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15 CENTS

# AINSLIE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS



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# AINSLIEE'S

THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

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RALPH HENRY BARBOUR

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JOHN B. TABB

JAMES BRANCH CABELL

# APRIL'S MESSAGE

BY  
JAMES  
BRANCH  
CABELL

Author of "The Eagle Shadow."



YES, I think we had better have the fellow hanged on the thirteenth," said the Duke of Ormskirk, as he leisurely affixed his signature. "The date seems eminently appropriate. Now the papers in the Ferrers business, if you please, Mr. Langton."

The impassive-faced young man who sat opposite placed a dispatch box before him. "They were sent down from London only last night, sir. Mr. Thornton has been somewhat dilatory."

"Eh, it scarcely matters. I looked them over in bed this morning and found them quite correct, Mr. Langton, quite. Why, heyday!" the duke demanded, "what's this? You have brought me the dispatch box from my dresser—not, as I distinctly told you, from the table by my bed."

Mr. Langton stammered that the mistake was natural. Two dispatch boxes were in appearances so similar.

"Never make excuses, Mr. Langton. *Qui s'excuse*—you can complete the proverb, I dare say. Bring me the Ferrers papers this afternoon, then. Yes—that appears to be all. You may go now, Mr. Langton. No, you may leave that box, I think, since it is here. Oh, man, man, a mistake isn't high treason! Go away, Mr. Langton—you annoy me."

Left alone, the Duke of Ormskirk sat for a while, tapping his fingers irresolutely against the open dispatch box. Presently he took a paper therefrom and began to read.

His grace was in blue and silver, which became him, though he was somewhat stomachy for such conspicuous colors. A handsome man, you would have said, honest but not particu-

larly intelligent. Bolingbroke in a fit of spleen had once called him "a porcelain sphinx" and the phrase stuck; but, indeed, there was more of the china doll about him. His blue eyes had the same spick-and-span vacuity; and the left one, a trifle larger than its fellow, gave him much the same expression of placid astonishment. Very plump, very sleepy-looking, immaculate as a cat, you would never have accorded him a second glance; covert whisperings that the stout gentleman yonder was the great Duke of Ormskirk had staggered human credulity any time these ten years past.

This, however, is not the place to dwell upon his extraordinary career; his rise from penury and obscurity, tempered indeed by gentle birth, to the priviest secrets of his majesty's council; climbing the peerage step by step as composedly as though that institution had been a garden ladder—may be read of in the history books.

"I collect titles as an entomologist does butterflies," he was wont to say, "and I find the gaudier ones the cheapest. My barony I got for a very heinous piece of perjury, my earldom for not running away until the latter end of a certain battle, my marquise for hoodwinking a half-senile Frenchman, and my dukedom for giving a lapdog to a lady whom the king at that time delighted to honor." It was, you observe, a day of candor.

Such, then, was the gentleman who sat reading upon the east terrace of Halvergate House. Behind him a tall yew hedge shut off the sunlight from the table where he and Mr. Langton had earlier completed divers businesses; before him a balustrade, ivy-covered, and set with flowerpots of stone empty as yet, half screened the terraced gar-

dens that sank to the artificial lake below.

Where the duke lounged he could see only a vast expanse of sky and a stray bit of Halvergate printing the horizon with turrets, all sober gray save where the two big copper cupolas of the south façade burned in the April sun; but by bending forward you glimpsed close-shaven lawns dotted with clipped trees and statues—as though a child had left his toys scattered haphazard about a green blanket—and the white of the broad marble stairway descending to the sunlit lake and, at times, the flash of a swan's deliberate passage across the lake's surface. All white and green and blue the vista was, and of a monastic tranquillity, save for the plashing of a fountain behind the yew hedge and the grumblings of an occasional bee as he lurched complainingly on some by-errand of the hive.

Presently his Grace of Ormskirk replaced the papers in the dispatch box and, leaning forward, sighed. "*Non sum fualis eram sub regno bonæ Cynaræ,*" said his Grace of Ormskirk. He had a statesmanlike partiality for the fag-end of an alcaic.

Then he lifted his head at the sound of a girl's voice. Somewhere in the rear of the hedge the girl idly sang—an old song of Thomas Heywood's—in a serene contralto, low pitched and effortless, but very sweet. Smilingly the duke beat time.

Sang the girl:

Pack, clouds, away, and welcome, day!  
With night we banish sorrow:  
Sweet air, blow soft; mount, lark, aloft,  
To give my love good-morrow.  
Wings from the wind to please her mind,  
Notes from the lark I'll borrow;  
Bird, prune thy wing, nightingale, sing,  
To give my love good-morrow.

