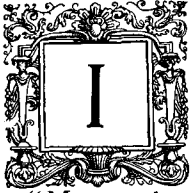


The Back Door

BY CLARENCE DAY, JR.



It was a hot midsummer afternoon in New York. I was at the club with Levellier, White, and Buchanan. We were watching Buchanan try to construct an epigram.

"Men make love," said Buchanan; "women make marriages."

"They have created the institution of marriage, that's evident," I agreed, "because its advantages are all on their side. They also may often do the marrying. Naturally. But with the exception, of course, of vulgar schemers, they cannot marry a man against his will."

"Why, Talbot Sims!" Buchanan protested. "I tell you they always can; and generally do."

White and Levellier, both of whom are married men, looked at each other. "Those two young bachelors," said White, "are like chickens, Levellier—little unborn chicks in the shell theorizing on bugs."

"There was Hickens's marriage, for instance," said Buchanan, not heeding them.

The mention of Hickens's name reminded me that my sister-in-law had asked me, weeks before, to find out for her all about Mrs. Hickens, who had taken a place in the country, next to my brother Niblo's. I therefore requested Buchanan to tell me the story.

He knew very few details. "But just to show you what sometimes happens," he said, "she even came here once after him, to this very club." His voice took on a low, thrilling, ghost-story tone. "One day about two months before they married I was reading at that big table in the up-stairs library, with Hickens working opposite to me, listing the technical terms of arctic travel (he was a vocabularian, you know—he made those vocabularies that go in the backs of books), when old William tiptoed softly in and muttered, 'Beg pardon, sir, Mr.

Hickens; they's a lady waiting at the door to see you, sir.'

"A lady?" said Hickens. 'Here? What's the matter with you, William? What lady?'

"Old William said he understood that it was Mrs. Hickens."

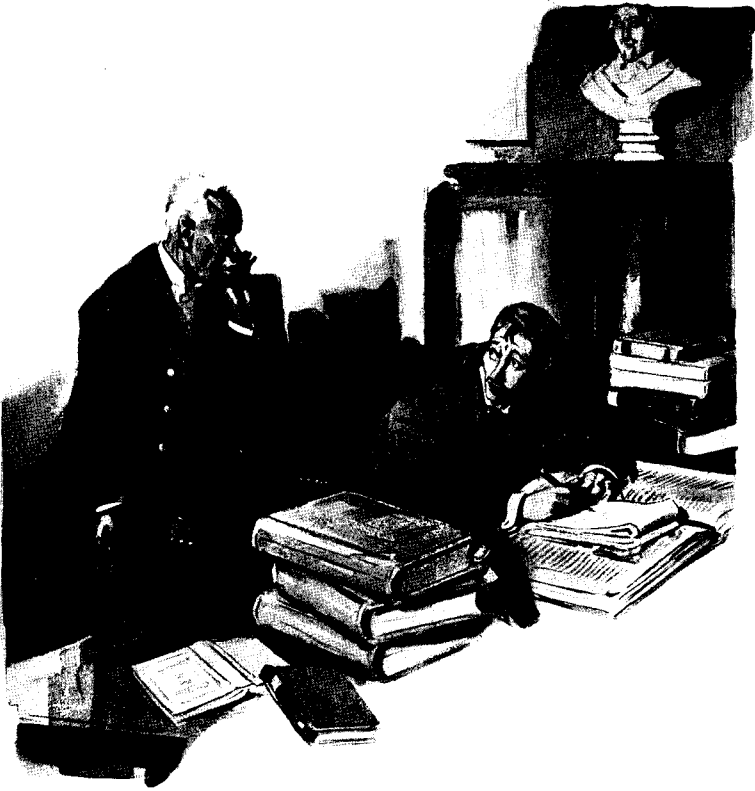
"Holy Yagguit!" exclaimed Hickens, calling upon some arctic deity, I believe; and informed William that there must be some mistake—there wasn't any Mrs. Hickens. Then they whispered a long time about it, and finally William showed Hickens how to leave by some rear entrance."

"I never knew she followed him here," White interrupted.

"Even if she did," Levellier said, with some feeling, "part of Buchanan's story is wrong, I'm sure. Madge Hilliard was impulsive, like all the Hilliards, and when she wanted anything she couldn't but think it was probably best for everybody that she should have it; but she wouldn't have sent up word she was Mrs. Hickens. It was no such bare-faced pursuit as Buchanan makes out. She was simply a very lovely, earnest creature who felt sure Hickens needed her, and was unconventional enough to show that she was fond of him. I always admired her immensely. Anybody would."

