

CRISTINA

AND

I

Arthur Stringer

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BY ARTHUR STRINGER



THE DOOR OF DREAD
THE MAN WHO COULDN'T SLEEP
THE HOUSE OF INTRIGUE
TWIN TALES
THE PRAIRIE WIFE
THE PRAIRIE MOTHER
THE PRAIRIE CHILD
THE WIRE TAPPERS
PHANTOM WIRES
THE GUN RUNNER
THE DIAMOND THIEVES
LONELY O'MALLEY
EMPTY HANDS
POWER
IN BAD WITH SINBAD
WHITE HANDS
THE WOLF WOMAN
A WOMAN AT DUSK
THE WOMAN WHO COULDN'T
DIE



Cristina and I

By
Arthur Stringer

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I
DEDICATE THIS BOOK TO
THE WOMEN WHO HAVE DISAGREED WITH ME,
KNOWING THEY WILL CONTINUE
TO DO SO

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CRISTINA AND I

CHAPTER I THE LADY ARRIVES

“Is it bad news?” I asked, observing both the frown that furrowed my wife’s brow and the smoke that curled up from the electric toaster.

But Margaret, instead of answering that question, asked one of her own.

“What’s a hoosgow?”

“It’s a vulgarism, I believe, for the county jail. And I hope no friend of ours is in one.”

“It’s Cristina,” said the abstracted-eyed Margaret as she put an orchid-tinted note down beside the toast-rack. “She’s coming to stay with us.”

I sat speechless, digesting both buttered toast and a sense of shock.

“Isn’t that rather like letting a puma loose in a lamb’s pen?” I finally inquired.

“She’s been having trouble at home,” averred Margaret as she quietly refilled my coffee-cup.

“But why bring her troubles to us?” was my natural enough query.

“Mother’s worried,” proclaimed Margaret, “about the way Cristina’s been carrying on since she broke off with Roddie Jones. And she won’t go abroad. And she won’t do what she’s told. And father says that if she wants to keep out of the hoosgow she’d better run her traffic-cops down in another county.”

This also had to be digested.

“Cristina’s a bright girl,” I conceded. “But I can’t see how one of those self-opinionated Amazons who smash up their underslung cars and other people’s overstrung nerves is going to add much to the peace of this once happy household.”

“I thought you liked Cristina?”

“I do. I also like shower-baths. But I don’t care to be under one all the time.”

“Cristina,” ventured her more sober-minded sister, “needn’t interfere with you in work-hours.”

“But she will. She always did. Why the devil can’t she take a studio in the Village and go Russian?”

“She may broaden us,” suggested my soliloquizing better half.

“The tinkling Cristina,” I scoffed, “in the rôle of a missionary steam-roller!”

“She might be steadied by contact with a strong character,” asserted her quiet-eyed sister.

“Does that mean me?” I demanded, trying in vain to ignore the writing on the wall.

“Of course,” answered Margaret as she turned off the toaster. “And she’ll come anyway. She always seems to do about what she wants to.”

“That,” I protested, “is exactly what I’ve been trying to tell you. She’ll argue with me, and be a bad example to the children, and smoke cigarettes at the breakfast-table, and——”

“You seem to forget, darling,” interrupted my wife, “that Cristina is a woman of twenty-five.”

“But still trying to act like twenty,” I amended.

“You used to say that you liked talking with Cristina,” Margaret reminded me. “You said you found her stimulating.”

“But I’ve a book to finish up before the first of October. And I’d much prefer that she stayed home and stimulated her own family.”

“Isn’t that a bit ungracious?” asked Margaret as she passed me the marmalade. “And it would be better, of course, if she doesn’t see Roddie for a while.”

“But you said she’d broken with Roddie,” I interposed.

“She has, for the time being. But Roddie’s the right sort, and Cristina knows it.”

“And she intends to marry him?”

“Of course.”

“Has she told you that?”

“She hasn’t needed to,” was the quiet-toned answer.

Women, I had to admit, were a trifle beyond me. They seemed as elliptical in their mental processes as a leaping frog. Even Margaret’s mind, I’d found, was amazingly like the Grand Central Station: it had two levels for its different trains of thought. She might not be as loquacious as Cristina, but she had a way of reaching her own ends that was no discredit to the matriarchs of other days.

“And if you’ll meet Cristina on the ten twenty-five,” suggested Margaret as she gathered up her mail, “it’ll give me a chance to get the Blue Room ready. And tell Williams, of course, she must have a place somewhere in the garage for her car.”

I looked after my spouse, wondering why women were so erroneously known as the fair sex. Then I went off in search of Williams, who was busy with the dahliabeds and in no mood for dredging and buoying any second channel through the silt of discarded furniture that so menacingly flowed into my stuccoed garage and made the mere housing of an automobile a matter of high adventure. So, rather than lose a good man in a poor cause, I took off my coat and set to work clearing a space for Cristina’s car. Then, having been twice warned from an upper window that my time

was short, I washed off the dust, donned my coat, backed out Margaret's asthmatic sedan and went to meet Cristina.

She looked very lovely as she emerged from her chair-car and stood in the flat sunlight of our open suburban platform. She stood surrounded by a disturbing number of bags and boxes, over which I cast a needlessly harried eye, dreading as I did the discovery of a dog-crate in the cortège. But the only animal there was Cristina herself. And she seemed very much alive, even if the little squeal of happiness with which she greeted me was an empty and factitious affair. She flung herself into my arms with a nestling movement, however, that seemed new to her. And before I could decide on just how avuncular should be my response to that embrace, she lifted up her face and shook me a little.

"Well, aren't you going to?" she demanded.

"Going to what?" I countered, remembering how barbaric it was for modern young women to surround their persons with aphrodisiac odors obviously distilled from different exotic flower-essences.

"Kiss me," answered the cool-eyed Cristina.

We were, after all, about the same as sister and brother. And I'd already been warned about a lack of graciousness in my make-up. And the poor girl, I remembered, had been having rather a hard time of it. I'd even expected to find her unexpectedly meek and quiet, a trifle like a blue-ribbon setter with its spirit broken by a long trip in an express-car.

Yet Cristina's spirit wasn't as crushed as it might have been. For when she kissed me, or, to be more chivalric, when I kissed her, she held me down with a hungry little gesture that made me wonder if she wasn't more alone in the world than she pretended. The fact that my old friend Smithers, the station-agent, and Slim, the express-man, and Patrolman Peter Sprung, were impartial yet interested witnesses of that encounter did not add to my happiness.

"You're a darling!" murmured Cristina, hugging my arm. "And you'll have to be awfully careful with that wicker box for it's got three bottles of dad's old stuff in it. And those rose dishes that mother's always been going to give to Margaret."

It wasn't until the laborious task of storing Cristina's hand-luggage in the sedan-back had been completed that my starry-eyed sister-in-law again directed her attention to me.

"Your collar's soiled, old dear," she said as she essayed to brush unseen maculations from my apparel. Her hand on my arm even made it a little harder to drive. But I fought down the pagan impulse to inform her that any dirt on my collar came there through cleaning up a garage-end for her own private and personal use.

One has to tread lightly, after all, where the sensibilities of starry-eyed women are concerned.

“Are you glad to see me?” Cristina asked out of the silence that had fallen between us.

“Of course,” I answered as I threaded a devious way through the mid-town traffic.

“And I’m going to make you gladder,” murmured my seat-mate as she leaned contentedly against me. In the next thirty yards, however, I had succeeded in straightening out the car again.

“How?” I belatedly demanded.

“I’m coming to help you with your work,” was Cristina’s unexpected announcement.

“How’ll you do that?” I somewhat dazedly inquired.

“You’re getting brackish, darling,” explained Cristina. “You need stirring up a bit.”

“And how’ll you stir me up?” I demanded in a natural enough tone of resentment.

Cristina studied me with a disapproving eye.

“I hate to see you getting old-fogyish,” she had the effrontery to proclaim.

“And how’ll you stop it?” I inquired.

I could see the two little laughter-lines, the drawn-bow lines that parenthesized Cristina’s red and softly curved lips, deepen into a smile.

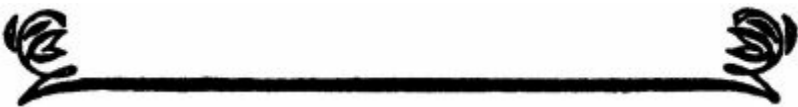
“I think I’ll make you fall in love with me,” she quietly announced.

“Cristina,” I slowly and solemnly asserted, “all you stand for to me is a shooting pain.”

She turned, at that, and studied me from under thoughtful brows.

“Wait until I get through with you,” she said with an enigmatic little laugh.

“You’ll never even begin,” I promptly assured her. And then I added, apropos of nothing in particular: “Trader Horn says all African cannibals, outside their appetite for long pig, are both moral and chaste.”





CHAPTER II

A QUESTION OF CHIVALRY



Cristina came into our home circle like a trumpeter-swan into a fowl-run. She came with her seven trunks and her clattering tongue and her unpredictable moods and her golf bags and her sapphire-studded lighter and her piratical sports car and her tendency to shed things in all parts of the house and her disregard of my work-hours and her blandly solemn way of accepting herself as something in answer to prayer.

She came with her five-ounce frocks and her unexpected flashes of emotionality and her devastating candor and her childlike combativeness and her equally childlike craving for affection and her eternal lip-sticks and compacts and pocket-mirrors and her imperial American demand for due homage to her carefully perpetuated artlessness. Yet Cristina, it must be remembered, was no longer a fledgling. There were, in fact, authentic family records to show that she would never see twenty-five again. And more than once I'd brought a flash of indignation to her limpid eyes by calling her an old maid. Not that there was anything austere and spinster-like about Cristina. Her darkest trouble, as I diagnosed it, was not that she hated Man but that she had liked altogether too many men. She had been unable to see the forest for the trees, for those sturdy oaks that stand so thick about any appealingly dependent vine. She had, I'm afraid, enjoyed life so much that she'd forgotten how to live. But now that she was settling on me like a buffalo-bird on a grazing bison I concluded that I'd take a hand in the molding of Cristina's character. I'd let in a little light there, no matter what it cost. And I'd see to it, eventually, that she married young Roddie Jones, who was a likable sort of chap and in many ways too good for her.

I didn't, of course, impart any of this to Cristina. She would only have laughed at me, and there is nothing more devastating than the scorn of a beautiful woman. I even suspect, in fact, that my fair sister-in-law had formed certain secret resolutions as to my own reformation. For it wasn't long before the educative influence of her company began to assert itself.

I was behind a barricade of reference-books, toilsomely approaching the end of my eleventh chapter, when Cristina invaded my work-room. That room was supposed to be a private one, a sactum sanctorum of silent toil, impervious to all such distractions as dogs and children and women. But Cristina, of course, never bothered her head much about things like that.

"How do you like my new hat?" she asked as she blew in like a breath of spring and thrust my volume of Eddington to one side.

“Your what?” I inquired with that quarantining abstraction which served to hold most intruders at bay.

“My hat,” said the quite unimpressed Cristina.

I turned and inspected the hat, the hat adorning the head so provocatively cocked on one side. And it impressed me as amazingly like an inverted coal-scuttle erupting with Brazilian orchids.

So when Cristina repeated her question I told the truth. I told her that, speaking as a mere man, I thought it was terrible.

I could see her face cloud up for a moment. But her air became judicial again as she crossed the room to sit on the end of my work-table.

“You don’t think much about hats, do you?” she said as she watched me pick up the books that had fallen to the floor.

“On the contrary,” I retorted, “I’ve given a great deal of thought to hats, and especially women’s hats. And my impersonal study of such things has persuaded me that woman must be abysmally unsatisfied with her head. She’s always changing it and redecorating it. She’s always roofing herself with new colors, line-combinations and——”

“Combinations?” cut in Cristina. “Aren’t you getting a little mixed in your geography?”

“I’m speaking of hats,” I resumed, “and why women wear them. They certainly don’t wear them for warmth. And they no longer wear them for protection. All they stand for, as far as I can see, is extravagant ornamentation.”

“Isn’t that enough?” asked Cristina.

“It’s certainly enough,” I answered, “to exemplify woman’s innate histrionism, her insistence on continuous masquerade. And even when she gets a hat that impresses her as sufficiently decorative she never keeps it. She merely uses it to feed her frustrated soul with fictitious and factitious novelty. For the next month, whether she needs it or not, she springs a new monstrosity on you. In other words, she tires herself out trying to be fresh.”

Cristina’s smile was a cryptic one. “Men will never know how women love hats!”

“It’s more important,” I contended, “to know *why* you love them. And why your affection for them is so unstable. For what woman ever wore a hat for five years? Yet why not? You’ll wear a ring for five years. And a ring’s no more ornamental than that felt contraption frescoed with artificial flowers.”

“Then you don’t like it?” asked Cristina as she studied herself in a pocket-mirror.

“Assuming you asked me an honest question,” I told her, “I tried to give you an honest answer.”

Cristina essayed a little moue of disdain.

“You might have lied like a gentleman,” she protested as she reached for one of my cigarettes. And a trace of the wounded-gazelle look remained on her face as she once more took up her little mirror and reinspected the orchidian coal-scuttle.

“But should a gentleman lie?” I demanded, backing a little away from her smoke.

“He would, I think, if he had any chivalry left,” was Cristina’s retort.

“Just what,” I countered, “do you mean by chivalry?”

A faint spark of contempt seemed to flutter like a firefly in the meshes of Cristina’s meditative smile.

“Can any one who pretends to be a scholar say he’s never heard of the Golden Age of Chivalry?” she asked as she casually dropped her ashes on the carefully sorted pages of my eleventh chapter.

“Yes, Cristina, I’ve heard of that Golden Age,” I acknowledged with more acerbity than I’d intended, “and the more I’ve investigated it the more I’m persuaded it wasn’t quite so golden as modern women and the makers of our historical romances imagine. Those medieval knights mouthed a great deal about ‘God and the Ladies,’ and essayed frantic exhibitions of personal daring, but it rather startles the patient investigator to find how frequently their ladies were degraded by personal violence, how these same chivalrous warriors retained and exercised the legal right of wife-beating, and how their false code of honor, arbitrarily accentuating two or three virtues at the cost of many others, was restricted to only women of rank, and as such was a selfish and self-defeating class enterprise.”

“You sound exactly like an encyclopedia,” complained the cloudy-eyed Cristina. “And the Golden Age may have had its faults. But there’s a knightly code that must have begun away back before Mr. Cervantes made fun of it. It’s something that doesn’t change. Every woman loves and honors it in a man. And every woman expects it.”

“And why does she?” I demanded, rescuing my book-manuscript from its newer ashtray avocation.

“Because men are stronger than women,” retorted Cristina, after a moment’s thought. “And it kind of evens things up and lets the world go on when the strong are willing to give a fighting-chance to the weak.”

There was more sagacity in this than I looked for from Cristina. But I resented the way in which she was at the moment dropping her cigarette-ashes into my ink-well.

“Yes,” I reminded the fair Cristina, “I remember how, when the militant suffragettes were pouring acid in the mail-boxes, they complained about the London bobbies not treating them like ladies. And I remember how we used to abstain from smoking, after dinner, until the frailer sex had retired to the drawing-room, and how, in Europe, we never sat on a sofa when a female remained within our line of vision and never even mentioned legs when a petticoat was about. But you seem to be changing, my dear. And that, in turn, seems to threaten a corresponding change in man’s chivalrous attitude toward women.”

“We don’t change, old dear, we only pretend to,” said the girl, carelessly crumpling my papers as she crossed her knees. And, consistently enough, I thought of Edward III and the Countess of Salisbury’s garter.

“But you go into business and shoulder men out of jobs,” I ventured. “And you go on juries and hang men for murder. You earn your own bread and butter and vote for Volstead Amendments and carry your own latch-key and roll your stockings and have your own clubs and go in for athletics and smoke cigarettes and bathe in one-piece suits and even use swear-words and make arrests and frame platforms. And in spite of all this, you still insist on certain special privileges for your sex. You demand and enjoy that chivalrous indulgence which may be appropriately designated as the deferential differential of the male.”

“One doesn’t seem to get much of it around here,” complained Cristina, retreating from my table-end to the Windsor chair.

“But isn’t that a compliment to you?” I argued. “Wasn’t there always a tacit acknowledgement of mental inferiority as well as physical weakness in the extension of that old-fashioned chivalry to women? Wouldn’t you rather have honest, man-to-man candor and do away with that old blight of artificial gallantry, of deceit embowered in condescensions? Isn’t it about time to scrap those foolish old gestures? For instance, why in the name of common sense should a man take off his hat when a woman steps into an elevator with him?”

Instead of answering that final question of mine, Cristina asked me one of her own.

“Then why is it, when a steamer like the *Titanic* goes down in mid-ocean, men still stand back from the life-boats and say ‘Women and children first’?”

“That’s a hard nut to crack, Cristina, for heroism, of course is something more than racial custom. But it can’t be pure sex-chivalry, otherwise there’d be no girl babies thrown into the Ganges, and the Blonde Eskimos wouldn’t smother all their daughters but one.”

“Perhaps those things are done for business reasons,” suggested the nimble-

minded Cristina.

“They are,” I promptly agreed. “Economic pressure undoubtedly prompts the partial elimination of the female, along the Ganges and the barbaric Arctic, and the woman-first slogan goes glimmering. And it was economic causes that contributed so greatly to the decay of romantic or medieval chivalry, just as they seem to be escorting twentieth-century sex-gallantry out of meeting. We spoke of elevators, but I notice, for example, that down in the business section of the city, it is no longer customary for men to stand bareheaded in an office-lift when a woman happens to be in it. And you no longer apologize for smoking on a bus or in a taxi when you see the newfangled lady beside you already opening her cigarette-case. And I know more than one business woman who declines to accept a subway seat when it is proffered to her by an equally tired business man.”

“But I’ll bet you a box of chocolates,” maintained Cristina, “she still likes that tribute to her sex!”

“But why should she demand it,” I required, “granting that it is a tribute?”

“She doesn’t demand it,” contended my tranquil-eyed opponent. “But she’s mighty grateful when she gets it.”

“You mean it’s a sop to her vanity, a personal and concrete vindication of her time-worn sex-charm, arguing she has still sufficient physical appeal to elicit some sacrificial effort from the enemy?”

“It’s much more than that, my dear,” said the girl with the Mona-Lisa smile. “Women don’t like over-mannered fops any more than men do. But life, you see, isn’t always easy for us. It’s considerably harder sometimes than you Solemn Thinkers dream. But we’ve found a couple of things that seem to make it easier for women. One is tact, which you can call a sense of the timely if you like, and the other is taste, which I suppose is more a sense of the appropriate. And chivalry, real chivalry, is in some way mixed up with these two things. I find it hard to explain just what I feel, for women don’t torture their minds in this matter as men do. They mostly leave it to instinct. But perhaps I can make it clearer by saying that chivalry is a sort of roof over the heads of our emotions. It shields our sensibilities—or perhaps I ought to say our personalities. Our personalities, you see, simply can’t run around the world naked, any more than our bodies can. We have to have protection there. So we put on ghostly clothes and build up invisible houses to stand between us and the forces of the world that keep assailing us.”

“But,” I essayed after thinking this over, “when undue attention is directed toward that protecting fabric, and when the shielding mansions become over-ornate, can’t you imagine an endless series of fantastic courtesies corrupting into what the

Freudians might term narcissism?”

Cristina shrugged a slender shoulder as she looked about for the matches.

“Don’t hold us women responsible for those diseases with the big names,” she somewhat wearily parried. “Men, it seems to me, have always been as extravagant that way as women. I’ve forgotten about all the history I ever knew, but wasn’t it at the siege of Pontoise that the English and French stopped fighting to exchange ballades?”

“It was,” I reluctantly acknowledged. “But while we’re on that particular subject, young lady, I’d like to remind you that in the Crécy campaign the astute Edward managed to save his army by keeping the King of France so muddled in the intricacies of chivalrous deportment that when all the grand gestures were over the French sovereign woke up and found the battle lost.”

“Am I to infer from that,” demanded Cristina, “that women are in danger of losing the battle of life, because men are still half-way decent to them?”

“The half-way movements,” I said with dignity, “were not under discussion. We were mentioning, I believe, the extremes of chivalric activity. And such extremes, once they are divorced from common sense, can become more than ridiculous, as, for example, appears to have been the case in Poland where, when Augustus the Strong got drunk it was the pleasant custom for all his loyal subjects to become and remain as intoxicated as their king.”

“It sounds very silly,” averred Cristina. “And it wasn’t, of course, the right sort of politeness.”

That prompted me to ask Cristina a question. “How do you perspire?” I inquired.

Cristina’s mouth, as she stared at me with a slowly hardening eye, wasn’t exactly a rosebud.

“You know,” she finally observed, “you used to be a man of considerable delicacy.”

“And what am I now?”

“You’re being vulgar,” said the lady who painted her face in public but shaved her armpits in private.

“No, Aspasia the Second, I’m not,” I pointed out. “I’m merely trying to show you how relative all this politeness business is. For that’s the way, remember, the polite-minded Egyptian used to say, ‘How do you do?’”

Cristina’s lips curled a little.

“Well, we seem to have grown past that personal interest in one another’s pores,” she said as she applied an astringent powder to her own. “We’ve hammered

down the harem walls, remember, and made man respect us for what we can *do* and not for what we *are*.”

“If you’ve done that,” I contended, “it’s only fair to assume that you’re ready to face the corollary of this particular proposition. I mean that if women continue to advance in sports and athletics as they are now doing, the captain of some future *Titanic*, on seeing his ship going down—or perhaps I ought to say on seeing *her* ship going down—will sternly announce the newer-fangled order: ‘Men and children first!’”

Cristina showed her impatience by uncrossing her legs and getting up from her chair.

“I don’t think it’s chivalrous to joke about a serious thing like that,” she announced. “Men want the race to continue, and it continues through women. You men are really serving your own selfish and social ends when you’re chivalrous to women at a time women most need chivalry, just as a farmer has to be patient with a setting hen. You’ve found, old dear, that it pays.”

“But can’t we hope for a day when men are so honest and aboveboard with women that——”

“Not in as crazily built a world as men have made it,” interrupted Cristina. “You see, if the Elizabethans had made better roads their Queen Bess would never have needed to miss the mud by walking over Sir Walter’s cloak. And men like making those little sacrifices.”

“But I’ve noticed,” I contended, “that the head of a firm doesn’t pop up out of his swivel-chair every time his stenographer comes into the office.”

“Of course not,” agreed the smiling Cristina, “any more than his lunch-club waitress swoons when he gives her a half-dollar tip.”

“You mean,” I triumphantly inferred, “that men and women really do permit chivalry to go to sleep during business hours?”

“I mean,” corrected Cristina, “that under different conditions men are chivalrous in a different way and in a different area. Instead of writing a sonnet to his lady’s eyebrow, the young cavalier of to-day probably takes her out and buys her a banana-float.”

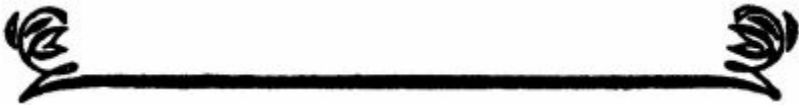
“Which she enjoys more as a gracious gesture than as a mere comestible?” I ungraciously interrogated.

“But think of the fun,” countered the elliptical Cristina as she stood up and shook down her skirts, “you old hypocrites get out of being nice to a nice girl!”

“Yes, my dear,” I retorted as I turned to rearrange my papers. “And if you weren’t an exceptionally good-looking woman you’d have been kicked out of this

room thirty minutes ago!”

Then, remembering myself, I got up solemnly from my chair. “Good morning,” I said, bowing as low as my obesity would allow.



CHAPTER III

ON THE VANITY OF MAN

I nursed the delusion that I was taking Cristina in to town. But I realized, long before we landed at the Ritz for luncheon, that it was Cristina who had taken me under her wing. I felt, in fact, considerably like a liner being maneuvered about by a busy little harbor-tug. And Cristina, I noticed, knew nooks and corners of the great city that had altogether escaped me. She found a silk-shop on a side-street where you could buy cobwebby and apricot-colored unmentionables for a trifle less than twelve dollars an ounce; she found a shoe-shop up on Madison Avenue that sedulously concealed every trace of its footwear and looked more like a drawing-room of the Second Empire than an emporium of trade; she found a cellar dispenser of bijoutry who sold amber and jade at a forty per cent. discount, and she found a piously respectable speak-easy where you could get an Orange Blossom that left no regrets and the lining on your boiler-pipes.

And Cristina, I also discovered, was better known than I imagined. She even made me feel a bit of a mossback as she was waved at, from time to time, from passing cars, as she was nodded to by women in the store-aisles and bowed to by presentable youths about the telephone-booths which she found it essential to visit on an average of at least once every half-hour. She even knew the Ritz waiter by his first name, and cold-bloodedly practised her French on him, and had a somewhat disappointing portion of broccoli changed for asparagus tips, and made a brave but not too prolonged effort, since it was *her* day, to impound and pay the check which the sad-eyed philosopher in black had placed midway between us.

Then, having tamped out her third cigarette, applied the war-paint where it would do the most good, and adjusted a Czechoslovakian scarf which the balminess of the air precluded from being reckoned as a preserver of calories, she led me forth to the multi-colored pageantry of Fifth Avenue, where our course was blocked by a line of marching potentates in blue and gold pinnies.

They went by proudly, keeping time to the thumping of drums and the braying of brass. But Cristina studied them with an unsympathetic eye.

"Men," she finally asserted with the devastating candor of beauty and the airy intolerance of youth, "are a pack of peacocks." And there was a look of scorn in her eyes as she continued to watch that Avenue parade of a certain Benevolent Order in full regalia.

"It's not often we break out this way," I pallidly contended as the brass band and the plumed resplendent marchers in blue and gold and purple passed up the

street. "But I suppose women hate to see us stealing their thunder."

"*Our* thunder?" cried Cristina, stabbing me with an indignant side-glance as we went on our way again. "Why, men have reveled in this sort of thing from the time they found something showier than the fig-leaves of Palestine. They were made the strutting sex and they've strutted in everything from a Roman toga to a frock coat, from a Sioux war-bonnet to a Crusader's helmet, from an Assyrian coronation-robe to a modern college-graduate's gown. And it always gives me a rather tired feeling when men talk about the vanity of women."

"Then you regard men as more vain than women?" I inquired of the decorative Cristina, who looked especially attractive that afternoon in a frock of pansy-colored chiffon festooned with the Czecho-Slovakian scarf that made me think of a double rainbow put through a clothes-wringer.

"Don't you?" countered Cristina, stopping to glance at a turquoise necklace in a shop-window.

"That might not be easy to answer until we agreed on just what we mean by vanity," I ventured. "How would you define it?"

"I'd say that vanity," asserted Cristina with an abstracted glance at her half-profile in the shop-window, "is being pettily over-proud of yourself and your appearance, of what you own or of what you do. It's self-love. And most men are so full of it they'd float off like a dirigible, if that same self-love had one-half the lifting-power of helium. Why, I know a devoted wife who after seven years of married life says she really ought to get a divorce from her husband simply because—with that male thing of hers so much taken with himself—they are both so hopelessly in love with the same man!"

"And women are different?" I acidulously inquired after digesting Cristina's *mot*. "*Women* think so little of themselves and give so much less time and thought to dress and adornment and doing their hair and powdering their noses and making themselves generally attractive?"

"We do those things, of course," agreed Cristina, "and we may even spend a great deal of time over them. But it's because men make us. For with women in the modern world, vanity is a sort of business. It has a purpose, and a pretty solemn one. Man has made it a part of our life-work to look appealing. If we fail in that, we just about fail in everything. And to look pretty you naturally have to be a little interested in your own prettiness."

"Which might be construed," I suggested, "as not a petty, but a petting, interest in life?"

