

"A FOOL THERE WAS"

By Edna Kenton

WHEN Kipling's "Vampire" first appeared, Minard sat down with his copy of it, and smote himself hip and head with joy and eating regret. All his life long, he asserted, he had felt it, every whit, and had merely lacked the one thing needful, divine words!

Minard bought one of the first copies of it which came out between covers. Later he had that copy specially bound, by some foreign genius who took his patron's measure, and set his price according. This copy lay on Minard's pet table, and was shown time over to all his guests and chance visitors. Not that Minard needed the copy personally, for with his second reading of the poem, "The Vampire" was his for all time.

From another foreign source he promptly invested in a fine copy of the Burne-Jones sensationalism, and thereafter it was worth the price of admission to any Broadway play to look upon Minard striking an attitude before his shadowy picture of a thin lady, and thereafter proceeding to recite—never the poem in consecutive entirety, but the poem bit by bit, done into an esthetic hash. Some of his discriminating and loudly applauding friends preferred to all else his rendition of the first line:

"A fool there was, and he said his prayer."

Others insisted that there was nothing then on the stage to equal the maniacal scorn which Minard succeeded in infusing into

"A rag and a bone and a hank of hair."

Dimmick said that Minard's interpretation of

"But the fool he called her his lady fair!"

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was not to be matched by Irving's mightiest mouthings. Little Bunton—called Bunny, of course—laid his sandy head upon a convenient resting-place and wept whenever Minard, not only in recitation, but in ordinary conversation remarked:

"'Even as you and I!'"

That phrase indeed became Minard's most cuttily cynical remark.

Now all this preceding jaunt afield has gone for naught if it has not shown first of all that Vynne Minard was young, although he himself would assert that it indicated, first of all, a most superior cynicism. But, being young, he had no deep wells of experience from which to draw, and therefore, since cynicism was his aim, he was entitled to the great credit of having achieved it, since he was certainly not born to it, considering that his race was of Presbyterian temper from the time of Calvin; and since it had in no way been thrust upon him. He had achieved it, too, at twenty years of age, for he was only so old when Mr. Kipling was moved to give "The Vampire" to a masculine world until then void of fit expression for its mute convictions; and he was even then reeking with diatribes against women in general—he did not know much or many of them in particular, being a clean-lived youth in the main, and being given to earnest work rather than to the pink tea or the pink claret life. He was, in fact, a most promising young art student, and it was owing perhaps to his early and quite painless attack of cynicism that his work showed such marvelous technique. For women are distracting creatures, and

Minard was a youth of the type which all women incontinently adore.

As the years went on, his technique developed as did his cheerful cynicism. His portraits became something of a rage, and he declared openly and without shame that all women, on the publication of "The Vampire," became forever divided into three classes: "rags," or "bones," or "hanks of hair." There was no doubt, of course, about the class into which the super-thin ladies fell, and, with superb ignoring of the flesh, he designated plumper womankind by "rags" or "hanks," according as their dresses or their tresses dominated their personal appearance. Yet no slim woman thing he had ever met dreamed that she was to him a "bone" and nothing more, for Minard was charmingly deferential to them all, being himself a boy utterly charming—not even his two or three enemies denied him that epithet, fond and foolish as it sounds—and his friends and enemies were alike faithful to him in not betraying to the women who swarmed about him his primitive classifications of them.

He became at last a painter of women, a truly realistic painter of women, and almost a fad. From this latter dark gulf of certain oblivion his own fairly good stock of common sense saved him, aided by Dimmick's and Bunton's jeers. These faithful friends jibed at his success as they had jibed at his failures, and Minard laughed at it all and at them, for jeering meant in prosperity precisely what it had meant in the comparative adversity through which they had come together, a quinine-coated, medicinal devotion.

They were gathered together in Minard's studio one night, self-invited critics of an all but finished portrait, a presentment of one Miss Lynette Gyles, the betrothed of the Duke of Chester, over which Miss Gyles and all the Gyleses and the blasé duke himself raved to self-suffocation. On the strength of that certain fame which would attend the successful filling of this order young Minard had moved out of his rough, student-day quarters

which he had inhabited up to this time, and took possession of his entrancing suite further uptown, a studio large enough to swallow up any three he had ever worked in before. His recent acquisition of a new, or rather exceeding old, Persian prayer rug was offered as the surface excuse for his friends' descent upon him, but once inside they pushed the easel into a fascinating light, and sat down before it to smoke and comment at their ease.

"She's a stunner!" admitted little Bunton, after a long, long look. Little Bunton was still doing courageous marines, and adding them patiently to his stock in hand. "Worthy of all that technique. She's enough to make me wish I was a duke, by George, and that's certainly a concession."

"That neck bone's a peach!" growled Dimmick gloomily. "It's beautiful."

"For God's sake," whispered little Bunton, "don't say 'bone' to Vynne. Haven't you savvied yet? That girl's mighty near got him worked off that line of talk."

Minard was sprawled along his couch, squinting his eyes ecstatically at his work. At Bunton's loud whisper he grinned a bit.

