



The Witch A La Mode

Lawrence, David Herbert

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About Lawrence:

David Herbert Lawrence (11 September 1885 - 2 March 1930) was an important and controversial English writer of the 20th century, whose prolific and diverse output included novels, short stories, poems, plays, essays, travel books, paintings, translations, literary criticism and personal letters. His collected works represent an extended reflection upon the dehumanizing effects of modernity and industrialisation. In them, Lawrence confronts issues relating to emotional health and vitality, spontaneity, sexuality, and instinctive behaviour. Lawrence's unsettling opinions earned him many enemies and he endured hardships, official persecution, censorship and misrepresentation of his creative work throughout the second half of his life, much of which he spent in a voluntary exile he called his "savage pilgrimage." At the time of his death, his public reputation was that of a pornographer who had wasted his considerable talents. E. M. Forster, in an obituary notice, challenged this widely held view, describing him as "the greatest imaginative novelist of our generation." Later, the influential Cambridge critic F. R. Leavis championed both his artistic integrity and his moral seriousness, placing much of Lawrence's fiction within the canonical "great tradition" of the English novel. He is now generally valued as a visionary thinker and a significant representative of modernism in English literature, although some feminists object to the attitudes toward women and sexuality found in his works. Source: Wikipedia

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When Bernard Coutts alighted at East Croydon he knew he was tempting Providence.

"I may just as well," he said to himself, "stay the night here, where I am used to the place, as go to London. I can't get to Connie's forlorn spot to-night, and I'm tired to death, so why shouldn't I do what is easiest?"

He gave his luggage to a porter.

Again, as he faced the approaching tram-car: "I don't see why I shouldn't go down to Purley. I shall just be in time for tea."

Each of these concessions to his desires he made against his conscience. But beneath his sense of shame his spirit exulted.

It was an evening of March. In the dark hollow below Crown Hill the buildings accumulated, bearing the black bulk of the church tower up into the rolling and smoking sunset.

"I know it so well," he thought. "And love it," he confessed secretly in his heart.

The car ran on familiarly. The young man listened for the swish, watched for the striking of the blue splash overhead, at the bracket. The sudden fervour of the spark, splashed out of the mere wire, pleased him.

"Where does it come from?" he asked himself, and a spark struck bright again. He smiled a little, roused.

The day was dying out. One by one the arc lamps fluttered or leaped alight, the strand of copper overhead glistened against the dark sky that now was deepening to the colour of monkshood. The tram-car dipped as it ran, seeming to exult. As it came clear of the houses, the young man, looking west, saw the evening star advance, a bright thing approaching from a long way off, as if it had been bathing in the surf of the daylight, and now was walking shorewards to the night. He greeted the naked star with a bow of the head, his heart surging as the car leaped.

"It seems to be greeting me across the sky—the star," he said, amused by his own vanity.

Above the colouring of the afterglow the blade of the new moon hung sharp and keen. Something recoiled in him.

"It is like a knife to be used at a sacrifice," he said to himself. Then, secretly: "I wonder for whom?"

He refused to answer this question, but he had the sense of Constance, his betrothed, waiting for him in the Vicarage in the north. He closed his eyes.

Soon the car was running full-tilt from the shadow to the fume of yellow light at the terminus, where shop on shop and lamp beyond lamp

heaped golden fire on the floor of the blue night. The car, like an eager dog, ran in home, sniffing with pleasure the fume of lights.

Coutts flung away uphill. He had forgotten he was tired. From the distance he could distinguish the house, by the broad white cloth of alyssum flowers that hung down the garden walls. He ran up the steep path to the door, smelling the hyacinths in the dark, watching for the pale fluttering of daffodils and the steadier show of white crocuses on the grassy banks.

Mrs. Braithwaite herself opened the door to him.

"There!" she exclaimed. "I expected you. I had your card saying you would cross from Dieppe to-day. You wouldn't make up your mind to come here, not till the last minute, would you? No—that's what I expected. You know where to put your things; I don't think we've altered anything in the last year."

