

JEROME

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NOVEL NOTES

Джером Джером

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Jerome K. Jerome

Novel Notes

PROLOGUE

Years ago, when I was very small, we lived in a great house in a long, straight, brown-coloured street, in the east end of London. It was a noisy, crowded street in the daytime; but a silent, lonesome street at night, when the gas-lights, few and far between, partook of the character of lighthouses rather than of illuminants, and the tramp, tramp of the policeman on his long beat seemed to be ever drawing nearer, or fading away, except for brief moments when the footsteps ceased, as he paused to rattle a door or window, or to flash his lantern into some dark passage leading down towards the river.

The house had many advantages, so my father would explain to friends who expressed surprise at his choosing such a residence, and among these was included in my own small morbid mind the circumstance that its back windows commanded an uninterrupted view of an ancient and much-peopled churchyard. Often of a night would I steal from between the sheets, and climbing upon the high oak chest that stood before my bedroom window, sit peering down fearfully upon the aged gray tombstones far below, wondering whether the shadows that crept among them might not be ghosts – soiled ghosts that had lost their natural whiteness by long exposure to the city’s smoke, and had grown dingy, like the snow that sometimes lay there.

I persuaded myself that they were ghosts, and came, at length, to have quite a friendly feeling for them. I wondered what they thought when they saw the fading letters of their own names upon the stones, whether they remembered themselves and wished they were alive again, or whether they were happier as they were. But that seemed a still sadder idea.

One night, as I sat there watching, I felt a hand upon my shoulder. I was not frightened, because it was a soft, gentle hand that I well knew, so I merely laid my cheek against it.

“What’s mumma’s naughty boy doing out of bed? Shall I beat him?” And the other hand was laid against my other cheek, and I could feel the soft curls mingling with my own.

“Only looking at the ghosts, ma,” I answered. “There’s such a lot of ’em down there.” Then I added, musingly, “I wonder what it feels like to be a ghost.”

My mother said nothing, but took me up in her arms, and carried me back to bed, and then, sitting down beside me, and holding my hand in hers – there was not so very much difference in the size – began to sing in that low, caressing voice of hers that always made me feel, for the time being, that I wanted to be a good boy, a song she often used to sing to me, and that I have never heard any one else sing since, and should not care to.

But while she sang, something fell on my hand that caused me to sit up and insist on examining her eyes. She laughed; rather a strange, broken little laugh, I thought, and said it was nothing, and told me to lie still and go to sleep. So I wriggled down again and shut my eyes tight, but I could not understand what had made her cry.

Poor little mother, she had a notion, founded evidently upon inborn belief rather than upon observation, that all children were angels, and that, in consequence, an altogether exceptional demand existed for them in a certain other place, where there are more openings for angels, rendering their retention in this world difficult and undependable. My talk about ghosts must have made that foolishly fond heart ache with a vague dread that night, and for many a night onward, I fear.

For some time after this I would often look up to find my mother’s eyes fixed upon me. Especially closely did she watch me at feeding times, and on these occasions, as the meal progressed, her face would acquire an expression of satisfaction and relief.

Once, during dinner, I heard her whisper to my father (for children are not quite so deaf as their elders think), “He seems to eat all right.”

“Eat!” replied my father in the same penetrating undertone; “if he dies of anything, it will be of eating.”

So my little mother grew less troubled, and, as the days went by, saw reason to think that my brother angels might consent to do without me for yet a while longer; and I, putting away the child with his ghostly fancies, became, in course of time, a grown-up person, and ceased to believe in ghosts, together with many other things that, perhaps, it were better for a man if he did believe in.

But the memory of that dingy graveyard, and of the shadows that dwelt therein, came back to me very vividly the other day, for it seemed to me as though I were a ghost myself, gliding through the silent streets where once I had passed swiftly, full of life.

Diving into a long unopened drawer, I had, by chance, drawn forth a dusty volume of manuscript, labelled upon its torn brown paper cover, NOVEL NOTES. The scent of dead days clung to its dogs'-eared pages; and, as it lay open before me, my memory wandered back to the summer evenings – not so very long ago, perhaps, if one but adds up the years, but a long, long while ago if one measures Time by feeling – when four friends had sat together making it, who would never sit together any more. With each crumpled leaf I turned, the uncomfortable conviction that I was only a ghost, grew stronger. The handwriting was my own, but the words were the words of a stranger, so that as I read I wondered to myself, saying: did I ever think this? did I really hope that? did I plan to do this? did I resolve to be such? does life, then, look so to the eyes of a young man? not knowing whether to smile or sigh.

The book was a compilation, half diary, half memoranda. In it lay the record of many musings, of many talks, and out of it – selecting what seemed suitable, adding, altering, and arranging – I have shaped the chapters that hereafter follow.

That I have a right to do so I have fully satisfied my own conscience, an exceptionally fussy one. Of the four joint authors, he whom I call “MacShaughnassy” has laid aside his title to all things beyond six feet of sun-scorched ground in the African veldt; while from him I have designated “Brown” I have borrowed but little, and that little I may fairly claim to have made my own by reason of the artistic merit with which I have embellished it. Indeed, in thus taking a few of his bald ideas and shaping them into readable form, am I not doing him a kindness, and thereby returning good for evil? For has he not, slipping from the high ambition of his youth, sunk ever downward step by step, until he has become a critic, and, therefore, my natural enemy? Does he not, in the columns of a certain journal of large pretension but small circulation, call me “Arry” (without an “H,” the satirical rogue), and is not his contempt for the English-speaking people based chiefly upon the fact that some of them read my books? But in the days of Bloomsbury lodgings and first-night pits we thought each other clever.

From “Jephson” I hold a letter, dated from a station deep in the heart of the Queensland bush. “*Do what you like with it, dear boy,*” the letter runs, “*so long as you keep me out of it. Thanks for your complimentary regrets, but I cannot share them. I was never fitted for a literary career. Lucky for me, I found it out in time. Some poor devils don't. (I'm not getting at you, old man. We read all your stuff, and like it very much. Time hangs a bit heavy, you know, here, in the winter, and we are glad of almost anything.) This life suits me better. I love to feel my horse between my thighs, and the sun upon my skin. And there are the youngsters growing up about us, and the hands to look after, and the stock. I daresay it seems a very commonplace unintellectual life to you, but it satisfies my nature more than the writing of books could ever do. Besides, there are too many authors as it is. The world is so busy reading and writing, it has no time left for thinking. You'll tell me, of course, that books are thought, but that is only the jargon of the Press. You come out here, old man, and sit as I do sometimes for days and nights together alone with the dumb cattle on an upheaved island of earth, as it were, jutting out into the deep sky, and you will know that they are not. What a man thinks – really thinks – goes down into him and grows in silence. What a man writes in books are the thoughts that he wishes to be thought to think.*”

Poor Jephson! he promised so well at one time. But he always had strange notions.

CHAPTER I

When, on returning home one evening, after a pipe party at my friend Jephson's, I informed my wife that I was going to write a novel, she expressed herself as pleased with the idea. She said she had often wondered I had never thought of doing so before. "Look," she added, "how silly all the novels are nowadays; I'm sure you could write one." (Ethelbertha intended to be complimentary, I am convinced; but there is a looseness about her mode of expression which, at times, renders her meaning obscure.)

When, however, I told her that my friend Jephson was going to collaborate with me, she remarked, "Oh," in a doubtful tone; and when I further went on to explain to her that Selkirk Brown and Derrick MacShaughnassy were also going to assist, she replied, "Oh," in a tone which contained no trace of doubtfulness whatever, and from which it was clear that her interest in the matter, as a practical scheme, had entirely evaporated.

I fancy that the fact of my three collaborators being all bachelors diminished somewhat our chances of success, in Ethelbertha's mind. Against bachelors, as a class, she entertains a strong prejudice. A man's not having sense enough to want to marry, or, having that, not having wit enough to do it, argues to her thinking either weakness of intellect or natural depravity, the former rendering its victim unable, and the latter unfit, ever to become a really useful novelist.

I tried to make her understand the peculiar advantages our plan possessed.

"You see," I explained, "in the usual commonplace novel we only get, as a matter of fact, one person's ideas. Now, in this novel, there will be four clever men all working together. The public will thus be enabled to obtain the thoughts and opinions of the whole four of us, at the price usually asked for merely one author's views. If the British reader knows his own business, he will order this book early, to avoid disappointment. Such an opportunity may not occur again for years."

Ethelbertha agreed that this was probable.

"Besides," I continued, my enthusiasm waxing stronger the more I reflected upon the matter, "this work is going to be a genuine bargain in another way also. We are not going to put our mere everyday ideas into it. We are going to crowd into this one novel all the wit and wisdom that the whole four of us possess, if the book will hold it. We shall not write another novel after this one. Indeed, we shall not be able to; we shall have nothing more to write. This work will partake of the nature of an intellectual clearance sale. We are going to put into this novel simply all we know."

Ethelbertha shut her lips, and said something inside; and then remarked aloud that she supposed it would be a one volume affair.

I felt hurt at the implied sneer. I pointed out to her that there already existed a numerous body of specially-trained men employed to do nothing else but make disagreeable observations upon authors and their works – a duty that, so far as I could judge, they seemed capable of performing without any amateur assistance whatever. And I hinted that, by his own fireside, a literary man looked to breathe a more sympathetic atmosphere.