And here the duke chimed in with a sufficiently pleasing baritone:

To give my love good-morrow,  
Notes from them all I'll borrow.

"Oh, heavens!" spoke the possessor of the contralto, "I should have thought

you were far too busy sending people to jail and getting them hanged, to have any time for music. I am going for a walk in the forest, Jack." Considering for a moment, she eventually conceded: "You may come, too, if you like."

But the concession was made so half-heartedly that in the instant the Duke of Ormskirk raised a dissenting hand toward his fiancée. "I would not annoy you for an emperor's ransom. Go in peace, my child."

Lady Marian Heleigh stood at an opening in the yew hedge and regarded him for a rather lengthy interval in silence. Slender, men called her, and women "a bean pole." There was about her a great deal of the child and something of the wood nymph. She had abundant hair, the color of a dead oak leaf, and her skin was clear, with a brown tinge. Her eyes puzzled you by being neither brown nor green consistently; no sooner had you convicted them of verdancy than they shifted to the hue of polished maple, and vice versa; but they were too large for her face, which narrowed rather abruptly beneath a broad, low forehead, and flavored her aspect with the shrewd innocence of a kitten. She was by ordinary grave, but, animated, her countenance quickened with the glow of a brown diamond; then her generous eyes flashed and filmed like water on a moonless night, and you saw that she was beautiful. All in all, I judge her to have been a woman designed for petting, a Columbine rather than a Cleopatra; her lures would never shake the stability of a kingdom, but would inevitably gut its toy shops; and her departure left you dreaming less of high enterprises than of buying something for her.

Now Marian considered the Duke of Ormskirk, her betrothed, and came at last to a conclusion that skirted platitude. "Jack," she finally pointed out, and with a hint of resentment, "two people can be very fond of one another without wanting to be together all the time. And I *am* fond of you, Jack."

"I should be a fool if I questioned

the first statement," rejoined the duke, "and if I questioned the second, very miserable. Nevertheless, you go in pursuit of strange gods, and I decline to follow."

Her eyebrows interrogated him.

"You are going," the duke continued, "in pursuit of gods by whom I esteem Zidonian Ashtoreth, and Chemosh, and Milcom, the abomination of the Ammonites, comparatively desirable acquaintances. You will pardon my pedantic display of learning, for my feelings are strong. You are going to sit in the woods. You will probably sit under a very young tree, and its branches will sway down almost to the ground and make a green sun-steeped tent about you, as though you sat at the heart of an emerald. You will hear the kindly wood gods go stealthily about the forest, and you will know that they are watching you, but you will never see them. From behind every tree they will watch you; you feel it, but you never, never quite see them. Presently the sweet warm odors of the place and its perpetual whispering and the quite idiotic boasting of the birds—that any living creature should be proud of having constructed one of their nasty little nests is a reflection to baffle understanding—this hodge-podge of sensations, I say, will intoxicate you. Yes, it will thoroughly intoxicate you, Marian, and you will be quite still in a sort of stupor, drugged into the inebriate's magnanimity, firmly believing that the remainder of your life will be of finer texture—earth-spurning, free from all pettiness, and at worse vexed only by the noblest sorrows. Bah!" cried the duke, "I have no patience with such nonsense! You will believe it to the tiniest syllable, that wonderful lying message April whispers to everything that is young—then you will return to me, a slim, star-eyed Mænad, and see that I am wrinkled. But go, Marian, April is waiting for you yonder—beautiful, mendacious, splendid April. And I? Faith, she has no message for me, my dear."

He laughed, but with a touch of wistfulness; and the girl came to him, lay-

ing her hand upon his arm, surprised into a sort of timid affection.

"How did you know?" she breathed. "How did you know that—things, invisible gracious things, went about the spring woods? I never thought that you knew of them. You always seemed so sensible. I have thought it all out, though," Marian went on, sagaciously wrinkling as to the brow. "There are probably the heathen fauns and satyrs and such—one feels somehow that they are all men. Don't you, Jack? Well, when the elder gods were sent packing from Olympus there was naturally no employment left for these sylvan folk. So April took them into her service. Every year she sends them about the woods on her errands—to fashion the daffodil cups, for instance, which I dare say is very difficult, for evidently they make them out of sunshine. Or to pencil the eyelids of the narcissi—narcissi are brazen creatures, Jack, and use a deal of kohl—or marshal the fleecy young clouds about the sky—or whistle the birds up from the south. Oh, she keeps them busy, does April. And as you say, if you be quite still you can hear them tripping among the dead leaves, and they watch you—with very bright, twinkling little eyes, I think—but you never see them. And always, always there is that enormous whispering, half friendly, half menacing—as if the woods were trying to tell you something. It is not only the leaves rustling, is it? No, I have often thought it sounded like some gigantic foreigner—some Titan probably—trying in his own queer language to tell you something very important, something that you really ought to know. Has no one ever understood him, Jack?" she queried, with a wistfulness that was but half humorous.