Mrs. Braithwaite chattered on, laughing all the time. She was a young widow, whose husband had been dead two years. Of medium height, sanguine in complexion and temper, there was a rich oily glisten in her skin and in her black hair, suggesting the flesh of a nut. She was dressed for the evening in a long gown of soft, mole-coloured satin.

"Of course, I'm delighted you've come," she said at last, lapsing into conventional politeness, and then, seeing his eyes, she began to laugh at her attempt at formality.

She let Coutts into a small, very warm room that had a dark, foreign sheen, owing to the black of the curtains and hangings covered thick with glistening Indian embroidery, and to the sleekness of some Indian ware. A rosy old gentleman, with exquisite white hair and side-whiskers, got up shakily and stretched out his hand. His cordial expression of welcome was rendered strange by a puzzled, wondering look of old age, and by a certain stiffness of his countenance, which now would only render a few expressions. He wrung the newcomer's hand heartily, his manner contrasting pathetically with his bowed and trembling form.

"Oh, why—why, yes, it's Mr. Coutts! H'm—ay. Well, and how are you—h'm? Sit down, sit down." The old man rose again, bowing, waving the young man into a chair. "Ay! well, and how are you? ... What? Have some tea—come on, come along; here's the tray. Laura, ring for fresh tea for Mr. Courts. But I will do it." He suddenly remembered his old gallantry, forgot his age and uncertainty. Fumbling, he rose to go to the bell-pull.

"It's done, Pater—the tea will be in a minute," said his daughter in high, distinct tones. Mr. Cleveland sank with relief into his chair.

"You know, I'm beginning to be troubled with rheumatism," he explained in confidential tones. Mrs. Braithwaite glanced at the young man and smiled. The old gentleman babbled and chattered. He had no knowledge of his guest beyond the fact of his presence; Coutts might have been any other young man, for all his host was aware.

"You didn't tell us you were going away. Why didn't you?" asked Laura, in her distinct tones, between laughing and reproach. Coutts looked at her ironically, so that she fidgeted with some crumbs on the cloth.

"I don't know," he said. "Why do we do things?"

"I'm sure I don't know. Why do we? Because we want to, I suppose," and she ended again with a little run of laughter. Things were so amusing, and she was so healthy.

"Why *do* we do things, Pater?" she suddenly asked in a loud voice, glancing with a little chuckle of laughter at Coutts.

"Ay—why do we do things? What things?" said the old man, beginning to laugh with his daughter.

"Why, any of the things that we do."

"Eh? Oh!" The old man was illuminated, and delighted. "Well, now, that's a difficult question. I remember, when I was a little younger, we used to discuss Free Will—got very hot about it ... " He laughed, and Laura laughed, then said, in a high voice:

"Oh! Free Will! We shall really think you're *passé*, if you revive that, Pater."

Mr. Cleveland looked puzzled for a moment. Then, as if answering a conundrum, he repeated:

"Why do we do things? Now, why *do* we do things?"

"I suppose," he said, in all good faith, "it's because we can't help it—eh? What?"

Laura laughed. Coutts showed his teeth in a smile.

"That's what I think, Pater," she said loudly.

"And are you still engaged to your Constance?" she asked of Coutts, with a touch of mockery this time. Coutts nodded.

"And how is she?" asked the widow.

"I believe she is very well—unless my delay has upset her," said Coutts, his tongue between his teeth. It hurt him to give pain to his fiancée, and yet he did it wilfully.

"Do you know, she always reminds me of a Bunbury—I call her your Miss Bunbury," Laura laughed.

Coutts did not answer.

"We missed you *so* much when you first went away," Laura began, reestablishing the proprieties.

"Thank you," he said. She began to laugh wickedly.

"On Friday evenings," she said, adding quickly: "Oh, and this is Friday evening, and Winifred is coming just as she used to—how long ago?—ten months?"

"Ten months," Coutts corroborated.

"Did you quarrel with Winifred?" she asked suddenly.

"Winifred never quarrels," he answered.

"I don't believe she does. Then why *did* you go away? You are such a puzzle to me, you know—and I shall never rest till I have had it out of you. Do you mind?"