Ethelbertha replied that of course I knew what she meant. She said that she was not thinking of me, and that Jephson was, no doubt, sensible enough (Jephson is engaged), but she did not see the object of bringing half the parish into it. (Nobody suggested bringing "half the parish" into it. Ethelbertha will talk so wildly.) To suppose that Brown and MacShaughnassy could be of any use whatever, she considered absurd. What could a couple of raw bachelors know about life and human nature? As regarded MacShaughnassy in particular, she was of opinion that if we only wanted out of him all that *he* knew, and could keep him to the subject, we ought to be able to get that into about a page.

My wife's present estimate of MacShaughnassy's knowledge is the result of reaction. The first time she ever saw him, she and he got on wonderfully well together; and when I returned to the

drawing-room, after seeing him down to the gate, her first words were, “What a wonderful man that Mr. MacShaughnassy is. He seems to know so much about everything.”

That describes MacShaughnassy exactly. He does seem to know a tremendous lot. He is possessed of more information than any man I ever came across. Occasionally, it is correct information; but, speaking broadly, it is remarkable for its marvellous unreliability. Where he gets it from is a secret that nobody has ever yet been able to fathom.

Ethelbertha was very young when we started housekeeping. (Our first butcher very nearly lost her custom, I remember, once and for ever by calling her “Missie,” and giving her a message to take back to her mother. She arrived home in tears. She said that perhaps she wasn’t fit to be anybody’s wife, but she did not see why she should be told so by the tradespeople.) She was naturally somewhat inexperienced in domestic affairs, and, feeling this keenly, was grateful to any one who would give her useful hints and advice. When MacShaughnassy came along he seemed, in her eyes, a sort of glorified Mrs. Beeton. He knew everything wanted to be known inside a house, from the scientific method of peeling a potato to the cure of spasms in cats, and Ethelbertha would sit at his feet, figuratively speaking, and gain enough information in one evening to make the house unlivable in for a month.

He told her how fires ought to be laid. He said that the way fires were usually laid in this country was contrary to all the laws of nature, and he showed her how the thing was done in Crim Tartary, or some such place, where the science of laying fires is alone properly understood. He proved to her that an immense saving in time and labour, to say nothing of coals, could be effected by the adoption of the Crim Tartary system; and he taught it to her then and there, and she went straight downstairs and explained it to the girl.

Amenda, our then “general,” was an extremely stolid young person, and, in some respects, a model servant. She never argued. She never seemed to have any notions of her own whatever. She accepted our ideas without comment, and carried them out with such pedantic precision and such evident absence of all feeling of responsibility concerning the result as to surround our home legislation with quite a military atmosphere.

On the present occasion she stood quietly by while the MacShaughnassy method of fire-laying was expounded to her. When Ethelbertha had finished she simply said: —

“You want me to lay the fires like that?”

“Yes, Amenda, we’ll always have the fires laid like that in future, if you please.”

“All right, mum,” replied Amenda, with perfect unconcern, and there the matter ended, for that evening.

On coming downstairs the next morning we found the breakfast table spread very nicely, but there was no breakfast. We waited. Ten minutes went by – a quarter of an hour – twenty minutes. Then Ethelbertha rang the bell. In response Amenda presented herself, calm and respectful.

“Do you know that the proper time for breakfast is half-past eight, Amenda?”

“Yes’m.”

“And do you know that it’s now nearly nine?”

“Yes’m.”

“Well, isn’t breakfast ready?”

“No, mum.”

“Will it *ever* be ready?”

“Well, mum,” replied Amenda, in a tone of genial frankness, “to tell you the truth, I don’t think it ever will.”

“What’s the reason? Won’t the fire light?”

“Oh yes, it lights all right.”

“Well, then, why can’t you cook the breakfast?”

“Because before you can turn yourself round it goes out again.”

Amenda never volunteered statements. She answered the question put to her and then stopped dead. I called downstairs to her on one occasion, before I understood her peculiarities, to ask her if she knew the time. She replied, “Yes, sir,” and disappeared into the back kitchen. At the end of thirty seconds or so, I called down again. “I asked you, Amenda,” I said reproachfully, “to tell me the time about ten minutes ago.”

“Oh, did you?” she called back pleasantly. “I beg your pardon. I thought you asked me if I knew it – it’s half-past four.”

Ethelbertha inquired – to return to our fire – if she had tried lighting it again.

“Oh yes, mum,” answered the girl. “I’ve tried four times.” Then she added cheerfully, “I’ll try again if you like, mum.”

Amenda was the most willing servant we ever paid wages to.

Ethelbertha said she would step down and light the fire herself, and told Amenda to follow her and watch how she did it. I felt interested in the experiment, and followed also. Ethelbertha tucked up her frock and set to work. Amenda and I stood around and looked on.

At the end of half an hour Ethelbertha retired from the contest, hot, dirty, and a trifle irritable. The fireplace retained the same cold, cynical expression with which it had greeted our entrance.

Then I tried. I honestly tried my best. I was eager and anxious to succeed. For one reason, I wanted my breakfast. For another, I wanted to be able to say that I had done this thing. It seemed to me that for any human being to light a fire, laid as that fire was laid, would be a feat to be proud of. To light a fire even under ordinary circumstances is not too easy a task: to do so, handicapped by MacShaughnassy’s rules, would, I felt, be an achievement pleasant to look back upon. My idea, had I succeeded, would have been to go round the neighbourhood and brag about it.

However, I did not succeed. I lit various other things, including the kitchen carpet and the cat, who would come sniffing about, but the materials within the stove appeared to be fire-proof.

Ethelbertha and I sat down, one each side of our cheerless hearth, and looked at one another, and thought of MacShaughnassy, until Amenda chimed in on our despair with one of those practical suggestions of hers that she occasionally threw out for us to accept or not, as we chose.

“Maybe,” said she, “I’d better light it in the old way just for to-day.”

“Do, Amenda,” said Ethelbertha, rising. And then she added, “I think we’ll always have them lighted in the old way, Amenda, if you please.”

Another time he showed us how to make coffee – according to the Arabian method. Arabia must be a very untidy country if they made coffee often over there. He dirtied two saucepans, three jugs, one tablecloth, one nutmeg-grater, one hearthrug, three cups, and himself. This made coffee for two – what would have been necessary in the case of a party, one dares not think.

That we did not like the coffee when made, MacShaughnassy attributed to our debased taste – the result of long indulgence in an inferior article. He drank both cups himself, and afterwards went home in a cab.

He had an aunt in those days, I remember, a mysterious old lady, who lived in some secluded retreat from where she wrought incalculable mischief upon MacShaughnassy’s friends. What he did not know – the one or two things that he was *not* an authority upon – this aunt of his knew. “No,” he would say with engaging candour – “no, that is a thing I cannot advise you about myself. But,” he would add, “I’ll tell you what I’ll do. I’ll write to my aunt and ask her.” And a day or two afterwards he would call again, bringing his aunt’s advice with him; and, if you were young and inexperienced, or a natural born fool, you might possibly follow it.

She sent us a recipe on one occasion, through MacShaughnassy, for the extermination of blackbeetles. We occupied a very picturesque old house; but, as with most picturesque old houses, its advantages were chiefly external. There were many holes and cracks and crevices within its creaking framework. Frogs, who had lost their way and taken the wrong turning, would suddenly discover themselves in the middle of our dining-room, apparently quite as much to their own surprise and

annoyance as to ours. A numerous company of rats and mice, remarkably fond of physical exercise, had fitted the place up as a gymnasium for themselves; and our kitchen, after ten o'clock, was turned into a blackbeetles' club. They came up through the floor and out through the walls, and gambolled there in their light-hearted, reckless way till daylight.

The rats and mice Amenda did not object to. She said she liked to watch them. But against the blackbeetles she was prejudiced. Therefore, when my wife informed her that MacShaughnassy's aunt had given us an infallible recipe for their annihilation, she rejoiced.

We purchased the materials, manufactured the mixture, and put it about. The beetles came and ate it. They seemed to like it. They finished it all up, and were evidently vexed that there was not more. But they did not die.

We told these facts to MacShaughnassy. He smiled, a very grim smile, and said in a low tone, full of meaning, "Let them eat!"

It appeared that this was one of those slow, insidious poisons. It did not kill the beetle off immediately, but it undermined his constitution. Day by day he would sink and droop without being able to tell what was the matter with himself, until one morning we should enter the kitchen to find him lying cold and very still.

So we made more stuff and laid it round each night, and the blackbeetles from all about the parish swarmed to it. Each night they came in greater quantities. They fetched up all their friends and relations. Strange beetles – beetles from other families, with no claim on us whatever – got to hear about the thing, and came in hordes, and tried to rob our blackbeetles of it. By the end of a week we had lured into our kitchen every beetle that wasn't lame for miles round.

MacShaughnassy said it was a good thing. We should clear the suburb at one swoop. The beetles had now been eating this poison steadily for ten days, and he said that the end could not be far off. I was glad to hear it, because I was beginning to find this unlimited hospitality expensive. It was a dear poison that we were giving them, and they were hearty eaters.

We went downstairs to see how they were getting on. MacShaughnassy thought they seemed queer, and was of opinion that they were breaking up. Speaking for myself, I can only say that a healthier-looking lot of beetles I never wish to see.

One, it is true, did die that very evening. He was detected in the act of trying to make off with an unfairly large portion of the poison, and three or four of the others set upon him savagely and killed him.

