

# The Accursed Cordonnier

By Bernard Capes

*Poor Chrymelus, I remember, arose from the diversion of a card-table, and dropped into the dwellings of darkness.—Hervey*

It must be confessed that Amos Rose was considerably out of his element in the smoking room off Portland Place. All the hour he remained there he was conscious of a vague rising nausea, due not in the least to the visible atmosphere—to which, indeed, he himself contributed languorously from a crackling spilliken of South American tobacco rolled in a maize leaf and strongly tintured with opium—but to the almost brutal post-prandial facundity of its occupants.

Rose was patently a degenerate. Nature, in scheduling his characteristics, had pruned all superlatives. The rude armour of the flesh, under which the spiritual, like a hide-bound chrysalis, should develop secret and self-contained, was perished in his case, as it were, to a semi-opaque suit, through which his soul gazed dimly and fearfully on its monstrous arbitrary surroundings. Not the mantle of the poet, philosopher, or artist fallen upon such, can still its shiverings, or give the comfort that Nature denies.

Yet he was a little bit of each—poet, philosopher, and artist; a nerveless and self-deprecatory stalker of ideals, in the pursuit of which he would wear patent leather shoes and all the apologetic graces. The grandson of a ‘three-bottle’ JP, who had upheld the dignity of the State constitution while abusing his own in the best spirit of squirearchy; the son of a petulant dyspeptic, who alternated seizures of long moroseness with fits of abject moral helplessness, Amos found his inheritance in the reversion of a dissipated constitution, and an imagination as sensitive as an exposed nerve. Before he was thirty he was a neurasthenic so practised, as to have learned a sense of luxury in the very consciousness of his own suffering. It was a negative evolution from the instinct of self-protection—self-protection, as designed in this case, against the attacks of the unspeakable. Another evolution, only less negative, was of a certain desperate pugnacity, that derived from a sense of the inhuman injustice conveyed in the fact that temperamental debility not only debarred him from that bold and healthy expression of self that it was his nature to wish, but made him actually appear to act in contradiction to his own really sweet and sound predilections.

So he sat (in the present instance, listening and revolting) in a travesty of resignation between the stools of submission and defiance.

The neurotic youth of today renews no ante-existent type. You will look in vain for a face like Amos’s amongst the busts of the recovered past. The same weakness of outline you may point to—the sheep-like features falling to a blunt prow; the lax jaw and pinched temples—but not to that which expresses a consciousness that combative effort in a world of fruitless results is a lost desire.

Superficially, the figure in the smoking room was that of a long, weedy young man—hairless as to his face; scalped with a fine lank fleece of neutral tint; pale eyed, and slave to a bored and languid expression, over which he had little control, though it frequently misrepresented his mood. He was dressed scrupulously, though not obtrusively, in the mode, and was smoking a pungent cigarette with an air that seemed balanced between a genuine effort at self abstraction

and a fear of giving offence by a too pronounced show of it. In this state, flying bubbles of conversation broke upon him as he sat a little apart and alone.

‘Johnny, here’s Callander preaching a divine egotism.’

‘Is he? Tell him to beg a lock of the Henbery’s hair. Ain’t she the dog that bit him?’

‘Once bit, twice shy.’

‘Rot!—In the case of a woman? I’m covered with their scars.’

‘What,’ thought Rose, ‘induced me to accept an invitation to this person’s house?’

‘A divine egotism, eh? It jumps with the dear Sarah’s humour. The beggar is an imitative beggar.’

‘Let the beggar speak for himself. He’s in earnest. Haven’t we been bred on the principle of self-sacrifice, till we’ve come to think a man’s self is his uncleanest possession?’

‘There’s no thinking about it. We’ve long been alarmed on your account, I can assure you.’

‘Oh! I’m no saint.’

‘Not you. *Your* ecstasies are all of the flesh.’

‘Don’t be gross. I—’

‘Oh! take a whisky and seltzer.’

‘If I could escape without exciting observation,’ thought Rose. Lady Sarah Henbery was his hostess, and the inspired projector of a new scheme of existence (that was, in effect, the repudiation of any scheme) that had become quite the ‘thing’. She had found life an arbitrary design—a coil of days (like fancy pebbles, dull or sparkling) set in the form of a main spring, and each gem responsible to the design. Then she had said, ‘Today shall not follow yesterday or precede tomorrow’; and she had taken her pebbles from their setting and mixed them higgledy-piggledy, and so was in the way to wear or spend one or the other as caprice moved her. And she became without design and responsibility, and was thus able to indulge a natural bent towards capriciousness to the extent that—having a face for each and every form of social hypocrisy and licence—she was presently hardly to be put out of countenance by the extremest expression of either.

It followed that her reunions were popular with worldlings of a certain order.

By-and-by Amos saw his opportunity, and slipped out into a cold and foggy night.

## II

*Be savoir votr’ grand age,  
Nous serions curieux  
A voir votre visage,  
Vous paraissez fort vieux;  
Vous avez bien cent mis,  
Vous montrez bien autant?*

A stranger, tall, closely wrapped and buttoned to the chin, had issued from the house at the same moment, and now followed in Rose’s footsteps as he hurried away over the frozen pavement.

Suddenly this individual overtook and accosted him. ‘Pardon,’ he said. ‘This fog baffles. We have been fellow-guests, it seems. You are walking? May I be your companion? You look a little lost yourself.’ He spoke in a rather high, mellow voice—too frank for irony.

At another time Rose might have met such a request with some slightly agitated temporizing. Now, fevered with disgust of his late company, the astringency of nerve that came to him at odd

moments, in the exaltation of which he felt himself ordinarily manly and human, braced him to an attitude at once modest and collected.

‘I shall be quite happy,’ he said. ‘Only, don’t blame me if you find you are entertaining a fool unawares.’

‘You were out of your element, and are piqued. I saw you there, but wasn’t introduced.’

‘The loss is mine. I didn’t observe you—yes, I did!’

He shot the last words out hurriedly—as they came within the radiance of a street lamp—and his pace lessened a moment with a little bewildered jerk.

He had noticed this person, indeed—his presence and his manner. They had arrested his languid review of the frivolous forces about him. He had seen a figure, strange and lofty, pass from group to group; exchange with one a word or two, with another a grave smile; move on and listen; move on and speak; always stately restless; never anything but an incongruous apparition in a company of which every individual was eager to assert and expound the doctrines of self.

