

IO

By Oliver Onions

As the young man put his hand to the uppermost of the four brass bell-knobs to the right of the fanlighted door he paused, withdrew the hand again, and then pulled at the lowest knob. The sawing of bell-wire answered him, and he waited for a moment, uncertain whether the bell had rung, before pulling again. Then there came from the basement a single cracked stroke; the head of a maid appeared in the whitewashed area below; and the head was withdrawn as apparently the maid recognised him. Steps were heard along the hall; the door was opened; and the maid stood aside to let him enter, the apron with which she had slipped the latch still crumpled in her greasy hand.

“Sorry, Daisy,” the young man apologised, “but I didn’t want to bring her down all those stairs. How is she? Has she been out to-day?”

The maid replied that the person spoken of had been out; and the young man walked along the wide carpeted passage.

It was cumbered like an antique-shop with alabaster busts on pedestals, dusty palms in faience vases, and trophies of spears and shields and assegais. At the foot of the stairs was a rustling portiêre of strung beads, and beyond it the carpet was continued up the broad, easy flight, secured at each step by a brass rod. Where the stairs made a turn, the fading light of the December afternoon, made still dimmer by a window of decalcomanied glass, shone on a cloudy green aquarium with sallow goldfish, a number of cacti on a shabby console table, and a large and dirty white sheepskin rug. Passing along a short landing, the young man began the ascent of the second flight. This also was carpeted, but with a carpet that had done duty in some dining- or bed-room before being cut up into strips of the width of the narrow space between the wall and the handrail. Then, as he still mounted, the young man’s feet sounded loud on oilcloth; and when he finally paused and knocked at a door it was on a small landing of naked boards beneath the cold gleam of the skylight above the well of the stairs.

“Come in,” a girl’s voice called.

The room he entered had a low sagging ceiling on which shone a low glow of firelight, making colder still the patch of eastern sky beyond the roofs and the cowls and hoods of chimneys framed by the square of the single window. The glow on the ceiling was reflected dully in the old dark mirror over the mantelpiece. An open door in the farther corner, hampered with skirts and blouses, allowed a glimpse of the girl’s bedroom.

The young man set the paper bag he carried down on the littered round table and advanced to the girl who sat in an old wicker chair before the fire. The girl did not turn her head as he kissed her cheek, and he looked down at something that had muffled the sound of his steps as he had approached her.

“Hallo, that’s new, isn’t it, Bessie? Where did that come from?” he asked cheerfully.

The middle of the floor was covered with a common jute matting, but on the hearth was a magnificent leopard-skin rug.

“Mrs. Hepburn sent it up. There was a draught from under the door. It’s much warmer for my feet.”

“Very kind of Mis. Hepburn. Well, how are you feeling to-day, old girl?”

“Better, thanks, Ed.”

“That’s the style. You’ll be yourself again soon. Daisy says you’ve been out to-day?”

“Yes, I went for a walk. But not far; I went to the Museum and then sat down. You’re early, aren’t you?”

He turned away to get a chair, from which he had to move a mass of tissue-paper patterns and buckram linings. He brought it to the rug.

“Yes. I stopped last night late to cash up for Vedder, so he’s staying to-night. Turn and turn about. Well, tell us all about it, Bess.”

Their faces were red in the firelight. Hers had the prettiness that the first glance almost exhausts, the prettiness, amazing in its quantity, that one sees for a moment under the light of the street lamps when shops and offices close for the day. She was short-nosed, pulpy-mouthed and faunish-eyed, and only the rather remarkable smallness of the head on the splendid thick throat saved her from ordinariness. He, too, might have been seen in his thousands at the close of any day, hurrying home to Catford or Walham Green or Tufnell Park to tea and an evening with a girl or in a billiard-room, or else dining cheaply “up West” preparatory to smoking cigarettes from yellow packets in the upper circle of a music-hall. Four inches of white up-and-down collar encased his neck; and as he lifted his trousers at the knee to clear his purple socks, the pair of paper covers showed, that had protected his cuffs during the day at the office. He removed them, crumpled them up and threw them on the fire; and the momentary addition to the light of the upper chamber showed how curd-white was that superb neck of hers and how moody and tired her eyes.

From his face only one would have guessed, and guessed wrongly, that his preferences were for billiard-rooms and music-halls. His conversation showed them to be otherwise. It was of Polytechnic classes that he spoke, and of the course of lectures in English literature that had just begun. And, as if somebody had asserted that the pursuit of such studies was not compatible with a certain measure of physical development also, he announced that he was not sure that he should not devote, say, half an evening a week, on Wednesdays, to training in the gymnasium.