He smiled. "And I, too, have dwelt in Arcadia," said his Grace of Ormskirk. "Yes, I once heard April's message, Marian, for all my crow's feet. But that was a long while ago, and perhaps I have forgotten it. I cannot tell, my dear. It is only from April in her own person that one hears this message. And as for me? Eh, I go into

the April woods, and I find trees there of various sizes that pay no attention to me, and shrill, dingy little birds that deafen me, and it may be a gaudy flower or two, and, in any event, a vast quantity of sodden, decaying leaves to warn me that this is no fitting haunt for a gentleman afflicted with rheumatism. So I come away, my dear."

Marian looked him over for a moment. "You are not really old," she said, with rather conscious politeness. "And you are wonderfully well preserved. Why, Jack, do you mind—not being foolish any longer?" she demanded, on a sudden.

He debated the matter. Then, "Yes," the Duke of Ormskirk conceded, "I dare say that at the bottom of my heart I regret that lost folly. A part of me died, you see, when that vanished, and it is not exhilarating to think of oneself as even partially dead. Once—I hardly know"—he sought the phrase—"once it was a spacious world of interesting construction and filled with wonderful men and women—some good, some bad, but every one of them very interesting. And now I miss the wonder of it all. You will presently discover, my dear, that youth is only an ingenious prologue to whet one's appetite for a rather dull play. Eh, I am no pessimist—one may still find satisfaction in the exercises of mind and body, in the pleasures of thought and taste and other titillations of one's faculties. Dinner is good and sleep, too, is excellent. But we men and women—flies, flies, Marian! I protest to you we seem when I think of it—you and I and all the myriads yonder—very paltry flies that buzz, and bustle aimlessly about, and breed perhaps, and eventually die, and rot, and are swept away from this fragile window pane of time that screens eternity."

"If you are the sort of person you describe," said Marian, reflectively, "why, then, I can scarcely blame April for having no communication with anyone possessed of such extremely heterodox and unpleasant opinions. But for my part, I shall never cease to wonder what it is the woods whisper about so zealously."

Appraising her, he hazarded a cryptic question: "Have you never—cared, Marian?"

"Why, yes—I think so," she answered, readily enough. "At least, I used to be very fond of Walter Agard—that is their place yonder, you know, just past the spur of the forest—but he was quite poor, so of course father wouldn't hear of it. That was very fortunate, too, as Walter presently went mad for Mistress Beatrix Skirlaw's bright eyes and fine shape—I think she is a brazen hussy, don't you, Jack?—and we quarreled. And I minded it—at first. And now—well, I scarcely know." Marian hesitated. "He was a handsome man, but his mustache was so bristly——"

"I beg your pardon?" said the duke.

"——that it disfigured him dreadfully," said she, with firmness. She had colored, though.

His Grace of Ormskirk was moved to mirth. "Child, child!" said he, "you are so deliciously young that it appears a crime to marry you to an old fellow like me!" He took her firm, soft hand in his. "Are you quite sure that you can endure me, Marian?"

"Why, of course, I want to marry you," she said, naïvely surprised. "How else could I be Duchess of Ormskirk?"

Again he chuckled. "You are a worldly little wretch," he stated; "but if you want my title for a new toy, it is at your service. And now be off with you—you and your foolish woods, indeed!"

Marian went a slight distance and then turned about, plainly troubled. "I am really very fond of you, Jack," she said, conscientiously.

"Be off with you!" the duke scolded. "You should be ashamed of yourself to practice such blandishments on a defenseless old gentleman. You had best hurry, too, for if you don't, I—I shall probably kiss you," he threatened. "I, also," he added, with point.

She blew him a kiss from her fingertips and went away singing.

Sang Marian:

Blackbird and thrush, in every bush,  
 Stare, linnet, and cock-sparrow,  
 You pretty elves, amongst yourselves,  
 Sing my fair love god-morrow.  
 Sing my fair love good-morrow.  
 Sing, birds, in every furrow.

## II.

Left to his own resources, the Duke of Ormskirk sat down once more beside the table and fell to making irrelevant marks upon a bit of paper, what time he hummed the air of Marian's song. There was a vague contention in his face. Once he put out his hand toward the open dispatch box, but immediately he sighed and pushed the box further from him. Presently he propped his chin upon both hands and so sat for a long while staring past the balustrade at the clear, pale sky of April.

