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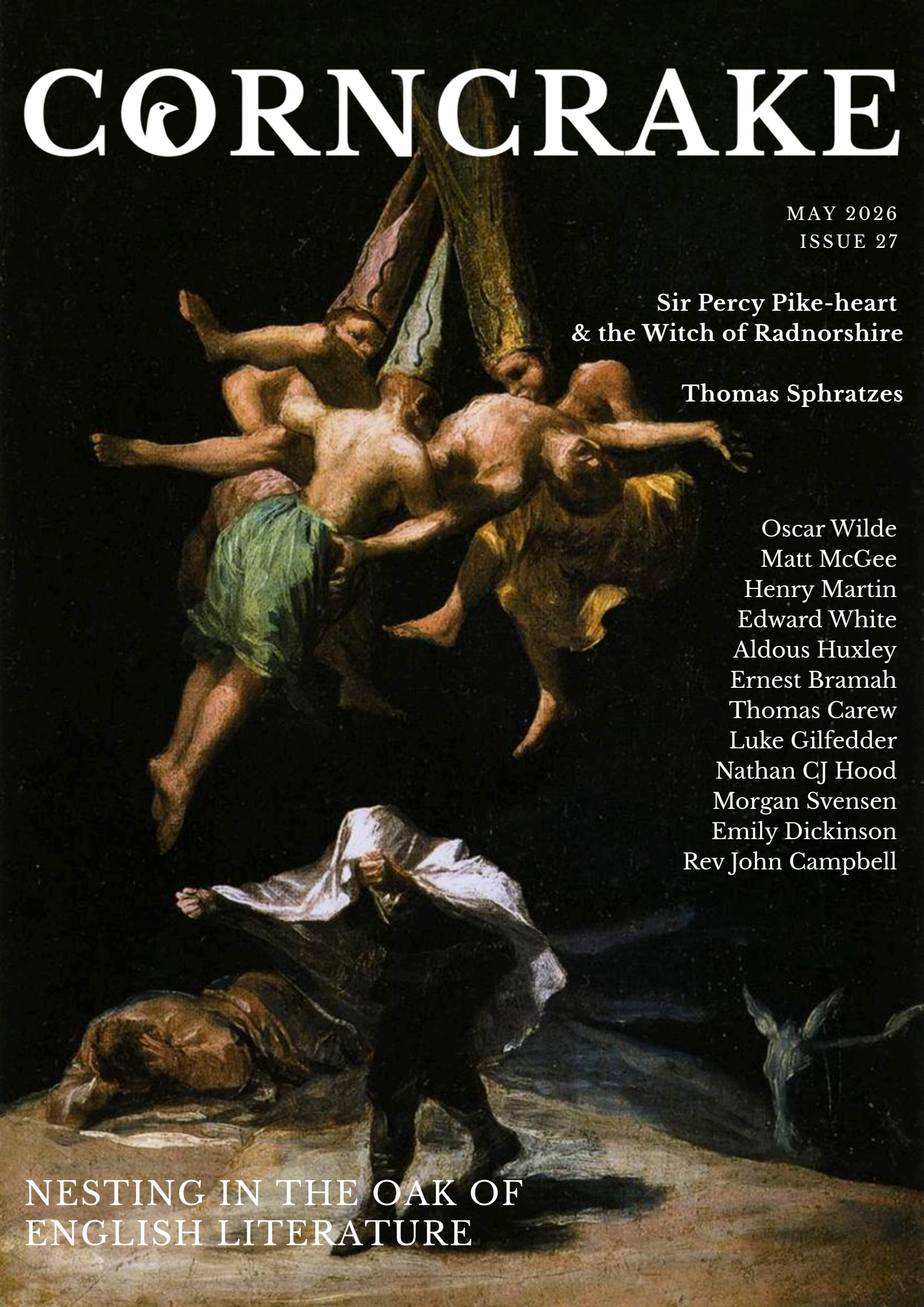

NESTING IN THE OAK OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

The Bee

By Emily Dickinson

Like trains of cars on tracks of plush
I hear the level bee:
A jar across the flowers goes,
Their velvet masonry

Withstands until the sweet assault
Their chivalry consumes,
While he, victorious, tilts away
To vanquish other blooms.

His feet are shod with gauze,
His helmet is of gold;
His breast, a single onyx
With chrysoprase, inlaid.

His labor is a chant,
His idleness a tune;
Oh, for a bee's experience
Of clovers and of noon!

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Francisco Goya

The Corncrake magazine promotes the best works in English literature, from the beginning of civilisation to the present and beyond.

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Featuring beautiful and arresting artwork by renowned painters.

Providing a platform for up-and-coming writers and artists.

From great names like Charles Dickens, Arthur Conan Doyle, and Anthony Trollope, to writers of the future like Nathan CJ Hood, Luke Gilfedder, and ND Wallace Swan, the Corncrake sets before you the imaginative, vital, and beautiful soul of the English literary and aesthetic tradition.

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You are also supporting contemporary and independent artists and authors who are engaging with the stories and artworks of the past to create new tales and paintings for our time.

Happy Reading!

shieldmaiden

Editor-in-Chief

> Fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don't we consider it his duty to escape?... If we value the freedom of mind and soul, if we're partisans of liberty, then it's our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can!
> JRR Tolkien

The Poetry of
Thomas Sphrantzes

Instructions for a Burial

Brambles and frost and sere salt air,
With oak-tree roots and shady sod,
Embrace the ruin. Go prop there
        The cloak and rod

I brought as pilgrim from the East
Against the wine-stained cellar wall
To mark me both profane and priest
        And all in all.

Feed rosehips to my mouth, and sloes,
And on the flagstones lay me out
Until there spring from lips or nose
        The first thin sprout,

Then sink me in the ground, to be
Both seed and substrate germinal:
Woman and man shall join in me,
        The All-in-All.

After my ribs have cracked or gone
And my swart flesh turned snowy clay,
Strew me with poppies, lest the dawn
        Of Judgment Day

Reveal death dead and graves upset
Forever—lest I hear the call
Of Him Who is not I, and yet
        Acts all in all.

Then shall I dream: I, standing guard
Beside the tomb in which I sleep,
See Gabriel from his many-starred
        Celestial keep

Thrice blast his trumpet's utmost cry
And fail to raise me; then I fall
Into oblivion's lap, where I
        Am all in all.

Ora et Labora

Dull clods of rust and soil I was, before,
Cleansed by the furnace, I first knew the taste
Of godhead; I partook—too brief a time!—
Of force ineffable, beyond the strength
Of stone or steel to trammel. Blocks of clay
Ministered there, far holier than I,
(Since changeless), to direct the miracle,
Which else had gone to waste; I took from them
The sacred gift; and by its power I glowed
With pure white light—uncounterfeited life—
As any star.

        But as my form dissolved,
Fluid, and I drew nearer to the One
Who fills all things free-flowing, I was poured—
Awful Necessity!—into a bed
Of frigid sand, and lost the heavenly fire,
And turned again a stone. But such a stone
As never was—I had a cunning shape:
Mathematic circle, with a clean-cut fringe
Of blocks. So did I boast: "The crown of God!
I am become His chosen."

        Stranger shapes,
Bulbous and pronged, removed me from that earth
When I had ceased to glow, and ground me down
With smaller circles. Smooth, they brought me back
To whence I had sprung. "I shall be cleansed anew,"
I thought—but then they fixed me to the side
Of a tall frame with rods of steel. I felt
Another crown above me, one below;
The one above turned, then I turned, and then
The other turned. And since that time we turn.
We move the clods.

        Lord, pardon the unworthy…

A Lamentable Ballad of Sir Percy Pike-heart and the Witch of Radnorshire

There was a knight Sir Percy rode on a sallow horse;
Refrain: Sir Percy went a-riding thorough the woods of Wye;
He came upon a woman lay wailing in the gorse.
Refrain: O do not go a-riding thorough the woods of Wye.

Says "Save me, good Sir Percy, these thorns do prick me so!
My clothes are torn asunder; I fear I am undo."

Says Percy, "Peace, good Aia; it seems right strange to me
That on your limbs nor blemish nor any blood I see."

Sir Percy keeps a-riding, comes to the cold Ithon,
And there he sees that Aia stood crying on a stone.

Says "Save me, brave Sir Percy, for I have wrecked my boat;
I am all soaked and shivering, and cannot swim nor float."

Says Percy, "Say, brave Aia, where sank this boat of yours?
I see nor beams nor splinters, nor butt-ends of the oars."

Sir Percy rides on past her, thinks he has lost the witch;
He falls on that same Aia lay naked in a ditch.

Straightway she wraps about him, shameless as any w—e;
Says "Love me, fair Sir Percy, and enter at my door."

Says Percy, "I know better than enter at your door;
For all who sleep with Aia, they never waken more."

Says Aia, "I do plight thee by my immortal soul
That in my bed or bower no harm shall thee befall."

Says Percy then, "So be it; I follow at thy word."
And up she sprang and kissed him when she that answer heard.

She took him to her chamber, gave him some old stale bread,
And three days she received him upon her marriage-bed.

Says Aia, "Dear Sir Percy, I'd have from thee a boon;
For it has been three days now, and soon thou wilt be gone.

"My food thou hast up-eaten, my bed thou hast defiled;
Now stay, my love, and wed me, for I am with a child."

Says "Tell me how a dead man can get a maid with child?"
Says Aia, "By the Goddess, I think I am beguiled."

Says Percy, "Dost not know me? I wed thee when I'd breath;
And for your crimes, dear Aia, you'll die a rank fiend's death."

Says "Spare me, love, O spare me! Have I not pleased thee well?"
Says Percy, "Thirteen lovers have you sent down to Hell;

"And to your thirteen lovers, who wait for you in Hell,
I am arrived to take you, there evermore to dwell.

"If you had let me wander, I would have gone my way;
But for your subtle courting the penalty you'll pay."

I went to see the funeral, got drunk on barmy ale;
Death punched me in the stomach, and that's the end o' th' tale.

The Æsthete's Ash-Wednesday

Away, porn-pedlars, and out, prostitutes;
Such common lust's beneath me. Such as I
To moan and moil like a brute beast?—What boots
This human form, whose planet-gathering eye
Must look on God, if, lured by things that die,
It grope at flesh-heaps and rub slippery sweat
Over itself for desecration? Why
Serve shameful pleasure, such as rapes beget,
When ecstasies are whispered of?—I'll set
My heart to waste itself in the grey mine
Of hermitry, and flog it with the threat
That, resting, it may lose both joys divine
And earthly trifles, and be doubly curst:
Though that be pride, and of all sins the worst.

The Remembrance of Death

Snowflakes, if they drift aright,
Land to face the sun,
Shining with its golden light
Till their frost's undone
And a mist floats thin and white
To the Fervent One.
So fare it with us all,
Since every one must fall.

Snowflakes, if they drift awry,
Land beneath a tree,
Suffering, to make them die,
Flames they cannot see;
Grave-earth sucks the shadows dry
Where they used to be,
For all must melt apace
And no one know their place.

Thomas Sphrantzes is an Orthodox Christian from Massachusetts. He has been published a bit elsewhere under other names.

Lunch with Sketch

By Matt McGee

"It's hard to feel hope in a fresh vacuum," Randy said.

He sat at the company-supplied outdoor break bench, salvaged from a long-closed Arby's and repurposed behind the CommTech building. Its brilliant aquamarine fiberglass table and seats had somehow survived years in the elements.

His co-worker, Sketch, had just joined him. No one knew Sketch's background and didn't try to find out. Mostly Sketch stood around looking like a relative on the payroll, or worse, someone casing the place.

Sketch unwrapped his 7-11 cooler sandwich and replayed Randy's words in his head. "You know," Sketch said through a bite of chewy, stale bread and three types of mystery meat, "this is why people don't talk to you much. You say weird stuff."

"Weirder than you?"

"Way weirder. Out of context. I mean, I come out here to have a nice lunch in the sun. And I saw you sitting there and in my head I said dammit, there's Randy. He's gonna say something stupid that's gonna lead into a story."

"You like my stories."

Sketch held up his sandwich. "Not when I'm trying to eat, man."

"You call that eating?"

"It's better than eating. You know why I like these things?"

Randy forked up some canned peaches, 69 cents from the Dollar Tree and shook his head. "No Sketch, why do you like grayish, three day old cooler sandwiches?"

"Because it's for survivors. Think about it. This thing? Probably assembled last week by someone in a warehouse. Wrapped up, packed, shipped, stocked then waited its turn getting bought. And 7-11 can't have spoilage, otherwise there's no profit. So what do they do? They find the stuff with the most preservatives."

"And that's good?" Randy asked.

"Damn right! Think about it. The more preservatives I put in my system, better preserved I'll be right?"

"Sketch..."

"Hear me out! I eat these things like five days a week, OK?"

"OK."

"So imagine I'm drinking a low-key, like a low-level dose of that stuff the funeral guy puts in you when you die."

Randy screwed up his brow. "Embalming fluid?"

"Yeah!" Sketch pointed his sandwich. "See? Imagine I'm drinking a tiny bit of embalming fluid every day. Twenty years, I'll have a perfectly preserved body!"

Randy unwrapped his own sandwich. Turkey on nine-grain bread, light mayo. He looked up at the corporate communications building, nestled in a pretty city among green hillsides he never got to hike. He bit into his sandwich. Even after spending the morning in the company fridge, the mayo was on the edge of spoilage.

Sketch sat up straight. "I've got the science to prove it."

Randy swallowed his marginal food. "You've got science to back up your claim that eating highly-processed, preserved meats will help you live longer."

"Yes."

"Let's hear it."

Sketch leaned in. "You know that lady Donna works on the third floor? One's dating the young dude?"

"Kelly."

"Is that his name?"

"Yeah, Kelly," Randy repeated.

Sketch leaned in. "OK. I happen to know Donna's easily twenty years older than him. She's pushing AARP status and he's what, twenty-seven?"

"So?"

"So she and I went to college together in '91. She ate more of these things than I did," Sketch bit into the sandwich again.

Randy shook his head. "Then why don't you look like her?"

"Whaddayamean?"

"I mean if you share the same diet, and she's over fifty with clear skin and nice hair...?"

"Right! Cause she preserved herself eating these back in the day." Sketch bit his sandwich. "Telling you man, GTA's are the way of the future."

Randy's eyes wandered. "You mean GMOs?"

"Whatever. Now what's this you said about vacuuming?"

Randy sighed. "I said it's hard to feel hope when you're fresh into a vacuum."

"Whaddaymean."

"I just finished this big project. Took four months. Turned it in yesterday. Big hit. Company's gonna make money."

"Enjoy it man, being the Golden Boy! Did you celebrate?"

"The wife put a candle in a cupcake, surprised me with it."

"Hope that's not all she surprised you with."

Randy sat still. His eyes lowered.

"No?" Sketch said.

Randy waited. He shook his head.

Sketch leaned back. "Aw man. And you work hard."

Randy shrugged.

"Dude," Sketch held out his sandwich. "Here."

Randy held up his hand.

"No man really, you'll feel better!"

Randy's shoulders fell. He took the sandwich, quietly bit into it. He chewed.

"Now how d'ya feel?"

Randy chewed, swallowed. "I gotta admit that isn't terrible."

"See!"

Randy picked up his Tupperware, stepped away and dropped it in the trash.

"Thanks Sketch."

"Any time, man!"

Randy walked inside. He'd stop by 7-11 after work for a fridge hoagie. Preservatives, he thought. They could be his new thing.

Or at least hold him over until something else came along.

The Invisible Hand Behind Middle-earth

By Nathan CJ Hood

Replica helmet from Sutton Hoo in Suffolk
By Ziko-C (Own work), CC BY-SA 3.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=3533575

The company of Thorin Oakenshield was in a terrible predicament. On their way to the Lonely Mountain to reclaim their homeland from the dragon Smaug, the thirteen dwarves, the wizard Gandalf and the hobbit Bilbo Baggins had taken refuge in a cave. However, this was no ordinary hollow. The goblins of the Misty Mountains used this cave as an entrance to their subterranean domain, the Mines of Moria. The dwarves and Bilbo soon learned this when they were taken captive by its monstrous inhabitants. The goblins led them into the heart of the mountain where they were presented before the Goblin King. Given his hatred of the dwarven folk, the prospects of the company looked grim.

Nonetheless, help was at hand. As the fracas in the cave was underway, Gandalf the Grey had managed to slip away. Tailing the goblins, he arrived at the court of the Goblin King. Using his magical abilities, Gandalf slew their leader and freed Bilbo and the dwarves. The wizard then led them towards the way out of Moria. The goblins were at their heels, seeking revenge for the death of their master. During the chase:

Quite suddenly Dori, now at the back again carrying Bilbo, was grabbed from behind in the dark. He shouted and fell; and the hobbit rolled off his shoulders into the blackness, bumped his head on hard rock, and remembered nothing more.

Bilbo awoke in a pitch-black tunnel. He was lost and alone, with no hope of aid or escape from the labyrinth of Moria. Afraid, he began to grope his way forward in the direction he thought that the company had been travelling. As he did so, "his hand met what felt like a tiny ring of cold metal lying on the floor of the tunnel" and he put it in his pocket.

The finding of this object was incredibly fortuitous for Bilbo. Bilbo escaped the clutches of the ghoulish Gollum and the Mines of Moria by using the Ring's bestowal of invisibility upon its wearer. He would later use its power to: save the dwarves from being eaten by spiders; free them from imprisonment within the halls of the Elven King Thranduil; penetrate into the lair of Smaug the Dragon; retrieve the Arkenstone so that it could be used by Bard and Thranduil in negotiations with Thorin; and finally survive the Battle of the Five Armies. Whereas Gandalf had previously been the one to rescue the company when it got into trouble, with the Ring Bilbo was able to take on the wizard's mantle following his departure at the borders of Mirkwood.

Thus, if Bilbo had not found the Ring, the quest would have failed. It was therefore fortunate that he was pulled by an invisible hand into the depths of Moria, that the hobbit set off in the direction he did and that his hand groped the floor where the Ring was lying. If he had not fallen or had landed somewhere else, then Bilbo would have not come across the Ring. Though at first his separation from the group seemed like a disaster, with hindsight it was 'lucky' that events transpired in the way that they did, for otherwise the dwarves would have perished long before they had reached the Lonely Mountain.

'Happy coincidences', such as the finding of the Ring, litter The Hobbit. A notable example that Tolkien is at pains to draw the reader's attention to is the company's escape from the Forest of Mirkwood towards Laketown. Though they had been warned by Beorn and Gandalf to stick to the forest road, the dwarves had abandoned its safety in search of food. This decision nearly ended up with them being eaten by giant spiders and they were eventually imprisoned by Thranduil's elves.

They managed to break free from the Elven King's clutches by hiding in barrels that floated down the river towards Laketown. Yet, by this series of travails "Bilbo had come in the end by the only road that was any good" towards their destination. It had transpired that the eastern edge of Mirkwood had changed following "great floods and rains". These had given rise to "marshes and bogs" that had devoured the paths through the forest. Consequently, the road the company had departed from came to "a doubtful and little used end". The only safe way to Laketown was by the river Bilbo and the dwarves had used to escape the Elven kingdom. Thus, it was somewhat 'lucky' that the group abandoned the path and suffered the misfortunes they did in Mirkwood, for otherwise they would have perished in the swamps on the forest's eastern border.

Improbable yet fortunate events also transpire throughout The Lord of the Rings. In the Old Forest, Tom Bombadil saves Merry and Pippin from being devoured by Old Man Willow. It is revealed that Bombadil did not know the hobbits were in trouble and that he did not hear their cries for help. He was travelling back from collecting water lilies for his wife, Goldberry. This was the final time before spring that he would have been in that part of the forest. Thus, it was lucky that the hobbits had been in trouble at the time and place that Tom was passing. If they had arrived a day later, Old Man Willow would have had his malicious way.

When the Ring had reached Rivendell, Elrond called a council to decide what should be done next. In attendance were representatives of the Free Peoples: Elves, Men, Dwarves and Hobbits. Yet, this was not achieved according to Elrond's design. Many of those at the council, such as Boromir, Gimli and Legolas, had come to Rivendell seeking Elrond for reasons of their own. They were not responding to a general summons or a coordinated call to action. Though travelling great distances for their own purposes, the participants arrived "in this very nick of time, by chance as it may seem".

Delayed by a week, Boromir, Gimli and Legolas would have missed the impromptu council. The formation of the Fellowship was the apparent result of luck. The climax of the story involves a decisive stroke of fortune. Frodo has managed to carry the Ring of Power to Mount Doom. If he cast it into the molten fire below, it would have been destroyed and Sauron defeated. However, the Ring tempts Frodo to abandon his quest and take it for his own. His will breaks. He gave in. All seems lost; Sauron will be victorious and all the world will be covered in shadow. At that moment, Gollum, consumed by lust for the Ring, attacks Frodo. In the emerging struggle he bites off Frodo's finger and claims the Ring for himself. Jubilant at the reclamation of his 'Precious', he begins to dance for joy. But in his excitement, "he stepped too far, toppled, wavered for a moment on the brink, and then with a shriek he fell." Falling to his death, Gollum inadvertently brought about the destruction of the Ring. It was fortunate that he had attacked Frodo, who no longer had the will to cast the Ring into the fires of Mount Doom, and 'lucky' that he slipped.

Otherwise, the quest would have failed and Sauron would have enslaved Middle-earth to his all-consuming will.

A surface reading of these stories may give the impression that they consist in a series of fortunate events. It could be construed that the triumph of the heroes was a thing of chance, brought about by a sequence of improbable yet fortunate circumstances. Had the timing been slightly different or a character's action altered, evil would have been victorious and our heroes defeated. However, there are suggestions throughout both tales that all is not the product of random chance. At the end of The Hobbit, many years after the events of the main story, Bilbo, Gandalf and Balin were reminiscing over their previous adventures. Balin shares that the new Master of Laketown had made the place prosperous so that the "rivers run with gold". Bilbo remarks that the "prophecies of the old songs have turned out to be true, after a fashion!", remembering that the return of Thorin to the Lonely Mount was heralded as the fulfilment of this prediction. Gandalf replied: Of course... And why should not they prove true? Surely you don't disbelieve the prophecies, because you had a hand in bringing them about yourself? You don't really suppose, do you, that all your adventures and escapes were managed by mere luck, just for your sole benefit?

You are a very fine person, Mr Baggins, and I am very fond of you; but you are only quite a little fellow in a wide world after all!"

Elrond similarly instructs the participants of the council in The Lord of the Rings that they have been "Called" to the meeting, even though it was not him who called them. Though "chance... it may seem" that those like Boromir arrived in time, he declares that "it is not so". He encourages those gathered to believe that "it is so ordered that we, who sit here, and none others, must now find counsel for the peril of the world". When Frodo offers to take the Ring to Mordor, motivated to do so "as if some other will was using his small voice", Elrond replies that "this task is appointed for you, Frodo", though it is not laid upon him by any gathered there. He goes so far as to say that if Frodo cannot find a way, no one will be able too – he was destined for this quest.

Gandalf is equally explicit in his suggestions that there is more than 'chance' at work in Middle-earth. Explaining the history of the Ring to Frodo, he commented on how Bilbo found the Ring. The Ring of Power has an agency of its own. Though it once belonged to Gollum, it realised that it would never get back to its Master, Sauron, if it remained with him as he would never leave his home hidden away in the depths of the Misty Mountains. So, it left him, "only to be picked up by the most unlikely person imaginable: Bilbo from the Shire!" It was the "strangest event in the whole history of the Ring so far: Bilbo's arrival just at that time, and putting his hand on it, blindly, in the dark". But this was not the product of chance:

Behind that there was something else at work, beyond any design of the Ring-maker [Sauron]. I can put it no plainer than by saying that Bilbo was meant to find the Ring, and not by its maker. In which case you also were meant to have it. And that may be an encouraging thought.

Tolkien's comments on the climax of the story suggest something similar. Writing to Amy Ronald, Tolkien recognised that the 'failure' of Frodo was inevitable according to the "logic of the plot". He was overcome by an overwhelming evil, the temptation of using the power of the Ring for his own ends. At that point, "The Other Power then took over: the Writer of the Story (by which I do not mean myself), 'that one ever-present Person who is never absent and never named' (as one critic has said)". Tolkien's words suggest that Gollum's slip was not a thing of chance or coincidence. Some 'Other Power', presumably that which meant for Bilbo and Frodo to have the Ring, arranged for the arrival of the participants at the Council of Elrond and directed the company of Thorin away from the forest road, had intended for him to fall with the Ring into the fires of Mount Doom.

