

THE CREATORS: A COMEDY

BY MAY SINCLAIR

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LII

THE next week, the last of September, Brodrick had a feverish cold and did not go to the office.

There was agitation there, and agitation in the mind of the editor and his secretary. Tanqueray's serial was running its devastating course through the magazine, and the last instalment of the manuscript was overdue. Tanqueray was always a little late with his instalments. Brodrick was worried, and Gertrude, at work with him in his study, tried to soothe him. They telephoned to the office for the manuscript. The manuscript was not there. The clerk suggested that it was probably still with the type-writer, Miss Ranger. They telephoned to Miss Ranger, who replied that the manuscript had been typed, and sent to the author three weeks ago for revision.

Brodrick sent a messenger to Tanqueray's house for the manuscript. He returned toward evening with a message that Mrs. Tanqueray was out, Mr. Tanqueray was in the country, and the servant did not know his address.

They telegraphed to Addy Ranger's rooms for his address. The reply came, "*Post-Office, Okehampton, Devon.*"

Brodrick repeated it with satisfaction as he wrote it down, "*Post-Office, Okehampton, Devon.*"

Gertrude was silent.

"He's got friends somewhere in Devonshire," Brodrick said.

"At the post-office?" she murmured.

"Of course, if they're motoring."

Gertrude was again silent. She achieved her effects mainly by silences.

"We'd better send a wire there," said Brodrick.

They sent it there the first thing in the morning.

Before noon a message came from Mrs. Tanqueray:

"*Tanqueray's address, The Manor, Wilbury, Wilts. Have sent your message there.*"

Admirable Mrs. Tanqueray!

"We've sent *our* wire to the wrong address," said Brodrick.

"It's the right one, I fancy, if Miss Ranger has it."

"Mrs. Tanqueray's got the wrong one, then?"

They looked at each other. Gertrude's face was smooth and still, but her eyes searched him, asking what his thoughts were.

They sent a wire to Wilbury.

Three days passed. No answer to their wires, and no manuscript.

"He's left Okehampton, I suppose," said Brodrick.

"Or has he left Wilbury?"

"We'll send another wire there, to make sure."

She wrote out the form obediently. Then she spoke again:

"Of course he's at Okehampton." Her voice had an accent of joyous certainty.

"Why 'of course'?"

"Because he went to Wilbury first. Mrs. Tanqueray said she sent our message there—the one we sent three days ago. So he's left Wilbury and he's staying in Okehampton."

"It looks like it."

"And yet you'd have thought he'd have let his wife know if he was staying."

"He probably is n't."

"He must be. The manuscript went there."

"Let's hope so; then we may get it tomorrow."

It was as if he desired to impress upon her that the manuscript was the important thing.

As he had hoped, it came the next day. Miss Ranger sent it up by special messenger.

"Good!" said Brodrick.

He undid the parcel hurriedly. The inner cover was addressed to Miss Ranger in Tanqueray's handwriting. It bore the post-mark of Chagford.

"He's been at Chagford all the time!" said Gertrude.

She had picked up the wrapper, which Brodrick had thrown upon the floor.

Silence.

"T-t-t. It would have saved a day," she said, "if he'd sent this direct to you instead of to Miss Ranger. Why could n't he, when he knew we were so rushed?"

"Why, indeed?" he thought.

"There must have been more corrections," he said.

"She can't have typed them in the time," said Gertrude. She was examining the inner cover. "Besides, she has sent it on unopened."

"Excellent Miss Ranger!"

He said it with a certain levity. But even as he said it, his brain accepted the inference she forced on it. If Tanqueray had not sent his manuscript to Camden Town for corrections, he had sent it there for another reason. The parcel was registered. There was no letter inside it.

Brodrick's hand trembled as he turned over the pages of the manuscript. Gertrude's eyes were fixed upon its trembling.

A few savage ink-scratches in Tanqueray's handwriting told where Miss Ranger had blundered; otherwise the manuscript was clean. Tanqueray had at last satisfied his passion for perfection.

All this Brodrick's brain took in while his eyes, feverish and intent, searched the blank spaces of the manuscript. He knew what he was looking for. It would be there, on the wide margin left for her, that he would find the evidence that his wife and Tanqueray were together. He knew the signs of her. Not a manuscript of Tanqueray's, not one of his last great books, but bore them—her queer, delicate, nervous pencil-markings, which Tanqueray, with all his furious erasures, left untouched. Sometimes, Brodrick had noticed, he would inclose them in a sort of holy circle of red ink, to show that they were not for incorporation in the text.

But it was not in him to destroy a word that she had written.

But he could find no trace of her. He merely made out some humble queryings by Miss Ranger, automatically erased.

The manuscript was in three parts. As he laid down each, Gertrude put forth a quiet hand and drew it to herself. He was too much preoccupied to notice how minutely and with what intent and passionate anxiety she examined it.

He was arranging the manuscript in order. Gertrude was absorbed in "Part Three." He had reached out for it when he remembered that the original draft of "Part Two" had contained a passage to which he had endeavored to exercise an ancient editorial right. He looked to see whether Tanqueray had removed it.

He had not. The passage stood, naked and immense, tremendous as some monument of primeval nature, alone in literature, simple, superb, immortal, irremovable by any prayer. Brodrick looked at it now with a clearer vision. He acknowledged its grandeur, and bowed his head to the power that was Tanqueray. Had he not been the first to recognize it? It was as if his suspicion of the man urged him to a larger justice toward the writer.

He turned to Gertrude. "There are no alterations to be made, thank Heaven!"

"How about this?"

She slid the manuscript under his arm; her finger pointed to the margin. He saw nothing.

"What?" He spoke with some irritation.

"This."

