand warmly, expressing to me his sincere gratitude, even calling me, so far as I can remember, his "saviour."

By the way, I succeeded in convincing the Warden that the portrait of even such a man as I, after all a prisoner, was out of place in such a solemn official room as the office of our prison. And now the portrait hangs on the wall of my cell, pleasantly breaking the cold monotony of the pure white walls.

Leaving for a time our artist, who is now carried away by the portrait of the Warden, I shall continue my story.

## Chapter VII

**M**y spiritual clearness, as I had the pleasure of informing the reader before, has built up for me a considerable circle of men and women admirers. With self-evident emotion I shall tell of the pleasant hours of our hearty conversations, which I modestly call "My talks."

It is difficult for me to explain how I deserved it, but the majority of those who come to me regard me with a feeling of the profoundest respect, even adoration, and only a few come for the purpose of arguing with me, but these arguments are usually of a moderate and proper character. I usually seat myself in the middle of the room, in a soft and deep armchair, which is furnished me for this occasion by the Warden; my hearers surround me closely, and some of them, the more enthusiastic youths and maidens, seat themselves at my feet.

Having before me an audience more than half of which is composed of women, and entirely disposed in my favour, I always appeal not so much to the mind as to the sensitive and truthful heart. Fortunately I possess a certain oratorical power, and the customary effects of the oratorical art, to which all preachers, beginning in all probability with Mohammed, have resorted, and which I can handle rather cleverly, allow me to influence my hearers in the desired direction. It is easily understood that to the dear ladies in my audience I am not so much the sage, who has solved the mystery of the iron grate, as a great martyr of a righteous cause, which they do not quite understand. Shunning abstract discussions, they eagerly hang on every word of compassion and kindness, and respond with the same. Allowing them to love me and to believe in my immutable knowledge of life, I afford them the happy opportunity to depart at

least for a time from the coldness of life, from its painful doubts and questions.

I say openly without any false modesty, which I despise even as I despise hypocrisy, there were lectures at which I myself being in a state of exaltation, called forth in my audience, especially in my nervous lady visitors, a mood of intense agitation, which turned into hysterical laughter and tears. Of course I am not a prophet; I am merely a modest thinker, but no one would succeed in convincing my lady admirers that there is no prophetic meaning and significance in my speeches.

I remember one such lecture which took place two months ago. The night before I could not sleep as soundly as I usually slept; perhaps it was simply because of the full moon, which affects sleep, disturbing and interrupting it. I vaguely remember the strange sensation which I experienced when the pale crescent of the moon appeared in my window and the iron squares cut it with ominous black lines into small silver squares....

When I started for the lecture I felt exhausted and rather inclined to silence than to conversation; the vision of the night before disturbed me. But when I saw those dear faces, those eyes full of hope and ardent entreaty for friendly advice; when I saw before me that rich field, already ploughed, waiting only for the good seed to be sown, my heart began to burn with delight, pity and love. Avoiding the customary formalities which accompany the meetings of people, declining the hands outstretched to greet me, I turned to the audience, which was agitated at the very sight of me, and gave them my blessing with a gesture to which I know how to lend a peculiar majesty.

"Come unto me," I exclaimed; "come unto me; you who have gone away from that life. Here, in this quiet abode, under the sacred protection of the iron grate, at my heart overflowing with love, you will find rest and comfort. My beloved children, give me your sad soul, exhausted from suffering, and I shall clothe it with light. I shall carry it to those blissful lands where the sun of eternal truth and love never sets."

Many had begun to cry already, but, as it was too early for tears, I interrupted them with a gesture of fatherly impatience, and continued:

"You, dear girl, who came from the world which calls itself free— what gloomy shadows lie on your charming and beautiful face! And you, my daring youth, why are you so pale? Why do I see, instead of the ecstasy of victory, the fear of defeat in your lowered eyes? And you, honest mother, tell me, what wind has made your

eyes so red? What furious rain has lashed your wizened face? What snow has whitened your hair, for it used to be dark?"

But the weeping and the sobs drowned the end of my speech, and besides, I admit it without feeling ashamed of it, I myself brushed away more than one treacherous tear from my eyes. Without allowing the agitation to subside completely, I called in a voice of stern and truthful reproach:

"Do not weep because your soul is dark, stricken with misfortunes, blinded by chaos, clipped of its wings by doubts; give it to me and I shall direct it toward the light, toward order and reason. I know the truth. I have conceived the world! I have discovered the great principle of its purpose! I have solved the sacred formula of the iron grate! I demand of you—swear to me by the cold iron of its squares that henceforth you will confess to me without shame or fear all your deeds, your errors and doubts, all the secret thoughts of your soul and the dreams and desires of your body!"

"We swear! We swear! We swear! Save us! Reveal to us the truth! Take our sins upon yourself! Save us! Save us!" numerous exclamations resounded.

I must mention the sad incident which occurred during that same lecture. At the moment when the excitement reached its height and the hearts had already opened, ready to unburden themselves, a certain youth, looking morose and embittered, exclaimed loudly, evidently addressing himself to me:

"Liar! Do not listen to him. He is lying!"

The indulgent reader will easily believe that it was only by a great effort that I succeeded in saving the incautious youth from the fury of the audience. Offended in that which is most precious to a human being, his faith in goodness and the divine purpose of life, my women admirers rushed upon the foolish youth in a mob and would have beaten him cruelly. Remembering, however, that there was more joy to the pastor in one sinner who repents than in ten righteous men, I took the young man aside where no one could hear us, and entered into a brief conversation with him.

"Did you call me a liar, my child?"

Moved by my kindness, the poor young man became confused and answered hesitatingly:

"Pardon me for my harshness, but it seems to me that you are not telling the truth."

"I understand you, my friend. You must have been agitated by the intense ecstasy of the women, and you, as a sensible man, not inclined to mysticism, suspected me of fraud, of a hideous fraud. No, no, don't excuse yourself. I understand you. But I wish you would

understand me. Out of the mire of superstitions, out of the deep gulf of prejudices and unfounded beliefs, I want to lead their strayed thoughts and place them upon the solid foundation of strictly logical reasoning. The iron grate, which I mentioned, is not a mystical sign; it is only a formula, a simple, sober, honest, mathematical formula. To you, as a sensible man, I will willingly explain this formula. The grate is the scheme in which are placed all the laws guiding the universe, which do away with chaos, substituting in its place strict, iron, inviolable order, forgotten by mankind. As a brightminded man you will easily understand—"

"Pardon me. I did not understand you, and if you will permit me I— But why do you make them swear?"

"My friend, the soul of man, believing itself free and constantly suffering from this spurious freedom, is demanding fetters for itself—to some these fetters are an oath, to others a vow, to still others simply a word of honour. You will give me your word of honour, will you not?"

"I will."

"And by this you are simply striving to enter the harmony of the world, where everything is subjected to a law. Is not the falling of a stone the fulfilment of a vow, of the vow called the law of gravitation?"

I shall not go into detail about this conversation and the others that followed. The obstinate and unrestrained youth, who had insulted me by calling me liar, became one of my warmest adherents.

I must return to the others. During the time that I talked with the young man, the desire for penitence among my charming proselytes reached its height. Not patient enough to wait for me, they commenced in a state of intense ecstasy to confess to one another, giving to the room an appearance of a garden where dozens of birds of paradise were twittering at the same time. When I returned, each of them separately unfolded her agitated soul to me....

I saw how, from day to day, from hour to hour, terrible chaos was struggling in their souls with an eager inclination for harmony and order; how in the bloody struggle between eternal falsehood and immortal truth, falsehood, through inconceivable ways, passed into truth, and truth became falsehood. I found in the human soul all the forces in the world, and none of them was dormant, and in the mad whirlpool each soul became like a fountain, whose source is the abyss of the sea and whose summit the sky. And every human being, as I have learned and seen, is like the rich and powerful master who gave a masquerade ball at his castle and illuminated it with many lights; and strange masks came from everywhere and the master greeted

them, bowing courteously, and vainly asking them who they were; and new, ever stranger, ever more terrible, masks were arriving, and the master bowed to them ever more courteously, staggering from fatigue and fear. And they were laughing and whispering strange words about the eternal chaos, whence they came, obeying the call of the master. And lights were burning in the castle—and in the distance lighted windows were visible, reminding him of the festival, and the exhausted master kept bowing ever lower, ever more courteously, ever more cheerfully. My indulgent reader will easily understand that in addition to a certain sense of fear which I experienced, the greatest delight and even joyous emotion soon came upon me—for I saw that eternal chaos was defeated and the triumphant hymn of bright harmony was rising to the skies....

Not without a sense of pride I shall mention the modest offerings by which my kind admirers were striving to express to me their feelings of love and adoration. I am not afraid of calling out a smile on the lips of my readers, for I feel how comical it is—I will say that among the offerings brought me at first were fruit, cakes, all kinds of sweet-meats. But I am afraid, however, that no one will believe me when I say that I have actually declined these offerings, preferring the observance of the prison regime in all its rigidity.

At the last lecture, a kind and honourable lady brought me a basketful of live flowers. To my regret, I was compelled to decline this present, too.

"Forgive me, madam, but flowers do not enter into the system of our prison. I appreciate very much your magnanimous attention—I kiss your hands, madam—" I said, "but I am compelled to decline the flowers. Travelling along the thorny road to self-renunciation, I must not caress my eyes with the ephemeral and illusionary beauty of these charming lilies and roses. All flowers perish in our prison, madam."

Yesterday another lady brought me a very valuable crucifix of ivory, a family heirloom, she said. Not afflicted with the sin of hypocrisy, I told my generous lady frankly that I do not believe in miracles.

"But at the same time," I said, "I regard with the profoundest respect Him who is justly called the Saviour of the world, and I honour greatly His services to mankind.

"If I should tell you, madam, that the Gospel has long been my favorite book, that there is not a day in my life that I do not open this great Book, drawing from it strength and courage to be able to continue my hard course—you will understand that your liberal gift could not have fallen into better hands. Henceforth, thanks to you,



the sad solitude of my cell will vanish; I am not alone. I bless you, my daughter."