The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings only hint at the presence of an overarching guiding agency. These texts do not explicitly describe the nature of the Other Power. It is also not clear how it relates to the narrative. In all the episodes discussed so far, there is no mention of fate, doom or a godlike being intervening in the world. We are given the impression that Bilbo's finding of the Ring and Gollum's slip were chance events because there were no additional characters impacting these occurrences directly in the respective narratives. There is an apparent contradiction here. We are simultaneously presented with events that seem like the outworking of the free actions of those involved whilst being told that these improbable and fortuitous events were intended by some Other Power. It is reasonable to wonder how Frodo's free choice to bear the Ring, or his free choice to take it for himself at Mount Doom, were intended by an agent beyond Frodo. The frequency of terms like 'will', 'shall' and 'choose' in the narratives suggests that freedom plays an important role in shaping the stories, which seems to stand in contrast to the notion something else, whether providence or fate, is guiding what happens.

Tolkien scholars have adopted a variety of positions on this issue. Some have suggested that Tolkien failed to fully illustrate the implications of fate in his narratives. Others have gone as far as saying the notion of an Other Power intending events contradicts Tolkien's emphasis upon free choice as the driver of narrative action. By contrast, others have emphasised the role of fate in Middle-earth, with some seeking to analyse the rich meanings of 'fate' and 'doom' in light of classical and medieval theology and philosophy.

For our purposes, there may be a clue in Tolkien's description of the 'Other Power' as the 'Writer of the Story'. An author attempts to create a narrative. They do so by imagining characters who, due to their respective motivations, perform actions that constitute a plot. Within the world of the story, the characters are 'free'; they act of their own volition within the imagined setting of the tale. But the characters are the imaginings of an author; the writer develops a plot. Within the world of a story actors may be free, but what they do is fully determined by the tale's creator. It is something like this which Tolkien has in mind when he considers the nature of the Other Power. In some sense, the Other Power is the author behind everything that happens in Middle-earth. It is the Writer of Middle-earth's (hi)story, creating characters who, following their motivations, act in ways that result in the Other Power's intended narrative. As a result, lucky contrivances are not the product of chance, but the Other Power's direction for the story. Everything happens as the Other Power means it to happen. Thus, the Author is present on every page and in every detail without being one among other characters. It can be that which directs the course of events without interfering in the free actions of the characters involved.

If we look beyond The Lord of the Rings to Tolkien's other writings, we can flesh out the nature and purposes of the Other Power. The primary source of information about this character comes from Tolkien's creation story, the 'Ainulindalë' or 'The Music of the Ainur'. A summary of the tale is required.

In the beginning, before anything else existed, there was Eru, 'the One', also known as Iluvatar, 'the All Father'. He brought into being the Ainur, who were the 'offspring of his thought'. In other words, they were Eru's thoughts made real. Each of the Ainur proceeded from a different part of Eru's mind than the others, thereby endowing them with distinct personalities and abilities. As a consequence, each was able to perform music according to their own nature. In time, Eru summoned the Ainur together and shared with them a 'mighty theme' that they were to play to make the 'Great Music'.

Moreover, Eru encouraged the Ainur to 'show forth your powers in adorning this theme, each with his own thoughts and devices'. Thus, the Ainur sang the sublime great music of Eru. However, one of the Ainur was discontented. Melkor, later known as Morgoth Bauglir, was the greatest of the Ainur, having proceeded from all the parts of Eru's mind. He wished to make something of his own, distinct from Eru's music, so that his part in the music may increase beyond its allotted station. Some of these vain thoughts entered into the music, creating discord. The song of the Ainur began to fall apart, while some of the singers joined Melkor's discordant melodies. In response, Eru set forth a new theme, filled with power and beauty. But Melkor's disharmony grew louder, so that there was "a war of sound more violent than before". Once more Eru produced a novel theme of music, so that it seemed that "there were two musics progressing at one time before the seat of Iluvatar, and they were utterly at variance". Eru's was "deep and wide and beautiful", filled with "immeasurable sorrow". Melkor's was "loud and vain, and endlessly repeated", a monophonic chorus of trumpets seeking to drown all else out. Nevertheless, it appeared that Eru's theme took the "most triumphant notes" of Melkor's and wove them "into its most solemn pattern". With a final chord, Eru brought the music to an end.

Eru then addressed the Ainur. He explained that their music was the template for the creation and history of the world. This included Melkor's discord. Eru went onto suggest that Melkor will see "that no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me, nor can alter the music in my despite. For he that attempteth this shall prove mine instrument in devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined". Eru then revealed to the Ainur a vision of the world they had sung, once more telling them that this "is your minstrelsy; and each of you shall find contained herein, amid the design that I set before you, all those things which it may seem that he himself devised or added. And thou, Melkor, wilt discover all the secret thoughts of thy mind, and wilt perceive that they are but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory". Following the vision, Eru sent forth the Flame Imperishable into the void, creating Ea, the world. The Ainur enter in and begin to adorn the unshaped matter into the world that they had sung and seen before its creation.

The Ainur seem to be free agents within the tale. They are able to add their own ideas to Eru's theme using their own volition. This is especially the case for those like Melkor who directly oppose Eru's three themes. Of their own free will, they choose to rebel against their creator and fashion their own crude melodies, seeking to silence all other songs. This is why it seems that there are two musics progressing before Eru, one in obedience to his theme, the other in opposition. It appears this way because the characters involved are free to act as they wish in response to Eru's apparent will. They are not compelled by Eru to do something like puppets on a string. They are genuinely free.

However, this is not the whole story. Eru explained that everything Melkor sang had "its uttermost source in me£. This was the same with all the additions made by the Ainur, which only seemed to have originated within themselves. Every Ainur was thought into being by Eru. He imagined their motivations and talents, and thereby their actions, both as individuals and as a collective. Thus, through their creation and subsequent engagement with the Great Music, the Ainur brought into being what Eru had already envisioned. Put another way, the free actions of the Ainur are the means by which Eru created the world and fashioned its history. They were, like Melkor, Eru's 'instrument' for the fulfilment of his plans.

Tolkien may have been influenced by George MacDonald, the writer of several influential fairy stories (such as The Princess and the Goblin) that Tolkien had read in his formative years. In his conception of the relationship between Eru and the Ainur. In an essay on the imagination, MacDonald explored Divine and human creativity. He observes that we tend to make things, such as "a machine, a picture, or a book". By contrast, "God makes the man that makes the book, or the picture, or the machine". So, when God desired Hamlet to be written, he created William Shakespeare, a man whose gifts and experiences were such that he could produce this play. For MacDonald, humans do not think things into being. Rather, we are "being thought' by God when "a new thought arises" in the mind, for ideas come to us

unexpectedly. We do not plan for them or cannot conjure them. They are, by extension, God's gift to us, the means by which he has us, his instruments, execute his plans. Thus, "Man is but a thought of God", a reality whose being and actions are wholly imagined by the Creator as part of a grand design. So too the Ainur in relation to Eru. He conceived of the history of Middle-earth, and so brought into being creatures who could achieve that end through their own volition.

The Ainur are not the only beings who enact Eru's plans. In the Quenta Silmarillion, there is a passage dealing with the creation of Men. Unlike the Valar (those Ainur who entered the world) and the Elves, Men are not bound by the Music of the Ainur, "which is fate to all things else". Their hearts "seek beyond the world" and have the powers "to shape their life"; they are truly free.

Nonetheless, even though they will "stray often", Eru promised that in time Men "shall find that all that they do redounded at the end only to the glory of my work". The Elves believe that by virtue of such freedom Men will be the instrument by which "everything should be, in form and deed, completed, and the world fulfilled unto the last and smallest". It seems that through the free actions of Men Eru will bring to completion his plans for Middle-earth.

It is striking that Melkor's discord, the source of evil in Middle-earth, is part of Eru's design for creation. That this is the case is indicated by Eru, insofar as he tells Melkor that, through his rebellion, he is "mine instrument in devising of things more wonderful, which he himself hath not imagined", that his disharmony is "but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory". Moreover, we see this insofar as Melkor's discord is incorporated into Eru's third theme. Just as the tension and resolution of discord can be used to create a beautiful symphony, so Eru's music includes the seemingly rebellious melody of Melkor as part of its gorgeous harmonies. Similarly, it is notable that Eru will use the failures of Men to bring about the fulfilment of Middle-earth. In both cases, evil, and the suffering it causes, seem to be a vital part of Eru's providential plan. It is not an accident or a reality independent from Eru's design. He intended for the emergence of evil, as indicated by his creation of a being like Melkor.

Why Eru wanted evil in the world can be more fully elucidated by considering the Christian motif of the felix culpa, the 'happy fault'. Tolkien would have been well acquainted with this idea as a devout Roman Catholic. He would have attended the Easter Vigil, the Roman Catholic service for the celebration of Christ's resurrection from the dead. In the early hours of Easter Morning, he would have heard the Deacon chant: 'O certe necessárium Adæ peccátum, quod Christi morte delétum est! O felix culpa, quæ talem ac tantum méruit habére Redemptórem!' which means 'O truly necessary sin of Adam, destroyed completely by the Death of Christ! O happy fault that earned for us so great, so glorious a Redeemer!' This phrase, inserted into the liturgy as early as the 7 th century, reflected the theology of Ambrose of Milan. He had claimed that, though the Original Sin of Adam and Eve (the taking of the fruit from the forbidden tree) had introduced evil into the world, the Fall of Man had "brought more benefit to us than harm". This was because God "knew that Adam would fall, in order that he might be redeemed by Christ". Gregory the Great would more fully develop this idea.

What greater fault than that by which we all die? And what greater goodness than that by which we are freed from death? And certainly, unless Adam had sinned, it would not have behooved our Redeemer to take on our flesh. Almighty God saw beforehand that from that evil because of which men were to die, He would bring about a good which would overcome that evil. How wonderfully the good surpasses the evil, what faithful believer can fail to see?

Great, indeed, are the evils we deservedly suffer in consequence of the first sin; but who of the elect would not willingly endure still worse evils, rather than not have so great a Redeemer?

Ambrose and Gregory believed that the Fall was a 'happy fault' because it necessitated the incarnation of, and redemption achieved by, Christ. The original paradise in Eden, though perfect, would be superseded by a world in which God the son became incarnate and redeemed humanity, resulting in an even greater paradise at the end of all things. However, for Christ to come and save the world, the world must need saving. Thus, if Adam and Eve had never fallen, the Son of God could not have redeemed the world. Consequently, the Original Sin was necessary for the bringing into being of a world wherein Christ saves humanity, a better world than one in which this does not happen. In short, the emergence of evil is the catalyst for salvation.

A similar narrative motif is at play in the Ainulindalë. The Great Music initially propounded by Eru is perfect. However, there is a suggestion that there will be a 'greater' music made by the Ainur and the Children of Iluvatar (Elves and Men) at the "end of days" – the "Second Music of the Ainur". This is the context within which Melkor's discord must be understood: the creation of the Second Music, and even greater paradise than that which went before, is the thing 'more wonderful' and the 'whole' to which Melkor's actions are but a means for 'devising', a 'tributary to its glory'. As already suggested, Elves believed that it would be through Men that the discord of Melkor would be redressed, thereby being the means by which the redemption of the world and a greater paradise are brought about. This sentiment is echoed in another text by Tolkien, Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth.

In the course of a dialogue, the woman Andreth tells the elf Finrod that many Men believe that "our errand here was to heal the Marring of Arda", the evils caused by Melkor. They think that they will not only make "Arda Unmarred", but instead "a third thing and greater": "Arda Healed" or "Arda Remade". Elsewhere, Tolkien suggested that Elves and Men were created by Eru to "complete the Design by 'healing' the hurts which it suffered, and so not to recover 'Arda Unmarred' (that is the world as it would have been if Evil had never appeared) but the far greater thing 'Arda Healed'".

Eru required the wickedness of Melkor because it was the catalyst for a story about redemption. If he had not introduced discord and marred the world, it would not need saved. Consequently, Elves and Men would not have been created by Eru as his agents for the healing of Middle-earth and the creation of Arda Remade. Thus, the evil of Melkor is a happy fault, a necessary condition for the production of something more wonderful than the initial creation. The same is true of the events leading into The Lord of the Rings. The desire of Sauron to dominate all life is a happy fault, as it provides the occasion for a tale of heroism that leads to the renewal of Middle-earth. The Shire after the scouring of the Shire is a better place than it was before, symbolised by the planting of a Mallorn tree in place of the felled party tree. It was lovely before, but after its redemption it is a place open to the good things beyond its borders, has developed learning and is governed by wise leaders. The evil of Sauron provides the opportunity for the growth of the Shire.

Moreover, Eru does not just use Elves and Men to redeem the world. He uses their failures as a means of redemption. This can be seen in the climax of The Lord of the Rings. Here we have two happy faults. On the one hand, Frodo succumbs to the temptation to take the Ring for himself. On the other hand, Gollum's attempt to steal the Ring from Frodo provides the means by which the Ring is destroyed, for in his jubilation he slips and falls into the fires below. Frodo's failure is a necessary condition for the destruction of the Ring by Gollum's treachery, as if he had done it himself Smeagol's villainy would not have been needed. But, as Frodo had fallen, Eru used Gollum's villainy as the means by which Sauron would be overcome. His promise had, in a small way, been fulfilled: the errors of Men (for hobbits are a derivative of Men) both provided the situation and means by which the Ring was destroyed. That the Ring was vanquished through the greed and duplicity of Gollum rather than Frodo's strength of will highlights that victory over Sauron was only achieved by Eru's providential design rather than the intentions and virtues of the characters involved, who in this case actively opposed the victory of Good. It thus brings him greater glory.

The references to the Other Power in The Lord of the Rings can now be more fully understood. This Power is Eru. The things that happen in the story are 'meant' to happen insofar as he is the author of the world. Every being is a product of his imagination. He has brought into being all that exists for the fulfilment of his plan, which is to bring about Arda Remade. To that end, he has created free creatures who, by their free actions, execute his design. This includes those who openly rebel against him, such as Melkor and Sauron, for their evil provides the context within which a story of redemption can take place. The defeat of Sauron highlights Eru's providential role and how it is he who has saved Middle-earth from this villain, a foreshadowing of the greater redemption of Arda.

We might even see the narrative trope of the 'eucatastrophe' as a microcosm of this dynamic. For Tolkien, fairy stories are based around the notion of a good catastrophe. When all seems lost, rescue comes unexpectedly, producing a happy ending. Notably,

this story arc presupposes a point when it looks like evil will triumph: it requires a happy fault from which there can be a sudden and unlooked for salvation. Thus, we might say that in The Lord of the Rings, Eru has created agents who will, without compulsion, produce a series of eucatastrophes, resulting in the triumph of good over evil and the renewal of Middle-earth. Put another way, Eru has authored a story of redemption in his providential arrangement of Middle-earth's history.

A TRADITION OF MORAR

Collected from Oral Sources By Rev. John Gregorson Campbell Minister of Tiree

Mac vic Ailein of Morar (Mòr-thìr) was out in a shealing with his men, on a summer morning, and saw a young woman following cows, with her petticoats gathered to keep them dry, as the dew was heavy on the ground (a còtaichean truiste, le truimead an driùchd, g' an cumail tioram). He said, "Would not that be a handsome young woman if her two legs were not so slender (mur biodh caoilead a dà choise)." She answered in his hearing, "Often a slender-shanked cow has a large udder (is minig a bha ùth mhòr aig bò chaol-chasach)." He asked her to be brought where he was; she was his own dairymaid. She went away to Ireland, and named her son Murdoch after his foster-father (oide), whom she afterwards married. He was known as Little Murdoch MacRonald (Murcha beag Mac Raonuill). As he grew older his mother would be telling him about a brother he had in Alban (an Albainn) who was a strong and powerful man, and the lad, being a good wrestler, thought he would like to go and see him, to try a bout of wrestling (car-gleachd) with him, to find which of them was the strongest man, and watched for an opportunity to get to Alban. As there was frequent communication then between Ireland and the Western Highlands he had not long to wait till he saw a boat in which it was likely he would be taken. He went to the harbour and on reaching the boat, without knowing that it belonged to his brother, asked the first person he met, who was Mac vic Ailein himself, if he would get ferried across to Scotland (dh' iarr e 'n t-aiseag). Mac vic Ailein said that he would take him with them. When they went away the day became stormy (shéid an latha), and no one who went to steer but was lifted from the helm, Mac vic Ailein being thrown aside as well as the others. When Murcha beag Mac Raonuill saw that the strongest man among them could not stand at the helm, he asked to be allowed to try it. "You would get that," Mac vic Ailein said, "if you were like a man who was able to do it, but when it is beyond our strength ('nuair a dh' fhairtlich i oirnn fhéin), you need not make the attempt." "At any rate," he said "I will give it a trial": and it did not make him alter his position (cha do chuir i thar a bhuinn e) till they reached land. As he was the best seaman Mac vic Ailein would not part with him. He took him to his house and entertained him as a guest. They entered into conversation and began to give news to each other (chaidh iad gu seanachas agus gu naigheachdan) till little Murdoch told him he was his brother and that it was for the express purpose (a dh' aon obair) of seeing him he had come from Ireland, and that he would not return till they tried a bout of wrestling, since Mac vic Ailein was so renowned for his prowess, and he would find out what strength he possessed before he left. The heroes rose and began to wrestle, but in a short time Mac vic Ailein was thrown (Dh' éirich na suinn, ach ann an tiota bha Mac 'ic Ailein 's a dhruim ri talamh). "I am pleased to have taken the trouble of coming from Ireland (toilichte as mo shaothair)," Murdoch said. Next day at dinner they had beef on the table, and little Murdoch said, "Let us try which of us can break the shank bone (a' chama-dhubh) with the hand closed." "I am willing," Mac vic Ailein said. "Well, try it, then," Murdoch said. Mac vic Ailein tried as hard as his strength would permit, and it defied him (dh' fhairtlich i air). Murdoch broke it at the first blow. Mac vic Ailein then said, "You will not return to Ireland any more; you will stay with me, and we will divide the estate between us." Murdoch replied, "I am well to do as it is (glé mhath dheth mar thà), my mother and stepfather have sufficient worldly means (gu leòir de 'n t-saoghal), and I will not stay away from them though you were to give me the whole estate," and wishing Mac vic Ailein enjoyment and prosperity, he bade him farewell and returned to Ireland, and friendly communication was kept up between them ever afterwards during their lives.

Roses of Shadow

Chapter V: Under the Rose

Luke Gilfedder

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Quintus leaned forward and stared at the younger priest, his ancient face cratered by firelight and shadow.

"I have it in my power to end this insane war and restore Christianity to an eminence it has not known since Pope Innocent III. What, Gregor, do you say to that?"

"I am prepared to be convinced."

The abbot's hand trembled over the buzzer.

"Very well, then I shall try to convince you. Leila, would you bring the boy to the library? Yes, we'll take the lift down."

Quintus creaked his chair back and smiled slowly at Pray.

"Isn't it odd, Gregor, the only apostle who did not deserve proof was St Thomas, and St Thomas was the only apostle who got it..."

*

Leila stood in the light of the stained glass window, a Russian blonde in black, watching the lights flicker across the night sky. They bloomed and faded over Mount Bakony like a distant firework display. The boy at her side mumbled that it looked pretty, and she snapped that every flash probably meant hundreds of innocent people dying in battle. He studied her slowly, inclining his head with a gesture that was neither coldness nor indifference, and yet, despite the grace that rendered the movement almost tender, it nonetheless bespoke a certain negation, which, in a woman, would have seemed almost coquettish.

She held the gaze of this strange boy, mummy-wrapped in bandages like a miniature Boris Karloff. A shiver of tenderness rippled her features, as a breeze does a reflection. Who was he? Dark, Lermontovian eyes, a fringe of brown hair — eyes that blazed like those of a beggar... Or of a Lord. No, he was nothing like the other soldiers she had tended in the infirmary. Not even the young ones, whose coarse hands were already so veteran at insinuating their fingers through the defences of her garments and corsets. She'd needed only one look at this boy – at his fair body, with no fullness of flesh but rather a kind of botanical slenderness, and at the supple whiteness of his neck – to know that he was one who did not love. She glanced down at her own hands, the old hands of a dirty peasant girl, and felt suddenly ashamed of herself...

In silence, they continued down the stone corridor to the library door. The abbey's bulk loomed up beyond the windows, a seascape of stormy roofage, ivy-mailed towers, and mouldering battlements – the Lear of inanimate nature – dispeopled, discrowned, beaten by the tempests, but regal still, and proud.

The boy walked a pace behind Leila, erect, fresh and English-seeming, somehow. But there was a curious cold distance to him, which she could not penetrate. An inward indifference to her, to the abbey — perhaps to everything. He almost reminded her of Miro—though she could never let Miro know that...

"Are you ready, Aleks?" she whispered. "It's not every night you get a summons from the Abbot himself."

She took out a massive key, as to the whole of Imperial Hungary, and said, "In here."

*

The door clanged shut behind them, its sound reverberating deep into the crannies and womby vaultages of the abbey. Miro waited a beat as the echo faded, then cat-footed down the corridor toward the oak door secreted at its end.

Rather timidly, as always, he pressed down the iron latch, ducked through the aperture, and ascended the spiral staircase rising within the wall thickness. With every step, he grew more conscious of the narrowing distance between himself and something terrible. He sensed it as the barometer senses a change in the pressure of the air, with utterly helpless passivity. Skulking and alert, he took a step and another step, aware that with each one he ceased to be a harmless visitor and had become an intruder. What if one of the monks caught him and took him to the abbot? Father Quintus would never let him back in the abbey again, let alone the library; he'd spend the rest of his life down in the camp, with that literally illiterate blacksmith...

With this repulsive thought caroming in his brain, Miro crept out onto the stone gallery of the library. It circled the room at about fifteen feet above the floor, and the books lining the walls of the hall below seemed to climb like creepers onto the high shelves that stretched before him. His nerves were sensitive and taut as resined strings; the feeling of criminality contracted his stomach and made his fingertips cold. Beyond the slit windows, above the towers — like a wing ripped from the body of an eagle — a lone cloud raced swiftly toward the moon. Miro crept along the slatted floor of the gallery – the cloud's shadow following on tiptoe – stealing silently beneath the rows of dark bookcases lining the curved wall. Somewhere in the serpentine darkness slithered a monk's soutane, and then he heard voices below: Quintus's voice...

"Let go of her hand, Aleks." Then more firmly: "Aleks! Take your hand off her. I don't know what's got into him. I swear insanity runs in our order."

"It practically gallops," sniped a second voice. Miro recognised it at once as that of the priest in the courtyard earlier – Father Pray.

He edged farther along the gallery, angling for a better view. Spotting a gap in the floorboards, Miro did a fair Nijinsky leap over to the other side, hoping that what little sound he made would be muffled by the hiss and drum of the rain, beating against the massive stone dome of the library and spurting from every gutter and cranny.

"What have you been doing to him?"

"Nothing, Father, I swear!" That was Leila's voice, hoarse and quavering, wandering through the library like something lost. "It started a few nights ago... he pulled me onto his bed, as if I were some servant girl—"

"And did you let him?"

"I didn't encourage him, if that's what you mean..." Her sigh expressed volumes of philosophy. "But he's a young boy, Father, and I'm a woman. He's been cooped up in a monastery for two years now..."

Miro crept along the curve of the gallery, his curiosity swelling like a boil. The books receded before him into the dark corners, tier upon tier, each a separate, tragic note in a vast fugue of volumes. Within seconds, he was part of the charcoaled shadow of the towering bookcases. He stopped midway and risked a glance over the railing. The reading room below was illuminated by a single taper whose light, unable to reach the far ends of the library, lit only the spines of the volumes on the central shelves lining the high walls. Nearest the candle sat the bandaged boy, erect in the velvet-backed chair, with Quintus crouched over him like a condor over his young.

"Hmm... it might be a sign... Or perhaps it's just the anaesthetic is wearing off..."