"I like it," he said, quietly, flashing a laugh at her.

She laughed, then settled herself in a dignified, serious way.

"No, I can't make you out at all—nor can I Winifred. You *are* a pair! But it's you who are the real wonder. When are you going to be married?"

"I don't know—When I am sufficiently well off."

"I *asked* Winifred to come to-night," Laura confessed. The eyes of the man and woman met.

"Why is she so ironic to me?—does she really like me?" Coutts asked of himself. But Laura looked too bonny and jolly to be fretted by love.

"And Winifred won't tell me a word," she said.

"There is nothing to tell," he replied.

Laura looked at him closely for a few moments. Then she rose and left the room.

Presently there arrived a German lady with whom Coutts was slightly acquainted. At about half-past seven came Winifred Varley. Courts heard the courtly old gentleman welcoming her in the hall, heard her low voice in answer. When she entered, and saw him, he knew it was a shock to her, though she hid it as well as she could. He suffered too. After hesitating for a second in the doorway, she came forward, shook hands without speaking, only looking at him with rather frightened blue eyes. She was of medium height, sturdy in build. Her face was white and impassive, without the least trace of a smile. She was a blonde of twenty-eight, dressed in a white gown just short enough not to touch the ground. Her throat was solid and strong, her arms heavy and white and beautiful, her blue eyes heavy with unacknowledged passion. When she had turned away from Coutts, she flushed vividly. He could see the pink in her arms and throat, and he flushed in answer.

"That blush would hurt her," he said to himself, wincing.

"I did not expect to see you," she said, with a reedy timbre of voice, as if her throat were half-closed. It made his nerves tingle.

"No—nor I you. At least ... " He ended indefinitely.

"You have come down from Yorkshire?" she asked. Apparently she was cold and self-possessed. Yorkshire meant the Rectory where his fiancée lived; he felt the sting of sarcasm.

"No," he answered. "I am on my way there."

There was a moment's pause. Unable to resolve the situation, she turned abruptly to her hostess.

"Shall we play, then?"

They adjourned to the drawing-room. It was a large room upholstered in dull yellow. The chimney-piece took Coutts' attention. He knew it perfectly well, but this evening it had a new, lustrous fascination. Over the mellow marble of the mantel rose an immense mirror, very translucent and deep, like deep grey water. Before this mirror, shining white as moons on a soft grey sky, was a pair of statues in alabaster, two feet high. Both were nude figures. They glistened under the side lamps, rose clean and distinct from their pedestals. The Venus leaned slightly forward, as if anticipating someone's coming. Her attitude of suspense made the young man stiffen. He could see the clean suavity of her shoulders and waist reflected white on the deep mirror. She shone, catching, as she leaned forward, the glow of the lamp on her lustrous marble loins.

Laura played Brahms; the delicate, winsome German lady played Chopin; Winifred played on her violin a Grieg sonata, to Laura's accompaniment. After having sung twice, Coutts listened to the music. Unable to criticise, he listened till he was intoxicated. Winifred, as she played, swayed slightly. He watched the strong forward thrust of her neck, the powerful and angry striking of her arm. He could see the outline of her figure; she wore no corsets; and he found her of resolute independent build. Again he glanced at the Venus bending in suspense. Winifred was blonde with a solid whiteness, an isolated woman.

All the evening, little was said, save by Laura. Miss Syfurt exclaimed continually: "Oh, that is fine! You play grand, Miss Varley, don't you know. If I could play the violin—ah! the violin!"

It was not later than ten o'clock when Winifred and Miss Syfurt rose to go, the former to Croydon, the latter to Ewell.

"We can go by car together to West Croydon," said the German lady, gleefully, as if she were a child. She was a frail, excitable little woman of

forty, naïve and innocent. She gazed with bright brown eyes of admiration on Coutts.

"Yes, I am glad," he answered.

He took up Winifred's violin, and the three proceeded downhill to the tram-terminus. There a car was on the point of departure. They hurried forward. Miss Syfurt mounted the step. Coutts waited for Winifred. The conductor called:

"Come along, please, if you're going."