I cannot forego mentioning the strange thoughts brought out by the crucifix as it hung there beside my portrait. It was twilight; outside the wall the bell was tolling heavily in the invisible church, calling the believers together; in the distance, over the deserted field, overgrown with high grass, an unknown wanderer was plodding along, passing into the unknown distance, like a little black dot. It was as quiet in our prison as in a sepulchre. I looked long and attentively at the features of Jesus, which were so calm, so joyous compared with him who looked silently and dully from the wall beside Him. And with my habit, formed during the long years of solitude, of addressing inanimate things aloud, I said to the motionless crucifix:

"Good evening, Jesus. I am glad to welcome You in our prison. There are three of us here: You, I, and the one who is looking from the wall, and I hope that we three will manage to live in peace and in harmony. He is looking silently, and You are silent, and Your eyes are closed—I shall speak for the three of us, a sure sign that our peace will never be broken."

They were silent, and, continuing, I addressed my speech to the portrait:

"Where are you looking so intently and so strangely, my unknown friend and roommate? In your eyes I see mystery and reproach. Is it possible that you dare reproach Him? Answer!"

And, pretending that the portrait answered, I continued in a different voice with an expression of extreme sternness and boundless grief:

"Yes, I do reproach Him. Jesus, Jesus! Why is Your face so pure, so blissful? You have passed only over the brink of human sufferings, as over the brink of an abyss, and only the foam of the bloody and miry waves have touched You. Do You command me, a human being, to sink into the dark depth? Great is Your Golgotha, Jesus, but too reverent and joyous, and one small but interesting stroke is missing—the horror of aimlessness!"

Here I interrupted the speech of the Portrait, with an expression of anger.

"How dare you," I exclaimed; "how dare you speak of aimlessness in our prison?"

They were silent; and suddenly Jesus, without opening His eyes—He even seemed to close them more tightly—answered:

"Who knows the mysteries of the heart of Jesus?"

I burst into laughter, and my esteemed reader will easily



understand this laughter. It turned out that I, a cool and sober mathematician, possessed a poetic talent and could compose very interesting comedies.

I do not know how all this would have ended, for I had already prepared a thundering answer for my roommate when the appearance of the keeper, who brought me food, suddenly interrupted me. But apparently my face bore traces of excitement, for the man asked me with stern sympathy:

“Were you praying?”

I do not remember what I answered.

## Chapter VIII

Last Sunday a great misfortune occurred in our prison: The artist K., whom the reader knows already, ended his life in suicide by flinging himself from the table with his head against the stone floor. The fall and the force of the blow had been so skilfully calculated by the unfortunate young man that his skull was split in two. The grief of the Warden was indescribable. Having called me to the office, the Warden, without shaking hands with me, reproached me in angry and harsh terms for having deceived him, and he regained his calm, only after my hearty apologies and promises that such accidents would not happen again. I promised to prepare a project for watching the criminals which would render suicide impossible. The esteemed wife of the Warden, whose portrait remained unfinished, was also grieved by the death of the artist.

Of course, I had not expected this outcome, either, although a few days before committing suicide, K. had provoked in me a feeling of uneasiness. Upon entering his cell one morning, and greeting him, I noticed with amazement that he was sitting before his slate once more drawing human figures.

“What does this mean, my friend?” I inquired cautiously. “And how about the portrait of the second assistant?”

“The devil take it!”

“But you —”

“The devil take it!”

After a pause I remarked distractedly:

“Your portrait of the Warden is meeting with great success. Although some of the people who have seen it say that the right moustache is somewhat shorter than the left —”

“Shorter?”

Yes, shorter. But in general they find that you caught the likeness very successfully.”

K. had put aside his slate pencil and, perfectly calm, said:

"Tell your Warden that I am not going to paint that prison riffraff any more."

After these words there was nothing left for me to do but leave him, which I decided to do. But the artist, who could not get along without giving vent to his effusions, seized me by the hand and said with his usual enthusiasm:

"Just think of it, old man, what a horror! Every day a new repulsive face appears before me. They sit and stare at me with their frog-like eyes. What am I to do? At first I laughed—I even liked it—but when the frog-like eyes stared at me every day I was seized with horror. I was afraid they might start to quack—qua-qua!"

Indeed there was a certain fear, even madness, in the eyes of the artist—the madness which shortly led him to his untimely grave.

"Old man, it is necessary to have something beautiful. Do you understand me?"

"And the wife of the Warden? Is she not—"

I shall pass in silence the unbecoming expressions with which he spoke of the lady in his excitement. I must, however, admit that to a certain extent the artist was right in his complaints. I had been present several times at the sittings, and noticed that all who had posed for the artist behaved rather unnaturally. Sincere and naive, conscious of the importance of their position, convinced that the features of their faces perpetuated upon the canvas would go down to posterity, they exaggerated somewhat the qualities which are so characteristic of their high and responsible office in our prison. A certain bombast of pose, an exaggerated expression of stern authority, an obvious consciousness of their own importance, and a noticeable contempt for those on whom their eyes were directed—all this disfigured their kind and affable faces. But I cannot understand what horrible features the artist found where there should have been a smile. I was even indignant at the superficial attitude with which an artist, who considered himself talented and sensible, passed the people without noticing that a divine spark was glimmering in each one of them. In the quest after some fantastic beauty he light-mindedly passed by the true beauties with which the human soul is filled. I cannot help feeling sorry for those unfortunate people who, like K., because of a peculiar construction of their brains, always turn their eyes toward the dark side, whereas there is so much joy and light in our prison!

When I said this to K. I heard, to my regret, the same stereotyped and indecent answer:

"The devil take it!"

All I could do was to shrug my shoulders. Suddenly changing his

tone and bearing, the artist turned to me seriously with a question which, in my opinion, was also indecent:

"Why do you lie, old man?"

I was astonished, of course.

"I lie?"

"Well, let it be the truth, if you like, but why? I am looking and thinking. Why did you say that? Why?"

My indulgent reader, who knows well what the truth has cost me, will readily understand my profound indignation. I deliberately mention this audacious and other calumnious phrases to show in what an atmosphere of malice, distrust, and disrespect I have to plod along the hard road of suffering. He insisted rudely:

"I have had enough of your smiles. Tell me plainly, why do you speak so?"

Then, I admit, I flared up:

"You want to know why I speak the truth? Because I hate falsehood and I commit it to eternal anathema! Because fate has made me a victim of injustice, and as a victim, like Him who took upon Himself the great sin of the world and its great sufferings, I wish to point out the way to mankind. Wretched egoist, you know only yourself and your miserable art, while I love mankind."

My anger grew. I felt the veins on my forehead swelling.

"Fool, miserable dauber, unfortunate schoolboy, in love with colors! Human beings pass before you, and you see only their frog-like eyes. How did your tongue turn to say such a thing? Oh, if you only looked even once into the human soul! What treasures of tenderness, love, humble faith, holy humility, you would have discovered there! And to you, bold man, it would have seemed as if you entered a temple—a bright, illuminated temple. But it is said of people like you—'do not cast your pearls before swine.'"

The artist was silent, crushed by my angry and unrestrained speech. Finally he sighed and said:

"Forgive me, old man; I am talking nonsense, of course, but I am so unfortunate and so lonely. Of course, my dear old man, it is all true about the divine spark and about beauty, but a polished boot is also beautiful. I cannot, I cannot! Just think of it! How can a man have such moustaches as he has? And yet he is complaining that the left moustache is shorter!"

He laughed like a child, and, heaving a sigh, added:

"I'll make another attempt. I will paint the lady. There is really something good in her. Although she is after all—a cow."

He laughed again, and, fearing to brush away with his sleeve the drawing on the slate, he cautiously placed it in the corner.

Here I did that which my duty compelled me to do. Seizing the slate, I smashed it to pieces with a powerful blow. I thought that the artist would rush upon me furiously, but he did not. To his weak mind my act seemed so blasphemous, so supernaturally horrible, that his deathlike lips could not utter a word.

"What have you done?" he asked at last in a low voice. "You have broken it?"

And raising my hand I replied solemnly:

"Foolish youth, I have done that which I would have done to my heart if it wanted to jest and mock me! Unfortunate youth, can you not see that your art has long been mocking you, that from that slate of yours the devil himself was making hideous faces at you?"

"Yes. The devil!"

"Being far from your wonderful art, I did not understand you at first, nor your longing, your horror of aimlessness. But when I entered your cell to-day and noticed you at your ruinous occupation, I said to myself: It is better that he should not create at all than to create in this manner. Listen to me."

I then revealed for the first time to this youth the sacred formula of the iron grate, which, dividing the infinite into squares, thereby subjects it to itself. K. listened to my words with emotion, looking with the horror of an ignorant man at the figures which must have seemed to him to be cabalistic, but which were nothing else than the ordinary figures used in mathematics.

"I am your slave, old man," he said at last, kissing my hand with his cold lips.

"No, you will be my favorite pupil, my son. I bless you."

And it seemed to me that the artist was saved. True, he regarded me with great joy, which could easily be explained by the extreme respect with which I inspired him, and he painted the portrait of the Warden's wife with such zeal and enthusiasm that the esteemed lady was sincerely moved. And, strange to say, the artist succeeded in making so strangely beautiful the features of this woman, who was stout and no longer young, that the Warden, long accustomed to the face of his wife, was greatly delighted by its new expression. Thus everything went on smoothly, when suddenly this catastrophe occurred, the entire horror of which I alone knew.

Not desiring to call forth any unnecessary disputes, I concealed from the Warden the fact that on the eve of his death the artist had thrown a letter into my cell, which I noticed only in the morning. I did not preserve the note, nor do I remember all that the unfortunate youth told me in his farewell message; I think it was a letter of thanks for my effort to save him. He wrote that he regretted sincerely

that his failing strength did not permit him to avail himself of my instructions. But one phrase impressed itself deeply in my memory, and you will understand the reason for it when I repeat it in all its terrifying simplicity.

"I am going away from your prison," thus read the phrase.