Motionless as the bookcase he crouched beneath, Miro peered down at the boy. The library seemed to spread outward from him as from a core. There was a rich atmosphere about him, so rich it suffocated, infecting the air about him and diffusing its gloom upon every side. All things in the long room absorbed his broodingness; it reminded Miro, irrationally, of drowsy odours and guttering lamps in the darker poems of Poe and Byron.

"Has he had an operation, this novitiate?" asked Pray.

"Yes – plastic surgery. He lost his memory two years ago when his plane crashed, and his face was badly cut by shrapnel."

Pray clucked his tongue. "I see."

Miro's flesh shifted on his back as if he were wearing a jacket of lizard skin. He craned his head forward as far as he dared. Leila had moved away from the two priests and leaned skulking against a pillar, holding a cigarette between finger and thumb, as a gypsy would. Her shadow, thrown long by the light, quivered behind her, stretching almost to the door.

"What was one of your monks doing in an aeroplane?" resumed Pray, his voice laconic as a gull's.

"Oh, he wasn't from my order," Quintus unexplained. "He still isn't, really. He crashed in the Bakony mountains, near the castle. There were six on the plane; only three survived."

"One of Herrut's planes?"

"No. It belonged to Eurostate."

Pray gave Quintus a long, odd glance, and his features seemed to stiffen. It was the glance of a poker player who guesses suddenly that his opponent holds a straight flush and that he had better be careful. At length, he answered, speaking slowly and with caution:

"Father, the twin powers of this world are about to turn Europe into a nuclear bonfire, and this monastery is caught between them like a bit of paper between the blades of a pair of shears. We don't have time for any more of your John-Le-Carry-On shtick. You called me down here because you said—"

"Yes, yes, Gregor. You're right. I'm sorry for seeming mysterious. But I wasn't lying about what I said — you'll see. Leila! Leila! Where have you gone?"

"J... just here!" She straightened herself, fretted her hair, and dropped the unlit cigarette into her bag. "Yes, Father?"

"Remove his bandages, would you?"

Miro felt the hairs on his neck prickle as Leila stepped toward the boy. The sudden silence was like breath held at the ribs: the two priests leant forward in rapt intensity as Leila, with her

nervously elegant fingers, unwound the bandages. Some of the newer scabs came away with the cloth, but the line of the boy's tight-shut lips remained straight as a blade's edge. “Almost there,” she whispered. The last strip unravelled, and she stepped back, revealing a face as white as freshly fallen snow. The boy's eyes glistened like wet leaves, and by the wavering light of the candle, some matted strands plastered to the left shimmered darkly.

“Oh my, Aleks, your hair has grown,” Leila said. “If it gets any longer, you'll look like Rasputin.” She wiped one of those loose strands from his lofty brow with her fingernail. “It's a miracle, Father. Look — that nasty gash has all gone.”

Even from his vantage on the gallery, Miro could see that the face was perfect – too perfect. It had the same angular, fashion-plate eyes raised at the corners, the same straight nose and lips carved into a double curve, and the same strained mouth — slightly open, like the mouth of a Roman mask of Tragedy — that the knife of a plastic surgeon so often dictates. From beneath the boy's eyelashes there emerged, as from a chrysalis, a bright ray, and down his pale cheek, glistening, a single tear rolled.

“Extraordinary,” said Quintus, not noticing. “What do you make of him, Father?”

“It might surprise you”, Pray said, lightening his voice for the first time, “but I know nothing of plastic surgery.”

“Look closer, Father.”

Pray shot Quintus a quizzical frown, then inclined his body over the boy, peering at him as if at a laboratory specimen. After a long half-minute, Quintus said:

“Well? Does he not remind you of anyone?”

“No. At least, only—”

“You needn't say it,” Quintus cut in, miming a ‘shush’. “I know.” He crutched over to Leila, laid his hand on her shoulder and said, “Would you take him out now, my dear?”

“Back to the infirmary, Father, or to the—”

“To the infirmary, my dear. And Leila – I want you to stay with him after his treatment tonight and not go back to your chambers.”

“Tonight? Must I, Father? I'd—”

“Why, have you arranged to see someone?” She glanced away with a shake of the head. “Good. I think Aleks is beginning to regain his memory, and I don't want him to be left alone.”

“What makes you think that, Father? He seems much the same to me, except that he's recovered certain… appetites.”

“It's not just that, Leila. Forgive me, but I must explain to you later.”

Leila shrugged and reached for the boy's hand; he proffered it to her, like a limp glove. With the huff of a no-nonsense nurse, she womanhandled him off the chair and toward the door, only to turn on the threshold and say to Father Pray:

“Who does he remind you of, Father?”

Pray shot Quintus a glance and muttered, with deliberate slowness, “Oh — just a young monk I knew once.”

“Well, you wouldn't have recognised him two years ago, Father. He looked like the Phantom of the Opera.”

The boy muttered something inaudible but plainly derisive, then turned away, flashing some half-quenched green fire out of his eyes.

“Go now, my girl—” Quintus wafted her towards the door with his cane. “Take care no one sees you. Oh, and Leila — bring him to my study tomorrow morning. I want to say my goodbyes.”

“Goodbye?”

“Yes, Leila. Aleks will be leaving us, for good. He is flying to Kyiv.”

“Kyiv!” she tinkerbelled. “Can I go, too? I've always wanted to see the Hagia Sophia.”

“Saint Sophia, Leila. And it's not that simple, my girl. Once you cross the border, there's no coming back.”

“Oh, but it'd be so nice to go travelling, Father! Not that I don't like being here, you understand… And besides, the war'll be over soon, you promised, Father.”

“God willing, it will be over by Easter. So why not stay here until then, Leila?”

“Oh, that's months away, Father! I could take a protector—”

“Miro, you mean? No. I'm sorry. I must insist you keep this a secret for now — especially from Miro. It is for his own good. Now, go.”

“As you say, Father.” She turned on her heel with the moue that went with the ghost of a sniff. “Come on, Aleks, let's see about getting your hair cut.”

Up in the gallery, Miro felt all his being vibrate as if a violin bow were drawn over his nerves. Not since that night on the farm, hiding from Alexei's soldiers, had he fought so hard to contain his terror, not to cry out. Through narrowed eyes, he watched the young monk as he departed. There was, apart from his unnerving silence, something else vaguely discordant about him — not just his face, but the way he held it, just a shade too much like a courtier out of a coloured plate in a history book. His smiling suavity, too, seemed to come out of a book, like a recipe for distinction. Before the implication resolved in Miro's mind, the boy flicked a glance up at the gallery, cruel and swift as the click of a camera. Miro ducked, scarcely breathing.

For ten intolerable seconds, nobody spoke. But as soon as the click-clack of Leila's heels had faded down the corridor, Pray rounded on Quintus, his voice as sharp as an apparition's nails.

“Is it deliberate?”

“What?” Miro heard the abbot reply.

“You know very well what. That boy's resemblance to Prince Alexei.”

“Yes. Naturally.”

Miro lifted his head a fraction. Quintus had seated himself in the chair the boy had just vacated and was smiling at the younger priest with his faint, superior smile. Pray glanced away with a shudder that all but dislocated his shoulder blades.

“I don't know what you're playing at. But that boy wouldn't fool anyone who knew the Prince when he was alive. His face is too full, to begin with—”

“That can be altered.”

“Why? Brother Quintus, tell me—who is that boy?”

Quintus gave a shy, Alec-Guinness-like smile.

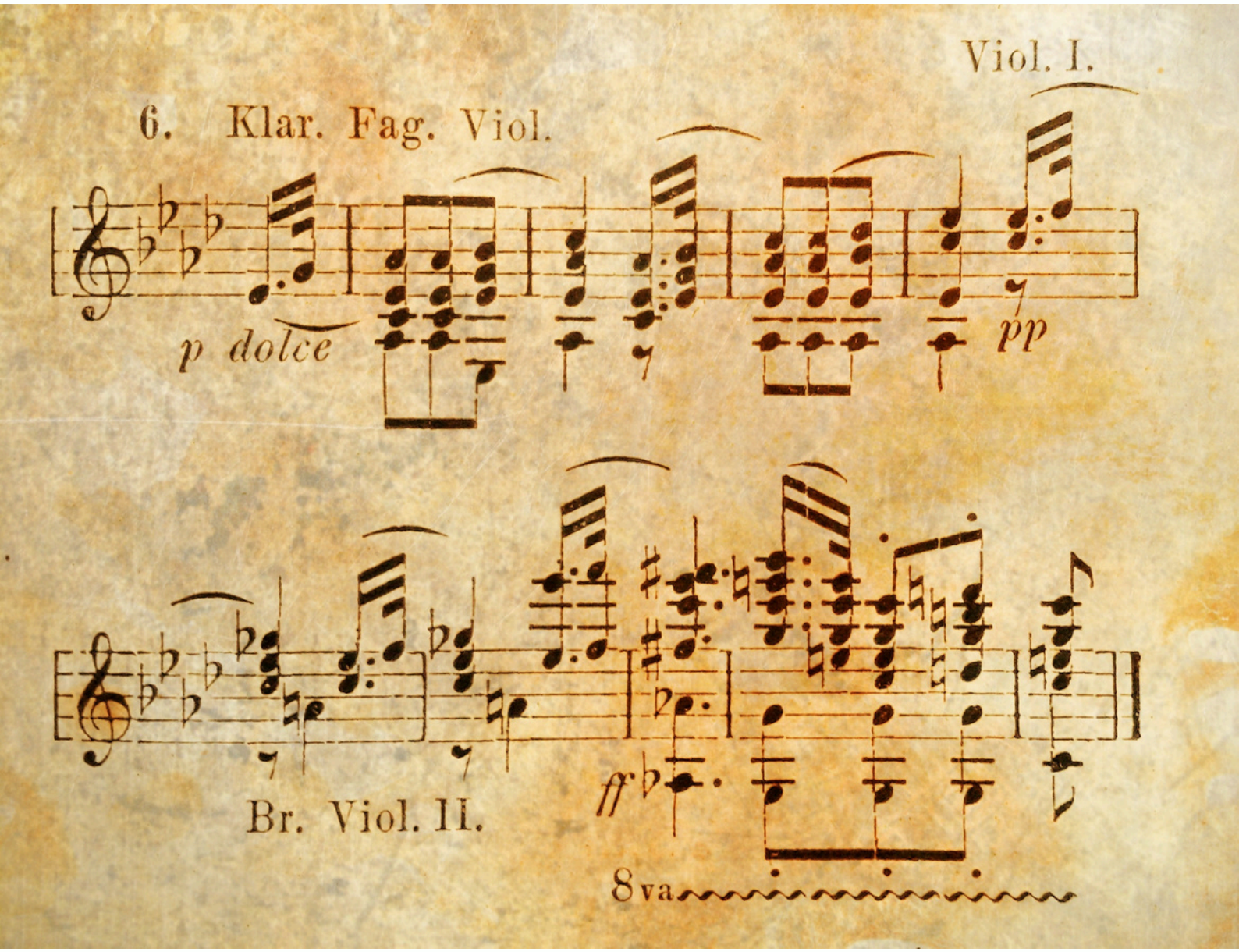
“You already know.”

“Who?”

“He is Prince Alexei.”

The Bookshop

By Aldous Huxley



It seemed indeed an unlikely place to find a bookshop. All the other commercial enterprises of the street aimed at purveying the barest necessities to the busy squalor of the quarter. In this, the main arterial street, there was a specious glitter and life produced by the swift passage of the traffic. It was almost airy, almost gay.

But all around great tracts of slum pullulated dankly. The inhabitants did their shopping in the grand street; they passed, holding gobbets of meat that showed glutinous even through the wrappings of paper; they cheapened linoleum at upholstery doors; women, black-bonneted and black-shawled, went shuffling to their marketing with dilapidated bags of straw plait. How should these, I wondered, buy books? And yet there it was, a tiny shop; and the windows were fitted with shelves, and there were the brown backs of books. To the right a large emporium overflowed into the street with its fabulously cheap furniture; to the left the curtained, discreet windows of an eating-house announced in chipped white letters the merits of sixpenny dinners. Between, so narrow as scarcely to prevent the junction of food and furniture, was the little shop. A door and four feet of dark window, that was the full extent of frontage. One saw here that literature was a luxury; it took its proportionable room here in this place of necessity. Still, the comfort was that it survived, definitely survived. The owner of the shop was standing in the doorway, a little man, grizzle-bearded and with eyes very active round the corners of the spectacles that bridged his long, sharp nose. “Trade is good?” I inquired. “Better in my grandfather’s day,” he told me, shaking his head sadly. “We grow progressively more Philistine,” I suggested. “It is our cheap press. The ephemeral overwhelms the permanent, the classical.”

“This journalism,” I agreed, “or call it rather this piddling quotidianism, is the curse of our age.” “Fit only for——” He gesticulated clutchingly with his hands as though seeking the word. “For the fire.” The old man was triumphantly emphatic with his, “No: for the sewer.” I laughed sympathetically at his passion.

“We are delightfully at one in our views,” I told him. “May I look about me a little among your treasures?” Within the shop was a brown twilight, redolent with old leather and the smell of that fine subtle dust that clings to the pages of forgotten books, as though preservative of their secrets —like the dry sand of Asian deserts beneath which, still incredibly intact, lie the treasures and the rubbish of a thousand years ago. I opened the first volume that came to my hand. It was a book of fashion-plates, tinted elaborately by hand in magenta and purple, maroon and solferino and puce and those melting shades of green that a yet earlier generation had called “the sorrows of Werther.” Beauties in crinolines swam with the amplitude of pavilioned ships across the pages. Their feet were represented as thin and flat and black, like tea-leaves shyly protruding from under their petticoats. Their faces were egg-shaped, sleeked round with hair of glossy black, and expressive of an immaculate purity. I thought of our modern fashion figures, with their heels and their arch of instep, their flattened faces and smile of pouting invitation. It was difficult not to be a deteriorationist. I am easily moved by symbols; there is something of a Quarles in my nature. Lacking the philosophic mind, I prefer to see my abstractions concretely imaged. And it occurred to me then that if I wanted an emblem to picture the sacredness of marriage and the influence of the home I could not do better than choose two little black feet like tea-leaves peeping out decorously from under the hem of wide, disguising petticoats.

While heels and thoroughbred insteps should figure—oh well, the reverse. The current of my thoughts was turned aside by the old man’s voice. “I expect you are musical,” he said. Oh yes, I was a little; and he held out to me a bulky folio. “Did you ever hear this?” he asked. Robert the Devil: no, I never had. I did not doubt that it was a gap in my musical education. The old man took the book and drew up a chair from the dim penetralia of the shop. It was then that I noticed a surprising fact: what I had, at a careless glance, taken to be a common counter I perceived now to be a piano of a square, unfamiliar shape. The old man sat down before it.

“You must forgive any defects in its tone,” he said, turning to me. “An early Broadwood, Georgian, you know, and has seen a deal of service in a hundred years.” He opened the lid, and the yellow keys grinned at me in the darkness like the teeth of an ancient horse. The old man rustled pages till he found a desired place. “The ballet music,” he said: “it’s fine. Listen to this.” His bony, rather tremulous hands began suddenly to move with an astonishing nimbleness, and there rose up, faint and tinkling against the roar of the traffic, a gay pirouetting music. The instrument rattled considerably and the volume of sound was thin as the trickle of a drought-shrunken stream: but, still, it kept tune and the melody was there, filmy, aerial. “And now for the drinking-song,” cried the old man, warming excitedly to his work. He played a series of chords that mounted modulating upwards towards a breaking-point; so supremely operatic as positively to be a parody of that moment of tautening suspense, when the singers are bracing themselves for a burst of passion. And then it came, the drinking chorus. One pictured to oneself cloaked men, wildly jovial over the emptiness of cardboard flagons. “Versiam’ a tazza piena Il generoso umor . . .” The old man’s voice was cracked and shrill, but his enthusiasm made up for any defects in execution. I had never seen anyone so wholeheartedly a reveller. He turned over a few more pages. “Ah, the ‘Valse Infernale,’” he said. “That’s good.”

There was a little melancholy prelude and then the tune, not so infernal perhaps as one might have been led to expect, but still pleasant enough. I looked over his shoulder at the words and sang to his accompaniment. “Demoni fatali Fantasmi d’orror, Dei regni infernali Plaudite al signor.” A great steam-driven brewer’s lorry roared past with its annihilating thunder and utterly blotted out the last line. The old man’s hands still moved over the yellow keys, my mouth opened and shut; but there was no sound of words or music. It was as though the fatal demons, the phantasms of horror, had made a sudden irruption into this peaceful, abstracted place. I looked out through the narrow door. The traffic ceaselessly passed; men and women hurried along with set faces. Phantasms of horror, all of them: infernal realms wherein they dwelt.

Outside, men lived under the tyranny of things. Their every action was determined by the orders of mere matter, by money, and the tools of their trade and the unthinking laws of habit and convention. But here I seemed to be safe from things, living at a remove from actuality; here where a bearded old man, improbable survival from some other time, indomitably played the music of romance, despite the fact that the phantasms of horror might occasionally drown the sound of it with their clamour. “So: will you take it?” The voice of the old man broke across my thoughts. “I will let you have it for five shillings.” He was holding out the thick, dilapidated volume towards me. His face wore a look of strained anxiety. I could see how eager he was to get my five shillings, how necessary, poor man! for him. He has been, I thought with an unreasonable bitterness— he has been simply performing for my benefit, like a trained dog. His aloofness, his culture— all a business trick. I felt aggrieved. He was just one of the common phantasms of horror masquerading as the angel of this somewhat comic paradise of contemplation. I gave him a couple of half-crowns and he began wrapping the book in paper.

“I tell you,” he said, “I’m sorry to part with it. I get attached to my books, you know; but they always have to go.” He sighed with such an obvious genuineness of feeling that I repented of the judgment I had passed upon him. He was a reluctant inhabitant of the infernal realms, even as was I myself. Outside they were beginning to cry the evening papers: a ship sunk, trenches captured, somebody’s new stirring speech. We looked at one another—the old bookseller and I—in silence. We understood one another without speech. Here were we in particular, and here was the whole of humanity in general, all faced by the hideous triumph of things. In this continued massacre of men, in this old man’s enforced sacrifice, matter equally triumphed. And walking homeward through Regent’s Park, I too found matter triumphing over me. My book was unconscionably heavy, and I wondered what in the world I should do with a piano score of Robert the Devil when I had got it home. It would only be another thing to weigh me down and hinder me; and at the moment it was very, oh, abominably, heavy. I leaned over the railings that ring round the ornamental water, and as unostentatiously as I could, I let the book fall into the bushes. I often think it would be best not to attempt the solution of the problem of life. Living is hard enough without complicating the process by thinking about it. The wisest thing, perhaps, is to take for granted the “wearisome condition of humanity, born under one law, to another bound,” and to leave the matter at that, without an attempt to reconcile the incompatibles.

Oh, the absurd difficulty of it all! And I have, moreover, wasted five shillings, which is serious, you know, in these thin times.

The Wind in the Willows

By Kenneth Grahame

The Road in front of Saint-Simeon Farm in Winter Claude Monet

V DULCE DOMUM

THE sheep ran huddling together against the hurdles, blowing out thin nostrils and stamping with delicate fore-feet, their heads thrown back and a light steam rising from the crowded sheep-pen into the frosty air, as the two animals hastened by in high spirits, with much chatter and laughter. They were returning across country after a long day's outing with Otter, hunting and exploring on the wide uplands, where certain streams tributary to their own River had their first small beginnings; and the shades of the short winter day were closing in on them, and they had still some distance to go. Plodding at random across the plough, they had heard the sheep and had made for them; and now, leading from the sheep-pen, they found a beaten track that made walking a lighter business, and responded, moreover, to that small inquiring something which all animals carry inside them, saying unmistakably, "Yes, quite right; this leads home!"

"It looks as if we were coming to a village," said the Mole somewhat dubiously, slackening his pace, as the track, that had in time become a path and then had developed into a lane, now handed them over to the charge of a well-metalled road. The animals did not hold with villages, and their own highways, thickly frequented as they were, took an independent course, regardless of church, post-office, or public-house.

"Oh, never mind!" said the Rat. "At this season of the year they're all safe indoors by this time, sitting round the fire; men, women, and children, dogs and cats and all. We shall slip through all right, without any bother or unpleasantness, and we can have a look at them through their windows if you like, and see what they're doing."

The rapid nightfall of mid-December had quite beset the little village as they approached it on soft feet over a first thin fall of powdery snow. Little was visible but squares of a dusky orange-red on either side of the street, where the firelight or lamplight of each cottage overflowed through the casements into the dark world without. Most of the low latticed windows were innocent of blinds, and to the lookers-in from outside, the inmates, gathered round the tea-table, absorbed in handiwork, or talking with laughter and gesture, had each that happy grace which is the last thing the skilled actor shall capture—the natural grace which goes with perfect unconsciousness of observation. Moving at will from one theatre to another, the two spectators, so far from home themselves, had something of wistfulness in their eyes as they watched a cat being stroked, a sleepy child picked up and huddled off to bed, or a tired man stretch and knock out his pipe on the end of a smouldering log.

But it was from one little window, with its blind drawn down, a mere blank transparency on the night, that the sense of home and the little curtained world within walls—the larger stressful world of outside Nature shut out and forgotten—most pulsated. Close against the white blind hung a bird-cage, clearly silhouetted, every wire, perch, and appurtenance distinct and recognisable, even to yesterday's dull-edged lump of sugar. On the middle perch the fluffy occupant, head tucked well into feathers, seemed so near to them as to be easily stroked, had they tried; even the delicate tips of his plumped-out plumage pencilled plainly on the illuminated screen. As they looked, the sleepy little fellow stirred uneasily, woke, shook himself, and raised his head. They could see the gape of his tiny beak as he yawned in a bored sort of way, looked round, and then settled his head into his back again, while the ruffled feathers gradually subsided into perfect stillness. Then a gust of bitter wind took them in the back of the neck, a small sting of frozen sleet on the skin woke them as from a dream, and they knew their toes to be cold and their legs tired, and their own home distant a weary way.

Once beyond the village, where the cottages ceased abruptly, on either side of the road they could smell through the darkness the friendly fields again; and they braced themselves for the last long stretch, the home stretch, the stretch that we know is bound to end, some time, in the rattle of the door-latch, the sudden firelight, and the sight of familiar things greeting us as long-absent travellers from far oversea. They plodded along steadily and silently, each of them thinking his own thoughts. The Mole's ran a good deal on supper, as it was pitch-dark, and it was all a strange country for him as far as he knew, and he was following obediently in the wake of the Rat, leaving the guidance entirely to him. As for the Rat, he was walking a little way ahead, as his habit was, his shoulders humped, his eyes fixed on the straight grey road in front of him; so he did not notice poor Mole when suddenly the summons reached him, and took him like an electric shock.

We others, who have long lost the more subtle of the physical senses, have not even proper terms to express an animal's inter-communications with his surroundings, living or otherwise, and have only the word "smell," for instance, to include the whole range of delicate thrills which murmur in the nose of the animal night and day, summoning, warning, inciting, repelling. It was one of these mysterious fairy calls from out the void that suddenly reached Mole in the darkness, making him tingle through and through with its very familiar appeal, even while yet he could not clearly remember what it was. He stopped dead in his tracks, his nose searching hither and thither in its efforts to recapture the fine filament, the telegraphic current, that had so strongly moved him. A moment, and he had caught it again; and with it this time came recollection in fullest flood.

Home! That was what they meant, those caressing appeals, those soft touches wafted through the air, those invisible little hands pulling and tugging, all one way! Why, it must be quite close by him at that moment, his old home that he had hurriedly forsaken and never sought again, that day when he first found the River! And now it was sending out its scouts and its messengers to capture him and bring him in. Since his escape on that bright morning he had hardly given it a thought, so absorbed had he been in his new life, in all its pleasures, its surprises, its fresh and captivating experiences. Now, with a rush of old memories, how clearly it stood up before him, in the darkness! Shabby indeed, and small and poorly furnished, and yet his, the home he had made for himself, the home he had been so happy to get back to after his day's work. And the home had been happy with him, too, evidently, and was missing him, and wanted him back, and was telling him so, through his nose, sorrowfully, reproachfully, but with no bitterness or anger; only with plaintive reminder that it was there, and wanted him.

