PERKINS, THE FAKEER

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"I groaned aloud, and felt the tears come to Caroline's beautiful eyes."

PERKINS, *The* FAKEER

A TRAVESTY ON REINCARNATION

His Wonderful Workings in the Cases of
" *When Reginald Was Caroline* "
" *How Chopin Came to Remsen* "
and " *Clarissa's Troublesome Baby* "

BY EDWARD S. VAN ZILE
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ILLUSTRATED BY HY MAYER

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PREFACE

In offering to the public in book form the following tales, from the pages of THE SMART SET, the opportunity is presented to the author of answering the questions that have frequently been asked of him and the publishers, since these stories first appeared in print, concerning their origin. He is not, and has not been, the *deus ex machina*.

One Perkins, a Yankee who lived for fifty years in India, and became an adept in mysteries rejected by the Occidental mind, is responsible for the curious psychical transpositions described in the following pages. I am not at liberty to say much about Perkins. He has control of a power that is so peculiar, and I may say erratic, that I dare not offend him. If, in this preface, I should tell the public too much about Perkins, he has both the ability and the inclination to work me harm of the disastrous sort herein described. I do not dare to defy him.

I have taken the liberty of telling these stories in the first person. My choice of this method will at once commend itself to the thoughtful reader; and, what is more important, I am sure that it will satisfy the *amour propre* of Perkins, the Fakeer–a consummation devoutly to be wished.

E. S. VAN Z.
Hartford, Conn., March, 1903.

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CHAPTER I.
TRANSPOSED.

But what a mystery this erring mind!
It wakes within a frame of various powers
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–*N. P. Willis.*

To begin at the beginning: the tragedy or farce–whichever it may prove to be–opened just a week ago. I turned on my side, as I awoke last Wednesday morning, to look into my wife's face, and, lo, I beheld, as in a mirror, my own countenance. My first thought was that I was under the influence of the tag end of a quaint dream, but presently my eyes, or rather my wife's, opened slowly and an expression of mingled horror and amazement shone therein.

"What–what–" groaned Caroline, in my voice, plucking at my–or perhaps I should say our–beard. "Reginald, am I mad–you look–where are you? What is this on my chin–and what have you done to yourself?"

Whether to laugh or swear or weep I hardly knew. The bedroom looked natural, thank God, or I think that at the outset we should have lost our transposed minds even more completely than we had. The sun came in through the window as usual. I could see my trousers–if they were mine–lying across a chair at the further end of my dressing-room. It was all common-place, natural, homelike. But when I glanced again at my wife, there she lay, pale and trembling, with my face, beard, tousled hair and heavy features. I rubbed a slender white hand across my brow–or, to be accurate, the brow that had been my wife's. There could be no doubt that something uncanny, supernatural, theosophical or diabolical had happened. While we lay dead with sleep our respective identities had changed places, through some occult blunder that, I realized clearly enough, was certain to cause us no end of annoyance.

"Don't move," I whispered to Caroline, and there flashed before my mind a circus-poster that I had gazed at as a boy, marveling in my young impressionability at the hirsute miracle that had been labeled in red ink, "The Bearded Lady."

"Don't move," I continued, hoping against hope that by prompt measures I might repair the mysterious damage that had been done to us by this psychical transposition. "Shut your eyes, Caroline, and lie perfectly still. Don't worry, my dear. Make your mind perfectly blank–receptive to impressions. Now, we'll put forth an effort together. I'm lying with my eyes closed, and I am willing myself to return to my own body. Do likewise, Caroline. Don't tremble so! There's no danger. Things can't be worse, can they? There's comfort in that, is there not? Now! Are you ready? Use your will power, my dear, for all it's worth."

We lay motionless, blind, silent for a time. That I should gaze into my wife's own face when I opened my eyes again I fondly imagined, for I had always been proud of my force of will. Caroline, too–as I had good reason to know–possessed a stubborn determination that had great dynamic possibilities.

"Ready!" I exclaimed, presently. "Open your eyes, my dear!"

Horror! There was my wife gazing at me with my eyes and pulling nervously at my infernal beard. As she saw that I was still occupying her fair body, my eyes began to fill, and a man's hoarse sobs relieved my wife's overwrought

feelings.

"Is it–oh, Reginald!–is it reincarnation, do you think?" she questioned in her misery.

"Ah, something of that nature, I fear, Caroline," I admitted, reluctantly. "It's a new one on me, anyway. But it can't last. Don't be impatient, my dear. It'll soon pass off."

But even as I spoke I knew that I was using my wife's sweet, soft voice for deception. Whatever it was, it had come to stay–for a time at least.

"I think, Reggie, dear, that, if you don't mind, I'll have breakfast in bed."

Like a flash, Caroline's remark revealed to me the frightful problems that would crop up constantly from our present plight. Number one presented itself instantly; I had an important engagement at my office at 9:30. If Caroline remained in bed I couldn't keep it. Then it came to me that if she rose and dressed I should be in no better case. Dressed? She would be obliged to put on my clothes, anyway! What other alternative was there?

"I think, Caroline, dear," I suggested, gently, "that we'd better wait awhile before we make our plans. It may go away suddenly. A change may take place at any moment."

"It came in our sleep, and it'll go in our sleep," said my wife, confidently, and I was struck by the gruffness that a firm conviction gave to my voice. I had never noticed it when I had been in full and free possession thereof.

"If we could only go to sleep," I sighed, glancing again at my trousers and suppressing a harsh expletive that arose to my beautiful lips.

"I couldn't sleep, Reginald. I'm sure of that. I feel a horror of sleep, but I need something. Perhaps–oh, Reggie, it can't be that!–but I can't help thinking that I want a–a–cocktail."

Caroline hid her borrowed face in my great, clumsy hands.

It required an effort of memory for me to put myself into sympathy with her present craving. I hadn't thought of a cocktail since I had awakened. It was only once in a very great while that I indulged in an eye-opener. But I had been out very late Tuesday night–in fact, it had been this morning before I had reached home from the club–and I was not, upon reflection, altogether astonished at the wish that my poor wife had expressed with such awkward coyness. But to grant her request demanded heroic action, and I hesitated before taking what might prove to be an irrevocable step. If I left the bed under existing conditions, a temporary psychical maladjustment might become permanent. Then, again, I realized that my little feet felt repelled by the chill that would come to them if exposed to a cold draught that blew through a window open in my–or, rather, Caroline's–dressing-room.

"Go into the bathroom and take a cold plunge," I suggested to Caroline, to

gain time. "It's more bracing than a cocktail."

"You ought to know, Reginald," she remarked, in my most playful voice.

Her ill-timed jocosity struck me as ghastly.

"Caroline, dear," I began, "we must beware of recriminations. 'It is a condition, not a theory, that confronts us,'" I quoted, mournfully. "If we should fall out, you and I—-"

"If we only could!" sighed Caroline.

"Could what?" I cried, in shrill falsetto.

"Fall out, Reginald," she answered, grimly. "Can't you think of something else to try? Really, it's too absurd! What is the matter with us, Reggie? Are we dreaming?"

I listened, intently. The servants were astir down-stairs, and through the windows came the clatter of early vehicles and the thin voice of a newsboy crying at eight o'clock the ten o'clock "extra" of a yellow journal. There was nothing in our environment to suggest the supernatural or to explain a mystery that deepened as the moments passed. The external world was unchanged, and–startling thought!–Caroline and I must confront it presently under conditions that were, so far as I knew, unprecedented in the history of the race.

"That's no dream!" I exclaimed, terror-stricken. My wife's maid had rapped, as usual at the outer door of our apartments. "Good God, Caroline, what shall we do?"

"Tell her I don't want her this morning, Reginald! Send her away, will you? She mustn't see me–yet."

"But my–your–this hair, Caroline? How'll I get it up without Suzanne's help?"

"I'll do it for you," answered Caroline, in a voice that sounded like a despairing moan.

"Look at those hands–my hands, Caroline! You can't dress hair with them. Take my word for that."

Suzanne rapped again, thinking, doubtless, that we were still asleep.

"I'll be there directly, Suzanne," cried Caroline, in my voice.

We turned cold with consternation. What would Suzanne think of this? My reputation in my own household had been jeopardized on the instant.

"Caroline! Caroline! You must pull yourself together!" I whispered. "Have courage, and do keep your wits about you! Act like a man, will you? Keep quiet, now. I'll speak to Suzanne."

With a courage begotten by desperation, I sat erect. Fear and hope had been at war within me as, for the first time since I had awakened, I changed my posture. I had dreaded the uncanny sensation that would spring from further proof that I was really imprisoned in my wife's body. But I had clung to a shred of hope.

It might be that Caroline and I in motion would find the psychical readjustment that had been denied to us in repose. I was instantly undeceived. As I sat up in bed, Caroline's luxuriant dark tresses fell over my shoulders and I looked down at a lock of hair that lay black against my tapering white fingers. A wave of physical well-being swept over me, and, despite the horror of my situation, my heart beat with a great joy in life. The blood came into my well-rounded cheeks, as I recalled Caroline's recent request for a cocktail. What a shame it was that a big, healthy man should want a stimulant early in the day!

"Suzanne!" I cried. "Suzanne, are you still there?"

"*Oui*, madame," came the maid's voice, a note echoing through it that I did not like.

"I shall not want you for fifteen minutes, Suzanne," I said. "Come back in a quarter of an hour." I felt a cold chill creeping over me, and Caroline's sweet voice trembled slightly. "And may the devil fly away with you, Suzanne!" I muttered, as I fell back against the pillows.

"We've had our sentence suspended for fifteen minutes, Caroline," I said, presently. "But how the deuce am I going to get through my toilet? My French is not like yours, my dear, and you never speak English to Suzanne. It's actually immoral, Caroline, the way I get my genders mixed up in French."

"Oh, don't say that, Reginald!" exclaimed my wife, in a horrified basso.

"Say what, Caroline?" I asked, petulantly.

"That about mixing genders being immoral, Reggie," she fairly moaned. "I'm not immoral, even if–if–if I have got your gender, Reginald. I didn't want it," she added, sternly, "and I can't be held responsible if I am masculine or neuter or intransitive. My advice to you, Reginald, is not to say much to Suzanne in any language."

I could not refrain from a silvery chuckle, the sound of which changed my mood instantly.

"How often I've said that to you, Caroline!" I remarked, most unkindly.

"I don't gossip with Suzanne any more than you do with your man," growled Caroline, in a tone that hurt me deeply.

My man! Great Lucifer, I had almost forgotten his existence. He would be in my dressing-room presently to trim my beard and make of himself a nuisance in various ways. Jenkins had his good points as a valet, but he was too talkative at times and always inquisitive. I could have murdered Suzanne and Jenkins at that moment with good appetite.

"Caroline," I said, gloomily, "Fate has ordained that you and I, for some reason that is not apparent, must make immediate choice between two courses of action. We can commit suicide–there's a revolver in the room. Or we may face the ordeal bravely, helping each other, as the day passes, to conceal from

the world our strange affliction. I have no doubt that while we sleep to-night the–ah–psychical mistake that has been made will be rectified."

My voice faltered as I uttered the last sentence. Neither my experience nor reading had furnished me with data upon which I could safely base so optimistic a conclusion.

"I–I don't want to die, Reggie," muttered Caroline, with a gesture of protest.

"The club was rather quiet last night," I remarked, musingly; but my wife did not catch the significance of the words. "Well, if we're to brace up and stand the racket, Caroline, we must begin at once. You must give me a few pointers about Suzanne. I'll reciprocate of course, and you'll have no trouble in bluffing Jenkins to a standstill. There he is now! Call out to him, my dear. Don't be afraid of using–ah–my voice. Tell him you are coming to him at once." Unbroken silence ensued.

"Now, Caroline, be a man–that's a good girl! Tell him you'll be out in five minutes."

My wife's stalwart figure was shaking with nervousness.

"Oh–ah–oh, Jenkins," she roared, presently. "Jenkins, go away. I don't want you this morning. Go away! go away! Do you hear me? Go away!"

"Yes, sir," came Jenkins's voice to us, amazement and flunkeyism mingled therein in equal parts. "Yes, sir. I'm going at once, sir."

"Now you have done it, Caroline!" I cried, in a high treble of anger. "Great Scott! how that man will talk down-stairs!"

For a moment the sun-lighted room whirled before my eyes like a golden merry-go-round, and I lay there, limp and helpless, awaiting in misery Suzanne's imminent return.

CHAPTER II.

A WEIRD TOILETTE.

My spirit wrestles in anguish
With fancies that will not depart;
A ghost who borrowed my semblance
Has hid in the depth of my heart.
–Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen.

"Madame seems to be in very low spirits this morning," Suzanne had the audacity to remark to me as she deftly manipulated my wife's dark, luxuriant hair, to my infinite annoyance. She spoke in French, a language that always rubs me the wrong way. I gazed restlessly at the dainty furnishings of Caroline's dressing-room, and remained silent.

Presently Suzanne spoke again. "I hope that madame has received no bad news."

"Great Scott, girl! what are you driving at?" I heard my wife's voice exclaim, and my recklessness appalled me. Suzanne was paralyzed for a moment. I could see her pretty face in the mirror, and it had turned pale on the instant.

"Pardon me, madame," she gasped, "but I–I thought—-"

"Don't think!" I cried, crossly. "Tie up my–this–ah, hair, and let me do the thinking, will you?"

Repentance for my harsh words came to me at once. Suzanne stifled a gasp and a sob and continued her work as a *coiffeuse*. I realized that I must control my impulsiveness at once. I had never understood what my friends had meant when they had accused me of a lack of imagination. I had taken pride in the fact that I was a straightforward, two-plus-two-makes-four kind of a man, not given to foolish fancies nor errant day-dreams. I had attributed my success in business to this tendency toward the matter-of-fact, but now, for the first time in my life, I regretted my lack of imaginative power. I must, for my dear Caroline's sake–yes, in the name of common decency–preserve my psychical incognito in the presence of my wife's maid. Suddenly, I was startled by hearing my voice in the bathroom uttering something that sounded much like an exclamation of horror. In my consternation I sat erect, listening intently.

"What is the matter, madame?" whispered Suzanne, excitedly. "Monsieur, too, seems out of sorts this morning."

I realized that Caroline had found sufficient courage to set out in quest of the cold plunge that I had advised in lieu of a cocktail. There came the sound of running water from the bathroom.

"Go on, Suzanne," I said, gently. "Get through with this hair of mine, will you? There's nothing the matter. Caroline–Reginald–ah–Mr. Stevens didn't get quite enough sleep, that's all. He's made the spray too cold."

Suzanne's hands trembled perceptibly as she resumed her task.

"There's a note for madame this morning," she said, presently, lowering her voice again, and always speaking her detestable mother-tongue.

"Of course there is," I remarked, astonished at the maid's manner. "Her–ah–my mail is full of 'em. Who's the note from, Suzanne?"

"Madame is so remote to-day!" murmured Suzanne, helplessly. "Did I not tell madame that he would write to her?"

A chill ran through my veins, but I made neither sound nor movement. Apparently my wife's maid had become a discreet postmistress, whose good offices it might behoove me to look into.

"I'll read the note later in the day, Suzanne. Are you nearly done with this infernal hair?"

"*Mon Dieu!*" exclaimed the girl, but she went no further.

A splash, a groan, followed by a hoarse yell, echoed through the suite.

"Damn it!" I cried, desperately. "Why didn't Jenkins stay here? She–he'll never get dressed!"

"Where is Jenkins, madame?" asked Suzanne, nervously. "Monsieur seems to be excited. And madame–what is the matter with madame?"

The girl's consternation was not strange. Caroline, the *grand dame*, gentle, self-poised, unexcitable, sat before the wide-eyed Suzanne, swearing in a voice that had been fashioned by nature for nothing harsher than a drawing-room expletive.

"Caroline," came my wife's borrowed voice, faintly, as if she were talking to herself. It was some time before I realized that she was calling me.

"Yes–ah–Reginald!" I managed to cry, in a trembling falsetto.

"Monsieur seems to want you, madame," said Suzanne, wonderingly. "Where is Jenkins, madame?"

"God only knows!" I exclaimed, desperately. "Down-stairs, I suppose, talking through his hat. Send him to me at once, girl."

"Madame! Jenkins? Send Jenkins to you? Madame, I do not comprehend."

"To me? I didn't say to me, did I? Send him to Car–Reginald–Mr. Stevens! Wasn't that what I said? Go, Suzanne! And–wait a minute. If you mention my name to Jenkins–that is, if you gossip with him coming up-stairs, I'll dismiss you this morning. Tell Jenkins to hold his chattering tongue, or he'll get the grand–ah, *manner nayst pah?*"

Suzanne burst into tears, and, instead of obeying my behest, fell, with true French impetuosity, upon her knees at my feet, and, seizing my cold hands, buried her face in them, sobbing hysterically.

"Oh, madame! madame! What have I done to deserve this?" she moaned, in her diabolical French. "Why do you speak to me–treat me–this way? It is so cruelly cruel! Oh, madame, have I not been faithful, discreet, blind, deaf, dumb? Have I ever betrayed even a little, little secret of yours?"

"Caroline!" There was a note of mingled anger and dismay in my voice as it came to me, harsh and unwelcome, from my distant dressing-room, the door of which Caroline had closed.

"I must go to her!" I cried, springing to my feet, and tripping over my dressing-gown as I pushed by the kneeling, hysterical maid. Suzanne grasped

what I now believe to have been the hem of my garment.

"Oh, madame, you must not go to him! Monsieur's voice is so wild! I am sure that he is not well. You must rest here, madame! See, I am going. I will send Jenkins to monsieur at once. *Mon Dieu*! *Mon Dieu*! I go, madame! I shall return to you very soon."

Suzanne had really gone, and, pulling myself together by a strong effort of will, I stumbled from the dressing-room, crossed our bed-chamber and knocked on the door, behind which I could hear Caroline uttering subdued exclamations in my raucous voice.

"Who's there? Go away! Who is it?" cried my wife, in a panic.

"Don't get rattled, my dear," I called out, in Caroline's sweetest tones. "Suzanne has gone to find Jenkins. Let me in, my dear. I may be able to give you a few tips."

The door flew open and I saw that Caroline had managed to don my underclothing. My heavy features displayed the joy that my wife felt at my arrival. I learned afterward that she had been having serious trouble with my linen shirt.

"Oh, Reggie," she exclaimed, making my voice tremble with emotion. "I've had such a horrible time!" She threw my great, muscular arms around her neck, and I felt my beard scratching my–her smooth, delicate cheeks.

"Sit down, Caroline, and calm yourself," I implored her. "This is no time for this kind of thing. We've got but a moment to ourselves. Suzanne has gone to bring Jenkins back."

Caroline shuddered, but said nothing.

"You gave me a terrible shock, my dear," I remarked, calmly. "I feared that some terrible accident had happened to you."

"The very worst has happened, Reggie," she mused, in something like a prolonged growl. "I don't think I'll ever be able to go through with it."

"We've made a bad beginning, Caroline. I'll admit that. But all is not yet lost. Jenkins and Suzanne doubtless imagine that you are merely suffering from a somewhat stubborn and persistent jag."

"How horribly vulgar!" groaned Caroline.

"Don't disabuse Jenkins's mind of the idea," I implored her. "It's hard on you, I'll admit, but it's better than the truth. We can't tell them that we've changed bodies for a time. They'd think us crazy, Caroline."

"We will be, Reginald," growled the dismayed giant, seemingly on the verge of tears. "If I were only dressed I wouldn't be so frightened. But you are such a clumsy creature, Reggie."

I sprang to my feet. I thought I heard voices in the lower hall.

"They're coming, Caroline. Don't say much to Jenkins, but, if you think of it, my dear, swear at him softly now and then. It'll quiet his suspicions, if he has

any."

As I started to leave the room, I turned sharply, and eyed my own face searchingly. Imitating Suzanne's voice as well as I could, I said:

"There's a note for madame this morning. Did I not tell madame that he would write to her?"

Bitterly did I regret my untimely sarcasm. Caroline, white to the lips, tottered where she stood.

"Reginald!" she cried, in a deep, horror-stricken voice that could have been heard throughout the house and in the street outside.

Rushing back, I helped her towards a chair.

"It's all right, Caroline," I said, in dulcet, pleading tones. "Don't mind it, my dear. I am sure that you will be able to explain the–ah–little matter wholly to my satisfaction." Then a thought flashed through my mind that was like a cold douche, and I added: "And don't forget about Jenkins, my dear. Don't encourage him to talk. And, above all, don't believe anything that he may say. He's a most stupendous liar."

With that I hurried back to Caroline's dressing-room just in time to seat myself before Suzanne, panting from haste and excitement, rushed into the room.

"Jenkins, madame," she cried, wringing her hands, "Jenkins is a villain, a rascal, a scoundrel." The girl appeared to have a long list of opprobrious French epithets in her vocabulary.

"Calm yourself, Suzanne," I said, coolly. "You have sent Jenkins to monsieur?"

"Alas, madame, he refused to obey me unless I agreed to kiss him. The horrid, degenerate, unprincipled English beast! *Mon Dieu*! I could not kiss him, madame."

"Curse the man's devilish impudence!" I exclaimed, while Suzanne stared at me, her pretty mouth wide open in amazement.

"You say such queer things to-day, madame!" she murmured, presently, resuming her duties in a melancholy way. "What will madame wear for breakfast?"

Her question startled me. My mind endeavored, without much success, to recall Caroline's morning costumes.

"What's the matter with her–ah–my plum-colored–ah–tea-gown?" I asked, recklessly.

"Madame is jocose–facetious," remarked Suzanne, pretending to laugh. I reflected bitterly that I could not see the joke.

"You have such excellent taste, Suzanne," I said, proud of my cleverness. "Tog me out in any old thing. But it must be warm and snug, girl. I have had chills up my back until I feel like a small icicle in a cold wind." Suddenly an inspiration came to me. "Suzanne, you'll find a bottled cocktail in the bedroom

closet. Never mind the cracked ice. Pour me out about four fingers and bring it to me at once. Don't stare at me like that, girl! Quick work, now. And–ah–don't let Caro–that is, Mr. Stevens hear you. Go!"

Suzanne, pale with amazement, hurried away to find the stimulant that had become suddenly the one thing on earth that I really desired. Presently, she returned, carrying a half-filled cocktail glass.

"Here's how, Suzanne!" I cried, joyously, forgetting caste distinctions in my delight at the opportunity of restoring my waning vitality. I swallowed the smooth concoction at a gulp, Suzanne watching me with a puzzled smile on her disturbed countenance.

"Jenkins is with monsieur," she remarked as she took the empty glass from my white, slender hand. Apprehension clutched at my heart again.

"Does–ah–Mr. Stevens–monsieur–seem to be–ah–quiet?" I asked, eagerly.

"I didn't hear his voice, madame," answered Suzanne, arranging a sky-blue morning-gown for my use. "But Jenkins is talking, talking, talking all the time, madame."

"Damn him for a confounded cockney gas-bag!" I murmured, despondently, but fortunately Suzanne was at that moment busy at the further end of the dressing-room. I stood erect, impatient of further delay.

"Look here, girl," I exclaimed, "will you quit this fussy nonsense and get me out of here? I've got an engagement at—-"

My sweet, velvety voice failed me as I realized that I was again forgetting myself, or, rather, Caroline.

The long suffering Suzanne was at my side, instantly.

"Madame may go now," she said, giving a finishing touch here and there to my hair and costume. I made for the bedroom eagerly, but tripped over my dress, recovering my equilibrium and went on. Suzanne said something to herself in French, but the only words that came distinctly to my ears were:

"*Le cocktail! Il est diabolique!*"

CHAPTER III.

CAROLINE'S USURPATION.

In philosophic mood last night, as idly I was lying,
That souls may transmigrate, methought, there could be no denying;

So just to know to what I owe propensities so strong,
I drew my soul into a chat–our gossip lasted long.
–*Béranger.*

It was not wholly unpleasant to find myself facing Caroline across the breakfast-table. There she sat, attired in my most becoming gray business suit, in outward seeming a large, well-groomed man-of-the-world. The light in her–or my–eyes suggested the possibility that she had found compensations for her soul's change of base. If that was the case, Caroline was more to be envied than I was, for, despite the feminine beauty that had become mine for a time, I was wholly ill-at-ease and disgruntled. My hand trembled and I spilled the coffee that it had become my duty to serve. Jones, our phlegmatic butler, appeared to be politely astonished at my clumsiness and glanced at me furtively now and again.

"Two lumps, Caroline?" I asked, absently. Catching my wife's masculine eye, I felt the blood rush to my cheeks. "Reginald, I mean!"

"Three lumps, and plenty of cream, Caroline," said my wife, with ready wit. What a domineering note there was in my voice when used vicariously! I wondered if Caroline had noticed it.

"You may go, Jones," I said, presently. "I'll ring if we need you."

A gleam of surprise came into the butler's eyes, but he controlled it instantly, and strode from the breakfast-room like a liveried automaton.

"You are not eating, Reginald," said my wife, in a gruff whisper, glancing at the door through which Jones had made his exit. "You must not give way to your nervousness, dear boy. You'll need all your strength before the day is over."

"Gad, you're right–if I can judge by the last hour, Caroline," I remarked, endeavoring by force of will to beget an appetite for toast and eggs. "Just hand me my letters, will you? Here are yours, my dear."

I saw the masculine cheeks redden, but Caroline made no effort to act upon the suggestion that I had thrown out.

"Reggie! Reggie!" she moaned, hoarsely, "is there no help for us? Can't you think of something that will change us back again? It's simply unbearable. Sometimes it makes me laugh, but I almost died before I got out of the bath-room. And Jenkins was simply detestable! You must get us out of this, Reginald, or I warn you I shall read these letters, go down to your office and your club–and enjoy life in your way for a while, my dear."

There was something in all this that I did not altogether like, but I smiled as I said:

"Are you laboring under the delusion, Caroline, that my daily life, filled to overflowing with business cares that you know nothing about, is pleasanter

than yours? You can do as you please all day long–see people or deny yourself to them, as you choose. I had noticed a tendency upon your part, my dear, before this–ah–accident occurred, to complain that your existence was dull, that a man had a happier lot than a woman. It's all bosh, that idea. From the moment when I leave this house in the morning, Caroline, I am a slave to duties that I cannot shirk. I am under a terrific strain all day long. As for you, my dear, you may go and come as you please, see the people you like, and dodge those you detest; take a nap if you're tired, a drive if you're suffocated, a walk if you feel energetic. And you have nothing but petty worries that don't amount to a row of beans. Great Scott! Caroline, what an easy job a woman in your position has!"

Caroline refused to meet my gaze, and I observed with annoyance that my eyes sometimes had a shifty way with them. She had placed one large relentless hand over my small pile of letters. Presently, she said, in a tone that indicated a stubborn spirit:

"You are off the track, Reginald. What I want to know is whether you think that we have exhausted every method for getting out of this queer scrape?"

"Drop that, will you, Caroline?" I exclaimed, petulantly. "I'm no theosophist nor faith-curist. I'm not going to fool with this thing at all. If we get to tampering with it–whatever it is–you may find yourself in Jenkins's shoes and I may be Suzanne or Jones for a change. I'm banking on a readjustment in our sleep to-night. Until then, we'll have to accept the situation as it stands."

"Then I'm going to boss things, Reggie," remarked my wife, firmly. "If I'm obliged to get about in your great, hulking figure, my dear, I'm going to enjoy all the perquisites for the next few hours. I don't believe–I never did believe–that you work half as hard as you say you do, nor that you have such horrible dragons to slay every day before dinner. Then, I want you to see for yourself how much leisure I really enjoy. You can stay at home and run my affairs, Reggie, dear. I'm going down-town to see 'the boys' at work!"

"Good heavens, Caroline, you are joking!" I cried, my delicate hand trembling as I endeavored to raise my coffee-cup to my white lips. "It would be utter madness–what you plan! I'll have to let things slide for to-day. I'll telephone to the office saying that I'm down with the grip. Grip? That's good," I went on, hysterically. "It's just what we've lost, Caroline. But never mind! It's a word that will serve my turn. And then, my dear, we'll pass the day together here. We might get a readjustment at any moment, don't you see, if we stick close to each other. If you're down-town–great Nebuchadnezzar! anything might happen to us, Caroline."

"But there's the telephone, Reginald," suggested my wife, coldly. "As soon as I reach your office I'll call you up. If you don't leave the house to-day you'll have me at the end of a 'phone most of the time. And let me tell you, Reggie,

you'll need me. I am very much inclined to think, my dear, that you'll wonder, before the day is over, what has become of my sinecure. I am quite sure that you'll not find time for a great many naps."

"If you leave me, Caroline," I said, musingly, "I shouldn't dare to fall asleep. But I really can't believe, my dear, that you seriously contemplate the expedition you have mentioned. You'll have the devil's own time, let me tell you, Caroline. Let me glance at that memorandum-book in your inside coat-pocket. Thanks. Wednesday? To-day is Wednesday. Nine-thirty–Boggs and Scranton. We'll scratch that off. I'm late for that, as it is. Rogers!" To myself, I cried: "Lord, she mustn't meet Rogers! I shouldn't have given him my office address."

As I glanced through the day's appointments, item by item, my horror grew apace. Caroline, if she went to my office, was bound to derive a wholly false impression of the general tenor of my life. There would be so many things that would be open to misconstruction! Unimaginative I might be, but my memoranda enabled me to foretell just what kind of an experience awaited Caroline in my daily haunts. The methods by which a successful business is conducted in New York would puzzle her sorely, and place me in a most uncomfortable light.

"It can't be done, my dear," I said, presently; and Caroline's sweet voice annoyed me by its lack of an imperative note. It seemed to beat impotently against that stubborn-looking countenance across the breakfast-table. "You'd bungle matters most desperately if I allowed you to go down. As it is, I dread the outcome of my enforced absence. Playing lady to-day will cost me a cool ten thousand, at the very least."

I could see, plainly enough, that what I had said had made very little impression upon my wife. Perhaps she doubted my word or felt confidence in her own business ability. In desperation, I took a new tack.

"I think, Caroline, that, on the whole, it would be much better for you to remain here with me and tell me all about that note to which Suzanne referred. It may take some time, my dear, to get that–ah–little matter straightened out."

My eyes never wavered as I gazed into their depths.

"It's easily explained, Reggie, dear," said Caroline, coldly. "It will take me but a moment. As to your interpretation of what Jenkins has been saying to me–that, of course, is another matter. Your explanations may require considerable time, Reggie, darling."

I dropped my coffee-cup, which went to pieces with its saucer.

"Jenkins?" I cried; in a tone so high that it gave me a headache. "Didn't I warn you that he was a great liar, Caroline? You mustn't believe more than ten per cent. of what he says."

"H'm!" growled Caroline, while she glanced idly at the outside of the envelopes beside her coffee-cup.

"I tell you, Caroline," I went on, feverishly, wondering why I had grown to hate my wife's voice so quickly, "I tell you, Caroline, that Jenkins is a waif from the School for Scandal. He was valet to Lord Runabout before he came over here. Jenkins's standards, I must say, are low. You know what Runabout is, my dear. Well, Jenkins seems to think that to be a gentleman one must have Runabout's tastes. I was idly curious at first to hear what Jenkins had to say. Naturally, he got a wrong impression, and there you are! Sometimes, Caroline, you'd think, to hear Jenkins talk to me, that I was a wild blade, a dare-devil rake, of the latest English pattern. In certain moods, he amuses me; at other times, I don't listen to him. But I can readily understand, my dear, what a shock he must have given you. Of course, you couldn't know–I should have told you more about it in detail–that I'm really a hero to my valet. It's not a nice kind of hero, of course, but it's the kind that Jenkins admires. In short, Caroline, dear, while I'm Dr. Jekyll to the world, I'm Mr. Hyde to my man."

"H'm," came my gruff voice again, and there was a smile on my face that aroused my anger. During our five years of married life I had never lost my temper with Caroline. But her present manner, made doubly offensive by the use of my own body as its medium, filled me with rage.

"By the eternal horn spoon, Caroline, you must drop that!" I cried, in a shrill treble. "If you say 'h'm' to me again in that cheap actor's manner–I'll–I'll–"

"Get a divorce, perhaps," suggested Caroline, pleasantly. "Come, come, Reginald, you've gone far enough. You have no cause for anger–unless, indeed, your conscience goads you. But I've put up a flag of truce. Suppose we drop this unpleasant subject for the present." Here she calmly stuck my letters into a pocket of my coat. "I'll look these over riding down-town. Just ring for Jones, will you, and ask him if the coupé is at the door."

"Caroline! Caroline!" I moaned, falling back in my chair, limp and hopeless, "you must not–you dare not attempt this mad prank! I tell you, Caroline, that you will regret your foolhardiness to the last day of your life."

"Listen to me, Reginald," said my wife, standing erect and drawing herself up to my full height. "Jones will come to you up-stairs for his orders. Think of it, my dear! You can order whatever you like best for dinner. The Van Tromps and Edgertons dine with us to-night. Don't forget that."

I groaned aloud, and felt the tears rushing to Caroline's beautiful eyes.

"This morning," she went on, seemingly in high spirits, "my new ball dress should arrive. Mrs. Taunton–you never liked her, Reggie, but she's really charming–is to lunch with me. Professor Von Gratz will be here at eleven to hear me play Beethoven's Opus 22. He's apt to be severe, but don't mind him, my dear. His bark is worse than his bite." Caroline bent down and touched the bell in front of me.

"Is the coupé ready, Jones?" she asked, as the butler entered.

"Yes, sir."

"Ta-ta, Reggie," cried my wife, in my most playful voice. "I'll call you by 'phone the moment I reach the office. Hope you'll have a pleasant day. Ta-ta!"

A moment later, I sat alone in the breakfast-room, gazing down at my broken coffee-cup and saucer. I regretted their accidental destruction. It would have pleased me now to smash them by design.

CHAPTER IV.
THE STRENUOUS LIFE.

No longer memory whispers whence arose
The doom that tore me from my place of pride.
–Whittier.

I had had the telephone placed in the library for reasons that need not be given here, and it was to this room that I betook myself after I had recovered from Caroline's cruel exit. I realized, in a vague kind of way, that the library was not my wife's customary haunt after breakfast, but I lacked the courage to seek a clue to her usual morning habits. That Suzanne would discover me presently in my hiding-place, I had no doubt, but I was safe from intrusion for a time, at least, and might find in solitude a poultice for the blows that this deplorable day–always to be remembered as Black Wednesday–had already given to me.

