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*Painting by Howard Pyle*

Illustration for "In the Second April"

"THE BASTILE IS NOT A VERY HEALTHY PLACE"

# In the Second April

BY JAMES BRANCH CABELL

A STORY IN TWO PARTS

## II

AS John Bulmer leisurely ascended from the village the birds were waking. Whether day were at hand or no was a matter of twittering debate overhead, but in the west the stars were paling one by one, like candles puffed out by the pretentious little wind that was bustling about the turquoise cupola of heaven; and eastward Bellegarde showed stark, as though scissored from a painting, against a sky of gray and rose. Here was a world of faint ambiguity. Here was the exquisite tension of dawn, curiously achime with his mood, for just now he found the universe too beautiful to put any actual faith in its existence. He had strayed into Faëry, somehow,—into Atlantis, or Avalon, or “a wood near Athens”—a land of opalescence and vapor and delicate color, that would vanish bubblelike at the discreet tap of Pawsey fetching in his shaving-water; and meantime his memory snatched at each loveliness, jealously, as a pug snatches bits of sugar.

Beneath her window he paused and shifted his lute before him. Then he began to sing, exultant in the unreality of everything and of himself in particular.

Sang John Bulmer:

“Speed forth, my song, the sun’s ambassador,  
Lest in the east night prove the conqueror,  
And day be slain, and darkness triumph,—for  
The sun is single, but her eyes are twain.  
“And now the sunlight and the night contest  
A doubtful battle, and day bides at best  
Doubtful, until she waken. ’Tis attest  
The sun is single.

“But her eyes are twain,—  
And should the light of all the world delay,

And darkness prove victorious? Is it day  
Now that the sun alone is risen?

“Nay,  
The sun is single, but her eyes are twain,—  
Twain firmaments that mock with heaven-  
lier hue  
The heavens’ less lordly and less gracious  
blue,  
And lit with sunlier sunlight through  
and through.

“The sun is single, but her eyes are twain,  
And of fair things this side of Paradise  
Fairest, of goodly things most goodly.”

He paused here and smote a resonant and louder chord. His voice, too, ascended in dulcet supplication.

“Rise,  
And succor the benighted world that cries,  
*The sun is single, but her eyes are twain!*”

“Eh—? So it is you, is it?” Claire was peeping disdainfully from the window. Her throat was bare—a superfluous miracle among so many—and her dusky hair was a shade dishevelled, and in her meditative eyes he caught the flicker of her tardiest dream just as it vanished.

“It is I,” John Bulmer confessed—  
“come to awaken you according to the  
ancient custom of Poictesme.”

“I had much rather have had my sleep out,” said she, resentfully. “In perfect frankness, I find you and your ancient customs a nuisance.”

“You lack romance, my wife.”

“Oh—?” She was a person of many cryptic exclamations, this bride of his. Presently she said: “Indeed, Monsieur Bulmer, I entreat you to leave Poictesme. I have informed Louis of everything and he is rather furious.”

John Bulmer said, “Do you comprehend why I have not already played the emigrant?”

“Yes,” she answered, after a little pause.

"And for the same reason I can never leave you so long as this gross body be at my disposal. You are about to tell me that if I remain here I shall probably be hanged on account of what happened yesterday. There are reasons why I do not consider this likely, but if I knew it to be true—if I had but one hour's start of Jack Ketch—I swear to you I would not budge."

"I am heartily sorry," she replied, "since if I had known you really cared for me—so much—I would never have married you. Oh, it is impossible!" the girl laughed with a trace of hysteria, "you had not laid eyes on me until a week ago yesterday."

"My dear," John Bulmer answered, "I am perhaps inadequately acquainted with the etiquette of such matters, but I make bold to question if love is exclusively regulated by clock-ticks. Observe!" he said, with a sort of fury; "there is a mocking demon in me who twists my tongue into a jest even when I am most serious. I love you; and I dare not tell you so without a grin. Then when you laugh at me I, too, can laugh, and the whole transaction be regarded as a parody. Oh, I am indeed a coward!"

"Not so!" she earnestly replied. "You proved that yesterday."

"Yesterday I shot an unsuspecting man, and afterward fenced with another—in a shirt of Milanese armor! Yes, I was astoundingly heroic yesterday, for the simple reason that all the while I knew myself to be as safe as though I were snug at home snoring under an eider-down quilt. Yet, to do me justice, I am a shade less afraid of physical danger than of ridicule."

She gave him a womanly answer. "You are not ridiculous, and to wear armor was very sensible of you."

"To the contrary, I am extremely ridiculous. For observe: I am an elderly man, quite old enough to be your father; I am fat—no, that is kind of you, but I am not well built. I am merely and unpardonably fat; and I believe I am not possessed of any fatal beauty of feature such as would by ordinary impel young women to pursue me with unsolicited affection: and being all this, I presume to love you. To me, at least, that appears ridiculous."

"Ah, do not laugh!" she said. "Do not laugh, Monsieur Bulmer!"

But John Bulmer persisted in that curious laughter, which somehow was peculiarly unjovial. "Because," he presently stated, "the whole affair is so very, very diverting."

"Believe me," Claire began, "I am sorry that you care—so much. I—do not understand. I am sorry—I am not," the girl said, in a new tone, and you saw her honest face transfigured; "I am glad! Do you comprehend?—I am glad!" And then she swiftly closed the window.

John Bulmer observed, "I am perhaps subject to hallucinations, for otherwise the fact had been previously noted by geographers that Heaven is immediately adjacent to Poictesme."

Presently the old flippancy came back to him, since an ancient custom is not lightly broken, and John Bulmer smiled sleepily and shook his head. "Here am I on my honeymoon, with my wife locked up in the château and me locked out of it. My position savors too much of George Dandin's to be quite acceptable. Let us, then, set about rectifying matters."

He came to the great gate of the castle later and found two sentries there. He thought this odd, but they recognized him as de Soyecourt's guest, and, after a whispered consultation, admitted him. In the courtyard a lackey took charge of Monsieur Bulmer, and he was conducted into the presence of the Marquis de Soyecourt. "What the devil!" he thought, "is Bellegarde in a state of siege?"

