In Dull Brown

By Evelyn Sharp

"All the same," said Nancy, who was lazily sipping her coffee in bed, "brown doesn't suit you a bit."

"No," said Jean sadly, "and I should not be wearing it at all if my other skirt did not want brushing. Nevertheless, a russet-brown frock demands adventures. The girls in novels always wear russet-brown, whatever their complexion is, and they always have adventures. Now——"

"Isn't it time you started?" asked the gentle voice of her sister. Jean glanced at the clock and said something in English that was not classical.

"I shall have to take an omnibus. Bother!" she said, and the heroine of the russet-brown frock made an abrupt and undignified exit.

It was a fine warm morning in November, the sort of day that follows a week of stormy wet weather as though to cheat the unwary into imagining that the spring instead of the winter is on its way. The pavements were still wet from yesterday's rain, the trees in the park stood stripped by yesterday's gale; only the sun and the sparrows kept up the illusion that it was never going to rain any more. But the caprices of the atmosphere made no impression on the people who cannot help being out; and Jean, as she made the fourteenth passenger on the top of an omnibus, had a vague

a vague feeling of contempt for the other thirteen who were engrossed in their morning papers.

"Just imagine missing that glorious effect," she thought to herself, as they rumbled along the edge of the Green Park where the mist was slowly yielding to the warmth of the sun and allowing itself to be coaxed out of growing into a fog. And almost simultaneously she became as material as the rest, in her annoyance with her neighbour for taking more than his share of the seat.

"Nice morning!" he said at that moment, and folded up his *Telegraph*.

"Yes," said Jean, in a tone that was not encouraging. That the morning was "nice" would never have occurred to her; and it seemed unfair to sacrifice the effect over the Green Park, even for conversational purposes. Then she caught sight of his face, which was a harmless one, and in an ordinary way good-looking, and she accused herself of priggishness, and stared at the unconscious passenger in front, preparatory to cultivating the one at her side.

"We deserve some compensation for yesterday," she continued, more graciously.

"Yesterday? Oh, it was beastly wet, wasn't it? I suppose you don't like wet weather, eh?" said the man, with a suspicion of familiarity in his tone. Jean frowned a little.

"That comes of the simple russet gown," she thought; "of course he thinks I am a little shop-girl." But the sun was shining, and life had been very dull lately, and she would be getting down at Piccadilly Circus. Besides, he was little more than a boy, and she liked boys, and there would be no harm in having five minutes' conversation with this one.

"I suppose no one does. I wasn't trying to be particularly original," she replied carelessly.

He

He smiled and glanced at her with more interest. Her identity was beginning to puzzle him.

"Going to business?" he asked tentatively.

"Well, yes, I suppose so. At least, I am going to teach three children all sorts of things they don't want to learn a bit."

"How awfully clever of you!"

The little obvious remark made her laugh. In spite of the humble brown dress that did not suit her, she looked very pretty when she threw back her head and laughed.

"That is because you have never taught," she said; "to be a really good teacher you must systematically forget quite half of what you do know. For instance, I can teach German better than anything else in the world, because I know less about it. Perhaps that is why I always won the German prizes at school," she added reflectively.

"You are very paradoxical—or very cynical, which is it?" asked her neighbour, smiling.

"Oh, I don't know. Am I? But did you ever try to teach?"

"Not I. Gives one the hump, doesn't it? I should just whack the little beasts when they didn't work. Don't you feel like that sometimes?"

"Clearly you never tried to teach," she said, and laughed again.

"Those are lucky pupils of yours," he observed.

"Why?" she asked abruptly, and flashed a stern look at him sideways.

"Oh, because you—seem right on it, don't you know," he answered hastily. The adroitness of his answer pleased her, and she put him down as a gentleman, and felt justified in going a little further.

"I like

"I like teaching, yes," she went on gravely. "But all the same I am glad that I only teach for my living and can draw for my pleasure. Now whatever made me tell you that I wonder?"

"It was awfully decent of you to tell me," he said; "I suppose you thought I should be interested, eh?"

"I suppose I did," she assented, and this time she laughed for no reason whatever.

"Will you let me say something very personal?" he asked, waxing bolder. But his tone was still humble, and she felt more kindly towards him now that he evidently knew she was not to be patronised. Besides, she was curious. So she said nothing to dissuade him, and he went on.

"Why do you look so beastly happy, and all that, don't you know? Is it because you work so hard?"

