

Boulte and he go out tiger-shooting together in all friendship. Boulte has put their relationship on a most satisfactory footing.

'You're a blackguard,' he says to Kurrell, 'and I've lost any self-respect I may ever have had; but when you're with me, I can feel certain that you are not with Mrs. Vansuythen, or making Emma miserable.'

Kurrell endures anything that Boulte may say to him. Sometimes they are away for three days together, and then the Major insists upon his wife going over to sit with Mrs. Boulte; although Mrs. Vansuythen has repeatedly declared that she prefers her husband's company to any in the world. From the way in which she clings to him, she would certainly seem to be speaking the truth.

But of course, as the Major says, 'in a little Station we must all be friendly.'

THE HILL OF ILLUSION

What rendered vain their deep desire?

A God, a God their severance ruled,

And bade between their shores to be
The unplumbed, salt, estranging sea.

--Matthew Arnold.

He. Tell your jhampanies not to hurry so, dear. They forget I'm fresh
from the Plains.

She. Sure proof that I have not been going out with any one. Yes, they
are an untrained crew. Where do we go?

He. As usual to the world's end. No, Jakko.

She. Have your pony led after you, then. It's a long round.

He. And for the last time, thank Heaven!

She. Do you mean that still? I didn't dare to write to you about it all
these months.

He. Mean it! I've been shaping my affairs to that end since Autumn. What
makes you speak as though it had occurred to you for the first time?

She. I? Oh! I don't know. I've had long enough to think, too.

He. And you've changed your mind?

She. No. You ought to know that I am a miracle of constancy. What are your arrangements?

He. Ours, Sweetheart, please.

She. Ours, be it then. My poor boy, how the prickly heat has marked your forehead! Have you ever tried sulphate of copper in water?

He. It'll go away in a day or two up here. The arrangements are simple enough. Tonga in the early morning reach Kalka at twelve Umballa at seven down, straight by night train, to Bombay, and then the steamer of the 21st for Rome. That's my idea. The Continent and Sweden a ten-week honeymoon.

She. Ssh! Don't talk of it in that way. It makes me afraid. Guy, how long have we two been insane?

He. Seven months and fourteen days, I forget the odd hours exactly, but I'll think.

She. I only wanted to see if you remembered. Who are those two on the Blessington Road?

He. Eabrey and the Penner Woman. What do they matter to us? Tell me everything that you've been doing and saying and thinking.

She. Doing little, saying less, and thinking a great deal. I've hardly been out at all.

He. That was wrong of you. You haven't been moping?

She. Not very much. Can you wonder that I'm disinclined for amusement?

He. Frankly, I do. Where was the difficulty?

She. In this only. The more people I know and the more I'm known here, the wider spread will be the news of the crash when it comes. I don't like that.

He. Nonsense. We shall be out of it.

She. You think so?

He. I'm sure of it, if there is any power in steam or horse-flesh to carry us away. Ha! ha!

She. And the fun of the situation comes in where, my Lancelot?

He. Nowhere, Guinevere. I was only thinking of something.

She. They say men have a keener sense of humour than women. Now I was thinking of the scandal.

He. Don't think of anything so ugly. We shall be beyond it.

She. It will be there all the same in the mouths of Simla telegraphed over India, and talked of at the dinners and when He goes out they will stare at Him to see how he takes it. And we shall be dead, Guy dear dead and cast into the outer darkness where there is--

He. Love at least. Isn't that enough?

She. I have said so.

He. And you think so still?

She. What do you think?

He. What have I done? It means equal ruin to me, as the world reckons it outcasting, the loss of my appointment, the breaking off my life's work. I pay my price.

She. And are you so much above the world that you can afford to pay it. Am I?

He. My Divinity what else?

She. A very ordinary woman, I'm afraid, but so far, respectable. How

d'you do, Mrs. Middle-ditch? Your husband? I think he's riding down to Annandale with Colonel Statters. Yes, isn't it divine after the rain? Guy, how long am I to be allowed to bow to Mrs. Middleditch? Till the 17th?