She turned up the lamp so that the light fell full upon the page. He bent closer. On the margin, so blurred as to be almost indecipherable, he saw his wife's sign, a square of delicate script. To a careless reader it might seem to have been written with a light pencil and to have been meant to stand. Examined closely, it revealed the firm strokes of a heavy lead obliterated with india-rubber. Gertrude's finger slid away, and left him free to turn the pages. There were several of these marks in the same handwriting, each one deliberately erased. The manuscript had been in his wife's hand within the last three days; for three days Tanqueray had certainly been in Chagford, and for three weeks, for all Brodrick knew.



Drawn by Arthur I. Keller. Half-tone plate engraved by R. Varley

“‘THEN, THAT,’ SHE SAID, POINTING—‘THAT IS NOT TO STAND?’”

There was no reason why he should not be there, no reason why they should not be together. Then why these pitiable attempts at concealment, at the covering of the tracks?

And yet, after all, they had not covered them. They had only betrayed the fact that they had tried. Had they? And which of them? Tanqueray, in the matter of obliteration, would, at any rate, have been aware of the utter inadequacy of india-rubber. To dash at a thing like india-rubber was more the sudden, futile inspiration of a woman made frantic by her terror of detection.

It was clear that Jane had not wanted him to know that Tanqueray was at Chagford. She had not told him. Why had she not told him? She knew of the plight they were in at the office, of the hue and cry after the nonappearing manuscript.

So his brain worked with a savage independence. He seemed to himself two men, a man with a brain that worked, following a lucid argument to an obscure conclusion, and a man who looked on and watched its working without attaching the least importance to it. It was as if *this* man knew all the time what the other did not know. He had his own light, his own secret. He had never thought about it before (his secret), still less had he talked about it. Thinking about it was a kind of profanity; talking would have been inconceivable sacrilege. It was as self-evident as the existence of God to the soul that loves Him; a secret only in that it was profounder than appearances, in that it stood by the denial of appearances, so that, if appearances were against it, what of that?

He was thinking about it now, obscurely, without images, barely with words, as if it had been indeed a thing occult and metaphysical.

Thinking about it—that meant, of course, that he had for a moment doubted it? It was coming back to him now, clothed with the mortal pathos of its imperfection. She was dearer to him, unspeakably dearer, for his doubt.

The man with the brain approached slowly and unwillingly the conclusion that now emerged, monstrous and abominable, from the obscurity. "If that be so," he said, "she is deliberately deceiving me."

And he who watched, he with the illuminating, incommunicable secret, smiled,

as he watched, in scorn and pity—scorn of the slow and ugly movements of the intellect, and pity for a creature so mean as to employ them.

In the silence that he kept he had not heard the deep breathing of the woman at his side. Now he was aware of it and of her.

He was positively relieved when the servant announced Mrs. Levine.

There was a look on Sophy's face that Brodrick knew—a look of importance and of competence, a look it always had when Sophy was about to deal with a situation. Gertrude's silent disappearance marked her sense of a situation to be dealt with.

Brodrick rose heavily to greet his sister. There was a certain consolation in her presence, since it had relieved him of Gertrude's. Sophy, by way of prelude, inquired about Brodrick and the children and the house, then paused to attack her theme.

"When 's Jane coming back?" said she.

"I don't know," said Brodrick.

"She 's been away two months."

"Seven weeks," said Brodrick.

"Is n't it about time she *did* come back?"

"She 's the best judge of that," said Brodrick.

Sophy's face was extraordinarily clear-eyed and candid as it turned on him.

"George Tanqueray 's at Chagford."

"How do you know?" He really wondered.

"Miss Ranger let it out to Louis this morning."

"Let it out? Why on earth should she keep it in?"

"Oh, well, I don't suppose *she* sees anything in it."

"No more do I," said Brodrick.

"You never saw anything," said Sophy. "I don't say there 's anything to see. All the same—"

She paused.

"Well?" He was all attention and politeness.

"All the same, I should insist on her coming back."

He was silent, as though he were considering it.

"Or, better still, go down and fetch her."

"I shall do nothing of the sort."

"Well, if you think it 's wise to give

her head to that extent—a woman with Jane's temperament—"

"What do you know about her temperament?"

Sophy shifted her ground. "I know, and you know, the effect he has on her, and the influence; and if you leave her to him—if you leave them to themselves, down there—for weeks like that, you'll have nobody but yourself to thank if—"

He cut her short.

"I have nobody but myself to thank. She shall please herself about coming back. If she did n't come, I could n't blame her."

Sophy was speechless. Of all the attitudes that any Brodrick could take, she had not expected this.

"We have made things too hard for her," he said.

"We?"

"You and I—all of us. We've not seen what was in her."

Sophy repressed her opinion that they very probably would see now. As there was no use arguing with him in his present mood,—she could see *that*,—she left him.

Brodrick heard her motor hooting down Roehampton Lane. She was going to dine at Henry's. Presently all the family would be in possession of the situation—of Jane's conduct and his attitude. And there was Gertrude Collett. He understood now that she suspected.

Gertrude had come back into her place. He picked up some papers and took them to the safe, which stood in another corner of the room behind his writing-table. He wanted to get away from Gertrude, to be alone with his secret and concealed, without betraying his desire for solitude, for concealment. He knelt down by the safe and busied himself there for a long time. He said to himself: "It could n't happen. She was always honest with me. But if it did, I could n't wonder. The wonder is why she married me."

He rose to his feet, saying to himself again, "It could n't happen."

With that slight readjusting movement, the two men in him became one, so that when the reasoning man reached slowly his conclusion, he formulated it thus: "It could n't happen. If it did, it would n't happen this way. He"—even to himself he could not say "they"—"would have managed better or worse." At last his

intellect, the lazy, powerful beast, was roused, and dealt masterfully with the situation.

He had to pass the fireplace to get back to his seat, which Gertrude guarded. As he passed, he caught sight of his own face in the glass over the chimneypiece—a face with inflamed eyes, a forehead frowning and overcast, and cheeks flushed with shame. Gertrude, looking up at him from the manuscript she brooded over, instinctively made way for him to pass her.