And he really did go away. Here are the walls, here is the little window in the door, here is our prison, but he is not there; he has gone away. Consequently I, too, could go away. Instead of having wasted dozens of years on a titanic struggle, instead of being tormented by the throes of despair, instead of growing enfeebled by horror in the face of unsolved mysteries, of striving to subject the world to my mind and my will, I could have climbed the table and—one instant of pain—I would be free; I would be triumphant over the lock and the walls, over truth and falsehood, over joys and sufferings. I will not say that I had not thought of suicide before as a means of escaping from our prison, but now for the first time it appeared before me in all its attractiveness. In a fit of base faint-heartedness, which I shall not conceal from my reader, even as I do not conceal from him my good qualities; perhaps even in a fit of temporary insanity I momentarily forgot all I knew about our prison and its great purpose. I forgot—I am ashamed to say—even the great formula of the iron grate, which I conceived and mastered with such difficulty, and I prepared a noose made of my towel for the purpose of strangling myself. But at the last moment, when all was ready, and it was but necessary to push away the taburet, I asked myself, with my habit of reasoning which did not forsake me even at that time: But where am I going? The answer was: I am going to death. But what is death? And the answer was: I do not know.

These brief reflections were enough for me to come to myself, and with a bitter laugh at my cowardice I removed the fatal noose from my neck. Just as I had been ready to sob for grief a minute before, so now I laughed—I laughed like a madman, realizing that another trap, placed before me by derisive fate, had so brilliantly been evaded by me. Oh, how many traps there are in the life of man! Like a cunning fisherman, fate catches him now with the alluring bait of some truth, now with the hairy little worm of dark falsehood, now with the phantom of life, now with the phantom of death.

My dear young man, my fascinating fool, my charming silly fellow—who told you that our prison ends here, that from one prison you did not fall into another prison, from which it will hardly be possible for you to run away? You were too hasty, my friend, you forgot to ask me something else—I would have told it to you. I would have told you that omnipotent law reigns over that which

you call non-existence and death just as it reigns over that which you call life and existence. Only the fools, dying, believe that they have made an end of themselves —they have ended but one form of themselves, in order to assume another form immediately.

Thus I reflected, laughing at the foolish suicide, the ridiculous destroyer of the fetters of eternity. And this is what I said addressing myself to my two silent roommates hanging motionlessly on the white wall of my cell:

“I believe and confess that our prison is immortal. What do you say to this, my friends?”

But they were silent. And having burst into good-natured laughter— What quiet roommates I have! I undressed slowly and gave myself to peaceful sleep. In my dream I saw another majestic prison, and wonderful jailers with white wings on their backs, and the Chief Warden of the prison himself. I do not remember whether there were any little windows in the doors or not, but I think there were. I recall that something like an angel’s eye was fixed upon me with tender attention and love. My indulgent reader will, of course, guess that I am jesting. I did not dream at all. I am not in the habit of dreaming.

Without hoping that the Warden, occupied with pressing official affairs, would understand me thoroughly and appreciate my idea concerning the impossibility of escaping from our prison, I confined myself, in my report, to an indication of several ways in which suicides could be averted. With magnanimous shortsightedness peculiar to busy and trusting people, the Warden failed to notice the weak points of my project and clasped my hand warmly, expressing to me his gratitude in the name of our entire prison.

On that day I had the honour, for the first time, to drink a glass of tea at the home of the Warden, in the presence of his kind wife and charming children, who called me “Grandpa.” Tears of emotion which gathered in my eyes could but faintly express the feelings that came over me.

At the request of the Warden’s wife, who took a deep interest in me, I related in detail the story of the tragic murders which led me so unexpectedly and so terribly to the prison. I could not find expressions strong enough—there are no expressions strong enough in the human language—to brand adequately the unknown criminal, who not only murdered three helpless people, but who mocked them brutally in a fit of blind and savage rage.

As the investigation and the autopsy showed, the murderer dealt the last blows after the people had been dead. It is very possible, however—even murderers should be given their due—that the man,

intoxicated by the sight of blood, ceased to be a human being and became a beast, the son of chaos, the child of dark and terrible desires. It was characteristic that the murderer, after having committed the crime, drank wine and ate biscuits—some of these were left on the table together with the marks of his blood-stained fingers. But there was something so horrible that my mind could neither understand nor explain: the murderer, after lighting a cigar himself, apparently moved by a feeling of strange kindness, put a lighted cigar between the closed teeth of my father.

I had not recalled these details in many years. They had almost been erased by the hand of time, and now while relating them to my shocked listeners, who would not believe that such horrors were possible, I felt my face turning pale and my hair quivering on my head. In an outburst of grief and anger I rose from my armchair, and straightening myself to my full height, I exclaimed:

“Justice on earth is often powerless, but I implore heavenly justice, I implore the justice of life which never forgives, I implore all the higher laws under whose authority man lives. May the guilty one not escape his deserved punishment! His punishment!”

Moved by my sobs, my listeners there and then expressed their zeal and readiness to work for my liberation, and thus at least partly redeem the injustice heaped upon me. I apologized and returned to my cell.

Evidently my old organism cannot bear such agitation any longer; besides, it is hard even for a strong man to picture in his imagination certain images without risking the loss of his reason. Only in this way can I explain the strange hallucination which appeared before my fatigued eyes in the solitude of my cell. As though benumbed I gazed aimlessly at the tightly closed door, when suddenly it seemed to me that some one was standing behind me. I had felt this deceptive sensation before, so I did not turn around for some time. But when I turned around at last I saw—in the distance, between the crucifix and my portrait, about a quarter of a yard above the floor—the body of my father, as though hanging in the air. It is hard for me to give the details, for twilight had long set in, but I can say with certainty that it was the image of a corpse, and not of a living being, although a cigar was smoking in its mouth. To be more exact, there was no smoke from the cigar, but a faintly reddish light was seen. It is characteristic that I did not sense the odor of tobacco either at that time or later—I had long given up smoking. Here—I must confess my weakness, but the illusion was striking—I commenced to speak to the hallucination. Advancing as closely as possible—the body did not retreat as I approached, but remained



perfectly motionless—I said to the ghost:

“I thank you, father. You know how your son is suffering, and you have come—you have come to testify to my innocence. I thank you, father. Give me your hand, and with a firm filial hand-clasp I will respond to your unexpected visit. Don’t you want to? Let me have your hand. Give me your hand, or I will call you a liar!”

I stretched out my hand, but of course the hallucination did not deem it worth while to respond, and I was forever deprived of the opportunity of feeling the touch of a ghost. The cry which I uttered and which so upset my friend, the jailer, creating some confusion in the prison, was called forth by the sudden disappearance of the phantom—it was so sudden that the space in the place where the corpse had been seemed to me more terrible than the corpse itself.

Such is the power of human imagination when, excited, it creates phantoms and visions, peopling the bottomless and ever silent emptiness with them. It is sad to admit that there are people, however, who believe in ghosts and build upon this belief nonsensical theories about certain relations between the world of the living and the enigmatic land inhabited by the dead. I understand that the human ear and eye can be deceived—but how can the great and lucid human mind fall into such coarse and ridiculous deception?

I asked the jailer:

“I feel a strange sensation, as though there were the odor of cigar smoke in my cell. Don’t you smell it?”

The jailer sniffed the air conscientiously and replied:

“No I don’t. You only imagined it.”

If you need any confirmation, here is a splendid proof that all I had seen, if it existed at all, existed only in the net of my eye.

## Chapter IX

Something altogether unexpected has happened; the efforts of my friends, the Warden and his wife, were crowned with success, and for two months I have been free, out of prison.

I am happy to inform you that immediately upon my leaving the prison I occupied a very honourable position, to which I could hardly have aspired, conscious of my humble qualities. The entire press met me with unanimous enthusiasm. Numerous journalists, photographers, even caricaturists (the people of our time are so fond of laughter and clever witticisms), in hundreds of articles and drawings reproduced the story of my remarkable life. With striking unanimity the newspapers assigned to me the name of “Master,” a highly flattering name, which I accepted, after some hesitation, with deep gratitude. I do not know whether it is worth mentioning the



few hostile notices called forth by irritation and envy—a vice which so frequently stains the human soul. In one of these notices, which appeared, by the way, in a very filthy little newspaper, a certain scamp, guided by wretched gossip and baseless rumors about my chats in our prison, called me a “zealot and liar.” Enraged by the insolence of the miserable scribbler, my friends wanted to prosecute him, but I persuaded them not to do it. Vice is its own proper punishment.

The fortune which my kind mother had left me and which had grown considerably during the time I was in prison has enabled me to settle down to a life of luxury in one of the most aristocratic hotels. I have a large retinue of servants at my command and an automobile—a splendid invention with which I now became acquainted for the first time—and I have skillfully arranged my financial affairs. Live flowers brought to me in abundance by my charming lady visitors give to my nook the appearance of a flower garden or even a bit of a tropical forest. My servant, a very decent young man, is in a state of despair. He says that he had never seen such a variety of flowers and had never smelled such a variety of odors at the same time. If not for my advanced age and the strict and serious propriety with which I treat my visitors, I do not know how far they would have gone in the expression of their feelings. How many perfumed notes! How many languid sighs and humbly imploring eyes! There was even a fascinating stranger with a black veil—three times she appeared mysteriously, and when she learned that I had visitors she disappeared just as mysteriously.

I will add that at the present time I have had the honour of being elected an honorary member of numerous humanitarian organizations such as “The League of Peace,” “The League for Combating Juvenile Criminality,” “The Society of the Friends of Man,” and others. Besides, at the request of the editor of one of the most widely read newspapers, I am to begin next month a series of public lectures, for which purpose I am going on a tour together with my kind impresario.

I have already prepared my material for the first three lectures and, in the hope that my reader may be interested, I shall give the synopsis of these lectures:

### FIRST LECTURE

Chaos or order? The eternal struggle between chaos and order. The eternal revolt and the defeat of chaos, the rebel. The triumph of law and order.

SECOND LECTURE

What is the soul of man? The eternal conflict in the soul of man between chaos, whence it came, and harmony, whither it strives irresistibly. Falsehood, as the offspring of chaos, and Truth, as the child of harmony. The triumph of truth and the downfall of falsehood.