“*Mens sana in corpore sano*, Bessie,” he said; “a sound mind in a sound body, you know. That’s tremendously important, especially when a fellow spends the day in a stuffy office. Yes, I think I shall give it half Wednesdays, from eight-thirty to nine-thirty; sends you home in a glow. But I was going to tell you about the Literature Class. The second lecture’s to-night. The first was splendid, all about the languages of Europe and Asia—what they call the Indo-Germanic languages, you know. Aryans. I can’t tell you exactly without my notes, but the Hindoos and Persians, I think it was, they crossed the Himalaya Mountains and spread westward somehow, as far as Europe. That was the way it all began. It was splendid, the way the lecturer put it. English is a Germanic language, you know. Then came the Celts. I wish I’d brought my notes. I see you’ve been reading; let’s look—”

A book lay on her knees, its back warped by the heat of the fire. He took it and opened it.

“Ah, Keats! Glad you like Keats, Bessie. We needn’t be great readers, but it’s important that what we do read should be all right. I don’t know him, not *really* know him, that is. But he’s quite all right—A1 in fact. And he’s an example of what I’ve always maintained, that knowledge should be brought within the reach of all. It just shows. He was the son of a livery-stable keeper, you know, so what he’d have been if he’d really had chances, been to universities and so on, there’s no knowing. But, of course, it’s more from the historical standpoint that I’m studying these things. Let’s have a look—”

He opened the book where a hairpin between the leaves marked a place. The firelight glowed on the page, and he read, monotonously and in-elastically:

*“And as I sat, over the light blue hills
There came a noise of revellers; the rills
Into the wide stream came of purple hue—
’Twas Bacchus and his crew!
The earnest trumpet spake, and silver thrills
From kissing cymbals made a merry din—
’Twas Bacchus and his kin!
Like to a moving vintage down they came,
Crowned with green leaves, and laces all on flame
All madly dancing through the pleasant valley
To scare thee, Melancholy.”*

It was the wondrous passage from *Endymion*, of the descent of the wild inspired rabble into India. Ed plucked for a moment at his lower lip, and then, with a “Hm! What’s it all about, Bessie?” continued:

*“Within his car, aloft, young Bacchus stood,
Trifling his ivy-dart, in dancing mood,
With sidelong laughing;
And little rills of crimson wine imbrued
His plump white arms and shoulders, enough white
For Venus’ pearly bite;
And near him rode Silenus on his ass,
Pelted with flowers as he on did pass,
Tipsily quaffing.”*

“Hm! I see. Mythology. That’s made up of tales, and myths, you know. Like Odin and Thor and those, only those were Scandinavian Mythology. So it would be absurd to take it too seriously. But I think, in a way, things like that do harm. You see,” he explained, “the more beautiful they are the more harm they might do. We ought always to show virtue and vice in their true colours, and if you look at it from that point of view this is just drunkenness. That’s rotten; destroys your body and intellect; as I heard a chap say once, it’s an insult to the beasts to call it beastly. I joined the Blue Ribbon when I was fourteen and I haven’t been sorry for it yet. No. Now there’s Vedder; he ‘went off on a bend,’ as he calls it, last night, and even he says this morning it wasn’t worth it. But let’s read on.”

Again he read, with unresilient movement:

*“I saw Osirian Egypt kneel adown
Before the vine wreath crown!
I saw parched Abyssinia rouse and sing
To the silver cymbals’ ring!
I saw the whelming vintage hotly pierce
Old Tartary the fierce!
Great Brahma from his mystic heaven groans. . . .”*

“Hm! He was a Buddhist god, Brahma was; mythology again. As I say, if you take it seriously, it’s just glorifying intoxication.—But I say; I can hardly see. Better light the lamp. We’ll have tea first, then read. No, you sit still; I’ll get it ready; I know where things are—”

He rose, crossed to a little cupboard with a sink in it, filled the kettle at the tap, and brought it to the fire. Then he struck a match and lighted the lamp.

The cheap glass shade was of a foolish corolla shape, clear glass below, shading to pink, and deepening to red at the crimped edge. It gave a false warmth to the spaces of the room above the level of the mantelpiece, and Ed’s figure, as he turned the regulator, looked from the waist upwards as if he stood within that portion of a spectrum screen that deepens to the band of red. The bright concentric circles that spread in rings of red on the ceiling were more dimly reduplicated in the old mirror over the mantelpiece; and the wintry eastern light beyond the chimney-hoods seemed suddenly almost to die out.