"No," said Winifred. "I prefer to walk this stage."

"We can walk from West Croydon," said Coutts.

The conductor rang the bell.

"Aren't you coming?" cried the frail, excitable little lady, from the footboard. "Aren't you coming?—Oh!"

"I walk from West Croydon every day; I prefer to walk here, in the quiet," said Winifred.

"Aw! aren't you coming with me?" cried the little lady, quite frightened. She stepped back, in supplication, towards the footboard. The conductor impatiently buzzed the bell. The car started forward, Miss Syfurt staggered, was caught by the conductor.

"Aw!" she cried, holding her hand out to the two who stood on the road, and breaking almost into tears of disappointment. As the tram darted forward she clutched at her hat. In a moment she was out of sight.

Coutts stood wounded to the quick by this pain given to the frail, child-like lady.

"We may as well," said Winifred, "walk over the hill to 'The Swan'." Her note had that intense reedy quality which always set the man on edge; it was the note of her anger, or, more often, of her tortured sense of discord. The two turned away, to climb the hill again. He carried the violin; for a long time neither spoke.

"Ah, how I hate her, how I hate her!" he repeated in his heart. He winced repeatedly at the thought of Miss Syfurt's little cry of supplication. He was in a position where he was not himself, and he hated her for putting him there, forgetting that it was he who had come, like a moth to the candle. For half a mile he walked on, his head carried stiffly, his face set, his heart twisted with painful emotion. And all the time, as she plodded, head down, beside him, his blood beat with hate of her, drawn to her, repelled by her.

At last, on the high-up, naked down, they came upon those meaningless pavements that run through the grass, waiting for the houses to line them. The two were thrust up into the night above the little flowering of

the lamps in the valley. In front was the daze of light from London, rising midway to the zenith, just fainter than the stars. Across the valley, on the blackness of the opposite hill, little groups of lights like gnats seemed to be floating in the darkness. Orion was heeled over the West. Below, in a cleft in the night, the long, low garland of arc lamps strung down the Brighton Road, where now and then the golden tram-cars flew along the track, passing each other with a faint, angry sound.

"It is a year last Monday since we came over here," said Winifred, as they stopped to look about them.

"I remember—but I didn't know it was then," he said. There was a touch of hardness in his voice. "I don't remember our dates."

After a wait, she said in a very low, passionate tones:

"It is a beautiful night."

"The moon has set, and the evening star," he answered; "both were out as I came down."

She glanced swiftly at him to see if this speech was a bit of symbolism. He was looking across the valley with a set face. Very slightly, by an inch or two, she nestled towards him.

"Yes," she said, half-stubborn, half-pleading. "But the night is a very fine one, for all that."

"Yes," he replied, unwillingly.

Thus, after months of separation, they dove-tailed into the same love and hate.

"You are staying down here?" she asked at length, in a forced voice. She never intruded a hair's-breadth on the most trifling privacy; in which she was Laura's antithesis; so that this question was almost an impertinence for her. He felt her shrink.

"Till the morning—then Yorkshire," he said cruelly.

He hated it that she could not bear outspokenness.

At that moment a train across the valley threaded the opposite darkness with its gold thread. The valley re-echoed with vague threat. The two watched the express, like a gold-and-black snake, curve and dive seawards into the night. He turned, saw her full, fine face tilted up to him. It showed pale, distinct, and firm, very near to him. He shut his eyes and shivered.

"I hate trains," he said, impulsively.

"Why?" she asked, with a curious, tender little smile that caressed, as it were, his emotion towards her.

"I don't know; they pitch one about here and there ... "

"I thought," she said, with faint irony, "that you preferred change."

"I do like life. But now I should like to be nailed to something, if it were only a cross."

She laughed sharply, and said, with keen sarcasm:

"Is it so difficult, then, to let yourself be nailed to a cross? I thought the difficulty lay in getting free."

He ignored her sarcasm on his engagement.