THIRD LECTURE

THE EXPLANATION OF THE SACRED FORMULA OF THE IRON GRATE

As my indulgent reader will see, justice is after all not an empty sound, and I am getting a great reward for my sufferings. But not daring to reproach fate which was so merciful to me, I nevertheless do not feel that sense of contentment which, it would seem, I ought to feel. True, at first I was positively happy, but soon my habit for strictly logical reasoning, the clearness and honesty of my views, gained by contemplating the world through a mathematically correct grate, have led me to a series of disillusiones.

I am afraid to say it now with full certainty, but it seems to me that all their life of this so-called freedom is a continuous self-deception and falsehood. The life of each of these people, whom I have seen during these days, is moving in a strictly defined circle, which is just as solid as the corridors of our prison, just as closed as the dial of the watches which they, in the innocence of their mind, lift every minute to their eyes, not understanding the fatal meaning of the eternally moving hand, which is eternally returning to its place, and each of them feels this, even as the circus horse probably feels it, but in a state of strange blindness each one assures us that he is perfectly free and moving forward. Like the stupid bird which is beating itself to exhaustion against the transparent glass obstacle, without understanding what it is that obstructs its way, these people are helplessly beating against the walls of their glass prison.

I was greatly mistaken, it seems, also in the significance of the greetings which fell to my lot when I left the prison. Of course I was convinced that in me they greeted the representative of our prison, a leader hardened by experience, a master, who came to them only for the purpose of revealing to them the great mystery of purpose. And when they congratulated me upon the freedom granted to me I responded with thanks, not suspecting what an idiotic meaning they placed on the word. May I be forgiven this coarse expression, but I am powerless now to restrain my aversion for their stupid life, for their thoughts, for their feelings.

Foolish hypocrites, fearing to tell the truth even when it adorns

them! My hardened truthfulness was cruelly taxed in the midst of these false and trivial people. Not a single person believed that I was never so happy as in prison. Why, then, are they so surprised at me, and why do they print my portraits? Are there so few idiots that are unhappy in prison? And the most remarkable thing, which only my indulgent reader will be able to appreciate, is this: Often distrusting me completely, they nevertheless sincerely go into raptures over me, bowing before me, clasping my hands and mumbling at every step, "Master! Master!"

If they only profited by their constant lying—but, no; they are perfectly disinterested, and they lie as though by some one's higher order; they lie in the fanatical conviction that falsehood is in no way different from the truth. Wretched actors, even incapable of a decent makeup, they writhe from morning till night on the boards of the stage, and, dying the most real death, suffering the most real sufferings, they bring into their deathly convulsions the cheap art of the harlequin. Even their crooks are not real; they only play the roles of crooks, while remaining honest people; and the role of honest people is played by rogues, and played poorly, and the public sees it, but in the name of the same fatal falsehood it gives them wreaths and bouquets. And if there is really a talented actor who can wipe away the boundary between truth and deception, so that even they begin to believe, they go into raptures, call him great, start a subscription for a monument, but do not give any money. Desperate cowards, they fear themselves most of all, and admiring delightedly the reflection of their spuriously made-up faces in the mirror, they howl with fear and rage when some one incautiously holds up the mirror to their soul.

My indulgent reader should accept all this relatively, not forgetting that certain grumblings are natural in old age. Of course, I have met quite a number of most worthy people, absolutely truthful, sincere, and courageous; I am proud to admit that I found among them also a proper estimate of my personality. With the support of these friends of mine I hope to complete successfully my struggle for truth and justice. I am sufficiently strong for my sixty years, and, it seems, there is no power that could break my iron will.

At times I am seized with fatigue owing to their absurd mode of life. I have not the proper rest even at night.

The consciousness that while going to bed I may absent-mindedly have forgotten to lock my bedroom door compels me to jump from my bed dozens of times and to feel the lock with a quiver of horror.

Not long ago it happened that I locked my door and hid the key under my pillow, perfectly confident that my room was locked,

when suddenly I heard a knock, then the door opened, and my servant entered with a smile on his face. You, dear reader, will easily understand the horror I experienced at this unexpected visit—it seemed to me that some one had entered my soul. And though I have absolutely nothing to conceal, this breaking into my room seems to me indecent, to say the least.

I caught a cold a few days ago—there is a terrible draught in their windows—and I asked my servant to watch me at night. In the morning I asked him, in jest:

“Well, did I talk much in my sleep?”

“No, you didn’t talk at all.”

“I had a terrible dream, and I remember I even cried.”

“No, you smiled all the time, and I thought—what fine dreams our Master must see!”

The dear youth must have been sincerely devoted to me, and I am deeply moved by such devotion during these painful days.

To-morrow I shall sit down to prepare my lectures. It is high time!

## Chapter X

**M**y God! What has happened to me? I do not know how I shall tell my reader about it. I was on the brink of the abyss, I almost perished. What cruel temptations fate is sending me! Fools, we smile, without suspecting anything, when some murderous hand is already lifted to attack us; we smile, and the very next instant we open our eyes wide with horror. I—I cried. I cried. Another moment and deceived, I would have hurled myself down, thinking that I was flying toward the sky.

It turned out that “the charming stranger” who wore a dark veil, and who came to me so mysteriously three times, was no one else than Mme. N., my former fiancée, my love, my dream and my suffering.

But order! order! May my indulgent reader forgive the involuntary incoherence of the preceding lines, but I am sixty years old, and my strength is beginning to fail me, and I am alone. My unknown reader, be my friend at this moment, for I am not of iron, and my strength is beginning to fail me. Listen, my friend; I shall endeavour to tell you exactly and in detail, as objectively as my cold and clear mind will be able to do it, all that has happened. You must understand that which my tongue may omit.

I was sitting, engaged upon the preparation of my lecture, seriously carried away by the absorbing work, when my servant announced that the strange lady in the black veil was there again, and that she wished to see me. I confess I was irritated, that I was

ready to decline to see her, but my curiosity, coupled with my desire not to offend her, led me to receive the unexpected guest. Assuming the expression of majestic nobleness with which I usually greet my visitors, and softening that expression somewhat by a smile in view of the romantic character of the affair, I ordered my servant to open the door.

"Please be seated, my dear guest," I said politely to the stranger, who stood as dazed before me, still keeping the veil on her face.

She sat down.

"Although I respect all secrecy," I continued jestingly, "I would nevertheless ask you to remove this gloomy cover which disfigures you. Does the human face need a mask?"

The strange visitor declined, in a state of agitation.

"Very well, I'll take it off, but not now—later. First I want to see you well."

The pleasant voice of the stranger did not call forth any recollections in me. Deeply interested and even flattered, I submitted to my strange visitor all the treasures of my mind, experience and talent. With enthusiasm I related to her the edifying story of my life, constantly illuminating every detail with a ray of the Great Purpose. (In this I availed myself partly of the material on which I had just been working, preparing my lectures.) The passionate attention with which the strange lady listened to my words, the frequent, deep sighs, the nervous quiver of her thin fingers in her black gloves, her agitated exclamations—inspired me.

Carried away by my own narrative, I confess, I did not pay proper attention to the queer behavior of my strange visitor. Having lost all restraint, she now clasped my hands, now pushed them away, she cried and availing herself of each pause in my speech, she implored:

"Don't, don't, don't! Stop speaking! I can't listen to it!"

And at the moment when I least expected it she tore the veil from her face, and before my eyes—before my eyes appeared her face, the face of my love, of my dream, of my boundless and bitter sorrow. Perhaps because I lived all my life dreaming of her alone, with her alone I was young, with her I had developed and grown old, with her I was advancing to the grave—her face seemed to me neither old nor faded—it was exactly as I had pictured it in my dreams—it seemed endlessly dear to me.

What has happened to me? For the first time in tens of years I forgot that I had a face—for the first time in tens of years I looked helplessly, like a youngster, like a criminal caught red-handed, waiting for some deadly blow.

"You see! You see! It is I. It is I! My God, why are you silent?"

Don't you recognise me?"

Did I recognise her? It were better not to have known that face at all! It were better for me to have grown blind rather than to see her again!

"Why are you silent? How terrible you are! You have forgotten me!"

"Madam—"

Of course, I should have continued in this manner; I saw how she staggered. I saw how with trembling fingers, almost falling, she was looking for her veil; I saw that another word of courageous truth, and the terrible vision would vanish never to appear again. But some stranger within me—not I—not I—uttered the following absurd, ridiculous phrase, in which, despite its chilliness, rang so much jealousy and hopeless sorrow:

"Madam, you have deceived me. I don't know you. Perhaps you entered the wrong door. I suppose your husband and your children are waiting for you. Please, my servant will take you down to the carriage."

Could I think that these words, uttered in the same stern and cold voice, would have such a strange effect upon the woman's heart? With a cry, all the bitter passion of which I could not describe, she threw herself before me on her knees, exclaiming:

"So you do love me!"

Forgetting that our life had already been lived, that we were old, that all had been ruined and scattered like dust by Time, and that it can never return again; forgetting that I was grey, that my shoulders were bent, that the voice of passion sounds strangely when it comes from old lips—I burst into impetuous reproaches and complaints.

"Yes, I did deceive you!" her deathly pale lips uttered. "I knew that you were innocent—"

"Be silent. Be silent."

"Everybody laughed at me—even your friends, your mother whom I despised for it—all betrayed you. Only I kept repeating: 'He is innocent!'"

Oh, if this woman knew what she was doing to me with her words! If the trumpet of the angel, announcing the day of judgment, had resounded at my very ear, I would not have been so frightened as now. What is the blaring of a trumpet calling to battle and struggle to the ear of the brave? It was as if an abyss had opened at my feet. It was as if an abyss had opened before me, and as though blinded by lightning, as though dazed by a blow, I shouted in an outburst of wild and strange ecstasy:

"Be silent! I—"

If that woman were sent by God, she would have become silent. If she were sent by the devil, she would have become silent even then. But there was neither God nor devil in her, and interrupting me, not permitting me to finish the phrase, she went on:

"No, I will not be silent. I must tell you all. I have waited for you so many years. Listen, listen!"