Bessie, her white neck below the level of the lamp-shade, had taken up the book again; but she was not reading. She was looking over it at the upper part of the grate. Presently she spoke.

“I was looking at some of those things this afternoon, at the Museum.”

He was clearing from the table more buckram linings and patterns of paper, numbers of *Myra’s Journal* and *The Delineator*. Already on his way to the cupboard he had put aside a red-bodied dressmaker’s “shape” of wood and wire.

“What things?” he asked.

“Those you were reading about. Greek, aren’t they?”

“Oh, the Greek room! . . . But those people, Bacchus and those, weren’t people in the ordinary sense. Gods and goddesses, most of ’em; Bacchus was a god. That’s what mythology means. I wish sometimes our course took in Greek literature, but it’s a dead language after all. German’s more good in modern life. It would be nice to know everything, but one has to select, you know. Hallo, I clean forgot; I brought you some grapes, Bessie; here they are, in this bag; we’ll have ’em after tea, what?”

“But,” she said again after a pause, still looking at the grate, “they had their priests and priestesses, and followers and people, hadn’t they? It was their things I was looking at—combs and brooches and hairpins, and things to cut their nails with. They’re all in a glass case there. And they had safety-pins, exactly like ours.”

“Oh, they were a civilised people,” said Ed cheerfully. “It all gives you an idea. I only hope you didn’t tire yourself out. You’ll soon be all right, of course, but you have to be careful yet. We’ll have a clean tablecloth, shall we?”

She had been seriously ill; her life had been despaired of; and somehow the young Polytechnic student seemed anxious to assure her that she was now all right again, or soon would be. They were to be married “as soon as things brightened up a bit,” and he was very much in love with her. He watched her head and neck as he continued to lay the table, and then, as he crossed once more to the cupboard, he put his hand lightly in passing on her hair.

She gave so quick a start that he too started. She must have been very deep in her reverie to have been so taken by surprise.

“I say, Bessie, don’t jump like that!” he cried with involuntary quickness. Indeed, had his hand been red-hot, or ice-cold, or taloned, she could not have turned a more startled, even frightened, face to him.

“It was your touching me,” she muttered, resuming her gazing into the grate.

He stood looking anxiously down on her. It would have been better not to discuss her state, and he knew it; but in his anxiety he forgot it.

“That jumpiness is the effect of your illness, you know. I shall be glad when it’s all over. It’s made you so odd.”

She was not pleased that he should speak of her “oddness.” For that matter, she, too, found him “odd”—at any rate, found it difficult to realise that he was as he always had been. He had begun to irritate her a little. His club-footed reading of the verses had irritated her, and she had tried hard to hide from him that his cocksure opinions and the tone in which they were pronounced jarred on her. It was not that she was “better” than he, “knew” any more than he did, didn’t (she supposed) love him still the same; these moods, that dated from her illness, had nothing to do with those things; she reproached herself sometimes that she was subject to such doldrums.

“It’s all right, Ed, but please don’t touch me just now,” she said.

He was in the act of leaning over her chair, but he saw her shrink, and refrained.

“Poor old girl!” he said sympathetically. “What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know. It’s awfully stupid of me to be like this, but I can’t help it. I shall be better soon if you leave me alone.”

“Nothing’s happened, has it?”

“Only those silly dreams I told you about.”

“Bother the dreams!” muttered the Polytechnic student.

During her illness she had had dreams, and had come to herself at intervals to find Ed or the doctor, Mrs. Hepburn or her aunt, bending over her. These kind, solicitous faces had been no more than a glimpse, and then she had gone off into the dreams again. The curious thing had been that the dreams had seemed to be her vivid waking life, and the other things—the anxious faces, the details of her dingy bedroom, the thermometer under her tongue—had been the dream. And, though she had come back to actuality, the dreams had never quite vanished. She could remember no more of them than that they had seemed to hold a high singing and jocundity, issuing from some region of haze and golden light; and they seemed to hover, ever on the point of being recaptured, yet ever eluding all her mental efforts. She was living now between reality and a vision.

She had fewer words than sensations, and it was a little pitiful to hear her vainly striving to make clear what she meant.

“It’s so queer,” she said. “It’s like being on the edge of something—a sort of tiptoe—I can’t describe it. Sometimes I could almost touch it with my hand, and then it goes away, but never *quite* away. It’s like something just past the corner of my eye, over my shoulder, and I sit very still sometimes, trying to take it off its guard. But the moment I move my head it moves too—like this—”

Again he gave a quick start at the suddenness of her action. Very stealthily her faunish eyes had stolen sideways, and then she had swiftly turned her head.

