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# SIGISMUND

by Wyndham Lewis

SIGISMUND'S bulldog was called Pym. He believed implicitly in his pedigree. And every one understood that the names of famous dogs to be found on Pym's family tree constituted a genealogical crop which did great credit to him and his master. This lifted Pym for Sigismund into the favoured world of race. He staggered and snorted everywhere in the company of Sigismund, with a look that implied his intention to make the most of being a bulldog, and a contemptuous curl of his chop for the world in which that appeared to signify so much.

Now Pym was really rather peak-headed. Far from being 'well broken up,' his head was almost stopless. His nostrils were perpendicular, the lay back of the head unorthodox: he would have been unable to hold anything for more than twenty seconds, as his nose would have flattened against it as well as his muzzle, his breathing automatically corked up by his prey. His lips were pendent, but his flews were not: his tusks were near together, and like eyes too closely set, gave an air of meanness. The jaws as well were level: in short he was both 'downfaced' and 'froggy' to an unheard-of degree. As to his ears, sometimes he had the appearance of being button-eared, sometimes tulip-eared: he was defective in dewlap, his brisket was shallow, he had a pendulous belly and a thick waist.

As to the back, far from being a good 'cut-up,' he had a very bad 'cut-up' indeed. He had *no* 'cut-up.' He was 'swamp-backed' and 'ring-tailed.' He also possessed a disgusting power of lifting his tail up and wagging it about above the level of his disgraceful stern, anomalously high up on which it was placed. His pasterns were too long, his toes seemed glued together: his stifles were wedge-shaped, and turned in towards the body. His coat was wiry, of the most questionable black and tan.

He was certainly the ugliest, wickedest, most objectionable bulldog that ever trod the soil of Britain. In the street he conducted himself like the most scurvy [hoodlum](#) ever issued from a nameless kennel. But he was a *bulldog*. His forebears had done romantic things. They had fixed their teeth in the noses of bulls. Sigismund was very proud of him. He insisted that the blood of Rosa flowed in his veins. All Sigismund's friends thumped and fingered him, saying what a splendid dog he was. To see Sigismund going down the road with Pym, you would say, from the dashing shamble of his gait, that he was bound for the Old Conduit Fields, or the Westminster Pit.

This partnership continued very uneventfully for several years, to Sigismund's perfect satisfaction. Then a heavy cantrip, of the most feudal ingredients, was cast upon Sigismund. He became deeply enamoured of a deep-chested lady. He pursued her tirelessly with his rather trite addresses. She had the slightest stagger, reminiscent of Pym. She was massive and mute. And when Sigismund mechanically slapped her on the back one day, she had a hollow reverberation such as Pym's swollen body would emit. Her eyes flickered ever so little. Sigismund the next moment was overcome with confusion at what he had done: especially as her pedigree was like Pym's, and he had the deepest admiration for race. A minute or two later she coughed. And he could not for the life of him decide whether the cough was admonitory—possibly the death-knell of his suit—or whether it was the result of his premature caress.

The next day, grasping the stems of a bushel of new flowers inside a bladder of pink paper, he called. A note accompanied them:

DEAR MISS LIBYON-BOSSELWOOD,—There are three flowers in this bouquet which express, by their contrite odour, the sentiments of dismay which I experience in remembering the hapless slap which I delivered upon your gorgeous back yesterday afternoon. Can you ever forgive me for this good-for-nothing action?—Your despondent admirer.

SIGISMUND.

But when they next met she did not refer to the note. As she rose to her thunderous stature to go over to the vase where the bushel of flowers he had brought was standing, and turned on him her enormous and outraged back, Sigismund started. For there, through a diaphanous *négligé*, he saw a blood-red hand upon her skin. His hand! And in a moment he realized that she had painted it to betray her sentiments, which otherwise would have remained, perhaps for ever, hidden. So he sprang up and grasped her hand, saying:

'Deborah!'