"You can wish you were a duke—" he said kindly. "But, considering the magic days are ended, you've got the best of the bargain in not getting your wish. A painter's like a doctor—he knows his subjects. Miss Gyles wears beautiful rags and's got gorgeous bones——"

"And a rippin' hank of hair!" put in Dimmick longingly.

"But when that's said, all's said," asserted Minard cheerfully. "Nobody's pretending that she's doing anything but selling herself to that confounded duke. She don't pretend anything more herself. She's had all the opportunities of our American princesses, and she's used 'em like they all do. She's skimmed over the surface of everything, and she don't even know that there are depths beneath. She's artificial and spineless and moral-less——"

"Hark to the talk!" Bunny interrupted cheerfully. "When did you get so worked up over dead bones before?"

Minard pulled some pillows about him and lay back upon them. "Of course, it's nothing to me," he said after a bit. "Only, once in a while, when I see a face divine, I'd like to know there was something behind it which smacks of moral sense—or any sense——"

"That's all right," said Bunton suddenly. "But there's sense in that face—horse and moral!" His long finger pointed straight at the portrait under fire.

"That's right!" affirmed Dimmick quickly. "The girl's no fool, not as you've put her down. And your roundest boast is that you don't deliberately idealize—don't and won't!"

Minard frowned. "That went in the other morning," he said slowly. "Her last sitting. Or after it. We got to talking. It's got no business there—I tried to take it out yesterday, and today. If she'd had a chance she might have made something decent of herself, but this royal method of rearing is awful bad for 'em—the strongest of 'em all can't lift their silly feet from the mapped-out path, and ever since she was a child, hers have led her straight to a titled marriage. But bah—that beast! Her only shred of excuse—and others must make it for her—is that she doesn't know enough yet to read what's written on his rocky old face, and in his hard little eyes."

He stared gloomily at the portrait. Miss Gyles had given him her last sitting three days before, and the masterpiece was to have been delivered at the Gyleses' mansion within the week following. But only this evening he had received a telegram from Miss Gyles herself, saying she was leaving for Palm Beach immediately, and desiring him to retain the portrait until her return—"since you esteem it so highly," was the phrase with which the telegram ended.

Under that phrasing Minard had winced a bit. On the morning of her

last sitting, with her maid asleep at the far end of the studio, she had discovered what he thought of the type of woman which her portrait represented. She had ventured to criticize, ever so slightly, a certain metallic hardness of treatment which she felt had crept into it, and Minard had defended the treatment, first on the contradictory ground of its non-existence, and then on the grounds of realism. There had followed then a brief discussion anent soul and soullessness, at the end of which Miss Gyles had insisted on the direct application. Thereupon, for a scant five minutes, the conversation between the two, the American princess and the young, exasperated artist, was altogether lacking in those delicate veilings which have adorned general conversation between man and woman since the passing of the Stone Age. Miss Gyles was very angry, and Minard could not deny that she had full right to be. When he reflected later on his direct employing of the terms, "sale and barter," and his brief dissection of the Duke of Chester's well-known character, he wondered that she was not more angry, although he knew that greater wrath than she already felt was quite impossible. She was as angry as one could well be and not suffer immediate brain congestion.

To be sure, she had forced most of it. She had insisted on his carrying a merely suggested comparison between the beauty of her face and body and the ugliness of her sordid spirit to the full limit of verbal expression, and under the fire of her attacks Minard had risen to the occasion with a barbarous reversion to the Stone Age type. It had come on them both without premeditation, and with volcanic force and swiftness, and when the few fervid, vivid minutes were ended, they stood, not two feet apart, looking on each other with a primitive hate in their eyes, and a mighty rage tearing at their young hearts. The man's hate and rage were born, he succeeded in persuading himself by asserting it to her, of his artist's revolt against perfection of form with poverty of spirit. The girl's—who

may catalogue all the reasons for her wrath and fury! She had wakened her stupid maid, and had left immediately, without so much as a courteous farewell, and Minard had pored furiously over the portrait all the rest of that day, dabbling at it here and there—he knew he was but "dabbling," and yet he could not keep his hands away from it. He had not seen Lynette Gyles since. Today had been the day appointed for her family and the Duke of Chester to view it, but though the family party came in force, she was not of them, and Minard was heartily glad of it. The sight of her beside the Duke of Chester, with his satyr-like ugliness of soul and body, would have been more than he could stand. The entire experience had been revolting in the extreme—had been nauseating.

He stared a moment longer at the portrait, and then he got up, and deliberately turned it away from them all.

"That look in her eyes doesn't belong there," he said half to himself, "but I'm damned if I can paint it out—seeing that somehow it's crept in—to make her back again into the wax doll she is. Forget it! Are you fellows going round to Foster's stag tonight?"

II

THE three of them dropped convivially in on Foster about ten o'clock that evening. Foster himself opened the door to them, and greeted them with uproarious hilarity. "It's a sight better than a stag!" he said loudly, as he pulled their coats and hats from them. "Donaldson started the ball when he asked to bring his cousin down—Olive Fair—you fellows all knew her over in Paris, and Lord! she's as good a fellow as any man here. So I scurried up a few others of the right sort among the women, and we're having a time! Rush along, and keep the fire burning! Billy Burbank's in there too, Red Bill, with his hair in a braid! Just landed from Holland today—met him at the

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club, and haven't let go of his coat-sleeve yet!"

