

# Hic Jacet

A Tale of Artistic Conscience

By Oliver Onions

## INTRODUCTION

As I lighted my guests down the stairs of my Chelsea lodgings, turned up the hall gas that they might see the steps at the front door, and shook hands with them, I bade them good night the more heartily that I was glad to see their backs. Lest this should seem but an inhospitable confession, let me state, first, that they had invited themselves, dropping in in ones and twos until seven or eight of them had assembled in my garret, and, secondly, that I was rather extraordinarily curious to know why, at close on midnight, the one I knew least well of all had seen fit to remain after the others had taken their departure. To these two considerations I must add a third, namely, that I had become tardily conscious that, if Andriaovsky had not lingered of himself, I should certainly have asked him to do so.

It was to nothing more than a glance, swift and momentary, directed by Andriaovsky to myself while the others had talked, that I traced this desire to see more of the little Polish painter; but a glance derives its import from the circumstance under which it is given. That rapid turning of his eyes in my direction an hour before had held a hundred questions, implications, criticisms, incredulities, condemnations. It had been one of those uncovenanted gestures that hold the promise of the treasures of an eternal friendship. I wondered as I turned down the gas again and remounted the stairs what personal message and reproach in it had lumped me in with the others; and by the time I had reached my own door again a phrase had fitted itself in my mind to that quick, ironical turning of Andriaovsky's eyes:

*"Et tu, Brute! . . ."*

He was standing where I had left him, his small shabby figure in the attitude of a diminutive colossus on my hearthrug. About him were the recently vacated chairs, solemnly and ridiculously suggestive of still continuing the high and choice conversation that had lately finished. The same fancy had evidently taken Andriaovsky, for he was turning from chair to chair, his head a little on one side, mischievously and aggravatingly smiling. As one of them, the deep wicker chair that Jamison had occupied, suddenly gave a little creak of itself, as wicker will when released from a strain, his smile broadened to a grin. I had been on the point of sitting down in that chair, but I changed my mind and took another.

"That's right," said Andriaovsky, in that wonderful English which he had picked up in less than three years, "don't sit in the wisdom-seat; you might profane it."

I knew what he meant. I felt for my pipe and slowly filled it, not replying. Then, slowly wagging his head from side to side, with his eyes humorously and banteringly on mine, he uttered the very words I had mentally associated with that glance of his.

*"Et tu, Brute!"* he said, wagging away, so that with each wag the lenses of his spectacles caught the light of the lamp on the table.

I too smiled as I felt for a match.

"It *was* rather much, wasn't it?" I said.

But he suddenly stopped his wagging, and held up a not very clean forefinger. His whole face was altogether too confoundedly intelligent.

“Oh no, you don’t!” he said peremptorily. “No getting out of it like that the moment they’ve turned their backs! No running—what is it?—no running with the hare and hunting with the hounds! *You* helped, you know!”

I confess I fidgeted a little.

“But hang it all, what could I do? They were in my place,” I broke out.

He chuckled, enjoying my discomfiture. Then his eyes fell on those absurd and solemn chairs again.

“Look at ’em—the Art Shades in conference!” he chuckled. “That rush-seated one, it was talking half an hour ago about ‘Scherzos in Silver and Grey!’ . . . Nice, fresh green stuff!”

To shut him up I told him that he would find cigarettes and tobacco on the table.

“ ‘Scherzos in Silver and Grey!’ ” he chuckled again as he took a cigarette. . . .

All this, perhaps, needs some explanation. It had been the usual thing, usual in those days, twenty years ago—smarming about Art and the Arts and so forth. They—“we,” as apparently Andriaovsky had lingered behind for the purpose of reminding me—had perhaps talked a little more soaringly than the ordinary, that was all. There had been Jamison in the wicker chair, full to the lips and running over with the Colour Suggestions of the late Edward Calvert; Gibbs, in a pulpy state of adoration of the less legitimate side of the painting of Watts; and Magnani, who had advanced that an Essential Oneness underlies all the Arts, and had triumphantly proved his thesis by analogy with the Law of the Co-relation of Forces. A book called *Music and Morals* had appeared about that time, and on it they—we—had risen to regions of kite-high lunacy about Colour Symphonies, orgies of formless colour thrown on a magic-lantern screen—*vieux jeu* enough at this time of day. A young newspaper man, too, had made mental notes of our adjectives, for use in his weekly (I nearly spelt it “weakly”) half-column of Art Criticism; and— and here was Andriaovsky, grinning at the chairs, and mimicking it all with diabolical glee.

“ ‘Scherzos in Silver and Grey’—‘Word Pastels’—‘Lyrics in Stone!’ ” he chuckled. “And what was it the fat fellow said? ‘A Siren Song in Marble!’ Phew! . . . Well, I’ll get along. I shall just be in time to get a pint of bitter to wash it all down if I’m quick . . . Bah!” he broke out suddenly. “Good men build up Form and Forms—keep the Arts each after its kind—raise up the dikes so that we shan’t all be swept away by night and nothingness—and these rats come nosing and burrowing and undermining it all! . . . *Et tu, Brute!*”

“Well, when you’ve finished rubbing it in—” I grunted.

“As if *you* didn’t know better! . . . Is that your way of getting back on ’em, now that you’ve chucked drawing and gone in for writing books? Phew! . . . Well, I’ll go and get my pint of beer—”

But he didn’t go for his pint of beer. Instead, he began to prowl about my room, pryingly, nosingly, touching things here and there. I watched him as he passed from one thing to another. He was very little, and very, very shabby. His trousers were frayed, and the sole of one of his boots flapped distressingly. His old bowler hat—he had not thought it necessary to wait until he got outside before thrusting it on the back of his head—was so limp in substance that I verily believed that had he run incautiously downstairs he would have found when he got to the bottom that its crown had sunk in of its own weight. In spite of his remark about the pint of beer, I doubt if he had the price of one in his pocket.

“What’s this, Brutus—a concertina?” he suddenly asked, stopping before the collapsible case in which I kept my rather old dress suit.

I told him what it was, and he hoisted up his shoulders.

“And these things?” he asked, moving to something else.

They were a pair of boot-trees of which I had permitted myself the economy. I remember they cost me four shillings in the old Brompton Road.

“And that’s your bath, I suppose. . . . Dumb-bells too. . . . And—oh, *good Lord!* . . .”

He had picked up, and dropped again as if it had been hot, somebody or other’s card with the date of a “day” written across the corner of it. . . .

As I helped him on with his overcoat he made no secret of the condition of its armholes and lining. I don’t for one moment suppose that the garment was his. I took a candle to light him down as soon as it should please him to depart.

“Well, so long, and joy to you on the high road to success,” he said with another grin for which I could have bundled him down the stairs. . . .

In later days I never looked to Andriaovsky for tact; but I stared at him for his lack of it that night. And as I stared I noticed for the first time the broad and low pylon of his forehead, his handsome mouth and chin, and the fire and wit and scorn that smouldered behind his cheap spectacles. I looked again; and his smallness, his malice, his pathetic little braggings about his poverty, seemed all to disappear. He had strolled back to my hearthrug, wishing, I have no doubt now, to be able to exclaim suddenly that it was too late for the pint of beer for which he hadn’t the money, and to curse his luck; and the pigmy quality of his colossusship had somehow gone.

As I watched him, a neighbouring clock struck the half-hour, and he did even as I had surmised—cursed the closing time of the English public-houses. . . .

I lighted him down. For one moment, under the hall gas, he almost dropped his jesting manner.

“You *do* know better, Harrison, you know,” he said. “But, of course, you’re going to be a famous author in almost no time. Oh, *ca se voit!* No garrets for *you!* It was a treat the way you handled those fellows—really. . . . Well don’t forget us others when you’re up there—I may want you to write my ‘Life’ some day. . . .”

I heard the slapping of the loose sole as he shuffled down the path. At the gate he turned for a moment.

“Good night, Brutus,” he called.