But he was the only one, so far as I could ever discover, to whom MacShaughnassy's recipe proved fatal. As for the others, they grew fat and sleek upon it. Some of them, indeed, began to acquire quite a figure. We lessened their numbers eventually by the help of some common oil-shop stuff. But such vast numbers, attracted by MacShaughnassy's poison, had settled in the house, that to finally exterminate them now was hopeless.

I have not heard of MacShaughnassy's aunt lately. Possibly, one of MacShaughnassy's bosom friends has found out her address and has gone down and murdered her. If so, I should like to thank him.

I tried a little while ago to cure MacShaughnassy of his fatal passion for advice-giving, by repeating to him a very sad story that was told to me by a gentleman I met in an American railway car. I was travelling from Buffalo to New York, and, during the day, it suddenly occurred to me that I might make the journey more interesting by leaving the cars at Albany and completing the distance by water. But I did not know how the boats ran, and I had no guide-book with me. I glanced about for some one to question. A mild-looking, elderly gentleman sat by the next window reading a book, the cover of which was familiar to me. I deemed him to be intelligent, and approached him.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you," I said, sitting down opposite to him, "but could you give me any information about the boats between Albany and New York?"

“Well,” he answered, looking up with a pleasant smile, “there are three lines of boats altogether. There is the Heggarty line, but they only go as far as Catskill. Then there are the Poughkeepsie boats, which go every other day. Or there is what we call the canal boat.”

“Oh,” I said. “Well now, which would you advise me to – ”

He jumped to his feet with a cry, and stood glaring down at me with a gleam in his eyes which was positively murderous.

“You villain!” he hissed in low tones of concentrated fury, “so that’s your game, is it? I’ll give you something that you’ll want advice about,” and he whipped out a six-chambered revolver.

I felt hurt. I also felt that if the interview were prolonged I might feel even more hurt. So I left him without a word, and drifted over to the other end of the car, where I took up a position between a stout lady and the door.

I was still musing upon the incident, when, looking up, I observed my elderly friend making towards me. I rose and laid my hand upon the door-knob. He should not find me unprepared. He smiled, reassuringly, however, and held out his hand.

“I’ve been thinking,” he said, “that maybe I was a little rude just now. I should like, if you will let me, to explain. I think, when you have heard my story, you will understand, and forgive me.”

There was that about him which made me trust him. We found a quiet corner in the smoking-car. I had a “whiskey sour,” and he prescribed for himself a strange thing of his own invention. Then we lighted our cigars, and he talked.

“Thirty years ago,” said he, “I was a young man with a healthy belief in myself, and a desire to do good to others. I did not imagine myself a genius. I did not even consider myself exceptionally brilliant or talented. But it did seem to me, and the more I noted the doings of my fellow-men and women, the more assured did I become of it, that I possessed plain, practical common sense to an unusual and remarkable degree. Conscious of this, I wrote a little book, which I entitled *How to be Happy, Wealthy, and Wise*, and published it at my own expense. I did not seek for profit. I merely wished to be useful.

“The book did not make the stir that I had anticipated. Some two or three hundred copies went off, and then the sale practically ceased.

“I confess that at first I was disappointed. But after a while, I reflected that, if people would not take my advice, it was more their loss than mine, and I dismissed the matter from my mind.

“One morning, about a twelvemonth afterwards, I was sitting in my study, when the servant entered to say that there was a man downstairs who wanted very much to see me.

“I gave instructions that he should be sent up, and up accordingly he came.

“He was a common man, but he had an open, intelligent countenance, and his manner was most respectful. I motioned him to be seated. He selected a chair, and sat down on the extreme edge of it.

“I hope you’ll pard’n this intrusion, sir,” he began, speaking deliberately, and twirling his hat the while; ‘but I’ve come more’n two hundred miles to see you, sir.’

“I expressed myself as pleased, and he continued: ‘They tell me, sir, as you’re the gentleman as wrote that little book, *How to be Happy, Wealthy, and Wise*.’”

He enumerated the three items slowly, dwelling lovingly on each. I admitted the fact.

“‘Ah, that’s a wonderful book, sir,’ he went on. ‘I ain’t one of them as has got brains of their own – not to speak of – but I know enough to know them as has; and when I read that little book, I says to myself, Josiah Hackett (that’s my name, sir), when you’re in doubt don’t you get addling that thick head o’ yours, as will only tell you all wrong; you go to the gentleman as wrote that little book and ask him for his advice. He is a kind-hearted gentleman, as any one can tell, and he’ll give it you; and *when* you’ve got it, you go straight ahead, full steam, and don’t you stop for nothing, ‘cause he’ll know what’s best for you, same as he knows what’s best for everybody. That’s what I says, sir; and that’s what I’m here for.’”

“He paused, and wiped his brow with a green cotton handkerchief. I prayed him to proceed.

“It appeared that the worthy fellow wanted to marry, but could not make up his mind *whom* he wanted to marry. He had his eye – so he expressed it – upon two young women, and they, he had reason to believe, regarded him in return with more than usual favour. His difficulty was to decide which of the two – both of them excellent and deserving young persons – would make him the best wife. The one, Juliana, the only daughter of a retired sea-captain, he described as a winsome lassie. The other, Hannah, was an older and altogether more womanly girl. She was the eldest of a large family. Her father, he said, was a God-fearing man, and was doing well in the timber trade. He asked me which of them I should advise him to marry.

“I was flattered. What man in my position would not have been? This Josiah Hackett had come from afar to hear my wisdom. He was willing – nay, anxious – to entrust his whole life’s happiness to my discretion. That he was wise in so doing, I entertained no doubt. The choice of a wife I had always held to be a matter needing a calm, unbiassed judgment, such as no lover could possibly bring to bear upon the subject. In such a case, I should not have hesitated to offer advice to the wisest of men. To this poor, simple-minded fellow, I felt it would be cruel to refuse it.

“He handed me photographs of both the young persons under consideration. I jotted down on the back of each such particulars as I deemed would assist me in estimating their respective fitness for the vacancy in question, and promised to carefully consider the problem, and write him in a day or two.

“His gratitude was touching. ‘Don’t you trouble to write no letters, sir,’ he said; ‘you just stick down “Julia” or “Hannah” on a bit of paper, and put it in an envelope. I shall know what it means, and that’s the one as I shall marry.’

“Then he gripped me by the hand and left me.

“I gave a good deal of thought to the selection of Josiah’s wife. I wanted him to be happy.

“Juliana was certainly very pretty. There was a lurking playfulness about the corners of Juliana’s mouth which conjured up the sound of rippling laughter. Had I acted on impulse, I should have clasped Juliana in Josiah’s arms.

“But, I reflected, more sterling qualities than mere playfulness and prettiness are needed for a wife. Hannah, though not so charming, clearly possessed both energy and sense – qualities highly necessary to a poor man’s wife. Hannah’s father was a pious man, and was ‘doing well’ – a thrifty, saving man, no doubt. He would have instilled into her lessons of economy and virtue; and, later on, she might possibly come in for a little something. She was the eldest of a large family. She was sure to have had to help her mother a good deal. She would be experienced in household matters, and would understand the bringing up of children.

“Julia’s father, on the other hand, was a retired sea-captain. Seafaring folk are generally loose sort of fish. He had probably been in the habit of going about the house, using language and expressing views, the hearing of which could not but have exercised an injurious effect upon the formation of a growing girl’s character. Juliana was his only child. Only children generally make bad men and women. They are allowed to have their own way too much. The pretty daughter of a retired sea-captain would be certain to be spoilt.

“Josiah, I had also to remember, was a man evidently of weak character. He would need management. Now, there was something about Hannah’s eye that eminently suggested management.

“At the end of two days my mind was made up. I wrote ‘Hannah’ on a slip of paper, and posted it.

“A fortnight afterwards I received a letter from Josiah. He thanked me for my advice, but added, incidentally, that he wished I could have made it Julia. However, he said, he felt sure I knew best, and by the time I received the letter he and Hannah would be one.

“That letter worried me. I began to wonder if, after all, I had chosen the right girl. Suppose Hannah was not all I thought her! What a terrible thing it would be for Josiah. What data, sufficient to reason upon, had I possessed? How did I know that Hannah was not a lazy, ill-tempered girl, a continual thorn in the side of her poor, overworked mother, and a perpetual blister to her younger

brothers and sisters? How did I know she had been well brought up? Her father might be a precious old fraud: most seemingly pious men are. She may have learned from him only hypocrisy.

“Then also, how did I know that Juliana’s merry childishness would not ripen into sweet, cheerful womanliness? Her father, for all I knew to the contrary, might be the model of what a retired sea-captain should be; with possibly a snug little sum safely invested somewhere. And Juliana was his only child. What reason had I for rejecting this fair young creature’s love for Josiah?”

“I took her photo from my desk. I seemed to detect a reproachful look in the big eyes. I saw before me the scene in the little far-away home when the first tidings of Josiah’s marriage fell like a cruel stone into the hitherto placid waters of her life. I saw her kneeling by her father’s chair, while the white-haired, bronzed old man gently stroked the golden head, shaking with silent sobs against his breast. My remorse was almost more than I could bear.

“I put her aside and took up Hannah – my chosen one. She seemed to be regarding me with a smile of heartless triumph. There began to take possession of me a feeling of positive dislike to Hannah.