"I admired her too, so far as looks were concerned," said Buchanan. "I called on her once with Hickens, hoping to help him. It was mighty hard work. Hickens kept telling her that he wasn't at all the kind she thought him, and cared only for vocabularies, but of course you couldn't make a woman in love believe that. My corroborations and my assurance that he was quite a stupid chap, really, had no effect—she simply thought I was ill-natured. The call was a failure."

"What finally precipitated the marriage was that night at the theater when an usher put her and her sister, Lady



"BEG PARDON, SIR; THEY'S A LADY WAITING AT THE DOOR TO SEE YOU, SIR"

Cary, into the box where Hickens and I were. By mistake, she said. Hickens sprang up in a wildish, panicky way, and let out a squawk like a hen, that got everybody staring at us—and what with the newspapers getting hold of it and the publicity and talk, a week later they were married. And now he's dead, and glad of it, I dare say, and she goeth about like a widow seeking another."

Levellier shook his head and suggested that we change the subject.

"If you ask me how he ever got in so deep in the first place," Buchanan concluded, "I simply don't know—nor did Hickens—but I do know this: a bachelor is always being misunderstood."

"The poor bachelor!" said White. "It's too true. The girls just will go and suppose he means what he says."

Buchanan saw me smile at this.

"Don't smile so confidently, Sims," he warned me. "What happened to Hickens might easily happen to you. When

a clever woman really wants him, no bachelor is safe."

I had heard all that before—and it was a drowsy Saturday in August: the city was empty, the club was bare and quiet. I yawned peacefully at Buchanan and lit a cigar.

Old William softly entered. He came to my side. "Beg pardon, Mr. Sims," he said. "They's—ah—some one outside to see you, sir."

"Yes?" I said. "Who?"

Old William hesitated. "Hit's—a lady, sir, Mr. Sims," he answered.

Everybody laughed. Buchanan half rose from his chair.

"Somebody's misunderstood him," White sighed, offensively. "That's it—all a mistake."

I confess that for once I felt confused. The town, I repeat, was empty. I couldn't imagine what lady would come to my club. "You should have asked for her name, William," I said.

"Yes, sir," William answered, unhappily. "We did ask the lady her name, sir, but she—now, she said as how hit was Mrs. Sims, sir. Yes, sir."

"By thingumbob! By Yagguit!" Buchanan exclaimed. "It's the Hickens case all over again. Was this why you wished me to tell you about it, Talbot? Have William say you're not here."

William coughed. "The doorman he took the liberty of saying he greatly doubted that you was here, Mr. Sims, sir, but the lady said for him not to be stupid, for she knew you was."

I perplexedly got up to go down-stairs.

Buchanan, who's rather fond of me, interposed. He suggested that he go in my stead and impersonate me.

"What on earth for?" I asked.

"It will end the trouble once and for all, don't you see," he explained, "because she'll understand that if I am J. Talbot Sims, you aren't. She'll think you've been giving a wrong name and deceiving her, and then she won't ever come after you here again."

I had been deceiving no one, I declared, impatiently.

He replied that maybe the woman was crazy or something.

"Let me go down instead of Buchanan," said Levellier.

"It wouldn't be as safe, Levellier," White objected. "You're too attractive. Let the plainest man do it."

Buchanan turned a bit stiff, but off he marched without further words, with William, leaving me to the others. They were still trying to persuade me to go out the back way, like Hickens, and I was expostulating with them, when Buchanan hurried back.

"She's a demon, Sims," he whispered. "Whew! A dark, obstinate, tall, new-womanish demon. I made William go out to her with me and explain that I was the Mr. J. Talbot Sims she'd asked for, but he didn't much want to, and got very nervous and mixed-up trying to do it, and all she said was, 'Don't be silly.' I politely bowed, reaffirming my identity as Sims. She thereupon beckoned to a policeman. We—er—it was very disagreeable. I've nearly been arrested."

The doorkeeper entered the room begging all our pardons, but the lady had taken Mr. Kitteridge's taxi, he said, to

sit in until I should appear, refusing to stand any longer on the pavement. Mr. Kitteridge was waiting in the vestibule. He had tried to appeal to the policeman, but the policeman seemed prejudiced.

"If you'll all be good enough to sit down and let me alone," I said, "I'll handle this myself." I went down-stairs.

"Please g-get your friend out of my t-t-t-tut-tut-taxi, will you?" said Kitteridge. "I'm in a hurry."

I stepped outside to the taxi. Inside it sat my sister-in-law, Mrs. Niblo Sims. I might have known. I *would* have known if it hadn't been for that conversation.

"Well, Hattie?" I said, relievedly.

"Jump in, please," she answered; "you've kept me long enough. Driver, go to the station."

