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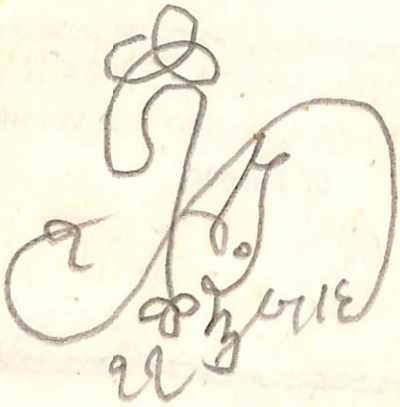
NUMBER EIGHT



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NUMBER EIGHT

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EDITORIAL

WHILE no branch of literature can be considered apart from its contemporary setting, the short story and the short poem reflect, perhaps more directly and intensively than the novel and the epic, the mood of the hour. Most of the authors represented in this number of Modern Reading are young, some of them we have the pleasure to introduce to the public for the first time, and it is inevitable that the war should be the background of much that appears here. We have, however, tried to present a picture in which that background is viewed from a variety of angles and in which there are lights as well as more sober colours.

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THE COLLABORATIONIST

BY PETER HARRIS

WHEN I heard that the English and the Americans had landed on the coast, I was afraid. The Germans tell me that I have no need to worry; their armies are invincible, and they have erected defences in depth which, they say, no army in the world can penetrate. Oberleutnant Klaus, who is in command of the garrison, told me so himself, yesterday.

But I am not sure. The townspeople can hardly hide their jubilation, because they are sure the German troops will soon be going away. They have hated me for four years, these people, but they have been afraid to say anything. When I pass along High-street they cross over to the other side of the road rather than pass me. And in the café, Elaine, the proprietor's daughter, brings me my coffee with a third of its contents slopped into the saucer. There is nothing tangible, you see.

But on Tuesday, when I passed M. Dupont, the chemist, he was standing in the doorway. He did not look at me, but he drew his fingers across his throat.

'*Bientôt, Bientôt*'. His lips seemed to frame the words.

Two nights ago, when my wife, Marie, and I were in bed, a stone was hurled through the glass of the parlour window. There was a piece of paper round it, with a drawing of a pair of gallows, and the slogan: 'Traitors end thus'.

I told the Oberleutnant about these things, but he was reassuring.

He said: 'Perhaps we give a little ground, but our army is like a recoiling spring. The further it is compressed, the greater its power'. He drew a diagram on a piece of paper to show me. The Oberleutnant is so capable, and I felt more comfortable.

Then I asked him: 'Suppose your army has to leave the town. Of course, as you say, it will be quite temporary. But a lot can happen in quite a short time, mein Herr. The people

here hate me. I think that every soul of the 10,000 in this town would like to see me dead'.

I wanted him to take me away with the retreating army, but he grew suddenly impatient.

'The Reich is fighting for its life, for its very existence, M. Grouard. We cannot allow civilians to impede military traffic'.

He gave me a drink, and patted me on the shoulder.

'Do not worry, M. Grouard—it will be all right', he said.

Now I listen three times a day to the news on the radio. But it is all so vague, you understand. In Russia three years ago the Germans were more specific.

. . . . .

I remember that fine day in June, 1940, when the German tanks clattered through the cobbled stones of the main street. All the shopkeepers had shut their doors, and fastened their shutters.

My wife and I were in the front room at home with our neighbours, the Denfin's. We had all hidden our jewellery and valuables under the floorboards. We were afraid to go too near the windows, for we did not know what to expect.

Mme. Denfin was nervous. She was well into her thirties, but a fine woman, for all that. She knew the uses and abuses of cosmetics. But that day she wore old, unfashionable clothes, as if to make herself as drab as possible.

'You know what soldiers are like', she said, as though by way of apology.

Marie was sympathetic. She remembered the Boche in the last war.

We did not stir from the house that day or the day after, but nothing happened. The Germans began posting proclamations in the street outside, and at last I went out to read what they said. I do not remember the words, but the posters said that we were to go about our business as usual. That was what the Fuehrer wanted. He had always been friendly towards the French people. We owed this occupation to the policy of encirclement followed by our government. Now, the French people were free. Under the Germans, they might look

forward to new prosperity. The occupation was merely a military necessity. It was to last only until the English plutocracy had been overthrown. But it warned us against sabotage. In the interests of the new France there must be law and order. Sabotage—that meant death.

The poster is cold. It is run off the rotary press in its millions, and the people who put it up may not sympathise with its message. They may wish to defeat it. Besides, the Germans were notoriously untruthful. Yet it reassured us, that poster. The troops seemed well disciplined, and one or two of the shopkeepers were opening again, and nobody molested them.

The next day I went to the newspaper office as usual. Jacques, the reporter, was waiting there for me. We did not know where to begin. A weekly paper in a small town depends on council meetings, weddings and funerals. The council did not meet, and there were no weddings that week, and although I suppose people still died, there were no funerals. But above all, we depend on advertisements. We repeated the regular announcements, but we did not expect to be paid for them. To fill the paper we had to lift articles from previous issues. Even so, it was no more than a single sheet.

How quickly we humans substitute the lesser for the greater. A man who has just recovered from typhoid fever worries over a wasp sting. A few days before, I had stood in fear of my life; that was forgotten, but I was wondering what was to become of my business. Slowly I had built it up from my humble beginning as a jobbing printer.

Marie said it was necessarily so under the Boche.

A few weeks later a man called to see me in my office,—a German, Herr Gruner. He was well-dressed and polite, and he spoke my language well, which is always helpful. I can recapture the picture of him as he sat in the leather chair in front of my desk, and he asked me about the state of my business.

I said, 'Everything is difficult, very difficult'.

He seemed almost sympathetic.

'I was afraid so. It is the fruit of war, this difficulty. The

Fuehrer did not want it to come—you know that. Your Government was obstinate, so obstinate. But the Fuehrer is not a vengeful man, M. Grouard. No, not vengeful, at all. He wants to help France, and the little people of France—like you. That is why I am here—to help you. I am not here for nothing; we Germans are a purposeful race'.

I did not say anything, and he went on: 'I was a newspaper man once, and I know your problems .Advertisement revenue, is it not? That is what enables paper worth a franc to be sold for fifty centimes. And of course, things are unsettled, very unsettled. Supplies are bound to be disorganised for a while, and the tradesmen cannot afford to advertise'.

'Just so', I said.

'Well, trade will revive, Monsieur—though as long as England stands in our way some of your factories will have to be turned over to war material. Until the new order is firmly established, some shortage is inevitable, quite inevitable. Prosperity will come only through the co-operation of your people. You see, M. Grouard, nothing in the world is independent of any other thing. On the surface perhaps, yes. But there is always reaction. In your case, now; the greater the sense of trust between our two peoples, the sooner a stable society is built, and trade revives. What happens? Your newspaper flourishes once more. The connection is obvious. You have worked hard, M. Grouard, have you not? You have succeeded because you are adaptable. I admire adaptable men'.

There was something in the man I did not like. 'I admire adaptable men'. It seemed that he emphasised the first two words. The object of his admiration—*eh bien*, he was somewhere in the room, too. He was turning over the old newspapers in my file.

After a while he said: 'We are prepared to buy advertising space in your paper. Let me see, you have, what, 48 columns in a normal issue. We will buy 12 columns a week at what we consider a fair rate'.

I am not a good business man, but I thought there must be some snag. He seemed to know what was passing in my mind.

'Yes, M. Grouard, we ask something else. When a customer buys a pair of shoes, he pays for them—but he expects courtesy, even though he does not pay for that. Local news is not prolific just now is it? I shall see that you are supplied with twelve columns of matter by our foreign news agency. But of course we shall expect you to use a high proportion of what we send you. Don't worry—we do not ask you to fill your journal with heavy, dull stuff. These days people want to be cheered, do they not? I think you are a shrewd man M. Grouard, and I do not disguise the fact that there will be some political colouring. But advertisers often insist on it, do they not? But in this case the end is a healthy one—reconciliation between the French and German peoples'.

I wanted time to think, so I changed the subject.

'My stock of paper is not large, Herr Gruner'.

'Probably not. But we Germans are the finest foresters in the world, and there is no shortage of pulping wood. We do not mind supplying paper—as long as we know it will be well used.'

He left me soon afterwards, and agreed to return in a week, when he had examined the question of rates.

I did not know what to do, and I consulted Marie. She is so discerning, Marie, and I like her advice on big matters.

'You must accept his offer, André', she said. 'We can expect no help from the English, and we must concede things—yes, even to the Boche. Otherwise you will be forced out of business, and perhaps sent to a concentration camp. . . . There is evidence enough in your files for that'.

'But is it not—treacherous'?

Marie shrugged. 'Marshal Petain is an honourable soldier. He is no traitor'.

Of course, it was true, what Marie said. You must understand my attitude. I am no nationalist. I want nothing as much as peace. Men are all the same, really. In the last war I was three years in the trenches, and I know that they are all the same. Lice do not discriminate between Latin and Teuton, and all men stink when they hang dead for days on the barbed wire, where no burial party can reach them. The

maggots are the same maggots, and after an advance and a retreat both French and Germans have queued outside the same brothels, and pawed the same women. Perhaps you say that is superficial. Oh yes, in peacetime, when there is time for idealogical differences. But in the trenches the physical is the all.

So I listened to Herr Gruner's offer, and if the rates he stipulated were ungenerous, they offered a living of sorts.

At first it was not so bad. People were without hope, and if I chose to fill my paper with German propaganda, it was no more than a small and unimportant addition to the sum of despair. England would fall. A few of the bolder of the townspeople listened to the English news bulletins in French. Winston Churchill promised liberation to France. Liberation. That was so *drôle*. And an obscure general, De Gaulle, was rallying a few outposts of our empire behind him. But we knew it was all futile. Then weeks followed days, and England did not fall. Futile? Well, perhaps. . . . A new spirit was infusing veins with a new fire. Food was short, and what there was of it was expensive; cattle was being driven into Germany; Jean, the doctor's youngest son, was shot for attacking a German sentry. This was the new order. The future might hold nothing that was good, but the present held everything that was bad. There was always hope. Hope costs nothing, and to the hungry it is a form of bread; it may not fill bellies, but it talks of fuller bellies to come. The new spirit was all-pervading. There must be no compromise. People spoke of impeding their German masters, that by doing so liberation might be brought nearer. There must be no compromise, that was it.

Eyes were turned on me and my newspaper, at first with vague, uncertain resentment. Later the feeling crystallised, Friends of twenty years avoided me, but the falling circulation of my journal was evidence enough. Each week sales dropped by a few dozen copies.

Occasionally I saw Herr Gruner. He was less affable.

'You French are a turbulent race', he said, 'How can we help you'?

After a year I was selling a few hundred copies instead of three thousand.

It was then that Herr Gruner told me that my paper would receive no more assistance.

'I cannot finance inefficiency, M. Grouard', he said.

I returned to printing. Here again I had to depend on the Germans, from whom I had orders for posters and proclamations. The Fuehrer had made a speech, and France must know. The Gauleiter had prohibited this, that, the other thing, and France must know. French workers were called for to go to Germany, and France must know. Sometimes I had to print the announcement that one of my compatriots had been executed for sabotage. But, worst of all, it fell to me to post these notices. I dreaded the task, and would leave my bed as soon as dawn broke, before many people were in the streets, that they might not see me. But they did see me, and despised me the more for my subterfuge. The local tradespeople had nothing to sell, and even had it been otherwise they would not have given me their orders. Every day new courses were added to the invisible wall which divided us.

I had always spent my days with men round me. Every morning would bring its quota of callers to my office. They were not always affable, these callers; perhaps I had abridged their reports or criticised their politics. But our wars were fought in gloves. The town was quiet, you see, and those little disagreements broke the monotony. But now there were no callers, except Germans. Often they were arrogant; they made me feel the inferiority of my position. But they were men, and I hungered for men's company. Sometimes I was invited to dine with them. These Germans did not go short of food.

Marie always refused to accompany me when I went out with the Germans. She would not say why.

One morning early a German officer was attacked in the street, and killed. I did not know about it until Marie told me that an arrest had been made. She said that I was suspected of having betrayed the killer to the Germans. What

evidence was there? None that I know of, but the people needed no evidence.

Previously the townspeople had ignored me, but now I saw them turn their heads in my direction as I walked through the town, and I heard them muttering among themselves. There was nothing I could do. I had made my choice; one may not queue for bread and potatoes. *Toujours, c'est l'un ou l'autre.*

Once I heard the name of the arrested man mentioned as I passed near a group of men standing in front of the café. Suddenly I was impelled to go across to them. I heard myself speak the first words to my fellow townsmen in two years.

'I didn't betray him', I cried. 'I didn't, I tell you. What evidence have you? What evidence . . .'?

They did not say anything, but put their hands in their pockets and turned their backs on me. *Qui s'excuse s'accuse.*

. . . . . .

Four years—and what years. The period seems to have been a decade. Time passes quickly for the happy man, for he seldom looks at the clock. When he does so the hands have moved a long way, and he is bounding toward the grave as a frog toward the river. But I would have it so, because a clock is for measuring time, and unless time is significant, it is futile to note its passage.

They have been bad years, and sometimes I think of the trenches. They were bad years, too, but even in the days when it rained, and the earth stank, one felt that there was some purpose, some end. Familiar places and people might be far away, but they were always there, and their existence stood in the mind. They were immovable and permanent, like rocks, and one day you might be back. You clung, limpet-like, to the idea. It was a reality; shells, lice, rats—they were mere illusions of a nightmare from which you would one day awake. War *is* a nightmare, you know.

But now, there is nothing left to cling to, no wall at my back. Marie tries to be comforting, but she says I should not have been so intimate with the Germans.

'Some concessions, perhaps, André, but to make friends of the Boches. . . .'

It is useless to try to explain that there was no middle course. I would try to escape to some other town, where I am unknown, but I cannot desert Marie.

Now the sun is setting, and the little town is strangely tranquil. Where are the German soldiers who usually throng the streets at this hour? Mustering, perhaps, for departure?

I passed M. Dupont again this evening. It seems that he must for ever be standing in the doorway of his shop. Was it imagination, or did his lips frame the same words: '*Bientôt, bientôt*'?

BLACK-EYED SUSAN

BY VIOLET QUIRK

SUSAN'S father began in a New York slum and ended in Mayfair. His sudden wealth, acquired during the prohibition period, sent him reeling at first and never afterwards did he regain complete balance though he always kept on his feet. When he set out to marry he looked for a girl who would fulfil all his ideas of a lady and he found Helen Randall, the daughter of a landscape painter with a small private income. She looked delicate which was what he wanted, his mother having been broad-hipped, great-bosomed and with a cracked voice which could out-shout every other woman in the street. She was a prodigious fighter and always won. She had been known to sink back, half-conscious, with a handful of her opponent's hair in each fist. He himself had been thumped through boyhood, his mother rarely giving an order without an accompanying blow or push, not painful or malicious but habitual. She indeed loved her son savagely, thereby supplementing the self-confidence he had inherited from her in good measure.

So naturally he wanted a lady when he could afford one, and to him a lady was languid, frail, delicate of accent, and incapable of manual labour. Her father had never wielded anything heavier than a paintbrush. He admired that, thinking of his father's pick. So he married Helen and she died a year later in childbirth, leaving a daughter who became just like herself in physique, only much smaller. She was indeed tiny and fair almost to excess so that she looked like a little angel. And like an angel she was treated, though she was a terror, her nurses said. What else could she have been? Every whim was gratified. She was pampered, body and soul. Like a princess, her father thought proudly, knowing nothing of the discipline to which most princesses are subjected. She had thousands of toys, hundreds of dresses, never went out when it was cold or wet. She fulfilled her father's heart's

desire but she was a miserable little thing, discontented, bad-tempered, given to whining. Naturally.

When she was sixteen her father died and she was put in the care of a refined widow who was frightened of her. No one resisted Susan. Even a rebellious puppy or kitten was mastered or removed. She got everything she wanted as soon as she wanted it. When she was eighteen she wanted an English earl and she got one. At last she was content. The American newspapers left her in no doubt as to who her father had been, and by New York society standards her mother had been a nobody. But now she was an English countess. Her husband was an earl. She liked the word earl more than the word duke. It occurred more often in old ballads and in historical romances. He had a castle just like the ones she had read about in English novels. She met the people she had seen before only in plays. It was perfect.

But in a year or so a familiar feeling stole over her. She had had it so often before when she grew tired of a new gift or a new dress. It was boredom. Her life had been one long boredom, broken only by flashes of delight when she got something she wanted. It says much for her marriage to the earl that it delighted her for so long.

When she was tired of it she wanted to be rid of it at once, but the earl wasn't agreeable. It is true he had been attracted by Susan's money, but he had also been attracted by Susan herself. Greatly. She was such a beautiful little doll, so unlike his six-foot sisters who could hunt and golf like men. Besides she was his wife, and for centuries the men of his family had always stuck to their wives, no matter what might happen on the side. He wanted to keep his Susan. She was offended, not being used to disobedience from others, but her tantrums, as he called them, didn't trouble him much. They even pleased him in a way. As though this dainty little creature could make him do what he was determined not to do! She wanted a divorce. A divorce! In his family! He laughed and waited for her to get over it. He didn't notice the purpose which was tightening her delicate, pink lips. When she found that indignation, argument, anger had no effect on him, she

simply removed herself. Wherever he was she was not, and in a few months the earl discovered that he hadn't a wife at all and never would have in the shape of Susan. Her cruelty gradually destroyed his love for her and amazed him to such an extent that he remained amazed ever after. Also, he wanted children and he would never get them from Susan. Not now. He consented to a divorce.

She already had someone else in her mind. It was beauty she wanted this time. She had had her fill of rank. Stephan was a Hungarian of ancient lineage and no money. His face, unmarred by mental effort, was formed by generations of happy living into perfectly harmonious features. His body was agile from much horseriding and muscle-trained by sports His temperament was accommodating, his family having lived like gentlemen on debts for three generations.

Susan wanted Stephan. In the case of the earl it had been his earlship she had wanted. She indeed greatly desired Stephan and his perfect, masculine beauty. Stephan was very willing. Why shouldn't he be with all her money considered? And she was such a little ornament as well. Stephan liked women. He had never been unloved since the age of seventeen. So it was very easy for him to respond to Susan's passion. They married. She enjoyed the way other women coveted him. He never dared look their way, not often anyway. Susan didn't like to share and she soon let him know it. And after all what had he to grumble about? She gave him heaps of pocket money and was as pretty as a picture. His relatives in Hungary reminded him ceaselessly that he had dropped into a good thing, that he was made for life.

But they didn't know Susan. The familiar feeling crept on her again. Stephan hadn't the power or prestige of the earl. He was weak really and too eagerly obedient. No wonder she grew tired of him, considering who she was. She told him she wanted a divorce. He was dismayed but showed no fight. And she was free again. Again she had the delightful feeling she had had in her childhood when she had asked for a new toy and it hadn't arrived yet but would any minute.

She fell in love with Jasper Canning when she saw him on the stage and that moment his fate was sealed. He was married, but she made it worth his wife's while to let him go. Her desire for him increased painfully, for she had never before had to wait so long to get what she wanted, divorces in England being so slow to get. He was a rising star and he loved it. Fame meant more to him than money. He earned money enough for his own needs and being a true artist was not greedy for any more. This added to his desirability in Susan's eyes, for both the earl and Stephan were compelled to marry for money.

Her marriage to Jasper, when at last it was possible, was more romantic than either of the others, for wasn't it pure love on Jasper's side when for her sake he relinquished his wife, a former actress who had comradely suited him, and when he cared so little for her money that he chose to go on acting though she had offered to pay him his salary ten times over? Oh, she was happy with Jasper. Sometimes she would sit in a box and watch him act and the love scenes fired her for his homecoming. They didn't affect her possessiveness being merely part of his job. But by and by other women did. Jasper aroused the love of women in the way all successful actors do and unlike the earl he was not intolerant of it, unlike Stephan he was not afraid to encourage it. His former wife had understood but not Susan. Rivalry was a thing she had never experienced and she didn't like it. She told Jasper it would have to stop and he took no notice. She threatened to divorce him and he told her to go ahead. Not that he meant that, she was sure, when he afterwards made love to her at her request. But he certainly was not intimidated. He did not ward other women off. He came home when he liked. He accepted invitations to himself alone without asking her first. And why wasn't she invited? Jasper said once that instead of mingling with the company she enthroned herself like a queen and waited to be approached on bended knee, but that was only his fun.

Then the war started. Susan did not believe that anything which could interfere so drastically with her way of living

could possibly last long, but Jasper lived as though every minute were a farewell. More and more he yearned for the companionship of his theatrical friends. One night when he wasn't home at twelve she went to bed, knowing he must have gone out to a supper party or perhaps a supper for two. She couldn't sleep. She had so much to say to him and it kept whirling round and round in her brain. Excitement and anger made her quiver with pain. Two, three, four. It was four in the morning and he hadn't come home yet. Surely it wasn't unreasonable to be annoyed. At twenty past four he walked in boldly, no guilty creeping to his door hoping he would not disturb her. She leaped out of bed and rushed out to him.

'Why didn't you telephone me you'd be late'? she demanded.

'When I do you make such a fuss', he said casually.

'Why didn't you ask me to come too'?

'You weren't invited'.

She hadn't been invited, but he had, a working actor, who had once lived on two pounds a week. She got herself ready for furious protest and an expression of distaste crossed his face. It had been such a fine party. Kathleen and Mary had been there amongst others. They were women of the theatre, middleaged, gifted, witty, tolerant, sad under their gaiety, knowing as they all knew that life would never be the same again. And now this homecoming! Another scene!

'Why do you go out with people who don't invite me'?

'You went out without Stephan—when you were tired of him'.

He implied he was tired of her just to hurt her; he didn't mean it of course, she was sure. He could sting like a woman when he liked. But she wasn't going to take insults from anybody. She slapped his face. And instantly he put out his hand to thrust her away. That is what he thought he did. But there had been champagne and its exhilaration was mixed with the fatigue of early morning. He was both elated and exhausted. He had struck rather than pushed and he had used his fist not his hand. His intention had been to put her out

of his sight and get to bed without further trouble. He went into his own room and locked the door. She went back to bed but couldn't sleep. She lay awake thinking—thinking . . .