“I fought against the feeling. I told myself it was prejudice. But the more I reasoned against it the stronger it became. I could tell that, as the days went by, it would grow from dislike to loathing, from loathing to hate. And this was the woman I had deliberately selected as a life companion for Josiah!

“For weeks I knew no peace of mind. Every letter that arrived I dreaded to open, fearing it might be from Josiah. At every knock I started up, and looked about for a hiding-place. Every time I came across the heading, ‘Domestic Tragedy,’ in the newspapers, I broke into a cold perspiration. I expected to read that Josiah and Hannah had murdered each other, and died cursing me.

“As the time went by, however, and I heard nothing, my fears began to assuage, and my belief in my own intuitive good judgment to return. Maybe, I had done a good thing for Josiah and Hannah, and they were blessing me. Three years passed peacefully away, and I was beginning to forget the existence of the Hacketts.

“Then he came again. I returned home from business one evening to find him waiting for me in the hall. The moment I saw him I knew that my worst fears had fallen short of the truth. I motioned him to follow me to my study. He did so, and seated himself in the identical chair on which he had sat three years ago. The change in him was remarkable; he looked old and careworn. His manner was that of resigned hopelessness.

“We remained for a while without speaking, he twirling his hat as at our first interview, I making a show of arranging papers on my desk. At length, feeling that anything would be more bearable than this silence, I turned to him.

“‘Things have not been going well with you, I’m afraid, Josiah?’ I said.

“‘No, sir,’ he replied quietly; ‘I can’t say as they have, altogether. That Hannah of yours has turned out a bit of a teaser.’

“‘There was no touch of reproach in his tones. He simply stated a melancholy fact.

“‘But she is a good wife to you in other ways,’ I urged. ‘She has her faults, of course. We all have. But she is energetic. Come now, you will admit she’s energetic.’

“I owed it to myself to find some good in Hannah, and this was the only thing I could think of at that moment.

“‘Oh yes, she’s that,’ he assented. ‘A little too much so for our sized house, I sometimes think.’

“‘You see,’ he went on, ‘she’s a bit cornery in her temper, Hannah is; and then her mother’s a bit trying, at times.’

“‘Her mother!’ I exclaimed, ‘but what’s *she* got to do with you?’

“‘Well, you see, sir,’ he answered, ‘she’s living with us now – ever since the old man went off.’

“‘Hannah’s father! Is he dead, then?’

“Well, not exactly, sir,’ he replied. ‘He ran off about a twelvemonth ago with one of the young women who used to teach in the Sunday School, and joined the Mormons. It came as a great surprise to every one.’

“I groaned. ‘And his business,’ I inquired – ‘the timber business, who carries that on?’

“‘Oh, that!’ answered Josiah. ‘Oh, that had to be sold to pay his debts – leastways, to go towards ’em.’

“I remarked what a terrible thing it was for his family. I supposed the home was broken up, and they were all scattered.

“‘No, sir,’ he replied simply, ‘they ain’t scattered much. They’re all living with us.’

“‘But there,’ he continued, seeing the look upon my face; ‘of course, all this has nothing to do with you sir. You’ve got troubles of your own, I daresay, sir. I didn’t come here to worry you with mine. That would be a poor return for all your kindness to me.’

“‘What has become of Julia?’ I asked. I did not feel I wanted to question him any more about his own affairs.

“A smile broke the settled melancholy of his features. ‘Ah,’ he said, in a more cheerful tone than he had hitherto employed, ‘it does one good to think about *her*, it does. She’s married to a friend of mine now, young Sam Jessop. I slips out and gives ’em a call now and then, when Hannah ain’t round. Lord, it’s like getting a glimpse of heaven to look into their little home. He often chaffs me about it, Sam does. “Well, you *was* a sawny-headed chunk, Josiah, *you was*,” he often says to me. We’re old chums, you know, sir, Sam and me, so he don’t mind joking a bit like.’

“Then the smile died away, and he added with a sigh, ‘Yes, I’ve often thought since, sir, how jolly it would have been if you could have seen your way to making it Juliana.’

“I felt I must get him back to Hannah at any cost. I said, ‘I suppose you and your wife are still living in the old place?’

“‘Yes,’ he replied, ‘if you can call it living. It’s a hard struggle with so many of us.’

“He said he did not know how he should have managed if it had not been for the help of Julia’s father. He said the captain had behaved more like an angel than anything else he knew of.

“‘I don’t say as he’s one of your clever sort, you know, sir,’ he explained. ‘Not the man as one would go to for advice, like one would to you, sir; but he’s a good sort for all that.’

“‘And that reminds me, sir,’ he went on, ‘of what I’ve come here about. You’ll think it very bold of me to ask, sir, but – ’

“I interrupted him. ‘Josiah,’ I said, ‘I admit that I am much to blame for what has come upon you. You asked me for my advice, and I gave it you. Which of us was the bigger idiot, we will not discuss. The point is that I did give it, and I am not a man to shirk my responsibilities. What, in reason, you ask, and I can grant, I will give you.’

“He was overcome with gratitude. ‘I knew it, sir,’ he said. ‘I knew you would not refuse me. I said so to Hannah. I said, “I will go to that gentleman and ask him. I will go to him and ask him for his advice.”’

“I said, ‘His what?’

“‘His advice,’ repeated Josiah, apparently surprised at my tone, ‘on a little matter as I can’t quite make up my mind about.’

“I thought at first he was trying to be sarcastic, but he wasn’t. That man sat there, and wrestled with me for my advice as to whether he should invest a thousand dollars which Julia’s father had offered to lend him, in the purchase of a laundry business or a bar. He hadn’t had enough of it (my advice, I mean); he wanted it again, and he spun me reasons why I should give it him. The choice of a wife was a different thing altogether, he argued. Perhaps he ought *not* to have asked me for my opinion as to that. But advice as to which of two trades a man would do best to select, surely any business man could give. He said he had just been reading again my little book, *How to be Happy*, etc., and if the gentleman who wrote that could not decide between the respective merits of one particular

laundry and one particular bar, both situate in the same city, well, then, all he had got to say was that knowledge and wisdom were clearly of no practical use in this world whatever.

“Well, it did seem a simple thing to advise a man about. Surely as to a matter of this kind, I, a professed business man, must be able to form a sounder judgment than this poor pumpkin-headed lamb. It would be heartless to refuse to help him. I promised to look into the matter, and let him know what I thought.

“He rose and shook me by the hand. He said he would not try to thank me; words would only seem weak. He dashed away a tear and went out.

“I brought an amount of thought to bear upon this thousand-dollar investment sufficient to have floated a bank. I did not mean to make another Hannah job, if I could help it. I studied the papers Josiah had left with me, but did not attempt to form any opinion from them. I went down quietly to Josiah’s city, and inspected both businesses on the spot. I instituted secret but searching inquiries in the neighbourhood. I disguised myself as a simple-minded young man who had come into a little money, and wormed myself into the confidence of the servants. I interviewed half the town upon the pretence that I was writing the commercial history of New England, and should like some particulars of their career, and I invariably ended my examination by asking them which was their favourite bar, and where they got their washing done. I stayed a fortnight in the town. Most of my spare time I spent at the bar. In my leisure moments I dirtied my clothes so that they might be washed at the laundry.

“As the result of my investigations I discovered that, so far as the two businesses themselves were concerned, there was not a pin to choose between them. It became merely a question of which particular trade would best suit the Hacketts.

“I reflected. The keeper of a bar was exposed to much temptation. A weak-minded man, mingling continually in the company of toppers, might possibly end by giving way to drink. Now, Josiah was an exceptionally weak-minded man. It had also to be borne in mind that he had a shrewish wife, and that her whole family had come to live with him. Clearly, to place Josiah in a position of easy access to unlimited liquor would be madness.

“About a laundry, on the other hand, there was something soothing. The working of a laundry needed many hands. Hannah’s relatives might be used up in a laundry, and made to earn their own living. Hannah might expend her energy in flat-ironing, and Josiah could turn the mangle. The idea conjured up quite a pleasant domestic picture. I recommended the laundry.

“On the following Monday, Josiah wrote to say that he had bought the laundry. On Tuesday I read in the *Commercial Intelligence* that one of the most remarkable features of the time was the marvellous rise taking place all over New England in the value of hotel and bar property. On Thursday, in the list of failures, I came across no less than four laundry proprietors; and the paper added, in explanation, that the American washing industry, owing to the rapid growth of Chinese competition, was practically on its last legs. I went out and got drunk.

“My life became a curse to me. All day long I thought of Josiah. All night I dreamed of him. Suppose that, not content with being the cause of his domestic misery, I had now deprived him of the means of earning a livelihood, and had rendered useless the generosity of that good old sea-captain. I began to appear to myself as a malignant fiend, ever following this simple but worthy man to work evil upon him.

“Time passed away, however; I heard nothing from or of him, and my burden at last fell from me.

“Then at the end of about five years he came again.

“He came behind me as I was opening the door with my latch-key, and laid an unsteady hand upon my arm. It was a dark night, but a gas-lamp showed me his face. I recognised it in spite of the red blotches and the bleary film that hid the eyes. I caught him roughly by the arm, and hurried him inside and up into my study.

“‘Sit down,’ I hissed, ‘and tell me the worst first.’

