

Midwinter
Number

M'LE New York.

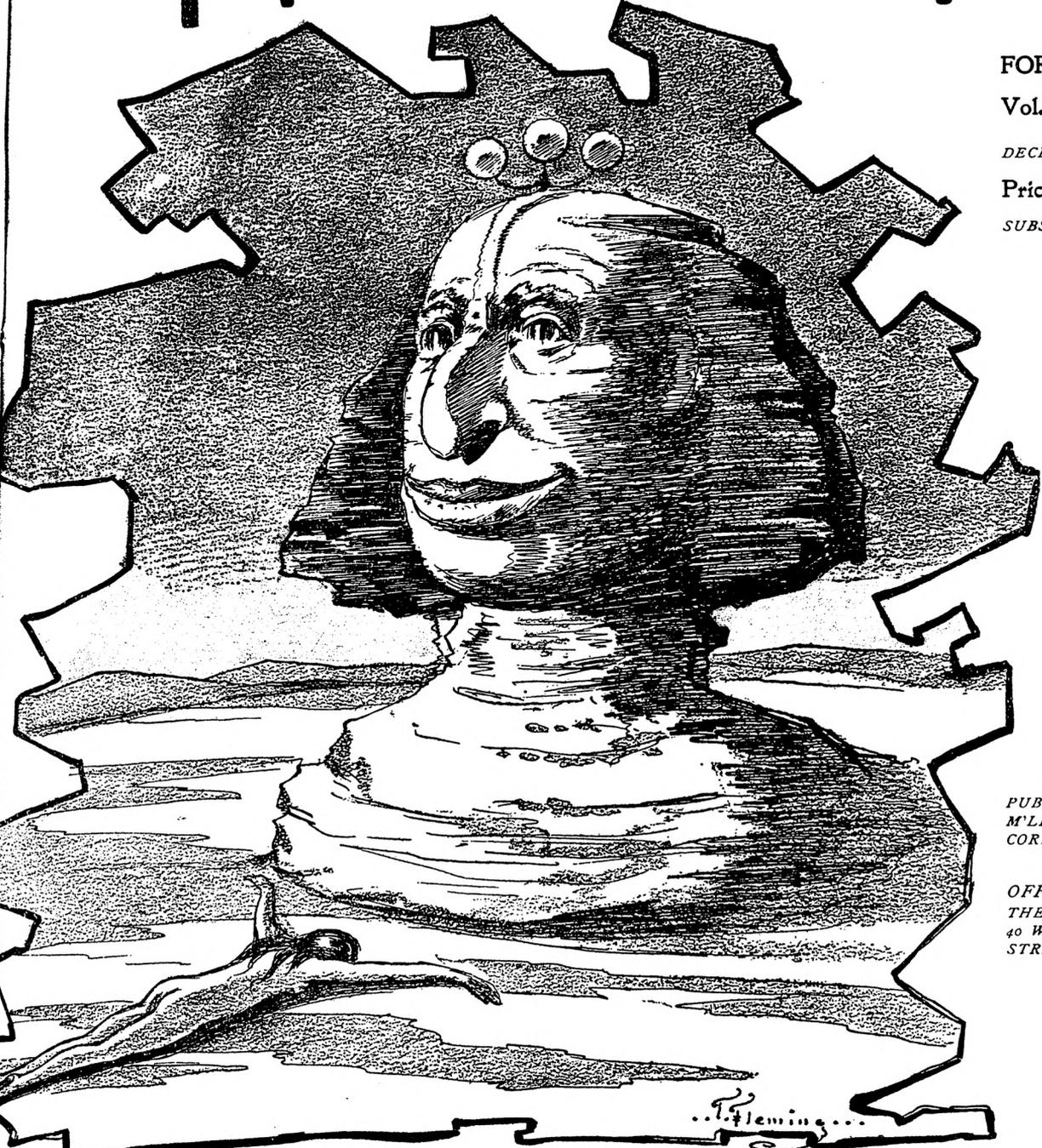
FORTNIGHTLY

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A NIGHT SCENE

G. HENRY PAYNE

There was a step on the stairs; then silence. She could feel that someone was coming up; she crouched in the corner and waited. A moment passed; she thought it was hours. Again she heard a noise; this time it sounded like suppressed breathing. She could feel the Presence outside the door; the knob turned. The candle flickered out; again the knob turned, and then the door opened noiselessly. She could not see the figure that entered, but a coldness was sent into the room that left no doubt as to the coming. Her limbs trembled with cold, and it seemed as if all her blood had turned into ice, except—except where It, the Mystery of the Womb, was; and there was a warm, glad feeling, an almost definite sensation of the Joy of Life. For a moment the visitor and the coldness were forgotten in the ecstatic contemplation of the unconscious joy of the Unborn.

“The Child.”

No one had spoken; it was not the voice of man; it was a Voice that cried to her heart. It brought her back to the coldness of the room and the deathly dark, to her unwelcome guest. She could feel that he was coming near her—

“The Child.”

It was the Voice of the Demander. It rang like the hangman’s knell; it snapped the cords that bound her to hope.

“The Child.”

The Voice was nearer. God of pity! Could she yield up that which was not only hers, but of her? She knelt at the feet of the Demander, but in the darkness she knew her prayers were of no avail. She muttered the words that had been taught her in childhood and hoped against hope the old spell had not gone out of them. Over her head the Demander stretched his hand. She could feel the weight on her heart, though the touch was not perceptible. She could hear—fond wretch, amorous of the unknown!—she could hear the cry of anguish from the Womb, from the innocent, non-individual mass that was not only hers, but of her; she could hear the Child’s protest against the fate that would soon claim it. Must all end thus—all the joy and hope and suffering and participation—all end thus? And the old prayers were impotent.

“The Child.”

The Presence has laid its demand upon the Unborn. God of pity! Will It take from her that which is of her! The Unborn is the Born.

But how cold are the bodies of the two.