This man had been of curious expression, too—so curious that Amos remembered to have marvelled at the little comment his presence seemed to excite. His face was absolutely hairless—as, to all evidence, was his head, upon which he wore a brown silk handkerchief loosely rolled and knotted. The features were presumably of a Jewish type—though their entire lack of accent in the form of beard or eyebrow made identification difficult—and were minutely covered, like delicate cracklin, with a network of flattened wrinkles. Ludicrous though the description, the lofty individuality of the man so surmounted all disadvantages of appearance as to overawe frivolous criticism. Partly, also, the full transparent olive of his complexion, and the pools of purple shadow in which his eyes seemed to swim like blots of resin, neutralized the superficial barrenness of his face. Forcibly, he impelled the conviction that here was one who ruled his own being arbitrarily through entire fearlessness of death.

‘You saw me?’ he said, noticing with a smile his companion’s involuntary hesitation. ‘Then let us consider the introduction made, without further words. We will even expand to the familiarity of old acquaintanceship, if you like to fall in with the momentary humour.’

‘I can see,’ said Rose, ‘that years are nothing to you.’

‘No more than this gold piece, which I fling into the night. They are made and lost and made again.’

‘You have knowledge and the gift of tongues.’

The young man spoke bewildered, but with a strange warm feeling of confidence flushing up through his habitual reserve. He had no thought why, nor did he choose his words or inquire of himself their source of inspiration.

‘I have these,’ said the stranger. ‘The first is my excuse for addressing you.’

‘You are going to ask me something.’

‘What attraction

‘Drew me to Lady Sarah’s house? I am young, rich, presumably a desirable *parti*. Also, I am neurotic, and without the nerve to resist.’

‘Yet you knew your taste would take alarm—as it did.’

‘I have an acute sense of delicacy Naturally I am prejudiced in favour of virtue.’

‘Then—excuse me—why put yours to a demoralizing test?’

‘I am not my own master. Any formless apprehension—any shadowy fear enslaves my will. I go to many places from the simple dread of being called upon to explain my reasons for refusing.’

For the same cause I may appear to acquiesce in indecencies my soul abhors; to give countenance to opinions innately distasteful to me. I am a quite colourless personality'

'Without force or object in life?'

'Life, I think, I live for its isolated moments—the first half-dozen pulls at a cigarette, for instance, after a generous meal.'

'You take the view, then—'

'Pardon me. I take no views. I am not strong enough to take anything—not even myself—seriously'

'Yet you know that the trail of such volitional ineptitude reaches backwards under and beyond the closed door you once issued from?'

'Do I? I know at least that the ineptitude intensifies with every step of constitutional decadence. It may be that I am wearing down to the nerve of life. How shall I find that? diseased? Then it is no happiness to me to think it imperishable.'

'Young man, do you believe in a creative divinity?'

'Yes.'

'And believe without resentment?'

'I think God hands over to His apprentices the moulding of vessels that don't interest Him.'

The stranger twitched himself erect.

'I beg you not to be profane,' he said.

'I am not,' said Rose. 'I don't know why I confide in you, or what concern I have to know. I can only say my instincts, through bewildering mental suffering, remain religious. You take me out of myself and judge me unfairly on the result.'

'Stay. You argue that a perishing of the bodily veil reveals the soul. Then the outlook of the latter should be the cleaner.'

'It gazes through a blind of corruption. It was never designed to stand naked in the world's market-places.'

'And whose the fault that it does?'

'I don't know. I only feel that I am utterly lonely and helpless.'

The stranger laughed scornfully.

'You can feel no sympathy with my state?' said Rose.

'Not a grain. To be conscious of a soul, yet to remain a craven under the temporal tyranny of the flesh; fearful of revolting, though the least imaginative flight of the spirit carries it at once beyond any bodily influence! Oh, sir! Fortune favours the brave.'

'She favours the fortunate,' said the young man, with a melancholy smile. 'Like a banker, she charges a commission on small accounts. At trifling deposits she turns up her nose. If you would escape her tax, you must keep a fine large balance at her house.'

'I dislike parables,' said the stranger drily.

'Then, here is a fact in illustration. I have an acquaintance, an impoverished author, who anchored his ark of hope on Mount Olympus twenty years ago. During all that time he has never ceased to send forth his doves; only to have them return empty beaked with persistent regularity. Three days ago the olive branch—a mere sprouting twig—came home. For the first time a magazine—an indifferent one—accepted a story of his and offered him a pound for it. He acquiesced; and the same night was returned to him from an important American firm an understamped MS, on which he had to pay excess postage, half a crown. That was Fortune's commission.'

'Bully the jade, and she will love you.'

‘Your wisdom has not learned to confute that barbarism?’

The stranger glanced at his companion with some expression of dislike.

‘The sex figures in your ideals, I see,’ said he. ‘Believe my long experience that its mere animal fools constitute its only excuse for existing—though’ (he added under his breath) ‘even they annoy one by their monogamous prejudices.’

‘I won’t hear that with patience,’ said Rose. ‘Each sex in its degree. Each is wearifully peevish over the hateful rivalry between mind and matter; but the male only has the advantage of distractions.’

‘This,’ said the stranger softly, as if to himself, ‘is the woeful proof, indeed, of decadence. Man waives his prerogative of lordship over the irreclaimable savagery of earth. He has warmed his temperate house of clay to be a hot-house to his imagination, till the very walls are frail and eaten with fever.’

‘Christ spoke of no spiritual division between the sexes.’

There followed a brief silence. Preoccupied, the two moved slowly through the fog, that was dashed ever and anon with cloudy blooms of lamplight.

‘I wish to ask you,’ said the stranger at length, ‘in what has the teaching of Christ proved otherwise than so impotent to reform mankind, as to make one sceptical as to the divinity of the teacher?’

‘Why, what is your age?’ asked Rose in a tone of surprise.

‘I am a hundred tonight.’

The astounded young man jumped in his walk.

‘A hundred!’ he exclaimed. ‘And you cannot answer that question yourself?’

‘I asked you to answer it. But never mind. I see faith in you like a garden of everlastings—as it should be—as of course it should be. Yet disbelievers point to inconsistencies. There was a reviling Jew, for instance, to whom Christ is reported to have shown resentment quite incompatible with His teaching.’

‘Whom do you mean?’

‘Cartaphilus; who was said to be condemned to perpetual wandering.’

‘A legend,’ cried Amos scornfully ‘Bracket it with Nero’s fiddling and the hymning of Memnon.’

A second silence fell. They seemed to move in a dead and stagnant world. Presently said the stranger suddenly—

‘I am quite lost; and so, I suppose, are you?’