"I look happy!" she exclaimed. "I suppose it is the sun, then, or the jolly day, or—or the *feel* of everything after the rain. Yes, I suppose it must be that."

"I don't, then. Lots of girls might feel all that and not look as you do. I think it is because you have such a bally lot to do."

"I should stop thinking that, if I were you," said Jean a little bitterly; "I know that is the usual idea about women who work—among those who don't. They should try it for a time, and see."

"I believe you are cynical after all," observed her companion. "Don't you like being called happy?"

"Oh, yes, I like it. But I hate humbug, and it is all nonsense to pretend that working hard for one's living is rather an amusing thing to do. Because it isn't, and if it has never been so for a man, why should it be for a woman? If anything, it is worse for women. For one happy hour it gives us two sad ones; it makes

makes us hard—what you call cynical. It builds up our characters at the expense of our hearts. It makes heroines of us and spoils the woman in us. We learn to look the world in the face, and it teaches us to be prigs. We probe into its realities for the first time, and the disclosure is too much for us. Working hard to get enough bread and butter to eat is a sordid, demoralising thing, and the people who talk cant about it never had to do it themselves. *You* don't like the kind of woman who works, you know you don't!"

The omnibus was slowing at the Circus. Jean stopped suddenly and glanced up at her companion with an amused, half shamefaced look.

"I am so sorry. You see how objectionable it has made *me*. Aren't you glad you will never see me again?"

And before he had time to speak she had slipped away, and the omnibus was turning ruthlessly down Waterloo Place.

"What deuced odd things women are," he reflected, by way of deluding himself into the belief that amusement and not interest was the predominant sensation in his mind. But the next morning saw him waiting carefully in West Kensington for the same City omnibus as before; and when it rumbled on its way to Piccadilly Circus and no one in russet-brown got up to relieve the monotony of black coats and umbrellas round him, he was quite unreasonably disappointed, though he told himself savagely at the same time that of course he had never expected to see her at all.

"And if I had, she would have avoided me at once. Women are always like that," he thought, and just as the reflection shaped itself in his mind he caught a glimpse of Air Street that sent his usual composure to the winds and brought him down the steps at a pace that upset the descent of all the other passengers who had no similar desire to rush in the direction of Air Street.

 "Did

"Did yer expect us to take yer to Timbuctoo?" scoffed the conductor, with the usual contempt of his kind for the passenger who gets into the wrong omnibus. But the victim of his scorn was as regardless of it as of the pink ticket he was grinding into pulp in his hand; and he stood on the pavement with his under-lip drawn tightly inwards, until he had regained his customary air of gentlemanly indifference. Then he turned up into Regent Street and made a cross cut through the slums that lie on the borders of Soho.

And as Jean was hastening along Oxford Street, ten minutes later, she met him coming towards her with a superb expression of pleased surprise on his face, which deceived her so completely that she bowed at once and held out her hand to him, although, as she said afterwards to Nancy, "he was being most dreadfully unconventional, and I couldn't help wondering if he would have spoken to me again, if I had worn my new tailor-made gown and looked ordinary." At the time she only felt that Oxford Street, even on a damp and muggy morning, was quite a nice place for a walk.

"Beastly day for you to be out," he began, taking away her umbrella and holding his own over her head. To be looked after was a novel experience to Jean, and she found herself half resenting his air of protection.

"Oh, it's all right. You get used to it when you have to," she said with a short laugh. It was not at all what she wanted to say to him, but the perversity of her nature was uppermost and she had to say it.

"All the same, it is beastly rough on you," he persisted.

"Why? Some one must do the work," she said defiantly.

"Is it so important, then?" he asked with a smile that was half a sneer. Jean blushed hotly.

"It

"It means my living to me," she said; and he winced at her unpleasant frankness.

"You were quite different yesterday, weren't you?" he complained gently.

"You speak as though my being one thing or another ought to depend on your pleasure," she retorted; "of course, you think like everybody else that a woman is only to be tolerated as long as she is cheerful. How can you be cheerful when the weather is dreary, and you are tired out with yesterday's work? You don't know what it is like. You should keep to the women who don't work; they will always look pretty, and smile sweetly and behave in a domesticated manner."

"I don't think I said anything to provoke all that, did I?"

"Yes, you did," she answered unreasonably. "I said—I mean *you* said, oh never mind! But you do like domesticated women best, don't you? On your honour now?"

There was no doubt that he did, especially at that moment. But he lied, smilingly, and well.

