Thorne Smith



The Stray Lamb

Thorne Smith

The Stray Lamb



Published by Good Press, 2022

goodpress@okpublishing.info

EAN 4064066357788

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<u>Chapter</u>	I.Spines	in ⁻	Iransit

Chapter II. The Ear Obtrudes

Chapter III. The Ear Has Legs

Chapter IV. The Little Russet Man Appears

Chapter V.A Horse in Bed

Chapter VI. Equine Excursions

Chapter VII.The Battle of the Church

<u>Chapter VIII.What Happened to the Horse</u>

<u>Chapter IX.The Height of Tolerance</u>

Chapter X.Lamb Takes the Air

Chapter XI.An Aerial Interlude

Chapter XII.Mr. Billings Removes His Clothes

<u>Chapter XIII.A Lapful of Sandy</u>

<u>Chapter XIV.Sapho Tries to Murder a Fish</u>

<u>Chapter XV.Sandy Gets Her Man</u>

Chapter XVI.Less Than the Dust

Chapter XVII.In Sandra's Bed

Chapter XVIII.The World's Worst Bootlegger

Chapter XIX.Above the Battle

Chapter XX.A Decidedly Different Something

Chapter XXI.Exit the Little Russet Man

Chapter XXII.In the Wake

CHAPTER I.SPINES IN TRANSIT

Table of Contents

Mr. T. Lawrence Lamb weaved his long, shad-bellied body down the aisle, and as one sorely stricken in affliction, crumpled into a seat. He hoped prayerfully that the other half of it would remain unoccupied. He hoped even more prayerfully that if it should be occupied it would not be by anyone he knew even remotely. Every evening he hoped this and almost every evening his hope was disregarded.

Mr. Lamb automatically elevated his knees. Out came his paper and off went the train. All set. Another day smeared.

He sighed profoundly. So far so good. No one had yet encroached upon his Jovian aloofness. Perhaps for a change he would get the best of the break. Adjusting his features in what he fondly believed to be a repellent expression he prepared to concentrate his attention on the financial section of his newspaper. His heart was not in it. Neither was his mind. Lamb was in a vagrant mood—misanthropic, critical, at odds with himself.

"Here we sit," he mused—his eyes darkly contemplating his fellow commuters—"Here we sit, the lot of us, a trainful of spines in transit ... so many sets of vertebræ, each curved and twisted according to the inclination of its individual owner."

His eyes rested unenthusiastically on a man he heartily disliked, Simonds, a purveyor of choice lots.

"Take Simonds there," he continued to reflect. "That spawn of hell is just a lot of vertebræ all curled up. I myself am scarcely more than a column of vertebræ. And that old lady over there, she's a repository of vertebræ, old tortured vertebræ, no doubt extremely brittle ... museum pieces."

He sighed morbidly over the great age and brittleness of the old lady's vertebræ, and rearranged his own, flexing them deftly between the seat and its back. His knees crept up higher in front of him. His head sank lower. He was gradually jack-knifing into his favorite commuting position.

For some inexplicable reason vertebræ this evening seemed unusually important to Lamb. They were almost getting the best of him. The more he thought of vertebræ the lower his spirits ebbed. There were too many commuters, all trying to contort themselves into the most comfortable, the most restful positions—all striving to do well for their backs after the strain of the day.

Tentatively Lamb peered into his newspaper. He fully intended to wash his hands of vertebræ and to study the details of a new bond issue.

There were newspapers everywhere—evening newspapers. Alluring tabloids with impartially quartered front pages displayed one pair of robust legs, one good corpse, a sanguinary railway accident, and a dull-looking pugilist. What more could any reasonable person crave?

Lamb studied the absorbed readers with detached animosity. Papers were being held at every conceivable angle, some negligently, untidily, others grasped tenaciously as if their owners lived in momentary dread of being deprived of their comfort. Some readers scanned their papers from afar. Others approached them secretively, nose touching type.

"Newspapers and vertebræ," elaborated Lamb, eyeing the suspended sheets bitterly. "That's all we are. That's all we're good for."

In the third seat in front of him sat a dignified old gentleman. He was having tough cerebration assimilating the fact that red ants greatly deplore the existence of essence of peppermint. For sixty-odd years he had managed to struggle through life without the benefit of this information. Now it had become urgent business with him. He must tell his wife about it the first thing. No more red ants for them. Then he tried to remember if they had ever suffered from red ants.