"There is nothing now that matters," he said, adding quickly, to forestall her: "Of course I'm wild when dinner's late, and so on; but ... apart from those things ... nothing seems to matter."

She was silent.

"One goes on—remains in office, so to speak; and life's all right—only, it doesn't seem to matter."

"This does sound like complaining of trouble because you've got none," she laughed.

"Trouble ... " he repeated. "No, I don't suppose I've got any. Vexation, which most folk call trouble; but something I really grieve about in my soul—no, nothing. I wish I had."

She laughed again sharply; but he perceived in her laughter a little keen despair.

"I find a lucky pebble. I think, now I'll throw it over my left shoulder, and wish. So I spit over my little finger, and throw the white pebble behind me, and then, when I want to wish, I'm done. I say to myself: 'Wish,' and myself says back: 'I don't want anything.' I say again: 'Wish, you fool,' but I'm as dumb of wishes as a newt. And then, because it rather frightens me, I say in a hurry: 'A million of money.' Do *you* know what to wish for when you see the new moon?"

She laughed quickly.

"I think so," she said. "But my wish varies."

"I wish mine did," he said, whimsically lugubrious.

She took his hand in a little impulse of love.

They walked hand in hand on the ridge of the down, bunches of lights shining below, the big radiance of London advancing like a wonder in front.

"You know ... " he began, then stopped.

"I don't ... " she ironically urged.

"Do you want to?" he laughed.

"Yes; one is never at peace with oneself till one understands."

"Understands what?" he asked brutally. He knew she meant that she wanted to understand the situation he and she were in.

"How to resolve the discord," she said, balking the issue. He would have liked her to say: "What you want of me."

"Your foggy weather of symbolism, as usual," he said.

"The fog is not of symbols," she replied, in her metallic voice of displeasure. "It may be symbols are candles in a fog."

"I prefer my fog without candles. I'm the fog, eh? Then I'll blow out your candle, and you'll see me better. Your candles of speech, symbols and so forth, only lead you more wrong. I'm going to wander blind, and go by instinct, like a moth that flies and settles on the wooden box his mate is shut up in."

"Isn't it an *ignis fatuus* you are flying after, at that rate?" she said.

"Maybe, for if I breathe outwards, in the positive movement towards you, you move off. If I draw in a vacant sigh of soulfulness, you flow nearly to my lips."

"This is a very interesting symbol," she said, with sharp sarcasm.

He hated her, truly. She hated him. Yet they held hands fast as they walked.

"We are just the same as we were a year ago," he laughed. But he hated her, for all his laughter.

When, at the "Swan and Sugar-Loaf", they mounted the car, she climbed to the top, in spite of the sharp night. They nestled side by side, shoulders caressing, and all the time that they ran under the round lamps neither spoke.

At the gate of a small house in a dark tree-lined street, both waited a moment. From her garden leaned an almond tree whose buds, early this year, glistened in the light of the street lamp, with theatrical effect. He broke off a twig.

"I always remember this tree," he said; "how I used to feel sorry for it when it was full out, and so lively, at midnight in the lamplight. I thought it must be tired."

"Will you come in?" she asked tenderly.

"I did get a room in town," he answered, following her.

She opened the door with her latch-key, showing him, as usual, into the drawing-room. Everything was just the same; cold in colouring, warm in appointment; ivory-coloured walls, blond, polished floor, with thick ivory-coloured rugs; three deep arm-chairs in pale amber, with large cushions; a big black piano, a violin-stand beside it; and the room very warm with a clear red fire, the brass shining hot. Coutts, according to his habit, lit the piano-candles and lowered the blinds.

"I say," he said; "this is a variation from your line!"

He pointed to a bowl of magnificent scarlet anemones that stood on the piano.

"Why?" she asked, pausing in arranging her hair at the small mirror.

"On the *piano*!" he admonished.

"Only while the table was in use," she smiled, glancing at the litter of papers that covered her table.

"And then—*red* flowers!" he said.

"Oh, I thought they were such a fine piece of colour," she replied.

"I would have wagered you would buy freesias," he said.