That familiar feeling, that annihilating boredom, had not come to her yet with regard to Jasper. How could she be bored with him when he was always exciting, amazing and enraging her? She had never been treated like this before. Servants would stand anything from her because, like her father, she paid them double wages to make slaves of them. Her two former husbands had lived to please her and when she wanted to be rid of them she had had to make them glad to go. Was that what Jasper was trying to do to her? He'd better think again. He had struck her. She got out of bed to look at that precious face which had been struck. She smiled slowly at what she saw. Was it a blood memory from the past which caused her to feel no humiliation, no bitterness, which, indeed, gave her a feeling of having come home after long wandering? Her father's mother had always fallen into satisfied sleep after a Saturday night fight with her husband, loving him all the more next morning for having been such a man.

Jasper was her perpetual saviour from that awful boredom. She never knew what he would do next. He had given her something she had never had before.

Susan had a black eye.

NO SERVANT

BY ARTHUR F. HEANE

IF I was able to go back to Paris now I wonder if I should see him. I should know just where to look,—at the bottom of the Rue Royale where people stop at the edge of the pavement and wait till the skimming, swooping taxicabs have passed. In daylight, of course; I never saw him there at night, he may have thought darkness added a touch too sinister even for him. But in the crisp whiteness of the Place de la Concorde his thin, shabby, insinuating body would slither across the pavement, his pale lips would say noiseless things, a hand would fumble inside his buttoned jacket, and at a rebuff he would turn with sly, lubricious humility to some other passer-by, his quiet lips would move and his fingers fumble again. Would you believe me if I said that in spite of Saint Luke he once made me feel more of a louse than I have ever felt in my life?

He always interested me. I used to stop and talk with him sometimes, sometimes we'd walk round to the Rue Mont Thabor and drink *amer picon* at a broken-down bistro he used. Not that I had, at that time anyway, much interest either in his dirty postcards or the erotic displays he represented on a 50-50 basis. As a customer, in fact, I was dud. But he interested me from the very moment when he withdrew his hand from his buttoned jacket and said 'No, I don't think you'll need me somehow'. And he had looked particularly lean and hungry that day, his light brown eyes were sunken, his lips twitched now and then, he was unshaven, with at least three days' growth, so that his yellowish beard sprouted, softening the point of his long, triangular chin. Those times he looked fifty.

He used to tell me of his bad times over the *amer picon;* of the winter when the tourists had gone home like the swallows, as he whimsically said, the sudden illogical appearances of the police that led to confiscation of his stock in

trade and sometimes to arrest, the detrimental effect of international crises (strange to reflect that even such tremendous events should have power to disturb the sale of filthy photographs and the receipts at side shows and brothels). He would never accept money from me, though several times he admitted he was broke to the wide. But once or twice he had *soupe aux choux* and *boeuf miroton* at my expense, and then a blot of colour would stain his high pale cheekbones and his dead eyes would lighten and he might speak of his ambition to live near Rouen for which, for some reason, he had a great affection. And once, swiftly and passionately, he told me of a chance that had just occurred for him to work there, he was off to Rouen next day to see about it. But when I was in Paris again a few weeks later he was still on the edge of the pavement, and we said nothing of it.

His nationality puzzled me. He spoke with a slight foreign accent as a rule, but when he was loosened by food or drink he used English idioms that usually evade even the most competent linguists. I have just mentioned one, 'broke to the wide', any foreigner might use it, but in the delivery, the tripping of the tongue, there is a something to detect. And he said it like I did.

He was, too, one of those men who, amazingly in an unspeakable calling, communicate a certain reticence, wear a veil as it were about their intimate existences. So that I knew him very little really, though I knew he had been in England and had had a position there, and then returned to France. He was a man of education, had read Shakespeare and Tolstoy, Baudelaire, William Blake, Montaigne; once, when he had been given a mille by a wealthy young Englishman for some services that lasted a couple of days, he quoted Horace. 'Horace'? I said. 'Yes' he said quickly as if discovered, 'you can learn things like that out of the end of a dictionary. In my job you never know what may be useful—professors, schoolmasters and—and so on'.

Sometimes he had fainting fits, then I put him into a taxicab and sent him home. At that time I never knew where he lived except that it was near the Place de la République,

('Not very cheap, but I can be near my business' he once told me almost impressively). But all the taxi drivers knew where he lived, he had some sort of arrangement with them about fares. I don't think those fainting fits have finished him. I imagine him still, in spite of all chaos, on the pavement's edge in the Rue Royale, for he seemed, he seemed—if I may use an impossible phrase—rather immortal.

At last, once, I went home with him. It was over one of those fainting fits, too, a worse one than usual; I was really concerned. As a rule he was coming round by the time he was in the taxicab but this time he lay back on the seat in a shabby shrivelled heap. The taximan peered into the vacant helpless face and shook his head violently. I got in beside him.

We stopped outside a ghastly narrow street near the Place, full of scabrous, reeling houses with balconies, ragged washing, people in bed, hot foetid interiors, four or five floors of them, and then attics with sloping ceilings and unopenable skylights. It was one of these, the taxi-man said, and we went to find out exactly from a fat, horrible woman sitting with a young man in a gutter. The smells of cabbage, garlic, smoke, sodden washing and an open urinal were sickening. As I paid the driver a naked girl came to a window and beckoned to me.

He still sagged in my arms as I pushed and carried him up the five flights of stairs to his attic. I put him on the bed and gave him brandy and while he spluttered and opened his eyes I looked round.

There was hardly any furniture, an iron bed with dirty bedclothes, a ragged strip of carpet, a bucket, a plain wooden box with a broken piece of looking glass. The window wouldn't open, the air was inconceivably foul.

In a corner behind the bed I saw the only book in the room. I felt a sudden unreasonable disappointment, for I had thought somehow he would have some books, a picture or two, something to take him away from it in the hopeless hours when his thoughts came trooping. But except the one book there was nothing.

I picked it up. It was a dirty, greasy old English Bible, the binding half off, the pages loose. One or two pages fluttered

sadly and drearily to the floor. One was from St. Luke, the 16th chapter. A photograph fell out of the pages. I picked it up. It was of a young, fair-haired, lean-faced man in Holy Orders, fearless-eyed, confident and aware.

I turned and looked at him as he lay there with his dull eyes open, a little colour back in his cheeks, his pale lips trembling. He half raised himself and began to speak, and then, seeing what was in my hand, he stopped.

And then, God forgive me, I opened the door, walked down the staircase into the obscene and stinking street and left him alone.

POEMS BY HELEN LOVAT FRASER

SEA SONG

FOLD in your curious soul the sound
Of echoing cold spume flung on shore
By tinselled seas where monsters lie,
Tinselled seas under a sky
Where low and strange the sea moon hangs:
Monstrous seas and monstrous sky
Only seen by your inward eye!

Low falls the shudder on the beach,
Hollow the sea-shells' bugle-shapes,
But in the seas the monsters reel
And no seabirds through the moonlight wheel.

THE SALT MARSH

YOU see nothing by that stunted tree
But a track winding through to the wet salt marsh?
You hear no sound at all but the sudden sound
Of wind and seabird harsh,
Nothing more—seen or heard, this fading dusk?
No, nothing more.

Then who is the man that is ceaselessly
Pacing the rough harbour with the old shrunk stones?
Who is that restless man, ah, who is he?
Nothing is there but stunted tree and grass!

How the wind rises! how it shakes that branch!
The thin and twisted branch of the wind-bowed tree—
Ah, stop that man who paces up and down!
His footsteps drag the very heart from me.
It is the wind you hear across the marsh.

OXFORD

SHADOW and sun and sky
Drift over tower and dome:
People like ghosts in the streets
Blown and unreal pass by.

Deep in the valley alone
Closed in itself and old
My river-ringed city lies
Quiet in its mists and its stone.

CRETE

HE fought by the ruins of the sea-king's palace:
Hot was the sun and loud the sound of war,
And over the ruins of the sea-king's palace
Scattered the ghosts of a long-ago war!

Fire and the sound of a war that is passed
Sky-tall flames and the shatter of stone.
Is it the sea-king's son that is fighting,
Or an English soldier far from his home?

OLD STONE AGE

ONCE old, shy creatures shambled down this hill,
Shuffling the dead leaf underneath the shade
Of the forgotten forests: now,
Leaf and bone forgotten, both are gone.

Long-armed, shag-eyed, roaming the forests' gloom
With wet and apish mouths these submen came!
Till forced aground by fear and time they fled
To caves of safety lapped in stone and death.

NO COMING BACK

BY WINSTON CLEWES

WE CROSSED the frontier at twelve noon. Yesterday.

At five minutes to twelve I was lying on my belly at the edge of the rocks, looking down the mountain. I was on one side of the frontier, and the muzzle of my tommy-gun, just the tip, was on the other. I'd waited for this moment for a long time. Now here it was, coming up fast, up the face of my watch, hot-footed. When the big hand touched twelve—I was coming back! I could have shouted it at the top of my voice: I'm coming back!—stood up and shouted it down the mountain-side like thunder.

I was keyed up. Waiting for zero-hour does that to you, keys you up so that when zero comes all you're thinking is let me like a soldier fall. It makes a nice cool dignified kind of war. I was with the partisans last year. They didn't bother with such refinements. They fought the cheapest way, the quiet way, with a knife from behind when they could. I didn't cotton on to it very well: I was there for fun then, just passing through, so to speak; and killing—just killing—didn't seem so hot. Let-me-like-a-soldier-fall was my idea of war, and my morale suffered if I didn't live up to it. That's why I joined the Legion. I see now I'd got the wrong angle. Guerrillas don't have any morale. If you hate enough you don't need it.

Well, there I lay, yesterday, waiting for zero, waiting for twelve o'clock. All along that frontier line, regularly spaced out on each side of me, was the rest of No. 2 Company, and others beyond them: soldiers, not partisans; and the tautness of the nerves of every one of them ran up and down the line till you could have sworn the unseen frontier was a live high-tension cable. We looked down the mountain to where the trees started, and below them, the vineyards, terrace by terrace. Nothing stirred in all that wide view. Nothing. Not a bird sang. The sun poured heat on us like boiling oil out of

a pan. We were like to have fried, up there on the bare rocks.

A drop of sweat fell from my nose on to my watch-face. I put up my other hand to smear it clean, and at that moment the whistle blew, a little lost sound like a seamew's call. Coming just then after waiting for it like I had, it caught me off guard, with a kind of shock. So I was a fraction of a second behind the others in getting started. As I stumbled after them down the steep sliding scree of loose muck, I could hear the Captain calling out: 'Keep in line, comrades, don't break the line', and the sergeants repeating it further slong. I could hear it with one part of my mind, that is, away outside myself; but right in my ear my own voice was saying, you damned fool, you damned fool, you damned dunderheaded fool.

I was flaming mad. Not with the enemy I was supposed to be charging. 'Keep in line, boys', the Captain kept on saying. 'Steady. There's no hurry. Take it easy'. That was how the charge was—nothing to get excited about. I was mad that I'd missed the great moment that I'd been waiting and working for, that bright flash of time in which I could say to myself NOW, now I am coming back at last. The moment had come, and I'd been elsewhere. I'd missed it. I'd looked forward to it so, and now it might never have happened. So I cursed like a kid that knows the words but not the passion in them. I never gave a thought to the enemy, although we were getting near the line of the woods. If the enemy was in those woods, pretty soon now he'd loose off with everything he'd got, and our line would waver, and re-form, and there'd be a rising yell, and we'd crash down into the woods feet first (those still on their feet), and trample his daylights into the ground.

But there wasn't a sound, except our feet on the shale, a muffled grunt now and again as a man traversed a few yards on his backside, and the Captain's voice saying quietly: 'Take it easy, comrades. Keep in line. Watch your next in line through the wood'. And then we were under the shadow of the trees.

It struck cool under there, almost stopped your breath

like a dip in cold water. It was that plunge from broiling light to moist half-darkness that took me back. I was alert, I'd got my gun at the ready, I wouldn't have given anyone a half chance to try any stand-and-deliver stuff, but—maybe I'd got a touch of the sun up there on the ridge. It was like being in two places at once. I was there in the wood, but another part of me, just as real, was back in last year, back on the plain, back at the door of the shed they called the Inn of the two Angels, back—

Just like when I saw her for the first time. The same moist half-darkness, after the same broiling light, that made the inside of the Inn seem as big as a cathedral. Inn, they called it. More like a big barn, it was. The casks went up to the roof in tiers, and back into the darkness, you couldn't see how far. What you breathed seemed to be half old wine-soaked air and half cobwebs. Only the local peasantry used the place, and few of them. I could never make out why it was there at all. There were no travellers on that road, the road led nowhere but to the foot of the mountains, and then stopped. I'd come that way because I was going over the mountains. I was sick of the partisans, as I said. I believed in their cause, but I didn't like their atmosphere. So I was going to join the army they said was forming over the mountains, and come back in proper style to finish the job off with a band playing, as it were. I came along the road in the brazen heat with martial music already in my ears, and turned off at the Inn to get a cup of wine and roll a cigarette.

I—she was standing inside and I saw her for the first time.

She was standing inside leaning against the trestle counter. She might have been waiting for me. She had a white flower in her hair. Her eyes were like lamps shining.

I've heard it said that if you're in love you can remember anyone's face except hers. The girl's, I mean, the girl you love. Well, maybe I haven't been in love. I don't know. I stayed over at the Inn for two days, and I can only say that from the hour I left, waking or sleeping, by night or by day, in company or alone, her face has never gone from me. Not like a picture hanging on the wall. Just that the shape of

her mouth's been in the songs I've sung, the moon's got its light from her, the wind's had her voice to speak with.

Maybe love's not like that. Maybe that's just craziness. Maybe I've been crazy for a year, and that's why I didn't mind leaving her, because I was crazy. It didn't seem to matter. We'd found each other: we *were*, we existed in for and by each other—what did a year matter? I should come back. So maybe it wasn't a touch of the sun, maybe I was just crazy, coming through that wood yesterday. Walking carefully, trigger-finger ready, keeping touch with the next in line—and all the time, half of me not there at all, and the other half ready to jump for joy like a crazy fool. If I'd come face to face with one of the enemy I should probably have thrown my arms around him and kissed him. Because I was coming back, at last, to my girl, like I said I would.

And the Captain's voice said quietly: 'Steady, boys. Take it easy. Check your line. We're coming into the open'. The sunlight opened up in front of us, and as we left the shadow of the trees, the heat struck us like a hammer. The vineyards fell away in front, terrace by terrace, down to the plain. There wasn't a sound but the scuffle of our feet. No enemy.

We reached the level ground, the whistles peeped in the stillness, we halted, and looked at each other. 'Take it easy, friends', the Captain said. 'At ease'. We flopped and waited, while a sort of council of war developed. Officers ran up and down the line. They conferred and broke up. The Captain came back.

'Boys', he said, 'the enemy have apparently fallen back to other positions. They may intend to hold San Raffaele. That's ten miles on. Or they may hope to fall on us from ambush. This company will provide scouts to go forward. I am calling for volunteers'.

There was a general movement, but I was in front.

'Sir', I said. 'Sir, I know this country. I was through here last year. If I may suggest, sir—'

'Go on', he said.

'Let me go forward alone, sir'.

He looked at me. 'Alone? Why'.

I told him. There was only the one road, and the country on each side as flat as your hand, no cover anywhere. Any ambush must be on the road. If I went forward down the road, followed after a short while by a screen of men flung out to each side, followed in turn by the main body, I was bound to spring any trap, and—

'You are prepared to do this'? he said. I said I was. He shook me by the hand. I think he was moved that I should make the offer, a foreigner. 'You are a brave man', he said theatrically. 'You deserve well of my country'. I let him run on. I wasn't playing hero. I knew the road, and I knew damned well there was no place for an ambush within miles. And anyway in my own mind I didn't believe the enemy were in that section at all; I wouldn't have bet money that they ever had been. There was nothing there for them, unless they intended going into the wine business.

No, I wasn't acting the hero. I just wanted to arrive at the Inn alone, I wanted to have her alone for a few minutes, before the army took over. I wanted to come back as myself, not as Private No. 999. I was—sentimental. Soldiers have no right to be sentimental.

I went off down the road. They'd been working in the fields a year ago. They'd waved to us as we walked along. We'd walked arm in arm, smiling at each other, and the outline of the mountain against the sky had had a rosy nimbus from the wine we'd drunk each other's health in. We were happy. It wasn't like a parting. It wouldn't be long. I was coming back.

Now as I walked the sun was going down. The fields were empty. The dust of the road was as soft as white velvet, and as soundless. I felt a little cold.

And there it was. The Inn. Just the same, no change, huddling by the roadside as though it had been dropped there. It threw a long untidy shadow across the road. As I stepped into the shadow I broke into a run, forgetting I was a soldier. I forgot the presence of the enemy, forgot the war. I ran up to the door and called her name. The door stood open as it always did. It was quiet inside, and dark. I stood inside the

doorway and called again, 'Hallo there. Anyone home'? At any rate her father must be about somewhere, I thought. The sound of my voice flew up into the roof and ran about among the tiered casks and came back to me.

I didn't know what to do. This was something I had never thought of. I half turned to come out when something dropped heavily on my shoulders from above, throwing me sideways on to the ground. My head came up against a barrel and I went out like a light.

When I came to I was outside by the wall, neatly laid out on a stretcher. Someone asked how I felt. 'O.K. O.K.', I said. 'What happened'? I couldn't remember a thing.

'Some old geezer took you for the enemy', the man said. 'Tried to stick you. Lay doggo up among the barrels and dropped on you'.

Then I remembered. I sat up. 'Where is he'? I said.

'Don't worry', the man said. 'He's dead. It was his last kick, I guess. Must have died as he dropped. He was lying on top of you when we found him. We thought you were both stiffs'.

My throat closed up. I couldn't ask it for a long time. When I did: 'Sure', he said. 'There's a girl. We can't get anything out of her. She's nuts'.

My darling. She sits without speaking, looking down at the ground. Now and then she trembles. She doesn't look up, just trembles, head to foot. If you put out a hand to touch her, she shrinks, winces away so you just don't touch her. She never looks up.

I don't know what they did to her. I thought there was nothing here for them. I didn't know that wherever there's beauty there's something for them to trample; wherever there's innocence, there's something for them to smirch; wherever there's life, there's something for them to kill.

I know now. I know now about the partisans. I know how they feel. When it's dark tonight I'm leaving the Legion to get on without me. I'm off on my own. No more martial music for me. No panoply of war, no girl I left behind me. And this time: no coming back.

GREATER LOVE

BY CYRIL HUGHES

THE first meeting between Helen Travers and the man who was to be her husband and her murderer was hardly romantic, but very significant.

It was at one of those silly parties which the wealthy and pathetic widow, Mrs. Venables, was in the habit of giving, and to which she invited all the more fashionable young people she could think of, in addition to a few of her older friends to whom she endeavoured to prove, with painful lack of success, that her own place lay rather with the younger guests than with them. The young people almost invariably came, partly because the prospect of free food and drink of a high quality, even with Mrs. Venables thrown in, was not one to be spurned, and partly because the simple virtues of politeness and charity towards the aged have not entirely died out, as some people think, in this generation.

Helen herself was not regarded by Mrs. Venables as either young or fashionable. She was thirty, and had an alarming tendency to be efficient in many directions, which made most women hate her and all men fear her. She deserved neither of these reactions, for in addition to possessing an honours degree in English literature, an apprehensive knowledge of politics, and a flair for making a house both comfortable and beautiful, she had a genuine love for her fellow-creatures, a pair of deep, calm eyes of sombre blue, and a smile which transformed her face in a second from a slightly melancholy pleasantness to a vivid beauty. But it was rumoured that she did book-reviews and articles for, amongst others, Left-wing magazines. Which was really quite enough to disqualify her from attending a Venables party. (For this was before the war, when Left views were young, but not fashionable).

However, Helen's mother was one of the few acquaintances of Mrs. Venables who had achieved the status of friendship

by never referring to that lady's age (which was actually an over-ripe sixty). So Mrs. Travers and daughter were always invited together. Mr. Travers was never invited because of the certainty that he would not come.

On this occasion, her mother being slightly ill, Helen was on her own, and feeling as though she had come under false pretences. And then she met Howard Preston.

It was during the noisy interval that succeeded two silly party games which Mrs. Venables had insisted on playing. Howard was talking to a group of breathless girls in various degrees of painted and glamorous undress, when it became embarrassingly obvious that his back brace buttons had come unstuck and his trousers were slipping. He made a furtive grab at them and calculated the chances of a graceful exit. One or two of the girls giggled. As often happens on such occasions, everyone in the room suddenly decided to look in his direction. He felt very unhappy.

And then Helen appeared and took him on one side in the most friendly manner, as though she'd been meaning to all evening, escorted him unobtrusively to an empty room, acquired a needle, thread and buttons from somewhere, and repaired the damage neatly and speedily.

His thanks were as handsome as his appearance. Helen had, in fact, been looking with interest for some time at his crisp, curly black hair, straight eyebrows and nose, clear, frank blue eyes, fine teeth, and the weak mouth which seemed, strangely, to add to his attractiveness. They were together for the rest of the evening.

After that it was quite inevitable. Perhaps only Helen knew just how inevitable it was, and how sublimely happy the thought made her. There were gossip, and sneers, and even laughter about the attachment, she well knew. Mr. Travers gave it his blessing. Long experience had led him to the conclusion that whatever Helen did was right. Mrs. Travers, who had sense enough to feel a little worried, had wisdom enough not to interfere. Helen and Howard found they had a lot to give each other.

Five months after the party they were married.

So began that brief and sad period of joint activity which was always a variation, in one form or another, on the theme of Helen preventing Howard's trousers from falling down.

Not that Helen found it sad or unpleasing in any way. Sad to the outside observer, yes, but the outside observer was not in Helen's shoes, and did not hold the grasp of the situation that she did. She received no shocks. Nothing that happened was fundamentally different from what she had expected. She had quickly learned all there was to be learned about Howard, and married him with her eyes open.