"Don't be catty," almost snapped Cristina. "Men and women are partners,

remember, in this high adventure known as life, and there wouldn't be so many clinging vines, old dear, if it weren't for the colossal vanity of you sturdy oaks. And if women have their own little vanities, a few thousand years of being the under-dog has at least left them clever enough to keep those vanities under cover. Or if they can't keep them under cover, they hemstitch them into attractiveness. When you pay a compliment to a woman, she may smile her gratitude, but she goes on her way unruffled. When you pay a compliment to a man, I've noticed, he shuts down the works, calls in his friends, and passes the precious nugget around as though it were a second Kohinoor straight from Kimberley."

"We get so few," I weakly contended.

"You deserve still fewer," retorted Cristina. "And you're all so childishly vain in the face of flattery! Tell a man about three times an hour that he's wonderful, tell him just that and nothing more, and he'll pass around the news that you're one of the most brilliant conversationalists he ever clashed swords with. Or announce to the meanest-looking worm in trousers that there's something distinguished looking about him and he'll swear you're a Solomon in petticoats. Or meekly let some male brag about his golf or his garden or his setting-up exercises and his iron muscles or his mysterious power over women or how he cures dandruff and can't eat cucumbers, and he'll be so grateful he'll want to take you out and buy you a new bonnet. Why, I know wives who soften their husband's disposition that way every morning exactly the same as the husbands use soap to soften their own beards before they shave."

"Speaking of beards," I craftily interposed, remembering that it always paid to be gallant with Cristina, "it was Hadrian, the fourteenth emperor of Rome, who introduced them to his age. And we are told he did this to hide the warts on his face. Which is, I suppose, another case of man's vanity?"

"Wouldn't you call it vanity," Cristina triumphantly contended, "to try to impress the world as being more attractive than you really were?"

"But you have just intimated," I meekly reminded her, "that this was the one big business of woman's career."

"Yes, but we don't do it so much for ourselves as for racial and eugenic reasons," asserted the agile-minded lady beside me. "If we are to have beautiful children, you see, we must first have beautiful mothers. And the more beautiful we make ourselves the more we deserve to have children."

"And the more likely you're to, my dear," I sagely interposed.

"Quite outside of that," pursued the frowning Cristina, "women have an impersonal love for the beautiful and the delicate. They seem to be born with an abstract love for lovely things."

“Especially if they’re expensive,” I was foolish enough to proclaim. “And I can’t help wondering what Ezekiel, who prohibited even woolen garments, would have to say about the silk things of our degenerate age. Or you may recall the advice of Cræsus to Cyrus, reported by Herodotus, pertaining to the debilitating and deteriorating influences of superfluous apparel.”

“I don’t know much about Cræsus,” retorted Cristina, “but I know the modern girl can be dressed from head to foot in a pound and a half of material. So I fancy she’s as healthy as those old Hittite ladies who scarcely showed the end of their noses to the world. And we don’t wear our clothes because a high-priest orders it, but because we like them and express ourselves in the choice of them.”

“And in exercising this newer esthetic sense,” I cynically suggested, “you widen the horizon of worldly happiness quite as much as you think of your own?”

“Of course we do,” retorted Cristina. “We make the lordly male quite as happy as we make ourselves. Perhaps, Sir Oracle, you’ll remember that time, about three or four years ago, when I came down with more make-up on than you approved of. You stopped me in the hall and said: ‘Go up and take it all off!’ And I did. And when I came down in twenty minutes you looked me over with a disapproving eye and said: ‘Go up and put it all on again!’”

That seemed to remind Cristina of something, for she stopped to take a two-by-four mirror out of her vanity-case and study a countenance that might have belonged to a coral-lipped figurante from the rue de la Paix.

“But men don’t use lip-sticks and powder-compacts and rouge-pots,” I deferentially pointed out to her when I once more had access to her attention. “They don’t load themselves down with ornamental jewelry and wear attire that looks like an explosion in a dye-factory and roll their stockings and expose their manly breasts and——”

“They’d be much more comfortable if they did something like that in hot weather, instead of being so vainly timid about being seen in their shirt-sleeves.”

“And they dress for convenience rather than for effect; and they aren’t crassly exploited by a bunch of foreign fashion-makers who add to the strain and stress of life and even more to the cost of living by imposing seasonal styles on women and——”

“How about those awful plus-fours you men stood for?” inquired Cristina. “And those absurd balloon trousers your college-boys adopted from Oxford, and those Fair-Isle sweaters and golf-stockings you’ve all been decorating the great open spaces with? And what can you say in defense of the plug hat? Or the high collar made stiff with cooked starch?”

“Well, we don’t tattoo butterflies on our knees,” I stubbornly contended.

“No, but you go with a razor-back crease ironed down the center of your pants-legs and when you get in full dress you parade enough white shirt-front to make it look like the tomb-stone of an intelligent man’s thinking power. You say, of course, that it’s an accepted mode, a uniform, and that you never give it any thought. But you nearly pass away if you wander into a formal gathering without your fish-and-soup clothes on. That’s the trouble with men. They haven’t the courage to be individual, to be conspicuously attractive, poor dears. They’re so inordinately vain about their modesty that they’re actually manipulated into wearing humdrum clothes that can be turned out like letterheads.”

I waited while Cristina blew a kiss to a bare-armed girl with the eviscerated body of a black fox draped about her shoulders. Then I went on with my argument.

“But that slavery to humdrum clothes, sweet maid, leaves us free to think about other things. And if the world is to go on, men can’t spend fifty per cent. of their working-day deciding on what color-scheme they’ll ride down to the office in next morning.”

“That’s exactly where men are so selfish,” proclaimed the volatile Cristina. “They’re too cowardly to announce their own well-being or advertise their own prosperity, so they expect their womenfolk to be walking advertisements of the lordly male’s success. They pile the pearls and diamonds and minks and sables on the female of the species and make us do the scrambling, to keep up our one-sided competition in the proclamation of family prosperity. Then, because the competition has become unexpectedly keen, because we have to give a good deal of thought to it, you sit back and call us the vain sex.”

“It’s amazing what ready victims you women are in the matter of this mink and sable hardship,” I said as we stopped in front of a furrier’s window.

“Well, when we decorate, we at least get away with it,” asserted the young woman at my side. “We have at least that much in our favor. But when a man tries it on, he just naturally makes himself ridiculous.”

“Those are the occasions when we usually describe him as being as vain as a woman!”

But Cristina, at the moment, wasn’t listening to me. She was staring at a fluffy blue-fox throw with a metal throat-clasp jeweled with aquamarines. And I knew, even before I saw the estimative look in her eye, that she wasn’t thinking of eugenics or the future welfare of the race.

“And besides,” I continued, trying to make my voice carry across that No Man’s Land of egocentric preoccupation, “you’re not only illogical and self-

contradictory when you charge man with being the strutting sex while in almost the same breath you attempt to indict him for the sobriety of his apparel, but you're also historically inaccurate when you claim he has always delegated the parade-function to his females. That movement, in fact, has been quite modern. There was a time when the cavalier and the soldier may have fixed the style in the matter of men's clothing. And in that earlier day, heaven knows, man's apparel had enough gold and lace and color and general splendor to liven up the landscape and satisfy the eye. But military science and modern firearms put a stop to all that. Twentieth-century warfare compelled the fighting man to become inconspicuous, taught him the need of protective coloration and put him in khaki. That wave of repression may have attempted too suddenly to key down our dominant note in attire, since our inhibited color-hunger still breaks out here and there in the college soph and the city toiler turned loose on the golf links. But, for all this, I contend that man, preoccupied as he is with the more serious businesses of life, is less active in the solicitation of the admiration of others, is less pettily preoccupied with his own appearance and attainments, in plain English, is less vain, than the modern woman to whom he has, willingly or unwillingly, deputized the function of—— But you're not even listening to me."

Cristina's smile as she linked her arm in mine was warm and wistful.

"You're absolutely right, old dear," she said as she nodded toward the blue-fox throw. "Wouldn't that be nifty, Arthur, with my new beryl English broadcloth? Wouldn't it be *wonderful*?"

"Wonderful for warmth?" I testily inquired.

"No, you old darling, just to strut in," said Cristina as she tugged me toward the door.





CHAPTER IV WHAT'S WRONG WITH WOMEN?



I'd always been prepared for the unexpected, where Cristina was concerned. One never knew, with that attenuated Aristotle in snake-skin shoes just which way the cat was going to jump. And a mere man, I was equally persuaded, would never interfere much with either her mental or her material activities.

That, at least, was my impression of the tinkling Cristina. But Cristina, apparently, wasn't running true to form. She wasn't being quite herself. Even an oaf knee-deep in his thirteenth chapter could see that a little of the luster had gone from her eyes and a trace of the old-time lilt from her laugh. She was moody and abstracted and self-immured, to say nothing of appearing unnecessarily sharp-tongued when I accused her of smoking too much.

So I went to my wife, in my predicament, as husbands have a habit of doing. I went to Margaret. And from Margaret came light.

"What's the matter with Cristina?" I demanded as I overheard that young lady's car go tearing past the library-windows and scatter the blue stone at the drive-corners before it vanished into the night.

"It's Roddie," explained Margaret as she ran a critical eye over my Scotch golf-stockings and seemed disappointed that no abraded surface demanded her darning-needle.

"What's Roddie been doing?"

"He's been acting atrociously with that Sheppard girl," averred Margaret.

"But what's that to Cristina?"

"It's everything," asserted my sister-in-law's sister as she neatly turned the disappointing stockings into a ball.

"But I thought that Cristina had given him up. She told me herself she never wanted to see him again as long as she lived."

"You don't seem to know much about women."

"I don't," I honestly acknowledged.

"If you did," proclaimed Margaret, "you'd understand that a girl never gives up a man she's in love with."

"Oh, then Cristina's still in love with her Roddie?"

"Of course she is."

"Then why did she give him the go-by? Why did she chuck him? Why didn't she stick to him?"

"There are times when a woman can't," explained the perspicacious Margaret.

“We had a scrap or two ourselves, you’ll remember, before I finally succeeded in roping you in!”

I chose to disregard the acidulated note in my wife’s voice at the same time that I avoided the unhappy episode in my troubled past. But there was a thing or two I wanted to get clear on.

“Then you feel that Cristina will eventually rope her Roddie in, as you phrase it?”

“If she’s given half a chance.”

“And am I to infer from that that it’s the woman who does the pursuing in modern courtship?”

“Ask Cristina,” was Margaret’s unnecessarily curt reply.

And I intended to ask Cristina. But the thirteenth chapter had merged into the fourteenth before I had a chance to hold converse with that moody-eyed fly-by-night who seemed able to feather the nest of misery with an incredible number of social diversions. Housing Cristina, in fact, sometimes seemed calamitously like trying to cage a canary with an attack of tarantism. And when Cristina eventually came to tell me that I wasn’t a good color and that I’d better do eighteen holes with her before the Dannemans dropped in for dinner, she talked about something quite different from courtship.

“I wish,” said Cristina as she walked to the window, “I knew what was wrong with me.”

I didn’t answer Cristina, at the moment. But I put a paper-weight on my day’s work and swung about to inspect the young woman who presumptively possessed about everything in the world to make her happy, including a very exceptional brother-in-law.

“What’s the matter with women, anyway?” demanded Cristina, fixing me with a morose eye.

“Well, you’re a woman,” I pointed out. “What’s the answer?”

“I thought you knew everything,” derided Cristina, who had so recently intimated that her first mission in life was to be the improvement of my mind.

“Not quite,” I conceded, “though I have been bitten once or twice by Solomon’s dog. You’re probably smoking too much.”

“Rubbish,” said Cristina as she reached for a cigarette. “The trouble is I want something to do!”

“Then run along and get married and have half a dozen babies and you’ll probably forget about this weltenschmerz that’s——”

“Now you’re getting vulgar,” cried Cristina.

“Biology,” I retorted, “is never vulgar. But even if you can’t have half a dozen

babies, haven't you your welfare work and your woman's club and your musicales and your new car and theaters and bridge and picture galleries and shopping?"

"Those fripperies!" exclaimed Cristina, reminding me of a tawny tigress in a zoo cage as she paced my worn Sarouk. "I want something that counts, something real. And the trouble is," she cried, turning on me with a look I couldn't altogether approve of, "you men have taken those things away from women!"

"As I know the men of this fair land," I protested, "they're so busy giving things to women they haven't time to gather up much in return."

"Exactly!" countered the irrepressible Cristina. "You've glorified your manhood by giving us so much that you've really pauperized our own souls. We're like the park squirrels that have been presented with peanuts every day until they've altogether forgotten how to provide for themselves. You've made the world a man's world and shut us out of it and told us the hard work of life is really man's and——"

"I thought women were more and more coming into it," I interrupted.

"Oh, you've taken a few of us under your wing," admitted Cristina, "but you've jolly well seen to it that we've none of the big jobs. And while you were doing that you took our regular work away from us and left us with such idle hands and empty heads that we have to dope ourselves with amusements and delude ourselves with the belief that the second-hand life of novels and plays and pictures can make up for the loss."

It wasn't often I saw the tinkling Cristina's brow darkened by any such frown of frustration as at that moment shadowed her delicately incarnadined face. But I refused to feel sorry for her.

"Would you prefer staying walled up in a back garden with gillyflowers and jessamine and spiked lavender and treacle-possets and a sewing basket, the way your great-grandmother did?" I indignantly demanded.

"If I know anything about it," retorted Cristina, "our great-grandmothers did a great deal more than decorate a gillyflower garden. As I recall it, they had flax to spin and wool to card and stockings and mufflers to knit and bread to bake and cream to churn and hams to cure and side-meat to pickle and beef-rolls to spice and dried apples to string and quilts to make and rugs to hook and pillows to stuff and peaches and pears to preserve and ale to brew and wine to bottle and candles to mold and damson jam to concoct and pillow-lace or cross-stitch embroidery to do in the evenings when they weren't entertaining the curate and making poplin rompers for the unenlightened heathen of darkest Africa."

I waited, with purely coerced patience, until Cristina had recovered her breath.

"And you modern women who were going to reform everything by law and now

have to be reminded whether you're Republican or Democrat on election day, why aren't you rounding out your lives with something of the same homely devotion and simple-hearted passion to promote the health and comfort of others and the quiet patience and courage and tenderness and unselfishness that kept those older-fashioned females from talking about their rights while they so uncomplainingly fulfilled them?"

"For the simple reason," retorted Cristina, fixing me with a rather glacial eye, "that you men won't let us. We did once tan the hides and make the clothes and prepare the food for you lordly males. But you were so clever at contriving machines to do things so much quicker if not so much better than the human hand could do them that you took all our tribal jobs away from us. You industrialized life and crowded us into cities and let the factories do about everything we used to do. For centuries and centuries woman had been stitching the seams of the world, and you bowled her over with a sewing-machine. For ages and ages she had been drying the meats and berries to tide the family over its lean spells, and you put her out of business with a tin can. And when over a quarter of a century ago your diabolically clever inventors forced on her a leisure she neither wanted nor knew how to use, she had no need to learn the laws of work and lost what ability she had for sustained effort and——"

"And developed an aversion to listening to the other side of any question she might at the moment be championing," I interpolated with more heat than I had intended.

"Well, isn't it true," demanded Cristina with a reproving quietness, "that modern machinery has changed modern life in the way I said and that woman's restlessness is due to the idleness that twentieth-century life has thrust on her?"

"Not entirely," I contended. "And I've never observed any undue idleness in the rural woman. Out in western Canada, in fact, I recall seeing twenty Doukhobor women dragging a plow to turn over the prairie sod for their first wheat crop. I may be wrong, of course, but to me they made a much nobler picture than twenty women fighting for the front seats at a lecture on 'Efficiency as an expedient in morals.'!"

Cristina's laugh was a slightly satiric one.

"You mean, of course, that we're much lovelier as draught-animals than as intellectual companions?"

"But you decline to be either," I said as I watched Cristina somewhat indignantly powder her nose. "The thing that most impresses me is the modern woman's aversion to toil, to sustained toil, unless that toil is in some way associated with the more decorative processes of life. And your second characteristic, my dear, is your

catlike, feminine, impenetrable and imperturbable independence and your stubborn detachment from your husband's cares and labors."

"But I don't happen to have a husband," Cristina tartly reminded me.

"Perhaps that's what's the matter with you," I as acrimoniously retorted.

"You're a pig," averred Cristina.

"And you're merely a hunk of mud. I know, because that's exactly what Aristotle called you. But to return to the amenities of impersonal discussion," I continued, "it always impressed me that both in England and in France a man's wife is really his partner. But in America it's different. Even Henry James has complained that the New World wife knows nothing of her husband's affairs except that they are of not the slightest importance."

"And the poor idiot of a husband," promptly retorted the lady with the luminous eyes, "is so ready to leave her outside that sacred circle of work, is so selfishly proud to think that he must shield her from every form of worry and care, that he's satisfied to see her relapse into the harem type that spends all its time making itself attractive to the mate it can control only through his appetites!"

"Well, even Solomon has never told us why a well-turned ankle should so repeatedly put one over on a cultured mind," I weakly admitted. "But there may be a glimmer of light in the suspicion that those so-called nobler minds among your up-to-date sisters have diffused their vitality in endless little channels of altruism and frittered away their primary force in a febrile circle of activities that possibly gets them a vice-presidency in a discussion club, but leaves them reluctant to nurse their own babies."

"Aren't we bungling into biology again?" queried the cold-eyed Cristina.

"It wasn't me who hauled harems and appetites into this discussion," I proclaimed. "What I was talking about was the American husband—and *there's* a hero, I think, who really ought to have a monument put up to him. He may not be long on what the ladies call culture and he may not be unduly brilliant over a teacup, but he strikes me as being superlatively heroic in ministering to the wants of his mate, in accepting her at her own none too modest valuation, and in unconsciously transforming himself from a drudge into a devotee by that tranquil selflessness and unconsciousness of sacrifice which in your grandmother's day was accepted as the peculiar prerogative of the female."

Cristina sat down and regarded me with a provokingly estimative stare.

"The lady you married has never impressed me as adhering any too passionately to that particular opinion," observed my over-cerebral sister-in-law.

"She at least married me," I said with an acerbity I was sorry for, a moment after

I'd spoken. For I could see the faint pink that mantled Cristina's well-powdered cheek.

"That's right, flaunt my being an old maid in my face," she cried with a cold eye but a slightly tremulous underlip.

"Oh, you'll marry quickly enough," I protested by way of restitution, "when you get tired of peeling the onion of curiosity."

"I don't quite understand about peeling the onion," said the lady with the clouded brow.

"Well, that's what too many of you modern women are doing," I announced. "You're taking up the onion of life and trying to peel away the sordid outer wrappings and when you've removed layer after layer you suddenly discover there's no onion left."

Cristina took a deep breath. She looked very lovely and troubled and Mona-Lisa-like in the late afternoon sunlight that filtered through the mulberry-colored curtains.

"Do you mean we're demanding a fineness of life that really isn't there?" she asked. "That we're in some way missing our true mission through this newfangled restlessness and——"

"Wait a minute," I interrupted. "This restlessness of women isn't quite as newfangled as you imagine. And that's where a little historical background is a bit of a help to the brute known as Man. The women of Sparta must have had a touch of this same restlessness, for this same old Aristotle that I've already mentioned complains that the economic independence of Spartan women was surely one of the causes of that state's decadence."

"But Sparta seems rather a long way back," complained the cloudy-eyed Cristina.

"In that case," I conceded, "let's come down to the lady of Rome, about the time a certain Porcian orator was raising merry hell over the goings-on of the feminists of the day.

"Cato sounds pretty modern when in his speech defending the Oppian Law he voices the time-worn uneasiness of the male when confronted by the insurgent female. 'If, Romans,' Livy has somewhere reported that orator as saying, 'every individual among us had made it a rule to maintain the prerogative and authority of a husband with respect to his own wife, we should have less trouble with the whole sex.' And although Metellus Macedonicus condoned marriage on patriotic grounds, he rather anticipated much later pessimists by proclaiming: 'If we could get along without wives, we should all dispense with the nuisance.' And she was a bit of a club

woman, too, that Roman Lady, for Juvenal somewhere asserts that he hates the woman who is always consulting the grammatical rules of Palæmon and recalling verses unknown to him and correcting the phrases of his friends. And even Cicero wanted to see established a censor who should teach men how to govern their wives properly. And Seneca was certainly twentieth-centuryish enough when he complained that it was hard to keep a wife whom every one admired, and even harder, if no one happened to admire her, to live with her yourself. So you see, fair one, that even in your wickednesses you're not as original as you fancied."

Cristina stood up and shook out her skirts.

"You're very brave when you get behind a musty old wall of books," proclaimed the insurgent daughter of to-day, "but I can't help wondering how many of those moth-eaten old insults you'd trot out if Margaret were here!"

"By the way," I asked, "where is Margaret?"

"She's down baking those oysters Rockefeller that you and Bill Danneman are so fond of," explained Cristina. "And I'm sorry I won't be here to help you enjoy them."

"Why not?" I asked as Cristina powdered her nose.

"Because I'm going out on the Little Lake with Dickie Frendel."

"Canoeing?"

"Yes, canoeing and uking *and* everything!"

I didn't like either the flippant note in Cristina's voice or the reckless look in her eye.

"Why," I demanded, "do you waste your time on a fudge-eater like young Frendel?"

Cristina studied my face for a moment of silence.

"Because *you*, old top, refuse to waste your time on *me*."

"But I've wasted a good hour on you," I pointed out, a trifle perplexed, as I proceeded to straighten up my desk, by a certain tremulous note that had crept into Cristina's small voice.

"But all you do is powwow and preach," objected the lawless young lady with the unsatisfied light in her eyes.

"What d'you want me to do?" I demanded with purely defensive brusqueness.

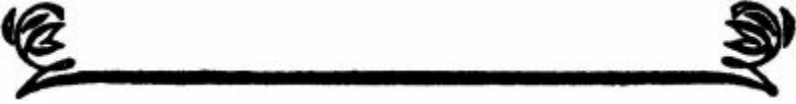
"Love me a little," announced the unabashed Cristina. "I'm lonely."

She looked very alluring, in the mellowed side-light that came from the big windows with the mulberry-colored drapes. She looked flower-like and forlorn and inarticulately in need of consolation. But I knew that any man, at that particular moment, would be merely a pinch-hitter for her inaccessible Roddie. And I'd no

intention of seeing any lawless young Calypso practising on *me*.

“I do love you, Cristina,” I solemnly averred. “I do love you,” I repeated as I put the desk between her outstretched arms and my slightly arthritic frame. “I love you, my child, as your own father might!”

“Fiddlesticks!” said Cristina with a doe-like stamp of her foot on my worn desk-rug. And as I solemnly proceeded to restore my solemn big books to their cases she stood there studying me, studying me with an unmistakable look of pity in her eye. Then, having powdered her nose for what must have been the twentieth time that day, she turned and walked slowly out of the room.





CHAPTER V THAT DANGEROUS AGE



Cristina, I noticed, did tolerably well for a girl who was supposed to be dying of a broken heart. Fatally as her young life had been blighted, she didn't altogether let the grass grow under her feet. There was always a car or two in the porte-cochère and a cloud of cigarette-smoke coming from the sun-parlor, or a long-distance conversation to interrupt dinner, or a collegiate-looking young nincompoop waiting to carry her off to golf. In fact, there were so many of these abstracted-eyed young nincompoops hanging around that I lost track of them and got mixed on their names and not infrequently sat on their boxes of bonbons and wondered why they couldn't be a little quieter when they came back from their dances so suspiciously near sunup.

She did pretty well, did Cristina, for a girl who had nothing left to live for. And instead of being satisfied with having a whale of a time herself, she insisted on brightening up my life by dragging me off to frivolous affairs where I secretly felt like a dancing elephant and repeatedly ate things which didn't agree with me.

But I suffered in silence. For it's not easy to quarrel with Cristina. She's much too attractive to storm at and much too wayward to reform. Yet times there are when a feather-headed woman needs a sober-minded man in the offing. And times there are when even one's limpid-eyed sister-in-law requires an honest word or two in her shell-pink ear.

"You were unpardonably rude to Mrs. Pillsbury to-night," I said as Cristina settled in the car-seat beside me and we headed for home.

"That crab!" said Cristina, lighting a cigarette. "Did you see the old prune trying to take my Dickie away from me?"

"Your Dickie?" I echoed, conscious that the rising generation was very far away from my own. "And from whom did you happen to capture that cake-eater?"

"He came to me in a thunder-shower," was the unexpectedly soft-noted answer from the lady with the embattled eyes. "And he was simply wonderful the other night out in the canoe. And he's not a cake-eater."

I politely regretted my inability to share her enthusiasms concerning young Frendel.

"But having arrived in a thunder-shower," I ventured, "can it be your intention that he should in some way end up in a bridal-shower?"

Cristina's laugh was a subacid one.

"Most certainly not," proclaimed the young woman whose activities we were eternally excusing by denominating her as dynamic. "But I'm all for the tomahawk

when some old hijacker like that Pillsbury person tries to gyp me out of my boy friend!”

“Your language,” I solemnly pointed out, “is almost as unpalatable as your conduct.”

“But honestly,” pursued the earnest-eyed young woman at my side, “that’s the sort of female who ought to be taken out at sunrise and shot. She’s the type that’s positively dangerous. She’s——”

“I thought you were all dangerous,” I interposed.

“Oh, we like to think we are. We’ve all a craving now and then to make a man’s career look like a lemon meringue delivered wrong side up. We all love to show our power. But the right sort of woman knows there are road rules and she finds she can’t travel far without keeping them.”

“And what becomes of the other kind?” I asked.

“They run to henna and other women’s husbands and submarine around until a depth-bomb blows them into a divorce court or chalk in the knee-joints carries them out of the Charleston class.”

Cristina, I could see, stood guilty of both the peculiarly modern error of mistaking frankness of speech for freshness of thought and the more ancient sin of mixing her metaphors.

“Am I to assume then,” I asked, “that the really dangerous portion of our society isn’t the flaming youth we’ve heard so much about, but the more autumnal ladies intent on making hay while the October sun still shines?”

“Flaming youth seems to have got a little tired of flaming, don’t you think?” was Cristina’s slightly delayed retort. “And all that fireworks wasn’t getting us very far in the really serious business of roping a life-partner.”

“I rather thought you’d forgotten about life-partners in the twentieth-century scramble for something in shellacked hair and plus-fours to play around with.”

I knew how annihilating, from Cristina’s glance, could be the scorn of a beautiful woman.

“That,” she finally cried, “is all camouflage. It is merely sacrificing one dignity to save another. We have to be satisfied with those collegiate light-weights because the really worth-while men——”

“Like myself,” I interpolated.

“Because the really worth-while men,” Cristina frowningly continued, “are too busy doing the real work of the world. That’s how we cheat ourselves. The worth-whilers are afraid that if they keep our awful hours they won’t have clear heads in the morning. So we have to be satisfied with the kids. We have to take what we can get.

For no woman wants to give the impression of being overlooked.”

“But on the other hand,” I observed, “no man can watch the whole five rings of any circus!”

“I know,” acknowledged the lady at my side. “And we eventually pay for all that parade out of our own cheapened souls. We haremize ourselves and are as indignant when a man doesn’t insult us as when he does. We go in for decorated fronts until we’re shouting color at each other like an oriental bazaar. We pound the old sex-appeal drum until the decalogue seems ready to tumble over. But it hasn’t given us what we wanted.”

“Then there’s hope that all this bob-headed devilishness of the young is getting a bit old-fashioned?”

“Oh, don’t imagine we’re going to turn into chocolate seraphs overnight,” was the indifferent-noted reply. “But we learn as we go. And the stag-line may have stepped out with the champagne-in-petticoats flapper, but——”

“I hate that word flapper,” I interrupted. “It’s grown about as shoddy as a near-silk stocking with seven runs.”

“But that stag-line,” pursued the social reformer at my side, “didn’t break its neck to get our champagne-in-petticoats young person into a bungalow apron on Honeymoon Row. And with all its other changes, a woman’s life without a marriage prospect is still about as empty as *Hamlet* without the prince.”