‘I haven’t an idea where we are.’

‘It is two o’clock. There isn’t a soul or a mark to guide us. We had best part, and each seek his own way.’

He stopped and held out his hand.

‘Two pieces of advice I should like to give you before we separate. Fall in love and take plenty of exercise.’

‘Must we part?’ said Amos. ‘Frankly, I don’t think I like you. That sounds strange and discourteous after my ingenuous confidences. But you exhale an odd atmosphere of witchery; and your scorn braces me like a tonic. The pupils of your eyes, when I got a glimpse of them, looked like the heads of little black devils peeping out of windows. But you can’t touch my soul on the raw when my nerves are quiescent; and then I would strike any man that called me coward.’

The stranger uttered a quick, chirping laugh, like the sound of a stone on ice.

‘What do you propose?’ he said.

‘I have an idea you are not so lost as you pretend. If we are anywhere near shelter that you know, take me in and I will be a good listener. It is one of my negative virtues.’

‘I don’t know that any addition to my last good counsel would not be an anti-climax.’

He stood musing and rubbing his hairless chin.

‘Exercise—certainly. It is the golden demephitizer of the mind. I am seldom off my feet.’

‘You walk much—and alone?’

‘Not always alone. Periodically I am accompanied by one or another. At this time I have a companion who has tramped with me for some nine months.’

Again he pondered apart. The darkness and the fog hid his face, but he spoke his thoughts aloud.

‘What matter if it does come about? Tomorrow I have the world—the mother of many daughters. And to redeem this soul—a dog of a Christian—a friend at Court!’

He turned quickly to the young man.

‘Come!’ he said. ‘It shall be as you wish.’

‘Do you know where we are?’

‘We are at the entrance to Wardour Street.’

He gave a gesture of impatience, whipped a hand at his companion’s sleeve, and once more they trod down the icy echoes, going onwards.

The narrow lane reverberated to their footsteps; the drooping fog swayed sluggishly; the dead blank windows and high-shouldered doors frowned in stubborn progression and vanished behind them.

The stranger stopped in a moment where a screen of iron bars protected a shop front. From behind them shot leaden glints from old clasped bookcovers, hanging tongues of Toledo steel, croziers rich in nielli—innumerable and antique curios gathered from the lumber-rooms of history.

A door to one side he opened with a latch-key. A pillar of light, seeming to smoke as the fog obscured it, was formed of the aperture.

Obedying a gesture, Rose set foot on the threshold. As he was entering, he found himself unable to forbear a thrill of effrontery.

‘Tell me,’ said he. ‘It was not only to point a moral that you flung away that coin?’

The stranger, going before, grinned back sourly over his shoulder. ‘Not only,’ he said. ‘It was a bad one.’

### III

*... La Belle Dame sans merci  
Hath thee in thrall!*

All down the dimly luminous passage that led from the door straight into the heart of the building, Amos was aware, as he followed his companion over the densely piled carpet, of the floating sweet scent of amber-seed. Still his own latter exaltation of nerve burned with a steady radiance. He seemed to himself bewitched—translated; a consciousness apart from yesterday; its material fibres responsive to the least or utmost shock of adventure. As he trod in the other’s footsteps, he marvelled that so lavish a display of force, so elastic a gait, could be in a centenarian.

‘Are you ever tired?’ he whispered curiously.

‘Never. Sometimes I long for weariness as other men desire rest. As the stranger spoke, he pulled aside a curtain of stately black velvet, and softly opening a door in a recess, beckoned the young man into the room beyond.

He saw a chamber, broad and low, designed, in its every rich stain of picture and slumberous hanging, to appeal to the sensuous. And here the scent was thick and motionless. Costly marqueterie; Palissy candlesticks reflected in half-concealed mirrors framed in embossed silver; antique Nankin vases brimming with pot-pourri; in one corner a suit of Milanese armour, fluted, damasquinée, by Felippo Negrolì; in another a tripod table of porphyry, spectrally repeating in its polished surface the opal hues of a vessel of old Venetian glass half-filled with some topaz coloured liqueur—such and many more tokens of a luxurious aestheticism wrought in the observer an immediate sense of pleasurable enervation. He noticed, with a swaying thrill of delight, that his feet were on a padded rug of Astrakhan—one of many, disposed eccentrically about the yellow tessellated-marble floor; and he noticed that the sole light in the chamber came from an iridescent globed lamp, fed with some fragrant oil, that hung near an alcove traversed by a veil of dark violet silk.

The door behind him swung gently to: his eyes half-closed in a dreamy surrender of will: the voice of the stranger speaking to him sounded far away as the cry of some lost unhappiness.

‘Welcome!’ it said only.

Amos broke through his trance with a cry

‘What does it mean—all this? We step out of the fog, and here—I think it is the guest-parlour of Hell!’

‘You flatter me,’ said the stranger, smiling. ‘Its rarest antiquity goes no further back, I think, than the eighth century. The skeleton of the place is Jacobite and comparatively modern.’

‘But you—the shop!’

‘Contains a little of the fruit of my wanderings.’

‘You are a dealer?’

‘A casual collector only. If through a representative I work my accumulations of costly lumber to a profit—say thousands per cent—it is only because utility is the first principle of Art. As to myself, here I but pitch my tent—periodically, and at long intervals.’

‘An unsupervised agent must find it a lucrative post.’

‘Come—there shows a little knowledge of human nature. For the first time I applaud you. But the appointment is conditional on many things. At the moment the berth is vacant. Would you like it?’

‘My (paradoxically) Christian name was bestowed in compliment to a godfather, sir. I am no Jew. I have already enough to know the curse of having more.’

‘I have no idea how you are called. I spoke jestingly, of course; but your answer quenches the flicker of respect I felt for you. As a matter of fact, the other’s successor is not only nominated, but is actually present in this room.’

‘Indeed? You propose to fill the post yourself?’

‘Not by any means. The mere suggestion is an insult to one who can trace his descent backwards at least two thousand years.’

‘Yes, indeed. I meant no disparagement, but—’

‘I tell you, sir,’ interrupted the stranger irritably, ‘my visits are periodic. I could not live in a town. I could not settle anywhere. I must always be moving. A prolonged constitutional—that is my theory of health.’

‘You are always on your feet—at your age—’

‘I am a hundred tonight— But—mark you—I *have eaten of the Tree of Life.*’

As the stranger uttered these words, he seized Rose by the wrist in a soft, firm grasp. His captive, staring at him amazed, gave out a little involuntary shriek.