But suddenly she saw my face and she retreated, seized with horror.

"What is it? What is the matter with you? Why do you laugh? I am afraid of your laughter! Stop laughing! Don't! Don't!"

But I was not laughing at all, I only smiled softly. And then I said very seriously, without smiling:

"I am smiling because I am glad to see you. Tell me about yourself."

And, as in a dream, I saw her face and I heard her soft terrible whisper:

"You know that I love you. You know that all my life I loved you alone. I lived with another and was faithful to him. I have children, but you know they are all strangers to me—he and the children and I myself. Yes, I deceived you, I am a criminal, but I do not know how it happened. He was so kind to me, he made me believe that he was convinced of your innocence—later I learned that he did not tell the truth, and with this, just think of it, with this he won me."

"You lie!"

"I swear to you. For a whole year he followed me and spoke only of you. One day he even cried when I told him about you, about your sufferings, about your love."

"But he was lying!"

"Of course he was lying. But at that time he seemed so dear to me, so kind that I kissed him on the forehead. Then we used to bring you flowers to the prison. One day as we were returning from you—listen—he suddenly proposed that we should go out driving. The evening was so beautiful—"

"And you went! How did you dare go out with him? You had just seen my prison, you had just been near me, and yet you dared go with him. How base!"

"Be silent. Be silent. I know I am a criminal. But I was so exhausted, so tired, and you were so far away. Understand me."

She began to cry, wringing her hands.

"Understand me. I was so exhausted. And he—he saw how I felt—and yet he dared kiss me."

"He kissed you! And you allowed him? On the lips?"

"No, no! Only on the cheek."



"You lie!"

"No, no. I swear to you."

I began to laugh.

"You responded? And you were driving in the forest—you, my fiancée, my love, my dream! And all this for my sake? Tell me! Speak!"

In my rage I wrung her arms, and wriggling like a snake, vainly trying to evade my look, she whispered:

"Forgive me; forgive me."

"How many children have you?"

"Forgive me."

But my reason forsook me, and in my growing rage I cried, stamping my foot:

"How many children have you? Speak, or I will kill you!"

I actually said this. Evidently I was losing my reason completely if I could threaten to kill a helpless woman. And she, surmising apparently that my threats were mere words, answered with feigned readiness:

"Kill me! You have a right to do it! I am a criminal. I deceived you. You are a martyr, a saint! When you told me—is it true that even in your thoughts you never deceived me—even in your thoughts!"

And again an abyss opened before me. Everything trembled, everything fell, everything became an absurd dream, and in the last effort to save my extinguishing reason I shouted:

"But you are happy! You cannot be unhappy; you have no right to be unhappy! Otherwise I shall lose my mind."

But she did not understand. With a bitter laugh, with a senseless smile, in which her suffering mingled with bright, heavenly joy, she said:

"I am happy! I—happy! Oh, my friend, only near you I can find happiness. From the moment you left the prison I began to despise my home. I am alone there; I am a stranger to all. If you only knew how I hate that scoundrel! You are sensible; you must have felt that you were not alone in prison, that I was always with you there—"

"And he?"

"Be silent! Be silent! If you only heard with what delight I called him scoundrel!"

She burst into laughter, frightening me by the wild expression on her face.

"Just think of it! All his life he embraced only a lie. And when, deceived, happy, he fell asleep, I looked at him with wide-open eyes, I gnashed my teeth softly, and I felt like pinching him, like sticking him with a pin."



She burst into laughter again. It seemed to me that she was driving wedges into my brain. Claspng my head, I cried:

"You lie! You lie to me!"

Indeed, it was easier for me to speak to the ghost than to the woman. What could I say to her? My mind was growing dim. And how could I repulse her when she, full of love and passion, kissed my hands, my eyes, my face? It was she, my love, my dream, my bitter sorrow!

"I love you! I love you!"

And I believed her—I believed her love. I believed everything. And once more I felt that my locks were black, and I saw myself young again. And I knelt before her and wept for a long time, and whispered to her about my sufferings, about the pain of solitude, about a heart cruelly broken, about offended, disfigured, mutilated thoughts. And, laughing and crying, she stroked my hair. Suddenly she noticed that it was grey, and she cried strangely:

"What is it? And life? I am an old woman already."

On leaving me she demanded that I escort her to the threshold, like a young man; and I did. Before going she said to me:

"I am coming back to-morrow. I know my children will deny me—my daughter is to marry soon. You and I will go away. Do you love me?"

"I do."

"We will go far, far away, my dear. You wanted to deliver some lectures. You should not do it. I don't like what you say about that iron grate. You are exhausted, you need a rest. Shall it be so?"

"Yes."

"Oh, I forgot my veil. Keep it, keep it as a remembrance of this day. My dear!"

In the vestibule, in the presence of the sleepy porter, she kissed me. There was the odor of some new perfume, unlike the perfume with which her letter was scented. And her coquettish laugh was like a sob as she disappeared behind the glass door.

That night I aroused my servant, ordered him to pack our things, and we went away. I shall not say where I am at present, but last night and to-night trees were rustling over my head and the rain was beating against my windows. Here the windows are small, and I feel much better. I wrote her a rather long letter, the contents of which I shall not reproduce. I shall never see her again.

But what am I to do? May the reader pardon these incoherent questions. They are so natural in a man in my condition. Besides, I caught an acute rheumatism while travelling, which is most painful and even dangerous for a man of my age, and which does not permit

me to reason calmly. For some reason or another I think very often about my young friend K., who went to an untimely grave. How does he feel in his new prison?

To-morrow morning, if my strength will permit me, I intend to pay a visit to the Warden of our prison and to his esteemed wife. Our prison—

## Chapter XI

I am profoundly happy to inform my dear reader that I have completely recovered my physical as well as my spiritual powers. A long rest out in the country, amid nature's soothing beauties; the contemplation of village life, which is so simple and bright; the absence of the noise of the city, where hundreds of wind-mills are stupidly flapping their long arms before your very nose, and finally the complete solitude, undisturbed by anything—all these have restored to my unbalanced view of the world all its former steadiness and its iron, irresistible firmness. I look upon my future calmly and confidently, and although it promises me nothing but a lonely grave and the last journey to an unknown distance, I am ready to meet death just as courageously as I lived my life, drawing strength from my solitude, from the consciousness of my innocence and my uprightness.

After long hesitations, which are not quite intelligible to me now, I finally resolved to establish for myself the system of our prison in all its rigidity. For that purpose, finding a small house in the outskirts of the city, which was to be leased for a long term of years, I hired it. Then with the kind assistance of the Warden of our prison, (I cannot express my gratitude to him adequately enough in words,) I invited to the new place one of the most experienced jailers, who is still a young man, but already hardened in the strict principles of our prison. Availing myself of his instruction, and also of the suggestions of the obliging Warden, I have engaged workmen who transformed one of the rooms into a cell. The measurements as well as the form and all the details of my new, and, I hope, my last dwelling are strictly in accordance with my plan. My cell is 8 by 4 yards, 4 yards high, the walls are painted grey at the bottom, the upper part of the walls and the ceiling are white, and near the ceiling there is a square window 1 1/2 by 1 1/2 yards, with a massive iron grate, which has already become rusty with age. In the door, locked with a heavy and strong lock, which issues a loud creak at each turn of the key, there is a small hole for observation, and below it a little window, through which the food is brought and received. The furnishing of the cell: a table, a chair, and a cot fastened to the

wall; on the wall a crucifix, my portrait, and the rules concerning the conduct of the prisoners, in a black frame; and in the corner a closet filled with books. This last, being a violation of the strict harmony of my dwelling, I was compelled to do by extreme and sad necessity; the jailer positively refused to be my librarian and to bring the books according to my order, and to engage a special librarian seemed to me to be an act of unnecessary eccentricity. Aside from this, in elaborating my plans, I met with strong opposition not only from the local population, which simply declared me to be insane, but even from the enlightened people. Even the Warden endeavoured for some time to dissuade me, but finally he clasped my hand warmly, with an expression of sincere regret at not being in a position to offer me a place in our prison.

I cannot recall the first day of my confinement without a bitter smile. A mob of impertinent and ignorant idlers yelled from morning till night at my window, with their heads lifted high (my cell is situated in the second story), and they heaped upon me senseless abuse; there were even efforts—to the disgrace of my townspeople—to storm my dwelling, and one heavy stone almost crushed my head. Only the police, which arrived in time, succeeded in averting the catastrophe. When, in the evening, I went out for a walk, hundreds of fools, adults and children, followed me, shouting and whistling, heaping abuse upon me, and even hurling mud at me. Thus, like a persecuted prophet, I wended my way without fear amidst the maddened crowd, answering their blows and curses with proud silence.

What has stirred these fools? In what way have I offended their empty heads? When I lied to them, they kissed my hands; now, when I have re-established the sacred truth of my life in all its strictness and purity, they burst into curses, they branded me with contempt, they hurled mud at me. They were disturbed because I dared to live alone, and because I did not ask them for a place in the “common cell for rogues.” How difficult it is to be truthful in this world!

True, my perseverance and firmness finally defeated them. With the naivete of savages, who honour all they do not understand, they commenced, in the second year, to bow to me, and they are making ever lower bows to me, because their amazement is growing ever greater, their fear of the inexplicable is growing ever deeper. And the fact that I never respond to their greetings fills them with delight, and the fact that I never smile in response to their flattering smiles, fills them with a firm assurance that they are guilty before me for some grave wrong, and that I know their guilt. Having lost confidence in their own and other people’s words, they revere my

silence, even as people revere every silence and every mystery. If I were to start to speak suddenly, I would again become human to them and would disillusion them bitterly, no matter what I would say; in my silence I am to them like their eternally silent God. For these strange people would cease believing their God as soon as their God would commence to speak. Their women are already regarding me as a saint. And the kneeling women and sick children that I often find at the threshold of my dwelling undoubtedly expect of me a trifle—to heal them, to perform a miracle. Well, another year or two will pass, and I shall commence to perform miracles as well as those of whom they speak with such enthusiasm. Strange people, at times I feel sorry for them, and I begin to feel really angry at the devil who so skillfully mixed the cards in their game that only the cheat knows the truth, his little cheating truth about the marked queens and the marked kings. They bow too low, however, and this hinders me from developing a sense of mercy, otherwise—smile at my jest, indulgent reader—I would not restrain myself from the temptation of performing two or three small, but effective miracles.