The little Marquis sat beside the Duchesse de Puyange to the rear of a long table with a crimson cover. Their attitudes smacked vaguely of the judicial, and before them stood a ragged, dissolute fellow, guarded by four attendants, whom the Marquis was languidly considering.

"My dear man," de Soyecourt was saying as John Bulmer came into the room, "when you brought this extraordinary epistle to Bellegarde, you must have been perfectly aware that thereby you were forfeiting your life. Accordingly, I am in nature compelled to deny your absurd claims to the immunity of a herald, just as I would decline to receive a herald from the cockroaches."

"That is cowardly," the man said. "I come as the representative of an honorable enemy who desires to warn you before he strikes."

"You come as the representative of vermin," de Soyecourt retorted, "and as such I receive you. You will, therefore, permit me to wish you a pleasant journey into eternity. Why, *holà, madame!* here is that vagabond guest of ours returned to observation!" The Marquis rose and stepped forward, all abeam. "Mr. Bulmer," said he, with an intense cordiality, "I can assure you that I was never more delighted to see any one in my entire life."

"Pardon, *monseigneur,*" one of the attendants here put in—"but what shall we do with this Achon?"

The Marquis slightly turned his head, his hand still grasping John Bulmer's. "Why, hang him, of course," he said. "Did I forget to tell you? But yes, take him out and hang him at once." The four men conducted their prisoner from the room.

"You find us in the act of dispensing justice," the Marquis continued, "yet at Bellegarde we temper it with mercy, so that I shall ask no indiscreet questions concerning your absence of last night."

"But I, *monsieur,*" said John Bulmer, "I, too, have come to demand justice."

"*Tête-bleu,* Mr. Bulmer! and what can I have the pleasure of doing for you in that respect?"

"You can restore to me my wife," John Bulmer said.

And now de Soyecourt cast a smile toward the Duchess, though the latter was plainly troubled. "Would you not have known this was an Englishman," he queried, "by the avowed desire for the society of his own wife? They are a mad race. And indeed, Mr. Bulmer, I would very gladly restore to you this hitherto unheard-of spouse, if only I were blest with her acquaintance. As it is—" He waved his hand.

"I married her but yesterday," said John Bulmer, "and I have reason to believe that she is now within Bellegarde."

He saw the eyes of de Soyecourt slowly narrow. "Jacques," said the Marquis, "fetch me the pistol within that cabinet." He resumed his seat to the rear of the table, the weapon lying before him.

"You may go now, Jacques; this gentleman and I are about to hold a little private conversation." Then, when the door had closed upon the lackey, de Soyecourt said, "Pray draw up a chair within just ten feet of this table, *monsieur,* and oblige me with your wife's maiden name."

"She was formerly known," John Bulmer answered, "as *Mademoiselle Claire de Puyange.*"

The Duchess spoke for the first time. "Oh, the poor man! *Monsieur de Soyecourt,* he is evidently insane."

"I do not know about that," the Marquis said, fretfully, "but in any event I wish that people would not rush into Bellegarde and absolutely compel me to kill them. First there was this Achon, and now you, Mr. Bulmer, come to annoy me. Listen, *monsieur,*" he went on, presently, "last evening *Mademoiselle de Puyange* triumphantly announced both to the Duchess and to me that her impending match with the Duke of Ormskirk must necessarily be broken off, as she was already married. She had, she stated, casually encountered you in the forest, where on the spur of the moment you two had espoused one another; and was quite unable to inform us what had become of you after the ceremony. You can conceive that as a sensible man I did not credit a word of her story. But now, as I understand it, you corroborate this moonstruck narrative?"

John Bulmer bowed his head. "I have that honor, *monsieur.*"

De Soyecourt sounded the gong beside him. "In that event, it is uncommonly convenient to have you in hand. Your return to Bellegarde I regard as opportune, even though I am compelled to attribute it to insanity; personally, I disapprove of this match with *Milord Ormskirk,* but as Gaston is bent upon it, you will understand that in reason my only course is to make *Claire* a widow as soon as may be possible."

"It is intended, then," John Bulmer queried, "that I am to follow the late and unlamented Achon?"

"I can but trust," said the Marquis, politely, "that your course of life has qualified you for a superior flight, since Achon's departure, I apprehend, was not unakin to a descent."

"No!" the Duchess cried, suddenly; "Monsieur de Soyecourt, can you not see the man is out of his senses? Let Claire be sent for. There is some mistake."

De Soyecourt shrugged. "You know that I can refuse you nothing. Jacques," he called to the appearing lackey, "request Mademoiselle de Puyange to honor us, if it be convenient, with her presence. Nay, I pray you, do not rise, Mr. Bulmer; I am of a nervous disposition, startled by the least movement, and my finger, as you may note, is immediately upon the trigger."

So they sat thus, John Bulmer beginning to feel rather foolish as time wore on, though actually it was not a long while before Claire had appeared in the doorway and had paused there quite unruffled. You saw a great wave of color flood her countenance, and then swiftly ebb and leave it ashen. John Bulmer observed, with a thrill, that she made no sound, but simply waited, composed and alert, almost stolidly, to find out how much de Soyecourt knew before she spoke.

The little Marquis said, "Claire, this gentleman informs us that you married him yesterday."

Tranquilly she inspected her claimant. "I did not see Monsieur Bulmer at all yesterday, so far as I remember. Why, surely, Louis, you did not take my nonsense of last night in earnest?" she demanded, and gave a mellow ripple of laughter. "Yes, you actually believed it; you actually believed that I walked into the forest and married the first unpetticoated person I met there, and that this is he. As it happens, I did not; so please let Monsieur Bulmer go at once and put away that absurd pistol—at once, Louis, do you hear?"

The Duchess shook her head. "She is lying, Monsieur de Soyecourt, and undoubtedly this is the man. Her denial would not be so convincing were it not a lie."

"It is a lie," John Bulmer said; "and I praise God for the nobility which prompted it." He went straight to the girl and took her hand. "You are trying to save me, because you know I must be hanged in order you may wed the Duke of Ormskirk. Yet I warn you that the fate of Ananias was never a synonym for felicity."

"Jean Bulmer! Jean Bulmer!" the girl wailed, and her voice was tender; "why did you return to Bellegarde, Jean Bulmer?"

"I came," he answered, "for the very absurd reason that I cannot live without you."