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The Rat, astonished and dismayed at the violence of Mole's paroxysm of grief, did not dare to speak for a while. At last he said, very quietly and sympathetically, "What is it, old fellow? Whatever can be the matter? Tell us your trouble, and let me see what I can do."

Poor Mole found it difficult to get any words out between the upheavals of his chest that followed one upon another so quickly and held back speech and choked it as it came. "I know it's a—shabby, dingy little place," he sobbed forth at last brokenly: "not like—your cosy quarters—or Toad's beautiful hall—or Badger's great house—but it was my own little home—and I was fond of it—and I went away and forgot all about it—and then I smelt it suddenly—on the road, when I called and you wouldn't listen, Rat—and everything came back to me with a rush—and I wanted it!—O dear, O dear!—and when you wouldn't turn back, Ratty—and I had to leave it, though I was smelling it all the time—I thought my heart would break.—We might have just gone and had one look at it, Ratty—only one look—it was close by—but you wouldn't turn back, Ratty, you wouldn't turn back! O dear, O dear!"

Recollection brought fresh waves of sorrow, and sobs again took full charge of him, preventing further speech.
The Rat stared straight in front of him, saying nothing, only patting Mole gently on the shoulder. After a time he muttered gloomily, "I see it all now! What a pig I have been! A pig—that's me! Just a pig—a plain pig!"

He waited till Mole's sobs became gradually less stormy and more rhythmical; he waited till at last sniffs were frequent and sobs only intermittent. Then he rose from his seat, and, remarking carelessly, "Well, now we'd really better be getting on, old chap!" set off up the road again over the toilsome way they had come.

"Wherever are you (hic) going to (hic), Ratty?" cried the tearful Mole, looking up in alarm.

"We're going to find that home of yours, old fellow," replied the Rat pleasantly; "so you had better come along, for it will take some finding, and we shall want your nose."

"Oh, come back, Ratty, do!" cried the Mole, getting up and hurrying after him. "It's no good, I tell you! It's too late, and too dark, and the place is too far off, and the snow's coming! And—and I never meant to let you know I was feeling that way about it—it was all an accident and a mistake! And think of River Bank, and your supper!"

"Hang River Bank, and supper too!" said the Rat heartily. "I tell you, I'm going to find this place now, if I stay out all night. So cheer up, old chap, and take my arm, and we'll very soon be back there again."

Still snuffling, pleading, and reluctant, Mole suffered himself to be dragged back along the road by his imperious companion, who by a flow of cheerful talk and anecdote endeavoured to beguile his spirits back and make the weary way seem shorter. When at last it seemed to the Rat that they must be nearing that part of the road where the Mole had been "held up," he said, "Now, no more talking. Business! Use your nose, and give your mind to it."

They moved on in silence for some little way, when suddenly the Rat was conscious, through his arm that was linked in Mole's, of a faint sort of electric thrill that was passing down that animal's body. Instantly he disengaged himself, fell back a pace, and waited, all attention.

The signals were coming through!

Mole stood a moment rigid, while his uplifted nose, quivering slightly, felt the air.

Then a short, quick run forward—a fault—a check—a try back; and then a slow, steady, confident advance.

The Rat, much excited, kept close to his heels as the Mole, with something of the air of a sleep-walker, crossed a dry ditch, scrambled through a hedge, and nosed his way over a field open and trackless and bare in the faint starlight.

Suddenly, without giving warning, he dived; but the Rat was on the alert, and promptly followed him down the tunnel to which his unerring nose had faithfully led him.

It was close and airless, and the earthy smell was strong, and it seemed a long time to Rat ere the passage ended and he could stand erect and stretch and shake himself. The Mole struck a match, and by its light the Rat saw that they were standing in an open space, neatly swept and sanded underfoot, and directly facing them was Mole's little front door, with "Mole End" painted, in Gothic lettering, over the bell-pull at the side.

Mole reached down a lantern from a nail on the wall and lit it, and the Rat, looking round him, saw that they were in a sort of fore-court. A garden-seat stood on one side of the door, and on the other a roller; for the Mole, who was a tidy animal when at home, could not stand having his ground kicked up by other animals into little runs that ended in earth-heaps. On the walls hung wire baskets with ferns in them, alternating with brackets carrying plaster statuary—Garibaldi, and the infant Samuel, and Queen Victoria, and other heroes of modern Italy. Down on one side of the fore-court ran a skittle-alley, with benches along it and little wooden tables marked with rings that hinted at beer-mugs. In the middle was a small round pond containing gold-fish and surrounded by a cockle-shell border. Out of the centre of the pond rose a fanciful erection clothed in more cockle-shells and topped by a large silvered glass ball that reflected everything all wrong and had a very pleasing effect.

Mole's face beamed at the sight of all these objects so dear to him, and he hurried Rat through the door, lit a lamp in the hall, and took one glance round his old home. He saw the dust lying thick on everything, saw the cheerless, deserted look of the long-neglected house, and its narrow, meagre dimensions, its worn and shabby contents—and collapsed again on a hall-chair, his nose to his paws. "O Ratty!" he cried dismally, "why ever did I do it? Why did I bring you to this poor, cold little place, on a night like this, when you might have been at River Bank by this time, toasting your toes before a blazing fire, with all your own nice things about you!"

The Rat paid no heed to his doleful self-reproaches. He was running here and there, opening doors, inspecting rooms and cupboards, and lighting lamps and candles and sticking them up everywhere. "What a capital little house this is!" he called out cheerily. "So compact! So well planned! Everything here and everything in its place! We'll make a jolly night of it. The first thing we want is a good fire; I'll see to that—I always know where to find things. So this is the parlour? Splendid! Your own idea, those little sleeping-bunks in the wall? Capital! Now, I'll fetch the wood and the coals, and you get a duster, Mole—you'll find one in the drawer of the kitchen table—and try and smarten things up a bit. Bustle about, old chap!"

Encouraged by his inspiriting companion, the Mole roused himself and dusted and polished with energy and heartiness, while the Rat, running to and fro with armfuls of fuel, soon had a cheerful blaze roaring up the chimney. He hailed the Mole to come and warm himself; but Mole promptly had another fit of the blues, dropping down on a couch in dark despair and burying his face in his duster. "Rat," he moaned, "how about your supper, you poor, cold, hungry, weary animal? I've nothing to give you—nothing—not a crumb!"

"What a fellow you are for giving in!" said the Rat reproachfully. "Why, only just now I saw a sardine-opener on the kitchen dresser, quite distinctly; and everybody knows that means there are sardines about somewhere in the neighbourhood. Rouse yourself! pull yourself together, and come with me and forage." They went and foraged accordingly, hunting through every cupboard and turning out every drawer. The result was not so very depressing after all, though of course it might have been better; a tin of sardines—a box of captain's biscuits, nearly full—and a German sausage encased in silver paper.

"There's a banquet for you!" observed the Rat, as he arranged the table. "I know some animals who would give their ears to be sitting down to supper with us to-night!"

"No bread!" groaned the Mole dolorously; "no butter, no—"

"No pâté de foie gras, no champagne!" continued the Rat, grinning. "And that reminds me—what's that little door at the end of the passage? Your cellar, of course! Every luxury in this house! Just you wait a minute."

He made for the cellar-door, and presently reappeared, somewhat dusty, with a bottle of beer in each paw and another under each arm, "Self-indulgent beggar you seem to be, Mole," he observed. "Deny yourself nothing. This is really the jolliest little place I ever was in. Now, wherever did you pick up those prints? Make the place look so home-like, they do. No wonder you're so

fond of it, Mole. Tell us all about it, and how you came to make it what it is."

Then, while the Rat busied himself fetching plates, and knives and forks, and mustard which he mixed in an egg-cup, the Mole, his bosom still heaving with the stress of his recent emotion, related—somewhat shyly at first, but with more freedom as he warmed to his subject—how this was planned, and how that was thought out, and how this was got through a windfall from an aunt, and that was a wonderful find and a bargain, and this other thing was bought out of laborious savings and a certain amount of "going without." His spirits finally quite restored, he must needs go and caress his possessions, and take a lamp and show off their points to his visitor and expatiate on them, quite forgetful of the supper they both so much needed; Rat, who was desperately hungry but strove to conceal it, nodding seriously, examining with a puckered brow, and saying, "wonderful," and "most remarkable," at intervals, when the chance for an observation was given him. At last the Rat succeeded in decoying him to the table, and had just got seriously to work with the sardine-opener when sounds were heard from the fore-court without—sounds like the scuffling of small feet in the gravel and a confused murmur of tiny voices, while broken sentences reached them—"Now, all in a line—hold the lantern up a bit, Tommy—clear your throats first—no coughing after I say one, two, three.—Where's young Bill?—Here, come on, do, we're all a-waiting—"

"What's up?" inquired the Rat, pausing in his labours.

I think it must be the field-mice," replied the Mole, with a touch of pride in his manner. "They go round carol-singing regularly at this time of the year. They're quite an institution in these parts. And they never pass me over—they come to Mole End last of all; and I used to give them hot drinks, and supper too sometimes, when I could afford it. It will be like old times to hear them again."

"Let's have a look at them!" cried the Rat, jumping up and running to the door. It was a pretty sight, and a seasonable one, that met their eyes when they flung the door open. In the fore-court, lit by the dim rays of a horn lantern, some eight or ten little field-mice stood in a semicircle, red worsted comforters round their throats, their fore-paws thrust deep into their pockets, their feet jigging for warmth. With bright beady eyes they glanced shyly at each other, sniggering a little, sniffing and applying coat-sleeves a good deal. As the door opened, one of the elder ones that carried the lantern was just saying, "Now then, one, two, three!" and forthwith their shrill little voices uprose on the air, singing one of the old-time carols that their forefathers composed in fields that were fallow and held by frost, or when snow-bound in chimney corners, and handed down to be sung in the miry street to lamp-lit windows at Yule-time.

CAROL

Villagers all, this frosty tide,
Let your doors swing open wide,
Though wind may follow, and snow beside,
Yet draw us in by your fire to bide;
Joy shall be yours in the morning!

Here we stand in the cold and the sleet,
Blowing fingers and stamping feet,
Come from far away you to greet—
You by the fire and we in the street—
Bidding you joy in the morning!

For ere one half of the night was gone,
Sudden a star has led us on,
Raining bliss and benison—
Bliss to-morrow and more anon,
Joy for every morning!

Goodman Joseph toiled through the snow—
Saw the star o'er a stable low;
Mary she might not further go—
Welcome thatch, and litter below!
Joy was hers in the morning!

And then they heard the angels tell
"Who were the first to cry Nowell?
Animals all, as it befell,
In the stable where they did dwell!
Joy shall be theirs in the morning!"

The voices ceased, the singers, bashful but smiling, exchanged sidelong glances, and silence succeeded—but for a moment only. Then, from up above and far away, down the tunnel they had so lately travelled was borne to their ears in a faint musical hum the sound of distant bells ringing a joyful and clangorous peal.

"Very well sung, boys!" cried the Rat heartily. "And now come along in, all of you, and warm yourselves by the fire, and have something hot!"

"Yes, come along, field-mice," cried the Mole eagerly. "This is quite like old times! Shut the door after you. Pull up that settle to the fire. Now, you just wait a minute, while we—O, Ratty!" he cried in despair, plumping down on a seat, with tears impending. "Whatever are we doing? We've nothing to give them!"

"You leave all that to me," said the masterful Rat. "Here, you with the lantern! Come over this way. I want to talk to you. Now, tell me, are there any shops open at this hour of the night?"

"Why, certainly, sir," replied the field-mouse respectfully. "At this time of the year our shops keep open to all sorts of hours."

"Then look here!" said the Rat. "You go off at once, you and your lantern, and you get me—"

Here much muttered conversation ensued, and the Mole only heard bits of it, such as—"Fresh, mind!—no, a pound of that will do—see you get Buggins's, for I won't have any other—no, only the best—if you can't get it there, try somewhere else—yes, of course, homemade, no tinned stuff—well then, do the best you can!" Finally, there was a chink of coin passing from paw to paw, the field-mouse was provided with an ample basket for his purchases, and off he hurried, he and his lantern.

The rest of the field-mice, perched in a row on the settle, their small legs swinging, gave themselves up to enjoyment of the fire, and toasted their chilblains till they tingled; while the Mole, failing to draw them into easy conversation, plunged into family history and made each of them recite the names of his numerous brothers, who were too young, it appeared, to be allowed to go out a-carolling this year, but looked forward very shortly to winning the parental consent. The Rat, meanwhile, was busy examining the label on one of the beer-bottles. "I perceive this to be Old Burton," he remarked approvingly. "Sensible Mole! The very thing! Now we shall be able to mull some ale! Get the things ready, Mole, while I draw the corks."

It did not take long to prepare the brew and thrust the tin heater well into the red heart of the fire; and soon every field-mouse was sipping and coughing and choking (for a little mulled ale goes a long way) and wiping his eyes and laughing and forgetting he had ever been cold in all his life.

"They act plays too, these fellows," the Mole explained to the Rat. "Make them up all by themselves, and act them afterwards. And very well they do it, too! They gave us a capital one last year, about a field-mouse who was captured at sea by a Barbary corsair, and made to row in a galley; and when he escaped and got home again, his lady-love had gone into a convent. Here, you! You were in it, I remember. Get up and recite a bit."

The field-mouse addressed got up on his legs, giggled shyly, looked round the room, and remained absolutely tongue-tied. His comrades cheered him on, Mole coaxed and encouraged him, and the Rat went so far as to take him by the shoulders and shake him; but nothing could overcome his stage-fright. They were all busily engaged on him like watermen applying the Royal Humane Society's regulations to a case of long submersion, when the latch clicked, the door opened, and the field-mouse with the lantern reappeared, staggering under the weight of his basket.

There was no more talk of play-acting once the very real and solid contents of the basket had been tumbled out on the table. Under the generalship of Rat, everybody was set to do something or to fetch something. In a very few minutes supper was ready, and Mole, as he took the head of the table in a sort of a dream, saw a lately barren board set thick with savoury comforts; saw his little friends' faces brighten and beam as they fell to without delay; and then let himself loose—for he was famished indeed—on the provender so magically provided, thinking what a happy home-coming this had turned out, after all. As they ate, they talked of old times, and the field-mice gave him the local gossip up to date, and answered as well as they could the hundred questions he had to ask them. The Rat said little or nothing, only taking care that each guest had what he wanted, and plenty of it, and that Mole had no trouble or anxiety about anything.

They clattered off at last, very grateful and showering wishes of the season, with their jacket pockets stuffed with remembrances for the small brothers and sisters at home. When the door had closed on the last of them and the chink of the lanterns had died away, Mole and Rat kicked the fire up, drew their chairs in,

brewed themselves a last nightcap of mulled ale, and discussed the events of the long day. At last the Rat, with a tremendous yawn, said, "Mole, old chap, I'm ready to drop. Sleepy is simply not the word. That your own bunk over on that side? Very well, then, I'll take this. What a ripping little house this is! Everything so handy!" He clambered into his bunk and rolled himself well up in the blankets, and slumber gathered him forthwith, as a swathe of barley is folded into the arms of the reaping machine.
The weary Mole also was glad to turn in without delay, and soon had his head on his pillow, in great joy and contentment. But ere he closed his eyes he let them wander round his old room, mellow in the glow of the firelight that played or rested on familiar and friendly things which had long been unconsciously a part of him, and now smilingly received him back, without rancour. He was now in just the frame of mind that the tactful Rat had quietly worked to bring about in him. He saw clearly how plain and simple—how narrow, even—it all was; but clearly, too, how much it all meant to him, and the special value of some such anchorage in one's existence. He did not at all want to abandon the new life and its splendid spaces, to turn his back on sun and air and all they offered him and creep home and stay there; the upper world was all too strong, it called to him still, even down there, and he knew he must return to the larger stage. But it was good to think he had this to come back to; this place which was all his own, these things which were so glad to see him again and could always be counted upon for the same simple welcome.

THE CAT AND THE MOUSE.

A Gaelic Nursery Rhyme.

Collected By
Rev. John Gregorson Campbell

The Mouse said from her hiding place,
“What are you about, Grey Cat?”
“Friendship, fellowship and love:
You may come out!”
“Well I know the hooked claw
That is fastened in the sole of your feet
You killed my sister yesterday,
And with difficulty I myself escaped,
You thieving cat, son of the grim grey one,
Where were you yesterday when from home?”
“I went away on my left hand
To hunt for mince-meat in an evil hour;
I was noticed by the goodman of the house,
My eye being shut and my cheek full;
He tightened my throat very hard,
And called out to bring him the cheese-knife,
He cut off one of my ears
And the red root of the ear to the bone.”

Thuirt an Luchag, ’s i ’s an fhròig,
“’Dé th’ air t’ aire, a Chait Ghlais?”
“Càirdeas ’s comunn ’s gaol:
Feudaidh tusa tighinn a mach.”
“Is eòlach mi air an dubhan chrom
’Tha ’n sàs ann am bonn do chas!
Mharbh thu mo phiuthar an dé,
’S ann air éiginn ’fhuair mi-fhéin as.
A chaoitein, mhic Ghrìmeich Ghlais,
C’ àit an robh thu ’n raoir air chuairt?”
“Dh’ fhalbh mi air mo làimh-chlì
’Shealg nan ìsbean ’s an droch uair;
Mhothaich fear-an-tighe dhomh,
Mo shùil druidte ’s mo phluic làn;
Theannaich e m’ amhach gu cruaidh,
’S ghlaodh e nuas air corc a’ chàis,
Thug e dhiom-sa an leth-chluas
’S am faillein ruadh gu ruig an cnàimh.”

Featured Artist William Laidlay

William James Laidlay (12 August 1846 – 25 October 1912) was a Scottish first-class cricketer, barrister and artist. He was born in August 1846 at Calcutta in British India.

He was educated in Scotland at the Loretto School, before going up to Peterhouse, Cambridge, from where he graduated in 1872.

A student of the Middle Temple, he was called to the bar in April 1875. In the same year that he was called to the bar, He was a member of the Faculty of Advocates in 1874 and served on the Scottish courts circuit until 1878, after which he studied art in Paris from 1879–85.

Laidlay was a founding member of the New English Art Club in 1885. He regularly exhibited his works at the Royal Academy of Arts, the Paris Salon, and the New Gallery.

Laidlay died in October 1912 at Glenbrook House in Freshwater on the Isle of Wight.

His brother was the amateur golfer, Johnny Laidlay.

After the Storm

A distant coastal harbour

Ballantrae Harbour from the SW

Winding Their Way Home

On the Ayrshire Coast,
with Arran in the Distance,
Painted near Ballantrae

Lapwings by the Sea

Breton coastal view

The Garden of Eros
Oscar Wilde

It is full summer now, the heart of June;
Not yet the sunburnt reapers are astir
Upon the upland meadow where too soon
Rich autumn time, the season's usurer,
Will lend his hoarded gold to all the trees,
And see his treasure scattered by the wild and spendthrift breeze.

Too soon indeed! yet here the daffodil,
That love-child of the Spring, has lingered on
To vex the rose with jealousy, and still
The harebell spreads her azure pavilion,
And like a strayed and wandering reveller
Abandoned of its brothers, whom long since June's messenger

The missel-thrush has frighted from the glade,
One pale narcissus loiters fearfully
Close to a shadowy nook, where half afraid
Of their own loveliness some violets lie
That will not look the gold sun in the face
For fear of too much splendour, - ah! methinks it is a place

Which should be trodden by Persephone
When wearied of the flowerless fields of Dis!
Or danced on by the lads of Arcady!
The hidden secret of eternal bliss
Known to the Grecian here a man might find,
Ah! you and I may find it now if Love and Sleep be kind.

There are the flowers which mourning Herakles
Strewed on the tomb of Hylas, columbine,
Its white doves all a-flutter where the breeze
Kissed them too harshly, the small celandine,
That yellow-kirtled chorister of eve,
And lilac lady's-smock, - but let them bloom alone, and leave

Yon spired hollyhock red-crocketed
To sway its silent chimes, else must the bee,
Its little bellringer, go seek instead
Some other pleasaunce; the anemone
That weeps at daybreak, like a silly girl
Before her love, and hardly lets the butterflies unfurl

Their painted wings beside it, - bid it pine
In pale virginity; the winter snow
Will suit it better than those lips of thine
Whose fires would but scorch it, rather go
And pluck that amorous flower which blooms alone,
Fed by the pander wind with dust of kisses not its own.

The trumpet-mouths of red convolvulus
So dear to maidens, creamy meadow-sweet
Whiter than Juno's throat and odorous
As all Arabia, hyacinths the feet
Of Huntress Dian would be loth to mar
For any dappled fawn, - pluck these, and those fond flowers which are

Fairer than what Queen Venus trod upon
Beneath the pines of Ida, eucharis,
That morning star which does not dread the sun,
And budding marjoram which but to kiss
Would sweeten Cytheraea's lips and make
Adonis jealous, - these for thy head, - and for thy girdle take

Yon curving spray of purple clematis
Whose gorgeous dye outflames the Tyrian King,
And foxgloves with their nodding chalices,
But that one narciss which the startled Spring
Let from her kirtle fall when first she heard
In her own woods the wild tempestuous song of summer's bird,

Ah! leave it for a subtle memory
Of those sweet tremulous days of rain and sun,
When April laughed between her tears to see
The early primrose with shy footsteps run
From the gnarled oak-tree roots till all the wold,
Spite of its brown and trampled leaves, grew bright with shimmering gold.

Nay, pluck it too, it is not half so sweet
As thou thyself, my soul's idolatry!
And when thou art a-wearied at thy feet
Shall oxlips weave their brightest tapestry,
For thee the woodbine shall forget its pride
And veil its tangled whorls, and thou shalt walk on daisies pied.

And I will cut a reed by yonder spring
And make the wood-gods jealous, and old Pan
Wonder what young intruder dares to sing
In these still haunts, where never foot of man
Should tread at evening, lest he chance to spy
The marble limbs of Artemis and all her company.

And I will tell thee why the jacinth wears
Such dread embroidery of dolorous moan,
And why the hapless nightingale forbears
To sing her song at noon, but weeps alone
When the fleet swallow sleeps, and rich men feast,
And why the laurel trembles when she sees the lightening east.

And I will sing how sad Proserpina
Unto a grave and gloomy Lord was wed,
And lure the silver-breasted Helena
Back from the lotus meadows of the dead,
So shalt thou see that awful loveliness
For which two mighty Hosts met fearfully in war's abyss!

And then I'll pipe to thee that Grecian tale
How Cynthia loves the lad Endymion,
And hidden in a grey and misty veil
Hies to the cliffs of Latmos once the Sun
Leaps from his ocean bed in fruitless chase
Of those pale flying feet which fade away in his embrace.

And if my flute can breathe sweet melody,
We may behold Her face who long ago
Dwelt among men by the AEgean sea,
And whose sad house with pillaged portico
And friezeless wall and columns toppled down
Looms o'er the ruins of that fair and violet cinctured town.

Spirit of Beauty! tarry still awhile,
They are not dead, thine ancient votaries;
Some few there are to whom thy radiant smile
Is better than a thousand victories,
Though all the nobly slain of Waterloo
Rise up in wrath against them! tarry still, there are a few

Who for thy sake would give their manlihood
And consecrate their being; I at least
Have done so, made thy lips my daily food,
And in thy temples found a goodlier feast
Than this starved age can give me, spite of all
Its new-found creeds so sceptical and so dogmatical.

Here not Cephissos, not Ilissos flows,
The woods of white Colonos are not here,
On our bleak hills the olive never blows,
No simple priest conducts his lowing steer
Up the steep marble way, nor through the town
Do laughing maidens bear to thee the crocus-flowered gown.

Yet tarry! for the boy who loved thee best,
Whose very name should be a memory
To make thee linger, sleeps in silent rest
Beneath the Roman walls, and melody
Still mourns her sweetest lyre; none can play
The lute of Adonais: with his lips Song passed away.

Nay, when Keats died the Muses still had left
One silver voice to sing his threnody,
But ah! too soon of it we were bereft
When on that riven night and stormy sea
Panthea claimed her singer as her own,
And slew the mouth that praised her; since which time we walk alone,

Save for that fiery heart, that morning star
Of re-arisen England, whose clear eye
Saw from our tottering throne and waste of war
The grand Greek limbs of young Democracy
Rise mightily like Hesperus and bring
The great Republic! him at least thy love hath taught to sing,

And he hath been with thee at Thessaly,
And seen white Atalanta fleet of foot
In passionless and fierce virginity
Hunting the tusked boar, his honied lute
Hath pierced the cavern of the hollow hill,
And Venus laughs to know one knee will bow before her still.

