But she must have felt that movement, for with a spring in which was no awkwardness, no scrambling, she got to her feet and stood above him.

"Don't touch me!" she said. And her voice had in it that harsh, hard ring which he had heard used to the sot her husband.

Slowly, he, too, rose. They stood and the eyes of each could see of the other just the pale blur of the face and a thickening of the darkness where the body blocked out such light as there was. There was a silence which seemed to last an hour. And then, still without moving, the woman spoke.

"I'll be going back," she said.

He answered, repeating her words dazedly but with a question somehow in them.

She said, idly almost, as if now, emotion having exhausted her, she discussed the affairs of another:

"It's not cheerful. That it's not. . . ."

He took her cue; it suited him, for his head and the thoughts within it were a fiery whirl in which nothing was certain; nothing real save the necessity to find and seize and clutch reality. He said:

"What's the matter? Is . . . he givin' trouble again?"

"Trouble?" She laughed again. Or rather it was not laugh, nor exclamation, nor query; it was that little sound of "Ha!" whose enigma he had noticed not once but many times.

"Trouble," she said. "He's dying!"

"What?" He spoke with the sharpness of astonishment.

"That . . . that night," she said. "He was dead, rotten drunk. You remember? Well, doctor says that was the last straw. He did it once too often, see? He's never come round yet. Not properly. And he's had a stroke. An' now there's haemorrhage. . . . And the house full of doctors and nurses. . . . And it drags on. . . ."

"I . . ." said the Sailor. "I . . . I'm . . ."

In the darkness she swayed closer to him. Her hand came up, groping, and seized the lapel of his coat and grasped and shook it. She said quickly, in a voice which showed the words to come through clenched teeth:

"If you say you're sorry, I'll . . . You're not sorry! If it matters to you any way, you're glad. Otherways, you're nothing. . . . For God's sake!" she cried, her voice loud now and round with vehemence, "for God's sake, let's be honest! I'm not sorry. I'm glad, glad! Glad, I tell you! And not to
any one will I say I'm sorry! . . . *Honesty.* That's what I want and I've never had and haven't been. . . . Is it honest to go on living with an animal when the sight and touch of him makes you sick? Sick! . . . But I've finished with all that. I'd made up my mind; that morning I made it up, after . . . after you. I was going to leave him. Anyway, I was, whether . . . whether I was to go . . . go alone . . . or . . ."

She broke off, leaving her sentence in mid-air, suspended as it were, between them. But the fingers still gripped his coat lapel, straining and twisting at it.

He said, stupidly by reason of that whirling which still was in his head:

"But . . . what were you doing here . . . crying. . . ."

She started. He could feel, through the arm whose hand gripped his coat, the sudden tension of her whole body.

"You fool!" she said. "You damned fool!" The hand was jerked suddenly from his coat. He felt a little rushing of air and then fingers and palm smacked, vicious and stinging, across his cheek.

"What the . . ." he began, startled.

And then, in a soft rush, she came close to him. Her body was pressed against him and her arms came up and clutched his shoulders and held him. Her head was strained back and now the face was so near that, looking down, he could see the features and something of its pallor, and the look of strain about the great dark eyes. She began to sob, quietly now and helplessly, like a child fatigued. He saw that her lips moved and that shining tears stood brimming in the eyes. He bent his head and heard the whisper. She was saying:

". . . So very sorry. . . . I didn't . . . but I've had such a time . . . please, will you kiss me. . . . Hold me very tight and kiss me. . . ."

There swayed up in him, choking his throat so that he could not speak, a great wave of greater emotions. A dark, soft wave shot every here and there with fierce yet kindly lights. A longing took him, and a memory, and a thought of past and present and future, and he grew aware, through all this and of it, of that deep, warm ecstasy which greets the man who has come at last to the goal of a quest.

His arms lifted and went about her shoulders. His head came down. There came a small sigh from the woman in his arms and yet farther her head went back. . . .
And then, as it seemed, so close were they that almost the meeting of their lips was accomplished, the Sailor raised his head. A sharp movement; it was as if he were listening. But he had heard nothing nor was striving after hearing. A thought had come to him; a thought and a memory.

His arms slackened; dropped again to his sides. He shook his head like a man in pain. For a moment she was still and quiet against him; then, with a quick thrust of her hands at his chest, stood clear. Her breath came hard and fast. She was erect again and rigid who had just now been soft and pliant in his arms. She said harshly:

"And what's come to you?"

He passed a hand across his eyes. His head was tired and pictures which came within it would not go at bidding. He had seen, suddenly and with that dreadful clarity of mental vision, a picture of the girl Valentine. And, while it stayed there, flaming behind his eyes, he could not... it was as if physical forces restrained him... he could not seize the happiness so near to him. It was a strange trick that his mind had played him, for at his inability to clutch what was in his grasp he felt, most acutely, a deep and wounding sense of loss, not the sharp stab of a loss for which a man knows he will be able to find a remedy, but the ache for which he doubts remedy to exist. He began haltingly:

"I thought... it was... Us here, we're..."

She sprang back from him as if he had struck her. She said, her words hard and fast and clear:

"Don't say. Don't trouble to say! I'm going." She came close again and said, clear still but slow and with a passion which shook her: "Don't come after me!" She turned and threw back over her shoulders: "You needn't be fearing. I'll not be seeing the police." With a crackling and a crashing in the light undergrowth, she was gone at a stumbling run.

The Sailor, stupefied, stood his ground. He called:

"Back! Come back! I didn't..." He broke off, cursing beneath his breath. He found futility in himself. He remembered, for the first time, the torch that lay in his pocket. He pulled it out and pressed its switch and a path of white light ending in a pool less bright cut its way through the darkness. He began to run, the torch's beam dancing and jerking before him.

But he had not gone twenty paces before he stopped.
He listened, but not a sound came. He did not, could not indeed, know whether she was going on, or hiding, or off along some clear ride to left or right which he did not know.

He cursed again and again fell silent. Then, with decision, thrust back the torch into his pocket and whistled softly. Betty came; she had been close beside him. He set off to retrace his steps and so gain his old paths and the point where he must leave this wood.

He ploughed on, not lighting his way but most careless as to the noise of his progress. His brows were creased into a deep frown which cut the V between his eyes. He had, now, so much upon his mind; a problem so momentous that its solution must wait. He forced, with an effort which cost him far more than then he knew, his mind to dwell upon the work that must be done; work which, done, would leave him free to wrestle with these wars and changings of wars which went on, as never before such things had, within his head.

CHAPTER XI

His pace upon the return journey was rather more than twice that of its original. He ran through the trees and across the clear spaces. He kept close to the bank of the Mallow road and so came soon upon the clearing and the cart track and, upon the far side of that track, Tom's hut.

At first, after a careful glance, he was for going straight to the door of the hut and so back once more into safety. But Betty gave him pause. As he stepped out from the trees and on to the little slope of rough grasses which led down from them to the cart track, she moved suddenly, with a sharp imperious thrust, against his knee. He stopped, looking down at her. She was rigid and trembling. She pointed, and in the direction of the hut itself. He bent down and put a hand upon her and with his fingers found that her hackles were up. Deep down within her, so that he could feel the vibrations, began a ghostly, ominous rumble.

He straightened himself, to pull thoughtfully at his lower lip and glance from the great dark shape of the dog to the barely visible squareness, fifteen yards away, of the hut. He shook his head and lifted his shoulders. He did not understand, and where he did not understand he was wary.

He went then, Betty tense and silent as a shadow at his side, diagonally out across the open and so came, by passing
behind the hut, to the wall in which was the one window. Through its green curtain he could see light, but the curtain was of a texture which made sight of the objects through it impossible. He put up cautious fingers and found to his amazement, that the window itself was closed.

Then from the ground came a whine, instantly repressed, from Betty. Against his leg, through the canvas gaiter, he could feel the storm of trembling eagerness which shook her. Softly and without a whisper of sound he moved away from the window and went round the hut to its doorway side. At the door, with a tap from his boot against her ribs to keep the dog silent, he bent his head and pressed it to the wood and listened.

Half he had expected voices. But none came to his ear. Movement he heard in plenty; a man going here and there about the hut; a scraping and a rustling with every now and then the sound of taps upon wood. The sort of sounds, in fact, that might well have been made by the hut’s owner. . . . Might have been . . . He bent again, and again set his hand upon Betty and again felt the bristling hair and shaking eagerness and that vibration which was her war-note repressed to silence. . . .

Might have been Tom, but . . . the Sailor straightened himself but stayed with bent head staring at the crouching shape of Betty . . . might have been, but by these symptoms was probably, most probably, not.

He raised his head and with sudden decision placed his hand upon the door. With his toe he touched Betty and said, low:

"Get in! Get in! Speak!" The words, particularly as they were not words of custom, can have meant nothing to her mind. But their tone, hissing and imperative, was enough. She was at the door. Her nails scrabbled wildly against it, her heavy body was flung at it, once and twice and three times, so that it shook and rattled on its fastenings. She put back her head and the great jaws opened and her bay went up to the skies.

The Sailor, backing a pace, flattened himself against the wall to the left of the door. He waited, thinking that this waiting would not be of much length.

He was right. Not more than a second from the time when the dog first used her voice there came quick steps within the hut and the click of the latch lifting. The door then was
opened, but only for so much as allowed of a head to be
thrust round its edge, look this way and that with furtive
glances and then with the lips hurl down words at the frenzied
dog.

The Sailor saw that this head, which he could only see
as a round dark splodge, was higher up the door than would
have been the head of Tom. Seeing, he leapt from where
he stood and clearing the raging impotent Betty, clamped
his fingers on the door’s edge and with a jerk of his arm
pushed the door itself open and back, almost flush with the
wall.

There was a scurry of events. With the push and the
door coming wide, the owner of the head stumbled backward.
Past him, a grey streak, went Betty, silent now. The Sailor
took a quick pace forward and sideways, so that he was now
close to the stranger. This one, recovering from what had
almost been a fall, found himself seized and most painfully
lifted, tall man that he was, so that his legs jerked and kicked
full a foot from the ground. He could barely breathe for
the grip upon the back of his collar; would have screamed,
had he been able, at the cruel constriction of the grip upon
the back of his belt.

Inside, the Sailor peered over the shoulder of his burden.
He saw that Betty, whining, was nosing frantic affection at
her master, who, his arms lashed behind him, lay huddled in
a graceless heap by the foot of the pallet bed.

“Ah!” said the Sailor. He put down his burden, who,
clutching and clawing to ease the collar which had been
drawn tight across his throat, turned on unsteady legs to face
his attacker.

So soon as that turn was complete, the Sailor struck. His
left fist drove at the body, coming home at a point some inch
or so below the curving away of the breast bone. The head
came forward with a jerky rush, its mouth wide, its eyes
staring; the Sailor’s right fist, carefully moderated strength
behind it, landed with a dull clap exactly upon the angle of
the jaw beneath the left ear.

The man sank, going to the floor like a suddenly deflated
pneumatic toy. Over the limp body the Sailor stepped.
He said:

“Wait!” And shut the door and latched it, and then
was kneeling beside Tom, at whom Betty still whined and
nosed and fawned. With his knife he cut the clumsy bonds
in one stroke. Tom got to his feet like a boy and stood grinning, rubbing at his arms. He said:

"Obliged, I'm sure. . . . Glad to see you, Shorty!"

The Sailor jerked a thumb behind him. "What's that?" he said.

They turned and Tom passed him and stood looking down at the huddled figure. "Ye're askin'," he said. "But I c'n tell. . . . Interodooce ye." He waved a hand. "My frien', Mr. Short—the Reverent Mister Something Bloody Pole."

The Sailor whistled. "Pole, eh?" He scratched his head. "What d'you know about that?" He came and stood close and put out a foot, and with it turned the body over. "This is a night!" he said. "They're goin' down like flies!" He laughed.

"What's that?" Tom looked up at him sharply.

"Tell you later," the Sailor said. He looked about the room and its disorder. Everything was out of place save the bed. The table had been dragged aside, the chairs overturned; the few books, covered with canvas by their owner, had been torn from their shelf and lay, their leaves scattered, all about the floor. The pots and pans were overturned; the shelves of miscellany were empty and their contents lying at their feet in uncouth heaps.

"Tidy scrap!" said the Sailor.

"Scrap your blasted foot!" Tom was indignant. "Scrap my eye! There wasn't no scrap. Think I couldn't deal wi' that!" He began to smile again. "Scrap your back leg! He got me outside. I went out f'r some water . . . an' slam!" His hand went up and felt tenderly at the back of his head. "Didn't know nothing then till I foun' meself lyin' here, like four pennorth o' Gawdelpus done up ugly and stuck on a fork." He looked about the room, smiling and still feeling tenderly at his head. "No. Mess an' litter's result o' his Rev-runque playin' hunt the thimble. . . . He was after some letter, he was. Funny, isn't it?" He laughed.

"It is!" said the Sailor, and laughed too. He put his hand to a pocket and brought it away with his packet and waved this under the nose of Tom. Who said:


"Strikes me . . ." The Sailor was thoughtful. "Strikes me the parson's done us proud. Yeah. . . . He put himself where I wanted. . . . How's Val?" he said.
Tom said: "All bonzer couple hours ago. Since then; well I knows not, not havin' seen."

The Sailor turned on his heel and crossed to the bed. As he lifted it clear and bent to raise the stone, he said over his shoulder:

"Shan’t be long. Keep y'r eye on Holy Joe; he’ll be round in a bit."

Then he was gone, his legs, his body, his head, all engulfed by that horizontal doorway in the earth.

He came to the bottom of the iron ladder and began to grope his way along the narrow, earth-walled passage, at whose end he could see the faint, outer edges of the light cast by the oil lamp which hung upon that beam which ran from floor to roof at her bed’s head. He went slowly, more slowly by far than he need. He was checked by swirling thoughts and emotions in which were currents and cross-currents.

But he came to the end of the passage in time and turned out of the darkness into the great square chamber. He saw the bed, a pool of bright light cast upon and around it, like the centre of a stage. . . . Upon the bed she sat. Her head was bent down, staring not at the floor but into her lap. He was struck, with a feeling he could not analyse, by something forced in the carriage of her body; some unnatural tension which gave a harsh unreality to line.

