GILBERT KEITH CHESTERTON

MANALIVE

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Part I

The Enigmas of Innocent Smith

Chapter I

How the Great Wind Came to Beacon House

A wind sprang high in the west, like a wave of unreasonable happiness, and tore eastward across England, trailing with it the frosty scent of forests and the cold intoxication of the sea. In a million holes and corners it refreshed a man like a flagon, and astonished him like a blow. In the inmost chambers of intricate and embowered houses it woke like a domestic explosion, littering the floor with some professor's papers till they seemed as precious as fugitive, or blowing out the candle by which a boy read "Treasure Island" and wrapping him in roaring dark. But everywhere it bore drama into undramatic lives, and carried the trump of crisis across the world. Many a harassed mother in a mean backyard had looked at five dwarfish shirts on the clothes-line as at some small, sick tragedy; it was as if she had hanged her five children. The wind came, and they were full and kicking as if five fat imps had sprung into them; and far down in her oppressed subconscious she half-remembered those coarse comedies of her fathers when the elves still dwelt in the homes of men. Many an unnoticed girl in a dank walled garden had tossed herself into the hammock with the same intolerant gesture with which she might have tossed herself into the Thames; and that

wind rent the waving wall of woods and lifted the hammock like a balloon, and showed her shapes of quaint clouds far beyond, and pictures of bright villages far below, as if she rode heaven in a fairy boat. Many a dusty clerk or cleric, plodding a telescopic road of poplars, thought for the hundredth time that they were like the plumes of a hearse; when this invisible energy caught and swung and clashed them round his head like a wreath or salutation of seraphic wings. There was in it something more inspired and authoritative even than the old wind of the proverb; for this was the good wind that blows nobody harm.

The flying blast struck London just where it scales the northern heights, terrace above terrace, as precipitous as Edinburgh. It was round about this place that some poet, probably drunk, looked up astonished at all those streets gone skywards, and (thinking vaguely of glaciers and roped mountaineers) gave it the name of Swiss Cottage, which it has never been able to shake off. At some stage of those heights a terrace of tall gray houses, mostly empty and almost as desolate as the Grampians, curved round at the western end, so that the last building, a boarding establishment called "Beacon House," offered abruptly to the sunset its high, narrow and towering termination, like the prow of some deserted ship.

The ship, however, was not wholly deserted. The proprietor of the boarding-house, a Mrs. Duke, was one of those helpless persons against whom fate wars in vain; she smiled vaguely both before and after all her calamities; she was too soft to be hurt.

But by the aid (or rather under the orders) of a strenuous niece she always kept the remains of a clientele, mostly of young but listless folks. And there were actually five inmates standing disconsolately about the garden when the great gale broke at the base of the terminal tower behind them, as the sea bursts against the base of an outstanding cliff.

All day that hill of houses over London had been domed and sealed up with cold cloud. Yet three men and two girls had at last found even the gray and chilly garden more tolerable than the black and cheerless interior. When the wind came it split the sky and shouldered the cloudland left and right, unbarring great clear furnaces of evening gold. The burst of light released and the burst of air blowing seemed to come almost simultaneously; and the wind especially caught everything in a throttling violence. The bright short grass lay all one way like brushed hair. Every shrub in the garden tugged at its roots like a dog at the collar, and strained every leaping leaf after the hunting and exterminating element. Now and again a twig would snap and fly like a bolt from an arbalist. The three men stood stiffly and aslant against the wind, as if leaning against a wall. The two ladies disappeared into the house; rather, to speak truly, they were blown into the house. Their two frocks, blue and white, looked like two big broken flowers, driving and drifting upon the gale. Nor is such a poetic fancy inappropriate, for there was something oddly romantic about this inrush of air and light after a long, leaden and unlifting day. Grass and garden trees seemed glittering with something at

once good and unnatural, like a fire from fairyland. It seemed like a strange sunrise at the wrong end of the day.

The girl in white dived in quickly enough, for she wore a white hat of the proportions of a parachute, which might have wafted her away into the coloured clouds of evening. She was their one splash of splendour, and irradiated wealth in that impecunious place (staying there temporarily with a friend), an heiress in a small way, by name Rosamund Hunt, brown-eyed, round-faced, but resolute and rather boisterous. On top of her wealth she was good-humoured and rather good-looking; but she had not married, perhaps because there was always a crowd of men around her. She was not fast (though some might have called her vulgar), but she gave irresolute youths an impression of being at once popular and inaccessible. A man felt as if he had fallen in love with Cleopatra, or as if he were asking for a great actress at the stage door. Indeed, some theatrical spangles seemed to cling about Miss Hunt; she played the guitar and the mandoline; she always wanted charades; and with that great rending of the sky by sun and storm, she felt a girlish melodrama swell again within her. To the crashing orchestration of the air the clouds rose like the curtain of some long-expected pantomime.

Nor, oddly, was the girl in blue entirely unimpressed by this apocalypse in a private garden; though she was one of most prosaic and practical creatures alive. She was, indeed, no other than the strenuous niece whose strength alone upheld that mansion of decay. But as the gale swung and swelled the blue and

white skirts till they took on the monstrous contours of Victorian crinolines, a sunken memory stirred in her that was almost romance – a memory of a dusty volume of *Punch* in an aunt's house in infancy: pictures of crinoline hoops and croquet hoops and some pretty story, of which perhaps they were a part. This half-perceptible fragrance in her thoughts faded almost instantly, and Diana Duke entered the house even more promptly than her companion. Tall, slim, aquiline, and dark, she seemed made for such swiftness. In body she was of the breed of those birds and beasts that are at once long and alert, like greyhounds or herons or even like an innocent snake. The whole house revolved on her as on a rod of steel. It would be wrong to say that she commanded; for her own efficiency was so impatient that she obeyed herself before any one else obeyed her. Before electricians could mend a bell or locksmiths open a door, before dentists could pluck a tooth or butlers draw a tight cork, it was done already with the silent violence of her slim hands. She was light; but there was nothing leaping about her lightness. She spurned the ground, and she meant to spurn it. People talk of the pathos and failure of plain women; but it is a more terrible thing that a beautiful woman may succeed in everything but womanhood.

"It's enough to blow your head off," said the young woman in white, going to the looking-glass.

The young woman in blue made no reply, but put away her gardening gloves, and then went to the sideboard and began to spread out an afternoon cloth for tea.

"Enough to blow your head off, I say," said Miss Rosamund Hunt, with the unruffled cheeriness of one whose songs and speeches had always been safe for an encore.

"Only your hat, I think," said Diana Duke, "but I dare say that is sometimes more important."

Rosamund's face showed for an instant the offence of a spoilt child, and then the humour of a very healthy person. She broke into a laugh and said, "Well, it would have to be a big wind to blow your head off."

There was another silence; and the sunset breaking more and more from the sundering clouds, filled the room with soft fire and painted the dull walls with ruby and gold.

"Somebody once told me," said Rosamund Hunt, "that it's easier to keep one's head when one has lost one's heart."

"Oh, don't talk such rubbish," said Diana with savage sharpness.

Outside, the garden was clad in a golden splendour; but the wind was still stiffly blowing, and the three men who stood their ground might also have considered the problem of hats and heads. And, indeed, their position, touching hats, was somewhat typical of them. The tallest of the three abode the blast in a high silk hat, which the wind seemed to charge as vainly as that other sullen tower, the house behind him. The second man tried to hold on a stiff straw hat at all angles, and ultimately held it in his hand. The third had no hat, and, by his attitude, seemed never to have had one in his life. Perhaps this wind was a kind of fairy wand

to test men and women, for there was much of the three men in this difference.

The man in the solid silk hat was the embodiment of silkiness and solidity. He was a big, bland, bored and (as some said) boring man, with flat fair hair and handsome heavy features; a prosperous young doctor by the name of Warner. But if his blondness and blandness seemed at first a little fatuous, it is certain that he was no fool. If Rosamund Hunt was the only person there with much money, he was the only person who had as yet found any kind of fame. His treatise on "The Probable Existence of Pain in the Lowest Organisms" had been universally hailed by the scientific world as at once solid and daring. In short, he undoubtedly had brains; and perhaps it was not his fault if they were the kind of brains that most men desire to analyze with a poker.