It is no easy matter to be famous when one bears a name which is spelled Przybyszewski and is pronounced Pchibicheski. The handicap is formidable. And yet this unspeakable Pole is making a noise in the world. He writes in German. The reviews of the Fatherland are publishing his portrait and learned discussions of his work. He is indeed a notable man. He stands in the forefront of the new movement in German letters—individualism. He has written monographs, a novel, and a play, which is to be produced, I observe, in Berlin this season. He seems to be a strange, vagrom, irresponsible sort of man. For a while he was a student of medicine. For a while he edited a socialistic journal in German Poland. Now he has given up all regular modes of life. In the winter he may be met in some of the smoky taverns of old Berlin. He is a ferocious noctambulist, a prestigious pianist, who plays Chopin with a sort of diabolical intimacy—think!—on the cracked pianos of second-rate taverns; this inspired Slav, reeking with alcohol and nicotine.

But when the summer comes he goes away to his wife's home in Norway and writes marvellous books. The first of his books I have been able to get is the "Psychology of the Individual," which deals with Chopin and Nietzsche and Ola Hansson (Berlin, 1893). Less a book than a brochure, it is an admirable introduction to Przybyszewski. It has for theme the conflict between the modern soul and the great Unconscious—the struggle between the individual and matter.

"That which distinguishes the individual to-day," he writes, "is the sentiment of being placed outside of the daily interests of the crowd; the supreme sentiment of feeling his instincts perish and feeling little by little the source of his powers dwindle; the history of the individual becomes thus the sad monograph of fettered desires and stifled instincts, the history of the slow crumbling of mountains, disintegrated by precipitous waters. Thence comes that dangerous yearning for something beyond—vain beating of a bird's wings, scaling the infinite. This infinite yearning has still one distinctive mark: a consciousness of the inefficacy of all such efforts—the lucid consciousness that the yearning for something beyond is but a lure. . . . And so the spirit reaches the conviction that all its search is vain and that, notwithstanding all its endeavour, it will never rise above itself. . . . From this it is that comes the feverish quest for pleasure. But this morbid hunger for pleasure lacks the simplicity which came from the early play of primitive forces. The actual individual replaces the naïf joy which came from the exercise of his instinctive powers by a subtle quest for the bewildering. All life thus becomes a mere question of attaining an exciting state of bewilderment.

"The decadent individual—his nerves inapt for their work, at dolourous tension—raises himself to the mysterious frontier where pain and pleasure are as one; where the two, combining, give a destructive sense of enjoyment, an ecstatic satisfaction of getting out of one's self and above one's self. Thoughts and acts take on destructive forms, become manias; over all the exhausted atmosphere hangs the hint of a coming storm—the dolourous vibrations of delirious but impotent lust; the hectic flush of a hysteria of the senses."

Human nature fighting mysteriously against the implacable forces which hem it in—this vain struggle in a twilight of semiconsciousness—is the theme of all these lyric monologues. His heroes have no precise reality. His women are not human beings; they are personified sex; they are Astarte or Isis or the Great Prostitute.

"In the beginning there was Sex. Out of Sex there was nothing, and in it everything was."

This is the beginning of the "Mass of the Dead," a sinister poem of drunkenness and decadence.

"And Sex made itself brain—this masterpiece of lust—whence was the birth of the soul."

Then Przybyszewski pictures largely, in great cosmic symbols, decorated with passionate and mystic fervours, the singular combat between the growing brain and the Sex, from which it would fain be free. I can not translate the poem here—in a journal which is read by pale, slender-hipped girls in convents.

STANISLAW PRZYBYSZEWSKI

V. T.



THE SCULPTRIX

*A slight grey woman, she stood alone,
In the great grey world alone,
And she said: "I will fashion my hidden dream
In a synthesis of stone."*

*She wrought by day in the facile clay,
In the night she fashioned clay,
Till her ideal stood, in its stark white mood,
Wonderful as young day.*

*"Oh, it's here in the marble," she said (and smiled),
"Is Love's dream" (and she smiled);
For the baby's arms crept round her neck
And —
"You are Art and Love, my child."*



THE LONELY GIRL'S LOVER

A Gypsy tale, heard in Transylvania by Wistocki; told in French by Professor Elie Reclus, anarchist and scientist; the English by V. T.

There was a young girl, a beautiful girl. She had neither father, nor mother, nor brother, nor friend. All were dead. She lived in a cabin at the edge of a wood. She never went to see anyone; no one ever came to see her.

Once as night was falling there came a fine man. He opened the door:

"— From afar I come, from very far away. I can go no further. I must sleep."

Said the girl "— Well, I will give you something to cover you. To-morrow you shall eat and drink."

Already the man had stretched himself on the floor: "— I am going to sleep. It is a long time since I slept."

The girl asked: "— How long since you slept, tell me?"

"— My dear, in a thousand years I have slept but once."

And the girl laughed: "— Bah! You joke." The other was already asleep.

At dawn the traveller woke. He looked at the girl: "— I say, but you are pretty! Do you want to keep me a week?" "— With pleasure."

One night as they slept together she woke trembling:

"— Oh, the evil dream! You were pale, dear man, and all cold. We rode in a silver coach. You blew a horn. And the dead trooped; they followed us in crowds. You were the king. You wore a long cloak." "— Bad affair, that," said the man. He leaped to his feet.

"— Dearest, I must go. It has been long, too long, since anyone died. I must go."

And the girl wept: "— Do not go! Stay with me, stay!" "— I must go — God guard you!"

She wept more bitterly: "— At least tell me your name." "— I will not tell you my name. Who hears my name must die." "— Let come what will, I wish to know who you are?" "— You wish it? You wish it? Well then, I am the king of Death."

The girl paled and trembled. She fell dead.



POSSESSION

V. T.

The thick curtains were drawn. In the chamber there was only the light of the night-lamp, feebly persistent. She lay with her young head on my arm. A shudder ran through her sleep, and she cried aloud. I woke abruptly.

"There is something there — something. Look, in the folds of the curtain — the flutter of evil wings!"

There was nothing but the night-lamp, feebly persistent in the anxious night. Inquiet myself, I hushed her terror and with avid lips we drank the enchantment of life — drunkenness of love and sleep. A blue and heavy sleep fell upon us, cool as linens, heavy and blue —

"He touched me — with his hands — I felt his bony hands on my flesh!"