“Here, I say, don’t, Bessie!” he cried nervously. “You look awfully uncanny when you do that! You’re brooding,” he continued, “that’s what you’re doing, brooding. You’re getting into a low state. You want bucking up. I don’t think I shall go to the Polytec to-night; I shall stay and cheer you up. You know, I really don’t think you’re making an effort, darling.”

His last words seemed to strike her. They seemed to fit in with something of which she too was conscious. “Not making an effort . . .” she wondered how he knew that. She felt in some vague way that it was important that she *should* make an effort.

For, while her dream ever evaded her, and yet never ceased to call her with such a voice as he who reads on a magic page of the calling of elves hears stillly in his brain, yet somehow behind the seduction was another and a sterner voice. There was warning as well as fascination. Beyond

that edge at which she strained on tiptoe, mingled with the jocund calls to Hasten, Hasten, were deeper calls that bade her Beware. They puzzled her. Beware of what? Of what danger? And to whom? . . .

“How do you mean, I’m not making an effort, Ed?” she asked slowly, again looking into the fire, where the kettle now made a gnat-like singing.

“Why, an effort to get all right again. To be as you used to be—as, of course, you will be soon.”

“As I *used* to be?” The words came with a little check in her breathing.

“Yes, before all this. To be yourself, you know.

“Myself?”

“All jolly, and without these jerks and jumps. I wish you could get away. A fortnight by the sea would do you all the good in the world.”

She knew not what it was in the words “the sea” that caused her suddenly to breathe more deeply. The sea! . . . It was as if, by the mere uttering of them, he had touched some secret spring, brought to fulfilment some spell. What had he meant by speaking of the sea? . . . A fortnight before, had somebody spoken to her of the sea it would have been the sea of Margate, of Brighton, of Southend, that, supplying the image that a word calls up as if by conjuration, she would have seen before her; and what other image could she supply, could she *possibly* supply, now? . . . Yet she did, or almost did, supply one. What new experience had she had, or what old, old one had been released in her? With that confused, joyous dinning just beyond the range of physical hearing there had suddenly mingled a new illusion of sound—a vague, vast pash and rustle, silky and harsh both at once, its tireless voice holding meanings of stillness and solitude compared with which the silence that is mere absence of sound was vacancy. It was part of her dream, invisible, intangible, inaudible, yet there. As if he had been an enchanter, it had come into being at the word upon his lips. Had he other such words? Had he the Master Word that—(ah, she knew what the Master Word would do!)—would make the Vision the Reality and the Reality the Vision? Deep within her she felt something—her soul, herself, she knew not what—thrill and turn over and settle again. . . .

“The sea,” she repeated in a low voice.

“Yes, that’s what you want to set you up—rather! Do you remember that fortnight at Littlehampton, you and me and your Aunt? Jolly that was! I like Littlehampton. It isn’t flash like Brighton, and Margate’s always so beastly crowded. And do you remember that afternoon by the windmill? I did love you that afternoon, Bessie!” . . .

He continued to talk, but she was not listening. She was wondering why the words “the sea” were somehow part of it all—the pins and brooches of the Museum, the book on her knees, the dream. She remembered a game of hide-and-seek she had played as a child, in which cries of “Warm, warm, warmer!” had announced the approach to the hidden object. Oh, she was getting warm—positively hot. . . .

He had ceased to talk, and was watching her. Perhaps it was the thought of how he had loved her that afternoon by the windmill that had brought him close to her chair again. She was aware of his nearness, and closed her eyes for a moment as if she dreaded something. Then she said quickly, “Is tea nearly ready, Ed?” and, as he turned to the table, took up the book again.

She felt that even to touch that book brought her “warmer.” It fell open at a page. She did not hear the clatter Ed made at the table, nor yet the babble his words had evoked, of the pierrots and banjos and minstrels of Margate and Littlehampton. It was to hear a gladder, wilder tumult that she sat once more so still, so aching listening. . . .

*“The earnest trumpet spake, and silver thrills
From kissing cymbals made a merry din—”*

The words seemed to move on the page. In her eyes another light than the firelight seemed to play. Her breast rose, and in her thick white throat a little inarticulate sound twanged.

“Eh? Did you speak, Bessie?” Ed asked, stopping in his buttering of bread.

“Eh? . . . No.”