‘Hadn’t I better leave? There is something—nameless—I don’t know; but I should never have come in here. Let me go!’

The other, heedless, half-pulled the troubled and bewildered young man across the room, and drew him to within a foot of the curtain closing the alcove.

‘Here,’ he said quietly, ‘is my fellow-traveller of the last nine months, fast, I believe, in sleep—unless your jarring outcry has broken it.’

Rose struggled feebly.

‘Not anything shameful,’ he whimpered—‘I have a dread of your manifestations.’

For answer, the other put out a hand, and swiftly and silently withdrew the curtain. A deepish recess was revealed, into which the soft glow of the lamp penetrated like moonlight. It fell in the first instance upon a couch littered with pale, uncertain shadows, and upon a crucifix that hung upon the wall within.

In the throb of his emotions, it was something a relief to Amos to see his companion, releasing his hold of him, clasp his hands and bow his head reverently to this pathetic symbol. The cross on which the Christ hung was of ebony a foot high; the figure itself was chryselephantine and purely exquisite as a work of art.

‘It is early seventeenth century,’ said the stranger suddenly, after a moment of devout silence, seeing the other’s eyes absorbed in contemplation. ‘It is by Duquesnoy.’ (Then, behind the back of his hand) ‘The rogue couldn’t forget his bacchanals even here.’

‘It is a Christ of infidels,’ said Amos, with repugnance. He was adding involuntarily (his *savoir faire* seemed suddenly to have deserted him)—‘But fit for an unbelieving—’ when his host took him up with fury—

‘Dog of a Gentile!—if you dare to call me Jew!’

The dismayed start of the young man at this outburst blinded him to its paradoxical absurdity. He fell back with his heart thumping. The eyes of the stranger flickered, but in an instant he had recovered his urbanity.

‘Look!’ he whispered impatiently. ‘The Calvary is not alone in the alcove.’

Mechanically Rose’s glance shifted to the couch; and in that moment shame and apprehension and the sickness of being were precipitated in him as in golden flakes of rapture.

Something, that in the instant of revelation had seemed part only of the soft tinted shadows, resolved itself into a presentment of loveliness so pure, and so pathetic in its innocent self-surrender to the passionate tyranny of his gaze, that the manhood in him was abashed in the very flood of its exaltation. He put a hand to his face before he looked a second time, to discipline his dazzled eyes. They were turned only upon his soul, and found it a reflected glory. Had the vision passed? His eyes, in a panic, leaped for it once more.

Yes, it was there—dreaming upon its silken pillow; a grotesque carved dragon in ivory looking down, from a corner of the fluted couch, upon its supernal beauty—a face that, at a glance, could fill the vague desire of a suffering, lonely heart—spirit informing matter with all the flush and essence of some flower of the lost garden of Eden.

And this expressed in the form of one simple slumbering girl; in its drifted heap of hair, bronze as copper-beech leaves in spring; in the very pulsing of its half-hidden bosom, and in its happy morning lips, like Psyche’s, night-parted by Love and so remaining entranced.

A long light robe, sulphur-coloured, clung to the sleeper from low throat to ankle; bands of narrow nolana-blue ribbon crossed her breast and were brought together in a loose cincture about her waist; her white, smooth feet were sandalled; one arm was curved beneath her lustrous head; the other lay relaxed and drooping. Chrysoberyls, the sea-virgins of stones, sparkled in her hair and lay in the bosom of her gown like dewdrops in an evening primrose.

The gazer turned with a deep sigh, and then a sputter of fury—

‘Why do you show me this? You cruel beast, was not my life barren enough before?’

‘Can it ever be so henceforward? Look again.’

‘Does the devil enter? Something roars in me! Have you no fear that I shall kill you?’

‘None. I cannot die.’

Amos broke into a mocking, fierce laugh. Then, his blood shooting in his veins, he seized the sleeper roughly by her hand.

‘Wake!’ he cried, ‘and end it!’

With a sigh she lifted her head. Drowsiness and startled wonderment struggled in her eyes; but in a moment they caught the vision of the stranger standing aside, and smiled and softened. She held out her long, white arms to him.

‘You have come, dear love,’ she said, in a happy, low voice, ‘and I was not awake to greet you.’

Rose fell on his knees.

‘Oh, God in Heaven!’ he cried, ‘bear witness that this is monstrous and unnatural! Let me die rather than see it.’

The stranger moved forward.

‘Do honour, Adnah, to this our guest; and minister to him of thy pleasure.’

The white arms dropped. The girl’s face was turned, and her eyes, solemn and witch-like, looked into Amos’s. He saw them, their irises golden brown shot with little spars of blue; and the soul in his own seemed to rush towards them and to recoil, baffled and sobbing.

Could she have understood? He thought he saw a faint smile, a gentle shake of the head, as she slid from the couch and her sandals tapped on the marble floor.

She stooped and took him by the hand.

‘Rise, I pray you,’ she said, ‘and I will be your handmaiden.’

She led him unresisting to a chair, and bade him sweetly to be seated. She took from him his hat and overcoat, and brought him rare wine in a cup of crystal.

‘My lord will drink,’ she murmured, ‘and forget all but the night and Adnah.’

‘You I can never forget,’ said the young man, in a broken voice. As he drank, half-choking, the girl turned to the other, who still stood apart, silent and watchful.

‘Was this wise?’ she breathed. ‘To summon a witness on this night of all—was this wise, beloved?’

Amos dashed the cup on the floor. The red liquid stained the marble like blood.

‘No, no!’ he shrieked, springing to his feet. ‘Not that! It cannot be!’

In an ecstasy of passion he flung his arms about the girl, and crushed all her warm loveliness against his breast. She remained quite passive—unstartled even. Only she turned her head and whispered: ‘Is this thy will?’

Amos fell back, drooping, as if he had received a blow.

‘Be merciful and kill me,’ he muttered. ‘I—even I can feel at last the nobility of death.’

Then the voice of the stranger broke, lofty and passionless. ‘Tell him what you see in me.’

She answered, low and without pause, like one repeating a cherished lesson— ‘I see—I have seen it for the nine months I have wandered with you—the supreme triumph of the living will. I see that this triumph, of its very essence, could not be unless you had surmounted the tyranny of any, the least, gross desire. I see that it is incompatible with sin; with offence given to oneself or others; that passion cannot live in its serene atmosphere; that it illustrates the enchantment of the flesh by the intellect; that it is happiness for evermore redeemed.’

‘How do you feel this?’