When I had mounted to my garret again my eyes fell once more on that ridiculous assemblage of empty chairs, all solemnly talking to one another. I burst out into a laugh. Then I undressed, put my jacket on the hanger, took the morrow’s boots from the trees and treed those I had removed, changed the pair of trousers under my mattress, and went, still laughing at the chairs, to bed.

This was Michael Andriaovsky, the Polish painter, who died four weeks ago.

## I

I knew the reason of Maschka’s visit the moment she was announced. Even in the stressful moments of the funeral she had found time to whisper to me that she hoped to call upon me at an early date. I dismissed the amanuensis to whom I was dictating the last story of the fourth series of *Martin Renard*, gave a few hasty instructions to my secretary, and told the servant to show Miss Andriaovsky into the drawing-room, to ask her to be so good as to excuse me for five minutes, to order tea at once, and then to bring my visitor up to the library.

A few minutes later she was shown into the room. She was dressed in the same plainly cut costume of dead black she had worn at the funeral, and had pushed up her heavy veil over the close-fitting cap of black fur that accentuated her Slavonic appearance. I noticed again with

distress the pallor of her face and the bisted rings that weeks of nursing had put under her dark eyes. I noticed also her resemblance, in feature and stature, to her brother. I placed a chair for her; the tea-tray followed her in; and without more than a murmured greeting she peeled off her gloves and prepared to preside at the tray.

She had filled the cups, and I had handed her toast, before she spoke. Then:

“I suppose you know what I’ve come about,” she said.

I nodded.

“Long, long ago you promised it. Nobody else can do it. The only question is ‘when.’ ”

“That’s the only question,” I agreed.

“We, naturally,” she continued, after a glance in which her eyes mutely thanked me for my implied promise, “are anxious that it should be as soon as possible; but, of course—I shall quite understand—”

She gave a momentary glance round my library. I helped her out.

“You mean that I’m a very important person nowadays, and that you’re afraid to trespass on my time. Never mind that. I shall find time for this. But tell me before we go any further exactly how you stand and precisely what it is you expect.”

Briefly she did so. It did not in the least surprise me to learn that her brother had died penniless.

“And if you hadn’t undertaken the ‘Life,’ ” she said, “he might just as well not have worked in poverty all these years. You can, at least, see to his fame.”

I nodded again gravely, and ruminated for a moment. Then I spoke.

“I can write it, fully and in detail, up to five years ago,” I said. “You know what happened then. I tried my best to help him, but he never would let me. Tell me, Maschka, why he wouldn’t sell me that portrait.”

I knew instantly, from her quick confusion, that her brother had spoken to her about the portrait he had refused to sell me, and had probably told her the reason for his refusal. I watched her as she evaded the question as well as she could.

“You know how—queer—he was about who he sold his things to. And as for those five years in which you saw less of him, Schofield will tell you all you want to know.”

I relinquished the point. “Who’s Schofield?” I asked instead.

“He was a very good friend of Michael’s—of both of us. You can talk quite freely to him. I want to say at the beginning that I should like him to be associated with you in this.”

I don’t know how I divined on the spot her relation to Schofield, whoever he was. She told me that he too was a painter.

“Michael thought very highly of his things,” she said.

“I don’t know them,” I replied.

“You probably wouldn’t,” she returned. . . . But I caught the quick drop of her eyes from their brief excursion round my library, and I felt something within me stiffen a little. It did not need Maschka Andriaovsky to remind me that I had not attained my position without—let us say—splitting certain differences; the looseness of the expression can be corrected hereafter. Life consists very largely of compromises. You doubtless know my name, whichever country or hemisphere you happen to live in, as that of the creator of *Martin Renard*, the famous and popular detective; and I was not at that moment disposed to apologise, either to Maschka or Schofield or anybody else, for having written the stories at the bidding of a gaping public. The moment the public showed that it wanted something better I was prepared to give it. In the

meantime, I sat in my very comfortable library, securely shielded from distress by my balance at my banker's.

"Well," I said after a moment, "let's see how we stand. And first as to what you're likely to get out of this. It goes without saying, of course, that by writing the 'Life' I can get you any amount of 'fame'—advertisement, newspaper talk, and all the things that, it struck me, Michael always treated with especial scorn. My name alone, I say, will do that. But for anything else I'm by no means so sure. You see," I explained, "it doesn't follow that because I can sell hundreds of thousands of. . . you know what . . . that I can sell anything I've a mind to sign."

I said it, confident that she had not lived all those years with her brother without having learned the axiomatic nature of it. To my discomfiture, she began to talk like a callow student.

"I should have thought that it followed that if you could sell something—" she hesitated only for a moment, then courageously gave the other stuff its proper adjective, "—something rotten, you could have sold something good when you had the chance."

"Then if you thought that you were wrong," I replied briefly and concisely.

"Michael couldn't, of course," she said, putting Michael out of the question with a little wave of her hand, "because Michael was—I mean, Michael wasn't a business man. You are."

"I'm speaking as one," I replied. "I don't waste time in giving people what they don't want. That *is* business. I don't undertake your brother's 'Life' as a matter of business, but as an inestimable privilege. I repeat, it doesn't follow that the public will buy it."

"But—but—" she stammered, "the public will buy a *Pill* if they see your name on the testimonial!"

"A Pill—yes," I said sadly. . . . Genius and a Pill were, alas, different things. "But," I added more cheerfully, "you can never tell what the public will do. They *might* buy it—there's no telling except by trying—"

"Well, Schofield thinks they will," she informed me with decision.

"I dare say he does, if he's an artist. They mostly do," I replied.

"He doesn't think Michael will ever be popular," she emphasised the adjective slightly, "but he does think he has a considerable following if they could only be discovered."

I sighed. All artists think that. They will accept any compromise except the one that is offered to them. . . . I tried to explain to Maschka that in this world we have to stand to the chances of all or nothing.

"You've got to be one thing or the other—I don't know that it matters very much which," I said. "There's Michael's way, and there's mine. That's all. However, we'll try it. All you can say to me, and more, I'll say to a publisher for you. But he'll probably wink at me."

For a moment she was silent. Then she said:

"Schofield rather fancies one publisher."

"Oh? Who's he?" I asked.

She mentioned a name. If I knew anything at all of business she might as well have offered *The Life of Michael Andriaovsky* to The Religious Tract Society at once. . . .

"Hm! . . . And has Mr. Schofield any other suggestions?" I inquired.

He had. Several. I saw that Schofield's position would have to be defined before we went any further.

"Hm!" I said again. "Well, I shall have to rely on Schofield for those five years in which I saw little of Michael; but unless Schofield knows more of publishing than I do, and can enforce a better contract and a larger sum on account than I can, I really think, Maschka, that you'll do better to leave things to me. For one thing, it's only fair to me. My name hasn't much of an

artistic value nowadays, but it has a very considerable commercial one, and my worth to publishers isn't as a writer of the Lives of Geniuses."

I could see she didn't like it; but that couldn't be helped. It had to be so. Then, as we sat for a time in silence over the fire, I noticed again how like her brother she was. She was not, it was true, much like him as he had been on that last visit of mine to him . . . and I sighed as I remembered that visit. The dreadful scene had come back to me. . . .

On account, I suppose, of the divergence of our paths, I had not even heard of his illness until almost the finish. Immediately I had hastened to the Hampstead "Home," only to find him already in the agony. He had not been too far gone to recognise me, however, for he had muttered something brokenly about "knowing better," that a spasm had interrupted. Besides myself, only Maschka had been there; and I had been thankful for the summons that had called her for a moment out of the room. I had still retained his already cold hand; his brow had worked with that dreadful struggle; and his eyes had been closed.

But suddenly he had opened them, and the next moment had sat up on his pillow. He had striven to draw his hand from mine.

"Who are you?" he had suddenly demanded, not knowing me.

I had come close to him. "You know me, Andriaovsky—Harrison?" I had asked sorrowfully.

I had been on the point of repeating my name but suddenly, after holding my eyes for a moment with a look the profundity and familiarity of which I cannot express, he had broken into the most ghastly haunting laugh I have ever heard.