I too had seen the hands, the evil, mocking hands stretched toward me; and in the folds of the curtain the black eyes shone. But the phantom vanished; it fled from our kisses. There was a chill in our kisses, as though mouth groped for mouth through a veil. Our lips were weary and chill. A light slumber fell upon us — a thin and peevish sleep, striped with fever; our arms and legs moved perversely, as though in fear of ankylosis. But still it was sleep. . . . There was a gurgle in her throat, and a faint, horrible sound came through her teeth; her great eyes opened and stared at me, mad, terrified —

"He was here, between us; he pushed away your arms, and on my face I felt a monstrous, formless kiss."

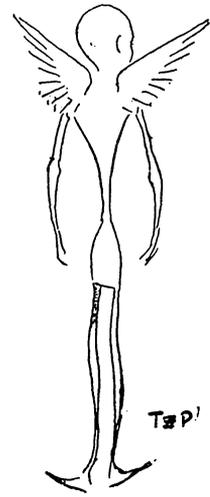
I too had felt on my face the touch of impure lips; and the curtains were moving, tremulously, mockingly. Yet once again our mouths grew together, but our lips were cold, as though fear had sucked them bloodless; and our embraces were weak and distant, as though the phantom lay with folded wings between us. The pale night-lamp flickered in the sepulchral darkness; with anxious eyes we questioned the darkness; we questioned the dim silence — . . . Bitter regret of our golden dreams obsessed us; bitter regret and the dreams all gold. . . .

"The shadows are sinister in this dark chamber."

"At God's feet kneel the nights and days, expectant. He bids each go forth to its appointed task. There are nights which work the ruin of eager lives."

"Tear down the curtains that a little of blue heaven may shine in — quench that flickering, shameless light —"

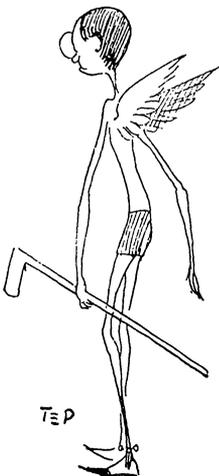
"It was death that entered here, through the folded curtains, and henceforth there is death in us, forevermore, forevermore."



NOCTAMBULISM

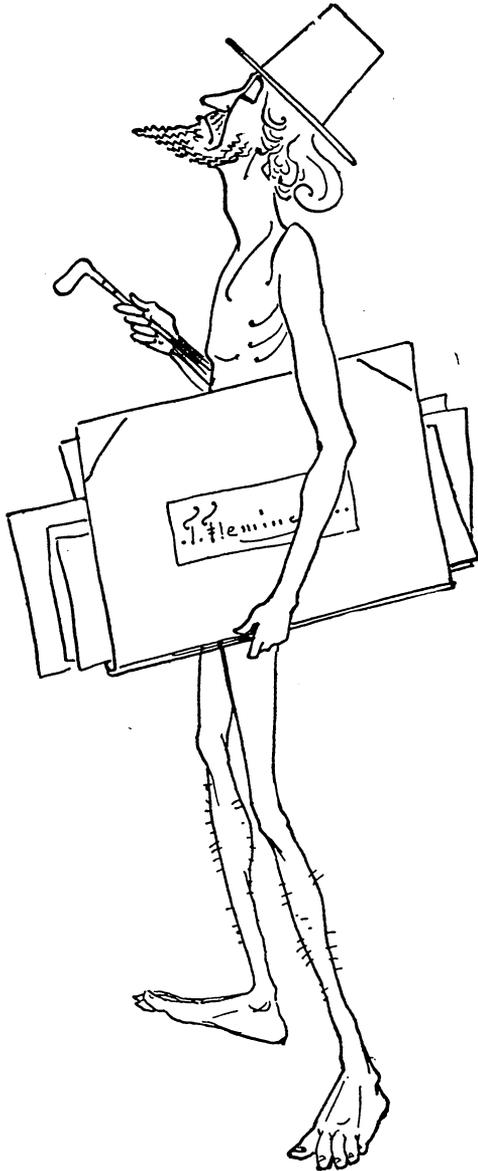
It was a troubled night — Mile after mile he walked the streets of the haggard city. Always ahead of him — indefinite, mystic — floated a gilded virgin — at times he saw only a glint of white wings and her fervid hair, all gold — then for a moment he would see her exceptional eyes; so he knew that she was the Mother of God's choice — the mystic Mother of the World's Salvation — and he followed her through the streets of the haggard city —

But he could not pray.



HISTRIO- MASTICISMS

DOCTOR
HAMILTON
WILLIAMS



Sooner or later all flesh returns to dust. We speak of this as a retrograde metamorphosis. It is essentially the reduction of a body highly organized and complex to its elementary units. Midway are encountered some weird suborganisms which long-suffering jurymen recognize as ptomaines. With such as these expert criminals who can afford to hire expert testimony poison their victims, not with rough-on-rats. This leads me to the view that the learned counsel who do the hiring, in fact, lawyers as a class, are products of the retrograde metamorphosis of society. Nature, endowing man with arms, leaves the tongue to woman; but Cicero and Joe Choate, who have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdoms of the earth, cast down their arms and wag the unresting tongue. "Such gentleness, a clemency so unwonted and unheard of, so universal a moderation united with absolute power, wisdom so incredible and almost divine, it is impossible for me to pass over in silence." He must have felt awfully bad over that impossibility, must Cicero, when thanking Caesar in the senate for the pardon of Marcellus. "This tyrant will not leave us even our thoughts free"; he nudges Atticus. Choate, suffering from the engorgements of a sluggish liver and the putrefactive auto-intoxication of defective peristalsis, where he should have swallowed a blue pill and a dose of salts and staid at home, goes out to dine with decent people and vomits up his bile upon the table-cloth. A fee it was he wanted and not a feed, and had he had it he would have found impossibilities as well as Cicero. So much for two of the lawyer class. For the rest—I have never tried holding my pen and holding my nose at the same time. Selah.

* * * *

How is it we hear so much about the nude in art and see so little of the nude in artists? Do they lack the courage of their convictions? Do they simply dread the pleurisy resultant from exposure and a sudden chill? What a bitter jest upon their transcendental mouthings on the human form divine were that supplied by Brown's spinal curvature, Jones's rachitic tibiae, and the Falstaffian pot-belly of beer-guzzling Robinson in an hypothetical life-school promenade adown the avenue. And then on general principles we must draw a veil over the undraped possibilities of the Misses Brown, Jones, and Robinson. Faugh! My gorge rises at them, rises at the lie which runs through the warp and woof of every manifestation of their salacious, prurient, and brazen strumpetry. Art, indeed. Dirt, I say. Pay-dirt, as the miners call it.