They stood thus for a while, both her hands clasped in his. "I believe you," she said, at last, "even though I do not understand at all, Jean Bulmer." And then she wheeled upon the Marquis. "Yes, yes!" Claire said; "the man is my husband. And I will not have him harmed. Do you comprehend?—you shall not touch him, because you are not fit to touch him, Louis, and also because I do not wish it."

De Soyecourt looked toward the Duchess for advice. "It is a nuisance, but evidently she cannot marry Milor Ormskirk so long as Mr. Bulmer is alive. I suppose it would be better to hang him out-of-hand?"

"Monsieur de Puyange would prefer it, I imagine," said the Duchess; "nevertheless, it appears a great pity."

"In nature," the Marquis assented, "we deplore the loss of Mr. Bulmer's company. Yet as matters stand—"

"But they are in love with one another," the Duchess pointed out, with a sorry little laugh. "Can you not see that, my friend?"

"Hein?" said the Marquis; "in that event it is doubly important Mr. Bulmer be locked up somewhere overnight and hanged the first thing in the morning." He reached for the gong, but Claire had begun to speak.

"I am *not* in love with him! You do not realize your profound imbecility, Hélène. I think he is a detestable man, because he always looks at you as if he saw something extremely ridiculous but was too polite to notice it. He is invariably making me suspect I have a smut on my nose. But in spite of that, I consider him a very pleasant old gentleman, and I will *not* have him hanged." With which ultimatum she stamped her foot.

"Yes, madame," said the Marquis, critically; "after all, she is in love with him. That is unfortunate, is it not, for Milor Ormskirk—and even for Achille Cazaio," he added, with a listless shrug.

"I fail to see," a dignified young lady stated, "what Cazaio, at least, has to do with your galimatias."

"Simply that I received this morning a letter demanding you be surrendered to Cazaio," de Soyecourt answered, as he sounded the gong. "Otherwise, our amiable friend of the Taunenfels announces he will attack Bellegarde at his convenience. I, of course, changed his herald and despatched messengers to Gaston, whom I look for to-morrow. If he indeed arrive to-morrow morning, Mr. Bulmer, I shall relinquish you to him; in other circumstances I shall have the melancholy pleasure of summoning a Protestant minister from Manneville, and afterward of hanging you—suppose we say at noon?"

"The hour suits me," said John Bulmer, "as well as another. But no better. And I warn you it will not suit the Duke of Ormskirk, either, whose relative—whose very near relative—" He posed for the astounding revelation.

But little de Soyecourt had drawn closer to him. "Mr. Bulmer," said he, with a certain intensity, "I have somehow omitted to mention that two years ago I was at Aix-la-Chapelle, when the treaty was in progress, and there saw your great kinsman. I cut no particular figure at the convocation, so that it is unlikely he recalls my features; but I remember his quite clearly."

"Indeed?" said John Bulmer, courteously; "it appears, then, that monsieur is a physiognomist?"

"You flatter me," the Marquis returned; "my skill enabled me to deduce the veriest truisms only—such as that the man who for fifteen years had beaten France, had hoodwinked France, would in France be not oversafe could we conceive him fool enough to hazard a trip into this country."

"Especially alone?" said John Bulmer.

"Especially," the Marquis assented, "if he came alone. But, ma foi! I am discourteous— You were about to say—?"

"That a comic subject declines to be set forth in tragic verse," John Bulmer answered; "and afterward to inquire the way to my dungeon."

But he escaped a dungeon, after all,

for at parting de Soyecourt had graciously offered to accept Mr. Bulmer's parole, which he gave willingly enough, and thereby obtained the liberty of a tiny enclosed garden, whence a stairway led to his new apartment on the second floor of what had been known as the Constable's Tower, since du Guesclin held it for six weeks against Sir Robert Knollys, when Bellegarde was only a fortress.

The garden, gravel-pathed, was a trim place, all green and white, containing four poplars, and in the centre a fountain where three Nereids contended with a brawny Triton for the possession of a turtle whose nostrils spurted water. A circle of attendant turtles, half submerged, shot inferior jets from their gaping mouths. It was an odd and not unhandsome piece, and John Bulmer inspected it with appreciation, and latterly the garden, and having found all things satisfactory, sat down and chuckled sleepily and waited.

"De Soyecourt has been aware of my identity throughout the entire week! Faith, then, I am a greater fool than even I suspected, since this fop of the Boulevards has been able to trick me so long. He has some card up his sleeve, too, has our good Marquis—eh, well! Gaston comes to-morrow, and thenceforward all is plain sailing. Meantime I suspicion that the poor captive will presently have visitors."

He had dinner first, though, and at this meal gave an excellent account of himself. Shortly afterward, as he sat over his coffee, little de Soyecourt unlocked the high and narrow gate which constituted the one entrance to the garden and sauntered forward, dapper and smiling.

"I entreat your pardon, Monsieur le Duc," de Soyecourt began, "that I have not visited you sooner. But in unsettled times, you comprehend, the master of a beleaguered fortress is kept busy. Cazaio, I now learn, means to attack to-morrow, and I have been fortifying against him. However, I attach no particular importance to the man's threats, as I have despatched three couriers to Gaston, one of whom must in reason get to him; and in that event he will arrive early in the afternoon, and accompanied by the dragoons of Entréchat. And subsequently—eh bien! if Cazaio has

stirred up a hornets' nest he has only himself to thank for it." He snapped his fingers and hummed a merry air, being to all appearances in excellent spirits.

"That is well," said John Bulmer—"for, believe me, I shall be unfeignedly glad to see Gaston once more."

"Decidedly," said the Marquis, sniffing, "they give my prisoners much better coffee than they deign to afford me. I shall make bold to ask you for a cup of it, what time we converse sensibly." He sat down opposite John Bulmer. "Oh, about Gaston!" said the Marquis, as he added the sugar—"it is deplorable that you will not see Gaston again, at least not in this naughty world of ours."

"I am the more grieved," said John Bulmer, gravely, "for I love the man."