"I like all women. But most of all, women like you. Didn't I tell you yesterday how happy you looked? You are such a rum little girl—oh hang, please forgive me. But without any rotting, I wish you'd tell me what you do want me to say. When I said how jolly you looked, you were offended; and now I pity you for being out in the rain, you don't like that any better. What am I to do?"

"I don't see why you should do anything," she said curtly. They had reached the corner of Berners Street, and she came to a standstill. "I am glad I met you again," she added very quickly, without meeting his eyes. And then she ran down the street, and disappeared inside a doorway.

Tom Unwin stepped into a hansom with two umbrellas and an unsatisfactory

unsatisfactory impression of the last quarter of an hour. And for the next two mornings he went to the City by train. But the third saw him again in Oxford Street shortly before nine o'clock, and he held a small and elegant umbrella in his hand, although it was a cloudless day, and there was hoar frost beneath the gravel on the wood pavement.

"How very odd that we should meet again," she exclaimed, blushing in spite of the self-possession on which she prided herself.

"Not so very odd," he replied; "I believe I am responsible for this meeting."

"I feel sure there is a suitable reply to that, but you mustn't expect me to make it. I am never any good at making suitable replies," said Jean; and she laughed as she had done the first time they met.

"I don't want suitable replies from you," he rejoined, just as lightly; "tell me what you really think instead."

"That it was quite charming of you to come this particular way to the City on this particular morning," said Jean demurely. "Now, do you know, I should have thought it was ever so much quicker to go along the Strand."

"On the contrary, I find it very much quicker when I come along Oxford Street."

"At all events, *you* know how to make suitable replies."

"Then you thought that was a suitable reply? Got you there, didn't I?" and he laughed, which pleased her immensely, although she pretended to be hurt.

"Isn't it queer how one can live two perfectly different lives at the same time?" she said irrelevantly.

"Two? I live half a dozen. But let's hear yours first."

"I was only thinking," continued Jean, "that if the mother of my

my pupils knew I was walking along Oxford Street with some one I had never been introduced to——"

"Well?" he said, as she paused.

"Oh, well, it isn't exactly an ordinary thing to do, is it?"

"Why not?"

"Well, it isn't, is it?"

"But must one be ordinary?"

"People won't forgive you for being anything else, unless you are in a history book, where you can't do any harm."

"People be hanged! When shall I see you again?"

"Next time you take a short cut to the City, I suppose. Good-bye."

"Stop!" he cried. And when she did stop, with an air of innocent inquiry on her face, he found he had nothing whatever to say.

"You—you haven't told me your name," he stammered lamely.

"Is that all? You needn't make me any later just for *that*," she exclaimed, turning away again. "Besides, you haven't told me yours," she added, over her shoulder.

"Do you want to know it?"

"Why, no; it doesn't matter to me. But I thought you wanted to make some more conversation. Good-bye, again."

"Well, I'm hanged! Look here, if I tell you mine, will you tell me yours?"

"But I don't mind a bit if you *don't* tell me yours."

"Will you, though?"

"Oh, make haste, or else I can't wait to hear it."

"Here you are, then. It is——Tom."

She faced him sternly.

"Why don't you go on?"

"Unwin,"

"Unwin," he added, hastily. "Now yours, please."

But the only answer he got was a mocking smile; and he was again left at the corner of Berners Street with a lady's umbrella in his hand.

The next morning there was a dull yellow fog, and Jean was in a perverse mood.

"I think you are very mistaken to walk to business on a day like this, when you might go by train," she said, as she reluctantly gave up her books to be carried by him. The fog was making her eyes smart, and she felt cross.

"But I shall get my reward," he said, with elaborate courtesy.

"Oh, please don't. The fog is bad enough without allusions to the hymn-book. Besides, I can't stand being used as a means for somebody else to get into heaven. It is very selfish of me, I suppose, but I don't like it."

"I am afraid you mistake me. I never for a moment associated you with my chances of salvation."

"Then why didn't you?" she cried indignantly. "I should like to know why you come and bother me every morning like this if you think I am as hopelessly bad as all that! I didn't ask you to come, did I? Please give me my books and let me go."

"I think you hopelessly bad? Why, I assure you——"

"Give me my books. Can't you see how late I am?" she said, stamping her foot impetuously. And she seized Bright's English History and Cornwall's Geography out of his hand, and left him precipitately, without another word.

"You are a most unreasonable little girl," he exclaimed hotly; and the policeman to whom he said it smiled patiently.