We shot off with a whir, leaving Kitteridge goggling his eyes at us from the vestibule.

"Sometime," Hattie said, "will you kindly explain to me why every one has such a frightened look at your club? That idiot doorman wouldn't even let me in."

"We've no ladies' room," I told her.

"He behaved as though I were dynamite," she continued, "and brought out some impudent man who said he was you."

"Nellstonecroft," I improvised. "Admires me so much it's gone to his head, we think. Can't help pretending he's me when he gets a chance. The doorman—"

"Never mind," said Hattie. "Don't tell me the secrets of your strange retreat. I don't doubt you've plenty of other crazy members besides this defective person who so admires you, but I've no time at present to go into that. I've only a minute. Please listen."

I listened. I preferred to.

Hattie had left my brother Niblo up in the country, she said—they've a place in Epsom Manor, just outside New York—and now she was hurrying off to her aunt's in New Jersey, to get my nephew—would return by Tuesday. Meantime she had thought I'd like to spend the week-end with Niblo, because sometimes a wife seemed to come between two brothers, and she was determined

not to. Niblo and I must see just as much of each other as though he'd never married, and I must go right up to Epsom Manor on the 4.06 train.

The prospect of sitting around with Niblo was not one to allure me. "We never did see each other the deuce of a lot," I objected.

"All the more reason for being together now," she persisted. "What did you find out for me about Mrs. Hickens?"

I said it was a long story.

"Is she the one who was in the newspapers?—that's all I wish to know," she asked. "Yes? Then I sha'n't call. The mischief of it is she has taken the Kews' place, next to ours; that's why I asked you to find out about her, you see; but Niblo and I must avoid having anything to do with her. I don't care if she *is* a Hilliard. Such women—oh! here's the station. You can catch the 4.06 if you hurry. Take good care of Niblo."

I perceived that I was being sent up to guard Niblo from Mrs. Hickens.

This grated on me all the way in the train. Niblo's an awful old frump—no get-up-and-go to him—and this gay Mrs. Hickens probably didn't know he existed. However, if it was any comfort to Hattie to have me visit him, I thought I'd stick it out over Sunday just this once. I have had a good deal of sympathy for Hattie since she married.

My brother was reading in their dark, stuffy little library when I arrived, with the piazza doors locked. I rapped on the glass.

"Don't do that," he called. "You'll break the glass." He got up and let me in. "How do you do?" he said. "Hattie telephoned you were coming. I—er—didn't expect you. How do you do?"

"Have you told the cook? That's the main thing," I replied. "I want a good dinner."

A worried look came into his

face. "Now, Talbot," he said, "let me apprise you of something. We must be very careful about the cook. I was—er— The toast was wrong at tea just now, and the third time I sent it back she packed her trunk. I had to—calm her. It took some time; she was not inclined to be reasonable; if she leaves before Hattie returns there'll be the dickens to pay."

I advised him to take some smelling-salts, and went up to dress (Hattie always keeps a few of my things in the house). When I'd done I looked over some copies of last year's magazines that were still on Niblo's desk, and tried to read a gilt-bound book called *Thoughts in Rhyme* that some very dull friend of his had had privately printed, and



I DELIGHTEDLY JOINED IN THE CHORUS

walked twice around the lawn, and trimmed up one of the bushes with my penknife, and wished I were back at the club. I hate the country.

We had a mediocre dinner. The spinach was especially poor, being gritty, but Niblo refused to send any reproof to his cook.

There was no further break in the monotony until the next afternoon—Sunday. Then, while Niblo was off taking a nap, and while I was smoking, alone, on the piazza, and wishing something would happen, the telephone rang.

There are two telephones in Niblo's house—one wire only, but two instruments: one up in Niblo's room, and one in the hall closet where they keep their hats, so that you can answer a call either up or down stairs. As I took up the receiver in the hall closet, I heard Niblo lift the other receiver up-stairs in his room.

"Yes?" he said.

A charming voice responded: "This is Mrs. Hickens. I wish to speak to Mr. Sims, quickly, please."

"This is Mr. Sims," said Niblo and I together, with the utmost courtesy. Niblo crossly added, however, "Get off the wire, Talbot."

"Talbot?" Mrs. Hickens said. "My name is not Talbot."

"No, indeed. I'm Talbot," I put in.

"Then why tell yourself to get off the wire?" she asked, in astonishment.

"Buck up there, my boy," I called, addressing Niblo. "That's one for you to answer."

"Will you get out of that closet?" Niblo demanded.

"This is Mrs. Hickens," said Mrs. Hickens, indignantly, "and I wish to speak to Mr. Sims at once."

"I am Mr. Sims, Mrs. Hickens," I repeated.