"It is necessary, you conceive, that I hang you, at latest, before twelve o'clock to-morrow, since Gaston is a little too fond of you to fall in with my plans. His premature arrival would in effect admit the bull of equity into the china-shop of my intentions. And day-dreams are fragile stuff, Monsieur d'Ormskirk! Indeed, I am giving you this so brief reprieve only because I am unwilling to have upon my conscience the reproach of hanging without due preparation a man whom of all politicians in the universe I most unfeignedly like and respect. The Protestant minister has been sent for, and will, I sincerely trust, be here at dawn. Otherwise—really, I am desolated, Monsieur le Duc, but you surely comprehend that I cannot wait upon his leisure."

John Bulmer cracked a filbert. "So I die to-morrow? I do not presume to dictate, monsieur, but I would appreciate some explanation of your motive."

"Which I freely render," the Marquis replied. "When I recognized you a week ago—as I did at first glance—I was astounded. That you, the man in all the world most cordially hated by Frenchmen, should venture into France quite unattended was a conception to confound belief. Still, here you were, and I realized that such an opportunity would not rap twice upon the door. So I despatched a letter post-haste to Madame de Pompadour at Marly—"

"I begin to comprehend," John Bul-

mer said. "Old Tournehem's daughter hates me as she hates no man alive. Frankly, monsieur, your excellent directress of the Parc-aux-Cerfs has cause to—may I trouble you for the nut-crackers? a thousand thanks—since I have outwitted her more than once both in diplomacy and on the battle-field. With me out of the way, I comprehend that France might attempt to renew the war, and our late treaty would be so much wasted paper. Yes, I comprehend that she would give a deal for me—but what the devil! France has no allies. She dare not provoke England just at present; she has no allies, monsieur, for I can assure you that Prussia is out of the game. Then what is the woman driving at?"

"Far be it from me," said the Marquis, with becoming modesty, "to meddle with affairs of state. Nevertheless, madame is willing to purchase you—at any price."

John Bulmer slapped his thigh. "Kaunitz! behold the key. Eh, eh, I have it now; the Empress despatched o' late a special ambassador to Versailles—one Anton Wenzel Kaunitz, a man I never heard of. Why, this Moravian count is a genius of the first water. He will combine France and Austria, implacable enemies since the Great Cardinal's time. Ah, I have it now, monsieur—Frederick of Prussia has published verses against the Pompadour she can never pardon—eh, against the Czaritza, too! Why, what a thing it is to be a poet! now Russia will join the league. And Sweden, of course, because she wants Pomerania, which the Emperor Frederick claims. Monsieur de Soyecourt, I protest it will be one of the prettiest messes ever stirred up in history! And to think that I am to miss it all!"

"I regret," de Soyecourt said, "to deny you the pleasure of participation. In sober verity I regret it. But unluckily, Monsieur d'Ormskirk, your dissolution is the sole security of my happiness; and in effect"—he shrugged—"you comprehend my unfortunate position."

"One of the prettiest messes ever stirred up in all history!" John Bulmer lamented; "and I to miss it! The policy of centuries shrugged aside, like



a last year's fashion! Decidedly I shall never again cast reflections upon the woman in politics, for this is superb. Why, this coup is worthy of me! And what is Petticoat the Second to give you, pray, for making all this possible?"

"She will give me," the Marquis retorted, "according to advices received from her yesterday, a lettre-de-cachet for Gaston de Puyssange. Gaston is a man of ability, but he is also a man of unbridled tongue. He has expressed his opinion concerning the Pompadour, to cite an instance, as freely as the Comte de Maurepas did. You know what happened to him. Ah yes, Gaston is undoubtedly a peer of France, but the Pompadour is Queen of that kingdom. And in consequence—on the day that Madame de Pompadour learns of your death—Gaston goes to the Bastille."

"Naturally," John Bulmer assented, "since it is by ordinary the reward of common sense when manifested by a Frenchman. What the devil, monsieur! Maréchal Richelieu has been there four times and Gaston himself, if I am not mistaken, twice. And neither is one whit the worse for it."

The Marquis sipped his coffee. "The Bastille is not a very healthy place. Besides, I have a friend there—a gaoler. He was formerly a chemist."

John Bulmer elevated the left eyebrow. "Poison?"

"Dieu m'en garde!" The Marquis was appalled. "Nay, monsieur, merely an unforeseen attack of heart-disease."

"Ah! ah!" said John Bulmer, very slowly. He presently resumed: "And afterward the Duchesse de Puyssange will be a widow. And already she is fond of you; but unfortunately the Duchess—with every possible deference—is a trifle prudish. I see it all now, quite plainly; and out of pure friendliness I warn you that in my opinion the Duchess is hopelessly in love with her husband."

"I sometimes fear she has been guilty of that weakness," said the Marquis, gloomily, "yet I shall take my only chance. Believe me, Monsieur le Duc, I profoundly regret that you and Gaston must be sacrificed in order to afford me this same chance."

But John Bulmer was chuckling. "My faith!" he said, and softly chafed

his hands together, "how sincerely you will be horrified when your impetuous error is discovered—just too late. You were merely endeavoring to serve your beloved Gaston and the Duke of Ormskirk when you hanged the rascal who had impudently stolen the woman intended to cement their friendship! The Duke fell a victim to his own folly, and you acted precipitately perhaps, but out of pure zeal. You will probably weep. Meanwhile your lettre-de-cachet is on the road, and presently Gaston, too, is trapped and murdered. You weep yet more tears—oh, vociferous tears!—and the Duchess marries you because you were so devotedly attached to her former husband. And England will sit snug while France reconquers Europe. Monsieur, I make you my compliments on one of the tidiest plots ever brooded over."

"It rejoices me," the Marquis returned, "that a conspirator of many years' standing should commend my maiden effort." He rose to his feet. "And now, Monsieur d'Ormskirk," he continued, with extended hand, "matters being thus amicably adjusted, shall we say adieu?"

John Bulmer considered. "Well—no!" said he, at last; "for there are, after all, such things as decency and honor. I commend your cleverness, Monsieur de Soyecourt, but as concerns your hand I must confess to a distaste."

The Marquis had gone white. "Because at the bottom of your heart you despise me," he said. "Ah, believe me, monsieur, your contempt for de Soyecourt is less great than mine." And presently he had left the garden.