Disturbed, he went forward quickly, and now he saw that in her lap, gripped by two hands whose trembling was betrayed by the sound of faint rustling, she held a newspaper.

In two strides he reached her. "Val!" he said. "Val!"

She did not look up; did not move so much as a muscle. He put down a hand and, bending, closed its fingers upon the folded paper and twitched it away.

She became aware of him then. She gave a little cry and threw up her head and then sprang to her feet. He saw that her face was not the face which he had left that afternoon. . . . It was again the face of the terror-ridden, hysterical child; the white, strained, distorted mask which he had seen upon the morning when he found Auntie lying dead in her room with only half a head.

He looked down, for an instant only, at the newspaper; saw that it was one of the more sensational of the batch from which Tom had read to him; saw one sub-headline: POLICE HUNT MAN AND GIRL. He said curtly:

"Where’d you get this?"
In the flat, lifeless tone which went, as he would always remember, with the little white mask of a face, she said:

"Asked Tom for it . . . it was sticking up out of 'is pocket . . . He . . . he wouldn't give it . . . Then he left 'is coat 'n' I took it . . . He didn't notice . . . "

The Sailor put his hand upon her shoulder. It seemed to his imagination that the coldness of the young flesh struck through the cotton to his fingers. He said:

"Sit down!" And pressed with a gently heavy hand.

She sat, looking up at him with wide, staring eyes, not eyes which looked at a man personally; eyes which were reflections of the fear within her. He said, looking down at her:

"Why fill your fool little head with this trash?" He beat the rolled up paper against his open palm.

She suddenly flung up her hands before her face; the palms strained down, pressing with a strength which left their knuckles white, against her eyes.

"They'll get me!" Her voice was a harsh yet reedy scream. "They'll shut me up . . . shut me up . . . I know they will . . . ." She flung down her hands again and leapt up and seized his coat with a clutch whose strength was almost unbelievable. She cowered against him, shivering and sobbing, half-kneeling, half-lying, her weight kept from the floor only by the pull of her hands.

He put an arm about her and lifted her small weight. He held her there against his side. Through all his pity there shot for a moment the faintest glimmer of distaste, gone as soon as it had come. But with its going there went something else. The little young body, limp now and soft and warm against him, waked nothing in him save determination to protect. He said: "Take hold of yourself!" His tone was decisive yet gentle. He took a pace forward and lowered her to sit again upon the bed. He kept the arm around her and sat himself by her side.

"Listen here now," he said. "Nobody's goin' to get you; nobody's goin' to shut you up! They're not going to do it. See?"

There came from her no reply. Against his arm he could feel once more the extraordinary tension of her body. He said:

"Will you speak! . . . Hear what I said?"

And then she did not answer; it was as if his words had not
been uttered. She said, whispering now in that whisper of hers that told more than any scream:

"Take me away . . . make Tom take me away. . . ."

"Tom!" said the Sailor. His brows went up. "Yes . . . we might do that. . . . But look here, what's matter with staying where you are?"

Against his arm her body strained, striving to break free. She beat at him with small, soft fists. "I won't stay! I won't stay!" Her voice was now higher, almost a real scream. "I'm shut in! I'm shut in here!"

He strove to soothe her with words and hand; he did, after a time, succeed at least in quieting the voice; but the rigidity of her body would not lessen. He said:

"What d'you mean, 'shut in here'? Didn't feel that before?"

"No, no! But now . . . now . . . I felt safe like . . . now I'm not . . . they'll get me no mind what you do . . . they'll get me. . . . They'll . . ." Her voice began to rise again.

He shook her by the shoulder. "Stop that!" he said. "Stop it!" He waited while the incipient scream sank to speech again and from incoherent words to a whispered murmuring; finally died away. He said then, using the only sedative at the moment within his power:

"Easy as she goes there! Keep quiet now and then in the morning we'll see about moving on out of this. . . ."

She strained to get free, leaning back against that vast encircling arm. "Not to-morrow!" she said. "Not to-morrow . . . Why not now? Now, before they get here. . . ."

"Quiet!" said the Sailor sharply. Then, when quiet she was: "Can't be done, kid. . . . Get that in your little head. . . . Nothin' doing to-night. . . . We'll see in the morning. . . ."

She clutched at his coat. She said: "We . . . why . . . why don't . . ." She stammered more and fell silent.

He peered down sideways at her. He said: "Out with it!"

Words came then in a torrent. "Let me and Tom go . . . me and Tom. He'll take care of me . . . Tom and me go. Then when they come . . . they come they'd . . . you could tell them it wasn't me . . . you could say . . . say . . ." She failed again, stammered words and phrases tailing off into
heavy silence. Her lips trembled beneath the haunted, staring eyes.

"Meaning..." said the Sailor very slowly, "...meaning you to go with Tom and me to stay here and when they come, here's me!" His tone was expressionless, like the eyes with which he looked down, twisting his body the better to see, at the white face which stared up at him.

The small head, gleaming burnished copper in the steady soft lamp-light, was nodded. She gained courage. She said:

"Yes. Yes. That's it. You wouldn't mind if they shut you up and they'd soon... soon find it was wrong and... and..."

She broke off as he rose, gently moving to do so the arm which had held her still. He said:

"Don't you worry that head of yours any more, kiddie. We'll fix something... There's your way... or p'r'aps another. But we'll fix it..." His head, as he stood above her, was higher by a foot or more than the top of the lamp; it was therefore in semi-darkness and almost invisible to her. She could not, even had she tried, have seen what expression it bore. His voice was level and calm.

He turned away and said, over his shoulder:

"Got to go up for a bit. Don't be scared; I'll send Tom down for company." And now his voice was dragging and weary. Slowly, he walked away, gradually fading through the ever-dimming circles of lamp-light.

Slowly down the dark passage he went and up the iron ladder and at last emerged into the hut above. He saw, as his head came clear above its floor, that Pole had recovered, for he sat limply, with his back to the stone, upon a chair drawn up to the table. Beside him, upon the floor, was Betty. She sat with her eyes bright and unwinking upon him; her mouth was open and her tongue showed scarlet against the glistening ivory of her teeth; she panted and trembled with longings. So often as he stirred, or she took it into her mind that he had moved, there came that deep and warning rumble, not subdued now by need for silence. Facing his prisoner, at the other end of the table, stood Tom, who smoked and smiled and every now and then felt with careful fingers at a swelling upon the back of his head. He said, as he saw the Sailor emerge:

"Keep quite quiet, your Ruv'runce." He jerked a sly thumb towards Betty; then came to the Sailor and watched
him as he climbed from the trap and left it open. He said, as he saw the Sailor’s face:

“Hell! What’s up, Shorty?”

“Up? . . . Why nothin’.” The Sailor raised inquiring brows. He did it with an admirable naturalness, but Tom shrugged. Together they looked a moment at the huddled back of their prize. The Sailor said, putting his lips to Tom’s ear and whispering:

“Leave it to me. Go down and cheer up that kid. Tell her anything only keep her mind off the police. She pinched The Wire from your pocket and that’s torn it.”

Again Tom looked at him. The glittering black eyes were cloudy with thought. But he said:

“Right, cap’n. I’m off.” He jerked a thumb at the prisoner. “No fight in him,” he said; then raising his voice: “I’m leaving your Rev’runce. My frien’, Mr. Short, he’ll be seein’ to th’ demands of hospitality. Don’t move now!” He winked at the Sailor and was gone.

The tweed-clad back in the chair stiffened with a sudden tension which told of desire to turn so strong that repression was barely possible. From the floor came low, angry thunder from the throat of Betty.

The Sailor did not move. He had need, before he began upon this work in hand, to deal sternly with himself; for this work would demand that a man should have all of his mind upon it and a determination that completed it should be. It was no work for one to whom, suddenly, there seemed no salt to the meal of living; to whom nothing was now of importance; whose mind seemed drained of zest and fire and interest.

This night had seen him throw down the real for the illusory; had seen him cast off that which, too late, he knew he wanted, in exchange for something which now he knew he never had in truth desired; had seen him robbed, by a pin-prick, of that great bubble of his own mind’s blowing; that bubble of size and symmetry and wonderful tender pale colours, the bubble he had fancied real until at its vanishing he cursed himself for ever having been duped into belief in its reality.

He dropped to sit upon the edge of Tom’s bed and took his head into his hands. Like that he stayed for minutes which, to the man behind whose back he was, must surely have seemed as many hours.

Then, when almost he had come to the borders of sleep,
forgetting or not heeding the work still to do, there came a thought which, though at first he sneered at it, grew from a needle point of light in the darkness of his mind until it became a spreading steady brightness which destroyed the gloom. He might be wrong . . . there was the chance . . . he might be wrong in supposing that what had been done that night could not be forgotten . . . It was a chance and perhaps none too good a one; but where there was a chance and while, he could not be other than eager to take it. And to take it he must first finish off these other, material matters.

He got suddenly to his feet; there was again in his great body the strength and quickness which were its habit. He walked up to the table and round it. He stood, leaning his hands upon its edge and looking down at the face which he now saw clearly for the first time.

He nodded. "Evening," he said. A little ruthless smile twisted the corners of his mouth. He continued to stare. He remembered a phrase of Tom's: "Sorter wash-out yaller, that bloke's eyes . . . but shiny. Bleedin' queery eyes."

These eyes were now raised to the Sailor's, meeting his with a steadiness belying strangely the obvious fear in their owner's body. The long, thin lips parted for speech.

The Sailor held up a hand. "You talk," he said, "when you're asked. Not before." He put out the other hand behind him and dragged up a chair and sat.

CHAPTER XII

He said:

"Pole: You're the dirtiest bit of work I ever struck. An' that, let me tell, is sayin' a whole plateful! . . . Listen. You get the screw put on you by that old bitch that's dead up yonder. It gets too tight. So you think to yourself: the only way's to finish her off. Very sensible. Very proper. Leastways, I'm not the one to say contrary. But . . . and here's your stink . . . but you do the trick in such a way it'll look like some one else's doing. Not, mind you, just any other person, but one particular person; the young kid that you know lives with the woman . . . No, hold your trap till I tell you speakin's in order! . . . It's no manner of use for you to tell me that you never meant or never thought or didn't this or didn't that! So get that out of your head. You knew, Pole! Knew. Just exactly what you were about. You wait till the
kid's out of the way; you go in; you get hold of that toy hammer, do the job, grab what you think are all the letters and beat it. You know the kid's the only person in the house besides Auntie; you know Auntie uses her badly... harsh anyway... bad enough to make it seem possible that the kid went cracka an' did her in. You know the kid's nervy an' taut-strung... you know all this. Knowin' it, it must be that you made use of it. Otherwise you'd 've managed the whole job in a different way... You ——, Pole!"

He finished on that and sat back, taking his arms from the table and crossing them on his chest and tilting back his chair. There was silence for a long moment, while the mad pale eyes in the sallow face of the clergyman roved this way and that about the little chamber, lighted in its centre by the soft golden light of the big lamp upon the table, but dark as to corners and roof with a soft impenetrable darkness which seemed to make the centre, when one's eyes came back to it, a microcosm of the world in a peep-show for Olympians.

The Sailor said:
"You can talk now."

"What," said the deep, smooth voice, "do you want me to do?" The tone of this voice, its note and quality and music, startled the Sailor. He found himself glancing quickly up at the eyes again, now steady, now shifting, but always with that strange hard sheen across the top of their queer paleness. It was as if there were two men with him here; one a strange fellow with the lean dark face and wiry strength and treacherous ways of a wharfside crimp, the other an honest, kindly gentleman. He looked hard again and said, after a pause:
"What I want you to do isn't in it. It's what you're going to do... I'm letting you speak because fair's fair."

The voice said slowly: "I understand... But why, if you..." It ceased suddenly and with its ceasing its owner's hand came from the pocket of the tweed jacket. A dark small shape flew through the air above the table top, straight for the Sailor's head, and, with the throwing, the thrower leapt. Away from Betty he jumped and with a flick of the wrist sent the small but heavy chair crashing down atop of her rising body.

There was noise; a whirlwind of falling chairs and stamping feet and a howl from Betty changing at once to a low savage baying. Then, as suddenly as pandemonium had begun, silence fell and the moving players were settled in a tableau.
Beside the table, on the far side of the door, they were grouped. The Sailor, his captive’s back pressed to the front of his own body, held by their wrists the captive’s arms, one twisted backwards and upwards, the other downwards and inwards. Betty, satisfied that the matter was being properly dealt with yet baulked of the sanguine share she had wished, sat quiet but longing, her jaws drooping flecked saliva, her eyes burning, her red strip of tongue shining between white fangs.

“You would, would you?” With each word the Sailor put twisting pressure upon the wrists he held.

A stifled scream came from the thin, grimacing lips of the prisoner. A sound, this, more in keeping with the pale eyes, which now shone with a deeper light, as if they burned with fires deep down within them.

“Chiupraho!” The Sailor twisted again. “Quiet! or I’ll do lots worse. But I’ll gag you first. Mallam? . . . Understand?” He twisted again and harder, and was answered now by only a groan, quickly checked. He said:

“That’s better! . . . Now! You sit down here, my lad!”

He released the arms, bent and set up again the chair which had been thrown down upon Betty. Before his captive had realised that he was free from the grip, he found himself thrust down upon the chair with a thud which sent a jarring pain through spine to scalp. He saw, with swimming eyes, that now this giant who had held him was seated again to face him. Saw also that upon the table, near the giant’s right hand, there lay a large automatic pistol, its dull gunmetal-blue glowing wickedly black in the yellow light.

The Sailor pointed. “See that gat? If you bat an eyelid, sonnie . . . if you so much as move a back hair, I’ll plug you. . . . You aren’t fit to hit!” He pulled out a handkerchief and dabbed at the long, bleeding graze above his left ear. “Yes . . . you got me there. What was it you heaved? Still now!”

He bent quickly and swept his hand along the floor and straightened and laid upon the table a closed, heavy knife of the type used by Boy Scouts.