It was she who spoke first. Her finger was on the pencil-marks again.

"Then, that," she said, pointing—"that is not to stand?"

"Of course it is n't," he answered coldly. "It was n't meant to. It's rubbed out."

He looked at her for the first time with dislike. He did not suspect her as the source of abominable suggestion. He was only thinking that if it had not been for her he would not have seen any of these things.

She shrank before his look. "Does he think I wanted him to see it?" she said to herself.

Already she was clean in her own eyes. Already she had persuaded herself that she had not wanted that. And in the same breath of thought she asked herself, "What *did* he see?"

She smiled as she answered his cold answer.

"I thought it was rubbed out, but I could n't be quite sure."

They were so absorbed that they did not hear the door open.

Jane stood in the doorway, quietly regarding them.

LIII

THERE were people who knew for a fact that Jane Holland (Mrs. Hugh Brodrick) had run away with George Tanqueray. The rumor ran through the literary circles shunned by Tanqueray and Jane. The theory of her guilt was embraced with excitement by the dreadful, clever little people. Not one of them would have confessed to a positive desire to catch her tripping; but now that the thing had happened, it satisfied the craving for complete vision of the celebrated lady. It reduced considerably her baffling eminence, and dispersed once for all the impenetrable, irri-

tating atmosphere of secrecy she had kept up.

There was George Tanqueray, too, who had kept it up even longer and more successfully. At last they had been caught, the two so insolent in their swift evasion of pursuit. Their fall, so to speak, enabled the hunter to come up with them. People who had complained that they could never meet them, who had wanted to meet them solely that they might talk about them afterward, who had never been able to talk about them at all, had now abundant material for conversation.

The rumor, once it had fairly penetrated, spread over London in five days. It started in Kensington, ran thence all the way to Chelsea, skipped to Bloomsbury, and spread from these centers into Belgravia and Mayfair. In three weeks the tale of George Tanqueray and Jane Holland (Mrs. Hugh Brodrick) had invaded Hampstead and the southwestern suburbs. It was only confirmed by the contemptuous silence and curt denials of their friends, Arnott Nicholson, Caro Bickersteth, Nina Lempriere, and the Protheros.

In Brodrick's family it sank down deep below the level of permissible discussion; but it revealed itself presently in an awful external upheaval, utterly unforeseen, and in a still more unforeseen subsidence.

There was first of all a split between Mrs. Heron and the doctor. The behavior of Eddy and Winny, specially of Eddy, had got on the doctor's nerves (he had confessed, in a moment of intense provocation, to having them). Eddy one evening had attacked violently the impermissible topic, defending Jin-Jin, in the presence of his young sister, from the unspeakable charge current in their suburb, taxing his uncle with a monstrous credence of the impossible, and trying to prove to him that it *was* impossible.

For the sake of the peace so beloved by Brodricks, it was settled that Frances and her children should live with poor, dear John in the big house in Augustus Road.

Brodrick then suggested that Gertrude Collett might with advantage keep house for Henry.

This arrangement covered the dreadful rupture, the intolerable situation at Moor Grange. Gertrude had contributed nothing to the support of the rumor beyond an

intimation that the rupture (between her and the Brodricks) *was* dreadful and the situation intolerable. The intimation, as conveyed by Gertrude, was delicate and subtle to a degree. All that she would admit in words was a certain lack of spiritual sympathy between her and Mrs. Brodrick.

It was felt in Brodrick's family that, concerning Jane and Tanqueray, Gertrude Collett knew considerably more than she cared to say.

And through it all Brodrick guarded his secret. The rumor had not yet touched him whom it most affected. It never would touch him, so securely the secret he guarded guarded him. And though it had reached Hampstead, the rumor had not reached Rose.

Rose had her hands full for once with the Protheros, helping Mrs. Prothero to look after *him*. For Owen was ill, dreadfully and definitely ill, with an illness to which you could put a name. Dr. Brodrick was attending him. Owen had consulted him casually the year before, and the doctor had then discovered a bell-sound in his left lung. Now he came regularly once or twice a week all the way from Putney in his motor-car.

Rose had positively envied Laura who had a husband who could be ill, who could be tucked up in bed and taken care of. It was Rose who helped Laura to make Prothero's big room look for all the world like the ward of a hospital.

Dr. Brodrick had wanted to take him away to a sanatorium, but Prothero had refused flatly to be taken anywhere. The traveler was tired of traveling. He loved with passion this place where he had found peace, where his wandering genius had made its sanctuary and its home. His repugnance was so violent and invincible that the doctor had agreed with Laura that it would do more harm than good to insist on his removal. She must do as best she could, with, he suggested, the assistance of a trained nurse.

Laura had very soon let him know what she could do. She had winced visibly when she heard of the trained nurse. It would be anguish to her to see another woman beside Owen's bed, and her hands touching him; but she said she supposed she could bear even that, if it would save him, if it was absolutely necessary. Was

it? The doctor had admitted that it was not so, if she insisted, absolutely, for the present; but it was advisable, if she wished to save herself. Laura had smiled then very quietly.

In twenty-four hours she showed him the great room as bare and clean as the ward of a hospital. Rose was on her knees on the floor, beeswaxing it. The long rows of bookcases were gone; so were the pictures. He could not put his finger on a single small, unnecessary thing. Laura, cool and clean in a linen gown, defied him to find a chink where a germ could lodge. Prothero inquired gaily, if they could not make a good fight there, where could they make it?