The young man who put his hat off and on was a scientific amateur in a small way, and worshipped the great Warner with a solemn freshness. It was, in fact, at his invitation that the distinguished doctor was present; for Warner lived in no such ramshackle lodging-house, but in a professional palace in Harley Street. This young man was really the youngest and best-looking of the three. But he was one of those persons, both male and female, who seem doomed to be good-looking and insignificant. Brown-haired, high-coloured, and shy, he seemed to lose the delicacy of his features in a sort of blur of brown and red as he stood blushing and blinking against the wind. He was one

of those obvious unnoticeable people: every one knew that he was Arthur Inglewood, unmarried, moral, decidedly intelligent, living on a little money of his own, and hiding himself in the two hobbies of photography and cycling. Everybody knew him and forgot him; even as he stood there in the glare of golden sunset there was something about him indistinct, like one of his own red-brown amateur photographs.

The third man had no hat; he was lean, in light, vaguely sporting clothes, and the large pipe in his mouth made him look all the leaner. He had a long ironical face, blue-black hair, the blue eyes of an Irishman, and the blue chin of an actor. An Irishman he was, an actor he was not, except in the old days of Miss Hunt's charades, being, as a matter of fact, an obscure and flippant journalist named Michael Moon. He had once been hazily supposed to be reading for the Bar; but (as Warner would say with his rather elephantine wit) it was mostly at another kind of bar that his friends found him. Moon, however, did not drink, nor even frequently get drunk; he simply was a gentleman who liked low company. This was partly because company is quieter than society: and if he enjoyed talking to a barmaid (as apparently he did), it was chiefly because the barmaid did the talking. Moreover he would often bring other talent to assist her. He shared that strange trick of all men of his type, intellectual and without ambition – the trick of going about with his mental inferiors. There was a small resilient Jew named Moses Gould in the same boarding-house, a man whose negro vitality and

vulgarity amused Michael so much that he went round with him from bar to bar, like the owner of a performing monkey.

The colossal clearance which the wind had made of that cloudy sky grew clearer and clearer; chamber within chamber seemed to open in heaven. One felt one might at last find something lighter than light. In the fullness of this silent effulgence all things collected their colours again: the gray trunks turned silver, and the drab gravel gold. One bird fluttered like a loosened leaf from one tree to another, and his brown feathers were brushed with fire.

"Inglewood," said Michael Moon, with his blue eye on the bird, "have you any friends?"

Dr. Warner mistook the person addressed, and turning a broad beaming face, said, —

"Oh yes, I go out a great deal."

Michael Moon gave a tragic grin, and waited for his real informant, who spoke a moment after in a voice curiously cool, fresh and young, as coming out of that brown and even dusty interior.

"Really," answered Inglewood, "I'm afraid I've lost touch with my old friends. The greatest friend I ever had was at school, a fellow named Smith. It's odd you should mention it, because I was thinking of him to-day, though I haven't seen him for seven or eight years. He was on the science side with me at school – a clever fellow though queer; and he went up to Oxford when I went to Germany. The fact is, it's rather a sad story. I often asked him

to come and see me, and when I heard nothing I made inquiries, you know. I was shocked to learn that poor Smith had gone off his head. The accounts were a bit cloudy, of course, some saying that he had recovered again; but they always say that. About a year ago I got a telegram from him myself. The telegram, I'm sorry to say, put the matter beyond a doubt."

"Quite so," assented Dr. Warner stolidly; "insanity is generally incurable."

"So is sanity," said the Irishman, and studied him with a dreary eye.

"Symptoms?" asked the doctor. "What was this telegram?"

"It's a shame to joke about such things," said Inglewood, in his honest, embarrassed way; "the telegram was Smith's illness, not Smith. The actual words were, `Man found alive with two legs.'"

"Alive with two legs," repeated Michael, frowning. "Perhaps a version of alive and kicking? I don't know much about people out of their senses; but I suppose they ought to be kicking."

"And people in their senses?" asked Warner, smiling.

"Oh, they ought to be kicked," said Michael with sudden heartiness.

"The message is clearly insane," continued the impenetrable Warner.

"The best test is a reference to the undeveloped normal type. Even a baby does not expect to find a man with three legs."

"Three legs," said Michael Moon, "would be very convenient in this wind."

A fresh eruption of the atmosphere had indeed almost thrown them off their balance and broken the blackened trees in the garden. Beyond, all sorts of accidental objects could be seen scouring the wind-scoured sky – straws, sticks, rags, papers, and, in the distance, a disappearing hat. Its disappearance, however, was not final; after an interval of minutes they saw it again, much larger and closer, like a white panama, towering up into the heavens like a balloon, staggering to and fro for an instant like a stricken kite, and then settling in the centre of their own lawn as falteringly as a fallen leaf.

"Somebody's lost a good hat," said Dr. Warner shortly.

Almost as he spoke, another object came over the garden wall, flying after the fluttering panama. It was a big green umbrella. After that came hurtling a huge yellow Gladstone bag, and after that came a figure like a flying wheel of legs, as in the shield of the Isle of Man.

But though for a flash it seemed to have five or six legs, it alighted upon two, like the man in the queer telegram. It took the form of a large light-haired man in gay green holiday clothes. He had bright blonde hair that the wind brushed back like a German's, a flushed eager face like a cherub's, and a prominent pointing nose, a little like a dog's. His head, however, was by no means cherubic in the sense of being without a body. On the contrary, on his vast shoulders and shape generally gigantesque, his head looked oddly and unnaturally small. This gave rise to a scientific theory (which his conduct fully supported) that he was

an idiot.

Inglewood had a politeness instinctive and yet awkward. His life was full of arrested half gestures of assistance. And even this prodigy of a big man in green, leaping the wall like a bright green grasshopper, did not paralyze that small altruism of his habits in such a matter as a lost hat. He was stepping forward to recover the green gentleman's head-gear, when he was struck rigid with a roar like a bull's.

"Unsportsmanlike!" bellowed the big man. "Give it fair play, give it fair play!" And he came after his own hat quickly but cautiously, with burning eyes. The hat had seemed at first to droop and dawdle as in ostentatious langour on the sunny lawn; but the wind again freshening and rising, it went dancing down the garden with the devilry of a ~pas de quatre~. The eccentric went bounding after it with kangaroo leaps and bursts of breathless speech, of which it was not always easy to pick up the thread: "Fair play, fair play… sport of kings… chase their crowns… quite humane… tramontana… cardinals chase red hats… old English hunting… started a hat in Bramber Combe… hat at bay… mangled hounds… Got him!"

As the wind rose out of a roar into a shriek, he leapt into the sky on his strong, fantastic legs, snatched at the vanishing hat, missed it, and pitched sprawling face foremost on the grass. The hat rose over him like a bird in triumph. But its triumph was premature; for the lunatic, flung forward on his hands, threw up his boots behind, waved his two legs in the air like symbolic

ensigns (so that they actually thought again of the telegram), and actually caught the hat with his feet. A prolonged and piercing yell of wind split the welkin from end to end. The eyes of all the men were blinded by the invisible blast, as by a strange, clear cataract of transparency rushing between them and all objects about them. But as the large man fell back in a sitting posture and solemnly crowned himself with the hat, Michael found, to his incredulous surprise, that he had been holding his breath, like a man watching a duel.

While that tall wind was at the top of its sky-scraping energy, another short cry was heard, beginning very querulous, but ending very quick, swallowed in abrupt silence. The shiny black cylinder of Dr. Warner's official hat sailed off his head in the long, smooth parabola of an airship, and in almost cresting a garden tree was caught in the topmost branches. Another hat was gone. Those in that garden felt themselves caught in an unaccustomed eddy of things happening; no one seemed to know what would blow away next. Before they could speculate, the cheering and hallooing hat-hunter was already halfway up the tree, swinging himself from fork to fork with his strong, bent, grasshopper legs, and still giving forth his gasping, mysterious comments.