It took time for me to absorb my shock. For candor, with Cristina, hitherto seemed to have traveled along more material lines, such as proclaiming she was still a forked radish, and allowing the clock on her sheer hose to be a public dial, and demonstrating by her dinner gowns that she most unequivocally belonged to the order of Mammalia.

“But I thought that old man-hunting business went out with crocheting and congress gaiters,” I finally averred.

“It’s our first profession, you charming old idiot,” was the over-candid Cristina’s reply. “Every last one of us is a born man hunter under her skin. For it still hurts, remember, to be an old maid.”

“But the pursuit of ten males is scarcely necessary for the possession of one home!”

“Of course not, old dear,” laughed Cristina. “But it’s occasionally a sportsman’s habit to shoot more ducks than he can eat at dinner. And when boredom turns a woman into a head hunter, you get the female of the species in her most dangerous form, dangerous to herself and dangerous to others. It seems to come, as a rule, when she’s bankrupt in the business of living, when her faith is gone, and her will is

thwarted, and she's forlornly set on getting even with a world that doesn't seem to have given her a fair deal. Whoopee! that's the time you want to watch 'em. That's when they're a real peril to navigation, when they're disillusioned and reckless and deliberately lawless, when they take the bit in their teeth and bolt. And you'll find that your lady friends seldom do that until they're on the shady side of forty. It's when they get to the now-or-never age that you need to keep the crowd back from the side-lines."

For several minutes I gave more thought to this than I did to my driving.

"But when a woman is deliberately and openly dangerous," I argued, "we all know it. She's the red flag for her own dynamite truck. And I can't help feeling that there's more menace in the timber-wolf lady who looks like a woolly lamb than in the egocentric and indulged peaches-and-cream young thing who knows no law except her own selfish and self-defeating ends."

"As the farmers say," observed Cristina, "the danger of frost is when the milk is in the car." Lighting another cigarette, she inconsequentially inquired: "Wouldn't you regard me as old enough to be safe?"

"As safe as a hungry leopard in a hen-run," I promptly retorted.

"That," said the happy Cristina, "is the nicest thing you've said about me in a week of Sundays."

"But you women are so consistently inconsistent," I pointed out. "You're outlaws only when the wind blows north-northwest. But you seem to know a moral hawk from a handsaw when an attractive enough rival interferes with your game. And when you find you've no law to protect you where the prophets have failed you, you feel you've got to go after these other lady freebooters, these perilous Pillsburys, about the same as Blake went after the Barbary pirates."

"No, old darling; it's you men who go after them," corrected the fair Cristina. "You all have a heap big powwow to say about the sanctity of the home tepee, but when a pink-and-white Rahab spreads her net in the offing I notice that most of you take a regular Aileen Riggin swan dive into the middle of it."

"Rahab may have been a bad lot," I casually explained, "but when she furnished shelter to Joshua's official observers she was given an honorable residence in Judea."

"Well, she won't get an honorable residence in this fair land." Cristina declared with quite unlooked-for heat. "I know it's the style just now to scoff at the Puritans, but if a lot of our high-life Rahabs got what Plymouth used to give 'em a couple of hundred years ago there'd be an unexpected amount of big initials sewn on georgette sleeves."

“You’re not asking for the scarlet letter again?”

“That love-’em-and-leave-’em breed,” asserted the pious lady beside me, “ought to be well branded.”

“You’ll probably remember that in the days of early Rome they were compelled by law to be blondes.”

“Blondes!” interpolated the moody young person beside me. “I hate ’em!”

“If they weren’t blondes by nature,” I went on as impersonally as I was able, “they had to make themselves into blondes by artifice.”

“Not because gentlemen preferred blondes?” queried Cristina.

“No, dusky child of beauty, but more to segregate the unlettered scarlet-letter ladies from the honest Roman matron, who was Latin and dark, and had never been led back across the Alps as the slave and plaything of the triumphant warrior.”

“And I suppose,” ruminated Cristina aloud, “it’s this echo out of the past that makes us feel there’s something dangerous and devilish about every strawberry blonde who pulls a peroxide cork!”

“The same,” I solemnly concurred, “as we give a simian shudder at the sight of a snake.”

But Cristina, deep in her own thoughts, was impervious to my thrust.

“I’m not so sure about that blonde stuff,” she finally observed. “For wasn’t there a fly-by-night queen called Helen of Troy who made a pretty good record at upsetting the world as she knew it? Didn’t she start enough fighting and break up enough homes to make a Hollywood star look like a pilgrim spinster? And wasn’t she just as dangerous at forty and fifty as her own flapper daughter was at fifteen? And wasn’t Cleopatra well up in the forties when she made Mark Antony forget home and mother? And wasn’t Ninon de L’Enclos able to bowl ’em over when she was almost sixty? And didn’t that worldly-wise old pill at the Country Club have my poor Dickie looking seven ways for Sunday? But what I can’t understand is why these old has-beens aren’t satisfied nowadays to go back to their digitalis and valerian and firesides the same as our grandmothers did.”

“But firesides and grandmothers,” I contended, “seem to have gone out of style. The steam pipe coiled itself about the former, like an anaconda about a pullet. And all this newfangled artificial prolongation of youth seems to have turned everything in our garden of womanhood from annuals into perennials.”

“Well, do you prefer the bloom that comes out of a rouge-box or the really-truly bloom of youth?” challenged my Socrates in chiffon.

“We were speaking, I think, of the dangerous age of woman,” I reminded Cristina as quietly as I could. “My own personal conviction was that woman stands

most dangerous when she is most alluring, for when she is loveliest to the eye she is most likely to put reason to sleep.”

“Well, that’s the kind of sleep that’s good for you.” And Cristina rather took my breath away by quoting from Browning: “He who gets beauty,” she quietly and somewhat erroneously intoned, “gets about the best that God can give.”

“Yet the more modern problem,” I amended, “seems to be the matter of keeping beauty. But if your monogamous matron no longer parades the beach in more clothes than any human being could safely swim in, and if your ingenue can render baggage-cars obsolete by packing her seven two-ounce stepins and her five eight-ounce frocks in a hand-bag, I don’t see that letting the world know you’ve got knees is going to endanger society.”

“No; we say it’s letting our skin breathe,” said the solemn-eyed Cristina. “But there are far too many lady hygienists who get their real kick out of making their boy friends gasp!”

“But they’re at least dressing for comfort,” I contended.

“What gives you that idea?” was Cristina’s unsympathetic inquiry.

“Well, take your hats,” I ventured. “They seem to have got smaller and smaller. You’ve adapted them, apparently, to the car and the cock-pit. You’re not crazy enough to try to get in and out of automobiles with three-foot Gainsboroughs on your heads. And you can’t swing a brassy with an artificial flower-garden tilted over one eye. So for once in your life you’ve sacrificed line for comfort.”

“But was it such a sacrifice?” contended Cristina, unconscious of the tilt she gave her own debonair little French cloche.

“In my humble opinion,” I retorted, “it is. For I’m so sick of those skull-hugging helmet contraptions that I’d like to remind you women a hat originally meant a hood. And I’d also like to see some skirted anarchist once more doing the Avenue with about five gallons of honest feathers over her head.”

“That,” proclaimed Cristina, “shows how unreasonable men are. You’re never satisfied. You tell us to dress this way, and then another way, until we get cross-eyed trying to give you what you want.”

“Ah, then you dress more for masculine admiration than for personal comfort?”

“Comfort nothing!” scoffed Cristina. “We’re women, old darling, and we want to look good to the brute known as man. We’d even take out a rib if we thought it was going to help us in that never-ending battle of trying to beat our sisters to the approval-stand.”

“Then it’s still the old sexual deceit that makes them dangerous, the angling after admiration for qualities which they don’t actually possess, the pretense toward

conditions and graces that really aren't there, the——”

“Let me tell you something, old-timer,” interrupted Cristina. “Every woman would be honest as the day, if other women would let her. Or if you neolithic-minded men would let her! But we've got a Hindenburg line to hold. And if you overlook the machine-gun and go back to bows and arrows you're sure to lose the battle.”

“Reasoning by analogy is not——”

“What you call love,” pursued the unperturbed Cristina, “or the proved approval of the male, or whatever tag you want to tie to that adorable old catastrophe, is still the great Gulf Stream that keeps warm and soft the whole blessed coast-line of womanhood. That's the only time when our idiotic sex is rounded out and complete and content. It's a habit about half a million years older than the bronze age, when you come to think of it. And this newfangled bachelor girl or the business woman may pretend she never wants to marry, but I notice that when a possible life-partner looms up over the horizon she doesn't let office hours interfere with the old game of landing her fish.”

“Her poor fish!” I ejaculated. But Cristina ignored the interruption.

“And when she doesn't mate and have children,” pursued the social philosopher with the cigarette, “she just naturally eliminates herself. Her tendency of mind disappears as the unproducing breed itself disappears. It's loving and mating that keeps this crazy old world of ours going. And no woman is dangerous when she's honestly trying to make a man love her.”

“If she'd only do it honestly!” I interposed. “But so many of those guiles and wiles she makes herself attractive with seem rather like—well, like cheating in games.”

“But you men leave us so little choice,” complained Cristina. “We have to be spiritual acrobats to satisfy you. Even when you're singing about maiden modesty and all that sort of thing I've noticed the timid cowslip type is generally overlooked in the stampede toward the cut-up in georgette.”

“But you're contradicting yourself,” I pointed out.

“That,” replied Cristina, “is a woman's privilege. And in the meantime, there's just one small thing you might remember.”

“What's that?”

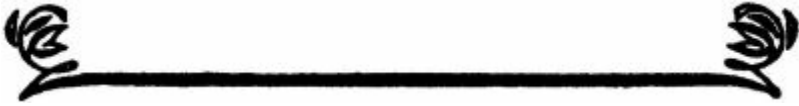
“It's that we women are really not half as bad as we paint ourselves.”

“You've said it!” I agreed, with a solemn glance at Cristina's vanity case.

Some undefined obtuseness on my part, I saw, had brought a heat-lightning smile about Cristina's lips.

“I wonder,” she dreamily intoned, “what will happen when men are really able to see through women?”

“The race will end!” I promptly retorted.





CHAPTER VI IT'S THE MAN WHO PAYS



I knew as well as the next man why Cristina was proving about as incandescent as a trolley-pole against a sleeted power-wire. I knew why she sparkled like lake-water ruffled by a morning wind. And I realized it wasn't merely the hunger of the frustrate for richer experience that made her so anxious to get over to that golf match.

It wasn't merely to observe championship play, any more than it was to see Glenna Collett outdrive a couple of knickerbockered duffers who'd probably outbulk her three to one. It wasn't merely to decorate a colonnaded club-piazza and bask in the soul-satisfying consciousness that she was as stunningly dressed as the next woman.

It was because her precious Roddie was going to be there.

She was going to see the man whom she never wanted to see again as long as she lived—according to her own passionate and repeated proclamations. And in anticipation of that calamitous confrontation she had been at pains, obviously, to make the outer shell that housed such inner brilliancy as presentable as possible. Yet it was the inner Cristina that most held my attention. For there was a delicate hover about her manner that spoke of dirty work at the crossroads, later in the day. There was, in fact, a subcosmetic flush of expectancy on Cristina's narrow cheek, and about her imperfectly barricaded eyes a luminous look which persuaded me that emotion, after all, is the final beautifier of any woman's face.

"You're looking pretty nifty to-day," I said after a side-glance at my abstracted seat-partner.

But that lady, for once in her life, manifested no visible response to male flattery. Instead, she consulted her wrist-watch and let a cloudy little frown obliterate the lake-ruffle on her face.

"Step on it, old dear," she somewhat impatiently proclaimed, "or we'll be late for the game."

"But we're doing almost thirty," I demurred. "And there's a traffic cop at the next corner."

"Oh, that canary!" laughed Cristina. "He's easy. He lets me slip along at forty any old time."

"And why doesn't he arrest you?"

"Because I brighten up his morning for him," said the self-assured young Juno beside me. "But why are you stopping?"

“So that you can drive,” was my grim retort. “For if you crave the joy of breaking your country’s laws, since this car is your property, you also deserve the pleasure of paying the fine.”

“Fiddlesticks!” cooed the winsome Cristina as she took the wheel, stepped on the gas, and waved affectionately to the traffic officer, sweeping blithely past him at a recorded rate of exactly eleven miles above the legal limit. “But why so solemn, old-timer?” she asked as she wiped a truck’s nose with her rear mud-guard, cut into a waiting line at the crossroads, and airily took a left-hand turn against an opposing signal.

“I was wondering,” I said as I found my breath again, “just how long you could get away with it.”

“With what?” demanded Cristina as she slowed down to study her make-up in the motor mirror.

“With this being a gate crasher instead of standing in line and paying your entrance fee, the same as——”

“Entrance fee to what?” interrupted the puzzled Cristina.

“To this highly complicated game that is sometimes known as civilization,” was my somewhat acetous reply.

It seemed to take Cristina a minute or two before she could quite understand what I was driving at.

“But we do pay,” she solemnly contended. “And haven’t all the old melodramas said that it’s the woman who pays, and pays, and pays?”

“Then their antiquity is their one conspicuous excuse for their sophistry,” I retorted. “For as I know the fair sex of to-day—and en passant they really ought to be known as the unfair sex—they neither pay the piper in general nor their dancing partner in particular. They get through on their faces. They refuse to get down to fundamentals. They clamor for special privileges at the same time that they’re marking the cards for their entrance into the game of commerce. They decline to be honest with either themselves or with men. They capitalize their ancient sex-charm and try to deadhead their way through life. And outside their one inescapable biological task of reproduction, when it comes to paying, they cheat their way along with a graceful insolence that would do credit to a Mississippi steamboat gambler.”

Cristina said “Phew!” under her breath as she reached into the door pocket for a cigarette. Then she inspected me with a slightly commiserative eye.

“You may be a well of truth, old top, but you really mustn’t try to bring it all up in one bucket!”

“When you’re as old as I am,” I quietly reminded her, “you’ll find that

personalities solve few problems.”

And Cristina laughed at that, openly.

“Gee, but you’re a dumb one! For it’s personality that gets us over the peak, darling, and every woman knows it—what your brother-author, Barrie, calls ‘that damned charm.’”

But Cristina’s brow, I noticed, was knitted as she struck a match on the brake pedal. “D’you mean you believe that to-day it’s man, poor man, who pays, and pays, and pays?”

“Don’t you?” I countered, as I dodged the ashes from her glowing fag. But for two minutes, oddly enough, Cristina sat silent.

“What I do say,” finally retorted the irrelevant-minded lady beside me, “is that no woman either thinks much of a piker, or roots long for a tightwad.”

“But isn’t it woman,” I maintained, “who’s really the piker and tightwad in the contemporary scene? Isn’t it woman who is the self-exploiting and non-social individualist of this newer age of ours? And isn’t it the poor fish known as man who is to-day paying for woman’s experiments in freedom, for her unrest, for her unorganized leisure, for her lack of respect for authority, and her lack of knowledge as to civilization’s demands on the civilized?”

“You seem to get along with us pretty well,” contended Cristina as she buckled her silver fox scarf under her rounded chin.

“Yes, by giving you everything you want,” I admitted. “By babyfying you, and haremizing you, and loading you down with jewelry and pretty clothes, and narcotizing you with flattery, we can get along with you wonderfully! But I think we’re beginning to see that this sort of thing isn’t doing either of us much good.”

“So now,” challenged the round-eyed Cristina, “you’re going to be brutally honest with us?”

“All man asks,” I replied, “is that woman should be honest with herself.”

“Perhaps,” pursued Cristina as she tossed away her cigarette, “she’s a trifle more that way than you imagine. And perhaps a good deal of what you’d call her newfangled boldness is really based on her utter weariness of man’s dishonesty with her. You keep harping, old dear, on how women have changed and how many rights you’ve had to give her. But you’ve never yet given her the right to be herself. You’ve demanded your own model in mates. You’ve wanted her hot and cold, fat and thin, and frail and strong, reserved and reckless, and you’ve tried to turn us into two-legged chameleons in keeping up with your whims. But while your tenor robusto in tights has been warbling *‘Donna e mobile!’* the lady has been smiling her own quiet smile and remembering that in a world pretty well topsyturvy with change she’s the

only thing that's stayed put. She's remained as unchanged, really, as the cat of the Ptolemies. And while you've had your fine theories about improving the world and uplifting the well-known human race, it's been woman, remember, who kept that race going."

I was tempted to point out that the lady guinea-pig, without conspicuously influencing earthly thought, had been equally assiduous in the perpetuation of its own species. But that, I knew, would only make Cristina mad. So I merely asked a question.

"Just how have you kept the race going?"

"By mating and having babies and making homes," was the prompt retort of the unwed lady at my side. "And also by yanking the male day-dreamer back to earth when he got to speculating too much about the questions there's no answer to. By being what our friend Mr. Mencken has always called woman, the intelligent realist of the world."

"But are you," I contended, "mating and making homes as you used to do? Don't a lot of you regard it as rather Cro-Magnon to have children? And do those restless number-threes of yours ever stay long enough on one spot to take root in a home? And don't some of you speak rather condescendingly of what you call 'this marriage business'? And in your revolt against the so-called tyranny of man, haven't you pretty well tumbled the father off his old racial throne and taught our daughters to disregard him as the head of the house? And hasn't your sex pretty neatly wolfed most of the leisure which the sterner sex's genius for machinery and mass production was beginning to present to the world? And hasn't your stubborn and thinly disguised hatred of housework driven a good slice of your urban sisters into those newfangled kraals of incompetents known as hotels? And isn't it true that unless a twentieth-century home can give a man love and understanding and sympathy, he can switch over to those man-run modern hostelries, or a quiet and competent club, and there buy all the residuary home comforts, from having his meals served and his beds made to having his linen mended and his buttons sewed on? And aren't you, my dear, really playing both ends against the middle? Don't you really give man much less than you used to, and at the same time demand a great deal more from him? For, after all, isn't it the man who pays now, and pays at every turn?"

"It's about time he did," said Cristina, with more heat than I had expected. I looked at her with the most hostile eye that I could manage, at the moment.

"That, to me, sounds suspiciously like trying to collect alimony from our cave-men ancestors," I found the courage to aver. "And I'm not exactly in favor of carrying sex-discrimination back beyond the bronze age. For even though we're

only imperfectly depiled apes, as Wells prefers to put it, we've at least advanced to the state where we want peace with our running-mate. We're so anxious for peace, in fact, that we've given you privilege even though we couldn't at the same time present you with philosophy. We've admitted you to our ranks as a fellow-worker and at the same time permitted you to shake the tin cup of incompetency on the street corner of romance. We've duly made you free and equal and at the same time let you retain the idea of sex as a social asset. We've politely overlooked the etymology of 'alimony,' implying as it does food to keep the weakling grass-widow alive in the straitened days of her desertion. We've given you the vote, but we've also given up trying to convict you in any earthly court of justice for those social misdemeanors that are known as crimes of passion. We are now so definitely persuaded that no American jury will convict a woman of murder that her arraignment for such a crime to-day stands merely preliminary to her official exculpation at the hands of twelve good men and true. Hence a vast amount of time might be saved, and a vaster amount of hypocrisy be removed if justice were expedited by the frank abolition of all such self-abortive gestures of going through the form of prosecution without the faintest hope of conviction. We writhe under a Mann Act that provides the unscrupulous woman with a highly remunerative means of blackmail at the same time that it confronts her male victim with a prolonged term in prison."

"That's where a great many of you should be," murmured Cristina.

"Nor," I patiently continued, "are we permitted to change our minds along the perilous paths of courtship, for once the mere male has usurped that essentially feminine prerogative, he can be saddled with a breach-of-promise suit that will eventually show him how pocketbooks can be broken as easily as palpitating hearts. If a married couple should be separated by due process of law, it's the man who, without actual regard to the merits of the case, must pay handsomely and periodically for his ignominious satisfaction of marital release, and, failing to do so, must go to jail until the rapacity of his ex-wife has been appeased and the dignity of the court has been restored. On the same day, I noticed, that our feminists in convention were kicking up such a row about the double standard, a notorious sex-cult was captured, though not cleaned up, by a police raid, and the mere males were held in five-thousand-dollar bail each, while the females of the species found their own bail fixed at exactly one-tenth of that amount."

"Go on!" cried Cristina, with a derisive grind of the jaw. "Go on and say there ought to be an age-of-consent law for the undergraduate football players and a riotsquad to escort the male lily to his morning's work!"

“But what’s the use of going on,” I pursued as calmly as I was able, “when you see evidences of what I mention all along the line? Even that old double standard that women once talked so much about seems to have gone where the woodbine twineth. You’re too busy, at the moment, talking about self-realization, too intent, as the poet put it, on sipping the foam of many lives.”

“We *do* make successful savages, don’t we?” mocked the morose-eyed Cristina.

“Not as successful as you imagine,” I promptly retorted. “But the appalling thing about it all is this new boldness of yours. You’ve no longer any ‘unmentionables’ in either your mental or physical wardrobe. Modesty is mid-Victorian, and a leg’s a leg, and if you see evil in exposure it’s all in your own mind. So you’ve triumphed in your demand to go about half-naked, but if a mere man takes off his coat in your presence you promptly dub him a bounder. You insist that he bare his head before you as he does before the national ensign. In door and domicile you demand the right-of-way. You exact sacrificial tribute in courtship, and in marriage you become so much what the scientists call an obligate parasite that when you generously instituted Father’s Day and made the trodden dandelion the floral emblem of that occasion you got away with it without a murmur. At the same moment that you prattle about being practical-minded, you quietly perpetuate a medieval form of sex-gallantry that paves your royal road through life with the muddied cloaks of a thousand chivalrous Raleighs!”

“You mean, old dear,” Cristina quietly amended, “that we do if we’re passably good to look at.”

“Yes, and that’s the tragic part of it,” I proclaimed as Cristina started a search for her lip-stick. “You use your confounded womanly beauty to club your way through the world. But you must remember, fair one, that it’s not going to work for ever. You can’t live on mush and look for strong teeth. You may, for the time being, fool the traffic-cop. You may cut in on the obtusely chivalric truck-driver, and soften the heart of the sentimental magistrate, and warp the judgment of the gyneolatrous juryman. But you can’t fool Nature.”

“I don’t think we’ve ever tried to fool Nature,” retorted the smooth-browed lady beside me. “We’ve been quite satisfied to fool you empty-headed men.”

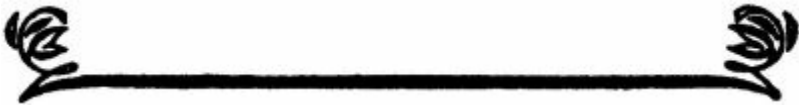
“Well, you won’t do that for ever,” I promptly amended. “And I shouldn’t be vastly surprised if some day soon you feminists found yourselves face to face with a revolt of the masculinists. Then you’d get put back where you belong and there wouldn’t be so many petticoated squealers asking to have the rules changed after the game’s begun.”

“But you like us, don’t you?” demanded Cristina with her starriest smile.

“We do, worse luck,” I meekly conceded as Cristina came to an unpredictable stop at the roadside fifty yards from a service station, “or we wouldn’t be here.”

“Bother!” said my sister-in-law with a moue of annoyance. “We’re out of gas.”

“Perhaps that awful man in his shirt-sleeves could bring us a couple of gallons from the garage,” I ventured as I reached for my pocketbook. And being merely a man myself, I meekly paid for Cristina’s gasoline.





CHAPTER VII

BONES THAT WALK



It was too hot to work. It was so hot that the shingles on my study gables were cracking in the midday sun and my moist wrist left a damp peninsula on each page of my manuscript, as I wrote. And the house, with Margaret and the children bundled off to the seashore, seemed singularly silent and deserted.

So I wasn't sorry when Cristina told me we were to have an alfresco luncheon in the rose-arbor. I wasn't sorry to shut the door on my den of prowling and slightly pediculoid thoughts and go down to the garden where for the first time in recorded history a robin was actually performing its ablutions in our bird-bath, and the dappled shade of the silver birches was a consolation to the eye.

And equally consoling was the rose-arbor luncheon which Cristina had prepared with her own fair hand. It was a very good luncheon, all things considered, though I couldn't help feeling that the lady responsible for it had devoted more thought to its purely ornamental phases than to its incidental dietetic attributes. And Margaret, of course, would have known better than to end up with a raspberry ice, which her rear-admiral uncle had once, with over-masculine coarseness, openly designated as "belly-wash."

But satisfied as Cristina was with her rose-colored meal under a companionably colorful canopy of roses, I could see that she wasn't herself. She didn't even finish her raspberry ice. And she didn't even want to smoke. And as she turned on the little sunken-garden fountain that cost me exactly sixty-seven cents an hour at current borough water-rates she observed that the heat was hellish. Yet to endure that heat, I noticed, she was much more suitably dressed as a woman than I happened to be as a man.

"What's bothering you, beautiful lady?" I asked. For I could see that Cristina had more on her mind than on her body. And since our day at the Country Club she had been as crabby as a caged lioness.

Cristina sat down in my split-bamboo peacock-chair, poked an orange-colored cushion under her spine, put her slippers up on the tea-wagon which the children so frequently used on the terrace for a roller-coaster, and contemplated the hydrophiloid robin that had returned to the marble basin for its second midday immersion.

"What does Roddie see in that awful Sheppard girl?" suddenly demanded the morose-eyed girl in the peacock-chair.

"He apparently likes 'em slinky," I said, recalling how ostentatiously the

gentleman in question had danced attendance on the attenuated Polly Sheppard and completely ruined Cristina's day-end over at the golf-match.

"Is she nicer than I am?" exacted the soul-probing Cristina.

"Not to my way of thinking," I guardedly admitted.

"Then why do men run after her?"

"The answer to that, I imagine, is involved in the devotion of Mary's little lamb to Mary, if you happen to recall the lines. And my impression was that your Miss Sheppard did a good deal of running after the men."

"Of course she does," proclaimed the triumphant Cristina. "But how does she get away with it?"

It wasn't, obviously, an easy question to answer.

"She's so young," I suggested.

"She's as old as I am," retorted Cristina.

"Then perhaps it's because she's so boyish."

"What has being boyish got to do with it?"

"In the present mode and mood, Cristina, it seems to have a great deal to do with it. This Sheppard girl, to my way of thinking, is nothing more than a rag and a bone and a hank of hair. She's a tarantic, slab-sided, animated skeleton, with so little meat on her bones and so little real womanhood in her body that when she puts on her four-ounce dancing frock we could aptly describe her as wearing next to nothing next to nothing. But there's one thing you've got to remember: she's the style of the moment. She's the type that seems to appeal to your over-stimulated stag-line. They like her lawlessness and call her a good sport. They fall for her paraded childishness and call it personal charm. And if they prefer to sit out with her even more than to step out with her you can still console yourself with the thought that they don't tumble over one another to marry her."

Cristina took her feet off the tea-wagon and sat up with a start. "Wouldn't it be awful," she frowningly observed, "if Roddie Jones should marry a girl like that?"

"It would," I acknowledged. "But he won't!"

"Why couldn't he?" questioned the unhappy Cristina.

"Because he's going to marry you," I said with a large and valorous movement that was rewarded by a modified smile from Cristina as she settled back in the peacock-chair, with a nestling motion all her own.

"What makes you think so?" asked the woman who had tried to make me eat raspberry ice.

"Because *you* do!"

Cristina's answer, to that, was an unexpected one.

“Don’t we talk nicely together,” she languidly observed. “You know, old dear, I really should have married you!”

“For what reason?” I challenged.

“I’d have kept your mind more open.”

“And presumably my pocketbook!”

“And I’d have been good for your intellect,” pursued the pensive-eyed Cristina.

“Very much at the expense of my stomach,” I retorted, remembering the raspberry ice.

“I wonder why men,” sighed Cristina, “are so incurably kitchen-minded?”

“And why are there so few range-finders left in the fair sex?” I promptly demanded.