"This is my house, *my* house," roared Niblo. "I am Mr. Sims here."

"Please do not be so passionate about it," Mrs. Hickens retorted, still unable to realize, apparently, that more than one man was speaking. "You will injure my ear-drum. If you are Mr. Sims, I have called up about your cow."

"I didn't know I had one," I said, enjoying myself greatly.

"What about my cow?" snapped Niblo.

"If you admire her, Mrs. Hickens," I said, "please accept her as a gift and—"

"Hang up your receiver," Niblo shouted. "I will not be annoyed like this. Get off the wire. I insist on speaking to Mrs. Hickens in peace."

"What is the matter with you, Mr. Sims?" Mrs. Hickens inquired. "You can't possibly speak to me if I get off the wire."

"Very true," I said. "Don't stop. It's been dull here all day."

At this point Niblo began to bang at his receiver, and call, "Come, now, are you off that wire?"

Mrs. Hickens jiggled her receiver, too. "Central! Central!" she entreated, "I must have the wrong person."

I delightedly joined in the chorus, just to keep things going, saying: "This line is busy. Very. Number, please. Information? *This* is Mr. Sims." Though not an intellectual form of amusement, I felt it was helping me through my Sunday with Niblo. But Central soon disconnected us, of course, and I went back to my cigar on the piazza.

A few minutes later the telephone rang again. I returned to the hall closet, but Niblo had come down-stairs to answer, this time, and was there ahead of me.

"*Who's* knocking down your wall?" he was crying. "My cow?"

I put my hand on his forehead, saying: "Steady, old man. Don't be feverish."

"For Heaven's sake let me alone, will you!" he sputtered; and returning to the instrument, said: "It's your wall, you know. Can't you stop her? . . . Eh? . . . Why—speak kindly to her, or something."

He listened intently to the reply. "In a barrel?" he repeated. "My cow's in a barrel knocking down your wall?" He listened again, then said, heavily, "I'll send the man over."

"Either the woman's demented," he informed me as he rang off, "or else something infernally queer has happened to my cow. I'll just send over the coachman to see what's wrong."

Now Niblo had given his coachman Sunday off, when I arrived, probably so as to keep me from using the horses—he thinks I drive too far. I gladly reminded him, therefore, that the coachman was out.



"SHE WAVES IT AROUND SO," HE COMPLAINED. "SHE'LL KNOCK OUT MY FRONT TEETH"

He swore a little and tried to get the gardener. The gardener was at church.

Niblo swore again, predicting eternal torments for employees who were always gallivanting off to church. "I'll have to go over myself, I suppose," he said. "There's not a soul on this place to do one thing for me."

"Don't feel so enormously ill-used all the time," I advised. "Think of what a speck you are, anyhow, in this great universe. Think of astronomy and the solar system."

The poor speck thereupon put forth all his strength and denounced the solar system from end to end. He said he didn't care if it were all knocked into a cocked hat, he was going to insist on having his rights.

Then off he trotted, swearing, across the lawn and through the apple orchard, away down to the farther pasture, which lies behind the house Mrs. Hickens had taken. I followed him. There was the cow, to be sure, her head wedged in a barrel.

"If I ever lay hands on the scoundrel who did this," said Niblo, "I'll nail him in jail for the longest day he lives."

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He made this announcement in a loud, threatening voice, as though he thought the criminal might be laughing at him somewhere in ambush.

I asked him who he thought it probably was.

"How can I tell?" he answered. "How in the name of rascality can I tell that? It may have been this Mrs. Hickens, for all I know. It may have been that psalm-singing gardener. There was a truckman who wouldn't pull out for me to pass, last week. When I finally drove by I gave him a piece of my mind. If that truckman has come here in a low, revengeful spirit and jammed a barrel on the head of my thoroughbred cow—"

"You're an extremely fatiguing person," I interrupted. "You attribute everything you don't like to a conspiracy against you—you're everlastingly suspecting somebody of doing you an injury. It's not at all likely any one has, in this case. Here's a pasture as parched and brown as a door-mat. You know very well you'd not touch it if you were a cow. Probably she poked her head in that barrel looking for nourishment. What breed do you call her?"

Niblo said he wasn't sure whether she was a Spitzenberg or a Leghorn.

"Well," I pointed out, "you and I don't know their habits; maybe those two breeds prefer to eat from barrels."