"Tree of life… Ygdrasil… climb for centuries perhaps… owls nesting in the hat… remotest generations of owls… still usurpers… gone to heaven… man in the moon wears it… brigand… not yours… belongs to depressed medical man… in

garden… give it up… give it up!"

The tree swung and swept and thrashed to and fro in the thundering wind like a thistle, and flamed in the full sunshine like a bonfire. The green, fantastic human figure, vivid against its autumn red and gold, was already among its highest and craziest branches, which by bare luck did not break with the weight of his big body. He was up there among the last tossing leaves and the first twinkling stars of evening, still talking to himself cheerfully, reasoningly, half apologetically, in little gasps. He might well be out of breath, for his whole preposterous raid had gone with one rush; he had bounded the wall once like a football, swept down the garden like a slide, and shot up the tree like a rocket. The other three men seemed buried under incident piled on incident – a wild world where one thing began before another thing left off. All three had the first thought. The tree had been there for the five years they had known the boarding-house. Each one of them was active and strong. No one of them had even thought of climbing it. Beyond that, Inglewood felt first the mere fact of colour. The bright brisk leaves, the bleak blue sky, the wild green arms and legs, reminded him irrationally of something glowing in his infancy, something akin to a gaudy man on a golden tree; perhaps it was only painted monkey on a stick. Oddly enough, Michael Moon, though more of a humourist, was touched on a tenderer nerve, half remembered the old, young theatricals with Rosamund, and was amused to find himself almost quoting Shakespeare —

"For valour. Is not love a Hercules,
Still climbing trees in the Hesperides?"

Even the immovable man of science had a bright, bewildered sensation that the Time Machine had given a great jerk, and gone forward with rather rattling rapidity.

He was not, however, wholly prepared for what happened next. The man in green, riding the frail topmost bough like a witch on a very risky broomstick, reached up and rent the black hat from its airy nest of twigs. It had been broken across a heavy bough in the first burst of its passage, a tangle of branches in torn and scored and scratched it in every direction, a clap of wind and foliage had flattened it like a concertina; nor can it be said that the obliging gentleman with the sharp nose showed any adequate tenderness for its structure when he finally unhooked it from its place. When he had found it, however, his proceedings were by some counted singular. He waved it with a loud whoop of triumph, and then immediately appeared to fall backwards off the tree, to which, however, he remained attached by his long strong legs, like a monkey swung by his tail. Hanging thus head downwards above the unhelmed Warner, he gravely proceeded to drop the battered silk cylinder upon his brows. "Every man a king," explained the inverted philosopher, "every hat (consequently) a crown. But this is a crown out of heaven."

And he again attempted the coronation of Warner, who, however, moved away with great abruptness from the hovering diadem; not seeming, strangely enough, to wish for his former

decoration in its present state.

"Wrong, wrong!" cried the obliging person hilariously. "Always wear uniform, even if it's shabby uniform! Ritualists may always be untidy. Go to a dance with soot on your shirt-front; but go with a shirt-front. Huntsman wears old coat, but old pink coat. Wear a topper, even if it's got no top. It's the symbol that counts, old cock. Take your hat, because it is your hat after all; its nap rubbed all off by the bark, dears, and its brim not the least bit curled; but for old sakes' sake it is still, dears, the nobbiest tile in the world."

Speaking thus, with a wild comfortableness, he settled or smashed the shapeless silk hat over the face of the disturbed physician, and fell on his feet among the other men, still talking, beaming and breathless.

"Why don't they make more games out of wind?" he asked in some excitement.

"Kites are all right, but why should it only be kites? Why, I thought of three other games for a windy day while I was climbing that tree.

Here's one of them: you take a lot of pepper – "

"I think," interposed Moon, with a sardonic mildness, "that your games are already sufficiently interesting. Are you, may I ask, a professional acrobat on a tour, or a travelling advertisement of Sunny Jim? How and why do you display all this energy for clearing walls and climbing trees in our melancholy, but at least rational, suburbs?"

The stranger, so far as so loud a person was capable of it, appeared to grow confidential.

"Well, it's a trick of my own," he confessed candidly.

"I do it by having two legs."

Arthur Inglewood, who had sunk into the background of this scene of folly, started and stared at the newcomer with his short-sighted eyes screwed up and his high colour slightly heightened.

"Why, I believe you're Smith," he cried with his fresh, almost boyish voice; and then after an instant's stare, "and yet I'm not sure."

"I have a card, I think," said the unknown, with baffling solemnity – "a card with my real name, my titles, offices, and true purpose on this earth."

He drew out slowly from an upper waistcoat pocket a scarlet card-case, and as slowly produced a very large card. Even in the instant of its production, they fancied it was of a queer shape, unlike the cards of ordinary gentlemen. But it was there only for an instant; for as it passed from his fingers to Arthur's, one or another slipped his hold. The strident, tearing gale in that garden carried away the stranger's card to join the wild waste paper of the universe; and that great western wind shook the whole house and passed.

Chapter II

The Luggage of an Optimist

We all remember the fairy tales of science in our infancy, which played with the supposition that large animals could jump in the proportion of small ones. If an elephant were as strong as a grasshopper, he could (I suppose) spring clean out of the Zoological Gardens and alight trumpeting upon Primrose Hill. If a whale could leap from the sea like a trout, perhaps men might look up and see one soaring above Yarmouth like the winged island of Laputa. Such natural energy, though sublime, might certainly be inconvenient, and much of this inconvenience attended the gaiety and good intentions of the man in green. He was too large for everything, because he was lively as well as large. By a fortunate physical provision, most very substantial creatures are also reposeful; and middle-class boarding-houses in the lesser parts of London are not built for a man as big as a bull and excitable as a kitten.

When Inglewood followed the stranger into the boarding-house, he found him talking earnestly (and in his own opinion privately) to the helpless Mrs. Duke. That fat, faint lady could only goggle up like a dying fish at the enormous new gentleman, who politely offered himself as a lodger, with vast gestures of

the wide white hat in one hand, and the yellow Gladstone bag in the other. Fortunately, Mrs. Duke's more efficient niece and partner was there to complete the contract; for, indeed, all the people of the house had somehow collected in the room. This fact, in truth, was typical of the whole episode. The visitor created an atmosphere of comic crisis; and from the time he came into the house to the time he left it, he somehow got the company to gather and even follow (though in derision) as children gather and follow a Punch and Judy. An hour ago, and for four years previously, these people had avoided each other, even when they had really liked each other. They had slid in and out of dismal and deserted rooms in search of particular newspapers or private needlework. Even now they all came casually, as with varying interests; but they all came. There was the embarrassed Inglewood, still a sort of red shadow; there was the unembarrassed Warner, a pallid but solid substance. There was Michael Moon offering like a riddle the contrast of the horsy crudeness of his clothes and the sombre sagacity of his visage. He was now joined by his yet more comic crony, Moses Gould. Swaggering on short legs with a prosperous purple tie, he was the gayest of godless little dogs; but like a dog also in this, that however he danced and wagged with delight, the two dark eyes on each side of his protuberant nose glistened gloomily like black buttons. There was Miss Rosamund Hunt, still with the fine white hat framing her square, good-looking face, and still with her native air of being dressed for some party that never came off.

She also, like Mr. Moon, had a new companion, new so far as this narrative goes, but in reality an old friend and a protegee. This was a slight young woman in dark gray, and in no way notable but for a load of dull red hair, of which the shape somehow gave her pale face that triangular, almost peaked, appearance which was given by the lowering headdress and deep rich ruff of the Elizabethan beauties. Her surname seemed to be Gray, and Miss Hunt called her Mary, in that indescribable tone applied to a dependent who has practically become a friend. She wore a small silver cross on her very business-like gray clothes, and was the only member of the party who went to church. Last, but the reverse of least, there was Diana Duke, studying the newcomer with eyes of steel, and listening carefully to every idiotic word he said. As for Mrs. Duke, she smiled up at him, but never dreamed of listening to him. She had never really listened to any one in her life; which, some said, was why she had survived.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Duke was pleased with her new guest's concentration of courtesy upon herself; for no one ever spoke seriously to her any more than she listened seriously to any one. And she almost beamed as the stranger, with yet wider and almost whirling gestures of explanation with his huge hat and bag, apologized for having entered by the wall instead of the front door. He was understood to put it down to an unfortunate family tradition of neatness and care of his clothes.