"Why?" she smiled. He pleased her thus.

"Well—for their cream and gold and restrained, bruised purple, and their scent. I can't believe you bought scentless flowers!"

"What!" She went forward, bent over the flowers.

"I had not noticed," she said, smiling curiously, "that they were scentless."

She touched the velvet black centres.

"Would you have bought them had you noticed?" he asked.

She thought for a moment, curiously.

"I don't know ... probably I should not."

"You would never buy scentless flowers," he averred. "Any more than you'd love a man because he was handsome."

"I did not know," she smiled. She was pleased.

The housekeeper entered with a lamp, which she set on a stand.

"You will illuminate me?" he said to Winifred. It was her habit to talk to him by candle-light.

"I have thought about you—now I will look at you," she said quietly, smiling.

"I see—To confirm your conclusions?" he asked.

Her eyes lifted quickly in acknowledgment of his guess.

"That is so," she replied.

"Then," he said, "I'll wash my hands."

He ran upstairs. The sense of freedom, of intimacy, was very fascinating. As he washed, the little everyday action of twining his hands in the lather set him suddenly considering his other love. At her house he was always polite and formal; gentlemanly, in short. With Connie he felt the old, manly superiority; he was the knight, strong and tender, she was the beautiful maiden with a touch of God on her brow. He kissed her, he softened and selected his speech for her, he forbore from being the greater part of himself. She was his betrothed, his wife, his queen, whom he loved to idealise, and for whom he carefully modified himself. She

should rule him later on—that part of him which was hers. But he loved her, too, with a pitying, tender love. He thought of her tears upon her pillow in the northern Rectory, and he bit his lip, held his breath under the strain of the situation. Vaguely he knew she would bore him. And Winifred fascinated him. He and she really played with fire. In her house, he was roused and keen. But she was not, and never could be, frank. So he was not frank, even to himself. Saying nothing, betraying nothing, immediately they were together they began the same game. Each shuddered, each defenceless and exposed, hated the other by turns. Yet they came together again. Coutts felt a vague fear of Winifred. She was intense and unnatural—and he became unnatural and intense, beside her.

When he came downstairs she was fingering the piano from the score of "Walküre".

"First wash in England," he announced, looking at his hands. She laughed swiftly. Impatient herself of the slightest soil, his indifference to temporary grubbiness amused her.

He was a tall, bony man, with small hands and feet. His features were rough and rather ugly, but his smile was taking. She was always fascinated by the changes in him. His eyes, particularly, seemed quite different at times; sometimes hard, insolent, blue; sometimes dark, full of warmth and tenderness; sometimes flaring like an animal's.

He sank wearily into a chair.

"My chair," he said, as if to himself.

She bowed her head. Of compact physique, uncorseted, her figure bowed richly to the piano. He watched the shallow concave between her shoulders, marvelling at its rich solidity. She let one arm fall loose, he looked at the shadows in the dimples of her elbow. Slowly smiling a look of brooding affection, of acknowledgment upon him for a forgetful moment, she said:

"And what have you done lately?"

"Simply nothing," he replied quietly. "For all that these months have been so full of variety, I think they will sink out of my life; they will evaporate and leave no result; I shall forget them."

Her blue eyes were dark and heavy upon him, watching. She did not answer. He smiled faintly at her.

"And you?" he said, at length.

"With me it is different," she said quietly.

"You sit with your crystal," he laughed.

"While you tilt ... " She hung on her ending.

He laughed, sighed, and they were quiet awhile.

"I've got such a skinful of heavy visions, they come sweating through my dreams," he said.

"Whom have you read?" She smiled.

"Meredith. Very healthy," he laughed.

She laughed quickly at being caught.

"Now, have you found out all you want?" he asked.

"Oh, no," she cried with full throat.

"Well, finish, at any rate. I'm not diseased. How are you?"

"But ... but ... " she stumbled on doggedly. "What *do* you intend to do?"

He hardened the line of his mouth and eyes, only to retort with immediate lightness:

"Just go on."