As Dimmick and Bunton entered the low studio they were almost felled by Billy Burbank's descent upon them, and in the medley which ensued Vynne Minard glanced casually about, while waiting for his chance to greet Burbank, whose red hair had indeed been allowed to grow to preposterous length during its owner's sojourn in the bohemian circles of Holland. At the farther end of the room he caught sight of Olive Fair, in the gorgeous red which she consistently affected and which became her so perfectly, with one red-slippered foot resting on a high ottoman, and her red-tipped cigarette held with consummate grace as she renewed a ten-year-old flirtation with Godfrey Sterans, a playwright of parts.

His cool eye ranged over the other men and women there. He caught a brief glimpse of Dolly Flower, with her black, black hair, and her red, red lips, cheekily slanging Doddy Streeter. He did not hear a word she was saying, but he smiled in spite of himself at the thought of what it must be. Laura Heyworth was there, dark and silent, almost glowering, yet a social power as potent as her painting. She was watching Fife Randall as he did a famous "stunt" of his, and Minard smiled again as he watched her moving lips, and imagined her acid comment. She openly loathed "stunters."

And then, suddenly, his eyes fell on a face apart, alone, and he uttered a low exclamation of sheer surprise. Even while Burbank, having released Dimmick and Bunton, was smiting him brutally on the back, and shaking him brutally by the hand, Minard still stared over Burbank's hair-swept shoulder at the face of the girl—the only feminine thing in the room who by any stretch of speech could be called a girl. All the others were women of the world. She was the pure Madonna type, oval-faced, luminous-eyed, with hair of shining gold. She wore a dress of dull blue crêpe and her hands were perfect.

"Who is she?" Minard found himself

asking vacuously of Burbank, as if Burbank, a wanderer just returned, could tell him. But Burbank answered promptly.

"Say, ain't she a type! Cousin of Oli Fair's—third or fourth or something—well, hang it, I never was good at dates and that! Come on over—sure, I know her—that's right, she does look sort of out of place in this gang—dandy old crowd though—tickled clear through to get back to it, old man!"

In another moment Minard dimly realized that Burbank had vanished from the immediate foreground leaving him alone with the girl whose name, as he seemed to recall it from the introduction, was Nana Wetherold. The girl's exquisite flush cast him into a swooningly sweet contemplation, which was rudely interrupted by a bit of Dolly Flower's irresistible, vulgar slanging, falling on his ears, his and this child's. He saw those blue eyes open wonderingly at Dolly, and their puzzled distress deepen as that young woman created shriek upon shriek of laughter with her bit of jugglery which intimately involved her ten fingers, four lighted cigarettes, and her cherry lips. That sort of thing was well enough, right enough, for those who understood life—and Dolly Flower! But what had Olive Fair meant, if this sweet child were indeed of her blood, by bringing her tonight to this feminized stag of Foster's! Olive understood life sufficiently well to know that there were some who did not understand, and with that knowledge she should have acted more wisely. Minard grew wrathful as he watched the slender girl. He glanced about the room, already dim with the smoke of slain cigars and cigarettes, and then he bent over her protectingly.

"There's a sort of cubby-hole out yonder that Foster calls his breakfast-room. It's liable to be free from this sort of thing." He waved his hand comprehensively about the studio. "You'll let me take you out there?"

Ah, the beauty of her, the grace of her, as she rose! Minard was prone to the critical attitude toward women as toward Woman. Of Woman he had

already, it will be recalled, an implacable opinion. Of Woman he was not a critic, but a wise philosopher or an opinionated wretch, according as a kindred spirit or women passed judgment. But when he viewed them as individuals he still weighed evidence for or against them, and the tally sheet "Pro" was pitifully bare when compared with its companion "Con." Too many failed to come up to his rigid young standards of grace and beauty, which were his vital points of judgment. In his mind women had no character, therefore why look for characteristics! He was an optimistic cynic, but a cynic notwithstanding.

But he was an esthete! He was delighted with the discovery that the blue of Foster's breakfast-room toned exquisitely with the blue of her soft falling crêpe gown; that a brass platter hanging just behind the couch she sat on made a heavenly nimbus for her head. With his tender courtesy he made her comfortable, and then he sat down beside her, and began to talk to her with that beautiful chivalry which all men of feeling bestow upon women who, through others' faults or their own ignorance, are placed in equivocal positions.

All of her life up to a few weeks preceding, he learned, she had spent in a small country town with an aunt and uncle, who, dying, left her entirely alone, with but an infinitesimally small income. By her uncle's wishes she had written the cold facts to her only living relative, Olive Fair, and while the girl was telling the sequence thereof, he leaned back and studied her more closely. He did not need to hear the sequence, for he knew, as all her world knew, Olive Fair's magnificent generosity, her splendid living-up to the doctrine of human brotherhood. Of course, to this small, terrified little stray, she offered the shelter of her home—and here, therefore, the child was, brimming with adoration for Olive, and full of wondering shyness over the glories of city life. But really, Minard reflected, Olive should have known much better than to bring such

a child to such a place, even though Olive herself were wild with eagerness to meet the old crowd again, having gone straight from her boat to that desolate country home, to bear back her little relative with her to this new life. But Olive should have made some other arrangement for this night.