Henry, although used to these combats, was singularly affected as he looked upon the scene, stripped as it was for the last struggle. What moved him most was the sight of Laura's little bed, set under the north window, and separated from her husband's by the long, empty space between, through which the winds of heaven rushed freely. It showed him what the little thing was capable of, day and night, night and day, the undying, indomitable devotion. That was the stuff a man wanted in his wife. He thought of his brother Hugh. Why on earth, if he had to marry one of them, had n't he married *her*? He was moved, too, and troubled by the presence there of Tanqueray's poor little wife. Whatever view truth compelled one to take of Jane's and Tanqueray's relations, Tanqueray's wife had, from first to last, been cruelly wronged by both.

Tanqueray's wife was so absorbed in the fight they were making as to be apparently indifferent to her wrongs, and they judged that the legend of Jane Holland and George Tanqueray had not reached her.

It had not. And yet she knew it; she had known it all the time—that they had been together. She had known it ever since, in the innocent days before the rumor, she had heard Dr. Brodrick telling Mrs. Prothero that his sister-in-law had gone down to Chagford for three months. Chagford was where he was always staying. And in the days of innocence Addy Ranger had let out that it was Chagford where he was now. She had given Rose his address—post-office, Chagford. He

had been there all the time when Rose had supposed him to be in Wiltshire, and was sending all his letters there.

She did not hear of Mrs. Brodrick's return until a week or two after that event; for, in the days no longer of innocence, his sister-in-law was a sore subject with the doctor. And when Rose did hear it finally from Laura, by that time she had heard that Tanqueray was coming back, too. He had written to her to say so.

That was on a Saturday. He was not coming until Tuesday. Rose had two days in which to consider what line she meant to take.

That she meant to take a line was already clear to Rose. It was perfectly clear, although her decision was arrived at through nights of misery so profound that it made most things almost obscure. It was clear that they could not go on as they had been doing. *He* might,—nothing seemed to matter to him,—but she could not; and she would not—not, so she put it, if it was ever so. They had been miserable.

Not that it mattered so very much whether she was miserable or not. But that was it: she had ended by making him miserable, too. It took some making; for he was not one to feel things much; he had always gone his own way as if nothing mattered. By his beginning to feel things now, as she called it, she measured the effect she must have had on him.

It was all because she was not educated proper, because she was not a lady. He ought to have married a lady. He ought—she could see it now—to have married some one like Mrs. Brodrick, who could understand his talk and enter into what he did.

There was Mr. and Mrs. Prothero, now. They were happy. There was not a thing he could say or do or think but what she understood it. Why, she would understand, time and again, without his saying anything. That came of being educated. It came—poor Rose was driven back to it at every turn—of being a lady.

She might have known how it would be. And in a way she had known it from the first. That was why she had been against it, and why Uncle and Aunt and her master and mistress down at Fleet had been against it, too. But, there, she loved him. Lady or no lady, she loved him.

As for his going away with Mrs. Brodrick, she "looked at it sensible." She understood. She saw the excuses that could be made for him. She could not understand *her*; she could not find one excuse for *her* behavior, a married woman, leaving her husband, such a good man, and her children—her little helpless children—and going off for weeks together with a married man, let him be who he might be. Still, if it had not been her, it might have been somebody else, somebody much worse. It might have been that Miss Lempriere. If *she* had had a hold on him, *she* would not have let him go.

For deep-bedded in Rose's obscure misery was the conviction that Jane Brodrick had let him go. Her theory of Jane's guilt had not gone much further than the charge of deserting her little helpless children. It was as if Rose's imagination could not conceive of guilt beyond that monstrous crime. And Jane had gone back to her husband and children, after all.

If it had been Miss Lempriere, she would have been bound to have stuck, she having nothing, so to speak, to go back to.

The question was, what was George coming back to? If it was to her, Rose, he must know pretty well what. He must know, she kept repeating to herself; he must know. Her line, the sensible line that she had been so long considering, was somehow to surprise and defeat his miserable foreknowledge.

By Sunday morning she had decided on her line. Nothing would turn her. She did not intend to ask anybody's advice, or to take it if it were offered. The line itself required the coöperation and, in a measure, the consent of Aunt and Uncle; and on the practical head they were consulted. She managed that on Sunday afternoon. Then she remembered that she would have to tell Mr. and Mrs. Prothero.

It was on Sunday evening that she told them. She told them very shortly and simply that she had made up her mind to separate from Tanqueray and live with her uncle.

"Uncle 'll be glad to 'ave me," she said.

She explained. "*He* 'll think more of me if he 's not with me."

Prothero admitted that it might be likely.

"It 's not," she said, "as if I was afraid of 'is taking up with another woman—serious." They wondered if she had heard. "I can trust him with Mrs. Brodrick."

They thought it strange that she should not consider Mrs. Brodrick serious. They said nothing, and in a moment Rose explained.

"She 's like all these writin' people. I know 'em."

"Yes," said Prothero; "we 're a poor lot, are n't we?" It was a mercy that she did not take it seriously.

"Oh, you—you 're different."

She had always had a very clear perception of his freedom from the literary taint.

"But Mrs. Brodrick, now, she does n't care for 'im. She 's not likely to. She 'll never care for anybody but herself."

"What makes you think so?"

"Well, a woman who could walk off like that and leave 'er little children, to say nothing of 'er husband—"

"Is n't it," said Prothero, "what you 're proposing to do yourself?"

"I 'ave n't got any little children. She 's leavin' 'er 'usband to get away from 'im, to please 'erself. I 'm leavin' mine to bring 'im to me." She paused, pensive. "Oh, no, I 'm not afraid of Mrs. Brodrick. She 'as n't got a 'eart."

"No?"

"Not wat I should call a 'eart."

"Perhaps not," said Laura.

"I used to hate her when she came about the place. Leastways I tried to hate her, and I could n't."

She meditated in their silence.

"If it 's got to be anybody, it 'd best be 'er. She 's given 'im all she 's got to give, and he sees 'ow much it is. 'E goes to 'er, I know, and 'e 'll keep on going; and she—she 'll 'old 'im orf and on. I can see 'er doin' of it, and I don't care. As long as she 'olds 'im, she keeps other women orf of 'im."