As I seated myself beside a table covered with books and magazines, a feeling of rebellion, not unmingled with envy, came over me. It was a clear, bracing, sunny morning, and Caroline, in my outward seeming, was rolling down-town, rejoicing, doubtless, like a bird that has escaped unexpectedly from a narrow cage. A new life lay before her. She had gone forth to see the world, while I, beautiful but despondent, sat trembling, in momentary dread of discovery by Jones or Suzanne. Menaced by a ball-dress, a music teacher, Mrs. Taunton and various unknown household duties, my mind exaggerated the miseries of my situation. Unworthy passions agitated my throbbing bosom. A longing for vengeance, a mad desire to make Caroline regret her base desertion of the man whom she had vowed to love, honor and obey, swept through me. It would go hard with me,

indeed, if some opportunity for punishing my errant spouse did not present itself during the long day that confronted me.

With great presence of mind, despite my agitation, I had brought Caroline's mail into the library with me. Should I open it? Why not? She had carried off my letters with a piratical nonchalance quite consistent with her present high-handed methods of procedure. It was only fair that I should dip into her correspondence at my leisure. But I feared, just now, any further shock to my nerves, and sat motionless, gazing listlessly at the little pile of notes addressed to Caroline. Suddenly, a thought came into my mind that sent the blood rushing through my veins. Was it not more than probable that my library contained a few volumes dealing with the occult sciences? At all events, I was sure that I owned several books relating to Oriental philosophy. Then there was Sir Edwin Arnold's "Light of Asia" at my disposal, and, if I became impatient of research, I could look up "Reincarnation," "Transmigration" and kindred topics in the encyclopædia.

But what had become of my courage? Great as was my curiosity regarding the strange psychical displacement that had made me practically a prisoner in my own home, I feared to take steps that, while they might increase my erudition, might also deprive me of all hope of the night's readjustment.

"I'd better leave it alone," I murmured to myself, despondently. "My very ignorance of this kind of thing may prove to be my salvation in the end. I'm up against it, there's no doubt of that. And the queer thing about it all is that I'm not more astonished at what has happened. It didn't hurt a bit! It was like taking gas. You wake up in a dentist's chair, and the only tooth you knew you possessed has gone. I wonder, by the way, if it would pay to consult a doctor–some specialist in nervous disorders? I could use an assumed name, and– Bosh! I haven't the sand to do it. And it might lead to an investigation as to my sanity. Great guns, girl! You here again?" The last words I spoke aloud, gazing upward into Suzanne's pale, disturbed face.

"I am so worried about madame," said Suzanne in French, glancing nervously around the library, as if she sought in my environment an explanation of her mistress's eccentricity. "Would it not be well for madame to come up-stairs and try to get a nap?"

"A nap!" I cried, in a vibrant treble. "Not on your life, girl! I'm up for all day, you may bet on that. Get me the morning papers, Suzanne. And–wait! Where's Jenkins?"

Suzanne gazed at me in surprise.

"He's eating his breakfast, madame."

"Bring me the papers, and then tell Jenkins to take a day off. Tell him he may go as far away as Hoboken if he wants to. He needn't return until to-morrow."

Suzanne glided from my side with a quick, silent movement that reminded me of a black cat.

A wild, fleeting hope seized me that Jenkins would carry the girl away with him, but presently Suzanne entered the library again.

"Jenkins sends his thanks to madame, and will take a holiday, after reporting to monsieur at his office," said my pretty gadfly, glibly, placing the morning newspapers beside me.

"Confound his impudence!" I exclaimed, and I saw at once that Suzanne considered me "no better."

"And now, girl, what next? Jones, I suppose."

"Yes, madame. He is awaiting your pleasure outside the door."

At that moment Jones entered the library.

"You called me, madame," he said, pompously, magnificent as a liar. "Your orders, madame?"

"We have guests for dinner, Jones," I remarked, bravely.

"Yes, madame. How many?"

"Four, Jones. Six at the table, that is. Cocktails to start with, Jones, and serve my best wines–freely, do you understand? I want you to give us a dinner to-night, Jones, that'll–make a new man of me," I murmured under my breath.

"Yes, madame," said the butler, respectfully, but I certainly caught a gleam of delight in his heavy eyes. "You give me *carte blanche*, madame?"

"Throw everything wide open, and let 'er go, Jones," I cried, with enthusiasm. Caroline should see that I know how "to provide."

Jones bowed, more, I believe, to conceal his astonishment than for mere ceremony, and turned to leave the room.

"Jones," I called, before he had disappeared, "if you talk to Jenkins before he leaves the house I shall discharge you."

The butler turned, with a flush in his face, and gave me a haughty stare. Then he said, recovering his machine-made humility:

"Yes, madame. Your orders shall be obeyed." With that he was gone.

"Go to the 'phone, Suzanne," I said at once, "and call up 502, Rector. When you've got 'em, let me know."

Suzanne was too nervous to accomplish this task, and I was forced to go to her assistance.

"Hello!" I heard Caroline's voice crying presently, and it warned me to be careful.

Standing at a 'phone it was hard for me to remember that I was far from being quite myself.

"Who's this?" came to my ears from 502, Rector.

"Has–ah–Mr. Stevens reached the office yet?" I asked.

"We expect him every moment. He's late this morning," came the answer in a man's voice, (I had grown very sensitive to sex in voices.) "Who is this?"

"I am–ah–Mrs. Stevens." Suddenly, I realized that I was talking to Morse, my head-clerk. How he happened to be in my inner office puzzled me. "Anything new this morning, Morse?" I inquired, impulsively. There was a sound that can be described as an electric gurgle at his end of the line.

"Hello," he cried, above a buzzing of the wires that might have been caused by his astonishment. "Are you still there, Mrs. Stevens?"

"Well, rather," I said to myself. Then aloud: "Will you kindly call me up–ah–Mr. Morse, the moment Mr. Stevens arrives?"

"On the instant, Mrs. Stevens," said Morse, deferentially.

Curiosity overcame my discretion.

"How did the market open, Mr. Morse?" I asked, recklessly.

Again that electric gurgle escaped from my startled clerk.

"It seems to be very feverish, madame," answered Morse, evidently recovering his equanimity.

"Naturally!" I exclaimed, feelingly, but I doubt that Morse caught the word.

"Is that all, Mrs. Stevens?" he asked, presently.

"That'll do for the present–ah–Mr. Morse," I said, reluctantly. "Good-bye!"

I returned to my seat beside the reading-table and found Suzanne gazing at me with soft, sympathetic eyes.

"If I had but dared to tell him to unload," I mused aloud, but went no further, for the French girl's glance had become an interrogation-mark.

"Tell monsieur to unload?" murmured Suzanne, who sometimes spoke English when she especially craved my confidence. "But–*mon Dieu!*–monsieur is not–what you say, madame, loaded?"

I broke into a silvery, high-pitched laugh that annoyed me, exceedingly. But it was not unpleasant to realize that the girl knew that Mr. Stevens was a gentleman. I felt grateful to Suzanne for her good opinion. A moment later, the telephone rang, sharply.

"There's Caroline," I said to myself; but I was quickly undeceived when I had placed the receiver to my ear.

"Is that you, Caroline?" I heard a voice saying. "This is Louise. What have you decided to do about those lectures on Buddhism? Will you join the class, my dear?"

"Not in a thousand years!" I fairly shrieked through the 'phone. "Good-bye!"

"More trouble, madame?" asked Suzanne, as I tottered back to my chair. "I am so sorry. Really, I think madame should come up-stairs with me and lie down. I will bathe madame's head, and she may drop off for a time."

"Suzanne," I said, solemnly, making a strong effort of will and controlling my temper nicely–"Suzanne, if you suggest a sleep to me again to-day I shall be forced to send you to Hoboken to find Jenkins. What's that? The telephone again? Ah–Mr. Stevens must have reached his office."

I was right this time. If my memory is not at fault, our conversation across the wire ran as follows.

"Hello!"

"Hello!"

Silence for a time and a buzzing in my ear.

"Is that you, Caroline?" from my office.

"You know best–ah–Reginald," in the sweetest tones that I could beget in my wife's voice.

"Hello!"

"Hello!" I returned. "Pleasant ride down–ah–Reginald?"

"Do be serious, will you?" gruffly, from the office.

"Tell Morse to sell L stock and industrials at once. Do you get that?"

"I'll have to use my own judgment in that matter, Caroline." My voice came to me through the 'phone with its own stubborn note.

"Great Scott!" I cried, realizing that I was absolutely helpless. "Be careful what you do–ah–Reginald. It's a very treacherous market. For heaven's sake, sell out at once, will you?"

"I must get to work now, my dear," said my wife, gruffly. "There's a heavy mail this morning, and several men are waiting to see me. Mr. Rogers comes in to me at once."

A cold chill ran through me, and Caroline's voice trembled as I cried:

"Don't see Rogers–ah–Reginald! I haven't decided yet what answer to give the man. Bluff him off, if you've got a spark of sense left in you. Tell him to call at the office next week."

"Good-bye, Caroline," came my voice to me, remorselessly. "I'll call you up again later. How's your ball dress? Does it fit you nicely? Don't over-exert yourself, my dear. You weren't looking well at breakfast. Ta-ta! See you later."

I heard the uncompromising click of the receiver, and knew that my wife had returned to my affairs. As I turned my back to the telephone, I felt that ruin was staring me in the face. If Caroline played ducks and drakes with my various stocks I stood to lose half my fortune. What a fool I had been, engaged in a profitable business, to go into speculation! Had it not been for what may be considered a feeling of false pride I should have sent Suzanne for a cocktail at once. It seemed to me that my masculine individuality exhausted Caroline's

nervous energy at a most deplorable rate.

CHAPTER V.
SUZANNE'S BUSY DAY.

Births have brought us richness and variety, and other births have brought us richness and variety.–*Walt Whitman.*

Buttons, the hall-boy was accustomed to sit where he could keep one ear on the 'phone in the library, the other on the bell in the main entrance, and both of them on the voice of Jones, the butler. The library stifled me, and the very sight of the telephone threatened me with nervous prostration.

"Tell Buttons," I said to Suzanne, "to listen to the 'phone, and if–ah–Mr. Stevens calls me up again, to let me know of it at once. Then come to me up-stairs. And, Suzanne, say to Buttons that if–what was her name?–ah, yes, Louise–rings me up again to tell her I've got an attack of neuralgia in my–ah–astral body, and that I'm writing to Buddha to ask for his advice in the matter. That'll shut her off for all day, I imagine."

"*Oui*, madame," murmured Suzanne, wearily. She was beginning to feel the effects of a great nervous strain. As I reached the door of the library, the effort to carry myself like a lady overcame my momentary infusion of energy.

"Suzanne," I said, "it might be well for you to bring some cracked ice with you. Ask Jones for it. Tell him I have a headache, if he glares at you."

As I mounted the stairs slowly, wondering how women manage to hold their skirts so that their limbs move freely, a feeling of relief came over me. It was pleasant to get away from the floor over which Jones, the phlegmatic and tyrannical, presided. I had lost all fear of Suzanne, but the butler chilled my blood. If Caroline and I failed to obtain a psychical exchange to-night Jones must leave the house to-morrow. Suddenly, I stood motionless in the upper hallway and laughed aloud, nervously. What would Jones think could he learn that he had become unwittingly a horror in livery to a lost soul? The absurdity of the reflection brought a ray of sunshine to my darkened spirit, and I entered Caroline's morning-room in a cheerful mood.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Stevens, but I was told to wait for you here."

A pretty girl confronted me, standing guard over a large pasteboard box that she had placed upon a chair.

"You–ah–have something for me?" I asked, coldly. I was beginning to wonder where Caroline's leisure came in.

"Your new ball-dress, Mrs. Stevens. You promised to try it on this morning, you remember."

"Very well! Leave it, then. I'll get into it later on. I've no doubt it'll fit me like a glove."

The girl stared at me for a moment, then recovered herself and said:

"Madame Bonari will be displeased with me, Mrs. Stevens, if I do not return to her with the report that you find the dress satisfactory. I may await your pleasure, may I not? Madame Bonari would discharge me if I went back to her now."

"Let me see the dress, girl," I muttered, reluctantly. To don a ball-dress in full daylight to save a poor maiden from losing her situation was for me to make a greater sacrifice than this dressmaker's apprentice could realize.

The girl opened the box, and I gazed, awestruck, at a garment that filled me with a strange kind of terror. There was not a great deal of it. It was not its size that frightened me; it was the shape of the thing that was startling.

"That'll do, girl," I exclaimed, somewhat hysterically. "Tell–ah–Madame Bonari that this–ah–polonaise is a howling success. I can see at a glance that it was made for me," and added, under my breath, "to pay for."

The girl stood rooted to the spot, gazing at me in mingled sorrow and amazement.

"But oh, Mrs. Stevens," she cried, the tears coming into her eyes, "you will not dismiss me this way? I will lose my place if you do!"

I sank into a chair, torn by conflicting emotions, as a novelist would say of his distraught heroine.

"Do you want me to climb into that thing, here and now?" I gasped.

"If madame will be so kind," murmured the girl, imploringly.

With joy, I now heard the tinkling of cracked ice against cut-glass. Suzanne, to my great relief, entered the room.

"Suzanne," I said, courageously, "I will trouble you to tog me out in this–ah–silk remnant. Have you got a kodak, girl?" I asked, playfully, turning toward the astonished young dressmaker. "You're not a yellow reporter?"

"Oh, Mrs. Stevens!" cried the girl, deprecatingly, glancing interrogatively at Suzanne. Perhaps the cracked ice and my eccentric manner had aroused suspicions in her mind.

A moment later, I found myself in Caroline's dressing-room alone with Suzanne, who had recovered her spirits in the delight that her present task en-

gendered.

"Madame's neck and arms are so beautiful!" she murmured in French, pulling the skirt of the ball-dress, a dainty affair made of mauve silk, with a darker shade of velvet for trimmings, into position. "Ah, such a wonderful hang! It is worthy of Paris, madame."

"Don't stop to talk, Suzanne," I grumbled. "This is indecent exposure of mistaken identity, and I can't stand much of it; so keep moving, will you?"

"The corsage is a marvel, madame!" exclaimed Suzanne, ecstatically.

"It is, girl," I muttered, glancing at myself in a mirror. "It feels like a cross between a modern life-preserver and a mediæval breast-plate. Don't lace the thing so tight, Suzanne. I've got to talk now and then!"

Suzanne was too busy to listen to my somewhat delirious comments.

"It is a miracle!" she cried in French. "Madame is a purple dream, is she not?"

"Madame will be a black-and-blue what-is-it before you know it," I moaned. "Does that girl outside there expect to have a look at–ah–this ridiculous costume?" I asked, testily.

"Madame is so strange to-day," murmured Suzanne, wearily. "You are free to go now, madame."

"I clutched at the train that anchored me to my place of torture, and moved clumsily toward the room in which the young dressmaker awaited me.

"Ah!" cried the girl, as I broke upon her vision, a creature of beauty, but very far from graceful. "Madame Bonari will be overjoyed. The dress is perfection, is it not, Mrs. Stevens? I've never seen such a fit."

"It feels like a fit," I remarked, pantingly. "Suzanne," I called out, desperately, "slip a few cogs in front here, will you? This is only a rehearsal, you know. If I must suffocate at the ball I'll school myself for the occasion. But I refuse to be a pressed flower this morning. Thanks, that's better. It's like a quick recovery from pneumonia. You may go, girl. Give my compliments to Madame–ah–Bonari, and tell her I'm on the road to recovery. Good morning!"

Suzanne and I were alone.

"A cocktail, girl. Quick, now! Do you think I wanted that ice as a musical instrument? If I ever needed a stimulant, Suzanne, I need one now. Make the dose stiff, Suzanne, for I'm not as young as I was. Do you hear me? Hurry!"

A rap at the door checked Suzanne in full career. We heard the strident voice of Buttons in the hallway.

"Open the door, Suzanne," I cried, nervously, bracing myself for another buffet from fate.

"Mr. Stevens is asking for Mrs. Stevens on the 'phone," I heard Buttons say to Suzanne. "He seems to be in a hurry, too."

Suzanne hastened back to me.

"I know the worst, girl! Say nothing!" I exclaimed, petulantly. "I must go down-stairs in this infernal ball-dress," and the ordeal before me filled me with consternation. If Jones should find me skulking around his domain in a décolleté dress at this time of day the glance of his arrogant eyes would terrify me. But there wasn't time for reflection, nor, alas! for a cocktail. Caroline was calling vainly to me with my voice through an unresponsive telephone. I must go to her at once. Doubtless, she craved immediate advice regarding the manipulation of my margins. Why, oh! why, had I jeopardized my fortune for the sake of quick returns, when my legitimate business was sufficient for my needs?

"I fly, Suzanne!" I cried, as I stumbled toward the hall. "If anybody calls to ask if I'm engaged for the next dance, tell 'em my card is full." Suzanne smiled. "And I wish I was!" I muttered to myself, desperately, as I looked down the staircase and wondered if it would be well to use my mauve train as a toboggan.

How I managed to reach the telephone, I cannot say. In the lower hall, I caught a glimpse of Jones's self-made face, and just saved myself from coming a cropper. To acquire a firm seat in a ball-dress requires practice.

"Hello!" I shouted, desperately, through the 'phone. "Is that you–ah–Reginald?"

"Jenkins is here." I heard my voice saying at the other end of the line. "What'll I do with him?"

"Send him to–ah–Hoboken, will you?" I returned, in a shrill falsetto. "But you have the better of it, my dear. He's not a marker to Jones. What have you done with the specialties?"

"Buying! buying! buying!" cried Caroline, in a triumphant basso that froze my blood. "Rogers gave me an inside tip, as he calls it. It was awfully nice of him, wasn't it?"

"Damn Rogers!" I exclaimed.

"Good-bye!" cried Caroline, with righteous indignation, and my attempt to call her back was futile.

My heart was heavy as I made my way, slowly and clumsily, from the library. Buttons, as bad luck would have it, had just opened the front door to a black-eyed, long-haired little man, who carried a roll of music under his arm. As I hesitated, hoping to make good my retreat to the library, Professor Von Gratz–as he proved to be–hurried toward me. If he was amazed at my costume, he managed to control his mobile face and musical voice.

"Oh, madame, I am zo glad to zee you are eager for de lezzon!" he exclaimed, bowing almost down to his knees. "Ve vill haf grade muzic, nicht war? You vill blay de vonderful Opuz 22! Beethoven, de giant among de pygmies, vill open de gates of baradize to us. It vill be beautiful. You are ready, madame?"

My bosom rose and fell with a conflict of emotions. I felt an almost irresistible longing to throw this detestable little foreigner out of the house. The sudden realization that my biceps, etc., were at my office cooled my ardor for action, and I said, presently, marveling at my own ingenuity:

"I regret to say–ah–Professor, that my doctor has put me upon a very slim musical diet. He says that–ah–Beethoven is ruining my nerves. But if you want to sing 'Danny Deever,' come into the music-room. I think I could manage to knock out the accompaniment."

Von Gratz stared at me in most apparent agitation, pulling at his horrid little black goatee with his left hand.

"I vill pid you gute morgen, madame," he gasped, bowing again. "Ven you are much petter you vill zend for me, nicht war? Gute morgen!"

The gates of paradise were not to be opened to the professor this morning. On the contrary, Buttons, to my great relief, shut the front door behind the hurrying figure of the master-pianist, whose farewell glance of mingled astonishment and anger haunted me as I mounted the stairs.

"Suzanne!" I gasped, as I tottered into the room in which the girl awaited my return. "Suzanne, unbuckle this chain-armor, will you? It's breaking my heart. That's better, Suzanne. Oh, yes, I'm going to a ball, all right. Or, rather, you're going to bring me one at once."

CHAPTER VI.

VERSES AND VIOLETS.

Oh, my brothers blooming yonder, unto Him the ancient pray
That the hour of my transplanting He will not for long delay.
–*From the Persian.*

Relieved of Caroline's new ball-dress and having swallowed a cocktail, I was horrified to find a feeling of almost irresistible drowsiness stealing over me.

"Suzanne," I cried, "it is imperative that you keep me awake–even if is becomes necessary for you to do the skirt-dance to drive sleep from my eyelids. Not that I approved of these Oriental vagaries. Far from it, Suzanne. Though I may at present come under that head myself–but *n'importe*! You might assert,

plausibly enough, that all this is Occidental. In a certain sense, I suppose that it is. But–Great Scott!"

I sank back in an easy-chair, startled by my own flippancy. The uncanny, inexplicable change that had made me what I was must not be revealed to Suzanne! Was it not enough that I had already driven my maid to the very verge of hysteria? And here I sat, talking recklessly to keep awake, and wearing my secret on my sleeve. Should Suzanne learn the truth from my punning tongue, her mind might become unhinged. In that case, another sudden transposition of identities might take place! Frightful possibility! I must not yield to the inclination creeping over me to indulge in a short nap. Perhaps Caroline's mail would revive me!

And just here I found myself confronted by a difficult problem in ethics. Despite the fact that my wife, with a heartless disregard of my wishes in the matter, had seized my letters, captured my business office, and assumed the full possession of all my business affairs, great and small, I could not forget that I still remained a gentleman. That Caroline had taken advantage of a psychical mischance to lay bare my inner life before her prying gaze could not excuse my surrender to a not unfounded but, perhaps, unwholesome curiosity.

"Suzanne," I said presently, and the girl stole softly to my side. "You spoke of a letter that you had received for me. It is–ah–from–ah?"

"Yes, madame," answered Suzanne, eagerly, but somewhat irrelevantly. "Here it is, madame. It is from him, I feel sure."

I gazed at the envelope with Caroline's brilliant eyes, but I was not thankful for my temporary perfection of face and form. It came to me grimly that beauty may be a nuisance, or even a curse. I lacked the courage to open this note–an unconventional, perhaps lawless, tribute to my my wife's powers of fascination. There was an air of Spanish or Italian intrigue about the whole affair that shocked me. My imagination, which had developed wonderfully since early morning, likened myself and Suzanne to Juliet and her nurse.

"O, Romeo, Romeo! wherefore art thou, Romeo?" I exclaimed, somewhat wildly. Suzanne drew back from me nervously.

"Will you not read the note, madame?"

"Anon, good nurse! But if thou mean'st not well, I do beseech thee–"

"*Mon Dieu!*" gasped Suzanne, gazing at me, awe-struck. But I was pitiless.

"Suzanne," I said, firmly, glancing at the note in my hand, the chirography upon which seemed to be familiar, "Suzanne, I am very beautiful, am I not?"

"*Oui*, madame," assented Suzanne, enthusiastically.

"And I love my husband dearly, do I not?"

"Devotedly, madame."

"Then, surely, Suzanne, I should not receive this epistle. What did I do with

his–ah–former notes?"

I had made a most egregious blunder. An expression of amazement came into the French maid's mobile face.

"But, madame, this is the first one, is it not? I know of no others, madame."

There was a gleam of suspicion in the girl's eyes. It was evident that, for a moment, she suspected my dear Caroline of a lack of straight-forwardness. Impulsively I tore Romeo's note into a dozen fragments.

"There, Suzanne." I cried, in a triumphant treble, "my *alibi* is perfect. Who wrote this note I do not know. What he had to say I do not care. If you can get word to him, girl, tell him that if he comes prowling around my balcony again I'll have–ah–Reginald pull his nose for him. *A bas* Romeo!"

"But, madame," murmured Suzanne, evidently pained by my flippant fickleness and fickle flippancy, "monsieur, the writer of the note, dines here to-night, you know."

"The deuce he does, girl!" I cried, impulsively, making as if to pull my beard, and bruising my spirit against new conditions. "Who are our guests? Edgerton and his wife. It can't be Edgerton. He's not a blooming idjit. Van Tromp? Dear little Van Tromp! It must be Van Tromp. Oh, Van Tromp, Van Tromp, wherefore art thou, Romeo? Van Tromp's the man, eh, Suzanne?"

Caroline's maid was red and tearful.

"Madame is so strange this morning," she complained. "It was Mr. Van Tromp's man who brought the note, madame."

My soul waxed gay in Caroline's bosom. I warbled a snatch of song from Gounod's "Faust."

"Suzanne," I cried, "gather up the fragments of Romeo's *billet-doux*. Possibly his note is not what I supposed it was. I'll read what the dear little boy has to say. Thank you, Suzanne. I think I can put these pieces together in a way to extract the full flavor of Van Romeo's sweet message. What saith the youth? Ha! I have it.

"'MY DEAR MRS. STEVENS: Is it presumption upon my part to believe that you meant what you said to me at the Cromptons' dance? At all events, I have had the audacity to cherish your words in my heart of hearts. I am sending you a few violets to-day. If you do me the honor of wearing them at dinner to-night, I shall know that there was a basis of earnestness underneath the words that were as honey to my soul.'

"Listen to that, Suzanne," I cried, hysterically. "Is it not worthy of a young poet? I

wonder what the dev–what Caro–ah–I said to this–ah–Romeo? Here's richness, Suzanne! I'll wear his flowers–with a string to 'em, eh? We'll have a merry dinner, Suzanne! I told Jones to throw everything wide open. I'll include young Van Tromp in the order. He shall be my special care, Suzanne. Van Tromp's mine oyster! What think you, Suzanne? Should I not quaff a toast to the success of my little game?"

"Madame, I do not understand," murmured the girl, in French. "Madame is feverish. Let me bathe madame's head, and she may get a quieting nap. If you could lose yourself only for an instant, madame!"

"Great Jupiter, Suzanne, will you get that idea out of your head? I don't want to lose myself. On the contrary–but–*n'importe*, as we say when we're feverish. You'll find some cigarettes in the bedroom, girl. Bring 'em to me at once. Don't stare at me that way! If I don't smoke I'll drink another cocktail, and then what'll happen?"

Suzanne shuddered and hurried away. Presently I was blowing smoke into the air, much to my own satisfaction and to Suzanne's ill-disguised amazement.

"Tobacco is quieting, Suzanne; soothing, cheerful. It stimulates hope and calms the perturbed soul. Damn it! what's that? Somebody's knocking, Suzanne. See who it is. If it's anyone for me, tell them that I won't draw cards this morning, but may take a hand later on. Don't stand staring at me, girl! Put a stop to that rapping at once."

"*Mon Dieu!*" groaned Suzanne, as she crossed the room. How much longer she could stand the strain of my eccentricities was becoming problematical. Presently she returned to me, carrying a box of flowers.

"Romeo's violets," I murmured, rapturously. "Tell me, nurse, did Juliet mean what she said to Romeo? Well, rather! I'll wear thy flowers, little boy! What's this? Another note, smothered in violets. Listen, Suzanne! Romeo has dropped into poetry. Listen:

"'Go, purple blossoms, the glory of Spring,
Gladden her eyes with thy velvety hue;
What are the words of the song that I sing?
They came to my heart as the dew came to you.

"'My love is a flower, my song is its scent;
Let it speak to her soul in the violet's breath!
And my spirit with thee, by a miracle blent,
Shall drink deep of life, of love unto death.'

"Take these away, Suzanne! Take them away!" I cried, in a panic. "Haven't I

had enough of this theosophical, transmigration idiocy for one day? Take them away! 'By a miracle blent!' Confound the boy! if I got into that little Van Tromp's body through these infernal flowers I could never hold up my head again. What's that, Suzanne? Yes, keep them fresh. Give them water. But don't let me get near them again until I've got my courage back. Perhaps I'll dare to wear them tonight. I can't say yet."

I needed rest. Reclining in my chair, I idly watched Suzanne as she moved restlessly about the room trying to quiet her excitement by action.

"Suzanne," I cried, softening toward the maid, "don't look so sad. All will come right in the end. Brace up, girl. 'While there's life there's hope.'"

"Do I look sad, madame? I am very sorry. I will try to be more cheerful, for madame's sake. But if madame could put herself into my place for a moment–"

"There you go again, Suzanne," I exclaimed, testily. "We'll change the subject, girl. What next?"

"I think it might be well for madame to dress for luncheon," suggested Suzanne, nervously. It was evident that she had begun to lose confidence in my intervals of calm.

"Let me think, Suzanne. Somebody lunches with me. Who is it? Oh, yes, Mrs. Taunton. And now I think of it, Suzanne, Mrs. Taunton is little Van Tromp's sister. That's the reason I never liked her, I suppose."

"But madame and Mrs. Taunton seem to be such good friends," remarked Suzanne, in French, moving about in a way that filled me with foreboding. It was evident that she contemplated changing my costume at once.

"Appearances are often deceptive, Suzanne," I remarked, feelingly, lighting a fresh cigarette, somewhat clumsily. "What are you up to now, girl?"

"Madame must look her best at luncheon," remarked Suzanne, professionally. "Mrs. Taunton has such exquisite taste."

I was not pleased at Suzanne's remark. Mrs. Taunton, an avowed admirer of Caroline, had never disguised the fact that she considered me a nonentity. But fate had vouchsafed to me a great opportunity for proving to Mrs. Taunton that I was not altogether insignificant. Disguised in Caroline's outward seeming I might readily avenge myself for Mrs. Taunton's persistent indifference to my good points. Little Van Tromp had placed a double-edged weapon in my hand.

"Suzanne," I said, gazing grimly at the dress that she had laid out for me, "before you go further with my toilet, I wish you would make a copy of these verses for me. You write English, do you not?"

Suzanne glanced at me, inquisitively.

"Madame knows well that I do," she remarked, mournfully. But the trembling of her slender hand as she grasped Van Tromp's screed to do my bidding

augured ill for the copy that she would make of his verses.

CHAPTER VII.
IRRITATION AND CONSOLATION.

Waste not your hour, nor in the vain pursuit
Of this and that endeavor and dispute;
Better be merry with the fruitful grape
Than sadden after none, or bitter fruit.
–*Omar Kháyyám.*

I must get on more rapidly with my narrative. It has been a great temptation to me to indulge in conjectures and surmises regarding the soul-displacement that may make my story a presentment worthy of attentive consideration from the Society for Psychical Research. But from the outset I have endeavored to resist this inclination and to give to the reader merely a bald statement of facts in their actual sequence. It must be apparent by this time, furthermore, that I am not fitted by education to discuss the uncanny problems begotten by the strange affliction that had befallen my wife and myself. That I have become perforce a sadder and wiser man may be true, but, despite my practical experience of what may be called instability of soul, I am not in any sense a psychologist. From various points of view; therefore, it seems best that I should eschew all philosophical or scientific comments on the curious phenomena with which I have been forced to deal, leaving, as it were, the circumference of my story to the care of the erudite, and confining my own endeavors strictly to its diameter.

Behold me, then, fresh from Suzanne's deft hands, confronting Caroline's bosom friend, Mrs. Taunton, across the luncheon-table. Our conversation, if my memory is not at fault, ran something as follows:

"You look flushed and excited, Caroline," said Mrs. Taunton, a large, blond, absurdly haughty woman, strangely unlike little Van Tromp, her poetical brother. "Something has happened to upset you, my dear?"

"Well, rather!" I could not refrain from exclaiming. What the deuce was Mrs. Taunton's given name? If I did not recall it soon she would begin to wonder at Caroline's peculiar bearing. It was not Mrs. Taunton, however, who was

driving me toward hysteria. To find myself again in the realm over which the phlegmatic but terrifying Jones presided was to lose confidence in my ability to stem the tide of disaster. Jones was so conservative! Such a radical change as I had undergone would be even more incomprehensible to him than it had been to me. I realized vaguely that I had grown to be supersensitive, and that what I took to be suspicion in the butler's eyes must be a product of my own overwrought nerves. But, struggle as I might against the impression, I could not free myself from the feeling that Jones watched me furtively, questioningly, as if he had gained possession of a clue to a great mystery.

"Tell me all about it, Caroline," urged Mrs. Taunton, sweetly. "If you were not so beautiful, my dear, you would not have so much trouble."

The blood rushed into Caroline's cheeks, and I found myself glaring angrily at Jones, who was serving croquettes to Mrs. Taunton. The latter had displayed the most wretched taste in praising my, or rather Caroline's, appearance before the butler. But Mrs. Taunton evidently looked upon a servant as a mere automaton, not to be considered even in heart-to-heart talks with young women. My growing annoyance made itself manifest in Caroline's voice, as I stammered:

"My–ah–beauty, such as it is, don't you know, is only–ah–skin deep. But my troubles–ah– Jones! Don't be so slow! Spend as much time outside as you can, will you?"

Mrs. Taunton stared at me in amazement, while Jones, showing no signs of emotion, made a most dignified exit.

"What is the matter with you, Caroline?" asked my *vis-à-vis*, anxiously. "I never heard you speak like that before."

An explanation seemed to be due to my guest.

"It's curious, don't you know," I began, lamely, trying to recall Mrs. Taunton's baptismal name, "it's curious–ah–my dear, what an intense repulsion I feel toward that man Jones. It came upon me suddenly. It's intermittent, not chronic, I think, but it's all there, and means business. Did you ever feel that way?"

"Caroline!" gasped Mrs. Taunton, pained surprise resting upon her patrician face.

"It's beneath me, I acknowledge," I went on, feverishly, making an effort to eat a croquette between sentences. "A butler's merely a necessary piece of movable furniture, and should–ah–not arouse a feeling of antagonism. But Jones has got an eye to–ah–induce intoxication."

"Caroline," queried Mrs. Taunton, solemnly, "have you–forgive me, my dear, for the question–have you been taking anything?"

"A fair exchange is no robbery," I remarked, impulsively, in my own defense, but Mrs. Taunton's face assured me that I had spoken irrelevantly.

"I should advise a cup of black coffee, Caroline," said my guest, in her iciest tone.

"We'll wait a bit, if you don't mind," I ventured to suggest. "No coffee without Jones. I'm not quite up to Jones at this moment–er–my dear."

Mrs. Taunton held my gaze to hers, and her light-gray eyes chilled me. It was evident that little Van Tromp's sister had no poetical nonsense in her make-up. Practical, obstinate, strong-willed she seemed to be, as she endeavored to solve from Caroline's beautiful eyes the mystery of my eccentric demeanor.

"Your sudden and inexplicable aversion to your butler, Caroline," remarked my guest, presently, apparently desirous of soothing my nerves by a poultice of gossip, "reminds me of the lecture upon Buddhism that I heard yesterday morning. An adept from India–Yamama, I think, is his name–talked to us, you know, about our Western blindness, as he called it, to the marvels of soul-sensitiveness."

My fork rattled against my plate, and I gazed down in dismay at Caroline's trembling hand. Mrs. Taunton overlooked my agitation and continued:

"He was so entertaining! But it's all absurd, of course. Louise told me that you were going with her to hear him this morning."

"Yes?" I managed to gasp. "She–ah–Louise called me up by the 'phone. I couldn't get away, you see–ah–my dear."