I would have said more, but the cow, who had been stamping vainly about while we argued, now gave a long, stifled bellow and jumped stiffly our way. I stepped behind a tree—the only tree. Niblo crowded in beside me. As there wasn't much room to spare, this annoyed me, rather. I said so, and we shouldered each other around the tree quite roughly, until the cow passed. Then we ran after her, planning to get her in a corner and hold her against the wall while we took off the barrel. It was one of those loosely built farm walls of stone. We found it awkward work pushing the cow against it, because cows are clumsy; and this one plunged about, more or less, and stepped on our feet; and when we did get her in the corner she knocked part of the wall down.

As the stones plumped off on the ground I heard cries from an arbor that ran along the other side of this wall. The voice was a woman's.

"Oh, please, please don't!" she begged. "I really can't have this creature bump so any longer."

I thought this impertinent of her. We were doing our best. Rather than swear at her, though, I swore at Niblo, and urged him not to fool about any longer, but take a good hold of the barrel and unsheathe his cow.

Niblo looked dispirited. "She waves it around so," he complained. "She'll knock out my front teeth."

"I'll pull it off, then," I said, "and you can hold on to her tail to keep her from butting me."

Niblo gingerly grasped her tail. I grabbed at the barrel. The cow backed rapidly away from me toward the tree. Niblo backed away from the cow, hit against the tree, fell over, and only saved himself from having her trample on him by a combination yell and scramble that was simply disgusting. I can't bear to see people made abject by danger.

"Oh dear!" wailed the woman, running out of her arbor. "I knew it. I hope he's not hurt. . . . You'll never get the barrel off that way, you know."

She was a nice, curly, fresh-looking woman with a managing eye—dressed in a fetching little green slip of a frock.

"Perhaps you'll show us how, then, madam," I suggested, bowing, and pretending not to see Niblo, who had got on his feet and was advancing on me in a most vindictive manner.

"Why, I think if you could knock in the bottom—" She hesitated.

It was the very thing, of course. Despite Niblo's objections, who feared I might hurt the cow's nose, I kicked in the bottom of the barrel and it then fell to pieces.

"You are an admirable person," I said to the lady, "but another time please speak sooner."

Niblo coughed, being a formal chap, and began to mutter introductions.

"Yes, our name is Sims," I repeated, mopping my forehead. "That one who's mumbling about it is Neighbor Sims, whom you telephoned to just now, if you're Mrs. Hickens; and I may be called by contrast Sims *d'Esprit*, a cast-away week-end visitor at that man's home, with almost nothing inside of me, on account of his cook."

Niblo explained that she had cooked well enough until Saturday, when Mrs. Sims left.

"Her idea of cooking," I said to Mrs. Hickens, "is to muss a thing up and slightly alter its temperature. For a yam-eating Zulu it's possible that would do nicely. For a civilized man—if you'd call old Neighbor Sims civilized—it's worse than no cooking at all. The things taste better raw."

"That is not true, Talbot," Niblo protested. "That is grossly exaggerated. You didn't like the spinach last night, but—"

"I did like the spinach," I said. "It was the grit in it I minded—the iron filings, the gravel."

The word gravel was objected to by Niblo. I declined to withdraw it. I said that sooner than touch his spinach again, I'd eat the driveway.

This cut him to the quick. If I didn't like the food, he said, he wished I'd go back to town.

Mrs. Hickens smiled apprehensively at us and made her retreat. Half-way to her house she turned back, though, say-

ing, uncertainly, "If I might send out some iced tea and cakes to you, in the arbor—?"

"By Jove!" I cried, "you're my fairy godmother. I felt it from the first. A starving man thanks you, lady, from the bottom of his stomach. But do let us have it on the piazza instead of in the arbor. There are mosquitoes enough down here to poison a druggist." I crossed the wall and showed Mrs. Hickens two bites I'd had already.

My brother Niblo, having no ideas of his own, is always helping himself to those of others. He, too, crossed the wall. He, too, it appeared, had received some bites.

I asked him not to display his revolting injuries, pointing out that Mrs. Hickens had seen enough, and that he'd make her flesh creep. Mrs. Hickens immediately began another retreat, but we went with her this time, one on each side, like the Gryphon and Mock Turtle with Alice in Wonderland. A few minutes later we were all at tea on the piazza.

The tea was awfully good. Niblo and I became more peaceful at once, and this change greatly reassured Mrs. Hickens. She laughed at some of our remarks in the most delicious manner, as though we weren't nearly as dangerous as she had feared, and when I asked her whether she thought me mad, she replied, "Not unpleasantly so."

"She didn't say much about herself," Niblo remarked, walking home.

"She had little chance to," I said, "the way you chattered. Why did you tell her that about my socks?" He had described to her how I mended the holes, with squares of sticking-plaster, placed inside the toe.

Niblo said it was because she had seemed so interested.

So she had, I realized; so she had. I began to think things over. Stopping to think things over is a habit of mine: it's one of the things that keep a man a bachelor. . . . She had been very much interested, indeed.