"My mother was rather strict about it, to tell the truth," he said, lowering his voice, to Mrs. Duke. "She never liked me to

lose my cap at school. And when a man's been taught to be tidy and neat it sticks to him."

Mrs. Duke weakly gasped that she was sure he must have had a good mother; but her niece seemed inclined to probe the matter further.

"You've got a funny idea of neatness," she said, "if it's jumping garden walls and clambering up garden trees. A man can't very well climb a tree tidily."

"He can clear a wall neatly," said Michael Moon; "I saw him do it."

Smith seemed to be regarding the girl with genuine astonishment.

"My dear young lady," he said, "I was tidying the tree. You don't want last year's hats there, do you, any more than last year's leaves?

The wind takes off the leaves, but it couldn't manage the hat; that wind,

I suppose, has tidied whole forests to-day. Rum idea this is, that tidiness is a timid, quiet sort of thing; why, tidiness is a toil for giants.

You can't tidy anything without untidying yourself; just look at my trousers.

Don't you know that? Haven't you ever had a spring cleaning?"

"Oh yes, sir," said Mrs. Duke, almost eagerly. "You will find everything of that sort quite nice." For the first time she had heard two words that she could understand.

Miss Diana Duke seemed to be studying the stranger with a sort of spasm of calculation; then her black eyes snapped with decision, and she said that he could have a particular bedroom on the top floor if he liked: and the silent and sensitive Inglewood, who had been on the rack through these cross-purposes, eagerly offered to show him up to the room. Smith went up the stairs four at a time, and when he bumped his head against the ultimate ceiling, Inglewood had an odd sensation that the tall house was much shorter than it used to be.

Arthur Inglewood followed his old friend – or his new friend, for he did not very clearly know which he was. The face looked very like his old schoolfellow's at one second and very unlike at another. And when Inglewood broke through his native politeness so far as to say suddenly, "Is your name Smith?" he received only the unenlightening reply, "Quite right; quite right. Very good. Excellent!" Which appeared to Inglewood, on reflection, rather the speech of a new-born babe accepting a name than of a grown-up man admitting one.

Despite these doubts about identity, the hapless Inglewood watched the other unpack, and stood about his bedroom in all the impotent attitudes of the male friend. Mr. Smith unpacked with the same kind of whirling accuracy with which he climbed a tree – throwing things out of his bag as if they were rubbish, yet managing to distribute quite a regular pattern all round him on the floor.

As he did so he continued to talk in the same somewhat

gasping manner (he had come upstairs four steps at a time, but even without this his style of speech was breathless and fragmentary), and his remarks were still a string of more or less significant but often separate pictures.

"Like the day of judgement," he said, throwing a bottle so that it somehow settled, rocking on its right end. "People say vast universe… infinity and astronomy; not sure… I think things are too close together… packed up; for travelling… stars too close, really… why, the sun's a star, too close to be seen properly; the earth's a star, too close to be seen at all… too many pebbles on the beach; ought all to be put in rings; too many blades of grass to study… feathers on a bird make the brain reel; wait till the big bag is unpacked… may all be put in our right places then."

Here he stopped, literally for breath – throwing a shirt to the other end of the room, and then a bottle of ink so that it fell quite neatly beyond it. Inglewood looked round on this strange, half-symmetrical disorder with an increasing doubt.

In fact, the more one explored Mr. Smith's holiday luggage, the less one could make anything of it. One peculiarity of it was that almost everything seemed to be there for the wrong reason; what is secondary with every one else was primary with him. He would wrap up a pot or pan in brown paper; and the unthinking assistant would discover that the pot was valueless or even unnecessary, and that it was the brown paper that was truly precious. He produced two or three boxes of cigars, and explained with plain and perplexing sincerity that he was no

smoker, but that cigar-box wood was by far the best for fretwork. He also exhibited about six small bottles of wine, white and red, and Inglewood, happening to note a Volnay which he knew to be excellent, supposed at first that the stranger was an epicure in vintages. He was therefore surprised to find that the next bottle was a vile sham claret from the colonies, which even colonials (to do them justice) do not drink. It was only then that he observed that all six bottles had those bright metallic seals of various tints, and seemed to have been chosen solely because they have the three primary and three secondary colours: red, blue, and yellow; green, violet and orange. There grew upon Inglewood an almost creepy sense of the real childishness of this creature. For Smith was really, so far as human psychology can be, innocent. He had the sensualities of innocence: he loved the stickiness of gum, and he cut white wood greedily as if he were cutting a cake. To this man wine was not a doubtful thing to be defended or denounced; it was a quaintly coloured syrup, such as a child sees in a shop window. He talked dominantly and rushed the social situation; but he was not asserting himself, like a superman in a modern play. He was simply forgetting himself, like a little boy at a party. He had somehow made the giant stride from babyhood to manhood, and missed that crisis in youth when most of us grow old.

As he shunted his big bag, Arthur observed the initials I. S. printed on one side of it, and remembered that Smith had been called Innocent Smith at school, though whether as a formal

Christian name or a moral description he could not remember. He was just about to venture another question, when there was a knock at the door, and the short figure of Mr. Gould offered itself, with the melancholy Moon, standing like his tall crooked shadow, behind him. They had drifted up the stairs after the other two men with the wandering gregariousness of the male.

"Hope there's no intrusion," said the beaming Moses with a glow of good nature, but not the airiest tinge of apology.

"The truth is," said Michael Moon with comparative courtesy, "we thought we might see if they had made you comfortable. Miss Duke is rather – "

"I know," cried the stranger, looking up radiantly from his bag; "magnificent, isn't she? Go close to her – hear military music going by, like Joan of Arc."

Inglewood stared and stared at the speaker like one who has just heard a wild fairy tale, which nevertheless contains one small and forgotten fact. For he remembered how he had himself thought of Jeanne d'Arc years ago, when, hardly more than a schoolboy, he had first come to the boarding-house. Long since the pulverizing rationalism of his friend Dr. Warner had crushed such youthful ignorances and disproportionate dreams. Under the Warnerian scepticism and science of hopeless human types, Inglewood had long come to regard himself as a timid, insufficient, and "weak" type, who would never marry; to regard Diana Duke as a materialistic maidservant; and to regard his first fancy for her as the small, dull farce of a collegian kissing his

landlady's daughter. And yet the phrase about military music moved him queerly, as if he had heard those distant drums.

"She has to keep things pretty tight, as is only natural," said Moon, glancing round the rather dwarfish room, with its wedge of slanted ceiling, like the conical hood of a dwarf.

"Rather a small box for you, sir," said the waggish Mr. Gould.

"Splendid room, though," answered Mr. Smith enthusiastically, with his head inside his Gladstone bag. "I love these pointed sorts of rooms, like Gothic. By the way," he cried out, pointing in quite a startling way, "where does that door lead to?"

"To certain death, I should say," answered Michael Moon, staring up at a dust-stained and disused trapdoor in the sloping roof of the attic. "I don't think there's a loft there; and I don't know what else it could lead to." Long before he had finished his sentence the man with the strong green legs had leapt at the door in the ceiling, swung himself somehow on to the ledge beneath it, wrenched it open after a struggle, and clambered through it. For a moment they saw the two symbolic legs standing like a truncated statue; then they vanished. Through the hole thus burst in the roof appeared the empty and lucid sky of evening, with one great many-coloured cloud sailing across it like a whole county upside down.

"Hullo, you fellows!" came the far cry of Innocent Smith, apparently from some remote pinnacle. "Come up here; and bring some of my things to eat and drink. It's just the spot for

a picnic."