He. Frowsy Scotchwoman! What is the use of bringing her into the discussion? You were saying?

She. Nothing. Have you ever seen a man hanged?

He. Yes. Once.

She. What was it for?

He. Murder, of course.

She. Murder. Is that so great a sin after all? I wonder how he felt before the drop fell.

He. I don't think he felt much. What a gruesome little woman it is this evening! You're shivering. Put on your cape, dear.

She. I think I will. Oh! Look at the mist coming over Sanjaoli; and I thought we should have sunshine on the Ladies' Mile! Let's turn back.

He. What's the good? There's a cloud on Elysium Hill, and that means

it's foggy all down the Mall. We'll go on. It'll blow away before we get to the Convent, perhaps. 'Jove! It is chilly.

She. You feel it, fresh from below. Put on your ulster. What do you think of my cape?

He. Never ask a man his opinion of a woman's dress when he is desperately and abjectly in love with the wearer. Let me look. Like everything else of yours it's perfect. Where did you get it from?

She. He gave it me, on Wednesday our wedding-day, you know.

He. The Deuce He did! He's growing generous in his old age. D'you like all that frilly, bunchy stuff at the throat? I don't.

She. Don't you?

Kind Sir, o' your courtesy,
As you go by the town, Sir,
'Pray you o' your love for me,
Buy me a russet gown, Sir.

He. I won't say: 'Keek into the draw-well, Janet, Janet.' Only wait a little, darling, and you shall be stocked with russet gowns and everything else.

She. And when the frocks wear out you'll get me new ones and everything else?

He. Assuredly.

She. I wonder!

He. Look here, Sweetheart, I didn't spend two days and two nights in the train to hear you wonder. I thought we'd settled all that at Shaifazehat.

She. (dreamily). At Shaifazehat? Does the Station go on still? That was ages and ages ago. It must be crumbling to pieces. All except the Amirtollah kutcha road. I don't believe that could crumble till the Day of Judgment.

He. You think so? What is the mood now?

She. I can't tell. How cold it is! Let us get on quickly.

He. 'Better walk a little. Stop your jhampanies and get out. What's the matter with you this evening, dear?

She. Nothing. You must grow accustomed to my ways. If I'm boring you I can go home. Here's Captain Congleton coming, I daresay he'll be willing to escort me.

He. Goose! Between us, too! Damn Captain Congleton.

She. Chivalrous Knight. Is it your habit to swear much in talking? It jars a little, and you might swear at me.

He. My angel! I didn't know what I was saying; and you changed so quickly that I couldn't follow. I'll apologise in dust and ashes.

She. There'll be enough of those later on Good-night, Captain Congleton. Going to the singing-quadrilles already? What dances am I giving you next week? No! You must have written them down wrong. Five and Seven, I said. If you've made a mistake, I certainly don't intend to suffer for it. You must alter your programme.

He. I thought you told me that you had not been going out much this season?

She. Quite true, but when I do I dance with Captain Congleton. He dances very nicely.

He. And sit out with him, I suppose?

She. Yes. Have you any objection? Shall I stand under the chandelier in future?

He. What does he talk to you about?

She. What do men talk about when they sit out?

He. Ugh! Don't! Well, now I'm up, you must dispense with the fascinating Congleton for a while. I don't like him.

She (after a pause). Do you know what you have said?

He 'Can't say that I do exactly. I'm not in the best of tempers.

She So I see, and feel. My true and faithful lover, where is your 'eternal constancy,' 'unalterable trust,' and 'reverent devotion'? I remember those phrases; you seem to have forgotten them. I mention a man's name.

He. A good deal more than that.

She. Well, speak to him about a dance perhaps the last dance that I shall ever dance in my life before I, before I go away; and you at once distrust and insult me.

He. I never said a word.

She. How much did you imply? Guy, is this amount of confidence to be our stock to start the new life on?

He. No, of course not. I didn't mean that. On my word and honour, I didn't. Let it pass, dear. Please let it pass.