John Bulmer sat down to consider more at leisure these revelations. He foreread like a placard Jeanne d'Étoiles' magnificent scheme: it would convulse all Europe, while England would remain supine, simply because Newcastle was a fool and Ormskirk would be dead. He would barter his soul for one hour of liberty, he thought. A riot, now,—ay, a riot in Paris, a blow from within, would temporarily at least stupefy French enterprise and gain England time for preparation. And it was so simple! Meanwhile he was a prisoner, and Newcastle was a fool, and the Pompadour was disastrously remote from being a fool.

"It is easy to announce that I am the Duke of Ormskirk—and to what end? Faith, I had as well proclaim myself the Pope of Rome or the Cazique of Mexico: the jackanapes will affect to regard my confession as the device of a desperate man and hang me just the same; and his infernal comedy will go on without a hitch. Nay, I am fairly trapped, and Monsieur de Soyccourt holds the winning hand—more thanks to my egregious folly! But to be outwitted—and hanged—by a smirking Hop-o'-my-thumb!

"Oh, this is very annoying!" said John Bulmer, in his impotence.

He sat down once more, sulkily, like an overfed cat, and began to read with desperate attention: "'Here may men understand that be of worship, that he was never formed that at every time might stand, but sometimes he was put to the worse by evil fortune. And at sometimes the worse knight putteth the better knight into rebuke.' Behold a niggardly salve rather than a panacea." He skipped. "'And then said Sir Tristram to Sir Lamorake, 'I require you if ye happen to meet with Sir Palomides—''" Startled, he glanced about the garden.

And later it turned on a sudden into the primal Garden of Paradise. "I came," she loftily explained, "because I considered it my duty to apologize in person for leading you into great danger. Our scouts tell us that already Cazaio is marshalling his men upon the Taunenfels."

"And yet," John Bulmer said, as he rose from his reading—though he was but cloudily cognizant of what he said—"Bellegarde is a strong place. And our good Marquis, whatever else he may be, is neither a fool nor a coward."

Claire shrugged. "Cazaio has ten men to our one. Yet perhaps we can hold out till Gaston comes with his dragoons. And then—I have much influence with Gaston. He will not deny me,—ah, surely he will not deny me if I go down on my knees to him and wear my very prettiest gown. Nay, at bottom Gaston is kind, my friend, and he will spare you."

"To be your husband?" said John Bulmer.

Twice she faltered "No," all one blush. And then she cried with a sudden flare of irritation: "I do not love you. I

cannot help that. Oh, you—you unutterable bully!"

Gravely he shook his head at her.

"You *are* a bully. You are trying to bully me into loving you, and you know it. What else moved you to return to Bellegarde,—and to sit here, a doomed man, tranquilly reading? Yes, you were,—I happened to see you through the keyhole in the gate. And why else were you doing that?"

"Because I adore you," said John Bulmer, "and because in this noble and joyous history of the great conqueror and excellent monarch, King Arthur, I find much diverting matter, and because, to be quite frank, Claire, I consider an existence without you neither alluring nor possible."

She had pinkened. But, "Oh, monsieur," the girl cried, "you are laughing because you are afraid that I will laugh at what you are saying to me. Believe me, I have no desire to laugh. It frightens me, rather. I had not known that nowadays men might love so greatly and with a foolishness so divine. I had thought all that perished with the Lancelot and Palomides of your book. I had thought—that in any event you had no earthly right to call me Claire."

"Superficially, the reproach is just," he assented, "but what was the name your Palomides cried in battle, pray? Was it not *Ysoude* when the searching sword had at last found the joints of the foeman's armor and his casque spouted blood?—*Ysoude* when the line of adverse spears wavered and broke and dissolved into nothingness, and the Saracen was victor? Was it not *Ysoude* he murmured riding over alien hill and dale in pursuit of the Questing Beast?—'the glatisant beast'? Assuredly: and meantime La Beale *Ysoude* sits snug in Cornwall, with Tristram, who dons his armor once in a while to roll Palomides in the sand *coram populo*. Still, the name was sweet, and I protest the Saracen had a perfect right to mention it whenever he felt so inclined."

"You jest at everything," she lamented—"which is one of the many traits that I dislike in you."

"Knowing your heart to be very tender," he submitted, "I am perhaps endeavoring to present as jovial and indif-

ferent an appearance as may be possible in spite of your rejection of my addresses—to you, whom I love as Palomides loved Ysoude. Otherwise you would be torn with anguish. Yet stay; is there not another similitude? Assuredly, for you love me much as Ysoude loved Palomides. What the deuce is all this lamentation to you? You don't value it the beard of an onion,—while of course grieving that your friendship, your most sincere friendship, should have been so utterly misconstrued, and wrongly interpreted, and trusting, etc., etc. Oh, I know you women!"

"I sometimes wonder," she reflected, "what sort of women you *have* known—before?"

He waved the implied query to the evening breeze. "It is not a matter of particular import. We have fought, you and I, the eternal duel of the sexes. The battle is over, so far as I am concerned, and the other side has won. Well! Pompey was reckoned a very pretty fellow in his day, but he took to his heels at Pharsalia, for all that; and Hannibal, I have heard, did not have matters entirely his own way at Zama. In any event, good men have been beaten before this. So, without stopping to cry over spilt milk—heigho!" he interpolated, with a grimace; "it was uncommonly sweet milk, though,—let's back to our tents and reckon up our wounds."

"I am decidedly of the opinion," she said, "that for all your talk you will find your heart unscratched." Irony bewildered Claire, though she invariably greeted it with a polite smile.

John Bulmer said: "Faith, I do not intend to flatter your vanity by going into a decline on the spot. For in perfect frankness I find no mortal wounds anywhere. We have it on the best authority that while many men have died from time to time, and worms have eaten them, it was never for love. I am inclined to agree with Rosalind; an aneurism may be fatal, but a broken heart is scarcely so. Lovers have died in divers manners since the antique world was made, but not the most luckless of them was slain by love. Even Palomides, as my book informs me, went abroad with Lancelot and probably died an old man here in France,—peaceably, in his bed, as gen-

teel people should; and I dare assert that long ere this unchronicled demise he had learned to chuckle over his youthful follies, and had assured his wife that La Beale Ysoude squinted, or was freckled, or the like; and had protested laughingly that the best of us must sow our wild oats. And at the last it was his wife who mixed his gruel and smoothed his pillow and sat up with him o' nights, and if he died thinking of Madame Palomides rather than La Beale Ysoude, who shall blame him? Not I, for one," said John Bulmer, stoutly; "if it was not heroic, it was at least respectable, and, above all, natural; and I expect some day to stammer through a twin valedictory. When I set about the process of dying, I may be thinking of you, O fair lost lady! and again I may not. Who can say? A fly, for instance, may have lighted upon my nose and his tickling may have distracted my ultimate thoughts. Meanwhile, I love you consumedly, and you don't care a snap of your fingers for me. Faith, it is very amusing."