Their silence marveled at her.

"Time and again I 've cried my eyes out, and *that* 's no good. I 've got to look at it sensible. She 's really keepin' 'im for me."

Down-stairs, alone with Laura, she revealed herself more fully.

"I dare say 'e won't ever ask me to come back," she said; "but once I 've gone out of the house for good and all, 'e 'll come

to me now and again. He 's bound to. You see, *she* 's no good to him. And, maybe, if I was to 'ave a child—I might—"

She sighed, but in her eyes there kindled a dim hope, shining through tears.

"W'at I shall miss is—workin' for 'im."

Her mouth trembled. Her tears fell.

LIV

BETWEEN seven and eight o'clock on Tuesday evening, Tanqueray, in an ex-citable temper, returned to his home.

The little house had an air of bright expectancy, not to say of festival, it was so intensely, so unusually illuminated. Each window, with its drawn blind, was a golden square in the ivy-darkened wall.

Tanqueray let himself in noiselessly with his latch-key. He took up the pile of letters that waited for him on the hat-stand in the hall, and turned into the dining-room.

It smiled at him brilliantly with all its lights. So did the table, laid for dinner; the very forks and spoons smiled, twinkling and dimpling in irrepressible welcome. A fire burned ostentatiously on the hearth. It sent out at him eager, loquacious tongues of flame, to draw him to the insufferable endearments of the hearth.

He was aware now that what he was most afraid of in this horrible coming back was his wife's insupportable affection.

He turned the lights down a little lower. All his movements were noiseless. He was afraid that Rose would hear him and would come running down.

He went up-stairs, treading quietly. He meant to take his letters to his study and read them there. He might even answer some of them. Anything to stave off the moment when he must meet Rose.

The door of her bedroom was wide open. The light flared so high that he judged that Rose was in there and about to appear. He swung himself swiftly and dexterously round the angle of the stair-rail, and so reached his own door.

She must have heard him go in, but there was no answering movement from her room.

With a closed door behind him he sat down and looked over his letters. Bills, proofs from the "Monthly Review," a letter from Laura that saddened him; he

had not realized that Prothero was so ill. Last of all, at the bottom of the pile, a little note from Rose.

She had got it all into five lines—five lines, rather straggling, rather shapeless lines, that told him with a surprising brevity that his wife had decided on an informal separation for his good. No resentment, no reproach, no passion, and no postscript.

He went down-stairs by no means noiselessly. In the hall, as he was putting on his hat, Susan came to him. She gave him a queer look. Dinner was ready, she said. The mistress had ordered the dinner that he liked. Irrepressibly, insistently, thick with intolerable reminiscence, the savor of it streamed through the kitchen door. The mistress had cooked it herself, Susan said. The mistress had told Susan that she was to be sure and make him very comfortable, and to remember what he liked for dinner. Susan's manner was a little shy and a little important; it suggested the beginning of a new rule, a new order, a life in which Rose was not and never would be.

Tanqueray took no notice whatever of Susan as he strode out of the house.

The lights were dim in the corner house by the Heath, opposite the willows. Still, standing on the upper ground of the Heath, he could see across the road through the window of his old sitting-room, and there, in his old chair by the fireplace he made out a solitary seated figure that looked like Rose.

He came out from under the willows, and made for the front door. He pushed past the little maid who opened it, and strode into the room. Rose turned.

There was a slight stir and hesitation, then a greeting, very formal and polite on both sides, and with Joey all the time leaping and panting and licking Tanqueray's hands. Joey's demonstration was ignored as much too emotional for the occasion.

A remark from Rose about the weather. Inquiries from Tanqueray as to the health of Mr. and Mrs. Eldred. Further inquiries as to the health of Rose. Silence.

"May I turn the light up?" asked Tanqueray.

"I'd rather you let it be," replied Rose.

He let it be.

"Rose," Tanqueray suddenly asked, "do you remember Mr. Robinson?"

No response.

"Rose, why are you sitting in this room?"

"Because I like it."

"Why do you like it?"

No response, only a furtive movement of Rose's hand toward her handkerchief. A sudden movement of Tanqueray's, restrained, so that he appeared to have knelt on the hearth-rug to caress the little dog. There was a long and silent stroking of Joey's back, and a demonstration of inefable affection from Joey.

"His hair never *has* come on, has it? Do you know,"—very gravely,—"*I'm* afraid it never will."

A faint quiver of Rose's mouth which might or might not have been a smile.

"Rose, why did you marry me? Would n't any other hairless little dog have done as well?"

A deep sigh from Rose.

Tanqueray was now standing up and looking down at her in his way.

"Rose, do you remember how I came to you at Fleet, and brought you the moon in a bandbox?"

She answered him with a sudden and convulsive sob.

He knelt beside her; he hesitated for a moment.

"Rose—I've brought you the bandbox without the moon. Will you have it?"

She got up with a wild movement of escape. Something rolled from her lap and fell between them. She made a dash toward the object; but Tanqueray had picked it up. It was a pair of Tanqueray's gloves, neatly folded.

"What were you doing with those gloves?" he said.

"I was mendin' them," said she.

Half an hour later Rose and Tanqueray were walking up the East Heath Road toward their little house. Rose carried Tanqueray's gloves, and Tanqueray carried Minny the cat in a basket.

As they went, they talked about Owen Prothero; and Tanqueray thanked God that, after all, there was something they *could* talk about.

LV

DR. BRODRICK had declared for the seventh time that Prothero was impossible.

His disease was advancing. Both lungs were attacked now. There was, as he perfectly well knew, a consolidation at the

apex of the left lung; the upper lobe had retracted, leaving his heart partly uncovered, and he knew it; you could detect also a distinct systolic murmur; and nobody could be more aware than Prothero of the gravity of these signs. Up till now, Brodrick had been making a record case of him. The man had a fine constitution,—he gave him credit for that,—he had pluck; there was resistance, pugnacity in every nerve. He had one chance, a fighting chance. His life might be prolonged for years, if he would only rest.