Thus Marian's father, the Earl of Brudenel, found him. The earl was a deep-wrinkled man, some three years older than his prospective son-in-law and his intimate since boyhood. Ormskirk had perhaps for his society the liking that a successful man usually has for that of his out-rivaled school fellows, for the earl was an embodied commentary as to what a less able man might make of chances far more auspicious than Ormskirk ever enjoyed. All failure his life had been; in London they had long ago forgotten handsome Harry Heleigh and the composure with which he nightly shoved his dwindling patrimony across the gaming table; and about Halvergate men called him "the muddled earl," and said of him that his heart died with his young wife some eighteen years back. Now he vegetated in the home of his fathers, contentedly, a veteran of life with a mild pride in his past vagaries; and kindly time had armed him with the benumbing, impenetrable indifference of the confessed failure — courteous, even apologetic, to a plowman, he would not, you felt, have given his undivided attention to an emperor.

"Dreamer!" said the earl. "I do not wonder that you grow fat, Jack."

The duke smiled up at him. "Con-

found you, Harry!" said he, "I had just cheated myself into believing I had made what the world calls a mess of my career and was supremely happy. There are disturbing influences abroad to-day." He waved his hand toward the green-and-white gardens. "Old friend, you permit disreputable trespassers about Halvergate. 'See you not Goldy-locks there, in her yellow gown and green sleeves? the profane pipes, the tinkling timbrels?' Spring is at her wiles yonder—Spring, the liar, the queen cheat, Spring that tricks all men into happiness."

"'Fore Gad," the earl capped his quotation, "if the heathen man could stop his ears with wax against the singing woman of the sea, then do you the like with your fingers against that trollop of the forest."

"Faith, time seals them firmler than wax. You and I may sit snug now with never a quicker heart-beat for all her lures. Yet I seem to remember—once a long while ago when we old fellows were somewhat sprier—I, too, seem to remember—this spring magic."

"Indeed," observed the earl, seating himself ponderously, "if you refer to a certain inclination at that period of the year toward the likeliest wench in the neighborhood, so do I. It is an obvious provision of nature, I take it, to secure the perpetuation of the species. Spring comes and she sets us all mating—humanity, partridges, poultry, pigs, every blessed one of us she sets a-mating. Propagation, Jack—propagation is necessary, you see; because," the earl conclusively demanded, "what on earth would become of us if we did not propagate?"

"The argument is unanswerable," the duke conceded. "Yet I miss it—this spring magic that no longer sets the blood of us staid fellows a-fret."

"And I," said Lord Brudenel, "do not. It got me into the deuce of a scrape more than once."

"That is the sensible view, no doubt. Yet I miss it. Ah, it is not only the wenches and the red lips of old years—it is not only that at this season lasses' hearts grow tender. There are some

verses——” The duke quoted with a half-guilty air:

I lie i' the grass with the branches swaying,  
 Laughing and lisp'ing, over my head,  
 Whispering softly that Winter is fled;  
 And over his ruins a world goes Maying.  
 And somewhere sensible men are saying  
 The sensible things that their fathers said,  
 But I lie i' the grass with the branches  
 swaying  
 Over my head.

“Verses!” the earl snorted here. “At your age!”

For the hand of Spring, that is fresh from  
 slaying  
 Tyrant Winter that now is dead,  
 Catches the crocus, staining it red;  
 And Mirth, that is heir to him, follows  
 slaying  
 All lesser griefs that the Tyrant bred;  
 And the clouds are marshaling overhead,—  
 The little clouds that are half-afraid,—  
 And now that the daffodil hosts are arraying;  
 And out of the South come the land-winds  
 playing,  
 I lie i' the grass with the branches swaying  
 Over my head.

“And now I cannot do so any longer  
 That is what I most miss, Harry—the  
 ability to lie a-sprawl in the spring  
 grass and dream out a new world—a  
 dream so vivid that beside it reality  
 grew tenuous and the actual world one  
 of childhood's shrug-provoking bug-  
 bears dimly remembered.”

“I do not understand poetry,” the earl apologetically observed. “It appears to me unreasonable to advance a statement simply because it happens to rhyme with a statement you have previously made. And that is what all you poets do. Why, that is very remarkable,” said Lord Brudenel, with a change of tone; “yonder is young Walter Agard with Marian. I thought him abroad with his regiment.”

Then the earl gave an exclamation, for in full view of them Lieutenant Agard was kissing his daughter.

“Oh, the devil!” said the earl. “Oh, the insolent young ape!”

“No,” said the duke, restraining him; “not particularly insolent, Harry. If you will observe more closely you will see that Marian does not exactly object to his caresses—quite the contrary, I

should say. I told you that you should not permit Spring about the premises.”