He was three years younger than she was by the calendar, and a lifetime younger in outlook. He edited and owned a weekly newspaper with the largest circulation in the county (left to him by his uncle), had a real talent for popular journalism and a retentive memory for the witty remarks of others, which he would reproduce with perfect timing in the most appropriate situations. This, and a certain easy adaptability, made him popular with men. This, a tendency to enjoy life beyond his income, and his undoubted sexual attraction, made him adored by women. He was not rich, but was beloved of an aunt (widow of the uncle) who was conveniently old and rich and intended to keep her money while she was alive but made no secret of its destination after her death.

Helen knew that she would have married Howard had he been a pauper; and she was undeterred by the unkind remarks which his undeniably attractive financial prospects occasioned from a number of females who had hoped to marry him themselves. Her knowledge of Howard made her quite certain of her course. She knew him as nobody else could have known him. Her calm dark eyes saw him, as no other eyes would have seen him. She had nothing spectacular to go by, nothing unique or unusual. Howard was always his normal self. She simply penetrated more deeply than others. And she knew that he was handsome, and charming, and kind and superficially clever. But she knew, also, that he was dishonest, a liar, and as irresponsible as a child.

It was even more because of this knowledge than for any

other reason that she married him. Perhaps there was in her head some notion of saving a person less capable than herself from the consequences of such a marriage. Perhaps there were other reasons too.

But the plain and simple fact was that she loved Howard. Nothing she discovered about him could alter that. The more she knew, the more she loved. It was an experience she had never really known before—somebody entirely her own, demanding her whole being, her whole attention, her whole womanhood. Had she been less perceptive, had she been blind to his failings, she would have loved him until her love went sour and turned to hate when revelation came. Had he been perfect, her love would have been mediocre, a small and insufficient thing. But he was not perfect. And his imperfections challenged her love, developed it, so that it enveloped and accepted them. She loved them because she loved him. She loved him utterly—as a lover, as a wife, as a mother.

Howard was, indeed, her own, her only child, to be protected at all costs from the world he could not face, and not least from the consequences of his own acts. To him the situation was manifestly pleasing. He basked in his wife's love, and thrived on it. He was psychologically constituted to worship, a very personal god, and to demand from that god at least as much as he gave. If the god had at any time failed him, he would have been quick to complain of being forsaken. Helen did not fail him. She was fully prepared to deal with the complications which her sharing of Howard's life was bound to entail, and from which a fortunate material situation and an unfettered existence had hitherto protected him. In return he offered her a genuine devotion which frankly acknowledged her almost maternal omnipotence; the fascinating but dangerous charm of his personality; and the weakness which called forth all the resources of her tender love. And the greatest of these, in Helen's eyes, was his weakness.

The marriage went well at first, of course. They were easily the brightest couple in the county. Their comet soared and dazzled in many directions. The unsigned articles and

reviews which Helen contributed to Howard's paper succeeded in creating for it in intelligent circles a respect rarely achieved by provincial journals of comparable unimportance. The anonymity of the contributions also produced the impression amongst people who did not know Helen that Howard was the author, a misunderstanding which both partners were glad to allow to continue.

Howard insisted on showing his wife to his numerous friends like a new toy. As her marriage seemed to have made Helen about ten years younger, Howard's friends did not bore her quite as much as they would have done had she been still single, And the kindness and tolerance which made her suffer fools gladly, added to the skill with which she contrived to subordinate her talents to Howard's inferior ones, made her a brilliant hostess and a flattering guest.

The first practical signs of Howard's true nature might have been passed off as pure exuberance, had she not been expecting them. A series of delightful extravagances—two new cars, a fantastically large house, too many expensive parties, a litter of unnecessary presents. Helen scolded gently but with acquiescence. She knew that this was but the beginning.

And then, quite suddenly, the brief comet reached its zenith, and began to decline—gently at first, but unmistakeably. The new toy lost its novelty, and, like a spoilt child, Howard began looking in the shop window again.

Not that he let Helen know, by any definite indication, that he was off on another course. He wouldn't for the world have done anything so calculated to hurt her. But Helen didn't need to be told. By now she could read Howard's every thought, foresee his every action.

His attempts at subterfuge amused her by their inadequacy. She knew that he really thought he was deceiving her, and she knew, too, that he felt no consciousness of doing wrong. He was trying to save her feelings. To save his she pretended to be deceived. Pretended even when he made those clumsy excuses for not taking her to several parties he attended by saying it was a stag party, or insisting laughingly that she

would be bored by the company. She even let him think she believed him when he went away for week-ends 'on business' concerned with persuading certain well-known authors to write articles and stories for his paper—persuasions which could equally well have been done by post, and which, of course, never produced any practical results.

Who the woman was (or, more probably, women) Helen never bothered to try to find out. She was certain that, for the present at least, it was not very serious. Not in itself, that was. There were, however, incidental circumstances which might have had serious consequences had she not been there to deal with them.

Howard was incurably generous where women were concerned. His new interests demanded an increased expenditure and impressive presents, and, at the same time, he saw to it that his wife was not neglected. The means by which he met his new commitments were as simple as they were unscrupulous.

It was fortunate that Helen received early practical evidence of her husband's financial methods. The first instance was provided by a visit, during Howard's absence from the house one day, from a suave representative of a firm of motor-car salesmen, who presented a cheque for over five hundred pounds, signed by Howard, which his account had been unable to meet. Several communications from the firm and the bank to Howard had elicited no reply. Helen murmured something about a mistake and gave the man a cheque on her own account for the amount required.

She said nothing to Howard about the matter. But she smilingly suggested one evening that a busy man like her husband could do with a personal secretary, and that no better person could be found for the task than his very efficient wife. Howard agreed quickly and gratefully. Subsequently several incidents of the same kind were dealt with before they had gone too far.

It would be untrue to say that Howard's next lapse did not give Helen a slight shock. Although she could plot her husband's future course with accuracy in its essentials, the

details of the route were apt to cause even her some surprise. And when after a visit by Howard's aunt she found him in his study carefully copying his aunt's signature from her most recent letter on to a cheque for a hundred pounds (made out to himself) in that lady's cheque book, she was inclined to remonstrate. This was really too much—though Helen was not thinking of any moral considerations, but only of the danger to Howard involved in the course he was taking.

Howard was a little embarrassed, certainly, but ingenuously frank. Helen knew that he had done it because he must have known that she was paying his debts, and wanted to save her further expenditure. She pointed out the dangers but said nothing about the dishonesty. Howard, she was sure, did not consider it dishonesty. After all, he would argue, his aunt's money was coming to him anyway, so what was wrong with getting a little of his own in advance when he needed it? Helen returned the cheque-book and hoped she managed to convince the owner that it had been left behind by accident (as Howard alleged it had) and gave Howard the hundred pounds, euphemistically terming it a loan.

Shortly after this Howard's aunt did at last die, to her nephew's candid delight and, it must be admitted, Helen's relief. The fortune which Howard inherited was substantial, and it seemed certain that monetary difficulties would no longer expose him to any risks.

But his newly acquired wealth made his female admirers bolder with their allurements and him more reckless with his attentions. This comparative abandonment of secrecy was, Helen thought, a natural development anyway. Having created a situation, Howard would inevitably begin to take it for granted, and to expect everybody else to do so as well.

Helen submitted gracefully to a series of increasingly frequent visits from women of varying degrees of animally attractive inanity. The visitors treated her at first with uneasy caution, which tended after a time to degenerate into careless contempt. She was often surreptitiously mocked, occasionally openly insulted. In return she was kind, charming, sometimes gently caustic. Only once did she lose her

temper, under quite unendurable provocation. That was when, returning unexpectedly early one week-end from a visit to her parents, and learning that Howard had gone to spend an hour with his friend Dr. Talbot, she found one of her husband's more objectionable mistresses brazenly unpacking her case in her and Howard's bedroom. There was an unpleasant scene, afterwards recalled by Helen with mingled regret and joy, which resulted in the visitor's leaving in a hurry before Howard's arrival. Howard she did not, could not blame. He collected women as a child collects tadpoles, and with as little concern about their fate when he had tired of them. He was not conscious of breaking any solemn vows. The vows he made on his marriage day he had no doubt sincerely meant at the time. But that time was not now, and promises made then were no longer valid.

Helen continued with considerable success to guide Howard through affair after affair without letting him become too deeply entangled with the numerous people capable of doing him serious harm. Because it was for him she was doing it, she was happy. But she could not rid herself of a growing apprehensive feeling that there might one day come an obstacle which even her skill would be unable to negotiate. That burst of deeply passionate and, for him, enduring love, which had led to his marrying her could conceivably occur again, with somebody else as its object. In that case, tact and diplomacy would not be enough.

It did occur again and, strangely enough, Helen herself was the means of bringing it about. She had travelled down to London to discuss some proposed articles with the editor of a literary weekly. There she met an old school friend, Elaine Fielding, and invited her to stay with them for a week or two. Elaine duly came, and immediately an electric spark seemed to pass between her and Howard. Helen observed and her heart sank.

Yet in a way she was glad. She had felt it must happen, and she was glad that it was Elaine rather than one of the atrocious females she had endured so heroically. She enumerated Elaine's qualities to herself. Physical beauty, yes—

she had always been prettier than Helen, a fair, vivacious beauty to which men were peculiarly susceptible. Strength, yes—she would need that, or rather, Howard would need it. Intelligence, yes, expressing itself not academically, but in a perceptive and valuable worldly wisdom. Why had Elaine not married before, she wondered? Perhaps she, too, had been waiting for somebody like Howard to tax her powers. But there were many possible reasons. Enough that it had turned out like this. Perhaps she would do the job better than Helen had done it.

It was quite clear to her that Howard and Elaine were in love, but Helen waited to see what Howard's reaction would be. He had to some extent gone beyond her ken now. She no longer possessed him, and so no longer had full knowledge of him. So that when she did discover what his intentions were, the shock was all the greater.

After Elaine left, he became unusually morose and melancholy, and kept casting worried looks at Helen which her smile and affectionate care entirely failed to charm away. He made frequent excuses to leave the house, saying he was interested in some work Dr. Talbot was doing, and was just running over to see how he was getting on. Dr. Talbot was a young and efficient doctor who had set up a practice in the county in order to make enough money to be able to indulge in research, but had by now, Helen suspected, decided that the county and the money were more attractive than any research.

It was after returning from one of these visits that Howard, with a return, too, of his usual tender manner, suddenly told Helen that she wasn't looking well. He suggested that she had been sleeping badly. Helen, who had been sleeping perfectly well, wondered what he was getting at, and allowed herself to be argued into admitting that perhaps she ought to be able to sleep better. Whereupon Howard said that he would mention the matter to Dr. Talbot next time he saw him, and ask him to prescribe a sleeping draught.

It was then that Helen first became aware that her husband meant to kill her.

For one brief moment she knew him entirely again. The whole panorama of his thoughts flashed before her mind. Her first automatic reaction of incredulity was instantaneously stifled and overwhelmed by the blinding flood of certainty. He was going to put her out of the way by the most direct and simple method he could think of.

Poor, dear, darling, lovable Howard! Seeing it as he saw it, she realised that there was really nothing else he could do. The idea of divorce, which had inevitably entered her head before, now seemed utterly impossible. That she should give Howard an excuse to divorce her was unthinkable—he was the type to be very upset if she should prove unfaithful to him. And if she availed herself of the abundant grounds for divorcing him she knew that his distress, not only at his own disgrace but at the thought that he had caused her pain, would be intense.

So there was really no other course open for Howard to take. She could imagine everything that had happened. She knew now why he had been worried and miserable. She could see him with Dr. Talbot, laughingly professing a dilettante interest in medicine; carelessly glancing through the doctor's books; asking questions on many topics to disguise his particular interest in Blyth on poisons; scanning through that book repeatedly and anxiously.

He would be looking for something easily obtainable. Spirits of salts, sugar of lead . . He would try to find something painless and quick, something that would cause her no agony. Vomiting, convulsions, respiratory paralysis . . . she could see his young face grow perplexed and aghast as he read through the various horrible symptoms and thought of Helen.

Dear, gentle darling! Thank heavens he had had the sense to abandon the idea of a crude poison and think of something else. Helen shuddered to think of the clumsiness with which he would have carried out his plan, of the certainty of discovery, of trial and guilt and gallows. His still remaining love for Helen had saved him from that. A drug to induce sleep, an accidental overdose, was a much kinder and safer method.

She allowed Dr. Talbot to come to see her and told him that she suffered from insomnia. He declared that she was probably writing too much, and gave her the drug, a bottle of small white tablets, emphasizing the warning on the label not to take more than the stated dose, which was two tablets.

For three or four nights she took the tablets with her retiring cup of chocolate in bed. On the second night Howard announced his intention of sleeping in another room, so that he would not disturb her during the night.

She was a little hurt, but thought she knew the reason for this move. She was certain it would not be long now.

A sudden doubt caused her a period of anxiety. Howard intended the affair to look like an accident, of course, but would he be able to carry it off convincingly? There was less danger than with ordinary poisons, but the danger was still formidable, and, at the very least, unless Howard was unusually skilful, there was likely to be unpleasantness. He must be saved from unpleasantness at any cost.

At any cost. Helen knew what the price was, and was willing, even eager, to pay it. She had not for one moment thought of attempting to defeat his end. Now she determined to assist it.

On the fifth day after Dr. Talbot's visit she decided, from a certain nervousness and exaggerated attention on Howard's part, that the time had come. She finished some articles she had been working on.

That evening she sat down and wrote an ordinary, chatty letter to her mother. In it she came round to the subject of her supposed insomnia.

". . . I'm still sleeping badly (she wrote), and Dr. Talbot's tablets don't seem to be helping very much. I think I'll try taking more of them—he warned me not to, but you know how these doctors are always very much on the safe side! I'm sure they're quite harmless, and, really, lack of sleep is making me quite desperate. I think I'll go up to bed when I've finished this and try the experiment.

Howard is as sweet as ever. The poor darling seems quite worried about me. . ."

Before she had finished, Howard came in looking, she thought, rather agitated.

'Dearest, you look so tired', he said. 'No more writing tonight. You go straight to bed, and I'll bring your chocolate up with my own little hands!'

So he hadn't been able to stand the strain, she thought. He couldn't wait any longer.

'I must catch the last post with this,' she said. 'I shan't be long now'.

You mustn't stop me. Don't try to stop me. I'm doing this to help you, my darling. My own darling, you still need me, just a little longer. I must finish this letter. I must post it to make sure. It's all right now, but I must make sure.

Teasingly, he gave her five more minutes. She addressed and stamped the letter and gave it to the maid to post. She heard her footsteps growing fainter down the drive. Should she have taken it herself? But of course not. Everything must be as usual, just as usual.

The maid returned and informed Helen that she had caught the post. Helen thanked her and went up to bed.

Before she had finished undressing Howard entered with her chocolate. She knew that he had taken some of the tablets from the bottle and that the chocolate was already liberally dosed. He *had* been clumsy, then!

But it didn't matter now. It didn't matter that the maid had not brought her chocolate as usual, or that they were alone together in the bedroom, with the fatal bottle on the bedside table. Everything was explained. Everything would be all right, for Howard, for Elaine.

She realized now that she had been waiting for this moment to see what Howard would do, perhaps, in spite of her certainty, to see whether he really would do it. It all seemed very normal, very commonplace. Could murder occur like this? Murder! She almost laughed at the incongruous association of the word with Howard. The letter, at least, would save him the trouble of convincing himself that it really had been an accident.

She changed into her nightdress, and sat down on the

edge of the bed. Very calmly she dropped the usual two tablets into the cup, and stirred the chocolate.

Howard suddenly stooped, and, pulling her nightdress aside, pressed his lips against her smooth shoulder. His eyes were bright, and wet. How helpless and pathetic he looked. He was pitying her, and it hurt him. Don't pity me, my sweet. Only the ignorant need pity, and I have knowledge and acceptance. She ran her fingers through his crinkly hair, and pulled his head round so that his lips met hers.

'Run along, now, dearest,' she said, in her most mischievous maternal manner.

'Goodnight, my darling!' he whispered. He pressed her hand, and was gone.

Deliberately, she put five more tablets in the cup. The letter wouldn't be altogether a lie.

The last rays of a late summer sun were coming through the window. They lit smouldering fires in the darkness of her eyes as she raised the cup to her lips.

Quite an easy way to die, she thought. To die. To cease upon the midnight with no pain. No pain because she died for love, for Howard. Greater love hath no man than this, that he lay down his life for a friend. No man—no, nor woman neither, though by your smiling . . . Was she smiling? She felt happy. There was no Hamlet-indecision here, no repercussions. . . .

She drained the cup, and turned to pull the bedclothes back. She was glad that Howard would not wake to find her dead beside him. He had been wise to choose another room.

She slipped into bed. The sheets were pleasantly cold. She lay and felt her body warming them, slowly, deliciously. She quickly became drowsy, and her eyes closed. The warm sheets rose gently, regularly, with her breathing. Soon, very soon, they would be cold again, and still.

POEMS BY KATHLEEN BALBERNIE

THE CHANGE

SINCE you, who never drew a coward breath,
Went courteously by honour's road to death,
This world, for all its bright moments and space,
Can never be to me my natural place.

I laugh when some laugh, still in life take part,
The change is in my heart.
For there a voice, not hurt by joyfulness,
Says, 'Could you leave this?' and my heart says, 'Yes.'

THE SUBSTITUTE

FAREWELL to joy, for joy must pass,
If love were true, and love be gone.
But pitiful life sometimes puts on
A little look that joy once had :
The child's smile, like his father's dead,
The mother kisses, but is sad.
Think this joy's image in a glass.

MARE IONIUM*

'I AM unhappy,' said my exiled spirit,
'Hush,' said the sea,
The clear green sea that lipped Ulysses' galley
And heard the song the sirens sang :
'Ah, hush.'
'I shall pass from his mind that loved me.'
'Peace,'
Said the straight cypresses by the vine-leaved wall.

And when darkness came walking over the sea
I was comforted, though there was only the moon
On black water, with stars lonely and bright.

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TO A GENTLEMAN NOT RETURNING FROM THE WARS

YOUR body, clean as air, white as sea-foam,
Straight as sun, never was that body of yours
More beautiful living than made ready to die.

Some who talk much and fearfully of death
Dare to condemn those days and nights
Your body knew, by waves and gales and lovers
Tumbled and kissed. But like the myriad lights
In steel your senses ran
Along that sword which is the courage of man,
Body or soul, who cares? Lifting this high,
You laughed into the battle. Though that blade
Be broken now, Mortality's cold breath
Clouding its wild stars, what it did endures,
And love while left without you still recovers
The loveliness your mere living once made.
Yes, though you never came, that would come home
To the heart which loved you once and having known
Your lovely weight, you lost, will break alone.
For the mean keep safe, but you would put aside
Death's very veil as though to kiss a bride.

STAPLE INN, 1944

LOVELINESS must not stay.
I could not learn this till I saw depart
The loves of my heart, the very life of my heart.

Some cannot lightly love : so cannot I.
Once I had wept to see this garden die,
As it did overnight. Where I had sat
At noon, caressing the sleepy gold cat
Among the sunflowers by the fountain-rim,
And breathing flowers which might have looked the same
To the exquisite houses in the small courtyard
When PRINCE CHARLES EDWARD came ,
There the bomb fell and dust was ruin's breath.

Where now is either sad stone cherubim
Who warned me (though I knew well) jealous death
Had struck already the hall he gazed on,
And cracked the attic pane where I gazed too
For a ghost's face? Beauty is gone away.

I saw the garden's ghost once in the sky
At sunset. But I see loveliness gone
Because it was lovely, and its place is not
In this world. So, sorrow, be unforgot ;
And, Death, forgive me if I clung too hard,
Not knowing the way yet to the world that is true.

NOTTE DI NATALE, SICILY

SOMETHING will happen . . soon
Something will happen . . all that night
Of Christmas Eve the air was like white
Wine.
'Their Procession will pass
At three in the morning," said
The English at the 'Dancing', flushed
Among the dark smiling Latins. 'Three . .
Four . . they are always late.'
From the Midnight Mass
Came shepherds and fishers, and with meek shawled head
Their women: the poor crowding peaceably
With their masters and those few sophisticate
That are strange nowhere.
Their black eyes bright-locked
By the glitter of candles, their nerves trembling yet
From primitive chant and the simplicity
Of the pastorals, they were waiting.
Rocked
A sudden bell.
Out rushed
Into the dark street the mad dancers, hushed
A little at the cobbled steps to the old
Defaced church, whence must come
Incredible beauty soon.

A drum
Beat ominously as the hour dragged on,
And the old Adam laughed in lighter men.
But some men stood impenetrable : some
Gazed like the children brought from bed
At a little Christmas-tree
More children in a window lit:
Male heads uncovering when
The band played confidently
At intervals the same music of war.

And at last the Procession came.
Some old poor men who yet carried the flame
Of candles steadily in hands hard-worn:
Three turbanned, grave Wise Men: and then upborne
Under a palanquin the priest, and he
Held the wax image of God's Child . .

It came and was gone.
There was fire on the Square like noon:
Music and marching and murmurs of strange bliss.

Was it this
That was to happen?
But soft airs were wild
With too much love for the containing of it.
Low to the still sea leant the morning star.
And there was no name for the manifold
Desire of the heart and its bitter regret.

RACE

IF I were but my own,
My arms I might put by;
But, whether I live or die,
I am never alone.

The blood of the line lives,
Stronger than my faint frame:

The lie to Death it gives,
And writes in stars a name!

To sink I would not dare,
Dreading a double scorn:
Theirs of whom I was born,
And the child's I shall bear.

THE FIRST DYING

ALL races into two divide,
But one is rare and scattered far.
And men of this forlorner star
Each other when they meet divine,
But not themselves know by what sign,
And mostly in this world meet not.

Outwardly they seem as others are,
But earth can break their hearts no more.
Friendly they smile at her child's plot,
As if they stood on the other side
Of lust and pain
And all they bore.
As if in some way they had died
Before their death, and risen again.

WINTER

FALL, fall, snow,
Heedless and soft;
Cover the leafless branch, the frozen pool.
Cover up passion with the whitening croft.
I have loved: I have suffered: I would rest.