"Harrison?" the words had broken throatily from him. . . . "*Oh yes; I know you! . . . You shall very soon know that I know you if . . . if . . .*"

The cough and rattle had come as Maschka had rushed into the room. In ten seconds Andriaovsky had fallen back, dead.

## II

That same evening I began to make notes for Andriaovsky's "Life." On the following day, the last of the fourth series of the *Martin Renards* occupied me until I was thankful to get to bed. But thereafter I could call rather more of my time my own, and I began in good earnest to devote myself to the "Life."

Maschka had spoken no more than the truth when she had said that of all men living none but I could write that "Life." His remaining behind in my Chelsea garret that evening after the others had left had been the beginning of a friendship that, barring that lapse of five years at the end, had been for twenty years one of completest intimacy. Whatever money there might or might not be in the book, I had seen *my* opportunity in it—the opportunity to make it the vehicle for all the aspirations, faiths, enthusiasms, and exaltations we had shared; and I myself did not realise until I began to note them down one tithe of the subtle links and associations that had welded our souls together.

Even the outward and visible signs of these had been wonderful. Setting out from one or other of the score of garrets and cheap lodgings we had in our time inhabited, we had wandered together, day after day, night after night, far down East, where, as we had threaded our way among the barrels of soused herrings and the stalls and barrows of unleavened bread, he had taught me scraps of Hebrew and Polish and Yiddish; up into the bright West, where he could never walk a quarter of a mile without meeting one of his extraordinary acquaintances—furred music-hall managers, hawkers of bootlaces, commercial magnates of his own Faith, touts,

crossing-sweepers, painted women; into Soho, where he had names for the very horses on the cab-ranks and the dogs who slumbered under the counters of the sellers of French literature; out to the naphtha-lights and cries of the Saturday night street markets of Islington and the North End Road; into City churches on wintry afternoons, into the studios of famous artists full of handsomely dressed women, into the studios of artists not famous, at the ends of dark and break-neck corridors; to tea at the suburban homes of barmaids and chorus girls, to dinner in the stables of a cavalry-barracks, to supper in cabmen's shelters. He was possessed in some mysterious way of the passwords to doors in hoardings behind which excavations were in progress; he knew by name the butchers of the Deptford yards, the men in the blood-caked clothes, so inured to blood that they may not with safety to their lives swear at one another; he took me into an opium-cellar within a stone's-throw of Oxford Street, and into a roof-chamber to call upon certain friends of his . . . well, they *said* they were fire extinguishers, so I'd better not say they were bombs. Up, down; here, there; good report, but more frequently evil . . . we had known this side of our London as well as two men may. And our other adventures and peregrinations, not of the body, but of the spirit . . . but these must be spoken of in their proper place.

I had arranged with Maschka that Schofield should bring me the whole of the work Andriaovsky had left behind him; and he arrived late one afternoon in a fourwheeler, with four great packages done up in brown paper. I found him to be a big, shaggy-browed, red-haired, raw-boned Lancashire man of five-and-thirty, given to confidential demonstrations at the length of a button-shank, quite unconscious of the gulf between his words and his right to employ them, and bent on asserting an equality that I did not dispute by a rather aggressive use of my surname. Andriaovsky had appointed him his executor, and he had ever the air of suspecting that the appointment was going to be challenged.

"A'm glad to be associated with ye in this melancholy duty, Harrison," he said. "Now we won't waste worrds. Miss Andriaovsky has told me precisely how matters stand. I had, as ye know, the honour to be poor Michael's close friend for a period of five years, and my knowledge of him is entirely at your disposal."

I answered that I should be seriously handicapped without it.

"Just so. It is Miss Andriaovsky's desire that we should pull together. Now, in the firrst place, what is your idea about the form the book should take?"

"In the first place, if you don't mind," I replied, "perhaps we'd better run over together the things you've brought. The daylight will be gone soon."

"Just as ye like, Harrison," he said, "just as ye like. It's all the same to me. . . ."

I cleared a space about my writing-table at the window, and we turned to the artistic remains of Michael Andriaovsky.

I was astonished, first, at the enormous quantity of the stuff, and next at its utter and complete revelation of the man. In a flash I realised how superb that portion at least of the book was going to be. And Schofield explained that the work he had brought represented but a fraction of the whole that was at our disposal.

"Ye'll know with what foolish generosity poor Michael always gave his things away," he said. "Hallard has a grand set; so has Connolly; and from time to time he behaved varry handsomely to myself. Artists of varry considerable talents both Hallard and Connolly are; Michael thought varry highly of their abilities. They express the deepest interest in the shape your worrk will take; and that reminds me. I myself have drafted a rough scenario of the form it appeared to me the 'Life' might with advantage be cast in. A purely private opinion, ye'll understand, Harrison, which ye'll be entirely at liberty to disregard. . . ."

“Well, let’s finish with the work first,” I said.

With boards, loose sheets, scraps of paper, notes, studies, canvases stretched and stripped from their stretchers, we paved half the library floor, Schofield keeping up all the time a running fire of “Grand, grand! A masterpiece! A gem, that, Harrison!” They were all that he said, and presently I ceased to hear his voice. The splendour of the work issued undimmed even from the severe test of Schofield’s praise; and I thought again with pride how I, I, was the only man living who could adequately write that “Life.” . . .

“Aren’t they grand? Aren’t they great?” Schofield chanted monotonously.

“They are,” I replied, coming to a consciousness of his presence again. “But what’s that?”

Secretively he had kept one package until the last. He now removed its wrappings and set it against a chair.

“*There!*” he cried. “I’ll thank ye, Harrison, for your opinion of *that!*”

It was the portrait Andriaovsky had refused to sell me—a portrait of himself.

The portrait was the climax of the display. The Lancastrian still talked; but I, profoundly moved, mechanically gathered up the drawings from the floor and returned them to their proper packages and folios. I was dining at home, alone, that evening, and for form’s sake I asked this faithful dog of Andriaovsky’s to share my meal; but he excused himself—he was dining with Hallard and Connolly. When the drawings were all put away, all save that portrait, he gave an inquisitive glance round my library. It was the same glance as Maschka had given when she had feared to intrude on my time; but Schofield did these things with a much more heavy hand. He departed, but not before telling me that even my mansion contained such treasures as it had never held before.

That evening, after glancing at Schofield’s I carefully folded it up again for return to him, lest when the book should appear he should miss the pleasure of saying that I had had his guidance but had disregarded it; then I sat down at my writing-table and took out the loose notes I had made. I made other jottings, each on a blank sheet for subsequent amplification; and the sheets overspread the large leather-topped table and thrust one another up the standard of the incandescent with the pearly silk shade. The firelight shone low and richly in the dusky spaces of the large apartment; and the thick carpet and the double doors made the place so quiet that I could hear my watch ticking in my pocket.

I worked for an hour; and then, for the purpose of making yet other notes, I rose, crossed the room, and took down the three or four illustrated books to which, in the earlier part of his career, Andriaovsky had put his name. I carried them to the table, and twinkled as I opened the first of them. It was a book of poems, and in making the designs for them Andriaovsky had certainly *not* found for himself. Almost any one of the “Art Shades,” as he had called them, could have done the thing equally well, and I twinkled again. I did not propose to have much mercy on *that*. Already Schofield’s words had given birth to a suspicion in my mind—that Andriaovsky, in permitting these fellows, Hallard, Connolly, and the rest, to suppose that he “thought highly” of them and their work, had been giving play to that malicious humour of his; and they naturally did not see the joke. That joke, too, was between himself, dead, and me, preparing to write his “Life.” As if he had been there to hear me, I chuckled, and spoke in a low voice.

“You were pulling their legs, Michael, you know. A little rough on them you were. But there’s a book here of yours that I’m going to tell the truth about. You and I won’t pretend to one another. It’s a rotten book, and both you and I know it. . . .”