"It's such utter nonsense, don't you know," went on Mrs. Taunton, evidently convinced that the worst was over with me. "I made notes, just for practice. He–the adept, or whatever he was–was a lovely piece of mahogany, with perfectly stunning eyes. I memorized one of my notes. The dear little brownie said–just listen to this, Caroline: 'The Hindu conception of reincarnation embraces all existence–gods, men, animals, plants, minerals. It is believed that everything migrates, from Buddha down to inert matter. Buddha himself was born an ascetic eighty-three times, a monarch fifty-eight times, the soul of a tree forty-three times, and many other times as an ape, deer, lion, snipe, chicken, eagle, serpent, pig, frog–four hundred times in all!' Isn't it all perfectly silly? Good gracious, Caroline, what is the matter with you? Are you faint?"

"Just a bit rocky," I found sufficient nerve to say. "Are you quite sure–ah–my dear–that he said pigs–and–and–frogs?"

Mrs. Taunton caught her breath, as if she struggled to swallow her amazement.

"You ought to be in bed, Caroline," she said, severely. "If you could get to sleep, my dear–"

"*Et tu, Brute!*" I murmured, with sardonic playfulness. "Look here–ah–my dear! You find a change in your Caroline, eh? You have suspected me of drinking, and now you imply that I need sleep. I swear that the next person who hints that I'm not up for all day shall hear something to–ah–her disadvantage."

Such talk was madness. Mrs. Taunton very naturally resented my childish ultimatum. She arose from her chair with a cool, calm dignity that shocked me like a cold shower-bath.

"I regret, Caroline, that I find my patience exhausted," she remarked, more in sadness than in wrath, transfixing me with her pale-gray eyes. "I shall leave you now, but not in anger. I can see, plainly enough, that you are not yourself."

"Don't you dare to say that in public–ah–Mrs. Taunton," I cried, hotly, fearful that, as it was, Jones might have overheard her remark. Reason assured me that her words were used figuratively, but the undeniable fact that she had hit the target and rung the bell drove me to desperation. Mrs. Taunton gazed at me for a moment in mingled scorn and astonishment, and then swept from the dining-room with head high in air and a rustle of skirts that seemed to sweep Caroline into outer darkness.

The next thing that I remember, as the flamboyant romancers remark, was an entrance even more theatrical than Mrs. Taunton's exit. Jones, impressing my errant fancy as Nemesis in the semblance of an imported butler, strode into the room bearing a tray upon which rested a coffee-pot, the aroma from which stirred hope in my heart. Much as I detested Jones, I welcomed the stimulant that he carried toward me. If Mrs. Taunton's disappearance surprised him, he succeeded in suppressing any outward exhibition of emotion.

Realizing for the moment that my fear of the man was unreasonable, I summoned common sense to my aid and said:

"One good bracer deserves another, Jones. Put a stick into my coffee, will you?"

The butler gave me a furtive glance, a cross between an exclamation and an interrogation.

"Brandy, madam?" he asked, smoothly.

When he had fortified my coffee with a dash of fine old French cognac, I looked him straight in the eye.

"Jones," I said, impressively, "Mr. Stevens has complained of you of late. But I don't want you to lose your place. I shall see to it that my–ah–husband becomes reconciled to you, but you must obey my instructions to the letter. To begin with, you are to leave this room at once, close the door, stand on guard outside and allow no one to disturb me until I give you word. If you open the door before I call to you, you leave the house immediately. Do you understand me?"

"Yes, madam," gasped Jones, thrown out of his orbit for once. But he retained sufficient self-control to make a hurried exit, noisily shutting the door behind him.

I swallowed my coffee–and cognac–at a gulp, and stumbled toward the

sideboard. After a short search I came upon a box of excellent cigars. Presently I was seated at the luncheon-table again, sipping a pony of brandy neat and blowing cigar-smoke into the air. For a glorious half-hour, I reflected joyously, I could enjoy myself in my own way. Glancing over my shoulder, I caught sight of my reflection in the sideboard mirror. Caroline, with a long, black panatella between her beautiful lips, held a pony of brandy poised in the air, with the other hand raised to remove the cigar from her mouth. An inexplicable wave of diabolical exultation swept over me. Bowing to my wife's handsome image–which cordially returned the salutation–I removed my cigar and raised the brandy to Caroline's mouth.

"Here's how, my dear!" I cried, gaily. "No heel-taps!"

Caroline's reflection drank the toast, and the warm glow of good-fellowship that crept through my veins reconciled me for the time being to my strange, uncanny fate.

CHAPTER VIII.

NEWS FROM CAROLINE.

Young and enterprising is the West,
Old and meditative is the East.
Turn, O youth! with intellectual zest
Where the sage invites thee to his feast.
–*Milnes.*

On the whole, I enjoyed my cigar. The waters of affliction had rolled over me and I basked in the sunshine of peaceful comfort for a full half-hour. Under like conditions, many good fellows of my set would have toyed too freely with the cognac. But I was cautious and conservative as regards the liquor. I glanced at Caroline's face, which wore a humorous smile as it gazed at me from the mirror.

"Spirits," I cried, facetiously, winking at Caroline's reflection, and receiving a winking response, "spirits are to be handled with care, my dear. There's no telling what they may do to us."

At first I derived considerable amusement from the grotesque effects that I could obtain from the juxtaposition of my cigar and Caroline's delicate face. If it

was a kind of sacrilege to sit there and watch the smoke issuing from my wife's dainty lips, I comforted my better self with the thought that I was in no way to blame for existing conditions. If the sideboard's mirror at that moment framed a picture that might have been taken from the *Police Gazette*, was I not powerless to alter the decrees of fate? I had come into my wife's butterfly-beauty without first sloughing off my gross chrysalis-habits.

I playfully shook my fist at the accusatory mirror.

"It's no reflection on me," I murmured, jocosely. A sickly kind of smile flitted across Caroline's face, driving me to a stimulant again. I poured out a pony of brandy.

"To drink or not to drink–that is the question," I soliloquized; observing with satisfaction that Shakespeare tended to remove the expression of untimely hilarity in my wife's countenance. "O Romeo, wherefore art thou, Romeo?"

A joyful gleam came into Caroline's eyes as I thought of Van Tromp. I swallowed the cognac and presently saw a flush creep into my wife's cheeks. The sight angered me.

"If two or three fingers of old brandy show themselves at once in this–ah–borrowed face of mine," I reflected, "I might as well take the pledge at once. Caroline," I continued, addressing my remarks to the mirror, "I am ashamed of you. If you don't quit this kind of thing, you'll lose your complexion–and what'll poor robin do then? I am ashamed of you, Caroline. I really didn't think that you'd go so far."

It suddenly came to me that I was talking in a most idiotic way, and I turned Caroline's left shoulder to the mirror. Resisting the temptation to follow the changing expressions of her face, I watched the smoke from my cigar as it floated across the luncheon-table or mounted toward the ceiling. At the outset, I derived a good deal of satisfaction from the change of attitude. My thoughts assumed a healthier tendency. The morbid, half-crazy inclinations that my mind had begun to display passed away and something like contentment with the present and hope for the future came gently to me. Even the question that would force itself upon me now and again as to what Caroline might be doing or undoing at my office failed to destroy wholly the pleasurable calm begotten of solitude, cognac and tobacco. I even found myself contemplating Caroline's white, tapering fingers, outstretched to flip the ashes from my panatella, with a satisfaction that was a strange compound of pride and jealousy. I could not refrain from an unworthy sense of delight at the thought that Caroline was being punished for her brazen defiance of my wishes every time she glanced at my hands.

But I had become a creature of changing moods, a prey to errant fancies. As I realized that my cigar–shrinking reminder of happier days–was nearly smoked out, and that my term of comparative freedom drew toward its end, the fever of

impotent rebellion burned in my veins–if they were mine. To a practical, energetic individual, accustomed to having his own way in small matters and great, the recurrent conviction that he has become the plaything of mischief-loving powers concerning which he knows little or nothing is not conducive to long intervals of repose. I was growing restless again, eager for action, but afraid to indulge in it; craving news of Caroline, but lacking courage to obtain it.

Suddenly a startling thought flashed upon my darkened mind, illuminating, convincing, explanatory. Caroline and her friends had been dipping into Oriental philosophy. Was it not more than probable that my wife had deliberately planned a soul-transposition that had ensured her freedom and made me a captive?

The longer I contemplated this supposition, the stronger grew my belief that Caroline had attempted a psychical experiment, the success of which accounted for her haughty, domineering manner after breakfast. It was clear enough, now, as I looked back upon the episodes that I have been recording. My wife's horror at the discovery of our soul-transposition had been merely a clever bit of acting. Her seizure of my mail and insistence upon a visit to my office had been parts of a well-laid plan. It was evident that she had become an adept in the theory and practice of transmigration, and had sacrificed me beneath the Juggernaut of her eccentric ambition. If she found the life of a business man attractive, I was at her mercy, doomed to skirts and corsets until she wearied of my career. Furthermore, it was not unreasonable to suppose that, while Caroline had acquired sufficient diabolical power to transpose our identities, she had not gained enough occult wisdom to restore our souls to their respective bodies. If that should prove to be the case, if she was only half-educated as a psychical switch-tender, the future for me became dark indeed. I could see before me a long stretch of weary, hopeless years, down which I tottered toward a welcome grave, solaced only now and then by the creature-comforts that I loved, the while Caroline made merry with my affairs. Beset day after day by Suzanne, Mrs. Taunton and other women in various stages of imbecility, I should be driven to desperation at last and bring disgrace, in some form or other, upon a proud name.

And how cleverly Caroline had played her little game! Had I not often complained loudly of the annoyances appertaining to a business man's life? Could not Caroline silence my accusing tongue with the assertion that she had presented me with a life of luxurious leisure, to take up burdens and responsibilities under which I had always grumbled? Had I not often protested against the new woman's efforts to better her condition, on the ground that woman had long enjoyed more special privileges than fell to the lot of man? I was forced to acknowledge that, even if Caroline was responsible for our psychical interchange, I could not remain consistent and utter any very emphatic complaint. She would fall back upon my own propositions and prove conclusively, quoting my remarks,

that, whatever may be the case with his soul, it may profit a man to lose his own body.

A hot wave of impotent anger swept through me, and I turned in a rage toward the mirror. The expression that my rebellious soul had thrust into Caroline's face destroyed the last vestige of my self-control. Seizing a carafe from the table, I hurled it at the sideboard, and my wife's face disappeared in a chaos of broken looking-glass.

Horrified at my recklessness, I hurried toward the door as rapidly as my skirts would permit. In the hall stood Jones, motionless, phlegmatic, gazing at me with a calmness that had in it something of superiority.

"Go in there–ah–butler, and make yourself useful," I cried, angrily, as I brushed past him to seek the library. "Don't be so damned statuesque!"

A few moments later, I had hooked Caroline at the end of a telephone wire.

"When are you coming up-town–ah–my dear?" I managed to gasp, with some show of diplomacy.

"Is that you, Caroline?" asked my wife, with my voice, which I was foolishly glad to hear again. "I've got good news for you. I'm twenty thousand ahead on the day–and every transaction is cleaned out."

"Great Scott!" I exclaimed, forgetting my suspicions and rage in the amazement that her words had caused.

"I'll stop at the club on the way up," went on Caroline, in a deep basso that vibrated with a note of intense self-satisfaction. "Have you had a pleasant day? How's Mrs. Taunton? By the way, my dear, Edgerton was here a few moments ago. Mrs. Edgerton has a treat in store for us to-night."

A chill of apprehension swept over me.

"What do you mean–ah–Reginald?" I faltered.

"She went to the lecture this morning, Caroline," explained my wife, glibly. "She is awfully clever, don't you think? She made him promise to look in on us at nine to-night."

"Him? Who's him?" I cried, cold with dread.

"Yamama," answered my voice, exultantly.

"Good God, Caroline!" I yelled through the 'phone, but my wife had cut me off.

Stumbling into a chair, I rested Caroline's aching head upon her moist, trembling hand.

"Yamama!" I murmured, terror-stricken. "He's the chocolate-colored adept that Mrs. Taunton referred to. Pigs! Frogs! He's the scoundrel that put Caroline up to this. He is coming here to look at me! Damn him!"

Excess of emotion had undone me. I felt the hot tears scorching Caroline's

cold hand.

CHAPTER IX.
AFTERNOON CALLERS.

Still in dreams it comes upon me that I once on wings did soar;
But or e'er my flight commences this my dream must all be o'er.
–*From the Persian.*

As I look back upon it now, that afternoon wears the aspect of a variegated nightmare, from which I could not awaken.

"What will madame wear this afternoon?" Suzanne had asked me when I had returned to my apartments above-stairs.

I kicked viciously at the empty air with one of Caroline's dainty feet. The time had come, evidently, for Suzanne to change my costume again. Should I take a ride or a walk, or remain at home? If I went out for a ride, I should have only my own bitter thoughts for company. If I took a stroll up the Avenue, almost anything unpleasant might happen to me. If I stayed in the house, I must receive callers. No one of these alternatives was alluring, but I was forced to choose the latter. For a number of rather vague reasons, I did not dare to cut off my line of communication with Caroline. She had become, as it were, a flying column not yet out of touch with headquarters.

"And she ought to be shot for disobedience to orders," I mused, aloud.

"Pardon me, madame?" exclaimed Suzanne, interrogatively.

"*N'importe*, girl," I answered, testily. "I shall remain at home, Suzanne. Give orders down-stairs that I have a headache and can receive no one."

"But Madame is looking so much better!" protested Suzanne. "And the débutantes will call to-day. It is madame's afternoon."

"Well, do your worst, then," I grumbled, discontentedly. "Can you get me some cloves, Suzanne?"

An hour later, I entered the drawing-room after a perilous descent from the second story, to confront three young women, who, I had gathered from Suzanne, held Caroline in high esteem as a chaperon. I had committed their names to memory before leaving the dressing-room, but the effort to get down-

stairs without spraining my wife's ankles had obliterated from my mind all traces of its recent acquisition. I stood, flushing painfully, gazing into the smiling faces of three handsome, modish girls who were wholly strangers to their vicarious hostess.

"Oh, Mrs. Stevens, what a charming day!"

"How lovely you are looking!"

"Wasn't the Crompton dance perfectly stunning?"

"Mr. Van Tromp made such a pretty epigram about your costume!"

"Just a moment–ah–girls," I gasped, seating myself awkwardly, and inclined to lose my temper. "There's a painful lack of method about all this. Suppose we begin at the beginning. You were saying–ah–my dear–?" I remarked to the calmest of the trio. The latter exchanged puzzled glances with her companions.

"I was speaking of the compliment that Mr. Van Tromp paid to you," explained the maiden, rather dolefully.

"He's a bad lot, that young Van Tromp," I exclaimed, impulsively. "Perhaps I ought not to talk against another man–ah–behind her–I mean his–back, but Van Romeo's too easy, girls. He writes poetry. I have no doubt that he makes puns. Charming–ah–day, isn't it?"

My beautiful callers had lost their vivacity. One of them–a pretty little brunette–had grown pale.

"What about the coaching-party, Mrs. Stevens?" the one I took to be the eldest of the three ventured to ask, presently.

"It's all arranged–ah–my dear," I answered, recklessly. "We're to have a dozen cases of champagne and a brass band of ten pieces. I'm up for all day, you see. If little Van Tromp praised my executive ability–ah–girls, he'd have a career open to him. Merrily we'll bowl along, bowl along–I'm to handle the reins, you know."

There were now three pallid maidens confronting me. In the eyes of the eldest I saw a gleam of mingled suspicion and fear.

"I must be going," she gasped.

"Don't go," I implored her, overacting my hospitable role a bit. There flashed through my mind a scene from a Gilbert-Sullivan opera–"The Mikado"–and I caught myself humming the air of "Three Little Girls from School Are We."

Jones, to my consternation, stalked into the drawing-room, as if about to reprove me for my lack of dignity.

"Pardon me, madame," said my *bête noir*, pompously, "but Mr. Stevens insists upon your coming to the telephone."

My callers were on their feet, instantly. They appeared to be glad of an excuse for leaving me, and, also, somewhat astonished at the butler's choice of words.

"Don't let us keep you a moment," cried the eldest.

"Remember me to Mr. Stevens," urged the little brunette, mischievously.

"Good-bye! We are so grateful to you, Mrs. Stevens," exclaimed the third, with a sigh of relief.

"Be good!" I answered, gaily. "Come again–ah–young ladies. Don't mind Jones. You'll get used to him. Look in next month, won't you? Ta-ta!"

I stumbled over my skirts as I stepped forward, and the little flock of débutantes hurried away in affright, glancing over their shoulders at me in a manner that suggested gossip to come.

"Hello!" I shouted through the 'phone, when I had managed to reach the library. "Is that you–ah–Reginald? Where are you?"

"Yes. This is Reginald," I heard my voice in answer. "I'm at the 'Varsity Club. Charming place. Nice boys here. You seem to be popular, my dear. 'Here's to you, good as you are, and here's to me, bad as I am; but as good as you are, and as bad as I am, I'm as good as you are, bad as I am!'"

"Good Lord–ah–ah–Reginald!" I faltered, horror-stricken.

"Don't worry, Caroline," came my voice, soothingly. "It's all right. I know when to stop. Had any callers? This is your day at home, is it not?"

"I'll send the coupé for you at once–ah–Reginald," I said, with great presence of mind. "Go easy till it arrives, will you?"

"What do you mean to imply, Caroline?" growled my wife, a note of anger in my voice. "I'm going to walk home by-and-bye. You needn't bother about the coupé. I hear the boys calling to me. Here's to you, my dear! Good-bye!"

Before I could utter another word, Caroline had cut me off, and I turned from the 'phone, despondently. For a moment, it seemed to me that the library was surrounded by an iron grating and that I wore a ball and chain attached to my legs. Caroline and "the Old Crowd!" I am forced to confess that the hot tears came into my wife's eyes as I seated myself in a reading-chair and found myself face to face with a loneliness that was provocative of despair.

Jones was hot on the scent. He strode into the library and bore down upon me relentlessly, carrying a tray upon which rested two calling-cards.

"They are in the drawing-room, madame," said the butler, indifferently.

Caroline's toast came ringing to my ears. "Here's to you, good as you are, and here's to me, bad as I am!" And here I sat, bullied by Jones and the plaything of a lot of light-headed women of all ages. For one wild, feverish, moment the thought of revolt darted through my mind. I might faint, or have a fit, and Jones would be forced to dismiss my callers. But I quickly realized that I was not up to a brilliant histrionic effort. Even as it was, I was playing another's role with but indifferent success.

Two elderly women, richly garbed, arose as I reentered the drawing-room.

"I'm so glad to see you–ah–my dears," I said, in a voice pitched to indicate cordiality. One of my callers tossed her head haughtily, while the prim mouth of her companion fell open. This was not encouraging, and I remained silent. We stared at each other for a long, agonizing moment.

"How do you do?" I began again, with much less assurance. "Go away, little girls," kept running through my mind from that diabolical, tinkling "Mikado."

"We are very well, I believe," remarked Mrs. Martin, as she proved to be, coldly. "I think I may answer for Mrs. Smythe's health."

"I am in perfect health," exclaimed Mrs. Smythe, with emphasis, staring at me in a superior kind of way.

"There's nothing like perfect health–ah–my friends," I said, in a high, almost hysterical, falsetto. "Who is it who says that a man is as old as he feels and a woman as old as she looks?"

"Whoever said it, Mrs. Stevens, did us a great injustice," commented Mrs. Martin, with some warmth. "I am as young in spirit as I was ten years ago, but I don't look it."

"No, you don't look it," I hastened to remark, cordially; but my comment was not well received. Mrs. Martin glanced at Mrs. Smythe, and they stood erect on the instant.

"You're not going–ah–my dears?" I cried, thinking it too good to be true.

"You will pardon the liberty that I am about to take, Mrs. Stevens," began Mrs. Martin, sternly, "but it seems only fair to you that we should ask a question before leaving you. You are out of sorts to-day? Not quite yourself, are you?"

"Not quite," I answered, drawing myself up to Caroline's full height and struggling against an inclination to give vent to wild, feverish laughter. "I may say–Mrs.–ah–my dear–that I'm not quite myself. Not quite! It'll pass off. I have every reason to believe it'll pass off. But you're right. I'm not quite myself."

My frankness, which appalled me as I thought of it afterward, seemed to have a soothing effect upon my callers.

"You really do too much, Mrs. Stevens," remarked Mrs. Smythe, in a motherly way. "You should try to get a nap at once."

"Your nerves are affected," Mrs. Martin added, speaking gently. "You are overdoing things. Did you ever try the rest cure?"

"Yes. I've been giving it a chance to-day," I confessed. "But it doesn't work. I can't sleep in the daytime. Bear that in mind–ah–my dear. Don't talk to me about a nap. As I said to Caroline–ah–Reginald, I'm up for all day. But you know what nerves are, do you not?"

Mrs. Martin again glanced furtively at Mrs. Smythe, and without more ado they swept out of the drawing-room.

I dropped into a chair, a feeling of relief mingled with self-disgust sweeping

over me. I realized that I had been making a sad botch of the part that I had attempted to play. At that moment, heavy footsteps behind me aroused me from my black-and-white revery. Two large, hot hands were placed over my eyes, and the end of a beard tickled Caroline's forehead.

"Guess who it is?" I heard my deep voice saying. "Here's to you, good as you are!"

"Caroline!" I exclaimed, conflicting emotions agitating my soul.

"Guess again, little woman," said my wife, playfully, in my voice. "They call me 'Reggie' at the club."

CHAPTER X.

RECRIMINATIONS.

We know these things are so, we ask not why,
But act and follow as the dream goes on.
–*Milnes.*

"Yes, I've had a simply perfect day, my dear," remarked Caroline, frankly, as we left the library to ascend to our second-story suite. "I've made twenty thousand dollars–by not taking your advice–and as to the 'Old Crowd' at the 'Varsity Club, I think they're really charming. I've been doing a good deal of miscellaneous thinking, my dear, and I'm convinced that women have a great future before them."

"What women?" I cried, impatiently, as I tripped against the top stair and caught my better half by the tail of my coat.

"You'll do better with practice," remarked Caroline, soothingly. "I'm sure you enjoyed the day. Who has been here?"

"That'll keep," I answered, resisting an inclination to tweak my own nose. "Where's Jenkins?"

Caroline indulged in a hoarse chuckle.

"Jenkins has gone to Hoboken. He won't be back for at least a month. I think I can get on without a man. How's Suzanne?"

We had come to a standstill in the upper hall, just outside of the main door to our private rooms.

"How'll you manage to dress for dinner?" I asked, gazing at my flushed, triumphant face with sharply contrasted emotions. I was glad to see it again, but I did not like Caroline's way of using it.

"I'm very quick to learn," answered my voice, tauntingly. "You must admit, my dear, that I've been a success to-day. You don't think that I'm to be overcome by a man's dinner costume?"

A chill ran through me, and Caroline's voice trembled as I said:

"What do you–ah–think I'd better wear to-night? Suzanne'll ask me presently."

A jovial laugh greeted my words. The humorous side of our horrible plight seemed to be always apparent to Caroline.

"You must be sure to do me credit, my dear boy," said my wife, gruffly. "You've glanced over my wardrobe, have you not?"

The hot blood came into my adopted cheeks at the suggestion.

"I–I've been too–ah–busy to look into the–ah–matter," I faltered. "Damn it, Caroline, don't be so confoundedly superior! I'm crushed and discouraged. That's straight. Give me a word of advice, will you? What shall I wear to-night? I don't want to make a fool of myself before Suzanne."

"Poor Suzanne!" growled Caroline, somewhat irrelevantly, I thought. "She must have had a day of it! Tell her you'll wear the dress I wore at the Leonards' dinner-party last week. You needn't say much about my hair. Suzanne'll know what to do with it."

Her hand, or rather mine, was on the knob of the door, when a hideous and persistent horror that had haunted me for some time forced me to say, in Caroline's most insistent treble:

"Why–oh, why–did you allow Edgerton to ask that infernal Yamama to come here to-night? It was madness, Caroline."

"Call me Reginald," interposed my wife, coolly.

"It was madness, I say–ah–Reginald. It was that–or worse."

My heart beat fast in Caroline's bosom.

"What do you mean?" asked my wife, thrusting my face forward, and transfixing me with my own eyes.

"You've enjoyed the day, haven't you?" I asked, my temper overcoming my prudence. "Well, I haven't. I've been driven nearly crazy by a lot of fool women, while you've had the time of your life."

"I don't follow you," remarked my wife, severely.

"That's just it," I cried, angrily. "You lead me, and I'm forced to follow you. I tell you frankly that I've grown suspicious. You've been studying Oriental mysticism. You've been to lectures and séances, and, for all I know, you may be a favorite pupil of this chocolate-drop, Yamama."

My wife drew herself up to my full height, and gazed down at me, freezingly.

"You mean to imply, Mrs. Stevens," she remarked, with studied coldness, "that I was deliberately responsible for what happened this morning, or last night?"

"Don't dare to call me Mrs. Stevens, Caroline," I whispered, shaking with futile rage. "If I have suspected you, have I not had sufficient circumstantial evidence? Mrs. Taunton tells me that this rascally fakir Yamama turns people into pigs, frogs, any old thing. And you've allowed Edgerton to bring him here to-night! I don't believe that you have the slightest desire to–ah–change back again."

My wife laughed aloud in my most disagreeable manner.

"Here's to you, good as you are, and here's to me, bad as I am!" she cried, with most untimely geniality, and, without more ado, threw open the door to our apartments. In the center of the room stood Suzanne, pale but self-contained, awaiting my advent. For a moment, a mad project tempted me. If I rushed downstairs and had a fit in the lower hall, I might escape many of the horrors that the evening threatened to bring with it. But if I took this heroic course a doctor would be called in. On the whole, I preferred Suzanne to a physician.

I realize, clearly enough, that I lack the ability to keep or reject data with the unerring judgment of the professional story-teller. I should like to give to my testimony a somewhat artistic structure, but I am hampered in this inclination by the necessity of following the actual sequence of events. Being neither a novelist nor a scientist, I am in danger of making an amorphous presentment of facts that shall fail either to convince the psychologist or entertain the idle reader of an empty tale. On the whole, I am prone to make sacrifices in behalf of the latter. My natural inclination is toward Art rather than toward Science, and for this reason I shall remain silent regarding the petty episodes of the hour that followed my talk with Caroline. As it is, my narrative is overweighted with what may be called details of the toilet.

At half-after six my wife and I entered our drawing-room under a flag of truce. The annoyances that had hampered Caroline's unaided efforts to don my evening clothes had had a beneficial effect upon her exultant, overbearing tendencies. She was subdued in manner to the verge of gloom.

"Why are you so downhearted, my dear?" I asked. "Don't you like–ah–my appearance?"

"Which appearance?" growled Caroline, glaring at me. "Are the studs in the right place?"

"Of course they are," I answered cheerfully. "I never looked better, I'm sure. I congratulate you. And Suzanne tells me that this costume is very becoming to

you. The one I have on, I mean. Have you noticed, Caroline, what an infernal nuisance pronouns have become? I'm glad our nouns have no gender. What did you say to young Van Tromp at the Cromptons' dance?"

My beard seemed to fairly bristle with Caroline's anger and astonishment.

"Van Tromp!" she exclaimed, in a surly basso. "What has he been doing now? Horrid little thing! He's not one of the boys, is he, my dear?"

I had seated myself with some difficulty, annoyed at Suzanne for lacing Caroline so tightly, but rather pleased, inwardly, at my feminine beauty and Parisian costume. Caroline stood not far away, six feet tall, broad-shouldered, a manly figure in black and white.

"Van Tromp," I remarked, in the soft musical tones that had at last reconciled me to my borrowed voice, "Van Tromp is a wandering minstrel, a troubadour out of his time, an age-end Romeo, who haunts Juliet's balcony at all hours of the day and night playing a hurdy-gurdy and reciting his own rhymes. Van Tromp is the one bright gleam in a black and starless night. He would atone for a dreary day were not Yamama coming too."

"I don't understand you, Caroline," growled my wife, shifting my feet uneasily.

"You haven't told me what Van Tromp said to you at the Cromptons' dance," I said, relentlessly. "I'll return to the subject later on. Now tell me–ah–Reginald, what you know about Yamama. You intimated, unless I am mistaken, that my suspicions as to your collusion with this Oriental fakir were unfounded?"

"Unfounded!" exclaimed my wife, scornfully. "Absurd! ridiculous! Do you imagine that I would choose this clumsy body of yours in preference to mine? Look at me, and then glance at the mirror, my dear. I'll admit that I've had a very enjoyable day. But I assure you I know little more about Yamama than you do. I am very nervous about him. I don't know what he'll do to us. But I have a horrible fear that he will read our secret at a glance."

"If he does–ah–Caroline," I cried, excitedly, "slug him! Never mind about hospitality. Hit him a crack on the nose. You can apologize to Edgerton afterward."

"That's just like a man," grumbled Caroline. "You think you can defeat esoteric Buddhism with your fists. I'm rather ashamed of you, my dear."

I felt the blood coming into Caroline's cheeks.

"It won't do, of course," I murmured, presently. "We must use diplomacy, not force, in dealing with this Oriental nuisance. Perhaps Yamama will find little Van Tromp sufficiently amusing to enable us to escape detection. I'm inclined to think that Van Tromp is the outward and visible sign of a love-sick tadpole. His sister, the débutante, is not so bad. I suppose she'll fall to Edgerton at dinner?"

"We must have a rehearsal, you and I," remarked Caroline, gruffly. "I escort

Mrs. Edgerton, of course, and you'll take Van Tromp's arm. You'll like that."

"Do you see these violets–ah–Reginald?" I cried, dramatically, making a gesture toward Van Tromp's floral offering, now bedecking my corsage. "He sent them to you. What was Van Romeo's little game? You were to wear the violets to-night, if you really meant what you said to him at the Cromptons' dance. As you always mean what you say, my dear, I have hung out the sign of your–ah–veracity, so to speak. There's more to come, of course. There's a poem, for one thing. I'll read it aloud when we get our coffee."

I saw that my heavy face was flushed and that my eyes glowed with anger as I glanced upward at my wife. She strode toward me menacingly, and laid a heavy hand upon her bare shoulder. Seizing Van Tromp's violets, before I could recover from my astonishment, she tore them from their fastenings, and hurled them toward a remote corner of the drawing-room.

"You carry a joke too far," she growled, menacingly. "If you dare to read that poem I'll–I'll tell Yamama the whole story when he comes. I know what to say to him, and he'll do what I ask him to do. I give you fair warning."

I fell back in my chair, cold and disheartened. My worst suspicions seemed to be confirmed. Caroline was in league, as I had feared, with that sunburnt fakir from the Far East! At that moment, Jones entered the room.

"Mr. and Mrs. Edgerton," he announced, and, an instant later, "Miss Van Tromp, Mr. Van Tromp."

CHAPTER XI.

A DINNER AND A DISCUSSION.

Yesterday This Day's Madness did prepare:
To-morrow's Silence, Triumph, or Despair.
Drink! for you know not whence you came, nor why.
Drink! for you know not why you go, nor where.
–Omar Kháyyám.

It is always, under the best of conditions, uncertain how a dinner-party will "go off." People are not unlike the ingredients of a salad-dressing. The smoothness of the dressing depends upon a mysterious chemical affinity that is recognized by

the salad-maker but never wholly understood. All the arts are closely related to each other. A dinner-party, a salad-dressing or an epic poem demands creative effort, and is successful in so far as its creator has made an effective fusion of its separate parts.

Caroline had been inclined to believe that her fame as a dinner-giver was no more than her due. She had reached an altitude as a triumphant hostess from which she could make experiments of a more or less interesting kind. She enjoyed bringing together around our board seemingly antagonistic social molecules to see if they would fuse. She had planned to-night's dinner much as a chemist prepares his materials for a novel combination. Edgerton and Mrs. Edgerton, Van Tromp and Miss Van Tromp formed the basis for an experiment that might produce either a perfume or an explosion.

What the result would have been had Caroline's effort not been hampered by a soul-transposition that made many things awkward to us that were unobserved by our guests, I cannot say. A large portion of the function, especially its earlier stages, is a blur and a buzz in my memory. It had been like this from the first, whenever I had come into the butler's sphere of influence. Van Tromp and Edgerton were not especially terrifying. I knew their limitations. But Jones impressed me as a mystery, concealing in a wooden exterior most frightful possibilities for mischief. I did not fully recover my self-control, if such it could be called, until after the fish had been served. By that time, the situation in the dining-room was about as follows:

Caroline, playing the rôle of host, was doing nicely, but was, I feared, inclined to over-act the part a bit. Little Van Tromp, a blue-eyed, insignificant-looking man, with a tender mustache, pointed blond beard and too much hair on his head, was lowspirited and inclined to wander in his talk. He would glance at my corsage, and then cast a reproachful, languishing glance at Caroline's eyes, into which I found it possible, now and then, to throw an expression of coquetry that revived the poet's drooping spirits for a time. Mrs. Edgerton, a handsome mondaine, was always self-poised, animated and self-satisfied. Miss Van Tromp, unlike her sister, Mrs. Taunton, was petite, vivacious and rather pretty, but somewhat in awe of her brother's genius. Edgerton was a typical New Yorker of the prosperous type, possessing blood, breeding and a pleasing exterior.

Mrs. Edgerton thought that I looked somewhat fagged.

"I've had such a busy day, don't you know–ah–my dear," I exclaimed, glancing at my face across the table, and flushing at the gleam of merriment that Caroline flashed at me from my eyes.

"You and Mrs. Edgerton really do too much," commented Edgerton, politely. "We are apt to underestimate a woman's cares and burdens, Reggie," he added, addressing Caroline.

"Indeed we are," Caroline asserted, readily, in my deep voice. "I'm inclined to think, Edgerton," she continued, giving a splendid imitation of my most impressive manner, "that we do scant justice to our wives, while we are forever harping upon our own importance."

"Hear! hear!" cried little Van Tromp, playfully. I manfully resisted an inclination to hurl a wine-glass at his too picturesque head.

Mrs. Edgerton smiled at me. "What has happened to Mr. Stevens, Caroline?" she cried, jocosely. "Unless my memory is at fault, I have heard him say that you and I are 'long on leisure and short on work.'"

"An epigram!" piped the poet, rolling his eyes in exaggerated rapture.

"Did I ever make that remark?" I heard my voice asking in surprise. "I'm afraid, Mrs. Edgerton, that you have misrepresented the source of what Mr. Van Tromp has mistaken for an epigram. It sounds to me, who never said it, more like a Wall street bull."

"I can't bear that," I ventured, in Caroline's merriest tones, and Miss Van Tromp giggled.