"I—I am sorry," she said, inadequately.

"You are the more gracious." And his face sank down into his hands, and even Claire was forgotten, for he was remembering Alison Pleydell and that ancient bankruptcy of his heart in youth. And the man groaned aloud.

A hand, feather-soft, fell upon his shoulder. "And who was your Ysoude, Jean Bulmer?"

"A woman who died twenty years ago,—a woman dead ere you were born, my dear."

Claire gave a little stifled cry. "Oh—oh, I *loathe* her!" she cried.

But when he raised his head she was gone.

He sat long in the twilight, now rising insensibly about him. The garden had become a grave, yet not unfriendly, place; the white straining Nereids were taking on a tinge of violet, the verdure was of a deeper hue, that was all; and the fountain plashed unhurriedly, as though measuring a reasonable interval (he whimsically thought), between the asking of a riddle and its solution given gratis by the asker.

He loved the woman; granted: but did

not love rise the higher above a cornerstone of delusion? And this he could never afford: he considered Claire to be not extravagantly clever, he could have improved upon her ears (to cite one instance), which were rather clumsily modelled; her finger-tips were a thought too thick, a shade too practical, and in fine she was no more the most beautiful woman in the world than she was the tallest: and yet he loved her. Here was no infatuation, no roseate and kindly haze surrounding a goddess, such as that which had by ordinary accompanied Alison Pleydell.

"I am grown older, perhaps. Perhaps it is merely that I am fashioned of baser stuff than—say, Achille Cazaio or de Soyecourt. Or perhaps it is that this overmastering, all-engulfing love is a mere figment of the poet, an age-long superstition as zealously preserved as that of the inscrutability of women, and both by men who don't believe a syllable of either. Ysoude is dead; and I love my young French wife as thoroughly as Palomides did, with as great a passion as was possible to either of us oldsters. Well! all life is a compromise; I compromise with tradition by loving her unselfishly, by loving her with the very best that remains in John Bulmer. *Soit!* I love her and the die is cast. I mean to have her, and afterward she shall be content.

"True, I may be hanged at noon tomorrow, which would somewhat disconcert my plan. I shall not bother about that. Always there remains the slender chance that, somehow, Gaston may arrive in time; and otherwise—why, otherwise I shall be hanged, and as to what will happen afterward I decline to enter into any discussion even with myself. I have my belief, but it is bolstered by no iota of knowledge. Faith, let us live this life as a gentleman should, and keep our hands and our consciences as clean as may be possible, and after that trust to God's common sense. There are certain people who must divert Him vastly by their frantic efforts to keep out of hell. For my own part, I would not think of wearing a pelisse in the Desert of Sahara merely because I happened to be sailing for Greenland during the ensuing week. I shall trust to His common sense.

"I wish that Reinault would hurry with the supper-trays. I am growing very hungry."

That night he was roused by a tapping at his door. "Jean Bulmer, Jean Bulmer! I have bribed Reinault. I have the keys. Come, and I will set you free."

"To do what?" said John Bulmer.

"To escape—to flee to your foggy England," said the voice without,—“and to your hideous Englishwomen.”

"Do you go with me?" said John Bulmer.

"I do *not*." This was spoken from the turrets of decision.

"In that event," said John Bulmer, "I shall return to my dreams, which I infinitely prefer to the realities of a hollow existence. And besides, now one thinks of it, I have given my parole."

An infuriate voice came through the keyhole. "You *are* a bully," it stated. "I loathe you." Followed silence.

Presently the voice said: "Because if you really loved her you were no better than she was, and so I hate you both."

"Beautiful as an angel, and headstrong as a devil," was John Bulmer's meditation. "And if I slink off to-night I shall never be to her anything more than her husband." Afterward John Bulmer turned over and went back to sleep.

For after all, as he reflected, he had given his parole; and always it pleased the notorious trickster, by some odd quirk of vanity, to have it said of Ormskirk that the formal word of Ormskirk, once given, had never yet been broken.

He was awakened later by a shriek, that was followed by a hubbub of tumult, what time John Bulmer sat erect in bed. Ensued a medley of yelling, of musketry, and of crashes, as the dilapidation of falling battlements. He knew well enough what had happened. Cazaio and his men were making a night attack upon Bellegarde.

John Bulmer arose and, having lighted two candles, dressed himself. He cast aside the first cravat as a failure, knotted the second with scrupulous nicety, and afterward sat down, facing the door to his apartment, and trimmed his finger-nails. Outside was pande-

monium, as the saying is, and the little scrap of sky visible from his one window was now of a sullen red.

"It is very curious I do not suffer more acutely. As a matter of fact, I am not conscious of any particular feeling at all. I believe that most of us, when we are confronted with a situation demanding high joy or agony, find ourselves quite void of emotion. They have evidently taken de Soyecourt by surprise. She is yonder in that hell outside and will probably be captured by its most lustful devil—or else be murdered. I am here like a trapped rat, impotent, waiting to be killed, which Cazaio's men will certainly attend to when they ransack the place and find me. And I feel nothing, absolutely nothing.

"By this she has probably fallen into Cazaio's power—"

And the man went mad. "God, God!" he wailed aloud, like a whipped child. And he dashed upon the locked door, and tore at it with soft white hands, so that presently they were all blood. He beat his face upon the door, cutting open his forehead. He sobbed with odd bestial noises and bit at the air.

He shook his bleeding hands toward heaven. "In my time I have been cruel. I am less cruel than You! Let me go!"

The door opened and she stood upon the threshold. His arms were about her and repeatedly he kissed her, mercilessly, with hard kisses, crushing her in his embrace.

"Jean, Jean!" she sobbed, beneath his lips, and lay quite still in his arms. He saw how white and tender a thing she was, and the fierce embrace relaxed.