I don’t know what it was that caused me suddenly to see just then something that I had been looking at long enough without seeing—that portrait of himself that I had set leaning against the

back of a chair at the end of my writing-table. It stood there, just within the soft penumbra of shadow cast by the silk-shaded light. The canvas had been enlarged, the seam of it clumsily sewn by Andriaovsky's own hand; but in that half-light the rough ridge of paint did not show, and I confess that the position and effect of the thing startled me for a moment. Had I cared to play a trick with my fancy I could have imagined the head wagging from side to side, with such rage and fire was it painted. He had had the temerity to dash a reflection across one of the glasses of his spectacles, concealing the eye behind it. The next moment I had given a short laugh.

"So you're there, are you? . . . Well, I know you agree very heartily about that book of poems. Heigho! If I remember rightly, you made more money out of that book than out of the others put together. But I'm going to tell the truth about it. *I* know better, you know. . . ."

Chancing, before I turned in that night, to reopen one of his folios, I came across a drawing, there by accident, I don't doubt, that confirmed me in my suspicion that Andriaovsky had had his quiet joke with Schofield, Hallard, Connolly and Co. It was a sketch of Schofield's, imitative, deplorable, a dreadful show-up of incapacity. Well enough "drawn," in a sense, it was . . . and I remembered how Andriaovsky had ever urged that "drawing," of itself, did not exist. I winked at the portrait. I saw his point. He himself had no peer, and, rather than invite comparison with stars of the second magnitude, he chose his intimates from among the peddlers of the wares that had the least possible connection with his Art. He, too, had understood that the Compromise must be entirely accepted or totally refused; and while, in the divergence of our paths, he had done the one thing and I the other, we had each done it thoroughly, with vigour, and with persistence, and each could esteem the other, if not as a co-worker, at least as an honourable and out-and-out opposite.

### III

Within a fortnight I was so deep in my task that, in the realest sense, the greater part of my life was in the past. The significance of those extraordinary peregrinations of ours had been in the opportunity they had afforded for a communion of brain and spirit of unusual rarity; and all this determined to my work with the accumulated force of its long penning-up. I have spoken of Andriaovsky's contempt for such as had the conception of their work that it was something they "did" as distinct from something they "were"; and unless I succeed in making it plain that, not as a mere figure of speech and loose hyperbole, but starkly and literally, Andriaovsky *was* everything he did, my tale will be pointless.

There was not one of the basic facts of life—of Faith, Honour, Truth-speaking, Falsehood, Betrayal, Sin—that he did not turn, not to moral interpretations, as others do, but to the holy purposes of his noble and passionate Art. For any man, Sin is only mortal when it is Sin against that which he knows to be immortally true; and the things Andriaovsky knew to be immortally true were the things that he had gone down into the depths in order to bring forth and place upon his paper or canvas. These things are not for the perusal of many. Unless you love the things that he loved with a fervour comparable in kind, if not in degree, with his own, you may not come near them. "Truth, 'the highest thing a man may keep,'" he said, "cannot be brought down; a man only attains it by proving his right to it", and I think I need not further state his views on the democratisation of Art. Of any result from the elaborate processes of Art-education he held out no hope whatever. "It is in a man, or it isn't," he ever declared; "if it is, he must bring it out for himself; if it isn't, let him turn to something useful and have done with it." I need not press the point that in these things he was almost a solitary.

He made of these general despotic principles the fiercest personal applications. I have heard his passionate outbreak of "Thief! Liar! Fool!" over a drawing when it has seemed to him that a man has not vouched with the safety of his immortal soul for the shapes and lines he has committed to it. I have seen him get into such a rage with the eyes of the artist upon him. I have heard the ice and vinegar of his words when a good man, for money, has consented to modify and emasculate his work; and there lingers in my memory his side of a telephone conversation in which he told a publisher who had suggested that he should do the same thing precisely what he thought of him. And on the other hand, he once walked from Aldgate to Putney Hill, with a loose heel on one of his boots, to see a man of whom he had seen but a single drawing. See him he did, too, in spite of the man's footman, his livened parlour-maid, and the daunting effect of the electric brougham at the door.

"He's a good man," he said to me afterwards, ruefully looking at the place where his boot-heel had been. "You've got to take your good where you find it. I don't care whether he's a rich amateur or skin-and-grief in a garret as long as he's got the stuff in him. Nobody else could have fetched me up from the East End this afternoon. . . . So long; see you in a week or so—"

This was the only time I ever knew him break that sacred time in which he celebrated each year the Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. I doubt whether this observance of the ritual of his Faith was of more essential importance to him than that other philosophical religion towards which he sometimes leaned. I have said what his real religion was.

But to the "Life."

With these things, and others, as a beginning, I began to add page to page, phase to phase; and, in a time the shortness of which astonished myself, I had pretty well covered the whole of the first ten years of our friendship. Maschka called rather less, and Schofield rather more frequently, than I could have wished; and my surmise that he, at least, was in love with her, quickly became a certainty. This was to be seen when they called together.

It was when they came together that something else also became apparent. This was their slightly derisive attitude towards the means by which I had attained my success. It was not the less noticeable that it took the form of compliments on the outward and visible results. Singly I could manage them; together they were inclined to get a little out of hand.

I would have taxed them fairly and squarely with this, singly or together, but for one thing—the beautiful ease with which the "Life" was proceeding. Never had I felt so completely *en rapport* with my subject. So beautifully was the thing running that I had had the idle fancy of some actual urge from Andriaovsky himself; and each night, before sitting down to work, I set his portrait at my desk's end, as if it had been some kind of an observance. The most beautiful result of all was, that I felt what I had not felt for five years—that I too was not "doing" my work, but actually living and being it. At times I took up the sheets I had written as ignorant of their contents as if they had proceeded from another pen—so freshly they came to me. And once, I vow, I found, in my own handwriting, a Polish name, that I might (it is true) have subconsciously heard at some time or other, but that stirred no chord in my memory even when I saw it written. Maschka checked and confirmed it afterwards; and I did not tell her by what odd circumstance it had issued from my pen.

The day did come, however, when I found I must have it out with Schofield about this superciliousness I have mentioned. The *Falchion* had just begun to print the third series of my *Martin Renard*; and this had been made the occasion of another of Schofield's ponderous compliments. I acknowledged it with none too much graciousness; and then he said:

“I’ve na doubt, Harrison, that by this time the famous sleuth-hound of crime has become quite a creature of flesh and blood to ye.”

It was the tone as much as the words that riled me; and I replied that his doubts or the lack of them were a privacy with which I did not wish to meddle. From being merely a bore the fellow was rapidly becoming insolent.

“But I opine he’ll get wearisome now and then, and in that case poor Michael’s ‘Life’ will come as a grand relaxation,” he next observed.

If I meant to have it out, here was my opportunity.

“I should have thought you’d have traced a closer connection than that between the two things,” I remarked.

He shot a quick glance at me from beneath his shaggy russet brows.

“How so? I see varry little connection,” he said suspiciously.

“There’s this connection—that while you speak with some freedom of what I do, you are quite willing to take advantage of it when it serves your turn.”

“‘Advantage,’ Harrison?” he said slowly.

“Of the advertisement *Martin Renard* gives you. I must point out that you condone a thing when you accept the benefit of it. Either you shouldn’t have come to me at all, or you should deny yourself the gratification of these slurs.”

“Slurrrrs?” he repeated loweringly.

“Both of you—you and Miss Andriaovsky, or Maschka as I call her, *tout court*. Don’t suppose I don’t know as well as you do the exact worth of my ‘sleuth-hound,’ as you call him. You didn’t come to me solely because I knew Andriaovsky well; you came because I’ve got the ear of the public also; and I tell you plainly that, however much you dislike it, Michael’s fame as far as I’m of any use to him, depends on the popularity of *Martin Renard*.”

He shook his big head. “This is what I feared,” he said.

“More,” I continued, “you can depend upon it that Michael, wherever he is, knows all about that.”

“Ay, ay,” he said sagely, “I misdoubt your own artistic soul’s only to be saved by the writing of poor Michael’s ‘Life,’ Harrison.”

“Leave that to me and Michael; we’ll settle that. In the meantime, if you don’t like it, write and publish the ‘Life’ yourself.”

He bent his brows on me.