Later that evening he told her so. That came after Billy Burbank had found him and Nana Wetherold out, and, by pure exercise of physical prowess, had borne the blushing child away from Minard for supper with him, a favor promised him, the girl murmured to Minard, from the evening's beginning. Minard watched the ill-assorted pair go off together—"Nymph and Satyr," he called them, with reckless insult to his good old friend, Billy Burbank. Billy was not handsome, and his figure was thick and clumsy, but the unpromising exterior concealed the warmest heart and merriest spirit which ever dwelt in man. Then, for want of Billy to score with scorn, he went to Olive Fair.

He found her just dismissing Godfrey Sterans, and he sank into Sterans's chair with a sigh of well-simulated content. So enchanting, indeed, was Miss Fair's personality, so alluring her aura, that for a moment Minard was tempted and fell. He forgot the sermon he had prepared for her, was conscious only that she was a most beautiful woman, in gorgeous bloom.

So for ten minutes he talked to her precisely as Sterans had talked to her—for he too, when a callow youth of eighteen, had had his delightful and instructive experience with Olive Fair, even then some several years his senior in point of finite time, and some several eons ahead of him in knowledge of men and women. It had been a tiny experience, and very delightful while it endured and when it ended, and he fell into the caressing note as readily as if he were still eighteen instead of twenty-eight.

And then he remembered, suddenly, Nana Wetherold.

"How could you have brought *her*

here, Olive!" he said with abrupt reproach. "That child!"

He looked again on the smoke-filled room; the men, one or two of them slightly exhilarated; Dolly Flower, sitting on a table, still slangily cheeking; Foster, uproariously gay; little Bunton, singing, in his mighty bass—an excruciatingly funny matter when one surveyed the small body from which it issued. Then he turned back to Olive Fair, scarlet-clad, seductive, who was gazing amusedly at him.

"Still the idealist!" she murmured. "Because this is good for her, and she wants it."

Minard frowned. Olive Fair had liked to call him the Idealist ten years back, and he had resented it then even more than he did now. Perhaps it had been the one definite thing which had started him on his still hunt after its antonym, the cynic's creed.

"It's not good for her," he said dogmatically. "For us who are older, who understand life, and know the real worth of all these people—well and good. But to a girl of your cousin's type, this must be shocking—do you think she could believe Dolly is a downright good sort, watching that!"

Olive Fair turned her dark eyes slowly upon the boon companion of her Paris days, who was dancing lightly as a flake of snow upon the table where only a moment before she had been sitting; then she looked back at Minard's earnest face, and smiled enigmatically.

"Everybody knows Dolly, of course," she said lightly.

Minard answered hotly. "That child doesn't. She was asking me only half an hour ago about all this—sort of thing! Dolly wouldn't ever do that stunt outside of this crowd, but can you possibly make a *child* understand how a thing can be relatively right! You can't. No one can. I gave up, and let Billy Burbank take her away from me. It was like explaining the ark and the whale to a wide-eyed baby fresh from its Sunday-school. At least, Olive, don't show her many places like this till I get the picture she's promised me—the darling!"

Olive Fair smiled brightly. "'Innocence'?" she queried.

Minard smiled back. "Really, I've been wanting her type for months, been trying to find it in town, fool that I am! I do owe you thanks for bringing her here tonight—otherwise I mightn't have seen her. Accidents like that do occur—I might never have seen her!"

"Ah, Vynne," Miss Fair murmured, "you couldn't have stayed away forever from my little place. And Nana is to be with me now until she is married—or something equally final happens."

"Until she is married!" repeated Minard. "My God! That child!"

"My dear Vynne, Nana is precisely twenty-two!" Olive Fair said meaningly.

"Not really!" remarked Mr. Minard. "Well, what matter, when her soul is the white one of a child? Ah, no, Olive, you need not smile—how could you have brought her here!"

"Because she wanted to come," replied her cousin, lightly still. "And because it is good for her. Here she is—and I shall take your words to heart and carry her off. Do come down some night soon, or shall I come up? If you have arranged to paint Nana, the time— Oh, tomorrow morning. Very well, then; at ten—is that right, Nana? Now come, Mr. Minard says the cigarette smoke is growing too thick, darling! Come."

Minard held the girl's cool hand, watching delightedly the color creep into her cheeks as his grasp tightened. "I'll never be able to thank you for sitting for me," he said.

"Mr. Burbank was just telling that you have just painted Lynette Gyles's portrait," she said softly. "Lynette Gyles! She is to marry the Duke of Chester! How can you want to paint me?"

Minard laughed. "I know you won't believe me when I tell you I'd rather paint you than a thousand Lynette Gyleses and dukes' fiancées. No, I knew you wouldn't believe me. Bring her tomorrow, Oli, please."