* * * *

Why people die has ever been to me a standing puzzle. There is the further difficulty that so very many people do get born. "Had I seen him but a day sooner," sighs the blatant and flamboyant quack, the rawboned and gawky Hippocrates from Painted Post or Four Corners, just graduated from the tail of an ambulance.

"It's all over, doctor," screams the sister-in-law with gleeful exultation, almost rushing into the arms of some omniscient old apoplectic coming belated from a dinner-party. "Twins! Twins!"

Whereat omniscience all but frowns in disapproval of the perverse and all too previous parturiency.

THE ANTIQUARY AS A SEER

DICK WOOD

The Antiquary took down his Powhatan pipe, filled it with thirty-year-old Perique, lighted it with flint and steel, and leaned back in his teak-wood chair to smoke. On a tabourette by his side stood an ivory mug with pewter lid and stained-glass bottom; an ivory mug, fashioned from a section of an elephant's tusk hollowed out, into which he poured from time to time from a leathern bottle small doses of rare old port. The Antiquary's port was not to be sneezed at. A sup was enough to tingle the finger-tips. So he supped and supped until his finger-tips tingled to the tickling-point. If the Antiquary had but possessed a planchette it would surely have written. But as he possessed no such instrument of magic and his finger-tips still tingled, he took up a Chinese fiddle, a sam-san, and smoked, supped, and sawed.

P-u-f-f. P-u-f-f.

Sputter! sputter! shrieked the expiring pipe, staccato, with all the agony of a grand finale. The Antiquary grimaced and spat nicotine.

* * * * *

The great bluestone, with the light behind it in the Turkish lamp above, glowed like a railway signal-lantern on a wet night. The Antiquary's eyes were closed. He was peering into the bluestone with the rapt gaze and the third eye of a seer.

Spiritualists and those mediums who can not tell after four o'clock say this eye is located in the centre of the forehead; spiritists and those mediums who can not tell before four o'clock say it is located in the top of the head. The only medium I ever knew who could tell at all said it was located in the pit of his stomach, and no doubt he was right.

One thing was certain, the Antiquary could and did see the bluestone. And he saw more. He saw the stone begin to revolve, shooting out arms of pale light which caught at everything and clung to nothing. He saw the bluestone spin toward its centre like the magic circles of a bicycle advertisement. He saw the thing reverse and open out like the picture in a kaleidoscope. Where there had been shooting rays of pale light flashed strips, curves, and crescents of brilliant colours. He saw these things group themselves on a maroon background in a design more wonderful and of greater beauty than the Persian rug or the Ashantee cloth he had that day priced. For he was a true Antiquary and always priced, whether he bought or no. He saw Joseph's coat, Indian shawls, Oriental hangings, and Tunisian sashes until his seer's soul was surfeited. Then beneath and across a Moorish arch the size of an ordinary centre-back stage-entrance he beheld a curtain strung. An ashes-of-roses curtain, worked in threads of old gold.

An undulation, graceful and sinuous as a serpent's glide, rippled o'er the cloth from behind at about the height of a woman's hand. He wondered what was beyond the veil. And then the curtain was pulled back, and on a draped pedestal he beheld a copper vase burnished to a more beautiful tint than the purest gold. Long-necked and slender of body, it sported acute-angled arms akimbo at its sides. Altogether, it so excited his pride of conquest he was on the point of asking its price. But he refrained, for he knew that would break the seer's circuit. Every time the curtain was pulled back he saw something new. Now a Benares bowl, now a sheik's scimitar, and many other things of which only an Antiquary knows. Surely with such a feast he should have been satisfied. But it was even not so. It troubled him what might or might not be behind the curtain. What caused the undulation? The graceful glide beyond the veil? His curiosity dwelt no more with curios. He watched the curtain. Once it stuck, and an extra tug was necessary. A corner flew up, and he caught the flying glimpse of a pretty pink foot with well-turned ankle, to say nothing of — something else.

For several times he waited patiently, hoping the curtain would give way entirely. In that he was disappointed. So, the curios having lost their interest, he arose and unlocked a drawer of his Japanese cabinet and took therefrom a certain sum in United States dollars. Throwing his Spanish cloak around him, he hurried out into the night.

For he was a true Antiquary.



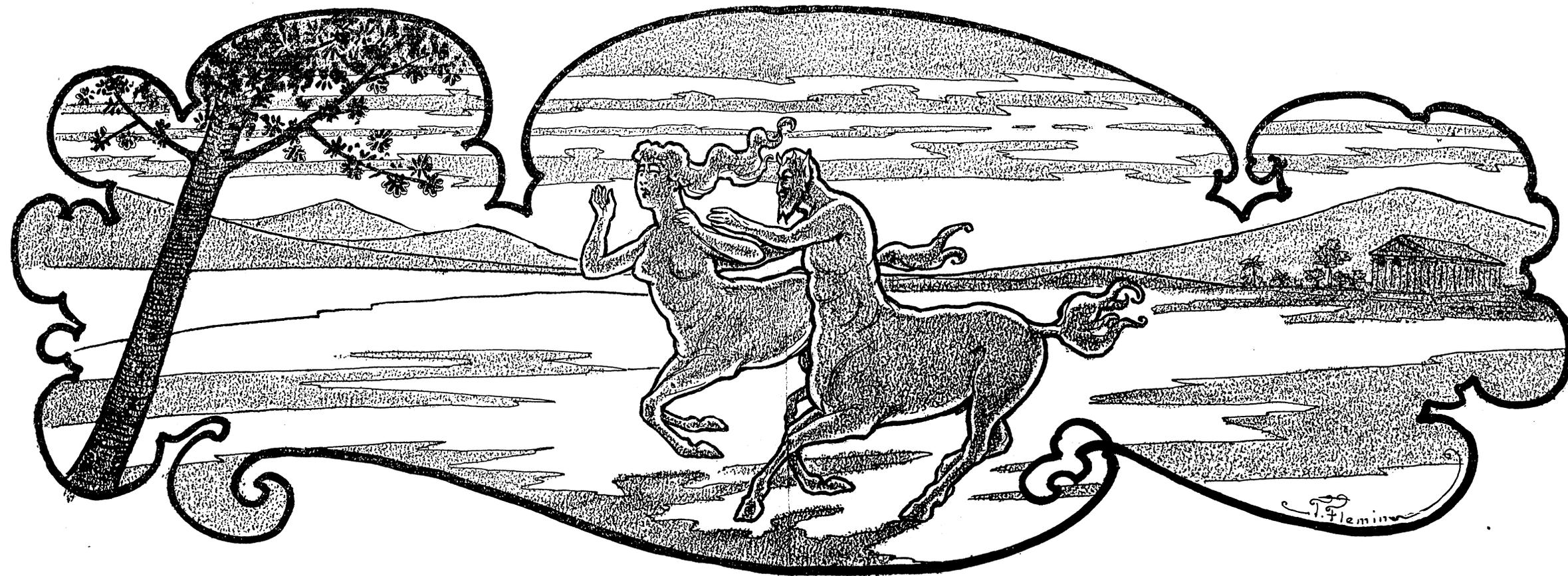
Litanies of Arcady—Psyche to Syrinx. Psyche (Soul), who hath by her former folly become bond-slave to Aphrodite (Mother of Passion), beseecheth Syrinx (Child of Nature) by the memory of her own escape from goatish Pan (Sensuality) to save her from the evil desires of her cruel mistress.