The earl wheeled in an extreme of astonishment. “Why, she is your betrothed wife! Do you not intend to kill the fellow?”

“My faith, why?” said his Grace of Ormskirk, with a shrug. “Don't you see that she loves him?”

Lord Brudenel raised his hands to heaven in a controversy of despair and rage. One of the best matches in the three kingdoms imperiled by that chit's idiocy!

Marian and Lieutenant Agard were mounting from the scrap of forest that juts out from Pevis Hill, like a spur from a man's heel, between Agard Court and Halvergate. Their progress was not conspicuous for its celerity. Now, though, they had come to the tiny elm-shadowed plateau beyond the yew hedge, and there Marian paused. Two daffodils had fallen from the great green-and-yellow cluster in her left hand. Walter Agard lifted them and then touched with his lips the dimpled, velvet-soft trifle that reached toward them.

She stood looking up at him—smiling a little timidly, her teeth glinting through parted lips, her eyes star-fire, her cheeks blazoning gules in his honor—and seeming not to breathe at all. A faint twinge woke in the Duke of Ormskirk's heart. Most women smiled upon him, but they smiled beneath furtive eyes, sometimes beneath rapacious eyes. How long, he wondered simply, since any woman had smiled like that for him?

“I think it is a dream,” said Marian. From the vantage of the yew hedge: “I would to Heaven I could think so, too,” said her father.

### III.

They had passed out of sight. But from the rear of the hedge there came to the duke and Lord Brudenel, staring blankly at one another across the paper-littered table, a sort of duet. First tenor, then contralto, then tenor again—and so on, with many long intervals



of silence, during which you heard the plashing of the fountain, grown doubly audible, and, it might be, the sharp, plaintive cry of a bird intensified by the stillness.

"I think it is a dream," said Marian.

"What eyes you have, Marian!"

"But you have not kissed the littlest finger of all. See—it is quite stiff with indignation."

"They are green, and brown, and yellow—oh, Marian, there are little gold specks in them like those in *eau de Dantzig*! They are quite wonderful eyes, Marian. And your hair is all streaky gold and brown. You should not have two colors in your hair, Marian. Marian, did anyone ever tell you that you are very beautiful?"

Silence. "Pee-weet!" said a bird. "Pee-weet!"

"I always detested that woman." This was distinctly vicious.

"Because she took me away from you? How absurd it was in me to leave you, Marian, when you have such remarkable eyes! See, how bright they are—see, here in the water. Two stars have fallen into the fountain, Marian."

"You are handsomer so. Your nose is too short—but here in the fountain you are quite handsome."

"Marian——"

"I wonder how many other women's fingers you have kissed—like that. Ah, don't tell me, Walter! Walter, promise me that you will always lie to me when I ask you about those other women. Lie to me, my dear, and I will know that you are lying and love you all the better for it. She hasn't *any* complexion, you know. And she paints—heavens, how she paints! It is well known she lays it on with a trowel."

"Who was she, Marian?—I have forgotten. Oh, yes—we quarreled—over some woman, and I went away. I left you for a mere woman, Marian. You! And then I heard you were to be married and I came back, my heart in my mouth. I remember now. But what do these things matter? Is it not of far greater importance that the sunlight turns your hair to pure topaz?"

"Ah, my hair, my eyes! Is it these

you care for; Walter? You would not love me, then, if I were old and ugly?"

"Eh, I love you."

"Animal!"

There was a longer silence now.

"Tweet!" said a bird, pertly.

Then Marian said: "Let us go to my father."

"To tell him?"

"Why—that I love you, I suppose—and that I cannot marry Jack, even to be a duchess. Oh, I *did* want to be a duchess! But when you came back to me yonder in the forest—somehow—I stopped wanting anything more. Something—I hardly know—something seemed to say, as you came striding through the dead leaves, laughing—something seemed to say: 'You love him.' Oh, quite audibly, Walter."

"Audibly! Why, the woods whispered it, the birds trilled it, screamed it, the very leaves underfoot crackled assent. Only they said: 'You love her—the girl yonder with glad, frightened eyes, Spring's daughter.' Oh, I, too, heard it, Marian! 'Follow,' the birds sang, 'follow, follow, follow, for yonder is the heart's desire.'"

The Duke of Ormskirk raised his head, his lips sketching a whistle. "Ah! ah!" he muttered. "Eureka! I have recaptured it—the message of April."

#### IV.

When they had gone the duke flung out his hands in a comprehensive gesture of giving up the entire matter. "Well!" said he, "you see how it is." "I do," Lord Brudenel assented. "And if you intend to sit patient under it, I, at least, wear a sword. Confound it, Jack, do you suppose I am going to have promiscuous young men dropping out of the skies and embracing my daughter?" The earl became forceful in his language.