Farther down the aisle was a man whose expression grew bleaker and bleaker. He was following a comic strip. His concentration was almost pathetic. When he arrived at the grand climax he sat as one stunned, gazing hopelessly ahead of him. One would have been led to believe that he had suddenly received a piece of extremely depressing news.

In another seat, crouched like a dog over a bone, an ingrown-looking individual was enjoying a vicarious thrill from the sex irregularities of a music teacher and a casual man of God. Satisfyingly salacious stuff. Shocking. However, this particular commuter would not discuss the sordid affair with his wife. Such topics are better left outside the family circle.

Meanwhile the landscape.

Lamb turned to the window and considered a rapidly receding cow. Then his glance ran through the train. Nobody else was considering that cow. Nobody else was considering anything other than newspapers so far as he could discover. Yet the cow had not been without its points ... a pleasant, contemplative, square-cut cow. And that brook out there. Lamb wondered idly where it wandered, through whose back-yard, through what meadows and woodlands. Lamb himself was wandering now far from the financial section.

No scenery in all God's world, he decided, was quite so unobserved, left quite so utterly flat and to its own devices as those sections traversed by these hurtling slave galleys of progress. For the commuter familiarity with the landscape completely skipped mere contempt and passed into the realms of non-existence.

If that proud home-owner laboring out there on his lawn could only realize how unappreciated his efforts were he would not feel so infernally smug about things. Perhaps, thought Lamb, the man would give up gadgeting about with garden implements and devote his time to disguising the flavor of bootleg gin—a far more utilitarian and artistic pursuit.

Especially this evening, Lamb's thoughts ran on, was the landscape neglected. Eyes looked upon it, but for the most part indifferently, unseeingly. Newspapers were to blame. Lamb worried his own paper. Commuting trains everywhere, he reflected, were more or less spiritually akin. That was the awfulness of it. His feeling of inferiority and sameness deepened. His mood grew more restless. It was gathering in revolt.

What was he himself but a poor doomed commuter, a catcher and quitter of trains? His destiny stood confronting him, smirking at him. Years from now he would be extending

a withered and feeble hand clutching a commutation ticket to be punched. He wondered if conductors ever died or grew old. They never seemed to, always stayed about the same loquacious mummies.

A good Grade A, case-hardened commuter, decided Lamb, would experience but scant difficulty in meeting his soul's brother in any part of the world where commuting trains operated. With this creature he would be able to discuss his favorite topic in his own pet vernacular. Neither of them would give a tinker's dam about the scenery. They would consider it in no terms other than those of building and real estate development—investment opportunity. With an inner ear, Lamb harkened to a hypothetical conversation:

"That's a neat bit of wooded highland," observes commuter A covetously.

"Yep," says B. "It's just itching to be opened up."

"Wish I had the ready to go in for a proposition like that," replies his friend.

"Man alive," says the other, "if I had the backing, that property wouldn't stay undeveloped long. Give me just six months, and I'd have a couple of paved streets run through and a row of model homes—."

He pauses and frowns masterfully at the hillside.

"And garages," adds commuter A, not to be outdone. "Bang-up sewerage and a garbage-disposal plant. That sort of stuff gets the right class of buyer."

The wooded hillside is doomed. Its trees shiver. Trees have a way of knowing about such things. Soon wayward lovers will be seeking elsewhere for stimulating

concealment. A neat little garage will have usurped their bower.

"My God!" muttered T. Lawrence Lamb, now thoroughly in revolt against the ordained measure of his days. "I'm a part of the system. I'm all tied up."

Then quite suddenly his attention became riveted on an object.

It was an ear.

CHAPTER II. THE EAR OBTRUDES

Table of Contents

An unqualified fact. The object at which Mr. Lamb was gazing with such rapt attention was nothing more nor less than an ear. A small pink ear. A perky shred of an ear. And this ear in turn was ornamenting a small sleek head. Exceedingly black hair, closely trimmed—a severe yet successful bob, becoming only to about one woman in a thousand.

"That's a mean-looking ear," mused Lamb. "Looks like a wicked horse's. Snakish sort of a head too, probably filled with all sorts of schemes and misery."