‘I see it reflected in myself—I, the poor visionary you took from the Northern Island. Week by week I have known it sweetening and refining in my nature. None can taste the bliss of happiness that has not you for master—none can teach it save you, whose composure is unshadowed by any terror of death.’

‘And love that is passion, Adnah?’

‘I hear it spoken as in a dream. It is a wicked whisper from far away. You, the lord of time and of tongues, I worship—you, only you, who are my God.’

‘Hush! But the man of Nazareth?’

‘Ah! His name is an echo. What divine egotism taught He?’

Where lately had Amos heard this phrase? His memory of all things real seemed suspended.

‘He was a man, and He died,’ said Adnah simply

The stranger threw back his head, with an odd expression of triumph; and almost in the same moment abased it to the crucifix on the wall.

Amos stood breathing quickly, his ears drinking in every accent of the low musical voice. Now, as she paused, he moved forward a hurried step, and addressed himself to the shadowy figure by the couch— ‘Who are you, in the name of the Christ you mock and adore in a breath, that has wrought this miracle of high worship in a breathing woman?’

‘I am he that has eaten of the Tree of Life.’

‘Oh, forego your fables! I am not a child.’

‘It could not of its nature perish’ (the voice went on evenly, ignoring the interruption). ‘It breathes its immortal fragrance in no transplanted garden, invisible to sinful eyes, as some suppose. When the curse fell, the angel of the flaming sword bore it to the central desert; and the garden withered, for its soul was withdrawn. Now, in the heart of the waste place that is called Tiah-Bani-Israïl, it waits in its loveliness the coming of the Son of God.’

‘He has come and passed.’

It might have been an imperceptible shrug of the shoulders that twitched the tall figure by the couch. If so, it converted the gesture into a bow of reverence.

‘Is He not to be revealed again in His glory? But there, set as in the crater of a mountain of sand, and inaccessible to mortal footstep, stands unperishing the glory of the earth. And its fragrance is drawn up to heaven, as through a wide chimney; and from its branches hangs the undying fruit, lustrous and opalescent; and in each shining globe the world and its starry system are reflected in miniature, moving westwards; but at night they glow, a cluster of tender moons.

‘And whence came *your* power to scale that which is inaccessible?’

‘From Death, that, still denying me immortality, is unable to encompass my destruction.’

The young man burst into a harsh and grating laugh.

‘Here is some inconsistency!’ he cried. ‘By your own showing you were not immortal till you ate of the fruit!’

Could it be that this simple deductive snip cut the thread of coherence? A scowl appeared to contract the lofty brow for an instant. The next, a gay chirrup intervened, like a little spark struck from the cloud.

‘The pounding logic of the steam engine!’ cried the stranger, coming forward at last with an open smile. ‘But we pace in an altitude refined above sensuous comprehension. Perhaps before long you will see and believe. In the meantime let us be men and women enjoying the warm gifts of Fortune!’

#### IV

*Nous pensions comme un songe  
Le récit de vos maux;  
Nous traitions de mensonge  
Tous vos plus grands travaux!*

In that one night of an unreality that seemed either an enchanted dream or a wilfully fantastic travesty of conventions, Amos alternated between fits of delirious self-surrender and a rage of resignation, from which now and again he would awake to flourish an angry little bodkin of irony.

Now, at this stage, it appeared a matter for passive acquiescence that he should be one of a trio seated at a bronze table, that might have been recovered from Herculaneum, playing three-handed cribbage with a pack of fifteenth-century cards—limned, perhaps, by some Francesco Bachiacca—and an ivory board inlaid with gold and mother-of-pearl. To one side a smaller ‘occasional’ table held the wine, to which the young man resorted at the least invitation from Adnah.

In this connexion (of cards), it would fitfully perturb him to find that he who had renounced sin with mortality, had not only a proneness to avail himself of every oversight on the part of his adversaries, but frequently to peg-up more holes than his hand entitled him to. Moreover, at such times, when the culprit’s attention was drawn to this by his guest—at first gently; later, with a little scorn—he justified his action on the assumption that it was an essential interest of all games to attempt abuse of the confidence of one’s antagonist, whose skill in check-mating any movement of this nature was in right ratio with his capacity as a player; and finally he rose, the sole winner of a sum respectable enough to allow him some ingenuous expression of satisfaction.

Thereafter conversation ensued; and it must be remarked that nothing was further from Rose’s mind than to apologize for his long intrusion and make a decent exit. Indeed, there seemed some thrill of vague expectation in the air, to the realization of which his presence sought to contribute; and already—so rapidly grows the assurance of love—his heart claimed some protective right over the pure, beautiful creature at his feet.

For there, at a gesture from the other, had Adnah seated herself, leaning her elbow, quite innocently and simply, on the young man’s knee.

The sweet strong Moldavian wine buzzed in his head; love and sorrow and intense yearning went with flow and shock through his veins. At one moment elated by the thought that, whatever his understanding of the ethical sympathy existing between these two, their connexion was, by their own acknowledgement, platonic; at another, cruelly conscious of the icy crevasse that must gape between so perfectly proportioned an organism and his own atrabilarious personality, he

dreaded to avail himself of a situation that was at once an invitation and a trust; and ended by subsiding, with characteristic lameness, into mere conversational commonplace.

‘You must have got over a great deal of ground,’ said he to his host, ‘on that constitutional hobby horse of yours?’

‘A great deal of ground.’

‘In all weathers?’

‘In all weathers; at all times; in every country.’

‘How do you manage—pardon my inquisitiveness—the little necessities of dress and boots and such things?’

‘Adnah,’ said the stranger, ‘go fetch my walking suit and show it to our guest.’

The girl rose, went silently from the room, and returned in a moment with a single garment, which she laid in Rose’s hands.

He examined it curiously. It was a marvel of sartorial tact and ingenuity; so fashioned that it would have appeared scarcely a solecism on taste in any age. Built in one piece to resemble many, and of the most particularly chosen material, it was contrived and ventilated for any exigencies of weather and of climate, and could be doffed or assumed at the shortest notice. About it were cunningly distributed a number of strong pockets or purses for the reception of diverse articles, from a comb to a sandwich-box; and the position of these was so calculated as not to interfere with the symmetry of the whole.

‘It is indeed an excellent piece of work,’ said Amos, with considerable appreciation; for he held no contempt for the art which sometimes alone seemed to justify his right of existence.

‘Your praise is deserved,’ said the stranger, smiling, ‘seeing that it was contrived for me by one whose portrait, by Giambattista Moroni, now hangs in your National Gallery.’