She fell into his arms to signify that she would willingly become his bride. In a precarious crouch he propped her for a moment, then they both subsided on to the floor, she with her eyes closed, rendered doubly heavy by all the emotion with which she was charged. Pym, true to type, 'the bulldog' at once, noticing this contretemps, and imagining that his master was being maltreated by this person whom he had disliked from the first, flew to the rescue. He fixed his teeth in her eighteenth-century bottom. She was removed, bleeding, in a titanic faint. Sigismund fled once more in dismay.

The next day he called unaccompanied by Pym. He was admitted to Deborah's chamber. She lay on her stomach. Her swollen bottom rose in the middle of the bed. But a flat disc of face lay sideways on the pillow, a reproachful eye slumbering where her ear would usually be.

He flung himself down on the elastic nap of the carpet and rolled about in an ecstasy of dismay. She just lisped hoarsely: 'Sigismund!' and all was well between them.

But she stipulated that Pym should be eliminated from their nuptial arrangements. So he sold Pym and wedded Deborah.

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On returning from the church—husband, at length, of the Honourable Deborah Libyon-Bosselwood—Sigismund's first action was to rub a little sandal-wood oil into both her palms. As she had stood beside him at the altar, her heavy hand in his, he had wondered what lay concealed in this prize-package he was grasping. As the gold ring ploughed into the tawny fat of her finger, descending with difficulty toward the Mount of the Sun, he asked himself if this painful adjustment contained an augury. Appropriately for the golden mount, however, the full-bellied ring, of very unusual circumference, settled down on this characteristic Bosselwood paw as though determined to preside favourably over that portion of the hand.

Having oiled her palms, much to her surprise, he flew with Deborah to a steaming basin, drew out a sheet of dental wax, and planted her hand firmly on it. But, alas, the Libyon hairiness had invaded even the usually bald area of the inside of the hand. And when Sigismund tried to pull her hand off the wax, Deborah screamed. She had not at all understood or relished his proceedings up to this point. And now that, adhering by these few superfluous hairs to the inadequately heated wax, she felt convinced of the malevolence of his designs, she gave him such a harsh buffet with her free hand that he fell at full length at her feet, a sound shaken out of him that was half surprise and half apology. He soon recovered, rushed to fetch a pair of scissors, and snipped her hand free of the wax cast. His bride scowled at him, but the next moment bit his ear and attempted to nestle, to show that he was forgiven.

'Deborah! Will you ever *really* forgive me?' He gasped in despair, covering her injured hand with kisses and a little blood, the result of her impulsive blow. The great Bosselwood motto 'Never Forgive' made him shake in every limb as he thought of it. How *uncanny* to be united to such a formidable offshoot of such an implacable race!

'Say you *can* forgive!'

But she only murmured in sulphurous Latin the words 'Nunquam ignoscete.'

For she read his heart and remembered the motto (with some difficulty). She always read his heart, but could not always remember the heraldic and other data required properly to prostrate him. On these occasions, she would confine herself to smiling enigmatically. This redoubled his terror. She in due course observed this, too. After that she did nothing but grin at him the whole time.

But now came the moment that must be considered as the virtual consummation of Sigismund's vows. The ordinary brutal proclivities of man were absent in the case of Sigismund. The monstrous charms of the by-now lisping and blushing Deborah he was not entirely unaffected by: but the innermost crypt of this cathedral of a body Sigismund sought in a quite public place. The imminence of her brown breasts was hidden to him. They were almost as remote as the furniture of the Milky Way. Enormous mounts, he saw them as (but of less significance than) those diminutive ones of Saturn or the Sun at the base of her fingers. The real secrets of this highly-pedigreed body lay at the extremities of her limbs. The Mount of Venus, for him, was to be sought on the base of the thumb, and nowhere else. The certain interest he felt for her person, heavy with the very substance of Race, that made it like a palpitating relic, was due really to the element of reference

that lay in every form of which it was composed, to the clear indications of destiny that enlivened to such an incredible degree the leathery cutis of her palm. Her jawbone, the jutting of her thighs, the abstract tracts of her heavily-embossed back, meant so many mitigations or confirmations of the Via Lasciva or her very 'open' line of head. Surely the venustal pulp of her thumb, the shape of a leg of mutton, had a more erotic significance than any vulgarer desiderata of the bust or belly? The desmoid bed of her great lines of Race, each 'island' a poem in itself, adapted for the intellectual picnicking he preferred, was a more suitable area for the discreet appearance of such sex-aims as those of Sigismund.