He took them to the door in Foster's stead, good old Foster, who grew happier and more happy as time fled by. No one save only Olive Fair perceived how short he cut the farewells to the guest of the evening and her cousin, how unobtrusively he hurried Donaldson into his coat and found his hat for him and thrust him after his two charges into their waiting cab. Minard dreaded the effect of the evening on Nana Wetherold. It was a far harder problem to set such atmosphere right for her than to explain the ark and Jonah's whale to the most orthodox child. Yet it was a good old crowd. He smiled dreamily as he went back to the jollity and the uproarious merry-making.

III

"I THINK she is perfectly beautiful!" sighed Nana Wetherold.

"She *is* beautiful!" amended Minard skilfully. He glanced up at the portrait at which the girl was staring, and then continued his own work with rather feverish haste.

For ten minutes, perhaps, there was silence in the studio. She had asked him some time before if she might step down from the throne to investigate some new pottery which he had added since her last sitting. Since then she had wandered about the room with a familiarity born of intimate acquaintance therewith, and paused at last before the portrait which hung still in Minard's studio, Lynette Gyles's portrait, three months finished. In all that intervening time, since his receiving of that telegraphic message, he had heard nothing of its disposal, one way or another. Its presence made him restless, and yet he could not write to ask her wishes, in the face of her silence—and in the face of what had gone before.

But in this intervening time he had met Nana Wetherold. Ever since that night at Foster's, she had been teaching him lessons he had not learned before of Woman and her Ways. She was the

first woman he had ever met whom he believed had Character—Minard capitalized it. She was twenty-two, on Olive Fair's word of honor, and a child, a serene, spiritual child! Several times every week of these three months she had come down to his studio, always with Olive, even though Olive left her to come home alone. She never showed by tone or flush the faintest consciousness of unchaperoned moments, and Minard gloried in her stirlessness, and in these weeks painted her madly, in every conceivable manner. She had become his only model. At least, he had let go several girls of varying charms while he devoted himself assiduously to the Madonna type, to "Lilies of Innocence," and "Blessed Damozels," and that ilk, for all of which mild mania she furnished the motif and the model. He never wearied of watching her; her cool, young, virginal calm and her faint, ever-ready flush charmed him beyond words. And many nights, after working with her all morning or afternoon, he would go down to Olive Fair's utterly charming little apartment and sit for hours, basking with the languorousness of a cat in the alluring atmosphere of the place. Olive was working hard that Winter, and was denying herself to all but a few old friends. Among these few she graciously counted Minard, with a half-smile curving her lips, an odd light in her deep eyes.

"I like to watch the process of experience," she said to him once.

He answered honestly. "I wish I could make you believe that there's not a trace of sentiment in this. I am past that sort of thing—an all absorbing passion, Oli."

"Oh, dearest Vynne," Olive replied, that odd light deepening. "I know so well there is no sentiment in this. Believe me. It is not sentiment. You will never be in love with Nana."

That reply had annoyed Minard, satisfactory and agreeing as it sounded. He was not in love with Nana, he knew that. But he was absorbed in her. She was twenty-two, and the days of her innocence were not yet past. He

did not believe they would ever slip from her; she was wonderful, wonderful. She had told him once that she had never loved, and he found himself wishing at the queerest moments that she might never know the mighty passion. Love was wonderful, but she, without it, was more wonderful. He liked to think of her always, as he was painting her now. The very thought of her was a potent inspiration. He had done an enormous quantity of work in these two months.

Her liquid voice fell through the silence which had held them ever since she had breathed her thought of Lynette Gyles's portrait.

"I wonder," she murmured, "if you will ever tell me one thing; why you said that first night you met me, that you would so much rather paint me than—her!"

Minard went across to where she stood before the portrait. "You wonder why I would rather paint you than Miss Gyles," he said. "Well then, look at it well, beautiful as she is. Perfectly beautiful there, perhaps—a bit of soul crept in—I am sorry it did, for it is not true, but I've never had the heart to take it out. Now come over here."

He took her over to the easel where he had been working.

"I've been doing this at odd times. You've never seen it before, I know. I didn't want you to see it until it was done—it isn't finished, quite. But the face is done, and the hands—they're what matter. You don't mind? I've given you the painting you liked best for your own; I wanted one for my own, which is *you*. Here it is, and I call you what I call it—'Mystic'!"

It was one of those indescribable "type" portraits, whose entire distinction lies in the treatment. Entire distinction Minard had achieved in it. It was a *rara avis* of portraiture, and it was a far cry from an idealized head, judging sternly from the girl who stood beside him. It was all fine, but the eyes were wonderful.

"The reason why I care more to

paint you than her lies here," said Minard. "In this: soul is more than body, than raiment. You are wonderful, dear child, wonderful!"

"I don't know what you mean," she said at last. "I'm not—wonderful." Her pauses were more expressive than other women's emphasis.