Yet, even as he gazed, Lamb attempted to reject the existence of the ear. He was not, he assured himself, actually looking at it. He was merely resting his eyes. In a moment or so he would return once more to his newspaper. As a matter of fact, his paper was so held as to be ready for immediate action. For instance, if the head to which the ear was attached should chance to reverse its position, Lamb could instantly take to cover. Meanwhile, if the ear happened to cross his field of vision that regrettable circumstance could hardly be obviated. It was not of his seeking. As he had previously done with vertebræ, he now proceeded to do with the ear. He washed his hands of it. He firmly set it aside. That silly-looking ear was really no concern of his.

Unconsciously Lamb found himself wondering just how it would feel to bite that ear ever so delicately—tentatively, so to speak. What would its owner say? What would she do? Bite back most likely. White teeth, small active teeth,

somehow went with that ear. A brazen character too, daring and unrestrained. A thoroughly objectionable female type. Even from the little Lamb had seen, he considered the owner of the ear a demoralizing influence.

Anyone observing Lamb would not have suspected him capable of such an odd line of thought. Lamb himself was far from being aware of the fact that he was a thoroughly unmoral man, a sort of warmed-over pagan as judged by all standards of conventional morality. Otherwise that ear would not have disturbed him so profoundly, would not have lured him away from consideration of finance and industry.

When the gods were fabricating Mr. T. Lawrence Lamb they were far from being single-minded about it. There had been a certain divergence of opinion, a lamentable lack of harmony. Some had contended, not without reason, that there were already too many commuters cluttering up the earth, too many hard-headed, conscientious home-owners, many undeviating husbands and proud fathers. Humanity was becoming too stable, too standardized. It needed highly spiced and more less orthodox representatives. Other gods were firmly convinced that in order to allow themselves a few gracious liberties and privileges and at the same to create a favorable public opinion it would be a far wiser thing to keep humanity more or less at a dead level, to make appetites and desires as orderly as possible, and to reduce imagination to a safe and sane minimum. It is to be remembered that these dissenting gods were the greatest hell-raisers on high and that they brought forward their contentions merely to further their own selfish ends and to assure themselves of unexamined enjoyment of their rather indelicate pursuits.

Unfortunately, though outnumbered, these represented a small but active minority, and the result with Lamb was an acrimonious compromise, an incongruous blending of strongly opposed elements. Outwardly Lamb looked and acted like a sober, responsible and respected member of the community—one of its more solid members. Lamb firmly believed himself to be every bit of that. But the inner Lamb, the true Lamb, was not quite so good. There was little conformity in him, scant reverence for the established order of things. Consequently Lamb was the seat of much mental and spiritual conflict, of many stray, orphaned thoughts. Within himself he contained unplumbed reservoir of good, healthy depravity that was constantly threatening to overflow and to spill all sorts of trouble about his feet.

Lamb's face, like his body, was long. His skin was dark and expression somewhat saturnine. His eyes looked out on life always a trifle sardonically. His associates believed him to be a capable, serious-minded man, whereas in reality he was filled with a sort of desperately good-natured irony. For purposes of self-protection he was often brusk and caustic. It was just as well for everybody concerned that many of the remarks that sprang uninvited to his lips were quickly stifled. He had a wife who considered herself both artistic and intellectual. Lamb heartily detested these qualities, little realizing he possessed them himself to a high degree.

He enjoyed sitting with his knees elevated and his arms waving vaguely above his head. In this position he gave the impression of a semi-recumbent cheer leader. It was his most effective pose. He could explain things better that way. When customers came to him for financial advice they usually found him in this position, his desk being used solely for the purpose of supporting his knees. As he talked to them, his hands churning about in the air seemed to be juggling the industries and public utilities of a nation. Fascinated, his callers saw golden opportunity dancing before their eyes. Lamb's success as a financier lay in the fact that he was often eloquently inarticulate—staccato. When necessary he could be masterfully blasphemous. His selling talks left much to the imagination. An overhead scrambling of the hands, a tortured oath or so, and a lowering scowl were sufficient to crumble the opposition of the most opinionated investor.

In his dress he somehow always managed to be smartly disheveled, always slightly sprinkled with cigarette ashes. His manners were not good. They were natural. At forty he no longer cared a rap whether or not he ever sold another bond. Like his fathers before him, he was the Lamb of Lamb & Co. Exactly who or what the "Co." represented people had given up speculating. Customers knew that Lamb alone was sufficient. They deferred to his judgment and absorbed his bonds. Lamb had never ceased to be both pleased and surprised by his success. He was conscientious about other people's money. The well-established reputation of Lamb & Co. had not suffered under his management. He was proud of it, but just a little fed up. This he scarcely realized. Fortunately for the business no one ever sensed the lurking instability of the man, least of all Lamb himself.