And there he was, with all that terrible knowledge in him, sitting up in bed and driving that infernal pen of his as if his life depended on *that*. Scribbling verses, he was, working himself into such a state of excitement that his temperature had risen. He displayed, Brodrick said, an increasing nervous instability. When Brodrick told him that, if he wanted to know, his inspiration was hollow, had been hollow for months, and that he would recognize that as one of the worst symptoms in his case, Prothero said that his critics had always told him that. The worst symptom in his case, *he* declared, was that he could not laugh without coughing. When Brodrick said that it was not a laughing matter, he laughed till he spat blood, and frightened himself. For he had, Brodrick had noticed, a morbid horror of the sight of blood. You had to inject morphia after every hemorrhage to subdue that awful agitation.

All this the doctor recounted to Laura, alone with her in her forlorn little drawing-room down-stairs. He unveiled for her intelligence the whole pathology of the case. It brought him back to what he had started with, Prothero's impossibility.

"What does he do it for?" he repeated. "He knows the consequences as well as I do."

Laura said she did not think that Owen ever had considered consequences.

"But he *must* consider them. What's a set of verses compared with his health?"

Laura answered quietly. "Owen would say what was his health compared with a set of verses, if he knew they'd be the greatest poem of his life."

"His life? My dear child—"

The pause was terrible.

"I wish," he said, "we could get him out of this."

"He does n't want to go. You said yourself it was n't the great thing."

He admitted it. The great thing, he reiterated, was rest. It was his one chance. He explained carefully again how good a chance it was. He dwelt on the things Prothero might yet do if he gave himself a chance. And when he had done talking, Laura remarked that it was all very well, but he was reckoning without Owen's genius.

"Genius?" He shrugged his shoulders. He smiled, as if they were not always reckoning with it at Putney. "What is it? For medicine it's simply and solely an abnormal activity of the brain. And it must stop."

He stood over her impressively, marking his words with clenched fist on open palm.

"He must choose between his genius and his life."

She winced. "I don't believe he *can* choose," she murmured. "It *is* his life."

He straightened himself to his enormous height, in dignified recoil from her contradiction.

"I have known many men of genius," he said.

"His genius is different," said she.

He had not the heart to say what he had always said, that Prothero's genius was and always had been most peculiarly a disease; but he did not shrink from telling her that at the present crisis it was death.

For he was angry now. He could not help being moved by professional animus, the fury of a man who has brought his difficult, dangerous work to the pitch of unexpected triumph, and sees it taken from his hands and destroyed for a perversity, an incomprehensible caprice.

He was still more deeply stirred by his compassion, his affection for the Protheros. Secretly, he was very fond of Owen, though the poet *was* impossible; he was even more fond of little Laura. He did not want to see her made a widow because Prothero refused to control his vice. For the literary habit, indulged in to that extent, amounted to a vice. The doctor had no patience with it. A man was not, after all, a slave to his unwholesome inspiration. It had dawned on him by this time that Prothero had made a joke about it. Prothero could stop it if he liked.

"I've told him plainly," he said, "that what it means to him is death. If you want to keep him, you must stop it."

"How can I?" she moaned.

"Don't encourage him. Don't let him talk about it. Don't let his mind dwell on it. Turn the conversation. Take his pens and paper from him, and don't let him see them again till he is well."

When the doctor left her she went upstairs to Owen.

He was still sitting up, writing, dashing down lines with a speed that told her what race he ran.

"Owen," she said, "you know. He told you—"

He waved her away with a gesture that would have been violent if it could.

She tried to take his pen and paper from him, and he laid his thin hands out over the sheets. The sweat stood in big drops between the veins of his hands; it streamed from his forehead.

"Wait just a little longer, till you're well," she pleaded.

"For God's sake! darling," he whispered hoarsely, "leave me! Go away!"

She went. In her own room her work stood unfinished on the table where she had left it months ago. She pushed it away in anger. She hated the sight of it. She sat watching the clock for the moments when she would have to go to him with his medicine.

She thought how right they had been, after all, Nina and Jane and Tanqueray, when they spoke of the cruelty of genius. It had no mercy and no pity. It had taken its toll from all of them. It was taking its toll from Owen now, to the last drop of his blood, to the last torturing breath. His life was nothing to it.

She went to him silently every hour to give him food or medicine or to take his temperature. She recorded on her chart heat mounting to fever, and a pulse staggering in its awful haste. He was submissive as long as she was silent, but at a word his thin hand waved in its agonized gesture.

Once he kissed her hands that gave him his drink.

"Poor little thing!" he said. "It's so frightened—always was. Never mind; it'll soon be over. Only—don't come again,"—he had to whisper it,—“if you don't mind—till I ring."

She sat listening then for his bell.

Rose came and stayed with her a little while. She wanted to know what the doctor had said to-day.

"He says he must choose between his genius and his life. And it's I who have to choose. If he goes on, he'll kill himself. If I stop him, I shall kill him. What am I to do?"

Rose had her own opinion of the dilemma, and no great opinion of the doctor.

"Do nothin'," she said, and pondered on it. "Look at it sensible. You may depend upon it, 'e's found somethin' 'e's got to do. 'E's set 'is 'eart on finishin' it. Don't you cross 'im. I don't believe in crossin' them when they're set."

"And if he dies, Rose? If he dies?"

"'E dies 'is way, not yours."

It was the wisdom of renunciation and repression, but Laura felt that it was right.

Her hour struck, and she went up to Owen. He was lying back now, with his eyes closed and his lips parted. Because of its peace, his face was like the face of the dead. But his lips were hot under hers, and his cheek was fire to her touch. She put her finger on his pulse, and he opened his eyes and smiled at her.