Minard laughed quite fatuously—for Minard. "You are wonderfully wonderful," he said, quite subtly for a young man who scoffed at the James school of intricate mentalities. "I never knew a woman could be like you, untouched of the world. I've been almost afraid for you, of this Winter in town, with—all of us. I've never got over the shocking incongruity of your face in Foster's studio that night, with Dolly Flower dancing on the table, and everybody smoking like chimneys, and Rossiter tanked—there, there, you didn't know about that then—I'm a brute!"

She looked at him wonderingly. "I had a lovely time that night," she said simply. "You took me away from all of that, quite away, and we talked a long while together."

For the life of him Minard could not control a flattered thrill. She knew enough now at least to know that he had rescued her from the rank atmosphere of Foster's feminized stag and its contaminations. How wonderfully she had said "you"!

"And then," he continued—he did not realize how much he talked, and how perfectly she listened, "you have such simple directness of moral vision. The rest of us weigh moral values, and puzzle over relative right and wrong—and you move straight ahead in a straight line. You would never believe how often your straight seeing has dragged me out of my circles, since I've known you. And all this, which shows irresistibly in your face, makes you a worthy subject for the highest art—which she is not!" Minard was guilty of a distinctly derogatory gesture toward the portrait of Lynette Gyles to his right.

"She—not!" Nana Wetherold's eyes opened wider as she gazed, first

at the painting, then at the painter. "But why!"

"Because," said Minard harshly, "I like to paint soul, when I can find it. I like to see the glint of trailing clouds about a woman's face, and I never find it. And that girl, when she marries that titled brute this coming Summer, will be giving herself in open sale in the open market, to the highest bidder, regardless of the sort of man he is——"

"But is the duke so very bad?" murmured the girl.

"He is so bad," said Minard, "that I could never make you understand a thousandth part of his badness and I should never try to make you understand a millionth part of it——"

They both turned toward the door as it opened unceremoniously, to admit Olive Fair. Minard laughed as he saw her frowning face.

"Not out of the dumps yet?" he cried. "You went out of here a thunder-cloud this morning, and you return blacker than ever."

"I've been seeing lawyers," she returned shortly. "Yes, Nana, everything is finally settled. Come. There are a thousand things to do this afternoon."

"Do get cheerful before tonight," said Minard. "I'm coming down."

"Are you indeed!" said Miss Fair shortly. She glanced at her cousin, and that slender girl moved forward, and laid a snowflake of a hand on Minard's arm.

"Please not tonight!" she said. "I've promised Olive to go with her to a stupid party. Tomorrow night—or—" She paused uncertainly.

"Come tomorrow night at nine, Vynne," said Olive quickly. "Not a moment before, but any time after, you'll be as welcome as the flowers in May."

A brief, somewhat stormy smile lighted her face. She looked beyond him to his "Mystic," which stood out strong on its canvas, and she went over to it.

"This is 'Innocence' at last?" she queried.

Minard laughed. "It's more—it's 'Mystic'!" he said proudly. "Aren't the eyes great, Oli—and the hands! I've been trying to tell her this morning why I like her better as a subject than that yonder."

"She is to marry the Duke of Chester!" murmured Nana.

Minard nodded at Olive. "The story horrified her," he said briefly. Miss Fair stared for a second, and then managed a comprehending nod.

"Naturally!" she remarked. "Come, Nana. Not a moment before nine, Vynne," she added over her shoulder, "but as immediately after as you can come. Do excuse me until then from discussion of your 'Mystic.'"

IV

THE clock on the corner drug-store pointed to one minute before nine o'clock when Minard, the next evening, rounded the corner and turned down Olive Fair's street. He grinned at his promptness, remembering how definitely she had set the time the day before. He found himself wondering for the first time what evening affair had called them out the night previous. Either from Olive or Nana he knew most of their engagements—but he had known nothing of this one.

Near Olive's number the street lamp shed a strong light, and at a distance of one hundred feet he saw a carriage standing before Olive's apartment house, and observed two figures emerging from the entrance. Just as the woman's figure was lost in the black interior of the carriage, Minard felt his legs propel him forward at a curiously increased gait. He had recognized Nana Wetherold. This was strange—who was the man!

Minard saw him clearly, as he turned up his face, in the full glare of street and carriage lights, to give the cabman an order. Minard had never seen him before. He was old, and very fat, and very wrinkled. His chin was accordion-pleated, and the third heavy crease was adorned

with an enormous mole. Minard observed all this in the few seconds which it took to give the order. Then, just as the young man reached the carriage step, the door slammed to, and the horses struck into a smart trot.

As Minard went up to Olive's apartment he carried with him the most vivid mental picture of his life, of a florid, massive, large-pored nose projecting in gigantic fashion from between two small, pig-like eyes overshadowed with beetling white brows, the whole overhanging the three heavy red chins and the enormous mole. Olive opened the door for him, and he went directly into the matter, being intensely interested.

"I saw Nana going out this evening," he said, drawing off his gloves. "Who was the fat proposition with her, Oli? The gross beast!"

He stared helplessly at his hostess as she replied.

"Her husband!" he repeated stupidly.

"Married tonight!" he said a bit later.

"Everything about settlements arranged yesterday—according to her mandates!" he ejaculated weakly, still later.