‘I have heard of it, I think. Is the fellow still in business?’

‘The tailor or the artist? The first died bankrupt in prison—about the year 1560, it must have been. It was fortunate for me, inasmuch as I acquired the garment for nothing, the man disappearing before I had settled his claim.’

Rose’s jaw dropped. He looked at the beautiful face reclining against him. It expressed no doubt, no surprise, no least sense of the ludicrous.

‘Oh, my God!’ he muttered, and ploughed his forehead with his hands. Then he looked up again with a pallid grin.

‘I see,’ he said. ‘You play upon my fancied credulity. And how did the garment serve you in the central desert?’

‘I had it not then, by many centuries. No garment would avail against the wicked Samiel—the poisonous wind that is the breath of the eternal dead sand. Who faces that feels, pace by pace, his body wither and stiffen. His clothes crackle like paper, and so fall to fragments. From his eyeballs the moist vision flakes and flies in powder. His tongue shrinks into his throat, as though fire had writhed and consumed it to a little scarlet spur. His furrowed skin peels like the cerements of an ancient mummy. He falls, breaking in his fall—there is a puff of acrid dust, dissipated in a moment—and he is gone.’

‘And this you met unscathed?’

‘Yes; for it was preordained that Death should hunt, but never overtake me—that I might testify to the truth of the first Scriptures.’

Even as he spoke, Rose sprang to his feet with a gesture of uncontrollable repulsion; and in the same instant was aware of a horrible change that was taking place in the features of the man before him.

*Trahentibus autem Judaeis Jesum extra praetorium cum venisset ad ostium, Cartaphilus praetorii ostiarius et Pontii Pilati, cum per ostium exiret Jesus, pepulit Eum pugno contemptibiliter post tergum, et irridens dixit, 'Vade, Jesu citius, vade, quid moraris?' Et Jesus severo vultu et oculo respiciens in eum, dixit: 'Ego vado, et expectabis donec veniam!' Itaque juxta verbum Domini expectat adhuc Cartaphilus ille, qui tempore Dominicae passionis—erat quasi triginta annorum, et semper cum usque ad cenium aetatem aetatem redeuntium annorum redit redivivus ad illum aetatis statum, quo fuit anno quand passus est Dominus.—Matthew of Paris, *Historia Major*.*

The girl—from whose cheek Rose, in his rough rising, had seemed to brush the bloom, so keenly had its colour deepened—sank from the stool upon her knees, her hands pressed to her bosom, her lungs working quickly under the pressure of some powerful excitement.

'It comes, beloved!' she said, in a voice half-terror, half-ecstasy.

'It comes, Adnah,' the stranger echoed, struggling—'this periodic self-renewal—this sloughing of the veil of flesh that I warned you of.'

His soul seemed to pant grey from his lips; his face was bloodless and like stone; the devils in his eyes were awake and busy as maggots in a wound. Amos knew him now for wickedness personified and immortal, and fell upon his knees beside the girl and seized one of her hands in both his.

'Look!' he shrieked. 'Can you believe in him longer? believe that any code or system of his can profit you in the end?'

She made no resistance, but her eyes still dwelt on the contorted face with an expression of divine pity

'Oh, thou sufferest!' she breathed; 'but thy reward is near!'

'Adnah!' wailed the young man, in a heartbroken voice. 'Turn from him to me! Take refuge in my love. Oh, it is natural, I swear. It asks nothing of you but to accept the gift—to renew yourself in it, if you will; to deny it, if you will, and chain it for your slave. Only to save you and die for you, Adnah!'

He felt the hand in his shudder slightly; but no least knowledge of him did she otherwise evince.

He clasped her convulsively, released her, mumbled her slack white fingers with his lips. He might have addressed the dead.

In the midst, the figure before them swayed with a rising throe—turned—staggered across to the couch, and cast itself down before the crucifix on the wall.

'Jesu, Son of God,' it implored, through a hurry of piercing groans, 'forbear Thy hand: Christ, register my atonement! My punishment—eternal—and oh, my mortal feet already weary to death! Jesu, spare me! Thy justice, Lawgiver—let it not be vindictive, oh, in Thy sacred name! lest men proclaim it for a baser thing than theirs. For a fault of ignorance—for a word of scorn where all reviled, would *they* have singled *one* out, have made him, most wretched, the scapegoat of the ages? Ah, most holy, forgive me! In mine agony I know not what I say. A moment ago I could have pronounced it something seeming less than divine that Thou couldst so have stultified with a curse Thy supreme hour of self-sacrifice—a moment ago, when the rising madness prevailed. Now, sane once more—Nazarene, oh, Nazarene! not only retribution for my

deserts, but pity for my suffering—Nazarene, that Thy slanderers, the men of little schisms, be refuted, hearing me, the very witness to Thy mercy, testify how the justice of the Lord triumphs supreme through that His superhuman prerogative—that they may not say, He can destroy, even as we; but can He redeem? The sacrifice—the yearling lamb;—it awaits Thee, Master, the proof of my abjectness and my sincerity I, more curst than Abraham, lift my eyes to Heaven, the terror in my heart, the knife in my hand. Jesu—Jesu!’

He cried and grovelled. His words were frenzied, his abasement fulsome to look upon. Yet it was impressed upon one of the listeners, with a great horror, how unspeakable blasphemy breathed between the lines of the prayer—the blasphemy of secret disbelief in the Power it invoked, and sought, with its tongue in its cheek, to conciliate.

Bitter indignation in the face of nameless outrage transfigured Rose at this moment into something nobler than himself. He feared, but he upheld his manhood. Conscious that the monstrous situation was none of his choosing, he had no thought to evade its consequences so long as the unquestioning credulity of his co-witness seemed to call for his protection. Nerveless, sensitive natures, such as his, not infrequently give the lie to themselves by accesses of an altruism that is little less than self-effacement.

‘This is all bad,’ he struggled to articulate. ‘You are hipped by some devilish cantrip. Oh, come—come!—in Christ’s name I dare to implore you—and learn the truth of love!’

As he spoke, he saw that the apparition was on its feet again—that it had returned, and was standing, its face ghastly and inhuman, with one hand leaned upon the marble table.

‘Adnah!’ it cried, in a strained and hollow voice. ‘The moment for which I prepared you approaches. Even now I labour. I had thought to take up the thread on the further side; but it is ordained otherwise, and we must part.’

‘Part!’ The word burst from her in a sigh of lost amazement.