So, still bleeding slightly from the feudal buffet he had lately encountered, he seized her hand, and slowly forced it round with the air of a brutal ravisher, until it lay palm uppermost. The pudeur and mystery of these primitive tracings sent a thrill down his spine. It had been almost a point of honour with him not to ravish the secrets of her hand until now. 'Silent upon a peak in Darien' was nothing to the awe and enthusiasm with which he peeped over the ridge of her palm as it gradually revolved.

But now occurred one of the most substantial shocks of Sigismund's career. Deborah's palm was almost *without* lines of any sort. Where he had expected to find every foray of a feudal past marked in some way or another, every intrigue with its zig-zag, every romantic crime owning its little line, there was nothing but a dumbfounding, dead, distressing *blank*. Sigismund was staggered. The Palmer Arch, it is true, had its accompanying furrow, rather yellow (from which he could trace the action of Deborah's bile) but clear. The Mars line reinforced it. Great health: pints of blood: larders full of ox-like resistance to disease. It was the health sheet of a bullock, not the flamboyant history of a lady descended from armoured pirates.

All the mounts swelled up in a humdrum way. But from the Mount of the Sun to the first bracelet, and from the Mount of Venus to Mars Mental, it was, O alas, for his purposes, an empty hand! Her life had never been disturbed by the slightest emotional spasm: the spasms of her ancestors were seemingly obliterated from the recording skin. Nature had made an enigma of her hide! The life-line flowed on and on. He followed it broodingly to the wrist. It actually seemed to continue up the arm. Sigismund turned in dismay from this complacent bulletin of unchequered health.

He set to work, however, on the sparse indications that his noble bride was able to provide. He made the little insular convolutions of the line of heart spell simply 'Sigismund.' Kisses followed: coquettish and minute kisses attempted to land on each island in turn. Deborah glared in surly amusement.

A sinister stump where the head-line should have been disturbed him. It had a frayed ending. (More uneasiness.) Although in quantity this hand possessed few marks, those that were there were calculated to electrify any cheiromancer. It was a penny-shocker of a hand.

But most disquieting of all was a peculiar little island that mated a similar offensive little irregularity in his own hand. He had never seen it on the hand of any other being. And it was backed up by a faint but very horrible Star. This star furthermore was situated in the midst of Jupiter. But, worse still, a cross on another part of the hand completely unnerved him. He paced twice from one end of the room to the other. He was so abstracted that it was with a new anxiety and amazement that he found in a minute or two, that Deborah had disappeared.

He rushed all over the house. At last he came upon her in the dining-room, finishing a stiff whisky-and-soda. A rather cross squint was levelled at him across the whisky. Five minutes later she again vanished. Fresh alarmed pursuit. This time he discovered her in their bedroom, as naked as your hand (though he would never have used this expression, having an intense delicacy about everything relating to the hand), in bed, and trumpeting in a loud, dogmatic, and indecent way. The palliase purred, and the bed creaked beneath her baronial weight. The eiderdown rose and fell with a servile gentleness. Her face was calm and forbidding. It was the dreamless, terrible sleep of the Hand he had just fled from. Yes. It was the Hand sleeping! He was united for better or for worse with this empty, sinisterly-starred, well-fed, snoring Hand.

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Their honeymoon was uneventful. Sigismund went about with an ephemeris of the year of Deborah's birth, with Tables of Eclipses. He had the moon's radical elongation, and the twenty-two synods that represented his wife's life up to date. The mundane ingress of planets, their less effectual zodiacal ingress, had all been considered in their bearing on the destinies of Deborah and himself. But as on her hand, so in the heavens, the planets and Houses appeared to behave in a

peculiarly non-committal, dull and vacant manner. The Spheres appeared to have slowed down their dance, and got in to some sort of clodhopping rustic meander, to celebrate the arrival of his wife upon the earth. But still the sinister star placed where her forefinger plunged into the palm perplexed him.