“He was about to select his favourite chair. I felt that if I saw him and that particular chair in association for the third time, I should do something terrible to both. I snatched it away from him, and he sat down heavily on the floor, and burst into tears. I let him remain there, and, thickly, between hiccoughs, he told his tale.

“The laundry had gone from bad to worse. A new railway had come to the town, altering its whole topography. The business and residential portion had gradually shifted northward. The spot where the bar – the particular one which I had rejected for the laundry – had formerly stood was now the commercial centre of the city. The man who had purchased it in place of Josiah had sold out and made a fortune. The southern area (where the laundry was situate) was, it had been discovered, built upon a swamp, and was in a highly unsanitary condition. Careful housewives naturally objected to sending their washing into such a neighbourhood.

“Other troubles had also come. The baby – Josiah’s pet, the one bright thing in his life – had fallen into the copper and been boiled. Hannah’s mother had been crushed in the mangle, and was now a helpless cripple, who had to be waited on day and night.

“Under these accumulated misfortunes Josiah had sought consolation in drink, and had become a hopeless sot. He felt his degradation keenly, and wept copiously. He said he thought that in a cheerful place, such as a bar, he might have been strong and brave; but that there was something about the everlasting smell of damp clothes and suds, that seemed to sap his manhood.

“I asked him what the captain had said to it all. He burst into fresh tears, and replied that the captain was no more. That, he added, reminded him of what he had come about. The good-hearted old fellow had bequeathed him five thousand dollars. He wanted my advice as to how to invest it.

“My first impulse was to kill him on the spot. I wish now that I had. I restrained myself, however, and offered him the alternative of being thrown from the window or of leaving by the door without another word.

“He answered that he was quite prepared to go by the window if I would first tell him whether to put his money in the Terra del Fuego Nitrate Company, Limited, or in the Union Pacific Bank. Life had no further interest for him. All he cared for was to feel that this little nest-egg was safely laid by for the benefit of his beloved ones after he was gone.

“He pressed me to tell him what I thought of nitrates. I replied that I declined to say anything whatever on the subject. He assumed from my answer that I did not think much of nitrates, and announced his intention of investing the money, in consequence, in the Union Pacific Bank.

“I told him by all means to do so, if he liked.

“He paused, and seemed to be puzzling it out. Then he smiled knowingly, and said he thought he understood what I meant. It was very kind of me. He should put every dollar he possessed in the Terra del Fuego Nitrate Company.

“He rose (with difficulty) to go. I stopped him. I knew, as certainly as I knew the sun would rise the next morning, that whichever company I advised him, or he persisted in thinking I had advised him (which was the same thing), to invest in, would, sooner or later, come to smash. My grandmother had all her little fortune in the Terra del Fuego Nitrate Company. I could not see her brought to penury in her old age. As for Josiah, it could make no difference to him whatever. He would lose his money in any event. I advised him to invest in Union Pacific Bank Shares. He went and did it.

“The Union Pacific Bank held out for eighteen months. Then it began to totter. The financial world stood bewildered. It had always been reckoned one of the safest banks in the country. People asked what could be the cause. I knew well enough, but I did not tell.

“The Bank made a gallant fight, but the hand of fate was upon it. At the end of another nine months the crash came.

“(Nitrates, it need hardly be said, had all this time been going up by leaps and bounds. My grandmother died worth a million dollars, and left the whole of it to a charity. Had she known how I had saved her from ruin, she might have been more grateful.)

“A few days after the failure of the Bank, Josiah arrived on my doorstep; and, this time, he brought his families with him. There were sixteen of them in all.

“What was I to do? I had brought these people step by step to the verge of starvation. I had laid waste alike their happiness and their prospects in life. The least amends I could make was to see that at all events they did not want for the necessities of existence.

“That was seventeen years ago. I am still seeing that they do not want for the necessities of existence; and my conscience is growing easier by noticing that they seem contented with their lot. There are twenty-two of them now, and we have hopes of another in the spring.

“That is my story,” he said. “Perhaps you will now understand my sudden emotion when you asked for my advice. As a matter of fact, I do not give advice now on any subject.”

* * * * *

I told this tale to MacShaughnassy. He agreed with me that it was instructive, and said he should remember it. He said he should remember it so as to tell it to some fellows that he knew, to whom he thought the lesson should prove useful.

CHAPTER II

I can't honestly say that we made much progress at our first meeting. It was Brown's fault. He would begin by telling us a story about a dog. It was the old, old story of the dog who had been in the habit of going every morning to a certain baker's shop with a penny in his mouth, in exchange for which he always received a penny bun. One day, the baker, thinking he would not know the difference, tried to palm off upon the poor animal a ha'penny bun, whereupon the dog walked straight outside and fetched in a policeman. Brown had heard this chestnut for the first time that afternoon, and was full of it. It is always a mystery to me where Brown has been for the last hundred years. He stops you in the street with, "Oh, I must tell you! – such a capital story!" And he thereupon proceeds to relate to you, with much spirit and gusto, one of Noah's best known jokes, or some story that Romulus must have originally told to Remus. One of these days somebody will tell him the history of Adam and Eve, and he will think he has got hold of a new plot, and will work it up into a novel.

He gives forth these hoary antiquities as personal reminiscences of his own, or, at furthest, as episodes in the life of his second cousin. There are certain strange and moving catastrophes that would seem either to have occurred to, or to have been witnessed by, nearly every one you meet. I never came across a man yet who had not seen some other man jerked off the top of an omnibus into a mud-cart. Half London must, at one time or another, have been jerked off omnibuses into mud-carts, and have been fished out at the end of a shovel.

Then there is the tale of the lady whose husband is taken suddenly ill one night at an hotel. She rushes downstairs, and prepares a stiff mustard plaster to put on him, and runs up with it again. In her excitement, however, she charges into the wrong room, and, rolling down the bedclothes, presses it lovingly upon the wrong man. I have heard that story so often that I am quite nervous about going to bed in an hotel now. Each man who has told it me has invariably slept in the room next door to that of the victim, and has been awakened by the man's yell as the plaster came down upon him. That is how he (the story-teller) came to know all about it.

Brown wanted us to believe that this prehistoric animal he had been telling us about had belonged to his brother-in-law, and was hurt when Jephson murmured, *sotto voce*, that that made the twenty-eighth man he had met whose brother-in-law had owned that dog – to say nothing of the hundred and seventeen who had owned it themselves.

We tried to get to work afterwards, but Brown had unsettled us for the evening. It is a wicked thing to start dog stories among a party of average sinful men. Let one man tell a dog story, and every other man in the room feels he wants to tell a bigger one.

There is a story going – I cannot vouch for its truth, it was told me by a judge – of a man who lay dying. The pastor of the parish, a good and pious man, came to sit with him, and, thinking to cheer him up, told him an anecdote about a dog. When the pastor had finished, the sick man sat up, and said, "I know a better story than that. I had a dog once, a big, brown, lop-sided –"

The effort had proved too much for his strength. He fell back upon the pillows, and the doctor, stepping forward, saw that it was a question only of minutes.

The good old pastor rose, and took the poor fellow's hand in his, and pressed it. "We shall meet again," he gently said.

The sick man turned towards him with a consoled and grateful look.

"I'm glad to hear you say that," he feebly murmured. "Remind me about that dog."

Then he passed peacefully away, with a sweet smile upon his pale lips.

Brown, who had had his dog story and was satisfied, wanted us to settle our heroine; but the rest of us did not feel equal to settling anybody just then. We were thinking of all the true dog stories we had ever heard, and wondering which was the one least likely to be generally disbelieved.

MacShaughnassy, in particular, was growing every moment more restless and moody. Brown concluded a long discourse – to which nobody had listened – by remarking with some pride, “What more can you want? The plot has never been used before, and the characters are entirely original!”

Then MacShaughnassy gave way. “Talking of plots,” he said, hitching his chair a little nearer the table, “that puts me in mind. Did I ever tell you about that dog we had when we lived in Norwood?”

“It’s not that one about the bull-dog, is it?” queried Jephson anxiously.

“Well, it was a bull-dog,” admitted MacShaughnassy, “but I don’t think I’ve ever told it you before.”

We knew, by experience, that to argue the matter would only prolong the torture, so we let him go on.

“A great many burglaries had lately taken place in our neighbourhood,” he began, “and the pater came to the conclusion that it was time he laid down a dog. He thought a bull-dog would be the best for his purpose, and he purchased the most savage and murderous-looking specimen that he could find.

“My mother was alarmed when she saw the dog. ‘Surely you’re not going to let that brute loose about the house!’ she exclaimed. ‘He’ll kill somebody. I can see it in his face.’

“I want him to kill somebody,’ replied my father; ‘I want him to kill burglars.’

“I don’t like to hear you talk like that, Thomas,’ answered the mater; ‘it’s not like you. We’ve a right to protect our property, but we’ve no right to take a fellow human creature’s life.’

“Our fellow human creatures will be all right – so long as they don’t come into our kitchen when they’ve no business there,’ retorted my father, somewhat testily. ‘I’m going to fix up this dog in the scullery, and if a burglar comes fooling around – well, that’s *his* affair.’

“The old folks quarrelled on and off for about a month over this dog. The dad thought the mater absurdly sentimental, and the mater thought the dad unnecessarily vindictive. Meanwhile the dog grew more ferocious-looking every day.

“One night my mother woke my father up with: ‘Thomas, there’s a burglar downstairs, I’m positive. I distinctly heard the kitchen door open.’