“Because you’ve all made so much fuss over the Carmens and the Camilles,” retorted Cristina. “It’s the poor little mud-hens like me who never get a chance to make history.”

“Mud-hen, my eye! I’d regard you, in fact, as one of the charter members of the ‘It’ cult.”

Cristina smiled her thanks, and then sat silent a moment.

“It’s funny, isn’t it,” she finally observed, “how all women would rather be called good-looking than good?”

“It’s not quite so funny,” I ventured, “as some of the things they try to do to make themselves good-looking.”

“Just what, old top, are you thinking about?” inquired Cristina as she reached for a cigarette.

“I was thinking about your Sheppard girl,” I explained as I lighted Cristina’s fag for her, “and how her type has rather given our deepest thinkers the laugh.”

Cristina leaned back against her orange cushion. “It’s really too hot to think,” she said with a shrug of boredom. “So you tell me about it.”

“Well, I was thinking that when you were in rompers some twenty years ago and when the feministic movement was still in its safety-pin era, we were all terribly afraid of the masculinized woman. Our cartoonists drew pictures of her, and our humorists made jokes about her, and our social philosophers tried to foretell what she would do to the world she was about to overrun. We seemed to huddle about our camp-fire of civilization, powwowing, always powwowing, about the mannish woman. We seemed terribly afraid of this new monstrosity that was going to leap out of the darkness into our home circle and play hob with our comfortable man-made order of things.”

“Well, she did, didn’t she?” inquired Cristina.

“Only temporarily,” I pointed out to my indifferent-eyed questioner. “You see, Cristina, you’re young and your vision of historical perspective is naturally limited. And the crusade of to-day sometimes scales down to the absurdity of to-morrow. But, in so far as the over-masculated female is concerned, the familiar old thing happened. The chimera faded away. The earthquake never occurred. Instead of putting the world in trousers, as the prophets had warned us, the iron-jawed lady quietly disappeared. She vanished in a cloud of talcum-powder. She slipped away into the limbo of terrors outgrown and slogans outworn.”

“And what,” asked Cristina, “took her place?”

“That,” I responded, “isn’t as hard a question to answer as you imagine. For, following some eternal law of rhythm that obtains in phylogeny as well as in biology, we find with us to-day something quite opposite to what we expected. We find the Sheppard type. We find our women most actively exploiting and capitalizing those characteristics which may be most unhesitatingly called feminine. We even find a tendency to exaggerate superficial femininity at the expense of woman’s more fundamental traits. For this is the age of the Girl. This is the era of the Young Thing, bob-headed, bob-skirted, bob-mannered. It’s the cycle of the flapper and the chicken and the pony—and there’s significance, mark you, in those illustrative titles, signifying as they do both the diminutiveness and the limitations of youth. She’s devoting herself to a sort of entr’acte divertissement. She doesn’t quite know why, but she’s doing a bit of tap-dancing while some pretty heavy sets are being shifted on the social stage behind her.”

“But she at least got her freedom.”

“Yes, she got her freedom,” I acknowledged. “And she doesn’t seem to have abandoned any of those prerogatives and privileges that came to her with her emancipation. But having fought and gained her point, she has sat down to powder her nose.”

“I thought you said she was tap-dancing,” said the over-literal Cristina.

“I was speaking only figuratively, fair one,” I went patiently on. “But, as I was about to say, woman, having shown man that she can be aggressive, has returned to her ancient and honorable task of showing him that she can still be attractive. But she is being attractive, remember, in a new and a more deliberated way. For here again the law of rhythm shows its power, and the pendulum, having swung so far in one direction, now swings just as far in the other. I mean that where before she intimidated man by her sagacities she now beguiles him with her immaturities. The newer revolt isn’t against man, but against Time. For the accent, as I’ve already said, is now on youth. To-day a woman can break any earthly law, apparently, except

Nature's oldest one of growing old. 'Thou shalt not grow old!' That's the newest of her commandments. She's trying to transform the seven ages of Shakespeare into an attenuated and elongated adolescence, a sort of self-telescoping youth that can be cut short by a dissolution as abrupt and complete as the breaking up of the One-Horse Shay. And if youth can't be retained, then by hook or by crook the appearance of youth must be achieved."

"It sounds very impressive," murmured Cristina, "but don't you think women always wanted to look young?"

"I naturally can't answer for your antediluvian sisters," was my dignified if slightly retarded answer. "But the movement I'm discussing seemed to begin with the Great War, the war that went through our world like a thunder-storm through a garden, tearing up our rooted beliefs and leaving windrows of shattered illusions in its wake. And out of all that suffering and tumult and uncertainty was born this darker New Hedonism which prompts our desperate souls into the desperate pursuit of pleasure and at the same time accounts for our bootleggers and our night-clubs and our revival of tarantism known as the 'dancing mania.'"

"Dancing is healthy," barked Cristina.

"It is, Aspasia, when it's done healthily," I said as I shifted my chair to keep in the shadow. "But there's a crazy sort of carnival spirit under which this sad old world seems to mask its heart-break. And just at present we're in a trough of recedence which, please God, may eventually turn into the promised crest of advance. But in the meantime we have to keep up the show, the valorous whistling until we get past the graveyard. And since woman's both more pliant and more impressionable than man, she's been most affected by this spirit of pretended abandonment. The war, I repeat, caught her just at the crossroads. The wine of liberty was still warm in her blood and the hunger to throw life into its highest gear was being fed by the cunning and cupidity of man the inventor, man the maker of machines. She found herself the spoiled darling of the ages. Even the spirit of jazz crept out of its African jungles and played its part in temporarily rebarbarizing her. She made candor her war-cry and chattered about the ancient Greeks and the sanity of life and talked about inhibitions and repressions and piously discussed companionate marriages and finally demanded a good time while alive since she was going to be a long time dead. She became the New Epicurean, the New Epicurean without a culture. She made herself the Play-Boy of the Western World, arrogant and selfishly individualistic, yet prodigiously isolated and pathetically unrelated to her racial past."

"But a blame sight honester," observed Cristina, "than her Tennysonian

grandmother!”

“That,” I demurred, “is open to question.”

“But you’ll at least admit that women are franker than they used to be?” challenged the girl with her heels on the tea-table.

“Since the area of visibility,” I retorted, “seems to have extended from her insteps to her stepins, I can only agree with you and John Held, Jr., that woman is a little franker than she used to be. But the arresting thing is that she has changed more in line and contour than in character. She’s tried to make herself two-dimensional. Her present revolt is against the maternal type. Any Prussian ideal like that of Major Schiff’s *Venus*, who should always be able to touch her own bosom with her own chin, would be unthinkable to the modern flapper. The new rebellion, if you’ll pardon my reference to such things, seems to be against both hips and bust, so that even Titian’s *Sacred Love* would have to get into a *Madame X* before she could think of facing society, and that brawny-armed *Diana* of Correggio could never dream of driving her chariot down the avenues of modern approval. Curves, as I see it, have suddenly become the curse of the world and eternal war must be waged against them. And woman’s second new commandment seems to be: ‘Thou shalt not be fat!’ Your true *Venus* of to-day is something about as gaunt as a gunboat stripped for action, stripped for action and built for speed and with the last collision-mat tossed overboard.”

Cristina stirred resentfully against the orange cushion.

“You surely don’t mean, darling, that you’ve a weakness for those ample-bosomed and asthmatic old fish-wife figures with three petticoats and a terrace of chins?”

“I don’t see,” I took the trouble to point out to Cristina, “what asthma has to do with the question at issue. I was trying to tell you that fashion no longer countenanced the encumbered and cumbersome lady, the redundant and furbelowed lady corseted behind a *chevaux-de-frise* of whalebone and metal, the lady of billowy lines and barricading draperies and all those mystifying intricacies of costume that used to translate even the rustling of a silken underskirt into mildly aphrodisiacal music, the lady so primly proud of her languors and so wordlessly afraid of her legs. Instead of that lost Hebe of yesterday we’ve got the slab-sided and straight-fronted and flat-torsoed young thing with only a few ounces of dress-goods between her and the outer world, the fearless young she-acrobat with little shame about her sun-burned body and no room for Freudian caves of repression under her flying wisps of chiffon.”

“It isn’t always chiffon, old dear,” retorted the listless-eyed Cristina.

“Perhaps not,” I conceded. “But I was about to observe that the woman of today has changed in more than mere attire. She seems to have changed in line and contour itself. She has most unmistakably changed in outlook. And about the most conspicuous feature of those different alterations, all things considered, is her latter-day attitude toward fat. Everything that is oleaginous stands odious to her. An adipic tendency is to be fought as one fights phthisis. You’re all so ashamed of your sebaceous glands that you frantically try to obliterate any evidence of their activity by frescoing your cuticle with astringent powders, leaving to your Hottentot sister, who can still identify beauty with an oily exterior, the privilege of anointing an opulent bosom with the factitious allurements of animal-greases. At any cost, the woman of to-day must be slender. Fat, either as an announcement of self-indulgence or as an advertisement of indolence or as assurance that the pleasant anabolic processes of the body are still outstripping the katabolic, must be frowned upon. The breathless *jeune fille* of the moment, along with her equally breathless mother, must achieve and retain a boylike hardness and trimness of line. Since old age is no longer fashionable, since, in fact, old age is no longer permissible, you must all be youth incarnate. You must grow upward but not outward, let the dietary chips fall where they may.”

Cristina fanned away a bumble-bee that seemed to have mistaken her slightly retroué nose for a tip-tilted trillium. Then she turned and inspected me with a look of modified pity. “Aren’t you afraid, O Caliph, that a thoughtless world might accept all this brooding on the secret lines of our sex as a sign of old age?”

“But there’s no longer anything secret about them,” I contended. “And I haven’t been brooding about them; I’ve merely been talking about them. And you know as well as I do that modern woman has declared war against fat. She simply *must* keep down the curves. She must stick to the straight-jacket silhouette of the slinky-sweatered nymph who comes in from her tennis and golf and looks at the abundant-bosomed women of Rubens and Van Dyck in their time-darkened frames and calls them the ‘cow’ women of the past. And if it’s true that thinness in the time of those billowy and bust-laden old dears implied asceticism and the ascendancy of the spiritual life, Cristina, you’ve got to remember that the thinness of modern woman is much less a preparation for the days of sanctimony than a grim training down for the rigors of her jazz-age diversions.”

“But after all,” queried Cristina, “isn’t it better to be lithe than lazy?”

“Yes,” I acknowledged, “just as it’s better to be round than angular. I mean that Nature, for her own immitigable ends, demands a certain softness in women. But so autocratic has this flat-chested new queen of fashion become, so fixed is she in her

passion for skinniness, that it seems about time for somebody to introduce a little biology into her childishly bobbed head and shake a little of the nonsense out of her half-skeletonized body. For, without quite knowing it, she's really walking hand in hand with a new phase of malnutrition and consorting with a new type of physical deformation. She's running both her Chinese sister of the stunted foot and her Peruvian rival of the compressed skull-bones a pretty close second in the race to abort nature. Her spindle-shanked stringiness may make her quite acceptable as a sub-deb of the moment, and those scarecrow lines that she describes as boyish may render her a better partner for the prevailing acrobatic feat known as dancing, her dieting and reducing may even prolong into middle age those outer contours once peculiar to the undeveloped adolescent, and in the grim battle for male attention she may delude unthinking man into admiration for a spring that promises never to ripen into summer. But if woman is still to be regarded as the mother of our race, it's high time to ask if this over-athletized framework of bone and sinew, with its muscle-bound torso and its over-tensioned nerves and its stultified glands, is equipped for its final job, its final and self-justifying job, of reproduction."

Cristina's sigh was a small one.

"I thought you'd get around to that before the day was over," she languidly observed. "Men always do."

"Well, that's a healthy sign. It wasn't so long ago that women got up and left the room when you touched on a thing like that. But reproduction, after all, is a pretty important function. Next to self-preservation, it's the biggest job we have to face. But when we face it honestly we're going to see that this newfangled flapper type of bride is developing into a childless or a one-child woman. We'll find that she's paying too high a price for this up-to-date passion for emaciation which may continue to crowd her into a vague twilight of universal girlishness where all cats are gray, but where in the end she'll find herself classified with the incompetents and the neurotics and the self-eliminating waste material of life. The Turk, she'll tell you as she tucks her lip-stick away, still likes his beauty fat. And adipose tissue may still be an asset to the belle of the Eskimo village where a reserve of potential fuel is an assurance of personal survival. But when the steam-roller of fashion irons out the curves of life, when——"

"Wait a minute," interrupted Cristina. "Are you trying to tell me it's a sin to be slender? Are you trying to argue that men don't like slenderness, that they haven't always liked it?"

"Of course we like slenderness," I acceded, "in its proper time and place. Didn't young Nausicaa make old Ulysses think of a little palm tree growing beside the

shrine of Apollo at Delos? And didn't the solemnly wise Solomon compare the stature of his true love of the moment to a palm tree in its slimness? And would I regard you as the second best-looking girl in all the family if you couldn't fit in between the arms of that peacock-chair? But both Solomon and Ulysses, you must bear in mind, were more intent on flattering the youthful than on outlining the physique of the mature. The bud, my dear, must swell into the flower and the flower must finally ripen for impregnation. And the macilent Nausicaa wasn't the mother of those saner and sterner Greeks who fashioned the Venus of Melos out of marble and handed that ample figure down to us as an imperishable ideal of womanly loveliness."

"That sounds rather sentimental," protested Cristina as she reached for a cigarette. "You know as well as I do you wouldn't want a Venus di Milo to dance with at the Lido or eat with at the Plaza!"

"Wouldn't I, now?" was my prompt retort. "And if I took her there she'd make all those 'chickens' of to-day look like a bunch of bony and attenuated neuresthenics. They might call her a 'cow' woman, but she'd soon show them how deficient in frame and subnormal in vitality they really were. They'd begin to feel a trifle flat and over-febrile and devoid of that serenity which should crown all conscious power. Our poor Venus, of course, might need a brassière and a rubber girdle and a round of Turkish baths before she'd look at home in front of a Paul Whiteman band, but she'd soon show herself more of a woman than the dehydrated and hamstrung females we now glimpse in the fashion-plate and the stage-chorus line. For men know what they want. They want, above all things, to see their world go on. And it can't get far with your length-without-breadth lady-hyena, with your cubistic scarecrow without softness or substance, with perpetuated immaturity that carries no promise of racial fulfillments."

"I guess," said Cristina, "that I'd better go back to cream in my coffee." She felt her ribs, apparently without knowing she was doing so. Then she reached for a domino of sugar and began to nibble it. Then she looked at me with a frown between her well-plucked eyebrows. "Since we're speaking of the Greeks," she resumed, "isn't there something to be said about the love of beauty they really invented, the callisthenics and games for women they insisted on? I'd an idea they were great dancers and rather good at outdoor sports, those Greek women. And isn't there something to be admired in girlhood that can dance off its vapors, just as we ought to like boyhood when it can box and race its morbidity away?"

"Of course," I agreed after a pause for the purpose of reorganizing my lines. "But those same Greeks were the first to invent an aphorism to the effect that by

taking the middle course we shall not go astray. They were responsible for what's been called the immoderate moderation of Aristotle. And your eternally teetering sex, Cristina, is always seesawing too far one way and then too far another."

"Which is something man never does?" ventured the solemn-eyed Cristina.

"When he does go to extremes," I countered, "you'll usually find a woman involved in the case."

"I was wondering," said Cristina with studied deliberateness, "if she'd be one of those women of—well, of certain Latin races who when they get to thirty surrender to fat and old age."

"Don't run away with the idea," I warned my willowy companion of the rose-arbor, "that I'm arguing against being young and attractive. Youth is youth, my dear, and about all vernal things is the fragile beauty of April. And it's lovely, of course, just to be young. But the years have the habit of taking our adolescence away from us. And life's crowning gift, it seems to me, is still the mighty complicated art of growing old gracefully."

"Well, that's what every woman wants to do."

"But is she doing it?" I demanded of the frowning Cristina. "And is a pitched battle with obesity the only avenue to dignity? For to my way of thinking there's something basically ridiculous in an army of banterers hanging breathless over the bathroom-scales and gnashing its teeth over its bust-measurements. It over-accentuates the superficial. And deep down in my mannish bosom it awakens the same sort of mild pity touched with revulsion which I always feel when I see you fair ladies making-up in public. It's not a felony, of course, to put powder and rouge on your face and lip-stick on your mouth and mascara on your lashes. And it's not against the law to take a bath. But there are certain things that are better done in private."

Cristina's laugh was a listlessly condoning one.

"But it's for you men, old dear, that women do all their decorating. And it should be flattering to remember that we still want your approval."

"But every time you publicly paint your face," I pointed out, "you really bare your soul. You openly acknowledge your preoccupation with an issue that is as trivial as it is deceptive, and you advertise a disillusioning self-absorption in your own appearance. While you're so blandly beautifying your skin you're really uglifying your spirit."

Cristina got up and stretched. Then she stepped to the far end of the tea-wagon for her vanity-case.

"You wouldn't like me with a shiny nose," she observed as she studied what she

could see of her face in a two-inch pocket-mirror.

“Live sanely,” I proclaimed, “and your nose won’t shine!”

“Wouldn’t it, now?” said Cristina through a little cloud of face-powder. “A day like to-day would make anything shine. And my things are positively sticking to me.”

I had long since learned, where Cristina was concerned, that you mustn’t bank too heavily on the modern girl behaving like a gentleman. So on that ultimate and over-intimate statement of hers I essayed no comment. I preferred, in fact, to return to the theme under discussion.

“And speaking of women and the ravages of time,” I ventured, “I’ve often wondered what’s become of those dear old ladies that used to make life and literature so delightful. Where can you find them now, those stately and mellow old ladies, unashamed of their years and enriched by all their past, placid and wise and tolerant, as sound and sweet as a winter apple, as restful as an open fire and as serene as an autumn evening? Where are we to find them in these degenerate days?”

I felt, from Cristina’s smile, that she was about to accuse me of being sentimental again. But her face sobered as she reached for her cigarette-case.

“Come around in thirty years, old top,” she said with purely protective flippancy, “and I’ll show you one!”



CHAPTER VIII
ON THE FASHIONABLE UGLINESS

“How do I look, old dear?” demanded Cristina as she sidled up to my paper-littered study-desk where I wallowed waist-deep in an eighteenth chapter that obstinately refused to keep afloat.

Now, Cristina’s all right, in a way, but I knew, I knew as well as I know I’ll never be a good golfer, that the lady in question hadn’t come to me for criticism. She had come for praise, and praise alone. And there were times, I’d found, when the contemplation of Cristina could fill me with much the same sort of esthetic fatigue that overtakes you after a reading of Amy Lowell, since there’s a natural limit to the color and intensity which any stunned mortal can digest at a single sitting.

So my glance wasn’t a too sympathetic one as I turned and scrutinized the silk-sheathed intruder who seemed to be always asking me about her more intimate landscaping effects.

“Wouldn’t you call that pretty catsy?” asked the effervescent Cristina as she caught up two folds of her incredibly colored frock and pirouetted back from my desk. Then she stood arrested, awaiting my answer.

“Just why,” I finally and solemnly proclaimed, “a passably good-looking woman can uglify herself in a Cro-Magnon get-up like that is beyond my comprehension.”

“Cro-Magnon?” cried Cristina, concealing her wince. “It’s positively the latest word from Paris.”

I reexamined *la dernier cri* from across the sea. But even that second inspection left me unimpressed.

“What are you thinking?” demanded Cristina.

“I was wondering why you should be so determined to look like a Comic Supplement.”

“Because,” announced Cristina as she patted a fold of the slinky Parisian monstrosity into place, “I intend to be striking.”

“Couldn’t you leave that to Nature?”

Cristina inspected me with a cloudy eye.

“Didn’t I hear you say the other day that there were a hanged sight too many beautiful women in the world?”

“If I did,” was my prompt retort, “I was talking a lot of mooshwa. For we can never have too much of a good thing.”

But Cristina’s brow remained furrowed.

“Well, you at least said that to be merely pretty no longer meant to stand out

from the mob. And you insinuated that since all women can make themselves good-looking there wasn't much distinction, nowadays, in being attractive."

I nursed a vague yet stubborn suspicion that I wasn't being correctly reported. But I managed to see what the rainbow-clad trespasser on my privacy was driving at.

"Remembering," I pursued, "woman's present herd-impulse toward ornamentation, and recalling how gladly she accepts Mr. Du Bois's command to get busy and bring the Beautiful and the Good into existence, if the world is really without such things, I must plead guilty to some such proclamation. But Beauty, my dear, should never make us suffer."

"It seems to do that when we get too big a dose of it," contended the slender-bodied Cristina.

"You mean Beauty's like bean-soup," I countered, "and people can only swallow so much of it?"

"Of course. For we all get tired of it and turn to something else. I even know a certain two-cylinder author who sometimes gets fed up with *me*. And don't you remember how tired you got of blue skies down in lower California two winters ago, and almost went crazy with relief when a rain-storm came along?"

"And who was the old lady," I asked of my companion, "who said '*De gustibus*' after kissing a cow?"

Cristina, apparently, understood the cow better than the Latin allusion.

"Well, why shouldn't one kiss cows?" she demanded. "They're cool-eyed and contented and browse on clover-blossoms and were never known to have halitosis. I like 'em. I like everything on four legs, cows and calves and colts and pigs and chickens."

"Chickens," I reminded Cristina, "have only two legs."

"Then it's ducks I must have been thinking of. But we're getting a long way from bean-soup, aren't we, old dear?"

"Oh, I thought, for a moment, it was Beauty we were discussing," I gently reminded the capricious Cristina.

"Of course it was," acknowledged the Socratic lady with the Platonic light in her eye. "You were telling me, or you were going to tell me, how lovely I looked. And I was saying how men seemed to get tired of mere loveliness, how they seemed to want something fresh and more rococo. So that, I imagine, is why we really invented Style. And you needn't smile in that superior way, Sir Oracle, for Style is positively the most important word in the whole dictionary of womanhood."

I turned and reinspected the weird cobweb of attenuated lines and incongruous

Czechoslovakian color-combinations that bedecked the solemn-eyed Cristina.

“The trouble is, darling, that your styles don’t and won’t wash in the laundry-tub of Time. And the more attention you give to your clothes and your complexion, apparently, the more you approximate to the appearance of the wax doll. You all look, eventually, as though you all came out of the same mold.”

Cristina’s pale hand, pearl-diving for a shoulder-strap, came to a sudden stop.

“That, stupid, is exactly what I’ve been trying to say. Now that about anybody without a hump or a harelip can make herself pretty, we’ve got to distinguish ourselves in some way. We’ve got to get across by being a little different from the mob. To be smart, we’ve got to be a step in advance of the Great Unwashed.”

“But an ounce of personality,” I maintained, “is often worth a pound of pulchritude. And these recurring tidal-waves of fashion that break over you seem, to a mere man, to wash too much of the individuality out of a woman. You are the puppets of something you can’t control. Fashion crowds you all into the same Procrustean bed. And the one pearl of wisdom I garner from this present leggy generation of women is that many, many girl-babies must have learned to walk too early in life.”

Cristina, instead of smiling at that, confronted me with a deepening frown.

“Would you want us to go back to the bondage of long skirts and corsets and petticoats and——”

“Stop!” I cried, with my hand up like a traffic-policeman’s. And seeing that she had stopped, I went on. “No, Cristina, I wouldn’t want to see you bury your light under a bushel of lingerie. But it seems to me that women are always slipping out of one bondage only to get tied up in another. Curtailing your skirts hasn’t curtailed your attention to apparel, just as shingling your empty young pates, although it may have ruined the hair-pin industry, hasn’t exactly deforested our nation of its barber-poles. You may be free from the hat-pin, darling, but you’re not free from the hair-dresser. And to-morrow, of course, will see its new mode and its new madness.”

“But freeing ourselves from all that mid-Victorian old harness isn’t madness,” contended the fair Cristina as she over-airily recrossed her silk-sheathed legs. “And women’s clothes were never as sane and never as lovely as they are to-day.”

“I wish,” I said as I closed my volume of Gibbon, “that I could share in your enthusiasm for yourself. But let’s try to get a bird’s-eye view of this beauty stuff. It’s not as new, remember, as you imagine, for they’ve just been digging make-up boxes out of the barrel-vaulted Temenos of Nebuchadnezzar. And what you call the harness of a hundred years ago shows that your sisters of the Godey’s *Lady’s Book* era were even then panting for the shadow of the great rock of attractiveness. But

they demanded, in those days, beauty combined with elegance. The duchesses were elegant in their lavender-scented boudoirs; the George-Eliot ingénues were elegant in their gardens of clove-pinks and primroses; the heroines of the parlor poets were unassailably elegant in their parlor backgrounds; the——”

“But such parlors!” interrupted Cristina, with a pitying shake of her shingle-bob.

“That’s what I was coming to,” I said with as much patience as I could retain. “We seem to get a lot of fun, nowadays, out of sneering at the lambrequin and the what-not and the plush-album and the lamp-mat and the alum-basket and the horsehair sofa. But the sanded simplicity of the Colonial movement that came after them was not exactly a thing of beauty. And the best the Pre-Raphaelites could bequeath us seems to be that ignominious throne of domesticity known as the Morris Chair. We drifted away from those florid interiors, I suppose, when we found out about germs, and realized what an unseemly litter all those crowded knickknacks stood for, just as woman realized that over-trussed bodies and trailing skirts weren’t the final word in personal hygiene. To-day, too, we’re more on the wing, both as individuals and as home-dwellers, so, since we’ve taken to nesting for a season in flats and hotel-suites, the old heaviness of fashion and furniture has proved doubly inconvenient. But we mustn’t run away with the idea that we have a corner on beauty. We’re going to be left, remember, to the tender mercies of 1959. And when the philosopher of that mid-century day compares our Volsteadean Era of Abbreviation with the Victorian Era of Elegance, it may prove a choice between two despairs.”

“Well,” retorted Cristina the realist, “I’m not staying awake nights worrying over what Nineteen-Fifty-Nine is going to say about us. I’m more interested in the opinion of Nineteen-Twenty-Nine. I may look foolish to posterity, but I want to look good to my friends.”

“And you do, sweet child, without a shadow of doubt,” I was human enough to concede. “But how are you going to pan out, purely on the basis of esthetics? I mean, is this modern get-up of woman’s something intrinsically beautiful? Is it unquestionably lovely, as a matter of line and plane and contour? Stepping aside from the narcotizing mists of Style, is the woman of to-day in her skull-clinging pastel cloche, her slinky short skirts, her French heels and plucked eyebrows, her flattened torso-lines and her Little Eva legginess, something for a second Shelley to rhapsodize over? No, not by a long shot. And dare any sculptor seriously hope to perpetuate her, just as she is, in a national monument? She might prove as historically interesting as a Norse throne made out of narwhal tusks, but on the basis of pure esthetics, you may be sure, she’ll eventually look quite as ridiculous as the crinolined

female in your Aunt Fanny's 1875 *Book of Beauty*."

The fair Cristina frowned for a full minute over this.

"Then the natural deduction," she finally and acidly affirmed, "must be that the only safe way for a poor woman to face the future is simply to take everything off."

"Well, the lady from Melos we were talking about the other day didn't have much on, and twenty-five hundred years of time doesn't seem to have left her outmoded. As Rodin has pointed out, she's essential and unchanging womanhood, pouring peace and splendor on the world."

"But why can't you have essential womanhood under two yards of 1929 crêpe-de-chine?" demanded Cristina. "Look at the women that Sargent has painted!"

"Yes, look at them," I challenged. "Look at them and you look at a gallery of discontented misfits, lovely modern ladies with all their disquiet, their restlessness, their drowsy eagerness for the unattainable, their utter and incontestable lack of imagination, and their betrayals of mental and physical maladjustments. They have all the earmarks of a generation that wants new sensations because it has exhausted so many of the old ones. They seem without poise, without serenity. And since our racial American vigor endows us with an admiration for force rather than form, we prefer those Sargent faces, with all their unrest, to the vapid beauties the Mauve Decade miniaturists used to dish out for us."