With a sudden impulse Michael snatched two of the small bottles of wine, one in each solid fist; and Arthur Inglewood, as if mesmerized, groped for a biscuit tin and a big jar of ginger. The enormous hand of Innocent Smith appearing through the aperture, like a giant's in a fairy tale, received these tributes and bore them off to the eyrie; then they both hoisted themselves out of the window. They were both athletic, and even gymnastic; Inglewood through his concern for hygiene, and Moon through his concern for sport, which was not quite so idle and inactive as that of the average sportsman. Also they both had a light-headed burst of celestial sensation when the door was burst in the roof, as if a door had been burst in the sky, and they could climb out on to the very roof of the universe. They were both men who had long been unconsciously imprisoned in the commonplace, though one took it comically, and the other seriously. They were both men, nevertheless, in whom sentiment had never died. But Mr. Moses Gould had an equal contempt for their suicidal athletics and their subconscious transcendentalism, and he stood and laughed at the thing with the shameless rationality of another race.

When the singular Smith, astride of a chimney-pot, learnt that Gould was not following, his infantile officiousness and good nature forced him to dive back into the attic to comfort or persuade; and Inglewood and Moon were left alone on the long gray-green ridge of the slate roof, with their feet against gutters and their backs against chimney-pots, looking agnostically at

each other. Their first feeling was that they had come out into eternity, and that eternity was very like topsy-turvydom. One definition occurred to both of them – that he had come out into the light of that lucid and radiant ignorance in which all beliefs had begun. The sky above them was full of mythology. Heaven seemed deep enough to hold all the gods. The round of the ether turned from green to yellow gradually like a great unripe fruit. All around the sunken sun it was like a lemon; round all the east it was a sort of golden green, more suggestive of a greengage; but the whole had still the emptiness of daylight and none of the secrecy of dusk. Tumbled here and there across this gold and pale green were shards and shattered masses of inky purple cloud, which seemed falling towards the earth in every kind of colossal perspective. One of them really had the character of some many-mitred, many-bearded, many-winged Assyrian image, huge head downwards, hurled out of heaven – a sort of false Jehovah, who was perhaps Satan. All the other clouds had preposterous pinnacled shapes, as if the god's palaces had been flung after him.

And yet, while the empty heaven was full of silent catastrophe, the height of human buildings above which they sat held here and there a tiny trivial noise that was the exact antithesis; and they heard some six streets below a newsboy calling, and a bell bidding to chapel. They could also hear talk out of the garden below; and realized that the irrepressible Smith must have followed Gould downstairs, for his eager and pleading accents could be

heard, followed by the half-humourous protests of Miss Duke and the full and very youthful laughter of Rosamund Hunt. The air had that cold kindness that comes after a storm. Michael Moon drank it in with as serious a relish as he had drunk the little bottle of cheap claret, which he had emptied almost at a draught. Inglewood went on eating ginger very slowly and with a solemnity unfathomable as the sky above him. There was still enough stir in the freshness of the atmosphere to make them almost fancy they could smell the garden soil and the last roses of autumn. Suddenly there came from the darkening room a silvery ping and pong which told them that Rosamund had brought out the long-neglected mandoline. After the first few notes there was more of the distant bell-like laughter.

"Inglewood," said Michael Moon, "have you ever heard that I am a blackguard?"

"I haven't heard it, and I don't believe it," answered Inglewood, after an odd pause. "But I have heard you were – what they call rather wild."

"If you have heard that I am wild, you can contradict the rumour," said Moon, with an extraordinary calm; "I am tame. I am quite tame; I am about the tamest beast that crawls. I drink too much of the same kind of whisky at the same time every night. I even drink about the same amount too much. I go to the same number of public-houses. I meet the same damned women with mauve faces. I hear the same number of dirty stories – generally the same dirty stories. You may assure my friends,

Inglewood, that you see before you a person whom civilization has thoroughly tamed."

Arthur Inglewood was staring with feelings that made him nearly fall off the roof, for indeed the Irishman's face, always sinister, was now almost demoniacal.

"Christ confound it!" cried out Moon, suddenly clutching the empty claret bottle, "this is about the thinnest and filthiest wine I ever uncorked, and it's the only drink I have really enjoyed for nine years. I was never wild until just ten minutes ago." And he sent the bottle whizzing, a wheel of glass, far away beyond the garden into the road, where, in the profound evening silence, they could even hear it break and part upon the stones.

"Moon," said Arthur Inglewood, rather huskily, "you mustn't be so bitter about it. Everyone has to take the world as he finds it; of course one often finds it a bit dull – "

"That fellow doesn't," said Michael decisively; "I mean that fellow Smith. I have a fancy there's some method in his madness. It looks as if he could turn into a sort of wonderland any minute by taking one step out of the plain road. Who would have thought of that trapdoor? Who would have thought that this cursed colonial claret could taste quite nice among the chimney-pots? Perhaps that is the real key of fairyland. Perhaps Nosey Gould's beastly little Empire Cigarettes ought only to be smoked on stilts, or something of that sort. Perhaps Mrs. Duke's cold leg of mutton would seem quite appetizing at the top of a tree. Perhaps even my damned, dirty, monotonous drizzle of Old Bill Whisky – "

"Don't be so rough on yourself," said Inglewood, in serious distress. "The dullness isn't your fault or the whisky's. Fellows who don't – fellows like me I mean – have just the same feeling that it's all rather flat and a failure. But the world's made like that; it's all survival. Some people are made to get on, like Warner; and some people are made to stick quiet, like me. You can't help your temperament. I know you're much cleverer than I am; but you can't help having all the loose ways of a poor literary chap, and I can't help having all the doubts and helplessness of a small scientific chap, any more than a fish can help floating or a fern can help curling up. Humanity, as Warner said so well in that lecture, really consists of quite different tribes of animals all disguised as men."

In the dim garden below the buzz of talk was suddenly broken by Miss Hunt's musical instrument banging with the abruptness of artillery into a vulgar but spirited tune.

Rosamund's voice came up rich and strong in the words of some fatuous, fashionable coon song: -

> "Darkies sing a song on the old plantation,
> Sing it as we sang it in days long since gone by."

Inglewood's brown eyes softened and saddened still more as he continued his monologue of resignation to such a rollicking and romantic tune. But the blue eyes of Michael Moon brightened and hardened with a light that Inglewood did not understand. Many centuries, and many villages and valleys, would have been happier if Inglewood or Inglewood's

countrymen had ever understood that light, or guessed at the first blink that it was the battle star of Ireland.

"Nothing can ever alter it; it's in the wheels of the universe," went on Inglewood, in a low voice: "some men are weak and some strong, and the only thing we can do is to know that we are weak. I have been in love lots of times, but I could not do anything, for I remembered my own fickleness. I have formed opinions, but I haven't the cheek to push them, because I've so often changed them. That's the upshot, old fellow. We can't trust ourselves – and we can't help it."

Michael had risen to his feet, and stood poised in a perilous position at the end of the roof, like some dark statue hung above its gable. Behind him, huge clouds of an almost impossible purple turned slowly topsy-turvy in the silent anarchy of heaven. Their gyration made the dark figure seem yet dizzier.

"Let us…" he said, and was suddenly silent.

"Let us what?" asked Arthur Inglewood, rising equally quick though somewhat more cautiously, for his friend seemed to find some difficulty in speech.

"Let us go and do some of these things we can't do," said Michael.

At the same moment there burst out of the trapdoor below them the cockatoo hair and flushed face of Innocent Smith, calling to them that they must come down as the "concert" was in full swing, and Mr. Moses Gould was about to recite "Young Lochinvar."

As they dropped into Innocent's attic they nearly tumbled over its entertaining impedimenta again. Inglewood, staring at the littered floor, thought instinctively of the littered floor of a nursery. He was therefore the more moved, and even shocked, when his eye fell on a large well-polished American revolver.

"Hullo!" he cried, stepping back from the steely glitter as men step back from a serpent; "are you afraid of burglars? or when and why do you deal death out of that machine gun?"

"Oh, that!" said Smith, throwing it a single glance; "I deal life out of that," and he went bounding down the stairs.