“Oh, well, the dog’s got him by now, then,’ murmured my father, who had heard nothing, and was sleepy.

“‘Thomas,’ replied my mother severely, ‘I’m not going to lie here while a fellow-creature is being murdered by a savage beast. If you won’t go down and save that man’s life, I will.’

“Oh, bother,’ said my father, preparing to get up. ‘You’re always fancying you hear noises. I believe that’s all you women come to bed for – to sit up and listen for burglars.’ Just to satisfy her, however, he pulled on his trousers and socks, and went down.

“Well, sure enough, my mother was right, this time. There *was* a burglar in the house. The pantry window stood open, and a light was shining in the kitchen. My father crept softly forward, and peeped through the partly open door. There sat the burglar, eating cold beef and pickles, and there, beside him, on the floor, gazing up into his face with a blood-curdling smile of affection, sat that idiot of a dog, wagging his tail.

“My father was so taken aback that he forgot to keep silent.

“Well, I’m – ,’ and he used a word that I should not care to repeat to you fellows.

“The burglar, hearing him, made a dash, and got clear off by the window; and the dog seemed vexed with my father for having driven him away.

“Next morning we took the dog back to the trainer from whom we had bought it.

“‘What do you think I wanted this dog for?’ asked my father, trying to speak calmly.

“Well,’ replied the trainer, ‘you said you wanted a good house dog.’

“Exactly so,’ answered the dad. ‘I didn’t ask for a burglar’s companion, did I? I didn’t say I wanted a dog who’d chum on with a burglar the first time he ever came to the house, and sit with him while he had supper, in case he might feel lonesome, did I?’ And my father recounted the incidents of the previous night.

“The man agreed that there was cause for complaint. ‘I’ll tell you what it is, sir,’ he said. ‘It was my boy Jim as trained this ’ere dawg, and I guess the young beggar’s taught ’im more about tackling rats than burglars. You leave ’im with me for a week, sir; I’ll put that all right.’

“We did so, and at the end of the time the trainer brought him back again.

“You’ll find ’im game enough now, sir,’ said the man. “E ain’t what I call an intellectual dawg, but I think I’ve knocked the right idea into ’im.’

“My father thought he’d like to test the matter, so we hired a man for a shilling to break in through the kitchen window while the trainer held the dog by a chain. The dog remained perfectly quiet until the man was fairly inside. Then he made one savage spring at him, and if the chain had not been stout the fellow would have earned his shilling dearly.

“The dad was satisfied now that he could go to bed in peace; and the mater’s alarm for the safety of the local burglars was proportionately increased.

“Months passed uneventfully by, and then another burglar sampled our house. This time there could be no doubt that the dog was doing something for his living. The din in the basement was terrific. The house shook with the concussion of falling bodies.

“My father snatched up his revolver and rushed downstairs, and I followed him. The kitchen was in confusion. Tables and chairs were overturned, and on the floor lay a man gurgling for help. The dog was standing over him, choking him.

“The pater held his revolver to the man’s ear, while I, by superhuman effort, dragged our preserver away, and chained him up to the sink, after which I lit the gas.

“Then we perceived that the gentleman on the floor was a police constable.

“‘Good heavens!’ exclaimed my father, dropping the revolver, ‘however did you come here?’

“‘Ow did *I* come ’ere?’ retorted the man, sitting up and speaking in a tone of bitter, but not unnatural, indignation. ‘Why, in the course of my dooty, that’s ’ow *I* come ’ere. I see a burglar getting in through the window, so I just follows and slips in after ’im.’

“‘Did you catch him?’ asked my father.

“‘Did I catch ’im!’ almost shrieked the man. “Ow could I catch ’im with that blasted dog of yours ’olding me down by the throat, while ’e lights ’is pipe and walks out by the back door?’

“The dog was for sale the next day. The mater, who had grown to like him, because he let the baby pull his tail, wanted us to keep him. The mistake, she said, was not the animal’s fault. Two men broke into the house almost at the same time. The dog could not go for both of them. He did his best, and went for one. That his selection should have fallen upon the policeman instead of upon the burglar was unfortunate. But still it was a thing that might have happened to any dog.

“My father, however, had become prejudiced against the poor creature, and that same week he inserted an advertisement in *The Field*, in which the animal was recommended as an investment likely to prove useful to any enterprising member of the criminal classes.”

MacShaughnassy having had his innings, Jephson took a turn, and told us a pathetic story about an unfortunate mongrel that was run over in the Strand one day and its leg broken. A medical student, who was passing at the time, picked it up and carried it to the Charing Cross Hospital, where its leg was set, and where it was kept and tended until it was quite itself again, when it was sent home.

The poor thing had quite understood what was being done for it, and had been the most grateful patient they had ever had in the hospital. The whole staff were quite sorry when it left.

One morning, a week or two later, the house-surgeon, looking out of the window, saw the dog coming down the street. When it came near he noticed that it had a penny in its mouth. A cat’s-meat barrow was standing by the kerb, and for a moment, as he passed it, the dog hesitated.

But his nobler nature asserted itself, and, walking straight up to the hospital railings, and raising himself upon his hind legs, he dropped his penny into the contribution box.

MacShaughnassy was much affected by this story. He said it showed such a beautiful trait in the dog’s character. The animal was a poor outcast, vagrant thing, that had perhaps never possessed

a penny before in all its life, and might never have another. He said that dog's penny seemed to him to be a greater gift than the biggest cheque that the wealthiest patron ever signed.

The other three were very eager now to get to work on the novel, but I did not quite see the fairness of this. I had one or two dog stories of my own.

I knew a black-and-tan terrier years ago. He lodged in the same house with me. He did not belong to any one. He had discharged his owner (if, indeed, he had ever permitted himself to possess one, which is doubtful, having regard to his aggressively independent character), and was now running himself entirely on his own account. He appropriated the front hall for his sleeping-apartment, and took his meals with the other lodgers – whenever they happened to be having meals.

At five o'clock he would take an early morning snack with young Hollis, an engineer's pupil, who had to get up at half-past four and make his own coffee, so as to be down at the works by six. At eight-thirty he would breakfast in a more sensible fashion with Mr. Blair, on the first floor, and on occasions would join Jack Gadbut, who was a late riser, in a devilled kidney at eleven.

From then till about five, when I generally had a cup of tea and a chop, he regularly disappeared. Where he went and what he did between those hours nobody ever knew. Gadbut swore that twice he had met him coming out of a stockbroker's office in Threadneedle Street, and, improbable though the statement at first appeared, some colour of credibility began to attach to it when we reflected upon the dog's inordinate passion for acquiring and hoarding coppers.

This craving of his for wealth was really quite remarkable. He was an elderly dog, with a great sense of his own dignity; yet, on the promise of a penny, I have seen him run round after his own tail until he didn't know one end of himself from the other.

He used to teach himself tricks, and go from room to room in the evening, performing them, and when he had completed his programme he would sit up and beg. All the fellows used to humour him. He must have made pounds in the course of the year.

Once, just outside our door, I saw him standing in a crowd, watching a performing poodle attached to a hurdy-gurdy. The poodle stood on his head, and then, with his hind legs in the air, walked round on his front paws. The people laughed very much, and, when afterwards he came amongst them with his wooden saucer in his mouth, they gave freely.

Our dog came in and immediately commenced to study. In three days *he* could stand on his head and walk round on his front legs, and the first evening he did so he made sixpence. It must have been terribly hard work for him at his age, and subject to rheumatism as he was; but he would do anything for money. I believe he would have sold himself to the devil for eightpence down.

He knew the value of money. If you held out to him a penny in one hand and a threepenny-bit in the other, he would snatch at the threepence, and then break his heart because he could not get the penny in as well. You might safely have left him in the room with a leg of mutton, but it would not have been wise to leave your purse about.

Now and then he spent a little, but not often. He was desperately fond of sponge-cakes, and occasionally, when he had had a good week, he would indulge himself to the extent of one or two. But he hated paying for them, and always made a frantic and frequently successful effort to get off with the cake and the penny also. His plan of operations was simple. He would walk into the shop with his penny in his mouth, well displayed, and a sweet and lamblike expression in his eyes. Taking his stand as near to the cakes as he could get, and fixing his eyes affectionately upon them, he would begin to whine, and the shopkeeper, thinking he was dealing with an honest dog, would throw him one.

To get the cake he was obliged, of course, to drop the penny, and then began a struggle between him and the shopkeeper for the possession of the coin. The man would try to pick it up. The dog would put his foot upon it, and growl savagely. If he could finish the cake before the contest was over, he would snap up the penny and bolt. I have known him to come home gorged with sponge-cakes, the original penny still in his mouth.

So notorious throughout the neighbourhood did this dishonest practice of his become, that, after a time, the majority of the local tradespeople refused to serve him at all. Only the exceptionally quick and able-bodied would attempt to do business with him.

Then he took his custom further afield, into districts where his reputation had not yet penetrated. And he would pick out shops kept by nervous females or rheumatic old men.

They say that the love of money is the root of all evil. It seemed to have robbed him of every shred of principle.

It robbed him of his life in the end, and that came about in this way. He had been performing one evening in Gadbut's room, where a few of us were sitting smoking and talking; and young Hollis, being in a generous mood, had thrown him, as he thought, a sixpence. The dog grabbed it, and retired under the sofa. This was an odd thing for him to do, and we commented upon it. Suddenly a thought occurred to Hollis, and he took out his money and began counting it.