And he hath kissed the lips of Proserpine,
And sung the Galilaean's requiem,
That wounded forehead dashed with blood and wine
He hath discrowned, the Ancient Gods in him
Have found their last, most ardent worshipper,
And the new Sign grows grey and dim before its conqueror.

Spirit of Beauty! tarry with us still,
It is not quenched the torch of poesy,
The star that shook above the Eastern hill
Holds unassailed its argent armoury
From all the gathering gloom and fretful fight -
O tarry with us still! for through the long and common night,

Morris, our sweet and simple Chaucer's child,
Dear heritor of Spenser's tuneful reed,
With soft and sylvan pipe has oft beguiled
The weary soul of man in troublous need,
And from the far and flowerless fields of ice
Has brought fair flowers to make an earthly paradise.

We know them all, Gudrun the strong men's bride,
Aslaug and Olafson we know them all,
How giant Grettir fought and Sigurd died,
And what enchantment held the king in thrall
When lonely Brynhild wrestled with the powers
That war against all passion, ah! how oft through summer hours,

Long listless summer hours when the noon
Being enamoured of a damask rose
Forgets to journey westward, till the moon
The pale usurper of its tribute grows
From a thin sickle to a silver shield
And chides its loitering car - how oft, in some cool grassy field

Far from the cricket-ground and noisy eight,
At Bagley, where the rustling bluebells come
Almost before the blackbird finds a mate
And overstay the swallow, and the hum
Of many murmuring bees flits through the leaves,
Have I lain poring on the dreamy tales his fancy weaves,

And through their unreal woes and mimic pain
Wept for myself, and so was purified,
And in their simple mirth grew glad again;
For as I sailed upon that pictured tide
The strength and splendour of the storm was mine
Without the storm's red ruin, for the singer is divine;

The little laugh of water falling down
Is not so musical, the clammy gold
Close hoarded in the tiny waxen town
Has less of sweetness in it, and the old
Half-withered reeds that waved in Arcady
Touched by his lips break forth again to fresher harmony.

Spirit of Beauty, tarry yet awhile!
Although the cheating merchants of the mart
With iron roads profane our lovely isle,
And break on whirling wheels the limbs of Art,
Ay! though the crowded factories beget
The blindworm Ignorance that slays the soul, O tarry yet!

For One at least there is, - He bears his name
From Dante and the seraph Gabriel, -
Whose double laurels burn with deathless flame
To light thine altar; He too loves thee well,
Who saw old Merlin lured in Vivien's snare,
And the white feet of angels coming down the golden stair,

Loves thee so well, that all the World for him
A gorgeous-coloured vestiture must wear,
And Sorrow take a purple diadem,
Or else be no more Sorrow, and Despair
Gild its own thorns, and Pain, like Adon, be
Even in anguish beautiful; - such is the empery

Which Painters hold, and such the heritage
This gentle solemn Spirit doth possess,
Being a better mirror of his age
In all his pity, love, and weariness,
Than those who can but copy common things,
And leave the Soul unpainted with its mighty questionings.

But they are few, and all romance has flown,
And men can prophesy about the sun,
And lecture on his arrows - how, alone,
Through a waste void the soulless atoms run,
How from each tree its weeping nymph has fled,
And that no more 'mid English reeds a Naiad shows her head.

Methinks these new Actaeons boast too soon
That they have spied on beauty; what if we
Have analysed the rainbow, robbed the moon
Of her most ancient, chastest mystery,
Shall I, the last Endymion, lose all hope
Because rude eyes peer at my mistress through a telescope!

What profit if this scientific age
Burst through our gates with all its retinue
Of modern miracles! Can it assuage
One lover's breaking heart? what can it do
To make one life more beautiful, one day
More godlike in its period? but now the Age of Clay

Returns in horrid cycle, and the earth
Hath borne again a noisy progeny
Of ignorant Titans, whose ungodly birth
Hurls them against the august hierarchy
Which sat upon Olympus; to the Dust
They have appealed, and to that barren arbiter they must

Repair for judgment; let them, if they can,
From Natural Warfare and insensate Chance,
Create the new Ideal rule for man!
Methinks that was not my inheritance;
For I was nurtured otherwise, my soul
Passes from higher heights of life to a more supreme goal.

Lo! while we spake the earth did turn away
Her visage from the God, and Hecate's boat
Rose silver-laden, till the jealous day
Blew all its torches out: I did not note
The waning hours, to young Endymions
Time's palsied fingers count in vain his rosary of suns!

Mark how the yellow iris wearily
Leans back its throat, as though it would be kissed
By its false chamberer, the dragon-fly,
Who, like a blue vein on a girl's white wrist,
Sleeps on that snowy primrose of the night,
Which 'gins to flush with crimson shame, and die beneath the light.

Come let us go, against the pallid shield
Of the wan sky the almond blossoms gleam,
The corncrake nested in the unmown field
Answers its mate, across the misty stream
On fitful wing the startled curlews fly,
And in his sedgy bed the lark, for joy that Day is nigh,

Scatters the pearled dew from off the grass,
In tremulous ecstasy to greet the sun,
Who soon in gilded panoply will pass
Forth from yon orange-curtained pavilion
Hung in the burning east: see, the red rim
O'ertops the expectant hills! it is the God! for love of him

Already the shrill lark is out of sight,
Flooding with waves of song this silent dell, -
Ah! there is something more in that bird's flight
Than could be tested in a crucible! -
But the air freshens, let us go, why soon
The woodmen will be here; how we have lived this night of June!

RODGERHATH & THE GOLDENAXE

EDWARD WHITE

Chapter Three

Flowergem was worried immediately by her husband's absence. She'd awoken bright and early and realized something was amiss. For one, she couldn't smell any beery breath in the bedroom and, for second, Rodgerhath could not be found next to her sleeping soundly. In fact, there were no signs Rodgerhath had ever returned to the bed. Flowergem got up and began to search the house for him, at times he had passed out in the garden, the cellar and even in the living room but she couldn't find him anywhere.

With increasing anxiety, she went outside and searched around the whole village, she checked all the usual and unusual spots but her husband was nowhere to be found.

Once she knew Rodgerhath was truly missing she went to Goldhelm's house and knocked on his door interrupting his breakfast.

"What is it?" Goldhelm grunted as he opened the door. The captain of the dwarven militia hated mealtime interruptions.

"Rodgerhath was drinking last night…"

"Is there a night he doesn't?" he was turning back to his table where his eggs and sausages were waiting.

"He's not here!" Flowergem cried, grabbing Goldhem's arm, "I can't find him anywhere!"

After finishing his breakfast, Goldhelm called together a search party. It included a dozen of the guard, Flowergem and her father Culbert. They knew Rodgerhath wasn't in the village so they made their way to the front gate and searched around the fortified walls of the hamlet and the nearby woods and fields but he was nowhere to be found.

So the party returned to the front gate and Goldhelm examined the ground carefully for any of Rodgerhath's tracks. He said nothing for a long minute before throwing his arms up in frustration.

"It's pointless!" he said, "there are tracks everywhere! All the farmers and their livestock have trampled all over the path this morning."

Flowergem's heart dropped. She sensed her husband was in danger and she knew that they had to find him, but it wasn't possible to begin searching without knowing where he might have gone.

Before she could express her fears, she saw her father drop to one knee and begin sniffing the path.

"What are you…?" Goldhelm began.

Culbert raised a hand and continued to sniff.

"Ale," he said.

"Ale? You can smell ale? How? The wind is clean and sober!" Goldhelm exclaimed.

"Yes… it's one of my pale ales… my dandelion ale! Yes that's the one! He must have been drinking and spilling it wherever he was going."

"Is there a trail father?" Flowergem asked, daring to hope.

Culbert got to his feet and walked up the path still sniffing the air.

"That there is! Follow me!"

Chapter Four

Rodgerhath now knew where he was or, at least, he thought he knew where he was.

He could remember that he had decided to go to the White Mountain to search for the Goldenaxe. Knowing what he knew about trogs and their tendency to make their strongholds in caves and caverns, he guessed he was inside the White Mountain.

However, he couldn't figure out how the trog tunnels had not been found years before. Dwarves had searched the whole region for the Goldenaxe and never discovered trogs.

Either the trogs were recent arrivals or they had remained hidden for all those years. Regardless, it raised a question which confounded him: how did he manage to discover the trogs' wardom in his drunken condition?

Rodgerhath was in trouble because he couldn't answer this question. If he could answer it, he would know how he managed to enter the trogs' wardom and then he would know how to escape. As it was, he would have to go through the passages blindly looking for the exit. He listened closely and considered his options. The trogs after so long would probably make their way back but they were searching the other tunnels for him at the moment. This meant nowhere was safe. After rubbing his eyes and brushing his forehead in an attempt to relieve the pains of his hangover, Rodgerhath decided he had to make a move. He wasn't going to wait to be hunted down like a dog, if he was going to die, he would die standing and in a battle of his own choosing.

"I'm going to get out of here or I'm going to die trying!" he told himself.

Forcing his head up, resting the Goldenaxe on his shoulder and lifting his legs, Rodgerhath moved in groggy fashion out of his hiding place and into the main tunnel.

Rodgerhath had a choice, he could either go left or right. Left would take him where the trogs had gone searching for him but right would take him away from them.

After a second of thought, Rodgerhath went left. He reasoned that because the warboss had come from that direction and, because all the trogs had gone up that passage searching for him, the exit out of the White Mountain had to be that way.

He knew that this was the dangerous route and that he could easily find himself face-to-face with a trog or even a whole war band. But there was nothing for it, he had to try and escape.

"As long as they don't shout too loudly, I might be able to fight my way through a couple of them," Rodgerhath mumbled to himself, too loudly to be stealthy. Fortunately, there were no trogs around to hear him and he continued up the passage undisturbed.

For the first dozen yards it was a straight cavern with multiple small chambers to the right and left which were the sleeping dens of the trogs and their broods. As Rodgerhath continued up the passage, the dens disappeared and the cavern began to twist and turn and wiggle through the black rock. After travelling a couple hundred yards, the tunnel split into five separate passageways, two went leftward, one continued straight and the last two went rightward. Rodgerhath listened closely to gauge how many trogs had gone down each tunnel but his ears were still muffled due to last night's merriment and he wasn't sure whether he was hearing the faint echoes of marching trogs or just imagining these things.

He now had to choose which tunnel to take. Rodgerhath thought back to the cavern in which he had first awoken. Because it was a natural chamber with no exits other than the one the trogs had made, it occurred to him that the trogs had been mining deeper and further into the mountain.

Therefore, he reasoned, if he went in the opposite direction of the natural cavern, he would find his way out of the mountain. His headache briefly relented with the surge of hope that this thought granted, and he moved down the first rightward tunnel and prayed that his hunch would prove correct.

Rodgerhath held the Goldenaxe at the ready, he kept his eyes and ears focused ahead even though it hurt his throbbing head to do so. Sweat prickled across his hot skin as his emotions wrestled with the anticipation of combat.

Thoughts about his neighbours, his friends, his kin, his kith, and his wife flooded his mind. How would they react if he didn't return? There would be much sadness and many tears. He could see it playing out in front of him. Rodgerhath could see Flowergem at the head of a solemn procession, dressed in black, tears falling down already wet cheeks.

Rodgerhath snapped his mind from this vision back to the present. It was doing him no favours to envision the worst case scenario, he needed to focus on the situation as it was.

"Besides I'm not going to die," Rodgerhath decided, "I'm going to make it home and tell her how much she means to me… and then I'm getting a celebratory pint!" At that moment, his head chose to throb badly with pain. "Err… I might do that one another day."

Aside from these ill-tempered mutterings, Rodgerhath continued up the tunnel in silence. And "up" was the appropriate word, the tunnel was gently sloping upwards and continued for what felt like an eternity until it ended in a stone spiral staircase which went straight up.

Rodgerhath was impressed, it was a crude construction with uneven steps but he was surprised the trogs had been able to craft a functional stairway. They were such dumb brutes obsessed with war and violence that they often never bothered with learning any of the fine crafts.

Maybe these stairs lead out of this mountain, Rodgerhath thought. He began to ascend the steps, carefully and deliberately as they were so uneven that one poorly considered foot would cause him to trip and fall. The unorthodox

movements necessitated by the stairway's poor construction, paired with the concentration required to climb the ever-spiralling stairs, made Rodgerhath's headache even worse and twice he felt like vomiting.

Somehow, Rodgerhath kept it all together and reached the last step where he promptly collapsed against one of the cavern walls to get his breath back and rest his turbulent stomach.

After a minute of rest, Rodgerhath felt healthy enough to move again. He looked up and examined the chamber which he was now in. He froze. Lined up against the walls and lying in piles on the floor were dozens of trog warclubs. All were made of crudely carved rough stone and looked unwieldy but immensely heavy.

There were no trogs in the chamber to grab these clubs and Rodgerhath calmed his beating heart. He examined the chamber carefully, although nothing was organized in a manner easy to comprehend with a dwarf's eye, he could tell that the trogs had been into the chamber recently and taken some of them. Clearly, the trogs liked having spares. Rodgerhath nodded in approval. This was something he could understand.

He saw on the other side of the warclub room a tunnel and from it he could feel a breeze hitting his skin. Hope surged within Rodgerhath as he imagined the outside world at its end. He trudged through the warclubs and up the tunnel expecting to see sunlight at its end. However, no such light was forthcoming but there was the sense of a wide expanse ahead. As Rodgerhath neared the end of the tunnel, he saw that he was coming onto a ledge which was overlooking a massive cavern. He could hear talking echoing from below. Keeping low, he moved out of the tunnel onto the ledge and looked below.

The wide open cavern met his eyes and he saw a hundred foot drop. At the other end of the vast chamber was what looked like a stone gate, although "gate" was too grand a term for what was essentially a large boulder pressed against the wall with the letters DOR carved into it. In the centre of the cavern was the trog warboss and several other trogs, one of whom was on the ground moaning and rubbing his head.

"That hurt!" the one on the ground cried. "And it will hurt some more unless you tell me where he went!" the warboss growled. "Where did he go, Nug?"

"I don't know boss, honest! I was by the door as you ordered. I just opened it for a tinkle and as I turned, this mean dwarf pops out of nowhere calls me a "rough-necked, slime-licking, piddle-block-head" and smacked me over the head with this."

He lifted up a plank of curved wood and Rodgerhath recognized it. It was what remained of his beer keg.

"And...?" the warboss asked, expectantly.

"...I can't remember anything else... he hit me very hard."

The warboss struck the kneeling trog on the head.

"Owww!"

"Maybe that will help you remember!"

Two trogs ran out into view resting their clubs on their shoulders.

"We've searched the northern chambers and found no trace of the dwarf."

"Bah! Useless! The lot of you!" the warboss cried.

As the conversation continued below him, Rodgerhath considered his options. He'd have to go back down the stairs the way he had come if he wanted to reach the gate below. He would have to wait until...

"There he is!"

Rodgerhath spun around and saw two angry trogs appear at the entrance to the ledge.

"Get him!"

The brutes charged, clubs ready to swing.

Rodgerhath scrambled to his feet and managed to dodge the first club but he lost his footing... He yelled as he tumbled over the ledge. The Goldenaxe slipped from his grip as he entered freefall.

Chapter Five

It turned out that while there was a hundred foot drop below the ledge, Rodgerhath hadn't actually been standing on a steep cliff. His hungover eyes couldn't see it but there was a rocky slope underneath the ledge which continued all the way to the floor of the cavern.

Rodgerhath hit this slope and the world spun as he rolled down the rocky incline, his limbs and back battered into sore numbness. He twirled and tumbled in this painful manner for what seemed like an eternity before he hit something and halted with a painful jolt.

Reeling from the rolling and this sudden impact, Rodgerhath tried to make sense of his surroundings but his vision was blurred and his eyes couldn't focus on anything.

The whole world still seemed to be spinning. He thought he could hear talking, in fact, he knew there was talking but his ears couldn't make head or tail of what was being said.

Rodgerhath forced himself up and leaned against the stalagmite he had crashed into. Blinking as fast as he could, he tried to restore his vision but all he could see in between blinks was vague surroundings and a shape approaching him.

Adrenaline kicked his eyes back into focus as the shape reached out a hand and grabbed him by the collar.

"Well what have we here?" the trog warboss growled.

Rodgerhath tried grabbing the thumbs and fingers of the trog in attempt to twist and break them, but the warboss' grip was too tight and his fingers were too strong for this to happen.

"The warspoils are mine!"

The warboss lifted his warclub with his free hand.

Rodgerhath began striking the arm holding his collar but the trog didn't even flinch, his hold and grip remained firm and did not yield. Rodgerhath would have died right there, his skull crushed by the stone club of the warboss, but tumbling down a cave slope after drinking enough beer to down three men is not something anyone - man, dwarf or trog - should do.

The contents of Rodgerhath's stomach welled up and he vomited right in the trog chieftain's face who dropped him immediately.

"Ugh!" the warboss recoiled. He dropped his club to use both hands to wipe the puke off his face. Rodgerhath landed on his feet and, not wasting a second, rushed and shoved the mighty trog with both arms. The unbalanced warboss tumbled backwards and tripped over his club.

"Don't just stand there! Get him!" the chief trog commanded as he hit the ground.

The three trogs who had been behind the warboss jumped to attention and raised their clubs.

Rodgerhath glanced around searching for a weapon. He saw the Goldenaxe gleaming next to a nearby stalagmite. He ran over to it and lifted the axe just as the first trog drew into striking range.

The trog swung at Rodgerhath. It was a downward strike and the dwarf easily side-stepped it. Then with an arcing swing of his own, Rodgerhath struck the trog in the ribcage.

The trog's chest collapsed as the axe split through his ribs and ruptured his internal organs. He fell over and hit the ground, the fight taken from him as his rancid soul entered the void.

The second trog was taken aback by Rodgerhath's clean kill but he paused for only a second before bellowing a war cry and charging at the dwarf.

The trog looked as if he were going for a rightward swing and Rodgerhath jumped back as the brute advanced.

But it was a feint.

With surprisingly deft skill, the trog lifted the club above his head and brought it down. Rodgerhath cursed, he should have guessed, trogs always preferred downward strikes. He lifted the Goldenaxe with both arms to block the blow.

And block it, the Goldenaxe did.

The club slammed into the haft of the legendary axe and went no further. Rodgerhath barely felt the strike as the Goldenaxe seemed to absorb all the energy from the blow. He felt the golden weapon hum in his hands with a strange power.

Rodgerhath tilted the shaft and hooked the club with the axe head. He pulled the stone club out of the trog's hands and, bringing the axe back, he struck the brute in the neck.

With a spray of blood, the trog's head came clean off and bounced on the ground just as gravity pulled down the lifeless body to which it had belonged.

The third trog, Nug, upon seeing his two comrades so quickly and brutally taken down by a single hungover dwarf, turned tail to flee.

"Nug!" the warboss bellowed, now back on his feet, "I always knew you were a whelp!" With one hand, the warboss swung his club at Nug's skull. There was a loud crack as Nug's head rolled back and his heavy body struck the ground as his life stopped.

By now, many other trogs had arrived at the scene but they stood back and watched as their chieftain faced Rodgerhath.

"You're mine!" he snarled, "or my name's not Trug the Bear-ripper!"

Rodgerhath readied himself, the warboss Trug was taller and stronger than the last two trogs and he guessed that he was a more aggressive and battle seasoned opponent.

Trug stepped forwards, slowly and deliberately, his muscles loose and relaxed but his eyes focused and fierce. Rodgerhath looked around him quickly, he could see the stone which blocked the exit to the outside world but he wouldn't be able to reach it, let alone move it, before the warboss was on top of him.

He was in this fight and there was only one way out.

The warboss was burning with battle hunger yet he did not charge, instead, he stepped to the side attempting to flank Rodgerhath. The dwarf responded by stepping to the other side and so the two began to circle one another.

As they circled, they drew closer. Trug moved closer out of a raw primal urge to kill the dwarf who had invaded his wardom and Rodgerhath edged closer because the only way out was through.

Then with a sudden yell, Trug swung his heavy warclub. Rodgerhath jumped to the side and swung the Goldenaxe at the trog but the warboss leaned back nimbly dodging the strike.

The trogs erupted with hollering and shouting which split Rodgerhath's already aching head. Rodgerhath was disorientated, pained and angry as a result. The anger and the frustration which come from pain rarely have any suitable outlet at the best of times but at this worst of times Rodgerhath was able to channel them on to one target.

He snarled, catching the trog leader off-guard and leapt at him, the Goldenaxe swinging. Trug had not expected the assault and he was caught flat-footed. He stumbled in his retreat and so was not poised to riposte or dodge an attack and Rodgerhath, even at half his mental strength, saw an opening.

The dwarf struck the trog in his side, the Goldenaxe bit deeply into Trug's ribs and stomach. Next second, Rodgerhath felt Trug's fist meet his face and he span backwards, the axe still in his grip as he rolled from the blow. He felt blood explode from his crunched and broken nose; his vision went blurry as he stumbled backwards and his head throbbed as if it would explode.

Rodgerhath had not seen Trug let go of the club with his left hand and did not have a chance to evade or block the strike. But the warboss was worse for wear, Trug was gasping for air and staggering from Rodgerhath's own strike, blood gushing from his wound.

This blow would have taken down a lesser trog but Trug was the warboss of the White Mountain and was from a long line of brutish chieftains – he was anything but lesser. Gripping his warclub with both hands, Trug roared loudly, breaking the cold silence of the cavern and charged at Rodgerhath, his eyes ablaze with bloodlust as he was possessed by a berserker's rage. Rodgerhath's heart sank in fear.

Trug swung violently, what little form he had was gone as he thrashed at Rodgerhath with all his might and fury. Rodgerhath was in full retreat but he kept control and did not turn his back to the trog as this would have been certain death.

The assault was powerful in its intensity but short in its time. The fast strides, the powerful strikes which never hit home and the quick movements left Trug weaker. His wound tore further as his body ripped itself apart. Lifeblood poured from his already mortal wound and soon he was coughing up the same blood which was gushing from his side.

Then his rage finally failed him.

Trug fell to his knees, his club slipped from his fingers and he coughed up more lifeblood. Still, he kept his head high and from behind he must have looked defiant to his underlings.

Indeed, there was defiance in Trug but his face expressed something more. His eyes looked into Rodgerhath's own and pleaded. They begged for a clean death. An honourable death free from the disgrace and pain of dying outside the battlefield. A death free from the politics of trogs killing and backstabbing each other around his deathbed for the wardom's crown – a death delivered from one warrior to another.

Rodgerhath could see it all in Trug's eyes and he made the slightest nod. Gripping the Goldenaxe with both hands, he charged and raised the legendary weapon high. Trug closed his eyes. With a clean swing the axe went down onto Trug's chest and into his heart. Bone cracked and flesh tore but Trug the Bear-ripper smiled before he rolled over and his spirit fell into oblivion.

As Trug's body fell onto the ground lifeless, Rodgerhath saw the faces in the crowd of trogs change from shock to terror. Rodgerhath took a step towards them and they turned tail and ran howling in fright like beaten dogs. Convinced they would bother him no longer, Rodgerhath turned and walked to the stone gate.

Chapter Six

Flowergem and the rest of the search party looked at the base of the White Mountain. Culbert was right next to the white rock face, he walked up and down sniffing the air. He did this for a few seconds before looking at the cliff and scratching his bald head.

"I don't get it," he said, "the trail ends here."

Goldhelm stepped forwards and examined the ground. "Someone has been here," he said, "but I can't see where he went."

Flowergem felt cold. "He has to be around here somewhere," she said, "maybe he went up the mountain?"

"I'll lead a team up there," Goldhelm said, "Flowergem, you should lead another group around the base. Who will come with me and who will go with Flowergem?"

The group was about to split into halves when there was a dull thud. They heard and felt it, minor as the impact was.

The dwarves went silent and listened, the same noise was heard again but this time it was louder. They could detect where it was coming from now: the rock wall ahead of them where Culbert was still standing.