Reed of the river,
Sedge of the mere,
Syrinx, white
Votress of Dian, moaning still,
"Ai, ai!" still a quiver,
Wildered with thy sudden fear,
Throbbing in thy wild affright;
Unto thee in the morning chill,
Weak as thy wavering leaves that shiver,
Bowed as are thy dead plumes sere,
Worn and weary I bend my flight.
O nymph of the reeds, from the hunter's will
The bird of the broken wing deliver.
Hear, O Syrinx! Hear!
By thy tremour when the brute
Deity in soft pursuit
Startled thee with stealthy tread;
By that nameless panic-dread

When behind thy flying feet
Clattered close the horny beat
Of his hooped foot-jalls; by
Throbbing breast and anguished eye,
And the mingled memories
Of his brutish infamies—
His foul fingers' sacrilege
Of thy pure robe's pennant edge,
When thy streaming hair was rent
By his clutch's ravishment—
The hot panting of his breath,
Carrion with the scent of death,
Slavering grin and lustful leer,
And within thy helpless ear
Leprous call and shameful word,
Like insidious poison poured,
Coursing quick through every vein,
Curdling, though it could not stain,

The pure ichor of thy blood;
By thy stupor when the flood,
Pathless, wide, before thee rolled,
And thy heart within grew cold,
And thy limbs in palsied fear
Shook like wintry sedges sere
Rooted on the river bank,
And thy fair head, drooping, sank
Downward on thy bosom bare,
A broken plume, and all thy hair
Floated, leaf-like, to the wind,
Making music, to the mind
Of prick-eared Pan beyond compare—
Sweeter than all thy beauties were;
So come, O nymph, and succour me,
Hearken to my litany.
Hear, O Syrinx! Hear!

MARION M. MILLER



THE CONVENT SPOON

V. T.

A green-eyed woman, with long, indolent legs and narrow thighs, lounged on a sofa, smoking a cigarette. A fat baby played noisily about the floor. The man watched her furtively, studying her small breasts and long neck, the small head crowned with wealth of pale hair.

"Open a bottle of beer," she said, "and give me another cigarette, my dear."

When he had served her hes at again and studied her, curled there like a cat, drowsy and well content. Her feet and hands were long and slender; her teeth were white—he noticed how white her teeth were, for her large red mouth was half open as she let the cigarette-smoke drift about her face. She put her face into the pillow and breathed deep and hard.

"God! How I love it!" she said. "Pine—there are pine-needles in the pillow."

In a few minutes she lay over on her side and stretched herself, like a woman weary with pleasure.

"Give me another beer, dearie," she said; "and won't you have a drink? Try the whiskey. There's a siphon over there too."

"I should prefer a cup of coffee," the man said.

She raised herself on her elbow and called, "Nellie! Nellie!" An old woman, very fat, laboured in, smiling, rosy, familiar.

"Get some coffee," she ordered, and the old woman went out. In a little while the coffee was brought; the man stirred it slowly.

"For God's sake!" said the woman, and laughed.

"What is the matter?"

"For God's sake," she said, "if you haven't got my convent spoon!"

He looked at the heavy, silver thing in his hand, with its shallow bowl and twisted handle, curiously carved. Then he deciphered the name "Isabel Gosse" in faint Italian script. He looked at the woman, her indolent arachnean body outstretched, and met her eyes, green with unhallowed fervours—beautiful, intimate, sinister eyes.

"It's my convent spoon," she said with a little ripple of laughter, as a cat might purr. "I don't know how I ever kept it all these years. I had three of them—three spoons and three forks and three knives. You know we had to provide all our own things—sheets and pillows and all that. I don't know how I ever kept that spoon; but I have. When anyone gets the convent spoon it's always luck, dear. O God! I wish I were back there again."

She curled up till her face almost touched her knees, and sobs shook her slender body.

"I wish I were dead," she said. "If it wasn't for baby I'd have killed myself long ago. I swear to God I would! And I will some day. A friend of mine took my revolver away the other day; but I'll kill myself yet! How would you like to have to identify me in the morgue to-morrow? Oh, you don't know what it is! Men can't understand. My whole life has been suffering and shame and misery."

For quite a time she lay there sobbing, crying over and over again, "O God! God! God!" The baby had fallen asleep on the floor, its face smeared with chocolate; her cries wakened it, and it began to wail dismally. The woman caught it in her arms and hugged it to her little breasts, crooning, "Mother's joy! Mother's darling!" Then she took it into the next room and laid it in the bed.

"Go to sleep, mother's angel," she said, and sang to the child:

"East side, west side,
All around New York."

The child wailed noisily, nervously. "Will you go to sleep, you little devil? Well, don't then! Nellie! Nellie! Can't you take this little beast into the kitchen with you? Well, take her then, and don't give me any back talk."