"Harry——" the duke began.

"The fellow hasn't a penny—not a stick or a stiver to his name except Agard Court yonder! That—that crow's nest!" Lord Brudenel spluttered. "They mooned about together a great deal a year ago, but I thought nothing

of it—then he went away and she never spoke of him again. Never spoke of him—oh, the jade!”

The Duke of Ormskirk seated himself and considered the affair, a mild amusement waking in his plump face.

“Old friend,” said he, at length, “it is my opinion that we have been a couple of fools. We planned this marriage, you and I—dear, dear, we planned it when Marian was scarcely out of her cradle! But we failed to take nature into the plot, Harry. It was sensible—oh, granted. I obtained a suitable mistress for Ingilby and Bottreaux Towers, an ornament for my coach and my opera box; you—pardon me, if I word it somewhat grossly—you, in effect, obtained a wealthy and not uninfluential husband for your daughter. Oh, I think you are fond of me, but that is beside the mark; it was not Jack Bulmer who was to marry your daughter, but the Duke of Ormskirk. The thing was as logical as a sale of bullocks—value for value. But now nature intervenes, and”—he snapped his fingers—“eh, well, since she wants this Walter Agard, of course she must have him.”

Lord Brudenel mentioned several penalties he would willingly incur in case of that event taking place.

“You are coarse,” the duke regretfully observed—“though from a worldly standpoint I do not contest that your position is unassailable. You have a handsome daughter to barter—and you want your price. The thing is not uncommon. Well, you shall have your price, Harry. What estate do you demand of your son-in-law?”

“What the devil are you driving at?” said Lord Brudenel.

Composedly the Duke of Ormskirk spread out his hands. “You have, in effect, placed Marian in the market,” he pointed out, “and I offer to give Lieutenant Agard sufficient money to purchase her.”

“You are mad, Jack—oh, you are quite mad!”

“Because I willingly part with money? But I have so much, you see—ah, yes,” said the great Duke of Orms-

kirk, “I have money and power, and the king occasionally pats me upon the shoulder—that most gracious king of ours, who was made a king by fate’s bungling, and is kept gracious by unlimited flattery and beer—and men call me ‘your grace,’ instead of ‘my lord,’ as they do you. I ought to be very happy, ought I not, Harry? Ah, yes, I ought to be, because I have had everything—*everything*—with the important exception of the one thing I wanted.” And his head sank a little wearily upon his hand as he sat leaning forward over the table.

But Lord Brudenel had drawn himself erect, very stiffly. “I am to understand, then, from this farrago that on account of the—er—incident we have just witnessed you decline to marry my daughter?”

“I would sooner cut off my right hand,” said the duke, “because I love her better than anything in the world.”

“Oh, very well!” the earl conceded, sulkily. “Umfravile wants her. He is only a marquis, of course, but so far as money is concerned, I believe he is a thought better off than you. I would have preferred you as a son-in-law, you conceive, but since you withdraw—why, then, let it be Umfravile.”

Now the duke looked up into his face for a long while. “You would do that!” he breathed. “You would give her to Umfravile—to a man who unites the continence of a partridge with the graces of a Berkshire hog—to that goat, that disease-rotted goat! Because he has money! Oh, God, Harry, what a cur you are!”

Lord Brudenel bowed to him as he sat sneering across the table. “My lord duke, you are to-day my guest. I apprehend you will presently be leaving Halvergate, however, and as soon as that regrettable event takes place, I will see that a friend waits upon you with the length of my sword. Meanwhile, I claim the privilege of managing my family affairs at my own discretion.

“I do not fight with hucksters,” the duke flung at him, “and you are one. Oh, you peddler! Can you not under-

stand that I am trying to buy your daughter's happiness from you?"

"I intend that my daughter shall make a suitable match," said the earl, stubbornly; "and she shall. If she is a sensible girl—and barring to-day, I have always esteemed her such—she will find happiness in obeying her father's mandates; otherwise——" He waved that possibility aside.

"Sensible! Ah, can you not see even now that to be sensible is not the highest wisdom? We are sensible as the world goes, you and I—and in God's name, what good does it do us? Here we sit, two miserable old men squabbling over a deal table, breaking up a friendship of thirty years. And yonder Marian and Walter Agard—who are within a measurable distance of insanity, if their conversation be the touchstone—yet tread the pinnacles of some seventh heaven of happiness. April has brought them love, Harry. Oh, I concede that love is folly! But it is all folly, Harry Heleigh—yes, even the things we sensible men strive for are folly. Purses, titles, blue ribbons and the envy of our fellows—these are the toys we struggle for, we sensible men, and in the end we find them only toys, and gaining them, we gain only weariness. And love, too, is a toy—but, gaining love we gain, at least, happiness. That is the difference, Harry Heleigh."