“You’re a bad padre, Pole. But you’re a damn’ sight worse as a tough.” He pointed to the knife. “If you’d managed to get that open before you heaved it, you might’ve done the trick. . . . Then where’d you be? Eh? Why, same place . . . You know, Pole, there’s folk that would say you ought to be let off because you’re mad . . . you are mad; but not the sort that gets let off. The balmy cramps your
style a bit, though. Else why’d you start these tricks? Suppose you had’ve pulled it off, how’d you explain having done me in? Because there’s my partner left, y’ know. . . . I suppose you thought we were crooks anyhow and daren’t split whatever you did. . . . Yes, that must’ve been it. . . . You were wrong, Pole. Off your course. . . . We’re helping the Police. . . .” His mouth twitched a little. “. . . Only they don’t know it; not so far. But they will.” He fell silent and the quarter smile of sardonic mockery that had been faint about his eyes died away. His face grew hard again, and dispassionate. He put a hand to his breast pocket and took thence the packet of letters.

There was a choked gasp from the throat of Pole, and a little movement, checked at once by the sudden glare from his captor’s eyes, and a rumble from the throat of Betty. The Sailor set the packet upon the table and his hand upon the packet. He said:

“Look here, Pole! This is what: I’ve seen enough of these letters to know what the screw was she put on you. Now, you’ve got to swing for that job, leastways you’ve got to be given in and you’ve got to clinch my proofs with a confession in writing. Get me? . . . If I didn’t get that you might go snake after you’d been handed over. . . . Your position’s this way: You know you’re for it; so you give me that confession now, and I’ll see that these”—he patted the letters—“don’t get flying around. I’ll guarantee they’re not mentioned in the proceedings; I’ll see they’re destroyed. . . . You’ll do this, Pole, I tell you you’re for it. You’ve got guts of a sort, and, knowin’ you’re for it, you may as well take that eight o’clock walk for a straight murder. See? Your line’ll be; she did this and that to me an’ I killed her. They say: What’d she do? You refuse to answer. They can’t but find you guilty but you’ll be a mystery, see? And this business”—he tapped the letters again—“it’ll never come out.”

He watched closely and in silence the pale mask of a face in which only the light eyes seemed alive. He saw, almost as he stopped speaking, a sudden flicker in the eyes. The deep smooth voice spoke. It said:

“Very well. I must do as you wish. You have paper?”

But the Sailor continued to stare. He said at last:

“You’re clever, aren’t you? But not quite clever enough. Listen; these letters’ll stay with me or elsewhere private until your trial’s over, see? Then they’ll be destroyed. Get that.

T.H.B.
You’ve only got my word for it, but that’s got to do you. Understand? Sure you do? Idea’s that if you cut up funny after you’re inside and try any contradictin’ or draggin’ other folk in, or fool at all, or do anything ’cept stick to your yarn, then these’ll be out.” Again he patted the letters. “And now we’ll get on. I’ll give you paper and ink and you’ll begin. See? You’re going to write a letter to the Chief Constable. See? In your own words, describing, with full details, how and when you did the job. . . . And, Pole . . .” He bent forward across the table and forced the pale eyes to meet his own. “. . . Don’t forget we know. So if you were thinkin’ of making the letter not tally with facts, don’t! I know the house and the times and everything; and we’ve checked up your movements that day by questions round your lodging.” He uttered this last sentence, which was entirely untrue, in a voice and with a manner no whit less compelling of belief than that which had marked its veracious forerunners.

Pole’s head sank. There was silence. When he raised it again his face seemed strangely impressive. It looked even thinner, but there was in it a curious placidity and about the thin-lipped mouth a certain dignity of resignation. The pale eyes no longer burned with that frosty fire upon their surface. He said:

“Very well!” Two small and everyday words. But there was in them everything that the Sailor had been fighting for. All that and something else which, until he brought back his mind to what this man had done and what through his doing might have happened to Valentine, for an instant gave him a feeling of compassion.

Then ink and paper were found. It was long work and tedious, for neither the first draft, nor the second, satisfied the Sailor. But the third would serve, with certain alterations. These were made and the whole copied and draft and copy put safe, an envelope having been addressed, in the Sailor’s pocket. Pole said:

“That should be delivered soon.” His voice was changed, it was higher and its beauty of tone was gone. It sounded weary and strained.

“It will be,” the Sailor said.

“I mean,” the tired voice went on, “that there is not far for it to go.”

“No. . . .” The Sailor’s tone was non-committal; the word might have been question or agreement.
There was nothing to show which way the other took it. But he said:

"No. The Hall's quite close." He waved a tired hand towards the southern end of the hut.

The Sailor repressed a smile of pleasure and surprise. He said—assuming an older knowledge than he had:

"Still there, is he? How do you know?"

"I... I..." The weary voice seemed to choke a little. "I... was talking to Inspector Curtis only this morning. I... I happen to know him slightly. He told me his Chief would be there for so long as... as the search went on."

The Sailor laughed. He began to speak and checked himself. He pointed to where, a tumbled heap in the corner, there lay the sacks and blankets of his last night's bed which that morning he had so neatly folded. He said:

"You can sleep if you've a mind to. Pile those up and doss down... There'll be a light, because one of us'll be awake all the time... see? But you can have a lay off."

Pole rose. He went, with dragging feet and bowed head sunk between sagging shoulders, to the corner where the blankets lay. He knelt and roughly folded them until a soft pile was made.

The Sailor watched him roll upon this and lie, head pillowed on his arm. He stood a moment, still watching, but saw no movement. He snapped his fingers and Betty came, grinning and expectant.

"Watch!" he said and pointed. She lay, head up and ears pricked, her gaze steady upon that corner.

The Sailor turned his back and went past the bed to the open trap. He went down three of the iron rungs, then, holding by one hand, lowered his head and whistled. The sound echoed down the narrow shaft and in a moment there came up to him Tom's voice.

"Everything O.K.," the Sailor said. "Come up soon as you can." He went back through the trap and sat down upon the bed and waited, filling his pipe. As he put match to bowl he heard boots clattering upon the rungs and presently Tom stood beside him.

The Sailor jerked with his pipe-stem to the far corner. "Sleep," he said. "Or getting that way. He's all in. Where'll we talk? Lot to tell."

"Jest outside." Tom nodded to the door; then began
lowering the stone. "Safe enough. Near enough, too. One move fr'm 'im, Bet'll tell us."

Outside they went. They leaned against the hut's wall beside the door. The soft clear dark was all about them and their pipe smoke hung heavy in the dew-drenched air. In a voice clear but softer than most whispers the Sailor told the tale of the night so far as it pertained to this task of theirs. While he spoke he gazed straight ahead to where the trees made a blacker darkness. Only once did Tom interrupt. He said, when the Sailor was telling of the letters and what they contained:

"What I can't see, Shorty—if the p'lice found them writin's, they'll sure be after Pole 'emsevles. . . ."

The Sailor cut him short. "They won't. There's not his surname to one of 'em. Pole knows that. He wouldn't 've minded 'em being found: it was when he saw that we'd got one of 'em and might be on to it that they were his, that he got the wind up. And when you'd told me he got the wind up I knew those I found were his. Get me?"

Tom nodded. The Sailor's voice went on. He reached the end of his story.

He came to an end and turned to look down at the figure beside him. He saw that its shoulders were shaking. He waited. Tom said, his voice thickened by the laughter:

"It's only . . . only them rozzers. . . . Four, ye said? *Four*. All lyin' there . . . lyin' there to wait while Nurse comes and takes 'em out o' their cots. . . ." Laughter shook him again. "How ye goin' to laugh *that* off?" he said. "Salt an' battery . . . obstructin' the Law in execution of dooty. . . ."

In the dark the Sailor smiled. "Not too easy," he said. "They may get me for it . . . but I got a hunch they won't. Anyways, if they do, 't won't be much." He turned grave again. "This letter," he said. "Now here's what I think." He spoke for many minutes.

At the end Tom said:

"It'll do. Neat, that is. But ye've got the galliest gall, Shorty, ever I struck."

"Maybe," said the Sailor. He put his hand to his pocket and took out the letter in its envelope. Tom took it. He said:

"Back in fifteen-twenty minutes. Then you can get a kip."
“Kip my eyes!” The Sailor’s tone was heavy now and lifeless. “No sleep for me. But I’ll lay off for a spell.”

He watched for a moment while Tom, silent as the shadow which, in a few steps, he might indeed have been, vanished utterly.

He turned then and went back into the hut. He crossed to the corner where his prisoner lay and stood a moment looking down at the long, limp body and the long, pale face whose whiteness was heightened by the blackness of the hair above it. The man did not move. Watching him, her position not changed by the hundredth of an inch, lay Betty.

The Sailor turned and went across to the bed and sat himself upon it. Looking down, he found that there were still upon his feet, over the heavy boots, remains of the socks which he had put on in the scullery of Auntie’s house. He bent to strip them off, then, with a limp gesture of weariness, left them where they were.

He swung his legs up and settled down upon his back. Every line of his body showed the restless relaxation of fatigue. But his eyes, bright and drawn with tiredness, did not shut. His mind was far from sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

Morning came. Thick grey mist; then the first strong shaft of sunlight which cut through the veil. Then more spears; then a steady blaze which sent the mist flying in tattered wisps like the smoke of fairy fires and promised a day yet hotter than its glowing predecessors.

While only the first grey light came through the small window, there was stir within the hut. The Sailor got stiffly to his feet from the chair in which for hours he had sat unmoving, staring before him with blank eyes behind which his mind, driven, worked protesting but clear. He crossed to the bed and set a hand on the shoulder of the sleeping Tom and shook.

Within half an hour, Tom was gone. So, too, were Betty and the small ass Gibson and the green cart. The Sailor was alone with his prisoner. He lay, this prisoner, in almost the pose in which first he had cast himself down. There was no doubt now that he slept. The Sailor, at the sight of this sleep, was envious a little, and puzzled and in a way admiring. He looked down at it a while, then, lifting his great shoulders,
turned away and busied himself with the making of a fire. When this was done he set water to boil and fetched from the corner of the bed his stick and bundle.

From the bundle he took a clean white shirt and spread it upon the table. He found next his small holdall and from it took his soap and brushes and razor. He bent, then, and pulled from over his boots the torn and befouled socks. The water boiled and he removed it and set in the billy-can's place a pail half-full.

He made then a long and careful toilet. He stripped and bathed himself. He shaved. He cleaned, as best he might, his boots and gaiters and clothing. He did these things with deliberate slowness, so that at the moment when, fresh and neat and somehow seeming larger yet than his usual greatness, he set about finding food to prepare a meal, he heard the rattle of the cart and Tom's voice and a whine from Betty and a soft, small thud-thudding from the hoofs of Gibson. There was a bustling then and the sounds of unharnessing and a jar as the cart was pushed back to rest in its place against the hut's wall.

He went to the door and unlatched it. Betty came; then Tom. The door was shut behind them.

"Well?" said the Sailor.

Tom looked him up and down. "Ve-ry nice!" he said. "Posh, I call it. Gob and burnish!" He looked up at the face, newly washed and shaven, with the hair neat above it. His smile went. "But ye look done in, Shorty," he said.

"Nemmind me!" The Sailor's voice was harsh. "Tell!"

Tom began to laugh. He said:

"As it turned out, no need for me to've gone. . . . That one ye said ye was worried over; concussion or what-not. He's all right. 'Twas him who let t'other birds out. . . . Jest's I got up there 'twas. I was doubting-like. Couldn't hear nought fr'm road an' couldn't think of a 'scuse fr'r goin' in to see. . . . Then this cove comes tearin' round fr'm back o' the house. . . . All wild like he was. . . . He says, 'Help! help!' wavin' his arms. . . . Me, I'm the righteous citizen. . . . Back I goes with im an' we gets in by scullery window an' finds that three . . . How in all flamin' hell I kept serious like, God may know but I doubt it. All very lucky, Shorty, when ye think on it. . . . 'F this bloke hadn't been half-silly he'd never've come the 'Help-elp' business. Then we shouldn't've known everything was bonzer. 'Cos why? 'Cos I wouldn't've jurst go in, not minus a water-tight
reason. . . .” He broke off and began to laugh a reminiscent laugh.

The Sailor smiled; his fatigue put laughter beyond him. He said:

“That one must’ve just waked when you got along. Glad he’s no worse. . . . Say anythin’, did they?”

“Did they say. . . .” Tom’s face was split by a vast smile. “Never knew as country slops had that variety o’ words. . . . Beautiful, it was . . . that Sergeant especially. . . . But I knew—nothing. I’ve learned that bit very careful. What do I know? Why nothin’ at all at all! I didn’t go in there an’ help untie ’em. I didn’t know they was tied up. . . . We settled all that, we did. Most partic’lar that Sergeant was. A bad story to get round, that’d be; did I understand ’im? Yes, yes, I did. . . . Make some o’ them foolish sorter people smile; y’ know, I told ’em, ‘what that sort are?’ He knew all right, he did. Give me to believe, I think rightly, that if me memory was to do a slip in regard to this job—well, there’s such a thing as bein’ thirsty an’ while I was around these parts I necdn’t never be that. Oh, no. . . .”

The Sailor said: “Like to cast an eye over report he puts in.” He smiled again. “Good reading, that’ll be!”

Tom nodded, the smile still broad. He looked at the table. “Gettin’ breakfast’, were ye? Don’t worry, son; my job.” He busied himself, whistling softly, with bacon and eggs and tea.

The Sailor sat and watched, idly smoking. From the fire Tom said, looking up from his pans:

“His Holiness there? What about a rouse?”

“He’s asleep . . . slept since I put him there.” The Sailor waved smoke-wreaths from him and bent forward to peer across the floor at the motionless figure. Near it, in her old place, Betty had of her own initiative, once more taken guard.

Tom turned back to his cooking. “Sleep!” he said. “Bloody wonderful that is! . . . ’D you sleep ’f ye’d got in front o’you what’s comin’ to him?”

“Maybe.” The Sailor put his pipe back into his mouth. “I can see it. . . . He knows what’s coming now; no wonder ing to do.”

“Summat in that . . .” Tom took the frying pan from the fire and stirred about its contents with a knife. “Takin’ ’im with ye . . . up t’ Hall, I mean?”