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Back in London, he took her about as he had formerly taken Pym. He explained her pedigree. He pointed to her nose, which was heavy and flat, and told his friends that underneath was the pure Roman curve of the Bosselwoods. Also he detected a blue glint in her eye. That was the blue of the Viking! The Bosselwoods, it was gathered, were huge, snake-headed, bull-horned, armour-plated Norse buccaneers. She would give him a terrifying leer when this transpired. It was her only histrionic effort. Her feet, on the other hand, were purely Libyon. If his friend could only see their jolly little well-oiled knuckles! A world of race slumbered in her footwear.

'Race is so poetic, don't you agree?' he would say.

All agreed with Sigismund that race was the most romantic thing imaginable, and that it lent a new interest not only to the human skeleton, but also to the smallest piece of fat or gristle. There were three friends especially of Sigismund's who felt things very much as he did. The four of them would sit around Deborah and gaze at her as connoisseurs in race. They all agreed that they had never met with quite so much race in anybody—so much of it, so exquisitely proportioned, or carried about with so much modesty.

'Deborah is amazing!' Sigismund would lisp. 'Her blood is the bluest in the land. But it might be green, she is so natural.'

'She is natural!' Fireacres said, with the emphasis proper to his years.

'Her language is sometimes—he! he—as blue, I promise you, as her blood!'

They all shuffled and a break of merriment went on cannoning for about a minute. It ended in a sharp crack crack from Gribble-Smith. She scowled at them with a look of heavy mischief. She felt like a red, or perhaps blue, ball, among several very restless white ones. She liked laughter about as little as a Blackfoot brave of romantic fiction. Her tongue appeared to be dallying, for a moment, with the most mediaeval malediction. They hushed themselves rapidly and looked frightened.

'You should have heard her today. A taxi-driver—he! he!—you should have seen the fellow stare! He wilted. He seemed to forget that he had ever known how to say "Dash it!"'

Deborah plucked at her chin, and spat out the seeds of her last plate of jam.

'How extremes meet!' said a newcomer.

A great insolence was noticeable in this man's carriage. He swung himself about like a famous espada. But when he tossed his locks off his brow, you saw that his bull-ring must be an intellectual one, where he would no doubt dispose of the most savage ideas. He was followed about by the eyes of the little group. Sigismund whispered to Deborah, 'He's a Mars Mental man.' An uninitiated person would probably, after being plunged for a little in this atmosphere, have thought of the Mars Mental man as possessed of phenomenally large muscular mental mounts, whatever they might be. The slender elevation on the side of his palm opposite to the thumb affected these simple people in the same way as athletic potentialities affect the schoolboy. In fingering his hand, as they sometimes did, it was with visible awe, and an eye fixed on the negative mount in question, as though they expected it to develop an eruption.

Deborah scratched her off leg. All were ravished. The Bosselwoods had no doubt always been great Scratchers: 'mighty scratchers before the Lord' Sigismund's mind proceeded.

Deborah bent her intelligence painfully for a moment on the riddle of this company. Could a stranger have glanced into her mind, the scene would have struck him as at once arid and comic. Sigismund's friends would have appeared as a group of monoliths in a frigid moonlight, or clowns tumbling in sacks in an empty and dark circus. Her mind would be seen to construct only rudimentary and quasi-human shapes: but details of a photographic precision arbitrarily occurring: bits of faces, shoes, moustaches and arms, large hands, palm outward, scarred with red lines of life, head and heart, all upside down. Stamped on one of these quasi-human shapes the stranger would have read 'Socialist' in red block letters.

This was:

'Tom Fireacres. Awfully good family you know. Fire-acres. Pronounced Furrakers. Jolly old bird. He is a queer fellow. A Socialist——' He would shake his head of rather long political hair from time to time over his young friend's aristocratic excess. But there was a light of kindly mansuetude that never left his eye.