“It’s precisely what I wanted to do from the varry first,” he said. “If you’d cared to accept my symposium in the spirit in which it was offered, I cannot see that the ‘Life’ would have suffered. But now, when you’re next in need of my services, ye’ll mebbe send for me.”

He took up his hat. I assured him, and let him take it in what sense he liked, that I would do so; and he left me.

Not for one single moment did I intend that they should bounce me like that. With or without their sanction and countenance, I intended to write and publish that “Life.” Schofield—in my own house too—had had the advantage that a poor and ill-dressed man has over one who is not poor and ill-dressed; but my duty first of all was neither to him nor to Maschka, but to my friend.

The worst of it was, however, that I had begun dimly to suspect that the Lancastrian had hit at least one nail on the head. “Your artistic soul’s only to be saved by writing poor Michael’s ‘Life,’ ” he had informed me . . . and it was truer than I found it pleasant to believe. Perhaps, after all, my first duty was not to Andriaovsky, but to myself. I could have kicked myself that the

fool had been perspicacious enough to see it, but that did not alter the fact. I saw that in the sense in which Andriaovsky understood Sin, I had sinned. . . .

My only defence lay in the magnitude of my sin. I had sinned thoroughly, out-and-out, and with a will. It had been the only respectable way—Andriaovsky's own way when he had cut the company of an Academician to hobnob with a vagabond. I had at least instituted no comparison, lowered no ideal, was innocent of the accursed attitude of facing-both-ways that degrades all lovely and moving things. I was, by a paradox, too black a sinner not to hope for redemption. . . .

I fell into a long musing on these things. . . .

Had any of the admirers of *Martin Renard* entered the library of his author that night he would have seen an interesting thing. He would have seen the creator of that idol of clerks and messenger-lads and fourth-form boys frankly putting the case before a portrait propped up on a chair. He would have heard that popular author haranguing, pleading, curiously on his defence, turning the thing this way and that.

"If *you'd* gone over, Michael," that author argued, "you'd have done precisely the same thing. If *I'd* stuck it out, we were, after all, of a kind:

We've got to be one thing or the other—isn't that so, Andriaovsky? Since I made up my mind, I've faced only one way—only one way. I've kept your ideal and theirs entirely separate and distinct. Not one single beautiful phrase will you find in the *Martin Renards*; I've cut 'em out, every one. I may have ceased to worship, but I've profaned no temple. . . . And think what I *might* have done—what they all do! They deal out the slush, but with an apologetic glance at the Art Shades; *you* know the style I—'Oh, Harrison; he does that detective rubbish, but that's not Harrison; if Harrison liked to drop that he could be a fine artist!'—I *haven't* done that. I *haven't* run with the hare and hunted with the hounds. I am just Harrison, who does that detective rubbish! . . . These other chaps, Schofield and Connolly, *they're* the real sinners, Michael—the fellows who can't make up their minds to be one thing or the other ('artists of considerable abilities'—ha! ha!). . . . Of course you know Maschka's going to marry that chap? What'll *they* do, do you think? He'll scrape up a few pounds out of the stew where I find thousands, marry her, and they'll set up a *salon* and talk the stuff the chairs talked that night, you remember! . . . But you wait until I finish your 'Life.' . . ."

I laid it all before him, almost as if I sought to propitiate him. I might have been courting his patronage for his own "Life." Then, with a start, I came to, to find myself talking nonsense to the portrait that years before Andriaovsky had refused to sell me.

#### IV

The first check I experienced in the hitherto so easy flow of the "Life" came at the chapter that dealt with Andriaovsky's attitude towards "professionalism" in Art. He was inflexible on this point; there ought not to be professional artists. When it was pointed out that his position involved a premium upon the rich amateur, he merely replied that riches had nothing to do with the question, and that the starver in the garret was not excused for his poverty's sake from the observance of the implacable conditions. He spoke literally of the "need" to create, usually in the French term, *besogne*; and he was inclined to regard the imposition of this need on a man rather as a curse laid upon him than as a privilege and a pleasure. But I must not enlarge upon this further than to observe that this portion of his "Life" which I was approaching coincided in point of time with that period of my own life at which I had been confronted with the alternative of starving for Art's sake or becoming rich by supplying a clamorous trade demand.

It came, this check I have spoken of, one night, as I was in the very middle of a sentence; and though I have cudgelled my brains in seeking how best I can describe it, I am reduced to the simple statement that it was as arresting, as sharp, actual and impossible to resist, as if my hand had been seized and pinned down in its passage across the paper. I can even see again the fragment of the sentence I had written “. . . and the mere contemplation of a betrayal so essential—” Then came that abrupt and remarkable stop. It was such an experience as I had formerly known only in nightmare.

I sat there looking blankly and stupidly at my own hand. And not only was my hand arrested, but my brain also had completely ceased to work. For the life of me I could not recall the conclusion of the sentence I had planned a moment before.

I looked at my hand, and looked again; and as I looked I remembered something I had been reading only a few days before—a profoundly unsettling description of an experiment in auto-suggestion. The experiment had consisted of the placing of a hand upon a table, and the laying upon it the conjuration that, the Will notwithstanding, it should not move. And as I watched my own hand, pale on the paper in the pearly light, I knew that, by some consent to the nullification of the Will that did not proceed from the Self I was accustomed to regard as my own, that injunction was already placed upon it. My conscious and deliberate Will was powerless. I could only sit there and wait until whatever inhibition had arrested my writing hand should permit it to move forward again.

It must have been several minutes before such a tingling of the nerves as announces that the blood is once more returning to a cramped member warned me that I was about to be released. Warily I awaited my moment; then I plucked my hand to myself again with a suddenness that caused a little blot of ink to spurt from my fountain-pen on to the surface of the paper. I drew a deep breath. I was free again. And with the freedom came a resolve—that whatever portion of myself had been responsible for this prank should not repeat it if I could possibly prevent it.

But scarcely had I come, as I may say (and not without a little gush of alarm now that it was over), to myself, when I was struck by a thought. It was a queer wild sort of thought. It fetched me out of my chair and set me striding across the library to a lower shelf in the farthest corner. This shelf was the shelf on which I kept my letter-files. I stooped and ran my fingers along the backs of the dusty row. I drew out the file for 1900, and brought it back to my writing-table. My contracts, I ought to say, reposed in a deed-box at my agent's office; but my files contained, in the form of my agent's letters, a sufficient record of my business transactions.

I opened the file concertina-wise, and turned to the section lettered “R.” I drew out the correspondence that related to the sale of the first series of the *Martin Renards*. As I did so I glanced at the movable calendar on my table. The date was January 20th.

The file contained no letters for January of any significance whatever.

The thought that had half formed in my brain immediately became nonsense. I replaced the letters in their compartment, and took the file back to its shelf again. For some minutes I paced the library irresolutely; then I decided I would work no more that night. When I gathered together my papers I was careful to place that with the half-finished sentence on the top, so that with the first resting of my eyes upon it on the morrow my memory might haply be refreshed.

I tried again to finish that sentence on the morrow. With certain modifications that I need not particularise here, my experience was the same as on the previous night.

It was the same when I made the attempt on the day after that.

At ten o'clock of the night of the fourth day I completed the sentence without difficulty. I just sat down in my chair and wrote it.

With equal ease I finished the chapter on professional artists.

It was not likely that Schofield would have refrained from telling Maschka of our little difference on our last meeting; and within a week of the date I have just mentioned I learned that she knew all about it. And, as the circumstances of my learning this were in a high degree unusual, I will relate them with such clearness as I am able.

I ought first to say, however, that the selection of the drawings that were to illustrate the book having been made (the drawings for which my own text was to serve as commentary would be the better expression), the superintendence of their production had been left to Schofield. He, Maschka, and I passed the proofs in consultation. The blocks were almost ready; and the reason for their call that evening was to consider the possibility of having all ready for production in the early spring—a possibility which was contingent on the state of advancement of my own share of the book.