The thuds continued and Culbert placed his ear to the rock wall to investigate further. The thuds grew stronger, harder and louder until…

Crack!

A golden blade punctured through the white rock inches away from Culbert's face. He fell backwards and crawled back many yards, his eyes wide and his jaw chattering in shock.

The rest of the dwarves readied their weapons and looked to the axe which was chipping the hole to make it bigger. It was extraordinary, the axe was made of gold yet it did not bend or break as it carved through the white stone. The dwarves watched in amazement and then a chorus of dwarven voices exclaimed all at once:

"It's the Goldenaxe!"

"The Goldenaxe!"

"It's real! The Goldenaxe!"

"It's my ale!" Culbert was scrambling to his feet and sniffing the air. "It's my ale! It's Rodgerhath!"

"Please not so loud!" a familiar voice cried.

Everyone went silent.

"I have a terrible headache."

"Husband!" Flowergem rushed towards the head-shaped and sized, gap in the stone.

"Wife!"

Flowergem poked her head through the hole and saw Rodgerhath in front of her. He was drenched with sweat, his nose was broken, blood was running down his face, and he looked exhausted, but he was very much alive. Flowergem pushed her face further through the gap and kissed him.

"My darling, you're hurt!"

"It's only a flesh wound. I'm very thirsty and I need to lie down. But stand back my dear. This "door" will not open for all my shoving and pulling. I need to break it open!"

Flowergem moved from the hole and Rodgerhath set the Goldenaxe to work once more. In ten short minutes, he and the axe had made an opening big enough for him to squeeze through.

Upon stepping into the bright daylight, he was set upon by Flowergem who hugged him tight and Goldhelm who offered a bottle of water and a handkerchief.

Rodgerhath drank deeply from the bottle and sighed with happiness; never had pure water tasted so good. As he wiped the blood off his face, the other dwarves stood around in a wide circle and stared wide-eyed at the Goldenaxe in Rodgerhath's hand. At first, the dwarves held back their curiosity and amazement but after a minute they lost all self-control and unleashed their burning questions.

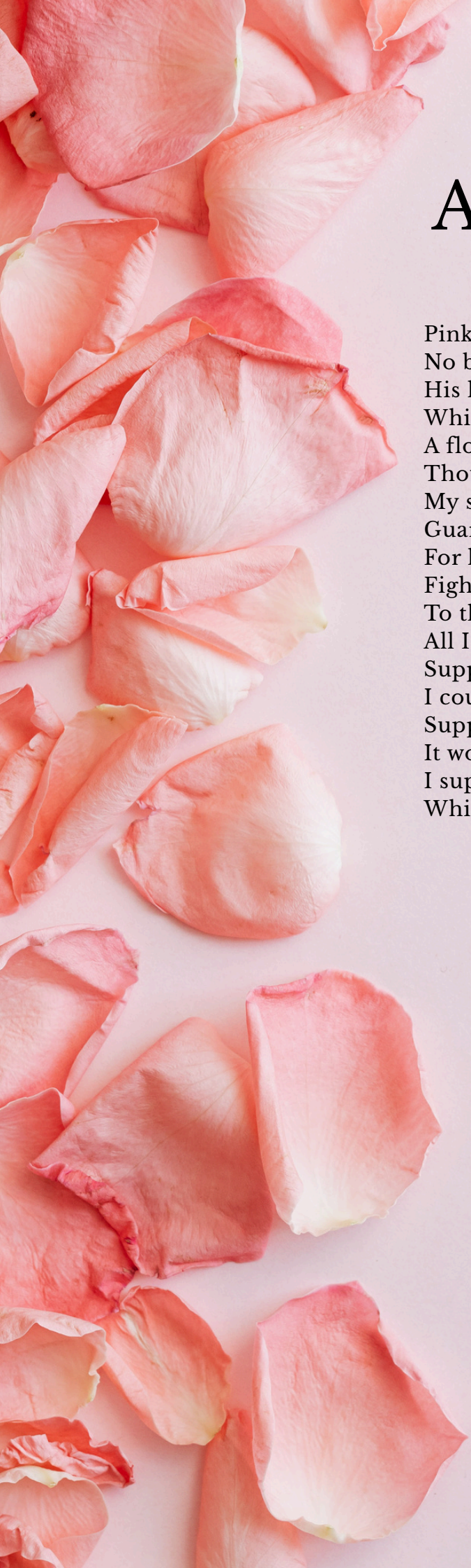
"Is that the Goldenaxe?"

"Where did you get it?"

"How did you get it?"

"Please!" Rodgerhath cried.

The crowd went silent again. "I'll answer all your questions later, I promise. But right now I just want to go home and rest. And then tomorrow…" He paused for dramatic effect and raised the Goldenaxe above his head. "I'll visit Stronghath and show him my new axe!" The End



A Future Grave

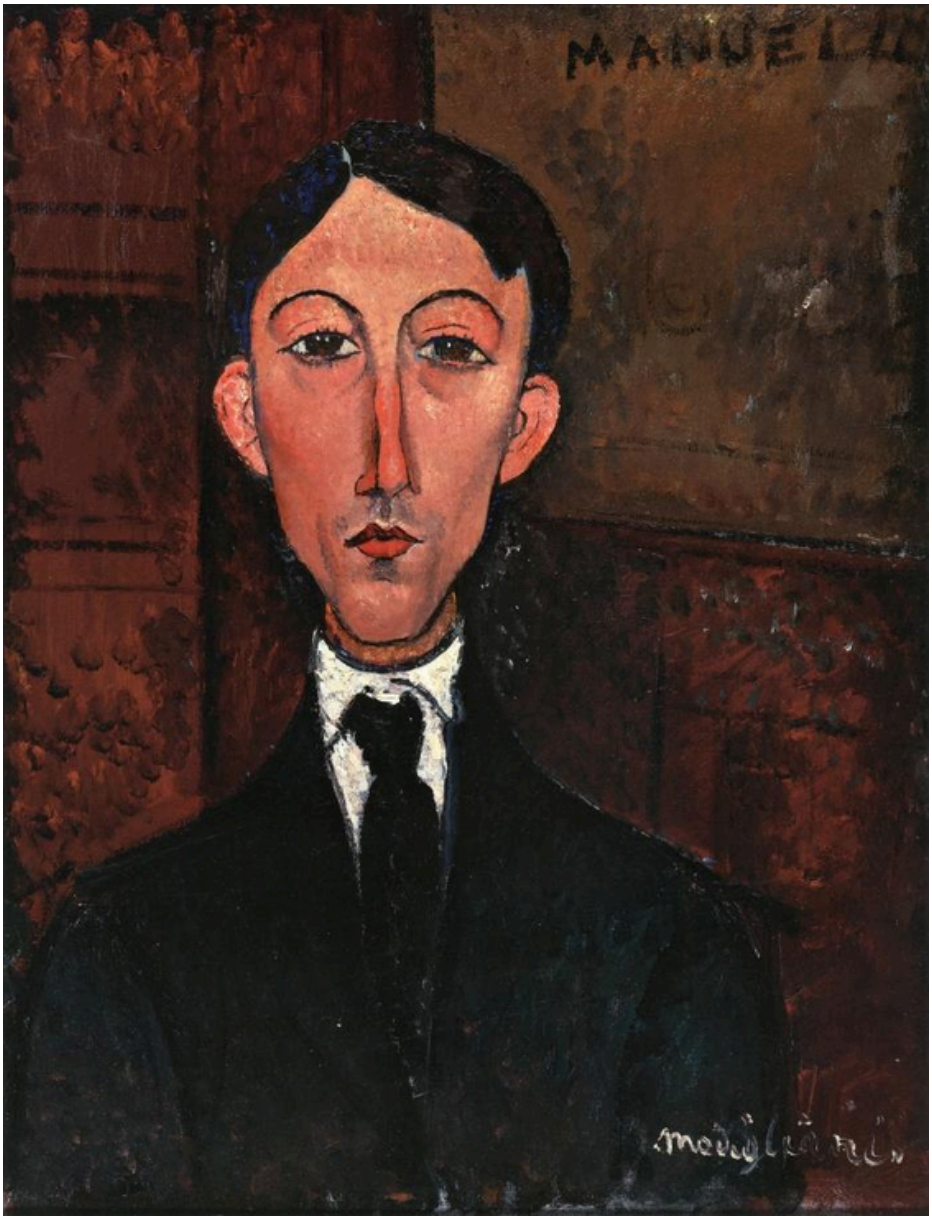
Morgan Svensen

Pink petals fall from a rose,
No better time for contemplation I suppose.
His life was short, only a few decades
Which he spent chasing all kinds of maids.
A flower that bloomed quickly; full of love
Though many foolishly called him a dove.
My singular task in the history of creation:
Guard him from eternal damnation.
For him, I petitioned The Almighty his entire life
Fighting tooth and nail to relieve his strife.
To those who shall stand over his grave and cry
All I can say is that I gave it my best try.
Suppose The Measurer chose mercy for him
I could finally scold him for being so dim.
Suppose he was deemed wicked and cast out
It would be just; he disobeyed without doubt.
I suppose now I should be gentle
While this beautiful flower loses its last petal.

Max Carrados: The Comedy At Fountain Cottage

By Ernest Bramah

Bust of Manuel Humbert
Amedeo Modigliani



Carrados had rung up Mr Carlyle soon after the inquiry agent had reached his office in Bampton Street on a certain morning in April. Mr Carlyle's face at once assumed its most amiable expression as he recognized his friend's voice.
"Yes, Max," he replied, in answer to the call, "I am here and at the top of form, thanks. Glad to know that you are back from Trescoe. Is there—anything?"
"I have a couple of men coming in this evening whom you might like to meet," explained Carrados. "Manoel the Zambesia explorer is one and the other an East-End slum doctor who has seen a few things. Do you care to come round to dinner?"
"Delighted," warbled Mr Carlyle, without a moment's consideration. "Charmed. Your usual hour, Max?" Then the smiling complacence of his face suddenly changed and the wire conveyed an exclamation of annoyance. "I am really very sorry, Max, but I have just remembered that I have an engagement. I fear that I must deny myself after all."
"Is it important?"
"No," admitted Mr Carlyle. "Strictly speaking, it is not in the least important; this is why I feel compelled to keep it. It is only to dine with my niece. They have just got into an absurd doll's house of a villa at Groat's Heath and I had promised to go there this evening."
"Are they particular to a day?"
There was a moment's hesitation before Mr Carlyle replied.
"I am afraid so, now it is fixed," he said. "To you, Max, it will be ridiculous or incomprehensible that a third to dinner—and he only a middle-aged uncle—should make a straw of difference. But I know that in their bijou way it will be a little domestic event to Elsie—an added anxiety in giving the butcher an order, an extra course for dinner, perhaps; a careful drilling of the one diminutive maid-servant, and she is such a charming little woman—eh? Who, Max? No! No! I did not say the maid-servant; if I did it is the fault of this telephone. Elsie is such a delightful little creature that, upon my soul, it would be too bad to fail her now."
"Of course it would, you old humbug," agreed Carrados, with sympathetic laughter in his voice. "Well, come to-morrow instead. I shall be alone."
"Oh, besides, there is a special reason for going, which for the moment I forgot," explained Mr Carlyle, after accepting the invitation. "Elsie wishes for my advice with regard to her next-door neighbour. He is an elderly man of retiring disposition and he makes a practice of throwing kidneys over into her garden."
"Kittens! Throwing kittens?"
"No, no, Max. Kidneys. Stewed k-i-d-n-e-y-s. It is a little difficult to explain plausibly over a badly vibrating telephone, I admit, but that is what Elsie's letter assured me, and she adds that she is in despair."
"At all events it makes the lady quite independent of the butcher, Louis!"
"I have no further particulars, Max. It may be a solitary diurnal offering, or the sky may at times appear to rain kidneys. If it is a mania the symptoms may even have become more pronounced and the man is possibly showering beef-steaks across by this time. I will make full inquiry and let you know."
"Do," assented Carrados, in the same light-hearted spirit. "Mrs Nickleby's neighbourly admirer expressed his feelings by throwing cucumbers, you remember, but this man puts him completely in the shade."
It had not got beyond the proportions of a jest to either of them when they rang off—one of those whimsical occurrences in real life that sound so fantastic in outline. Carrados did not give the matter another thought until the next evening when his friend's arrival revived the subject.
"And the gentleman next door?" he inquired among his greetings. "Did the customary offering arrive while you were there?"
"No," admitted Mr Carlyle, beaming pleasantly upon all the familiar appointments of the room, "it did not, Max. In fact, so diffident has the mysterious philanthropist become, that no one at Fountain Cottage has been able to catch sight of him lately, although I am told that Scamp—Elsie's terrier—betrays a very self-conscious guilt and suspiciously muddy paws every morning."
"Fountain Cottage?"
"That is the name of the toy villa."
"Yes, but Fountain something, Groat's Heath—Fountain Court: wasn't that where Metrobe——?"
"Yes, yes, to be sure, Max. Metrobe the traveller, the writer and scientist——"
"Scientist!"
"Well, he took up spiritualism or something, didn't he? At any rate, he lived at Fountain Court, an old red-brick house in a large neglected garden there, until his death a couple of years ago. Then, as Groat's Heath had suddenly become a popular suburb with a tube railway, a land company acquired the estate, the house was razed to the ground and in a twinkling a colony of Noah's ark villas took its place. There is Metrobe Road here, and Court Crescent there, and Mansion Drive and what not, and Elsie's little place perpetuates another landmark."
"I have Metrobe's last book there," said Carrados, nodding towards a point on his shelves. "In fact he sent me a copy. 'The Flame beyond the Dome' it is called—the queerest farrago of balderdash and metaphysics imaginable. But what about the neighbour, Louis? Did you settle what we might almost term 'his hash'?"
"Oh, he is mad, of course. I advised her to make as little fuss about it as possible, seeing that the man lives next door and might become objectionable, but I framed a note for her to send which will probably have a good effect."
"Is he mad, Louis?"
"Well, I don't say that he is strictly a lunatic, but there is obviously a screw loose somewhere. He may carry indiscriminate benevolence towards Yorkshire terriers to irrational lengths. Or he may be a food specialist with a grievance. In effect he is mad on at least that one point. How else are we to account for the circumstances?"
"I was wondering," replied Carrados thoughtfully.
"You suggest that he really may have a sane object?"
"I suggest it—for the sake of argument. If he has a sane object, what is it?"
"That I leave to you, Max," retorted Mr Carlyle conclusively. "If he has a sane object, pray what is it?"
"For the sake of the argument I will tell you that in half-a-dozen words, Louis," replied Carrados, with good-humoured tolerance. "If he is not mad in the sense which you have defined, the answer stares us in the face. His object is precisely that which he is achieving."
Mr Carlyle looked inquiringly into the placid, unemotional face of his blind friend, as if to read there whether, incredible as it might seem, Max should be taking the thing seriously after all.
"And what is that?" he asked cautiously.
"In the first place he has produced the impression that he is eccentric or irresponsible. That is sometimes useful in itself. Then what else has he done?"
"What else, Max?" replied Mr Carlyle, with some indignation.
"Well, whatever he wishes to achieve by it I can tell you one thing else that he has done. He has so demoralized Scamp with his confounded kidneys that Elsie's neatly arranged flower-beds—and she took Fountain Cottage principally on account of an unusually large garden—are hopelessly devastated. If she keeps the dog up, the garden is invaded night and day by an army of peregrinating feline marauders that scent the booty from afar. He has gained the everlasting annoyance of an otherwise charming neighbour, Max. Can you tell me what he has achieved by that?"
"The everlasting esteem of Scamp probably. Is he a good watch-dog, Louis?"
"Good heavens, Max!" exclaimed Mr Carlyle, coming to his feet as though he had the intention of setting out for Groat's Heath then and there, "is it possible that he is planning a burglary?"
"Do they keep much of value about the house?"
"No," admitted Mr Carlyle, sitting down again with considerable relief. "No, they don't. Bellmark is not particularly well endowed with worldly goods—in fact, between ourselves, Max, Elsie could have done very much better from a strictly social point of view, but he is a thoroughly good fellow and idolizes her. They have no silver worth speaking of, and for the rest—well, just the ordinary petty cash of a frugal young couple."
"Then he probably is not planning a burglary. I confess that the idea did not appeal to me. If it is only that, why should he go to the trouble of preparing this particular succulent dish to throw over his neighbour's ground when cold liver would do quite as well?"
"If it is not only that, why should he go to the trouble, Max?"
"Because by that bait he produces the greatest disturbance of your niece's garden."
"And, if sane, why should he wish to do that?"
"Because in those conditions he can the more easily obliterate his own traces if he trespasses there at nights."
"Well, upon my word, that's drawing a bow at a venture, Max. If it isn't burglary, what motive could the man have for any such

nocturnal perambulation?"
An expression of suave mischief came into Carrados's usually imperturbable face.
"Many imaginable motives surely, Louis. You are a man of the world. Why not to meet a charming little woman——"
"No, by gad!" exclaimed the scandalized uncle warmly; "I decline to consider the remotest possibility of that explanation. Elsie ——"
"Certainly not," interposed Carrados, smothering his quiet laughter. "The maid-servant, of course."
Mr Carlyle reined in his indignation and recovered himself with his usual adroitness.
"But, you know, that is an atrocious libel, Max," he added. "I never said such a thing. However, is it probable?"
"No," admitted Carrados. "I don't think that in the circumstances it is at all probable."
"Then where are we, Max?"
"A little further than we were at the beginning. Very little.... Are you willing to give me a roving commission to investigate?"
"Of course, Max, of course," assented Mr Carlyle heartily. "I—well, as far as I was concerned, I regarded the matter as settled."
Carrados turned to his desk and the ghost of a smile might possibly have lurked about his face. He produced some stationery and indicated it to his visitor.
"You don't mind giving me a line of introduction to your niece?"
"Pleasure," murmured Carlyle, taking up a pen. "What shall I say?"
Carrados took the inquiry in its most literal sense and for reply he dictated the following letter:—
"'My dear Elsie,'—
"If that is the way you usually address her," he parenthesized.
"Quite so," acquiesced Mr Carlyle, writing.
"'The bearer of this is Mr Carrados, of whom I have spoken to you.'
"You have spoken of me to her, I trust, Louis?" he put in.
"I believe that I have casually referred to you," admitted the writer.
"I felt sure you would have done. It makes the rest easier.
"'He is not in the least mad although he frequently does things which to the uninitiated appear more or less eccentric at the moment. I think that you would be quite safe in complying with any suggestion he may make.
"'Your affectionate uncle,
"'Louis Carlyle.'"
He accepted the envelope and put it away in a pocket-book that always seemed extraordinarily thin for the amount of papers it contained.
"I may call there to-morrow," he added.
Neither again referred to the subject during the evening, but when Parkinson came to the library a couple of hours after midnight to know whether he would be required again, he found his master rather deeply immersed in a book and a gap on the shelf where "The Flame beyond the Dome" had formerly stood.
It is not impossible that Mr Carlyle supplemented his brief note of introduction with a more detailed communication that reached his niece by the ordinary postal service at an earlier hour than the other. At all events, when Mr Carrados presented himself at the toy villa on the following afternoon he found Elsie Bellmark suspiciously disposed to accept him and his rather gratuitous intervention among her suburban troubles as a matter of course.
When the car drew up at the bright green wooden gate of Fountain Cottage another visitor, apparently a good-class working man, was standing on the path of the trim front garden, lingering over a reluctant departure. Carrados took sufficient time in alighting to allow the man to pass through the gate before he himself entered. The last exchange of sentences reached his ear.
"I'm sure, marm, you won't find anyone to do the work at less."
"I can quite believe that," replied a very fair young lady who stood nearer the house, "but, you see, we do all the gardening ourselves, thank you."
Carrados made himself known and was taken into the daintily pretty drawing-room that opened on to the lawn behind the house.
"I do not need to ask if you are Mrs Bellmark," he had declared.
"I have Uncle Louis's voice?" she divined readily.
"The niece of his voice, so to speak," he admitted. "Voices mean a great deal to me, Mrs Bellmark."
"In recognizing and identifying people?" she suggested.
"Oh, very much more than that. In recognizing and identifying their moods—their thoughts even. There are subtle lines of trouble and the deep rings of anxious care quite as patent to the ear as to the sharpest eye sometimes."
Elsie Bellmark shot a glance of curiously interested speculation to the face that, in spite of its frank, open bearing, revealed so marvellously little itself.
"If I had any dreadful secret, I think that I should be a little afraid to talk to you, Mr Carrados," she said, with a half-nervous laugh.
"Then please do not have any dreadful secret," he replied, with quite youthful gallantry. "I more than suspect that Louis has given you a very transpontine idea of my tastes. I do not spend all my time tracking murderers to their lairs, Mrs Bellmark, and I have never yet engaged in a hand-to-hand encounter with a band of cut-throats."
"He told us," she declared, the recital lifting her voice into a tone that Carrados vowed to himself was wonderfully thrilling, "about this: He said that you were once in a sort of lonely underground cellar near the river with two desperate men whom you could send to penal servitude. The police, who were to have been there at a certain time, had not arrived, and you were alone. The men had heard that you were blind but they could hardly believe it. They were discussing in whispers which could not be overheard what would be the best thing to do, and they had just agreed that if you really were blind they would risk the attempt to murder you. Then, Louis said, at that very moment you took a pair of scissors from your pocket, and coolly asking them why they did not have a lamp down there, you actually snuffed the candle that stood on the table before you. Is that true?"
Carrados's mind leapt vividly back to the most desperate moment of his existence, but his smile was gently deprecating as he replied:
"I seem to recognize the touch of truth in the inclination to do anything rather than fight," he confessed. "But, although he never suspects it, Louis really sees life through rose-coloured opera glasses. Take the case of your quite commonplace neighbour——"
"That is really what you came about?" she interposed shrewdly.
"Frankly, it is," he replied. "I am more attracted by a turn of the odd and grotesque than by the most elaborate tragedy. The fantastic conceit of throwing stewed kidneys over into a neighbour's garden irresistibly appealed to me. Louis, as I was saying, regards the man in the romantic light of a humanitarian monomaniac or a demented food reformer. I take a more subdued view and I think that his action, when rightly understood, will prove to be something quite obviously natural."
"Of course it is very ridiculous, but all the same it has been desperately annoying," she confessed. "Still, it scarcely matters now. I am only sorry that it should have been the cause of wasting your valuable time, Mr Carrados."
"My valuable time," he replied, "only seems valuable to me when I am, as you would say, wasting it. But is the incident closed? Louis told me that he had drafted you a letter of remonstrance. May I ask if it has been effective?"
Instead of replying at once she got up and walked to the long French window and looked out over the garden where the fruit-trees that had been spared from the older cultivation were rejoicing the eye with the promise of their pink and white profusion.
"I did not send it," she said slowly, turning to her visitor again. "There is something that I did not tell Uncle Louis, because it would only have distressed him without doing any good. We may be leaving here very soon."
"Just when you had begun to get it well in hand?" he said, in some surprise.
"It is a pity, is it not, but one cannot foresee these things. There is no reason why you should not know the cause, since you have interested yourself so far, Mr Carrados. In fact," she added, smiling away the seriousness of the manner into which she had fallen, "I am not at all sure that you do not know already."
He shook his head and disclaimed any such prescience.
"At all events you recognized that I was not exactly light-hearted," she insisted. "Oh, you did not say that I had dark rings under my eyes, I know, but the cap fitted excellently.... It has to do with my husband's business. He is with a firm of architects. It was a little venturesome taking this house—we had been in apartments for two years—but Roy was doing so well with his people and I was so enthusiastic for a garden that we did—scarcely two months ago. Everything seemed quite assured. Then came this thunderbolt. The partners—it is only a small firm, Mr Carrados—required a little more capital in the business. Someone whom they know is willing to put in two thousand pounds, but he