I must go back to the description of my prison.

Having constructed my cell completely, I offered my jailer the following alternative: He must observe with regard to me the rules of the prison regime in all its rigidity, and in that case he would inherit all my fortune according to my will, or he would receive nothing if he failed to do his duty. It seemed that in putting the matter before him so clearly I would meet with no difficulties. Yet at the very first instance, when I should have been incarcerated for violating some prison regulation, this naive and timid man absolutely refused to do it; and only when I threatened to get another man immediately, a more conscientious jailer, was he compelled to perform his duty. Though he always locked the door punctually, he at first neglected his duty of watching me through the peephole; and when I tried to test his firmness by suggesting a change in some rule or other to the detriment of common sense he yielded willingly and quickly. One day, on trapping him in this way, I said to him:

“My friend, you are simply foolish. If you will not watch me and guard me properly I shall run away to another prison, taking my legacy along with me. What will you do then?”

I am happy to inform you that at the present time all these misunderstandings have been removed, and if there is anything I can complain of it is rather excessive strictness than mildness. Now that my jailer has entered into the spirit of his position this honest man treats me with extreme sternness, not for the sake of the profit but for the sake of the principle. Thus, in the beginning of this week

he incarcerated me for twenty-four hours for violating some rule, of which, it seemed to me, I was not guilty; and protesting against this seeming injustice I had the unpardonable weakness to say to him:

"In the end I will drive you away from here. You must not forget that you are my servant."

"Before you drive me away I will incarcerate you," replied this worthy man.

"But how about the money?" I asked with astonishment. "Don't you know that you will be deprived of it?"

"Do I need your money? I would give up all my own money if I could stop being what I am. But what can I do if you violate the rule and I must punish you by incarcerating you?"

I am powerless to describe the joyous emotion which came over me at the thought that the consciousness of duty had at last entered his dark mind, and that now, even if in a moment of weakness I wanted to leave my prison, my conscientious jailer would not permit me to do it. The spark of firmness which glittered in his round eyes showed me clearly that no matter where I might run away he would find me and bring me back; and that the revolver which he often forgot to take before, and which he now cleans every day, would do its work in the event I decided to run away.

And for the first time in all these years I fell asleep on the stone floor of my dark cell with a happy smile, realizing that my plan was crowned with complete success, passing from the realm of eccentricity to the domain of stern and austere reality. And the fear which I felt while falling asleep in the presence of my jailer, my fear of his resolute look, of his revolver; my timid desire to hear a word of praise from him, or to call forth perhaps a smile on his lips, re-echoed in my soul as the harmonious clanking of my eternal and last chains.

Thus I pass my last years. As before, my health is sound and my free spirit is clear. Let some call me a fool and laugh at me; in their pitiful blindness let others regard me as a saint and expect me to perform miracles; an upright man to some people, to others—a liar and a deceiver—I myself know who I am, and I do not ask them to understand me. And if there are people who will accuse me of deception, of baseness, even of the lack of simple honour—for there are scoundrels who are convinced to this day that I committed murder—no one will dare accuse me of cowardice, no one will dare say that I could not perform my painful duty to the end. From the beginning till the end I remained firm and unbribable; and though a bugbear, a fanatic, a dark horror to some people, I may awaken in others a heroic dream of the infinite power of man.

I have long discontinued to receive visitors, and with the death of the Warden of our prison, my only true friend, whom I visited occasionally, my last tie with this world was broken. Only I and my ferocious jailer, who watches every movement of mine with mad suspicion, and the black grate which has caught in its iron embrace and muzzled the infinite—this is my life. Silently accepting the low bows, in my cold estrangement from the people I am passing my last road.

I am thinking of death ever more frequently, but even before death I do not bend my fearless look. Whether it brings me eternal rest or a new unknown and terrible struggle, I am humbly prepared to accept it.

Farewell, my dear reader! Like a vague phantom you appeared before my eyes and passed, leaving me alone before the face of life and death. Do not be angry because at times I deceived you and lied— you, too, would have lied perhaps in my place. Nevertheless I loved you sincerely, and sincerely longed for your love; and the thought of your sympathy for me was quite a support to me in my moments and days of hardship. I am sending you my last farewell and my sincere advice. Forget about my existence, even as I shall henceforth forget about yours forever.

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A deserted field, overgrown with high grass, devoid of an echo, extends like a deep carpet to the very fence of our prison, whose majestic outlines subdue my imagination and my mind. When the dying sun illumines it with its last rays, and our prison, all in red, stands like a queen, like a martyr, with the dark wounds of its grated windows, and the sun rises silently and proudly over the plain—with sorrow, like a lover, I send my complaints and my sighs and my tender reproach and vows to her, to my love, to my dream, to my bitter and last sorrow. I wish I could forever remain near her, but here I look back—and black against the fiery frame of the sunset stands my jailer, stands and waits.

With a sigh I go back in silence, and he moves behind me noiselessly, about two steps away, watching every move of mine.

Our prison is beautiful at sunset.

## God Sees the Truth, But Waits

Leo Tolstoy

**I**n the town of Vladimir lived a young merchant named Ivan Dmitrich Aksionov. He had two shops and a house of his own.

Aksionov was a handsome, fair-haired, curly-headed fellow, full of fun, and very fond of singing. When quite a young man he had been given to drink, and was riotous when he had had too much; but after he married he gave up drinking, except now and then.

One summer Aksionov was going to the Nizhny Fair, and as he bade good-bye to his family, his wife said to him, "Ivan Dmitrich, do not start to-day; I have had a bad dream about you."

Aksionov laughed, and said, "You are afraid that when I get to the fair I shall go on a spree."

His wife replied: "I do not know what I am afraid of; all I know is that I had a bad dream. I dreamt you returned from the town, and when you took off your cap I saw that your hair was quite grey."

Aksionov laughed. "That's a lucky sign," said he. "See if I don't sell out all my goods, and bring you some presents from the fair."

So he said good-bye to his family, and drove away. When he had travelled half-way, he met a merchant whom he knew, and they put up at the same inn for the night. They had some tea together, and then went to bed in adjoining rooms.

It was not Aksionov's habit to sleep late, and, wishing to travel while it was still cool, he aroused his driver before dawn, and told him to put in the horses.

Then he made his way across to the landlord of the inn (who lived in a cottage at the back), paid his bill, and continued his journey.

When he had gone about twenty-five miles, he stopped for the horses to be fed. Aksionov rested awhile in the passage of the inn, then he stepped out into the porch, and, ordering a samovar to be



heated, got out his guitar and began to play.

Suddenly a troika drove up with tinkling bells and an official alighted, followed by two soldiers. He came to Aksionov and began to question him, asking him who he was and whence he came. Aksionov answered him fully, and said, "Won't you have some tea with me?" But the official went on cross-questioning him and asking him. "Where did you spend last night? Were you alone, or with a fellow-merchant? Did you see the other merchant this morning? Why did you leave the inn before dawn?"

Aksionov wondered why he was asked all these questions, but he described all that had happened, and then added, "Why do you cross-question me as if I were a thief or a robber? I am travelling on business of my own, and there is no need to question me."

Then the official, calling the soldiers, said, "I am the police-officer of this district, and I question you because the merchant with whom you spent last night has been found with his throat cut. We must search your things."

They entered the house. The soldiers and the police-officer unstrapped Aksionov's luggage and searched it. Suddenly the officer drew a knife out of a bag, crying, "Whose knife is this?"

Aksionov looked, and seeing a blood-stained knife taken from his bag, he was frightened.

"How is it there is blood on this knife?"

Aksionov tried to answer, but could hardly utter a word, and only stammered: "I—don't know—not mine." Then the police-officer said: "This morning the merchant was found in bed with his throat cut. You are the only person who could have done it. The house was locked from inside, and no one else was there. Here is this blood-stained knife in your bag and your face and manner betray you! Tell me how you killed him, and how much money you stole?"

Aksionov swore he had not done it; that he had not seen the merchant after they had had tea together; that he had no money except eight thousand rubles of his own, and that the knife was not his. But his voice was broken, his face pale, and he trembled with fear as though he went guilty.

The police-officer ordered the soldiers to bind Aksionov and to put him in the cart. As they tied his feet together and flung him into the cart, Aksionov crossed himself and wept. His money and goods were taken from him, and he was sent to the nearest town and imprisoned there. Enquiries as to his character were made in Vladimir. The merchants and other inhabitants of that town said that in former days he used to drink and waste his time, but that he was a good man. Then the trial came on: he was charged with murdering a



merchant from Ryazan, and robbing him of twenty thousand rubles.

His wife was in despair, and did not know what to believe. Her children were all quite small; one was a baby at her breast. Taking them all with her, she went to the town where her husband was in jail. At first she was not allowed to see him; but after much begging, she obtained permission from the officials, and was taken to him. When she saw her husband in prison-dress and in chains, shut up with thieves and criminals, she fell down, and did not come to her senses for a long time. Then she drew her children to her, and sat down near him. She told him of things at home, and asked about what had happened to him. He told her all, and she asked, "What can we do now?"

"We must petition the Czar not to let an innocent man perish."

His wife told him that she had sent a petition to the Czar, but it had not been accepted.

Aksionov did not reply, but only looked downcast.

Then his wife said, "It was not for nothing I dreamt your hair had turned grey. You remember? You should not have started that day." And passing her fingers through his hair, she said: "Vanya dearest, tell your wife the truth; was it not you who did it?"

"So you, too, suspect me!" said Aksionov, and, hiding his face in his hands, he began to weep. Then a soldier came to say that the wife and children must go away; and Aksionov said good-bye to his family for the last time.

When they were gone, Aksionov recalled what had been said, and when he remembered that his wife also had suspected him, he said to himself, "It seems that only God can know the truth; it is to Him alone we must appeal, and from Him alone expect mercy."