He started with the intention of going by train on the following morning; then he changed his mind, and ran back to take an omnibus

omnibus. After that he found it was getting late, so he took a cab to Oxford Circus, and then strolled on towards Holborn as though nothing but chance or necessity had brought him there. But, although he walked as far as Berners Street and back again to the Circus, he met no one in a dull brown frock. And he was just as unsuccessful the next morning, and the one after, and at the end of a week he found himself the sad possessor of a slender silk umbrella, a regretful remembrance, and a fresh store of cynicism.

"She is like all the others," he told himself, with a shrug of his shoulders; "they play the very devil with you until they begin to get frightened of the consequences, and then they fight shy. And I'm hanged if I even know her name!"

And the days wore on, and the autumn grew into winter, and Oxford Street no longer saw the playing of a comedy at nine o'clock in the morning. And Tom Unwin found other interests in life, and if a chance occurrence reminded him of a determined little figure in russet brown, the passing thought brought nothing but an amused smile to his lips.

Then the spring came, suddenly and completely, on the heels of a six weeks' frost; and chance took him down Piccadilly one morning in March, where the budding freshness of the trees drew him into the Green Park. The impression of spring met him everywhere, in the fragrance of the almond-trees, and the quarrelling of the sparrows, and the transparency of the blue haze over Westminster; and, indifferent though he was to such things, there was a note of familiarity in it all that affected him strangely, and left him with a lazy sensation of pleasure. What that something was he did not realise until his eyes fell on one of the chairs under the trees, and then, as he stood quite still and wondered whether she would know him again, he discovered what there was in the air that had seemed to him so familiar and so pleasant.

"I was

"I was just thinking about you," he said deliberately, when she had shown very decidedly that she did mean to know him. He spoke with an easy indifference that she showed no signs of sharing.

"Oh, I have been wondering——" she began, in a voice that trembled with eagerness.

"Yes? Supposing we sit down. That's better. You have been wondering——?"

She leaned back in her chair, and looked up through the branches at the pale blue sky beyond. There was an odd little look of defiance on her face.

"So, after all, you did find that the Strand was the quickest way," she said abruptly.

"Possibly. And you?" he asked, with his customary smile.

"How often did you go down Oxford Street after—the last time I saw you?"

"As far as I can remember, the measure of my endurance was a week. And how much longer did you take the precaution of avoiding such a dangerous person as myself?"

She turned round and stared at him with great wondering eyes, into which a look of comprehension was slowly creeping.

"You actually thought I did that? And all the time I was ill, I was having visions of you——"

"Ill? You never told me you had been ill," he interrupted.

"You didn't exactly give me the chance, did you? It was the fog, I suppose. I am all right now. They thought I should never go down Oxford Street again. But I take a good deal of killing, and so here I am again." She ended with a cynical smile. He was making holes in the soft turf with his walking-stick. She went on speaking to the pale blue sky and the network of branches above her.

"And

"And the odd part is that I did not mind the illness so much as——" And she paused again.

"Yes?" he said, in a voice that had lost some of its jauntiness. "I think it won't interest you."

"How can you say that unless you tell me?"

"I am sure it won't," she said decidedly. "And I couldn't possibly tell you, really."

"Go on, please," he said, looking round at her; and she went on meekly.

"The thing that bothered me was my having been cross the last time we met. You see, it was not the being cross that I minded exactly; *that* wouldn't have mattered a bit if I had seen you again the next day, but——"

"I quite understand. Bad temper is a luxury we keep for our most familiar friends. I am honoured by the distinction," he said, and his smile was not a sneer.

"I wish you wouldn't laugh at me," she said, a little wistfully.

"I am not laughing at you, child," he hastened to assure her, and he took one of her hands in his. "I have missed you, too," he went on, in a low tone that he strove to make natural.

"Did you *really?* I thought you would at first, perhaps, and then I thought you would just laugh, and forget. And you really did think of me sometimes? I am so glad."

He had a twinge of conscience. But a reputation once acquired is a tender thing, and must be handled with delicacy.

"I have not forgotten," he said, and tried to change the conversation. "And you never even told me your name, you perverse little person," he added playfully.

"You told me yours," she said, and laughed triumphantly.

"And yours, please?"

"It will quite spoil it all," she objected.

"Is

"Is it so bad as that, then? Never mind, I can bear a good deal. What is it—Susan, Jemima, Emmelina?"

There was a little pause, and then she nodded at the pale blue sky above and said "Jean" in a hurried whisper. And he was less exigent than she had been, for he did not ask for any more.

When he left her on her own doorstep she lingered for a moment in the sunlight before she went in to Nancy.