"Sit down, Vynne, here," said Olive kindly, at this juncture. "That's right. Now don't try to talk. Just listen—it's very simple, I assure you."

Minard allowed her to designate his chair and to slip a pillow behind his whirling head. Then he listened rigorously, with a truant mind which every now and then would slip its leash and go straying off into the oddest byways and pasturings. There was quite a good deal about a love affair previous to all this—Minard wondered wearily why women could never stick to the subject in hand. Later he perceived that this previous love affair of Nana's had much to do with the last one, for the young lover had shot himself through the head in his despair over the victory which old Bradson of Chicago, up for Fall shooting, had achieved with

his millions. Minard found himself stupidly repeating the figures: fifty millions—fifty millions!

Then he listened to Olive's cool dissection of her cousin, which, for directness of method, sureness of touch and revolting facts could not be surpassed in any medical clinic the world over. Nana, it appeared by her cousin's word of mouth, was a heartless, grasping, soulless creature, greedy for luxury, a hypocrite, an all but degenerate, whom Olive had taken under her protection until her marriage with old Bradson could be arranged for, there having been a hitch over the amount of prenuptial settlements in which Nana had been victor.

He listened silently, hearing every word, yet carrying on a distinct train of thought. He was remembering how very little, in their hours together, the girl had said, of herself or of anything. At first he could not believe Olive; later he could not disbelieve. At last he lost all sense of her words, conscious only of two mental concepts set side by side: old Bradson's gross face and his own "Mystic."

He laughed at last, interrupting Olive, still engaged in her passionless dissection of Nana Wetherold. She seemed to be speaking of the girl's utter sweetness of bearing the night before, when she met old Bradson for the first time in weeks—having refused to see him until her settlements were to her liking—and Minard remembered the little party Nana was to have attended with Olive. That was the immediate cause for his laughter. But other causes rose swiftly, and he bubbled with irrepressible mirth. That he should be so befuddled, after all, by this moon-eyed girl, with all his vaunted knowledge of her sex, all his understanding of their total lack of principle and character, of morals and of souls! Since his brain had been swept with his great flood of understanding of them, she was the only one who had been able to make him believe for a time in their ability to develop souls—and she was merely a soulless thing like them

all. He had honestly begun to think that what he called his philosophic cynicism was about to slip from him in the face of her spiritual graces. He had always said that he was large-souled enough to do full justice to the Perfect Woman when he met her—he had begun to fancy weird things in these last few weeks. And therefore, with this night's revelations and the memory of his "Mystic" waiting for him at home, he laughed and laughed.

"To a rag and a bone and a hank of hair!" he said at last—it had been a long, long time since he had resurrected that famous old rhyme. "Well, Olive, you've called me an idealist often and often, but you have called me that for the last time, honestly. Never, never," protested young Minard warmly, "shall I feel again that capacity for seeing the good in any woman, and shutting my eyes to the bad and the indifferent. If a man prepared for the worst can be so deceived, where is the woman who can be trusted!"

He found himself in the street not long afterward, walking rapidly. Fifty millions—that was in truth a price at which to go—enough to sell oneself to the devil—the trend of his reflections was, in very truth, of the rankest order of cynicism, and there is no need to follow it further.

When he reached his rooms he let himself into his studio. As he dropped into a chair, after turning up the lights, and casting his hat and coat to one side, he saw a creamy envelope lying on his table, which had evidently come in the late mail, and which he had not noticed before his hurried departure. With his rather unlovely sneer still on his face he picked it up, and caught his breath at sight of the postmark: "Palm Beach, Florida"! And the handwriting—Lynette Gyles had written him several delightfully cordial notes in the long ago.

He tore open the note with the same jerky feeling at his heart which he endured whenever he looked upon that portrait unexpectedly, and he read it over twice, once rapidly, once very slowly, each time, however, in the same

mental daze. In it Mr. Minard was requested, briefly, to destroy the writer's portrait forthwith, and to do her, at the same time, the favor of accepting her father's cheque for his work thereon, his acceptance thereof being Gyles père's conditional sanction of his daughter's mad whim. The letter ended briefly:

My father's second condition, that I explain to you, at least, adequately my mad whim, is unnecessary, since there is no need of explanation between you and me. We went over the ground too thoroughly at my last sitting. You made the portrait forever detestable to me—I do not wish to look on it ever again. And yet I find myself grateful, not to your motives, for they were not as high as you think them, but to the chance which flung us into that brutal moment.

Minard laid the letter down at last, upon the evening paper spread out upon the table. A heavy headline caught his eye: "Duke of Chester Jilted. Miss Gyles Announces Broken Troth."

The story followed, padded, sensational, conjectural, surmising. Minard read it standing. A life of the Honorable Duke was appended, preceded by all his honors and titles. After all, the man had a statesman's record; it would mean something to be the duchess of such a man. Brute and libertine that he might be, he had brains, ability, greatness which was genuine and self-earned, not merely the ancestral shadow. It meant something to throw such a man over—by so much did Minard feel he sensed the truth of the matter—a man to whom the Gyles wealth was but a drop, a man who Lynette Gyles had a right to feel desired her honorably, who was not marrying her for her settlements, but for herself.