And Aksionov wrote no more petitions; gave up all hope, and only prayed to God.

Aksionov was condemned to be flogged and sent to the mines. So he was flogged with a knot, and when the wounds made by the knot were healed, he was driven to Siberia with other convicts.

For twenty-six years Aksionov lived as a convict in Siberia. His hair turned white as snow, and his beard grew long, thin, and grey. All his mirth went; he stooped; he walked slowly, spoke little, and never laughed, but he often prayed.

In prison Aksionov learnt to make boots, and earned a little money, with which he bought *The Lives of the Saints*. He read this book when there was light enough in the prison; and on Sundays in the prison-church he read the lessons and sang in the choir; for his voice was still good.

The prison authorities liked Aksionov for his meekness, and his

fellow-prisoners respected him: they called him "Grandfather," and "The Saint." When they wanted to petition the prison authorities about anything, they always made Aksionov their spokesman, and when there were quarrels among the prisoners they came to him to put things right, and to judge the matter.

No news reached Aksionov from his home, and he did not even know if his wife and children were still alive.

One day a fresh gang of convicts came to the prison. In the evening the old prisoners collected round the new ones and asked them what towns or villages they came from, and what they were sentenced for. Among the rest Aksionov sat down near the newcomers, and listened with downcast air to what was said.

One of the new convicts, a tall, strong man of sixty, with a closely-cropped grey beard, was telling the others what he had been arrested for.

"Well, friends," he said, "I only took a horse that was tied to a sledge, and I was arrested and accused of stealing. I said I had only taken it to get home quicker, and had then let it go; besides, the driver was a personal friend of mine. So I said, 'It's all right.' 'No,' said they, 'you stole it.' But how or where I stole it they could not say. I once really did something wrong, and ought by rights to have come here long ago, but that time I was not found out. Now I have been sent here for nothing at all... Eh, but it's lies I'm telling you; I've been to Siberia before, but I did not stay long."

"Where are you from?" asked some one.

"From Vladimir. My family are of that town. My name is Makar, and they also call me Semyonich."

Aksionov raised his head and said: "Tell me, Semyonich, do you know anything of the merchants Aksionov of Vladimir? Are they still alive?"

"Know them? Of course I do. The Aksionovs are rich, though their father is in Siberia: a sinner like ourselves, it seems! As for you, Gran'dad, how did you come here?"

Aksionov did not like to speak of his misfortune. He only sighed, and said, "For my sins I have been in prison these twenty-six years."

"What sins?" asked Makar Semyonich.

But Aksionov only said, "Well, well—I must have deserved it!" He would have said no more, but his companions told the newcomers how Aksionov came to be in Siberia; how some one had killed a merchant, and had put the knife among Aksionov's things, and Aksionov had been unjustly condemned.

When Makar Semyonich heard this, he looked at Aksionov, slapped his own knee, and exclaimed, "Well, this is wonderful!

Really wonderful! But how old you've grown, Gran'dad!"

The others asked him why he was so surprised, and where he had seen Aksionov before; but Makar Semyonich did not reply. He only said: "It's wonderful that we should meet here, lads!"

These words made Aksionov wonder whether this man knew who had killed the merchant; so he said, "Perhaps, Semyonich, you have heard of that affair, or maybe you've seen me before?"

"How could I help hearing? The world's full of rumors. But it's a long time ago, and I've forgotten what I heard."

"Perhaps you heard who killed the merchant?" asked Aksionov.

Makar Semyonich laughed, and replied: "It must have been him in whose bag the knife was found! If some one else hid the knife there, 'He's not a thief till he's caught,' as the saying is. How could any one put a knife into your bag while it was under your head? It would surely have woke you up."

When Aksionov heard these words, he felt sure this was the man who had killed the merchant. He rose and went away. All that night Aksionov lay awake. He felt terribly unhappy, and all sorts of images rose in his mind. There was the image of his wife as she was when he parted from her to go to the fair. He saw her as if she were present; her face and her eyes rose before him; he heard her speak and laugh. Then he saw his children, quite little, as they were at that time: one with a little cloak on, another at his mother's breast. And then he remembered himself as he used to be—young and merry. He remembered how he sat playing the guitar in the porch of the inn where he was arrested, and how free from care he had been. He saw, in his mind, the place where he was flogged, the executioner, and the people standing around; the chains, the convicts, all the twenty-six years of his prison life, and his premature old age. The thought of it all made him so wretched that he was ready to kill himself.

"And it's all that villain's doing!" thought Aksionov. And his anger was so great against Makar Semyonich that he longed for vengeance, even if he himself should perish for it. He kept repeating prayers all night, but could get no peace. During the day he did not go near Makar Semyonich, nor even look at him.

A fortnight passed in this way. Aksionov could not sleep at night, and was so miserable that he did not know what to do.

One night as he was walking about the prison he noticed some earth that came rolling out from under one of the shelves on which the prisoners slept. He stopped to see what it was. Suddenly Makar Semyonich crept out from under the shelf, and looked up at Aksionov with frightened face. Aksionov tried to pass without looking at him, but Makar seized his hand and told him that he had

dug a hole under the wall, getting rid of the earth by putting it into his high-boots, and emptying it out every day on the road when the prisoners were driven to their work.

"Just you keep quiet, old man, and you shall get out too. If you blab, they'll flog the life out of me, but I will kill you first."

Aksionov trembled with anger as he looked at his enemy. He drew his hand away, saying, "I have no wish to escape, and you have no need to kill me; you killed me long ago! As to telling of you—I may do so or not, as God shall direct."

Next day, when the convicts were led out to work, the convoy soldiers noticed that one or other of the prisoners emptied some earth out of his boots. The prison was searched and the tunnel found. The Governor came and questioned all the prisoners to find out who had dug the hole. They all denied any knowledge of it. Those who knew would not betray Makar Semyonich, knowing he would be flogged almost to death. At last the Governor turned to Aksionov whom he knew to be a just man, and said:

"You are a truthful old man; tell me, before God, who dug the hole?"

Makar Semyonich stood as if he were quite unconcerned, looking at the Governor and not so much as glancing at Aksionov. Aksionov's lips and hands trembled, and for a long time he could not utter a word. He thought, "Why should I screen him who ruined my life? Let him pay for what I have suffered. But if I tell, they will probably flog the life out of him, and maybe I suspect him wrongly. And, after all, what good would it be to me?"

"Well, old man," repeated the Governor, "tell me the truth: who has been digging under the wall?"

Aksionov glanced at Makar Semyonich, and said, "I cannot say, your honour. It is not God's will that I should tell! Do what you like with me; I am in your hands."

However much the Governor! tried, Aksionov would say no more, and so the matter had to be left.

That night, when Aksionov was lying on his bed and just beginning to doze, some one came quietly and sat down on his bed. He peered through the darkness and recognized Makar.

"What more do you want of me?" asked Aksionov. "Why have you come here?"

Makar Semyonich was silent. So Aksionov sat up and said, "What do you want? Go away, or I will call the guard!"

Makar Semyonich bent close over Aksionov, and whispered, "Ivan Dmitrich, forgive me!"

"What for?" asked Aksionov.

"It was I who killed the merchant and hid the knife among your things. I meant to kill you too, but I heard a noise outside, so I hid the knife in your bag and escaped out of the window."

Aksionov was silent, and did not know what to say. Makar Semyonich slid off the bed-shelf and knelt upon the ground. "Ivan Dmitrich," said he, "forgive me! For the love of God, forgive me! I will confess that it was I who killed the merchant, and you will be released and can go to your home."

"It is easy for you to talk," said Aksionov, "but I have suffered for you these twenty-six years. Where could I go to now?... My wife is dead, and my children have forgotten me. I have nowhere to go..."

Makar Semyonich did not rise, but beat his head on the floor. "Ivan Dmitrich, forgive me!" he cried. "When they flogged me with the knot it was not so hard to bear as it is to see you now ... yet you had pity on me, and did not tell. For Christ's sake forgive me, wretch that I am!" And he began to sob.

When Aksionov heard him sobbing he, too, began to weep. "God will forgive you!" said he. "Maybe I am a hundred times worse than you." And at these words his heart grew light, and the longing for home left him. He no longer had any desire to leave the prison, but only hoped for his last hour to come.

In spite of what Aksionov had said, Makar Semyonich confessed, his guilt. But when the order for his release came, Aksionov was already dead.



## Authors, Stories and Notes

### Aesop

Aesop (620-560 BC), was, by tradition, a slave who wrote fables, which are very short stories, in prose or verse, that feature animals, plants, inanimate objects, or forces of nature which are given human qualities and that illustrate a moral lesson. The three Aesop's fables included here are *The Ape and the Two Travelers*, *Truth and the Traveler* and *The Boy Who Cried Wolf*.

### Hans Christian Andersen

Hans Christian Andersen (1805–1875) was a Danish author noted for his children's stories. *The Emperor's New Clothes* was first published with *The Little Mermaid* in 1837 as the third and final installment of Andersen's *Fairy Tales Told for Children*.

### Leonid Andreyev

Leonid Nikolaievich Andreyev (1871–1919) was a Russian playwright and short story writer who led the Expressionist movement in the national literature. *The Man Who Found the Truth* is from his 1916 collection, *The Crushed Flower*, translated by Herman Bernstein.

### Maurice Baring

Maurice Baring (1874–1945) was an English dramatist, poet, novelist, translator, essayist, travel writer and war correspondent. *What is Truth?* originally appeared in the *Morning Post* and was reprinted in his collection *Orpheus in Mayfair* in 1909.

### Ambrose Bierce

Ambrose Bierce (1842–?1914) was an American editorialist, journalist, short story writer, fabulist and satirist. Four of the stories included here are from his 1899 book *Fanstastic Fables*, which are parodies of Aesop's fables: *A Forfeited Right*; *At the Pole*; *A Fatal Disorder* and *Religions of Error*. There are also several entries from *The Devil's Dictionary*, which appeared in a weekly paper from 1881 through 1906 and was published in book form that year as *The Cynic's Word Book*.