"You came to me," he said, stupidly.

"Louis had forgotten you. They had all retreated to the Inner Tower. Cazaio cannot take that, for he has no cannon. Louis can hold out there until Gaston comes with help," Claire rapidly said. "But the thieves are burning Bellegarde. I could bribe no man to set you free. They were afraid to venture."

"And you came," said John Bulmer,— "you left the safe Inner Tower to come to me!"

"I could not let you die, Jean Bulmer."

"No? Then I will live—I will live not unworthily the life which you have

given me. O God!" John Bulmer cried, "what a pitiful creature was that great Duke of Ormskirk! Now make a man of me, O God!"

"Listen, dear madman," she breathed; "we cannot go out into Bellegarde. They are everywhere—Cazaio's men. They are building huge fires about the Inner Tower, but it is all stone, and I think Louis can hold out. But we, Jean Bulmer, can only retreat to the roofing of this place. There is but a trap-door to admit you to the top, and there—there we can at least live until the dawn."

"I am unarmed," John Bulmer said, "and weaponless I cannot hold even a trap-door against armed men."

"I have brought you weapons," Claire said, and waved one hand toward the outer passageway. "Naturally I would not overlook that. There were many dead men on my way hither, and they had no need of weapons. I have a sword here and two pistols."

"You are," said John Bulmer, with supreme conviction, "the most wonderful woman in the universe. By all means let us get to the top of this infernal tower and live there as long as we may find it possible. But first, will you permit me to make myself a thought tidier? For in my recent agitation as to your whereabouts I have, I perceive, somewhat disordered both my person and my apparel."

Claire laughed a little sadly. "You have been sincere for once in your existence, and you are hideously ashamed, is it not? Ah, my friend, I would like you so much better if you were not always playing at life, not always posing as for your portrait."

"For my part," said he, obscurely, from the rear of a wet towel, "I fail to perceive any particular merit in dying with a dirty face. We are about to deal with the most important and, by an ill chance, the final crisis of our lives. So let us do it with decency."

Afterward he changed his cravat, since the one he wore was soiled and crumpled and stained a little with his blood, and they went up the winding stairway to the top of the Constable's Tower. These two passed through the trap-door into moonlight that drenched the world; westward the higher walls of the Hugonet

Wing shut off that part of Bellegarde where men were slaughtering one another, and the turrets of it, black and untenanted, stood in strong relief against a sky of shifting crimson and gold. At their feet was the tiny enclosed garden, half hidden by the poplar boughs. And to the east the tower dropped sheer to the moat; and past that was the curve of the highway leading to the main entrance of the château, and the moonlighted plains of the Duardenez, and one little tributary, a thread of pulsing silver, in passage to the great river that showed as a smear of white, a chalk-mark on the world's rim.

John Bulmer closed the trap-door. They stood with clasped hands, eyes straining toward the east, whence help must arrive if it came at all.

"No sign of Gaston," the girl said. "We must die presently, Jean Bulmer."

"I am sorry," he said,—“oh, I am hideously sorry that we two must die.”

"I am not afraid, Jean Bulmer. But life would be very sweet with you."

"That was my thought, too. . . . I have always bungled this affair of living, you conceive. I had considered the world a healthy and not intolerable prison, where each man must get through his day's work as best he might, soiling his fingers as much as necessity demanded—but no more—so that at the end he might sleep soundly,—or perhaps that he might go to heaven and pluck eternally at a harp, or else to hell and burn eternally, just as divines say we will. I never bothered about it much, so long as there was any work at hand which demanded performance. And in consequence I missed the whole meaning of life."

"Not so!" Claire replied. "No man has played a greater part in our little world."

This was an odd speech. But he answered idly: "Eh, I have done well enough as respectable persons judge these matters. And I went to church on Sunday, and I paid my tithes. Trifles, these, sweetheart; for in every man, as I now see quite plainly, there is a god. And the god must judge, and the man himself be but the temple and the instrument of the god. It is very simple, I think. And whether he go to church or no, is a matter of trivial importance, so long as

the man obey the god which is within him." He was silent now, staring vaguely toward the blank horizon.

"And now that you have discovered this," she murmured, "therefore you wish to live?"

"Why, partly on account of that," he said, "yet perhaps mostly on account of you. . . . But heigho!" said John Bulmer; "I am disfiguring my last hours by inflicting upon a lady my half-baked theology. Let us sit down, my dear, and talk of trifles till they find us. And then I will kill you, sweetheart, and afterward myself. Presently come dawn and death; and my heart, according to the ancient custom of Poictesme, cries '*Oy Dieus! Oy Dieus, de l'alba tantost ve!*' but for all that my mouth will resolutely discourse of the last Parisian flounces, or of your unfathomable eyes, or of Monsieur de Voltaire's new tragedy of *Oreste*—or, in fine, of any topic you may elect."

He smiled, with a twinging undercurrent of regret that not even in impending death did he find any stimulus to the heroic. But the girl had given a muffled cry.

"LOOK, Jean! Already they come for us."

Through the little garden a man was running, doubling like a cornered beast when he found the place had no entrance save the gate through which he had scuttled. It was fat Guiton, the steward of the Duc de Puyange. Presently came Achille Cazaio and harried the unarmed old man with a wet sword, wantonly driving him about the poplars, pricking him in the quivering shoulders, but never killing him. All the while the steward screamed with the monotonous and shrill wail of a mad woman.

After a little he fell at Cazaio's feet, shrieking for mercy.

"Fool!" said the latter, "I am Achille Cazaio. I have no mercy in me."

He kicked the steward in the face two or three times, and Guiton, his countenance all blood, black in the moonlight, embraced his knees and wept. Presently Cazaio slowly drove his sword into the back of the prostrate man, who shrieked, "O Jesu!" and began to cough and choke. Five times Cazaio spitted the writhing thing, and afterward was Guiton's soul released from the tortured body.



*Painting by Howard Pyle*

THE DEATH OF CAZAI0

"Is it well, think you," said John Bulmer, "that I should die without first killing Achille Cazaio?"

"No!" Claire answered, fiercely.

Then John Bulmer leaned upon the parapet of the Constable's Tower and called aloud: "Friend Achille, your conduct vexes me."