The flakes fall slow,
Starry and cool:
And quiet the earth lies.

Touch the hot mouth, the aching brilliant eyes,
And the heart in the breast.

ABU ARAB

BY MAHMOUD TEYMOUR
Translated from the Arabic
BY DENYS JOHNSON-DAVIES

IN a humble hair tent near the estate of Imad Bey lived Sulaiman Wida, his wife and children. They belonged to those Bedouin Arabs who make their living by tending their sheep, and shift about from place to place in search of pastures. This Sulaiman, whom people out of fear and respect called Abu Arab, was a giant of a man with broad shoulders and a dried-up face over which his skin was tightly drawn. When he walked wrapped up in his great white shawl you would think that he was a camel swaying along, and should you hear him chanting his monotonous song as he smoked at his narghile, you would imagine yourself sitting by the side of a howling wolf. He was quick to anger and if anyone provoked him he would become like an enraged bull; yet he was also quickly calmed and when humoured became as gentle as a lamb, a mass of smiles and good-will.

He bore great love towards his six children, treating them like a tender mother. He also had a dog named Dhahab which held in his heart no less a place than that of his children. He had come across it by chance in the road when it had still not been weaned and was almost dying of hunger. He had taken it in and cared for it until it grew up, when it became the guardian of his flock and the protector of his tent. It was a black, hairy, fierce-looking dog, which in character had taken after its master—fierce when the occasion demanded, gentle at other times.

Imad Bey, the owner of the estate, lived with his wife and Hamid, his only son, in his old house, which the peasants called 'the mansion'. Hamid was a petted young boy of ten, whose parents' love for him bordered on worship. He spent his time with his servant Mabrouk trying to catch birds or fish or in play on the hills at the edge of the canal, from which

they would hurl down stones at the dogs. As a result of the boy's teasing of Dhahab there arose great hostility between the two of them, each one harbouring within himself great enmity towards the other. Whenever the dog sensed the presence of Hamid—even at a great distance—it would prick up its ears with anxiety and sniff the air, while it glanced savagely in the direction of the boy and prepared for attack. After which it would begin to bark loudly. Should Hamid, while in the company of friends, catch a glimpse of Dhahab he would rain down on the dog a shower of stones and then seek the protection of those with him in case the dog should attack.

One day Hamid went out as usual with Mabrouk to play on the hills. At that time they were alone. It chanced that the dog came to drink from the canal and as it was engrossed in drinking Hamid threw a sharp stone at it, which drew blood from its head. It jumped up furious with rage and looked round for the culprit, although feeling that it could be none other than Hamid. Meanwhile Hamid was sheltering with his servant on the peak of a high, steep hill. The dog, sensing the position of the boy, rushed up the hill, barking intermittently and taking no heed of the hail of stones that rained down. The boy felt that he was in danger; his courage weakened and his strength forsook him. He began shouting in a choked voice for Mabrouk to come to his help, but the other had saved his own skin and taken to his heels. The dog found the way clear before it, which fact increased its strength and daring. It had almost reached the summit of the hill and only a short distance separated it from the boy. Hamid saw the dog drawing near to him, its eyes blazing like fire, its hair bristling, and he trembled. But all of a sudden he sensed a strange power enter into him, and like a soldier in the moment of danger, he took up a dauntless stand. The dog also stood regarding its adversary with sparkling eyes as it prepared for the decisive attack. Thus a moment passed while the two enemies stood facing each other, motionless like two sinister statues. At last the dog delivered its final assault, but the boy was quicker and hurled a stone, which cleaved open the

dog's head. It staggered and drew back, while it tried to rise and renew the attack. Foaming blood started to run down its face, forming a curtain of red in front of its eyes; then it lost its balance, turned over and went rolling head over heels down the length of the hill, at the bottom of which its movements stopped for ever. The boy stared confusedly at the corpse of the dog, then his eyes followed the path of blood, traced down from the peak of the hill to its base, which appeared to him like a sea of gore or the flame of a fire. All at once the boy experienced a strange feeling of weakness; he sat on the ground shaking all over, his face deadly yellow.

. . . . . .

As he was returning Abu Arab heard wailing and lamentation coming from his tent. He was puzzled and feared that there had been some accident. He quickly entered the tent asking: 'What's up?' All bowed their heads in silence. Abu Arab glanced round at those present and found that all were there. He then hurried out to where his flock was grazing; he found nothing missing but, noticing that Dhahab was not to be seen, he returned to the tent.

'Where is Dhahab'? he shouted at everybody.

No one answered.

'Then it was he that you were wailing about'?

One of the boys nodded his head in assent.

'But how did he die?' Was he killed or did he die naturally?

His wife approached him gently and began relating to him the incident of the dog's death. He listened calmly and in silence; soon his face paled and rage mounted up in him gradually. She had not finished talking before he shouted at her.

'I swear by the head of my father that I shall kill him, and that by the same means as he killed Dhahab'.

Several months went by and people forgot the incident of the dog. However Abu Arab started prowling round Imad Bey's mansion secretly when darkness came and the silence of sleep had spread over the estate, as a wolf prowls round its unsuspecting prey, waiting for the opportunity to carry out that which he had sworn upon himself.

One night he left his tent and made his way towards Imad Bey's mansion. He was muffled up in his great shawl and carried a large quantity of sharp heavy stones, which weighed him down as he walked. He crept along cautiously and, arriving at the fence, climbed it deftly and jumped down into the garden with the agility of a cat. He scaled up into the thickly-covered tree and hid himself amongst its branches. Thus he remained watching the boy's room with the eyes of a rapacious hawk, for the tree was quite close to the window of the room.

An hour passed, during which time Hamid in his play would enter the room and then go out again into the hall, never settling in any one place. Abu Arab began nervously fingering the stones which lay in the folds of his gown.

At last the mother came in with her son, carrying him to the bed in which she lay him down. She signed to him that he should go to sleep, at which the child clasped her round the neck smothering it with kisses; he hugged her and whispered playfully in her ear. Then she took him in her arms, clasping him closely to herself and kissing him, while she gazed at him tenderly, adoringly. No sooner had she finished than she would take him up again in her arms and smother him with kisses.

Abu Arab sat upright and began looking intently at the two of them. Once again the mother lovingly fondled her child, listening to its merry, childish laughter, as sweet to her as the strains of music to the artist. She rose holding him and walked slowly about the room singing in a tender voice, the child hanging round her neck with eyes closed in sweet contentment. . . . A strange numbness came over Abu Arab and a feeling of deep depression took hold of his heart. A stone fell from his hand without knowing. . . . At last when the mother perceived that her only one had gone to sleep she approached the bed and lay him in it. Covering him up and placing a soft kiss on his forehead, she tiptoed from the room. . . . For a long time Abu Arab gazed at the child as he slept smiling angelically. Embarrassed and confused he smiled as though answering the child's smile. Suddenly he felt as

though a dagger was piercing his heart; he hurriedly jumped to the ground and started running along the road to his tent, filled with loathing and disgust at himself. Directly he reached the tent he hurried to his son, who was of the same age as Hamid, and, taking him in his arms, began eagerly hugging and kissing him, while the tears flowed down from his eyes.

Absurd

FISH OUT OF WATER

BY VINCENT BROME

THERE was no mistaking the resemblance. It wasn't so much the cold, fixed stare of the eyes, the nose which was almost a snout, or even the way his ears twitched whenever he talked. It was the very skin of the man. It had a scaly quality which reflected the high lights of the bar as he raised his mug.

John Rogers wasn't greatly liked in the Bull Inn. I discovered that on the third night. He manoeuvred himself alongside me and began one of his interminable pieces of reminiscence about London and the life he had once led in the 'big city'.

Towards the end he leant towards me with a heavy air of conspiracy. . . . 'I'm a Londoner really—Don't get on with these people . . .'

No, John Rogers didn't get on with them. But then I doubt whether Rogers would have got on with anybody . . .

Perhaps I am prejudiced. I had no notion then of what was going to happen, but since it has happened I remember very clearly the way he struck me that first night.

I remember the crazy notions which came into my head. . . . Rogers born out of his element. . . . A throw-back, something quite out of his time, a man who was meant to be a fish. . . . Given fins and a tail, life in a wayside river, or some warm corner of the ocean, would hold infinite possibilities for him. But here, in Liddlecombe Manor, under the edge of the moor, John Rogers was wrong.

I found amusement in it then. I laughed on my way back to the cottage where I always stayed for two weeks fishing every year.

But it doesn't amuse me now.

Joe, behind the bar, looked a bit surprised when I said to him the third night, 'He'd be happy in an aquarium'?

'Well—ah doan know—I never seed a fish look quite that way'.

'At least he's out of water'.

Joe laughed. 'Yoom right there'.

But it wasn't the fish quality about John Rogers which kept the men away from him in the old Bull Inn. It was the way he ran his shop. Before the war he had gone out of his way to be polite to the least important of his customers. Even then, there was something ingratiating about the man, but times were bad and sometimes you were forced to make small concessions in your conduct if you wanted to live.

The war changed all that. Overnight he became the master. The demand was greater than the supply, and it was no longer necessary to bother about the casual customer and young Johnny Carter who wanted a fish head or two for the cat.

If it had stopped there nobody would have minded, but as the months slipped by Rogers developed a quite new arrogance. When he sold you a normal piece of mackerel he might have been dispensing largesse to the poor. When he sold you a tit-bit, he made you feel the obligation.

It didn't worry the villagers. They did not openly isolate Rogers. They had to maintain some kind of relationship. After all there were good things in his shop, but there was no need to be bored with his interminable reminiscences about London.

My first touch of uneasiness came the night I discovered he ran a fish shop. I can't tell you precisely why. Perhaps it was the thought of those cold bodies, their fins quite still, eyes gaping, lying on the white marble. Perhaps it was the absurd notion that John Rogers would look that way if he was stretched out on the same marble slab. Cold and wet from water he had never known, lifeless out of an element he had never really found.

It happened the next day as I stood in the stream braced against the powerful pull of the water, watching with half an eye the slender line dipping into the cool glooms below, and with the other half, the lovely stretch of hill and valley beyond.

My line did not move, but I was aware of a disturbance

in the water, and then, very suddenly, a big fish snicked at the weeds close to my feet and vanished in a swirl of bubbles.

I blinked down at the spot where it had been. I had only seen the thing for a flashing instant, but in that instant the lines of the face, nose and mouth had an awful familiarity.

A fish with a face. Crazy. . . . I laughed and went back to the Bull that evening and drank and talked to them all, the villagers, Joe and Rogers.

But I remembered. Coincidence has its own laws and sometimes makes us look very silly. What we thought was odd turns out to have a very simple explanation. Only, coincidence or not, you cannot be charged with killing a fish. No court of modern law will indict you for such an offence.

The following day it was there again. It did not go for the bait. It deliberately circled the line and then it stopped—Hung there in mid-stream, fins quivering, a line of bubbles coming up, the eyes staring. . . . I was mistaken, of course. It was sheer imagination. . . . Fish just don't sit there in midwater staring at a man. . . .

Then it went again. Or perhaps it had never been there.

I suppose it was nearly an hour later. I had caught a couple of bream quite straightforwardly and was feeling more myself again. Then it was there again. A fish, grinning. . . .

I went for it bald-headed. I forgot all that they had ever taught me about fishing, and lunged at it with the net. I never came near it.

I talked to Rogers that night in the Bull. I talked and watched him. I tried to find out more about him, but I did not get very far.

Once upon a time they said that men had been fish. . . . Centuries of evolution had changed us, but traces of our former selves sometimes appeared, and sometimes there were throw-backs. . . .

Fish out of water.

I went off the next day full of resolution. This was becoming—silly. . . . I went off to end the farce once and for all. . . . The thing was a fish. I would catch it and prove it.

My resolution shook a little when it came up stream again,

unmistakably the same fish. Odd the way it was always there. This time I used all the cunning I had ever known, this time I used every wile to get it interested in the fragment of bait, until at last, it sniffed, hesitated and I went rigid.

Even when the mouth snapped at it, I knew it was just a beginning. The big rod bent nearly double. The giant threshing pulled me half into the river, and then began the biggest tussle of my fishing life, for this thing I was out to prove a simple, cold-blooded fish, used half a man's intelligence. Twice I thought I had it. Twice it went dead on the end of the line, and then when I moved gently, so very gently, it crashed away again and I all but lost rod, line and fish.

It was nearly dark before I won. As I hauled it up on the bank I was wet with perspiration. And for the first time in my life I was afraid—of a fish—but I was also excited in a cold, glittering way, and I steeled myself to pick it up. Then I made off across the moor back to the Bull Inn.

John Rogers wasn't there. His usual place at the end of the bar was empty. 'Where's Rogers, Joe?' I said, and my voice surprised me. It was sharp, tense.

'Haven't you heard', said Joe.

'Heard what'?

I waited for the answer as I might wait for the surgeon's knife.

'Fell in the river this arternoon. . . . Dead. . . . Drowned'.

CHEAT

BY EILY O'HORAN

'HI! Wait a minute, Carmel. That's no way be to mountin' a hill on a hot day'!

Carmel waved, trying to be casual. 'Good evening, Willie'. Her bicycle was grey with dust. Perspiration beaded her forehead.

In a moment he was alongside her and they both dismounted at the Little Bridge. He wiped his face with a red handkerchief and smiled showing very white teeth. 'Hot'.

'Very'. Miss Costello was distant. She had not intended a *tête-à-tête*. She strongly resented the use of her Christian name by Willie Rourke.

'I hear there's goin' to be changes above at your place, Carmel. How the hell are you goin' to put up with Miss Dunne livin' in the one house wid' ye'?

A dull wave of anger at his impertinence swept through Carmel's sleepy being. Extreme heat always made her irritable, but she curbed her temper because she was a little bit afraid of Rourke.

'She'll be Mrs. Costello by the time she's under my roof, Willie. She's Ned's choice when all's said and done'.

'Oh, faith, it's a good match by all accounts'. He grinned. 'But I wouldn't have that one for a king's ransom—hard as nails, and an asp's tongue—oh, God Almighty—'

She glanced at her wrist watch. The heat pressed down upon them from a yellow August sky. The hedgerows were parched, and trees in the plantation rustled heavy grey leaves in a sudden dry breeze.

'I have to be off—'

He laid a big welted hand on her bicycle. 'Come on down by Devlin's bohereen. It's cooler there. You can cut across the field path home. I want to talk to you'.

Miss Costello hesitated, her heart commencing to pound. The high road stretched empty before and behind. It was

best to be casual. She smiled out of heavy-lidded eyes, pushing her bicycle beside him down the narrow side road.

'What do you want to talk to me about'?

He walked in silence for a minute, his eyes on the road thoughtfully, as though she were not there. He was good-looking, she conceded, in a coarse sort of way and must be almost ten years her junior.

'I often wanted to say I was sorry for what happened last year above at Flynn's dance'. He observed, still thoughtful.

The blood rushed to her face. But her words sounded remote and cool in his ears. 'Oh, let's forget that'.

'No, but how the blazes was I to know you were so good-livin' an' that you were thinkin' of the convent one time'.

Her hand on the bicycle relaxed. She pushed it along easily.

'That's off now though, isn't it'? He glanced at her suddenly.

'Yes—'

'An' you're plannin' to live on at Tullyrange with Katy Dunne bossin' the show. That one won't rest until she has you out of it. You'll have a hell of a life. It's what everybody's sayin''.

Anger banished her fear. 'How dare you'! She stopped and faced him in the middle of the road with white lips. 'How dare you meddle in my affairs. What business is it of yours'?

'Ah, now Carmel, don't get mad. I always say the wrong thing —you're the one person in the world I always say the wrong thing to—and you're in my mind day and night—' His impudent kindling eye appraised her.

She turned away and walked on swiftly, but he kept step with her with his satyr's grin. She was morbidly conscious of her clinging frock and of her stout square figure.

'Look, why can't you marry me, Carmel? It's not a bad little place up there at Dunmore. You'd soon have it neat and decent lookin' again. It's lonesome up there now—ah, sure a man is no good about a house'— he paused, — 'on the day of my mother's funeral I thought of you'.

She sneered. 'I suppose you figured I must have a tidy bit saved, and I'd be useful in supplying your miserable holding

with livestock. I'd do to scrub and bake and slave. What a fool I'd be to slave for you or for any man when I'm earning more in one year at my job than you ever had in your life—or ever will have—'

'You're wrong there, Carmel. That's not how I thought of it at all. It's not your money I'm thinkin' of—though I admit a bit of ready cash would come in useful an' you're a nice thrifty piece of goods! No—it's yourself—you'd be surprised at the way I think of you, Carmel—'

She turned sulphurous brown eyes upon him. 'It's a pity you didn't stay on at school a bit longer, Willie Rourke. You might have learned manners'.

His eyes lingered on the sunburned base of her neck. Her anger glanced off his composure like pebbles off a rock. 'Sure, couldn't you fix up my education—Carmel? I'd learn anything from you'.

Speechless, she mounted her bicycle and rode on up the road. He shouted after her. 'I'd be good to you—You'd be mistress of your own house anyway'!

She rode on swiftly through the heat, afraid to look behind until she reached the open field facing Tullyrange. But he had not followed her and she propped her bicycle up against the neat green pailing with a sense of escape from something too sickening to contemplate. The words 'lewd' and 'lascivious' crawled through her mind like insects surprised by the removal of a stone.

She went up the path to the geranium-filled porch. How well kept, how decent it looked, this house where she and Ned were born and reared and had lived so peacably together after the death of their parents.

Every morning before cycling two miles to the solicitor's office Carmel finished her dairy work and mapped out Nelly Clancy's day down to the last detail. Every evening when she came home she donned her overall and baked and swept and polished till the house smelt of cleanliness, and then in the dusk she would bend patiently among the little garden beds. Now she saw the crisp window curtains, the smooth front lawn, and the heavy-headed roses drooping in the

heat as though for the first time. Something of herself had gone into Tullyrange.

She went into the dim kitchen and sat down gratefully on the polished brown settle-bed. Ned had closed a shutter to keep out the heat. The kettle was singing, hanging on its black crane. A little lamp burned with a steady glow before a picture of the Blessed Virgin. Sanity and peace crept back into Carmel's mind. But the sound of voices in the parlour broke in upon her thoughts—Katy Dunne and Ned! They must not see her dishevelled like this. She hurried upstairs to her room and bathed her face in a dish of butter milk which she kept on her washing stand in hot weather. Then changing her dress she came downstairs and lifted the cups and saucers from the dresser.

Ned came down from the parlour when he heard the clatter of cups. Carmel's heart sank when she looked at his face.

'What's kept you? Didn't you know Katy was coming for tea? Wasn't it all arranged last week. Here she was sitting by herself for a whole hour when I came in—not a sign of you anywhere. Nice way to bid the girl welcome'. Her brother's angry whispers followed her about the kitchen.

'I'm sorry, Ned, I forgot'.

'You forgot! Very convenient! You'll have to change your tune from now on and treat Katy Dunne as she ought to be treated. I'm sick of this jealousy'.

Carmel spread a spotless cloth on the table. When she looked up Katy was standing by the fire. 'It's all right, Ned. Perhaps she did forget. And I enjoyed sitting here by myself planning where I'd place the new furniture'. Katy's voice was hard and smooth like her brassy-coloured hair. She was younger than Carmel and her figure was flat like a boy's in her cool cotton frock.

'I'll have the tea wet in a minute'. Carmel apologised, curbing her spirit. For over two years Katy Dunne had baited her. But Carmel had not lost her temper. It had become the chief object of her days now—not to lose her temper before Katy Dunne. As long as she could pretend to be deaf and blind to Katy's hints and insinuations Carmel

felt she was safe enough behind the facade of her own dignity.

When they sat down at the table Ned was in high spirits again planning the new arrangements of the house. He had forgotten Carmel's existence with the passing of his brief anger. But Katy had not forgotten her and every sentence had a threat in it. 'We'll scrap a lot of this old-fashioned stuff, Ned, and we'll turn the store room into a spare bedroom. We must have another bedroom—where is my mother to sleep when she visits us'?

The kitchen was dark and the atmosphere unbearably oppressive. Carmel's food choked her. She started when the other girl spoke again brightly.

'That grandfather clock would look better in the parlour. It's lost up there on the stairs'.

The clock was Carmel's. But she did not trust herself to speak—yet.

Great drops of rain spat against the window. A streak of lightning cleft the black sky. The roses on the lawn swayed faintly. Then rain fell in torrents as the storm broke, and thunder cracked above the roof. In a flash she had decided. Between the lifting of the cup and the drinking, Carmel's mind was made up. She would marry Willie Rourke.

The voices of the other two were indistinct now, lost in the sound of the deluge. Relief surged through Carmel's being, relief and strong purpose. She would make a new home. She would plant another garden from whence she could not be banished. With narrowed eyes she sipped her tea and watched her companions as from some safe remoteness. Katy would never enjoy the slow-ticking old clock, nor would she pass her bridal nights in the big mahogany bed, nor would her covetous eyes gloat over the delicate china in the parlour, the egg-shell tea cups with the blue and gold design, for the clock and the mahogany bed and the delicate china were Carmel's—bequeathed to her in her mother's will.

After that the days passed like a dream and Carmel had moments of panic when she considered Willie Rourke with his coarse satyr's grin, moments of shivering distaste. But

she kept steadfast and did not swerve from her purpose. They had met and she had insisted on a business-like manner and conversation and permitted no liberties.

Willie had considered her coolly—'Well, I can wait, Carmel'.

Their engagement was announced. The wedding was arranged to take place at the parish church in December, a fortnight before Ned's marriage to Katy Dunne. No amount of persuasion would induce Carmel to visit Willie's house before her marriage. She could not endure the sight of the poverty-stricken neglected farm until she was in a position to change it. She remembered that the house was well situated on the sheltered side of a hill and that there used to be a garden, and she consoled herself with the thought that there would be a good foundation to start from and no interfering mother-in-law to contend with.

A few day's before Christmas Carmel's wedding took place, and the mahogany bed, the clock, and the delicate china preceded the couple to Dunmore. They hired a car to drive them there to Willie's house in the grey sleet of winter.