The next of these dismal shapes would be a suit of clothes, not unlike Deborah's brother's: but a palpably insignificant social thing, something inside it, like its spirit jerking about, and very afraid of her. The form its fear seemed to take was that of an incessant barking, just like a dog, with the same misunderstanding of human nature. For it seemed to bark because it thought she liked it. This was:—

'Reddie Gribble-Smith. Been in the Army—Senior Captain. Awful nice feller.' This particular cliché propelled itself through life by means of a sort of Army-laugh.

One of these shapes was rather disreputable. To our hypothetic observer it would have looked like abstract Woman, Sex and its proper Tongue, in a Rowlandson print. The reason for this would be that when she looked at Jones—'Jones: Geoffrey Jones. Charming fellow. He was up at Oxford with me. Very psychic. He's got a lot in him'—she always saw in his place a woman on whose toe she had once stepped in Sloane Square. Abuse had followed. The voice had been like an advertisement. Sounds came up from its sex machinery that were at once réclame and aggression. She felt she had trodden on the machinery of sex, and it had shouted in some customary 'walk-up!' voice, 'Clumsy cat! Hulking bitch! Sauce!' Whatever Jones said reached her, through this medium, as abuse. She did nothing: but she threw knives at him sometimes with her eyes.

Sigismund appeared to know dense masses of such men. As far as she could she avoided encounters. But there seemed no escape. So they all lived together in a sort of middle-class dream. Therein she played some rôle of onerous enchantment, on account of her beautiful extraction. They smoked bad tobacco, used funny words, their discourse was of their destiny, that none of them could have any but the slenderest reasons for wishing to examine. They very often appeared angry, and habitually used a chevaleresque jargon: ill-bred, under-bred, well-bred; fellow, cad, boor, churl, gentleman; good form, bad form, were words that came out of them on hot little breaths of disdain, reprobation, or respect. Had she heard some absent figure referred to as a 'swineherd,' a 'varlet,' or 'vilain,' she would not have felt surprised in any way. It would have seemed quite natural. You would have to go to Cervantes and his self-invested knight for anything resembling the infatuation of Sigismund and his usual companions.

In more bilious moments Deborah framed the difficult question in the stately mill of her mind, taking a week to grind out one such statement: *What is all this game about, and what are these people that play it?* Deborah could not decide. She abandoned these questions as they dropped, one by one.

Her noble attributes assumed in her mind fantastic proportions. Everything about herself, her family, her name, became unreal. One day she pinched Lord Victor Libyon-Bosselwood to see if he was a figment of Sigismund's brain or a reality. She caused him, by this unprovoked action, so much pain and surprise, that he shouted loudly. Sigismund was in ecstasy. Obviously the war-cry of the Bosselwoods, the old piratic yell! But Sigismund could not leave it at that. Possibly Lord Victor was the last Bosselwood who would ever utter that particular sound. He hesitated for some time. Then one day when Lord Victor was deeply unconscious of his peril, Sigismund led him up to the bell-shaped funnel of a gramophone recorder. He approached it jauntily, flower in buttonhole, haw-hawing as he went. As his face was a few inches off the recording mouth, Sigismund ran a large pin into his eminent relative's leg. The mask *à la* Spy vanished in a flash. And sure enough from a past, but a past much further back than that of the successful pirate, another man darted like a djinn into Lord Victor's body. This wraith contracted the rather flaccid skin of Lord Victor's face, distended its nostrils, stuck a demoniacal glint in each of Lord Victor's eyes, and finally curled the skin quickly back from his teeth, and opened his mouth to its fullest extent. Not the romantic battle-cry of the operatic pirate, but a hyena-like yelp, smote the expectant ears of the Boswell-like figure behind him: and the machine had recorded it for all time. But the next moment first the machine and then Sigismund crashed to the floor, as it took about thirty seconds for the pain to ebb and the djinn to take his departure. This period was spent by the ferocious nobleman in kicking the gramophone-box about the floor, then turning upon the ingenious Sigismund, whom he kicked viciously about the head and body. Even when no longer possessed of this dark spirit that had entered along with Sigismund's pin, he still continued to address our hero in

a disparaging way.