"Of course," exulted Cristina. "That's what I've been trying to tell you. We can be appealing even in our ugliness. And we're tired of being prettified. We've had a hanged sight too much of that old honeyed sweetness and we want to be ourselves."

"But you're not being yourselves," I contended, "when tidal-waves of herd-impulse over which you seem to have no control swing you first this way and then that way. You are individual only in job lots. You accept your commercialized fashions as passively as you accept the seasons. And the most singular thing about it, to a mere man like myself, is that all your work is on the outside. You spend twenty-five dollars for a permanent-wave on your empty heads, but you hesitate a long time before you expend a like sum on the interior decoration of that same head, on a few intellectual assets to counterbalance your preoccupation with personal adornment. To attain to the tenderness of Imogen, or the wit of Rosalind, or the soft austerity of Isabella, is no more your secret ideal than to be guilty of the waist-measurement of the *Venus Genetrix* in the Louvre. Yet a little study of that old-fashioned monstrosity in marble might set you on your feet, just as a study of Japanese painting finally put Whistler on the right road to simplicity. It might bring home to you a sense of proportion and refinement. And that in turn might persuade you that the best way to attain earthly beauty is not to *épater* the bewildered male with factory-made

novelties and new twists of attire, or lack of attire, but to bear more or less meekly in mind that a beautiful body is the outward expression of a beautiful soul. All that, Cristina, may sound fantastic and preachy and old-fashioned, but, if I'm wrong in either statement or assumption, I wish you'd point out where."

Cristina, having studied her face in her gold and ivory pocket-mirror, abstractedly powdered the former and tucked away the latter.

"You're wrong, Sir Oracle, in just two points," she patiently retorted. "It may be true, as you said the other day, that the hunger for beauty is as permanent as the hunger for bread. But the apple of beauty, in the first place, seems to get over-ripe, now and then, and go bad, so to speak. And men, in the second place, are not as analytically high-hat as you imagine. They still like their meat raw, apparently, in the matter of sex-appeal. We've got to ballyhoo them inside the door before we can proceed with the auction-sale. Every woman pretty well knows just how much or how little outward appearance, or dress, or adornment, or anything you want to call it, counts in selling herself to the lordly male. But it's this same personal adornment, this matter of dress and all the other dreadful things you preach about, that baits the hook, that draws the idle window-shopper in through the door. Dress, I mean, delivers man into woman's hands. It delivers him——"

"Duly chloroformed," I interrupted.

"And having delivered him there," proceeded the indefeasible Cristina, "it gives the poor lady her forlorn and frantic chance to show just what she's got beyond the window-dressing. For women, remember, are most everlastingly working for the attention and admiration of men. At least, all natural and normal women are."

"Then why can't they do it in a natural and normal way?"

"For the same reason, I suppose, that only about one man in a hundred prefers Tchaikovsky and Godowsky to the musical epidemics of Tin-Pan Alley. They're not educated up to it. And to conquer, old dear, woman still has to stoop."

"Well," I said with a sigh, "it takes an endless amount of history to make even a little tradition, and an endless amount of tradition to make even a little taste."

Cristina gazed at me with a look of grudging approval.

"You've at last said something," she observed, "almost worth remembering."

"Oh, don't blame me for that," I meekly confessed. "It happened to come from Henry James a good many years ago!"

Cristina's retort, whatever it may have been, was cut short by the majestic entrance of Williams. That ambidextrous butler of ours somewhat startled me by appearing with a coffin under his arm and a look of triumph on his face.

"A most important message for you, Miss Cristina," said Williams as he handed

my Cro-Magnon companion a carefully sealed note and stood the coffin on end beside her. The latter, I noticed, she surrounded with an appropriative arm while the former was tremulously torn open and read. And it wasn't until, with a little coo of rapture, she took the lid off the coffin that I realized it was actually a box of American Beauty roses.

"It's from Roddie," said Cristina out of the silence that prolonged itself after Williams' departure. "He wants me to motor over to Bay-Head with him tomorrow. Would you?"

I sat regarding Cristina with a saturnine eye.

"Why shouldn't you?" I demanded.

Cristina's eye, during a full minute of silence, was a meditative one.

"I think," she finally asserted, "that Roddie ought to eat crow for at least another week or two."

"With that incendiary Sheppard girl?" I suggested. But Cristina was busy rereading her note.

"He says that his unhappy experiences with other women have only taught him to appreciate the Good and the Beautiful."

"And does that mean you?"

"Of course," said Cristina.

"And you're going to take him back?" I inquired as Cristina took the long-stemmed American Beauties out of the box that looked so much like a coffin.

"Not too quickly," said the tight-lipped lady in the Cro-Magnon get-up. "He's sure going to do his share of crawling before he buys any meals for me!"

I knew, by the light in her eye, that she meant it. And a man has his sex to protect.

"That," I remonstrated, "sounds a bit barbaric."

"Well, aren't you always saying that women are only half civilized?" demanded the perversely adorable savage-lady who marched so triumphantly out through my doorway.



CHAPTER IX
THE MATTER OF MALE AND FEMALE

The house, with everybody away, seemed quiet and lonely. I sat in the empty sun-room, listening to the katydids and wondering why on that abysmal August night even my best briar-wood tasted bitter. I was tired, after wrestling with a nineteenth chapter that never seemed to get anywhere, and I was willing to agree with Joe Hergesheimer that writing books was much harder work than digging ditches.

I was, in fact, on the point of refreshing myself with a mint-julep when Cristina unexpectedly invaded my deheliated solarium, flung herself into a chaise-longue, and regarded me with a meditative eye.

“What is it this time?” I asked as I reached for my tobacco-jar.

“It’s Roddie,” admitted the cloudy-eyed Cristina. “And you were right, old top, for once in your life. I didn’t give him enough line, and he got away.”

“You mean you’ve had another rumpus?” I asked of my perilously high-spirited sister-in-law.

“It’s worse than a rumpus. You see, Roddie’s so ridiculously possessive. He says an engaged girl should be interested in only one man, that she shouldn’t even _____”

“Well, shouldn’t she?” I interrupted.

“Yes, in a way,” acknowledged Cristina. “But she mustn’t let him know it. I certainly never intend to keep running behind Roddie with my tongue hanging out. And if he’s willing to go yachting with that Cranston woman just because I danced three times with Dickie Frenkel, he can go for good.”

I remembered “that Cranston woman.” She was christened “Wilhelmina,” after the late margravine of Baireuth, but she was known to her more intimate circle of friends as “Bill.” And I knew Bill. I knew her as a browned and broad-shouldered Amazon who did swan-dives in the Salters’ swimming-pool and sailed her own single-sticker and shot ducks down on the swamps of Barnegat and bred dogs and swaggered around in hairy tweeds and thought herself a good deal of a man.

“It won’t last long.”

“Why won’t it?” asked the girl in the chaise-longue.

“Because she’s a big horse,” I said with consolatory coarseness, “and Roddie’s too masculine to get much out of a woman of that type.”

“He certainly was on the job to-night,” averred the unconsolated Cristina.

“That, my dear, was to punish you for demanding more than your due. It was a Roland for your Oliver. It was exactly what your federation of women’s clubs did

down at Atlantic City when they made all husbands and male guests sit in the gallery.”

But Cristina wasn't listening to me.

“I wonder,” she said as she reached for a cigarette, “if men don't really get a double-barreled kick out of knocking around with those mannish women? And, as a matter of fact, aren't men and women getting more and more alike?”

I smoked for a silent moment, thinking this over.

“It wasn't so long ago,” I acknowledged, “when you could tell a man from a woman, about the same as you can tell a fork from a knife. But in at least one aspect of your contention you're right. We have to look twice at many a youthful figure, nowadays, before we're dead sure whether it's male or female. And even after a second glance we can't be quite sure. But if you're trying to say that modern life is narrowing the gulf between the sexes, is tending to make the woman actually more manly and the man more womanly, then you're barking up an entirely different tree.”

“But women,” contended Cristina, “are more and more doing what men do. They smoke and drink and swear and dress like men. And the male flower of our civilization, such as—well, such as you authors and artists and musicians seem to get more and more like women.”

“But all genius, Bayard Taylor has pointed out, is slightly hermaphroditic!” I modestly reminded Cristina.

“You call women vain,” retorted Cristina. “But you're all getting more and more like them.”

“And the sequential inference is that this merging tendency will persist?” I asked after finally swallowing the insult to my fellow-toilers in the fine arts.

“It seems plausible enough,” retorted Cristina, “when you remember the number of Bill Cranstons there are running around loose.”

“But while Bill is trying to be a sport in a social way,” I proclaimed, “she is really proving herself a sport after the horticultural manner of speaking. She's merely a throw-back. And your fears, svelte lady of the shingle-bob, are quite groundless. ‘Male and female created He them,’ as the Good Book has it. And man is man, my dear, and woman is woman. And such they will and must remain as long as the race continues.”

“But there's the thing you call evolution,” persisted Cristina as she shut the windows to keep the sound of the katydids out. “We're working side by side with men and getting more and more molded by the same environment.”

“But the fixed tendency of evolution,” I argued, “has been to make the sexes more and more different. And when I say different, I mean different in both character

and appearance. When you bump into an exceptional case where the two seem to merge in mental and physical uncertainties you find the homotonous neuter promptly eliminating itself from the propagatory scene.”

“You’re trying to say, I suppose, that what we called the Nances and sissies are not strong for parenthood?”

“If you prefer putting it that way,” I agreed. “But it’s worth remembering that the ancient verities remain, even though newer overtones occasionally come into existence. The pinched and pallid male lily, who minces and lips and puts scented hair-oil on his cerulean locks, isn’t the idol of the twentieth-century girl like yourself, just as the towering and thick-muscled she-grenadier, the bony and brawny and thumping big giantess with a hard hand and an evident mustache isn’t ever going to be the matrimonial ideal of a normal-minded man like Roddie.”

Cristina shifted uneasily in her chaise-longue.

“There’s always the chance,” she ventured, “that those big she-bullies may go back to something like marriage by capture. And then what would poor Roddie do?”

“He’d do,” I retorted, “about the same that he does when he gets face to face with one of your aggressively intellectualized women. He’d beat it back to a circle where he could still feel reasonably assured that he was the lord of creation. He’d revive his wounded amour propre by frivolling with a low-brow. He’d——”

“Thanks!” interrupted the icily ironic Cristina.

“I was speaking impersonally,” I solemnly asseverated. “For no man, you’ll find, is drawn to a woman cleverer than himself. And he’ll never become romantically attached to a woman who is stronger than he is.”

“But you men are always telling us that we should be stronger,” contended the cloudy-eyed Cristina. “And there have been women who were just as strong as men.”

“Where?” I asked. “And when?”

“Well, there were those Amazons that we read about.”

“We nurse,” I had to acknowledge, “a somewhat disturbing memory of that Amazonian régime and those legendary warrior-women who willingly removed the right breast to facilitate the use of the bow and arrow in battle. And we’re told that they temporarily dominated the destinies of the Cappadocian male. But those lusty Amazons, under the cold light of research, seem to be about as mythical as the Atlas who once held up the world and the mænads who so blithely tore their lovers to pieces.”

“But there have been big women in the world,” maintained Cristina, “women we

really know about, like Boadicea and Elizabeth and Joan of Arc and Catherine of Russia.”

“And Carrie Nation,” I added. And having dodged the pillow that Cristina threw at me, I went back to the subject in hand as a harried robin goes back to its nest. “Yes, Cristina,” I concurred, “we have the occasional historical example of a virile and vigorous-minded woman becoming a power in the state and a leader in national movements. But such women are so rare, candor compels me to admit, that they remain memorable because they stand exceptions to the general rule. As in the case of the man who bites the dog, they constitute front-page news.”

“Then how about the Bill Cranstons?”

“I try not to think about them.”

“But we have ’em,” averred Cristina, “all around us.”

“Yes,” I agreed, “it must be admitted we have a momentary fashion for masculinity in line and attire on the part of a certain limited number of women. But this fashion is due to something we were talking about the other day. It’s really the effort of the over-formalized female to torture herself into passing distinction. Being mannish is her short-cut to conspicuity. And yet she makes herself mannish only as Hamlet happened to be mad, in definitely restricted points of the compass. When the wind is from the northeast, you may be sure, she knows a depilatory from a shaving-cream and a spring bonnet from a ballot-box.”

But Cristina wasn’t satisfied.

“You can’t,” she maintained, “wave a real condition away with a short-winded joke. You’ve said yourself that occupation and environment always have their influence on character and physique. And machines are certainly taking the hard work away from men. And when they lose the ability to do hard work they certainly lose a little of their virility. They’re losing their hair earlier and earlier in life, and you know it. And since woman has learned to work side by side with man, whether it’s in an office or a shop or a factory, it seems only natural to me that she should get more masculine, more masculine in the way she looks and the way she thinks.”

“But long before our era of engines and electric currents, Cristina, woman learned to labor without entirely losing her womanhood. And since a great surgeon has said that God first made a womb and then built a woman up around it, you may be sure she’s not going to throw overboard her cargo of sex no matter what happens to the ship of state. And since to-day woman seems to be very neatly avoiding those occupations that demand muscularity, and muscularity alone, she is likewise avoiding that threat of racial virilence which time and fatigue occasionally bring to the feminine.”

"I don't quite get that," demurred the frowning Cristina.

"I mean," I patiently amplified, "that modern woman differs and always will differ from the medieval peasant-woman and from the North American squaw. Unceasing toil and drudgery, it's true, made those types harsh and hard and stolid. But the woman worker of to-day, and especially the woman worker in the New World, still finds her tribal valuation reckoned along esthetic lines rather than along economic lines. It may be a good thing to be efficient, but it's fatal to be ugly. It may be sad to march in the great army of the unemployed, but it's sadder to trail along in the great army of the unloved."

Cristina's movement was one of exasperation.

"That's such a pig-headed masculine point of view!" she cried. "And if woman's upsetting the world to-day she's really doing it to escape from the tyranny of man. She's going to have her innings, no matter what it costs."

"But she isn't going to upset the world, old dear," I proclaimed with all the patience at my command. "And this social revolution of women that you talk so much about may loom momentous in the narrow dooryard of our present era, but in some way it still fails to prove itself startling when inspected from the heights of historical perspective."

"Men's vision, of course, is so wonderful!" muttered the frowning Cristina.

"We make our mistakes, being mortal," I conceded. "But we've at least learned that fundamental changes come slowly. We've also found out how heavy the long chain of ancestral habit can drag behind us. At this very moment, in fact, we're both nursing in these nicely clothed bodies of ours quite a number of simian inheritances. Your fifth toe may be dwindling, Cristina, but you can't get away from your arboreal ancestors."

"I never knew I had any," demurred the scrupulously depiled lady confronting me.

"There are quite a number of things you don't know," I observed with what casualness I could command, "for all your cleverness. And what makes it worse, Cristina, is the fact that you also do so many things without knowing just why you do them. You're like the modern house-dog that always turns around before he lies down on the rug. He does it, of course, because his far-off ancestors who happened to live in jungle and undergrowth had to flatten out a bed before they could rest in it. They also had to make sure there was no coiled-up enemy in the immediate neighborhood. And that turn on the hearth-rug is an echo out of the dim past. It's like the restlessness that comes to the tamest old canine when the moon is full."

"Then you know that feeling?"

“I know,” I resumed, ignoring both the interruption and the implication, “that long, long ago a full moon meant light enough for the primitive wolf-dog to get after a deer-pack and run down a meal. It meant good hunting weather. And a ghostly back-wash of that old impulse still surges through our dogs of to-day and makes them bay the moon. Even you women, I’ve also noticed, are characterized by an unmistakable unrest in the right sort of moonlight. You all get dreamy and romantic and want something to happen. And those subliminal psychic disturbances are really echoes out of an age when marriage by capture must have been mostly a nocturnal activity.”

Cristina’s eye was an abstracted one.

“It’s wonderful what men can get away with,” she murmured, “when the moonlight’s just right. You really ought to try it some night, old-timer.”

There was a note in Cristina’s voice that I didn’t altogether approve of. So I punished her by staring off into space, sitting silent a moment, and then meditating aloud: “I wonder if, after all, woman is going to be like the gorilla, and grow into one of Nature’s failures?”

Cristina leaned languidly back in her chaise-longue.

“Yes, that really brings us back to our theme, doesn’t it,” she said with lemon-drop sweetness. “For we were talking about men and women getting more alike, weren’t we?”

“But they’re not getting more alike,” I reminded Cristina, realizing how futile it was to argue with the fair sex. “This advancing civilization of ours may tend to make the sexes more and more alike with regard to legal rights and social privileges. But it most distinctly doesn’t bring a corresponding similarity in either physical appearance or mental make-up. And the inference that equality of rights implies equality of aspect might even flower in the naive belief that putting a ballot in a box will bring a spade-beard to a suffragette’s chin overnight. The radical-minded lady may rock the boat, my dear, but Time has the habit of tolerantly trimming it for her. And in that connection,” I added as I reached for a book next to my parchment-shaded reading-lamp, “let me give you a sentence or two I dug out of Havelock Ellis just before dinner to-night. ‘Any exaggerated anxiety lest the natural law be overthrown is misplaced. The world is not so insecurely poised. We may preserve an attitude of entire equanimity in the face of such social re-adjustment. For such re-adjustment is either the outcome of wholesome natural instinct, in which case our social structure is strengthened and broadened, or it is not. And if it is not, it is unlikely to become organically ingrained in the species.’”

Cristina sat silent as I put the book down again.

“But there *have* been bearded ladies,” she contended, obviously following her own secret line of thought.

“All right,” I agreed, “let’s look at this problem of the beard. Let’s go back to the ancestral ghosts who ride in our crowded omnibus of instinct and find out how they felt about it. Whiskers, we know, were revered by the ancient Hebrew, honored by the early Egyptians, and solemnly respected by the old Greeks. The latter, it’s true, often represented a beardless youth as their type of ideal beauty. But beards, in that earlier day, seemed to connote power. Michael Angelo, you’ll remember, certainly put a good one on his Moses. And Jupiter and Janus and Neptune and Hector have always been pictured for us as bearded figures. Yet Eschricht and Darwin unite in telling us that both sexes were once bearded. The later Egyptians may have learned to shave for reasons of personal comfort, since it’s recorded that the cootie and the tick were troublesome pests along the banks of the ancient Nile. But man’s face, notwithstanding the barber and shaving-cream and the safety-razor, has persisted in remaining a hairy one. It was pretty early in the race, on the other hand, that woman lost her face-hair. It went, for one reason, because her life became more sheltered, and it was helped along, you may be sure, by an instinctive effort to emphasize the differences between woman and her mate. For it was the dawn of civilization, of course, that brought its first promises of individualization. Woman wanted to be different. Amorous infatuation, she found, depended more and more on differentiation. The thick-haired hunter and the bearded warrior, I mean, were more readily attracted by the woman whose skin was soft and smooth. They competed for her and mated with her and tended to perpetuate her type.”

“If that’s true,” contended Cristina, “the woman of to-day ought to love whiskers on a man. But she doesn’t. They’re almost funny to her.”

“She may not care for a Mittel-European parade of spinach,” I countered, “but she does still care for the virility which is implied in the power to grow that good set of whiskers, even though our modern male American fashion seems to demand rigorous and continuous deforestation of the human face. For the youth who finds himself unable to raise a mustache, no matter how untimely its end, is manifestly a shamefaced young man. Along the same line, the girl of to-day who finds hair on her lip is manifestly an unhappy young lady. And if it’s there, she gets rid of it. It all goes back to the fundamental expectation that the one sex should remain the complement of the other. I mean, Cristina, that we are drawn by what is different. We’re allured by what is aloof from our own life-sphere. And out of those over-tones of a basic impulse is born what we call romantic love. We perhaps don’t always remember that

we're groping blindly for the benefits of cross-fertilization. We may not even stop to think, when we find love scorning near relationships and reaching out for its opposites and its complementaries, how sagaciously we are campaigning against the ever-threatening hereditary transmission of injurious qualities in our stock. We don't stop to tell ourselves that we are fighting more for the race than for our individual happiness. We pretty well leave it to instinct. And about all we know, in the whirlpool of all those intermingling impulses, is that we've fallen in love. And to-day it's a pretty deeply ingrained habit, this trick of falling in love with our prospective mates. We want them because they embody, or for the time being seem to embody, our somewhat vaguely formulated ideals of beauty and adequate functioning power."

Cristina sat for a full minute, deep in frowning thought.

"I never felt that way about Roddie," she finally averred. "And I never expected to find him a Hercules with thirty-inch biceps."

"Of course you didn't," I agreed. "For woman may differ considerably from man in broadening the esthetic grounds on which she makes her choice. She has the habit of making that choice include certain dynamic considerations, so that beauty, to her way of thinking, may be complicated with a consciousness of strength other than physical. For there are different kinds of strength. And there are different kinds of beauty. Our sense of beauty, in fact, is neither absolute nor innate. It's subjective, depending on the nature of the mind, irrespective of the object admired. But through it all flows a utilitarian current which we simply can't and mustn't ignore. You, for example, are never going to fall for a husky shot-putter simply because he looks like a second Achilles. Instinct naturally enough prompts the modern woman to reach out for a mate who is capable of protecting her in those competitions of the counting-house that have so generally superseded the combats of the battle-field. In other words, since our world became industrialized, and brains supplanted brawn in the struggle toward survival and success, woman, much as she admires mere physical perfection, is not only instinctively drawn toward the cerebral type of man, but adroitly imposes on her ideal of attractiveness a latter-day coloring of intellectuality. For brains to-day mean power. And, as always, she capitulates to the promise of power. That attribute, I repeat, is no longer embodied in the old-time sinew and muscle of a blood-spattered Viking. Since alertness of mind and grimness of will and steadiness of nerves now constitute the storage-battery of modern courage, women are no longer satisfied with the mere gladiator type. They want something more than the muscular dumb-bell."

"How about all those football heroes of ours?" demanded Cristina. "And some of those movie-sheiks that Bill Cranston could bat over with one hand?"

“In certain of her stoker-ashore moods,” I acknowledged, “woman may nurse a perverse and more or less impersonal admiration for those tailor-made *matinée*-idols. But that’s merely her repercussion from formality. It’s like the lonesome cowboy riding in to shoot up the town. It’s her compensating splash of color across the over-drabness of life. And in her adolescent years she may make a good deal of fuss over the stadium athlete and the football hero. But this is only a sigh out of the past, like her cave-age love for fur and open fires and her masochistic longing to be manhandled now and then. It’s something as anachronistic as the chipped arrow-head of a vanished era turned up by the busy plowshare of industrialism. For you women, with a sagacity all your own, know well enough when the thrust of economic necessity is against your mate-type, just as you all come into a working knowledge of those sex-differences which can feed the flame of love.”

“I wonder,” murmured Cristina, “if we’re really as wise as you imagine?”

“Oh, woman knows her stuff all right,” I assured the thoughtful-eyed enemy. “She has a way of finding her line, I’ve noticed, and working it to the limit. She may, now and then, ape man in a few of his habits and imitate him in a few of his absurdities. But the similarity will always be superficial. She may scrap her petticoats and bob her hair and starve herself into a flattened torso that makes her look suspiciously like an hermaphrodite. But scratch through that momentary veneer and you’ll find plenty of woman left. She still pays man the compliment of remaining complementary to him. And whether we like it or not, old dear, the two sexes will continue to develop divergent aptitudes and cultivate opposing characteristics. For in all your little fluctuations of fashion and fleeting vagaries of taste, it’s worth remembering that the one fundamental thing that makes men still appealing to women is manliness. And the one basic attribute that still fastens the affection of man upon woman is womanliness.”

Cristina gazed at me with a morosely meditative eye.

“If you end up by quoting Kingsley about being good, sweet maid, and let who will be clever, I think I’ll kill you!”

I could afford to laugh at that threat. But, remembering its implications, I soon grew solemn again.

“I won’t insult you by saying you’re good,” I conceded. “And you can be indignant, if you want to, when I write myself down as antediluvian enough to claim that the Creator has given woman grace and charm and sweetness and a few other qualifications which have not been bestowed in like measure on mere man. But now that you all feel that you’ve got a message to deliver to the world, and a part to play in its management, why in heaven’s name can’t you do it with all that beauty and all

that womanly graciousness with which your Creator has endowed you?"

"We do," asserted Cristina as she stood up and shook out her crumpled and cobwebby loin-cloth known as a skirt, "when you men give us half a chance."

"And now," I said as I reached to turn out the lights, "why don't you go up and get Roddie on long-distance and tell him how much you really like him."

Cristina's laugh was a sardonic one.

"It's not that simple, you darling old dunderhead. That's something we have to work out in our own barbaric way."

"The female of to-day," I ventured, "apparently has to fight pretty hard to get a husband."

"Yes," acknowledged the arrested Cristina, "it's a close race. Just to-night I saw two girls neck and neck,—and it was all in the old steeplechase to get a man!"

"You know, Cristina," I said as I switched out the sun-room lights, "I don't like you as much when you make bad jokes about a serious problem."

"Then you're not going to kiss me good night?" asked the dulcet-voiced girl in the darkness.

"Not until I turn these lights on again," I promptly responded.

"Coward!" cried Cristina as she stood blinking up at me in the sudden and salvaging Mazda glow that surrounded us. And I wondered, with characteristic masculine obtuseness, just why there was a trace of tears in her starry eyes.



CHAPTER X
MADE OVER WHILE YOU WAIT

It was a humid and listless Sunday morning, with a misty sense of completion in the air, a faint and saddening whisper that summer would soon be over. That depressing foretaste of autumn even made the Sunday papers that lay like a drift of leaves between Cristina and me seem little more than over-voluminous reports from the sick-bed of civilization. But one last section of the *Times* I irritably retained, holding it up as a barricade between myself and an indignant-eyed Cristina arrayed in lounging-pajamas of jade-green silk. And when Cristina changed her place I as promptly shifted the position of my temporal fire-screen.

“You don’t like me any more, do you?” her small voice complained over the top of the *Times*.

“I love you,” I asserted, “even though you do go around in those silk contraptions that belong to either a harem or a bedroom. I love you as though you were my own daughter.”

“Daughter, my eye!” scoffed Cristina as she took my paper away from me. “You say that, old Yogi, simply because you’re afraid of yourself.”

“Not where *you’re* concerned,” I responded with perhaps unnecessary harshness.

“There!” cried the triumphant and slightly tearful Cristina. “I told you so. You *are* tired of me. And just because Margaret and the children are coming back tomorrow you want me to go home again.”

“But you haven’t yet completed my education,” I reminded my cloudy-eyed sister-in-law.

“And nobody ever will,” proclaimed Cristina.

“Certainly nothing in jade-green pajamas,” I acidly reassured her.

“Why do you hate women?” asked Cristina.

“I don’t,” was my prompt and solemn answer. “I couldn’t if I wanted to. And that’s what makes the whole thing look so perilous to me, as a man of thought. One of the first lessons that history seems to teach us is the danger of thinking too much of our women. For gyneolatriy always marks the road to ruin. In every civilization which man has founded the undue adoration of woman has either caused or accompanied the collapse of that civilization.”

Cristina’s gesture was one of incredulity.

“That simply doesn’t sound sensible to me,” she contended. “Treating its women with respect is and always will be the first sign of any civilization.”

“But when we treat them with undue respect,” I ventured to point out, “when we get over-chivalrous and idealize them and attribute undue importance to them in our daily lives, we always seem to slip into a period of decadence. Greece may have laughed when Pericles tried to turn his concubine into his companion, but that laugh was the death-rattle of Hellenic civilization.”

Cristina’s frown was a thoughtful one.

“But aren’t men always trying to do that?” she demanded.

“Not with any marked success!”

“Then,” pursued the indignant Cristina, “you’d prefer that the men of this country should be more like Arabs and Indians and Chinamen? You’d actually like to see them accepting woman as merely a female animal, with nothing more than her body to bring you, when every poet and artist who was ever worth a tinker’s dam has been telling us that it’s her spirit we must love and cherish?”