‘The holocaust, Adnah!’ he groaned—‘the holocaust with which every seventieth year my expiation must be punctuated! This time the cross is on thy breast, beloved; and tomorrow—oh! thou must be content to tread on lowlier altitudes than those I have striven to guide thee by.’

‘I cannot—I cannot. I should die in the mists. Oh, heart of my heart, forsake me not!’

‘Adnah—my selma, my beautiful—to propitiate—’

‘Whom? Thou hast eaten of the Tree, and art a God!’

‘Hush!’ He glanced round with an awed visage at the dim hanging Calvary; then went on in a harsher tone, ‘It is enough—it must be.’ (His shifting face, addressed to Rose, was convulsed into an expression of bitter scorn). ‘I command thee, go with him. The sacrifice— oh, my heart, the sacrifice! And I cry to Jehovah, and He makes no sign; and into thy sweet breast the knife must enter.’

Amos sprang to his feet with a loud cry.

‘I take no gift from you. I will win or lose her by right of manhood!’

The girl’s face was white with despair.

‘I do not understand,’ she cried in a piteous voice.

‘Nor I,’ said the young man, and he took a threatening step forward. ‘We have no part in this—this lady and I. Man or devil you may be; but—’

‘Neither!’

The stranger, as he uttered the word, drew himself erect with a tortured smile. The action seemed to kilt the skin of his face into hideous plaits.

‘I am Cartaphilus,’ he said, ‘who denied the Nazarene shelter.’

‘The *Wandering Jew!*’

The name of the old strange legend broke involuntarily from Rose's lips.

'Now you know him!' he shrieked then. 'Adnah, I am here! Come to me!'

Tears were running down the girl's cheeks. She lifted her hands with an impassioned gesture; then covered her face with them.

But Cartaphilus, penetrating the veil with eyes no longer human, cried suddenly, so that the room vibrated with his voice, 'Bismillah! Wilt thou dare the Son of Heaven, questioning if His sentence upon the Jew—to renew, with his every hundredth year, his manhood's prime—was not rather a forestalling through His infinite penetration, of the consequences of that Jew's finding and eating of the Tree of Life? Is it Cartaphilus first, or Christ?'

The girl flung herself forward, crushing her bosom upon the marble floor, and lay blindly groping with her hands.

'He was a God and vindictive!' she moaned. 'He was a man and He died. The cross—the cross!'

The lost cry pierced Rose's breast like a knife. Sorrow, rage, and love inflamed his passion to madness. With one bound he met and grappled with the stranger.

He had no thought of the resistance he should encounter. In a moment the Jew, despite his age and seizure, had him broken and powerless. The fury of blood blazed down upon him from the unearthly eyes.

'Beast! that I might tear you! But the Nameless is your refuge. You must be chained—you must be chained. Come!'

Half-dragging, half-bearing, he forced his captive across the room to the corner where the flask of topaz liquid stood.

'Sleep!' he shrieked, and caught up the glass vessel and dashed it down upon Rose's mouth.

The blow was a stunning one. A jagged splinter tore the victim's lip and brought a gush of blood; the yellow fluid drowned his eyes and suffocated his throat. Struggling to hold his faculties, a startled shock passed through him, and he dropped insensible on the floor.

## VI

'Wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

Where had he read these words before? Now he saw them as scrolled in lightning upon a dead sheet of night.

There was a sound of feet going on and on.

Light soaked into the gloom, faster—faster; and he saw—

The figure of a man moved endlessly forward by town and pasture and the waste places of the world. But though he, the dreamer, longed to outstrip and stay the figure and look searchingly in its face, he could not, following, close upon the intervening space; and its back was ever towards him.

And always as the figure passed by populous places, there rose long murmurs of blasphemy to either side, and bestial cries: 'We are weary! the farce is played out! He reveals Himself not, nor ever will! Lead us—lead us, against Heaven, against hell; against any other, or against ourselves! The cancer of life spreads, and we cannot enjoy nor can we think cleanly. The sins of the fathers have accumulated to one vast mound of putrefaction. Lead us, and we follow!'

And, uttering these cries, swarms of hideous half-human shapes would emerge from holes and corners and rotting burrows, and stumble a little way with the figure, cursing and jangling, and so drop behind, one by one, like glutted flies shaken from a horse.

And the dreamer saw in him, who went ever on before, the sole existent type of a lost racial glory, a marvellous survival, a prince over monstrosities; and he knew him to have reached, through long ages of evil introspection, a terrible belief in his own self-acquired immortality and lordship over all abased peoples that must die and pass; and the seed of his blasphemy he sowed broadcast in triumph as he went; and the ravenous horrors of the earth ran forth in broods and devoured it like birds, and trod one another underfoot in their gluttony

And he came to a vast desolate plain, and took his stand upon a barren drift of sand; and the face the dreamer longed and feared to see was yet turned from him.

And the figure cried in a voice that grated down the winds of space:

‘Lo! I am he that cannot die! Lo! I am he that has eaten of the Tree of Life; who am the Lord of Time and of the races of the earth that shall flock to my standard!’

And again: ‘Lo! I am he that God was impotent to destroy because I had eaten of the fruit! He cannot control that which He hath created. He hath builded His temple upon His impotence, and it shall fall and crush Him. The children of His misrule cry out against Him. There is no God but Antichrist!’

Then from all sides came hurrying across the plain vast multitudes of the degenerate children of men, naked and unsightly; and they leaped and mouthed about the figure on the hillock, like hounds baying a dead fox held aloft; and from their swollen throats came one cry:

‘There is no God but Antichrist!’

And thereat the figure turned about—and it was Cartaphilus the Jew.

## VII

*There is no death! What seems so is transition.*

Uttering an incoherent cry, Rose came to himself with a shock of agony and staggered to his feet. In the act he traversed no neutral ground of insentient purposelessness. He caught the thread of being where he had dropped it—grasped it with an awful and sublime resolve that admitted no least thought of self-interest.

If his senses were for the moment amazed at their surroundings—the silence, the perfumed languor, the beauty and voluptuousness of the room—his soul, notwithstanding, stood intent, unfaltering—waiting merely the physical capacity for action.

The fragments of the broken vessel were scattered at his feet; the blood of his wound had hardened upon his face. He took a dizzy step forward, and another. The girl lay as he had seen her cast herself down—breathing, he could see; her hair in disorder; her hands clenched together in terror or misery beyond words.

Where was the other?

Suddenly his vision cleared. He saw that the silken curtains of the alcove were closed.

A poniard in a jewelled sheath lay, with other costly trifles, on a settle hard by. He seized and, drawing it, cast the scabbard clattering on the floor. His hands would have done; but this would work quicker.