'Necromancing nincompoop: what does that signify—to run a pin into a man's leg, and then stand grinning at him like a Cheshire cat? Half-witted, flat-faced, palm-tickling imbecile, you will get yourself locked up if you go round sticking pins into people's legs, and telling them to beware of gravel, that they have spatulate hands, and will be robbed by blonde ladies!'

The doors of Lord Victor's dwelling were in future guarded against Sigismund. He found it difficult to satisfy Deborah when she heard of his doings.

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They spent a month at Bosselwood Chase.

The first book that Sigismund picked up in the library enthralled him. It seemed to betray such an intelligent interest in Race. He read, for instance, aloud to Deborah the following passage:

These luckily-born people have a delicious curve of the neck, not found in other kinds of men, produced by their habit of always gazing *back* to the spot from which they started. Indeed they are trained to fix their eyes on the Past. It is untrue, even, to say that they are unprogressive: for they desire to progress backwards more acutely than people mostly desire to progress forwards. And when you say that they hold effort in abhorrence, more inclined to take things easily, that also is not true: for it requires just as much effort to go in one direction as in the other.

The thoroughfares of life are sprinkled with these backward gazing heads, and bodies like twisted tendrils. It is the curve of grace, and challenges nobly the uncouth uprightness of efficiency.

That class of men that in recent years coined the word 'Futurist' to describe their kind, tried to look forward, instead. This is absurd. Firstly, it is not practical: and, secondly, it is not beautiful. This heresy met with bitter opposition, curiously enough, from those possessing the tendril-sweep. Unnecessary bitterness! For there are so many more people looking *back*, than there are looking forward, and in any case there is something so vulgar in looking in front of you, the way your head grows, that of course they never had much success. Here and there they have caused a little trouble. But the people have such right feelings *fundamentally* on these subjects. They realize how very uncomfortable it must be to hold yourself straight up like a poker. Through so many ages they have developed the habit of not looking where they are going. So it is all right. It is only those whom the attitude of grace has rendered a little feeble who are at all concerned at the antics of the devotee of this other method of progressing.

The training of these fortunate people—ancient houses, receding lines of pictures, trophies, books, careful crystallization of memories and forms, quiet parks, large and massive dwellings—all is calculated to make life grow backward instead of forward, naturally, from birth. This is just as pleasant, and in some ways easier. The dead are much nicer companions, because they have learnt not to expect too much of existence, and have a lot of nice habits that only demise makes possible. Far less cunning, only to take one instance, is required to be dead than to live. They respect no one, again, for they know, what is universally recognized, that no one is truly great and good until he is dead: and about the dead, of course, they have no illusions. In spite of this they are not arrogant, as you might expect.

'I think that is divinely well put, don't you agree, darling?' asked Sigismund closing the book. Deborah looked straight at him with genuine hatred: with the look of a dog offered food about which he feels there is some catch.

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Some months later, settled in the midst of a very great establishment, Sigismund's fancy found a new avenue of satisfaction. He resolved to make a collection of pictures. His newly-awakened sensibility where pictures were concerned was the servant of his ruling passion, and admirably single-minded. His collection must be such as a nobleman would wish to possess. And again in this fresh activity his instinct was wonderfully right.

But Deborah grew blacker day by day. The dumb animal from the sacred Past felt by now that there was something exceedingly queer about her husband. The fabulous sums of money that Sigismund got through in the prosecution of his new fad awoke at last her predatory instincts. Solid bullion and bank balances was what she had wedded: not a crowd of fantastic and rather disturbing scenes. She secretly consulted with Lord Victor.