She came back into the room where the man sat idly stirring the coffee. She lit a cigarette and perched on the arm of his chair, winding her long, slender arms round his neck. She kissed his hair again and again, slowly, burrowingly. Then she slid down into his lap, and her eyes blazed at him—

"Isn't it a lucky spoon," she whispered, "dear, dear, dear?"

Her great red lips fastened on his mouth. Faintly, from the kitchen, the man heard the noise of the wailing baby.



The bill-board said it was the opening night. I had no trouble, although the clock-hands pointed at eight, in buying an aisle seat close to the stage. The theatre was large, austere. There was no roof, for constellations, ordered geometrically, blazed above my head, and these stellar figures were changed at regular intervals by Someone. Their light would now be purple, now yellow, now scarlet. The audience paid no attention to these perturbations and permutations in the sky. Each person read diligently a programme, although I heard talking in the boxes. Benignant Lydia Pinkham sat alone in one of these and looked across at President Cleveland and Mr. Dana, who were discussing mooted points of literary style. I recognized some in the audience by their resemblance to their portraits. Thus I noticed Gautier and E. P. Roe, Montaigne and Catulle Mendes, P. T. Barnum and Mr. Bok. Mr. Richard Harding Davis was head usher, and he was dressed in the exploring suit worn by him when he blazed his way through the virgin forests of the Champs Elysees.

I looked at my neighbour. It was Thomasine, whom I had not seen for many years, and when I last saw her she was in her coffin under the high pulpit of the Old Church. I remember the slow procession of the boys and the girls of the Sunday-school; the sight of good Deacon Kingsley as he stroked pathetically his nose; the smell of fresh varnish and flowers. Thomasine was seventeen when she died. She was not changed; she was still slight and pale and maidenly. She turned a little and murmured, "Oh, it's you. I thought you would come. I have been waiting for you for some time." And then she looked eagerly at her programme.

The air was heavy with musk, and I noticed two large, smoking urns, fed constantly with aromatic drugs. The air was hot to stifling.

There was a queer whirring. The curtain descended. The stage was empty, but chairs of all shapes and all periods waited in a semicircle. The leader of the orchestra took his place, but he faced the audience. A thin man, with a patch over his right eye, he coughed horribly and used no score. He was clad in russet leather, which had not been polished for some weeks. An enormous brass key dangled by a string from his neck. He beat time with a handless arm. Instruments were on the floor—clarinets, bassoons, fiddles, flutes, lyres, little cymbals, an oboe, a kissar, a galoubet, and a takigoto; and there were instruments I had never seen before. There were no players to play them, yet the instruments gave forth mellifluous sounds in obedience to the handless arm, sounds that seemed aromatically drugged, or, at the liveliest, swooning. Now this was passing strange, and I was about to inquire into the cause when a dazzling light struck my eyes.

It was the splendour of nude Helen of Troy, radiant in her nudeness. Thus did she speak to those who gazed upon her and wondered: "It is true, you see, that I am the most beautiful woman of the world. My mouth is little, my neck is long and very white; from my breasts they made cups for the service of the mannish Diana. Nor do I lack one of the thirty imperative requisites of beauty. See for yourselves: three things are white, three things are black, three things are red, three things are narrow, three things are wide—but why enumerate them. Constantine Manasses gave a catalogue raisonne of my intimate charms; I wonder who told him. It must have been Astyanassa, my French maid, who taught me so much. Ah, I shall never be able to replace her! But why do they lie so about me? I loved Theseus, I married Menelaus, but I never had five husbands, nor did I go to a violent death. Nor did I run away with Paris, but I remember him well. He and I once appeared in tableaux vivants, 'The Siege of Troy,' and the old men in the front row, Priam, Antenor, and Ucalegon, talked so loudly about my beauty that I lost my balance and fell from the practical wall. Why, I was nearly sixty years old when I first met Paris, but I was well preserved. Many have admired me, but the one I could have really loved was Marlowe. Why did he not wait for me? Am I not fairer than the punk who grinned when she saw him stabbed?"

And then Christopher Marlowe, who sat just behind me, asked the way to the

THE THEATRE OF FAIR WOMEN

PHILIP HALE





stage-door. The handless arm waved, and as Helen pouted and took her seat Jeanne Darc entered on a bicycle and in bloomers. "Yes, I was a new woman long, long ago, but I never knew what ailed me until I read a chapter by Doctor Icard on religious delirium; he cites my case at length; and so, instead of sending me to an alienist they burned me. Can you tell me who wrote my life for Harper and Brothers? Of course, they expurgated it, but I shall bring out a full and complete edition."

A high staccato voice squeaked, "Mes-sa-li-na!" An elderly yet flamboyant and bulbous matron in widow's weeds, prudishly clad; not an inch of flesh below her insatiable mouth was visible. A black band covered even her chin. Her hands were concealed by black mitts. Arrogant were her teeth; blue spectacles perched on a pasty nose. "I was the victim of political scandal," she wheezed out greasily. "'Tis true I married Silius, the dear boy, but my husband knew it. Tacitus and Juvenal wrote nasty things about me, but they did not believe in women's rights. Why, even you, Helen, couldn't have stood Claudius. His table manners were shocking, and on the most inopportune occasions he would fall asleep. I did go to the slums, but only to relieve the poor, degraded creatures. Misunderstood and abused, often exhausted by my unremitting labours, I anticipated the music-hall reformers of London."

Poppaea admitted that she had bathed in ass's milk. "The men had no right to advertise the fact for business purposes. There were better cosmetics by which I ensnared Nero and affected seriously his tone-production."

Then came a troop of women, wondrous in their beauty. Arlotta danced the dance that enflamed Robert, Duke of Normandy. Elephantis showed her picture-books. Dejazet explained why she always slept supine. Thais and Lais, Lamia and Rhodope, Tullia and d'Aragona, Imperia, Isabella di Luna, Cora Pearl exchanged agreeable reminiscences. Diana swore that Acteon never saw her, for she never bathed. Zoleikha cried in a loud voice, "There is another side to that Joseph story. The Arabians and the Rabbins knew that he sat in my lap. Why did his father's ghost appear and bite his fingers' ends?"