"The point at issue, as I understand it," began Edgerton, genially, "is whether Reggie is making a confession. Did you cry 'Peccavi!' old man?"

"You are as great a sinner in this matter as I am," answered Caroline, seriously, looking at Edgerton. "How often have I heard you complain of overwork, my dear fellow! They were saying at the club this afternoon that you seldom reached there before four o'clock."

A flush came into Edgerton's face, and Mrs. Edgerton laughed aloud.

"Betrayed! betrayed!" she exclaimed, gleefully. "Reggie has deserted you, hubbie dear."

"This is absolutely shocking!" cried Miss Van Tromp. "I shall never marry."

"Let us change the subject," I suggested, suppressing a shudder as Jones glided past me. "We have become a horrible warning to our two unmarried guests–ah–Reginald."

"I am not easily frightened, Mrs. Stevens," the poet dared to say, looking at me courageously.

"Discretion is the better part of bachelorhood," I retorted, and Van Romeo collapsed at once.

"I am so excited at the prospect of meeting Yamama," said Mrs. Edgerton, presently. "He says such wonderful things!"

"And does 'em, too," I murmured, under my breath, and flashing a glance at my smiling face across the table.

"What does he say?" asked Miss Van Tromp, with youthful curiosity.

"Oh, I can't begin to tell you," protested Mrs. Edgerton, and then began: "He says that poetry suffices; that he cannot understand why prose was invented."

"Hear! hear!" cried little Van Tromp, with enthusiasm.

"He abhors egotism. Intellectual self-satisfaction is hideous, he says."

"He ought to know," I exclaimed, and Caroline had the audacity to laugh.

"Go on, Mrs. Edgerton," cried the Van Tromps with one voice.

"Yamama tells us that our Western world is not only self-satisfied, but ignorant. We are contented with half-truths. Science makes a discovery, as it imagines, and, behold! it is something that the East has known for ages."

"But how about the famine in India?" asked Edgerton, argumentatively. "If they know so much, these Eastern wise men, why don't they make grain grow in a dry season? They are great frauds, eh, Reggie?"

"I don't agree with you, Edgerton," I heard my voice in answer. "You fail to get their point of view."

"Betrayed again, Edgerton," laughed the poet.

"What's their point of view?" grumbled Edgerton, casting a glance of surprise at Caroline.

"If you believed in reincarnation," exclaimed my wife, in my somewhat overbearing manner, "you would look upon death as merely a stepping-stone to a higher existence. A famine, don't you see, helps a large number of souls up the spiral."

"Mr. Stevens has become a theosophist," cried Mrs. Edgerton, in exaggerated amazement.

"How perfectly lovely," commented Miss Van Tromp, somewhat irrelevantly. I saw Jones pouring wine at the poet's corner, and I thought that his hand trembled. I'm sure that my voice was unsteady as I remarked:

"But–ah–Reginald, what about snakes and–ah–frogs? Starvation is bad enough, but you aren't going up a spiral if you are changed into something that squirms and crawls."

"It's not like climbing a ladder," answered my voice, authoritatively. "You may go down, now and then, but as the ages pass the general trend is upward."

"It's awfully interesting," reflected Miss Van Tromp, aloud. "But how is it done?"

"It isn't done!" exclaimed Edgerton, almost angrily, "it's only half-baked. Of all the absurd nonsense that is talked this Oriental mysticism is the worst. That's why I was glad to get this man Yamama to come here this evening. I want to prove to Mrs. Edgerton that he's just about as significant as a Bab ballad."

"Do you think that Yamama will be inclined to do–ah–stunts, Mr. Edgerton?" I faltered, catching the butler's eye, and wondering why Caroline's toes got cold so easily.

"What do you mean by stunts, my dear?" Caroline asked, using my voice, rather sternly. "Yamama, I imagine, would not understand the word. He is not

here to play tricks."

"What is he here for–ah–my dear?" I asked, in a falsetto that was too shrill to be good form. Mrs. Edgerton looked annoyed, and Edgerton said, half-apologetically:

"Really, Mrs. Stevens, I thought that you would be glad to have Yamama come to us to-night. Frankly, I wanted to make a closer study of the man, and your husband assured me that it would be pleasing to you to have him here."

"Don't think me inhospitable and ungrateful, Mr. Edgerton," I began in Caroline's smoothest manner. "I shall enjoy meeting Yamama, of course. But do you really think that a man who prefers poetry to prose can be trusted?"

Van Tromp gasped and glanced furtively at Caroline. The latter raised her wine-glass, smiled at me gaily, and I heard my voice crying:

"Here's to you, my dear, good as you are!"

"What are you staring at, Jones?" I asked, angrily, turning sharply toward the butler. He continued his task of serving the course without noticing my reproof. My wife and guests were gazing at me in surprise.

"A toast! A toast!" cried little Van Tromp, almost hysterically.

Edgerton laughed aloud. "Let us drink to the mysterious East," he suggested, like one who bore an olive branch in his hand.

"To the secrets of the Orient and Yamama!" amended Caroline, showing my teeth to me in a cruel smile.

"Yamama! Yamama!" murmured my guests.

As we sipped our wine, I glanced at Jones. There was a flush on his phlegmatic face, but he appeared to be paying no attention to anything but his duties.

CHAPTER XII.

YAMAMA AND RELEASE.

Then dimness passed upon me, and that song
Was sounding o'er me when I woke
To be a pilgrim on the nether earth.
–Dean Alford.

On our return to the drawing-room, I found myself annoyed by the attention of

little Van Tromp and appalled by the imminent advent of Yamama. A new and most distressing dread had crept into my errant soul. I had begun to think that I should come to hate my wife, unless she altered at once her mode of procedure. The fear was upon me that she had enjoyed the day's experience sufficiently to tempt her to make existing conditions permanent. Angry as I was with her, I realized that diplomacy was a better tool at present than denunciation.

"I must speak to her at once," I mused aloud, glancing at my manly, patrician, well-groomed outward seeming as Caroline stood at the further end of the room, chatting with Miss Van Tromp and the Edgertons. An exclamation beside me convinced me that little Van Tromp was very wide-awake.

"Shall I take you to her, Mrs. Stevens? There is no sacrifice that I would not make for you. You would go to Mrs. Edgerton?"

"Mrs. Edgerton?" I exclaimed, somewhat dazed for the moment. "No; I was referring to–ah–Reginald. Tell him I want to see him, will you, old man? These infernal skirts are such a nuisance!"

The poet's eloquent eyes recalled me to my senses. He was gazing at me in amazement, evidently wondering if I had drunk too deep a toast to Yamama.

"What a pitiable fate is mine!" murmured Van Romeo, gloomily. "I have been dreaming of this moment for days, and, lo! you destroy my happiness by a word. Chasing a rainbow is so much more delightful that summoning your lesser half!"

"Lesser half, indeed!" I could not refrain from saying, bitterly. "My three-quarters, or more. Look here, Van Tromp, if you don't move more rapidly I shall read those silly verses of yours to Yamama when he arrives, and he'll turn you into a green-and-yellow parrot. Good heavens, man, it's too late! There he is!"

[image]

"Unannounced and unattended, Yamama glided into the drawing-room."

Unannounced and unattended, Yamama glided into the drawing-room. I recognized him at a glance, and Caroline's bosom heaved with a conflict of emotions. Little Van Tromp had jumped to his feet.

"Isn't he stunning?" he exclaimed most unpoetically.

Yamama was, indeed, pleasing to the eye. His light-brown complexion, dark brilliant eyes and gorgeous costume made a picture that gave an Oriental splendor to our drawing-room. He stood motionless for a moment, half-way between Caroline and me. Suddenly it flashed upon me that I had a duty to

perform. Caroline and I reached Yamama at the same time.

"It was so kind of you to come to us," I heard Caroline saying to the adept. "Mrs. Stevens was overjoyed to hear that you had consented to honor us."

Yamama's black, fathomless eyes smiled at me, like deep, dark pools touched by sunshine. A chill ran through me, but I found strength to say, falteringly:

"Glad to see you, Mr.–ah–Yamama. We're so interested–ah–Reginald and I–in Bhesotericuddhism! Glad to see you! Aren't we–ah–Reggie?"

I suspected that Caroline chuckled behind my beard. I am sure that the smile in Yamama's eyes deepened.

We had grouped ourselves around the adept, who stood calm, picturesque, silent, in the center of the room; the majesty and mystery of the brooding East seeming to fill the universe of a sudden. It was as some priceless Oriental rug had become on the instant not merely an ornament, but a creation of infinite psychical significance.

"Does he talk?" Edgerton whispered to me, and I glanced at him, reprovingly. Mrs. Edgerton was gazing, awestruck, at Yamama. Presently, the adept spoke, in a voice that drove from my fevered mind all thoughts of frogs, snakes and tadpoles.

"Man is composed of seven principles, a unit, but capable of partial separation."

"Well, rather!" I could not refrain from saying, but Yamama ignored my rudeness. He went on impressively, while the group surrounding him listened eagerly, fascinated by his appearance and manner.

"The evolutionary process demands a number of planets, corresponding to the seven principles. On each of these planets a long series of lives is required before a full circuit is made."

"How wildly exciting!" cried Miss Van Tromp. Yamama smiled, indulgently. Then he said:

"Before reaching the perfection attainable, every soul must pass through many minor circuits. We are said to be in the middle of the fifth circuit of our fourth round, and the evolution of this circuit began about a million years ago."

"It knocks the Ferris Wheel silly," I overheard Edgerton mutter to himself, and I felt an unaccountable anger at his flippancy.

"I should so like to ask you a question," faltered Miss Van Tromp, and Yamama bowed his inspired head, resignedly.

"How soon do we come back after we die?"

"When a man dies," answered the adept, in his low, soft, musical voice, "his ego holds the impetus of his earthly desires until they are purged away from that higher self, which then passes into a spiritual state, when all the psychic and

spiritual forces it has generated during the earthly life are unfolded. It progresses on those planes until the dormant physical impulses assert themselves, and curve the soul around to another incarnation, whose form is the resultant of the earlier lives."

"That's easy," muttered Edgerton, at my shoulder.

"I've often felt that way," exclaimed Van Tromp, gazing ecstatically at Yamama.

"Are you making converts?" asked Mrs. Edgerton.

A haughty smile, dark-red streaked with white against a brown background, the whole lighted by two eyes of marvelous power, met our gaze.

"Only by soul itself is soul perceived," answered Yamama, somewhat irrelevantly, I thought.

"You're out, my dear," whispered Edgerton, playfully, to his wife.

"May I trouble you, my dear sir," began Van Tromp, pompously–"may I trouble you to explain to a mind darkened by Occidental erudition why it is that the West is so blind to the mighty truths that you teach?"

"That's a touchdown," muttered Edgerton.

Yamama gazed fixedly at the poet for a time. Then he said:

"The West is not blind to the mighty truths of which you speak. You only imagine that you do not see them. Your great thinkers have taught what we teach. Schopenhauer, Lessing, Hegel, Leibnitz, Herder, Fichte the younger, are with us. Your great poets sing the eternal verities. It is nothing new, that which I bring to you from the East."

"Is there–ah–any reason to fear," I dared to ask, "that when we–ah–change around again–I mean–ah–get reincarnated, you see, that we become–ah–frogs or–or snakes–that is, if we don't–ah–so to speak, stay put?"

My voice had been gradually ascending Caroline's scale until it hit the interrogation mark in a sharp falsetto. As Yamama's eyes met mine I thought for an instant that I had been struck by lightning. What his strange glance–cutting through me until I knew that I had no secrets left–meant I had no way of determining. I was like a rabbit fascinated by an anaconda.

"There is salvation for him whose self disappears before truth, whose will is bent upon what he ought to do, whose sole desire is the performance of his duty. The root of all evil is ignorance." Thus spake Yamama, whether in answer to my question I could not decide.

"What's the matter with the love of money?" asked Edgerton, in an unconventional tone of voice. His bump of reverence is not well developed.

"'Tis but a small part of the ignorance that enfolds you like a worthless garment," answered the adept, coldly.

"That's one on me," I heard Edgerton mutter, while Mrs. Edgerton laughed,

softly.

"The Enlightened One," went on Yamama, literally in a brown study, "saw the four noble truths which point out the path that leads to Nirvana or the extinction of self."

"Good eye!" murmured Edgerton, and his wife whispered "Hush!"

As I glanced at Caroline, I saw that my face had undergone a change. She was watching the adept with my eyes, but the expression on my countenance was wholly her own.

"The attainment of truth," continued Yamama, "is possible only when self is recognized as an illusion. Righteousness can be practiced only when we have freed our mind from the passion of egotism. Perfect peace can dwell only where all vanity has disappeared."

"I've known that for years," exclaimed Van Tromp, brushing his hair back from his forehead in a self-conscious way.

I had begun to feel faint.

"Won't you be seated–ah–Mr. Yamama?" I asked, hoping that he would observe my indisposition. Even as I spoke, I lost sight of him. The lights went out of a sudden, and a sharp, exquisite pain shot through me. I was surrounded by a fathomless gloom, as if the universe had turned black at a word. I was conscious, but seemingly alone in a dark void. For a moment only was I cognizant of self. Then there came a flash of dazzling light, and I knew no more.

My testimony is at an end. A week has passed since Caroline and I awoke one morning to find our souls transposed. We are still confined to our rooms, suffering, our physician tells us, from acute nervous prostration. But "Richard's himself again!" When we recovered our senses–for Caroline had fainted at the moment when Yamama dissappeared from my sight–we found ourselves restored to our respective bodies; but the shock of our psychical interchange had left us physically weak and depressed.

I have not yet had the energy to compare notes with Caroline in regard to our uncanny experiences. But, fearing that my memory might play me false, I have relieved the tedium of my convalescence by jotting down the foregoing presentment, in the hope, as I have said before, that the data may prove of interest to minds more erudite than mine and my wife's.

Jenkins has returned from Hoboken–or wherever he went–and I have had him remove my beard. It had become a horror to me. Suzanne is very attentive to Caroline, and seems to have recovered her spirits.

One significant fact I have reserved for the last. It has caused me much uneasiness, not unmingled with a sense of relief. Jones has not been seen since

the night of our weird dinner-party. No trace of him has been found. I have advertised for a butler, but have not yet received an application that appealed to me in my present supersensitive condition. What I want is a butler as unlike Jones as possible. Unfortunately, he was a pattern of his kind. But I hate the very thought of him, and so I shall drop my pen at this point and watch Suzanne and Caroline through the open door. I think I shall try to get down to the club to-morrow to see the boys.

II.
How Chopin Came to Remsen.

There cometh evil to my house,
And none of ye have wit to help me know
What the great gods portend sending me this.
THE LIGHT OF ASIA.

HOW CHOPIN CAME TO REMSEN.

CHAPTER I.
CHOPIN'S OPUS 47

It brings an instinct from some other sphere,
For its fine senses are familiar all,
And with the unconscious habit of a dream,
It calls and they obey.
N. P. WILLIS.

It has been with the greatest reluctance that I have agreed to submit to the public all the details, so far as they are known to me, of my husband's seemingly mirac-

ulous change from an average man into a genius. Poor Tom! He was so happy as a phlegmatic, well-balanced, common-place lawyer and clubman, devoted to his wife, his profession and his friends! But now, alas, his amazing eccentricities demand from me a presentation of his case that shall change censure into sympathy and malicious gossip into either silence or truth.

I am forced to admit at the outset that Tom is justified in attributing his present predicament to my own fondness for music. He had protested, gently but firmly, against the series of musicals that I had planned to give last season.

"They'll be an awful nuisance, my dear," he had remarked, gloomily, gazing at me appealingly across the table at which we were dining *en tête-à-tête*. "Why not substitute bridge whist in place of the music? Why will you insist on asking a crowd of people who don't care a rap for anything but ragtime to listen to your high-priced soloists? A musical, Winifred, is both expensive and tiresome."

"What a Philistine you are, Tom!" I exclaimed, protestingly, knowing, however, that my dear old pachyderm would not wince at the epithet I had hurled at him across the board. Tom's vocabulary is not large, and possesses a legal rather than a Biblical flavor.

"What's a Philistine?" he asked, indifferently. "If it's a fellow who objects to inviting a lot o' people that he doesn't like to listen to a lot o' playing and singing that *they* don't like, well, then, I'm it. But what's the use of my getting out an injunction? If you've made up your mind to give these musicals, Winifred, I might as well quash my appeal. I've no standing in this court."

One of the advantages of living with a man for ten years is that one is eventually confronted by a most fascinating problem. "Why did I marry him?" is the question that adds a keen zest to existence. We derive a new interest in life from the hope that the future may provide us with an answer to this query. I can remember now, to my sorrow, that I gazed across the table at Tom's heavy, immobile face, and longed for some radical, perhaps supernatural, change in the man that should render him more congenial to me, more sympathetic, less practical, matter-of-fact, commonplace. A moment later I felt ashamed of myself for the disloyalty of my wish. It may be that subsequent events were preordained as a punishment to me for the internal discontent to which I had temporarily succumbed.

"Tom doesn't look quite fat, my dear," remarked Mrs. Jack Van Corlear to me early in the evening of my first–and last–musical. "Is he working too hard? Jack tells me that Tom has been made counsel for the Pepper and Salt Trust."

"It's not that," I answered, lightly, glancing at Tom and noting the unusual pallor of his too fleshy face. "He's expecting an evening of torture, you know. He hates music. He can't tell a nocturne from a ballade–and they both torment him. But he's an awfully good fellow, isn't he? See, he's trying to talk to Signor Turino.

I hope he'll remember that Verdi didn't write 'Lohengrin.' I've been coaching Tom for several days, but it's hard, my dear Mrs. Jack, to make a man who doesn't play or sing a note remember that the Moonlight Sonata is not from Gounod's 'Faust,' and that it's bad form to ask Mlle. Vanoni if she admires 'Florodora.'"

My duties as hostess and the pronounced success of the earlier numbers of my program led me presently to forget Tom's existence. He had been cruelly unjust to my guests in asserting that they would prefer ragtime to the classics. The applause that had rewarded the efforts of both Turino and Vanoni had been spontaneous and genuine. Signorina Molatti had created an actual furor with her violin solo, intensified, no doubt, by her marvelous beauty. It was Molatti's success that presently recalled Tom to my reluctant consciousness. As the dark-eyed, fervid young woman responded smilingly to an insistent encore, I caught a glimpse of my unimpressionable husband, standing erect at the rear of the crowded music-room and watching the girl's every movement with eyes alight with interest and approval. I had not seen his unresponsive countenance so animated before in years. Mrs. Jack Van Corlear had followed my glance, and a mischievous smile was in her face as she leaned toward me.

"Perhaps Tom is more musical than you imagine, my dear," she whispered, maliciously.

"Do you think it's the violin?" I returned, laughingly, ashamed of the feeling of annoyance that her playful pin-prick had given me.

Jealous of Tom! The idea was too absurd. I had so often wished to be, but his devotion to me had always been chronic and incurable. "It's really bad form," I had once said to him; "your indifference to other women, Tom, causes comment. Overemphasis is always vulgar. You underscore our conjugal bliss, my dear boy, in a way that has become a kind of silent reproach to other people. You must really have a mild flirtation now and then, Tom."

It seemed to me that the vivacious Molatti had noted Tom's too apparent enthusiasm, for she smiled and nodded to him as she made ready to coax her Cremona into giving her silent auditors new proof of her most amazing genius. I, a lover of music, had been carried into unknown, blissful realms by the magic of her bow, my whole being throbbing with the joy of strange, weird harmonies that lured my errant soul away from earth, away from my duties as a hostess, my worries as a wife. I came back to my music-room with a thump. Something unusual, out of the common, was taking place, but at first I could not concentrate my faculties in a way to put me in touch with my environment. Presently I realized that Signorina Molatti had left the dais and–could I believe my senses?–that Tom brazenly, nonchalantly, before the gaze of two hundred wondering eyes, had seated himself at the piano.

"What's the matter with him?" whispered Mrs. Van Corlear to me in an

awe-struck tone.

"Wait," I answered, irrelevantly; "maybe he won't do it."

"Do what?" she returned, almost hysterically.

"I don't know," I gasped; and the thought flashed through my mind that possibly Tom had been drinking.

There lay the hush of expectancy on the astonished throng. Here and there furtive glances were cast at my program cards in search of Tom's name on a little list made up wholly of world-famous artists. But the large majority of my guests knew as well as I that Tom had never touched a piano in his life, that his ignorance of music was as pronounced as his detestation of it. But he might have been a Paderewski in his total absence of all awkwardness or self-consciousness as he sat motionless at the instrument for a moment, coolly surveying us all, in very truth like a master musician sure of himself and rejoicing in the delight that he was about to vouchsafe to his auditors.

I cannot recall now without a shudder the sensation that cut through my every nerve as Tom raised his large, pudgy hands above the keyboard, his small, gray eyes turned toward the ceiling just above my throbbing head. He looked at that instant like the very incarnation of Philistinism poised to hurl down destruction upon the center of all harmonies.

"It's revenge," I groaned, under my breath, and felt Mrs. Jack's cold hand creep into mine.

Down came the paws of Nemesis, and lo, the injustice that I had done to Tom was revealed to me. His touch was masterly. I could not have been more amazed had I seen an elephant threading a needle. The whole episode was strangely blended of the uncanny and realistic. I found myself noting the angle at which Tom held his chin. He always raised it thus when his man shaved him, his head thrown back and his eyes half-closed.

Then gradually it dawned on me that I was taking keen delight in his rendition of that marvelous ballade in A flat major that Chopin dedicated to Mlle. de Noailles. There is nothing more thoroughly Chopinesque in all the master's works than this perfect exposition of the refined in art. Tom's rendering of the lovely theme in F major, one of the most delicate in the world of music, thrilled me with startled admiration. But a chill came over me. What would he do with the section in C sharp minor, with its inverted dominant pedal in the right hand while the left is carrying on the theme? Without both skill and passion on the part of the performer the interpretation of this passage is certain to be commonplace. But hardly had this doubt assailed me when I knew that Tom had triumphed over every obstacle of technique and temperament, that he was approaching the harmonic grandeur of the finale with the poise and power of genius in full control of itself and its medium.

I have never fainted. Swooning went out of fashion long before my time, and I am devoted to the modern cult of self-control, but if it hadn't been for Mrs. Jack, who is really fond of me at times, I think that the last bar of Tom's Opus 47 would have seen my finish. The room had begun to whirl in a circle, like a merry-go-round in evening dress, when she steadied me by whispering:

"It's all right, my dear. Tom wins by four lengths, well in hand."

I came to myself in the very center of a storm of applause. Our guests had forgotten the conventionalities pertaining to a will-ordered musical. The men were on their feet, cheering. The women waved fans and handkerchiefs, and pelted Tom with violets and roses. The poor fellow sat at the piano in a half-dazed condition. A bunch of flowers, deftly thrown, struck him on the forehead, and he put his gifted hand to his brow as if he had just been recalled to consciousness.

"Encore! Encore!" cried our guests. Turino was gesticulating frantically, while Mlle. Vanoni and Signorina Molatti smiled and clapped their hands in exaggerated ecstasy.

I was worried by the expression that had come into Tom's face, and made my way quickly toward the piano.

"Aren't you well, my dear?" I asked, bending toward him, while the uproar behind me decreased a bit.

"What have I been doing, Winifred?" he asked, sheepishly, like one who wakens from a dream. "Get one of your damned dagos to sing, will you? I've got to have a drink or die!"

Standing erect abruptly, Tom cast a defiant glance at the chattering throng behind me and hurriedly made his way through a side door from the music-room. As I turned away from the piano I saw that Signorina Molatti's eyes were fixed upon his retreating figure with an expression that my worldly wisdom could not interpret. There was more of wonder than of admiration in her gaze, a gleam of questioning and longing that might, it seemed to me, readily flame into hot anger.

CHAPTER II.

REMSEN CONFRONTS A MYSTERY.

From memories that come not and go not;
Like music once heard by an ear

That cannot forget or reclaim it;
A something so shy it would shame it
To make it a show.
JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL.

After saying good-night to the last of my guests, who had expressed regret at the rumor that my husband was seriously indisposed, I hurried to the smoking-room, having learned that Tom had fled thither as a refuge from the curious and the congratulatory. As I came upon him he was alternately puffing a cigar and sipping a brandy-and-soda. On the instant the conflicting emotions that had beset me during the evening became a wave of anger, sweeping over me with irresistible force.

"Why have you deceived me, Tom Remsen?" I cried, sinking into a chair and resting my aching head against its back, as I scanned his pale, weary countenance attentively. "You have always pretended that you had no knowledge of music. I have heard you say that you could not whistle even a bar of 'Yankee Doodle' correctly. What a *poseur* you have been! And to-night, in a vulgar, theatrical way you suddenly exhibit the most astonishing talent. There is not an amateur in the world, Tom, who can interpret Chopin with such sympathy, such perfection of technique, such reserved power as you displayed this evening. You have placed me in a ridiculous position, and I can't conceive of any reasonable motive for your unnatural reticence. Why, Tom–answer me!–why have you concealed from me the fact that you are an accomplished–yes, a brilliant musician? Think of all the pleasure that we have lost in the last ten years by your deception and falsehoods–for that's what they were, Tom!" My voice broke a little, and I felt the tears creeping toward my eyes. "You have been cruel, Tom! Knowing my passionate love for music, why did you choose to hide a talent that would have drawn us so close together? And your revelation! It was the very refinement of brutality, Tom Remsen, to place me in such an awkward attitude! How could I explain my ignorance of your genius to our friends? They must consider me either a fool or a liar. As for what they think of you, Tom–"

"Stop it, Winifred!" cried my husband, hoarsely, putting up a hand protestingly. "I've had enough. I can't stand anything more to-night. If I tried to tell you the truth you wouldn't believe it, so you'd better leave me. I'll smoke another cigar. I'll never get to sleep again, I fear."

His last words sounded like a groan. My mood was softened by his evident distress.

"Do try to tell me the truth, Tom," I said, gently. "I'll believe what you say. There's a difference between positive and negative lying. I don't think you'd tell

me a deliberate falsehood, Tom."

There was something in his appearance at this moment that suggested to me a wounded animal at bay. Presently he lighted a fresh cigar, and gazing at me steadily, said:

"The cold, hard truth is this, Winifred: I never touched the keys of a piano in my life until an hour ago. I remember being drawn irresistibly to the instrument. What happened afterward I don't know. The first thing that I can recall was being hit in the head with some fool woman's bouquet. I remember saying, 'No flowers, please,' in a silly kind of way, but what it all meant I didn't know, and I don't know now. Do you?"

I sat speechless, gazing at Tom in amazement. He had never, in the twelve years of our betrothal and marriage, told me an untruth. I had often caught myself envying women whose husbands spiced the realism of domestic life with a romantic tale now and again. I know a woman who derives great intellectual enjoyment from cross-questioning her lesser half every twenty-four hours in an effort to prove that nature designed her for a clever detective. She would have drooped and died had she married Tom.

As I watched his honest face, pale now and careworn, I realized that I was confronted by two explanations of the present crisis, either one of which was inconceivable. Tom had told me a deliberate lie, or a miracle, to use an unscientific word, had been wrought through forces the existence of which I had always denied.

"No, Tom, I don't know what it means," I answered, presently. "How did you happen to choose the Chopin ballade for your début?"

I had not intended to hurt the poor fellow's feelings, but the change in his expression from weariness to wonderment filled me with remorse.

"I didn't choose anything," he muttered, reproachfully. "If I made an ass of myself, Winifred, I was not responsible. What the deuce did I do? You haven't told me–and I don't know."

By an effort of will I controlled the nervous chill that was threatening me, and said, quietly:

"Tom, you played Chopin's Ballade Number 3, Opus 47, in a way that would have satisfied Chopin himself. No performer living could have equaled your rendition. It was masterly."

Tom's mouth fell open in amazement. He closed it over a brandy-and-soda. "I can't believe it," he cried, setting down his glass and gazing at the smoke curling up from his cigar. "Why, Winifred, the thing's absurd. I never heard the–what do you call it?–in my life. And if I'd listened to it every day for a year I couldn't play it. I couldn't even whistle it."

I laughed aloud hysterically. There was a ludicrous side to the situation,

despite its uncanny features.

"What are you laughing at, Winifred?" demanded Tom, angrily. "Is there anything funny about all this? It seems, if I can believe what you say, that I made a kind of pianola of myself without knowing it. Is that a joke? I tell you, Winifred, it's paresis or something worse. Maybe I'll rob a bank next. And when I'm bailed out, I suppose I'll find you on a broad grin."

I was too near the verge of nervous collapse to repress the feeling of unreasonable annoyance that came over me at Tom's words. "I think you're very unjust, Tom," I exclaimed, with great lack of judgment.

"Unjust!" he echoed, petulantly. "Unjust to whom–to what?"

"You're unjust to Chopin," I answered, hotly, realizing that I was talking in a distinctly childish way. "Playing one of his masterpieces is not quite like robbing a bank."

"Why not," he snapped, "if I don't know how to play it? I certainly robbed those fool women of their flowers, didn't I? They pelted me with bouquets as if I were a boy wonder or a long-haired bang-the-keys, and I don't know the soft pedal from the key of E. I wouldn't do Chopin an injustice. He's dead, isn't he? But you mustn't do *me* an injustice, Winifred. I can't stand anything more to-night."

My heart seemed to come into my throat with a sob, and I drew my chair close to Tom's and took his cold hand in mine. "I'm sorry, Tom. I didn't mean to hurt your feelings, but I've been sorely tried, you must admit. I'm not quite myself, I fear."

Tom turned quickly and gazed squarely into my eyes. "Don't you worry, Winifred. You're yourself, all right. But who the dickens am I? If I'm Tom Remsen, I can't play Chopin. And you say I did play Chopin. I don't say I didn't. But how did I do it? Tom Remsen couldn't do it. Look at my hands, Winifred. Could my fingers knock a pianissimo out of a minor chord?–if that's what that fellow Chopin does. I tell you, it's queer, and I don't like it."

A well defined shudder shook Tom's heavy frame, and his hand, as it rested in mine, trembled perceptibly. His voice had sunk to a whisper as he asked: "Do you think it possible, Winifred, I was hypnotized, Winifred? I never took any stock in hypnotism, but there may be something in it. That Signor Turino has got a queer eye."

"I'm sure I don't know what to think, Tom," I admitted, reluctantly. By abandoning the theory that Tom had deceived me for a dozen years I was plunged into a tempestuous sea of mystery and conjecture. "But come, my dear boy, you are fagged out. We'll talk it over in the morning. Perhaps our minds will be clearer after a few hours' sleep."

"I couldn't sleep now," he returned nervously, glancing at his watch. "Don't

go yet, Winifred. It's only two o'clock."

We sat silent for a time, hand clasped in hand, like a youth and maiden awed by a sudden realization of the marvelous mysteries of existence.

Presently Tom spoke again, and I felt that it was a lawyer, in full control of his nerves, who questioned me. "Did I look–ah–dazed–or queer–when I went to the piano, my dear?"

"No, Tom," I answered, after a pause. "You–you–now, don't think me flippant–you looked just as you do when you're being shaved."

"Before all those people!" he gasped. "What *do* you mean, Winifred?"

"Your chin was up in the air, Tom, and your head was thrown back."

"But you didn't see any lather?" he asked, foolishly.

"Don't be silly, Tom," I cried, petulantly. But I had done him another injustice; he had not intended to be jocose.

"And then what did I do?" he asked, eagerly.

"And then you played that ballade with the inspiration of genius and the technique of a master."

"It stumps me!" he muttered. "Winifred, is there anything about this fellow Chopin in the library? Any books about him?"

"Yes, Tom, several; but you'd better not look at them to-night–if at all. Perhaps to-morrow you won't care to."

Tom's heavy features assumed their most stubborn aspect. He stood erect, still holding my hand, and I was forced to rise.

"Come with me, Winifred. I'm going to solve this mystery before I sleep, even if it takes two days. Come!"

Without further protest I accompanied Tom to the library.

CHAPTER III.

BIOGRAPHICAL DATA.

And, to meet us, nectar fountains still
Poured forever forth their blissful rill;
Forcibly we broke the seal of Things,
And to Truth's bright sunny hills our wings
Joyously were soaring.
SCHILLER.

It was a real relief to get into the library. Tom felt it, and his face soon resumed its normal expression. The heavy shadows beneath his eyes remained, but there had come a flush into his cheeks, and he carried himself with the air of a man who has a purpose in life and is in a fair way to accomplish it. I remember that the idea came into my mind that Tom had assumed the attitude of a lawyer who has been retained by the prosecution and has but little time in which to prepare his case. I had grown tactless, I fear, in my change of mood, for I was indiscreet enough to say, as Tom seated himself beside the library-table, leaving it to me to find the books that he wished to consult; "In the case of Winifred Remsen and others, against the late Frederic François Chopin, charged with house-breaking and breach of the peace."

Tom turned instantly, and a gleam of anger flashed in his eyes as they met mine. "If you cannot treat this matter with the seriousness that I think that it deserves, Winifred, you would do well to retire. It's no joke. When I make a donkey of myself before a lot of perfectly respectable people, I consider it a matter of some importance. You don't seem to grasp the full horror of it all. I suppose that I'm liable to have another attack at any time. In fact, it may become chronic. I have of late come across very curious psychical phenomena in a professional way, Winifred, and I insist on taking every precaution before you are forced to place me in the hands of the alienists."

"Tom!" I cried, in horror, and remorse. "You mustn't talk like that. There's nothing the matter with your mind. I'll admit that I can't explain what happened to-night, but I'm sure that it was not caused by any mental trouble on your part. There is doubtless some very simple and commonplace explanation of your–your—-"

"Call it seizure," suggested Tom, curtly. "What do you find there?"

I carried a little armful of books to the table, and placed them within Tom's reach.

"Here's a 'Life of Chopin,' by Niecks," I said. "'Frederic Chopin,' by Franz Liszt. Here's Joseph Bennett and Karasowski and the 'Histoire de ma Vie,' by George Sand. And here are Willeby and Mme. Audley. And I think I have—-"

"That'll do for to-night," remarked Tom, seizing the volume nearest to his hand. "What kind of a chap was this Chopin, anyway?"

"He was simply fascinating," I remarked, indiscreetly.

"H'm!" growled Tom, angrily. "Not very respectable, I suppose you mean. George Sand! She was a woman, wasn't she? How did she happen to write his life? What did she know about him?"

I have called Tom a Philistine. Perhaps that was too harsh a term to use, but I'm sure there is a good deal of the Puritan about him.

"She used to see a good deal of him," I answered, rather lamely. "They were

great chums for a while."

