

'What is that?'

'People being sick on the pavement in Glasgow.'

'Oh!'

'Do you know how the poem ends? "Now we maun totter down, John, But hand in hand we'll go, And *sleep together* at the foot, John Anderson my jo."'

'Dennis, why is all the poetry you know so coarse? And you talking of being a pastor.'

'Non-sectarian; but I incline to the Anabaptists in these matters. Anyway, everything is ethical to engaged couples.'

After a pause Aimée said: 'I shall have to write and tell Mr. Joyboy and the—and someone else.'

She wrote that night. Her letters were delivered by the morning post.

Mr. Slump said: 'Send her our usual letter of congratulation and advice.'

'But, Mr. Slump, she's marrying the wrong one.'

'Don't mention that side of it.'

Five miles away Aimée uncovered the first corpse of the morning. It came from Mr. Joyboy bearing an expression of such bottomless woe that her heart was wrung.

CHAPTER VIII

Mr. Slump was late and crapulous.

'Another letter from la belle Thanatogenos,' said Mr. Slump. 'I thought we'd had the last of that dame.'

Dear Guru Brahmin,

Three weeks ago I wrote you that everything was all right and I had made up my mind and felt happy but I am still unhappy, unhappier in a way than I was before. Sometimes my British friend is sweet to me and writes poetry but often he wants unethical things and is so cynical when I say no we must wait. I begin to doubt we shall ever make a real American home. He says he is going to be a pastor. Well as I told you I am progressive and therefore have no religion but I do not think religion is a thing to be cynical about because it makes some people very happy and all cannot be progressive at this stage of Evolution. He has not become a pastor yet he says he has something to do first which he had promised a man but he doesn't say what it is and sometimes I wonder is it something wrong he is so secretive.

Then there is my own career. I was offered a Big Chance to improve my position and now no more is said of that. The head of the department is the gentleman I told you of who helps his mother in the housework, and since I plighted my troth with my British friend and wrote to tell him he never speaks to me even as much as he speaks professionally to the other girls of the department. And the place where we work is meant to be Happy that is one of the first rules and everyone looks to this gentleman for an Example and he is very unhappy, unlike what the place stands for. Sometimes he even looks mean and that was the last thing he ever looked before. All my fiancé does is to make unkind jokes about his name. I am worried too about the interest he shows in my work. I mean I think it quite right a man should show interest in a girl's work but he shows too much. I mean there are certain technical matters in any business I suppose which people do not like to have talked about outside the office and it is just those matters he is always asking about. . . .

'That's how women always are,' said Mr. Slump. 'It just breaks their hearts to let any man go.'

There was often a missive waiting for Aimée on her work-table. When they had parted sourly the night before, Dennis transcribed a poem before going to bed and delivered it at the mortuary on his way to work. These missives in his fine script had to fill the place of the missing smiles; the Loved Ones on their trolleys were now as woebegone and reproachful as the master.

That morning Aimée arrived still sore from the bickering of the preceding evening and found a copy of verses waiting for her. She read them and once more her heart opened to her lover.

*Aimée, thy beauty is to me
Like those Nicean barks of yore. . . .*

Mr. Joyboy passed the cosmetic rooms on his way out, dressed for the street. His face was cast in pitiful gloom. Aimée smiled shyly, deprecating; he nodded heavily and passed by, and then on an impulse she wrote on the top of the lyric: 'Try and understand, Aimée', slipped into the embalming room and reverently laid the sheet of paper on the heart of a corpse who was there waiting Mr. Joyboy's attention.

After an hour Mr. Joyboy returned. She heard him enter his room; she heard the taps turned on. It was not until lunch-time that they met.

'That poem', he said, 'was a very beautiful thought.'

'My fiancé wrote it.'

'The Britisher you were with Tuesday?'

'Yes, he's a very prominent poet in England.'

'Is that so? I don't ever recall meeting a British poet before. Is that all he does?'

'He's studying to be a pastor.'

'Is that so? See here, Aimée, if you have any more of his poems I should greatly appreciate to see them.'

'Why, Mr. Joyboy, I didn't know you were one for poems.'

'Sorrow and disappointment kinda makes a man poetic I guess.'

'I've lots of them. I keep them here.'

'I would certainly like to study them. I was at the Knife and Fork Club Dinner last night and I became acquainted with a literary gentleman from Pasadena. I'd like to show them to him. Maybe he'd be able to help your friend some way.'

'Why, Mr. Joyboy, that's real chivalrous of you.' She paused. They had not spoken so many words to one another since the day of her engagement. The nobility of the man again overwhelmed her. 'I hope,' she said shyly, 'that Mrs. Joyboy is well.'

'Mom isn't so good today. She's had a tragedy. You remember Sambo, her parrot?'

'Of course.'

'He passed on. He was kinda old, of course, something over a hundred, but the end was sudden. Mrs. Joyboy certainly feels it.'

'Oh, I am sorry.'

'Yes, she certainly feels it. I've never known her so cast down. I've been arranging for the disposal this morning. That's why I went out. I had to be at the Happier Hunting Ground. The funeral's Wednesday. I was wondering, Miss Thanatogenos: Mom doesn't know so many people in this State. She certainly would appreciate a friend at the funeral. He was a sociable bird when he was a bit younger. Enjoyed parties back East more than anyone. It seems kinda bitter there shouldn't be anyone at the last rites.'

'Why, Mr. Joyboy, of course I'd be glad to come.'

'Would you, Miss Thanatogenos? Well, I call that real nice of you.'

Thus at long last Aimée came to the Happier Hunting Ground.

CHAPTER IX

Aimée Thanatogenos spoke the tongue of Los Angeles; the sparse furniture of her mind—the objects which barked the intruder's shins—had been acquired at the local High School and University; she presented herself to the world dressed and scented in obedience to the advertisements; brain and body were scarcely distinguishable from the standard product, but the spirit—ah, the spirit was something apart; it had to be sought afar; not here in the musky orchards of the Hesperides, but in the mountain air of the dawn, in the eagle-haunted passes of Hellas. An umbilical cord of cafés and fruit shops, of ancestral shady businesses (fencing and pimping) united Aimée, all unconscious, to the high places of her race. As she grew up the only language she knew expressed fewer and fewer of her ripening needs; the facts which littered her memory grew less substantial; the figure she saw in the looking-glass seemed less recognizably herself. Aimée withdrew herself into a lofty and hieratic habitation.

Thus it was that the exposure as a liar and a cheat of the man she loved and to whom she was bound by the tenderest vows, affected only a part of her. Her heart was broken perhaps, but it was a small inexpensive organ of local manufacture. In a wider and grander way she felt that things had been simplified. She held in her person a valuable concession to bestow; she had been scrupulous in choosing justly between rival claimants. There was no room now for further hesitation. The voluptuous tempting tones of 'Jungle Venom' were silenced.

It was, however, in the language of her upbringing that she addressed her final letter to the Guru Brahmin.

Mr. Slump was ill-shaven; Mr. Slump was scarcely sober; 'Slump is slipping,' said the managing editor. 'Have him pull himself up or else fire him.' Unconscious of impending doom, Mr. Slump said: 'For Christ's sake, Thanatogenos again. What does she say, lovely? I don't seem able to read this morning.'

'She has had a terrible awakening, Mr. Slump. The man she thought she loved proves to be a liar and cheat.'

'Aw, tell her go marry the other guy.'

'That seems to be what she intends doing.'