“That,” I conceded in the face of Cristina’s wistfully remote smile, “is where the catch comes. For it’s a peculiarity of man, at least of the white man, to crave companionship in his mate. Man is for ever hoping that he’ll find in woman not only something to love in his hour of passion, not only an adequate mother for his children, but something quite above these matters of the flesh. He nurses the forlorn hope that he may find in her an unaltering friend in his joys and his sorrows, a steadfast companionship in his uncertainties, and a consolation in that loneliness which darkens the soul of the best of us. He still craves a good deal of the angelic in women.”

“And don’t you think he gets it?” demanded Cristina.

“In spots,” I hesitatingly acceded.

“But doesn’t he get all he deserves?” exacted Cristina. “No matter what we are, don’t you suppose every woman gets a kick out of being regarded as three-quarters angel? And don’t you realize that we’re going to darn near break our necks to make good on that belief, any old time any man shows us that he has that much faith in us? It’s you men who cheapen women, by being satisfied with only the cheap things in them.”

“But it was only the other day,” I pointed out, “that you said you were tired of being put up on a pedestal. You said you wished men would be a little more open and aboveboard in their treatment of women.”

“That doesn’t mean we want to be kicked all around the yard,” contended the lady in jade-green pajamas.

“Well, being occasionally kicked might prove more beneficial than being eternally cajoled,” I found the courage to proclaim. “And you certainly get enough of

the latter. Doesn't every visiting foreigner have something or other to say about America being a woman's country? And are you treated the way women are treated in England? And are any of you engaged in the navy work done by some of your sex in Europe? Or hitched up beside a dog to pull a milk-cart? And hasn't the woman of the New World powers and privileges altogether unknown to her sisters over the sea? And, in that connection, isn't it about time for some disinterested male to ask just what has been woman's influence on this newer sphere which she has so triumphantly invaded?"

"If you can get him to answer his own question honestly," said the shrugging Cristina.

"Yes, that's the difficulty," I promptly acknowledged. "For the inherited chivalry of the male, combined with a much more arrant cupidity, still seems to cloud the issue where any question of the relation of the sexes is involved. And sex, of course, is ineradicably involved in this newer movement which we so clumsily call Feminism. Sex is mixed up with it since woman is woman because of sex. And while woman herself may try to forget that fact, man never can."

"And yet you criticize us for taking advantage of that weakness in you," I was curtly reminded.

"What I criticize, Cristina, is the way you take advantage of it. You were, and still are, perfectly willing to let man romanticize you. You've tried to make him think you were something you aren't. And quite outside the question as to whether or not it was men who first imposed dissimulation on your sex, deception is now so deep-rooted in your capricious bosom that it's organic with you. It's really given you a second nature, a nature about which you remain pretty inarticulate, on the whole, partly through instinct and partly through expediency. But woman was discreet enough, when man sentimentalized that terra incognita of her soul, to fence it off as a sort of Yellowstone Park that must remain naively aboriginal. Women, I mean, have learned the trick of capitalizing their incompetencies. They took two of man's finest instincts, his stubborn trust in woman's goodness and his tolerance born of a knowledge of his own strength, and degraded them into supers for their eternal sex-drama. They let man excuse their feminine deficiency of strength by enlarging on the allurements of the diminutive, just as they tried to extenuate their lack of sustained reasoning power by placing the stress on woman's powers of intuition."

"Well," contended Cristina, "we had a hunch now and then that didn't turn out wrong."

"But you had a hunch," I countered, "that you had the world under your heel. And that *did* turn out wrong. Woman may have seemed the petted and spoiled child

of our modern civilization, but she remained unversed in the means by which that civilization had been brought about and childishly inclined to over-estimate her intellectual contribution to its growth. Yet man, remember, always wanted to be good to woman. He'd toiled long enough, God knows, to give her leisure and freedom. But when, through his inventiveness and feverish activity, he finally made life too easy for her by leaving her largely functionless in an age of machinery, she turned on him, out of her ease and idleness, and somewhat shrilly demanded both her dower of labor and a share in his strength. So man, the patient and sad-eyed adjuster, admitted her to his factories and offices and shops and franchises."

"At slightly reduced wages," asserted Cristina.

"And with much cleaner balloting-booths," I agreed. "But since the chief aim of the feminists seemed to be masculinism, man gave you women what you clamored for. You were permitted to roll up your sleeves and roll down your stockings and walk into public life. But, coming to that estate without any duly acquired communal consciousness, you made man pay for his romanticizing sins by promptly romanticizing this very power which he'd given you. You took your brand-new privilege of legislating and decided to reform the world by law. For it's you women, remember, who are largely responsible for this prohibition mess. And you even nursed the idea that you could dispose of 'the oldest profession in the world' by a municipal mandate or two. And you decided to beautify the highways and make politics clean and do away with the bosses. You wanted it done promptly, of course, for being new at this ruling business, you neither live in regrets for a vanished past nor toil in hope of a tardily achieved future. You got your freedom quickly and you wanted to be equally quick in freeing the rest of the world from evil. It was going to be a spring house-cleaning. It——"

"With some pretty dirty corners that needed attention," interrupted Cristina.

"Yes," I acknowledged, "some corners that harbored the silt of forgotten centuries. But you women, with the immediacy peculiar to your sex, clamored for the prompt making-over of the entire world. Life must be cleansed, and women suddenly seemed intent on cleansing it, very much as a cat cleanses its fur, by the use of the tongue alone."

Cristina fixed me with an accusatory eye. "Just who," she demanded, "does most of the talking around this establishment?"

But I chose to ignore that side-issue. As an evidence of nonchalance, in fact, I reached for my trusty pipe.

"You were in rompers, of course, when the thing began," I pursued through a protective screen of tobacco-smoke. "But it was a great age for slogans and

catchwords. Woman seemed to find her voice. And disdainful of male flattery, she made herself her own press-agent. She tooted her own horn. And she did it very adroitly, with many a hurried excursion back to pre-mammalian conditions to demonstrate the antiquity of female predominance and a hint now and then that a mistake had been made in the sex of the Deity. There was considerable talk about the prehistoric woman and the variety of her domestic duties and the antique tyrannies of cave-mates which had been superseded by the intellectual tyrannies of man-written histories. Even Schopenhauer, who chose to designate the long-suppressed sex as 'big children, intermediate between the man and the child,' and even Plato, who called woman 'a weaker and inferior man,' were shown to be as outmoded as the hoop-skirt and the clout-cloth."

"Well, aren't they?" exacted a cold-eyed Cristina. "Isn't it a little archaic for men to be always defaming women? And can we be so terrible, after all, since we're still fathered by men?"

"It's this world of ours, Cristina, that's so terrible. It's so old and cumbersome and hard to change. And mankind can't be made over in a day, remember, as nimble fingers can make over a gown for you while you wait. And there's another point worth remembering. This world, from the managerial and administrative standpoint, is and always has been a man's world. Man, I mean, has fashioned it as it is and man has ruled it. He may have messed up the job a bit, but he's managed to keep things going. He's rather given up looking for miracles, remembering that there was one ice-age and will probably be another, and also recalling that what has been decided among prehistoric protozoa can't be annulled by an act of Parliament. Evolutionary changes, as I've already said, come slow. Even the humble safety-pin, it now develops, is over seven thousand years old, and they were using lip-sticks on the upper Nile before the first Ptolemy saw the light of day. And man, in this present year of grace, stands the sum total of all his predecessors, an often contradictory and immensely complex and amazingly variable specimen, with the chain of his lineage dragging heavily behind him."

"And trailing fewer clouds of glory," suggested Cristina, "than gobs of shame."

"Perhaps so, fair lady," I admitted, "but there's something still heroic in that climb up from the ooze. For it's been a slow climb and a hard one. And he may not have gone far. But I don't think we should sneer at the present. For it seems to me, in a way, holy ground, the flowering of all that tangled and timeless past. And that past, remember, is not to be lightly lived down. It's with us, crowded in between the narrow walls of consciousness. And our mental life is so clouded with those old shadows that we scarcely needed a Haeckel to remind us that we're all the

aggregate of our ancestors, an accumulation of the instincts and inhibitions and tendencies reaching back and back and still further back into the immemorial mists of time.”

“Weren’t there women there, as well?” asked Cristina.

“Yes, there were women,” I admitted, “or there would have been no men. But down that long avenue, remember, woman has stood the inferior of man. I know by your face, Cristina, that you disapprove of that statement. But we are compelled to admit that, muscularly, mentally and socially, woman was for ages and ages the inferior of man. It seems unchivalric to have to say so, but the fact simply must be swallowed. And no matter what awakening has finally come to woman, no matter what may be her personal latter-day determination in any race for supremacy, she must face the further cold fact that she’s entering that race handicapped by the habits and traits of several thousand centuries. For it was man, man with perhaps little more than the courage of the brute, but still with that splendid courage, who conquered the world and made it his own. And no one can take that glory away from him.”

“But was it always such a glory?” asked Cristina as she languidly inspected the photographed face of a gang-murderer in one of my Sunday papers. “And were you so terribly proud of all this man-made civilization about the time your World War was coming to an end?”

“No,” I acknowledged after a moment or two of none too pleasant thought, “I wasn’t. It was a sad business, of course, but it had its casual glories. The important point, however, seems to be that even these setbacks don’t altogether crush the spirit of man. They keep him, I think, a little more vigilant. For he has been, and still is, a sort of anxious-eyed Columbus venturing across a trackless Unknown. He may not know what lies behind the curve of Time, but he has at least acquired the habit of captaincy, the slow fortitude of the pioneer. You may not agree with me, but I also feel that he has achieved toleration, a gift which only time and power seem to give us. And if to-day he looks at his more intolerant mate as he might look at a hornet buzzing angrily against some imprisoning window-pane, he’s at least able to remember, as he watches, that freedom doesn’t always lie closest where the light streams warmest.”

“If I get that hornet business right,” ventured Cristina, “you mean it’s time for women to back up every time they see the light?”

“Not unless there’s some impermeable solid between them and their ends,” I said with what dignity I could command. “And all the angry buzzing isn’t going to get you far. For, having laid siege to the world of politics and occupational toil, having got a job and a vote and having discovered that a world which is both male-formed

and malformed can't be renovated overnight, woman betrays a tendency first to indict man as a sex and secondly to campaign for immediate privileges where she can't and won't wait for racial progress."

Cristina's movement, in her chair, seemed one of impatience.

"But aren't you making the tremendous mistake," she frowningly inquired, "of dividing the so-called human race into two parts, into men and women, each with a world of his own and each with an end of his own? When, after all, there's really only one race and one world and one common end?"

"That's a Platonic ideal," I sadly admitted, "that we might all try to live up to. And if we did there'd be less of all this cat-and-dog dissension. But you revolting ladies will first have to learn a little tolerance. For, since man and woman are destined as fellow-voyagers on this good ship known as the earth, and since on their fellowship devolves the survival of that craft, it's manifest destiny that woman can't hate man and still survive. Sex-antagonism can't get you far, my dear, for the simple reason that it's unable to perpetuate itself. And in that basic and biological fact lies the doom of your so-called feministic movement. For a social tendency which can't be transmitted isn't worth much in this old world of ours."

"But supposing," suggested Cristina, "we pretended to love you a little? Supposing, like the lady-spiders, we didn't breakfast on you until after you'd given us our babies?"

"It has to go deeper than pretense, Cristina, or your babies, when you got 'em, would be a goggle-eyed little bunch of degenerates. And the one thing the man of today wants from woman is a trifle more honesty. He is willing to acknowledge that woman's intentions are honorable, that her aims are high, that she really wants reforms, that she actually hungers to see her cities made clean and her home circles made safe. But he nurses a cynic conviction that it can't be done through club resolutions. And he has an equally stubborn suspicion that one can't jump from *Kinder, Küche und Kirche* into a complete working knowledge of social psychology."

"I wouldn't be too cocky about that," ventured the rebelliously frowning Cristina. "For don't you think that belonging to a church and having good food served in a home that's run right and bringing up children and being responsible for their future is almost as good a preparation for politics as running a corner saloon and smoking black cigars and ward-heeling and bribing the cops and buying the poolroom vote could be?"

"The picture you paint is touching," I admitted, "but slightly obsolescent. For the corner saloon, of course, went out with that Eighteenth Amendment which you

women succeeded in imposing on this republic. That, you may remember, made us all total abstainers.”

“I hate you,” averred Cristina, “when you’re sarcastic.”

“Well, who started it?” was my natural enough inquiry.

Cristina got up and walked to the window and back again, kicking the papers aside as she went.

“You never get anywhere,” she pointed out, “when you haggle and wrangle and scrap about things. You only——”

“That,” I interrupted, “is precisely what I’ve been trying to tell you. That’s why we’re all getting a little fed up on what you call feminism. Women may be changeable, but their attitude of the moment still has considerable to do with man’s comfort.”

“But,” contended Cristina, “you ought to be glad that women are even interested in your spavined old civilization. I can’t see that you’ve done so much with it.”

“Perhaps we haven’t,” I said as I began gathering up the papers that littered the floor, “but we’re still sitting up and taking notice. We’re still waiting and watching. For our civilization, as the race has evolved it, is still in the nature of a highly complex experiment. Besides calling for struggle and sacrifice, it calls for the subtler virtues of patience and fortitude and toleration. And man, who has fought and died for it through the ages, even yet isn’t certain that the Big Experiment is going to be a success. We’ve tottered once or twice, as we did during that World War you mentioned a few minutes ago.”

“Then you ought to be a little humbler than you are,” was Cristina’s muttered suggestion.

“If you’re referring, not to me, but to man as a sex,” I retorted, “I feel safe in saying that Time has humbled him considerably. Time has at least taught him not to bite off more than he can chew, but to make the best of things, to fashion the fabric of his laws on the basic facts of human nature, to be pragmatist enough to use the tools at hand. For the final lesson of wisdom, as I see it, is that final making the best of things as they are. And about the only use of a knowledge of the past is to equip us for the present.”

“Well, women have been alive and busy almost as long as men,” protested the lady in jade-green.

“Even longer,” I admitted, “if she’s the mother of man. But she’s rather a newcomer, you see, in the field of public life. And social consciousness is coming to her late. I hate to say that she’s unimaginative, but I must admit that her interest in the world of objectivity has always seemed limited. In the past, frankly, she’s usually

been rather preoccupied with herself. That, I'm afraid, has left her a bit individualistic in her actions, a little uncompromising in her ideality, a trifle over-sanguine in her convictions. She's determined, at the present moment, that the world should be set right. It's suffering, apparently, from some obscure disease which only surgery can remedy. But unsound as the limb of the tree may seem, it happens to be the limb on which we are all sitting. And the saw, in cases like that, may not always seem an emblem of safety."

"Your figure of speech may be picturesque," admitted Cristina, "but the manner in which you argue isn't convincing. The world has had reforms, a good many reforms, and you know it. And much as you seem to dread them, we may have others."

"One moment, Aspasia the Second," I said with all the patience at my command. "I don't dread reforms, any more than any other sane man does. The thing we have learned to dread, however, is the zeal of inexperienced reformers, just as we dread emotionalism, however exalted, when uncontrolled by reality. And that's something you women bill-boosters still have to learn."

"Well, we're on our way," contended Cristina.

"Perhaps you are," I admitted, "but you've still got a long hike ahead of you. And just how much you've still got to learn of that social psychology which deals with the higher and more conscious facts of human behavior, is shown first by your recent anarchistic lapses when you were fighting for equal suffrage, and later by your attribution of miraculous powers to the ballot-box, accepting it as you did as a panacea for all social evils, and still later by your lamentable neglect of duty as a sovereign elector. For, strangely enough, once you'd achieved the privilege of recording your decisions in this same ballot-box, a sad percentage of your sister-voters were busy with other things on election-day."

"But woman has problems of her own," demurred Cristina, "problems that aren't decided by making little crosses on a sheet of paper."

"Yet it's worth remembering, Cristina, that the social and political problems standing closest to woman still remain unsolved. You haven't made the stage less salacious, or literature less erotic, or apparel less extreme, or society less shrill and febrile. You haven't made youth more controllable, or certain types of big business less predatory. You haven't made child-bearing less painful or cities less ugly or the meaning of home less tenuous. In plain English, you haven't accomplished a miracle."

"But we live in hopes," said Cristina with a ghost of a sigh.

"Well, it's nice to know you're at least and at last interested. That's something. The one sustained note of our new century, in fact, the one thing that's found an

echo is woman's consciousness, seems to be this newer note of social consciousness as applied to the family-unit. You may not be having as many babies as you used to, but you're thinking harder about them. The children must be attended to. The next crusade, apparently, is going to be toward the cradle. You may have met failure when you tried to reform this old world of ours, but you've got a stubborn longing to reform the generation still in diapers. And woman's first step forward in this wider confederal sisterhood seems to be a growing realization that she's not merely the mother of her own child, but of every child in the world."

"You're feeling preachy this morning, aren't you?" observed Cristina as she perched herself on a distant window-sill. She sat there for a full minute of silence, apparently deep in thought. Then she abstractedly studied her own profile in the mirroring casement-window. "I think," she said as she brushed an ash-fleck from her pajama-front, "that I'll be satisfied with my own children."

"When you get 'em!" I called back from the doorway.



CHAPTER XI

BOBBED MANNERS

I wasn't happy during that unexpected call of Roddie's. I knew, in the first place, that he hadn't come to see me. All he wanted, of course, was to be alone with Cristina. But that perverse-minded sister-in-law of mine, for reasons entirely her own, was determined not to be alone with the one man who so particularly wished to be alone with her. She even made me go down-stairs and sit in the sun-room with Roddie, where we talked about the new air-port and bootlegger's gin and the recent slump in bonds.

But all the while, of course, the unhappy and empty-eyed Roddie was sitting with one ear cocked for the sound of approaching heeltaps on the red-tile flooring. And as we sat there for thirty-five long minutes awaiting the advent of Cristina I found myself suffering in spirit with the sedulously attentive Roddie Jones. For I liked Roddie. I liked his honest and well-tanned face, his clean-cut manliness, his characteristic twentieth-centuryish air of being able to get what he was going after. I couldn't help feeling that he, like so many of the young American business men around me, in some mysterious way partook of qualities peculiar to the Indian whom he and his kind had superseded in this wide-flung New World of ours. For the Indian seems to come out, not alone in so much that the modern American desires, but also in his stoic determination to reach certain goals, his dogged endurance, his paganly grim tenacity of purpose. Even his spare and sinewed figure and his swarthy and clean-shaved face, his quietness in the midst of unhappiness, his tribal silence as to his inner and deeper feelings, seemed strangely suggestive of the Indian. And I couldn't help wondering, as we talked determinedly on, why men and women weren't more honest in this tragically complicated business of modern courtship.

That thought remained with me, in fact, even after the demure-eyed Cristina had joined us. For Cristina, I noticed, paid precious little attention to her caller. All her cross-barrages of charm, I suddenly discovered, were being openly and brazenly directed at *me*. She seated herself on my chair-arm and coiled an ostentatious arm about my neck and pushed her slender fingers through my hair and told me that nobody understood her as I did. Then, having given voice to the perplexing question as to why all the nice men of to-day were married men, she kissed me with unexpected ardor and all but greta-garboed me out of my chair. Then, in no way disturbed by any lack of response, she disposed herself at my feet and gazed up at me with tragically hungry and unsatisfied eyes.

I was conscious enough, all the while, of the drama within the drama. I knew

well enough that I was nothing more than a fish-worm on Cristina's double-fanged hook of sex-deception. I knew that she was playing me, for her own abstruse ends, against the uncomfortable and uncomprehending Roddie, who finally felt so much like an intruder on a scene of unbridled and over-intimate tenderness that he took his departure and left my shameless young sister-in-law gazing after him with a triumphant light in her eyes.

"Well, I hope you're satisfied," I said as I put the width of the sun-room between us.

"I would be," announced Cristina, "if you'd been less like an icicle on a convent-roof."

"Did you expect me to swallow you, just to get a gasp of envy out of that man?" I indignantly demanded.

Cristina stopped short. She turned on me, with a flash of anger on her face.

"That's a rottenly rude speech," she said as she kicked a cushion aside. And I noticed for the first time how tired she looked about the eyes.

"Well, you don't think I'm so dunder-headed I can't see through your tuppenny little tricks?" I none too graciously inquired.

"If you had any manners," asserted Cristina, "you wouldn't talk that way to a woman."

"And if you had any manners," I amended, "you wouldn't act that way with a man."

"I was only being nice to you," cried the indignant Cristina.

"I wasn't referring to my own suffering," I coldly proclaimed, "but to Roddie's."

"You're still being rotten," said Cristina as she sank wearily into an armchair. "And I used to think of you as an especially polite man."

"You and your younger generation," I asserted, "don't know the meaning of politeness. You're as mannerless, the whole bunch of you, as the beasts of the field."

Cristina sat blinking over that for a brooding moment of silence.

"I wonder if we are?" she meditated aloud. "I wonder if we are, even though we don't happen to be living with a second Lord Chesterfield?"

"Calling the kettle black," I pointed out, "doesn't make your pot of rudeness any whiter. And I'm just beginning to realize why the English made all that row about the Deceased Wife's Sister's Bill not long ago."

It was a full half-minute before Cristina got an inkling of what I was driving at.

"That's rottener than ever!" she exclaimed as her color deepened perceptibly.

"You're using a word, Cristina, that I don't think should be in any lady's vocabulary. And I dislike your language almost as much as I do your actions."

“Applesauce!” said the rebellious-eyed Cristina. “You won’t find me so different from the rest of them.”

“And there,” I proclaimed, “is precisely where the trouble lies. This whole younger generation has thrown good manners overboard.”

“Well, what good were they?” demanded the emancipated lady confronting me.

“We’d a college at Oxford,” I took the trouble to point out, “which had a sentence over its doors several centuries old. It said: ‘Manners maketh man.’ And Emerson, I believe, once explained manners as being the happy way of doing things, each one of them once a stroke of genius or of love, and then repeated and hardened into usage. But you young people, of course, have changed all that. Bad form, to-day, is really good form. And if you want to be considered the right sort of person you must do the wrong sort of thing. You must be slumpy and nonchalant. You must be curt instead of courteous. And you mustn’t respect your elders. No high-hat stuff; that’s your challenge to the new century. Give it to ’em straight from the shoulder. Cut out the bowing and scraping and talk turkey. Forget the fussing and be yourself.”

“Well, isn’t that a move toward honesty?” demanded the dissimulative Cristina. “And didn’t all that bowing and scraping you talk about grow up around kings and courts? And isn’t it about time that we, as free Americans, got rid of some of the old flubdubbery? For I’ve a suspicion that you hate an over-mannered fop, to-day, as much as the rest of us do.”

“But I don’t see,” I contended, “why we should promptly suspect any one who remains respectably and old-fashionedly polite of being a damned hypocrite.”

“Such language!” murmured the faintly smiling Cristina.

“Oh, I know how you feel about it,” I said as I watched her reach for a cigarette, “you youngsters who’ve set up your modern new Camorro of frankness. You’re the comers and you’re going to take no back seat for the has-beens. You’re going to say what you feel, and if we don’t like it, we can lump it. And the ‘Yes, sir’ of yesterday has been superseded by the ‘Yeh’ and ‘Yep’ of to-day.”

“But wasn’t it William Archer who observed that in that American ‘Yep’ of ours still nestled the entire Declaration of Independence? And as true democrats, naturally, we’re not going to perpetuate the cant and hypocrisy of court life. We haven’t got time, old top. You can still pull the soft stuff over in the Flowery Kingdom, but if you try it in this country we begin to wonder what you’ve got up your sleeve.”

I sat down and studied the frank-eyed young woman confronting me.

“Life, Cristina, is a tremendously complicated struggle toward simplicity. As I

see it, it's a sort of pendulum-swing from excess to excess, with the enthusiasm of yesterday becoming the oppressions of to-day, with renaissance following decline, with the crusade of one era often enough turning into the comic-strip theme of another. But the centripetal forces seem fairly well balanced with the centrifugal, and this war-scarred old globe of ours achieves an equilibrium that may look perilous yet in some way remains permanent. Since you've spoken of the Declaration of Independence, I might say that human existence, in the nature of things, is always drawing up its little Declaration of Independence. The young artist rebels against the Old Masters; the newfangled poet turns in revolt from the time-honored forms that seem to have grown a little thread-bare; a long-enslaved sex stands embattled for its belated rights; man, over-urbanized, puts on his old clothes and goes camping, and the Young Thing in shorts laughs at the draped pomposities of its elders. The *jeune fille* guillotines the chaperon with one hand and reaches for a gin-flask with the other. And the equally emancipated *jeune homme* tosses aside his cigarette and fox-trots on what is left of the Fifth Commandment. Life, in other words, seems to pursue its way stubbornly balanced between freedom and form, between liberalism and conservatism."

"With the liberals," interpolated Cristina, "most unmistakably in the saddle at the present moment."

"That," I agreed, "no one can dispute. For the cry seems to be all for freedom, for the throwing aside of the absurd old social shackles, for the bobbing of manners and the abolition of consideration for others. But some of those older ceremonials seemed to dignify life and make social intercourse a little pleasanter. And it's about time to ask if the pendulum hasn't swung too far."

"Then you blame us," said Cristina as she stopped to scratch a mosquito-bite on her knee, "for being blunt and honest?"

"It's the duty of the true philosopher," I meekly responded, "to allot neither blame nor praise, but to elucidate causes and effects. And honesty, I've noticed, doesn't always sleep in the same bed with bluntness. But no matter what our attitude toward this later fashion in deportment, whether we consider this newer casualness of contact a sign of social decay and accept the offhand posture of to-day as an evidence of national decline, it's still worth remembering that a number of things united to bring about our distrust of the Chesterfieldian. In the first place, we're a pioneer people. And pioneer conditions naturally don't make for the ceremonial type of existence. Where survival and success, I mean, are due to personal initiative, to grim individual aggressiveness and stick-to-it-iveness, we're more interested in the end than in the manner of achieving that end. You may even have noticed that certain

crafty-minded individuals betray a tendency to capitalize our pioneer affinity for the uncouth. There are certain congressmen, for example, who take advantage of a persistent belief that a rough exterior houses an honest heart, and how sedulously those bluff-voiced old gentlemen do fight to keep the bark on! You don't have to travel far to find a politician or two who revels in the democratic modesty of his attire and makes friends by the homeliness of his address. Not a little of it, I'm afraid, goes back to Abe Lincoln the rail-splitter. And if you can't split rails, you can at least still split infinitives. For there's an equally persistent tradition that precision in language is the concomitant of effeminacy in character, just as a faulty method of enunciation is the true earmark of masculinity. We even have the confession of a noted labor-leader to the effect that he stood closer to his followers because of his deliberated infelicities of expression. And I found much the same spirit reflected in a certain English public-school, where those pupils coerced into a study of French invariably accepted any close adherence to Gallic orthoepy as flat evidence that British manliness was in some way lacking in the over-polished offenders."

"We all hate the show-off," was Cristina's laconic comment.

"But on the other hand," I maintained, "there's a calamitously wide-spread belief throughout our great open spaces, where men are men, that a meticulously maintained courtesy may be all right for the Turk and the Oriental, but rides ill on the shoulders of the free-born American. As you've already implied, we're vaguely suspicious of politeness. Behind the timbers of graciousness we always smell the rat of hypocrisy. And the nose of this younger generation of yours seems especially sensitive to the nuances and gestures of a social code that's becoming about as obsolete as the etiquette of dueling. You sneer at the old hypocrisies. You laugh at the old timidities. You——"

"If we've got legs," interrupted Cristina, "why try to hide that fact from the world?"

"I don't mind your having legs, Cristina. For it's in more ways than one that this seems to be the era of the golden calf. It also seems to be the Age of Denudation. But bobbed skirts and bobbed hair and bobbed manners don't tend toward either dignity or reticence."