Now I'm not one to be nervous, though I've had my close calls, but I thought of the conversation we'd had at the club about her crude insistence on marrying Hickens; and I told myself that perhaps I'd better be wary if I saw

her again. It's often rather exciting when one has to be wary; and of course one does have to, women have such an unfair advantage over bachelors. When a bachelor feels injured at the way a woman has treated him, people only laugh, or suspect him of secret vices. When a woman feels injured, though, people say it is a shame, and proceed at once to think badly of the bachelor, no matter how conscientious he may be; and some of them may try to chevy him into marrying her. It's a serious business. It's a thing that might happen to any one. I didn't at all intend to marry Mrs. Hickens.

By dinner-time, however, I had dismissed all these thoughts from my mind, and laughed at myself for being so ready to scent danger. Our dinner, by the way, turned out to be only a Sunday evening supper, consisting principally of sardines, cold pudding, and cheese. Other things were passed to us, such as a *mêlée* of decayed fruits and water, which Niblo called salad, and some black and brittle baked beans; but they did not tempt me. The cook, it appeared, was out. After one cigar with Niblo, I went out too.

It was a fine, soft, starry evening. A beautiful night for killing cooks, I reflected. I sent word back to Niblo, by the waitress, that I had gone to find and destroy his cook, and strolled off down the road toward the station. It was far from attractive. I turned around and strolled up the road, instead, past the grounds of the Kews' place.

"Is that you, Mr. Sims?" a slim figure said in the darkness.

"Yes, godmother," I answered. "Not Neighbor Sims, you know. Sims *d'Esprit*."

It was Mrs. Hickens, with a spray of flowers on her breast and veil-draped hair. "You are looking extremely well," I said, peering at her, "though you seem to be feeling a trifle sluggish, perhaps. Did you have too much dinner?"

She asked whether my mind didn't run a good deal on that subject.

"At the moment, yes," I replied. "That's because I'm digesting three lean and gray sardines. Let's talk of even pleasanter things, however. Look at yon stars."

"They're *too* lovely to-night," she sighed.

"Ah," said I, "on many and many a one of those brilliant orbs, I dare say, beings of various kinds exist, who at this moment are looking out into space, same as us, and wondering what it all comes to and what they'll have for breakfast."

"Really, Mr. Sims—" said my god-mother.

"Don't say Mr. Sims," I suggested.

"Call me Sims *d'Esprit*."

"I think I like Neighbor Sims better than you," she observed.

"What, you too?" I protested. "That's the very same blunder the lady made who married him. Have you a match?"

There were matches indoors, she replied. We went indoors.

I had a rather peculiar time indoors. We began by talking almost immediately about Me, and for a while the subject seemed inexhaustible. I told Mrs. Hickens things about myself—many of them true—that I had never expected any one to listen to before. This led ultimately, however, to a discussion of frankness, and that was where my peculiar time commenced.

She adored directness and candor. She thought it was so nice, she said, when men and women could chat quite plainly with one another and say whatever they truly felt. Didn't I? Almost the only thing on which she and her husband had differed had been that. They had differed about it one of the very first times they met, she pensively remembered; he strongly disapproving of having women be open about what they felt—especially an unmarried woman to an unmarried man.

The picture of an alarmed Hickens came into my mind, uttering the first of his fruitless squawks.

His widow bent prettily toward me, her chin in her hand. "Do you disapprove of frankness in a woman?" she asked.

Not wishing to be like old Hickens, I said no.

She said that she was glad, and that I was a man with whom a woman could easily be frank.

"What about?" I inquired, growing uneasy.

"Why, her feelings, for instance," she replied, fingering a fan. "Many nice men don't like a woman to lay aside her reserve. They may say they do; but when one takes them at their word, they get awfully uncomfortable!"

"Ha, ha!" I managed to laugh. My throat was a trifle dry, so I repeated it: "Ha, ha!"

Mrs. Hickens smiled. "They behave, she said, "as though they thought the woman was going to propose marriage to them!"

"Silly fellows," I articulated, wagging my head. "A woman can discuss her feelings without dragging in marriage all the time, I should hope."

"Still," said Mrs. Hickens after a pause, "a woman should be free to discuss marriage if she wants to."

"Oh, if she really wants to," I lamely assented, "and if she knows the man very well, and all that."

She leaned gracefully back and shaded her eyes. "I feel somehow as though I knew you very well," she confided.

I held tightly to the arms of my chair.

"Isn't it odd," she went on, "how some people know each other through and through from the start? For such people reserves don't really exist—or shouldn't exist. They need not hesitate to—to speak right out."