Chapter III

The Banner of Beacon

All next day at Beacon House there was a crazy sense that it was everybody's birthday. It is the fashion to talk of institutions as cold and cramping things. The truth is that when people are in exceptionally high spirits, really wild with freedom and invention, they always must, and they always do, create institutions. When men are weary they fall into anarchy; but while they are gay and vigorous they invariably make rules. This, which is true of all the churches and republics of history, is also true of the most trivial parlour game or the most unsophisticated meadow romp. We are never free until some institution frees us; and liberty cannot exist till it is declared by authority. Even the wild authority of the harlequin Smith was still authority, because it produced everywhere a crop of crazy regulations and conditions. He filled every one with his own half-lunatic life; but it was not expressed in destruction, but rather in a dizzy and toppling construction. Each person with a hobby found it turning into an institution. Rosamund's songs seemed to coalesce into a kind of opera; Michael's jests and paragraphs into a magazine. His pipe and her mandoline seemed between them to make a sort of smoking concert. The bashful and bewildered Arthur Inglewood

almost struggled against his own growing importance. He felt as if, in spite of him, his photographs were turning into a picture gallery, and his bicycle into a gymkhana. But no one had any time to criticize these impromptu estates and offices, for they followed each other in wild succession like the topics of a rambling talker.

Existence with such a man was an obstacle race made out of pleasant obstacles. Out of any homely and trivial object he could drag reels of exaggeration, like a conjurer. Nothing could be more shy and impersonal than poor Arthur's photography. Yet the preposterous Smith was seen assisting him eagerly through sunny morning hours, and an indefensible sequence described as "Moral Photography" began to unroll about the boarding-house. It was only a version of the old photographer's joke which produces the same figure twice on one plate, making a man play chess with himself, dine with himself, and so on. But these plates were more hysterical and ambitious – as, "Miss Hunt forgets Herself," showing that lady answering her own too rapturous recognition with a most appalling stare of ignorance; or "Mr. Moon questions Himself," in which Mr. Moon appeared as one driven to madness under his own legal cross-examination, which was conducted with a long forefinger and an air of ferocious waggery. One highly successful trilogy – representing Inglewood recognizing Inglewood, Inglewood prostrating himself before Inglewood, and Inglewood severely beating Inglewood with an umbrella – Innocent Smith wanted to have enlarged and put up in the hall, like a sort of fresco, with the inscription, —

"Self-reverence, self-knowledge, self-control —
These three alone will make a man a prig."
– *Tennyson.*

Nothing, again, could be more prosaic and impenetrable than the domestic energies of Miss Diana Duke. But Innocent had somehow blundered on the discovery that her thrifty dressmaking went with a considerable feminine care for dress – the one feminine thing that had never failed her solitary self-respect. In consequence Smith pestered her with a theory (which he really seemed to take seriously) that ladies might combine economy with magnificence if they would draw light chalk patterns on a plain dress and then dust them off again. He set up "Smith's Lightning Dressmaking Company," with two screens, a cardboard placard, and box of bright soft crayons; and Miss Diana actually threw him an abandoned black overall or working dress on which to exercise the talents of a modiste. He promptly produced for her a garment aflame with red and gold sunflowers; she held it up an instant to her shoulders, and looked like an empress. And Arthur Inglewood, some hours afterwards cleaning his bicycle (with his usual air of being inextricably hidden in it), glanced up; and his hot face grew hotter, for Diana stood laughing for one flash in the doorway, and her dark robe was rich with the green and purple of great decorative peacocks, like a secret garden in the "Arabian Nights." A pang too swift to be named pain or pleasure went through his heart like an old-world rapier. He remembered how pretty he thought her years

ago, when he was ready to fall in love with anybody; but it was like remembering a worship of some Babylonian princess in some previous existence. At his next glimpse of her (and he caught himself awaiting it) the purple and green chalk was dusted off, and she went by quickly in her working clothes.

As for Mrs. Duke, none who knew that matron could conceive her as actively resisting this invasion that had turned her house upside down. But among the most exact observers it was seriously believed that she liked it. For she was one of those women who at bottom regard all men as equally mad, wild animals of some utterly separate species. And it is doubtful if she really saw anything more eccentric or inexplicable in Smith's chimney-pot picnics or crimson sunflowers than she had in the chemicals of Inglewood or the sardonic speeches of Moon. Courtesy, on the other hand, is a thing that anybody can understand, and Smith's manners were as courteous as they were unconventional. She said he was "a real gentleman," by which she simply meant a kind-hearted man, which is a very different thing. She would sit at the head of the table with fat, folded hands and a fat, folded smile for hours and hours, while every one else was talking at once. At least, the only other exception was Rosamund's companion, Mary Gray, whose silence was of a much more eager sort. Though she never spoke she always looked as if she might speak any minute. Perhaps this is the very definition of a companion. Innocent Smith seemed to throw himself, as into other adventures, into the adventure of making her talk. He never

succeeded, yet he was never snubbed; if he achieved anything, it was only to draw attention to this quiet figure, and to turn her, by ever so little, from a modesty to a mystery. But if she was a riddle, every one recognized that she was a fresh and unspoilt riddle, like the riddle of the sky and the woods in spring. Indeed, though she was rather older than the other two girls, she had an early morning ardour, a fresh earnestness of youth, which Rosamund seemed to have lost in the mere spending of money, and Diana in the mere guarding of it. Smith looked at her again and again. Her eyes and mouth were set in her face the wrong way – which was really the right way. She had the knack of saying everything with her face: her silence was a sort of steady applause.

But among the hilarious experiments of that holiday (which seemed more like a week's holiday than a day's) one experiment towers supreme, not because it was any sillier or more successful than the others, but because out of this particular folly flowed all of the odd events that were to follow. All the other practical jokes exploded of themselves, and left vacancy; all the other fictions returned upon themselves, and were finished like a song. But the string of solid and startling events – which were to include a hansom cab, a detective, a pistol, and a marriage licence – were all made primarily possible by the joke about the High Court of Beacon.

It had originated, not with Innocent Smith, but with Michael Moon. He was in a strange glow and pressure of spirits, and talked incessantly; yet he had never been more sarcastic, and

even inhuman. He used his old useless knowledge as a barrister to talk entertainingly of a tribunal that was a parody on the pompous anomalies of English law. The High Court of Beacon, he declared, was a splendid example of our free and sensible constitution. It had been founded by King John in defiance of the Magna Carta, and now held absolute power over windmills, wine and spirit licences, ladies traveling in Turkey, revision of sentences for dog-stealing and parricide, as well as anything whatever that happened in the town of Market Bosworth. The whole hundred and nine seneschals of the High Court of Beacon met once in every four centuries; but in the intervals (as Mr. Moon explained) the whole powers of the institution were vested in Mrs. Duke. Tossed about among the rest of the company, however, the High Court did not retain its historical and legal seriousness, but was used somewhat unscrupulously in a riot of domestic detail. If somebody spilt the Worcester Sauce on the tablecloth, he was quite sure it was a rite without which the sittings and findings of the Court would be invalid; or if somebody wanted a window to remain shut, he would suddenly remember that none but the third son of the lord of the manor of Penge had the right to open it. They even went to the length of making arrests and conducting criminal inquiries. The proposed trial of Moses Gould for patriotism was rather above the heads of the company, especially of the criminal; but the trial of Inglewood on a charge of photographic libel, and his triumphant acquittal upon a plea of insanity, were admitted to be in the best

tradition of the Court.

But when Smith was in wild spirits he grew more and more serious, not more and more flippant like Michael Moon. This proposal of a private court of justice, which Moon had thrown off with the detachment of a political humourist, Smith really caught hold of with the eagerness of an abstract philosopher. It was by far the best thing they could do, he declared, to claim sovereign powers even for the individual household.

"You believe in Home Rule for Ireland; I believe in Home Rule for homes," he cried eagerly to Michael. "It would be better if every father COULD kill his son, as with the old Romans; it would be better, because nobody would be killed. Let's issue a Declaration of Independence from Beacon House. We could grow enough greens in that garden to support us, and when the tax-collector comes let's tell him we're self-supporting, and play on him with the hose… Well, perhaps, as you say, we couldn't very well have a hose, as that comes from the main; but we could sink a well in this chalk, and a lot could be done with water-jugs… Let this really be Beacon House. Let's light a bonfire of independence on the roof, and see house after house answering it across the valley of the Thames! Let us begin the League of the Free Families! Away with Local Government! A fig for Local Patriotism! Let every house be a sovereign state as this is, and judge its own children by its own law, as we do by the Court of Beacon. Let us cut the painter, and begin to be happy together, as if we were on a desert island."