The Sailor nodded. “That’s best as I figure it. . . . Old
man what's-a-name . . . Carson . . . he'll 've had the letter. . . . Then we come, and his being with me'll help. Get me a hearing. . . . That ought to fit."

"When d'ye reckon t' go?"

"Early's may be." The Sailor rose and stretched. "What's time?"

"Breakfus' time." Tom began to ladle food from pan to plates. "An' by the clock 'bout six-thirty."

"We'll eat," the Sailor said. "And you can see to the kid and tell me how she's going and then it'll be about time to start."

Tom said: "Gettin' there roun' the quarter t' eight?"
He stopped suddenly and came to the table and set down food. He looked keenly at the Sailor's down-bent head. "What ye mean; me go an' see to Val an' come back an' tell if she's bonzer? What's wrong wi' you goin'?"

The Sailor sat, pulling his chair to the table. He did not look up. He said:

"Wrong nothing. Only you go. See?"

"See hell!" Tom said. He sat down and fixed his eyes upon the Sailor, who still did not look up. "I see 'bout as much's a blind nig in dark cellar lookin' fr a black cat as isn't there. That's how I see!"

The Sailor reached for knife and fork. He began to eat. He said his eyes upon his plate:

"Sorry. But that's all. Get me? I've been doin' a lot of things lubber fashion. And now I'm gettin' em ship-shape as soon as I can. . . ." He broke off suddenly like a man who has said more than he means to say.

Tom shrugged. A frown came between his eyes but faded soon into a smile. He said:

"Right. An' that's that, whatever it is, which God may know but I doubt it."

They ate in friendly silence. They finished the meal and Tom went down below the stone. The Sailor waked the prisoner and stood over him and made him eat a little. He then gave him towel and soap and a half-bucket of water and busied himself with putting the little house in order. Betty, banished to her proper post across the door, glanced every now and then at the man who washed, growling deep in her throat.

Then to the wide-eyed astonishment of the captive, who as yet had not seen this, the trap opened and Tom came back. He drew the Sailor close. "None so bad," he said. "But
nervy. I've told her: to-day's the end of this job. She's taken it." He dropped his voice yet lower, and a frown of anxiety showed between his eyes. "Nothing's goin' wrong, is it, Shorty? . . . 'F it did an' they was someway still t' be after that kid, why she'd . . ."

"Put the bung in!" said the Sailor. "There's nothing goin' to be wrong." He turned. "Pole!" he said sharply, raising his voice. "Get a move on. Start in ten minutes."

And in ten minutes they went. From the doorway, shading his eyes from the sun-glare, Lom watched. He saw the two; the Sailor with his towering height, his great bulk and light, rolling walk; the man Pole, long and lean and to-day not striding but shambling and bent like a man of twice his years; he saw them side by side cross the cart track, ascend the bank of rough grass and at last disappear among the deep shadows, latticed every here and there with golden slats of sunshine, of the wood through which lay their shortest path to the Hall. Long after they had passed from his sight he stood there, as if he yet were watching. It had come upon him, suddenly and with a shock of wonder at his previous dullness of perception, that this affair was strange with a strangeness surpassing any of the other ventures which had gone to make up his crowded life. Strange with a different strangeness. A business, this whole thing, which now that two of its leading and strangest characters were no longer before his eyes, seemed almost as if it might have no life except in dreams. He had to force upon himself the memory of the girl who now, at this very moment, hid in that hole of his beneath his feet. That, he found, drove away any mist of fancy. He went back into the hut, walking slowly and with down-bent head. He was become the prey of anxieties. He doubted, all at once, the possibility that this giant of a man, this Sailor whose name he did not know, should carry through this matter, should force to his own will all the machinery of Law and Order, machinery driven by a pig-headed and stubborn race known generically as Gentry. He dropped into a chair and held his head in his hands. Gloom came down upon him and his humour fled. He saw trouble. Bad trouble. For himself and the Sailor and, above all, for the queer, lovely frightened child towards whom he had, for years past and now more acutely, felt almost the emotions of a father.

He sat thus, his head propped in his hands, for long black minutes. Betty came, whining a little with her soft note of sympathy, and laid her great head upon his knee and looked up
to his face with eyes that were large and soft and sorrowful. He put down a hand and absently caressed her ears.

A mile away or so, the Sailor and his companion came out from among trees and found themselves, after crossing grass, upon the well-rolled gravel of a wide, curling carriage drive. They went up this and, turning a corner, came in sight of the house which was their goal. A long, low house whose brick was of a soft and mellowed red well matched with the easy dignity of its lines. From the drive broad steps went up to a great porch, guarded upon either side by a griffon of grey stone, about which were scattered chairs where one might sit and look out, over the yellow gold of the driveway’s gravel, at a lawn of soft emerald where was a fountain and below the fountain lichened steps which led to other lawns and a rose garden hedged about with yew clipped to fantastic shapes.

One might sit . . . A man did. A thick and burly man of easy neatness. Upon his knees was an open letter which, every now and then, he raised and read again. At his shoulder stood one in a uniform of blue cloth having buttons bright upon it and wearing upon his rigidly carried head a flat round cap whose peak was a glinting, shining black.

Pole faltered. The Sailor’s hand gripped at his arm with a pressure which brought back strength to the legs. Their feet crunched boldly upon the gravel with a crisp and purposeful crackle. They came nearer rapidly and now the seated man folded the letter and looked up to study their approach. As he sat, the sun was in his eyes, and the Sailor saw him peer, at first inquisitive, from beneath a shading hand. Then, with a sudden jerk of surprise, he got quickly to his feet; so quickly that the chair which had held him was pushed back to totter and then fall upon its side with a little creaking crash.

The two came closer now, and closer; at last halted at the step’s foot. With the coming of their tread a queer silence fell. The hot sun bathed them, and from somewhere behind their backs came the lewd chuckling of a peacock, the only sound in a stillness which was alive with the promise of thunder to come.

Again the Sailor gripped at the lean tweed-covered arm of the shrinking figure beside him. Side by side still they mounted the steps . . . one step . . . two . . . four; six steps. They halted. Still the silence.

The Sailor’s fingers sank into the arm that they held. The drooping figure straightened. Its head went up and
beneath it the shoulders squared themselves. The Sailor dropped his hand.

Pole said, his voice ravishing the silence with a strange harsh rasping:

"I am Thomas Manderton Pole. Do I address Sir Walter Carson?"

The man who held it glanced swiftly down at the letter in his hand; then up again at the white, unshaven face of the speaker. He said:

"You do." His voice was light and pleasant, with somewhere in it the crispness of army. He held up the letter. "You wrote this?"

Pole bowed his head. "Yes," he said. "I have come to... to give myself up for the murder of the woman Watkyn."

Carson turned. "Inspector," he said. "You will..." He broke off, watching the policeman's face as, mouth half-open he stared over the shoulder of his chief, not at the self-confessed murderer but at the giant who stood at the murderer's side; the man whose description was graven upon every helmet-covered mind within the country and without. The man in whose ear there glinted, sparkling as the sun caught it, the tiny ring of gold which made certainty doubly sure.

The Inspector's astonishment found voice. He took half a step forward. "Sir!" he said urgently. "Sir. That's the... this man..."

He was cut short abruptly. Carson tapped him on the arm.

"Inspector," he said sharply. "This man is Pole." He tapped the letter against the fingers of his free hand. "Pole, you understand? He has given himself up as the murderer of Minnie Watkyn. You will formally arrest him. You will take him yourself down to Mallow and hand him over to the Station. Then you'll report to me here."

The Inspector stiffened. "Very good, sir!" He saluted, touched Pole upon the shoulder, murmured at him a numble of words and marched him down the steps and away to the left for the back of the house and the police car.

The Chief Constable of the county and the Sailor faced each other upon the porch. The Sailor felt the sharp grey eyes running over him. He stiffened. He was silent.

Carson dropped into the chair that leaned against the griffon's back. He said suddenly:

"What's your height?"

The Sailor told him.
He nodded. "Weight?"
He was told, and nodded again. He said:
"Age? Profession?"
"Thirty-five. Seaman'll fit. Leaving the sea, sir."
The Chief Constable muttered something which sounded like: "Finest thing I've seen for years." He said aloud:
"Afford it? Leave the sea, I mean?"
The Sailor allowed himself a smile. "Yes, sir. Should explain; not been before the mast. Not for five years back. Been running a partnership. Trading the islands, sir."
The Chief Constable nodded. "Any pearling?" he said.
"Maybe, sir. Maybe not." The Sailor was firm.
"Er... quite, quite." Beneath the neat grey moustache, Carson's lips curved to a half-smile. He said, after a pause:
"What are you messed up in this for?"
"What I've come to tell you, sir." The Sailor stood looking down at his questioner. His face was set but inside him there was glee. This was a man, this Big Noise of Policemen. A man you could talk to. His mind ran over the various editions he had prepared, during that sleepless night, of the story; he chose without hesitation the full one, or that, rather, which was the nearest to full.
Carson said: "Fire ahead, then. Sit down." He took a cigarette case from his pocket.
The Sailor sent a swift glance about the porch. He said:
"Here, sir?"
"Why not?... Er... p'raps you're right. How long'll it take?"
"Tidy while, I'm afraid, sir." The Sailor was apologetic.
"Lot to it. Say an hour."
The Chief Constable rose. He said:
"Come on, then. There's a room here they let me use."
The door opened, then swung to behind them. The house and the drive and the gardens were left alone with the sun in a peace which presently was shattered by the noise of a closed car which, swinging round the end of the house, went chugging past it down the drive towards the great gates. Inside, the Inspector on one side of him, a plain-clothes man on the other, sat Pole. His eyes sought the windows of the car and the trees and grass and air that were without those windows. They looked with a wide-eyed fixity which had in it now a sort of gentleness more painful to see than any glare of hate or fury.
Then silence again, and the sun and stillness.
The Sailor had said an hour; but two had gone and then another half, before he stood once more, the Chief Constable of the county yet with him, at the head of those steps which faced the drive. In the Sailor’s lips was a cigar, brother to that between the Chief Constable’s fingers. Across the lined weariness of the Sailor’s face was a half-smile and that look of content which comes from the complete removal of a strain. He said, taking the cigar from his mouth:

“Can’t thank you, sir. It’s . . . .”

“You can cut that out,” Carson said. He smiled a little. “You’re a damn’ ruffian. And a nuisance. But I’m glad it was I you came to.”

The Sailor laughed. “Always go t’ the top, sir. Only way.”

“Yes. You’re right.” The Chief Constable looked at his watch. “Great God!” he said. “Now off with you! And don’t forget what I’ve told you. Brer Rabbit for you. Lay low and say nuffin’. I don’t think you’ll be wanted. I think we can fade you out and that child. But I’m not sure . . . . You’re to report to me to-morrow where you can be found, and she. On the telephone, mind. Mallow twenty-four. And I keep the letters; you’re not breaking faith with Pole, because I’ve given my word to do as you said you would do. . . . All this is most damnably unofficial and therefore, to an old rebel like myself, perfectly fascinating. But I’m trusting you. Keep quiet. Keep damn quiet and I’ll do the rest. . . . Now, good-bye. And I very much hope that, when all this dirty business is over and done, we shall be able to meet again.” He came close and thrust out a hand.

The Sailor took it and gripped. “Thank you, sir,” he said. “Nothing I’d like better, when this job’s done.”

Carson set hands upon him and urged him to the steps. “Enough of that!” he said. “Now off with you!” He stood watching while the Sailor, his long rolling stride making havoc of distance, disappeared round the sweep of the drive. Then, hands in pockets, he went back and into the house. Round the cigar his mouth was smiling, and little chuckles came from him. He was seeing visions . . . four policemen bound and helpless in the dark. Within the room where just now he had listened to the strangest tale of the many strange tales within his wide experience, the cigar came out of his mouth and the chuckles changed to laughter unrestrained. He foresaw yet further entertainment in the official report, if
any indeed should be made, which would come to him of
this episode.
He had out his laugh; then, sitting upon the table edge,
reached for the telephone.

CHAPTER XIV

There was celebration in Tom's small house. The door
stood wide and the hot sun of middle afternoon cut a
broad swathe of gold across the shaded coolness.
Three sat at the table. The Sailor and Tom and the girl
Valentine. Beneath the table Betty lay with a beef-bone
clamped by her feet while her jaws rent and crushed and
tore, and small growling sighs of ecstasy came from her
throat.

Upon the table lay the remnants of a meal. And now
the girl, pale no longer but quiet and shy and glancing with
veiled eyes now at Tom, now at the Sailor, leant back and
sipped at tea, hot within her mug, while, also from mugs,
the men took whisky. The bottle upon the table stood half-
empty and the eyes of Tom were brighter even than their
habit. Some of the pallor had left the face of the Sailor
but still there were about his eyes the strained lines of fatigue
and in the eyes themselves a distance-watching look; an
absent concentration which belied his words, at least in so
far as he had made them applicable to himself, about the end
of troubles.

He shook his head a little, as if suddenly it had hurt him.
He said, breaking a silence:
"How d'you make the time, Tom?"
Tom fished for his watch. "Kia budgi hai? Eh? Saheeb; I tell you eet iss four and one half."
The Sailor stretched. "And as I told you," he said,
"Sir Walter said I could walk about free after four. No police
watchin' for me; they'll all 've had the tip by now. . . . So;
I'm off."

A grunt came from Tom and from the girl a little sound
that was half-sigh, half-cry. The Sailor said patiently:
"But I told you. Didn't I now?"
"But . . . but . . ." The girl stammered, blushing, and
was silent again.
"But," Tom said, "we didn't think you meant it. Did
us, Val?"
In silence she shook her head. In the light and shade it glowed now here, now there, with sudden gleams and fadings.

The Sailor got to his feet. "But I did," he said. He leaned with his hands on the table and looked down upon them, first one, then the other. He said:

"I'm sorry. But I've got to go. See? Must take my word for it. We'll all see each other again. And soon. See? There's... there's something I've got to try and put right that I made a hash of. That's what it is. Understand? Don't think I'm skyetin' off for no reason... You'll do fine, you two." He strove successfully to make words and tone lighter. "Do fine! 'Specially now Val's got all the old bird's money, eh? Lucky for you, Val, she didn't make a will..." His words trailed off into stillness; it was as if suddenly he had realised their inadequacy.