In answering, her head had turned for a moment, and she had seen him. Suddenly it struck her with force: what a shaving of a man he was! Desk-chested, weak-necked, conscious of his little “important” lip and chin—yes, he needed a Polytechnic gymnastic course! Then she remarked how once, at Margate, she had seen him in the distance, as in a hired baggy bathing-dress he had bathed from a machine, in muddy water, one of a hundred others, all rather cold, flinging a polo-ball about and shouting stridently. “A sound mind in a sound body!” . . . He was rather vain of his neat shoes, too, and doubtless stunted his feet; and she had seen the little spot on his neck caused by the chafing of his collar-stud. . . No, she did not want him to touch her, just now at any rate. His touch would be too like a betrayal of another touch . . . somewhere, sometime, somehow . . . in that tantalising dream that refused to allow itself either to be fully remembered or quite forgotten. What *was* that dream? *What* was it? . . .

She continued to gaze into the fire.

Of a sudden she sprang to her feet with a choked cry of almost animal fury. The fool *had* touched her. Carried away doubtless by the memory of that afternoon by the windmill, he had, in passing once more to the kettle, crept softly behind her and put a swift burning kiss on the side of her neck.

Then he had retreated before her, stumbling against the table and causing the cups and saucers to jingle.

The basket-chair tilted up, but righted itself again.

“I told you—I told you—” she choked, her stockish figure shaking with rage, “I told you—you—”

He put up his elbow as if to ward off a blow.

“*You touch me—you!—you!*” the words broke from her.

He had put himself farther round the table. He stammered.

“Here—dash it all, Bessie—what *is* the matter?”

“*You touch me!*”

“All right,” he said sullenly. “I won’t touch you again—no fear. I didn’t know you were such a firebrand. All right, drop it now. I won’t again. Good Lord!”

Slowly the white fist she had drawn back sank to her side again.

“All right now,” he continued to grumble resentfully. “You needn’t take on so. It’s said—I won’t touch you again.” Then, as if he remembered that after all she was ill and must be humoured, he began, while her bosom still rose and fell rapidly, to talk with an assumption that nothing much had happened. “Come, sit down again, Bessie. The tea’s in the pot and I’ll have it ready in a couple of jiffs. What a ridiculous little girl you are, to take on like that! . . . And I say, listen! That’s a muffin-bell, and there’s a grand fire for toast! You sit down while I run out and get ’em. Give me your key, so I can let myself in again—”

He took her key from her bag, caught up his hat, and hastened out.

But she did not sit down again. She was no calmer for his quick disappearance. In that moment when he had recoiled from her she had had the expression of some handsome and angered snake, its hood puffed, ready to strike. She stood dazed; one would have supposed that that ill-advised kiss of his had indeed been the Master Word she sought, the Word she felt approaching, the Word to which the objects of the Museum, the book, that rustle of a sea she had never seen, had been but the ever “warming” stages. Some merest trifle stood between her and those elfin cries, between her and that thin golden mist in which faintly seen shapes seemed to move—shapes almost of tossed arms, waving, brandishing objects strangely all but familiar. That roaring of the sea was *not* the rushing of her own blood in her ears, that rosy flush *not* the artificial glow of the cheap red lamp-shade. The shapes were almost as plain as if she saw them in some clear but black mirror, the sounds almost as audible as if she heard them through some not very thick muffling. . .

“Quick—the book,” she muttered.

But even as she stretched out her hand for it, again came that solemn sound of warning. As if something sought to stay it, she had deliberately to thrust her hand forward. Again the high dinning calls of “Hasten! Hasten!” were mingled with that deeper “Beware!” She knew in her soul that, once over that terrible edge, the Dream would become the Reality and the Reality the Dream. She knew nothing of the fluidity of the thing called Personality—not a thing at all, but a state, a balance, a relation, a resultant of forces so delicately in equilibrium that a touch, and—*pff!*—the horror of Formlessness rushed over all.

As she hesitated a new light appeared in the chamber. Within the frame of the small square window, beyond the ragged line of the chimney-cowls, an edge of orange brightness showed. She leaned forward. It was the full moon, rusty and bloated and flattened by the earth-mist.

The next moment her hand had clutched at the book.