"I know that desert island," said Michael Moon; "it only exists in the `Swiss Family Robinson.' A man feels a strange desire for some sort of vegetable milk, and crash comes down some unexpected cocoa-nut from some undiscovered monkey. A literary man feels inclined to pen a sonnet, and at once an officious porcupine rushes out of a thicket and shoots out one of his quills."

"Don't you say a word against the `Swiss Family Robinson,'" cried Innocent with great warmth. "It mayn't be exact science, but it's dead accurate philosophy. When you're really shipwrecked, you do really find what you want. When you're really on a desert island, you never find it a desert. If we were really besieged in this garden, we'd find a hundred English birds and English berries that we never knew were here. If we were snowed up in this room, we'd be the better for reading scores of books in that bookcase that we don't even know are there; we'd have talks with each other, good, terrible talks, that we shall go to the grave without guessing; we'd find materials for everything – christening, marriage, or funeral; yes, even for a coronation – if we didn't decide to be a republic."

"A coronation on `Swiss Family' lines, I suppose," said Michael, laughing. "Oh, I know you would find everything in that atmosphere. If we wanted such a simple thing, for instance, as a Coronation Canopy, we should walk down beyond the geraniums and find the Canopy Tree in full bloom. If we wanted such a trifle as a crown of gold, why, we should be digging up dandelions,

and we should find a gold mine under the lawn. And when we wanted oil for the ceremony, why I suppose a great storm would wash everything on shore, and we should find there was a Whale on the premises."

"And so there IS a whale on the premises for all you know," asseverated Smith, striking the table with passion. "I bet you've never examined the premises! I bet you've never been round at the back as I was this morning – for I found the very thing you say could only grow on a tree. There's an old sort of square tent up against the dustbin; it's got three holes in the canvas, and a pole's broken, so it's not much good as a tent, but as a Canopy – " And his voice quite failed him to express its shining adequacy; then he went on with controversial eagerness: "You see I take every challenge as you make it. I believe every blessed thing you say couldn't be here has been here all the time. You say you want a whale washed up for oil. Why, there's oil in that cruet-stand at your elbow; and I don't believe anybody has touched it or thought of it for years. And as for your gold crown, we're none of us wealthy here, but we could collect enough ten-shilling bits from our own pockets to string round a man's head for half an hour; or one of Miss Hunt's gold bangles is nearly big enough to – "

The good-humoured Rosamund was almost choking with laughter.

"All is not gold that glitters," she said, "and besides – "

"What a mistake that is!" cried Innocent Smith, leaping up in great excitement. "All is gold that glitters – especially now we are

a Sovereign State. What's the good of a Sovereign State if you can't define a sovereign? We can make anything a precious metal, as men could in the morning of the world. They didn't choose gold because it was rare; your scientists can tell you twenty sorts of slime much rarer. They chose gold because it was bright – because it was a hard thing to find, but pretty when you've found it. You can't fight with golden swords or eat golden biscuits; you can only look at it – and you can look at it out here."

With one of his incalculable motions he sprang back and burst open the doors into the garden. At the same time also, with one of his gestures that never seemed at the instant so unconventional as they were, he stretched out his hand to Mary Gray, and led her out on to the lawn as if for a dance.

The French windows, thus flung open, let in an evening even lovelier than that of the day before. The west was swimming with sanguine colours, and a sort of sleepy flame lay along the lawn. The twisted shadows of the one or two garden trees showed upon this sheen, not gray or black, as in common daylight, but like arabesques written in vivid violet ink on some page of Eastern gold. The sunset was one of those festive and yet mysterious conflagrations in which common things by their colours remind us of costly or curious things. The slates upon the sloping roof burned like the plumes of a vast peacock, in every mysterious blend of blue and green. The red-brown bricks of the wall glowed with all the October tints of strong ruby and tawny wines. The sun seemed to set each object alight with a different coloured

flame, like a man lighting fireworks; and even Innocent's hair, which was of a rather colourless fairness, seemed to have a flame of pagan gold on it as he strode across the lawn towards the one tall ridge of rockery.

"What would be the good of gold," he was saying, "if it did not glitter? Why should we care for a black sovereign any more than for a black sun at noon? A black button would do just as well. Don't you see that everything in this garden looks like a jewel? And will you kindly tell me what the deuce is the good of a jewel except that it looks like a jewel? Leave off buying and selling, and start looking! Open your eyes, and you'll wake up in the New Jerusalem.

> "All is gold that glitters —
> Tree and tower of brass;
> Rolls the golden evening air
> Down the golden grass.
> Kick the cry to Jericho,
> How yellow mud is sold;
> All is gold that glitters,
> For the glitter is the gold."

"And who wrote that?" asked Rosamund, amused.

"No one will ever write it," answered Smith, and cleared the rockery with a flying leap.

"Really," said Rosamund to Michael Moon, "he ought to be sent to an asylum.

Don't you think so?"

"I beg your pardon," inquired Michael, rather sombrely; his long, swarthy head was dark against the sunset, and, either by accident or mood, he had the look of something isolated and even hostile amid the social extravagance of the garden.

"I only said Mr. Smith ought to go to an asylum," repeated the lady.

The lean face seemed to grow longer and longer, for Moon was unmistakably sneering. "No," he said; "I don't think it's at all necessary."

"What do you mean?" asked Rosamund quickly. "Why not?"

"Because he is in one now," answered Michael Moon, in a quiet but ugly voice.

"Why, didn't you know?"

"What?" cried the girl, and there was a break in her voice; for the Irishman's face and voice were really almost creepy. With his dark figure and dark sayings in all that sunshine he looked like the devil in paradise.

"I'm sorry," he continued, with a sort of harsh humility. "Of course we don't talk about it much… but I thought we all really knew."

"Knew what?"

"Well," answered Moon, "that Beacon House is a certain rather singular sort of house – a house with the tiles loose, shall we say? Innocent Smith is only the doctor that visits us; hadn't you come when he called before? As most of our maladies are

melancholic, of course he has to be extra cheery. Sanity, of course, seems a very bumptious eccentric thing to us. Jumping over a wall, climbing a tree – that's his bedside manner."

"You daren't say such a thing!" cried Rosamund in a rage.

"You daren't suggest that I – "

"Not more than I am," said Michael soothingly; "not more than the rest of us.

Haven't you ever noticed that Miss Duke never sits still – a notorious sign?

Haven't you ever observed that Inglewood is always washing his hands —

a known mark of mental disease? I, of course, am a dipsomaniac."

"I don't believe you," broke out his companion, not without agitation.

"I've heard you had some bad habits – "

"All habits are bad habits," said Michael, with deadly calm.

"Madness does not come by breaking out, but by giving in; by settling down in some dirty, little, self-repeating circle of ideas; by being tamed.

YOU went mad about money, because you're an heiress."

"It's a lie," cried Rosamund furiously. "I never was mean about money."

"You were worse," said Michael, in a low voice and yet violently. "You thought that other people were. You thought every man who came near you must be a fortune-hunter; you

would not let yourself go and be sane; and now you're mad and I'm mad, and serve us right."

"You brute!" said Rosamund, quite white. "And is this true?"

With the intellectual cruelty of which the Celt is capable when his abysses are in revolt, Michael was silent for some seconds, and then stepped back with an ironical bow. "Not literally true, of course," he said; "only really true. An allegory, shall we say? a social satire."

"And I hate and despise your satires," cried Rosamund Hunt, letting loose her whole forcible female personality like a cyclone, and speaking every word to wound. "I despise it as I despise your rank tobacco, and your nasty, loungy ways, and your snarling, and your Radicalism, and your old clothes, and your potty little newspaper, and your rotten failure at everything. I don't care whether you call it snobbishness or not, I like life and success, and jolly things to look at, and action. You won't frighten me with Diogenes; I prefer Alexander."