There was a dim soundlessness then, heavy and stifling, which, it seemed to each, ought to be—must be—broken. It was, but by none of them.

There appeared in the doorway, blocking out a part of the golden light, a small grey head; long-faced, great-cared. Its lips twitched and suddenly the hut was full with sound. A whistle—a grunt; a grunt—a whistle.

There was a pause; then laughter. The Sailor sighed relief and gratitude to Gibson. Tom got to his feet.

"I've forgot 'im!" he said. "Five minutes late. Here! Outside, you!" He went to the door and caught a long ear and holding it went off.

The silence came again then. It was broken by the scraping of wood upon the floor of beaten earth as the girl got suddenly to her feet, pushing back her chair. She came close and stood to face him, her head bent, her hands clasped before her. She said:

"You are going? Truly?"

He nodded. "That's sure," he said gently.

"I want... I want..." She faltered in her speech, then bravely recovered. "I want to say... there's been something worrying me... last night. I said... I remember there was... was... I said something..."

He put a hand upon the small shoulder. "Forget that," he said. "Don't bother your head."

She said: "And... and it doesn't make any difference to your going if I... if I..."
He kept the hand upon her shoulder. He said:

"Kiddie; I'm going. See? Nothing can alter that." He fumbled for words. "You want... you want to just put... put out of your head all except that there's no trouble for you now and that Tom'll look to you, and that we're all good friends. See?" He dropped the hand from her shoulder and turned away.

She stood as she had been standing; head down-bent, slim shoulders drooping a little. As he searched for his stick and bundle among the litter of a corner there came to his ears a little stifled sound. He turned sharply. He thought that he saw, between the down-bent head and the locked hands, the flashing fall of something like a tiny glistening jewel. He started forward but with his movement there was a blocking of light in the doorway and Tom was with them again. The Sailor, half-relieved, cast anxious eyes to where the girl stood. His relief became complete. She looked up as Tom came towards her and ran to him. She said, in her sweet high voice:

"He is going, Tom. Tom, he is going! But we're all to see each other. And often. Aren't we?" She looked to the Sailor. He said:

"Bet your life." He came smiling towards them. His stick, the bundle once more lashed to it, swung in his left hand. He gripped at Tom's hand; then the girl's. "See you soon," he said. "Tom; I took that paper with the address where you'll be from to-morrow? Yes, here 'tis. Don't change your mind. Do the kid good, a change will. . . . Now I am going. And good luck."

"Good luck!" they said together. And Tom called after him: "Make it soon, Shorty. Make it soon."

He turned and waved an arm and shouted something which they could not catch. Until he was out of sight and after, they watched, standing in the doorway. Snuffling at their heels, Betty whined. . . .

He came out through the gate and on to the Mallow road. He turned to his left and began the long ascent, his easy stride making nothing of its steepness.

As he walked his face was without smile or peace. Hard it was, and the deep frown was back between his brows and beneath his brows the eyes, overbright from sleeplessness, stared unwinking upon the road ahead. His lower jaw was
out-thrust and some of the tireless spring had gone from the long stride.

He reached the hill-top and followed the road, now level, round to the right. It was as he paused, considering at what point he should strike off for the wood upon his left and the short cut which the wood made, that he saw, at the bend of the road at the far side of the shoulder, a small white cloud of dust. Idly he watched and saw the cloud become a horse, travelling towards him at a raking trot. Behind this horse was a high two-wheeled dog-cart.

He could not tell you what it was that made him wait. But wait he did. The cart came nearer; he saw the driver now as a woman. His heart began to play a triple-beat tattoo against his ribs. He stepped sideways, once . . . twice . . . until he stood in the centre of the road.

Then, with a roaring, rattling rumble, the cart came at him. He stood his ground and flung up his arm, palm of his hand outward, as a signal to halt.

The brake went on. There was a grinding jar; a scuttering scurry of hooves; a shout; a cloud of dust which filled the Sailor’s eyes, whitened his hair; and a thick film of grit between his teeth. . . .

From the height of the driving seat she stared. She made no sound; spoke no word. She looked at him.

He felt like a small and foolish boy detected by authority at the crux of what has seemed, as its incipience, a dashing escapade.

There was a silence. Desperate, he broke it. He said:

“Got to talk to you!” His voice was thick, and unrecognisable even to his own ears.

“Have you!” she said. It was not a question. Rather was it a challenge.

“Yes!” he said savagely. “By God! Yes! And I’m going to!” He came nearer and seized the horse by the bridle and forced it into a walk, his hand close to the bit’s ring.

Off the road he led them and on to the heath, and down and round, parallel with their own tracks, until they came abreast of the stile which broke the monotony of the bottom fence of Auntie’s garden. Round the top rail of the fence he looped the reins and knotted them. He turned to look up at her. He said:

“Get down!” His voice was peremptory, belying the
thumping of his heart and that difficulty of breathing which brought out his words short and jerky.

She looked down at him. He saw her a different woman; severe in tight felt hat and a tweed coat. He tried for further words but could not find them. She said at last:

"If you must, you must." The tone was non-committal, the voice a cold evenness which he did not recognise. She got down, with a clean spring from step to ground which disdained his outflung hand.

His fingers closed upon her arm. Through the harshness of the tweed the soft warmth of her flesh spread to the skin of his palm. He said nothing. They walked ahead and at last were in among the trees.

He stopped. He dropped his hand and turned to face her full. He said:

"I've got to say this: I'm sorry! Last night... well, I'd had... I'd been through a toughish piece... I didn't... but that's that... You know. When I've said what I have said—said 'I'm sorry'... You'll take that or you won't... Which... which..." His tongue went heavy, suddenly. He found that it would not move. He swallowed and tried again. After abortive attempts, he said:

"Which is it? Will you take it? Or won't you?... For God... for God's sake say! Don't stand there lookin'... lookin' at me like... like that..."

A miracle happened. His strained, hungry eyes, devouring her face, saw it soften; saw it slough that bleak seeming; saw it become the face that he had seen by moonlight streaming through an open window...

She opened her arms. Her body tense, those arms, suppliant yet commanding, bade and invited him. He went to them...

Then there was silence. But a silence differing so much from those other differing silences which throughout this day had beset and pressed upon him that the Sailor did not know that silence this was; it seemed to him a heavenly pressure. He broke it with his own voice. He said:

"Then it's all... it's all right..."

Soft strong arms were about him; arms whose strength and softness and beauty both his body and mind remembered. A soft voice said, deep and low:

"Yes. All right; all right. Everything's all right, boy..."
They were, he found, half-sitting, half-lying. Her back was against the stout trunk of the tree up which he had climbed, upon an evening which seemed, in the dim comfortable woolliness of his mind, to have been many, many years ago, to watch upon the business of the small white house. . . . He said, half-whispering:

"There's a thing . . . Last night . . . I didn't . . . you thought I was . . . was . . . you thought I was scared o' the bulls. . . . I was not . . . I . . ."

A soft pressure silenced him. The deep voice said:

"Boy, you're foolish . . . I thought nothing . . . except that you were uncertain of your feelings. . . . You'll lie to me and lie to me, but that don't signify . . . I knew. There was a girl . . . And you . . . you were puzzled. You didn't know . . . you know now. . . ." Her hand caressed his face.

"You know now. . . . Tell me you know. Tell me. Tell me!"

"I know!" he said. A pause. "But there's . . . there's a thing. . . . Not that it's in . . ."

She laughed a little, and his heart swelled within him at the sound. She said:

"You're a child! Ask me, then. . . ."

He wriggled and sat upright, propping himself upon his left hand at the end of a great bent arm. He said:

"That . . . that morning after . . . after that night. 'S I was goin', you said a thing to me . . ." He brought his gaze—with something of an effort, it seemed—to rest upon her face. "It was a thing . . . well, it made me think—couldn't help m'self!—it made me think you were mates with that old trollop that was scuppered. . . ."

She stirred at that. She opened her mouth to speak, but his right hand came up and its fingers sealed her lips. He said:

"I'm a fool! I didn't mean I thought you were—in thick with the old harridan. . . ."

She smiled. Behind his fingers her lips said: "Yes. You did!"

"No! No, I say! . . . But it was queer. It was queer. I don't rightly see yet. . . ."

She pulled her mouth free of those fingers which had gently restrained her speech. She said:

"Say what it is, child! How can I tell you when you won't tell me?" Her voice was gentle still, but there was in it an undertone of almost harsh bewilderment.
He looked at her keenly. He said at once:

"Just a couple o' words. That morning. You called those words after me. You said: 'Tiger-lily.' ... Now that was one of that old devil's jokes ... and a hell of a joke it was—for that kid! ... How did ..." He broke off sharply. He said, slowly:

"What you laughin' for?"

Against his arm her body was shaking softly. Her mouth was curved into a little smile. She said, through the silent laughter:

"Boy, boy! ... I didn't know the old woman. Never set eyes on her. But when ... when I said that, I did know you—a little. I've told you you're a child. ... And children ... children often talk in their sleep. ..."

For an instant the Sailor stared. Then his mouth, too, curved into a smile. His arm came up and went about her shoulders. She looked sidelong at him. She said:

"Any more questions? Or am I ..."

He closed her mouth.
MADONNA OF THE FIREFLIES

Air had fallen in love with earth, and though all was silvery and the sky clouded, yet it seemed that the gold of past sunshine lingered interwoven as a permanent possession of mountain and vale. Vegetation draped rather than clothed this earth. The emerald and jade spread no heavy vesture over plain and hill, but transparently covered them, as though in these haunts of sunlight no pelt was needed to keep the brown earth warm.

Spring danced through Tuscany, and where her twinkling footfall passed, the bud broke and the flower bloomed. Here was radiant green of vine, pear and apple, peach and almond; while darker foliage of plum and fig spattered the golden verdure, and, darker yet, seen far off, reigned the cypress, splashing earth with its solitary notes of exclamation, now dotted singly, now clustering about some lifted campanile, or marking boundaries between land and land. Ringed in with mountains, that fell broadly to their foothills, lapped in milky air, its din silenced, its detail hidden, there spread a city, levelled like a low island of corals and bright lavas in the midst of a dim green sea. It broke out of the verdant plain, and by the russet and amber of it, by the mellow tincture kneaded into every roof, by its mighty dome and that silver stalk beside it; by the lesser cupolas and turrets and by the tower of towers, that breaks like a brown flower from a brown sheath, one marked Firenze, queen and enchantress of the olden time.

John Travers gazed upon this scene from a tiny piazza five miles distant, and his troubled face grew softer. He lifted it to the blue-robed Apennine, then turned to gaze at a podere a
mile away. The place rose perched on its proper knap, like a thousand others. Under old terra-cotta, whose warmth was bleached by a century of sunshine and fretted with orange and ebony lichens, the white walls stood. No cypress crowned this hill, but a great loquat massed against the dwelling, a hayrick, reduced to a mere wedge of gold about its stake, flashed sunbright beside the farm, and beneath, subtending the homestead, there rolled out familiar cultivation. Hay was being saved, and pale ribbons of fallen grass spread shining between the rows of vine and fruit-trees.

Hitler went the watchier presently. It was his home for a season. Life had crossed the man's hopes and derided his ambitions of late, had put to him harsh questions, only to be answered after intervals of dismay and doubt. For here was one who had dictated to fate and turned his back on fortune. With full hands she came to him, and he had sent her with full hands away, counting dearer than her obvious gifts of peace and plenty, one little, doubtful, personal possession born with him—a glimmer from remote, ancestral flames.

The son of a prosperous physician, John Travers might have followed in the safe footsteps trampled by his father, and with no more than fair measure of steady work and application have succeeded to the parental name and renown. Nor in his earlier youth did it occur to him to question a career so indicated. As a matter of course, John Travers the elder assumed that his son—a man of good presence and fine ability—would carry on his own work, succeed to his practice and pursue his original field of inquiry, which was the eye; indeed, the lad for long years accepted the situation as expedient in every aspect, and not until he had been at a hospital for nearly five years, filled the position of intern and begun to read for his finals, awakened the doubts that waxed into ultimate denial.

He had always drawn with accuracy, and his father, no draughtsman, was wont to impress on the lad how valuable this gift must prove; but the instinct grew with use; the studies in anatomy became less and less a means and more of an end; some subtle seed of art, that had not perished but only slept through certain generations, now found a congenial temperament, or modelled it; and at twenty-five years of age John Travers the younger knew that he must be a painter.
Life for him meant art, not science; the spirit awoke and cried to him that he must indeed use his own eyes, that the sight of other men might be bettered, but not as his father had done before him. He was called into the world to make beautiful things from his own sense of beauty; and now he had been striving to do so for six years, and the goal was far distant still. He followed the uphill path of the painter of ideas. No conventional road lured him; he answered to his own vision; but as yet it was not perfected, and he stood upon the bleak plateau-lands of doubt, where difficulties crowd the horizon like mountain peaks, and the climber, chilled and wearied by his last effort, finds each point gained but the vantage ground that shows a loftier one.

To Firenze he had come, smarting and wounded, for his year’s work and his masterpiece had been rejected by the Royal Academy—a trial unforeseen after three years of acceptance. And for a moment art tasted bitter to his palate; the kinship of friends in the city was vain; their enthusiasm and undying hope appeared but folly.

He walked amid figures of the mind, that beckoned and promised much; and others that also beckoned and promised nothing. Like Lucian before him, he dreamed and saw two women, and doubted between them, while his heart beat low and hope went hungry. The one was thin, worn, labour-stained, with deep lines on her face and a great wistfulness in her wonderful eyes. Gaunt she was, and her hands were made ugly by eternal labour; her garment was earth-coloured and ragged, so that it hardly served to hide her lean bosom and thin arms. But the other minced in her going, and was round and very fair. Her garment owned neither stain nor tatter; she went sleekly in purple and fine linen, and she moved with smiles confidently, daintily, as one for ever welcome, from whom no lover of beauty could turn away. Art was the first woman, and culture was the second; and Travers remembered how Lucian, with a cynical indifference, had flouted the spirit for the substance, disowned the creator, and thrown in his lot as jurist and literary trifler with her who promised the fruits and the joys of earth.