His wife found it convenient to regard him as an unimaginative plodder—a money-grubber. Lamb no longer bothered his head about her opinion. In his eyes she had long been a matrimonial washout. Occasionally he found enjoyment in annoying her. For years she had been trying to subjugate him, to mold him to her ways of life. Today he was as inexplicable and as recalcitrant as when he had just married her. He was not a satisfactory husband. He knew this and was pleased. He failed utterly to harmonize with Mrs. Lamb's background, yet there he was and there probably he would be always with his long legs and mocking face. Mrs. Lamb often wished she had married an unqualified fool instead of this dark, ambling creature on whom she could make no impression.

It was essential to Mrs. Lamb's happiness that she should always make an impression. She feared Lamb's unuttered observations and never felt quite securely poised in the presence of his enigmatic grin. Lamb was no household comfort. He cramped his wife's style dreadfully. His daughter a little more than liked him. Together they considered life critically, cynically, and just a bit coarsely. With the aid of Hebe, Lamb at times became a jovial vulgarian. It was a relief to him, an outlet. With everyone else he automatically acted the part of the conventional, unemotional, complacent business man he fondly believed himself to be.

And for that reason the ear offended him. Lamb disliked philandering, yet for some reason or other, he felt that with very little persuading he could bring himself to philander with that ear. For several weeks he had been observing it in

a casual, detached way. It was such a ridiculously small ear—the merest pretence of an ear. Why should a full-grown man like himself trouble about such a trifle? He was well past the age of foolishness. His own daughter was nearly as old as the ear. Anyway, the whole idea was out of the question. Yet the ear was undeniably a challenge. And that small sleek head so independently perched on a nicelooking neck, that too, was not without its appeal.

Strange to say, Mr. Lamb had never looked on the countenance of the owner of the ear. He had not even tried to push his investigations that far. He had felt it safer to let bad enough alone. He had ideas about the face, vague speculations, but he did not dwell on them. Why should he? Of what interest was it to him? Rubbish!

The train was slowing down for his station. Experienced already collecting their inevitable commuters were packages from the racks. Mr. Lamb methodically folded his newspapers and dismissed the ear from his thoughts—that is, he half rose preparatory to making his way down the aisle when guite unexpectedly the ear turned, and Mr. Lamb sat down hurriedly like one suddenly atrophied. The man was shocked to the core. He felt himself being intimately caressed by a pair of incredibly melting eyes set in a face whose pallor is usually associated with innate vice. There was a mouth too, vivid and terribly defenseless, and at the same time quite capable.

It was one of the most alarming experiences in Mr. Lamb's life. Those eyes. The languor in them. What a way for a women to look at a man in public! The only word Lamb could think of in connection with those eyes was

"voluptuous." They were actually voluptuous eyes, yet strange to say, they were unconsciously so. The girl did not know what she was doing. She could not possibly know.

"A creature with eyes like that," thought Lamb, "should be forced to wear smoked glasses."

She was more dangerous than a floating mine in the path of shipping. Her very innocence increased her potency. For some inexplicable reason Lamb smelled the fragrance of branches heavily ladened with blossoms and caught a glimpse of a Chinese print he had once intended to buy.

The girl had turned her face away. Simonds, the bounder, was pausing to talk with her. The girl was smiling a slow, provocative smile, and Simonds, fool that he was, seemed to be ghoulishly pleased.

"She's cooking up something," thought Lamb. "The Jezebel—a regular Messalina, that girl—a she devil."

The train was gradually emptying. Lamb half rose again to make his way out. Then her eyes met his for a second time, and once more Mr. Lamb felt himself transfixed.

This was all nonsense. He rallied and calmly returned the girl's gaze. Then he finished folding his paper, rose snappily and left the train.

"What the hell!" he kept saying to himself. "What the hell!"

CHAPTER III. THE EAR HAS LEGS

Table of Contents

Still numbed by the high voltage of those passionate eyes—Mr. Lamb had slightly refined his first expletive—he made his way down the aisle and mingled with his kin on the station platform. In his deep abstraction he failed to respond with his customary briskness to the salutations of his friends.

"'Lo there, Lamb, how's the boy?" passed unchallenged as did, "Evening Larry, how's tricks?" and other such innocuous inquiries.