This was their battlefield: she could not understand how he could marry: it seemed almost monstrous to her; she fought against his marriage. She looked up at him, witch-like, from under bent brows. Her eyes were dark blue and heavy. He shivered, shrank with pain. She was so cruel to that other, common, everyday part of him.

"I wonder you dare go on like it," she said.

"Why dare?" he replied. "What's the odds?"

"I don't know," she answered, in deep, bitter displeasure.

"And I don't care," he said.

"But ... " she continued, slowly, gravely pressing the point: "You know what you intend to do."

"Marry—settle—be a good husband, good father, partner in the business; get fat, be an amiable gentleman—Q.E.F."

"Very good," she said, deep and final.

"Thank you."

"I did not congratulate you," she said.

"Ah!" His voice tailed off into sadness and self-mistrust. Meanwhile she watched him heavily. He did not mind being scrutinised: it flattered him.

"Yes, it is, or may be, very good," she began; "but *why* all this?—*why*?"

"And why not? And why?—Because I want to."

He could not leave it thus flippantly.

"You know, Winifred, we should only drive each other into insanity, you and I: become abnormal."

"Well," she said, "and even so, why the other?"

"My marriage?—I don't know. Instinct."

"One has so many instincts," she laughed bitterly.

That was a new idea to him.

She raised her arms, stretched them above her head, in a weary gesture. They were fine, strong arms. They reminded Coutts of Euripides' "Bacchae": white, round arms, long arms. The lifting of her arms lifted her breasts. She dropped suddenly as if inert, lolling her arms against the cushions.

"I really don't see why you should be," she said drearily, though always with a touch of a sneer, "why we should always—be fighting."

"Oh, yes, you do," he replied. It was a deadlock which he could not sustain.

"Besides," he laughed, "it's your fault."

"Am I so bad?" she sneered.

"Worse," he said.

"But"—she moved irritably—"is this to the point?"

"What point?" he answered; then, smiling: "You know you only like a wild-goose chase."

"I do," she answered plaintively. "I miss you very much. You snatch things from the Kobolds for me."

"Exactly," he said in a biting tone. "Exactly! That's what you want me for. I am to be your crystal, your 'genius'. My length of blood and bone you don't care a rap for. Ah, yes, you like me for a crystal-glass, to see things in: to hold up to the light. I'm a blessed Lady-of-Shalott looking-glass for you."

"You talk to *me*," she said, dashing his fervour, "of my fog of symbols!"

"Ah, well, if so, 'tis your own asking."

"I did not know it." She looked at him coldly. She was angry.

"No," he said.

Again, they hated each other.

"The old ancients," he laughed, "gave the gods the suet and intestines: at least, I believe so. They ate the rest. You shouldn't be a goddess."

"I wonder, among your rectory acquaintances, you haven't learned better manners," she answered in cold contempt. He closed his eyes, lying back in his chair, his legs sprawled towards her.

"I suppose we're civilised savages," he said sadly. All was silent. At last, opening his eyes again, he said: "I shall have to be going directly, Winifred; it is past eleven ... " Then the appeal in his voice changed to laughter. "Though I know I shall be winding through all the *Addios* in 'Traviata' before you can set me travelling." He smiled gently at her, then closed his eyes once more, conscious of deep, but vague, suffering. She

lay in her chair, her face averted, rosily, towards the fire. Without glancing at her he was aware of the white approach of her throat towards her breast. He seemed to perceive her with another, unknown sense that acted all over his body. She lay perfectly still and warm in the fire-glow. He was dimly aware that he suffered.

"Yes," she said at length; "if we were linked together we should only destroy each other."

He started, hearing her admit, for the first time, this point of which he was so sure.

"You should never *marry* anyone," he said.

"And you," she asked in irony, "must offer your head to harness and be bridled and driven?"

"There's the makings of quite a good, respectable trotter in me," he laughed. "Don't you see it's what I *want* to be?"

"I'm not sure," she laughed in return.

"I think so."

They were silent for a time. The white lamp burned steadily as moonlight, the red fire like sunset; there was no stir or flicker.