She. This once yes and a second time, and again and again, all through the years when I shall be unable to resent it. You want too much, my Lancelot, and, you know too much.

He. How do you mean?

She. That is a part of the punishment. There cannot be perfect trust between us.

He. In Heaven's name, why not?

She. Hush! The Other Place is quite enough. Ask yourself.

He. I don't follow.

She. You trust me so implicitly that when I look at another man Never mind. Guy, have you ever made love to a girl a good girl?

He. Something of the sort. Centuries ago in the Dark Ages, before I ever met you, dear.

She. Tell me what you said to her.

He. What does a man say to a girl? I've forgotten.

She. I remember. He tells her that he trusts her and worships the ground she walks on, and that he'll love and honour and protect her till her dying day; and so she marries in that belief. At least, I speak of one girl who was not protected.

He. Well, and then?

She. And then, Guy, and then, that girl needs ten times the love and trust and honour yes, honour that was enough when she was only a mere wife if if the other life she chooses to lead is to be made even bearable. Do you understand?

He. Even bearable! It'll be Paradise.

She. Ah! Can you give me all I've asked for not now, nor a few months later, but when you begin to think of what you might have done if you had kept your own appointment and your caste here when you begin to look upon me as a drag and a burden? I shall want it most then, Guy, for there will be no one in the wide world but you.

He. You're a little over-tired to-night, Sweetheart, and you're taking a stage view of the situation. After the necessary business in the Courts, the road is clear to--

She. 'The holy state of matrimony!' Ha! ha! ha!

He. Ssh! Don't laugh in that horrible way!

She. I I c-c-c-can't help it! Isn't it too absurd! Ah! Ha! ha! ha! Guy, stop me quick or I shall l-l-laugh till we get to the Church.

He. For goodness sake, stop! Don't make an exhibition of yourself. What is the matter with you?

She. N-nothing. I'm better now.

He. That's all right. One moment, dear. There's a little wisp of hair got loose from behind your right ear and it's straggling over your cheek. So!

She. Thank'oo. I'm 'fraid my hat's on one side, too.

He. What do you wear these huge dagger bonnet-skewers for? They're big enough to kill a man with.

She. Oh! don't kill me, though. You're sticking it into my head! Let me do it. You men are so clumsy.

He. Have you had many opportunities of comparing us in this sort of

work?

She. Guy, what is my name?

He. Eh! I don't follow.

She. Here's my card-case. Can you read?

He. Yes. Well?

She. Well, that answers your question. You know the other's man's name. Am I sufficiently humbled, or would you like to ask me if there is any one else?

He. I see now. My darling, I never meant that for an instant. I was only joking. There! Lucky there's no one on the road. They'd be scandalised.

She. They'll be more scandalised before the end.

He. Do-on't! I don't like you to talk in that way.

She. Unreasonable man! Who asked me to face the situation and accept it? Tell me, do I look like Mrs. Penner? Do I look like a naughty woman! Swear I don't! Give me your word of honour, my honourable friend, that I'm not like Mrs. Buzgago. That's the way she stands, with her hands clasped at the back of her head. D'you like that?

He. Don't be affected.

She. I'm not. I'm Mrs. Buzgago. Listen!

Pendant une anne' toute entiere
Le regiment n'a pas r'paru.
Au Ministere de la Guerre
On le r'porta comme perdu.
On se r'noncait--retrouver sa trace,
Quand un matin subitement,
On le vit reparaetre sur la place,
L'Colonel toujours en avant.

That's the way she rolls her r's. Am I like her?

He. No, but I object when you go on like an actress and sing stuff of that kind. Where in the world did you pick up the Chanson du Colonel? It isn't a drawing-room song. It isn't proper.

She. Mrs. Buzgago taught it me. She is both drawing-room and proper, and in another month she'll shut her drawing-room to me, and thank God she isn't as improper as I am. Oh, Guy, Guy! I wish I was like some women and had no scruples about What is it Keene says? 'Wearing a corpse's hair and being false to the bread they eat.'