However, Sigismund proceeded to fill the house with pictures, engravings, drawings and pieces of sculpture. They all had some bearing on the Past. Many were historical pieces. They showed you Henry VIII., the king of the playing card, divorcing Catherine. He appeared, in the picture, to be trying to blow her away. They disclosed the barons after their celebrated operation at Runnymede, thundering off with the Charter: or William the Conqueror tripping up as he landed. There were pictures celebrating Harry Page's doings, 'Arripay': episodes on the Spanish main. There was an early lord earning his book-rights with an excellent ferocity: and a picture of a lonely geneat on his way to the manor with his lenten tribute of one lamb.

A rather special line depicted a runaway labourer being branded upon the forehead with a hot iron, at the time of the

Labour Statutes of the fourteenth century: and sailors being bastinadoed after unusually violent mutinies. Stock and thumbscrew scenes. There was a picture of a Kentish churchyard, John Ball preaching to a rough crowd. As Sigismund gazed at this terrible picture, he experienced perhaps his richest thrill.

When Adam delved and Eve span  
Who was then the gentleman?

He could see these unhallowed words coming out of the monk's lips and the crowd capering to them.

He had the six English regiments at Minden, mechanical red and accoutred waves, disposing of the French cavalry: and Hawke in Quiberon Bay, pointing with a grand remote pugnacity to the French flagship: the old ceremonious ships, caught in a rather stormy pathos of the painter's, who had half attempted, by his colouring and arrangement, to find the formula for an event very remote in time from the day of the artist depicting it.

Charles II. dying—('do not let poor Nelly starve')—Sigismund's model of how to die: 'forgive me, Deborah, for protracting this insignificant scene.' He was not sure about 'insignificant' and sometimes substituted 'tedious.' The word 'unconscionable,' he felt, was the prerogative of dying princes.

The masked executor holding up the head of Charles I., whose face, in the picture, although severed from the body, still wore a look of great dignity and indifference to the little trick that had been played upon it by the London Magnificos. ('Eikon Basilike' drew as many tears from Sigismund's susceptible lids as it did from many honest burgesses at the time of its publication.)

Mary Queen of Scots over and over again: Fotheringay: many perfect deaths: the Duke of Cumberland holding the candle for the surgeon amputating his leg.

Gildas, Kemble's 'Saxons in England,' the life of Wilfrid, by Eddi, were three of his favourite books. And pictures dealing with this period he concentrated in a room, which he called the 'Saxon' room. In these pieces were seen:

The Crowning of Cedric.

Guthlac of Crowland vomiting at the sight of a bear.

The Marriage of Ethelbert with Bertha, daughter of King Charibert.

The Merchants telling Gregory that the angelic slaves came from 'Deira.'

Constantine on the chalk cliffs, Minster below, knees jutting out, for the first time, in a bluff english breeze; and Ethelbert, polite, elevated, but postponing his conversion with regal procrastination, or possibly leisureliness.

Eumer's dagger reaching Edwine through Lilla's body.

Coifi, the priest, at Godmanham, making his unexpected attack on an obsolete temple.

Aidan with a bag of hairy converts in the wilds of Bernicia.

Penda looking at the snowy fist blessed by Aidan after he had defeated the Northumbrians.

Alfred singing psalms and turning cakes, and Caedmon writing verses in his stable.

These were only a few of the many scenes that Sigismund roamed amongst: standing in front of them (when he could prevail on her to come with him) with his arm round Deborah's waist.

The pictures that Deborah hated most were those most economically noxious. These were pictures by masters contemporary with the Past. Van Dyck was his great favourite, at once a knight, a Belgian, and a painter. He reflected with uncertainty, 'a foreign title, obviously!' Contemporary painters who were at the same time knights, or even lords, he thought less of, it may be mentioned in passing: though he never grudged them, on account of their good fortune, the extra money he had to pay for their pictures.