"Oh, have done with your balderdash!" said Lord Brudenel. He spoke irritably, for he knew his position to be sensible, and his slow wrath was kindling at opposition.

His Grace of Ormskirk rose to his feet, all tension. In the act his hand struck against the open dispatch box; and afterward, with a swift alteration of countenance, he overturned it and scattered the contents about the table. For a moment he seemed to forget Lord Brudenel; then quite without warning a mastering rage seized him.

"Harry Heleigh, Harry Heleigh!" he cried, as he strode across the terrace, and caught Lord Brudenel roughly by the shoulder; "are you not content to go to your grave without killing another

woman? Oh, you dotard miser! you haberdasher! haven't I offered you money, and isn't money the only thing you are now capable of caring for? Give the girl to Agard, you huckster!"

Lord Brudenel broke from his grasp, spluttering with rage. "I will see you damned first. You offer money—I fling the money in your face. Look you, you have just insulted me and now you offer—money! Another insult. John Bulmer, I would not take an insult from an archangel. You are my guest, but I am only flesh and blood. I swear to you this is the most deliberate act of my life." Lord Brudenel struck him full in the face.

"Pardon," said the Duke of Ormskirk. He stood rigid, his arms held stiff at his sides, his hands clinched; the red mark showed very plain against an ashy countenance. "Pardon me for a moment. I—I never accepted a blow before this." Once or twice he opened and shut his eyes like an automaton. "But I have other matters to attend to. We are very wise, you and I, Harry. We know that love sometimes does not endure; sometimes it flares up at a girl's glance, quite suddenly, and afterward smolders out into indifference or even hatred. So, say we, let all sensible people marry for money, for then in any event you get what you marry for—a material benefit, a tangible thing that does not vanish when the first squabble, or perhaps the first gray hair, arrives. That is sensible; but women are not sensible, Harry. Give a woman to a man she does not love and just one of two things happens, according to the nature of the woman; either you make her a courtesan, you make of marriage a *liaison* countenanced by the constable, or—you kill the woman. And as God lives, you shall not kill Marian!"

"Draw, you coward!" Lord Brudenel snarled at him. The earl had already lugged out his sword, and would have been as he stood on guard a ludicrous figure, had he not been rather terrible. His rage shook him visibly, and his obstinate mouth twitched and snapped like that of a beast cornered. All gray he was and the April wind played with his

scanty hair as he waited. His eyes were coals.

But Ormskirk had by this regained his composure. "You know that I am not a coward," the duke said, equably. "I have proven that many times. Besides, only gentlemen fight duels, and just now we are hucksters, you and I, chaffering over Marian's happiness. You will not sell it to me for money? Why, then—remember, we are only hucksters, you and I—I will purchase it by a dishonorable action. I will show you a woman's letters. Read them, Harry Heleigh—and God pity you!"

He pushed the papers lying upon the table toward Lord Brudenel. Afterward he turned away and stood looking over the ivy-covered balustrade into the gardens below. All white and green and blue the vista was and of a monastic tranquillity, save for the plashing of the fountain behind the yew hedge. Irresolute gusts brought tepid woodland odors from the gardens. He heard the rustling of papers, heard Lord Brudenel's sword fall jangling to the ground. Then the duke turned.

"And for twenty years I have been eating my heart out with longing for her," the earl said. "And—and I thought you were my friend, Jack."

"She was not your wife then. Ah, they are dated, these letters. But Jack Bulmer was a penniless nobody—so they gave her to you, an earl's heir, those sensible parents of hers. And I went away—to Madrid, it was, with the embassy, where I got my start. I never saw her again. And her parents did the sensible thing; but they tell me it killed her, Harry."

"Killed her?" Lord Brudenel echoed, stupidly. Then on a sudden it was curious to see the glare in his eyes puffed out like a candle. "I killed her," he whispered; "why, I killed Alison—I!" He began to laugh. "Now, that is very amusing, because she was the one thing I ever loved in the world. I remember now that she used to shudder when I kissed her—shudder, do you understand, Jack? I thought it was because she was only a very young girl. Now I comprehend it was because every kiss

was torment to her; because every time I touched her it was torment. And through it all I loved her! Through it all I was happy and she—but I prefer not to think of that. Still, is it not a very diverting jest that a man should kill the thing he loves, not knowing? She wasted away, Jack—wasted away, and always, always I was at hand with my kisses, my pet names, my paddlings—killing her, you observe, always urging her graveward. For I loved her, and she—Jack, Jack, how she must have loathed me!" he said, in a mild sort of wonder, and then, quite without prelude, broke into a fit of tearless sobbing. He appeared senile now, the shrunken and calamitous shell of the man he had been within the moment.