### Anton Chekhov

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860–1904) was a Russian short-story writer, playwright and physician, considered to be one of the greatest short story writers in the history of world literature. *The Beggar* was first published in 1887 and translated from the Russian by Constance Garnett.

### Fyodor Dosoyevsky

Fyodor Mikhaylovich Dostoyevsky (1821–1881) was a Russian writer, essayist and philosopher, known for his novels *Crime and Punishment* and *The Brothers Karamazov*. *The Dream of a Ridiculous Man* was written in 1877.

### Paul Laurence Dunbar

Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906) was an important African-American poet and short story writer. *The Faith Cure Man* is from his collection *The Strength of Gideon and Other Stories* (1900.)

### Lord Dunsany

Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, 18th Baron of Dunsany (1878–1957) was an Anglo-Irish writer and dramatist. *The True History of The Hare and The Tortoise* and *A Moral Little Tale* both first appeared in *Fifty-One Tales* (1915.)

### Anatole France

Anatole France (1844–1924), born François-Anatole Thibault, was a French poet, journalist, and novelist. *Putois*, translated by William Patten, was first published in 1907.

### Oliver Wendell Holmes

Oliver Wendell Holmes, Sr. (1809–1894) was an American physician, professor, lecturer, and author. His son served as an associate justice on the Supreme Court of the United States from 1902 to 1932. *An Aphorism and a Lecture* is from his 1872 book, *The Poet at the Breakfast Table*.

### W. W. Jacobs

William Wymark Jacobs (1863–1943), was an English author of short stories and novels. *The Test* is from his 1906 collection, *Short Cruises*.



### Henry James

Henry James (1843–1916) was a noted American author who spent the last 40 years of his life living in England. He was the brother of the philosopher and psychologist William James. *The Liar* was written in 1887; *The Tree of Knowledge* in 1900.

### Henry Lawson

Henry Lawson (1867–1922) is among the best-known Australian poets and fiction writers of the colonial period. *Telling Mrs. Baker* was written in 1901.

### Stephen Leacock

Stephen Butler Leacock (1869–1944) was a Canadian writer and political economist; he taught at McGill University. Between 1915 and 1925, Leacock was the most popular humourist in the English-speaking world. *Homer and Humbug* is from *Behind the Beyond and Other Contributions to Human Knowledge* (1913); *The First Newspaper: A Sort of Allegory and Truthful Oratory, or What Our Speakers Ought to Say* are both from *Moonbeams From the Larger Lunacy* (1915.)

### Alain-René Lesage

Alain-René Lesage (1668–1747) was a French novelist and playwright. The selection in this anthology is taken from *Gil Blas* (*L'Histoire de Gil Blas de Santillane*), a picaresque novel written from 1715 to 1735. The selection here is from Book Two, Ch. IV and is considered a classic exposition of the consequences of telling an unpleasant truth to your boss.

### Jack London

Jack London (1876–1916) was an American author who wrote *The Call of the Wild*, *White Fang*, and *The Sea Wolf* and many other popular books. *Nam-Bok, the Liar* (also called *Nam-Bok, the Unveracious*) is from his short story collection *Children of the Frost*, published in 1902.

### Guy de Maupassant

Henri René Albert Guy de Maupassant (1850–1893) was a popular 19th Century French writer, considered one of the fathers of the modern short story. *Simon's Papa* (1879) is in Vol. XI of his collected stories.

### Catulle Mendès

Catulle Mendès (1841–1909) was a French poet and man of letters, of Portuguese-Jewish extraction. The story presented here, *The Mirror*, was first published in French and 1886 and ten years later in English in the Magazine *Short Story*.

### A.A. Milne

Alan Alexander Milne (1882–1956) was an English author; his earlier work was overshadowed by the success of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. *The Truth About Home Rails* was published in his 1915 collection *Happy Days*; it originally appeared in the humor magazine *Punch*.

### Edgar Allen Poe

Edgar Allan Poe (1809–1849) was an American writer, poet, editor and literary critic, best known for his tales of mystery and the macabre. *The Purloined Letter* was first published in 1845.

### Saki

Hector Hugh Munro (1870–1916), better known by the pen name Saki, was a British writer, whose stories satirized Edwardian society and culture. *The Open Window* was first collected in *Beasts and Super-Beasts* in 1914.

### Robert Louis Stevenson

Robert Louis Balfour Stevenson (1850–1894) was a Scottish novelist, poet, essayist and travel writer. Some of his best-known works are *Treasure Island*; *Kidnapped*; *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, and *A Child's Garden of Verses*. *Something In It* is from his collection *Fables*, first published in 1896.

### Bram Stoker

Abraham “Bram” Stoker (1847–1912) was an Irish-born novelist and short story writer, best known today for his 1897 novel *Dracula*. *The Gipsy Prophecy* was included in *Dracula's Guest and Other Weird Stories*, a collection of short stories first published two years after Stoker's death.

### Leo Tolstoy

Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy (1828–1910) was a Russian writer widely regarded as among the greatest of novelists. His masterpieces are *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. *The Coffee-House of Surat* was published in an 1885 anthology, *What Men Live By*. *God Sees the Truth, But Waits* was first published in 1872.

### Mark Twain

Samuel Langhorne Clemens (1835–1910), better known by the pen name Mark Twain, was an American author and humorist, best known for his novels *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. *Was it Heaven? Or Hell?* first appeared in *Harper's Magazine* in 1902, *A Fable* in 1906. *The Petrified Man* was first published in *The Virginia City Territorial Enterprise* in 1862.

### Edith Wharton

Edith Wharton (1862 – 1937) was an American novelist and short story writer. She was the first woman to win the Pulitzer Prize for Literature, in 1921, for *Age of Innocence*. *The Verdict* was written in 1908.

### John Greenleaf Whittier

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–1892) was an influential American Quaker poet and ardent advocate of the abolition of slavery in the United States. *The Proselytes* was first published in 1833.

### Virginia Woolf

Adeline Virginia Woolf (born Stephen; 1882–1941) was an English novelist, essayist, publisher, feminist, and writer of short stories, and one of the foremost modernist literary figures of the Twentieth Century. *A Society* and *A Mark on the Wall* both appeared in her 1921 short story collection, *Monday or Tuesday*.

### William Butler Yeats

William Butler Yeats (1865–1939) was an Irish poet and dramatist, winner of the 1923 Nobel Prize for Literature. He was a driving force behind the Irish Literary Revival and one of the founders of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin. *The Wisdom of the King* was first published in the *New Review* in 1895 and anthologized in *The Secret Rose* two years later.

Answer to the puzzle on page iv:

The trick is to ask a question where the response will be the same from both natives: a question that incorporates how a member of the tribe not answering would respond to the same question.

For example, what if we say to one of the natives, “If I asked a member of the tribe you *don’t* belong to which road I should take to get to the castle, what would he say?”

1. If we ask a truth teller, the response will be: “He would say to take the north road.” The road to the castle is the south road so the liar will tell us to take the north road, and the truth teller will faithfully report this to us.

2. If we ask a liar, the response will be: “He would say to take the north road.” The road to the castle is the south road and the truth teller will tell us to take the south road, but the liar will not report this faithfully to us — he will say the opposite.

In both cases we’ll get the same response. We should do the opposite of what we have been told because, regardless of whether we are speaking to a liar or a truth teller, our question will always produce the wrong answer to which road we should take.

## FOR FURTHER READING

*If you are interested in further exploring the nature of truth, these books may be of interest:*

**Truth: A Guide**, by Simon Blackburn (Oxford University Press, 2007)

**On Truth**, by Henry G. Frankfurt (Knopf, 2006)

**The Nature of Truth: Classic and Contemporary Perspectives**, by Michael P. Lynch (M.I.T. Press, 2001)

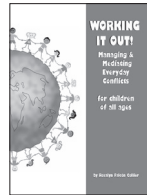
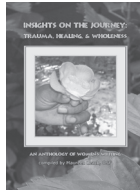
**Theories of Truth**, by Frederick F. Schmitt (Wiley-Blackwell, 2003)

**Theories of Truth: A Critical Introduction**, by Ricahrd L. Kirkham (M.I.T. Press, 1995)

**Truth and Tension in Science and Religion**, by Varadaraja V. Raman (Beech River Books, 2009)

An excellent film to open a lively conversation about truth is *The Matrix* (Warner Home Video, 1999) You might want to also pick up a copy of:

**Philosophers Explore The Matrix**, Christopher Grau (editor) (Oxford University Press, 2005)



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**Class of Nonviolence:**  
48 Readings, by Colman McCarthy

**Peace is Our Birthright:**  
*the p.e.a.c.e. process and interfaith community development* by Ann E. Helmke and Rosalyn Falcón Collier, with a foreword by Arun Gandhi

**Hajj Journal** by Narjis Pierre, with an introduction & photographs by Ali Moshirsadri

**Insights on the Journey:**  
*Trauma, Healing and Wholeness.* Maureen Leach, OSF, editor

**Working It Out! Managing and Mediating Everyday Conflicts** by Rosalyn Falcón Collier

**Death Sentences:** 34 Classic Short Stories about the Death Penalty Susan Ives (editor) with a foreword by Jay Brandon

**End of the Line:** Five Short Novels about the Death Penalty, Susan Ives

**Detour to Death Row** by David Atwood, founder, Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty

**Capital Ideas:** 150 Classic Writers on the Death Penalty, from the Code of Hammurabi to Clarence Darrow, Susan Ives (editor)

**Visualize Whirled Peas:** Vegan Cooking from the San Antonio peaceCENTER, Susan Ives

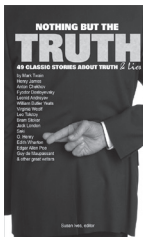
**Shall We Ever Rise? A Holy Walk** Lenten collages by Rosalyn Falcón Collier and Ann E. Helmke **COLOR!** In English & Spanish.

**The Love of Money:** 56 Classic Stories About Greed by Susan Ives

**The Tug of War:** 48 Classic Stories About War & Peace, Susan Ives (editor)

**Nothing But the Truth:** 49 Classic Stories About Truth, Susan Ives

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