Young Minard stood frowning beside the table, thinking many things. He sat down at last, still frowning, still reflecting with some earnestness and some discrimination. At midnight he drew a sheet of paper toward him, and wrote a few hurried lines, in which he

besought Miss Gyles to forgive him the liberty he was taking of sending the portrait direct to her city home. He confessed to the "dabbling" he had done after that stormy talk, and the wherefore, and he begged her to look at least once upon the result, and spare him untold humiliation by that small mercy—after that it would be hers to keep or to destroy. He added a line of heart confession which should have eased his soul but did not, and added to that a beggar's plea for one chance to tell her his realization of his brutal sinning. Then he signed his name.

He went outside his door and dropped it into the mail chute. When he came back he shut the door and barred it. The light from his table fell upon his "Mystic," the paint of whose background was not yet dry. But young Minard passed it without a flicker of expression on his face, and drew out Lynette Gyles's portrait. He did not look long upon the girl who looked deeply back on him, and he shivered when he turned away, although the room was oppressively warm. He went back to the table, and stared down at the flagrantly black headlines of the Chester story. At last he put out his hand toward the lamp.

"A fool there was!" remarked young Minard, as the flame swiftly died, and left him in darkness, and it is a noteworthy fact that in all the history of his quoting of "The Vampire," this was the time of all times on or off record when he uttered those four pregnant words out of context. A deed which is misleading always, and in this case especially so, since Mr. Kipling was speaking primarily of The Lady in Any Case, the "fool" being an all but unimportant accessory. But young Mr. Minard uttered his short quotation with decision and authority, quite as if, at last, after his eight years of ardent study, he had seen a great white light shining full upon the ringing keynote of a masterpiece.

UN NOUVEAU JEU

LES deux mains dans les poches, un cigare à large bague dans le coin de la bouche, le chapeau sur l'oreille, le gilet de smoking barré d'une épaisse chaîne d'or, il regardait d'un œil amusé les joueurs de baccara, se levant parfois sur la pointe des pieds pour mieux voir les cartes. Il demeurait ainsi jusqu'à la fin de la partie, sans jamais risquer un jeton de cent sous, sans avoir même une seule fois l'ébauche du geste de prendre de l'argent dans son gousset.

À la mer, autour d'une table de jeu, surtout, on se lie vite; je lui dis un soir:

— Vraiment, vous m'étonnez. Je vous observe depuis plusieurs jours et j'en arrive à penser que vous êtes peut-être le seul homme que le jeu ne tente absolument pas...

Il hocha la tête et me dit:

— Vous vous trompez...

Et, comme je paraissais surpris, il ajouta:

— Seulement, je ne joue qu'à coup sûr.

Il m'avait dit cela tranquillement, sans baisser le ton, et je pensai:

— Voici un cynique drôle, un écumeur de casinos qui doit être rudement sûr de son procédé pour avoir l'audace d'en parler avec ce sang-froid.

Il devina sans doute ma pensée, car il se mit à rire.

— Non, je ne suis pas ce que vous croyez. Je ne place pas de portées sur mon paquet de cartes... Je joue — à ma façon.

— Et quelle est-elle?

— Vous allez le comprendre de suite. D'abord il ne s'agit ni de dés ni de cartes, ni de trente-et-quarante, ni de roulette.

— Un jeu nouveau, alors ?

— Absolument nouveau, en effet. Écoutez-moi bien. Ce jeu-là se nomme, ou plutôt, je le nomme le jeu des cent-chevaux.

Je pensai, cette fois: J'ai sûrement affaire à un fou. Mais, décidément, cet homme avait le don de la seconde vue, car il lut ma réflexion aussi aisément qu'il avait déchiffré la première, et ajouta:

— Je ne suis pas fou. Rassurez-vous. Je suis un modeste inventeur. Tout au plus si j'ai un grain de génie. Je reprends. Mon jeu des cent-chevaux se joue généralement à deux. Il peut se jouer à plus, mais le nombre des participants ne change rien ni à sa théorie, ni à sa pratique. Il n'exige ni un long apprentissage, ni de grands efforts de réflexion. Dans quelques instants, vous serez à même d'y jouer aussi bien que votre serviteur.

Pour commencer la partie, il faut et il suffit d'une petite entrée en jeu de quinze ou vingt mille francs. Moins, parfois, mais ce chiffre peut être nécessaire, et il faut savoir, dans ces sortes d'affaires, ne pas y regarder à quelques centaines de louis.

Il lisait la surprise que son étrange discours causait en moi et, pour aiguillonner davantage ma curiosité, ouvrit une nouvelle parenthèse:

Notez bien qu'il ne s'agit pas ici de doubler sa mise, ce qui est une pitoyable opération. Je travaille sur de gros chiffres et ne m'arrête pas aux petites martingales qui causent plus de soucis que de profits.

— Mais, lui dis-je, je ne vois toujours pas...

— Ne vous impatientez pas. J'y suis. Suivez-moi bien. J'arrive par exemple ici, à Houlgate. La plage est jolie, les baigneurs élégants, les prome-