"And he really is coming to see me to-morrow," she said out loud with a joyous laugh; "I wonder, shall I tell Nancy or not?" After mature consideration she decided not to tell Nancy, though if Nancy had been less unsuspicious she would certainly have noticed something unusual in the manner of her practical little eldest sister, when she started for Berners Street on the following morning, and twice repeated that she would be back to tea should any one call and ask for her.

"Nobody is likely to ask for you," said Nancy with sisterly frankness, "nobody ever does. You needn't bother to be back to tea unless you like," she added with a self-conscious smile. "Jimmy said he might look in."

"So much the better," thought Jean; "I can bring in a cake without exciting suspicion." And she started gaily on her way, and wondered ingenuously why all the people in the street seemed so indifferent to her happiness. At Berners Street, a shock was awaiting her. Would Miss Moreen kindly stay till five to-day as the children's mother was obliged to go out, and nurse had a holiday? And as the children's mother had already gone out and nurse's holiday had begun before breakfast, there was no appeal left to poor Jean, and she settled down to her day's work with a sense of injustice in her mind and a queer feeling in her throat that had to be overcome during an arithmetic lesson. But as the day wore on her spirits rose to an unnatural pitch; she spent the afternoon

afternoon in romping furiously with her pupils; and when five o'clock came, she was standing outside in the street counting the coins in her little purse.

"I can just do it, and I shall!" she cried, and a passing cabby pulled up in answer to her graphic appeal and carried her away westwards. He whistled when she paid him an extravagant fare, and watched her with a chuckle as she flew up the steps and fumbled nervously at the keyhole before she was able to unlock the door. He would have wondered more, or perhaps less, had he seen her standing on the mat outside the front room on the first floor, giving her hat and hair certain touches which did not affect their appearance in the least, and listening breathlessly to the sound of voices that came from within. Then she turned the handle suddenly and went in.

The lamp was not yet lighted and the daylight was waning. The room was in partial darkness, but the fire was burning brightly, and it shone on the face of a man as he leaned forward in a low chair, and talked to the beautiful girl who lay on the sofa, smiling up at him in a gentle deprecating manner, as if his homage were new and overwhelming to her.

The man was not the expected Jimmy, and Jean took two swift little steps into the room. The spell was broken and they looked round with a start.

"Oh, here you are," cried Nancy, gliding off the sofa and putting her arms round her in her pretty affectionate manner. "Poor Mr. Unwin has been waiting quite an hour for you. Whatever made you so late?"

Jean disengaged herself a little roughly, and held out her hand to Tom.

"Have you been very bored?" she asked him with a slight curl of her lip.

"That

"That could hardly be the case in Miss Nancy's company," he replied in his best manner; "but if she had not been so kind to me your tardiness in coming would certainly have been harder to bear."

The carefully picked words did not come naturally from the boyish fellow who had talked slang to her on the top of the omnibus, but Tom Unwin never talked slang when there was a situation of any kind. Jean was bitterly conscious of being the only one of the three who was not behaving in a picturesque manner. The other two vied with each other in showing her little attentions, a fact that entirely failed to deceive her.

"Do they think I am a fool?" she thought scornfully. "Why should they suppose that I need propitiating?"

And she insisted curtly on pouring out her own cup of tea, and sat down obstinately on a high chair, without noticing the low one he was pulling forward for her.

"Don't let me disturb you," she said calmly; "you made such a charming picture when I came in."

They only seemed to her to be making a ridiculous picture now. She was conscious of nothing but the satirical view of the situation, and she had a mad desire to point at them and scream with laughter at their fatuity in supposing that she did not see through their discomfiture.

"We thought you were never coming," began Nancy in her gentle tired voice; "I was afraid you had been taken ill or something."

"Yes, indeed," added Tom with strained jocularity; "it was all I could do to restrain Miss Nancy from sending a telegram to somebody about you. She only gave up the idea when I got her to acknowledge that she didn't even know where to send it."

"Now,

"Now, that is really too bad of you," exclaimed Nancy with a carefully studied pout; "you know quite well——"

"Indeed, I appeal to you, Miss Moreen——"

"Don't listen to him, Jean."

"It doesn't seem to me to matter very much," said Jean with much composure; "I am very glad that I gave you so much to talk about."

They made another attempt to conciliate her.

"Do have some cake. It isn't bad," said Nancy invitingly.

"Or some more tea?" added Tom anxiously. "You must be so played out with your long day's work. Have the little brats been very trying?"