"H'm," growled Tom, throwing aside George Sand's work and opening another. Presently, he began to read biographical scraps aloud, for all the world like an angry police official drawing up a sweeping indictment against a man of genius.

"'The little Frederick duly received the name of Frederic François, after the son of Count Sharbek, who stood as his godfather,'" began Tom. "'We are told that he very soon showed a great susceptibility to musical sounds, although hardly in the direction which we should have expected, for he howled lustily whenever he heard them.'"

Tom looked up from the printed page, and our eyes met.

"That's a curious coincidence, Winifred," he remarked, musingly. "It's a family tradition that I used to yell like a young Indian whenever they tried to sing to me in my babyhood. A rattle-box would quiet me, but the sweetest lullaby always made me howl. But I must get on. Chopin began well, didn't he?"

There was silence for a time as Tom feverishly scanned the pages of his book.

"The dickens! Listen to this!" he exclaimed, presently. "'During his ninth year he was invited to assist at a concert for the benefit of the poor. He played a pianoforte concerto, the composition of Adalbert Gyrowetz, a famous composer of the time.'"

Tom placed the book on the table, and held the pages open with his hand as he glanced at me over his shoulder. "If he played that kind of thing at nine years of age, Winifred, there was something uncanny about it. It was just as unnatural as what happened to me to-night. I'm beginning to formulate a theory about this kind of thing, my dear." Tom placed the open book face downward, and turned squarely toward me. "Music, you see, may be, like electricity, imprisoned, as it were, in a universe of both conductors and non-conductors. It may be that a temperament, like mine for instance, that is permanently a non-conductor might, under given conditions become temporarily a conductor. Chopin played like a master at nine years of age. He had become a conductor, and remained so permanently. When he howled at music as a baby he was still a non-conductor–just as I had been up to to-night–or rather last night. Possibly, the conditions that made me a kind of spasmodic music-box, with the Chopin peg pulled out, may never occur again. What do you think, Winifred? Doesn't all that sound reasonable?"

Before I could formulate a sensible answer to a not very sensible proposition Tom had resumed the perusal of his book. He appeared to me like a man fascinated against his will by a line of investigation that he had begun as a disagreeable duty. But I was glad to see that he had regained full control of himself,

and that his countenance no longer displayed traces of intense mental disquietude.

"He was a pretty lively boy," remarked Tom, a few moments later. "Listen, Winifred! 'At school, Frederic was a prime favorite, and was always in the midst of any fun or mischief that was going on. His talent for mimicry was always extraordinary, and has been commented on not only by George Sand and Liszt but by Balzac.'"

Tom gazed at me, musingly. "Do you consider that significant, my dear?" he asked, with a seriousness that struck me as both ludicrous and pathetic. I was getting worried by Tom's persistence in this futile line of endeavor.

"It's nearly three o'clock, Tom Remsen," I cried, standing erect. "Come upstairs at once. It won't be fair to your clients for you to get to your office fagged out for lack of sleep."

"Sit down, Winifred," he said, peremptorily. "It's little use I'll be to my clients until I find out what happened to me in the music-room. Suppose that I should have an attack of–what shall I call it?–Chopinitis–in the court-room? I should suddenly begin to sing–or perhaps whistle a–what-d'you-call'em?–pianoforte concerto–what would the judge say? I'd be disbarred, Winifred, for indecent exposure of musical genius. No; I'm going to find out more about this strange affair–here and now."

I was forced to reseat myself, protesting silently against Tom's absurd stubbornness. I endeavored in vain to shake off a feeling of uneasiness that was creeping over me, a sensation that was closely akin to fear of the phlegmatic man who sat before me motionless and calm, pursuing a course of study that had been inspired by a most untenable supposition. What had Chopin to do with the matter? What difference could it make to Tom whether the latter had been one kind of man or another? It was ridiculous to assert that in Chopin's personality might be found an explanation of the curious incident that had made my musical so memorable. My prejudice against Spiritualists, Christian Scientists, Theosophists and other eccentrics had been, I had believed, shared by my husband. But there he sat at three o'clock in the morning trying to find among the biographical data before him some explanation of his recent "seizure," that must, of necessity, lean toward the occult. That a well-balanced, rather materialistic lawyer, whose mental methods were habitually logical, should suddenly begin to dabble in psychical mysteries in this way frightened me the more the longer I weighed Tom's words and actions in all their bearings. Nevertheless, I was forced to admit to myself that he had never looked saner in his life than he did at that moment, as he turned from his book again and gazed straight into my tired eyes.

"He was a very flirtatious chap, Winifred, and very fickle. Listen to this: 'Although of a peculiarly impressionable and susceptible disposition, and, as a

not unnatural consequence, more or less fickle where women were concerned, Chopin's love affairs did, on more than one occasion, assume a serious aspect. He had conceived a fancy for the granddaughter of a celebrated master, and although contemplating matrimony with her, he had at the same time in his mind's eye another lady resident in Poland, his loyalty being engaged nowhere and his fickle heart concentrated on no one passion. One day, when visiting the former young lady in company with a musician who was at the time better known in Paris that he himself, she unconsciously offered a chair to his companion first. So piqued was he at what he considered a slight that he not only never called on her again, but dismissed her entirely from his thoughts.' Do you begin to see, Winifred, what a queer fellow he was? Really, I'm inclined to think—-"

I was standing erect, gazing at him, angrily.

"If you are joking, Tom," I exclaimed, having lost all patience, "I think you are displaying most wretched taste. If you are really in earnest, I am very sorry for you. I'm going to bed. I hope I'll find you fully recovered at breakfast."

He did not seem to be at all impressed by my exhibition of temper.

"Wait just a moment, Winifred," he suggested, his eyes fixed on his book. "Here it is about George Sand–their first meeting, you know. Wait! I'll read it to you."

"I shall not wait, Tom Remsen," I cried. "Chopin's love affairs are nothing to me–and they should be nothing to you. Good night. This is my last word. Good night."

As I reached the door, I glanced over my shoulder. Tom seemed to have forgotten my existence. He had plunged again into the dust-heap of an old scandal that seemed to fascinate him–Tom Remsen, who had hitherto always deprecated and avoided that kind of research.

CHAPTER IV.

SIGNORINA MOLATTI.

And thou, too–when on me fell thine eye,
What disclos'd thy cheek's deep-purple dye?
SCHILLER.

Two days went by, and while I still pondered the great mystery and kept a close watch on Tom, I had begun to hope that the exactions of his profession had led him to abandon his effort to explain what he had called his "seizure." He had been busy of late with the technicalities involved in the formation of a new trust, and his mind seemed to be wholly engrossed by this gigantic task. By tacit consent we had both avoided all reference to my recent musical and its weird and inexplicable outcome. At times, I was almost inclined to believe that Tom had forgotten Chopin and all his works.

As for myself, I could not recover a normal state of mind. For the first time in my life, I felt an admiration for the very characteristics of my husband's make-up that hitherto had annoyed and wearied me. His ability to rebound at once from the shock that he had sustained filled me with both envy and amazement. I had begun to realize that the mental poise of an unimpressionable, unimaginative man is a very desirable and praise-worthy possession.

I regretted at times that I could not throw myself into some despotic occupation that should demand all my physical and mental energies. As yet, I had not found the courage to face the world and its questionings. For two days, I had denied myself to even my most intimate friends, not excepting Mrs. Jack Van Corlear, who had hurried to me on the day succeeding my musical. I knew that my callers were actuated by a not unnatural curiosity, and I lacked the nervous energy to face people who would politely claim the right to know why Tom had always concealed his genius as a pianist. I think I fully understand the set in which I move. We dearly love a new sensation. Without leaving my house or receiving a single visitor, I could readily grasp the fact that the leading topic of conversation in society at the moment revolved around Tom Remsen as a masterly interpreter of Chopin.

Chopin! I had begun to hate the name. But I had not been able to resist the temptation to spend many hours in the library poring over the books that dealt, directly or indirectly, with his personality and achievements. The temporary enthusiasm that Tom had displayed for research into the life of Frederic Chopin bade fair to become a permanent passion in my case. I devoted whole afternoons to playing, in my amateurish way, his waltzes, mazurkas, nocturnes and ballads. One of the latter, his Opus 47, I had not the audacity to attempt. Somehow, Tom's recent rendition of the piece seemed to stand as a barrier that it would be sacrilege for me to cross. Nevertheless, I longed to hear the ballad again, and was almost tempted to ask Tom to play it to me alone. That he was wholly incapable of repeating his recent performance, my mind refused to believe. I had returned, almost unconsciously, to my first conviction, that my husband had wilfully deceived me for years regarding his musical ability.

I sat poring over an English criticism of Chopin's posthumous works late

one afternoon when a card was brought to me in the library that tempted me to come out of my self-imposed retreat. It bore the name:

SIGNORINA MOLATTI.

In the half-light of the drawing-room, the girl looked handsomer than in the glare of evening lamps. Her dark, oriental beauty was at its best in the subdued glow of early twilight. She was dressed in a rich but quiet Parisian costume, and I felt that her attractiveness increased the further she was removed from Signor Turino, Mlle. Vanoni and the other noted artists with whom she associated. Nevertheless, I realized that my manner was cold and unsympathetic as we seated ourselves and I awaited her pleasure. Having had business dealings with the signorina I was not willing to admit that she could assume the right to call on me as a social equal.

But patrician blood must have flowed in Molatti's veins, for she sat there silent and calm, and my skirmish line was driven back. I spoke first. The self-confidence in the girl's smile hurt me.

"It is a pleasure, signorina, to have an opportunity I had not hoped for, to thank you again for the great pleasure you afforded my guests the night before last."

"But it is me, signora, who is in the debt of you," said Molatti, in her soft, musical, broken English. "I hava coma to you to thanka you and to ask a leetle favor. Signor Remsen! oh, eet was so wonderful–so vera wonderful! I hava waited all my leetle life for eet."

I stared at the girl in astonishment. Her enthusiasm, her gestures, the brilliant glow in her dark eyes offended me. And "eet!" What was "eet," for which she had waited all her life?

"Yes?" I remarked, interrogatively. Her fervor was not cooled by the iced water of my question mark.

"Leesten to me, signora. I hava worsheeped Chopin since I was a leetle girl. I have heard alla the great interpretaires of the *maestro*. But I have nevaire heard Chopin. In my dreams–*si*, signora, but nevaire in my hours that are awake. But I cama here! Signor Remsen–he playa Chopin! Eet was no dream. Eet was the soul of the *maestro* speaking to the soul of me. Eet was wonderful–so vera wonderful!"

Conflicting emotions warred within me. I hardly dared speak lest I should either laugh or cry hysterically. With lips compressed I sat motionless, staring at the girl, into whose eloquent eyes there had come a pleading look that suggested tears.

"Signor Remsen," she murmured, presently, like a devotee who breathes

the name of an idol–"do you thinka, signora, that he would let me hear him play again? Peety me, signora! I cannot sleep. I cannot eat. I crave only the music of the *maestro*–music that I hava heard only once in my leetle life. Signor Remsen! Eef he would permeet me–justa once–to accompany him on my leetle violin–oh, signora, I coulda then die happy. I should hava leeved just a leetle while, and then I would not care. But now, I am so unhappy–so vera miserable!"

I was too nervous to stand this kind of thing any longer. I rose, and Molatti faced me, erect at once.

"You pay my husband's talent a great compliment, signorina," I said, coldly; "but I cannot take it on myself to answer you in his name. However, I shall present your request to him and let you know at once what he says." A diabolical impulse came over me, and I added: "Of course, Mr. Remsen would not wish you to starve, signorina, nor to die a horrible death from insomnia."

The girl spiked my guns–if that be the right expression–by a merry, musical laugh.

"You are so vera kind!" she cried. "I kissa your lovely hand."

Before I could prevent it she had touched my outstretched hand with her red, smiling lips; then she took her departure. I returned to the library in a condition that verged dangerously on complete nervous collapse.

At dinner that evening, Tom was unwontedly silent. As I glanced at him over my soup there was something in his face that suggested thoughts not connected with the Pepper and Salt Trust. I was soon to become accustomed to this expression and to identify it in my mind as "Chopinesque."

"Aren't you feeling well to-night, Tom?" I ventured presently, noting that he was drinking more wine than usual.

"A bit tired, Winifred," he answered, absently. Then his eyes met mine, and I saw that he was worried. I had planned to fulfill conscientiously my promise to Signorina Molatti, but the time seemed inopportune. I was glad, presently, that I had refrained from mentioning my caller and her mission. As we were sipping our coffee Tom tossed an envelope across the table to me.

I opened it with a chill misgiving. It ran as follows:

MR. THOMAS REMSEN.

DEAR SIR: As it has come to the knowledge of the Executive Committee of the Chopin Society of New York that your rendition of the works of our master is unexcelled by any living performer, we humbly beg of you to accept the hospitality

of our association at an early date, to be chosen by you. Our members and their guests would consider it the highest of privileges could they be permitted to hear you play such selections from Chopin as you might wish to perform. Thanking you in advance for the great joy that you will vouchsafe to us by accepting this invitation, we remain, etc.

There lay a wan smile on Tom's face as he met my gaze. "Kind, aren't they?" he muttered. "What the deuce'll I write to 'em, Winifred?"

"You can't accept, of course," I said, confidently. Then I hesitated, surprised at the queer gleam in Tom's eyes. "Can you?" I added, weakly.

"I can, I suppose," he remarked, with an effort at playfulness. "There's no law against it."

His answer struck me as strangely unlike him. If he had cried, "The Chopin Society be damned!" I should have felt more at ease, less oppressed by a sensation of nameless dread. There was something distinctly uncanny in Tom's manner.

"It would be a good joke on 'em, wouldn't it, if I *should* accept their bid?" he remarked as he lighted his cigar. "Confound their impudence! That's what they deserve."

"But–but–Tom, would you try to–to play?" I gasped, in dismay.

Tom laughed in a way that shocked my overwrought nerves. It was a shrill, unnatural note of merriment, that struck me as diabolical. "Play?" he repeated, sardonically. "Why not? Do you imagine, madame, that the marvelous genius of Thomas Remsen, interpreter of Frederic François Chopin, is to be confined strictly to your musicals? That would be a gross injustice to the music-loving world, would it not? But come into the library with me, Winifred. I must resume my studies as a student of 'the master.'"

I followed Tom mechanically, fascinated by his gruesome mood. For the life of me I couldn't tell whether he was joking or in earnest, whether it was his mind or mine that had lost its poise.

CHAPTER V.

A POLISH FANTASIA.

Ah, sure, as Hindoo legends tell,

When music's tones the bosom swell
The scenes of former life return.
DR. LEYDEN.

I made a clean breast of the whole matter to Mrs. Jack Van Corlear the next morning. I had sent for her early in the day, saying that I was in trouble and needed advice, and she came to me at once. It was a great relief to me just to look into her eyes and hold her hand.

"It's about Tom!" she remarked, sagely. "Has he done it again?"

Her question made me realize fully the awkwardness of my position. Close as our friendship had been, I had never gossipped about Tom to Mrs. Jack. If there is anything more vulgar than what Tom had once called "extra-marital confidences between women," I don't know what it is. But I was forced to talk about my husband's increasing eccentricity to somebody, or endanger my own mental health. I knew that I should derive temporary nervous restoration from a heart-to-heart confab with a woman who has the reputation of being "a mighty good fellow." I have heard people complain that Mrs. Jack was "too horsey" for their taste. But if you are seeking a friend who shall possess courage, reticence and common sense, pick out a woman that rides. A fondness for horses seems to enlarge a woman's sympathies, while at the same time it increases her discretion.

"He has not actually done it again, my dear," I answered; "but he threatens to. He informed me at breakfast this morning that he intended to accept the invitation of the Chopin Society. Furthermore, he said he was going to send the society a cheque for their Chopin Monument Fund."

"Tom's a thoroughbred, isn't he?" exclaimed Mrs. Jack, with what struck me as ill-timed enthusiasm. "But tell me more about Signorina Molatti. Did you keep your promise to her?"

"Yes; I told him this morning about her call. Do you know, he seemed to be actually pleased. It wasn't like Tom at all. Young women always bore him. And he has a special abhorrence for people connected in any way with the stage."

"Now, Winifred, tell me honestly: Has Tom never played a note in all the twelve years that you have known him?"

"Never! never! never!" I cried, hotly. It was so hard to make even Mrs. Jack, who fully understands me, get at my point of view.

"And he wins a big handicap the first time he starts," mused my confidante. "It's miraculous! Is there a strain of music in his blood, my dear? Any of the Remsens gifted that way?"

"Not that I ever heard of," I answered, rather petulantly. Mrs. Jack's surmises seemed to be as unsatisfactory as my own solitary musings.

"Is he going to play for Molatti?" she asked, presently.

The blood rushed to my cheeks as I realized that this was the keynote to the whole conversation. "He says he is," I confessed, reluctantly. "You may not believe it, but he actually joked about it; said that it would be cruel on his part to withhold from 'a worthy young woman'–what an expression!–a pleasure that might restore her appetite and sleep."

Mrs. Jack laughed aloud, despite the frown on my brow. "Give him the bit, my dear," she advised, playfully. "You aren't afraid of a little black filly over a distance, are you? But tell me, what does Tom say about it all? You tell me that he speaks of his recent rendition of the Chopin ballad as 'a seizure.'"

"For nearly two days, my dear, I fondly imagined he had forgotten all about it. He didn't speak of it. But last night he went into the library and recommenced his researches into the life of Chopin. I couldn't help laughing at some of the comments he made, but he was in dead earnest all the time. I am forced to believe Tom really thinks he is–it seems so absurd when one puts it into words–thinks he is haunted by Chopin's spirit, or something of that kind."

Mrs. Jack's mood changed and the merriment in her face disappeared. "Do you know," she remarked, thoughtfully. "I am sometimes inclined to think that we are awfully ignorant about some things. I have heard of so many queer occurrences of an uncanny nature lately–and among the very nicest kind of people, too. And it used to be really good form to have a family ghost, you know. Perhaps it's coming in again. Old fashions have a way of cropping up again, haven't they?"

I could not refrain from smiling at Mrs. Jack's peculiar attitude toward psychical mysteries. However, I refused to be led into generalities. "But just look at the ludicrousness of the idea," I began. "Admitting, my dear, that Chopin's soul has grown uneasy and desires a temporary reincarnation, would he be likely to select Tom as a–what shall I call it?–medium? Wouldn't he be more inclined to haunt a man who was naturally musical, or at least loved music? But you know, Mrs. Jack, what Tom is. He hasn't the slightest liking for music of any kind. Unless he has been a great actor for many years, never for an instant forgetting his role, I'm sure of this."

"What can we know about the methods or longings of a disembodied spirit?" argued my confidante, logically enough. "Perhaps Chopin was backing a long shot, just for the excitement of the thing."

I glanced at Mrs. Jack, half-angrily. I thought for a moment that she was inclined to poke fun at me. But her face was as serious as mine, and I repented quickly of my unjust suspicion.

And thus we talked in a circle for an hour or more. Mrs. Jack lunched with me, and finally persuaded me to spend the afternoon with her, driving along the

river side. As we drew up in front of the house about five o'clock, I turned to her with gratitude in my heart and eyes and voice.

"Thank you so much, my dear," I said, gratefully. "I'll come to you in the morning if there are any new developments in the case." I had turned away when Mrs. Jack called me back.

"It's a problem that you and I can't solve, little woman," she said, affectionately. "If he has another attack, or any new symptoms develop, what would you think of consulting a specialist? I'd go with you, of course. We needn't give out names, you know."

"A specialist–in what?" I asked, trying to repress a feeling of annoyance that I must conceal from a friend who had been all kindness to me at a crisis.

"Think it over," returned Mrs. Jack, vaguely. "I'm sure I don't know who is an authority on–what did Tom call it–Chopinitis. But come to me in the morning, anyway; I may have something really practical to suggest. And don't touch him with the whip! Tom's a thoroughbred, you know, my dear. Good-bye!"

As I entered the hall, depressed by a quick reaction from my recent cheerfulness, I was roused from my self-absorption by a revelation that drove the blood to my head and made me dizzy for a moment. From the music-room, always unoccupied at this hour of the day, came the weird, searching harmonies of a Polish fantasia arranged for the piano and violin. The effect was marvelous. Softened by distance, the perfect accord of the two instruments bore testimony to the complete sympathy that existed between the pianist and the wielder of the bow. There was something in this half-barbaric music that set my veins on fire. Hardly knowing what I did and with no thought of what I intended to do, I crossed the drawing-room quickly and noiselessly, and stood motionless at the entrance to the music-room.

I remember now that I felt no sensation of astonishment at what I saw. It seemed to me that the picture before my eyes was just what I had come from a remote distance to gaze upon.

Tom was seated at the piano, his back toward me. Beside him stood Signorina Molatti, her Cremona resting against her shoulder. They had not heard my footsteps, and I realized that if I had yelled like a wild Indian they would not have come to earth. They played like creatures in a trance, and I felt the strange, seductive hypnotism of the mad, sweet, feverish music that they made, as I stood there voiceless, motionless, helpless, hopeless. Vainly I appealed to my pride. Vainly I strove to act as one worthy of the name of mondaine. The shock had been too sudden, too severe, and I could not trust myself.

As silently as I had come, I crept away. Recrossing the drawing-room, I encountered the butler in the hall. My face flushed with shame as I said to him:

"If Mr. Remsen asks for me, James, say that I have not returned."

[image]

"They played like creatures in a trance..."

Then I stumbled up-stairs to my rooms, dismissed my maid curtly, and gave way like a foolish girl to foolish tears.

CHAPTER VI.

CONSULTING A SPECIALIST.

An angel is too fine a thing
To sit behind my chair and sing
And cheer my passing day.
EDMUND E. GOSSE.

"But, madam, the symptoms, in so far as I can gather them, are insufficient for an accurate diagnosis. You have stated the case clearly and in minute detail, but my experience in the new school of medicine–if such it can be called–convinces me that you have inadvertently omitted some significant factor in the premises, without which I can vouchsafe to you nothing more valuable than sweeping generalities. In other words, you have given me an opportunity to lay before you a theory, but no chance to suggest to you a practical line of action."

I looked helplessly at Mrs. Van Corlear and saw that she was scanning Dr. Emerson Woodruff's strong, thoughtful face attentively. Presently, she glanced at me, as if asking my permission to speak, and I nodded to her in acquiescence.

"We have told you, doctor," began Mrs. Jack, "that this–ah–friend of ours plays nothing but Chopin. That's important, of course?"

"Exceedingly," remarked Dr. Woodruff, impressively, his hands folded across his chest and his head bent forward. Even at that critical moment, I found myself wondering if all practitioners of the anti-materialistic school were large, dignified, magnetic men, with majestic brows and bright, searching eyes.

"But he's not always a soloist," went on Mrs. Jack, in a low but vibrant tone; "he has shown an inclination of late to travel in double harness–piano and violin,

you know."

An enigmatical smile came into Dr. Woodruff's face for an instant. The man's intuition was so quick and keen that I had begun to fear I should find it difficult to maintain my incognita.

"You say," he asked, presently, turning toward me, "that his general health remains good? He has no tendency towards melancholia; doesn't grow flighty at times in his talk?"

"I have never seen him look so well as he does at present," I answered, wearily. I had come to Dr. Woodruff against my will, succumbing weakly to Mrs. Jack's insistence. And now the whole affair appeared ridiculous and the doctor's questions irrelevant and futile. My interest in the séance–if that is the word for it–was reawakened, however, by the physician's next question.

"Who plays the violin for him?" he asked, curtly.

Mrs. Jack answered him at once. "Signorina Molatti. You know her by reputation?"

"Yes," he answered; "I have heard her play. She has a touch of genius. They must make great music together–Molatti and your friend."

A lump came into my throat and I clutched the arms of my chair awkwardly. That Dr. Woodruff had noticed my emotion, I felt sure.

"Well, what is your explanation of all this, doctor?" I asked, impatiently. I was thoroughly out of harmony with myself, Mrs. Jack and the physician, and my pride revolted at the false position in which I had been placed. A skeptic who goes to a clergyman for guidance sacrifices both his logic and his dignity. Here I sat in Dr. Emerson Woodruff's office, under an assumed name, telling a stranger weird tales about a supposititious acquaintance who was in reality my own husband. Had I not been unfair to Tom, Dr. Woodruff and myself? Surely the road to truth is not through a zigzag lane of lies!

"My dear madam," began the doctor, in his most pompous manner, "the case as you have stated it is unique in the annals of what I take the liberty to call the new science–new, that is, to the Western world. To the brooding East, the introspective, sapient, miracle-working Orient, there would be nothing strange or inexplicable in what your–er–friend calls his 'seizure.' I have seen in India phenomena that, should I describe them to you, would wholly destroy what little confidence you have in my veracity and common sense. May I ask why you have come to me, madam? You have no faith in the school to which I am devoted."

His voice had grown suddenly stern, and I avoided his gaze in confusion. The ease with which he had read my thoughts offended and frightened me.

"It's my fault, Dr. Woodruff," cried Mrs. Jack, loyally; "I persuaded her to come. I have been over the jumps before, and I rather like the course. But it's pretty stiff going at first, you must acknowledge."

To my surprise, Dr. Woodruff laughed aloud. His merriment restored my equilibrium, and I hastened to explain.

"Won't you believe me, doctor, when I say that I have not come to you in an antagonistic mood? I am intensely interested in the problem we have laid before you–and I feel sure you can help us to read the riddle. We have a friend who has no music in his soul. Suddenly, he begins to play Chopin like a master. Then he develops a fondness for duets. We fear the future. Presently, he will begin to neglect his business and his—and–"

"And his wife," added the doctor, glancing at me, quizzically. Then he turned sharply toward Mrs. Jack. "Is this man fond of horses? Does he ride?"

"Before he became so completely absorbed in his profession he was a marvel over timber," she answered, with enthusiasm. "I remember–" she began, reminiscently.

"Never mind ancient history," I cried, rather rudely. "I really can't see, Dr. Woodruff, what his cross-country skill has to do with his Chopin seizure."

"As I understand it, madam," explained the physician, evidently hurt by my petulance, "as I understand it, you are desirous of turning your–ah–friend's mind from music. You tell me that his professional duties have had no effect in this connection. To use an expression that is not often employed by psychologists, a counter-irritant is what I had in mind. It is not strictly scientific to prescribe a remedy before the diagnosis is completed, but, as I gather from your words, you wish to attempt a cure at once."

I am sure there flashed a gleam of suspicion, not unmingled with contempt, from my eyes as I scanned the doctor's face. Surely, it was absurd to suppose that if Tom was really the victim of some supernatural manifestation he could be restored to a normal condition by a resumption of his equestrian enthusiasm. Furthermore, what was I to gain by the line of treatment that this psychological *poseur* seemed to have in mind? Was it not just as well for my peace of mind to have Tom playing duets with Signorina Molatti as chasing an anise-seed bag across fields and ditches in company with Mrs. Jack Van Corlear or some other horsey woman?

"Do you think he has been hypnotized by Signorina Molatti?" I asked, bluntly, anxious to pin the physician down to some explanation of Tom's eccentricities that should not offend against probability.

"Admitting the possibility of hypnotism in this instance," answered Dr. Woodruff, gravely, "it would seem to be much more likely that your friend had hypnotized Signorina Molatti. Do you not agree with me?"

Taking all the circumstances into consideration, I was forced to admit to myself that his argument was sound. But I could not imagine Tom in the role of a Svengali. Whichever way I turned I was at the horn of a dilemma.

"The fact is, madam," began Dr. Woodruff, very seriously, "the fact is that your reticence has placed me in a somewhat awkward position. While you have apparently made a clean breast of the whole affair, there are several gaps in your story that I must fill up before I can be of any great service to you. There are various explanations of your friend's remarkable outbreak that naturally suggest themselves. Most people would assert at once that he had deliberately concealed his musical ability for years, planning to make a sensational début when occasion served. You have rejected this explanation as inconsistent with your knowledge of the man's character. I accept your view of the matter, and lay aside as untenable the seemingly most reasonable solution of the problem. Practically, but two lines of conjecture remain open to us. Your friend may have been hypnotized, may have become the plaything of a harmless medium who possesses a sense of humor and enjoys a practical joke. But, I must admit, this explanation appears far-fetched and involves several very improbable hypotheses."

The doctor paused for a time and eyed us musingly. I felt better disposed toward him than heretofore, recognizing the fact that I had been listening to the words of a well-balanced, logical man who might tread lofty heights, but who always stepped with care. If Dr. Emerson Woodruff was a mystic and a dreamer, there was nothing in his outward seeming or his mental methods to indicate it.

"How many hurdles on the other track?" asked Mrs. Jack, abruptly.

"Pardon me," said the physician, gently; "I didn't catch your meaning."

"There were two lines of conjecture open to us," explained Mrs. Jack, "after we had agreed that–what shall I call him?–the man with Chopinitis is not a liar. You don't accept the hypnotic theory, Dr. Woodruff. What's the other?"

"Would you be shocked," asked the psychologist, suavely, "if I should suggest that your friend may be possibly under the direct influence of the spirit of the late Frederic François Chopin?"

"That's what Tom thinks!" I cried, excitedly, and then bit my tongue, regretfully. Dr. Woodruff's penetrating eyes were fixed on me.

"I said that there were gaps in your narrative," he remarked, reproachfully. "Your friend–I take it that his name is Tom–believes, then, that he is under the control of Chopin?"

"I think he does," I answered, not very graciously; "he has spent much time of late reading the details of Chopin's life."

"H'm!" exclaimed the doctor, like one who comes gladly on a new symptom in a puzzling case; "would it not be possible, madam, for me to see this man, unobserved myself? If I could hear him play it would be throwing a flood of light on the case. As it is, I am groping in the dark."

"And–and–in case, sir, that your worst fears are realized," I faltered, "can you do anything for him? Can he be cured?"

"You see, doctor, she didn't marry Chopin. Naturally–"

The look that I gave Mrs. Jack quieted her restless tongue. But the fat was in the fire.

"Yes, the murder's out, Dr. Woodruff," I confessed, wearily. "We've been talking about my husband. We were very happy together before his seizure. And–and–now—-"

"And now his wife isn't one, two, three," cried Mrs. Jack, excitedly; "and it's a burning shame. Can you do something for him, doctor? Surely you don't think it's chronic, do you?"

The suspicion of a smile crossed the physician's face, and I felt the blood come into my cheeks. I had no intention of laying my marital misery before the keen eyes of this strangely powerful man, but somehow I felt a sense of relief now that he had come into possession of all the facts.

"If you think it advisable, doctor, for you to hear my husband play," I said, presently, "I'm sure it can be arranged. He has agreed to give a recital at the rooms of the Chopin Society to-morrow evening. He has asked us to go with him. Could you not obtain a card? He would not know, of course, why you were there."

"I have many friends among the Chopin idolaters; it is easily arranged," remarked Dr. Woodruff, as he rose and ushered us toward the exit from his inner office. "Meanwhile, madam, I shall make a close study of the case from the data already at hand. I am very grateful to you for coming to me, and I think I can safely promise to be of service to you. Au revoir. To-morrow evening at eight."

As we seated ourselves in the carriage, I turned angrily to Mrs. Jack. "Why did you betray me?" I cried. "It was cruel, cruel!"

Mrs. Jack smiled affectionately and seized my hand. "Don't be annoyed at me, my dear. I was merely doing justice to Dr. Woodruff. It's absurd to try to put a thoroughbred over the water jump with blinders. It's unfair to the horse, to say the least."

CHAPTER VII.

A PRELIMINARY CANTER.

So comes, at last,
The answer from the Vast.

"Do you really intend to go, Tom? But suppose, dear, you don't feel like playing; what will happen then? Do be sensible, old fellow, and stay home with me. You always shunned notoriety–and now you go in search of it. What is the matter with you, Tom? You haven't been at all frank with me since–since–"

"Since when, my dear?" asked my husband, smiling at me kindly over his demi-tasse.

"Since you played that duet with Signorina Molatti in the music-room," I answered, ashamed of the feeling of jealousy that I had nourished for several days. As I gazed at Tom's honest face the absurdity of the accusation that I had brought against him in this undirect way forced itself upon me. My husband at that moment struck me as the least flirtatious-looking man I had ever seen. But facts are stubborn things. I had good reason to believe that Tom had accompanied a famous violiniste, not only in our music-room but in the signorina's own drawing-room. It is astonishing how quickly a suspicious wife develops into a female Sherlock Holmes!

"I plead guilty to the indictment," said Tom presently, lighting a cigar. "Suppose we go into the library, Winifred. We can have a quiet half-hour at least before we start."

I derived both pleasure and pain from this suggestion. It was satisfactory to find Tom more inclined to be companionable than he had been for nearly a week. On the other hand, I was disappointed at discovering that his determination to attend the meeting of the Chopin Society remained unshaken. That any further protest from me would be futile, I fully realized, and it was with a feeling of apprehension and disquietude that I seated myself in the library, and watched Tom as he dreamily blew smoke into the air, seemingly forgetful of my presence. After a time, he began to speak, more like a poet soliloquizing than an unimaginative lawyer addressing his wife.

"It was a strangely vivid vision. I have had dreams that were like reality, but none that approached this one in intensity. I passed first through a doorway that led into old picturesque, crumbling cloisters, forming a quadrangle. Stretching away from these cloisters ran long corridors with vaulted roofs. Down one of the corridors, I hurried toward a light that seemed to come through a rose window, intensifying the grim darkness surrounding me. It was bitterly cold; the chill of death seemed to clutch at my heart. And always I heard the sound of mournful voices through the resounding galleries."

"Tom!" I cried, shocked by the queer gleam in his eyes.

But he went on as if he had not heard me. "There were other noises, some

harsh, others majestically musical. There came to me the mighty roaring of a storm-swept sea beating against a rocky shore. The winds sobbed and thundered and whistled and fell away. Then I could hear the plaintive notes of sea-birds outside the stone walls of the monastery. But always it was the chill dampness that appalled me. I was forever hurrying toward the rose window, where warmth and love and joy awaited me; but always it fled before me, and the long black corridor lay between me and my goal. It was horrible."

"What had you been doing, Tom?" I asked, in a desperate effort to recall him to his present environment. "Had you been eating a Welsh rabbit at the club?"

He gazed at me, defiantly. "No," he said, gloomily, "I had been playing Chopin with Signorina Moletti."

By an effort of will, I restrained the words that rushed to my lips, and asked, quietly: "And which of his works had you been playing?"

"I don't know," he answered, wearily. "I think the signorina said our last rendition was No. 1 of Opus 40, whatever that may mean."