The man started, peered about, and presently stared upward. "Monsieur Bulmaire, this is indeed an unlooked-for pleasure. May I inquire wherein I have been so ill-fated as to offend you?"

"You have an engagement to fight me on Thursday afternoon, friend Achille, so that to all intent I hold a sort of mortgage on your life. I submit that in consequence you have no right to endanger it by besieging castles and wasting the night in horticultural assassinations."

"There is something in what you say, Monsieur Bulmaire," the brigand replied, "and I very heartily apologize for not thinking of it earlier. But in the way of business, you understand— However, may I trust it will please you to release me from this inconvenient obligation?" Cazaio added, with a smile. "My men are waiting for *mé* yonder, you comprehend."

"In fact," said John Bulmer, hospitably, "the moonlight up here is clear as day. We can settle our affair in five minutes."

"I come," said Cazaio, and plunged into the entrance to the Constable's Tower.

"The pistol! quick!" said Claire.

"And for what, pray?" said John Bulmer.

"So that from behind, as he lifts the trap-door, I may shoot him through the head. Do you stand in front as though to receive him. It will be quite simple."

"My dear creature," said John Bulmer, "I am now doubly persuaded that God had entirely run out of what we term a sense of honor when He created the woman. I mean to kill this rapscaillon, but in passing I mean to kill him fairly." He unbolted the trap-door, and immediately Cazaio stood upon the roof, his sword drawn.

Achille Cazaio stared at the tranquil woman, and now his countenance was less that of a satyr than of a demon. "At four in the morning! I congrat-

ulate you, Monsieur Bulmaire," he said,—"oh, decidedly, I congratulate you."

"Thank you," said John Bulmer, sword in hand; "yes, we were married yesterday."

Cazaio, with the agility of a snake, drew a pistol from his girdle and fired full in John Bulmer's face; but more quickly the latter had fallen upon one knee, and the ball sped harmlessly above him.

"You are very careless with firearms," John Bulmer lamented. "Really, friend Achille, if you are not more circumspect you will presently injure somebody and forever afterward be consumed with un-availing regret and that sort of thing. Now let us get down to our affair."

They crossed blades in the moonlight. Cazaio was in vein to-night; John Bulmer's tolerant acceptance of any meanness that a Cazaio might attempt, the vital shame of this new and baser failure before Claire's very eyes, had made of Cazaio a crazed beast. He slobbered little flecks of foam, clinging like hoar frost to the tangled beard, and breathed with shuddering inhalations, like a man in agony, what time he charged with redoubling thrusts. The Englishman appeared to be enjoying himself, but quite discreetly; he chuckled as the other cursed and shifted from tierce to quart, and met the assault with a nice inevitableness; in short, each movement had the comely precision of some finely adjusted clockwork, though at times John Bulmer's face showed a spurt of mild amusement, roused by the brigand's extravagancy of gesture and his contortions as he strove to pass the line of steel that flickered cannily between his sword and John Bulmer's portly bosom.

Then John Bulmer, too, attacked. "For Guiton!" said he, as his point slipped into Cazaio's breast. He recoiled and lodged another thrust in the brigand's throat. "For attempting to assassinate me!" His foot stamped as his sword ran deep into Cazaio's belly. "For insulting my wife by thinking of her obscenely. You are a dead man, friend Achille."

Cazaio had dropped his sword, reeling as drunken against the western battlement. "My comfort," he said, hoarsely, while one hand tore at his jetting throat,



—"my comfort is that I could not die slain by a braver enemy." He moaned and stumbled backward. Momentarily his knees gripped the low embrasure. Then his feet flipped upward, convulsively, so that John Bulmer saw his spurs glitter and twitch in the moonlight, and there was a snapping and crackling and swishing among the poplars, and immediately the slump of his body upon the turf below.

"May he find more mercy than he has merited," said John Bulmer, "for the man had excellent traits. Yes, in him the making of a very good swordsman was spoiled by that abominable Boisrobert."

But Claire had caught him by the shoulder. "Look, Jean!"

He turned and stared toward the Duardenez. A troop of horse was nearing. Now they had swept about the curve in the highway, and at their head was Gaston, laughing terribly. They went by like a tumult in some sick man's dream, and the Hugonet Wing had screened them, swift as thought.

"Then is Bellegarde relieved," said John Bulmer, "and your life, at least, is saved."

The girl stormed. "You—you *thing!*" said she; "you would not be content with the keys of heaven if you had not got them by outwitting somebody! Do you fancy I had never seen the Duke of Ormskirk's portrait? Gaston sent me one six months ago."

"Ah!" said John Bulmer, very quietly. He took up the discarded scabbard and sheathed his sword without speaking.

Presently he said, "You have been cognizant all along that I was the Duke of Ormskirk?"

"Yes," she answered, promptly.

"And you married me, knowing that

I was—God save the mark!—the great Duke of Ormskirk? knowing that you made what we must grossly term a brilliant match?"

"I married you because, in spite of Jean Bulmer, you had betrayed yourself to be a daring and a gallant gentleman,—and because for a moment I thought that I did not dislike the Duke of Ormskirk quite so much as I ought to."

He digested this.

"Oh, Jean Bulmer," the girl said, "they tell me you were ever a fortunate man, but I consider you the unluckiest I know of. For always you are afraid to be yourself. Sometimes you forget, and are just *you*,—and then, ohé! you remember, and are only a sulky, fat old gentleman who is not you at all, somehow; so that at times I detest you, and at times I cannot thoroughly detest you. So that I played out the comedy, Jean Bulmer. I meant in the end to tell Louis who you were, of course, and not let them hang you, but I never quite trusted you; and I never knew whether I detested you or no, at bottom, until last night."

"Last night you left the safe Inner Tower to come to me—to save me at all hazards or else to die with me—" His voice rang like a trumpet. "And for what reason, Claire?"

"You are bullying me!" she wailed.

"And for what reason, Claire?" he repeated, without any change of intonation.

"Can you not guess?" she said. "Oh, because I am a *fool!*" she said, but very happily, for his arms were about her.

"Eh, in that event—" said the Duke of Ormskirk. "Look!" said he, with a deeper thrill of speech, "it is the dawn."

They turned hand in hand; and out of the east the sun came statelily, and a new day was upon them.

[THE END.]