"And what of you?" he asked.

She crooned a faint, tired laugh.

"If you are jetsam, as you say you are," she answered, "I am flotsam. I shall lie stranded."

"Nay," he pleaded. "When were you wrecked?"

She laughed quickly, with a sound like a tinkle of tears.

"Oh, dear Winifred!" he cried despairingly.

She lifted her arms towards him, hiding her face between them, looking up through the white closure with dark, uncanny eyes, like an invocation. His breast lifted towards her uptilted arms. He shuddered, shut his eyes, held himself rigid. He heard her drop her arms heavily.

"I must go," he said in a dull voice.

The rapidly-chasing quivers that ran in tremors down the front of his body and limbs made him stretch himself, stretch hard.

"Yes," she assented gravely; "you must go."

He turned to her. Again looking up darkly, from under her lowered brows, she lifted her hands like small white orchids towards him. Without knowing, he gripped her wrists with a grasp that circled his blood-red nails with white rims.

"Good-bye," he said, looking down at her. She made a small, moaning noise in her throat, lifting her face so that it came open and near to him like a suddenly-risen flower, borne on a strong white stalk. She seemed

to extend, to fill the world, to become atmosphere and all. He did not know what he was doing. He was bending forward, his mouth on hers, her arms round his neck, and his own hands, still fastened on to her wrists, almost bursting the blood under his nails with the intensity of their grip. They remained for a few moments thus, rigid. Then, weary of the strain, she relaxed. She turned her face, offered him her throat, white, hard, and rich, below the ear. Stooping still lower, so that he quivered in every fibre at the strain, he laid his mouth to the kiss. In the intense silence, he heard the deep, dull pulsing of her blood, and a minute click of a spark within the lamp.

Then he drew her from the chair up to him. She came, arms always round his neck, till at last she lay along his breast as he stood, feet planted wide, clasping her tight, his mouth on her neck. She turned suddenly to meet his full, red mouth in a kiss. He felt his moustache prick back into his lips. It was the first kiss she had genuinely given. Dazed, he was conscious of the throb of one great pulse, as if his whole body were a heart that contracted in throbs. He felt, with an intolerable ache, as if he, the heart, were setting the pulse in her, in the very night, so that everything beat from the throb of his overstrained, bursting body.

The hurt became so great it brought him out of the reeling stage to distinct consciousness. She clipped her lips, drew them away, leaving him her throat. Already she had had enough. He opened his eyes as he bent with his mouth on her neck, and was startled; there stood the objects of the room, stark; there, close below his eyes, were the half-sunk lashes of the woman, swooning on her unnatural ebb of passion. He saw her thus, knew that she wanted no more of him than that kiss. And the heavy form of this woman hung upon him. His whole body ached like a swollen vein, with heavy intensity, while his heart grew dead with misery and despair. This woman gave him anguish and a cutting-short like death; to the other woman he was false. As he shivered with suffering, he opened his eyes again, and caught sight of the pure ivory of the lamp. His heart flashed with rage.

A sudden involuntary blow of his foot, and he sent the lamp-stand spinning. The lamp leaped off, fell with a smash on the fair, polished floor. Instantly a bluish hedge of flame quivered, leaped up before them. She had lightened her hold round his neck, and buried her face against his throat. The flame veered at her, blue, with a yellow tongue that licked her dress and her arm. Convulsive, she clutched him, almost strangled him, though she made no sound.

He gathered her up and bore her heavily out of the room. Slipping from her clasp, he brought his arms down her form, crushing the starting blaze of her dress. His face was singed. Staring at her, he could scarcely see her.

"I am not hurt," she cried. "But you?"

The housekeeper was coming; the flames were sinking and waving up in the drawing-room. He broke away from Winifred, threw one of the great woollen rugs on to the flame, then stood a moment looking at the darkness.

Winifred caught at him as he passed her.

"No, no," he answered, as he fumbled for the latch. "I'm not hurt. Clumsy fool I am—clumsy fool!"

In another instant he was gone, running with burning-red hands held out blindly, down the street.

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