There was a shout of admiration, for Balkis, Queen of Sheba, opened her languorous mouth. "And why should you believe that my legs were covered with hair like that of a wild ass, or that Solomon planned a trick for my discomfiture? Look, is not the story a lie?" But Helen smiled and said, "Oh, I know how you got rid of it. Astyanassa showed me a safe way. Why did I discharge that girl?"

Expectant silence reigned. The stars blazed as if they would fain look nearer. "The-o-do-ra." She was very small and very pale, with lively, piercing eyes. Geese followed her and pecked amorously at her quivering, faultless thighs. "I once snubbed a society reporter named Procopius. How the fellow abused me in print! Now, ladies and gentlemen, with your kind permission I will do the turn that so delighted the audience at Byzantium." But the handless arm waved her imperiously to a seat. She twitched upon it; the geese huddled about her.

Throbbing, palpitating music. By her gait the Goddess was revealed. "Like Ulysses, I have known many towns and many men. Great is my punishment, for I must perforce appear in 'Tannhauser' and sing the strains of Wagner. Shall I never get rid of this knight? He was a bore when he was in the Horsel. And that song of his! It was bad enough before he kept transposing it higher."

Cleopatra was flushed and angry. "You have seen Fanny Davenport, you now see me. Come, is there the slightest resemblance? Wine was my drink in the mad days. Do you think that I would have recommended an extract of malt?"

And Elizabeth, Queen of England, laughed. "They say I was a prude. Do you remember what Bassompierre saw?"

Someone snuffed the stars. A meteor flashed across the sky. There was the moaning of lawless wind. The urns shot forth madding odours. The handless arm beat deliriously; the instruments leaped into the air in sonorous frenzy; the handless arm at the climax, loosened, flew toward the excited sky. There was a portentous hush. And lo, a little, dark woman, with black hair and a beautiful smile, stood in the glare of the footlights. The headless gentleman across the aisle applauded noisily until he was removed by an usher. The music was in passion-riven, systaltic rhythm. The noble dames on the stage waxed hysterical. The little, dark woman, with black hair and a beautiful smile, turned and scanned them anxiously. She saw there neither Atthis, nor Telesippa, nor yet Megara. There was a melancholy, caressing cry, "Oh, Sappho!" The stars now shone balefully, and they were watching nearer. White arms were stretched toward her, but, again facing the audience, she looked steadily at Thomasine, whose face was corpse-like save for scarlet lips. And I grew faint. "Come with me, Thomasine," I whispered; "this is no place for you." But Sappho, with her beautiful smile, held her. As I fled for air the music wailed in wild longing.

Outside the sleet restored me. I would have gone back to my seat, but I could not find the theatre-door. Nor have I been able to find it since that night, although I have sought for it and with tears.



After her sickness the neighbours whispered that Santuzza would never be the buxom wench she was before Turriddu's death. She fell in a dead faint when she heard the news, and only Lucia's careful nursing saved her. She brought into the world a very pretty baby girl, with its mother's eyes and its father's features. They called the child Emma after Santuzza's mother. Santuzza went to live with Lucia, the mamma of the dead man and the one to whom she first confided her trouble. The afternoon after the duel Alfio gave Lola, his flirting wife, a terrible beating and then went away. Lola was so ashamed at the affair that she, too, got together her goods and trudged off without one thought of foolish Turriddu, whose body lay yonder in the graveyard. Talk of the affair gradually died out; occasionally a tipsy villager would troll out Turriddu's favourite drinking-song or a teamster hum Alfio's whip-cracking ditty. The authorities took no steps to arrest Alfio, although Mamma Lucia lodged a complaint. The gossips conceded that it was tit for tat, and, while hard on the two women who loved him, it served Turriddu right. He would have killed Alfio if he had tampered with Santuzza. And so eighteen years passed and the summers were hot in Sicily.

Emma, the daughter of Santuzza and Turriddu, grew up a fine, strong maiden, with fiercely black hair and eyebrows, dark-blue eyes, red-lipped, and of a proud, haughty carriage, "as if she were a princess instead of Turriddu's bastard," said the neighbours, who bore her a grudge for her beauty. She helped her grandmother and sang the livelong day. Her mother, a sickly, sallow woman, had little to say to anyone. She avoided her neighbours, she never went to church, and she talked but little, even to Emma. Lucia was an old, nut-brown, shrivelled woman, with a bright eye and cheerful tongue, and brought up Emma as carefully as she knew how. Above all, she was warned that men were dangerous creatures, and the girl grew to fear them. One day she asked her mother about Turriddu, and Santuzza gave the girl a look that drove her to silence. Emma was fond of singing in church. She always went to mass and vespers with her grandmother and her voice was the loudest and freshest in town. Once on a Sunday night, when the cicada had begun its song to the stars, a woman with a worn, passionate face trudged into the village and knelt at the church-door. As Lucia came out with Emma the dusty stranger stared at both women as if she saw ghosts. Lucia made the sign of the Jettatura, for the woman had the evil eye. Emma asked her grandmother who the funny-looking, thin creature was. "Never you mind, damsel. She is not good." More she refused to say, and Emma wondered. Late that night she heard the sound of voices. Her mother was talking in shrill tones to Lucia, and both women seemed excited. Emma wondered vaguely why "Lola" should trouble her kin. Then she fell asleep and

SANTUZZA'S CHILD

JAMES GIBBONS
HUNEKER

dreamed that she was singing in a long, white dress in a theatre, just like the picture in a paper that she much treasured.