The bride was prepared for the untidy fences, the neglected garden, and the poor lost look of the house huddling in the rain when she stepped up shivering to the door. But she was not prepared for the sight of Willie's brother sitting possessively in the ingle, spitting into the fire over his clay pipe, and his ten-year-old son, barefoot, astride the hearth.

Thomas Rourke stood up untidily. 'Come in. Come in the two of ye out of the rain. You're welcome, Mrs. Rourke'!

Carmel crossed the threshold and dropped her suitcases on the floor.

'Sure there's no place like home on a cowld wet night. I'll wet the tay meself', went on Thomas affably. 'Sure we'll all be as snug as bugs in a rug together'. He leered at the new Mrs. Rourke across the red embers.

Carmel moved and spoke mechanically until she went up to the room with her lighted candle. Then she locked the door and sat on the side of the creaking doubtful-looking bed watching her shadow on the smoke-grimed wall. When

Willie came knocking on the door she did not answer. There was silence for a few minutes and the knocking ceased until the bridegroom returned with a sharp instrument and quietly broke open the lock.

'Lookat, Carmel, I know you're vexed on account of the brother an' the gossoon—' He was gentle, apologetic.

'Mistress of my own house'! She spoke through clenched teeth. 'Why didn't you tell me your good-for-nothing brother had come back from his wanderings and his child with him. The house is his. He can bring a new wife here any day he likes'.

'Devil a wife that fellow will ever take again. We'll get him and the boy to bring in the turf and carry water. Ah, come on Carmel—there's room for us all—what could I do when he turned up here one night a month ago without a bite to eat or a place to lie'?

She shrank away into a corner. 'Don't come near me, Willie Rourke. I'm off out of this with the first light'.

He stood in the middle of the floor regarding her. She watched his huge shadow on the yellow wall. It came nearer, monstrous across the ceiling. The shadow and the silence encompassed the room.

. . . . . .

On a morning in early spring when Ned Costello and his wife were at breakfast the postman brought them a letter from Carmel. 'I'm very contented back in my old job and getting a rise next month', she wrote. 'I've taken a flat in the main street and am getting my things together nicely. Father Cahill knows my whole story. I have assured him that a separation from the likes of Willie Rourke is essential for my spiritual well-being. No clean-minded girl can be expected to live with a sex maniac—not to mention the fact that he married me under false pretences—. Everybody in the town sympathises with me'.

Ned put down the letter, puzzled. 'I always thought Rourke a good-natured poor devil. It shows how little you can know about anyone. He must be a bad lot all right—'.

Katy took the letter and read it. Then she buttered a

piece of bread and forgot to eat it. Ned looked up, surprised at the fervour in her tones when she spoke. 'Do you know what it is—hell itself inn't hot enough for a cheat like that'.

FLAMINGO

BY TOM AUGUSTINE RITCHIE

FIRE from the western Isles of Verde,
Flame from a warm-washed Southern Sea,
Sunfire blazoned-breasted bird
O'er the dark lagoon is heard
Winging to a red-path'd sea.
There, from the green-rimmed marshy side
He skitters forward—sprawling wide
With spindled legs, unsteady feet—
Scrambling, rolling, for a neat
And upward airborne flush to meet
The evening.
Soaring up, and ever on,
Now the mingling crimsons run
On and on, and then are gone
. . . Into the setting American sun . . .

YOU CAN ONLY DIE ONCE

BY JEFFERY MALLARD

HIS name was Joe, but we always called him Big Joe on account of his size. He was the huskiest, craziest soldier I ever set eyes on, and he took risks that would make your blood freeze. Many a time I've seen him loping on ahead, while the bullets knocked out a regular boogie-woogie all around him. But they never did more than nick playfully at his clothes.

We used to kid him about his 'charmed life.' One day the magic would wear off, we told him. Nobody could get away with it forever. But Big Joe would just shrug his broad shoulders and grin.

'No use getting your belly in an uproar' he'd say. 'You can only die once'.

We were in France at the time. Things were pretty hot, and we didn't have much time for small talk. But there *were* times, when we'd drag out photographs of our wives and kids, and wonder how things were going back home. Big Joe had no photographs, and when it came to conversation his traffic only came one way. All he knew about, or cared about, was animals. His folks had been farmers out in the Middle West, but Joe didn't want to be a farmer. When war broke out he was all set to become a veterinary surgeon.

This animal business certainly was an obsession. He'd creep out at night, when Jerry was so close you could almost smell him, just to make sure that some animal out there—a cow maybe—was dead. He'd slink back, as quiet as a shadow for all his size, and he was deadly serious about the whole thing. After a time we quit making cracks, for when Big Joe is deadly serious he is not a man to play around with.

Still, I always had a feeling at the back of my mind that he was heading for a show-down with Lady Luck, and sure enough it came. It was just before the big break-through, and we were moving forward, tidying up anything we met.

Joe and me and another guy somehow got cut off from the rest, and when we checked up everything had gone quiet. A glow in the sky told us where we should be, and we headed in that direction. But after a while we came to a river. There was no sign of a bridge, so there was nothing for it but to take to the drink.

The river was deep and swift-flowing. I've never been a strong swimmer, and what is worse, I always get cramp. Before I was half-way across it had me in knots, and if it hadn't been for Big Joe, well, it would have been curtains for me all right. As it was we lost our equipment, and most of our clothes, but we made it. We lay in the mud, panting, until our strength returned. Then we pushed on.

Heavy rain started to fall, and it seemed like we'd been walking for hours when Big Joe stumbled, and I heard him curse as he fell. Moonlight streamed out from behind a cloud, then everything was dark again, but the light had lasted long enough for Big Joe to see the revolver lying beside the dead man on the ground. He bent down, feeling for it.

We slumped down behind a hedge. Three words repeated themselves over and over in my brain, as if a needle had stuck somewhere. How many bullets? How many . . . When the moon flashed out again, Big Joe told us.

'Four,' he said grimly.

Four bullets; three men; against—what? I peered through the hedge. The moon, still paying peek-a-boo, showed me a broad field, sloping upwards, milled about with white tank tracks. Over on the left, the gaunt outline of a German tank, leaning drunkenly where it had been knocked out. Way beyond, that glow in the sky. I was thinking I'd rather be there, where Death's hot breath was blowing, than lingering around this uncanny, silent spot, when the stillness was ripped by the sound of a single shot. It came from somewhere on our right, upfield.

'Sniper' said Big Joe. He spent one of the precious bullets in swift reply, but soon the firing came again, feeling around for us every time we moved. So we quit moving, and lay flat with our faces in the mud.

After about half-an-hour of this you begin to feel the strain. The other man hadn't said much all along, but I'd seen that he was only a kid, green to the game. Came one of those fierce crescendos of moonlight, and I noticed his face was very white. There was a sort of—rippling—about his mouth as he looked at me.

'I can't stand this,' he said, suddenly. 'I'm goin' on.' Before we could stop him he was zigzagging towards the little wood on the other side of the road, but to get there he had to span a wide gap in the hedge. I watched him fall, jerk, lie still. He'd had it, poor devil.

Big Joe's voice was like cold steel. 'Listen', he said, 'I'm going up there'. He thrust the revolver into my hand. 'You only use two bullets, see? One as I reach the gap, to draw his fire. The other when—if—I get back. O.K.'?

My throat was dry. 'O.K. Joe', I said.

As he wriggled away, I kept my eyes glued to that gap, every nerve in my body taut as a singing wire. As he poised for the leap, I fired at the dark patch of shadow where the sniper lay hidden. Back came the answer—*two* shots, with only a split second between them. It was then I realised we had double trouble on our hands.

I swung my gaze back to the gap. Big Joe was over. After what seemed an hour, there he was wriggling back, and the whole business must be gone through again. But Joe's luck held. In a few minutes he dropped down beside me.

When he spoke, I was shocked by the savage intensity of his words. 'I never believed about them until now,' he said, 'Those—rats—are using a wounded horse for cover, and they haven't the decency to kill it. Its just—lying—there.' His voice choked, 'Give me the gun'.

I heard myself arguing. 'Don't be a fool', I said, 'You can't throw your life away for a horse. It'll soon . . . Joe, for God's sake wait till help comes. . . .'

He caught my wrist in an iron grip.

'Give me the gun', he said. I handed it over. 'One bullet', I babbled, 'only one bullet . . .'

'One's plenty' said Joe. He turned to go.

'Wait!' I whispered. 'I'm coming with you'.

I'll never know how we made it, but somehow we got across that nightmare gap; gained the far corner of the field, about a hundred yards downwind from the Jerries.

Stay here,' said Joe. He slid silently upward, hugging the shadow of the hedge.

For a long time I lay in the cold mud, tense—shivering. Soon a grey dawn started to creep up, outlines became more distinct. But Time had grown tired, the minutes heavy with waiting. I found myself thinking of home, and my girl. Maybe I shouldn't see her again . . . maybe all that was a dream anyway, and I'd always been here, with an icy hand clutching at my guts. Maybe . . .'

Sudden and sharp as pain, came the crack of a shot. A long pause, then another. Then silence.

Fifteen minutes or so snailed by. The light was growing fast, but still no movement came from up there. I became aware of a familiar rumble, coming closer. Looking over my shoulder, I saw them, rocketing through the mist like clowns through a paper hoop. Tanks, our tanks, sweeter than a vision from heaven.

But Big Joe? It looked like he and the snipers had made a good job of each other. Crouching, I ran along the hedge. There was the horse. Beside it sprawled the bodies of two very dead Germans. There was Big Joe, lying on his back. I bent over him.

He opened his eyes. 'They'd run out of slugs, too', he said, with a grin, 'but one of 'em had a knife. Don't worry, kid', he went on, seeing the concern in my face, 'This isn't my number. I'm O.K.'

I turned one of the Germans over. He had been unmistakably, scientifically, throttled. So much for your blond good looks, I thought. You may have been a pin-up type one time, but you don't qualify now. I let the body drop, turned again to Joe.

'So the other one got the bullet', I said, standing over him.

In Big Joe's eyes a little blue flame flickered, died.

'Bullet hell', he said, 'That was for the horse'.

DRINK OF WATER

BY HERMINE DE VIVENOT

Now the snow lay on the ground and the whole village seemed very still. In the cottage kitchen the clock on the mantelpiece ticked noisily, while on the range the kettle had started to hiss. A woman stood by the window, looking out, leaning wearily against the sill. There had been a snow storm in the night. The smooth drifts gleamed in the oncoming dusk which flowed like a tide over the white fields.

The cottage stood at the end of the village street, a little apart from other houses. Nora did not look in the direction of her neighbours but stared across the fields, to the humped shape of a haystack and beyond the dark outline of a little copse.

It had looked so very different in the bright light of mid-August when she had watched the soldier coming up the dusty road. She had been standing in the open doorway, letting her body relax in the draught, her child beside her, holding her by the hand. He had walked with long strides, his shoulders hunched forward, his face shining with sweat under the unwieldy helmet.

Nora remembered then that American soldiers from the nearby camp were out on an exercise and this man must be one of them. He was alone, making straight for her, smiling a little. At the low wooden gate he had stopped abruptly, pushing back his helmet. A red weal marked the white forehead and still smiling he had asked her for a drink of water. The woman had nodded in answer and turned to go indoors, leaving the child on the pathway.

When she came back, a jug and a mug in her hand, the soldier was crouched low on his heels, his hands outstretched in a gesture of welcome to the child, now walking unsteadily towards him. He did not change his position, as though the child's shyness had the quality of a bird's, ready to take flight at the least movement, and when he spoke, looking up

at the mother, it was in a whisper.

'I have a boy, about this size when I left home'. Nora noticed the way in which his voice, with its strange inflections, lingered over the one word, home.

The child had allowed herself to be taken by the hand. Now she was in his arms, held securely against his shoulder, and he had risen to his full height again and stretched out for the water. Before drinking he murmured 'Thank you', his eyes narrowed in greeting.

He stood there, the child on his arm staring at him in wonder while he drank, his head flung back, the muscles of his throat moving as the liquid went down in a steady stream.

Nora filled the mug three times and three times he thanked her in his dry twanging speech. Then he put the child down, very gently.

'Well, I must be going'. He hesitated before opening the gate. 'What is your name, and the little girl's'? 'Nora and Elizabeth' he mused, then added 'Very pretty. Goodbye Nora, goodbye Elizabeth'.

The woman had continued to stand for a little while watching him, until a bend in the road hid him from sight and there were only the fields, yellow-white with stubble, and the luminous sky, and high above the hum of aircraft, streaming invisible, overhead. Then with a little stifled cry she turned to go indoors.

The kitchen was cool and dark after the glare outside. Nora saw that it was tea-time and began to lay the things out for herself and the child and for her mother, bed-ridden upstairs. She moved gracefully, her legs firm and slender beneath her short cotton frock. Her corn coloured hair lay in a knot on her neck, a strong, rather sensual, white, neck and under her bodice her firm breasts with their sharply modelled nipples seemed to strain at the material. But she was not conscious of her grace nor her sensuality, as she carried out patiently the monotonous task of taking cups and saucers from the cupboard, cutting the bread in thick slices, bringing the child's high chair to the table.

On the mantelpiece stood the framed portrait of a man

in uniform. She glanced up at him, the gesture which with the months and the years had become almost as automatic as her movements with the crockery. Had he, too, she wondered, stopped by a cottage door and asked for water, long ago? So long now since he had gone, since he had been posted missing, since she had become accustomed to the full measure of her loneliness. Accepted because inevitable.

Everything lay ready on the table, she took the tray and carried it to the sick woman, sitting up in her bed, a piece of knitting in her old, patient hands, her eyes tired from long sleepless nights.

'Did I hear someone at the gate, Nora'? The daughter nodded, 'Yes, an American, he came for a drink of water'. 'Ah'. She was not really interested. She never became interested in him, Nora remembered, not even when he had come and sat by her bedside, reading aloud.

For the soldier had returned. Towards dusk, one Sunday, while she was clearing the things from the evening meal, he had returned.

It was still early for the blackout but dark in the kitchen and she had lit the oil lamp. It stood, with its white china shade on the round table, casting a soft light among the plates, shining sharply on the crystals in the sugar bowl, and flinging her shadow on the walls and the beamed ceiling as she moved. All day it had been hot and even now the air in the cottage was warm. There were little beads of sweat on the woman's forehead and the stray hairs on her neck were dark with moisture.

'Can I help you with the dishes'? She had not heard his footstep on the flagged path and his voice startled her out of her monotonous abstraction. She turned a frightened face towards him, where he leaned against the window-sill, looking in. His forage cap had replaced the helmet, she saw that his hair was flaxen against the sun-tanned skin. He had strong features, roughly cast, and blue, rather childish, eyes.

'Can't I help you? Can't I wash the dishes'? He asked very tentatively almost afraid that she might refuse, tell him to go away. But the woman had continued to stare at him as

if unable to understand his speech, her lips parted in a little smile. Then she had recognised him and her glance echoed her smiling mouth.

'Do you really want to——'

'Call me Ben'.

'Do you really want to, Ben'? Her voice was low and caressed each word as she spoke.

'Yes'. And he had walked into the kitchen. Thus his shadow joined hers as together they moved plates and cups from the table to the scullery, cleared the cloth, shaking it out of the window and putting it away in a drawer of the dresser.

Outside the night had fallen and the woman drew the curtains, shutting them off from the outer world, leaving them together at work by the stone sink. The woman washed, the soldier dried. His movements were deft. He worked carefully, conscientiously, not talking much, concentrating on the crockery, polishing forks and knives as he dried them, then putting them away in the drawer which the woman had indicated with a movement of the head. When they had finished they stood, suddenly self-conscious, before the empty sink, the water swirling away noisily. The soldier was the first to speak, amusement in his voice.

'Well, I guess I never thought I would enjoy just drying dishes in a kitchen. But I did, Nora, it was grand of you to let me'. He smiled, a spontaneous gleam of strong white teeth and candid eyes.

'Won't you sit down for a little while'? The woman had moved into the kitchen. There were chairs by the hearth and a basket of mending stood beside one of them. The soldier sat down facing her. He drew his pipe from his pocket and stretched out his legs, luxuriating in the comfort of the old chair. He glanced about him, nodded in the direction of the picture on the mantelpiece. 'Your husband'? She answered with a brief 'Yes'.

Threading a needle as she did so, holding the steel up to the light her head on one side. 'He's abroad I guess'? 'Yes, missing since Dunkirk'. 'Too bad' he murmured and then sat

there, silently smoking, lost in his thoughts, while the woman bent over her sewing, her hands busy, thimble clicking minutely against her needle, stopping now and again to search for a reel of cotton in the basket or to match a strand of wool.

The soldier did not stay very long. A cry from the child brought the woman to her feet, and up the stairs in swift anxious movement. When she came down again he was standing in the middle of the room, ready to go.

'Goodbye'. He stretched out his hand, held hers for a second, then let it drop and it hung motionless by her side. At the door he turned.

'It was grand helping you, may I come again'? He hardly waited for her reply, but walked out into the night. Nora could hear his heavy steps on the flagged path, the rattle of the garden gate and the sound of cheerful whistling. The woman went back to her mending. She worked steadily, her breath coming and going evenly as she darned.

The soldier, Ben, had come again later in the week. This time there were no dishes to wash, for she had supped earlier. But he had stayed all the same, sat by the empty fire-place, watched her as her busy hands guided the flashing knitting needles, her head bent a little in thought while she listened to him. For he was no longer silent.

That second night he talked of his own home—the small store in some distant upstate New York village, very primitive, very far away. His mother and his wife ran the store now, while he was in the Army. There had been no need for him to enlist, but he had suddenly felt the urge—to move east as his forefathers long ago had moved west, to fight. Two years now since he had left home. He always pronounced that one word home as though it were unlike any other word in his vocabulary. There was always a little pause—as though he were reverently baring his head—and then he pronounced it gently, looking at her with his faintly smiling, candid eyes.

Nora staring out at the winter landscape tried to remember what she had said to him during those first meetings.

But it was no use trying to remember. She had acquiesced smilingly in his offers to help her, had listened to his gratitude, his endless stories of his life as a civilian in another world. She listened with interest, it was all so new to her and yet so known. Did not the soldier describe to her something of what her own life had been before war and desolation had come, bringing her this loneliness which, through long usage, had become little more than a weary ache? And so she listened, smiling—knowing that he but thought aloud, stimulated by the simplicity of her presence, the quiet domesticity of the scene, all that which made it so different from the camp life which surrounded him.

She did not know, then, how much he was aware of her. He was, indeed, far quicker to respond to the child, taking her on his knee, caressing her, letting his hands play among her curls. And the child responded with all the warmth of a child too long accustomed to purely feminine surroundings. The woman felt a warm glow of friendship as she watched the little girl in the man's arms.

She would sometimes stand, unobserved, letting her eyes rest on the simplicity of the scene, the soldier with her child, laughing and playful or dreamingly confident, leaning her head against his shoulder. He would help put her to bed in the evening on those days when he arrived early and shared their meal. And always he helped with that candid, slightly wistful smile in his eyes, the little air almost of suffering which cloaked him.

The wintry night was ebbing fast out of the sky—there was only an angry yellow brightness now to the west and the kitchen was full of shadows. In the range, through the bars, a live coal glowed dully red. Nora, at the window, pressed her body against the glass, feeling it cold on her cheek and through the coarse stuff of her dress.

In her hand she held a crumpled piece of paper, her fingers played with it while she stared obstinately out of the window. She had folded and unfolded the scrap of message so often it was now little more than a torn paper-rag in her hand. She leaned her forehead against the glass, always

glancing out to the fields and the little copse beyond and the first stars flashing in the stormy sky.

She was trying to remember when she had first walked in those fields with the soldier and they had moved their slow steps towards the woods. On a warm sultry evening, no doubt, when it had been too close indoors, with the black-out curtains drawn, and the hum of gnats about the lamp.

They walked in the darkness side by side, saying little, though now and again his laughter had rung out, joyous, untrammelled, as it had rarely rung out indoors. He walked carefully, keeping in step with her. Once she had stumbled and he had put out his hand, quickly, holding her bare elbow for an instant, then relaxing his hold, for they were back at the cottage gate and he had bidden her good-night, turning on his heel in a swift movement.

The warm summer nights succeeded the warm sunlight days, the harvest moon rose in the sky, the earth grew languid with plenty. The soldier came now almost every day. There were rumours that soon they would be leaving, but he made no mention of the future in his talks. It was still always of home, of his child, of his wife, that he spoke.

His eyes rested on hers as he sat opposite her at the supper table, or followed her about while she prepared the tray for the sick woman upstairs. And the woman answered his look with her own level, unhurried gaze. He had fitted himself into her life with unquestioning ease. She had come to take him for granted. She rarely thought of him throughout the day. She did not even watch the clock as the hour came nearer when his hand fumbled with the latch or the bright beam of his torch flashed its greeting through the open door. And she would greet him as a matter of course, as though indeed he were returning home, to her, to the cottage, at the end of the day's work.

The soldier drawled his inevitable 'How are you'? and the child as likely as not would call out, bidding him come and kiss her goodnight if she were already in bed, or running towards him, hair flying, arms outstretched in a gesture of welcome. The weeks passed. The departure of

the troops was delayed. The weather grew sultry and the cottage became close and oppressive. The soldier and the woman walked often along the country lanes in the warm, scented, dusk of late summer.

They did not talk much, even the soldier was silent now, given to long periods of abstraction. He had told her so much in the first weeks, given her so complete a picture of that other world in which he truly lived that there was little left to say. His present existence, here in this foreign land, was a mere shadowy succession of days barely affecting him.

And the woman? She had never spoken much, at most, ordinary commonplaces. She was content to listen to him, to minister to him in so far as he would allow her, intent always on helping. Sometimes their eyes met in a clear untroubled smile. She had lived in a strange emptiness so long that the soldier could not dispel her inner loneliness, but the surface of her being was warmed and comforted by his presence.