stipulates for a post with them as well. He, like my husband, is a draughtsman. There is no need for the services of both and so ——"
"Is it settled?"
"In effect, it is. They are as nice as can be about it but that does not alter the facts. They declare that they would rather have Roy than the new man and they have definitely offered to retain him if he can bring in even one thousand pounds. I suppose they have some sort of compunction about turning him adrift, for they have asked him to think it over and let them know on Monday. Of course, that is the end of it. It may be—I don't know—I don't like to think, how long before Roy gets another position equally good. We must endeavour to get this house off our hands and creep back to our three rooms. It is ... luck."
Carrados had been listening to her wonderfully musical voice as another man might have been drawn irresistibly to watch the piquant charm of her delicate face.
"Yes," he assented, almost to himself, "it is that strange, inexplicable grouping of men and things that, under one name or another, we all confess ... just luck."
"Of course you will not mention this to Uncle Louis yet, Mr Carrados?"
"If you do not wish it, certainly not."
"I am sure that it would distress him. He is so soft-hearted, so kind, in everything. Do you know, I found out that he had had an invitation to dine somewhere and meet some quite important people on Tuesday. Yet he came here instead, although most other men would have cried off, just because he knew that we small people would have been disappointed."
"Well, you can't expect me to see any self-denial in that," exclaimed Carrados. "Why, I was one of them myself."
Elsie Bellmark laughed outright at the expressive disgust of his tone.
"I had no idea of that," she said. "Then there is another reason. Uncle is not very well off, yet if he knew how Roy was situated he would make an effort to arrange matters. He would, I am sure, even borrow himself in order to lend us the money. That is a thing Roy and I are quite agreed on. We will go back; we will go under, if it is to be; but we will not borrow money, not even from Uncle Louis."
Once, subsequently, Carrados suddenly asked Mr Carlyle whether he had ever heard a woman's voice roll like a celestial kettle-drum. The professional gentleman was vastly amused by the comparison, but he admitted that he had not.
"So that, you see," concluded Mrs Bellmark, "there is really nothing to be done."
"Oh, quite so; I am sure that you are right," assented her visitor readily. "But in the meanwhile I do not see why the annoyance of your next-door neighbour should be permitted to go on."
"Of course: I have not told you that, and I could not explain it to uncle," she said. "I am anxious not to do anything to put him out because I have a hope—rather a faint one, certainly—that the man may be willing to take over this house."
It would be incorrect to say that Carrados pricked up his ears—if that curious phenomenon has any physical manifestation—for the sympathetic expression of his face did not vary a fraction. But into his mind there came a gleam such as might inspire a patient digger who sees the first speck of gold that justifies his faith in an unlikely claim.
"Oh," he said, quite conversationally, "is there a chance of that?"
"He undoubtedly did want it. It is very curious in a way. A few weeks ago, before we were really settled, he came one afternoon, saying he had heard that this house was to be let. Of course I told him that he was too late, that we had already taken it for three years."
"You were the first tenants?"
"Yes. The house was scarcely ready when we signed the agreement. Then this Mr Johns, or Jones—I am not sure which he said—went on in a rather extraordinary way to persuade me to sublet it to him. He said that the house was dear and I could get plenty, more convenient, at less rent, and it was unhealthy, and the drains were bad, and that we should be pestered by tramps and it was just the sort of house that burglars picked on, only he had taken a sort of fancy to it and he would give me a fifty-pound premium for the term."
"Did he explain the motive for this rather eccentric partiality?"
"I don't imagine that he did. He repeated several times that he was a queer old fellow with his whims and fancies and that they often cost him dear."
"I think we all know that sort of old fellow," said Carrados. "It must have been rather entertaining for you, Mrs Bellmark."
"Yes, I suppose it was," she admitted. "The next thing we knew of him was that he had taken the other house as soon as it was finished."
"Then he would scarcely require this?"
"I am afraid not." It was obvious that the situation was not disposed of. "But he seems to have so little furniture there and to live so solitarily," she explained, "that we have even wondered whether he might not be there merely as a sort of caretaker."
"And you have never heard where he came from or who he is?"
"Only what the milkman told my servant—our chief source of local information, Mr Carrados. He declares that the man used to be the butler at a large house that stood here formerly, Fountain Court, and that his name is neither Johns nor Jones. But very likely it is all a mistake."
"If not, he is certainly attached to the soil," was her visitor's rejoinder. "And, apropos of that, will you show me over your garden before I go, Mrs Bellmark?"
"With pleasure," she assented, rising also. "I will ring now and then I can offer you tea when we have been round. That is, if you ——?"
"Thank you, I do," he replied. "And would you allow my man to go through into the garden—in case I require him?"
"Oh, certainly. You must tell me just what you want without thinking it necessary to ask permission, Mr Carrados," she said, with a pretty air of protection. "Shall Amy take a message?"
He acquiesced and turned to the servant who had appeared in response to the bell.
"Will you go to the car and tell my man—Parkinson—that I require him here. Say that he can bring his book; he will understand."
"Yes, sir."
They stepped out through the French window and sauntered across the lawn. Before they had reached the other side Parkinson reported himself.
"You had better stay here," said his master, indicating the sward generally. "Mrs Bellmark will allow you to bring out a chair from the drawing-room."
"Thank you, sir; there is a rustic seat already provided," replied Parkinson.
He sat down with his back to the houses and opened the book that he had brought. Let in among its pages was an ingeniously contrived mirror.
When their promenade again brought them near the rustic seat Carrados dropped a few steps behind.
"He is watching you from one of the upper rooms, sir," fell from Parkinson's lips as he sat there without raising his eyes from the page before him.
The blind man caught up to his hostess again.
"You intended this lawn for croquet?" he asked.
"No; not specially. It is too small, isn't it?"
"Not necessarily. I think it is in about the proportion of four by five all right. Given that, size does not really matter for an unsophisticated game."
To settle the point he began to pace the plot of ground, across and then lengthways. Next, apparently dissatisfied with this rough measurement, he applied himself to marking it off more exactly by means of his walking-stick. Elsie Bellmark was by no means dull but the action sprang so naturally from the conversation that it did not occur to her to look for any deeper motive.
"He has got a pair of field-glasses and is now at the window," communicated Parkinson.
"I am going out of sight," was the equally quiet response. "If he becomes more anxious tell me afterwards."
"It is quite all right," he reported, returning to Mrs Bellmark with the satisfaction of bringing agreeable news. "It should make a splendid little ground, but you may have to level up a few dips after the earth has set."
A chance reference to the kitchen garden by the visitor took them to a more distant corner of the enclosure where the rear of Fountain Cottage cut off the view from the next house windows.
"We decided on this part for vegetables because it does not really belong to the garden proper," she explained. "When they build farther on this side we shall have to give it up very soon. And it would be a pity if it was all in flowers."
With the admirable spirit of the ordinary Englishwoman, she spoke of the future as if there was no cloud to obscure its prosperous course. She had frankly declared their position to her uncle's best friend because in the circumstances it had seemed to be the simplest and most straightforward thing to do; beyond that, there was no need to whine about it.

"It is a large garden," remarked Carrados. "And you really do all the work of it yourselves?"
"Yes; I think that is half the fun of a garden. Roy is out here early and late and he does all the hard work. But how did you know? Did uncle tell you?"
"No; you told me yourself."
"I? Really?"
"Indirectly. You were scorning the proffered services of a horticultural mercenary at the moment of my arrival."
"Oh, I remember," she laughed. "It was Irons, of course. He is a great nuisance, he is so stupidly persistent. For some weeks now he has been coming time after time, trying to persuade me to engage him. Once when we were all out he had actually got into the garden and was on the point of beginning work when I returned. He said he saw the milkmen and the grocers leaving samples at the door so he thought that he would too!"
"A practical jester evidently. Is Mr Irons a local character?"
"He said that he knew the ground and the conditions round about here better than anyone else in Groat's Heath," she replied.
"Modesty is not among Mr Irons's handicaps. He said that he—— How curious!"
"What is, Mrs Bellmark?"
"I never connected the two men before, but he said that he had been gardener at Fountain Court for seven years."
"Another family retainer who is evidently attached to the soil."
"At all events they have not prospered equally, for while Mr Johns seems able to take a nice house, poor Irons is willing to work for half-a-crown a day, and I am told that all the other men charge four shillings."
They had paced the boundaries of the kitchen garden, and as there was nothing more to be shown Elsie Bellmark led the way back to the drawing-room. Parkinson was still engrossed in his book, the only change being that his back was now turned towards the high paling of clinker-built oak that separated the two gardens.
"I will speak to my man," said Carrados, turning aside.
"He hurried down and is looking through the fence, sir," reported the watcher.
"That will do then. You can return to the car."
"I wonder if you would allow me to send you a small hawthorn-tree?" inquired Carrados among his felicitations over the teacups five minutes later. "I think it ought to be in every garden."
"Thank you—but is it worth while?" replied Mrs Bellmark, with a touch of restraint. As far as mere words went she had been willing to ignore the menace of the future, but in the circumstances the offer seemed singularly inept and she began to suspect that outside his peculiar gifts the wonderful Mr Carrados might be a little bit obtuse after all.
"Yes; I think it is," he replied, with quiet assurance.
"In spite of——?"
"I am not forgetting that unless your husband is prepared on Monday next to invest one thousand pounds you contemplate leaving here."
"Then I do not understand it, Mr Carrados."
"And I am unable to explain as yet. But I brought you a note from Louis Carlyle, Mrs Bellmark. You only glanced at it. Will you do me the favour of reading me the last paragraph?"
She picked up the letter from the table where it lay and complied with cheerful good-humour.
"There is some suggestion that you want me to accede to," she guessed cunningly when she had read the last few words.
"There are some three suggestions which I hope you will accede to," he replied. "In the first place I want you to write to Mr Johns next door—let him get the letter to-night—inquiring whether he is still disposed to take this house."
"I had thought of doing that shortly."
"Then that is all right. Besides, he will ultimately decline."
"Oh," she exclaimed—it would be difficult to say whether with relief or disappointment—"do you think so? Then why——"
"To keep him quiet in the meantime. Next I should like you to send a little note to Mr Irons—your maid could deliver it also to-night, I dare say?"
"Irons! Irons the gardener?"
"Yes," apologetically. "Only a line or two, you know. Just saying that, after all, if he cares to come on Monday you can find him a few days' work."
"But in any circumstances I don't want him."
"No; I can quite believe that you could do better. Still, it doesn't matter, as he won't come, Mrs Bellmark; not for half-a-crown a day, believe me. But the thought will tend to make Mr Irons less restive also. Lastly, will you persuade your husband not to decline his firm's offer until Monday?"
"Very well, Mr Carrados," she said, after a moment's consideration. "You are Uncle Louis's friend and therefore our friend. I will do what you ask."
"Thank you," said Carrados. "I shall endeavour not to disappoint you."
"I shall not be disappointed because I have not dared to hope. And I have nothing to expect because I am still completely in the dark."
"I have been there for nearly twenty years, Mrs Bellmark."
"Oh, I am sorry!" she cried impulsively.
"So am I—occasionally," he replied. "Good-bye, Mrs Bellmark. You will hear from me shortly, I hope. About the hawthorn, you know."
It was, indeed, in something less than forty-eight hours that she heard from him again. When Bellmark returned to his toy villa early on Saturday afternoon Elsie met him almost at the gate with a telegram in her hand.
"I really think, Roy, that everyone we have to do with here goes mad," she exclaimed, in tragi-humorous despair. "First it was Mr Johns or Jones—if he is Johns or Jones—and then Irons who wanted to work here for half of what he could get at heaps of places about, and now just look at this wire that came from Mr Carrados half-an-hour ago."
This was the message that he read:
Please procure sardine tin opener mariner's compass and bottle of champagne. Shall arrive 6.45 bringing Crataegus Coccinea.—Carrados.
"Could anything be more absurd?" she demanded.
"Sounds as though it was in code," speculated her husband.
"Who's the foreign gentleman he's bringing?"
"Oh, that's a kind of special hawthorn—I looked it up. But a bottle of champagne, and a compass, and a sardine tin opener! What possible connexion is there between them?"
"A very resourceful man might uncork a bottle of champagne with a sardine tin opener," he suggested.
"And find his way home afterwards by means of a mariner's compass?" she retorted. "No, Roy dear, you are not a sleuth-hound. We had better have our lunch."
They lunched, but if the subject of Carrados had been tabooed the meal would have been a silent one.
"I have a compass on an old watch-chain somewhere," volunteered Bellmark.
"And I have a tin opener in the form of a bull's head," contributed Elsie.
"But we have no champagne, I suppose?"
"How could we have, Roy? We never have had any. Shall you mind going down to the shops for a bottle?"
"You really think that we ought?"
"Of course we must, Roy. We don't know what mightn't happen if we didn't. Uncle Louis said that they once failed to stop a jewel robbery because the jeweller neglected to wipe his shoes on the shop doormat, as Mr Carrados had told him to do. Suppose Johns is a desperate anarchist and he succeeded in blowing up Buckingham Palace because we——"
"All right. A small bottle, eh?"
"No. A large one. Quite a large one. Don't you see how exciting it is becoming?"
"If you are excited already you don't need much champagne," argued her husband.
Nevertheless he strolled down to the leading wine-shop after lunch and returned with his purchase modestly draped in the light summer overcoat that he carried on his arm. Elsie Bellmark, who had quite abandoned her previous unconcern, in the conviction that "something was going to happen," spent the longest afternoon that she could remember, and even Bellmark, in spite of his continual adjurations to her to "look at the matter logically," smoked five cigarettes in place of his usual Saturday afternoon pipe and neglected to do any gardening.
At exactly six-forty-five a motor car was heard approaching. Elsie made a desperate rally to become the self-possessed hostess again. Bellmark was favourably impressed by such marked punctuality. Then a Regent Street delivery van bowled past their window and Elsie almost wept.
The suspense was not long, however. Less than five minutes later another vehicle raised the dust of the quiet suburban road, and this time a private car stopped at their gate.
"Can you see any policemen inside?" whispered Elsie.
Parkinson got down and opening the door took out a small tree which he carried up to the porch and there deposited. Carrados followed.

"At all events there isn't much wrong," said Bellmark. "He's smiling all the time."
"No, it isn't really a smile," explained Elsie; "it's his normal expression."
She went out into the hall just as the front door was opened.
"It is the 'Scarlet-fruited thorn' of North America," Bellmark heard the visitor remarking. "Both the flowers and the berries are wonderfully good. Do you think that you would permit me to choose the spot for it, Mrs Bellmark?"
Bellmark joined them in the hall and was introduced.
"We mustn't waste any time," he suggested. "There is very little light left."
"True," agreed Carrados. "And Coccinea requires deep digging."
They walked through the house, and turning to the right passed into the region of the vegetable garden. Carrados and Elsie led the way, the blind man carrying the tree, while Bellmark went to his outhouse for the required tools.
"We will direct our operations from here," said Carrados, when they were half-way along the walk. "You told me of a thin iron pipe that you had traced to somewhere in the middle of the garden. We must locate the end of it exactly."
"My rosary!" sighed Elsie, with premonition of disaster, when she had determined the spot as exactly as she could. "Oh, Mr Carrados!"
"I am sorry, but it might be worse," said Carrados inflexibly. "We only require to find the elbow-joint. Mr Bellmark will investigate with as little disturbance as possible."
For five minutes Bellmark made trials with a pointed iron. Then he cleared away the soil of a small circle and at about a foot deep exposed a broken inch pipe.
"The fountain," announced Carrados, when he had examined it.
"You have the compass, Mr Bellmark?"
"Rather a small one," admitted Bellmark.
"Never mind, you are a mathematician. I want you to strike a line due east."
The reel and cord came into play and an adjustment was finally made from the broken pipe to a position across the vegetable garden.
"Now a point nine yards, nine feet and nine inches along it."
"My onion bed!" cried Elsie tragically.
"Yes; it is really serious this time," agreed Carrados. "I want a hole a yard across, digging here. May we proceed?"
Elsie remembered the words of her uncle's letter—or what she imagined to be his letter—and possibly the preamble of selecting the spot had impressed her.
"Yes, I suppose so. Unless," she added hopefully, "the turnip bed will do instead? They are not sown yet."
"I am afraid that nowhere else in the garden will do," replied Carrados.
Bellmark delineated the space and began to dig. After clearing to about a foot deep he paused.
"About deep enough, Mr Carrados?" he inquired.
"Oh, dear no," replied the blind man.
"I am two feet down," presently reported the digger.
"Deeper!" was the uncompromising response.
Another six inches were added and Bellmark stopped to rest.
"A little more and it won't matter which way up we plant Coccinea," he remarked.
"That is the depth we are aiming for," replied Carrados.
Elsie and her husband exchanged glances. Then Bellmark drove his spade through another layer of earth.
"Three feet," he announced, when he had cleared it.
Carrados advanced to the very edge of the opening.
"I think that if you would loosen another six inches with the fork we might consider the ground prepared," he decided.
Bellmark changed his tools and began to break up the soil. Presently the steel prongs grated on some obstruction.
"Gently," directed the blind watcher. "I think you will find a half-pound cocoa tin at the end of your fork."
"Well, how on earth you spotted that——!" was wrung from Bellmark admiringly, as he cleared away the encrusting earth.
"But I believe you are about right." He threw up the object to his wife, who was risking a catastrophe in her eagerness to miss no detail. "Anything in it besides soil, Elsie?"
"She cannot open it yet," remarked Carrados. "It is soldered down."
"Oh, I say," protested Bellmark.
"It is perfectly correct, Roy. The lid is soldered on."
They looked at each other in varying degrees of wonder and speculation. Only Carrados seemed quite untouched.
"Now we may as well replace the earth," he remarked.
"Fill it all up again?" asked Bellmark.
"Yes; we have provided a thoroughly disintegrated subsoil. That is the great thing. A depth of six inches is sufficient merely for the roots."
There was only one remark passed during the operation.
"I think I should plant the tree just over where the tin was," Carrados suggested. "You might like to mark the exact spot." And there the hawthorn was placed.
Bellmark, usually the most careful and methodical of men, left the tools where they were, in spite of a threatening shower.
Strangely silent, Elsie led the way back to the house and taking the men into the drawing-room switched on the light.
"I think you have a tin opener, Mrs Bellmark?"
Elsie, who had been waiting for him to speak, almost jumped at the simple inquiry. Then she went into the next room and returned with the bull-headed utensil.
"Here it is," she said, in a voice that would have amused her at any other time.
"Mr Bellmark will perhaps disclose our find."
Bellmark put the soily tin down on Elsie's best table-cover without eliciting a word of reproach, grasped it firmly with his left hand, and worked the opener round the top.
"Only paper!" he exclaimed, and without touching the contents he passed the tin into Carrados's hands.
The blind man dexterously twirled out a little roll that crinkled pleasantly to the ear, and began counting the leaves with a steady finger.
"They're bank-notes!" whispered Elsie in an awestruck voice. She caught sight of a further detail. "Bank-notes for a hundred pounds each. And there are dozens of them!"
"Fifty, there should be," dropped Carrados between his figures.
"Twenty-five, twenty-six——"
"Good God," murmured Bellmark; "that's five thousand pounds!"
"Fifty," concluded Carrados, straightening the edges of the sheaf.
"It is always satisfactory to find that one's calculations are exact."
He detached the upper ten notes and held them out. "Mrs Bellmark, will you accept one thousand pounds as a full legal discharge of any claim that you may have on this property?"
"Me—I?" she stammered. "But I have no right to any in any circumstances. It has nothing to do with us."
"You have an unassailable moral right to a fair proportion, because without you the real owners would never have seen a penny of it. As regards your legal right"—he took out the thin pocket-book and extracting a business-looking paper spread it open on the table before them—"here is a document that concedes it. 'In consideration of the valuable services rendered by Elsie Bellmark, etc., etc., in causing to be discovered and voluntarily surrendering the sum of five thousand pounds deposited and not relinquished by Alexis Metrobe, late of, etc., etc., deceased, Messrs Binstead & Polegate, solicitors, of 77a Bedford Row, acting on behalf of the administrator and next-of-kin of the said etc., etc., do hereby'—well, that's what they do. Signed, witnessed and stamped at Somerset House."
"I suppose I shall wake presently," said Elsie dreamily.
"It was for this moment that I ventured to suggest the third requirement necessary to bring our enterprise to a successful end," said Carrados.
"Oh, how thoughtful of you!" cried Elsie. "Roy, the champagne."
Five minutes later Carrados was explaining to a small but enthralled audience.
"The late Alexis Metrobe was a man of peculiar character. After seeing a good deal of the world and being many things, he finally embraced spiritualism, and in common with some of its most pronounced adherents he thenceforward abandoned what we should call 'the common-sense view.'
"A few years ago, by the collation of the Book of Revelations, a set of Zadkiel's Almanacs, and the complete works of Mrs Mary Baker Eddy, Metrobe discovered that the end of the world would take place on the tenth of October 1910. It therefore became a matter of urgent importance in his mind to ensure pecuniary provision for himself for the time after the catastrophe had taken place."
"I don't understand," interrupted Elsie. "Did he expect to survive it?"
"You cannot understand, Mrs Bellmark, because it is fundamentally incomprehensible. We can only accept the fact by the light of cases which occasionally obtain prominence. Metrobe did not expect to survive, but he was firmly convinced that the currency of this world would be equally useful in the spirit-land into which he expected to pass. This view was encouraged by a lady medium at whose feet he sat. She kindly offered to transmit

to his banking account in the Hereafter, without making any charge whatever, any sum that he cared to put into her hands for the purpose. Metrobe accepted the idea but not the offer. His plan was to deposit a considerable amount in a spot of which he alone had knowledge, so that he could come and help himself to it as required."
"But if the world had come to an end——?"
"Only the material world, you must understand, Mrs Bellmark. The spirit world, its exact impalpable counterpart, would continue as before and Metrobe's hoard would be spiritually intact and available. That is the prologue.
"About a month ago there appeared a certain advertisement in a good many papers. I noticed it at the time and three days ago I had only to refer to my files to put my hand on it at once. It reads:
"'Alexis Metrobe. Any servant or personal attendant of the late Alexis Metrobe of Fountain Court, Groat's Heath, possessing special knowledge of his habits and movements may hear of something advantageous on applying to Binstead & Polegate, 77a Bedford Row, W.C.'
"The solicitors had, in fact, discovered that five thousand pounds' worth of securities had been realized early in 1910. They readily ascertained that Metrobe had drawn that amount in gold out of his bank immediately after, and there the trace ended. He died six months later. There was no hoard of gold and not a shred of paper to show where it had gone, yet Metrobe lived very simply within his income. The house had meanwhile been demolished but there was no hint or whisper of any lucky find.
"Two inquirers presented themselves at 77a Bedford Row. They were informed of the circumstances and offered a reward, varying according to the results, for information that would lead to the recovery of the money. They are both described as thoughtful, slow-spoken men. Each heard the story, shook his head, and departed. The first caller proved to be John Foster, the ex-butler. On the following day Mr Irons, formerly gardener at the Court, was the applicant.
"I must now divert your attention into a side track. In the summer of 1910 Metrobe published a curious work entitled 'The Flame beyond the Dome.' In the main it is an eschatological treatise, but at the end he tacked on an epilogue, which he called 'The Fable of the Chameleon.' It is even more curious than the rest and with reason, for under the guise of a speculative essay he gives a cryptic account of the circumstances of the five thousand pounds and, what is more important, details the exact particulars of its disposal. His reason for so doing is characteristic of the man. He was conscious by experience that he possessed an utterly treacherous memory, and having had occasion to move the treasure from one spot to another he feared that when the time came his bemuddled shade would be unable to locate it. For future reference, therefore, he embodied the details in his book, and to make sure that plenty of copies should be in existence he circulated it by the only means in his power—in other words, he gave a volume to everyone he knew and to a good many people whom he didn't.
"So far I have dealt with actualities. The final details are partly speculative but they are essentially correct. Metrobe conveyed his gold to Fountain Court, obtained a stout oak coffer for it, and selected a spot west of the fountain. He chose a favourable occasion for burying it, but by some mischance Irons came on the scene. Metrobe explained the incident by declaring that he was burying a favourite parrot. Irons thought nothing particular about it then, although he related the fact to the butler, and to others, in evidence of the general belief that 'the old cock was quite barmy.' But Metrobe himself was much disturbed by the accident. A few days later he dug up the box. In pursuance of his new plan he carried his gold to the Bank of England and changed it into these notes. Then transferring the venue to one due east of the fountain, he buried them in this tin, satisfied that the small space it occupied would baffle the search of anyone not in possession of the exact location."
"But, I say!" exclaimed Mr Bellmark. "Gold might remain gold, but what imaginable use could be made of bank-notes after the end of the world?"
"That is a point of view, no doubt. But Metrobe, in spite of his foreign name, was a thorough Englishman. The world might come to an end, but he was satisfied that somehow the Bank of England would ride through it all right. I only suggest that. There is much that we can only guess."
"That is all there is to know, Mr Carrados?"
"Yes. Everything comes to an end, Mrs Bellmark. I sent my car away to call for me at eight. Eight has struck. That is Harris announcing his arrival."