"But who's asking for dignity?" demanded Cristina. "We're beginning to see now that all that old mid-Victorian passion for dignity only made people acrobats in self-delusion."

"Then let's not get mixed up," I suggested, "in a confusion of meretricious dignity with its more honest and honorable sister. For the pursuit of dignity is the first and last passion of man. And even more so of woman. And the voluminous drapery of

those old mid-Victorians you spoke of may have been inconvenient, but it was at least dignifying.”

“To the stately wife in bombazine,” suggested Cristina, “who turned pink when she addressed her husband by his first name!”

“I’d like to find something left,” was my cry to the bland-eyed Cristina, “to turn *you* pink for once in your life. But perhaps those women who could turn pink had something left in their lives which is lost to this age of brass. They at least had their romanticizing reservations and their unviolated personal privacies. They didn’t put so much in the street-parade that nothing was left for the matrimonial tent-performance.”

“Oh, we may still have a trick or two up our sleeve,” suggested the cryptically smiling Cristina. “But how can you ask us to respect our elders when the old birds don’t show us anything to respect? Do I have to bow low before a dad who waddles out on a golf-course in checkered plus-fours and a Fair-Isle sweater? And do I have to love, honor, and obey a maternal parent who uses henna and puts on skirts as short as mine and has her face lifted and her fat pounded off and pretends to be enjoying a rowdy Paul Jones at the Country Club, when she ought to be home reading Dorothy Dix and thinking about the Other World?”

“You are speaking of modes and *mores*,” I reminded my questioner, “which are perplexing but not necessarily disheartening to the philosopher. For all the accent, apparently, now seems to be thrown on the note of juvenility. The triumph of your era, Cristina, has obviously been the abolition of old age. As you’ve implied, mothers apparently no longer surrender to their infirmities, and fathers are more and more resorting to the sand-blast of sport to remove the patina of time. And the American father seems to be waking up to the need of keeping in the game, for instead of complaining so much about the passing of parental authority he seems more and more ruled by an impulse to give the glad hand to his sternly scrutinizing offspring. He even seems to be making a blithely pathetic effort to chum with them, just as the more discerning mother of the moment is satisfied to sit meekly at the knees of her more enlightened daughters and learn enough about biology to give her goose-flesh for the rest of the day. *Tempori parendum*.”

“What does that mean?” asked Cristina.

“That means that one must yield to the times. And we oldsters must remember that the grown-up isn’t so much the cock of the walk he was a century ago. It may not be the first duty of the old to fear the young, as Shaw phrased it, but there’s no need for the grown-ups to sit back and see the youngsters wolf all the good things in life. They’re trying to do it, of course, for youth is selfish and must be served. And if

they're doing it a bit too ruthlessly we who are older and wiser should at least remember that they're making their own beds and they and not us must lie in them. It's a better game, I mean, when all the players learn to replace their divots. It seems, just at present, more of a stampede than a game—and no stampede, even though it be toward liberty, is dignified.”

“But I don't see that we've found so much liberty,” objected the brooding-eyed Cristina.

“Of course not, my dear, for that's something always just around the corner. But you're young. And the future belongs to the young. What's more, you seem to be appropriating a fairly generous slice of the present. And you're doing it in a mighty hit-and-miss and happy-go-lucky manner. Later on, of course, when the road of life becomes more crowded, the need for traffic-rules will make itself more manifest to you. Then perhaps the etiquette-books will be dug out from under a layer of Freud and free-verse and a little more thought given to the graces of communal contacts.”

“You mustn't think,” said Cristina as she got up from her chair and strode back and forth in front of me, “that I don't like decent manners in people. And even this younger generation, you'll find, has a code of its own. It knows about what it can and can't get away with. And it's still passably strong for what you'd call sportsmanship.”

“Then perhaps, as time mellows their flashing adolescent individualism,” I meekly suggested, “they may begin to perceive that manners, after all, can confound their earlier philosophy of life by tending to simplify existence more than they complicate it. For manners, in the final issue, are the oil of our social machine. They save a tremendous amount of wear and tear. And they seem to survive only when they are rooted in reason. For example, I couldn't possibly revive the Papuan habit of kissing attractive young ladies on the nose.”

“No, it's much nicer the other way,” admitted Cristina.

“And there's the ceremonial,” I added, “of shaking hands. We're told that it originated with our suspicious-minded ancestors when they wanted to make sure their friend of the moment didn't have a knife hidden in his hand. But it's far removed to-day from a gesture of suspicion. The hand-clasp, with us, is an acknowledgment of fellowship. And fellowship, in this world, is a fine and noble thing. And that which hinders fellowship, it seems to me, is bad manners, while that which helps fellowship must be reckoned as good manners.”

“But there are over-pompous old fogies,” objected Cristina, “who make me tired. They try so hard to be dignified that they get ridiculous.”

“Yet our hunger for dignity,” I ventured to assert, “is a persistent one. We rather

hate to part company with our own self-respect. And true politeness, it seems to me, is respecting one's self-respect. But dignity, unfortunately, is never static, is never fixed. It's about as fluid and fleeting as light. And what stands for dignity in one civilization may stand for absurdity in another. The Papuan cannibal bride anointed with red ocher and coconut-oil and decorated with a necklace of dogs' teeth and an eight-inch rod of white quartz through her nose-septum may be a knock-out in the land of the wallabas, but in the chancel of St. Bartholomew's she'd be a monstrosity. And a holy man of India reposing on his bed of nail-points isn't the embodiment of heroic austerity to American eyes, just as the Kavaranda warrior who buries his well-greased shoulders under seven layers of ostrich-feathers, no matter how impressive he proves to his East African assegai-bearers, is bound to be ridiculous to the modern white man."

"But need we travel so far from home," queried Cristina, "to find get-ups that are almost as funny?"

"Yes," I acknowledge, "we still have some queer customs and costumes in our midst. We still put our envoys in silk panties and make our presidents wear plug hats. But even if gold keys tacked to the coat-tails of royal chamberlains are the ceremonious survival of some obscure and time-mellowed custom, that bullion-covered apparel isn't the outward and visible sign of the equality of man most acceptable to a democracy. And we're not so bad as England in the matter of gold braid."

"If we except the movie ushers, and those door-men we doll up like field-marshals," suggested Cristina.

"Your movie usher," I reminded her, "is merely our twentieth-century effort to get back to institutional dignity. For the picture-palace, of course, spells grandeur to the color-starved dweller in a three-room flat. And our modern cities, in this connection, are pretty well changing both the type and the source of our dignity. Where we acquire it in one quarter, you see, we run the risk of losing it in another. Our citizens, for example, no longer go afoot over rough roads. They travel on wheels, as only Emperors did in the olden days. But that dignity is so wide-spread that it has resulted in rush-hours. And that, in turn, has resulted in the traveler on wheels being herded and jostled and crowded into subway-cars about the same as cattle are crowded into a shipping-pen. Then, too, we urbanites pity the rural toiler who must carry water and chop wood to keep warm. But the regal and steam-heated apartment-hotel that enthrones us in idleness at the same time dethrones us in individuality, scaling us down as it does to a mere identifying number in a colorless colony of cliff-dwellers. So, since we can't always dignify ourselves, we eventually

save our pride by dignifying the institution or the community which has absorbed us. If we happen to be New Yorkers, I mean, we're prone to address with undeviating condescension the smaller folk of smaller towns. If we're young enough to belong to a college we bask in the refracted glory of an alma mater that perhaps downed Yale at football in the finals of 1917 or mayhap has the mightiest class-roll and the speediest track-runner west of the Mississippi. Or if we happen to be a restless daughter of wealth and never deigned to handle a broom or make up a bed until we decided to be a trained nurse, we go proudly down on our knees and scrub with green soap and bathe the neglected old bodies of ward-patients and clean up after an operation, and still preserve our self-respect in the therapeutic knowledge that the cause is a good one. Or we may be a third-rater behind the white-wear counter, yet the best pinocle player in the township. Or we may be a failure as a steam-fitter and remain the best amateur *Hamlet* in the whole Dramatic Guild. But excel we must in something. I've even known men so modest that they've determined to excel in modesty, only to defeat their own ends by discovering, as Barrie did, that when modesty is too intense it can pass into its Hegelian antithesis of publicity. But, as I've already said, excel we must. If it can't be in graciousness, it may be in evil, as it apparently is with the gangsters. If it can't be with the urbanity with which we handle a situation it may be with nonchalance with which we handle an automatic pistol. The etiquette-books keep changing, they tell me, but personal force never seems to go out of fashion."

"Then you feel," said Cristina as she came and sat on the arm of my chair, "that there's some hope for the younger generation?"

"Oh, yes," I wearily admitted. "You'll get tired of thriving on public disapproval. You'll get tired of making whoopee and pounding on the old tomtom and wake up to the fact that it's only a sort of herd courage that wasn't getting you very far. You'll finally be your age, Cristina, and marry and settle down and wonder what's gone wrong with the next rising generation."

"Is it polite of you to refer to my age?" demanded the cloudy-eyed Cristina.

"Probably not," I admitted, "all things considered."

"That makes it ruder than ever!"

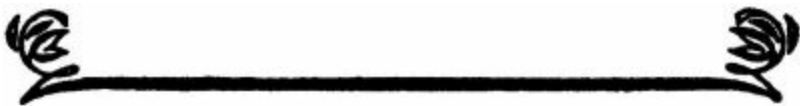
"Then what do you want me to do?" was my natural enough inquiry.

"I want you to say you're sorry you were so ungracious to me when Roddie was here," was Cristina's slightly tremulous demand. "For you *were*. And you know you were."

"And then what?" I inquired.

"Then," conceded the unsmiling Cristina, "after you've said you're sorry, you

can kiss me. And not in the Papuan way, either!”



CHAPTER XII

THE CAVE-MAN STUFF

The September beach, for all the warmth of the day, seemed touched with a vague desolation. The wine-dark sea that Homer once loved still thundered companionably in front of us, but the wide slope of sand on either side, now that the holiday crowds were gone, seemed an arena of loneliness. I could see Margaret and the children clinging to the ropes, shouting in unison as the green Atlantic combers broke over their pleasantly pounded bodies. These bodies, I noticed, were as brown as an Indian's. It amazed me, as I watched Margaret brace herself against the recurring breakers, that she could be the mother of the three little shrieking Saracens beside her and yet remain so slim-torsoed and girlish in line. She seemed, at the moment, like one of her own children, something too small and fragile to be pounded by those merciless rollers.

Then I looked out to where Cristina's green-helmeted head was swaying up and down in the long surf. She was swimming toward the raft, swimming with a slow and assured side-stroke that filled me with a new and unexpected admiration for her adeptness. Roddie Jones, who sat beside me in the sand, watched her with an equal intentness as she swung lightly aboard the float, where she lay flat on the bleached planking, blinking contentedly up at the sun. Roddie's frown, I noticed, deepened as he continued to watch her. And something, I knew, was on his mind.

"You seem to understand Cristina," he finally ventured.

"No man," was my deliberate reply, "really understands any woman."

"But you've been a great deal together," essayed the none too happy Roddie.

"We have," I acknowledged. "And I'm very fond of Cristina."

"I know," said Roddie, with an uncalled-for implication of tragedy in his voice.

"I feel like a father toward that kid," said I in a clumsy effort to clear the air.

"She's not such a kid," demurred the morose-eyed Roddie.

I remembered, as I burrowed more comfortably into the warm sand, that for a great many centuries the women of this world had been managing its courtship and marriage business. And into that business, I also remembered, they'd introduced the obliquities and deceptions peculiar to their sex. They'd forgotten, in this solemn matter of mating, how to be honest with themselves and their prospective mates. And it was about time for men to have a finger in the pie.

So, knowing what I knew, I decided to be open and aboveboard with the unhappy Roddie. Candor, I reminded myself, could hurt nobody. And men, after all, ought to stick together.

“Roddie,” I solemnly inquired, “are you going to marry Cristina?”

He stiffened at that. And into his dark skin came a still deeper tinge of color.

“I want to,” he said after a ponderable lapse of time.

“Then what prevents it?” I asked. And I could feel Roddie’s shrewd eyes searching my face.

“Cristina doesn’t want to marry me,” he eventually admitted.

“How do you know that?”

Roddie, obviously, wasn’t used to having people getting in under his guard that way. But he was civil enough to the trespassing outsider.

“She’s told me so,” he dolorously acknowledged. His eyes, as he spoke, were fixed on the sun-bathed figure on the slow-heaving raft.

“I wouldn’t pay too much attention to that,” I found the courage to suggest.

Still again, Roddie studied me with a barricaded eye.

“D’you think she could ever care for me?” he asked with a sudden final shamelessness. And I felt, for some reason or other, very close to the valorously smiling young man beside me.

“Roddie,” I brazenly averred, “she’s so in love with you she can’t see straight.”

Roddie both gulped audibly and lost a little of his color.

“Did she ever tell you that?” he demanded.

“She never needed to. But I’ve known it, all along.”

This shameless betrayal, however, didn’t leave Roddie as happy as I might have expected.

“Then why——” he began. But he broke off again.

“You’ve found her, I take it, a trifle hard to manage?” I said with a purely achieved matter-of-factness.

“It’s not a case of managing,” objected Roddie. “I’ve never wanted to manage Cristina. I don’t think any man could. What I want, really, is to understand her.”

“About what, for instance?” I prompted.

“Well, for example,” was Roddie’s slightly hesitating reply, “about her saying she likes mastery in a man, and yet kicking up a row every time I try to do something in my own way. Something, I mean, with which she is personally connected.”

“They were always that way,” I said out of my more autumnal wisdom.

“And her willingness to be married,” went on the still perplexed Roddie, “on condition that she can keep all her old freedom.”

“I wouldn’t worry about that,” I assured my moody companion.

“But it won’t work,” contended Roddie, watching me as I dug a hole in the sand, a hole which slowly collapsed.

“The great mistake you’re making,” I proceeded to point out, “is the fear that you as a man must in some way tame Cristina, when it’s really life that’s going to tame her.”

“How?” demanded Roddie.

“Well,” I said as I watched the three squealing figures clinging to the beach-ropes, “it’s wonderful what a couple of babies can do for a woman.”

Roddie’s eye became a wistful one.

“She once said she wanted a flock of ’em,” he soliloquized aloud.

“Time, you’ll find, will also modify that demand. But meanwhile, Roddie, we’ve got to take woman as we find her. We may not like her hats, for example, yet we can’t arm ourselves with stone-hatchets and swat that ever-altering monstrosity from her head. We may not like some of her equally monstrous fashions in frocks, but we can’t strip her of her silks and laces and put her in blue denim like a Robot. And we may think at times that she’s asking for a little too much liberty, but we don’t want to see her turned into a house-cat.”

“There’s not much danger,” said Roddie, “of that ever happening to Cristina.”

“After you’re married,” I casually observed, “you’ll find that Cristina will change about the same as other women do. But your problem will be tremendously simplified, I think, if you can only remember that all women are really barbarians.”

“I see nothing barbarous about Cristina,” objected the indignant-eyed Roddie.

“No, you’re in love with her, and you wouldn’t, of course. But you’ll face enough barbarity before you get through with this wedding of yours. In the first place, you’ll give her back her ring, the ring that’s costly enough to take on the persuasive air of the sacrificial. Then you’ll be joined in holy wedlock, surrounded by a series of carefully perpetuated rites, without either of you thinking much about the racial origin of a wedding-journey that grew out of the unwilling nuptial-flight incidental to an earlier marriage-by-capture, or remembering that the orange-blossom is an ancient Saracen emblem of fecundity, or recalling that the rice so blithely tossed over you is a further symbol, out of the twilight of time, that the bride may be fruitful. And after all the wedding-gifts of linen and silk and china and silver and gold are duly packed up you’ll have your honeymoon and come back to your own home. There you’ll install her in her own house and surround her with all the ingenious machinery that keeps women’s hands so adorably white and small. You’ll want to see her well gowned, for through her you’ll proclaim to the rest of the world your success in gathering those modern clam-shells known as dollars. You’ll also entertain pretty lavishly, since conspicuous waste still seems to be an avenue to social distinction. And you’ll see your wife in formal décolletage at the other end of

the table during one of your twelve-course dinners where the array of plate stands a glittering endorsement of just how high you've climbed on the social ladder, and the hierarchical costuming of your butler and footman will proclaim just how close you've crept to the true heart of democracy. But sometimes, during those functions which your life-partner insists on transferring from the fantastic to the essential, you'll stop and look at your wife as a Sunday visitor has been seen to look at a brooding-eyed leopard in its zoo cage. You'll look at her and wonder why you know so little about her. You'll still be puzzled by moods and impulses and contradictions that seem to leave her remote from you. And you'll wonder why in the final surrender of holy wedlock she hasn't surrendered the final mystery of her being. Then, even more than now, you'll want to understand her, to be closer to her. And you'll wonder what the barrier is that can't quite be beaten down."

Roddie's smile was a modified one.

"I may not travel by that particular roadmap," he objected.

"Then you'll travel by another that's equally complicated," I contended. "And in that connection I'm going to venture to give you a bit of advice. Just remember, when you have a breakdown or get off the highway, that there's still a strain of barbarism dormant in every modern woman. Remember that you, as the male, are still her hunter-hero, even though the quest of the mastodon has been superseded by the quest of the mighty dollar. You're her cave-man, slightly disguised in a business-suit. And sad as it may seem to acknowledge, her instinctive allegiance to you is prompted not only by your power but also by your brutality."

Roddie brushed the sand off his browned and hirsute legs.

"There are some women," he contended, "you can't pull that cave-man stuff with. And Cristina's one of them."

"On the contrary," I countered, "Cristina's as atavistic as the next woman. She wouldn't be sunning herself out on that raft if there wasn't a good deal of the arboreal and the bronze age still left in her. It's in all women. And they're always trying to tell us so. They hint at it when they abjure steam-heat and purr contentedly before an open fire, when they break through the too protecting walls of city life and crowd out into sports, when, if they can't get a country place, they at least get a pent-house and a roof-garden, and if they can't even have that, they keep a growing plant or two in those modern cubby-holes known as flats. And when she has 'em, she sends her pallid offspring out to summer camps where they can roughen up and toughen up and approximate to the cave-man she wants every male to be."

"I'm afraid," said Roddie as he stood up and shook the shore-sand out of his bathing-trunks, "that we may be facing the danger of counting our chickens before

they're hatched."

"That may be true," I patiently agreed, "but I want to see you and Cristina happy. She's a woman, and she has a woman's craving for things we don't always think about. So don't stand around raving about her being a wild woman, but give her a healthy taste of wildness."

"I really," said Roddie as he sat down again, "wanted to have a honeymoon somewhere in the woods."

"Which," I proclaimed, "is precisely the place for such things. Capture your woman and get her out into the wilderness, or into the best imitation of a wilderness you can reach. It may be for only a few weeks out of the year, but let her lead the life that all the ancestral ghosts in her restless body are clamoring to lead. She can't go wrong in the woods. She'll bloom again, in a new way, an instinctive way. Supplant the compact with the camp-fire and the rouge-pot with the mountain-climb. Turn the lip-stick into a fishing-rod and the powder-puff into a canoe-paddle. Put her into rough clothes, into old clothes, remembering that real beauty can forego the fine feathers that cause wrinkles of worry to crease her over-troubled brow and harden her face when she sees a sister-body more adorned than her own. Get her back to biology. And if she's the right sort of woman, she'll revel in it."

Roddie's smile as he leaned against his sand-pile was a slightly commiserative one.

"That may be good stuff for the resort catalogues," he blandly observed, "but I think a lot of rubbish has been talked about the Great Open Spaces and the mysteriously regenerative influences of the wilderness. And eating off tamarack logs isn't always going to make marriage happy."

"Of course not," I admitted as I watched Cristina's green-helmeted head bobbing shoreward once more, "but too much limousine and livery can make a woman hard to live with."

"Well, business will have to experience an unexpected pick-up before any such threat overtakes *my* home circle!" Roddie said with a flippancy which I knew to be largely protective. But he was, I could see, already interested in other things, especially in a brown-legged sea nymph who slowly approached us.

"What are you two old wisecracks talking about?" asked Cristina as she seated herself, wet and shimmering, between two slightly discomfited males.

I looked at Roddie and Roddie looked at me.

"We were talking about going camping," was the eminently safe reply of my worldly-wise young companion.

"That sounds catsy," said Cristina. "Am I included?"

“On certain terms,” I announced, ignoring Roddie’s clumsy signal of warning.

“What terms?” inquired Cristina.

“Well, one is that you take your husband with you,” I deliberately proclaimed. I thought, in my blindness, that I was really helping things along. But I could see a shutter go down over Cristina’s small face still wet with salt water. I could also see a faint hardening about the honey-dew corners of her lips.

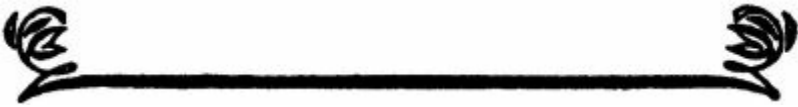
“I mustn’t forget,” she absently observed as she wrung out a wet flap of bathing-suit, “about making that reservation for the *Mauretania* next month.”

I waited for Roddie to say something. But he remained silent, as silent as a Sioux with a sun-dance skewer through his shoulder-flesh.

“I—I guess I’d better round up Margaret and the children,” I dispiritedly suggested.

Cristina, I noticed, was staring out over the wide Atlantic, straight toward Spain.

“No, let me,” said Roddie as he rose dejectedly to his feet.



CHAPTER XIII
MUST THEY BE BARBAROUS?

"I hate hairy things like that!" cried Cristina as she shuddered back against her bed-pillows. "Was it a tarantula?"

"It was merely a spider," I said as I dropped the crushed remains into the little bronze ash-try beside the reading-lamp. "And I almost wish he'd bitten you?"

"Why?" asked the tremulous Miss Muffet in the four-poster.

"Because it sounded, up in my study, as though you were being murdered. And you've stopped me in the middle of a good night's work."

"You shouldn't work at night," said Cristina as she reached for a cigarette to soothe her shaken nerves. "And don't leave me, either," she added as I edged toward the door.

"What good can I do here?" I inquired.

"You can talk to me until I quiet down again," said the solemn-eyed young lady in the sleeveless and neckless nightgown of flesh-colored georgette.

"Then put on some clothes," I commanded. And having seen Cristina drape herself in five ounces of rose-tinted negligée, I asked: "What do you want to talk about?"

"Anything," answered the unflattering Cristina as, entirely by pantomime, she offered and accepted my refusal of a cigarette, showed her disfavor because I declined to sit on the bed, and ordered me to bestow my highly proper carcass on a pillow-strewn chaise-longue, which properly belonged in Margaret's room. "What was that you were telling Roddie the other day about all women being barbarians?"

"Well, aren't they?" I asked as I got rid of a number of rather smelly pillows suggestive of an East Indian zenana.

"Of course they're not," retorted Cristina.

"Who says so?"

"Roddie himself says so. I made him."

"Is that why you've got his picture back on your dresser?" I casually inquired.

Cristina, instead of answering my question, made a face at me.

"I'd think more of your Roddie," I told her, "if he'd learn to tell the truth now and then. And there'd be more happy marriages in this love-scarred world of ours if women learned to think more fundamentally about life. There'll be less bitterness between the sexes, too, when prospective grooms are taught to be less blindly chivalrous toward women. For you all suffer quite as much through men's kindness as you do through their cruelty."

“But it began such a long time ago,” said Cristina, hugging her knees.

“It did,” I acknowledged. “It probably began when paleolithic man left his wife, or rather his wives, safely at home in the cave while he roamed the jungle for bear-meat. It kept up when, having learned to make weapons, he still left his ladies on the side-lines while he fought rival claimants to his hunting-ground. And it still kept up when, turning into a tool-maker, he farmed the land he had once hunted and, tired of being a nomad, installed his weaker partner in a hand-made home of her own.”

“Why,” asked Cristina, “are you always harping back to those arboreal ancestors of ours?”

“Because so much of them is still with us,” was my prompt retort. “But as I was about to point out when you interrupted me, those first little hand-made homes soon grew into a collection of huts and became a community. Men, for the first time, learned to live together, to fraternize. This, in turn, resulted in a natural enough pooling of interests and a division of labor. Man’s work, I mean, became specialized. He turned more and more to tools. He hungered for bread and made the plow. He invented machinery. And that let the earlier communities expand into cities. These cities grew into industrial centers, where, through his slowly developing genius for cooperating and organizing, he transformed the carrying of water and the curing of hides and the weaving of clothing into community enterprise. He became civilized and urbanized, and in doing so nursed a stubborn determination to protect his mate and make life easier for her.”

“But she isn’t a bit happier to-day, and you know it,” contended Cristina.

“Let’s stick to the past for a moment or two,” I patiently suggested. “Man began, I suppose, by stunning his mate with a stone axe and carrying her triumphantly off to his bone-strewn cave in the hillside. Still later he bought her, for so many pelts or so many cows. But as he climbed higher toward the light he inspected her in the aggregate and chose the lady who most appealed to his more and more judicial eye. Whether she was a good scraper of hides and roaster of shin-bones eventually became a secondary consideration. The utilitarian, I mean, was slowly eclipsed by the esthetic, and it became a woman’s duty to stand well in the eye of lordly man or be left behind in the race of life. So——”

“Exactly as it is to-day,” interrupted the georgette-clad Cristina.

“So the general order of nature,” I patiently resumed, “became oddly reversed. The plumage was transferred from the strutting rooster to the lowly hen. The parade-passion that customarily goes with power went to women. And woman, waking up to the fact that she acquired a mate and won a home through her personal appeal, soon learned to dress, not for warmth, but for loveliness. She resorted to studied

and artificial enhancements of her person. She made apparel deceptive and provocative. She was smaller than her mate, but she dignified her softer-muscled body with feathers and furs. She adorned it with bright stones and bits of metal dug from the earth. She anointed it with certain animal-fats and animal-smells—such as your time-honored musk—which experience and courtship taught her to be unfailingly aphrodisiacal in effect. Besides even artificially altering the contours of that body, when so demanded by the competitive innovations of her sisters, she painted her face with earthy pigments and colored her hair with herb-dyes.”

“I didn’t know henna was that old.”

“There are quite a number of things you’ve failed to realize the age of,” I told the lady on the four-poster. “But above and beyond the mere physical changes in woman I’ve mentioned, she modified the very make-up of her mind and spirit. She did it first, of course, to placate a choleric and lusty camp-mate. Then she did it to endear herself to a triumphant and increasingly tyrannous house-mate with a hero-complex and a strong right arm. She draped herself, vinelike, on his sturdiness.”

“And she fooled him then,” crowed Cristina, “exactly as she fools him to-day. And yet you ask us to look up to something that we can still twist around our little finger!”

“It’s quite true, Cristina, that man with all his cunning has retained one primitive stupidity and remains guilty of one childlike mistake. He still confounds the container with the thing contained. He still judges by appearances. He still fails to realize that the clinging vine doesn’t do the sturdiest oak a bit of good. So he has continued to condone the dissimulative attire of women. He’s even encouraged it. He’s allowed woman to trade on her charm-value. He’s prompted her into an oblique glorification of his own manliness by inducing her to accentuate her own comparative helplessness. And, extending the parade-instinct beyond the natural period of courtship, he’s made woman the show-animal of the race, the tub-thumper in front of his tent of accomplishment, what’s been called the ‘advertising’ wife, who stands a public proclamation of her husband’s worldly success, if no longer as a gatherer of tiger-claws and clam-shells, at least as an acquirer of dollars and diamonds and landaulets.”

Cristina’s shrug seemed slightly typical of boredom. “Roddie told me you’d been harping on that old clam-shell stuff again,” she said as she reached for another cigarette.