Tom glanced at me sheepishly, for all the world like a mischievous schoolboy who has been forced to make a confession. My mind was hard at work trying to recall the details of my recent researches into the life of Chopin. To refresh my memory, I opened a book that lay among other Lives of "the master" on the library-table.

"'No. 1 of Opus 40,'" I presently found myself reading aloud, "'is in A major, and is throughout an intensely martial composition. There is a spirit of victory and conquest about it. The most remarkable circumstances attached to it seems to lie in the fact that it is supposed to have been written during Chopin's sojourn at the Carthusian monastery on the island of Mallorca with George Sand.'"

Bitterly did I regret my indiscreet quotation. Tom had turned white and there had come into his eyes an appealing, despairing expression that reminded me of a deer I had once seen brought to bay in the Adirondack forest.

"Mrs. Van Corlear," announced the butler at the door of the library, and Mrs. Jack, who had the run of the house, came toward us gaily.

"And how is our boy-wonder this evening?" she cried, laughingly. "I'm backing Tom Remsen for the great Chopin handicap to-night. Are you quite fit, Tom? Do I get a run for my money?"

How easy it is for our most intimate friends to take our troubles lightly! Although I realized that underlying Mrs. Jack's levity was a kindly motive–a desire to carry off an awkward situation with the least possible friction–I could not help feeling annoyed at her flippant words. Grateful as I was to her for her loyal interest in my peculiar affliction, it was unpleasant to feel that Mrs. Jack was treating as a light comedy what seemed to me to involve all the elements of a tragedy. There was nothing farcical, surely, in Tom's appearance as he stood

there, pale, silent, smiling perfunctorily at our guest, every inch a modern gentleman, but strangely like the tagonist of some classic drama, the rebellious but impotent plaything of vindictive gods.

"Come, let us go," I cried, nervously, anxious to put an end to a most uncomfortable situation. "Do you really feel up to it, Tom? There is still time to back out of it, you know. A solo before a crowd is much more trying than a duet in private."

I had not intended to hurt Tom's feelings, but my words had displayed a plentiful lack of tact. And the worst of it was that Mrs. Jack seemed to be in a diabolical mood, for she at once jumped at the chance to make mischief.

"I have heard of your fondness for duets, Tom," she remarked, and I was reminded of the soft purring of a cat preparing to pounce on a helpless mouse. "What a delight it must be to Signorina Molatti to find an interpreter of Chopin worthy of her fiddle! You find her a very interesting personality, do you not?"

Tom stopped short–we were slowly making our exit from the library–and gazed at Mrs. Jack with a puzzled expression in his eyes. "Signorina Molatti?" he queried, musingly. "What do I think of her? I really don't know. I never considered the question before. She's merely a part of the music–not an individual, don't you see?" Suddenly his face changed, and he put his hand to his brow as if a sharp pain had tormented him. "Wait a moment! Don't go!" he implored us, in a labored, unnatural voice. "What does it all mean? Tell me! What am I doing? I can't play Chopin! I can't play anything! Have I been hypnotized? I tell you, Winifred–Mrs. Jack–'tis all a mistake, a mystery, an uncanny, hideous bedevilment. It's demoniac possession–or something of that kind. And what'll the Chopin Society think if I make a horrible flunk? At this moment, I don't feel as if I could play a note. Come into the music-room!" he ended, a touch of wildness in his voice and manner.

Mrs. Jack and I followed him, silently. There was in Tom's way of hurrying across the drawing-room a mingling of eagerness and dread that was wholly uncharacteristic of the man. As he hastened feverishly toward the piano, a hectic flush on his cheeks and his eyes aglow, he reminded me of a youth I had seen at Monte Carlo staking his whole fortune on a turn of the roulette wheel.

For a time, Tom sat at the instrument, his head bowed low and his hands hanging listlessly at his side. Mrs. Jack's arm was round my waist, and I could hear her deep, hurried breathing and feel the nervous tremor of her slender, well-knit form. It was indeed a most trying crisis that could disturb the poise of the athletic woman beside me.

"He doesn't connect," she whispered to me, presently. "I wish Dr. Woodruff were here."

But Mrs. Jack had spoken prematurely. Suddenly Tom's hands were raised

and he struck the opening chords of Chopin's Scherzo in B minor, Opus 20. The fury of the following measures he rendered with stunning effect. Then the vigor of the rushing quaver figure lessened gradually, and, at the repeat, Tom sprang erect and turned toward us, an expression of weird ecstasy on his face.

"It's all right, girls!" he cried, with a boyish lack of dignity. "Come on! We're late, as it is. I'll show those Chopin people something they'll never forget! Come on!"

"He's fit!" whispered Mrs. Jack to me. "It wasn't much of a preliminary canter–but he's in the running fast enough!"

CHAPTER VIII.

THE CHOPIN SOCIETY.

In this dark world where now I stay,
I scarce can see myself;
The radiant soul shines on my way
As my fair guiding elf.
VICTOR HUGO.

Molatti was a marvel of beauty that evening. Great as was my prejudice against the girl, I was forced to admit to myself, as we entered the crowded rooms of the Chopin Society, that I had never seen a handsomer creature, nor one more radiant with the joy of life. The glory of youth, the fire of genius were in her eyes. There were many striking faces in evidence that evening, faces full of the subtle charm that the worship of music frequently begets; ugly faces alight with an inward glow, symmetrical faces whose regularity was not insipid; plebeian faces stamped by an acquired distinction; patrician faces warmed by an esthetic enthusiasm; faces that told their story of struggle and defeat, and others that bore the mysterious imprint of success. But there was only one countenance in all that picturesque throng to which my gaze constantly returned, paying unwilling homage to a fascination against which I vainly rebelled. I found it difficult to believe that Tom had never noticed the signorina's wonderful beauty of face and form, that he had always considered her, as he had said, "merely a part of the music."

Mrs. Jack, who had been watching me closely, seemed to read my mind, for she whispered to me teasingly: "Tom'll sit up and take notice to-night, don't you think? She's well groomed and shows blood, doesn't she?"

From Mrs. Jack Van Corlear this was high praise indeed, and Molatti deserved it. The studied simplicity of her low-cut black gown, relieved by a small cluster of diamonds below the neck, harmonized with the quiet arrangement of her luxuriant, dark hair, seemingly held in place by a miniature aigrette of small diamonds. The marmoreal whiteness of her perfect neck and firm, well-rounded arms was emphasized by a sharp contrast. Of color there was none, save for the slight flush of health in her cheeks and the rich, red line of her strong, sensitive mouth.

I glanced at Tom, who stood not far from me, listening to the words of the president of the society, a short, slender, nervous-looking man, whose mobile countenance at that moment suggested the joy of a lion-hunter who has achieved unexpectedly a difficult feat. Tom was pale, and there was a wrinkle in his brow just between the eyes that assured me he was not completely at ease. But he seemed to be wholly indifferent to the presence of Signorina Molatti. That he had not glanced at her since our entrance to the hall I felt quite sure. Was Tom really a great actor? It was a question that was constantly recurring to me, despite the weight of evidence against an affirmative answer.

Presently Tom returned to my side, and Mrs. Jack deliberately stuck a pin into him–or, rather, us.

"Is music antagonistic to manners, Tom Remsen? Go over and speak to Signorina Molatti. It is your duty, sir."

"And my pleasure, Mrs. Jack," said Tom, with a smile that recalled his former self, my Tom of the ante-Chopin days. He left us at once to make his way through the crowd to Molatti's corner.

"I take it, madam, that that is your husband," remarked a deep, low, carefully modulated voice. I turned to find Dr. Emerson Woodruff beside me. "He doesn't look musical."

"No, but he is," Mrs. Jack put in, hastily. "We've heard him play to-night, doctor. He's good for any distance–with something to spare. Mark my words, sir."

"Have you reached any conclusion about the case, Dr. Woodruff?" I whispered, nervously. "Mrs. Van Corlear is right. He was in splendid form just before we left home. He seemed to be delighted at the prospect of astonishing these people. But he had had a curious outbreak. He had remarked, rather wildly, that he was not a musician, couldn't play a note, and was, he believed, suffering from 'demoniac possession.'"

I saw that my statement had made a deep impression on the psychologist.

His face was very grave as he watched Tom, who stood beside Molatti, evidently conversing with her with more vivacity than I had ever seen him display before.

"He's a phlegmatic, well-balanced man, in perfect health," muttered the doctor, musingly. "I am inclined to think," he went on, addressing me directly, "that your husband's case, madam, is the most remarkable that has ever come under my personal observation. I am very anxious to hear–and see–him play before saying anything further about it. You feel sure that he intends to perform to-night?"

Before I could answer this question I found myself beset by the fussy little president of the society, who appeared to believe that he owed me a great debt of gratitude.

"I tried to thank Mr. Remsen for coming here–to our so great joy!–but he referred me to you, madam. Oh, how much I owe you! And it is so charming to find the wife of a man of genius wholly in sympathy with his career. It is not always thus, you know, Mrs. Remsen."

I could feel the internal laughter that I knew Mrs. Jack was suppressing behind me. I longed to turn round and glare at her, but I was forced to smile down into the excited face of the Chopin enthusiast, who, *ex officio*, was my host for the evening.

"I trust you will not find Mr. Remsen a great disappointment," I managed to say, weakly. For an instant a hot, almost irresistible inclination stung me to tell this overwrought, undersized bundle of nerves the plain truth, to assure him that Tom Remsen, my husband, couldn't tell a nocturne from a negro lullaby, that he was as ignorant of music as I was of law.

"I am sure," commented the president, politely, "that no disappointment awaits us–rather a great and holy joy. But I regret that our pleasure must be deferred for a few moments. Won't you and your friends find seats, please? I have prepared–at the request of the society–a short paper on 'The Personality of Chopin.' It will take not more than ten minutes for me to read it. After that, Mrs. Remsen, we are to have a most wonderful duet from Signorina Molatti and Mr. Remsen."

The little man disappeared, and I was glad to rest myself in the chair that Dr. Woodruff had found for me. I turned toward Mrs. Jack, who had seated herself beside me. She saw the gleam of annoyance in my eyes as they met hers, but smiled, sweetly.

"Why are you angry with me, my dear?" she whispered. "Am I responsible if nature granted me a sense of humor? You must acknowledge that the situation is amusing–even if it is a bit uncanny."

Tom had seated himself beside Molatti to listen to the president's essay. Presently, I found myself hearkening, with almost feverish interest, to the latter.

"I have thought it well, my friends," the president was saying, "to confine my remarks this evening to Chopin in his great general relations to the world. I shall endeavor to draw a picture of the man rather than of the musician. And first of all, let me quote from Liszt in regard to the master's appearance."

I glanced at Tom. He sat motionless, almost rigid, with a face so lacking in expression that it was hard to believe he had caught the significance of the speaker's words.

"'The ensemble of his person,'" quoted the president, "'was harmonious, and called for no special comment. His eye was more spiritual than dreamy; his bland smile never writhed into bitterness. The transparent delicacy of his complexion pleased the eye; his fair hair was soft and silky, his nose slightly aquiline, his bearing so distinguished and his manner stamped with so much of high breeding that involuntarily he was always treated *en prince*. He was generally gay; his caustic spirit caught the ridiculous rapidly, and far below the surface at which it usually strikes the eye. His gaiety was so much the more piquant because he always restrained it within the bounds of good taste, holding at a distance all that might tend to wound the most fastidious delicacy.'" To this quotation, the president added a few words from Orlowski: "'Chopin is full of health and vigor; all the Frenchwomen dote on him, and all the men are jealous of him. In a word, he is the fashion, and we shall no doubt shortly have gloves *à la Chopin*.'"

The president paused, and I saw with consternation that he was glaring at my husband. The cause of this interruption was apparent at once as I shifted my gaze. Tom was rocking back and forth in his chair, shaking with laughter. His effort to keep his merriment in check, to restrain the loud guffaws that seemed to rack his very frame, was painfully in evidence. There was something almost heroic in his endeavor to repress an outbreak that would have been brutally rude. Tom had become the center of all eyes through the president's lack of tact.

"What's the matter with him?" whispered Mrs. Jack, hysterically.

"I don't know," I answered, lamely. "He's had a funny thought. Is he better?" I had turned away from him.

"He's growing worse, I think," answered Mrs. Jack, despondently. "Why doesn't the president go on? There, it's all right. He's quiet now."

Mrs. Jack spoke truly. The president had resumed his lecture, and I turned and saw that Tom was no longer swaying with mirth.

"How did it happen?" I murmured in Mrs. Jack's ear.

"I'm not sure," she whispered, "but I think Molatti touched his hand. Oh,

isn't it weird? I can't help feeling it's like breaking a colt."

CHAPTER IX.
AN UNRECORDED OPUS.

Methought it was a glorious joy, indeed,
To shut and open heaven as he did.
EMMA TATHAM.

Whenever a number of men and women whose lives are devoted to some one line of art are gathered together the social atmosphere becomes surcharged with electricity. If one is impressionable, acutely sensitive to an environment, it is best, perhaps, to avoid the haunts of genius. I am inclined to believe that sociologists will investigate eventually the eternal antagonism between Belgravia and bohemia by strictly scientific methods. How large an infusion of genius can be safely sustained by a throng in search of social relaxation it would be well to know. One fact, at least, in this connection has been repeatedly demonstrated–as I had learned to my cost–namely, that a social function based on music rests on a powder mine. Belgravia had witnessed an explosion at my recent musical. And now, I felt convinced, bohemia was to undergo a like ordeal.

Tom was at the root of this disquieting conviction. His hysterical attack of wholly irrelevant hilarity, his quick response to Molatti's soothing touch, and now the tense, unnatural expression of his face filled me with painful apprehension. I both craved and dreaded the end of the president's discourse, and my forebodings were darkened by a remark made by Mrs. Jack, who seemed to derive real pleasure from the excitement of the crisis.

"Look at Tom," she whispered. "He's fretful at the post. He'll get the bit in his teeth, presently. Do you see Dr. Woodruff over there? He's taking notes."

Before she had ceased to speak Tom was out of hand and had bolted down the track, as Mrs. Jack would have put it. In other words, he had sprung from Molatti's side as the president ended his discourse and had rushed to the piano at the end of the room. I caught the look of amazement on the president's quaint face, and laughed aloud, nervously. Utterly ashamed of my lack of self-control, I glanced at the crowd surrounding me, but nobody had noticed my touch of hys-

teria. Every eye in the room was fastened on Tom, who was seated motionless at the piano in an apparently dazed condition. His eyes were closed and the corners of his mouth drawn down. He looked at that moment like the very incarnation of all that was unmusical in the universe. I feared that Mrs. Jack would comment on his ridiculous appearance, but she was kind enough to keep quiet. She told me afterward that my raucous laugh had frightened her.

Suddenly Tom's chin went up, he opened his eyes, fixed them on Molatti's white face, and began to play. Such weird, intoxicating harmonies as filled the room, setting every soul therein athrob with an ecstasy that was close akin to agony, no earthly audience had ever heard before. Men and women were there who had memorized each and every note that Chopin wrote, but there was not among them one who could identify this marvelous improvisation, this strange exposition of a great master in his most inspired mood. It was Chopin, but Chopin unrecorded; his genius in its most characteristic tendency, but raised, as a mathematician would say, to the *n*th power. It was as if the soul of the composer, dissatisfied with the heritage that he had left to us, had returned to earth to exhibit to his worships the one perfect flower of his creative spirit.

How long Tom played I have never known. I had forgotten all about him before many minutes had passed, losing in my impressionability to music my sensitiveness as the wife of a man misunderstood. There were in the universe only my soul and a throbbing splendor of great music, mighty harmonies that filled all space, magic chords that awakened dim memories of a life long past, filled to overflowing with joy and sorrow, tossing waves of melody that bore me to the stars or sank with me into vast, mysterious realms peopled by gray shadows that I had learned to love.

Presently I felt Mrs. Jack's hand clasping mine. "Don't go to him, dear. He has only fainted," I heard her saying, her voice seeming to reach me from a remote distance. "He was all out, and collapsed under the wire. But it's nothing serious."

Tom had sunk back into Molatti's arms, and his head rested against her shoulder. She had sprung toward him, as I learned later, just in time to save him from a fall. She now stood gazing mournfully down on his white, upturned face, sorrow, pity and, I imagined, remorse in her glance. For an instant a hot rage swept over me, and I strove to stand erect, despite Mrs. Jack's restraining hand.

"Don't make a scene!" she whispered to me, passionately in earnest. "He is in no danger. See, Dr. Woodruff is feeling his pulse."

Even at that awful moment, when I knew not whether Tom was alive or dead. I remember that my mind dwelt for a moment on the tendency of new schools of medicine to cling to old traditions. Of what significance to a psychologist could the rapidity of Tom's pulse be? I heard people all around me talking

excitedly.

"Did you ever hear anything like it?"

"I tell you, it's one of the master's posthumous works. I couldn't identify it, but perhaps it was discovered by Remsen."

"That's absurd! Where could he find it?"

"He's better now. See, he opens his eyes."

"I don't wonder he fainted; I was just on the verge of collapse myself."

"*Parblen! Chopin à la diable! Non, non*, no more *pour moi, s'il vous plait!*"

"I can now die so vara happy! I hava justa once heard the *maestro* himself. I hava nothing left for to live."

"Who is this wonderful Remsen? Never heard of him before."

"You'll hear of him again, then. He's the only man living who can interpret the master."

It was, all of it, intolerable. How I hated these chattering idiots, who were making an idol of clay, setting up my poor Tom–who was to me at that moment an object of pity–as the incarnation of their cult, to whom they must pay reverent homage! I longed to cry aloud to them that they had been tricked, that my husband was a sensible, commonplace, lovable man, as far removed from a musical crank as he was from a train-robber or a pirate. All my former love for music seemed to have turned suddenly into detestation, and I longed to get away from this nest of Chopiniacs into the noisy, wholesome atmosphere of the outside world. It seemed to me that nothing could restore my equilibrium but the uproar of the streets and the unmelodious clatter of my coach.

"We must get out of this at once," I said to Mrs. Jack, standing erect and checking the dizziness in my head by an effort of will. I saw that Tom had fully recovered his senses and that he seemed to be actually enjoying the homage the excited throng pressing toward him offered to his vicarious genius. Beside him stood Molatti, her face radiant, as if her mission on earth were to reflect the glory of Tom Remsen's musical miracle.

"We must get out of this," I found myself saying again, as I urged Mrs. Jack toward the exit. "I'll send the carriage back for Tom."

"But it's such bad form to run away like this," protested Mrs. Jack. "What will the president think of us? And Dr. Woodruff! Surely you want to ask him what he thinks of the–ah–case."

But my will for the time being was stronger than hers, and presently we were seated in my carriage, homeward bound, and I was fighting back the hot tears that had rushed to my eyes.

"I–I–don't care what–what Dr. Woodruff thinks about the–the case," I sobbed. "I–I–know what I think about it."

Mrs. Jack said nothing for a time, but it was pleasant to feel the pressure

of her hand and to realize that she could be tactful now and again.

We had nearly reached the house before she ventured to ask: "And what, my dear, do you think of the case?"

I pulled myself together and restrained my sobs. I am not of the weeping variety of woman, and I was ashamed of my hysterical exhibition of weakness.

"I think," I began, and then I hesitated, weighing my words carefully–"I think that Signorina Molatti is in love with Tom."

Mrs. Jack laughed outright, both to my amazement and anger. "You've wholly lost the scent, my dear," she remarked, while I removed my hand from hers. "Signorina Molatti is not in love with Tom–she's in love with Chopin."

CHAPTER X.

TOM'S RECOVERY.

At length the man perceives it die away
And fade into the light of common day.
WILLIAM WORDSWORTH.

After rereading the foregoing deposition I am forced to the conclusion that I was designed by nature neither for a novelist nor a historian. I can see that my narrative fails to be convincing, considered either as a work of fiction or as a statement of fact. But may I not comfort myself with the thought that I have given my testimony conscientiously, and that if the outcome of my literary efforts is unsatisfactory my failure is due rather to the inexplicable phenomena with which I have been obliged to deal than to my own defects as an annalist and witness? I have endeavored to inscribe simply and in chronological order the unadorned tale of my husband's sudden attack of genius and its consequences, and I realize now that my data will not be accepted by the scientific, nor will their arrangement appeal to the artistic. But I have told the truth, and if not the whole truth, at least nothing but the truth. As literature my story belongs to the realistic school and is of the present. As a contribution to science it will have no standing to-day, but I am firmly convinced that the psychologists of the future will read the details of Tom Remsen's case with enlightened interest.

I have felt too deeply the nervous strain of setting down in black and white

the story of the greatest crisis in my life to go into details here and now regarding the ups and downs of the long illness that Tom underwent after his triumphant appearance before the Chopin Society.

For two days before he collapsed I saw that he was fighting in grim silence against weakness and fever. He was like a man struggling to overcome an unnatural appetite and growing constantly more weary of the contest. He would stroll with reluctant steps into the music-room, stand for a time gazing defiantly at the piano, with his hands clenched and beads of perspiration on his troubled brow; then he would turn away, meeting my gaze with a melancholy smile, and hurry off to his office or his club, to return to me after a time pale and listless, but always stubbornly silent as to the cause of his evident suffering. Only once before he was forced to take to his bed, where he tossed for a week in delirium, did he refer, even indirectly, to the cause of his disquietude.

"Has Signorina Molatti been here to-day?" he asked me, abruptly, one evening at dinner.

"No, Tom," I answered, a note in my voice that I'm sure he did not like. "Did you expect her?"

"I always expect her," he muttered, speaking more to himself than to me.

That evening the magnetism of the open piano in the music-room proved irresistible to him. To my mingled consternation and delight he played selections from Chopin until long after midnight, the while I sat behind him fascinated by his renditions but appalled by the persistent recurrence of his "seizures." "To-morrow," I said to myself, "I will consult Dr. Woodruff again. Perhaps he has made his diagnosis and can suggest some line of treatment."

But on the morrow Tom was in charge of our family doctor and two trained nurses. The morning had found him hot with fever, and by noon he was out of his head and inclined to be violent. Then followed days and nights of alternating hope and fear, during which there came to me a complete revelation of what the old Tom had been to me, the Tom who had bored me at times–ungrateful woman that I was!–by his practical, unimaginative, inartistic personality. How I treasured a word of encouragement from the doctor or a nurse! How bitterly I repented my former discontent, my disloyal longing for something in Tom's make-up that nature had not vouchsafed to him! It had come to him–this "something"–and it had well-nigh ruined our lives. Whatever it had been, demoniac possession, hypnotism or what-not, it had been a thing of evil, despite the uncanny beauty of its manifestation. In my heart of hearts I craved one of two alternatives–either Tom's death or his restoration to his former self, freed forever from the black shadow of Chopin's genius.

It was not until one afternoon well on in his convalescence that I knew my fondest hopes had been realized. We had betaken ourselves to the library, not to

read but to enjoy in an indolent way our new freedom from trained nurses and the discipline of the sick-room. Tom, leaning back comfortably in a reclining-chair and puffing a cigarette, wore on his invalid's face an expression of supreme contentment. Not once, I was glad to note, did his eyes wander to the distant shelf on which stood our Chopin literature, books that I had doomed in my mind to an *auto-da-fé* when a fitting opportunity for the sacrifice should arise.

"Isn't this cozy?" remarked Tom, presently, glancing at me affectionately. "But I suppose I must hasten my recovery, my dear. The Pepper and Salt Trust and other enterprises don't take much stock in sick men."

"Don't worry about business matters, Tom Remsen," I said, with playful sternness. "We can get on very well if you never do another stroke of work in your life."

A shadow passed over Tom's face, and he puffed his cigarette nervously. "I'm not fitted for a life of leisure, my dear," he remarked, grimly. "A man may get into so many kinds of mischief if he isn't busy."

I hastened to change the subject. "Remember, sir, that you are under orders. You are to do as you are told to do. You may not know it, Tom, but the fact is that you and I sail for Europe just as soon as you are strong enough to stand the voyage."

"Where are we going?" he asked, apprehensively. "Not to Paris?"

"No, not to Paris," I answered, understanding him. "We'll spend all our time in Scotland and Ireland. They're the only countries over there that we have not seen, Tom."

The next day I discharged our butler for an indiscretion that he committed at this moment.

"Signorina Molatti," he announced from the doorway of the library, and turning my head I saw the violiniste, with her Cremona under her arm, coming toward us. I glanced at Tom. The two red spots that had leaped into his white cheeks seemed to be an outward manifestation, not of joy but of hot anger. I rose and went toward our visitor, a question in my face.

"Will you not forgiva me, signora?" cried Molatti, in soft, pleading tones. "Eet ees what you calla vera bad form, but I hava been so vera unhappy. They tolda me that Signor Remsen was dying. Can you not forgiva me?"

"But he is on the road to recovery, signorina," I said, perfunctorily. It would not do to give way to my inclination to chide this insinuating girl for her presumption. A scene might cause Tom to have a relapse.

"I see," she cried. "And I am so glad! And I hava broughta my violin. That the signor would lika to hear the voice of the *maestro*–"

"Stop right there, will you–ah–signorina," exclaimed Tom, gruffly, endeavoring, as I saw, to control his annoyance and show no discourtesy to even an

unwelcome guest. "I'm not it, young woman. He's gone away, whoever he was. If he comes back–which God forbid–I'll notify you. But you won't catch me drumming any more on a piano. My musical career is at an end. I'm under the care of a doctor, and he says that I'm on the road to recovery. Forgive me if I have spoken too plainly. You're a very charming young woman, and I admire your–ah–genius. But mine's gone, and I'll take good care that it doesn't come back. If you'd like that piano in the music-room, Signorina Molatti, I'm sure that my wife would be glad to send it over to your apartments. We're through with it–forever!"

I was sorry for the girl. The expression of amazement–even horror–that had come into her dark, expressive face touched my heart, and I laid my hand gently on her arm.

"It's a great mystery, signorina," I whispered to her, as I led her from the library. "I can't explain it to you very clearly, for I don't understand it myself. But Mr. Remsen told you the truth. He is no longer musical. In his normal condition he is the most unmusical man in the world. The Signor Remsen that you have known, with whom you have played duets, is dead–I can hardly believe that he ever existed. Will you, Signorina Molatti, grant me the great privilege of presenting to you yonder piano? Frankly, it would be a great relief to me to be rid of it."

There were tears in her splendid black eyes as she turned her face toward me. "I do not understand," she said, mournfully. "You do not know whata it all meant to me. I cannot taka your piano. There is nobody in the wide world to playa eet, now that he ees gone. And you are telling me the truth? I was dreaming? Eet did not really happen? But, signora, there were so many who hearda heem–hearda me–hearda us! Eet could not hava been a dream. Whata was eet?"

Her voice broke with a sob, and I bent down and kissed her tear-stained face.

"I cannot tell you, signorina. But do not let your heart break. You may find him again some day."

"Nevaire again," she sighed, seizing my hands impulsively. "Nevaire again. But I thanka you so much. Fareawell."

My heart was heavy as I returned to Tom, uncertain of the state in which I should find him. To my delight, I saw as I entered the library that he had suddenly made a great stride toward renewed health. He was sitting erect, and there was little of the invalid in his face or voice.

"That's over, my dear!" he cried, gaily, "and I'm going to celebrate Chopin's utter rout. Order me a brandy and soda, will you?–and push that box of cigars toward me. Then we'll read up a bit, little woman, about Scotland and Ireland.

On the whole, I'm inclined to believe you and I will have a very jolly outing."

I leaned forward and kissed the dear fellow's smiling lips. "It's so good to have you back again, Tom," I murmured.

"And the signorina?" he asked, presently. "How did she take it? I'm afraid I was cruel to her, my dear. Did I speak too harshly to her?"

"You had no alternative, Tom," I assured him, soothingly; "you had been placed in a very awkward position."

"I had–in a very awkward position," he acknowledged. "And who the deuce put me there? I wonder—-"

"Don't wonder, Tom," I cried, sharply. "The less wondering you do the better it will be for us both."

"You're right, Winifred, as you always are," he said, raising aloft the glass of bubbling brandy that the butler had brought to him, and nodding toward me. "Here's your good health, my dear, and *bon voyage* to us both!"

III.
Clarissa's Troublesome Baby.

For while the wheel of birth and death turns round,
Past things and thoughts, and buried lives come back,
I now remember, myriad rains ago,
What time I roamed Himâla's hanging woods,
A tiger, with my striped and hungry kind.
THE LIGHT OF ASIA.

CLARISSA'S TROUBLESOME BABY.

CHAPTER I.

MY LATE HUSBAND.

And while the wheel of birth and death turns round
That which hath been must be between us two.
–*Sir Edwin Arnold.*

I was alone in the nursery with the baby, a chubby boy whose eight months of life had amazingly increased his weight and vigor, when I heard the crack of doom issuing from his miniature mouth!

I wonder if your imagination is strong enough to put you, for a moment, in my place. Suppose that you had dismissed the nurse for a time that you might have a mother's frolic in the twilight with your only child, the blessing that had come to you as a reward for marrying again after five years of widowhood. Suppose that the baby, opening his little eyes to their widest extent, had said to you, as my baby said to me:

"You don't seem to recognize me, my dear, but I've come back to you."

Wedded to Tom, already jealous of your maternal fondness for the boy, what effect would Jack's voice, silenced five years ago by death, have had upon you, rising in gruff maturity from a baby's tiny throat? Was it strange that I came within a hair's breadth of dropping the uncanny child to the floor? Mechanically I glanced over my shoulder, in cold dread lest the nurse might return at any moment. Then I found courage to glance down into the baby's upturned face. There was something in the child's eyes so old and wise that I realized my ears had not deceived me–I had not been the victim of an hallucination resulting from the strain of an afternoon of calls and teas. The conviction came to me, like an icy douche, that I was standing there in a stunning afternoon costume, holding my first husband in my arms, and liable to let him fall if our weird *tête-à-tête* should be sharply interrupted.

"You aren't glad to see me," grumbled Jack, wiggling uneasily against my gloves and coat. "But it isn't my fault that I'm here, Clarissa. There's a lot of reincarnation going on, you know, and a fellow has to take his chances."

Softly, I stole to a chair and seated myself, holding the baby on my trembling knees.

"Are you–are you–comfortable, Jack?" I managed to whisper, falteringly, the thought flashing through my mind that I had gone suddenly insane.

"Keep quiet, can't you?" he pleaded. "Don't shake so! I'm not a rattle-box. I wish you'd tell the nurse, Clarissa, to put a stick in my milk, will you? There's a horrible sameness to my present diet that is absolutely cloying. Will you stop

shaking? I can't stand it."

By a strong effort of will I controlled my nervous tremors, glancing apprehensively at the door through which the nurse must presently return.

"There, that's better," commented Jack, contentedly. "You don't know much about us, do you, Clarissa?"

"About–about–who?" I gasped, wondering if he meant spirits.

"About babies," he said, with a wiggle and a chuckle that both attracted and repelled me. "Where's your handkerchief? Wipe my nose–pardon me, Clarissa, that sounds vulgar, doesn't it? But what the deuce am I to do? I'm absolutely helpless, don't you know?"

I could feel the tears near my eyes, as I gently touched the puckered baby face with a bit of lace.

"There was only one chance in ten thousand millions that I should come here," went on Jack, apologetically. "It's tough on you, Clarissa. Do you think that you can stand it? I've heard the nurse say that I make a pretty good baby."

I sat speechless for a time, trying to adapt myself to new conditions so startling and fantastic that I expected to waken presently from a dream–a dream that promised to become a nightmare. But there was an infernal realism about the whole affair that had impressed me from the first. Jack's matter-of-fact way of accepting the situation was so strikingly characteristic of him that I had felt, at once, a strong temptation to laugh aloud.

"I want you to make me a promise, Clarissa," he said, presently, seizing one of my gloved fingers with his fat little dimpled hand and making queer mouths, as if he were trying to whistle. "You won't tell–ah–Tom, will you? He wouldn't understand it at all. I don't myself, and I've been through it, don't you see? In a way, of course, it's mighty bad form. I know that. I feel it deeply. But I was powerless, Clarissa. You know I never took any stock in those Oriental philosophies. I was always laughing at Buddhism, metempsychosis, and that kind of thing. But there's really something in it, don't you think? Keep quiet, will you? You're shaking me up again."

"There's more in it than I had ever imagined, Jack," I remarked, gloomily. "Of course, I'll say nothing to Tom about it. It'll have to be our secret. I understand that."

"You'll have to be very careful about what you call me before people, Clarissa," said the baby, presently. "My name's Horatio, isn't it? What the dickens did you call me that for? I always hated the name Horatio."

"It was Tom's choice," I murmured. "I'm sorry you don't like it–Jack."

"If you called me 'Jack' for short–no, that wouldn't do. Tom wouldn't like it, would he? Your handkerchief again, please. Thank you, my dear. By the way, Clarissa, I wish you'd tell the nurse that she gets my bath too hot in the morning.

I'd like a cold shower, if she doesn't mind."

"You'll have to adapt yourself to circumstances, my child," I remarked, wearily, wondering if this horrible ordeal would never come to an end. I longed to get away by myself, to think it all over and quiet my nerves, if possible, before I should be forced to meet Tom at dinner.

"Adapt myself to circumstances!" exclaimed Jack, bitterly, kicking savagely with his tiny feet at his long white gown. "Don't get sarcastic, Clarissa, or I'll yell. If I told the nurse the truth, where'd you be?"

"Jack!" I cried, in consternation. There seemed to be a hideous threat in his words.

"You'd better call me Horatio, for practice," he said, calmly, but I could feel him chuckling against my arm. "I'll get used to it after a time. But it's a fool name, just the same. How about the cold shower?"

"Jack," I said, angrily, "I'll put you in your crib and leave you alone in the dark if you annoy me. You must be good! Your nurse knows what kind of a bath you should have."

"And she'll know who I am, if you leave me here alone, Clarissa," he exclaimed, doubling up his funny little fists and shaking them in the air. "I've got the whip-hand of you, my dear, even if I am only a baby. By the way, Clarissa, how old am I?"

"Eight months, Jack," I managed to answer, a chill sensation creeping over me, as the shadows deepened in the room and a mysterious horror clutched at my heart. I am not a dreamer by temperament; I am, in fact, rather practical and commonplace in my mental tendencies, but there was something awful in the revelation made to me which seemed to change my whole attitude toward the universe and filled me, for the moment, with a novel dread of my surroundings. I was recalled sharply to a less fantastic mood by Jack's querulous voice:

"Will you stop shaking, Clarissa?" he cried, petulantly. "You make me feel like a milk-bottle with delirium tremens. Call the nurse, will you? She hasn't got palsy in her knees. I want to go to sleep."