"By Jove," he exclaimed, "I've given that little beast half-a-sovereign – here, Tiny!"

But Tiny only backed further underneath the sofa, and no mere verbal invitation would induce him to stir. So we adopted a more pressing plan, and coaxed him out by the scruff of his neck.

He came, an inch at a time, growling viciously, and holding Hollis's half-sovereign tight between his teeth. We tried sweet reasonableness at first. We offered him a sixpence in exchange; he looked insulted, and evidently considered the proposal as tantamount to our calling him a fool. We made it a shilling, then half-a-crown – he seemed only bored by our persistence.

"I don't think you'll ever see this half-sovereign again, Hollis," said Gadbut, laughing. We all, with the exception of young Hollis, thought the affair a very good joke. He, on the contrary, seemed annoyed, and, taking the dog from Gadbut, made an attempt to pull the coin out of its mouth.

Tiny, true to his life-long principle of never parting if he could possibly help it, held on like grim death, until, feeling that his little earnings were slowly but surely going from him, he made one final desperate snatch, and swallowed the money. It stuck in his throat, and he began to choke.

Then we became seriously alarmed for the dog. He was an amusing chap, and we did not want any accident to happen to him. Hollis rushed into his room and procured a long pair of pincers, and the rest of us held the little miser while Hollis tried to relieve him of the cause of his suffering.

But poor Tiny did not understand our intentions. He still thought we were seeking to rob him of his night's takings, and resisted vehemently. His struggles fixed the coin firmer, and, in spite of our efforts, he died – one more victim, among many, to the fierce fever for gold.

* * * * *

I dreamt a very curious dream about riches once, that made a great impression upon me. I thought that I and a friend – a very dear friend – were living together in a strange old house. I don't think anybody else dwelt in the house but just we two. One day, wandering about this strange old rambling place, I discovered the hidden door of a secret room, and in this room were many iron-bound chests, and when I raised the heavy lids I saw that each chest was full of gold.

And, when I saw this, I stole out softly and closed the hidden door, and drew the worn tapestries in front of it again, and crept back along the dim corridor, looking behind me, fearfully.

And the friend that I had loved came towards me, and we walked together with our hands clasped. But I hated him.

And all day long I kept beside him, or followed him unseen, lest by chance he should learn the secret of that hidden door; and at night I lay awake watching him.

But one night I sleep, and, when I open my eyes, he is no longer near me. I run swiftly up the narrow stairs and along the silent corridor. The tapestry is drawn aside, and the hidden door stands open, and in the room beyond the friend that I loved is kneeling before an open chest, and the glint of the gold is in my eyes.

His back is towards me, and I crawl forward inch by inch. I have a knife in my hand, with a strong, curved blade; and when I am near enough I kill him as he kneels there.

His body falls against the door, and it shuts to with a clang, and I try to open it, and cannot. I beat my hands against its iron nails, and scream, and the dead man grins at me. The light streams in through the chink beneath the massive door, and fades, and comes again, and fades again, and I gnaw at the oaken lids of the iron-bound chests, for the madness of hunger is climbing into my brain.

Then I awake, and find that I really am hungry, and remember that in consequence of a headache I did not eat any dinner. So I slip on a few clothes, and go down to the kitchen on a foraging expedition.

It is said that dreams are momentary conglomerations of thought, centring round the incident that awakens us, and, as with most scientific facts, this is occasionally true. There is one dream that, with slight variations, is continually recurring to me. Over and over again I dream that I am suddenly called upon to act an important part in some piece at the Lyceum. That poor Mr. Irving should invariably be the victim seems unfair, but really it is entirely his own fault. It is he who persuades and urges me. I myself would much prefer to remain quietly in bed, and I tell him so. But he insists on my getting up at once and coming down to the theatre. I explain to him that I can't act a bit. He seems to consider this unimportant, and says, "Oh, that will be all right." We argue for a while, but he makes the matter quite a personal one, and to oblige him and get him out of the bedroom I consent, though much against my own judgment. I generally dress the character in my nightshirt, though on one occasion, for Banquo, I wore pyjamas, and I never remember a single word of what I ought to say. How I get through I do not know. Irving comes up afterwards and congratulates me, but whether upon the brilliancy of my performance, or upon my luck in getting off the stage before a brickbat is thrown at me, I cannot say.

Whenever I dream this incident I invariably wake up to find that the bedclothes are on the floor, and that I am shivering with cold; and it is this shivering, I suppose, that causes me to dream I am wandering about the Lyceum stage in nothing but my nightshirt. But still I do not understand why it should always be the Lyceum.

Another dream which I fancy I have dreamt more than once – or, if not, I have dreamt that I dreamt it before, a thing one sometimes does – is one in which I am walking down a very wide and very long road in the East End of London. It is a curious road to find there. Omnibuses and trams pass up and down, and it is crowded with stalls and barrows, beside which men in greasy caps stand shouting; yet on each side it is bordered by a strip of tropical forest. The road, in fact, combines the advantages of Kew and Whitechapel.

Some one is with me, but I cannot see him, and we walk through the forest, pushing our way among the tangled vines that cling about our feet, and every now and then, between the giant tree-trunks, we catch glimpses of the noisy street.

At the end of this road there is a narrow turning, and when I come to it I am afraid, though I do not know why I am afraid. It leads to a house that I once lived in when a child, and now there is some one waiting there who has something to tell me.

I turn to run away. A Blackwall 'bus is passing, and I try to overtake it. But the horses turn into skeletons and gallop away from me, and my feet are like lead, and the thing that is with me, and that I cannot see, seizes me by the arm and drags me back.

It forces me along, and into the house, and the door slams to behind us, and the sound echoes through the lifeless rooms. I recognise the rooms; I laughed and cried in them long ago. Nothing is changed. The chairs stand in their places, empty. My mother's knitting lies upon the hearthrug, where the kitten, I remember, dragged it, somewhere back in the sixties.

I go up into my own little attic. My cot stands in the corner, and my bricks lie tumbled out upon the floor (I was always an untidy child). An old man enters – an old, bent, withered man – holding a lamp above his head, and I look at his face, and it is my own face. And another enters, and he also is myself. Then more and more, till the room is thronged with faces, and the stair-way beyond, and all

the silent house. Some of the faces are old and others young, and some are fair and smile at me, and many are foul and leer at me. And every face is my own face, but no two of them are alike.

I do not know why the sight of myself should alarm me so, but I rush from the house in terror, and the faces follow me; and I run faster and faster, but I know that I shall never leave them behind me.

* * * * *

As a rule one is the hero of one's own dreams, but at times I have dreamt a dream entirely in the third person – a dream with the incidents of which I have had no connection whatever, except as an unseen and impotent spectator. One of these I have often thought about since, wondering if it could not be worked up into a story. But, perhaps, it would be too painful a theme.

I dreamt I saw a woman's face among a throng. It is an evil face, but there is a strange beauty in it. The flickering gleams thrown by street lamps flash down upon it, showing the wonder of its evil fairness. Then the lights go out.

I see it next in a place that is very far away, and it is even more beautiful than before, for the evil has gone out of it. Another face is looking down into it, a bright, pure face. The faces meet and kiss, and, as his lips touch hers, the blood mounts to her cheeks and brow. I see the two faces again. But I cannot tell where they are or how long a time has passed. The man's face has grown a little older, but it is still young and fair, and when the woman's eyes rest upon it there comes a glory into her face so that it is like the face of an angel. But at times the woman is alone, and then I see the old evil look struggling back.

Then I see clearer. I see the room in which they live. It is very poor. An old-fashioned piano stands in one corner, and beside it is a table on which lie scattered a tumbled mass of papers round an ink-stand. An empty chair waits before the table. The woman sits by the open window.

From far below there rises the sound of a great city. Its lights throw up faint beams into the dark room. The smell of its streets is in the woman's nostrils.

Every now and again she looks towards the door and listens: then turns to the open window. And I notice that each time she looks towards the door the evil in her face shrinks back; but each time she turns to the window it grows more fierce and sullen.

Suddenly she starts up, and there is a terror in her eyes that frightens me as I dream, and I see great beads of sweat upon her brow. Then, very slowly, her face changes, and I see again the evil creature of the night. She wraps around her an old cloak, and creeps out. I hear her footsteps going down the stairs. They grow fainter and fainter. I hear a door open. The roar of the streets rushes up into the house, and the woman's footsteps are swallowed up.

Time drifts onward through my dream. Scenes change, take shape, and fade; but all is vague and undefined, until, out of the dimness, there fashions itself a long, deserted street. The lights make glistening circles on the wet pavement. A figure, dressed in gaudy rags, slinks by, keeping close against the wall. Its back is towards me, and I do not see its face. Another figure glides from out the shadows. I look upon its face, and I see it is the face that the woman's eyes gazed up into and worshipped long ago, when my dream was just begun. But the fairness and the purity are gone from it, and it is old and evil, as the woman's when I looked upon her last. The figure in the gaudy rags moves slowly on. The second figure follows it, and overtakes it. The two pause, and speak to one another as they draw near. The street is very dark where they have met, and the figure in the gaudy rags keeps its face still turned aside. They walk together in silence, till they come to where a flaring gas-lamp hangs before a tavern; and there the woman turns, and I see that it is the woman of my dream. And she and the man look into each other's eyes once more.