That evening I had experienced my second check. (I omit these that had immediately succeeded the first one, as resembling that one so closely in the manner of their coming.) It had not come by any means so completely and definitively as the former one, but it had sufficed to make my progress, both mentally and mechanically, so sluggish and struggling a performance that for the time being I had given up the attempt, and was once more regarding with a sort of perturbed stupor my hand that held the pen. Andriaovsky's portrait stood in its usual place, on the chair at the end of my writing-table; but I had eyes for nothing but that refractory hand of mine.

Now it is true that during the past weeks I had studied Andriaovsky's portrait thoroughly enough to be able to call up the vivid mental image of it at will; but that did not entirely account for the changed aspect with which it now presented itself to that uncomprehended sense within us that makes of these shadows such startling realities. Flashing and life-like as was the presentation on the canvas (mind you, I was not looking at it, but all the time at my own hand), it was dead paint by comparison with that *mental image* which I saw (if I may so use a term of which custom has restricted the meaning to one kind of seeing) as plainly as I ever saw Andriaovsky in his life. I know now that it was by virtue of that essential essence that bound us heart and brain and soul together that I so saw him, eyes glittering, head sardonically wagging, fine mouth shaping phrases of insight and irony. And the strange thing was, that I could not have located this so living image by confining it to any portion of the space within the four walls of my library. It was before me, behind me, within my head, about me, *was me*, invading and possessing the "me" that sat at the table. At one moment the eyes mockingly invited me to go on with my work; the next, a frown had seated itself on that massive pylon of his forehead; and then suddenly his countenance changed entirely. . . . A wave of horror broke over me. He was suddenly as I had seen him that last time in the Hampstead "Home"—sitting up on his pillow, looking into my eyes with that terrible look of profundity and familiarity, and asking me who I was. . . . "*Harrison—ha ha! . . . You shall very soon know that I know you, if . . .*"

It is but by the accident of our limited experience that sounds are loud or soft to that inner ear of us; these words were at one and the same time a dreadful thunder and a voice interstellarly inaccessible and withdrawn. They, too, were before, behind, without, and within. And incorporated (I know not how else to express it) with these words were other words, in the English I knew, in the Hebrew in which he had quoted them from the sacred Books of his People, in all languages, in no language save that essential communication of which languages are but the inessential husk and medium—words that told me that though I took the Wings of the

Morning and fled into the uttermost parts of the earth, yea, though I made my bed in Hell, I could not escape him. .

He had kept his word. I *did* know that he knew who and what I was. . . .

I cannot tell whether my lips actually shaped the question that even in that moment burst from me.

“But Form—and Forms? It *is* then true that all things are but aspects of One thing? . . .”

“Yes—in death,” the voice seemed to reply.

My next words, I know, were actually spoken aloud.

“Then tell me—tell me—*do you not wish me to write it?*”

Suddenly I leapt out of my chair with a gulping cry. A voice *had* spoken. . . .

“Of course we wish you to write it. . . .”

For one instant of time my vision seemed to fold on itself like smoke; then it was gone. The face into which I was wildly staring was Maschka’s, and behind her stood Schofield. They had been announced, but I had heard nothing of it.

“Were you thinking of *not* writing it?” she demanded, while Schofield scowled at me.

“No—no——,” I stammered, as I got up and tardily placed them chairs.

Schofield did not speak, but he did not remove his eyes from me. Somehow I could not meet them.

“Well,” she said, “Jack had already told me that you seemed in two minds about it. That’s what we’ve called about—to know definitely what it is you propose to do.”

I saw that she had also called, if necessary, to quarrel. I began to recover a little.

“Did you tell her that?” I demanded of Schofield. “If you did, you—misinterpreted me.”

In my house, he ignored the fact that I was in the room. He replied to Maschka.

“I understood Mr. Harrison to say definitely, and in those words, that if I didn’t like the way in which he was writing Michael’s ‘Life,’ I might write and publish one myself,” he said.

“I did say that,” I admitted; “but I never said that whatever *you* did *I* should not go on with mine.”

“Yours!” cried Maschka. “What right have you in my brother’s ‘Life’?”

I quickly told her.

“I have the right to write my recollections of him, and, subject to certain provisions of the Law, to base anything on them I think fit,” I replied.

“But,” she cried aghast, “there can’t be *two* ‘Lives’! . . .”

“It’s news to me that two were contemplated,” I returned. “The point is, that I can get mine published, and you can’t.”

Schofield’s harsh voice sounded suddenly—but again to Maschka, not to me.

“Ye might remind Mr. Harrison that others have capabilities in business besides himself. Beyond a doubt our sales will be comparatively small, but they’ll be to such as have not made the great refusal.”

Think of it! . . . I almost laughed.

“Oh! . . . Been trying it?” I inquired.

He made no reply.

“Well, those who have made the refusal have at least had something to refuse,” I said mildly. Then, realising that this was mere quarrelling, I returned to the point. “Anyhow, there’s no question of refusing to write the ‘Life.’ I admit that during the last fortnight I’ve met with certain difficulties; but the task isn’t so easy as perhaps it looks. . . . I’m making progress.”

"I suppose," she said hesitatingly, after a pause, "that you don't care to show it as far as it is written?"

For a moment I also hesitated. I thought I saw where she was. Thanks to that Lancashire jackanapes, there was division between us; and I had pretty well made up my mind, not only that he thought himself quite capable of writing Andriaovsky's "Life," himself, but that he had actually made an attempt in that direction. They had come in the suspicion that I was throwing them over, and, though that suspicion was removed, Maschka wished, if there was any throwing over to be done, to do it herself. In a word, she wanted to compare me with Schofield.

"To see it as far as it is written," I repeated slowly. . . . "Well, you may. That is, *you*, Michael's sister, may. But on the condition that you neither show it to anybody else nor speak of it to anybody else."

"Ah!" she said. . . . "And only on those conditions?"

"Only on those conditions."

I saw a quick glance between them. "Shall we tell him?" it seemed to say. . . .

"Including the man Michael's sister is going to marry?" she said abruptly.

My attitude was deeply apologetic, but, "Including anybody whomsoever," I answered.

"Then," she said, rising, "we won't bother. But will you at least let us know, soon, when we may expect your text?"

"I will let you know," I replied slowly, "one week from to-day."

On that assurance they left; and when they had gone I crossed once more to the lower shelf that contained my letter-files. I turned up the file for 1900 once more. During their visit I had had an idea.

I ran through the letters, and then replaced them. .

Yes, I ought to be able to let them know within the week.

## V

Against the day when I myself shall come to die, there are in the pigeon-holes of the newspaper libraries certain biographical records that deal roughly with the outward facts of my life; and these, supplemented by documents I shall place in the hands of my executors, will tell the story of how I leaped at a bound into wealth and fame with the publication of *The Cases of Martin Renard*. I will set down as much of that story as has its bearing on my present tale.

*Martin Renard* was not immediately accepted by the first editor to whom it was offered. It does not suffice that in order to be popular a thing shall be merely good—or bad; it must be bad—or good—in a particular way. For taking the responsibility when they happen to miss that particular way editors are paid their salaries. When they happen to hit it they grow fat on circulation-money. Since it becomes me ill to quarrel with the way in which any man earns his money, I content myself with merely stating the fact.

By the time the fourth editor had refused my series I was about at my last gasp. To write the things at all I had had to sink four months in time; and debts, writs and pawnshops were my familiars. I was little better off than Andriaovsky at his very worst. I had read the first of the *Martin Renards* to him, by the way; the gigantic outburst of mirth with which he had received it had not encouraged me to read him a second. I wrote the others in secret.

I wrote the things in the spring and summer of 1900; and by the last day of September I was confident that I had at last sold them. Except by a flagrant breach of faith, the editor in whose desk they reposed could hardly decline them. As it subsequently happened, I have now nothing

but gratitude for him that he did, after all, decline them; for I had a duplicate copy “on offer” in another quarter.

He declined them, I say; and I was free to possess my soul again among my writs, debts and pawnshops.