His instinct manifested itself more subtly, though, in his choice of modern works. Burne-Jones was perhaps his favourite artist not belonging, except in spirit, to the wonderful Past. He recognized the tendril or twist he had read about in the book found at Bosselwood. Also the unquestionable proclivity to occupy himself with very famous knights and queens struck Sigismund as a thing very much in his favour. But our hero was an incomparable touchstone. His psychic qualities had their part in this. You could have taken him up to a work of art, watched his behaviour, and placed the most entire confidence in the infallibility of his taste in deciding as to the really noble qualities, or the reverse, of the artist. The Man in the Savage State propensity always met with a response. And you would not be surprised, if going further along the gallery with Sigismund, you came upon a work by the same painter of a very tender description, showing you some lady conceived on a plane of rhetorical spirituality. The Animal and the Noble, you would know, are not so far apart: and the savage or sentimental and the impulses to high-falute very contiguous.

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Suffocated by this avalanche of pictorial art, Deborah had been constantly sending up S.O.S.'s, and Lord Victor had hurried to her assistance, unknown to Sigismund. This very 'natural' female splinter from a remote eruption grew more violent every day. The more animal she grew the better pleased was Sigismund. One day when as usual he strolled round his galleries, he was only able to examine his acquisitions with one eye, the other having been 'poached' overnight by his wife.

Then one day the end came with a truly savage unexpectedness.

Sigismund lay along the wall, nails in his mouth, on a pair of library steps. He was filling up the last space in his room of Prints with an engraving showing Ben White running his Bulldog Tumbler and Lady Sandwich's Bess at the head of Bill Gibbons' Bull. He was startled a little at the sound of a distant hurly-burly, and a bellow that something told him must be Deborah. Shrieks then rose, it seemed of dismay. Then a very deep silence ensued.

Sigismund scratched his head, and blinked discontentedly. But as the silence remained so dead as to be in the full technical sense a dead silence, he stepped down to the floor, and went out into the vast passages and saloons of his establishment, looking for the cause of this mortuary hush.

Deborah was nowhere to be found. But a group of servants at the foot of the main staircase were gathered round her prostrate maid. He was informed that this young lady was dead, having been flung from the top of the stairs with great force by his wife. A doctor had been telephoned for: the police were to be notified.

Sigismund was enraptured. He dissimulated his feelings as best he could. There was indeed a Bosselwood for you! ('The police' meant nothing to him. He never read Oppenheim.) He stood with a sweet absorption gazing at the inanimate form of the maid. He was brought to a consciousness of his surroundings by a tap on his shoulder. A strange man, two strange men, had in some way insinuated themselves amongst his retainers. The first man whispered in his ear: he was evidently under the impression that Sigismund was the author of this tragedy. He modestly disclaimed all connexion with it. But the man smiled, and he could not be sure, but he thought *winked* at him.

What was this fellow murmuring? If he had annihilated his entire domestic staff, he seemed to be saying, with a chuckle, it would have been all the same! Privilege, something about privilege: 'last little fling,' ha! ha! 'Fling' referred, he supposed, to the act of 'flinging' the maid. He held strange views, this newcomer! He was drawing Sigismund aside. He wanted to have a word with him apart. He was rather a nice sort of man, for he seemed to take quite a different sort of view of the accident from the servants. Where was he going? He wanted to show Sigismund something outside. Sell him a car? At a moment like this? No, he could not buy any more cars: and he must see Deborah at once. What was this strange fellow doing? He had actually pushed him inside the car.

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Lord Victor had plotted with Deborah for some weeks past. But he had not counted on the Bosselwood fierceness manifesting itself almost simultaneously with the Libyon cunning. A few minutes after Sigismund had been driven off to an asylum, Deborah was also removed to a jail. After a trial that Sigismund would have keenly enjoyed (many a feudal flower in the gallery; the court redolent of the Past, and thundering to the great name of Libyon-Bosselwood), she also found her way to an asylum.

On thinking matters over in his new but very comfortable quarters, Sigismund concluded that that was what the two

islands meant: and that that was also the signification of the star upon Jupiter.



## TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

The following change was made to the original text:

Page 256: hoodlam → [hoodlum](#)

Other than the addition of an opening bracket, minor variations in spelling and punctuation have been preserved.

[End of *Sigismund*, by Wyndham Lewis]