But Art had won this man for ever, and there was no turning back for him. Though the loaf that she offered was lean and her flask of wine but thin, they held that nourishment of the soul no other food could promise him.

He had turned his back on Firenze, and removed from
sight and sound of his fellow-labourers. At a little podere in Bagni di Ripoli, Travers came by sure stages to himself, while his unconquerable ideal, dimmed for a while, now, in the dreaming vales of Arno, trembled out again, daily to grow brighter and steadier. His purposes were assured, his mind affirmed, and patience visited him as a welcome guest.

Life at the podere, unutterably fine in its stern simplicity, was well qualified to help the painter. Here generation after generation of one race laboured upon land that they could never own. Yet it sustained them, and they lived and toiled in contentment and family friendship. Here were twelve men, women, and children, all knit together in relationships; and with them lived one old man, who had known another world than this, and come by accident of fallen fortunes to home at Ripoli with a dead wife’s kindred. They made room for him without question, recognized his superior birth and education, lifted him to a place above themselves and loved him for his tribulations and his bravery. Now he also worked with his hands and earned his few daily pence; but in the fields he could not labour, therefore he did lesser tasks about the home, for he was a good carpenter and house-painter; he had made the podere fair with green shutters, and drawn beneath the deep eaves a frescoed pattern of purple grapes upon a golden lattice. These were his holiday tasks, and he spent his pennies on the colours that went to make them; but at other times he mended the picks and ploughs, repaired the hedges, and used his needle upon the clothes of the men.

Amedio Brogi was the head of the family—a grandfather whose wife was dead. Then came Giacomo, his eldest son, with a living wife and two children, and Luigi, his second son, a bachelor. Giacomo’s eldest boy, Gustavo, was wedded to his cousin, Emilia, and their offspring had brought beauty into the Brogi race—a quality until her advent lacking.

But Bice was fairer than a lap of spring flowers—all woman at sixteen, with innocent brown eyes that made the heart of man glad, a small red mouth, and fair hair that still dwelt in twin-plaited tails upon her back, though Emilia declared that it should be lifted to its proper crown.

Concerning the rest of the family, Travers as yet knew little. It took time to appreciate the clan and master the relationships, but for the present his first friends were Amedio, the grandfather, Gustavo, Emilia’s husband and Bice’s father, and Bice herself. For she was that loveliest of artists’
dreams, an Italian girl at once beautiful and fair. "My skin is the colour of the filbert nuts, when the sun just touches them; and my hair is the colour of the ripe maize, and my eyes are the colour of the wine of Orvieto," explained Bice to the artist, when he talked about painting her. The last simile he declined to accept. "No," he said, "your eyes are more beautiful than wine; they are the colour of the autumn woods, when the leaves change to amber."

Bice was betrothed to Carlo Brogi, a distant cousin, who dwelt with the clan; but here was a dark and difficult matter, for Carlo—now twenty years of age, a skilled vine-dresser, and a man of gentle disposition and good character—was not strong. He suffered, and there were days that followed on sleepless nights when Carlo could do no work. Sometimes he coughed; sometimes his strength seemed to leave him, and his heart beat too fast. Then he could only sit in the sun and plait straw, like a girl. His folk whispered the grave word "consumption" among themselves, and were very tender to Carlo; but a local physician, who had seen him, uttered no definite pronouncement, though he shook his head and declined to give any hopeful promise. He bade Carlo be stirring, eat well, take much olive oil, and work in the air when he could do so.

Lastly, of the friends of John Travers was Virgilio Torrigiani, the old kinsman of the clan, who loved beautiful things. His very name bespoke some culture, and there was extraordinary dignity about his bent figure. Ugliness triumphed in him and achieved the lovable and picturesque. He had a great nose and a bulldog mouth, large grey eyes that never lacked puzzlement and wonder for all his fourscore years, and a head as bald as head could be. He had lost all his money by going surety for a friend, who betrayed him: and he had lost his wife, Amedia Brogi's sister, and three daughters, who had all died in youth. And now he himself stood on the verge, very busy, uncomplaining, childlike, full of stories and full of interest in the life of his wife's people. He had found her a serving woman in a friend's family, and fallen in love with her and married her. Visitors from England and America knew Virgilio. He could speak English, and was fond of bringing from an under-recess in his garments a Christmas card sent to him three years earlier by a British lady of high degree.

"I mended her travelling-bag with a silver clasp," he said.
“And she was by birth honourable, though she scorned to claim the fact. You can see her name written by herself upon this card of Christmas memory. It was to show that, while moving amidst honourable people, like herself, she still could remember Virgilio Torrigiani and his silver clasp.”

Among these peace-lovers, to a home where not one harsh word was ever heard or voice lifted in anger; into a sunlit habitation of human souls as poor and contented as the lizards on their threshing-floor, had come John Travers; and little by little his larger interests faded, his deeper cares died. The trivial concerns and fleeting hopes and fears of the Brogi gathered weight for him; politics were narrowed to their affairs; ambition descended upon the promise of the vines; and, for excitement, was the plan of a fresco on the side of the barn; for intrigue, certain matters hatched in secret with Virgilio concerning the welfare of Carlo Brogi and his sweet-heart.

II

At first Travers had felt a sort of contempt for these people. Smarting and writhing under the heavy hand of chance, he scorned a folk who could “take life lying down,” as he phrased it; but presently he began to accept the point of view, and to perceive not only the limitations, but also the compensation of an existence represented by the temporal return of four centimes a day. The Brogi farmed the podere for its owner, and received roughly one-half of the profits that accrued from all sources. It was a prosperous enterprise, and averaged a return of from five to seven and even eight per cent. upon the outlay. But not all the family was content to have no hand in their own fate. Bice had a will, and the artist, whose Italian sufficed for the purpose, presently found that, added to beauty, the girl possessed character. It expressed itself naturally in the terms of her religion, and an intellect, bright enough, found in superstition food that chimed with her ambitions and her hopes. She had an active mind, as opposed to the passive instincts of her kindred; it was not enough that the saints should smile upon her dreams and help her to be good; she looked to them to help her to be happy also.

Dark as a cave opened the mouth of a lower chamber upon a little piazza before the dwelling-house of the Brogi, and
from within, there issued the savour of cattle. Four beasts dwelt there—milch cows which Bice attended. They never grazed, for their food was served to them daily; but Bice took them for a walk sometimes after the evening milking, that they might stretch their legs and take pleasure in the fresh air at sunset time. Then best the artist liked to talk with her, because the spirit of rest and contemplation haunted that hour; and when Carlo did not walk beside his sweetheart, Travers would sometimes do so, and mark her moods, now gay, now sad. She uttered surprising things sometimes, and dumbly felt the poetry of life.

"It is because my lover is not strong," she explained. "If he was like me—hard and tough and always ready to work, and hungry and knowing no pain—then I should never think of sad, strange things, but just be like other girls: full of joy of being a girl and having a lover. But it makes you old and wise very quickly if there is doubt. It brings curious thoughts into your mind. The thoughts are not themselves funny, but it is funny that I, Bice, should think them. For instance, I wondered last night in my bed what had become of all the smiles of all the beautiful, dead women that have ever lived. A smile frightens away the ugliness of the ugliest people. A girl's face is never ugly when it is smiling. But the smiles of a pretty girl are like the cornflowers and poppies in the corn: you cannot see them without smiling back."

"The smiles of the fair, dead women have all warmed somebody's hearts in their time, perhaps."

"It is not enough. What becomes of them? There are things that are too beautiful for God to let them die. I tell you, smiles are treasured up, as we treasure up the grapes, and when we lovely girls die and go to heaven, our smiles are given back to us again—they are all there waiting for us."

So would the girl chatter beside the kine, and presently, with growing intimacy, she began to give the painter a larger glimpse of the secrets of her heart. Returning one day to his mid-day meal, which he ate with the family, who were now accustomed to his presence, Travers found Bice dragging a haycart as though she were a dish of hay. Her sleeves were pulled up, and her feet burdened up the hill. A steeply, flanked by whispering wheat, whose blue made harmony with the olives about it; and way up the track was a shrine
of ripe, red brick, faced with crumbling mortar. The niche held a little marble Virgin and Child, and behind them dabs of russet and rose, faded and fallen from the mouldering plaster, told of a perished fresco there. Above was a penthouse of sun-dried tiles, and in the niche stood a green bowl that held a bouquet of wild flowers—blue sage, the gladiolus of the corn, nigella, and sweet, sad-coloured broom- rapes. A vine clambered up the little sanctuary, and presently amber bunches of fruit would cluster there.

"Your patron saint, Bice. I am always wishing that you would tell me about her. There are fresh flowers for her every day, and the place where you kneel has no grass left upon it."

Bice rested, and wiped her forehead with her blue skirt. She looked at the speaker and nodded.

"I may tell you," she said. "I cannot tell you all there is to tell at one moment; but in pieces perhaps. She is my saint, and sometimes I think she is going to be strong, and sometimes I doubt about it. I am not very sure of her yet. Time will tell. I am being very good to her. I look at her with four eyes every day, and I pray to her with two hearts. A girl cannot do more than that. Sometimes I call her Madonna delle Lucciole, and sometimes Madonna delle Lucertole. Because certainly the lizards love her. I have seen them lift up their paws and pray to her."

Travers nodded gravely.

"The good St. Francis taught them to do that. You remember how he wanted all the world to know the best thing he had ever heard, and how he talked to the birds and fishes and told them about Christ? So the fireflies and the lizards no doubt heard too."

She doubted it not.

"The fireflies love this place best in the whole podere. They much like the iris, that make so great a brightness under the trees when they are in flower, and they love the olives, and signal backwards and forwards and wave their little lamps to each other; but I burn brightest at the shrine, and I have seen their faces up the face of Mary Madonna till it shone. As a smile looked to them, that they understand sometimes and hop me something—son of the mouth."

"Perhaps it will happen."

"Elling.
"One has to be patient with the saints and the Blessed Mother. They take their own time. But she will give me a sign presently."

"I believe Carlo is going to be strong again, Bice."

"It must be one way or the other soon. We want to marry, but if he is to die before long, we must not."

"I don't think he is going to die."

"It is not what you think, or what I hope. It is what will happen," she said. "And nothing ever happens till it has happened. Corn is not bread till it has gone into the oven. So I pray a great deal here—far oftener than anybody knows—and I am a very good girl in other ways—exceedingly good."

"I know you are. It is a most deserving case, Bice, and if Madonna of the Fireflies does not take some trouble about it soon, I shall feel very much surprised."

"It is certainly her turn now—one must give and take, I suppose, even if one is the Mother of Christ," said Bice.

"The saints themselves get nothing for nothing in this weary world," he admitted.

"Why should they?" she asked. "We Brogi say it is not honest to take without giving. But there are plenty of people in Italy who think it the great cleverness to do that."

"And everywhere else," he assured her.

They went on presently and entered the house-place, where a mighty chimney yawned over an open hearth and the food was spread for the workers. Amedio Brogi and Virgilio Torrigiani sat in the places of honour—snug chairs on either side of the fire, lifted above the floor—while Giacomo took the head of the table and Luigi, the foot. Emilia, Giacomo's daughter-in-law, stirred a great red, copper pot upon the charcoal fire and presently served broth of beans and fennel. Then followed black bread, with oil and some red wine. And that was all. They ate much bread, but butter they did not know, nor tea, nor coffee. Water, and wine made on the podere was all their drink, and of meat they took but little; yet they celebrated delicate feasts sometimes at the season of fruits, and Travers had already tasted alpine strawberries and curds and ewes' milk—a dish that no gourmet might scorn.

So the stranger lived among the people and found his heart go out to them at last and peace return to him. And she came not empty-handed, for, as his wounded spirit healed and disappointments faded behind this foreground of beauty and
human content, the normal desire to create awoke, and he girt up his loins and answered the voice that called.

III

Round about the old shrine the flowering vines were hung on little maple trees that lifted them above the corn, and a strip of soft sward, newly shorn, passed behind the ancient holy place. This accident led to an inspiration, and John Travers, returning in the crepuscule through dusk of the olives silently, marked Bice at her orisons. She knelt upright with her hands together, and it happened that above her head the fireflies twinkled. So absorbed was she that his footfall passed unheeded, and he stood awhile marking her profile fitfully outlined as the golden green lights spangled the darkness behind it. A magic picture came and went in the waver- ing illumination, and Bice remained visible even when the living lights quivered away amid the trees and above the wheat. For during these June nights there was no darkness—only a tender, ineffable grey and blue mingled. The sun loved teeming earth too well to leave her long, and after midnight the aura above his secret way could be seen, where he dallied a little behind the Apennine before returning.

Travers waited motionless until the girl was done; then, when she rose, he appeared and declared his purpose.

"I must paint you in this beautiful, dim light—just your head against the smoke-colour of the olives in the dark," he said. "But there shall be the glimmer of one firefly behind your hair throwing up a little halo, and perhaps two or three other fireflies—one far off and one passing by in front of you. I see a beautiful picture if I am clever enough to paint it; and I shall call you 'La Madonna delle Lucciole.'"

"It would be better to paint the saint herself. I gave her a bunch of tassel hyacinths to-day; but yesterday a bad thing happened. The rose I put there had a green beetle hid in the midst of it, and all the heart of the rose was eaten out by the greedy beetle. It was a stupid thing to happen, and Madonna will be vexed. I should have seen the beetle."

As they went up through the glimmering orchards, Bice expounded the folk-lore by which she unconsciously guided many of her actions; while the listener made pretence to listen and learn as he studied the outlines of her head, long neck, and straight back. She was so fresh and virginal. For a
moment he contemplated an "Annunciation," painting it as none had painted it yet—a night piece with a moony spirit on silver wings bending before the Virgin, where she wandered under the tender and transparent gloom of olives. But he returned to the earlier vision—the girl's head lit by the little living fires.

She was busy the next day, and he sat beside her and offered his help while she shelled a dish of peas for market. The delicate green of them, in a red copper bowl beside Bice's dark blue dress, made fragrant colour, and he, in good humour, told her so. But she was pensive and full of a great matter. He tuned himself to her mood, therefore, and begged to learn what had befallen her.