But four days later I received the alternative offer. It was from the *Falchion*. “The *Falchion*, as you may remember, has since run no less than five complete series of *Martin Renards*. It bought “both sides,” that is to say, both British and American serial rights. Of the twelve *Martin Renards* I had written, my wise agent had offered the *Falchion* six only. On his advice I accepted the offer.

Instantaneously with the publication of those six stories came my success. In two continents I was “home”—home in the hearts of the public. I had my small cheque—it was not much more than a hundred pounds—but “Wait,” said my agent; “let’s see what we can do with the other six. . . .”

Precisely what he did with them only he and I know; but I don’t mind saying that £3000 did not buy my first serial rights. Then came second and third rights, and after them the book rights, British, American, and Colonial. Then came the translation rights. In French, my creation is, of course, as in English, *Martin Renard*; in German he is *Martin Fuchs*; and by a similar process you can put him—my translators have put him—into Italian, Swedish, Norwegian, Russian, and three-fourths of the tongues of Europe. And this was the first series only. It was only with the second series that the full splendour of my success appeared. My very imitators grew rich; my agent’s income from his comparatively small percentage on my royalties was handsome; and he chuckled and bade me wait for the dramatic rights and the day when the touring companies should get to business. . . .

I had “got there.”

And I remember, sadly enough now, my first resolution when the day came when I was able to survey the situation with anything approaching calm. It was, “Enough.” For the rest of my days I need not know poverty again. Thenceforward I need not, unless I chose, do any but worthy work. *Martin Renard* had served his purpose handsomely, and I intended to have nothing more to do with him.

Then came that dazzling offer for the second series. . . .

I accepted it.

I accepted the third likewise; and I have told you about the fourth. . . .

I have tried to kill *Martin Renard*. He was killing me. I have, in the pages of the *Falchion*, actually killed him; but I have had to resuscitate him. I cannot escape from him. . . .

I am not setting down one word more of this than bears directly on my tale of Andriaovsky’s “Life.” For those days, when my whole future had hung in the balance, *were the very days covered by that portion Andriaovsky’s life at which I had now arrived*. I had reached, and was hesitating at, our point of divergence. Those checks and releases which I had at first found so unaccountable corresponded with the vicissitudes of the *Martin Renard* negotiations.

The actual dates did not, of course, coincide—I had quickly discovered the falsity of that scent. Neither did the intervals between them, with the exception of those few days in which I had been unable to complete that half-written sentence—the few days immediately prior to my (parallel) acceptance by the *Falchion*. But, by that other reckoning of time, of mental and spiritual experience, *they tallied exactly*. The gambling chances of five years ago meant present stumblings and haltings; the breach of faith of an editor long since meant a present respite; and

another week should bring me to that point of my so strangely reduplicated experience that, allowing for the furious mental rate at which I was now living, would make another node with that other point in the more slowly lived past that had marked my acceptance of the offer for the second half-dozen of the *Martin Renards*.

It had been on this hazardous calculation that I had made my promise to Maschka.

I passed that week in a state of constantly increasing apprehension. True, I worked at the "Life," even assiduously; but it was plain sailing, mere cataloguing of certain of Andriaovsky's works, a chapter I had deliberately planned *pour mieux sauter*—to enhance the value of the penultimate and final chapters. These were the real crux of the "Life." These were what I was reserving myself for. These were to show that only his body was dead, and that his spirit still lived and his work was still being done wherever a man could be found whose soul burned within him with the same divine ardour.

But I was now realising, day by day, hour by hour more clearly, what I was incurring. I was penning nothing less than my own artistic damnation. Self-condemned, indeed, I had been this long time; but I was now making the world a party to the sentence. The crowning of Andriaovsky involved my own annihilation; his "Life" would be my "Hic Jacet." And yet I was prepared, nay, resolved, to write it. I had started, and I would go forward. I would not be spewed with the lukewarm out of the mouth of that Spirit from which proceeds all that is bright and pure and true. The vehemence with which I had rejected its divine bidding should at least be correspondent with my adoration of it. The snivelling claims of the Schofields I spurned. If, as they urged, "an artist must live," he must live royally or starve with a tight mouth. No complaining. . . .

And one other claim I urged in the teeth of this Spirit, which, if it was a human Spirit at all, it could not disregard. Those pigeon-holed obituaries of mine will proclaim to the world, one and all, the virtues of my public life. In spite of my royal earnings, I am not a rich man. I have not accepted wealth without accepting the personal responsibility for it. Sick men and women in more than one hospital lie in wards provided by *Martin Renard* and myself; and I am not dishonoured in my Institution at Poplar. Those vagrant wanderings with Andriaovsky have enabled me to know the poor and those who help the poor. My personal labours in the administration of the Institute are great, for outside the necessary routine I leave little to subordinates. I have declined honours offered to me for my "services to Literature," and I have never encouraged a youth, of parts or lacking them, to make of Literature a profession. And so on and so forth. All this, and more, you will read when the day comes; and I don't doubt the *Falchion* will publish my memoir in mourning borders. . . .

But to resume.

I finished the chapter I have mentioned. Maschka and her fiancé kept punctiliously away. Then, before sitting down to the penultimate chapter, I permitted myself the relaxation of a day in the country.

I can't tell you precisely where I went; I only know it was somewhere in Buckinghamshire, and that, ordering the car to await me a dozen miles farther on, I set out to walk. Nor can I tell you what I saw during that walk; I don't think I saw anything. There was a red wintry disc of a sun, I remember, and a land grey with rime; and that is all. I was entirely occupied with the attempt I was about to make. I think that even then I had the sense of doom, for I know not how otherwise I should have found myself several times making little husbandings of my force, as if conscious that I should need it all. For I was determined, as never in my life have I been determined, to write that "Life." And I intended, not to wait to be challenged, but to

challenge. . . . I met the car, returning in search of me; and I dined at a restaurant, went home to bed, and slept dreamlessly.

On the morrow I deliberately refrained from work until the evening. My challenge to Andriaovsky and the Powers he represented should be boldly delivered at the very gates of their own Hour. Not until half-past eight, with the curtains drawn, the doors locked, and orders given that on no account whatever was I to be disturbed, did I switch on the pearly light, place Andriaovsky's portrait in its now accustomed place, and draw my chair up to my writing-table.

## VI

But before I could resume the "Life" at the point at which I had left it, I felt that there were certain preliminaries to be settled. It was not that I wished to sound a parley with any view of coming to terms; I had determined what the terms were to be. As a boxer who leaps from his corner the moment the signal is given, astounding with suddenness his less prompt antagonist, so I should be ready when the moment came. But I wished the issue to be defined. I did not propose to submit the whole of my manhood to the trial. I was merely asserting my right to speak of certain things which, if one chose to exaggerate their importance by a too narrow and exclusive consideration of them, I might conceivably be thought to have betrayed.

I drew a sheet of paper towards me, and formally made out my claim. It occupied not more than a dozen lines, and its nature has already been sufficiently indicated. I put my pen down again, leaned back in my chair, and waited.

I waited, but nothing happened. It seemed that if this was my attempt to justify myself, the plea was certainly not disallowed. But neither had I any sign that it was allowed; and presently it occurred to me that possibly I had couched it in terms too general. Perhaps a more particular claim would meet with a different reception.

During the earlier stages of the book's progress I had many times deliberated on the desirability of a Preface that should state succinctly what I considered to be my qualifications for the task. Though I had finally decided against any such statement, the form of the Preface might nevertheless serve for the present occasion. I took another sheet of paper, headed it "Preface," and began once more to write.

I covered the page; I covered a second; and half-way down the third I judged my statement to be sufficient. Again I laid down my pen, leaned back, and waited.

The Preface also produced no result whatever.

Again I considered; and then I saw more clearly. It came to me that, both in the first statement and in the Preface, I was merely talking to myself. I was convincing myself, and losing both time and strength in doing so. The Power with which I sought to come to grips was treating my vapourings with high disregard. To be snubbed thus by Headquarters would never, never do. . . .