“It may not be as old as he imagines,” I retorted with more acerbity than I intended. “And it’s worth remembering, even in Wall Street, that we are what we have been. For we’re the sum total, Cristina, of a mighty long line of progenitors. Or,

as Holmes preferred putting it, we're omnibuses in which all our ancestors still ride as passengers. At our heels we still drag a chain that goes clanking back to the childhood of the world. And this century of ours about which we talk so much is only a clock-tick in the long morning of time since man first appeared on this earth. We needn't stop to take sides in the fight whether it's a hundred thousand years or three hundred thousand years. But viewed as a whole it leaves George Cohan a pretty close neighbor to Julius Cæsar and President Hoover treading pretty close on the heels of Tut-Ankh-Amen."

"I wish you wouldn't talk that way," complained Cristina. "It makes me feel like a worm."

"Do you happen to know," I sternly inquired, "just what a light-year is?"

"You told me once," answered the frowning Cristina, "that it's the distance light would travel if it kept on for three hundred and sixty-five days."

"And at what rate would it travel?"

"*You* tell me," said the childlike Cristina.

"We'll say, roughly, at three hundred thousand kilometers a second. And there are sixty seconds in a minute and sixty minutes in an hour and twenty-four hours in a day and three hundred and sixty-five days, as you've already informed me, in a year. And a kilometer, remember, is well over half a mile. Yet the calculated extent of space is some five million light-years. Add that up in your empty little head. Get that thought and put it in your pipe and smoke it. And then tell me, all things considered, how important you feel."

Cristina sat silent for a full minute. Then she pulled the brocaded coverlet closer up about her huddled body.

"You're being simply horrible," she said with a sort of forlorn timidity that made me think of a cave-woman turning from her little camp-fire to study the midnight firmament.

"Then," I suggested, "let's get comfortably back to ourselves and our own microscopic little careers. Let's camp right beside modern woman again and remember that packed neatly away in that body of hers, like canned goods on a grocery-shelf, are all the inherited tendencies and triumphs, frustrations and foolishnesses, repressions and passions, tendernesses and cruelties, that were passed on to her from the ancestors who must sometimes turn in their graves at the thought of how little posterity is doing for her."

"But most men," argued Cristina, "don't think of a good-looking girl as something that got mixed up in the batter-pan of the bronze age."

"It's naturally not easy," I acknowledged, "for mere man, especially when he's

looking about for a mate, to think impersonally of woman. You can't expect that, any more than you can expect woman to think fundamentally about life. Yet life's biggest failure seems to lie in failing to understand life. Or, as Descartes expressed it, 'All errors are crimes.' And we must eventually pay for our sins of judgment, of course, quite as much as for our sins of passion."

"But there aren't any sins of passion," contended Cristina. "They're only sins of judgment looked at from the wrong side. I mean it's a sign you've judged wrong if your passion happens to end in suffering."

"That's something," I admitted after a moment of troubled thought, "that Descartes should have put in his pipe and smoked. Yet a philosophic and impersonal study of modern woman must surely but sadly persuade any twentieth-century investigator that the female of the species, in spite of her present-day scramble for culture, in spite of her veneer of refinement, in spite of her loyalty to lost issues, in spite of that painfully achieved beauty of body of hers, still retains a great many of the stigmata of barbarism."

"Some of them may be that way," contended Cristina. "But when she's good she's very, very good."

"On the contrary," I promptly retorted, "there's where the big catch comes in. For the higher woman mounts the social ladder, unhappily, the closer she seems to approach her primitive ancestors. You know as well as I do that she continues to adorn her body with animal-skins. She seeks to dazzle the eye of man with polished metal ornaments and the brightest stones that can be dug out of the Ural Mountains or Kimberley mud. She deceptively adds to her stature by heel-stilts under her feet and by bird-plumes on top of her head. She may eschew the nose-ring but she still hangs earrings from her ear-lobes, though heaven only knows why she now prefers the ear to the nose. She likes dazzle so much, in fact, that she gives an artificial sheen to her legs by sheathing them in the finest of woven silk. On her fingernails she imposes an unnatural polish. And she ends up by doing her best to bury both her unsavory past and her sebaceous glands under a layer of powdered magnesium silicate."

Cristina's gesture was an impatient one.

"And why do you object to all that?" she demanded. "Women certainly want to look their best."

"But they're so set," I objected, "on short-cuts. They want the red-blooded glow of health on their cheeks, so they put it there with chemical coloring-matter, just as they try to indicate a satisfactory blood-count by disguising anemia under a layer of lip-stick. And now they even half Indianize themselves with an imitation sun-burn

they call 'liquid tan.' Their coiffure, of course, always has been deceptive,—and era by era, it's almost incredible what woman could do with her hair. She can also alter the very lines of her body to suit the exigencies of fashion. She can forget her convenient timidities and revel in partial nudity, when the same is sanctified by the caprices of social usage. For the most decorous of dinners she can bare her back to the waist-line, just as she can roll down her stockings for the tennis-court and pretty well revert to the Polynesian loin-cloth for the bathing-beach. I'm not objecting to woman uncovering herself, remember. What I object to is the attitude of mind behind that ever-shifting exposure. And I don't object to her social diversions. But when she campaigns to professionalize society and reverts to capricious taboos and fetishes and bows to exclusions and restraints not based on reason, it seems about time to scrutinize the true integrity of her culture. You were very proud of your Court presentation, a couple of summers ago, and it cost your poor old dad a great deal of wire-pulling and ready money. But to my way of thinking it was about as pagan a ceremony as any Durbar of white-skinned women could be interested in. And your modern fashionable wedding, of course, is to-day a rite as intrinsically barbaric as the 'give-away' dance of the Kooteny Indians."

"Well, when women *do* lapse into such things," proclaimed Cristina, "they certainly get away with it better than the men do. Men at weddings are always falling into the tubbed palms or trying to forget their cut-away coats by getting tipsy."

"I'm glad you mentioned the matter of apparel," I said with what dignity I could command, "for when lovely woman really dresses herself she can lapse back into aboriginal cruelties that are as razor-bladed as her social enmities. She can ignore the blood-stained source of her aigrette and forget the ermine-cloak for which five-score small bodies died of slow torture."

"And all the poor little silk-worms," cried Cristina, "who died to make petticoats free!"

"She can build up cliques and rivalries," I solemnly continued, "confounding man's aspiration toward the brotherhood of man by her stubborn attribution of esoteric values to accidental social standings and by her championing of arbitrary caste obligations. She can even make culture seem questionable by coloring it with so many of her paganisms, but, bless her soul——"

"Now that man acknowledges she has one," interrupted the acidly smiling Cristina.

"But whether she has a soul or not, it was man himself who had most to do in making her that way. And it's man who, having forced parasitism and parade-passion and protectional obliquities on his running-mate, must now pay the piper.

For, whatever her failings, she's still the keeper of his home and the mother of his children."

"When she happens to have children," qualified Cristina.

"Precisely," I admitted. "For here too, my dear, you may have observed that Time is bringing about its changes. Mating isn't the instinctive and offhand thing it may once have been. It's like the dinner-hour, the more fashionable you are the later it occurs. You women, in fact, are making matrimony so blamed expensive that men have to be middle-aged before they dare to marry. And the having of children is no longer a casual enterprise stumbled on in blindness even though accepted with courage. That, of course, is one function which man, with all his science and machinery, has never been able to take away from her, although it was man, with his knowledge of antiseptics and anesthetics, who made child-birth a considerably safer process. Outside of that vital function, however, man pretty well succeeded in exiling woman from his male-made civilization. He fashioned his cities and his water-systems, his abattoirs and bakeries and textile-houses and canning-factories and railways, his hospitals and restaurants and apartment-hotels, his meekly harnessed power and his industrial machinery, and in doing so left woman, as wife and homemaker, with empty hands. And empty hands are the curse and menace of modern woman. For in that empty-handedness, it seems to me, lies the tragedy of our modern life. Olive Schreiner, I suppose must have felt that when she so abandonedly cried out: 'For God's sake, *give us something to do!*' For home-building, after all, is more than piling cushions under a selfish man's selfishness. And the fulness of life, you'll find, consists in more than attaching oneself to the male, after the manner of the parasite-crab, and permitting to wither away every function but the operating media of such attachment."

"But women are doing considerably more than that," insisted Cristina. "They're not all back-seat drivers."

"It may be coming a little late in the long cycle of time," I admitted, "but woman does seem to be waking up. She's doing it slowly, but she's doing it determinedly. She's listening to Bergson and learning that 'we exist to the degree that we are experienced.' She still wants to be admired, of course, but she's requesting that we cease to center our thoughts on her beautiful hair and give a little attention to the brains beneath that hair. She's beginning to revolt against being so blindly exploited by the makers and unmakers of fashion. It even looks as though she might some day insist that her apparel should be based on some semblance of reason and that her charm-value should not be an affront to biology. She seems to be getting closer to reality, even if she does lose a little of her glamour. And the newer chivalry seems to

set her more firmly on her legs by clipping her wings. For she has agreed, remember, to acknowledge that she has legs. She's even anxious to train those legs to keep stride with her ex-jailor in the courtyard of life. She's tired of squaw-talk and frets to get face to face with facts, the newer facts. She was never really a shirker, and she still wants to joy in work well done. She may not admit it, but she still wants to sacrifice herself, just as she still wants to be a mother. If man, when he puts her into one of his factories or admits her to one of his colleges, finds her momentarily disqualified for motherhood or economically averse to babies, she can remind him that it was his clumsily adroit hand which built the big cities and at the same time penalized the birth of citizens with which to fill them."

"She's also learning," said the lady propped up in the big four-poster, "that idleness is the worst form of human misery."

"Yes," I admitted, "it seems to be a case of boring from within. And women even more than men, I think, have a craving to simplify life, to get back to the essentials, to escape in some way from this modern machinery of industrialism which was primarily evolved to free the race from monotonous labor and yet has actually left it more monotonous. She sees that man, as you've pointed out several times, hasn't made such a howling success of things. But she's still ready to serve on the listed ship while the captain sobers up and studies his chart. Only, for the sake of the ship, she's demanding more and more of her superior officer. He's even becoming more comprehensible to her, and she, in turn, is trying to make herself the same to him. She's demanding, in her saner moments, that he throw overboard that condescending old sex-chivalry which has proved so like the doles that save the poor but prolong the life of pauperism. She's studying a little biology and talking a great deal about eugenics and nursing an ever-growing belief that her purity is now Nature's care, and not altogether man's. And when she mates and links up with the chain, her latter-day task seems to be not so much to keep the fathers from sinning as the sinning from fatherhood."

"Then why are you so gloomy about us?" asked Cristina as she reached for a hand-mirror and abstractedly studied her own reflection.

"You'll oblige me," I suggested, "by not confounding candor with gloom. I've no patience, in fact, with the alarmists. Their charge that woman is changing, and changing for the worse, needn't be disturbing to the wider-ranging student of history. The pot boils over a trifle, now and then, but the old fires burn on. The race continues—and you and your precious Roddie, I trust, will play your part in that continuance."

"But I decided not to marry Rodman Jones," announced the eruptive Cristina.

“Then you’ll rake in some other dunderhead,” I prophesied. “You’ll do that with your undeviatingly punctual lateness, and feel very important about it, although the racial rôle you fill may prove about the size of the watercress-seller’s part in *Louise*. But the great river of life flows on. The cranks can’t stop it. It hesitates for neither the feminist of yesterday nor the flapper of to-day.

“And the back-waters and the side-issues are soon forgotten. The lady-orator on the soap-box no longer arrests us, and the Lucy Stoners seldom interfere with traffic. The revolvers, in other words, are now revolting. And the Abandoned Ladies, the love-privateers along the marriage-lanes, needn’t bother us so much, since precious few babies come into the world under their blithe flag of sex-banditry. For woman is the perpetuator, and to perpetuate she must normalize herself or be eliminated.”

Cristina turned and studied me with a glacial eye.

“Is that why,” she sternly inquired, “you told Roddie he needn’t tame me but life would do it for him?”

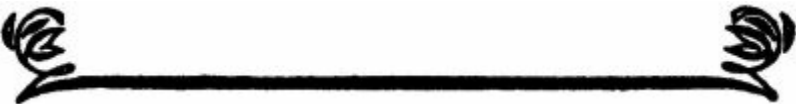
“Roddie,” I retorted, “had no business repeating a personal and private conversation. But you needn’t be ashamed of your sex, Cristina. Life for woman during countless centuries has been rude and hard and vigorous. The instinct for service is planted pretty deep in her make-up. And about the costliest, about the most colossal, mistake that man has ever made has been his failure to realize woman’s tremendous and untapped reservoirs of courage, of self-immolating endurance where pain is concerned, of self-sacrifice for tribal ends, of loyalty to a leader and mate who hasn’t always merited that allegiance.”

I thought, at first, that Cristina wasn’t listening to me, she wriggled so indolently down under the brocaded coverlet and buried her side-face so contentedly in an engulfing pillow.

“That’s such a nice note to end up with,” she sleepily acknowledged. “And you’ve really given me a lot to think about, old top. And now that I’ve made up my mind to be a Better Woman, and do only the bigger and better things, you can kiss me good night if you like.”

“Save that for Roddie,” I said as I reached to turn out the light.

“Pig!” muttered Cristina, already half asleep.



CHAPTER XIV

THE END OF ALL TALK

It was almost midnight when I wrote the last sentence on the last page of my last chapter. And instead of knowing a sense of deliverance at a long task eventually done I felt merely a misty sense of weariness touched with loneliness. I felt, all things considered, a great deal like the thirteenth chapter of Ecclesiastes.

For I stood, I knew, on the eve of a double departure. Along with the neatly piled script on my desk would slip away a little company of shadows who had companioned me through many hours, who had stood as close to me, almost, as my own children. And somewhere out on the garden terraces, I also knew, walked Cristina and her Roddie, studying the stars. That, I felt in my prophetic bones, meant a second departure and the loss of yet another companion. For when young people turn to astronomy, on a soft-aired September-end night with an etherealizing harvest moon bathing the world in its golden effulgence, there is always the danger of some secret and final consummation.

So I showed no surprise, as I sat silent before my cleared desk and the mounded sheets of manuscript that looked like a little grave of lost enthusiasms, when Cristina drifted into my study like a summer moth. She stood poised for a moment or two, staring at me as I pretended to scan an open page of *The Provençal Troubadours*. Then she tripped across the room and subsided into a big green wing-chair that made her look rather like a Peter Pan under a rhubarb-leaf.

I pretended not to see her. But Cristina's eyes, I noticed, were glowing like a road-animal's when they throw back the gleam of your headlights. On the third finger of her left hand, I also noticed, once more glittered the solitary diamond that always made me think of Arcturus in a northern sky.

It wasn't until she sighed, and sighed audibly, that I looked openly and directly up at Cristina. And even then I pretended not to see the carefully paraded stone-glitter on her inadequate small hand.

"Well, can't you at least congratulate me?" she finally demanded.

"On what?" I inquired as I noticed how perversely young and lovely she looked in apricot-colored silk, in about enough of it, all told, to dust a flute.

"On getting it back!"

"Getting what back?" I obtusely exacted.

Cristina's answer was not a vocal one. She merely held up the hand that wore the *subjugum* emblem of crystallized carbon.

"It's Roddie, I suppose," I said after dutifully blinking at the faceted splendor in

front of me.

“Of course,” was Cristina’s prompt and slightly indignant response.

“So you ate crow, after all?” I ventured with a purely achieved and sheltering gruffness.

“Not openly,” retorted my companion.

“And you intend to marry him this time?” I asked, once more solemnly regarding the engagement-ring.

“Of course,” cooed Cristina as she came and sat on my desk-end.

“But I was beginning to regard you as one of those Advanced Thinkers who didn’t approve of that clumsy old ceremonial. In fact, from the way you’ve been talking about marriage for the last few months, I’d just about concluded you didn’t believe in that old barbarism. And from the way you talked about men, I also assumed you’d never find one to satisfy you.”

Cristina’s smile was a sub-abstracted one.

“I haven’t,” she acknowledged. “But we have to take what we can get. And I don’t believe in marriage, either. Not altogether. At least, I don’t in theory. But even the modern woman can’t always practise what she preaches. And Roddie’s awfully old-fashioned. He feels that society will have to put up with marriage until it can invent something better.”

“How liberal of Roddy!” I ejaculated. “He seems to have been reading Keyserling.”

“I don’t know what he’s been reading,” averred Cristina. “But he’s taking over the Van Gelder house next April and he’s going to have his life insured. And while we’re having our month in the South he’s going to have it all done over—not his life, of course, but the house, and——”

“But there’s no nursery to that Van Gelder place,” I casually observed.

“Don’t be coarse,” admonished the starry-eyed Cristina.

“Then how about that flock you were talking about the other day?” I ungraciously inquired.

“Facts and theories are quite different things,” retorted my companion. “And if Roddie is made a partner next year we can go in to the city for the winter months and the next spring get a cottage somewhere on the Sound. And because I gave up sailing on the *Mauretania* he’s promised me a trip to Paris, and——”

“You’ve got it pretty well worked out,” I ventured as I reached for my pipe. “In fact, you’re amazingly well organized, for a woman who’s going down, bow first.”

“Well, women have to be realists in things like this,” Cristina rather surprised me by asserting.

“I thought it was the one time,” I contended, “when you women demanded romance.”

Cristina’s laugh was light and tinkling.

“Oh, you can’t argue away my happiness,” she said with a body-writhe that threatened to approach the voluptuous. “I’m so happy I daren’t come an inch closer to you.”

“Why not?” I sedately inquired.

“Because I’d bite holes in you.”

But Cristina, in the ensuing period of silence, became sober again.

“That old rot about romance,” she said with a faint feathering of scorn creeping about her bee-stung upper lip, “has gone, Sir Oracle, where the woodbine twineth. You know as well as I do that women are more practical-minded than men. They’ve had to be. It’s you men who are romantic-minded. You’re so romantic-minded about love and courtship and marriage that you’ve taken this once simple old business of mating and mixed it up with religion and grand opera and inheritance-laws and poetry-anthologies until a twentieth-century bride feels she isn’t legally paired off until they put her into thirty feet of tulle and tie her trunks up with ribbon while you’re tying her future up with obedience-oaths and throwing rice down her neck while the family sobs are smothered under *The Voice That Breathed o’er Eden!*”

“My dear child, no male ever glories in that kind of wedding. It’s the one occasion, in fact, when the female of the species shines forth. At all such fêtes, as you yourself observed the other day, mere man invariably looks like a cross between a shell-shocked undertaker and a court-prisoner awaiting sentence.”

“Then what makes him put up with it?” demanded Cristina.

“You women do,” I retorted. “It’s the one function where you have the upper hand. And, all things considered, you’ve succeeded in making the modern marriage-ceremony about the most barbaric function known to our so-called era of civilization. The one thing that puzzles me is the amount of clothes you still wear on all such occasions, bearing in mind as I must the Great Disrobing Movement that’s been driving the baggage-transfer people out of business and putting the petticoat in the museums of natural history.”

Cristina studied me with a dark and smoldering eye.

“It’s easy to cloud the issue by sneering at our dress reforms,” she said as she uncrossed her knee. “But woman has been the realist there, and you know it. They’ve scrapped that old harem stuff about veils and skirts and sex-mystery. They’ve come down off the pedestal and tried to be honest. You said yourself they

weren't ashamed of their legs. And they're not afraid to know a little about anatomy, or——”

“Or let poor man know a little about the same,” I gently interpolated. But Cristina didn't deign to notice that interruption.

“We've tried to get things back to a fifty-fifty basis,” pursued the earnest-eyed young lady in the apricot gown, “and make all that old sexual hypocrisy and pretense a thing of the past. We're at last trying to be honest and open and aboveboard. We're——”

Cristina stopped for a moment to open her rouge-compact and rub a little color on her cheek-bones, intently studying her own face in her own little gold-rimmed vanity-mirror.

“—We're really trying to be honest,” resumed Cristina, “not only with ourselves, but with men. In fact, we're doing what we can to reform man. For it's not women who keep changing. It's men.”

“Tell that to the marines,” I said as I shut up the foolish big book on the troubadours. “You'll be trying to say next that love never changes.”

It wasn't the right time, of course, to taunt Cristina about such things. You can't wear an eighteen-hundred-dollar engagement-ring and remain entirely impersonal in your judgments on the Grand Passion.

“Well, love never does change,” proclaimed Cristina, with a faint tremolo in her voice. “It's everlasting and unchangeable and the one elemental and basic thing in our make-up. That is, of course, next to hunger. And, in a sort of way, it's the same as hunger.”

“Then it certainly changes its methods,” I maintained. “For when your primitive ancestor went wooing, instead of slipping a stone on your third finger, he tied it to the end of a stick and thumped you over the head with it.”

“Yes, that's just it,” was Cristina's triumphant cry. “We were captured then. We had no say in the matter. We were the helpless quarry. It was man who did all the chasing in that old game of sexual selection, but——”

“But now the weaker sex insists on having a finger in the pie,” I pursued. “And while you and your dawn-of-light sisters are dishing out this newer line about square-deal partnerships and Honest-John fifty-fifty arrangements, with one hand, you're pretty busy putting chemical dyes on your face and recoloring your hair and pretending to be younger and healthier than you really are, with the other. So my sorrowful and final conviction is, my dear, that you couldn't be honest if you wanted to be.”

Cristina, instead of showing anger, regarded me with a rather pitying eye.

“It’s a sign you’re getting on a bit, old dear, when you’re callous and cynical about the Greatest Thing in the World.”

“You mean women?” I gasped.

“No; I mean Love,” retorted Cristina, linking her fingers together over her deluded young heart. “Love that never changes and never dies, Love that does all those wonderful things that history and poetry tell us about!”

“Then instead of trying to be cynical,” I observed after studying Cristina for a moment of indignant silence, “let’s make a stab at trying to be historical. For people can’t play ducks and drakes with the Recorded Word. Let’s have a look at how history and the poets really did handle this old problem of love, love as we know it to-day, what we may truthfully call Romantic Love. In the old Greeks, and the old Hebrews, and the other ancient civilizations that have passed definite records down to us, we find not infrequent references to what may be termed conjugal love, but no mention at all of meta-physical or premarital or purely romantic love. Even the Bible takes no account of it. Not a single one of the Greek tragedies is a love drama, as you’d call *Faust* or *Romeo and Juliet* a love drama. No trace of romantic love appears in either Sophocles or Euripides. Müller, in his study of the Dorians, somewhere says: ‘There is no instance of an ancient Athenian falling in love with a free-born woman and marrying her from violent passion.’ And Becker in his *Charikles* somewhere states that ‘None other than a sensual love was acknowledged between man and wife.’”

Cristina, having commandeered one of my cigarettes, wandered disconsolately back to her wing-chair. “Then how about Penelope?” she demanded. “Didn’t she hold off all those suitors and stay true to one man?”

“That was not premarital love. It was strictly conjugal. There was, in fact, no gallantry in ancient Greece. It was utterly unknown to Plato, wide as was that gentleman’s range of thought and feeling. It was almost as rare in Rome, though we perhaps get the first faint twilight of the dawning change in Ovid’s *Ars Amoris*. The Roman matron was both a little more emancipated and a little more elevated than the woman of Greece, where even Aristotle knew nothing of the spiritual love of a man for a woman. So instead of the orgiastic cults of Dionysus and Aphrodite, of Adonis and Astarte, we begin to lose the purely animal relationship and begin to see the development of personality in the woman of the Cæsars and a demand on her part for some form of social recognition. But there was a relapse, of course, during the Dark Ages. It was the ebb-tide of womanhood. She went so low in the social order that her property-rights vanished and the Council of Macon, as you very well know, officially denied her a soul. And then, oddly enough, two strangely diverse things

combined to change her, our crystallizing Christian faith, on the one hand, and the wandering troubadour, on the other. Christianity, of course, always sought to center life in the soul, and naturally foreshadowed a newer and more meta-physical relationship between the sexes. And chivalry, whatever its faults, at least taught the medieval military rough-neck—and he *was* a rough-neck—to look upon woman with sentiments of respect and occasional signs of adoration.”

“I don’t know much about those knights who used to go around like tinned sardines,” acknowledged Cristina. “And I never had a wandering minstrel sing under my window. But didn’t somebody once say that all those old ballad-makers and scalds and minne-singers invariably addressed their effusions to married ladies?”

Cristina was right; and I was compelled to concede the point.

“That, of course, was the social fly in the amber of all their rhapsody. But there was a reason for it. The Crusades, you see, were over, and there were a lot of returned soldiers out of work. Western Europe was pretty full of wandering veterans, unattached and homeless and sex-hungry adventurers, mercenaries and ne’er-do-wells who, outside their shirts of mail and their metal helmets, couldn’t have been so tremendously different from our modern hoboes, our own knights of the road. At any rate, it was in them that what we now call romantic love had root. They’re primarily responsible for the modern amorous motif in poetry, for the erotic note, not only in song, but also in story and novella, for the extravagant adulation of women, for the presumptively impersonal service to a mistress, the *Minnedienst* which we see shadowed, for example, in *Parsifal*. But with all their faults, they at least gave love an overtone of the super-sensual. They transferred it to an imaginative basis. Instead of marriage by capture and love by violence, instead of ruthlessly possessing woman, they directed their attention more to the pangs and pleasures of wooing, to the saddened joy of waiting, of refusal and frustration.”

“But they didn’t mean half what they sang,” interpolated Cristina. “And you said yourself their real treatment of women couldn’t always be talked about in polite circles.”

“At any rate,” I resumed, “there seems to have been a period in history when this more mystical phase of amorous emotion was no mere affectation. Manly hearts contemplated beauty and a genuine impulse of adoration ensued and flowered in an odd belief in the moral superiority of the weaker sex. And you can’t laugh away a movement that gave birth to Dante’s *Vita Nuova*. That’s the gospel of modern love expressing itself for the first time in regal and lovely language. What’s more, it was the overture to Shakespeare—and when you’ve said that you’ve said about everything.”

But Cristina, obviously, wasn't listening to me. Instead, she was gazing abstractedly down at her new diamond.

"Well, what's all that got to do with Roddie and me?" she finally demanded.

"Only this, fair one," I said as I pushed back my chair, "that if you and your up-to-date sisters insist on scrapping sex-mystery and always demanding candor and abetting exposure and encouraging matter-of-factness, you may eventually succeed in killing this goose of romance that lays the golden eggs of adoration. For instance, did your precious Roddie, when he put that ring back on your finger out there in the moonlight, get down on his knees?"

Cristina's shoulder-movement was casual and slightly commiserative.

"It's not being done, old dear," she said as she blinked down at a grass-stain on the apricot-colored silk. "And besides, he did something much nicer."

It took no great stretch of the imagination to picture what two rhapsodic young people, under that soft and mellowing harvest moon, had been doing. And I sighed, without quite knowing it.

"Don't be jealous," said the egocentric Cristina.

"I'm not," I barked back at the apricot-colored girl who seated herself on my chair-arm.

"And after this," she said by way of punishment, "I'll have my Roddie to talk all these things over with."

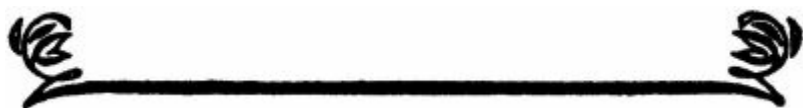
"He has my sympathy," I morosely proclaimed.

But Cristina, totally unimpressed by that proclamation, slipped an arm about my shoulder.

"I'll be sorry to lose you, old-timer," she said as she rested an ear, well-anointed with some absurd come-hither flower-scent, against my furrowed and slightly averted brow. "And nobody will ever, ever take your place."

"Applesauce!" was my solemnly unromantic retort. And after Cristina had kissed me, and trotted down to her four-poster to dream of Roddie, I sat staring for a long time at my empty desk-top. Then I methodically tied up my manuscript, covered my ink-well, and turned out the lights. But the house, as I groped my way down-stairs, seemed an oppressively silent one. And the world outside my open windows, for all the harvest moon that bathed the garden terraces in a flood of golden light, seemed an incomprehensively empty one.

THE END





TRANSCRIBER NOTES



Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been fixed.

Inconsistency in hyphenation has been retained.

[The end of *Cristina and I* by Arthur Stringer]