"Oh, you needn't worry about the little brats, thanks," said Jean, eating bread and butter voraciously for the sake of an occupation.

"Come nearer the fire," said Nancy coaxingly; "Mr. Unwin will move up that other chair."

"Of course," said Mr. Unwin with alacrity, glad of any excuse that removed him for a moment from the unpleasant scrutiny of her large cold eyes.

"You are both very kind to bother about me like this. I am really not used to it," said Jean with a hard little laugh. "Won't you go on with your conversation while I write a postcard?"

She made a place for her cup on the tea-tray, strolled across the room to the bureau, and sat down to look vacantly at a blank postcard. The other two seated themselves stiffly at opposite ends of the hearthrug, and manufactured stilted phrases for the ears of Jean.

"Your sister draws, I believe?"

"Oh, yes. Jean is fearfully clever, you know. She used to win prizes and things. I never won a prize in my life. Oh, yes; Jean is certainly very clever indeed."

"I am

"I am sure of it. It must be charming to be so clever."

"Yes. Nothing else matters if you are as clever as all that. It doesn't affect Jean in the least if things happen to go wrong, because she always has her cleverness to console her, don't you see."

"Brains are a perennial consolation," said Tom solemnly; "I always knew, Miss Nancy, that your sister was very exceptional."

"Exceptional! Yes, I suppose I am that," thought Jean with a curious feeling of dissatisfaction. The burden of her own cleverness was almost too much for her, and she would have given worlds, just then, to have been as ordinary as Nancy—and as beautiful.

"Will you forgive me if I go upstairs and finish a drawing?" she said, coming forward into the firelight again. They uttered some conventional regrets, and Tom held the door open for her. "Good-bye," she said, smiling, "I am sorry my drawing won't wait. It has to go in to-morrow morning."

"I envy you your charming talent," he said with a sigh that was a little overdone.

"Do you? It prevents me from being domesticated, you know, and that is always a pity, isn't it?" she said, and drew her hand away quickly.

Upstairs with her head on an old brown cloak she lay and listened to the hum of voices below.

"Why wasn't I born a fool with a pretty face?" she murmured. "Fools are the only really happy people in the world, for they are the only people the rest of us have the capacity to understand. And to be understood by the majority of people is the whole secret of happiness. No one would take the trouble to understand *me*. Of course, it is unbearably conceited to say so, but there is no one to hear."

When

When Nancy came up to bed, she found her sister working away steadily at her drawing.

"It was very mean of you to leave me so long with that man, Jean; he stayed quite an hour after you left," she said, suppressing a yawn.

"Oh, I thought you wouldn't mind; I don't get on with him half so well as you do. Stand out of the light, will you?"

"He thinks you're immensely clever," said Nancy; "he says he never met any one so determined and plucky in his life. Of course you will get on, he says."

"Yes," said Jean with a strange smile, as she nibbled the top of her pencil; "I suppose I shall get on. And to the end of my days people will admire me from a distance, and talk about my talent and my determination, just as they talk about your beauty and your womanly ways. That is so like the world; it always associates us with a certain atmosphere and never admits the possibility of any other."

Nancy was perched on the end of the bed in her white peignoir, with her knees up to her chin and a puzzled expression on her face.

"How queer you are to-night, Jean," she said; "I don't think I understand."

"My atmosphere," continued Jean in the same passionless tone, "is the clever and capable one. It is the one that is always reserved for the unattractive people who have understanding, the sort of people who know all there is to know, from observation, and never get the chance of experiencing one jot of it. They are the people who learn about life from the outside, and remain half alive themselves to the end of time. Nobody would think of falling in love with them, and they don't even know how to be lovable. It is a very clinging atmosphere," she added sadly; "I shall never shake it off."

Nancy stopped making a becoming wreck of her coils of hair, and looked more bewildered than before.

"I don't understand, Jean," she said again.

Jean looked at her for a moment with eyes full of admiration.

"Don't worry about it, child," she said slowly; "you will never have to understand."

A Falling Out

By Kenneth Grahame

HAROLD told me the main facts of this episode, some time later—in bits, and with reluctance. It was not a recollection he cared to talk about. The crude blank misery of a moment is apt to leave a dull bruise which is slow to depart, if indeed it ever does so entirely ; and Harold confesses to a twinge or two, still, at times, like the veteran who brings home a bullet inside him from martial plains over sea.