"I have had a dream," she said, "a deep dream, and it was a happy dream, but it was also very difficult."

"Dreams never come true, they say, in my country."

"Dreams are sent," she answered, "and it is silly of your country to say that they never come true. Dreams are sent to help us and to warn us and to save us sometimes. They do come true. This dream was sent to save Carlo. I am perhaps wrong to say that it was a dream at all. It may have happened."

"Tell me about it, Bice."

Her thumb ceased not from tumbling the peas into the pan while she talked to him, so that little pops of the splitting peascocks punctuated the wonders of her dream.

"It was the middle of the night, Senor, when I woke suddenly to hear a tiny tapping and a tiny voice talking to me. 'Lift me up, Bice,' said the little voice, and I looked down upon the floor and saw my white Madonna delle Luciole standing there! She had come all the way from her shrine to me; but she had left the Bambino there, and her arms were empty. And in each hand she carried a firefly, as a man or woman might hold a candle, and the flies understood that they were to light Madonna to me through the darkness of the sleeping house. I lowered down my open hand to the ground, and the wee Lady rested her foot upon it, so that I lifted her up gently to the coverlet; and she set her fireflies on my knee, and she sat down near my shoulder and talked to me.

"Of Carlo she talked, and it was thus. 'Bice Brogi,' said Madonna. 'I am come to tell thee how thy betrothed shall win health and strength again and be strong of his hands and thy joyful husband and the father of thy children'; and I
said: 'Blessed Mother of Christ, I knew it was possible to thee; and I am sorry for the green beetle in the rose.' She held up her little hand, because, you see, she had come to talk to me, and didn't want me to talk to her. Then she went on again, in a voice like the 'glu -glu' of the night-gale. 'Bice, there is a crucifix at the first shop over the Ponte Vecchia—an old, old crucifix. It is in the window beside a gold and crystal snuff-box and a piece of old lace.' And that nearly made me jump out of bed with wonder, because I have longed and longed for that crucifix since I was a little girl. It has been in the window for thirty years. It is black and silver, curiously carved and fretted, though he is very small, so wonderful that you see the droop of blood at his hands and feet and side. And at the heel of looking her on each arm is a round bead of red coral so tangled that I interrupted Madonna again, 'ucifix for I ent in the waxy cited. 'Blessed Mother,' I said, 'I haven't old at the even when long years, and I have talked with cutty lires, third and above the of a man in the shop and tried to tell whether was no dark enough I haven't got them if he dir the crucifix, afmangled. The sixty lires, for too well he must will along, and after r.

"Then the little Lady Carlo to him, I'd be seen, when it for Carlo, because it is life if you th returning. Have that precious thing. It belongs to a sair, girl was don't lover but holds it to his breast each night and this purp the suffering Lord with faith, his sickness will pass from him, and he will be whole again. But single-handed and by your own strength and through your own fortune, must you win in the price of it. None shall help you; none can help you but I.' It is true that I am a very business-like girl, Senor—oven old Virgilio Torrigiani has said that. Now I blessed the little Virgin again and asked her if she would help me and put it into the heart of the old toad of a man to take less; but she did not seem to be interested in that. It was too small a thing for her holy mind. 'Remember!' she said. 'Carlo must have the crucifix, and you alone can get it for him. None must help you. Now lift me down, for the dawn is making ready and I must go.' I did as the Lady bade me, and she tripped away, with the fireflies flying in front of her to light the darkness. I heard her little feet tapping on the stone floor, and then everything was silent again. And when the morning came I woke up all one puzzle—because I have to do this great thing alone."
A tame white chicken came close to Bice, and she held out some green peas for the bird to peck out of her hand.

"It was a beautiful dream, and of course it has got to come true, Bice. Don't you think I might help?"

"No, no, no," she declared vehemently. "If that had been possible, I should not have told you, because it would have been begging. None can help me, and if anybody gave me a single lira of the price, the crucifix would be useless to Carlo."

"How much have you saved?"
Bice shrugged her shoulders.

"I have got no money in the world," she said. "My last lira went to buy a pipe for my grandfather on his birthday."

"And the crucifix is sixty lire?"
She nodded.

"I do not think Madonna delle Lucciole will trouble to make the old toad man's heart softer."

"Then the grand thing is to know how you are going to earn the money. Well, I see a very easy way out of the fix."

"Impossible, Senor."

"You sit to me for my picture, and I pay you sixty lire for the sittings."

"No, that is charity. I know an old man at Firenze. He is a friend of Virgilio's. He has a white beard, like flax, and brown eyes, that he can lift to heaven, so that you would think he saw God's Throne and the angels round it. It is his great art to look like a saint, and he is run after in the studios and does very well. He makes three lira a day, and he is a fine man and can be turned into fine pictures, and has the art to keep as still as a sleeping cat for hours. But I cannot earn sixty centimes that way. It would not be honest, and the crucifix would not work."

"You're a purist, Bice. But think twice. How can you do what the Madonna wants you to do if you raise objections of this sort? If you're worth sixty lire to me as a model, there's an end of it."

She shook her head.

"A thing is only worth what you have to pay to get it," she told him. "I would sit to you for nothing."

"But suppose I sell the picture of you for a thousand lire?"

"That is your affair, and I should not suppose anything so silly. I only tell you this dream because it is so beautiful and interesting. The Madonna would not have bade me do..."
it if there was no way to do it. I trust her. There will come a way. Only I must be better than ever, and do good things, and think good thoughts, and tempt her with all my strength to come and talk to me again."

She rose and picked up the bowl of peas, while Travers, as interested as a child in the story, considered the problem and could see no immediate solution. He allowed Bice’s affairs to take possession of his mind to the exclusion of his own.

The drift and drizzle of time in this haunt of amity and frugal peace had come between him and the realities and problems of his own life. He was conscious of it, and happy that it should be so. When he picked up reality again it should be with a strong grasp. For the moment here was other reality and the problem of a girl’s happiness.

He sought Virgilio Torrigiani and talked with him. Roses, white and red, climbed a trellis on the western face of the farmhouse; but the woodwork had failed here and there, so that Virgilio was called to mend it. A new lattice had been erected, and now the ancient man gave it a coat of paint before placing it in position.

"May I talk to you, Virgilio? Here’s a puzzle that Bice Brogi has set me. She is a brave and honest girl, with faith enough to move mountains."

"Her dream?"

"Yes. Now we must fix the way out for her."

Virgilio set down his brush and nodded. To him the subject possessed infinite charm. But he put his finger to his lip.

"Not here—the walls listen and there are windows behind the rose trees. Sometimes, too, I think that the cows overhear one and tell people things, for secrets are hard to keep if a man is poor. The poor have no privacy. But I am going to the valley presently to mend a plough. The metal tongue is worn out, and we have a new one that I screw to the wooden share for Luigi. Then we will talk."

"You’ll find a way—such a wise and clever man as you are."

"I am wise," admitted Virgilio, patting his forehead, "but I am not clever. If I was clever, I should not be painting this lattice and living with the Brogi."

They met by the plough, and the old man asked a question.

"Is it not true that you have considered Carlo and think he may get better?"

"Yes; I was a doctor once—or very nearly. I have
thought a great deal about Carlo. It's only a typical case of anæmia, and I have got a chemist in Firenze to make him some very special physic. It's a food rather than a physic."

"He is very much better for it already."

"Much. He will be absolutely well and hearty in six months. In fact, I've found out what is the matter with him, Virgilio; but the point is that neither he nor Bice will ever believe that he can be cured now without the crucifix. It is vital that he should have it. There is a thing called Faith Healing, and, if you give it another name, Science will recognize it and admit its significance. I'm doing wonders with Carlo. The truth is that he has nothing radically the matter. He is tall and has grown too fast. I am fattening him and getting blood into him. But, given the crucifix, my task is lightened and we hasten the cure. Of course what we have to do is to put sixty lira into Bice's pocket—in such a way that she will consider it has fallen honestly and properly to her, either as a result of work, or good fortune. But she's so punctilious that I don't see any way."

Virgilio regarded the painter with mild astonishment.

"Do you not? There are a great many ways really. We are a subtle people and quick in such things. Yes, there are plenty of ways—if you will pay the money. For instance, Enrico Cardoso is dying. He will be dead and in his grave in two—three weeks. He has known the Brogi and cared for them. He might leave Bice sixty, or even a hundred lira under his will. It would be surprising, but not beyond possibility."

"A stroke of genius, Virgilio! Could you manage it?"

"Yes, but it is clumsy. There is a better way. This little Madonna in the shrine. Why should not she find the money?"

Old Torrigiani winked and then laughed. His amusement brought tears to his eyes and he wiped them away. Travers broke a black Tuscan cigar in half and they smoked it together.

"How on earth can the little puppet find sixty lira? She's not worth a franc herself," he said.

"Come and look at her," answered the other. "I'm glad you approached me with this matter, for it takes an Italian to outwit an Italian. You would never have been too clever for Bice. But I shall show you how easy it will be to hoodwink her and give her the desire of her heart."
They went to the shrine, where Bice’s last offering of flowers flagged a little in a blaze of afternoon sunshine. A great jar of asphodel she had set there, with a spike or two of Mary’s thistle—the plant upon whose leaf fell milk from the Virgin Mother’s breast to stain it with ivory whiteness evermore. Virgilio elaborated a plan, and the painter listened and applauded.

“Do it not too swiftly, else she may suspect,” he said; “but wait until the next festa, and then let the thing happen. Carlo will be getting still stronger by that time, and his eye brighter, and his power to pull and carry greater. And meanwhile you shall hurry to old Giacomo Rossi, the man of the antiquity shop, and buy the crucifix yourself for fear of accidents. But explain to him that when Bice Brogi comes to pay for it, she may take it away.”

IV

Bice was not self-conscious, and since the painter wished it, she did not mind him making sketches of her at her prayers. He studied her in the morning sometimes, when the low sun burned through the vines and set great dew drops glittering upon every green thing; but best he liked to see her when twilight sucked the form and colour out of the orchards, and the filigrane of foliage was gone. Then only dim masses, amorphous and vast, marked the roll of the land, where it spread darkling to the starry skies of summer nights, while a cool breath moved through the glades and amid the trees like a presence, and the fireflies trickled their little lamps in the network of the flowering olives.

On such a night came Bice to her shrine and, unknown to her, John Travers kept watch, for the plot was afoot, and the trap set. He had, at the inspiration of Virgilio, purchased an ancient vessel of bronze—hard and sharp-edged—and when the girl was safely out of the way, with his old friend’s aid, Travers carefully buried the curio where Bice’s knees had worn away the grass before her shrine. Then in the dry dust was the old vase hidden, so that the edge of it must salute the suppliant’s touch when next she knelt. The thing was worth two hundred lire, and it seemed to Virgilio and the painter that by no possibility could Bice deny her little Lady’s direct interposition, for had not her own patient knees worn down the earth until the vase proclaimed its presence?
"It is a gift from Madonna to her, and she must accept it as the reward of prayer," explained Virgilio. His old eyes blinked innocently as he spoke; but his mouth twitched.

And now the bronze lip of the vase bit gently on Bice's rounded knee, and she, thinking it a stone, bent to dislodge it. But the obstacle would not be moved, and presently she began scraping away the soil. She felt the rim of the vase now, and talked aloud to herself.

"What is it? What is this under the earth?" she said.

Stones had been thrust in with the vase, to make the disposal of it seem more natural, and now, impatient, Bice hurt her hand, and uttered a little cry, whereon Travers, as though by chance, came past on his way to the house, and asked her what she was doing. She explained, and soon between them they unearthed the treasure. Then the girl flew homeward, to learn what she had found, while John hastened beside her a little way and warned her not to be too sanguine that the metal was of any worth. She had fallen straightway into the snare; she assured him that the treasure must be precious; she accepted it as a gift from the saint.

"I know, I feel how it is," she said. "The good, little white Madonna's heart has gone out to me and Carlo. This heavy thing will go to Rossi, and he will give me the crucifix in exchange for it. Miracles can still be made to happen, if a girl has faith."

Then she outspeed him, and when Travers arrived, he found Bice in the midst of her family with Amedio Brogi holding the treasure in his hands, and Giacomo, Gustavo, Emilia, and the rest, in conclave about the elder. Only old Virgilio Torrigiani sat in his chimney corner apart and showed no enthusiastic interest.

"I love not croaking," he said, "but it is wise not to count too much upon promises. Things do not keep their promises any more than men do. We must not taste the wine at sight of the flower buds."

Invited to give an opinion, Travers was equally cautious.

"It may be worth plenty of money—hundreds of lire for all I can tell," he said. "On the other hand, you may not find anybody to buy it. Of course, I would buy it at any price you liked to ask; but I know you won't let me. Still, it must be worth something, for it is very old, surely. If it doesn't fetch sixty lire, it might at least fetch thirty."

But Bice scorned their prudence.
"You know nothing at all," she said. "It is a miracle, and there's an end of it. The vase was not there yesterday, and it was there to-day, and Madonna knows to a soldo the value of it. And if you are so dull that you do not feel in your heads what will happen to-morrow, I will tell you what will happen. It is this. The old, toad-faced Rossi at the shop will claw the vase and tap it and shrug his shoulders and sigh and say it is a great sacrifice; and then he will give me the crucifix and keep the vase. That is going to happen to-morrow."

They were silent before her assurance; and when the family rose next day with the sun, to go about their business before breakfast, Bice had already set out for Firenze with her vase.

Descending the orchard, Travers marked that she had put fresh flowers on the shrine before starting. A mauve spike of dalmatian iris and a white rose and a red rose were laid at the foot of the image.

And two hours later the radiant Bice returned with her crucifix and fifty lire.

Rossi, with a sudden, rare generosity, had been content to make no more than a hundred per cent. on the exchange.

"There is no doubt that my marriage with Carlo is in sight," declared Bice, "for now that the crucifix sent to me by Madonna of the Fireflies shall lie on his breast every night, he will grow stronger and stronger, so fast that he will soon do a man's work again. And I shall keep the money for our wedding. And where the vase was hidden in the earth is most holy evermore, so I shall plant a loquat seed there, and it will spring up and grow faster than common trees, and bear fruit in five years, and make good money for my children."