"It's finished," he said. "You can take it away now."

She gathered up the loose sheets and laid them in a drawer in his desk. The poem once finished, he was indifferent to its disposal. His eyes followed her, they rested on her without noting her movements. They drew her as she came toward him again.

"Forgive me," he said. "It was too strong for me."

"Never again," she murmured. "Promise me, never again till you're well."

"Never again." He smiled as he answered.

Dr. Brodrick, calling late that night, was informed by Laura of the extent to which he had been disobeyed. He thundered at her and threatened, a Brodrick beside himself with fury.

"Do you suppose," she said, "it is n't awful for me to have to stand by and see it and do nothing? What can I do?"

He looked down at her. The little thing had a will of her own; she was indeed, for her size, preposterously overcharged with will. Never had he seen a

small creature so indomitably determined. He put it to her. She had a will; why could n't she use it?

"His will is stronger than mine," she said. "And his genius is stronger than his will."

"You overrate the importance of it. What does it matter if he never writes another line?"

It seemed to her that he charged him with futility, that he echoed, and in this hour, the voice of the world that tried to make futile everything he did.

"It does n't matter to you," she said. "You never understood his genius; you never cared about it."

"Do you mean to tell me that you—you care more about it—more than you care about him? Upon my word, I don't know what you women are made of."

"What could I do?" she said. "I had to use my own judgment."

"You had not. You had to use mine." He paused impressively.

"It's no use, my child, fighting against the facts."

To Henry, Laura was a little angry child, crying over the bitter dose of life. He had got to make her take it.

He towered over her, a Brodrick, the incarnate spirit of fact.

It was a spirit that revolted her. She stood her ground and defied it in its insufferable tyranny. She thought of how these men, these Brodricks, behaved to genius wherever they met it; how, among them, they had driven poor Jinny all but mad, martyring her in the name of fact. As for Owen, she knew what they had thought and said of him, how they judged him by the facts. If it came to that, she could fight the doctor with his own weapons. If he wanted facts, he should have them; he should have all the facts.

"This is n't what's killing him," she said. "It's all the other things, the things he was made to do. Going out to Manchuria—that began it. He ought never to have been sent there. Then five years on that abominable paper. Think how he slaved on it! You don't know what it was to him. To have to sit in stuffy theaters and offices; to turn out at night in vile weather; to have to work whether he was fit to work or not."

He looked down at her very quietly and kindly. It was when people were really

outrageous that a Brodrick came out in his inexhaustible patience and forbearance.

"You say he had to do all these things. Is that the fact?"

"No," said Laura, passionately; "it 's the truth."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean it 's what it amounted to. They—they drove him to it with their everlasting criticism and fault-finding and complaining."

"I should not have thought he was a man to be much affected by adverse criticism."

"You don't know," she retorted, "how he was affected. You can't judge. Anyhow, he stuck to it up to the very last—the very last," she cried.

"My dear Mrs. Prothero, nobody wanted him to—"

"He did it, though. He did it because he was not what you all thought him."

"We thought him splendid. My brother was saying only the other day he had never seen such pluck."

"Well, then, it 's his pluck—his splendor that he 's dying of."

"And you hold us, his friends, responsible for that?"

"I don't hold you responsible for anything."

She was trembling on the edge of tears.

"Come, come," he said gently, "you misunderstand. You 've been doing too much. You 're overstrained."

She smiled. That was so like them. They were sane when they got hold of one stupid fact and flung it at your head; but you were overstrained when you retaliated. When you had made a sober selection from the facts, such a selection as constituted a truth, and presented it to them, you were more overstrained than ever. They could not stand the truth.

"I don't hold *you* responsible for his perversity," said the poor doctor.

"You talked as if you did."

"You misunderstood me," he said sadly. "I only asked you to do what you could."

"I have done what I could."

He ordered her some bromide then, to quiet her nerves.

That evening Prothero was so much better that he declared himself well. The wind had changed to the south. She had prayed for a warm wind; and, as it swept

through the great room, she flung off her fur-lined coat and tried to persuade herself that the weather was in Owen's favor.

At midnight the warm wind swelled to a gale. Down at the end of the garden the iron gate cried under the menace and torture of its grip. The sound and the rush of it filled Prothero with exultation. Neither he nor Laura slept.

She had moved her bed close up against his, and they lay side by side. The room was a passage for the wind; it whirled down it like a mad thing, precipitating itself toward the mouth of the night, where the wide north window sucked it. On the floor and the long walls the very darkness moved. The pale yellow disk that the guarded night-light threw upon the ceiling swayed incessantly at the driving of the wind. The twilight of the white beds trembled.

Outside the gust staggered and drew back; it plunged forward again, with its charge of impetus, and hurled itself against the gate. There was a shriek of torn iron, a crash, and the long sweeping, rending cry of live branches wrenched from their hold, lacerated and crushed, trailing and clinging in their fall.

Owen dragged himself up on his pillows. Laura's arm was round him.

"It 's nothing," she said; "only the gate. It was bound to go."

"The gate?"

It seemed to her touch that he drew himself together.

"I said I'd come back—through it," he whispered. "I shall—come back"—his voice gathered a sudden, terrible, hoarse vibration—"over it—treading it down."

At that he coughed and turned from her, hiding his face. The handkerchief she took from him was soaked in blood. He shuddered and shrank back, overcome by the inveterate, ungovernable horror.

He lay very still, with closed eyes, afraid lest a movement or a word should bring back the thing he loathed. Laura sat up and watched him.

Toward morning the wind dropped a little, and there was some rain. The air was warm with the wet south, and the garden sent up a smell, vivid and sweet—the smell of a young spring day. Once the wind was so quiet that she heard the clock strike in the hall of the hospital. She counted seven strokes.

It grew warmer and warmer out there. Owen was very cold.

Laura ran down-stairs to telephone to the doctor. She was gone about five minutes.