One summer a young lord came down to live near the village. That is, everyone thought he was a lord, for he dressed in white linen and did nothing. He wandered about listlessly and was always humming. No one knew his name, and so he was called the Englishman, although he spoke Italian without a foreign accent. He was always singing and whistling. His landlady, a great gossip, said that at home he did nothing but make funny marks on funny-looking, lined paper, and whistled to himself as he ate and drank. Everyone liked him, for he was liberal. He often spoke to Emma, but she never answered him, for she had been taught by Lucia not to speak to men; it was a mortal sin and a grave offense against the Christ-child. The young man wondered at her silence and admired her beauty greatly. He heard her singing in church one Sunday morning and his cheeks flushed. He asked his hostess about Emma, and the long story which she gave him did not bore him in the least. The next day he went to call on Lucia and parleyed with her for an hour. Santuzza was called and listened with bent head to the young man's eager talk. He went away looking dejected and wandered off to the back of the house. After he left the women had another excited conversation, and high words might have been heard by Emma if she had been at home. The grapes had never tasted so fine and the morning air was a caress on the cheeks. Emma was on a ladder, throwing bunch after bunch into a basket below and trilling like a lark. The sky made her happy when she saw bits of its blue through the vines and her heart beat fast with life. "Emma, Emma, I want to speak to you!" She thrilled with fear and joy. She knew the voice well. It was the young Englishman, the handsome lord whose glances made her cheeks hot. But she looked coldly down on him and never a word she said. "Emma," he continued, in almost passionate accents, "I have spoken to your grandmother and mother about you. You have a glorious voice. You are beautiful. You must be a singer in the opera—in my opera. I am not an English lord. I am a poor Italian composer. Come to Milan. I will get you taught. You are too wonderful to pass your life with the clods of this village. Come with me. Tell your grandmother, tell Santuzza you must go." The man's face glowed with expectation; he loved her—he loved her voice. For answer she threw a bunch of grapes straight in his face and then, scrambling down the ladder, she ran like a wounded animal straight ahead and disappeared. The composer murmured, "I'll get her after all." In a hedge, sobbing violently, with her head on her hand, sat Emma. Her dream could come true after all. She had a voice; she could see the wonderful Milano, of which she had heard so much; she could see and be of that great world which she longed for. How she hated her birthplace, how she disliked the people, and how she shivered when she thought of Santuzza, even of her poor old Lucia! When Emma arose an hour later her mind was made up.

A great change came over her. She had never been garrulous. She became taciturn. She attended to her simple duties as if in a trance. Her people could not make it out. Like simple-minded folk, they never believed that the young man would speak to her alone. Besides, he had gone away and the episode was almost forgotten. The autumn waned to winter and Emma became stranger. She hardly ever sang, but sat during the long, cold evenings and looked into the dark shadows. Santuzza questioned her with her faded glance, but the girl's eyes were pure and the mother only sighed. Even the sharp looks of Lucia discovered not Emma's secret. In the spring the young man came back, looking sick and worn they heard, but he seldom stirred from within doors, and they saw him not until a hot day in May when the village turned out to see the mountebanks who had come to play their merry pranks and get a few "lire" from the savings of the rustics. The players had pitched their acting-booth on the village green and, grouped on benches, sat the Sicilian folk all agape. The only music was the shrill fife and the tam-pam of a big drum beaten by a dark, middle-aged man, who scowled at the instrument as he dealt it vicious whacks. When the curtain parted the old play of faithless Columbine began. The clown made the town roar. He was such a funny fellow, this clown. Every time he stuck his tongue out the big drum resounded and the laughter was overwhelming. Emma sat and stared her soul out of her eyes. It was a stage, a real stage, and she would stand on one like it, perhaps one bigger, and sing, and then people would not laugh, but huzza and cry "Brava! Brava!" Two bright spots burned like red planets on her cheeks. Her relatives sat ahead of her. The clown told the audience that he knew he was loving a coquette, but he would win her yet. Hark, there she comes! Just then a hot hand stole into Emma's and she never budged. She knew by instinct that it was the young man who touched her tremulously, lovingly. Her throat swelled, but she never ceased gazing at the stage. Her heart beat as loudly as the big drum and she felt happy. She knew that he would come back after all. The play went on and the bass-drummer cast lowering glances at the Columbine, who, pretty and young, gaily disported with the Pagliaccio. Then the drummer looked at the audience from under his dark eyebrows, and his glance shifted from bench to bench until it rested upon Santuzza. He shivered and then hit his drum a savage blow that made the Columbine start and the Pagliaccio stare. The play went on. Emma's hand was still held by the stranger. He put his mouth to her ear and whispered, "I love you! You will come?" Suddenly the Columbine shrieked. The dark man who beat the big drum had jumped on the platform and, seizing the clown by the throat, had thrown him violently to the floor. "Wretch!" he cried to the trembling woman. "This has gone far enough. Get you gone, else I will give you a beating!" The audience applauded. The woman, giving a frightened glance at her husband, sneaked away, while the dark man turned and savagely kicked her prostrate lover. Then the curtains were violently pulled together and a hum and chatter began in the crowd outside. Emma turned with blazing eyes to the young man at her side and whispered, "He should have killed her!" And Santuzza whispered to Lucia, "It was Alfio who beat the drum." Then everybody hurried homeward. Emma disappeared the next day.

One day, down in Milan, a wealthy man said to the genius, "Give her to me and you shall be celebrated," and the young man consented, for he loved his art better than this woman. "Cavalleria Rusticana" set all Europe on fire with its intoxicating music, and the girl who played the betrayed Sicilian girl was proclaimed marvellous. But the composer never conducted when she sang, and in her heart she cried for that cool afternoon in the vineyard. She is now fat and famous. Down in Sicily an old woman sits and thinks of Turridu and of Emma, who was Santuzza's child.



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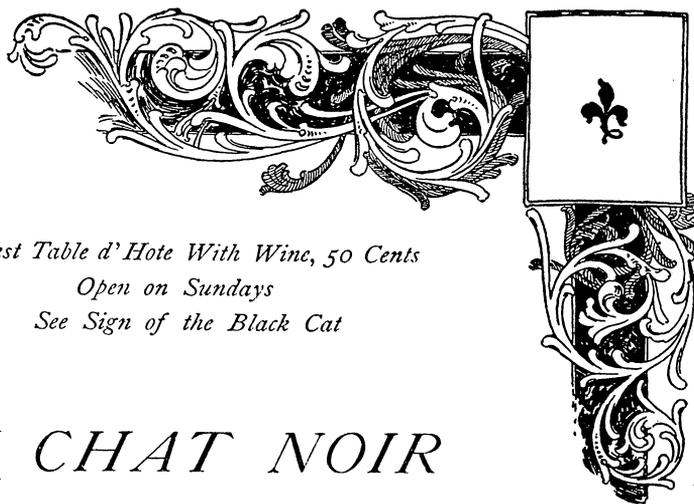
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