He knew he was a brute the moment after he had done it ; Selina had not meant to worry, only to comfort and assist. But his soul was one raw sore within him, when he found himself shut up in the schoolroom after hours, merely for insisting that 7 times 7 amounted to 47. The injustice of it seemed so flagrant. Why not 47 as much as 49? One number was no prettier than the other to look at, and it was evidently only a matter of arbitrary taste and preference, and, anyhow, it had always been 47 to him, and would be to the end of time. So when Selina came in out of the sun, leaving the Trappers of the Far West behind her, and putting off the glory of being an Apache squaw in order to hear him his tables and win his release, Harold turned on her venomously, rejected her kindly overtures, and even drove his elbow into her sympathetic ribs, in his determination to be left alone in the glory

glory of sulks. The fit passed directly, his eyes were opened, and his soul sat in the dust as he sorrowfully began to cast about for some atonement heroic enough to salve the wrong.

Needless to say, Selina demanded no sacrifice nor heroics whatever; she didn't even want him to say he was sorry. If he would only make it up, she would have done the apologising part herself. But that was not a boy's way. Something solid, Harold felt, was due from him; and until that was achieved, making up must not be thought of, in order that the final effect might not be spoilt. Accordingly, when his release came, and poor Selina hung about, trying to catch his eye, Harold, possessed by the demon of a distorted motive, avoided her steadily—though he was bleeding inwardly at every minute of delay—and came to me instead.

Of course I approved his plan highly; it was so much better than just going and making it up tamely, which any one could do; and a girl who had been jobbed in the ribs by a hostile elbow could not be expected for a moment to overlook it, without the liniment of an offering to soothe her injured feelings.

"I know what she wants most," said Harold. "She wants that set of tea-things in the toy-shop window, with the red and blue flowers on 'em; she's wanted it for months, 'cos her dolls are getting big enough to have real afternoon tea; and she wants it so badly that she won't walk that side of the street when we go into the town. But it costs five shillings!"

Then we set to work seriously, and devoted the afternoon to a realisation of assets and the composition of a Budget that might have been dated without shame from Whitehall. The result worked out as follows:

	s.	d.
By one uncle, unspent through having been lost for nearly a week—turned up at last in the straw of the dog-kennel	2	6
By advance from me on security of next uncle, and failing that, to be called in at Christmas	1	0
By shaken out of missionary-box with the help of a knife-blade. (They were our own pennies and a forced levy)		4
By bet due from Edward, for walking across the field where Farmer Larkin's bull was, and Edward bet him twopence he wouldn't—called in with difficulty .		2
By advance from Martha, on no security at all, only you mustn't tell your aunt	1	0
Total	5	0

and at last we breathed again.

The rest promised to be easy. Selina had a tea-party at five on the morrow, with the chipped old wooden tea-things that had served her successive dolls from babyhood. Harold would slip off directly after dinner, going alone, so as not to arouse suspicion, as we were not allowed to go into the town by ourselves. It was nearly two miles to our small metropolis, but there would be plenty of time for him to go and return, even laden with the olive-branch neatly packed in shavings; besides, he might meet the butcher, who was his friend and would give him a lift. Then, finally, at five, the rapture of the new tea-service, descended from the skies; and then, retribution made, making up at last, without loss of dignity. With the event before us, we thought it a small thing that twenty-four hours more of alienation and pretended sulks must be kept up on Harold's part; but Selina, who naturally knew nothing of the treat in store for her,

her, moped for the rest of the evening, and took a very heavy heart to bed.

When next day the hour for action arrived, Harold evaded Olympian attention with an easy modesty born of long practice, and made off for the front gate. Selina, who had been keeping her eye upon him, thought he was going down to the pond to catch frogs, a joy they had planned to share together, and slipped out after him; but Harold, though he heard her footsteps, continued sternly on his high mission, without even looking back; and Selina was left to wander disconsolately among flower-beds that had lost—for her—all scent and colour. I saw it all, and, although cold reason approved our line of action, instinct told me we were brutes.