*“Whence came ye, merry Damsels! Whence came ye
So many, and so many, and such glee?
Why have ye left your bowers desolate,
Your lutes, and gentler fate?
‘We follow Bacchus, Bacchus on the wing
A-conquering!
Bacchus, young Bacchus! Good or ill betide
We dance before him thorough kingdoms wide!
Come hither, Lady fair, and joined be
To our wild minstrelsy!’*

There was an instant in which darkness seemed to blot out all else; then it rolled aside, and in a blaze of brightness was gone. It was gone, and she stood face to face with her Dream, that for two thousand years had slumbered in the blood of her and her line. She stood, with mouth agape and eyes that hailed, her thick throat full of suppressed clamour. The other was the Dream now, and *these!* . . . they came down, mad and noisy and bright—Mænades, Thyades, satyrs, fauns—naked, in hides of beasts, ungirded, dishevelled, wreathed and garlanded, dancing, singing, shouting. The thudding of their hooves shook the ground, and the clash of their timbrels and the rustling of their thyrsi filled the air. They brandished frontal bones, the dismembered quarters of kids and goats; they struck the bronze cantharus, they tossed the silver obba up aloft. Down a cleft of rocks and woods they came, trooping to a wide seashore with the red of the sunset behind

them. She saw the evening light on the sleek and dappled hides, the gilded ivory and rich brown of their legs and shoulders, the white of inner arms held up on high, their wide red mouths, the quivering of the twin flesh-gouts on the necks of the leaping fauns. And, shutting out the glimpse of sky at the head of the deep ravine, the god himself descended, with his car full of drunken girls who slept with the serpents coiled about them.

Shouting and moaning and frenzied, leaping upon one another with libidinous laughter and beating one another with the half-stripped thyrsi, they poured down to the yellow sands and the anemonied pools of the shore. They raced to the water, that gleamed pale as nacre in the deepening twilight in the eye of the evening star. They ran along its edge over their images in the wet sands, calling their lost companion.

“Hasten, hasten!” they cried; and one of them, a young man with a torso noble as the dawn and shoulder-lines strong as those of the eternal hills, ran here and there calling her name.

“Louder, louder!” she called back in an ecstasy.

Something dropped and tinkled against the fender. It was one of her hairpins. One side of her hair was in a loose tumble; she threw up the small head on the superb thick neck.

“Louder!—I cannot hear! Once more—”

The throwing up of her head that had brought down the rest of her hair had given her a glimpse of herself in the glass over the mantelpiece. For the last time that formidable “Beware!” sounded like thunder in her ears; the next moment she had snapped with her fingers the ribbon that was cutting into her throbbing throat. He with the torso and those shoulders was seeking her . . . how should he know her in that dreary garret, in those joyless habiliments? He would as soon know his Own in that crimson-bodiced, wire-framed dummy by the window yonder! . . .

Her fingers clutched at the tawdry mercerised silk of her blouse. There was a rip, and her arms and throat were free. She panted as she tugged at something that gave with a short “click-click,” as of steel fastenings; something fell against the fender. . . . These also. . . . She tore at them, and kicked them as they lay about her feet as leaves lie about the trunk of a tree in autumn. . . .

“Ah!”

And as she stood there, as if within the screen of a spectrum that deepened to the band of red, her eyes fell on the leopard-skin at her feet. She caught it up, and in doing so saw purple grapes—purple grapes that issued from the mouth of a paper bag on the table. With the dappled pelt about her she sprang forward. The juice spurted through them into the mass of her loosened hair. Down her body there was a spilth of seeds and pulp. She cried hoarsely aloud.

“Once more—oh, answer me! Tell me my name!”

Ed’s steps were heard on the oil-clothed portion of the staircase.

“My name—oh, my name!” she cried in an agony of suspense. . . . “Oh, they will not wait for me! They have lighted the torches—they run up and down the shore with torches—oh, cannot you see me? . . .”

Suddenly she dashed to the chair on which the litter of linings and tissue-paper lay. She caught up a double handful and crammed them on the fire. They caught and flared. There was a call upon the stairs, and the sound of somebody mounting in haste.

“Once—once only—my name!”

The soul of the Bacchante rioted, struggled to escape from her eyes. Then as the door was flung open, she heard, and gave a terrifying shout of recognition.

“I hear—I almost hear—but once more. . . IO! IO, IO, IO!”

Ed, in the doorway, stood for one moment agape; the next, ignorant of the full purport of his own words—ignorant that though man may come westwards he may yet bring his worship with

him—ignorant that to make the Dream the Reality and the Reality the Dream is Heaven's dreadfulest favour—and ignorant that, that Edge once crossed, there is no return to the sanity and sweetness and light that are only seen clearly in the moment when they are lost for ever—he had dashed down the stairs crying in a voice hoarse and high with terror:

“She's mad! She's mad!”