Following the trail of commuters up the circular stairs, Lamb paused in the waiting-room by the newspaper counter and looked through a window at the glittering array of waiting motors. Some of them were already pulling out bearing their complacently successful owners homeward through the neat well-ordered streets of that opulent suburban town.

Ordinarily this massing of wealth, this tangible evidence of purchasing power would have given Mr. Lamb a comfortable sense of security. It would have made him feel that all was well with the state of the nation and that under the beneficent guidance of a cautious administration prosperity was assured. This evening, however, Lamb looked upon the automobiles without elation. They were mostly being driven by wives and daughters—smartly togged women for whom this moment constituted one of the high spots of the day. Any woman so unfortunate as to be forced to meet her bread-winner in an outmoded car was the object of some pity and no little secret self-

congratulation. Her costume was examined a little more critically, and questions were asked about her husband. Did he count or was he unimportant? Why did people like that try to hold their own in such a well-to-do community? There were other commuting towns. Nice little places where they would feel more at home.

The bemused Lamb picked out his own well-groomed automobile and dwelt on its handsome lines unappreciatively. There was his daughter at the wheel. A good girl Hebe, but after all was she really good? Was any woman fundamentally good? Lamb was none too sure.

He saw another person standing by his car. A young man in white flannels, light sweater, and sport shoes. A well-set-up youngster. Obviously very much absorbed in Hebe. This youth was leaning over the side of the automobile, and Mr. Lamb was struck by the lithe, unconscious grace of the vigorous young body. A fine-looking pair those two made. A romantic splash of color and animation. Romance—that was for them. They still had time ahead. Heaps of it. His was rapidly running low.

Without realizing how far he was going, Lamb leaned over the newspaper counter and attempted to strike an attitude similar to that held by the youth. The effect was somewhat surprising. The counter was low, and Lamb was long. As a result of this combination Lamb appeared to be sprawlingly, jauntily, suggestively confidential. The newspaper man looked at him with startled eyes for a moment, then mistaking Mr. Lamb's motives, approached slowly and leaned tensely forward across the counter. Unconscious of the man's presence, Mr. Lamb maintained

the immobility of his peculiar position. Believing that he might be still too far away to receive the delicate communication Mr. Lamb desired to make, the newspaper man drew even nearer, placed his ear to the other's lips and waited expectantly.

For a long moment this odd tableau remained fixed as if in wax, then the man's curiosity got the better of him.

"Shoot, Mr. Lamb," he murmured. "Something good?"

Slowly Mr. Lamb turned. It took a little time for him to realize the full import of the situation. All he could see at first was an avid ear. Then he drew back as if stung and gazed blankly at the vendor of papers. Why was the creature so breathlessly expectant? With a shiver of apprehension he suddenly realized the full significance of the situation. He looked down at his unnaturally cascading body and immediately assumed a more normal position.

"What?" he asked, fighting for time. "What's that you said about something being good?"

"Oh, nothing," replied the man defensively. "From the way you were leaning over, I thought you wanted to whisper something. You know, something sort of—er—racy."

The newspaper man had barely avoided the use of the word "dirty." In his substitution of "racy" for it, he felt he had achieved a conversational triumph. Nevertheless, he considered himself cheated—let-down. Mr. Lamb regarded him with growing disapproval. He studied the eager eyes and half-parted lips. Sedulously he avoided the ear. That face, he feared, that repellent face would henceforth haunt his dreams.

"No," he replied at last. "There seems to have been some misunderstanding. Those stairs got me. I was merely resting. It must be the weather. Somehow I feel quite wornout this evening."

He turned wearily, his shoulders suddenly sagged, and arranging his body in lines of utter exhaustion he dragged his feet away from the presence of the hateful person behind the counter. Lamb was not cut out to be an actor. His idea of feigning fatigue was far too elaborate. It was arresting but lacked conviction. Mr. Lamb had never progressed in such a remarkable way in the whole course of his life. He looked as if he had been mortally wounded and was blindly making his way toward human aid.

How many others had witnessed his momentary madness, he wondered. How many eyes had dilated at the sight of his humiliating posture? Had the ear chanced to see his breakdown? Lamb was filled with panic.

"Sort of a funny place to pick out for a rest," pondered the mystified newspaper man, looking after the halfcrouching figure of Mr. Lamb. "Hope he makes his car before he drops in his tracks."

The object of his solicitude was by this time painfully approaching his automobile. He was relieved to see that the youth he had so disastrously attempted to imitate had departed, but was not at all reassured by the puzzled look of inquiry in his daughter's eyes.