Exhaling a quick sigh of satisfaction, he went forward with a noiseless rush and tore apart the curtains.

Yes—he was there—the Jew—the breathing enormity, stretched silent and motionless. The shadow of the young man’s lifted arm ran across his white shirt front like a bar sinister.

To rid the world of something monstrous and abnormal—that was all Rose's purpose and desire. He leaned over to strike. The face, stiff and waxen as a corpse's, looked up into his with a calm impenetrable smile—looked up, for all its eyes were closed. And this was a horrible thing, that, though the features remained fixed in that one inexorable expression, something beneath them seemed alive and moving—something that clouded or revealed them as when a sheet of paper glowing in the fire wavers, between ashes and flame. Almost he could have thought that the soul, detached from its envelope, struggled to burst its way to the light.

An instant he dashed his left palm across his eyes; then shrieking, 'Let the fruit avail you now!' drove the steel deep into its neck with a snarl.

In the act, for all his frenzy, he had a horror of the spurting blood that he knew must foul his hand obscenely, and sprinkle his face, perhaps, as when a finger half-plugs a flowing water-tap.

None came! The fearful white wound seemed to suck at the steel, making a puckered mouth of derision.

A thin sound, like the whinny of a dog, issued from Rose's lips. He pulled out the blade—it came with a crackling noise, as if it had been drawn through parchment.

Incredulous—mad—in an ecstasy of horror, he stabbed again and again. He might as fruitfully have struck at water. The slashed and gaping wounds closed up so soon as he withdrew the steel, leaving not a scar.

With a scream he dashed the unstained weapon on the floor and sprang back into the room. He stumbled and almost fell over the prostrate figure of the girl.

A strength as of delirium stung and prickled in his arms. He stooped and forcibly raised her—held her against his breast—addressed her in a hurried passion of entreaty

'In the name of God, come with me! In the name of God, divorce yourself from this horror! He is the abnormal!—the deathless—the Antichrist!'

Her lids were closed; but she listened.

'Adnah, you have given me myself. My reason cannot endure the gift alone. Have mercy and be pitiful, and share the burden!'

At last she turned on him her swimming gaze.

'Oh! I am numbed and lost! What would you do with me?'

With a sob of triumph he wrapped his arms hard about her, and sought her lips with his. In the very moment of their meeting, she drew herself away, and stood panting and gazing with wide eyes over his shoulder. He turned.

A young man of elegant appearance was standing by the table where *he* had lately leaned.

In the face of the newcomer the animal and the fanatic were mingled, characteristics inseparable in pseudo-revelation.

He was unmistakably a Jew, of the finest primitive type—such as might have existed in preneurotic days. His complexion was of a smooth golden russet; his nose and lips were cut rather in the lines of sensuous cynicism; the look in his polished brown eyes was of defiant self-confidence, capable of the extremes of devotion or of obstinacy. Short curling black hair covered his scalp, and his moustache and small crisp beard were of the same hue.

'Thanks, stranger,' he said, in a somewhat nasal but musical voice. 'Your attack—a little cowardly, perhaps, for all its provocation—has served to release me before my time. Thanks—thanks indeed!'

Amos sent a sick and groping glance towards the alcove. The curtain was pulled back—the couch was empty. His vision returning, caught sight of Adnah still standing motionless.

'No, no!' he screeched in a suffocated voice, and clasped his hands convulsively

There was an adoring expression in her wet eyes that grew and grew. In another moment she had thrown herself at the stranger's feet.

'Master,' she cried, in a rich and swooning voice: 'O Lord and Master—as blind love foreshadowed thee in these long months!'

He smiled down upon her.

'A tender welcome on the threshold,' he said softly, 'that I had almost renounced. The young spirit is weak to confirm the self-sacrifice of the old. But this ardent modern, Adnah, who, it seems, has slipped his opportunity?'

Passionately clasping the hands of the young Jew, she turned her face reluctant.

'He has blood on him,' she whispered. 'His lip is swollen like a schoolboy's with fighting. He is not a man, sane, self-reliant and glorious—like you, O my heart!'

The Jew gave a high, loud laugh, which he checked in mid-career.

'Sir' he said derisively, 'we will wish you a very pleasant good-morning.'

How—under what pressure or by what process of self-effacement—he reached the street, Amos could never remember. His first sense of reality was in the stinging cold, which made him feel, by reaction, preposterously human.

It was perhaps six o'clock of a February morning, and the fog had thinned considerably, giving place to a wan and livid glow that was but half-measure of dawn.

He found himself going down the ringing pavement that was talcous with a sooty skin of ice, a single engrossing resolve hammering time in his brain to his footsteps.

The artificial glamour was all past and gone—beaten and frozen out of him. The rest was to do—his plain duty as a Christian, as a citizen—above all, as a gentleman. He was, unhypnotized, a law-abiding young man, with a hatred of notoriety and a detestation of the abnormal. Unquestionably his forebears had made a huge muddle of his inheritance.

About a quarter to seven he walked (rather unsteadily) into Vine Street Police Station and accosted the inspector on duty.

'I want to lay an information.'

The officer scrutinized him, professionally, from the under side, and took up a pen.

'What's the charge?'

'Administering a narcotic, attempted murder, abduction, profanity, trading under false pretences, wandering at large—great heavens! what isn't it?'

'Perhaps you'll say Name of accused?'

'Cartaphilus.'

'Any other?'

'The Wandering Jew.'

The Inspector laid down his pen and leaned forward, bridging his finger-tips under his chin.

'If you take my advice,' he said, 'you'll go and have a Turkish bath.'

The young man grasped and frowned.

'You won't take my information?'

'Not in that form. Come again by-and-by.'

Amos walked straight out of the building and retraced his steps to Wardour Street.

'I'll watch for his coming out,' he thought, 'and have him arrested, on one charge only, by the constable on the beat. Where's the place?'

Twice he walked the length of the street and back, with dull increasing amazement. The sunlight had edged its way into the fog by this time, and every door and window stood out sleek

and self-evident. But amongst them all was none that corresponded to the door or window of his adventure.

He hung about till day was bright in the air, and until it occurred to him that his woeful and bloodstained appearance was beginning to excite unflattering comment. At that he trudged for the third time the entire length to and fro, and so coming out into Oxford Street stood on the edge of the pavement, as though it were the brink of Cocytus.

‘Well, she called me a boy,’ he muttered; ‘what does it matter?’

He hailed an early hansom and jumped in.