I cast about in my mind for some useful form of words to have ready when the crash came. I could offer to be a brother to her if necessary. But I felt limp at having to experiment being a brother. It would require such alertness to keep the footing fraternal.

"Your cigarette has gone out," she noticed. "Let me light it for you." She struck a match and reached toward me, looking large-eyed and intimate.

I put the cigarette unsteadily to my lips, and plumped it into the flame. There was silence for a moment or two while I tried to think of the best way to say good night. The best way to say it was just to say it, I decided.

"Good night," I therefore coughed, rising.

"Oh," she cried, "is it so late? Why, it isn't late at all yet. Must you go back to your brother?"

I nodded. "You've been charming, a good deal of the time," I admitted, "but

on the whole I like Neighbor Sims better."

She took this brutal verdict as merely a jest and went gaily out into the hall. "Here's your hat," she said, not giving it to me, however, but holding it half unconsciously to her breast. I wondered if she were going to spring at me. "Tell me," she demanded, "don't you believe in acting on impulse?"

"No," I said, "I do not," hoping that would check her.

"Really?" she objected. "But you believe in frankness; and how can one who represses an impulse be frank?"

"He can think it over, can't he?" I answered, fretfully.

"A-ah," she slowly rejoined. "I see, I see. Then so be it."

I made for the door, not daring to ask so be what.

"*Au revoir, D'Esprit,*" she called, as I fled.

I slept little that night, and went down to breakfast next day with a tight, head-binding headache.

"This egg is practically raw," I said

to the waitress. "Can't that culinary impostor even do a boiled egg?"

The waitress explained that she had had to do it herself, the cook being on strike: she was sitting out there in the kitchen, but wouldn't lift a hand.

This seemed quite spirited of cook. I admired her spunk. At the same time I had a headache and needed my breakfast. Thinking it might be well to use tact and firmness, I rose cheerlessly from the table and made for the kitchen.

With one look at my face the waitress leaped out ahead of me. What she told her friend I don't know, but when I reached the kitchen the cook was slipping up-stairs. "Come back down here instantly," I ordered. There was no response. I lost my temper and ran for the stairs myself. At this she bolted for her life, with me clattering after her, two steps at a time, calling, sternly, "Come here!" and she replying with screams.

She got up to the top long before I did, owing to her terror. I heard her slam and lock the door of her room, and shove furniture against it. "Gr-r-r-rh!" I snarled through the keyhole, panting,



"I FEEL SOMEHOW AS THOUGH I KNEW YOU VERY WELL," SHE CONFIDED

and wondering what the deuce I'd have done if I'd overtaken her. What *could* I have done? Thumped her? Pulled off her hair? Her hair was in a very tight knot. I felt glad she'd escaped me, and I gave her door a good happy kicking before going down, while she scrambled around inside as though climbing the cornice.

Niblo met me in the hall, clutching at his bathrobe and holding a shaving-brush. "See here," he complained, "what are you doing? I can't have you treeing my cook like some dashed bloodhound."

"Go look at my egg," I replied. "It's as raw as glue."

He said many persons considered raw eggs as nourishing as any.

"So's cod-liver oil, if you wish to argue," I told him.

He peevishly affirmed that he had no

wish whatever to argue. He just wished to know how I expected him to eat without a cook. This was pretty inconsistent of a man who'd been praising things raw. I pointed this out to him and begged him in a general way to think less about himself and more of his guest. Then, leaving the house, I paced up and down the driveway, enjoying the air.

After a fairly hearty meal of air I felt in my pocket for cigarettes. The case wasn't there. Strange. I felt in all my pockets. No cigarette case.

Then I remembered. I'd left it at Mrs. Hickens's.

With that special clairvoyance vouchsafed to those in danger, I saw with burning distinctness what would happen. She would telephone the house and expect me to go over after it. I would reply, "So sorry, I'm just taking the train for New York." She would answer, "Oh wouldn't you like me to take you in, in my motor?" (She went in to town every now and then, she had told me.)

And then I would be dished.

I have a habit of acting with promptitude in an emergency. It's one of the things that keep a man a bachelor. Without even going back to Niblo's house for my stick, I ran down the road to the station and caught the next train.

The noise of the train was soothing. I felt better at once. And how peaceful and secure the city seemed when I arrived. "In this great hive," I reflected, "with its thousand alleys, an active man could live uncaught for years." I ate a delicious breakfast at the best of restaurants; I telegraphed Hattie she'd better take home a new cook, and went down to the office.

In great good humor, I went up to lunch at the



"GO LOOK AT MY EGG. IT'S AS RAW AS GLUE"



"QUICK, WILLIAM!" I WHISPERED, DIZZILY. "WHERE'S THE BACK DOOR?"

club. There I found White, Levellier, and Buchanan.