At that instant the nurse bustled into the room, apologizing for her long absence.

"I'm going to make a slight change in his diet, Mrs. Minturn," she explained, taking Jack from my arms and gazing down with professional satisfaction at his cherubic face. "He's in fine condition–aren't you, you tunnin' 'ittle baby boy? But he's old enough to have a bit of variety now and then. There are several preparations that I've found very satisfactory in other cases, and I've ordered one of them for–there, there, 'ittle Horatio! Don't 'oo cry! Kiss 'oo mamma, and then 'oo'll go seepy-bye."

As I bent down to press my lips against the baby's fat cheeks, I caught a

gleam in his eyes that the nurse could not see, and, unless my ears deceived me, Jack whispered "Damn!" under his breath.

CHAPTER II.
A FOND FATHER.

As in the world of dream whose mystic shades
Are cast by still more mystic substances,
We ofttimes have an unreflecting sense,
A silent consciousness of some things past.
–*Richard Monckton Milnes.*

I remember that Tom impressed me as an extremely handsome man, as he faced me across the dinner-table and smilingly congratulated me on my appearance.

"You must have had an interesting day, Clare. You look very animated. I am so glad that you are beginning to get around a bit. There's a golden mean, you know. A woman should become a slave to neither society nor the nursery."

I realized that there was an abnormal vivacity in my manner as I added: "Nor to her husband, Tom. Do you accept the amendment?"

"Do you imply that I am inclined to be tyrannical, my dear?" he asked, laughingly. "It's not that, Clare. But I can't help being jealous of you. How's the baby?"

My wine-glass trembled in my hand, and I replaced it on the table, not daring to raise it to my lips. "He grows more interesting every day, Tom," I answered, truthfully. "You don't appreciate him." I wanted to laugh hysterically, but managed to control myself.

"Don't I, though?" cried Tom, protestingly. "He's the finest boy that ever happened, Clare, and I'm the proudest father. But I don't believe in a man's making an ass of himself all over the place because there's a baby in the house. After all, it's hereditary, so to speak, and quite common."

I glanced at the butler, but his wooden face showed no comprehension of the bad taste of Tom's remarks. I was glad of that, for Tom has earned a reputation among all classes for always saying and doing the right thing at the right time. I could not help wondering how he would act if I should tell him over our coffee

that my first husband was in the nursery, doomed to another round of earthly experience in the outward seeming of Horatio Minturn.

"Forgive me, Clare," implored Tom, misinterpreting the expression of my face. "I didn't intend to hurt your feelings, my dear. And you mustn't do me an injustice. You have hinted several times of late that I am not as fond of the baby as I should be. Now, I know exactly what you mean, and I–"

"Suppose, Tom, that we defer further discussion of the subject until later on," I suggested, realizing that I was losing rapidly my grip on my nerves. "Tell me about your day. Where have you been? What have you done? Whom have you seen?"

It was not until we were seated in the smoking-room and Tom had lighted a long black cigar that he returned to a topic I had learned to dread. Heretofore, Tom's interest in the baby had seemed to me to be intermittent and never very intense. To-night is struck me as persistent and painfully strong.

"What I was going to say, Clare, when you interrupted me at the table," he recommenced, gazing at me thoughtfully through a nimbus of tobacco smoke, "was this: Theoretically, I am a fond and enthusiastic father; practically, I haven't seen the baby more than a dozen times–and he has always yelled at sight of me."

I laughed aloud, nervously, and Tom's glance had in it much astonishment and a little annoyance.

"It's hardly a subject for merriment, is it?" he queried, coldly. "You accuse me of not appreciating Horatio. May I ask you, my dear, when I have had an opportunity of observing his–ah–good points, so to speak? To be frank with you, Clare, and to paraphrase a popular song, 'all babies look alike to me.'"

"But there are great differences among them, Tom," I cried, impulsively; and again a touch of hysteria got into my voice.

"And ours, of course, is the finest in the world," he remarked, good-naturedly. "But what I was getting at, Clara, is this: I want to become better acquainted with the boy. He's old enough now, isn't he, to begin to–what is it they call it?–take notice?"

"Oh, yes." I managed to answer, without breaking down. If Tom would only change the subject! But how could I lead his mind to other things? Surely, I couldn't tell him flatly that hereafter the baby must be a tabooed topic between us, that there really was not any Horatio, that the law of psychic evolution through repeated reincarnations was making in our nursery a demonstration unprecedented in our knowledge of the race. All that I could do was to sit silent, pressing my cold hands together, and endeavor to prevent Tom from observing my increasing agitation.

"He sits up and takes notice," repeated Tom, as if proud of his old nurse's phrase. "Well, it's about time that Horatio ceased to treat me with that antagonis-

tic uproariousness that has characterized his demeanor hitherto in my presence. I have decided to cultivate his acquaintance, Clare, and I need your help."

"He's–he's very young, Tom," I remarked, catching at a straw as I sank.

"I actually believe that you're jealous of the boy, my dear," cried Tom, laughingly. "Frankly, I'm greatly disappointed at your reception of my suggestion. You're so illogical, Clare! In one breath you charge me with lack of appreciation of the baby, and in the next you intimate that he's too young to endure my society. You place me in a very awkward position. I had honestly thought to please you, but I seem to have made a mess of it."

I was sorry for Tom, and realized that the accusation he had made against me was just. For a moment the mad project flashed through my mind of telling him the whole truth, the weird, absurd, unprecedented fact that lay at the bottom of my apparent inconsistency. But the instant that the thought took shape in unspoken words I rejected it as wildly impracticable. Furthermore, there had come to me, under the matter-of-fact influences surrounding me, a possibility that appealed to me as founded on common sense. Was it not reasonable to suppose that I had been the victim before dinner of overwrought nerves, of an hallucination that could be readily explained by purely scientific methods? I had gone to the nursery worn out by social exertions to which I had not been recently accustomed. Alone with the baby in the twilight, would it have been strange if I had fallen asleep for a moment and had dreamed that the child was talking to me? As I looked back upon the episode at this moment, it appeared to me more like the vagary of a transient doze than an actual occurrence. Even the "Damn!" that had seemed to issue from Horatio's tiny mouth as I had kissed his cheek might have been merely the tag-end of an interrupted nightmare, the reflex action of my disordered nervous system.

"You haven't made a mess of it, Tom," I said, presently, "and you have pleased me. The baby's old enough to–to–"

"To find my companionship bracing and enlightening?" suggested Tom, merrily.

"Yes, he's old enough for that," I answered, lightly, glad to feel the fog of my uncanny impressions disappearing before the sunlight of a rising conviction. With every minute that passed thus gaily in Tom's companionship, the certainty grew on me that in the nursery I had been the prey of nervous exhaustion, not the helpless protagonist of a startling psychic drama.

"I'll tell you what we'll do, Clare," remarked Tom, toward the close of an evening that had grown constantly more enjoyable to me as time passed, for, as I playfully misquoted to myself, Horatio was himself again, "I'll tell you what we'll do. I'll come home to luncheon to-morrow and we'll have the baby down from the nursery. I suppose we're all out of high chairs; but you can telephone for one

in the morning, my dear."

"But, Tom, Horatio is–is only eight months old," I protested. "He–he doesn't know how to act at the table."

"Well, I'll teach him, then," cried Tom, paternally. "He needs a few lessons in manners, Clare. He has always treated me with the most astounding rudeness. It's really time for him to come under my influence, don't you think? Of course, I may be wrong. I don't know much about these matters, but I can learn a thing or two by experimenting with Horatio."

"He doesn't like his–" I began, impulsively, and then laughed, rather foolishly. The influence of my dream, it appeared, was still upon me.

"Doesn't like what?" asked Tom, eying me searchingly, evidently surprised at my untimely hilarity.

"Game and salads and other luncheon things," I explained, adroitly, suddenly glad that the evening was at an end and that I could soon quiet my throbbing nerves by sleep.

"We'll have some bread and milk for him," suggested Tom, hospitably. "Maybe he won't yell at me if we give him something to eat–something in his line, you know."

Again I succumbed to temptation and laughed aloud. "How little you know about babies, Tom," I remarked, in my most superior way; but even as I spoke the horrible suspicion crept over me again that I, also, might have much to learn about my own little boy.

CHAPTER III.

MY FIRST AND SECOND.

Sometimes a breath floats by me,
An odor from Dreamland sent,
Which makes the ghost seem nigh me
Of a something that came and went.
–James Russell Lowell.

I lunched with Tom and Jack the next day. It was an appalling function, driving me to the very verge of hysteria and destroying forever my belief in my dream

theory. My first husband sat in his new high chair, pounding the table with a spoon, as if calling the meeting to order, while my second husband sat gazing at the baby with a fatuous smile on his handsome face that testified to his inability to rise to the situation. Behind the baby's chair stood his nurse, evidently prepared to defend her prerogatives as the protector of the child's health. Lurking in the background was the phlegmatic butler, no better pleased than the nurse at this experiment of Tom's.

"That's it! Go it, Horatio!" cried Tom, nervously. "Hit the table again, my boy. That's what it's for."

"I thought that your idea, Tom, was to teach Horatio how to behave in public," I suggested, playfully, still calm in the belief that I had been deceived in the nursery by a dream.

"But as you said, Clare," argued Tom, "he's very young. It's really not bad form, you know, for a baby to pound a table with a spoon. Is it, nurse?"

"I think not, sir," answered the nurse, pushing the high chair back to its place. The baby had kicked it away from the table while Tom was speaking.

"Isn't he–isn't he rather–ah–nervous, my dear?" asked Tom, glancing at me with paternal solicitude. "It's quite normal, this–ah–tendency to bang things–and kick?"

"Perhaps he's hungry, Tom," I suggested, lightly. My spirits were rising. In the presence of the baby, whose appearance and manner were those of a healthy child something under a year in age, the absurdity of my recent incipient nightmare was so evident that I blushed at the recollection of my nonsensical panic. Reincarnation? Bah! what silly rubbish we do get from the far East!

"Of course he's hungry," assented Tom, glancing down at a bird the butler had put before him. "With your permission, nurse, I'll give the youngster a square meal. How would a bit of the breast from this partridge do? It's very tender and digestible–"

"How absurd, Tom!" I cried. "He'd choke!"

"He's choking as it is!" exclaimed Tom, half rising from his chair. "Pat him on the back, nurse!"

"He's all right, sir," said the nurse, calmly as Horatio's cheeks lost their sudden flush and he opened his pretty little eyes again. "You needn't worry, Mr. Minturn. He's in perfect health, sir."

"Aren't they queer?" exclaimed Tom, glancing at me, laughingly.

"Sir?" cried the nurse in pained amazement.

"I meant babies, nurse," explained Tom, soothingly, motioning to the disaffected butler to refill his wine-glass. "But look here, Clare; you and I are eating and drinking heartily, but poor little Horatio is still the hungry victim of a dietary debate. What is he to have?–milk?"

The baby leaned forward in his chair, seized his empty silver bowl with a chubby hand, and hurled it to the floor.

"Horatio!" Tom's voice was stern as he scowled at the mischievous youngster. I could not refrain from laughing aloud.

"Is that bad form, Tom, for a little baby?" I asked, mischievously.

"No," answered Tom, repentantly. "I don't blame you at all, Horatio. Your prejudice, my boy, against an empty bowl when you are both hungry and thirsty is not unnatural. Give him some bread and milk, nurse, or he'll overturn the table. What a wonderful study it is, Clare, to watch a baby develop! Do you know, Horatio is actually able to grasp a syllogism!"

"Or a milk-bowl," I added.

"Don't interrupt my scientific train of thought," protested Tom, gazing musingly at the child. "I saw his mind at work just now. 'I'm hungry,' thought Horatio. 'There's my silver bowl. The bowl is empty. There are bread and milk in the house. If I throw the empty bowl to the floor, my nurse will return it to me filled with food. So here goes! Q.E.D.' Clever baby, isn't he?"

It was at that moment I met the baby's eyes, and a sharp chill ran down my back and found its way to my finger-tips. There was an expression in the child's troubled gaze so eloquent that its meaning flashed upon me at once. If the baby had cried aloud, "What an amazing fool that man is!" I could not have been more sure than I was of the thought that had passed through his infantile mind.

"What's the matter, Clare?" I heard Tom asking me, apprehensively. "Do you feel faint?"

"Not at all," I hastened to say, turning my eyes from my first to my second husband. The former was eating bread and milk–reluctantly, it seemed to me–from a spoon manipulated by his nurse. That it was really Jack who was sitting there in a high chair, doomed to swallow baby food while he craved partridge and Burgundy was a conviction that had come to me for a fleeting moment, to be followed by a return to conventional common sense and a renewed satisfaction in my environment. Tom sat opposite me, smiling contentedly, while between us, at a side of the table, the baby perfunctorily absorbed a simple but nutritious diet, deftly presented to his tiny mouth by his attentive nurse. It was a charming scene of domestic bliss at that moment, and I realized clearly how much I had to lose by giving way, even intermittently, to the wretched hallucinations that my overwrought nerves begot.

"Just look at him, Clare!" exclaimed Tom, presently. "I tell you it's an interesting study. It's elevating and enlightening, my dear. To an evolutionist there's a world of meaning in that baby's enthusiasm for bread and milk. Here he sits at the table covered with gastronomic luxuries and actually rejoices in the simplest kind of food. You see, Clare, how well the difference between Hora-

tio and myself in regard to diet illustrates Spencer's definition of evolution as a continuous change from indefinite, incoherent homogeneity to definite, coherent heterogeneity through successive differentiations and integrations. Great Scott, nurse! What's the matter with him? He's choking again!"

"It's nothing, sir," remarked the nurse, quietly, as the baby recovered from a fit of coughing and resumed his meal. "But, if you'll pardon the remark, sir, I think that he's much better off in the nursery."

It was not a tactful suggestion, and I knew that Tom felt hurt; but he maintained his self-control and made no further comment, merely glancing at me with a smile in his eyes. I realized, with a vague uneasiness, that open and active hostilities between baby's nurse and Tom were among the possibilities of the near future, and it was not a pleasing thought.

"What does he top off with?" asked Tom, presently, grinning at Horatio, who had emptied his bowl and had stuck a fist into his rosebud mouth, as if still hungry. "Have you got an ice for him, James?"

The butler stood motionless, gazing fixedly at the nurse.

"What queer ideas you have, Tom!" I cried, to break the strain of an uncomfortable situation. "An ice would give him an awful pain."

"Perhaps he'd like a Welsh rabbit, then?" growled Tom, crossly.

The baby seized a spoon and rapped gleefully on the table.

"Isn't he cunning!" I cried, delightedly. "He's happy now, isn't he? I am inclined to think, Tom, that he'd rather have a nap than a rabbit."

"Not on your life!" came a deep, gruff voice from nowhere in particular. I looked at Tom in amazement, thinking that he had playfully disguised his tones and was poking fun at me and the baby. But Tom's expression of wonderment was as genuine as my own, while the nurse was gazing over her shoulder at the butler, who was eying us all in a bewildered way. Tom glanced at the nurse.

"Leave the room, James," he said hotly. "I'll see you later in the smoking-room." Then, to the nurse: "Remove the baby, will you, please? Thank you for letting us have him for an hour."

As soon as we were alone in the dining-room, Tom leaned toward me and said: "Shall I discharge James, my dear? He was most infernally impudent, to put it mildly."

But the frightful certainty had come to me that the butler was innocent of any wrong-doing. Absurd as the bald statement of fact seemed to be, my first husband was the guilty man, and, struggle as I might against the conviction, I knew it.

"Give him another chance, Tom." I managed to say, my voice unsteady and my tongue parched. "James was not quite himself, I imagine. I'm not well, Tom. Give me a swallow of cognac, will you, please?"

Tom, alarmed at my voice and face, hastily handed me a stimulant, and presently I felt my courage and my color coming back to me.

CHAPTER IV.
NURSERY CONFESSIONS.

The priceless sight
Springs to its curious organ, and the ear
Learns strangely to detect the articulate air
In its unseen divisions, and the tongue
Gets its miraculous lesson with the rest.
–*N. P. Willis.*

I longed, yet dreaded, to have an hour alone with the baby. I could no longer doubt that, through some psychical mischance, Jack's soul had found a lodgment in a family hospitable by habit and inclination, but not accustomed to disquieting intrusions. It was thus that I put the matter to myself, as I sat alone in my boudoir after luncheon, having dismissed Marie, my maid, with a message to Horatio's nurse; and the conventional make-up of my thought revealed to me, in a flash of insight, the materialistic tendencies of my mental methods. Metempsychosis had never assumed to my mind the dignity of even a philosophical working hypothesis. Much less had the idea ever come to me that reincarnation actually furnished a process through which the physical laws of evolution and the conservation of energy might find a psychical demonstration.

My natural inclination to take the world as I found it, and to leave the inner mysteries of life to profounder minds than mine, had been intensified by my association with Tom, a disciple of Haeckel, Büchner and other extremists of the materialistic school. I had come to admire Tom's intellectuality and to find satisfaction in the fact that his fondness for scientific studies would strengthen him to resist the temptations that surrounded him to become a mere man of leisure and luxury. Possessed of great wealth and without a profession, it was fortunate for Tom that he had found in scientific research an outlet for his superabundant energies. He had begun to make a reputation for himself as a clear-headed, well-balanced evolutionist, both conservative in method and progressive in spirit, and

at our table could be found at times the leading scientific minds of New York. And now, into our little stronghold of enlightened materialism had been dropped a miraculous mystery, or mysterious miracle, that had overthrown all my preconceived ideas of the universe and opened before me a limitless field of groping conjecture. I realized, with due gratitude to fate, that if I had been born with an imaginative, poetical temperament my present predicament would have driven me insane at the outset. Fortunately for everybody concerned, I am a woman who rebounds quickly from the severest nervous shock, and I have taken a great deal of pride in retaining my mental poise in crises of my life that would have made hysteria excusable.

Nevertheless, it was a severe test of my nervous strength to hold Horatio in my arms at four o'clock that afternoon and watch his nurse donning her coat and hat preparatory to a short ride with Marie. I had carefully planned this opportunity for an uninterrupted hour with the baby, but now that it lay just before me I longed to run away from it. The nursery had become to me a temple of mysteries within which I felt chilled and awe-stricken, a victim of supernatural forces against which I was both rebellious and powerless.

After the nurse had left the room I seated myself in a rocking-chair, cuddling Horatio in my arms and softly humming a lullaby, attempting to deceive myself by the thought that I really wished him to sleep for an hour. In my innermost consciousness lay the conviction that I had actually come to the nursery for a heart-to-heart talk with Jack. My deepest desire was to be quickly gratified. A gruff whisper came to me presently from his pretty lips.

"Stop that 'bye-bye, baby,' will you, Clarissa?" he said, petulantly. "Haven't I had enough annoyance for one day?"

"Hush! hush!" I murmured, rocking frantically in the effort to put the child to sleep, despite my realization of the utter inconsistency of my action.

"Don't! don't!" growled the baby. "Do you want me to have *mal-de-mer*, Clarissa? I can't be responsible for what may happen. Where did everybody get the notion that a baby must be shaken after taking? It's getting to be an unbearable nuisance, Clarissa."

"Is that better, Jack?" I whispered, holding him upright on my knees and peering down into his disturbed face, puckered into a little knot, as if he were about to cry aloud.

"Thank you," he muttered, gratefully. "Under the circumstances, my dear, perhaps it's well that I didn't get that Welsh rabbit. But, frankly, I was bitterly disappointed at the moment."

"What can you expect, Jack?" I asked, argumentatively, again astonished at the matter-of-fact way in which I was handling this astounding crisis. "You seem to have a man's appetite but only a baby's digestive apparatus."

"That's my punishment, Clarissa," he explained, in awe-struck tones. "In the former cycle I ate too many rabbits. That was scored against me, under the general head of 'Gluttony,' and the sub-title 'Midnight Unnecessaries.' I'm up against it, Clarissa. I wouldn't complain if it were merely a question of not getting what I want. But it's getting what I don't want that jars me. You understand, of course, my dear, that, generally speaking, I refer to milk. Isn't there something in its place that you could persuade the nurse to give me? Don't babies get–er–malt extract, for instance?"

"I'll do what I can for you, Jack." I said, suddenly struck by a brilliant idea. "But I must make a condition, and you must make me a promise."

"I'd promise you anything for a change of diet," muttered Jack, kicking vigorously with his tiny legs and waving his fat fists in the air.

"If you'll swear to me, Jack, never to speak aloud again unless you and I are alone together, I'll agree to make every effort in my power to add to your physical comforts."

"Comforts be–blowed!" exclaimed the baby, crossly. "What I want are a few luxuries. And, furthermore, my dear, I'm getting very weary of that machine-made nurse. She's narrow, Clarissa. I don't wish to speak harshly about a woman whose heart seems to be in the right place, but you must get rid of her, if you care a continental rap about your little baby. You'll have to fill her place, Clarissa, with somebody more broad-minded and up-to-date. She bores me to death."

"You don't mean that you've been talking to her, Jack?" I cried, horrified.

"That's not necessary," growled the child. "What with her "ittle baby go to seepy,' and 'now, Horatio, 'oo dear 'ittle pet lambie,' she freezes the words upon my tongue. Another thing, Clarissa, that you can't fully understand–I'm not permitted, through psychological conditions that you cannot grasp, to talk to anybody but you. It will relieve your mind to know that I'm as dumb as a–as a real baby when you're not within hearing."

"I'm so glad of that, Jack," I exclaimed, impulsively. "From things you've said before, I had obtained a different impression."

"I was only trying to scare you, Clarissa," remarked Jack, mischievously. "But I've told you the truth at last. By the way, what a stupendous idiot Tom Minturn is! How in the world did you happen to marry him?"

"Jack," I cried, angrily, "I am amazed at your lack of good taste. You are hardly in a position to do Tom justice. Unless you refrain from making such brutal remarks in the future, I shall leave you entirely to the care of the nurse."

"And be accused of neglecting your only child," suggested the baby, slyly.

I had not grasped the full scope of this clever remark, before I was startled by a quick step in the hallway, the throwing open of the door, and the sound of Tom's voice, crying:

"Oh, here you are! I've found you at last, have I? What a pretty picture you make, Clare, there in the half-lights with the baby on your knees. How is the dear little chap? Poor fellow, he must have thought that his dismissal from the luncheon-table was rather abrupt."

"What an ass he is!" whispered Jack, under his breath. Then he began to cry lustily, as had been his custom whenever Tom had deigned to enter the nursery.

CHAPTER V.
A SPOILED CHILD.

Yes, 'tis my dire misfortune now
To hang between two ties,
To hold within my furrowed brow
The earth's clay, and the skies.
–*Victor Hugo.*

Tom had come to the nursery in high spirits and with the best possible intention. Freed from the depressing presence of the nurse and butler he had argued, I felt sure, that now was the time for a frolic with the baby that should put their relations upon a smoother footing. He had said to me, more than once, that little Horatio's apparent prejudice against him was due to the fact that hirelings were always coming between children and parents in these latter days.

The baby's voice, however, was still for war. I did not dare to trot him upon my knees, knowing his prejudice against a shaking, so I sat there gazing up at Tom's smiling face in perplexity and holding my first husband, now howling lustily, firmly upright on my lap.

"Let me take him, my dear," suggested Tom, with what struck me as rather artificial enthusiasm. "I'll walk with him awhile. It may quiet him."

To my astonishment, the baby stopped crying at once, as Tom bent down and clasped him, rather awkwardly, in his arms. Hope began to dance merrily in my heart, and I laughed aloud. It was a sight to bring smiles to the saddest face. Tom paced up and down the nursery, sedately, furtively watching Jack, as he nestled against his shoulder, making no sound and apparently contented for the moment with the situation. But a sudden fear fell upon me. The thought that this

might be the calm before the storm flashed through my mind, and the lightning of premonition was almost instantly followed by the thunder of fulfilment.

"What the dickens!" cried Tom, in anger and amazement. Jack, having deftly hurled Tom's eyeglasses to the floor, had begun to pummel his nose with one hand while he pulled his hair with the other, making strange, guttural sounds the while that were unlike anything that had ever issued from his baby throat before.

"Take him away, will you, Clare?" implored Tom, wildly. "He's the worst that ever happened. What's the matter with him?"

"Perhaps he's sleepy, Tom," I suggested, uncertain whether I should laugh or weep, as I removed the baby from my second husband's arms. "What a bad little boy you have been, Horatio!" I managed to say, chidingly, wondering if nature had not designed me for an actress.

"He ought to be spanked," growled Tom, bending to the floor to grope for his eye-glasses in the twilight.

"Spanked, eh?" whispered the baby, close to my ear. "We'll see about that. I've got it in for him, all right. Just wait!"

"Hush! hush!" I implored him, hurrying back to the rocking-chair, to get as far away from Tom as possible.

"What an infernal temper the boy has," remarked the latter, standing erect again and replacing his eye-glasses upon his nose. "I'm afraid my visit to the nursery has not been a success, Clare," he added, as he stalked to the doorway, evidently sorely hurt at heart.

When we were alone together again, I planted the baby firmly on my knees and bent down till I could look straight into his tear-stained eyes.

"You are very unkind, Jack," I said to him, earnestly. "Have you ever paused to consider what are you here for? Of course, I'm a convert to the theory of reincarnation. You're sufficient proof of its truth. As I understand it, it is incumbent upon you to lead a better life this time than you led before. Frankly, Jack, you aren't beginning well."

"I realize that, Clarissa," said the baby, repentantly. "If I don't brace up, I'll make a terrible mess of it, and my next birth'll be sure to jar me. Maybe I'll be doomed to show up in Brooklyn–or even Hoboken. If you care anything about my–ah–psychical future, my dear, you'll keep Tom Minturn away from me. He's so confoundedly patronizing! He's actually insufferable, my dear. Did you hear him quoting Herbert Spencer at the table, gazing at me all the while as if I were some kind of a germ that might develop in time? And the funny part of it is, Clarissa, that I am a sage, and he's nothing but a misguided ignoramus."

"But Tom has the reputation of being quite learned, Jack," I protested. "He's an active member of the Darwin Society, and has just been elected to the Asso-

ciation for the Promulgation of the Doctrine of Evolution."

"'And the dead, steered by the dumb, moved upward with the flood,'" quoted the baby, somewhat irrelevantly, I thought. "They are blind leaders of the blind, Clarissa. I could tell Tom in a minute more than he'll ever know if he always clings to the idea that the universe is a machine that was made by chance and is run by luck. But I sha'n't take the trouble to give him the tip. He'll know a thing or two some day. Meanwhile, my dear, you'd better keep him away from me. If worse comes to the worst you might send me to some institution. I realize, bitterly enough, that I'll be an awful nuisance to you if you keep me here."

I felt the tears coming into my eyes, and impulsively I drew the baby closer to me. I was in the most deplorable predicament that my imagination could conceive, torn by conflicting emotions and horrified by the awful possibilities presented to me by the immediate future. If Tom, through Jack's hot temper, should discover the truth, and be forced suddenly to abandon materialism by coming face to face with a convincing psychical demonstration, what would happen? I shuddered, there in the gloaming, as my mind dwelt reluctantly upon the unprecedented perils menacing my happiness. It was no comfort to my distraught soul to realize that, in all probability, no woman, since the world began, had been afflicted in just this way. Neither was there any relief in the conviction that I had been in no way to blame for this incongruous psychical visitation.

"No, I couldn't send you away, Jack," I said, musingly; "that is practically impossible. We'll have to make the best of it, and our successful manipulation of the situation depends almost wholly upon your self-control. You must adapt yourself to your environment, my boy; become a baby in fact as well as in theory. You'll be happier that way."

"Don't talk nonsense, Clarissa," grumbled Jack, kicking viciously at his long clothes. "I'm the victim of what might be called a temporary maladjustment of the machinery of psychical evolution. Ordinarily, a baby is not cognizant of a former existence. You advise me to forget the past and remember only that I am your cunning little eight-months-old Horatio. If I only could! It's the only thing that could give me permanent relief, my dear. But it's not possible. Here I am doomed to a kind of dual punishment, ashamed of myself as Horatio and afraid of myself as Jack. And all because I clogged my psychical progress in my late life by a carnal craving for Welsh rabbits! It sounds absurd, doesn't it, when one puts it into words? But, my dear, the sublime and the ridiculous are as close together in one realm of existence as in another. Truth has many faces, and there's always a grin on one of them."

"I think that I hear your nurse coming, Jack," I whispered. "Is there anything that I can do for you?"

"Yes," he answered, excitedly, lowering his voice, however. "Do you think,

Clarissa, that you could secrete a flask of bottled cocktails in the room somewhere? I've learned a thing or two of late that might prove useful to me if I needed a stimulant and knew where to find it. I can raise my body by my arms and hold up my whole weight for ten minutes at a time. I've been experimenting at night, when the nurse was asleep. Tom's an evolutionist; ask him about it. He'll explain to you how it happens. You'll bring the cocktails, my dear?"

I hesitated, bewildered by his request; daring neither to grant nor deny it. The nurse was half-way down the hall, and nearing the door rapidly.

"Take your choice, Clarissa," whispered the baby, coolly. "Unless you promise me at once, I shall tell the nurse who I am, the moment she enters the room."

My heart sprang chokingly into my throat, and I whispered, hoarsely:

"Very well, Jack. I'll do as you wish. But do be careful, won't you? Don't take more than a sip at a time, will you?"

Before the baby could reply, the nurse had entered the room, smiling gaily.

CHAPTER VI.

PROTOPLASM AND FROTH.

We have forgot what we have been,
And what we are we little know.
–*Thomas W. Parsons.*

There was not the least doubt that our dinner in honor of the German biologist, Plätner, had been a tremendous success. Long before we had reached the game course I had caught the gleam of triumph in Tom's eyes, and across the long board my gaze had met his in joyous congratulation. It was not merely personal glory that we had won by this well-conceived and smoothly executed social function. In a way, we had vindicated our caste, had proved to a censorious world that the inner circle of metropolitan society is not wholly frivolous, utterly indifferent to the achievements of genius and the marvelous feats of modern science.

When Tom had first suggested to me the possibility of our entertaining Plätner, whose efforts had won the enthusiasm of materialists in all parts of the world, I had fought shy of the project. Tom's idea was to gather at our table the

most noted scientists of the city, with the German biologist as the magnet, and to select our women from among the cleverest of our set, once vulgarly known as the "Four Hundred." Upon his first presentation of the scheme I had argued that it was impracticable, that the scientists would find our women frivolous, and that our women would be horribly bored by the sages. Even up to the moment of our entrance to the dining-room I had been annoyed by the fear that my pessimistic attitude toward the function was to be vindicated, that Tom's effort to make oil and water mix was doomed to failure.

And the funniest thing about the whole affair is that we were saved from disaster and raised to glory through the quaint personality of the Herr Doctor, our guest of honor. A typical German savant in appearance, with spectacles, beard and agitated hair, he displayed from the outset a perfect self-control beneath which, one quickly realized, glowed the fires of a fine enthusiasm. Speaking French or English with a fluency that was enviable, he aired his hobby in a genial, entertaining way, which saved him from being the bore that a man with a fixed idea is so apt to prove. Protoplasm may seem to be a most unpromising topic upon which to base the conversation at a fashionable dinner-party, but I found myself intensely interested, before the oyster-plates had been removed, in the scientific discussion that the learned Herr Doctor had set in motion and Tom had deftly kept alive.

"I had been impressed, years ago," Plätner had begun, in answer to a polite question from Mrs. "Ned" Farrington, who is a very tactful woman; "I had been impressed by the similarity of protoplasm to a fine froth." Here the German scientist held an oyster poised on a fork and gazed at it musingly, the while he continued, in almost flawless English: "The most available froth, soap lather, is made up of air bubbles entangled in soap solution. After years of experimenting, my friends, I succeeded in making an oil foam from soapy water and olive oil. Under the microscope my solution closely resembles protoplasm."

"Does it really?" cried Mrs. "Ned," rapturously.

"Wonderful!" commented Professor Shanks, America's most noted zoölogist.

"It's curious," remarked Elinor Scarsdale, rather cleverly, I thought, "that from protoplasm to the highest civilization there should have been a struggle from soap to soap."

The Herr Doctor glanced approvingly at the brightest débutante of the season.

"In those words, young lady," he said, with flattering emphasis, "you have summed up the whole history of physical evolution. But to continue: My drops of oil foam act as if they were alive, their movements bearing a most marvelous resemblance to the activities of Pelomyxa, a jelly-like marine creature, protoplas-

mic in its simplicity." The Herr Doctor was again addressing his remarks to his oyster fork.

"Do I understand you, Dr. Plätner," asked Tom, from the foot of the table, "that, under the microscope, rhozopod protoplasm, for example, would resemble your–ah–oil foam?"

"So closely, sir," answered Herr Plätner, instantly, "that I have often deceived the most expert microscopists in Germany. Furthermore, Mr. Minturn, my artificial protoplasm retains its activity for long periods of time. I made one drop, sir, that was alive, so to speak, for six days."

"And then it died?" asked Mrs. "Ned," mournfully.

"To speak unscientifically, yes," answered the German, carefully. "Now, what are we to gather from all this, my friends?" The butler had removed the oysters, and the Herr Doctor was forced to glance at his audience.

"New reverence for soap and olive oil," suggested one of the younger scientists, a professor at a neighboring university.

Plätner eyed the speaker suspiciously, and then said:

"That, of course, sir; but much more than that. I have proved conclusively, my friends, that the primary movements of life are due to structure, and that there is absolutely no necessity for believing in any peculiar vital essence or force. The living cell, I confidently assert, may be built up out of inert matter. The old-fashioned idea of a vital spark being absolutely essential is as obsolete as the belief in special creation. Let me live a hundred years, my friends, and I'll make for you a Goethe or a Shakespeare out of soap lather and olive oil."

"Just imagine it!" exclaimed Mrs. Farringdon, gazing with exaggerated admiration at the German genius.

"It's really not so shocking to our pride of ancestry as it seems at first sight;" Tom ventured to suggest. "Our generation has become reconciled, perforce, to its humble origin. It is hard for us to realize how severely Darwinism shocked our fathers and mothers."

"As I understand you, Dr. Plätner," broke in Mrs. "Bob" Vincent, turning the blaze of her great, dark eyes full upon the German's face, "your discovery is a triumph for the extreme materialists? It destroys absolutely all the bases upon which the belief in psychic forces rests? We are machines, wound up to run for a while, and then to stop forever?"

"You have practically stated my creed, madame," answered the Herr Doctor, gravely. "Constant motion, constant change–these are the alpha and the omega of the universe. Why should we superimpose the concept of a psychical existence upon a structure that is already perfect? As I said in other words, my friends, I could, if sufficient time were granted to me, rebuild the earth and its creatures in my laboratory."