He. I am only a man of limited intelligence, and, just now, very bewildered. When you have quite finished flashing through all your moods tell me, and I'll try to understand the last one.

She. Moods, Guy! I haven't any. I'm sixteen years old and you're just twenty, and you've been waiting for two hours outside the school in the cold. And now I've met you, and now we're walking home together. Does that suit you, My Imperial Majesty?

He. No. We aren't children. Why can't you be rational?

She. He asks me that when I'm going to commit suicide for his sake, and, and I don't want to be French and rave about my mother, but have I ever told you that I have a mother, and a brother who was my pet before I married? He's married now. Can't you imagine the pleasure that the news of the elopement will give him? Have you any people at Home, Guy, to be pleased with your performances?

He. One or two. One can't make omelets without breaking eggs.

She (slowly). I don't see the necessity

He. Hah! What do you mean?

She. Shall I speak the truth?

He Under the circumstances, perhaps it would be as well.

She. Guy, I'm afraid.

He I thought we'd settled all that. What of?

She. Of you.

He. Oh, damn it all! The old business! This is too bad!

She. Of you.

He. And what now?

She. What do you think of me?

He. Beside the question altogether. What do you intend to do?

She. I daren't risk it. I'm afraid. If I could only cheat

He. A la Buzgago? No, thanks. That's the one point on which I have any notion of Honour. I won't eat his salt and steal too. I'll loot openly or not at all.

She. I never meant anything else.

He. Then, why in the world do you pretend not to be willing to come?

She. It's not pretence, Guy. I am afraid.

He. Please explain.

She. It can't last, Guy. It can't last. You'll get angry, and then you'll swear, and then you'll get jealous, and then you'll mistrust me you do now and you yourself will be the best reason for doubting. And I what shall I do? I shall be no better than Mrs. Buzgago found out no better than any one. And you'll know that. Oh, Guy, can't you see?

He I see that you are desperately unreasonable, little woman.

She. There! The moment I begin to object, you get angry. What will you do when I am only your property stolen property? It can't be, Guy. It can't be! I thought it could, but it can't. You'll get tired of me.

He I tell you I shall not. Won't anything make you understand that?

She. There, can't you see? If you speak to me like that now, you'll call me horrible names later, if I don't do everything as you like. And if you were cruel to me, Guy, where should I go? where should I go? I can't trust you. Oh! I can't trust you!

He. I suppose I ought to say that I can trust you. I've ample reason.

She. Please don't, dear. It hurts as much as if you hit me.

He. It isn't exactly pleasant for me.

She. I can't help it. I wish I were dead! I can't trust you, and I don't trust myself. Oh, Guy, let it die away and be forgotten!

He. Too late now. I don't understand you I won't and I can't trust myself to talk this evening. May I call to-morrow?

She. Yes. No! Oh, give me time! The day after. I get into my 'rickshaw here and meet Him at Peliti's. You ride.

He. I'll go on to Peliti's too. I think I want a drink. My world's knocked about my ears and the stars are falling. Who are those brutes howling in the Old Library?

She. They're rehearsing the singing-quadrilles for the Fancy Ball. Can't you hear Mrs. Buzgago's voice? She has a solo. It's quite a new idea. Listen!

Mrs. Buzgago (in the Old Library, con molt. exp.).

See-saw! Margery Daw!

Sold her bed to lie upon straw.

Wasn't she a silly slut

To sell her bed and lie upon dirt?

Captain Congleton, I'm going to alter that to 'flirt.' It sounds better.

He. No, I've changed my mind about the drink. Good-night, little lady. I shall see you to-morrow?

She. Ye es. Good-night, Guy. Don't be angry with me.

He. Angry! You know I trust you absolutely. Good-night and God bless you!

(Three seconds later. Alone.) Hmm! I'd give something to discover whether there's another man at the back of all this.

A SECOND-RATE WOMAN

Est fuga, volvitur rota,