"You're not married, are you, old man?" Buchanan inquired; and finding I wasn't, he made a great demonstration in my honor. "He who was blamed near lost is found," he chanted. White paid him ten dollars. It seems White had bet him I'd never return a bachelor.

"I should have made the limit a few days longer," White said. "Sims won't last. Not at this rate. When a good catch who's as impressionable as Sims is carried bodily off by some strange lady—"

"It was my sister-in-law," I interrupted.

They made no comment on this, simply smiled politely, but I could see not one of the three believed it, not even Levellier. To break the feeling of constraint in the air, Buchanan said, with a good attempt at heartiness, that I had been a brave fellow, anyway, not to go out the back door.

"A hero indeed," said White. "Only, next time he'd better."

"There'll be no next time," I assured them. "I've had my lesson."

Not five minutes after this, old William entered, and, regarding me with hardened disapproval, approached my chair. "They's a lady waiting outside to see you, sir, Mr. Sims," he said, reproachfully.

"My sister-in-law again," I explained to the men. "It's Mrs. Sims, William?"

"I—I don't really know, sir," he stammered. "This lady give me the name of M-Mrs. Hickens, sir."

"What!" sang out Levellier.

I rose in consternation.

"Buchanan," White drawled, "I'll repeat my bet with you, a hundred to fifty."

But good old Buchanan was standing at my side, saying: "Anything I can do for you, Sims? This must be even more serious than we thought."

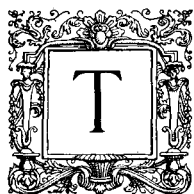
"Be a brave fellow, Sims," said White.

I felt I was face to face with a genuine crisis. I also felt very ill. Steadying myself on the chair-backs, I stepped toward William.

"Quick, William!" I whispered, dizzily. "Where's the back door?"

What Is Gravity?

BY SIR OLIVER LODGE



THE first experiment which a baby makes is connected with the force of gravity. It is born with an instinctive or ancestral dread of the unrestrained action of that force upon its own body; and it is said to be able to cling with tenacity to a stick or branch of a tree. Later on it takes pleasure in dropping miscellaneous objects to see them fall; perhaps to see if they all fall alike.

And a very remarkable fact it is which is thus being observed; the most familiar of all material facts, and one of the least understood—least understood, that is, of all the simple physical facts which must surely be well within the limits of human comprehension. For if a philosopher is asked why all bodies tend to move toward the earth, and why they all fall with steady, equal acceleration unless retarded or checked somehow, he has to reply that he does not know.

The idea that this familiar force of attraction is due in some way to the neighborhood of the earth must be very ancient; such an idea became inevitable to any thinking naturalist who was aware that the earth is spherical, for the adverb “down” has then no other significance—it can only mean toward the earth. It need not be—indeed, it is not—accurately toward the center, but it is along a plumb-line—*i.e.*, along a vertical; and that points very nearly to the center of the earth.

Kepler was familiar with the force of gravity, and many of the Greeks must have realized that there was some sort of attraction between the earth and the things on it; perhaps they guessed that that is what held the atmosphere on to it; although the knowledge must have flickered and wavered into extinction from time to time until permanently re-

kindled by Galileo. He it was who made the first careful experiments on falling bodies, showing that their velocity increased regularly with the time of fall—in other words, that the acceleration was constant, and that it was independent of size and material. And he likewise, by the invention of the pendulum, and so ultimately of clocks, put a powerful instrument of exact research into the hands of his successors.

By means of pendulums with bobs of various kinds Newton tested and accurately verified the law that the acceleration of every kind of matter was identical in magnitude: a very remarkable fact, whose rationale remains to be discovered. It is commonly expressed by saying that *weight* is proportional to *inertia* or *mass*; or it may be expressed by saying that the static measure of gravity corresponds to the kinetic measure. This means that whether forces are compared by the stretch they produce in a bit of elastic or a spring, or whether they are compared by the momentum they can generate or destroy in a given time, or by the masses in which they can produce the same acceleration, all the comparisons correspond. Yet one is a static method depending on the elastic properties of matter, the others are kinetic measures depending on Newton's second law of motion. What is called “Hooke's Law” governs the first, or elastic, method. “Newton's law” governs the second, or momentum, method; and uniformity of experience by both methods gives confidence in the laws.

Another simple, not to say babyish, experiment may here again be introduced. Take a number of similar marbles, and add one to a scale-pan hanging from a spiral spring or a piece of elastic. Note the stretch. Then add two. The stretch will be found to be double. Three will treble it, and so on. This