"Provided that it was situated near a barber shop and a delicatessen store," whispered Dr. Hopkins, who had been listening in silence on my left to our guest of honor. I was glad to hear this subdued note of protest from so eminent a source, but he shook his gray head as I glanced at him approvingly. Professor Hopkins, Ph. D., loves science but hates controversy. Had he crossed swords at that moment with the German he would have found, I imagine, that the sympathies of my guests were with the materialist. When a scientist frankly tells you that he can manufacture protoplasm, and goes on to describe to you his method of procedure, it's well to pause before plunging into an argument with him. But I, who had good reason to know that Herr Plätner was ludicrously at fault in his conception of the universe, could not but regret that so brilliant a champion as Dr. Hopkins had not rushed to the defense of the truth. For a moment I was almost tempted to defy the rules of hospitality and voice the new faith that had come to me in the existence of psychic mysteries. This inclination was intensified by Herr Plätner's answer to a question put to him by one of the men.

"It's all the veriest rubbish," I heard the German saying, with great emphasis. "All those Oriental philosophies and religions are merely picturesque presentments of the truths that are clearly stated by modern materialism, so-called. What is Nirvana but simply cessation of motion? Admitting reincarnation, for example, as a working hypothesis, it would mean simply the coming and going of atomic vibrations with successive losses of identity. They are dreamers, those Orientals, seeing half truths clearly enough, but never following them out to their logical conclusions."

"And yet the East is the mother of lather and olive oil," murmured Dr. Hopkins, under his breath.

At that instant my heart leaped into my throat, and I sprang to my feet in affright. With Horatio in her arms, his nurse had rushed frantically into the dining-room, despite the interference of the butler, and, with blanched face and staring eyes, was bearing down on me, with the purpose, evidently, of thrusting the baby into my grasp.

[image]

"He's bewitched, ... He's been talking like a man."

"Take him! take him!" she cried, hysterically, and before I could resist her insistence, Horatio was squirming in my bare arms. "He's bewitched," continued his nurse, frantically. "He's been talking like a man. I'm through with him. He ain't a baby! You just wait a moment, Mrs. Minturn. He'll speak again in a

moment. He's got a voice like a steam calliope. And what he says! Oh, my!"

"Take her away at once," Tom was crying to the butler. "She has gone crazy," he went on, rushing past our astounded guests to my assistance. "Don't be frightened, my dear! I always thought that she was unbalanced, and now I know it. Poor little Horatio! He looks scared to death!"

CHAPTER VII.

A BIOLOGIST AND A BABY.

We know these things are so, we ask not why,
But act and follow as the dream goes on.
–*Lord Houghton.*

"Isn't he a lovely baby!"

"Don't send him away, Mrs. Minturn."

"Get his high chair for him, James."

"See him smile! I don't wonder at his relief. Just imagine being in the care of a crazy nurse!"

"What wild eyes she had! You say she was always eccentric, Mr. Minturn?"

"The baby's only eight months old? Really, Mrs. Minturn, he looks older."

"He has such pretty eyes! And look at the dimples in his little hands. Doesn't he ever cry? How good he is, dear little fellow!"

"Horatio! What a fine, dignified name! Horatio held a bridge, didn't he? or was it a full house?"

"What a question for a famous scientist to ask!"

The baby, erect and smiling in his high chair, had wonderfully enlivened our dinner-party. Even Tom, startled as he had been by the advent of the distraught nurse, was now wholly at his ease and beamed genially from the foot of the table upon the youngster, who seemed to be delighted at the attention that he was receiving from beautiful women and famous men. As he sat there, merrily waving a spoon in the air and crowing lustily, I watched him with mingled pride and consternation. Although a most distressing episode had been brought to a picturesque conclusion, there seemed to me to be startling possibilities in the present situation. I did not like the flush upon the baby's cheeks, the unnatural

gleam in his laughing eyes. Impulsively I bent down and kissed him upon his pretty mouth. My worst fears were instantly realized, and I felt my spinal marrow turn to ice. I had detected the odor of a cocktail upon Horatio's–or, rather, Jack's–breath.

"I am forced to acknowledge, madame," I heard Herr Plätner saying, in answer to one of Mrs. Farringdon's leading questions, "I am forced to acknowledge that my theories destroy much of the poetry of life. It is a most prosaic attitude that I am forced to hold toward yonder most beautiful baby, for example. Romance would point to him as an immortal soul in embryo. Realism asserts that he is a machine, like the rest of us, with a longer lease of activity before him than you or I have, who have been ticking, so to speak, for several years."

"Be good, Horatio!" I whispered. "Don't cry. You can have an ice pretty soon."

The baby brought his spoon down upon the table with a thump, and actually glared at the German professor, while my guests laughed gaily at the child's precocious demonstration.

"Isn't he cunning!" exclaimed Elinor Scarsdale, delightedly.

"He seems to have a prejudice against me, *nicht wahr*?" remarked the Herr Doctor, laughing aloud.

"You aren't to blame for that, little boy," murmured Dr. Hopkins, so that I alone could hear him. "He says that you are sprung from oil and lather and are rushing toward annihilation."

"Bah!" yelled the baby. "Bah! bah! bah!"

"'Ba-ba, ba-ba, black sheep, have 'oo any wool?' quoted Professor Rogers, the noted comparative philologist, who has identified the germ of epic poetry in the earliest known cradle songs.

"Isn't he fascinating!" cried Elinor Scarsdale, referring to the baby, not to the philologist.

"If you'll excuse me for a time," I said to my guests, seeing that Tom was growing weary of Horatio's prominence at the table, "I'll take the baby to the nursery."

"You'll do it at your peril," I heard a deep voice grumble, and Dr. Hopkins jumped nervously and glanced at me in amazement.

"Don't run off with him, Mrs. Minturn," cried Mrs. Farringdon; and her protest was sustained by a chorus of "don't" and "do let him stay."

"It may be only temporary," I heard Dr. Plätner saying, as he gazed at Professor Shanks, who had asked him, evidently, a question about the baby's nurse. "It's not an uncommon form of insanity, and may be only temporary. I recall an instance of a very learned and perfectly harmless professor at Göttingen who believed for years that his pet cat talked Sanskrit to him. There was at my own

university a young man wholly sane, apparently, who made a record of conversations that he had held with the skeleton of a gorilla. Both of these men were eventually restored to mental health, and have never had a return of their delusions. It is fortunate, however, that the poor woman, whose insanity we have so recently witnessed, exhibited her mania at this time. What might have happened otherwise to that charming little baby I shudder to think."

Horatio was pounding the table with a spoon, as if applauding the Herr Doctor's remarks. Suddenly he dropped the spoon and made a grab for Dr. Hopkins's wine-glass.

"What vivacity he has!" remarked Professor Shanks, as if addressing a roomful of students interested in a zoölogical specimen.

"He seems to know a rare vintage when he sees it," suggested Dr. Hopkins, intending, of course, to compliment his hostess.

"I think my dear–" began Tom, nervously.

"Don't go any further, Mr. Minturn," cried Elinor Scarsdale, playfully. "The baby is so much more interesting than—-"

"Protoplasm," added Dr. Hopkins, under his breath.

Dr. Plätner was gazing at the baby searchingly. He had been impressed evidently by certain eccentricities in Horatio's bearing.

"How old did you say the boy was, madame?" asked the German savant, presently.

"Eight months," I answered, a catch in my voice that I could not control.

"He's–ah–very intelligent for a child of that age," commented Plätner, laboring under the mistake that he was saying something complimentary. "He has a most expressive face."

As the baby was scowling savagely at the German at that moment, and frantically shaking his little fists at him, there were both pith and point to the latter's remark.

"Rot!" muttered Jack, wickedly. I sprang to my feet and lifted him from his chair. He kicked protestingly for a moment, and gave vent to a yell that bore witness to his possession of a marvelous pair of lungs.

"Be quiet, Horatio," I whispered, imploringly, hurrying toward the door, without further apology to my guests. "If you'll be silent now, I'll have a bottle of champagne brought to the nursery."

At these words the baby nestled affectionately in my arms, and I felt that the fight was won. Just as we reached the doorway, however, Jack clambered to my shoulder and waved his little fist defiantly at my guests.

"Damn that frowsy old German donkey!" he muttered, close to my ear. "I'd give half a bottle of cocktails to prove to him what an amazing ignoramus he is! Just wait a minute, will you, Clarissa?"

I rushed out of the dining-room without more ado. In another instant Jack would have said the word that trembled on his tiny mouth, the word that would have brought the whole temple of modern materialism toppling down upon Herr Plätner's devoted head.

CHAPTER VIII.

HUSH-A-BY, NUMBER ONE!

Methinks that e'en through my laughter
Oft trembles a strain of dread;
A shivery ghost of laughter
That is loath to rise from the dead.
–Hjalmar Hjorth Boyesen.

The nursery was in a condition of much disorder as I entered it with the baby's arms around my neck. Much to my surprise and delight Jack had fallen asleep as we mounted the stairs. How to get him into his crib without rousing him was a problem that I longed to solve, although I had determined not to return to the dining-room. I would send a maid presently to tell the butler to inform Tom that I could not leave the baby at this crisis. Surely our guests would consider a crazy nurse sufficient excuse for the retirement of their hostess.

But Jack opened his little eyes and crowed, rather hilariously, as I laid him on his pillows.

"Don't go, my dear Clarissa," he said, his baby tones strangely out of harmony with his words. "I have much to say to you at once. I owe you an explanation and apology. Sit down, won't you?"

"Keep quiet, Jack," I whispered, "I'll be back in a moment."

After I had despatched a servant to the dining-room with my message to Tom, and had assured myself that the baby's hysterical nurse had left the house–poor woman, I was sincerely sorry for her!–I returned to the nursery and shut myself in, with a feeling of great relief. So intense, indeed, was my nervous reaction after hours of varied emotions that I sank at once into a chair to check a sensation of dizziness that had come over me as I crossed the room.

"Isn't this cosy!" exclaimed the baby, kneeling at the side of his crib and

striving to touch me with his fat, uncertain little hands. "I wanted to say to you, Clarissa, that I did not deliberately plan to frighten that tyrannical nurse of mine. To tell you the truth, my dear, I had taken just one swallow too much of those cocktails and was astonished to discover that, while thus slightly elevated, so to speak, I could communicate in the language of maturity with this–ah–comparative stranger. Naturally, it was a great shock to the nurse. As I remarked to you before, my dear, she's narrow. A more broad-minded woman would not have rushed before the public, making a kind of Balaam's ass of a helpless baby. But she's been discharged, of course?"

"She has gone away, if that's what you mean," I answered, laughing rather hysterically. "How do you account for your sudden loquacity in her presence, Jack?"

"That's a mystery," said the baby, screwing up his tiny mouth into a funny little knot. "Spirits had something to do with it, I suppose."

"Spirits!" I repeated, nervously.

"Yes," responded Jack, clapping his palms together with a ludicrously infantile gesture. "You see, my dear, there were spirits in the cocktail. To tell you the truth, Clarissa, I'm a bit scared. I'm going to swear off. By the way, did you order that champagne?"

"No," I answered, curtly.

"Well, perhaps it's better, on the whole, that you didn't," sighed the baby, tumbling back on his pillows and waving his chubby legs in the air. "I've about made up my mind, my dear, to lead a better life. It'll be easier for me to be good than it has been, now that the nurse is gone. She was so narrow, Clarissa! It was always on my mind, and it finally drove me to drink."

"I'll have to replace her at once, Jack," I remarked, drawing my chair closer to the crib. "What–ah–that is–have you some idea as to just what kind of a nurse you'd like?"

The baby was on his knees again at the side of the crib, waving his expressive fists in the air.

"Understand me, Clarissa," he said, sternly, "I refuse to risk my life again by placing myself in the power of a hireling nurse. You can't expect people of that kind to be open to new ideas. To a man of my temperament, my dear, you must realize that repeated doses of baby-talk are actually cloying. If you could engage some broad-minded, elderly woman who had been deaf and dumb from birth, I might put up with her for a while. But, of course, it would be hard to find such a prize. You'll have to look after your little baby yourself, my dear, until I'm a few years older. It'll be hard for you, I realize that, Clarissa. But, frankly, is there any other alternative? If I'm to lead a better life, my dear, I must have some encouragement."

I leaned back in my chair, and closed my eyes wearily. The burden that had been thrust upon me was growing greater than I could bear.

"We'll postpone this discussion until to-morrow, Jack," I said, presently. "I must think it all out carefully before I can come to a decision. Meanwhile, you'd better go to sleep. It's getting late, you know."

"You aren't going to leave me here alone, Clarissa?" cried the baby, nervously. "You'd better not. There'll be trouble if you do."

The fact was that I was in a quandary as to what was the proper thing to do, under the circumstances. I had only just begun to realize how many problems had been solved by the presence of the nurse. At this time of night it was impossible, of course, to get anybody to take her place. At such a crisis as this the natural solution of the problem lay in my temporary occupancy of her position. But I shrank from the obligation that fate had so unkindly thrust upon me. Lifting the very willing baby from the crib, I carried him to a rocking-chair, hoping that I might get him to sleep while I came thoughtfully to a determination regarding my course of action for the immediate future.

"Gently!" murmured Jack, cuddling gratefully in my arms. "A long, slow, dreamy kind of rocking is not so bad, Clarissa. It's the tempestuous, jerky style that I object to. That confounded nurse had a secret sorrow. It used to bother her whenever she got me into this chair. She'd groan and weep and swing me up and down, as if she were trying to pulverize her grief, with me as the hammer. Then I'd begin to yell, and she'd rock all the harder. You can't imagine, Clarissa, what your little Horatio has suffered of late."

I laughed aloud nervously, knowing that my merriment had a cruel sound, but unable to control it.

"Did you think that I was joking!" growled Jack, clutching at my chin, angrily.

"Forgive me, Jack!" I exclaimed, repentantly. "I know that you've had an awfully hard time, poor boy. And I promise you that I shall try my best to make life easier for you, from now on. And now, Jack, do try to get to sleep! I'll see to it that you are perfectly comfortable to-night, and to-morrow we'll talk about the future. Would you like to have me sing to you, Jack, as I rock you?"

The baby fairly shook with suppressed laughter at the suggestion.

"Doesn't it seem absurd, Clarissa?" he gasped, between chuckles. "Just imagine what it really means. You're about to hum hush-a-bye-baby to Number One, while Number Two is down-stairs talking scientific rubbish to a lot of old fogies! If you should ever write your memoirs, my dear—-"

"Hush, Jack!" I cried, petulantly, setting the chair in motion. "I shall never write anything for publication."

"Nonsense," commented the baby, drowsily. "Everybody does. You'll be

sure to try it on some day. What a story you could tell, couldn't you, my dear? You might call it, with my permission, 'Clarissa's Troublesome Baby.'"

CHAPTER IX.
A BOSTON GIRL.

It would be curious if we should find science and philosophy taking up again the old theory of metempsychosis. But stranger things have happened in the history of human opinion.–*James Freeman Clarke.*

It was only through the exercise of the nicest care that I escaped a complete nervous collapse during the weeks immediately following our now famous dinner to Herr Plätner. I was tempted at times to run off to Europe and leave my fevered household to fend for itself. I seemed to spend the larger part of my time in keeping Jack quiet and Tom cool. Which was the more difficult task I am unable to say. Jack remained stubbornly unreasonable regarding the kind of nurse he was willing to submit to, while Tom grumbled continually because I spent so much time with the baby.

"What is the trouble in the nursery, Clarissa?" the latter asked me one morning at breakfast. "You have tried ten different experiments there since that crazy woman left us, and now you tell me that her place is again vacant. We pay the highest wages, Horatio is not a sickly, fretful child, but still these alleged nurses come and go, offering, so far as I can learn, only the flimsiest excuses for throwing up a seemingly desirable situation. There must be something radically wrong up there. Have you any idea, my dear, what it is?"

How could I tell Tom the truth about the matter? Had I informed him that the baby still insisted upon my engaging an elderly woman deaf and dumb from birth, and refused to adapt himself to any one of the many compromises that I had offered to him, Tom would have been justified in suspecting the existence of insanity germs in our nursery. He had seen one woman issue therefrom in an apparently crazy condition, and he had noted the eccentric fickleness of her successors. If I should now lay the actual facts before him, he would have good reason to believe that I also had lost my mental balance. At that moment there came to me a vague dread of my second husband's scientific habit of mind. It

was evident that he was bent upon collecting data about the baby and his nurses, in order that he might reach some reasonable conclusion in explanation of the existing disturbed conditions in our formerly unruffled household. And the unfortunate part of it was that Tom had the leisure and, I feared, the inclination to wrestle with this problem until he had solved it in some way satisfactory to his exacting mind.

"The root of the trouble, Tom," I answered, presently, after carefully weighing my words before uttering them, "the root of the trouble is not in the baby or the nursery or the wages–or in me. It is to be found in the great change that is going on in the conditions of domestic service. A child's nurse to-day–I mean one of the kind that we should be willing to employ–is a highly-trained specialist who has grown haughty and despotic in the mere exercise of her profession. She realizes that the demand for experts in her line is greater than the supply, and—-"

"I see," interrupted Tom, rather rudely, I thought. "But it does seem to me that if other people in our position, Clare, can find satisfactory nurses, we should not be the one family in the city that is forced to take care of its own baby. I am willing to pay any amount of money to insure Horatio's comfort. I'll admit that he is difficult at times. He seems to be a very sensitive, highly-strung child, but there's nothing abnormal about him. He's pugnacious and hot-tempered, but most healthy boy babies are inclined to be spunky, aren't they? What I object to is that he is gradually absorbing all your time, day and night, Clare. I'm not jealous of Horatio, my dear, but I don't believe in the old-fashioned idea that parents should sacrifice their comfort upon the altar of the nursery. You understand my position, do you not?"

"Gwendolen will be here to-day, Tom," I said, smiling at his disturbed face from across the table. "I hope that she'll take a fancy to the baby. At all events, she'll relieve the situation. When your wife's in the nursery, Tom, you'll have your cousin to talk to."

"Bah!" grumbled Tom, rising and placing a hand on the back of his chair, "Gwendolen's pretty and chic and up to date, but she's not in your class intellectually, my dear."

I smiled gratefully at Tom's compliment, but my mind was not at ease. Wasn't the presence of Gwendolen Van Voorhees in the house more likely to prove disastrous than satisfactory? When, however, Tom had insisted that his cousin's long-deferred visit to us be made at once, I could find no reasonable argument to oppose to his washes. From various points of view, Gwendolen's advent to the household appeared to be desirable. She was a charming girl, well read, widely traveled and a thoroughbred little *mondaine*. But I dreaded her arrival, despite the fact that I could not have put the vague fears that haunted me into specific words. I was beginning to realize what it means in this prosaic, unimagi-

native world to hide in one's bosom an uncanny secret. There had come to me, of late, moments when the inclination to tell Tom the whole truth about Horatio–or, rather, Jack–was almost irresistible. Perhaps my real reason for objecting to Gwendolen's presence was my fear, unacknowledged to myself, that I should be tempted eventually to tell her the amazing tale of Jack's ridiculous reincarnation. There were times, and they had constantly become more frequent, when the burden of my secret seemed greater than I could bear, when the longing to confess to somebody that the baby was a psychical freak of the most astounding kind burned hot within me. As I lingered over my coffee in the breakfast-room that morning, after Tom's departure, the immediate future looked black enough, and I could not see that the coming of Gwendolen gave it a lighter shade.

Nevertheless, I was really glad to welcome her later in the morning as I met her at the door of the drawing-room, and kissed her pretty, piquante mouth affectionately.

"I was awfully glad to come to you, Clare," she cried, vivaciously, as we mounted the stairs that I might show her to her rooms. "You know the song with the chorus, 'There's one New York, only one New York?' It's been running through my mind for two days."

"But I thought that you were wedded to Boston, Gwen," I remarked, my mind wandering for a moment as we passed the closed door of the nursery.

Presently we were seated cozily before an open fire in the guest chamber, while Gwendolen, dark, petite, smiling, appeared to me to be a most ornamental and fascinating addition to our little circle.

"Boston is amusing," she was saying, in her pleasantly emphatic way, "but it's so erratic, don't you know. My nerves always begin to ache after I've been there a few weeks. They are so fond of fads, Clare, those clever Bostonians! They take up everything, you know, and always go to extremes."

"It's American history now, is it not?" I asked.

"Yes," answered Gwen, gazing at the fire musingly. "That's coming in again. But they're perfectly crazy about theosophy just at present. You'd be amazed, Clare, to discover how much I know about Nirvana and adepts and metempsychosis, and all that kind of thing. Several of my most intimate friends have become vegetarians and live mostly on baked beans. It's awfully funny–they take it all so seriously."

"And what do you really think of it, Gwen?" I asked, nervously.

"Think of what, of which, my dear? Of living on beans, do you mean?"

"No. Beans are only a side issue, or, to speak with Tom's scientific accuracy, a side dish. What do you think, for instance, of reincarnation?"

"I don't know what to think about it, Clare," she answered, reflectively, pushing her dainty little feet toward the fire and gazing into my face with earnest

eyes. "Do you know, there are times when I really imagine that there's something in it! Of course, it's absurd in a way, but it does solve a great many problems, does it not? It conforms beautifully to the laws of evolution and the conservation of energy, and there are so many things that can't be explained by any other theory! But it always makes me shudder to think of it. Imagine, Clare, being born again in Turkey, for example. Wouldn't it be shocking?"

I laughed, rather hysterically.

"The whole subject is too silly for any use," I managed to say, in a superior kind of way. "It does very well for Boston, of course, but it will never have much of a run here in New York."

"What a narrow way of looking at it, Clare!" exclaimed Gwendolen, protestingly. "Of course, I'm not a theosophist, but I'm broad-minded enough to realize that what's true in Benares or Boston must be true in New York. If reincarnation is really going on in this world, I can't believe that any exception is made in favor of our Knickerbocker families."

Again I laughed aloud, nervously. It was pleasing to me to discover that Gwendolen had a mind open to startling truths, but I regretted the fact that I must henceforth constantly fight against the temptation to tell her my great secret. The imminence of my peril in this regard was illustrated at once, for she turned to me suddenly and asked, with great vivacity of manner:

"Where is the baby, Clare? Won't you let me see him at once? I came to visit him, you know; not you or Tom. He's got such a lovely name! 'Horatio' is so fine and dignified! What do you call him for short, my dear?"

"I have not given him a nickname, Gwendolen," I answered, coldly. "If you wish to, we'll go to the nursery at once. As I told you in my letter, we've had difficulty in getting the baby a nurse. Just at present, I'm obliged to spend most of my time with him. But I gave you fair warning, you know."

"I'm so glad that I can have the run of the nursery," cried Gwendolen, gaily, springing to her feet. "I do so love really nice children, Clare! Is he a jolly baby? Will he take to me, do you think?"

I answered her question as we reached the door of the nursery: "I am sure I can't say, Gwen. Horatio is very eccentric and pronounced in his likes and dislikes. But if he goes to you at once, follow my advice and don't toss him up and down violently. He says–that is, he doesn't like to be shaken after taken."

CHAPTER X.

AN UNCANNY FLIRTATION.

And thou, too–when on me fell thine eye,
What disclos'd thy cheek's deep-purple dye?
Tow'rd each other, like relations dear,
As an exile to his home draws near,
Were we not then flying?
–*Schiller.*

I must acknowledge that the enthusiasm displayed by the baby when he caught sight of Gwendolen filled me with mingled astonishment and annoyance. He sat bolt upright in his crib, waved his hands joyously in the air, and crowed lustily. I realized that the poor little chap was laboring under a delusion, that he had mistaken Tom's fascinating cousin for a new nurse; but, even so, why should he act as if he were intoxicated with happiness? I could not check the conviction that Jack was making an exhibition of very bad taste by his warm reception of Gwendolen. That I was jealous of her was not true–that would have been absurd–but it was not pleasant to realize that the baby could rejoice openly in the advent of one who, as he believed at the moment, was to take my place in the nursery. Jack's horrible psychical disaster had greatly endeared him to me, and I could not help feeling hurt at his eagerness to go to a perfect stranger. There was something not altogether infantile in the way in which he threw his chubby little arms around Gwendolen's neck and tucked his smiling little face into her cheek, chuckling contentedly, while the girl laughed aloud.

"Isn't he just the sweetest little thing that ever lived!" cried Gwendolen, with spontaneous enthusiasm. "Did you see him jump right into my arms, Clare? Such a thing never happened to me before. Is he always so cordial to strangers?"

"As I told you, Gwendolen, Horatio goes to extremes in his likes and dislikes. He evidently approves of you." For the life of me, I could not prevent my voice from sounding cold and harsh. But the girl was too thoroughly interested in the baby to note the lack of cordiality in my tones.

"'Oo clear 'ittle angelic creature," she was murmuring to him, as she seated herself in the rocking-chair, with Jack cuddled in her arms. "Will 'oo always love 'oo cousin Gwen?"

Here was a kind of baby-talk that Jack seemed to like, for his every sound and movement expressed approval of Gwendolen's nonsensical endearments. But, I must admit, it annoyed me. Logically, I could not blame Gwendolen for displaying a sudden fondness for the baby. She had no way of knowing that she

was holding my first husband on her lap. I was glad that she was ignorant of the fact, but, while my mind fully exonerated her, my heart protested against her fetching ways with the child. Jack as a baby had never appeared to such advantage. He smiled and laughed, winked his eyes, made funny little holes with his mouth, and waved his tiny fists in the air in a kind of oratorical way that was irresistibly amusing.

"He's perfectly sweet!" cried Gwendolen, glancing at me with dancing eyes. "I don't think that I ever cared much for a baby before, Clare, but Horatio has cleared the first bunker beautifully. Is he always like this?"

I laughed aloud, nervously. I hadn't the courage to say anything uncomplimentary of the baby at that moment, not knowing how far I could trust Jack's self-control, and so I remarked, in a non-committal way:

"He's a very good baby, on the whole, my dear. Of course, he isn't to be blamed for protesting if things don't go just right with him."

"Of course 'oo aren't, 'oo lovely 'ittle caramel," murmured Gwendolen, her cheeks pressed against Jack's baby face. "I've always been so sorry for babies, Clare, because they couldn't talk. It must be trying when a pin is sticking into you somewhere to have your gums rubbed by a misguided nurse, or to be rocked violently when the heat of the room has made your head ache."

The baby gave vent to a most astounding yell of delight, a very precocious exhibition of emotion that made Gwendolen laugh merrily. But his vivacity quite upset me. I feared, momentarily, that his enthusiasm would find speech an imperative necessity, and that Gwendolen would discover to her consternation that what was theory in Boston had become practice in New York. Thereupon I acted in a most tactless way. I bent down and removed Jack from Gwendolen's arms to mine.

"Put me back, or I'll denounce you," whispered the baby, in my ear. Then he began to howl in the most exaggerated infantile manner. I was annoyed to realize that my cheeks had flushed with anger and that a feeling of hot jealousy had swept over me. Gwendolen, sympathetic and impressionable, had noticed the outward manifestations of my inward turmoil and had hurried toward the door.

"I'll go back to my room, Clare," she said, as she passed me. "When you've put him to sleep, come to me. I want to tell you what I think of him. *Au revoir*, 'oo dear, sweet 'ittle marshmallow!"

Jack and I were alone in the nursery, and I seated myself wearily in the rocking-chair, holding the uneasy baby on my lap.

"What did you do that for, Clarissa?" he growled, kicking violently with his expressive legs. "I was in for the time of my life–this life, I mean–and you deliberately snatched me from that lovely girl's arms and practically drove her

from the room. Do you not realize that you have been very cruel, my dear? Surely you can't be ignorant of the fact that I lead a very colorless life. Suddenly the tiresome humdrum of my existence is broken by a chance for a perfectly harmless flirtation. Do you rejoice at your little baby's momentary relief from ennui? Not at all; you treat me with the most tyrannical harshness, grudging me the slightest change in the horrible monotony of this infernal nursery. What's that girl's name?"

"Gwendolen Van Voorhees," I murmured. "She's Tom's cousin."

"She called herself Cousin Gwen and expressed the hope that I might always love her," mused Jack, gazing with eyes too old for his face at his dimpled, restless fists. "I don't like Tom, Clarissa, but his cousin does him credit. I shall always love her. No, don't rock, my dear. I don't want to go to sleep. If you don't mind, Clarissa, I should like to lie very quiet and think about Gwendolen. Isn't it a beautiful name? I'm sorry my name's Horatio. Don't rock, not even a little bit. I'm very nervous, am I not? I'd give half a dozen slips and my silver rattlebox for a smoke, Clarissa. Do you think that a cigarette would hurt me?"

"You remember, Jack, that cocktails didn't agree with you," I argued, soothingly. "I'm sure that tobacco would be very bad for you."

"Of course you are," grumbled the baby, resuming his impatient gestures with his legs. "You think that everything worth having is bad for me, Clarissa. I suppose that you intend to cut me off entirely from Cousin Gwen?"

"Don't be unreasonable, Jack," I implored him. "Gwen can come here just as often as she cares to. But you must realize, Jack, that I have no confidence left in your veracity or discretion. You don't keep your promises to me and you seem to have no realization of the terrible results that might come from a discovery of your identity."

"Is this a curtain-lecture, Clarissa?" growled Jack. "I tell you flatly, my dear, that I can't stand much more. I've about reached the limit of my self-control. There's a deadly dullness to this kind of a life that is slowly driving your sweet 'ittle baby-boy, Cousin Gwen's caramel and marshmallow, to desperation."

"But what can you do, Jack?" I asked, frightened by the peculiar tones in his voice. "My role is as hard to play as yours, is it not? We must both be brave and circumspect, my dear."

"Bah!" exclaimed the baby, rudely, clutching at my chin with his absurd little hands. "You may rock a little now, Clarissa, very gently. Perhaps I could get

a nap if you'd stop scolding me for a few moments."

CHAPTER XL
A MYSTERIOUS ELOPEMENT.

Empty is the cradle; baby's gone!
–*Old Song.*

From one standpoint I have come close to the end of my narrative; from another, I am still at its beginning. But, with Tom's permission, I have placed the foregoing facts before the public in the hope that the statement may be read by somebody in Europe, Asia, Africa or America, who is able to assist us in solving a hard problem. The New York newspapers have mingled fact and fiction, realism and romance, in the articles bearing upon what they call "The Great Minturn Mystery," in a manner most annoying to my husband and myself. The only really sympathetic and enlightening account of the awful affliction that has fallen on our erstwhile happy home was printed by a Boston journal whose editor is a Buddhist. But I'm getting too far ahead of my story!

Yet I have nothing to relate that you, who keep abreast of the times, do not already know. You remember reading in your morning newspaper, a few months ago, of the strange disappearance from Mr. Thomas Minturn's town house of his baby, Horatio Minturn, and a guest, the well-known society favorite, Miss Gwendolen Van Voorhees. You have perused, I suppose, subsequent journalistic presentments of the case, telling how futile had been the search for our lost ones. Tom, as the public knows, has offered enormous rewards for the slightest clue that should serve to throw even a glimmer of light upon the most astounding disappearance of modern times. We have employed the most famous detectives in all parts of the world in our vain efforts to find some trace of the fugitives–if such Jack and Gwendolen may be called. But, up to the present moment, we have learned nothing that can help us in any way in our weary quest. In desperation, and as a last resort, I have written and published this account of the events that led up to our great loss. When the editor of a magazine insisted that I should choose a title for my amazing presentment of our weird experience, a lump came into my throat and tears bedimmed my eyes. Had not Jack himself, with a most uncanny

foresight, chosen the title of my unwilling deposition? "Clarissa's Troublesome Baby!" Alas, how little did I realize at the time of his suggestion how appropriate would be this caption to my melancholy tale!

"Where's Gwendolen?" Tom had asked of me at breakfast upon the morning of the fateful day that was to shatter for all time my second husband's materialistic tendency of thought. "In the nursery, as usual, I presume?"

"She'd rather play with the baby than eat or sleep, Tom," I answered laughingly. "In the present dearth of nursemaids, Gwendolen's enthusiasm for Horatio is most opportune."

Tom laughed as he lighted his after-breakfast cigar.

"Let's go to the nursery, Clarissa, and bid them good morning. I haven't seen Horatio for forty-eight hours. I'm glad that Gwen likes him so well, but I really feel that I am entitled to a glimpse of the youngster now and again."

Thus did Tom and I gaily mount the stairway to our doom. We rushed, so to speak, with laughing faces, to the very edge of a precipice, and toppled over, with a quip half spoken upon our white lips.

As we entered the nursery, crying playfully to Gwendolen to abdicate the throne she had usurped, we were struck silent and motionless by the sudden discovery that the room was empty. Tom was, of course, less shocked than I by Jack's deserted nest. There came to me, as I stood there, cold and trembling, on the threshold of the nursery, the conviction that I was confronting the scene of another miracle, an environment within which I should never again be annoyed by psychical mysteries.

I was recalled to myself by Tom's voice saying:

"What do you suppose has become of them, my dear? Gwendolen! Horatio! Where are you?"

Ah, but the pathos of it all! Gwendolen! Horatio! Where are you? Were you wilfully, heartlessly selfish, indifferent, in your strange ecstasy, to the sorrow that you brought to others, or were you powerless in the grasp of fate, forced through psychical affinity to disappear thus weirdly from the sight of men?

You must see, dear reader, that what I have written cannot come to an end that will satisfy either your mind or your heart. I began with an exclamation point; I must conclude with an interrogation mark. And in that obligation I find that my tale resembles every human life. We come to earth with a cry, and we leave it with a question. So far as man is concerned, evolution has been merely a zigzag progress up from protoplasm to a problem.

And how has Tom withstood the unmaterialistic revelation that I have been forced to make to him and to the public? Has he been shaken in his faith in the teachings of Büchner, Haeckel and Herr Plätner? Of course, being a man, he is slow to admit that his nursery has vouchsafed to him more enlightenment than

his library, but he has grown very gentle and sympathetic when I talk to him about the possibility that the dreams of the brooding East may be nearer the ultimate truth than the syllogisms of the practical West. You see, it was a condition, not a theory, which confronted Tom that morning in our empty nursery.

Nevertheless, he tells me that he has just hired a young detective, who is said to have a genius for solving mysteries that his older colleagues have abandoned as beyond their skill. Let me assure you, dear reader, that if Tom's latest employee gets on the track of Gwendolen Van Voorhees and little Horatio Minturn, I shall see to it that the public be instantly informed of the fact.

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