The fate of the loquat tree, John Travers never learned, though it is certain that before he left Bagno di Ripoli, Carlo was nearly restored to health. But neither the artist's physics nor his council had much to do with the cure, in the opinion of the Brogi. They doubted little that Bice had saved her lover from an early grave, and to the black and silver crucifix with the coral beads they gave the praise. Only Virgilio understood; but he never contradicted the clan. He was too wise for that.

"You must let me know when the wedding happens," John said to Bice during the last sitting that she gave him, "for I will send you both a wedding present."

She promised to tell him.
"You have been already far too good to us, but you are yourself happier and fatter than when you came, and happiness and fatness are great gifts," she said, "because they keep out care and cold, which are the saddest things in the world. So we have done something."

"Not to mention your picture. It is finished now. Look at yourself with your head dark against the night-hidden olive trees, and the shrine all dim, and the fireflies just lighting your hair like a halo."

"It is wonderful to make such a thing out of those little tubes of paint. I hope somebody will love it well enough to buy it," said Bice.

"It has been a rest and a joy and a blessing to make it, and none can ever love it as much as I do."

"Ah! That is the way with all we make ourselves. Only God understands what work may be to the worker," said old Virgilio.
THE BOX TUNNEL

The 10.15 train glided from Paddington, May 7, 1847. In the left compartment of a certain first-class carriage were four passengers; of these two were worth description. The lady had a smooth, white, delicate brow, strongly marked eyebrows, long lashes, eyes that seemed to change colour, and a good-sized delicious mouth, with teeth as white as milk. A man could not see her nose for her eyes and mouth; her own sex could and would have told us some nonsense about it. She wore an unpretending greyish dress buttoned to the throat with lozenge-shaped buttons, and a Scottish shawl that agreeably evaded colour. She was like a duck, so tight her plain feathers fitted her, and there she sat, smooth, snug, and delicious, with a book in her hand, and the soupçon of her wrist just visible as she held it. Her opposite neighbour was what I call a good style of man—the more to his credit, since he belonged to a corporation that frequently turns out the worst imaginable style of young men. He was a cavalry officer, aged twenty-five. He had a moustache, but not a very repulsive one; not one of those subnasal pigtail on which soup is suspended like dew on a shrub; it was short, thuck, and black as a coal. His teeth had not yet been turned by tobacco smoke to the colour of juice, his clothes did not stick to nor hang to him, he had an engaging smile, and, what I liked the dog for, his vanity, which was inordinate, was in its proper place, his heart, not in his face, jostling mine and other people’s who have none; in a word, he was what one oftener hears of than meets—a young gentleman.

He was conversing in an animated whisper with a companion, a fellow-officer; they were talking about what it is far better
not to—women. Our friend clearly did not wish to be over-
heard; for he cast ever and anon a furtive glance at his fair
vis-à-vis and lowered his voice. She seemed completely
absorbed in her book, and that reassured him.

At last the two soldiers came down to a whisper (the truth
must be told); the one who got down at Slough, and was lost
to posterity, bet ten pounds to three that he who was going
down with us to Bath and immortality would not kiss either
of the ladies opposite upon the road. "Done, done!"

Now I am sorry a man I have hitherto praised should have
lent himself, even in a whisper, to such a speculation; "but
nobody is wise at all hours," not even when the clock is striking
five-and-twenty; and you are to consider his profession, his
good looks, and the temptation—ten to three.

After Slough the party was reduced to three; at Twyford
one lady dropped her handkerchief; Captain Dolignan fell
on it like a lamb; two or three words were interchanged on
this occasion.

At Reading the Marlborough of our tale made one of the
safe investments of that day, he bought a Times and Punch;
the latter full of steel-pen thrusts and wood-cuts. Valour
and beauty deigned to laugh at some inflamed humbug or
other punctured by Punch. Now laughing together thaws
our human ice; long before Swindon it was a talking match—
at Swindon who so devoted as Captain Dolignan?—he handed
them out—he souped them—he tough-chickened them—he
brandied and cochinealed one, and brandied and burnt-sugared
the other; on their return to the carriage, one lady passed
into the inner compartment to inspect a certain gentleman's
seat on that side of the line.

Reader, had it been you or I, the beauty would have been
the deserter, the average one would have stayed with us till
all was blue, ourselves included; not more surely does
our slice of bread and butter, when it escapes from our
hand, revolve it ever so often, alight face downward on the
carpet.

But this was a bit of a pop, Adonis, dragoon—so Venus
remained tête-à-tête with him. You have seen a dog meet an
unknown female of the species; how handsome, how impresséd,
how expressive he becomes; such was Dolignan after Swindon,
and to do the dog justice, he got handsomer and handsomer;
and you have seen a cat conscious of approaching cream—such
was Miss Haythorn; she became demurer and demurer;
presently our captain looked out of the window and laughed; this elicited an inquiring look from Miss Haythorn.

"We are only a mile from the Box Tunnel."

"Do you always laugh a mile from the Box Tunnel?"
said the lady.

"Invariably."

"What for?"

"Why, hem! it is a gentleman's joke."

Captain Dolignan then recounted to Miss Haythorn the following:

"A lady and her husband sat together going through the Box Tunnel—there was one gentleman opposite; it was pitch dark; after the tunnel the lady said, 'George, how absurd of you to salute me going through the tunnel.' 'I did no such thing.' 'You didn't?' 'No! Why?' 'Because somehow I thought you did!'

Here Captain Dolignan laughed and endeavoured to lead his companion to laugh, but it was not to be done. The train entered the tunnel.

Miss Haythorn. Ah!

Dolignan. What is the matter?

Miss Haythorn. I am frightened.

Dolignan (moving to her side). Pray do not be alarmed; I am near you.

Miss Haythorn. You are near me—very near me, indeed,

Captain Dolignan.

Dolignan. You know my name?

Miss Haythorn. I heard you mention it. I wish we were out of this dark place.

Dolignan. I could be content to spend hours here, reassuring you, my dear lady.

Miss Haythorn. Nonsense!

Dolignan. Pweep! (Grave reader, do not put your lips to the next pretty creature you meet or you will understand what this means.)

Miss Haythorn. Eh! Eh!

Friend. What is the matter?

Miss Haythorn. Open the door! Open the door!

There was a sound of hurried whispers, the door was shut and the blind pulled down with hostile sharpness.

If any critic falls on me for putting inarticulate sounds in a dialogue as above, I answer with all the insolence I can command at present, "Hit boys as big as yourself"; bigger
perhaps, such as Sophocles, Euripides, and Aristophanes; they began it, and I learned it of them, sore against my will.

Miss Haythorn's scream lost most of its effect because the engine whistled forty thousand murders at the same moment; and fictitious grief makes itself heard when real cannot.

Between the tunnel and Bath our young friend had time to ask himself whether his conduct had been marked by that delicate reserve which is supposed to distinguish the perfect gentleman.

With a long face, real or feigned, he held open the door; his late friends attempted to escape on the other side—impossible! they must pass him. She whom he had insulted (Latin for kissed) deposited somewhere at his feet a look of gentle, blushing reproach; the other, whom he had not insulted, darted red-hot daggers at him from her eyes; and so they parted.

It was perhaps fortunate for Dolignan that he had the grace to be a friend of Major Hoskyns of his regiment, a veteran laughed at by the youngsters, for the major was too apt to look coldly upon billiard-balls and cigars; he had seen cannon-balls and linstocks. He had also, to tell the truth, swallowed a good bit of the mess-room poker, which made it impossible for Major Hoskyns to descend to an ungentleman-like word or action as to brush his own trousers below the knee.

Captain Dolignan told this gentleman his story in gleeful accents; but Major Hoskyns heard him coldly, and as coldly answered that he had known a man to lose his life for the same thing.

"That is nothing," continued the major, "but unfortunately he deserved to lose it."

At this blood mounted to the younger man's temples; and his senior added, "I mean to say he was thirty-five; you, I presume, are twenty-one!"

"Twenty-five."

"That is much the same thing; will you be advised by me?"

"If you will advise me."

"Speak to no one of this, and send White the £3, that he may think you have lost the bet."

"That is hard, when I won it."

"Do it for all that, sir."

Let the unbelievers in human perfectibility know that this dragoon capable of a blush did this virtuous action, albeit with
violent reluctance; and this was his first damper. A week
after these events he was at a ball. He was in that state of
factious discontent which belongs to us amiable English.
He was looking in vain for a lady, equal in personal attraction
to the idea he had formed of George Dolignan as a man, when
suddenly there glided past him a most delightful vision! a lady
whose beauty and symmetry took him by the eyes—
another look: "It can’t be! Yes, it is!" Miss Haythorn!
(not that he knew her name!) but what an apotheosis!

The duck had become a peahen—radiant, dazzling, she
looked twice as beautiful and almost twice as large as before.
He lost sight of her. He found her again. She was so lovely
she made him ill—and he, alone, must not dance with her,
speak to her. If he had been content to begin her acquaintance
the usual way, it might have ended in kissing; it must end in
nothing.

As she danced, sparks of beauty fell from her on all around,
but him—she did not see him; it was clear she never would
see him—one gentleman was particularly assiduous; she
smiled on his assiduity; he was ugly, but she smiled on him.
Dolignan was surprised at his success, his ill taste, his ugliness,
his impertinence. Dolignan at last found himself injured:
"Who was this man? and what right had he to go on so?
He never kissed her, I suppose," said Dolle. Dolignan could
not prove it, but he felt that somehow the rights of property
were invaded.

He went home and dreamed of Miss Haythorn, and hated
all the ugly successful. He spent a fortnight trying to find
out who his beauty was—he never could encounter her again.
At last he heard of her in this way: A lawyer’s clerk paid him
a little visit and commenced a little action against him in the
name of Miss Haythorn, for insulting her in a railway train.

The young gentleman was shocked; endeavoured to
soften the lawyer’s clerk; that machine did not thoroughly
comprehend the meaning of the term. The lady’s name,
however, was at last revealed by this untoward incident;
from her name to her address was but a short step; and the
same day our crestfallen hero lay in wait at her door, and many
a succeeding day, without effect.

But one fine afternoon she issued forth quite naturally,
as if she did it every day, and walked briskly on the parade.
Dolignan did the same, met and passed her many times on the
parade, and searched for pity in her eyes, but found neither
look nor recognition, nor any other sentiment; for all this she walked and walked; till all the other promenaders were tired and gone—then her culprit summoned resolution, and taking off his hat, with a voice for the first time tremulous, besought permission to address her.

She stopped, blushed, and neither acknowledged nor disowned his acquaintance. He blushed, stammered out how ashamed he was, how he deserved to be punished, how he was punished, how little she knew how unhappy he was, and concluded by begging her not to let all the world know the disgrace of a man who was already mortified enough by the loss of her acquaintance.

She asked an explanation; he told her of the action that had been commenced in her name; she gently shrugged her shoulders and said, "How stupid they are!" Emboldened by this, he begged to know whether or not a life of distant unpretending devotion would, after a lapse of years, eraze the memory of his madness—his crime!

"She did not know!"

"She must now bid him adieu, as she had preparations to make for a ball in the Crescent, where everybody was to be."

They parted, and Dolignan determined to be at the ball, where everybody was to be. He was there, and after some time he obtained an introduction to Miss Haythorn, and he danced with her. Her manner was gracious. With the wonderful tact of her sex, she seemed to have commenced the acquaintance that evening.

That night, for the first time, Dolignan was in love. I will spare the reader all a lover's arts, by which he succeeded in dining where she dined, in dancing where she danced, in overtaking her by accident when she rode. His devotion followed her to church, where the dragoon was rewarded by learning there is a world where they neither polk nor smoke—the two capital abominations of this one.

He made an acquaintance with her uncle, who liked him, and he saw at last with joy that her eye loved to dwell upon him, when she thought he did not observe her. It was three months after the Box Tunnel that Captain Dolignan called one day upon Captain Haythorn, R.N., whom he had met twice in his life, and slightly propitiated by violently listening to a cutting-out expedition; he called, and in the usual way asked permission to pay his addresses to his daughter.

The worthy captain straightway began doing quarter-deck,
when suddenly he was summoned from the apartment by a mysterious message. On his return he announced, with a total change of voice, that "It was all right, and his visitor might run alongside as soon as he chose." My reader has divined the truth; this nautical commander was in complete and happy subjugation to his daughter, our heroine.

As he was taking leave, Dolignan saw his divinity glide into the drawing-room. He followed her, observed a sweet consciousness deepen into confusion—she tried to laugh and cried instead, and then she smiled again; when he kissed her hand at the door it was "George" and "Marian" instead of "Captain" this and "Miss" the other.

A reasonable time after this (for my tale is merciful and skips formalities and torturing delays), these two were very happy; they were once more upon the railroad, going to enjoy their honeymoon all by themselves. Marian Dolignan was dressed just as before—ducklike and delicious; all bright except her clothes; but George sat beside her this time instead of opposite; and she drank him in gently from her long eyelashes.

"Marian," said George, "married people should tell each other all. Will you ever forgive me if I own to you; no——"

"Yes! yes!"

"Well, then, you remember the Box Tunnel." (This was the first allusion he had ventured to it.) "I am ashamed to say I had £3 to £10 with White I would kiss one of you two ladies," and George, pathetic externally, chuckled within.

"I know that, George; I overheard you," was the demure reply.

"Oh! you overheard me! impossible."

"And did you not hear me whisper to my companion? I made a bet with her."

"You made a bet! how singular! What was it?"

"Only a pair of gloves, George."

"Yes, I know; but what about it?"

"That if you did you should be my husband, dearest."

"Oh! but stay; then you could not have been so very angry with me, love. Why, dearest, then you brought that action against me."

Mrs. Dolignan looked down.

"I was afraid you were forgetting me! George, you will never forgive me!"

"Angel! why, here is the Box Tunnel!"
THE BOX TUNNEL

Now reader—fie! no! no such thing! you can’t expect to be indulged in this way every time we come to a dark place. Besides, it is not the thing. Consider, two sensible married people. No such phenomenon, I assure you, took place. No screams in hopeless rivalry of the engine—this time!