The Duke of Ormskirk put his arm about him. "Old friend, old friend!" said he.

"Why did you not tell me?" the earl said. "I loved you, Jack. I loved her. I would never willingly have seen you unhappy."

"Her parents would have done as you planned to do—given their daughter to the next richest suitor. I was nobody then. So the wisdom of the aged slew us, Harry—slew Alison utterly, and left me with a living body, indeed, but one that cased a long-dead heart. For I, too, loved her, Harry Heleigh. And when I saw this new Alison—for Marian is her mother, face, heart and soul—why, some wraith of emotion stirred in me, some thrill, some not quite forgotten pulse. It seemed Alison come back from the grave. I did not love her—ah, no, the old fervor was gone out of me, but presently I fell a-dreaming over my madeira on long winter evenings—sedate and tranquil dreams of this new Alison flitting about Ingilby, making the splendid, desolate place into a home, making it heaven. An old man's fancies, Harry! fancies bred of my loneliness, for I am very lonely nowadays. But my dreams, I find, were not sufficiently comprehensive; for they did not anticipate April—and nature—and Walter Agard. We must yield to that triumvirate, we sensible old men. Ah, we are wise as the world goes, but we

have learned, you and I, that to be sensible is not the highest wisdom. Marian is her mother in soul, heart and feature. Don't let the old tragedy be repeated, Harry. Let her have this Agard! let her have her chance of happiness!"

But Lord Brudenel had paid him very little attention. "I—I suppose so," he said, when the duke had ended. "Oh, I suppose so, Jack, she was always kind, and patient, and gentle, you understand, but she used to shudder when I kissed her," he repeated, dully—"shudder, Jack." He sat staring at his sword lying on the ground, as though it fascinated him.

"Ah, old friend, old friend!" the duke cried, his hand upon Lord Brudenel's shoulder; "forgive me! It was the only way. We are deaf to April's meaning, we oldsters—we cannot understand that loving means anything very serious except by remembering. And most of us have forgotten. You would never have yielded—ah, forgive me, Harry!"

Lord Brudenel rose to his feet. "I suppose so," he said—"oh, yes, I forgive you, if that is any particular comfort to you. It scarcely seems of any importance, though. The one thing that really matters is that I loved her and I killed her. Oh, beyond doubt, I forgive you. But now that you have made my whole past a hideous stench to me, and proven the love I was so proud of—the one quite clean, quite unselfish thing in my life, I thought it, Jack—to have been only my lust vented on a defenseless woman—why, just now, I have not time to think of forgiveness. Yes, Marian may marry Agard if she cares to. And I am sorry. I took her mother away from you. I would not have done it if I had known."

He started away drearily, but turned back when he had gone a little distance.

"And the joke of it is," he said, with a smile, "that I shall go on living just as if nothing had happened and probably live for a long, long time. My body is so confoundedly healthy. How the deuce did you have the courage to go on

living?" he demanded, enviously. "You loved her and you lost her. I should have thought you would have killed yourself long ago."

The duke shrugged his shoulders. "Does it seem worth while?"

Lord Brudenel paused for a heartbeat, looking down into the gardens. Wonderfully virginal he found that small portion of a world upon the brink of renaissance; a tessellation of clean colors, where the graveled walkways were snow beneath the sun, and were in shadow transmuted to dim violet tints; and for the rest, green ranging from the sober foliage of yew and box and ilex to the pale glow of young grass in the full sunlight; all green, save where the lake shone, a sapphire green girdle. Spring triumphed with a vaunting pageant. And in the forest, in the air, even in the unplumbed sea depths, there woke the mating impulse—irresistible, borne as it might seem on the slow-rising tide of grass that now rippled about the world. Everywhere they were mating; everywhere glances allured and mouth met mouth, but he stood alone. Alone! his fancy clutched the word, yet with an odd apathy; for was there anywhere a loneliness that mastered his? It might exist yonder where errant stardust froze in the remotest by-corners of space; but he doubted it.

"No," Lord Brudenel conceded, after reflection, "I suppose not. I wonder will anything ever seem worth while again?"

The Duke of Ormskirk took his arm. "Scarcely to us, I fancy," he said, negligently. "However, the daws must seek their food elsewhere, for a gentleman may not wear his heart upon his sleeve. Empires crumble, and hearts break, and we are blessed or damned, as fate elects; but through it all we find comfort in the reflection that dinner is good, and sleep, too, is excellent. As for the future—eh, well, if it mean little to us, it means a deal to Alison's daughter. Let us go to them, Harry."