Soon he was going away. She viewed the prospect with equanimity. Her life would continue as untroubled, as uneventful, as it had been before the day when the soldier had greeted her and asked for water. He had thanked her then as though the gift had been precious, and always now he thanked her. His eyes thanked her, too, for the lamp-lit room, for the meals at the round, well-filled table, for the weight of the child in his arms, for her silence while he told her of his homelife. Above all for her silence, the level glance of her eyes, the gentle smile of the curved, warm mouth. And she accepted his thanks, hardly listening, quietly pleased to see him thus at home. At times, when she was alone, she pondered over his words, his descriptions of his home life. She thought of the woman to whom he penned laboriously the letters which, he sighed, were so frail, so unsatisfactory a link with home. The soldier had produced earlier, much earlier, the inevitable snapshots. The unfamiliar background interested her more than the slender figure in the printed frock with eyes narrowed against the light.

She was very conscious of the soldier's wife, an abiding

influence, making itself felt even at this distance in the upsurge of nostalgia which made him talk, endlessly, about their life together. She felt indeed at times that they were not alone, the other woman, shadowy as to colouring and features, was there beside them. Oh yes, she had always been with them, never so distinctly perhaps as when they had walked in the empty fields.

Nora, at the window, closed her eyes in a sudden little spasm of pain, for now she remembered so vividly. The night had been very dark and hushed, the velvety flight of an owl had startled her as she had walked beside him, and he had put out his hand to reassure her and in the darkness touched her breasts. She had felt them spring to life, and then his arms about her and his mouth, insistent, beseeching her. Back in the cottage they had stood in the sudden brightness of the light, uncertain, facing each other, overcome with shyness. The woman had glanced up at the portrait on the mantelpiece, then quickly averted her eyes. She must not forget this was not important. This did not mean anything. This was but kindness to the stranger. This was but the glass of water in terms of her mouth, unkissed so long, her clinging arms, her fresh young body, And so, bidding him goodnight she clung to him, laughing a little, and he held her to him, trembling and breathing hard as though he had been running.

He did not come the next night—nor the next. There were rumours that the troops were leaving. In the gathering dusk the lanes were filled with couples walking arm in arm, laughing softly. The woman lived through the days in patient understanding.

Would he return? She did not know. And if he returned would they still feel, as they had felt in the sudden lamplight, uncertain and vaguely troubled? She did not know. She went about her work humming softly to herself. Sometimes she could feel a strange joy surge in her heart, within her inmost being. Even so in the spring the sap must stir and surge deep within the slender tree boles and burn at last in the green flames of budding leaves. But she was not troubled, nor even curious.

The third day dawned with a promise of heat in the distant haze shrouding the woods, the fields, There was a hint of thunder in the air, too, and as the morning wore on great clouds piled themselves into towering, mother of pearl shapes against the darkly blue sky. The woman busied herself with many tasks. Her cotton frock stuck to her body, and she could feel the sweat between her breasts as she walked in the garden among the tall rows of beans, picking the long green pods.

Later, she picked fruit, and after tea she put the great purple plums into a preserving pan and stood by the fire, stirring gently with a wooden spoon. She was pouring the dark, steaming, jam into jars and the kitchen was full of the rich, spiced, scent of the fruit when the soldier came in.

He stood beside her, watching her, then he put out his hand and touched her neck, gently, with his finger tips. She turned and looked at him, her eyes half-closed, her mouth trembling.

'You have come back'?

'Yes', he dragged his words, 'I have come back'.

He gave no explanation of his absence but stood there, staring at her as she busied herself with the jars, set the pan to soak, washed and dried the spoon. Then with a slight laugh, 'See it is all finished'.

She wondered, did he know how fast her heart was knocking at her side, how her knees trembled, and her thighs felt faint? He must not know. He must never know. He had taken her by the hand.

'Come,' he had said and they were out again in the soft, gently starlit darkness of the night. Summer lightning flashed across the sky from time to time, and once they heard the far-off rumble of thunder. He did not kiss her, nor do more than hold her lightly by the arm, while they walked towards the rising ground of the copse, where the wind made a faint rustling of leaves and the little creatures of the night scurried away at their approach.

At the entrance to the wood he stopped. Only then did he take her in his arms and seek her mouth once more. The

woman had closed her eyes. She did not want to see him, only to feel his weight against her body, his entreating arms clinging to her. She knew, too, that for him she was but a presence, the answer to his anguished longing for home. She was only the cup out of which he drank yet he was also the answer to her dry sobs, her nights of tears in the agony which had preceded the long years of empty monotony. But this was not love. In the dark wood, held in his arms, she knew that this was not love. Only his loneliness reaching out to her loneliness and accepting in all simplicity the full measure of her generosity.

He came again. He helped her with her household cares, played with the child, put her to bed, and then would draw the woman to him, calling her gently by name, and she responded always with closed eyes, raising her mouth to his in a gesture of entreaty.

Now, indeed, she waited for his coming, and sometimes fretted through the day, and thought of him, his voice, his hands. She turned over in her mind, pondering them, the things he had spoken of before they went to the wood. His home, always his home. And almost against her will she felt some faint stir of envy, of jealousy, unable to remind herself that she was but the cup of water asked for in the glare of the summer heat.

All this she held close to her heart, afraid of looking too deeply, afraid almost, she confessed it, of losing him, of becoming no longer necessary. Until the day came when he must leave. She had always known it would come to this; indeed had considered it calmly, as inevitable, not knowing then that her heart would contract in sudden pain, and her throat tighten in anguish. She had not known then how the eagerness with which he had greeted her with the news, 'They say we may be sent back home'! would hurt like a knife wound.

'Thanks. Thanks a lot'. He had kissed her good-bye, lightly, his mind already afire with the possibility of his return, and she had smiled in answer and waved goodbye with a laugh, only to lie that night in sudden wretchedness,

watching the long drawn-out greyness of a future even emptier than the past.

And then, a little later, the woman knew that the future would not be utterly empty. She did not know whether to be glad or sorry. Only the soldier must never know, his happiness must not be tarnished by any shadow of self-reproach. Thus she reasoned in the innocence and generosity of her heart.

Then, a little later still, already her body had seemed to grow a trifle heavy and a gentle brooding look had settled on her face, when the first snow had fallen, had come the telegram she now held crumpled in her hand. The words had danced before her eyes, the words which were to bring her immense joy and which did make her tremble with happiness for a minute, until she remembered and stood still, in utter fear. Her husband was coming home, was on his way. Missing, given up for dead these years, he had been found, was coming towards her. Each day now brought him nearer.

The woman at the window shivered, she felt cold. Outside the winter night had almost fallen. She drew the curtains and turned away, towards the fire glowing in the grate. Mechanically, she made herself tea, moving like an automaton. She had returned the telegram to its place on the mantelpiece, beside her husband's portrait. Slowly she poured herself a cup of tea, sat down by the fire.

Would he come back to-night?

And when he came, how would she greet him, she who loved him? The tears rose in her eyes once again, as they had risen so often during the past few weeks.

How would he greet her? How? And the woman hiding her face in her hands wept yet again, softly, noiselessly. For she believed that he would never understand and she saw, stretched between them the gulf of their misunderstanding, more terrible and overwhelming than the loneliness which was past. She had forgotten, in her despair, how once, long ago, she had idly wondered whether her husband, too, in some foreign land had stopped at a cottage door and asked for water.

A WIZARD STORY

BY PHYLLIS HASTINGS

MRS. MORGAN got on the number thirty-three bus and took a fourpenny ticket. Her shopping-bag was heavy, but it contained nothing rich or strange—just turnips and sausages and porridge-oats.

The old man beside her had a bag, too, a black, shabby thing, almost flat. Didn't look as if he'd spent a very successful morning in the queues, she thought, pityingly.

He was a queer old cuss, with a long beard, a high hat, and a coat which might have gone into the Ark with Noah. She took an interest in her neighbours, Mrs. Morgan did. Well, there wasn't much else to do on a bus, was there? And presently, feeling that she was staring at him, the old man turned and said, 'Greetings, fair lady'.

She thought he was being funny, so she sniffed, and looked straight ahead.

But, now that the ice was broken, he seemed anxious to talk. 'I gave thee greetings, lady. Wilt thou not unbend, or is it that I should prove myself'?

'Foreign, aren't you'?

'In a manner of speaking, maybe'.

'Ah'! Mrs. Morgan's face softened. Another of those refugees, poor souls! It was getting so you didn't know whether you were shopping in High Street or on a Boolvard. 'You must find it strange here'.

'Indeed I do'.

'Get your rations all right'?

'I beg your pardon'?

'Rations. You know, food. Champagne and caviyare. S'pose you could let me have a couple of new laid eggs, couldn't you'? She nudged him and laughed heartily at her own joke.

'Right willingly', said the old man, and put his hand into the black bag.

Mrs. Morgan's mouth watered at the sight of the two well-developed brown eggs he brought out. She thought of young Lily, in bed with bronchitis again. But she was a fair-minded woman. 'No, Dad. You hang on to those. Never know when you'll get the next allocation. Ta all the same'.

'Thou dost not desire them'?

'I wouldn't like to take your last two'.

'My last two'? He pushed them into her hands, and dived again into the black bag. 'I have many. Here! And here'!

The eggs came out so fast she was quite dizzy. 'My! Your hens must be laying well. No, stop! That's enough. Goodness! This is my lucky day. Lily's eyes will fair pop out when she sees these. Thirteen she is, and none too strong. Everything goes to her chest. You wouldn't have a lemon, now? Nothing like lemon for cutting the phlegm'.

From the black bag emerged the rare pale gold of a lemon.

Mrs. Morgan gasped. 'Well! You may be a refugee, but you certainly know your way about. Is there anything else in that bag'?

'Ask what you will'.

Mrs. Morgan asked for an orange, a banana, a box of chocolates and a packet of hairpins, and got them all. But by now her bag was overloaded, and her sense of caution was asserting itself. 'You really didn't ought to do that here', she said, 'People are gawping at you, and you never know what somebody might say. Black market'?

'There is nothing black in my necromancy', the old man declared, indignantly.

She looked blank, so he added, 'I am a wizard'.

Mrs. Morgan was well up in this kind of talk. Her Arthur was in the R.A.F. 'I'll say you are wizard'! she agreed, heartily, 'It's a piece of cake to you'.

'I mean, I am a magician'.

'Oh, indeed? My sister Elsie married one. Called himself the Great Hocus. I never saw him conjure up anything more useful than pigeons out of a hat, but he did pretty well at one time. Used to be the first turn after the interval. He drank, though. Came to taking odd engagements at children's

parties, and now he can't even conjure up a week's wages. Are you touring the halls'?

'I am but newly delivered from the stone in which I was immured'.

'Ah! Painful things. My brother-in-law had one cut out of his kidney'.

'I was within the stone. The stone was not within me'.

'You don't say'!

'The faithless Nimue imprisoned me. It seemed I lay there through all eternity, until one day the stone was riven and I escaped. Methinks an earthquake did it'.

'More likely to be a doodlebomb. Where are you making for now'?

'I do not know'.

'Hm!' Mrs. Morgan's heart swelled with compassion for this lonely old man, and her eyes fastened with longing on the mysterious black bag. 'Why did you get on this bus'?

'To find thee'.

'To find the what? Oh, you mean me, I can't get used to this foreign talk. What did you want me for'?

'Because thou art called Mrs. Morgan'.

'What's that got to do with it? And how did you know my name'?

'There is nothing I wot not of. I bethought me, Morgan, it hath a homely sound. There was a Morgan I once knew'.

'Well, Morgan's not a very uncommon name'.

'Morgan le Fay, Arthur's sister'.

'That's funny. My eldest girl is Fay, and Arthur is my boy'.

'It hath been written in the stars. I knew that Arthur would come back'.

'Yes. He's been lucky. Touch wood! On leave he is now'.

'I must see him'.

'Certainly you can, if you want to. Look here, Mr——, I don't even know your name'.

'I am Merlin'.

'Pleased to meet you, I'm sure, Mr. Merlin. Why don't you come and stay with us for a few days? We've got the top

back room empty. It's not quite like the Ritz Hotel, but there's a bed in it'.

Merlin accepted the invitation graciously, and Mrs. Morgan flustered, excited, and even a little apprehensive, conducted him to number eighty-seven, Tenpenny Street.

'There you are, Mr. Merlin. That's the room, and a lot more comfy than the workhouse or a park bench, isn't it? I'll get a nice bit of dinner cooked in less than no time. Shall I take your bag'?

'No', said Merlin, hanging on to it.

'Just as you like'. She eyed it covetously. 'I suppose you wouldn't have a morsel of farm-butter hidden away? Arthur's awful partial to butter'.

'Will this be of use to thee'? He took out a pound packet, and Mrs. Morgan went quite faint. The top back room suddenly didn't seem so elegant. She thought of all the people who would willingly sacrifice their best bedroom. Butter! She said, hastily 'I'll put a hot-water bottle in your bed'.

Merlin's greeting of Arthur was embarrassing to Arthur, and his greeting of Fay was embarrassing to Mrs. Morgan.

'O beauteous shape'! he cried.

'Now, Mr. Merlin'! she reproved him. 'None of that! I won't have you passing remarks about Fay's figure. Any monkey business and out you go, magician or no magician'.

But, with his usual weakness for young women, Merlin could not take his eyes off Fay, and she enjoyed his admiration. Men were men to Fay, and though beards were not exactly her cup of tea,——well, this old geezer was someone to practise on. Besides, she had heard about the bag, and she wanted to test it for herself.

'What could you find for me in that little black bag'? she asked, coyly.

'What does my lady desire'? She thought his language was lovely. So poetic.

'A pair of silk stockings', she replied, promptly.

They were there. She gave a little cry of pleasure, then examined them critically to see if they were fully fashioned. They were.

'That's a useful lodger you've got, Mom', she said to her mother.

'Maybe yes and maybe no', replied Mrs. Morgan, darkly, 'You watch your step. The older they get, the worse they get, I always say'.

'But where does he find those lovely presents'?

'Ask no questions and you'll be told no lies. That's what I say'.

'He's a bit touched in the head', Arthur said, disgustedly, 'See what he did to me? Went down on his knees and kissed my hand. Phoo'!

'That's his old world courtesy', Fay explained, 'Why don't you ask him for something'?

'What would I ask for'?

'Isn't there anything you want'?

'Course there is! I want a horse and a motor bike and a decent job for when I get back into civvies. But he wouldn't have *them* in his little black bag'.

However, there was a gift for Arthur, Merlin said, 'I've brought this for thee'.

Arthur studied it critically, then handed it back. 'Thanks, Mr. Merlin, but I wouldn't rob you'.

Merlin paled. 'What canst thou do without Excalibur'?

Arthur tried to explain. 'Look, chum, it's like this. I'm a tail-end Charlie. I gotta gun. What'd I do with an old-fashioned sword'?

'Smite thine enemies'.

'Well, I've heard it said that some of the Home Guard had bows and arrows, but I tell you straight there's no need for it now. We've got the stuff all right. You ought to go round some of the factories. I'll do plenty of smiting, don't you worry'!

'Then thou wilt be king again'.

'You bet! And you'll be Prime Minister, I suppose'?

'Thou hast said'.

'Aw, come off it! Fond of kidding, aren't you? I guess you couldn't lend me a fiver? I want to go to the dogs to-night, and I'm broke'.

From his black bag Merlin extracted a five-pound note. 'Is this sufficient'?

Arthur whistled. 'Where d'you get it'?

'From my bag'.

'I mean, before'.

Merlin smiled. 'By the infinite powers of sorcery'.

'That sounds a bit crooked to me. Don't think I'd better have it. I'm not keen on changing a doubtful five-pound note. They can be traced'.

'It is right genuine currency of the Bank of England'.

'Perhaps. But I feel safer with good old everyday pound notes'.

'Why, that is simple,' Merlin said, and counted out five.

Arthur still hesitated. 'Are you sure you can spare them? Mind you, it's only a loan. Hope I'll be able to pay you back after the races'.

'All the payment I require is thine approval'.

'Thanks a lot. You haven't any tips, have you? I don't know the form of the dogs since I've been away'.

Merlin handed him a piece of paper bearing eight names.

'This is a selected dog for each race, is it'?

'Those are the names of the winners', Merlin asserted, solemnly.

Arthur went off to the greyhound races, still dubious, still looking for the snag. But Fay had no qualms. She went to Merlin's room and stated her case quite clearly.

'Listen, sweetie-pie, I'm going to a dance tonight, and I want to look like the soldier's dream of home. What can you do for me'?

'Thou art always a dream, even unadorned'.

Fay frowned. This was evidently what Mom had been warning her against. But she could handle it. 'If I went looking like *your* idea of a dream, I'd be run out and then run in, you naughty old man! Come on, now! Do your stuff'!

'My lady speaks and I obey'.

'Well, even dreams have a foundation. I don't think I need go into details. You understand? Then there's the dress. I want the loveliest creation. Something like Ginger Rogers

wore——' She described it at great length, and it materialised She gave a little gasp, because words were cold and colourless compared with this soft, shimmering, real thing. She remembered she must have shoes. Then, 'A cloak of some kind. Does it matter to you what kind of a cloak it is, sugar-daddy'?

Merlin said recklessly that there were no limits to what he could produce.

'All right. White foxes. Six or seven of them hanging down with their tails brushing my knees'.

It was wonderful. It was incredible. But still she felt something was missing. 'Bracelets. I should have some bracelets. And could you——would it make any difference if they were real diamonds'?

Not a scrap, he laughed. What were diamonds, anyway, beside the brightness of her eyes'?

Fay crept out without saying goodbye to her mother, because she was afraid she looked perhaps a little overdressed for Tenpenny Street, and Merlin lay down on his bed. He felt sick and dizzy and exhausted. Satisfying Fay's desires had been a big strain on him. He was out of practice with his magic, and, besides, he wasn't as young as he used to be. Still, you couldn't refuse the young girls, bless 'em!

Arthur came home early from the dogs. 'Mom, I want to talk to you. Where's the old man'?

'Up in his room. What's the matter with you? You look real pale and peaked tonight'.

'Well, he lent me five quid——'

'Now don't say you've gone and lost it all'!

'No. That's just it. I won on every race. Got over two hundred pounds in my pocket'.

'Arthur'!

'He gave me every winner. I just couldn't go wrong. And now I'm kind of worried'.

'Why'?

'Well, I think there's something phoney about the old man. I don't know what his racket is, but I bet it's crooked'.

Mrs. Morgan sighed. 'You think I ought to tell him to go'?

'What's the use of that? If he gets caught he'll mention us, and get us into trouble. No, I think we ought to inform the police'.

'Oh, Arthur, I don't want to harm the old man. And him so kind'.

'We needn't make any charge against him. Just get Ducksworth to come in and check up on him'.

'I don't know, I'm sure. But do what you think best. You're the man of the house now your poor Dad's gone'.

'I'll pay back the five quid first, then they'll have nothing on us. After all, the other's my own honest winnings'.

Arthur did as he had decided, and presently he returned with Constable Ducksworth, and the three of them went up to the top back room.

The constable got out his notebook. 'Good evening, Granpa. I want to ask you a few questions. What's your name'?

'I am hight Merlin'.

'Just name. Not height or weight, Merlin what'?

'Merlin. No more'.

'That's funny. Let's see your identity card'.

Merlin looked to Mrs. Morgan for help. 'Of what does he speak'?

'Identity card, of course. Haven't you got one'?

Merlin shook his head. He resented this man in uniform who was questioning him, and he knew his answers were unsatisfactory. Dimly he sensed a plot against him. Dimly he felt a threat to his liberty. He knew what it was to step into a trap. Centuries in that stone had taught him what imprisonment meant. Once bitten, twice shy, thought Merlin. Oh, if only he weren't so tired!

He roused himself, and began to chant the spell which should send his persecutors into a deep sleep. But somehow the words wouldn't come right. It was so long since he had used them.

The policeman had stepped forward and taken his arm. 'You'd better come along with me.' Merlin did the only thing left to him. He used the strong, never-failing spell which is

the magician's final get-out. He vanished.

Constable Ducksworth rubbed his eyes. 'Where's he gone'?

'He must have slipped out and run down the stairs when we weren't looking'.

'But we were looking. All the time'.

'Ah, well, least said soonest mended,' Mrs. Morgan consoled him, 'What about a nice cup of tea, Constable'?

A shock awaited her. When she went to the larder she noticed that all Merlin's gifts had disappeared, too. The eggs had gone, and the lemons, and the butter. She said, in an aside to Arthur, 'Looks as if we've killed the goose that laid the golden eggs'.

Fay arrived home from the dance very cross. She was wearing nothing but the overcoat which her partner had had the presence of mind to throw around her.

One thing, however, Merlin did leave behind him—— his black bag. Mrs. Morgan hung it on the hallstand, and every day she plunged her hand into it, hoping to find something there. But it was always empty.

PRIDE IS A FUNNY THING

BY JULIAN WARD

YOU remember me? I am the poor young man with the club-foot. No, it doesn't worry me at all . . . only you. Well, as usual, I was in a pub. You see a lot in pubs and hear very interesting things in pubs. Yes, very interesting. You probably know this pub I was in? it stands back from the Embankment, sheltering pleasantly amongst the plane trees from the grimness of the river.

I was in the Private Bar. It was a small room with fixed leather seats round the walls. It would not hold more than, say, six. There were only three of us there. The first man was called, (I noticed), Mr. Jackson. He was a very, very big man. The high stool on which he sat by the bar was quite lost and vanished in the magnificence of his posterior. His fingers were white and round like parsnips. He was holding a whisky and soda and had his Homburg hat on his head.

He said, 'Don't give me that stuff and nonsense. I'm too old to be fooled. Come down to facts'. He looked round at us, first at one and then at the other. He said, 'What does a man want,——a real man? Eh? Tell me that! What does a man want? He wants comfort and security, that's what he wants. He wants a wife and he wants to see her well set up. Good house, good car, and the children at a good school. That's what he aims for. Doesn't he'?

He turned suddenly on me. 'Doesn't he'? he said.

'Why, yes', I said, 'He wants those'.

'Exactly, exactly'. He nodded his head several times. He pursed his lips like a proboscis towards his glass and sipped, and then put down the glass on the counter. He held his hand stretched out over the counter, fingers extended, palm down. 'A man's worth is judged by results'. He slammed his palm down on the bar. 'Results'! he said.