* * * * *

In another dream that I remember, an angel (or a devil, I am not quite sure which) has come to a man and told him that so long as he loves no living human thing – so long as he never suffers himself to feel one touch of tenderness towards wife or child, towards kith or kin, towards stranger or towards friend, so long will he succeed and prosper in his dealings – so long will all this world's affairs go well with him; and he will grow each day richer and greater and more powerful. But if ever he let one kindly thought for living thing come into his heart, in that moment all his plans and schemes will topple down about his ears; and from that hour his name will be despised by men, and then forgotten.

And the man treasures up these words, for he is an ambitious man, and wealth and fame and power are the sweetest things in all the world to him. A woman loves him and dies, thirsting for a loving look from him; children's footsteps creep into his life and steal away again, old faces fade and new ones come and go.

But never a kindly touch of his hand rests on any living thing; never a kindly word comes from his lips; never a kindly thought springs from his heart. And in all his doings fortune favours him.

The years pass by, and at last there is left to him only one thing that he need fear – a child's small, wistful face. The child loves him, as the woman, long ago, had loved him, and her eyes follow him with a hungry, beseeching look. But he sets his teeth, and turns away from her.

The little face grows thin, and one day they come to him where he sits before the keyboard of his many enterprises, and tell him she is dying. He comes and stands beside the bed, and the child's eyes open and turn towards him; and, as he draws nearer, her little arms stretch out towards him, pleading dumbly. But the man's face never changes, and the little arms fall feebly back upon the tumbled coverlet, and the wistful eyes grow still, and a woman steps softly forward, and draws the lids down over them; then the man goes back to his plans and schemes.

But in the night, when the great house is silent, he steals up to the room where the child still lies, and pushes back the white, uneven sheet.

“Dead – dead,” he mutters. Then he takes the tiny corpse up in his arms, and holds it tight against his breast, and kisses the cold lips, and the cold cheeks, and the little, cold, stiff hands.

And at that point my story becomes impossible, for I dream that the dead child lies always beneath the sheet in that quiet room, and that the little face never changes, nor the limbs decay.

I puzzle about this for an instant, but soon forget to wonder; for when the Dream Fairy tells us tales we are only as little children, sitting round with open eyes, believing all, though marvelling that such things should be.

Each night, when all else in the house sleeps, the door of that room opens noiselessly, and the man enters and closes it behind him. Each night he draws away the white sheet, and takes the small dead body in his arms; and through the dark hours he paces softly to and fro, holding it close against his breast, kissing it and crooning to it, like a mother to her sleeping baby.

When the first ray of dawn peeps into the room, he lays the dead child back again, and smooths the sheet above her, and steals away.

And he succeeds and prospers in all things, and each day he grows richer and greater and more powerful.

CHAPTER III

We had much trouble with our heroine. Brown wanted her ugly. Brown's chief ambition in life is to be original, and his method of obtaining the original is to take the unoriginal and turn it upside down.

If Brown were given a little planet of his own to do as he liked with, he would call day, night, and summer, winter. He would make all his men and women walk on their heads and shake hands with their feet, his trees would grow with their roots in the air, and the old cock would lay all the eggs while the hens sat on the fence and crowed. Then he would step back and say, "See what an original world I have created, entirely my own idea!"

There are many other people besides Brown whose notion of originality would seem to be precisely similar.

I know a little girl, the descendant of a long line of politicians. The hereditary instinct is so strongly developed in her that she is almost incapable of thinking for herself. Instead, she copies in everything her elder sister, who takes more after the mother. If her sister has two helpings of rice pudding for supper, then she has two helpings of rice pudding. If her sister isn't hungry and doesn't want any supper at all, then she goes to bed without any supper.

This lack of character in the child troubles her mother, who is not an admirer of the political virtues, and one evening, taking the little one on her lap, she talked seriously to her.

"Do try to think for yourself," said she. "Don't always do just what Jessie does, that's silly. Have an idea of your own now and then. Be a little original."

The child promised she'd try, and went to bed thoughtful.

Next morning, for breakfast, a dish of kippers and a dish of kidneys were placed on the table, side by side. Now the child loved kippers with an affection that amounted almost to passion, while she loathed kidneys worse than powders. It was the one subject on which she did know her own mind.

"A kidney or a kipper for you, Jessie?" asked the mother, addressing the elder child first.

Jessie hesitated for a moment, while her sister sat regarding her in an agony of suspense.

"Kipper, please, ma," Jessie answered at last, and the younger child turned her head away to hide the tears.

"You'll have a kipper, of course, Trixy?" said the mother, who had noticed nothing.

"No, thank you, ma," said the small heroine, stifling a sob, and speaking in a dry, tremulous voice, "I'll have a kidney."

"But I thought you couldn't bear kidneys," exclaimed her mother, surprised.

"No, ma, I don't like 'em much."

"And you're so fond of kippers!"

"Yes, ma."

"Well, then, why on earth don't you have one?"

"Cos Jessie's going to have one, and you told me to be original," and here the poor mite, reflecting upon the price her originality was going to cost her, burst into tears.

* * * * *

The other three of us refused to sacrifice ourselves upon the altar of Brown's originality. We decided to be content with the customary beautiful girl.

"Good or bad?" queried Brown.

"Bad," responded MacShaughnassy emphatically. "What do you say, Jephson?"

“Well,” replied Jephson, taking the pipe from between his lips, and speaking in that soothingly melancholy tone of voice that he never varies, whether telling a joke about a wedding or an anecdote relating to a funeral, “not altogether bad. Bad, with good instincts, the good instincts well under control.”

“I wonder why it is,” murmured MacShaughnassy reflectively, “that bad people are so much more interesting than good.”

“I don’t think the reason is very difficult to find,” answered Jephson. “There’s more uncertainty about them. They keep you more on the alert. It’s like the difference between riding a well-broken, steady-going hack and a lively young colt with ideas of his own. The one is comfortable to travel on, but the other provides you with more exercise. If you start off with a thoroughly good woman for your heroine you give your story away in the first chapter. Everybody knows precisely how she will behave under every conceivable combination of circumstances in which you can place her. On every occasion she will do the same thing – that is the right thing.

“With a bad heroine, on the other hand, you can never be quite sure what is going to happen. Out of the fifty or so courses open to her, she may take the right one, or she may take one of the forty-nine wrong ones, and you watch her with curiosity to see which it will be.”

“But surely there are plenty of good heroines who are interesting,” I said.

“At intervals – when they do something wrong,” answered Jephson. “A consistently irreproachable heroine is as irritating as Socrates must have been to Xantippe, or as the model boy at school is to all the other lads. Take the stock heroine of the eighteenth-century romance. She never met her lover except for the purpose of telling him that she could not be his, and she generally wept steadily throughout the interview. She never forgot to turn pale at the sight of blood, nor to faint in his arms at the most inconvenient moment possible. She was determined never to marry without her father’s consent, and was equally resolved never to marry anybody but the one particular person she was convinced he would never agree to her marrying. She was an excellent young woman, and nearly as uninteresting as a celebrity at home.”

“Ah, but you’re not talking about good women now,” I observed. “You’re talking about some silly person’s idea of a good woman.”

“I quite admit it,” replied Jephson. “Nor, indeed, am I prepared to say what is a good woman. I consider the subject too deep and too complicated for any mere human being to give judgment upon. But I *am* talking of the women who conformed to the popular idea of maidenly goodness in the age when these books were written. You must remember goodness is not a known quantity. It varies with every age and every locality, and it is, generally speaking, your ‘silly persons’ who are responsible for its varying standards. In Japan, a ‘good’ girl would be a girl who would sell her honour in order to afford little luxuries to her aged parents. In certain hospitable islands of the torrid zone the ‘good’ wife goes to lengths that we should deem altogether unnecessary in making her husband’s guest feel himself at home. In ancient Hebraic days, Jael was accounted a good woman for murdering a sleeping man, and Sarai stood in no danger of losing the respect of her little world when she led Hagar unto Abraham. In eighteenth-century England, supernatural stupidity and dulness of a degree that must have been difficult to attain, were held to be feminine virtues – indeed, they are so still – and authors, who are always among the most servile followers of public opinion, fashioned their puppets accordingly. Nowadays ‘slumming’ is the most applauded virtue, and so all our best heroines go slumming, and are ‘good to the poor.’”

“How useful ‘the poor’ are,” remarked MacShaughnassy, somewhat abruptly, placing his feet on the mantelpiece, and tilting his chair back till it stood at an angle that caused us to rivet our attention upon it with hopeful interest. “I don’t think we scribbling fellows ever fully grasp how much we owe to ‘the poor.’ Where would our angelic heroines and our noble-hearted heroes be if it were not for ‘the poor’? We want to show that the dear girl is as good as she is beautiful. What do we do? We put a basket full of chickens and bottles of wine on her arm, a fetching little sun-bonnet on her head, and

send her round among the poor. How do we prove that our apparent scamp of a hero is really a noble young man at heart? Why, by explaining that he is good to the poor.

“They are as useful in real life as they are in Bookland. What is it consoles the tradesman when the actor, earning eighty pounds a week, cannot pay his debts? Why, reading in the theatrical newspapers gushing accounts of the dear fellow’s invariable generosity to the poor. What is it stills the small but irritating voice of conscience when we have successfully accomplished some extra big feat of swindling? Why, the noble resolve to give ten per cent of the net profits to the poor.

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