"Victrix causa deae – " said Michael gloomily; and this angered her more, as, not knowing what it meant, she imagined it to be witty.

"Oh, I dare say you know Greek," she said, with cheerful inaccuracy; "you haven't done much with that either." And she crossed the garden, pursuing the vanished Innocent and Mary.

In doing so she passed Inglewood, who was returning to the house slowly, and with a thought-clouded brow. He was one of those men who are quite clever, but quite the reverse

of quick. As he came back out of the sunset garden into the twilight parlour, Diana Duke slipped swiftly to her feet and began putting away the tea things. But it was not before Inglewood had seen an instantaneous picture so unique that he might well have snapshotted it with his everlasting camera. For Diana had been sitting in front of her unfinished work with her chin on her hand, looking straight out of the window in pure thoughtless thought.

"You are busy," said Arthur, oddly embarrassed with what he had seen, and wishing to ignore it.

"There's no time for dreaming in this world," answered the young lady with her back to him.

"I have been thinking lately," said Inglewood in a low voice, "that there's no time for waking up."

She did not reply, and he walked to the window and looked out on the garden.

"I don't smoke or drink, you know," he said irrelevantly, "because I think they're drugs. And yet I fancy all hobbies, like my camera and bicycle, are drugs too. Getting under a black hood, getting into a dark room – getting into a hole anyhow. Drugging myself with speed, and sunshine, and fatigue, and fresh air. Pedalling the machine so fast that I turn into a machine myself. That's the matter with all of us. We're too busy to wake up."

"Well," said the girl solidly, "what is there to wake up to?"

"There must be!" cried Inglewood, turning round in a singular excitement – "there must be something to wake up to! All

we do is preparations – your cleanliness, and my healthiness, and Warner's scientific appliances. We're always preparing for something – something that never comes off. I ventilate the house, and you sweep the house; but what is going to HAPPEN in the house?"

She was looking at him quietly, but with very bright eyes, and seemed to be searching for some form of words which she could not find.

Before she could speak the door burst open, and the boisterous Rosamund Hunt, in her flamboyant white hat, boa, and parasol, stood framed in the doorway. She was in a breathing heat, and on her open face was an expression of the most infantile astonishment.

"Well, here's a fine game!" she said, panting. "What am I to do now,

I wonder? I've wired for Dr. Warner; that's all I can think of doing."

"What is the matter?" asked Diana, rather sharply, but moving forward like one used to be called upon for assistance.

"It's Mary," said the heiress, "my companion Mary Gray: that cracked friend of yours called Smith has proposed to her in the garden, after ten hours' acquaintance, and he wants to go off with her now for a special licence."

Arthur Inglewood walked to the open French windows and looked out on the garden, still golden with evening light. Nothing moved there but a bird or two hopping and twittering; but beyond

the hedge and railings, in the road outside the garden gate, a hansom cab was waiting, with the yellow Gladstone bag on top of it.

Chapter IV

The Garden of the God

Diana Duke seemed inexplicably irritated at the abrupt entrance and utterance of the other girl.

"Well," she said shortly, "I suppose Miss Gray can decline him if she doesn't want to marry him."

"But she DOES want to marry him!" cried Rosamund in exasperation.

"She's a wild, wicked fool, and I won't be parted from her."

"Perhaps," said Diana icily, "but I really don't see what we can do."

"But the man's balmy, Diana," reasoned her friend angrily.

"I can't let my nice governess marry a man that's balmy!

You or somebody MUST stop it! – Mr. Inglewood, you're a man;

go and tell them they simply can't."

"Unfortunately, it seems to me they simply can," said Inglewood, with a depressed air. "I have far less right of intervention than Miss Duke, besides having, of course, far less moral force than she."

"You haven't either of you got much," cried Rosamund, the last stays of her formidable temper giving way; "I think I'll go

somewhere else for a little sense and pluck. I think I know some one who will help me more than you do, at any rate… he's a cantankerous beast, but he's a man, and has a mind, and knows it…" And she flung out into the garden, with cheeks aflame, and the parasol whirling like a Catherine wheel.

She found Michael Moon standing under the garden tree, looking over the hedge; hunched like a bird of prey, with his large pipe hanging down his long blue chin. The very hardness of his expression pleased her, after the nonsense of the new engagement and the shilly-shallying of her other friends.

"I am sorry I was cross, Mr. Moon," she said frankly. "I hated you for being a cynic; but I've been well punished, for I want a cynic just now. I've had my fill of sentiment – I'm fed up with it. The world's gone mad, Mr. Moon – all except the cynics, I think. That maniac Smith wants to marry my old friend Mary, and she – and she – doesn't seem to mind."

Seeing his attentive face still undisturbedly smoking, she added smartly,

"I'm not joking; that's Mr. Smith's cab outside. He swears he'll take her off now to his aunt's, and go for a special licence.

Do give me some practical advice, Mr. Moon."

Mr. Moon took his pipe out of his mouth, held it in his hand for an instant reflectively, and then tossed it to the other side of the garden. "My practical advice to you is this," he said: "Let him go for his special licence, and ask him to get another one for you and me."

"Is that one of your jokes?" asked the young lady.

"Do say what you really mean."

"I mean that Innocent Smith is a man of business," said Moon with ponderous precision – "a plain, practical man: a man of affairs; a man of facts and the daylight. He has let down twenty ton of good building bricks suddenly on my head, and I am glad to say they have woken me up. We went to sleep a little while ago on this very lawn, in this very sunlight. We have had a little nap for five years or so, but now we're going to be married, Rosamund, and I can't see why that cab…"

"Really," said Rosamund stoutly, "I don't know what you mean."

"What a lie!" cried Michael, advancing on her with brightening eyes. "I'm all for lies in an ordinary way; but don't you see that to-night they won't do? We've wandered into a world of facts, old girl. That grass growing, and that sun going down, and that cab at the door, are facts. You used to torment and excuse yourself by saying I was after your money, and didn't really love you. But if I stood here now and told you I didn't love you – you wouldn't believe me: for truth is in this garden to-night."

"Really, Mr. Moon…" said Rosamund, rather more faintly.

He kept two big blue magnetic eyes fixed on her face. "Is my name Moon?" he asked. "Is your name Hunt? On my honour, they sound to me as quaint and as distant as Red Indian names. It's as if your name was `Swim' and my name was `Sunrise.' But our real names are Husband and Wife, as they were when we fell

asleep."

"It is no good," said Rosamund, with real tears in her eyes; "one can never go back."

"I can go where I damn please," said Michael, "and I can carry you on my shoulder."

"But really, Michael, really, you must stop and think!" cried the girl earnestly. "You could carry me off my feet, I dare say, soul and body, but it may be bitter bad business for all that. These things done in that romantic rush, like Mr. Smith's, they – they do attract women, I don't deny it. As you say, we're all telling the truth to-night. They've attracted poor Mary, for one. They attract me, Michael. But the cold fact remains: imprudent marriages do lead to long unhappiness and disappointment – you've got used to your drinks and things – I shan't be pretty much longer – "

"Imprudent marriages!" roared Michael. "And pray where in earth or heaven are there any prudent marriages? Might as well talk about prudent suicides. You and I have dawdled round each other long enough, and are we any safer than Smith and Mary Gray, who met last night? You never know a husband till you marry him. Unhappy! of course you'll be unhappy. Who the devil are you that you shouldn't be unhappy, like the mother that bore you? Disappointed! of course we'll be disappointed. I, for one, don't expect till I die to be so good a man as I am at this minute – a tower with all the trumpets shouting."

"You see all this," said Rosamund, with a grand sincerity in her solid face, "and do you really want to marry me?"

"My darling, what else is there to do?" reasoned the Irishman. "What other occupation is there for an active man on this earth, except to marry you? What's the alternative to marriage, barring sleep? It's not liberty, Rosamund. Unless you marry God, as our nuns do in Ireland, you must marry Man – that is Me. The only third thing is to marry yourself – yourself, yourself, yourself – the only companion that is never satisfied – and never satisfactory."

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.