'Well, what do you count as results'? said the other man.

'What do I count as results'? He raised his eyebrows almost to the brim of his smart, pale grey hat. He appeared astonished, as though he had been asked whether he had had his breakfast. He said, 'I'll tell you what I count. I count money in the bank and a good, solid house that's paid for. That's something I count'. He swivelled his head round to me. 'Eh'? he said.

I said, 'I haven't a house. Only a room. I am not very well off just now'.

'But I bet you wish you had a house. That's right, isn't it'?

'Yes, it is. My God, it is. I am sick and tired of rooms. Little rooms. Dirty rooms. Lonely rooms. A room, a furnished room, can be like a rain swept mountain . . . a place of tears and suicide'.

He looked at me, his pale eyes moving from side to side and up and down, taking in each expression of my features. He said, 'Maybe. I suppose so'.

The other man leaned towards us. He was tall and very thin and very shabby. He looked like a sick wolf. He said, 'But there are other things'.

'What other things'?

'You ask me what other things? You ask me that'?

'Yes, I do'.

There was silence, a silence of anger. The big man, Mr. Jackson, sat hugely on his stool and stared truculently. The tall man stood at bay. His cheeks were hollow and his eyes brilliant. He said, 'Were Shakespeare and Beethoven nothing'?

'Shakespeare and Beethoven were successes'.

'Meaning, I am not'?

Mr. Jackson looked into his glass and shrugged his shoulders. 'You should know', he said.

I said, 'Was it Beethoven who went stone deaf'?

Neither of them looked at me. The tall man gripped the edge of the counter with both hands as though he could not trust himself. He said, 'Is it only success that is worth while? Is there no glory in the attempt'?

Mr. Jackson looked him in the face and then ran his eyes

down his greasy overcoat to his sodden shoes. 'Glory', he said, 'What is glory'?

The tall man leaned forward and his voice shook. 'I'll tell you', he said. 'It is seeing a great treasure, a Holy Grail, and casting everything aside to venture after it'.

'Is that what Shakespeare did'?

'Yes'.

Mr. Jackson put down his glass, shifted his grey Homburg off his forehead, and eased his weight on the stool. 'Listen', he said, 'I'll tell you something. Shakespeare wrote because it was worth his while. The labourer is worthy of his hire. Shakespeare was a man who knew the value of his work. He knew what it was worth. Shakespeare was no fool'.

'I don't agree with you'.

' I don't care whether you agree with me or not. I just happen to be right'.

'You are not. You don't even know what you're talking about'.

The barmaid came from the public bar to our bar, and leaned on the counter. She smiled and Mr. Jackson bobbed his head to her. She looked at me carefully because I was a stranger and she assessed my value. I said, 'Good evening', but she did not answer. She was a wonderful woman.

The tall man did not look at her. He said, 'There is something in men that is greater than man himself. Without it we should be animals. Many men have been content to give their lives for it'.

Mr. Jackson held out his glass to the barmaid to be refilled. He said, 'Were you content'?

'Yes'.

'I don't think you were'.

'Don't I know my own self'?

'No. You just tell yourself tales to hide what you don't wish to see. Sour grapes. You set out in life with grand ideas and find they don't work. You make a mess of things so you tell yourself you are content with the struggle. You say it was worth while. I say nonsense. Only success is worth while'.

'That isn't true. Damn you, that isn't true'!

'Oh, manners! Before ladies! Pardon his French, dear'.

The barmaid smiled and looked at the tall man. She had thick masses of bright gold hair cascading in twin waterfalls on to either shoulder. Her black silk dress reflected the lights where it was stretched tight over her fine curves at hip and breast. Her lips were bright as wet poppies. She was a lovely pirate frigate of a woman, with the Jolly Roger of her sex flaunted at the mast-head.

Mr. Jackson said, 'What'll you take for it, Lily'?

She did not answer but poured herself a whisky into a glass and held it up to him with a quick, polite smile. She was neither grateful nor encouraging. They understood exactly, speaking the same language between the two of them. You could see that. He wasn't asking for anything at the moment.

The tall man said, 'Oh, how you weary me with your stupidity'.

There was an embarrassed pause. No one spoke. The barmaid looked at him with blank, lovely eyes.

Mr. Jackson said, 'Well, I won't quarrel with you. I'll ask you a question instead. Are you married'?

The man glared at him. 'What if I am'?

Mr. Jackson said, 'Have a drink'? and looked at us all. I said, 'Thank you, I don't mind a pint'. The tall man put his hand over his glass. The barmaid lifted the bottle with the silver plated pourer and Mr. Jackson said, 'Give him a double,' and the tall man took his hand away slowly and looked down at his feet.

Mr. Jackson said, 'Doesn't your wife ask anything else of you but this . . . this "glorious failure?" '

'She doesn't call it a failure. She thinks as I do'.

'Oh'?

'Yes. She knows that six beautiful words are worth more than a Rolls Royce'.

'Have you ever offered her a Rolls Royce'?

'No. Of course not'.

'Try it. Just try it'. Mr. Jackson looked at the barmaid and she moved her shoulders deliciously backward, arching

her rich bosom luxuriously under the glittering silk. Mr. Jackson said, 'Any woman wants one thing in any man. She wants a fighter. In one way or another a fighter. Someone who goes out and licks the world on its own ground and comes back with the spoils. Eh? Isn't that so? Most certainly it is'. He nodded two or three times. 'Then she can be proud of her man. And of herself. Make her as fine as Solomon in all his glory and . . .' He took a cigarette case from his pocket and opened it. 'And . . .' he said, taking a cigarette from it and holding the case open in his hand. 'And she won't give a tuppenny damn for all your miserable, petty, snivelling little schoolboy poems'. He snapped the case to with a report.

The tall man went quite white and his hand holding his empty glass shook. He said, 'You dare . . .'

'Yes, I dare. Because I know what I am and what you are. I know what all you trumped up little men who call yourselves artists are. Failures, that's what you are. Men who have been licked by life in the first round because they are no good and have run screaming about their souls being above filthy lucre ever since. Oh, I know 'em. Say they don't want the dough just because they can't make it. Haven't got the guts to make it. Sour grapes, I say'.

The tall man looked at him and his lips trembled. 'I'm . . . contaminated by talking to you', he said and went out, slamming the door behind him.

'Contaminated, contaminated'? Mr. Jackson put his hand over his heart and groaned in mock distress. He pulled his coat more comfortably round him and said, 'Now, that's more cosy'.

The barmaid smiled and said, 'Same again'?

Mr. Jackson nodded. 'Ta, please dear'. He said to me, 'There is no living man who is a failure who doesn't in his heart of hearts admire and envy the man who is a success'.

'No'? I said, and poured my pint over his head as I went out too.

THE MASK

BY MICHAEL PHILIPS

HE always sat in the same chair with his back to the wall, among the shadows made by the corner of the room. Sometimes he read a book but more often he sat very still with his hands along the arms of the chair and looked through the window across the sea to Naples. He never spoke to anyone and nobody dared speak to him. His isolation was so utter that there was a chill around him in the shadows in which he hid.

When I came into the room it was empty except for the dim figure sitting in the corner. The whole room was slashed by swords of sunlight blazing in through the open windows; the sun seemed to be scabbarded in the room. I made up my mind. I would go up to him and talk to him.

Ten days ago I had come to the convalescent home to get over a bullet in the leg. I came across the bay from Naples in a ferry to Sorrento. The day was cold and the wind blew through one's bones like a draught through a key hole. The other passengers were all Officers like myself recovering from wounds of some kind.

In the bow of the boat standing with his back to the rest of us was a Pilot Officer. He had been standing there all the time with his legs braced against the dip of the boat. Suddenly the boat lurched more violently than usual and made him stagger and half turn round. And I saw his face. My first impression was of a Punch and Judy show; his face seemed the same bright pink colour, and the features seemed waxen and over emphasised. His eyebrows were coal black and looked as if they were stencilled on the flesh. From the distance his face looked like Punch's, big nosed and gnarled.

He saw me looking at him and turned away, giving me his back. Although the spray flicked over him he never turned round for the whole of the rest of the voyage.

Later on when we docked at the tiny stone jetty at

Sorrento I saw him close to. His face was a terrible sight. The features had been remade by a surgeon and were useful but not very human. You could see the botching of man's handiwork everywhere; scars, seams, puckerings. The whole skin was tightly stretched, and the flesh a livid, unnatural fungus colour. Only his eyes were as they must have been before his face was destroyed; they were blue and cold. He looked at me with a slow calculating stare, I could feel that I was being looked at as a specimen not as a man. I wanted to speak to him, but that look with its utter indifference and lack of any interest froze my soul. I turned away as one turns away from a dead body.

Ever since that day he arrived at the convalescent home, nobody had dared to speak to him. He ate by himself, walked by himself and sat by himself.

But I made up my mind that I'd go and talk to him. I'd seen plenty of disgusting sights lately, and a scarred piece of flesh that masked a man's soul and personality wasn't anything to avoid or flinch from.

So I went up to him and said the first thing that came into my head.

'What a lovely day'.

He answered me from the shadows. 'Yes. Isn't it.' His voice was very steady, balanced on a knife-edge of indifference.

'Not much to do here except sit about and stare at Naples across the bay', I said.

'That's about all'. He sounded bored by my company. I tried again.

'The local wine's not too bad'.

'No. Quite passable'. He got up and came out of the shadows. The light struck his face so that it was shown in its full horror and distortion. He stood looking out across the blue Tyrrhenian sea.

'It's very blue, isn't it'? His voice was as blank as a white sheet of paper. 'And now if you'll excuse me, I must go and write some letters'.

I was left alone by the windows. I stayed on looking out

at that view that makes the eye dazzle with its colour. The great curve of the Bay. Vesuvius, with its white feather of smoke. Naples in the distance, jumbled and yet architectural, rising in tiers from the water. Away on the left Capri, jutting out of the sea like some dream solidified in the mould of beauty.

I am very obstinate by nature and I decided that I'd make him talk, even if I had to hurt both of us in the process.

For the next few days he avoided me by getting up when I came into the room, or if he passed me on the stairs by looking the other way. And then one afternoon I caught him alone in the lounge sitting in his usual chair in the empty room. I went up to him and sat down in the chair next to his. This time he spoke first and laughed.

'What do you want? Why are you hunting me'?

'I want to talk to you'.

'What about'?

I felt him beginning to slip away from me so I spoke to the point and about as tenderly as an east wind.

'Look, you are isolating yourself from men and the world. Why'? ...

He looked at me with his cold blue eyes very steadily for ten seconds.

'What do you want from me'?

'Nothing. I want to listen to you talking about yourself'.

'Is that all'? He looked away from me out over the sea.

'That's all. You've had a terrible thing happen to you, but instead of facing it you're running away. I'm going to make you face it'.

'Why'?

'Because cowardice is worse than death, and you are alive'.

He laughed again. 'You are a queer fellow. It's a pity I can't take off this mask of mine for a bit and talk to you without this on, but you'll have to put up with it. All right, as you're so persistent I *will* talk to you'.

He gave me a look that was a mixture of contempt and indifference. He lit his pipe and the match showed up his

face and made it look like a gutted candle.

'You feel sorry for me, don't you? Everybody does. Also you feel disgusted, everybody feels that too. I used to once, especially when I saw my face in a shaving mirror. I used to talk aloud to myself then and say "what's the good of shaving that horrible thing"? . . . But I'll start at the beginning.

When I was shot down my face was burnt. There wasn't very much of it left and I remember it smelt like a grilled chop. They kept me under morphia at first and then when the flesh had healed the surgeon began to make me a new face. I spent months in bandages. I had skin grafts, I had twenty-seven operations. I used to lie in bed and look at the walls and ceilings and wonder what I'd look like when they'd finished with me.

I hadn't been allowed a mirror till they had begun to tidy me up a bit, but one morning the surgeon told me I could have a look at myself. He prepared me for it by saying that of course they hadn't finished yet, and that when he'd given me a new pair of nostrils I'd look quite different.

I held up the mirror and saw a sight that made me shudder. I had expected to see myself, and of course I only saw a thing or man who not only was a complete stranger but was a horror. I gave the surgeon back the mirror and thanked him and agreed that a pair of nostrils would improve my nose.

After they'd gone I lay on my back and tried to keep calm, while hot and icy shudders went up and down my spine. I felt as though I was chained to a corpse, trapped with a horror that was doubly horrible because it was myself.

'Am I boring you'?

He stopped and looked at me.

'No, go on', I said.

'No. I don't suppose I am boring you; man enjoys the taste of somebody else's misfortune.

At last they discharged me and I had to face the outside world. You see, in the hospital we were all in varying stages of mutilation and we somehow felt that the Sisters and doctors with their dull ordinary faces were the freaks, not us.

I came out of the discharge office of the hospital into a biting east wind that made my eyes water. They had given me a week's leave and I went to Rome.

I didn't enjoy Rome. Wherever I went people stared at me and then looked away quickly, I could feel them still staring at me when I couldn't catch their eye. It was like being stabbed in the back. You've seen small boys poking sticks at a frog. They poked their eyes into every corner of my face and explored it till they shuddered. I drew eyes as though I was a beautiful girl or a dead horse.

I was hunted and looked at where ever I went. Even in the dim quiet corners of the churches of Rome I was still looked at. Even Christ, nailed like vermin on his Cross board, looked down into my face and although he didn't look away, he seemed to say: "You and I are alike, we are both single and alone, but I've left the earth and have the Kingdom of Heaven, while you remain in a world of men and women with millions of staring eyes." '

He lit another match; the flame once more showed his face. I thought I saw something soft and gentle in that grotesque and terrible screen that war had carved in front of him. He was silent for a while. Outside the day was deepening into dusk, the shadows growing longer and heavier on the water. Capri rose out of the sea like a mass of purple violets. Vesuvius smoked lazily and contentedly like an old man sitting on a bench on a summer evening.

He went on talking.

'This is a beautiful place, isn't it? Like Paradise. I sometimes think that I'm the serpent, or perhaps the flaming sword.

After a time I became angry and deadly. I used to hide and hunt in my turn. I'd wait till I saw a pair of lovers arm in arm, thigh to thigh, walking along under the trees, seeing only each other and the earth in its gentlest and most lovely mood. Then I'd step suddenly in front of them and stand there looking at them, forcing them to look reality in the face. It was rather like showing a child its pet puppy cut up into four neat quarters of meat.

I used the remains of my face to hammer and shatter people's day dreams about the sweetness of life. I made myself into an avenging fate to dog the world and make it uneasy and afraid.

Looking back now I suppose I wasn't quite normal then. You see the shock was pretty great; I used to be quite good looking once, and I used to take a delight in the beauty of women, their hair and their eyes and the smooth satin skins of their bodies. The legend of Beauty and the Beast had a very topical significance for me just then'.

He stopped, and then went on. There was a change in his voice that made me think of a calm pool suddenly scarred by a wind blowing across it.

'Are you married'? he said.

'Yes'.

'So am I. And that of course is really the maggot in the rose. It's eighteen months since I was shot down and I'm overdue to go home back to England, but I just can't. She knows of course what's happened to me, but I can't go home. I can't'.

'A woman doesn't love a man because of his face, she loves him', I said.

He looked at me with such blazing contempt that I thought he was going to hit me.

'I *knew* you'd say that! I've been waiting for it. Truth sometimes is so obvious that it becomes an insult'. Then his voice calmed to its normal slow pace.

'I'll try and make you understand.

I soon passed beyond that stage of bitterness and violence against the whole world. Hate is as exhausting as love and not so full of nourishment. In time I became what I suppose I am now, quite accustomed to the situation; I accept it and feel no ill will'.

'Then why not go home to your wife'?

'I must say I admire your persistence. I can't go back to her because I love her and I don't want to see her slowly begin to learn to love a stranger. She's a girl that can stand the sight of blood, dead mice don't frighten her, my face

could be stomached. It's not that. But you see, people, although they can get accustomed to a freak and can even get to the stage where they are no longer uncomfortable or squeamish, can never quite cross the barrier. They must always stay on one side and look over. She would love me as though I had a strange "distance" to me, she could never again come close to my soul. I would be far off and different to her and she'd try to love the new, different man that had come home to her. But I'm the same. I haven't changed'.

'You're talking words, not truth', I said.

'What do you know about it? Nothing! You saw me sitting here in the shadows and just because you've got a kind heart you wanted to draw me out of myself, to help me to mingle with my fellow men and all the rest of it. But you see, I don't sit about in shadows because I can't face the world. It's because the world can't face me, and puts me away from it like a stuffed bird in a glass case.

I'm given an eternal cold courtesy. You've seen young men and women treating their parents or friends of an elder generation so respectfully, so courteously, and yet speaking to them as though they were some relic of the fifteenth century.

No. I'm an outcast, a frozen relic walled up in a glacier, to be looked at with interest, wondered at, but never to be allowed to come out from my ice and isolation'.

His voice had no bitterness, no waspish resentment. I began to understand the slow, even tones in which he always spoke. He was cold, and his voice was chilled.

'What are you going to do'? I said.

'What can I do? I am my own prison as long as I live'.

Night was falling. Naples had vanished, leaving only a few lights glittering in the distance. Capri was a velvet shadow on the sea, and the silhouette of Vesuvius was unseen except for an occasional red glow in the sky. A cold wind blew in land and ruffled the trees, making the leaves rustle.

I could still just see his face in the shadows. He was looking at me.

'Well', he said.

I didn't know what to say. I felt that I was in the presence of something too large to be circumscribed with a sentence.

He spoke for me. 'I think I know what you are going to say. You'll say that you don't feel any barrier between us, and no sense of "distance"; you'll say I'm inventing the whole thing. But I'm not. If I hadn't looked as I do, if I hadn't been a freak, you would never have spoken to me. You were intrigued by the frozen man in the glacier. You're the same as all the rest'.

He got up. 'But thank you for listening to me all the same'.

After he had left the room I sat by myself and thought about him. I could still hear the steady cold tones of his voice in my ears. I could still picture his face like some gargoyle carved in flesh.

Suddenly I felt very cold; outside the sea made its murmuring white lace in the darkness down below on the rocks. The stars, scattered in the sky, were like crystals of frost in the outer wastes of desolation. I was cold. My teeth chattered in my head. I shuddered.

AN APPLE FOR THE TEACHER

BY AUBREY SEBBA

OUTSIDE it was hot. The air seemed to be scorched by a fervid, shimmering heat. When she looked through the window, she could see the courtyard, with its solitary tree, motionless and petrified in the still glare of the sun, and then the block opposite, dazzling in its whiteness, with its serried rows of windows gaping at her in a toothy smile. Now and again, a head would bob up and down in one of the windows, a silent, disembodied head, part of another world, and each time, with a dull subconscious shock, she would realise that she knew this secret head, and its secret owner, and that it was Miss Forsythe busy at the blackboard drilling mathematics into Form III.

Inside the classroom, there was a chalky smell, dusty, not unpleasant, but so familiar that it had become long ago part and parcel of her existence. The children were bored and tired, and they shuffled their feet, and every now and again a rustle of whispering would break out in one of the corners, and she would look sternly in the direction of the whispering, and it would quieten down, and then it would break out again in another corner. It reminded her of the little pimples on her face that continually harrassed her by yielding to her care, and then tormenting her by breaking out elsewhere. A fine simile, she thought, bitterly, and pensively she rubbed her long, efficient finger on the latest eruption.

'Thank you Joan, that was good', she said. 'Next'.

A freckled boy stood up and looking earnestly at the blackboard in front, began, in a toneless sing-song, to recite.

'Oh, young Lochinvar is come out of the West
Through all the wide border his steed was the best . . .'

It was a fine, romantic poem, with a fine, romantic lilt, fine romantic words, and a fine romantic subject. It hurt her to think of the glorious, filibustering swagger of young Lochinvar. She thought, dully, that life was very, very unkind to

her. She wondered if he thought of her as much as she thought of him.

She remembered again the evening that they had first met. It was at a meeting of the Literary Society. There had been a symposium of two papers read that evening, and she had delivered an address on 'Walt Whitman—His Relationship to the Moderns'. She had enjoyed preparing that paper—Whitman's stern masculinity had always appealed to her.

The other paper had been on 'The Life and Art of Swinburne', and it had been read by a stranger to the town and the Society. He was about forty, and she had thought that he was very romantic-looking, with distinguished greying hair, and a beautifully modulated voice. Ironically, she reflected that now, if she reviewed him in the cool aftermath, he really hadn't been much to look at at all, because he was quite short, and his teeth were very bad. But, that night she had listened enthralled to the rich sensuousness of Swinburne's verse, beautifully recited, and her soul had thrilled and vibrated, and it was as if she had been bathed in the rich glow of a tropical sunset, and everything seemed lustrous and fresh and irridescent. The typical virginal adoration of a starved old maid, she thought bitterly to herself.

'Oh, come ye in peace here, or come ye in war,
Or to dance at our bridal, young Lord Lochinvar?'

The freckled boy had reached the end of the third verse. But now he stumbled and faltered. The gates of his memory had jammed. She prompted him gently, and he perspired, and stammered, his red hair unkempt and falling into his eyes.

'All right, Arthur', she said, wearily. 'Learn it properly, and recite it to me tomorrow. Carry on, Maureen'.

Not that she was terribly old. Thirty three. A school-marm, though. She had a bad complexion, and she was very short-sighted, and her glasses hid her eyes, which she knew to be her best feature. Oh, she had looked long and often in the mirror, after she had met him, and really, her figure wasn't very bad, and she had gone to a hairdresser, and had had her hair set, and she had bought a smart new costume and

new shoes. Calf-love, at her age, she thought cynically, and set her lips grimly.

A fat lot of good it had done! The Literary Society always served tea and buns, and so they were eventually introduced. He was a bank teller, just detailed to the local branch on transfer. He had met Mr. Swailey, the Society's President, had disclosed his deep interest in literature, and had been invited to give the address.

They had talked together, and had discovered an amazing common interest in literature. He had eventually escorted her to her boarding-house, and it was swathed in a rapturous aura that she had sought her bed. His voice still rang mellow in her ears. 'Would you care to accompany me for a stroll on Sunday afternoon, Miss Gardener? Through the woods, or somewhere'?