He stood up, but embarrassment and indecision marked the looks and movements of the other two.
"How can we possibly take all this money, though?" murmured Elsie, in painful uncertainty. "It is entirely your undertaking, Mr Carrados. It is the merest fiction bringing me into it at all."
"Perhaps in the circumstances," suggested Bellmark nervously —"you remember the circumstances, Elsie?—Mr Carrados would be willing to regard it as a loan——"
"No, no!" cried Elsie impulsively. "There must be no half measures. We know that a thousand pounds would be nothing to Mr Carrados, and he knows that a thousand pounds are everything to us." Her voice reminded the blind man of the candle-snuffing recital. "We will take this great gift, Mr Carrados, quite freely, and we will not spoil the generous satisfaction that you must have in doing a wonderful and a splendid service by trying to hedge our obligation."
"But what can we ever do to thank Mr Carrados?" faltered Bellmark mundanely.
"Nothing," said Elsie simply. "That is it."
"But I think that Mrs Bellmark has quite solved that," interposed Carrados.

Beyond Romantic Love

By Henry Martin

The Lovers Pierre-Auguste Renoir

Henry Martin is an anonymous blogger and Substack writer who has spent nearly five years writing primarily on law-related topics, including political lawfare, legal and historical analysis, and, on occasion, sociology and social phenomena. He is also a published author with Imperium Press.

His interest in this subject developed through both the toxicity and apparent pointlessness of much online dating discourse, as well as through observing the relationships—or lack thereof—among friends and family. In particular, he became interested in the recurring phenomenon whereby individuals fall in love, only to find themselves unable to tolerate one another a few months later.

Links to his Substack can be found below, where he explores a range of topics spanning sociology from a legal perspective, as well as lawfare and legal history

https://substack.com/@reactionaryreadinglaw171
https://x.com/LawReading
https://www.imperiumpress.org/shop/practical-guides-lawfare/

Today, the layperson is unable to describe what love is beyond referring to it as a feeling.

Describing love is essential for understanding it, and understanding love is essential for experiencing it in the higher form in which it is intended to be enjoyed.

Relationships of all kinds must, to varying degrees, be based on love of one type or another.

Traditionally, love has been understood as a multi-faceted concept, comprising different types that are directed towards different people depending on context. The love a man gives to his wife is different from the love given to his brothers-in-arms; yet, despite the differing
contexts, love is still shared.

Relegating the love that Achilles and Patroclus had for one another to mere friendship — or, even worse, suggesting that their love was part of a homosexual relationship — is an abominable claim. It fails to understand love as anything more than something profane.

Reducing love to a form of pleasure, a feeling without any higher spiritual function.

Likewise, understanding love merely as a biochemical reaction occurring to ensure optimal reproductive choices reduces man to a creature with no higher purpose than reproduction.

Yet this has become the common understanding of love: that it is the feeling produced by a person's relationship — normally with another person — which makes that other person happy.

In modern thought, this often centres on sexual gratification and passion without any sense of divine origin. Such an understanding renders love fragile and shallow, dependent upon circumstance and the moods and whims of others.

Types of love

Throughout the ancient world, there has been a complex understanding of love, giving it many attributes and natures depending on context. This ranges from possessive mania, which almost has the effect of bewitching them into madness and causing them to do anything to satisfy that mania, often described as love with divine origins. In myth and art, this is shown through characters like Romeo and Juliet, Anthony and Cleopatra, or the myth of Orpheus. Which have the same theme of lovers being driven to extraordinary feats that end in tragedy.

On the other hand, agape is a more centred type of love that can best be described as wanting the good of a person for its own sake. This was seen in ancient Greek philosophy as the highest form of love, and it is also emphasised as such in Christian traditions.

In the Greco-Roman tradition, and more broadly across the pagan world, the different types of love were given to and applied to varying degrees depending on context. Within the Greek philosophical tradition, philia was generally a gendered type of love that was considered to exist primarily between men, normally noble men.

There is something to be said for this in that the idea of sisterly love is not often comparable to the brotherly kind seen with Achilles and Patroclus, the Inklings, or the Brothers Grimm. It is not something that appears frequently in historical or mythological contexts, other than within formal sisterhoods such as religious orders.

Within evolutionary psychology, it is often argued that women are incapable of loyalty and love to the extent that men are. Evidence often cited includes genetic considerations, claims about higher rates of infidelity, and historical examples in which women were willing to become war brides or switch sides during wars for their own safety.

Even so, I am not convinced that women are incapable of sisterly love, or philia, in a way comparable to men. Philia among women will naturally be different from that among men because of physiological, sociological and psychological differences. Even though it may take different forms, philia is still recognisable as such. The loyalty within it is so great that it becomes transcendent, going beyond ordinary human needs and material things.

A practical example of this is that philia can be shown through expressing loyalty by suffering for one's brother. The act of suffering for them, or the willingness to do so, is what elevates the relationship beyond the merely material friendship.

It seems that the reason brotherly love philia appears more commonly in mythology and literature is that women have fewer causes to suffer for their sisters in such clear ways.

Through childbirth, women suffer for their children, but that is storge (natural, affectionate, and familial love), not philia.

For the most part, love in all its forms can be a choice, something that can be given or received. Even beyond more reciprocal types of love, such as storge and Eros, love, for the most part, can be a conscious decision that a person makes towards others. Whether it is a passionate devotion towards another, expressing desire (eros), loyalty or self-love (philautia), love is a learned skill that is built over time.

Love makes the world go round

Greco-Roman

Properly understood by the Greeks and Romans, and later by the Christians, ordered love forms the bedrock of society and enables moral development. As explained by Plato, agape enables selfless behaviour towards others, fostering compassion and ethical conduct that transcends the self (Symposium, 210a–212b). Philia, in turn, creates the bonds of friendship and trust that allow a society to become a high-trust community, where cooperation and commerce can take place even without the constant guarantee of the state, as discussed in Nicomachean Ethics (VIII.1, 1155a3–5). At the same time, eros and philautia create a drive towards beauty and excellence, inspiring the creation of beautiful works of art and culture, a theme also reflected in Moralia (495D–496A). Social cohesion is further strengthened through the loyalties between individuals, particularly within the family, where the bonds between parents and children give rise to a sense of belonging and shared identity that allows society to exist as a unit that transcends the individual.

Forms of love, such as storge and the devoted care within families, enable stability, ensuring that society can reproduce itself not only biologically but also morally and culturally across generations, a point emphasised by Anne Carson (1986, p. 16).

Christian

Broadly, Christian love works as an enabling factor for human cooperation. Though the Christian understanding of love is not as broad as that of the Greco-Roman world. It centres on agape and the means of expressing it through ordered love, ordo amoris. Harmonic or ordered love in the Christian tradition focuses primarily on agape, broadly performing the same function as Greco-Roman ideas of ordered love, in that it enables a society to flourish without excessive interference from the state, because this love creates high-trust societies.

The Christian understanding of ordered love gives less importance to eros and other forms of romantic or sexual desire. This appears to be because Christianity is less accepting of the raw, selfish, and material aspects of life as part of religious practice than paganism. Pagans could understand pleasure as a good in itself, whereas

Christians tend to view sexual pleasure as a means to an end, that end being communion with God and the creation of life.

Pagans indeed did, in some instances, use sexual pleasure as forms of worship, such as in the cult of Dionysus and other sex cults that existed in the ancient world.

However, these practices are so far removed from Christian approaches that they bear little resemblance to any Christian understanding of sex or eros as a transcendent activity.

Why Romanticism does not work

Romanticism as a literary movement is broadly recognised as emerging in the 1780s and continuing until the 1850s. Unlike what the name suggests, Romanticism as a literary genre does not simply discuss, or even necessarily focus on, romances and love stories between lovers. Instead, Romanticism can best be described as a literary approach that focuses primarily on sentiment and the desires of the individual, which are assumed to have their origins in truth. Focusing on how the world should be, not how it is. In literature, this is determined by the author through the protagonist, often in a progressive direction that is opposed to previously existing social structures.

Romantic ideas have saturated the modern world, especially influencing the approach taken by young people to some of the most important decisions they will make in their lives, such as their career and romantic partnerships. For example, the Romantic approach to choosing a career is to follow one's dreams and passions, whereas the classical approach is to consider what one is good at and where one belongs.

The same passion-led approach has been adopted in relation to love and marriage, with people choosing partners based on passion and perceived love rather than on material and spiritual suitability.

The emergence and dominance of Romanticism, and the romantic approach to marriage and sexual partnership, are fairly unique in historical terms.

Although marital customs have varied widely throughout history, it is generally true to say that marriage has traditionally been a community affair, involving financial, spiritual, and social considerations. Across many civilisations, there are myths, traditions, plays, and other art forms that depict — and often caution against — the romantic approach to pair-bonding. Romanticism is controversial among both Christians and atheists.

Christian perspective

Christian critiques of Romanticism vary in severity and origin depending on the denomination and theological background. Starting with Scripture, in 1 Corinthians 13:4–7, love is described as "patient and kind; it is not envious or boastful, arrogant or rude, nor is it irritable or resentful. It bears all things, hopes all things, and endures all things." This understanding is quite far removed from the passionate, illogical feeling of desire that the Romantics often take to be love. Within Scripture, other descriptions of love are broadly similar.

The twentieth-century theologian Anders Nygren made broadly similar criticisms in his book Agape and Eros (1953). He argues that romantic love is self-centred and thus incompatible with Christian teaching. The Christian writer C. S. Lewis is less opposed to romantic love in itself. Through his concept of the four loves, presented in The Four Loves (1960), he makes a proportionality argument, warning that romantic love, when treated as the supreme authority or the meaning of life, can excuse irrational and destructive behaviour. Romantic love requires balance with charity, responsibility, and moral judgment; otherwise, it becomes unstable and harmful both to the individual and to society more broadly.

Pope Benedict XVI, in his book Deus Caritas Est (2006), makes a slightly different criticism of Romanticism and romantic love, arguing that it separates eros from agape. In the romantic understanding, love is often portrayed as an uncontrollable emotional force that overwhelms reason and commitment. Benedict argues that eros must be disciplined and transformed so that it becomes integrated with charity, in a view that partially agrees with Lewis. Romantic love outside its proper place leads to instability. However, Benedict differs in that he suggests romantic love—eros and desire—must be transformed into higher forms of love, whereas Lewis suggests that romantic, desire-based love should merely be kept in its proper place and balanced with other types of love.

From my perspective, there are some practical problems with the broader Christian view of romantic love. Unlike the pagan understanding of love, there is little recognition of a legitimate place for eros. Some pagan perspectives, and to a lesser extent that of C. S. Lewis, critique romantic love primarily on proportionality grounds and see it as something that must be balanced with other forms of love. In this view, the problems associated with romantic love arise from its lack of balance rather than from the existence of eros and desire themselves.

As mentioned earlier, Christian theology—Lewis being a partial exception—has broadly treated eros as something negative in itself, something that must be ordered by agape before it can become a proper form of love. The issue with this position is that within Christianity, there is little acknowledgement that romantic love or eros may function as a genuine human need. This creates practical difficulties in the process of finding a spouse and understanding the sexual dynamics within marriage.

Men and women often experience eros differently and have different practical needs related to it. If these needs are seen as lustful and wrong, it is difficult for them to be processed and satisfied healthily.

Furthermore, the practical process of linking eros with agape can be quite difficult, particularly in the modern world. Christians are called to show agape to everyone in an ordered way, which can make the creation of a specifically spousal love—eros integrated with agape difficult to achieve in practice. Broadly speaking, in pre-Enlightenment civilisations, the formation of marriages was largely organised by the community. Through the courtship process within these arrangements, it was normal for different types of love—alongside agape and eros—to develop over time.

The practical difficulty described above arises partly because Christianity in the modern era has largely functioned as a conservative institution. It attempts to conserve inherited morality while simultaneously operating within societies that have increasingly developed in an individualist rather than structuralist direction. Institutions that seek to uphold universal moral frameworks are often at odds with individualist moralities and forms of individual freedom. In many respects, individualist and universalist moral systems create tensions that are difficult to reconcile, and this is something modern Christianity has struggled to address, particularly in terms of how it should separate itself from, or adapt to, these broader cultural shifts.

Much of the Christian theological commentary mentioned dates from the twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. This matters because even relatively modern theological reflections on love and romanticism remain influenced by assumptions that predate contemporary social realities. Before the twentieth century, discussions of spousal love would often have taken it for granted that it typically emerged within non-coercive arranged marriages organised by the family and community, marriage being a ritual that enabled spousal love. Rather than the modern expectation that romantic spousal love is discovered individually, as part of a dating process that is emotionally led within the self, often referred to as the "Heart".

The practical problem with the modern Christian understanding of love is that it attempts to impose values and teachings that were originally intended to function within a structured community in which those values and teachings could be practised. Loving someone, as God intended, is inseparable from communal structures.

Within the ordinary, unstructured nature of humanity, both men and women are drawn towards more base forms of romantic love, often with little consideration for wider forms of love. Transcending these forms of love in practice is not an easy task and requires more than the individual. Individuals possess faith, but faith alone is insufficient; they must be guided in how to direct and order their love within the spousal context. Without such guidance, rightly ordered love between spouses cannot simply be assumed, but must be cultivated and sustained.

Atheist perspective

Within atheist thought, there are two main criticisms of Romanticism. The first comes from a biological perspective: the idea that Romanticism is inseparable from biology and functions as a means of mate selection. This idea was first put forward by the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who criticised romantic love as nature's trick to ensure reproduction. He suggested that what people interpret as deep emotional destiny is actually sexual instinct disguised as profound attachment.

This view later developed into the evolutionary psychology critique. Modern secular thinkers influenced by evolutionary psychology describe romantic love as an adaptive behavioural system that promotes reproduction. From this perspective, romantic love is a biological mechanism that encourages mate selection and creates pair bonding long enough to raise a child.

The Therapeutic form of love

Most atheistic critiques of romantic love broadly come from the angle that it is not real and is the result of some form of biology, whether that is evolution or bodily and mental reactions to adverse childhood experiences or trauma. Few critiques of this kind address the morality or workability of romantic love. Even so, there have been atheist criticisms of romantic love that do provide a positive vision of what love should be. The most common is the therapeutic approach to love, which often sees itself as an evolution of romanticism, prompted by the perceived unworkability of previous forms of love.

The therapeutic approach to love is centred on attachment theory, Attachment theory is the idea that the way people form emotional bonds with others develops during early childhood. According to this perspective, the relationships children have with their parents or caregivers shape how they later relate to others in adulthood.

Attachment theory was further developed by researchers John Bowlby and Mary Ainsworth. In her research, Ainsworth developed an understanding of different types of attachment among infants: secure attachment (Type B), insecure avoidant attachment (Type A), and insecure resistant–ambivalent attachment (Type C). By contrast, John Bowlby's work on attachment theory was more practical in outlook, contributing to the development of therapeutic approaches aimed at addressing attachment issues in therapy.

People who grow up in less-than-ideal attachment environments may develop unhealthy patterns of attachment. As adults, they may unconsciously repeat the relationship dynamics they experienced as children. This happens because people attempt to revisit and resolve unresolved childhood experiences.

In doing so, they may try to change or overcome situations they were powerless to control when they were young, such as a parent's drinking or other harmful behaviour.

Broadly, the therapeutic approach often sees romantic love as a reflection of desires that are rooted in childhood experiences. This perspective broadly suggests that, for people to develop healthy relationships, they must first identify and address their patterns of love and attachment. This is typically done in a therapeutic context, where individuals learn to understand and reshape their relational patterns through one-to-one therapy.

From this viewpoint, there is often scepticism about the idea that people can simply learn to love in healthier ways outside a therapeutic setting. Because patterns of attachment and emotional "love languages" are formed early in childhood, the therapeutic perspective tends to argue that individuals cannot easily overcome adverse childhood experiences on their own. Instead, they may require professional help to recognise and change their attachment styles so that they can form healthier forms of love.

Unlike the Christian perspective, the therapeutic view of love is highly individualistic rather than structural. Within this framework, the purpose of therapy in the context of relationships is for individuals to become aware of their own attachment styles and emotional patterns, and to address them. Through this process, they learn which forms of communication and expressions of affection — often referred to as "love languages" — work best for them.

From a pragmatic perspective, the therapeutic approach to love has certain advantages. It encourages people to learn how to love one another with the understanding that negative childhood experiences, or even trauma, may create relational difficulties either in the present or in the future. In this sense, the therapeutic approach promotes patience, self-awareness, and a willingness to understand the emotional backgrounds that shape people's behaviour.

However, from a broader metaphysical perspective, the therapeutic approach to love is often highly self-centred and present-centred. Struggling to account for the deeper aspects of loving relationships, such as links to family, friends, and the community.

When people talk about romantic relationships from a therapeutic point of view, the phrases "are you" (when referring to another person) or "am I" (when referring to oneself) are often used. The problem with this is that the therapeutic approach attempts to escape from lower forms of love, such as eros, mania, and so on.

However, in practice, it often relegates relationships to precisely that. From an atheistic point of view, love—even when inspired by older forms of wisdom—is frequently detached from a love that transcends the self.

Issues with therapeutic love

From a pragmatic point of view, the therapeutic approach to love is useful and worthy of consideration, especially because its approach to romantic love, which is primarily based on mania and eros, can be harmful to most people. Love that goes beyond reason, in a way that is—at least from a Christian and Stoic point of view—not transcendent but animalistic, is therefore treated with caution.

The rational and atheistic origins of therapeutic love are often unable to consider love as anything other than material, rather than recognising it as something that transcends the individual and mere human experience. That said, early therapeutic thinkers such as John Bowlby did regard the pursuit of love as an important purpose in life for most people, though primarily from an individualist perspective.

By contrast, properly ordered love—not only in an immediate familial or spousal sense—allows society to flourish and to produce structures that sustain its strength, while also enabling communities to cultivate stronger relationships with God.

If the therapeutic approach to love is the best rejection of romantic love that modernity can produce, then there must also be a structured approach through which people can learn to love. Within the therapeutic approach, there is a suggestion by Alain de Botton that people cannot consciously learn love languages. He uses the analogy that people do not consciously learn to speak; rather, they acquire language from what they absorb in their early years.

However, this is something about which I remain sceptical. Indeed, people often learn to speak even when they are not consciously taught. Yet in the modern world, when people are not actively taught how to speak at a broader societal level—as they once were—their use of language can be weaker, particularly in terms of vocabulary and the constructive use of language.

The same should apply to love languages. In societies where there is a broad and nuanced understanding of love, and where people express different forms of love towards one another depending on the context, individuals will surely become more proficient in love languages and better able to love one another.

From a structural perspective, it may therefore be valuable to teach children and young people more intentionally about different "love languages", particularly if it is true that many are not learning these elsewhere. This does not necessarily mean direct lessons in school, but rather a clearer understanding among responsible adults that constructive social time for children and young people matters. Without such guidance, society risks missing an opportunity to develop adults with more sophisticated ways of loving and, more generally, greater emotional maturity.

Advocates of the therapeutic approach to love are modern and grounded in contemporary ideas—while also holding some questionable assumptions about how marriage functioned historically in a pragmatic sense—the therapeutic approach to love is often reluctant to adopt a structural framework. Instead, it tends to assume that individuals should learn about love internally and at their own pace, rather than through established social norms that guide how people learn to love one another within spousal partnerships.

By contrast, as mentioned earlier, Christian courting and marriage have historically been intertwined with a more structured approach, often connected with forms of non-coercive arranged marriage. In such systems, individuals did not learn how to love in isolation but within a broader social framework that guided courtship and partnership.

This lack of a structural approach to cultivating and finding love may be the greatest weakness of the therapeutic model. It may also explain why it struggles to provide a stable alternative to romantic love in the long term, and why a more structured model will eventually be required to replace or reform modern romantic ideals.

Conclusion revisit

Both traditional critiques and psychological or therapeutic critiques of romantic love seem to agree on a central problem: romanticism fails to do the boring things first.

In a spousal context, these "boring things" include ensuring that someone is materially suitable — such as their income and prospects — as well as whether they are temperamentally, spiritually, and familiarly compatible. These necessary forms of suitability are not commonly considered essential preconditions for romantic love by laypeople.

However, for long-lasting spousal relationships, most of these preconditions need to be met. Without them, romantic and passionate love has nothing to anchor it. When that passion inevitably waxes and wanes.

Furthermore, when some of these preconditions are not met, such as incompatible temperaments or incompatible families, spouses can have difficulty building other forms of love because they are drawn together by eros and mania. which possesses a person, making it almost impossible for them to engage their higher spiritual or rational faculties. Familial love, storge and philia, loyalty-based love, is quite hard to build upon when couples are consumed by desire for one another from a largely pleasure-based point of view. The same is true for philia, because loyalty is something that is built slowly. If a primary relationship is based on desire, it is almost impossible to build loyalty later, because loyalty and desire are somewhat opposed to one another. Loyalty requires discipline and delayed gratification, whereas Eros requires desires, passion and indulgence.

This is not to say that eros, mania, and desire-based love more generally do nothave their place within a spousal relationship. In fact, they are somewhat essential in their proper place, but only after affectionate, familial, and loyalty-based love have been established.

It is likely to be quite difficult to find a pragmatic solution capable of replacing romantic love with a more classical approach that encourages people to build other forms of love before eros, beyond the options mentioned above. This is largely due to the atomised nature of modern societies, particularly in Britain, Western Europe, and North America. As a result, the historic norm of non-coercive arranged marriage—organised and supported by the extended family and wider community—is now all but impossible for most people, aside from those in highly religious communities, such as the Bruderhof, and some ethnic

minority groups.

Without a return to these extended family structures and strong community networks, family- and community-led, non-coercive arranged marriage is unlikely to be a pragmatic solution in the near future. That said, the question of how scalable any alternative might be remains unclear. Matchmaking services, in some cases, along with organised dating events, have proven relatively popular and effective in facilitating relationships and marriages. What appears to underpin the success of these approaches is the selection of individuals who are serious about commitment and the creation of environments in which they are encouraged to build meaningful bonds.

Going forward, the building of spousal relationships and wider community relations will have to reject individualist ideas of love and recognise that love, particularly spousal love, has familial and communal consequences, and requires the deliberate cultivation of different forms of love. This applies to all kinds, even those forms of love that may seem boring or cumbersome. Romantic approaches to love have reinforced the heavy atomisation of couples and families from the wider community.

This is because romantic love is centred around self gratification. In the long term, this isolation tends to produce misery and instability, and in turn creates a greater dependence on the state.

The Spring

By Thomas Carew

Now that the winter's gone, the earth hath lost
Her snow-white robes, and now no more the frost
Candies the grass, or casts an icy cream
Upon the silver lake or crystal stream;
But the warm sun thaws the benumbed earth,
And makes it tender; gives a sacred birth
To the dead swallow; wakes in hollow tree
The drowsy cuckoo, and the humble-bee.
Now do a choir of chirping minstrels bring
In triumph to the world the youthful Spring.
The valleys, hills, and woods in rich array
Welcome the coming of the long'd-for May.
Now all things smile, only my love doth lour;
Nor hath the scalding noonday sun the power
To melt that marble ice, which still doth hold
Her heart congeal'd, and makes her pity cold.
The ox, which lately did for shelter fly
Into the stall, doth now securely lie
In open fields; and love no more is made
By the fireside, but in the cooler shade
Amyntas now doth with his Chloris sleep
Under a sycamore, and all things keep
Time with the season; only she doth carry
June in her eyes, in her heart January.

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Love is enough: though the World be a-waning,
And the woods have no voice but the voice of complaining,
Though the sky be too dark for dim eyes to discover
The gold-cups and daisies fair blooming thereunder,
Though the hills be held shadows, and the sea a dark wonder
And this day draw a veil over all deeds pass'd over,
Yet their hands shall not tremble, their feet shall not falter;
The void shall not weary, the fear shall not alter
These lips and these eyes of the loved and the lover.

From Love is Enough by William Morris