Then I saw more clearly still. It seemed that my *right to challenge* was denied. I was not an adversary, with the rights and honours of an adversary, but a transgressor, whose transgression had already several times been sharply visited, and would be visited once more the moment it was repeated. I might, in a sense, please myself whether I brought myself into Court; but, once there, I was not the arraigner in the box, but the arraigned in the dock.

And I rebelled hotly. Did I sit there, ready for the struggle, only to be told that there could be no struggle? Did that vengeful Angel of the Arts ignore my very existence? . . . By Yea and Nay I swore that he should take notice of me! Once before, a mortal had wrestled a whole night with

an angel, and though he had been worsted, it had not been before he had compelled the Angel to reveal himself! And so would I. . . .

Challenge, title to challenge, tentatives, preliminaries, I suddenly cast them all aside. We would have it in deeds, not in further words. I opened a drawer, took out the whole of the "Life" so far written, and began to read. I wanted to grasp once more the plan of it in its entirety.

Page after page, I read on, with deepening attention. Quickly I ran through half of it. Then I began to concentrate myself still more closely. There would come a point at which I should be flush with the stream of it again, again feel the force of its current; I felt myself drawing nearer to that point; when I should reach it I would go ahead without a pause. . . .

I read to the end of Chapter Fifteen, the last completed chapter. Then instantly I took my pen and wrote, "Chapter Sixteen. . . ."

I felt the change at the very first word.

I will not retrace any ground I have covered before. If I have not already made clear my former sensations of the petrification of hand and brain, I despair of being able to do so any better now. Suffice it that once more I felt that inhibition, and that once more I was aware of the ubiquitous presence of the image of the dead artist. Once more I heard those voices, near as thunder and yet interstellarly remote, crying that solemn warning, that though I took the Wings of the Morning, made my bed in Hell, or cried aloud upon the darkness to cover me, there was one Spirit from which I could not hope to escape. I felt the slight crawling of my flesh on my bones as I listened.

But there was now a difference. On the former occasion, to bear again those last horrible words of his, "*You shall very soon know I know who you are if. . . .*" had been the signal for the total unnerving of me and for that uncontrollable cry, "*Don't you then want me to write it?*" But now I intended to write it if I could. In order that I might tell him so I was now seeking him out, in what heights or depths I knew not, at what peril to myself I cared not. I cared not, since I now felt that I could not continue to live unless I pressed to the uttermost attempt. And I must repeat, and repeat again, and yet repeat, that in that hour Andriaovsky was immanent about me, in the whole of me, in the last fibre and cell of me, in all my thoughts, from my consciousness that I was sitting there at my own writing-table to my conception of God Himself.

It may seem strange—whether it does so or not will depend on the kind of man you yourself are—that as long as I was content to recognise this immanence of Andriaovsky's enlarged and liberated spirit, *and not to dispute with it*, I found nothing but mildness and benignity in my hazardous experience. More, I felt that, in that clear region to which in my intensified state of consciousness I was lifted, I was able to move (I must trust you to understand the word aright) without restraint, nay, with an amplitude and freedom of movement past setting down, as long as I was satisfied to possess my soul in quiescence. The state itself was inimical neither to my safety nor to my sanity. I was conscious of it as a transposition into another register of the scale of life. And, as in this life we move in ignorance and safety only by accepting the hair-balance of stupendous forces, so now I felt that my safety depended on my observation of the conditions that governed that region of light and clarity and Law.

Of clarity and Law; save in the terms of the great abstractions I may not speak of it. And that is well-nigh equal to saying that I may not speak of it at all. The hand that would have written of it lay (I never for one moment ceased to be conscious) heavy as stone on a writing-table in some spot quite accidental in my new sense of locality; the tongue that would have spoken of it seemed to slumber in my mouth. And I knew that both dumbness and stillness were proper. Their

opposites would have convicted me (the flat and earthly comparison must be allowed) of intrusion into some Place of beauty and serenity for which the soilure of my birth disqualified me.

For beauty and serenity, austerity and benignity and peace, were the conditions of that Place. To other Places belonged the wingy and robed and starry and golden things that made the heavens of other lives than that which I had shared with Andriaovsky; here, white and shapely Truth alone reigned. None questioned, for all knew; none sinned, for sin was already judged and punished in its committal; none demonstrated, for all things were evident; and those eager to justify themselves were permitted no farther than the threshold. . . .

And it was to justify, to challenge, to maintain a right, that I was there. I was there to wrestle, if needs be, with the Angel of that Place, to vanquish him or to compel him to reveal himself. I had not been summoned; I had thrust myself there unbidden. There was a moment in which I noticed that my writing-table was a little more than ordinarily removed from me, but very little, not more than if I had been looking over the shoulder of another writer at it; and I saw my chapter heading. At the sight of it something of the egotism that had prompted me to write it stirred in me again; everywhere was Andriaovsky's calm face, priest and Angel himself; and I became conscious that I was trying to write a phrase. I also became conscious that I was being pitifully warned not to do so. . . .

Suddenly my whole being was flooded with a frightful pang of pain.

It was not local. It was no more to be located than the other immanences of which I have spoken. It was Pain, pure, essential, dissociated; and with the coming of it that fair Place had grown suddenly horrible and black.

And I knew that the shock came *of my own resistance*, and that it would cease to afflict me the moment I ceased to resist.

I did cease. Instantly the pain passed. But as when a knife is plucked from a wound, so only with its passing did I shriek aloud. . . .

For I know not how many minutes I sat in stupefaction. Then, as with earthly pains, that are assuaged with the passing of accidental time, the memory of it softened a little. Blunderingly and only half consciously, I cast about to collect my dispersed force.

For—already I was Conscious of it—there still remained one claim that even in thought I had not advanced. I would, were I permitted, still write that “Life,” but, since it was decreed so, I would no longer urge that in writing it I justified myself. So I might but write it, I would embrace my own portion, the portion of doom; yea, though it should be a pressing of the searing-iron to my lips, I would embrace it; my name should not appear. For the mere sake of the man I had loved I would write it, in self-scorn and abasement, humbly craving not to be denied. . . .

“*Oh, let me but do for Love of you what a sinful man can!*” I groaned. . . .

A moment later I had again striven to do so. So do we all, when we think that out of a poor human Love we can alter the Laws by which our state exists. And with such a hideous anguish as was again mine are we visited. . . .

And I knew now what that anguish was. It was the twining of body from spirit that is called the bitterness of Death; for not all of the body are the pangs of that severance. With that terrible sword of impersonal Pain the God of Peace makes sorrowful war that Peace may come again. With its flame He ringed the bastions of Heaven when Satan made assault. Only on the Gorgon-image of that Pain in the shield may weak man look; and its blaze and ire had permeated with deadly nearness the “everywhere” where I was. . . .

“*Oh, not for Love? Not even for Love?*” broke the agonised question from me..

The next moment I had ceased, and ceased for ever, to resist. Instantaneously the terrible flashing of that sword became no more than the play of lightning one sees far away in the wide cloud-fields on a peaceful summer's twilight. I felt a gentle and overpowering sleep coming over me; and as it folded me about I saw, with the last look of my eyes, my own figure, busily writing at the table.

Had I, then, prevailed? Had Pain so purged me that I was permitted to finish my task? And had my tortured cry, "Oh, not even for Love?" been heard?

I did not know.

I came to myself to find that my head had fallen on my desk. The light still shone within its pearly shade, and in the penumbra of its shadow the portrait of Andriaovsky occupied its accustomed place. About me were my papers, and my pen lay where it had fallen from my hand.

At first I did not look at my papers. I merely saw that the uppermost of them was written on. But presently I took it up, and looked at it stupidly. Then, with no memory at all of how I had come to write what was upon it, I put it down again.

It was indeed a completion.

But it was not of Andriaovsky's "Life" that it was the completion. As you may or may not know, Andriaovsky's "Life" is written by "his friend John Schofield." I had been allowed to write, but it was my own condemnation that, in sadness and obedience, in the absence of wrath but also in the absence of mercy, I had written. By the Law I had broken I was broken in my turn. It was the draft for the fifth series of *The Cases of Martin Renard*.

No, not for Love—not even for Love. . . .