And Prothero lay in his bed under the window with the warm wind blowing over his dead body.

LVI

LAURA PROTHERO was sitting with Jane in the garden at Wendover one day in that spring. It was a day of sudden warmth and stillness that brought back vividly to both of them the hour of Owen's death.

They were touched by the beauty and the peace of this place where Nicky lived his perfect little life. They had just agreed that it was Nicky's life, Nicky's character, that had given to his garden its lucent, exquisite tranquillity. You associated that quality so indivisibly with Nicky that it was as if he flowered there; he came up every spring, flaming purely, in the crocuses on the lawn. Every spring Nicky and a book of poems appeared with the crocuses; the poems as Nicky made them, but Nicky heaven-born, in an immortal innocence and charm.

It was incredible, they said, how heaven sheltered and protected Nicky.

He, with his infallible instinct for the perfect thing, had left them together, alone in the little, green chamber on the lawn, shut in by its walls of yew. He was glad that he had this heavenly peace to give them for a moment.

He passed before them now and then, pacing the green paths of the lawn with Nina.

"No, Jinny, I am *not* going on any more," Laura said, returning to the subject of that intimate communion to which they had been left. "You see, it ended as a sort of joke, his and mine; nobody else saw the point of it. Why should I keep it up?"

"Would n't he have liked you to keep it up?"

"He would have liked me to please myself—to be happy. How can I be happy

going on—giving myself to the people who rejected *him*? I 'm not going to keep *that* up."

"What will you do?"

Laura said that she would have enough to do editing his poems and his memoirs. Jane had not realized the memoirs. They were, Laura told her, mainly a record of his life as a physician and surgeon—a record so simple that it only unconsciously revealed the man he was. George Tanqueray had insisted on her publishing this first.

"I hated doing it for some things," she said. "It looks too much like a concession to this detestable British public; but I can't rest, Jinny, till we've made him known. They'll see that he did n't shirk, that he could beat the practical men—the men they worship—at their own game, that he did something for the empire. Then they'll accept the rest. There's an awful irony in it, but I'm convinced that's the way his immortality will come."

"It'll come, anyway," said Jane.

"It'll come soonest this way. They'll believe in him to-morrow because of the things he did with his hands. His hands were wonderful. Ah, Jinny, how could I ever want to write again?"

"What will you *do*, dear child? How will you live?"

"I'll live as he did." She said it fiercely. "I'll live by journalism. It does n't matter how I live."

"There are so many things that don't matter, after all," she said.

Nicky and Nina passed.

"Do you think," said he, "she's happy?"

"Who? Jane, or Laura?"

"You can't think of Laura," said Nicky, gravely, "without *him*."

"That's it. She is n't without him. She never will be. He has given her his certainty."

"Of immortality?" Nicky's tone was tentative.

"Of the thing he saw. That is immortality. Of course she's happy."

"But I was thinking," Nicky said, "of Jane."

THE END

HOLY WEEK IN JERUSALEM

(THE HOLY LAND: SEVENTH PAPER)

BY ROBERT HICHENS

Author of "The Garden of Allah," "Egypt and Its Monuments," etc.

WITH PICTURES BY JULES GUÉRIN AND FROM PHOTOGRAPHS

MY first impression in the Church of the Holy Sepulcher was that I had suddenly come into a barbaric castle of magic connected with innumerable caves of Aladdin. Amazement sat like a weight upon me as I looked at the strange and glittering mystery. Yes, this must be a castle of magic, and about me were caves of Aladdin—caves lined with silver and gold, and immense jewels unknown to me; caves across which miraculous spiders had spun webs of silver and gold. Stars gleamed in them; footsteps echoed, voices murmured, eery lights twinkled,—almost like miners' lights in the earth's black bowels,—marvelous fabrics shone softly among great pictures, carved wood, marble, bronzes, and gilded ironwork. Fortunes were laid up here in this world of brilliance and gloom. As I paused, it almost seemed to me as if I heard the beat of the picks of the *Nibelungen*. As I looked, the painted faces of saints and virgins, of prophets and martyrs, seemed for a moment to be the faces of magicians and sorceresses, watching the enchanted victims of desires that were unearthly.

The most wonderful church in Christendom! But was it really a church? And I waited spellbound; and presently a crowd of impressions beset me.

To gain this astounding sanctuary, the church of the five creeds, of the five monasteries, of from twenty to thirty chapels, of the seventy sacred localities, in which the traditional site of Calvary is inclosed with the legendary site of Adam's burial-ground, the place of the Virgin's agony, with the place of the resurrection, I had passed through the narrow, dirty,

crowded, and marvelous alleys called in Jerusalem streets, leaving on the left the Greek monastery where the Patriarch Damianos lives, often in fear for his life; had descended between the rows of bazaars dedicated to the wants of the Russian pilgrims, where, amid groves of sacred pictures and forests of gilded and painted candles, the soft-tongued goblin-men were busily fleecing the simple children of the steppes; and had traversed the great quadrangle called the court of the Holy Sepulcher.

In that court, already I had been aware of the tug of something strange, powerful, and almost terrible; I had felt the first eddies of the whirlpool trying to suck me in, and had paused, had almost braced my muscles for resistance.

The courtyard is roughly paved, and has two levels connected by steps, the lower level being flush with the main entrance of the church, which is on the south side. Much of it dates from the time of the Crusades. It is surrounded by walls and buildings. The façade of the church does not suggest the wonders of the interior. It is brown and gray, with a rugged belfry to the left containing bells, and along the flat top an iron railing. Over the doorway is an arch, with pillars, joining a second arch which is filled up with masonry. Above these are two more arches, with ugly windows. To the right there is a sort of stunted tower, with a cupola covered with lead.

At my first coming into the court I had been unable to notice these details, for humanity seethed within it. A roar of voices went up. The pavement echoed