Harold reached the town—so he recounted afterwards—in record time, having run most of the way for fear lest the tea-things, which had reposed six months in the window, should be snapped up by some other conscious-stricken lacerator of a sister's feelings; and it seemed hardly credible to find them still there, and their owner willing to part with them for the price marked on the ticket. He paid his money down at once, that there should be no drawing back from the bargain; and then, as the things had to be taken out of the window and packed, and the afternoon was yet young, he thought he might treat himself to a taste of urban joys and *la vie de Bohème*. Shops came first, of course, and he flattened his nose successively against the window with the india-rubber balls in it, and the clock-work locomotive: and against the barber's window, with wigs on blocks, reminding him of uncles, and shaving-cream that looked so good to eat; and the grocer's window, displaying more currants than the whole British population could possibly consume without a special effort; and the window of the bank, wherein gold

was

was thought so little of that it was dealt about in shovels. Next there was the market-place, with all its clamorous joys; and when a runaway calf came down the street like a cannon-ball, Harold felt that he had not lived in vain. The whole place was so brimful of excitement that he had quite forgotten the why and the wherefore of his being there, when a sight of the church clock recalled him to his better self, and sent him flying out of the town, as he realized he had only just time enough left to get back in. If he were after his appointed hour, he would not only miss his high triumph, but probably would be detected as a transgressor of bounds—a crime before which a private opinion on multiplication sank to nothingness. So he jogged along on his homeward way, thinking of many things, and probably talking to himself a good deal, as his habit was. He must have covered nearly half the distance, when suddenly—a deadly sinking in the pit of the stomach—a paralysis of every limb—around him a world extinct of light and music—a black sun and a reeling sky—he had forgotten the tea-things!

It was useless, it was hopeless, all was over, and nothing could now be done; nevertheless he turned and ran back wildly, blindly, choking with the big sobs that evoked neither pity nor comfort from a merciless, mocking world around; a stitch in his side, dust in his eyes, and black despair clutching at his heart. So he stumbled on, with leaden legs and bursting sides, till—as if Fate had not yet dealt him her last worst buffet—on turning a corner in the road he almost ran under the wheels of a dog-cart, in which, as it pulled up, was apparent the portly form of Farmer Larkin, the arch-enemy whose ducks he had been shying stones at that very morning!

Had Harold been in his right and unclouded senses, he would have vanished through the hedge some seconds earlier, rather than

pain

pain the farmer by any unpleasant reminiscences which his appearance might call up ; but as things were he could only stand and blubber hopelessly, caring, indeed, little now what further ill might befall him. The farmer, for his part, surveyed the desolate figure with some astonishment, calling out in no unfriendly accents, "What, Master Harold ! whatever be the matter ? Baint runnin' away, be ee ?"

Then Harold, with the unnatural courage born of desperation, flung himself on the step, and, climbing into the cart, fell in the straw at the bottom of it, sobbing out that he wanted to go back, go back ! The situation had a vagueness ; but the farmer, a man of action rather than words, swung his horse round smartly, and they were in the town again by the time Harold had recovered himself sufficiently to furnish some details. As they drove up to the shop, the woman was waiting at the door with the parcel ; and hardly a minute seemed to have elapsed since the black crisis, ere they were bowling along swiftly home, the precious parcel hugged in a close embrace.

And now the farmer came out in quite a new and unexpected light. Never a word did he say of broken fences and hurdles, trampled crops and harried flocks and herds. One would have thought the man had never possessed a head of live stock in his life. Instead, he was deeply interested in the whole delorous quest of the tea-things, and sympathised with Harold on the disputed point in mathematics as if he had been himself at the same stage of education. As they neared home, Harold found himself, to his surprise, sitting up and chatting to his new friend like man to man ; and before he was dropped at a convenient gap in the garden hedge, he had promised that when Selina gave her first public tea-party, little Miss Larkin should be invited to come and bring her whole sawdust family along with her, and the

farmer

farmer appeared as pleased and proud as if he had been asked to a garden party at Marlborough House. Really those Olympians have certain good points, far down in them. I shall leave off abusing them some day.

At the hour of five, Selina, having spent the afternoon searching for Harold in all his accustomed haunts, sat down disconsolately to tea with her dolls, who ungenerously refused to wait beyond the appointed hour. The wooden tea-things seemed more chipped than usual; and the dolls themselves had more of wax and sawdust, and less of human colour and intelligence about them, than she ever remembered before. It was then that Harold burst in, very dusty, his stockings at his heels, and the channels ploughed by tears still showing on his grimy cheeks; and Selina was at last permitted to know that he had been thinking of her ever since his ill-juded exhibition of temper, and that his sulks had not been the genuine article, nor had he gone frogging by himself. It was a very happy hostess who dispensed hospitality that evening to a glassy-eyed stiff-kneed circle; and many a dollish *gaucherie*, that would have been severely checked on ordinary occasions, was as much overlooked as if it had been a birthday.

But Harold and I, in our stupid masculine way, thought all her happiness sprang from possession of the long-coveted tea-service.