The little girl with the bow in her hair sat down with a satisfied smirk.

'Good, Maureen', she said. 'Next'! A fat little boy stood up and began to chant.

They had gone out that Sunday afternoon, and she had walked through the woods, and miraculously she had walked on air. They spoke mainly about English literature. He had an amazing knowledge of the poets, and could quote great lumps. Shelley to Kipling, Marlowe to Brooke, Pope to T. S. Eliot—he knew their works and their lines. Once he had surprised her by reciting 'The Hunting of the Snark', and then together they had solemnly recited 'The Jabberwocky'. Then they had talked about Keats, and from that they had gone to 'The Ancient Mariner', and then to basic English and James Joyce.

It was lovely, oh, so lovely, and she had fallen deeply, deeply in love. She knew she was in love, but it was a new experience to her. She had tried desperately to please him, but it was difficult to know what to do. She knew she was unsophisticated, and naive, and that she spoke too rapidly and eagerly, like an enthusiastic school-girl, and she had tried to control her voice, so that she spoke easily, and in a cultivated manner. But then her excitement would run out,

like emancipated mercury, and her speech would bubble, like exuberant soda-water, and she would see him smiling a little indulgently, and she would blush darkly, and would hate herself.

The rustling in one corner grew stronger. There was a snicker of amusement.

'Arthur Templeton'! she called out sharply.

'Yes, Miss Gardener'. The freckle-faced boy looked up.

'You were laughing', she reproved him. 'You will bring me a hundred lines to-morrow—"I must not laugh in class." '

'Yes, Miss Gardener'.

'Carry on reciting, Charles, and put some spirit into it. Make it sound as if you like it'.

She felt annoyed with herself for venting her rage on Arthur Templeton. You couldn't altogether blame the boy for feeling bored. And, my goodness, that sultry heat was driving her mad. She bit her lip, and looked at her watch. Ten minutes more before the day was over. She felt utterly gloomy and depressed.

It was obvious, she thought to herself, that so inexperienced a woman as she would never attract a man. Although she had always felt that warm, comforting glow blanket her whenever she was in his company, it was not, apparently, an exultation that was reciprocated. Eagerly and zestfully they talked of literature, but there was never the faintest, never the remotest, vestige of a personal relationship. He always addressed her formally as Miss Gardener, and he always acted towards her in the most gentlemanly of fashions. She never could raise a single word of reproach about his conduct towards her. She pulled her fingers nervously, and they cracked sharply.

Three times she had seen him out with that attractive Mary Atkinson, who worked in the same bank as he did. As if she could ever hope to compete with little hussies like that! Silly fool that she was ever to think of it!

He had left yesterday, on transfer to another town. He had thanked her very politely for the stimulating conversations they had had together, and had promised to write

to her some time. Perhaps they would meet again one day. Good luck. Good-bye.

She felt lost, and very, very lonely. It was as if she was floating about in the middle air, cast adrift in celestial clouds. The world around roared and blustered, but its impact was unreal, swathed in cotton wool. She was on a pinnacle, miles above the rest of the world, and people would speak to her, and she would answer. But really, it didn't make much difference if they spoke, and it didn't make much difference if she answered, and really, she didn't think it would make much difference at all if she lived.

She felt scornful and disgusted with herself. How could she have so disgraced herself ever to have brought herself to love a man, she thought angrily. She, with her unattractive pimply face, and her glasses, and her machine-gun voice, and her schoolmarm methods! She was doomed to failure from the start!

Her thoughts swelled hotly, and she could feel herself flushing. Her self-contempt rose suddenly in an uncontrollable tide. She hated herself, and she hated him, and she hated everybody, and everybody hated her!

The school-bell rang sharply, and there came a buzz of voices, and a shuffle of feet along the corridors outside. She dismissed the class, and waited patiently for the children to file out.

The freckled boy paused before her desk.

'Please? Miss Gardener', he said.

'Well, Arthur'? She asked wearily.

He looked awkwardly at his feet, and ran his inky fingers through his unruly, red mop.

'Please, I'm sorry, Miss Gardener', he said.

'It was very wrong of you', she said, sternly.

'Yes, I know', he said. Then in a rush. 'Please, Miss Gardener, here's an apple for you'!

He put it roughly on the desk, a big, green Winter Pearmain, swelling in its own importance.

She felt embarrassed. He shuffled his feet awkwardly.

'Thank you, Arthur', she said. He shuffled again. 'And you

needn't do the lines'. She smiled at him. It hurt her to smile.

'Thank you, Miss Gardener', he burst out. 'You're O.K.'! and he bolted from the classroom.

She sat for a moment, and stared at the apple. His words rang in her ears. She was O.K.! At least one person in this world had some sort of regard for her. An apple—he was probably fond of apples—and a word of appreciation, and, in the limited vocabulary of schoolchildren, that word of recommendation probably stood very high! It was very nice of him.

In her gloomy soul a vital spark began to glow. Somebody liked her! He was only an inky, freckled little ruffian of a schoolboy, but in his inky freckled heart, he thought sufficiently highly of her to give her a present and a compliment. And to win the respect and regard of a boy like that was, perhaps, more of a feat and achievement than to gain the love and adoration of a bank-teller who, probably, was no better than he ought to have been, and had probably made Mary Atkinson his mistress!

She was mad, silly, idiotic to have wasted a simple thought on him! And to have felt gloomy and depressed because he had gone! How ridiculous! He would have probably have tried it on with her, if she would have carried on with him. On the whole, she thought, she had had a very lucky escape.

Eventually, she put the apple into her bag, and put on her hat. Outside, the hard sun still cast gaunt shadows on the ground, but she hardly felt the heat. A strong feeling of anti-climax was surging over her. She chided, and jeered at herself. Silly-billy, to have ever taken an affair like that seriously! It was all just a big joke, now!

Nice boy, Arthur—considerate, helpful, polite. She felt that she must pay him a little more attention, help him on with his work. Maybe she would get him to come and have tea with her one day.

She reached her boarding-house, and went up to her room. She took off her hat, and looked long and earnestly in the mirror. What if she did wear glasses, and did have pimples! One person there was, at least, who could see behind facial

blemishes, and espy the true merits of her soul. Mary Atkinson, indeed! What did *she* know of literature and culture! She felt sure that Arthur was interested in literature—she must really train him to appreciate the poets! He would enjoy 'The Hunting of the Snark'!

She sat down, happily, and took the apple out of the bag. Holding a little fruit-knife delicately in her fingers, she pared the apple. The long green skin serpentined down on to her bed. Then, elegantly, she took the knife, and sliced the apple into two neat sections.

Instead of crisp whiteness, she saw brown, soggy decay.

The apple was rotten.

Miss Gardener threw herself on to her pillow, and wept as if her heart was breaking.

WOLF! . . . WOLF!

BY RONALD HORTON

IT was freezing cold in Togayevka where the cruel wind whistled unchecked across the Nogaisky Steppe. The second-hand woollies and cast-off underwear, appealed for with such impassioned eloquence by the Reich Kommissioner in Remscheid, were but playthings for the grim humour of the unspeakable cold of this barren steppe-land.

Inside the small wooden hut, banked by solid slabs of concrete-like ice in a vain pretence to keep out the wind, Trooper Carl Wolfe, crouching amidst the acrid fumes which rose from a spluttering stove, fought against his panic.

A couple of gutted candles, sensitive to each gust of wind outside, flickered miserably, and gave mere pin pricks of light in the rapidly gathering darkness.

Slumped on an empty ammunition box, as near the stove as he could get without being choked, Trooper Carl Wolfe shivered incessantly, sometimes not so much with the cold as with the chill fear which the Bolsheviks always struck into his heart when he allowed himself to think of them—mainly every time when he was alone.

Why in heaven's name, reflected Trooper Wolfe bitterly, didn't the Fuehrer send more tanks and planes to crush these accursed Bolsheviks. Some of the soldiers whispered that the R.A.F. had blasted Cologne right off the Rhine, and that 'planes were badly needed within the Reich. But that was only wild rumour. Hadn't they been promised that no bombs should ever fall in Reich territory? Visions of the Rhine set him thinking of Remscheid, his home, where Elli, his wife, worked long hours on munitions, and little Johann, his son was looked after by Uncle Hermann.

Outside the hut, used as a sentry's outpost, the swirling gusts had, for a moment subsided, and the two candles flared up into sudden light, illuminating the hut with a yellowish glow, casting weird shadows which Trooper Wolfe's

overwrought imagination turned into Russian soldiers.

Then, the door opened suddenly and the Camp Postman strode in.

'Heil Hitler! A letter for you', and flinging it on the floor, marched out again.

Mechanically, Trooper Carl Wolfe tore open the envelope The letter was headed, 'Remscheid', and the date was nearly six weeks old.

'My dear Nephew Carl (it said),

We are thinking of you in Remscheid, and all the brave men fighting so gallantly and victoriously for the Fuehrer on the Russian front. Very soon you will be in Stalingrad, and the annihilation of the Bolshevik hordes which the Fuehrer promised us himself a few days ago will be complete. Russia is crumbling at this moment under the weight of our great armies.

'There is, however, some news to cause you sadness, but you, as a soldier of the Reich, will bear it manfully. Last week, vast numbers of British Tommies dropped bombs of a terrifying character on Cologne and Remscheid. Your house received a direct hit, and the bodies of Elli and little Johann have just been recovered. Had I not been on fire guard, I, too, would have been killed. Be brave, dear Nephew, and remember that the Fuehrer himself shares in the sorrows of all his people.

Heil Hitler,

Your affectionate uncle,

Hermann'.

'Elli, my wife—' his lips moved. 'Johann, my little one—' and the letter dropped to the floor.

A gust of wind swirling round the hut caused the candles again to flicker to pin-point. Then, something in the dazed brain of Trooper Carl Wolfe seemed to snap.

Jumping up suddenly, he seized his rifle and raced to the door. Flinging it open, he gasped painfully as a sudden icy blast caught him full face.

'The Bolsheviks! The Bolsheviks'! he screamed hysterically, and pounded with his rifle-butt a hollow shell-case

hanging by a chain from the door-post—the signal by which the sentry warned the camp.

The warning echoed through the little garrison whose members, flung back with devastating losses many hundreds of kilometres from the gates of Stalingrad itself, had been ordered, at all costs, to hold the railway junction of Torgayevka until such reserves as could be spared were brought up to reinforce them.

Colonel von Baumann, Major Schultz, of the Gestapo, and the officers were dining in the mess—a well-heated, comfortably furnished brick building—when the alarm sounded.

'Heil Hitler! Herr Commandant—' a mess steward rushed into the room—'the alarm's sounding'.

Cursing heavily, von Baumann rapped out orders as his officers hurried into what protective clothing the High Command could let them have.

An Oberleutnant and a couple of men rushed to the little wooden hut outside which Trooper Carl Wolfe still hammered the hollow shell-case with his rifle-butt.

'Silence, fool——'!

Mechanically, Trooper Wolfe obeyed. The wind had dropped, and not a sound disturbed the evening air.

'This is not right, Herr Oberleutnant', a sergeant shivered, and stamped on the snow in an effort to keep his feet warm. 'It's uncanny——'.

Ignoring him, the Oberleutnant turned to Trooper Wolfe.

'Where did you see them, these Bolsheviks?' he snapped.

'I——I didn't——' gasped Trooper Wolfe and collapsed in a heap.

'WHAT! Why, you——you——' the Oberleutnant screamed the words. 'It's a false alarm. Put this swine under arrest. We'll deal with him in the morning', and he kicked unmercifully the unconscious man on the ground.

Two men and the sergeant flung him into a corner of the little hut, slammed the door, and crouching low in the centre of the room, attempted to get what warmth they could from the spluttering, fume exuding stove.

At ten o'clock next morning, Trooper Carl Wolfe limped

into von Baumann's office in the improvised H.Q. He neither saluted nor gave the Heil sign until a smart blow in the ribs which almost bereft him of wind reminded him to rectify the omission.

'Well——'! roared Colonel von Baumann.

'I——I——my mind must have gone, Herr Commandant. I——I dream of these Bolsheviks——they haunt me. Ever since Stalingrad——' choking for breath he continued—— 'and yesterday I had news from Remscheid of the death of Elli, my wife, and Johann, my little one. The bombing was terrible——it——'.

Major Schultz of the Gestapo looked up quickly.

'Who told you this——'?

'My—my uncle Hermann in Remscheid', stammered Trooper Wolfe.

'What's his name, fool——'?

'HermannWolfe, Herr Major.

'We will teach Uncle Hermann to be a little more discreet', said the Gestapo Major, writing rapidly. 'Now, Herr Commandant——' he turned to von Baumann——'are we going to shoot this imbecile'?

'No——I think not——' a smile played round the corners of von Baumann's cruel mouth. 'I have a better way than that. Listen: when darkness falls to-night, he will be tied to a sapling tree and he will shout "Bolsheviks! Bolsheviks!" until I give orders for him to stop. It is our duty to teach soldiers of the Reich to regain their nerve, Herr Major'.

'Excellent, Herr Commandant, excellent'! chuckled the Major. 'Take him out, sergeant'.

Their laughter echoed in the room for quite a long time.

The saplings which had bent nearly double in the fury of the gale during the morning and afternoon were upright as Trooper Wolfe was led to the edge of the garrison as darkness began to fall. Then, securely tied, his captors left him, and nothing but the faint crunching of their boots in the snow broke the stillness of the evening air until Trooper Wolfe raised his first shout.

Tugging vainly at the strong ropes, he panicked, and his

head began to pound unmercifully. Chilled to the bone, he began to moan and whimper, when something caught his attention.

To his right there was a slithering movement on the ground——and to his right again——something straight ahead.

Blind panic seized him.

'The Bolsheviks! The Bolsheviks'! and his screams echoed through the shuttered windows of the mess where von Baumann, hearing the cries, laughed and lit another cigar.

'Comrade Captain', breathed a voice in the ear of Nicolai Demitsky, close to the sapling tree on the edge of the camp, 'there is a Nazi giving the alarm. His cries are ringing through the camp, Comrade Captain'.

'Through the camp they may be ringing', the Russian officer smiled in the darkness, 'but to his shouts no one pays any attention'.

'Shall I shoot him, Comrade Captain'?

'By no means, Comrade Sergeant, because if he stops his shouting his friends will come to find out why. He's being punished for something, and he must be kept shouting'.

Captain Demitsky and his sergeant were within feet of the sapling when Trooper Wolfe gave a choking cry, and stopped shouting.

'Some liquor, quick', the Russian officer snapped, and from his pocket the sergeant drew a flask, the top of which he forced between Trooper Wolfe's frozen lips.

Recovering consciousness, he began to scream again as Captain Nicolai Demitsky, smiling broadly in the darkness rapped out orders and the encirclement of the garrison began.

The attack was only a matter of minutes. In the mess, the first man to see Captain Demitsky and his burly sergeant was the steward who met them in the corridor outside the ante-room. Petrified, he stood without a sound, his hands raised high above his head.

The Russian officer, tommy-gun in hand, burst into the ante-room as Colonel von Baumann, a second too late,

reached for his revolver. The Captain's gun spurted flame. Major Schultz, springing forward, collapsed with a choking cry. The remainder of the mess put up their hands as one man.

Outside, the rat-a-tat of machine guns was subsiding.

Bullets were flying round the sapling tree when Trooper Carl Wolfe gave a choking gasp.

'Elli, my wife——Johann, my little one', he murmured, and dropping his head suddenly on his chest, went forward to meet them.

ARCADY

BY PETER DEREK

WHEN Corydon first played his pipe
To Phyllis, carefree, lightly,
The skies that echoed every note
Were not, by bricks unsightly,
Bescarred. He saw an empty sky,
And 'May-Fair Ground' was not a lie.

They danced and kissed in meadows cool,
And picked a scented lily
Where now the strident voices cry
'Change here for Piccadilly'!
St. John's Wood was a leafy sea,
And Bethnal Green was wild and free.

But London lovers now must snatch
What joys a city yields.
We cannot see that charming sight,
St. Martins—in the fields.
And fields in Whitehall would seem strange,
And Shepherd's Market's suffered change.

No, here we love in London's grime,
But yet we're far from sorrow,
And even now we see more trees
Than some may see tomorrow
So let us run and catch that 'bus—
St. James's Park is still for us!

THESE ARE THE WRITERS

PETER HARRIS left St Paul's School early in the war to join the reporting staff of the *West Middlesex Gazette*, Ealing, and later worked as reporter for the *Evening Gazette*, Middlesbrough and Stockton-on-Tees. He has been doing farming and forestry work since 1942. Has contributed to *Tribune*, *Country Life*, *Wine and Food*, etc. and is writing a novel which, he says, he does not expect any publisher to be 'foolhardy enough to take.'

VIOLET QUIRK has had three books published, a few serials and articles, several poems and many short stories. Writing is her favourite occupation and reading her favourite recreation.

ARTHUR FRANCIS HEANE has published a few short stories and articles. He has practised law in this country and the United States. From 1915-1919 he served in France, Italy and Palestine in the Forces, and in the last war he was attached to the Admiralty from 1939-40, commanded a Coast Defence Battery, R,A. at Vickerstown from 1940-41 and subsequently joined the Ministry of Aircraft Production. He has travelled extensively and has lived in Paris, on the Riviera and in Spain.

HELEN LOVAT FRASER is the daughter of C. Lovat Fraser, the artist and designer of *The Beggar's Opera*, and the God-daughter of James Stephens, the Irish Poet and novelist. She earns her living as a journalist and her first novel "Tomorrow's Harvest", which is set in the time of the Minoans of ancient Crete, has recently been published by Hutchinson.

WINSTON CLEWES has been writing for years in his spare time. His first story was taken by the B.B.C. in 1941 and since then he has written numerous shorts and a broadcast play. His first novel, "The Violent Friends"

dealing with the life of Jonathan Swift in Dublin, was published by Michael Joseph in 1944 and is now in its fourth impression; it has also been published in the United States. His play on the same theme was produced at Liverpool in 1944. A second novel *Sweet River in the Morning* is to be published this spring.

CYRIL HUGHES was a librarian before the war and during the war has done Civil Defence and hospital work and teaching. He has written numerous pacifist and socialist articles and hopes now to devote more time to literature proper.

KATHLEEN BALBERNIE says she was "brought up on the Authorised Version of the Bible, that magnificent and timeless prose"; she was early drawn to the Greek writers and has read much French poetry and literature. She has published five novels and many poems and articles. She has recently had a play about Shelley and Byron accepted by a London manager and a novel taken by the Staples Press. During the war she has worked at the Ministry of Information.

DENYS JOHNSON-DAVIES spent his early youth in Egypt, Sudan, Kenya and Uganda, and at the age of 14 decided to take up Oriental languages. After spending a year at the School of Oriental Studies he took a degree in Arabic and Persian at Cambridge, and during the war has been working on propaganda to the Arab countries. He has published a few short stories and a thriller (written under a pseudonym) and has had a children's book accepted. He hopes to publish a volume of translations from Teymour.

VINCENT BROME has written for hundreds of newspapers, periodicals and magazines throughout the world and more than thirty of his short stories have been published in this country and reprinted abroad. In 1934 Messrs. Methuen published his anthology of *Favourite Quotations*—and later his second book appeared—*The Underground Press of Europe*. He has lately written

another novel and is well into a play. He has worked for two years at the Ministry of Information on propaganda work and done a certain amount of script writing and broadcasting for the B.B.C.

EILY O'HORAN started short story writing about eight years ago and became a regular contributor to *Chambers' Journal*, *Woman's Magazine*, and various periodicals and magazines in this country. She has also written for *The Bell*, a modern Irish Magazine edited by Sean O'Faolain. Her first novel was published in serial form in 1944 and she is working on another. Her ambition is to write novels and short stories portraying ordinary middle-class life in Ireland especially with regard to the relationship between 'the man in the street' in Ireland with his fellow over here.

TOM AUGUSTINE RITCHIE has been writing 'reams of poetry for twenty years' but *Flamingo* is the first to achieve national publication. Describes his profession as 'trying to settle down, the present spasm being journalism.'

JEFFERY MALLARD started writing as a hobby in 1933 and has had verse published in *Good Housekeeping* *London Opinion* and *The Melody Maker*. *You Can Only Die Once* is her first short story to be published, but she is writing others and hopes to devote herself to serious writing in future.

HERMINE DE VIVENOT is a journalist and novelist, who has been Buenos Aires correspondent of the *Saturday Review of Literature*, New York; *The Studio*, *Times Literary Supplement*, and *Christian Science Monitor*. Her publications include travel articles on South America, Portugal, the Netherlands, and a South American novel *The Ninas of Balcarce* which was recommended by the Book Society.

PHYLLIS HASTINGS has been writing short stories and poetry for about ten years. Before the war her work appeared in about forty magazines and newspapers

in Great Britain and on the Continent. She hopes to have a novel published when paper becomes plentiful.

JULIAN WARD has written for the *London Mercury*, *Argosy*, and poetry in *The Observer* and other publications. As a Lieutenant in the R.N.V.R. he was minesweeping from December 1939 until November 1944 when he was blown up by a mine in the Scheldt operations. He has been a bank clerk, a policeman and a drummer in a dance band at various times; plays the flute clarinet and guitar and draws in black and white.

MICHAEL PHILIPS has been six years in the Army, two-and-a half of them in the Middle East, Sicily and Italy.

AUBREY SEBBA was born in South Africa and is a chartered accountant practising in Cape Town. He is very interested in the short story and has written and published many stories in South African Journals. *An Apple for the Teacher* is his first story to be published in this country. He has devoted much of his spare time to giving free lectures to coloured students at an institute in Cape Town founded to improve the educational standard of the coloured population in South Africa.

RONALD HORTON is rector of a large industrial North Midlands mining parish, and previously served some time as a Service Padre. Ten years ago he took up writing as a serious hobby and has contributed stories to many magazines. He is also a publishers' reader.

PETER DEREK'S ambition is to write prose, although so far he has achieved only a few appearances in print. He was a Bevin Boy until last summer, when he was whisked out of the mines and into the Royal Army Pay Corps, and he has been writing a novel on the theme of the eighteen-year olds awaiting call up.

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