"What happens to have broken down in you, major?" the young lady demanded in a cool, censorious voice. "From that peculiar walk you appear to be practicing, I'd say you needed a hot water bottle and a dose of castor—"

"Don't!" interrupted Mr. Lamb sharply. "You may be right. Perhaps I do, but why advertise my shame to the entire community? Would you like to have people pointing out your father as a man who has or is about to take a dose of castoroil? Do you desire to drag your own flesh and blood through the dust of these streets? And why do you persist in calling me major?"

"As for the dust of these streets," the girl replied, "you seem to be doing the dragging of your own free will. How came you to get your middle section all bunged up like that? And why are you crouching before me like a jackal about to spring? One would think you'd checked your stomach somewhere. And that agonized shuffle of yours. Why did you embark on that?"

Mr. Lamb looked at his daughter with hopeless eyes. With a deep sigh he opened the door to the front seat and crawled in beside her.

"My stomach got itself that way," he explained briefly. "Don't know exactly how it did it. Had a frightful day in the city. Dog-tired."

Why had he ever attempted to deceive that hellish newspaper vendor with such an obviously artificial walk? It had only succeeded in making matters worse. Now he must somehow save his face. His daughter was regarding him with an undermining look of sympathy. Lamb essayed a groan. Perhaps that might help a little.

"If you go on like that," observed Hebe, "you'll not only be dragging yourself through the dust, but you will actually have to get a prop for your stomach to keep your head from bouncing along on your feet." "A horrid picture," thought Lamb. Then to keep his daughter's mind from dwelling any longer on the subject, he asked abruptly:

"Just who was that emaciated-looking loafer who was practically swooning all over my car just now?"

"That emaciated-looking loafer," replied Hebe unemotionally, "might be occupying the position of your son-in-law at any minute now. You'd better be careful how low you classify him. I have an idea he was admiring my legs. So many people do."

The physical collapse aroused himself sufficiently to consider his daughter's legs. He had always been interested in legs.

"Is that so?" he remarked. "Well, if he wasn't nearsighted to the point of blindness, he must have got an eyeful."

"Father dear," admonished the girl, "I am still but a child."

"Not with those legs," replied Lamb. "From the way that fellow was peering into the car you would have thought he was trying to learn your legs by heart, or to subject them to the third degree."

"And why not?" demanded Hebe ominously. "What's wrong with the legs?"

"Don't like them," said Lamb. "They're too vigorous. Interminable legs. Do they never come to an end?"

"I wouldn't worry about that," said Hebe. "They're better than Sapho's legs. Not so frank and confiding."

Hebe was alluding to her mother, who had unfortunately been christened Mary, and who because of her penchant for amateur dramatics, had been renamed Sapho by her daughter. The name had been gratefully accepted by Mrs. Lamb. She was strongly of the opinion that she deserved it. Mary Lamb would not have been a livable name.

"You might be right," agreed Mr. Lamb. "Your mother's legs seem to be pretty well all over the place these days. Yours are a little less visible at least."

He paused to consider the subject in all its ramifications. Hebe at times was quite a relief. Only she understood how to treat unimportant matters with academic thoroughness.

"You know," he went on reminiscently. "In spite of Sapho's extreme leggishness, I personally don't seem to see them any more—not as legs, if you get what I mean. But she must have had legs at one time, I suppose."

"Certainly," replied Hebe, "or else I wouldn't be here."

"Logically arrived at," agreed Mr. Lamb, "although your way of putting it has rather indelicate implications. Your parental respect also needs a little brushing up."

They were alone now, the other automobiles having departed, and a new flock was arriving for the next contingent of commuters. Neither father nor daughter seemed to care whether they ever reached home or not. The casual ways of the pair were quite a trial to Mrs. Lamb. They were not popular around the house.

"Speaking of legs," observed Hebe casually, "yon' is an upstanding pair of shafts."

She pointed directly across the street, and Mr. Lamb's eyes followed the direction of his inelegant daughter's finger. The shafts referred to belonged to a pair of arms busily intent on carrying several large bundles from the

delicatessen store. Lamb looked on the legs with instinctive covetousness, then, like a frightened rabbit, froze defensively to his seat. They were the legs of the ear.

"Uh-hoo!" bawled Hebe's uncultured voice. "Uh-hoo, Sandy! Over here!"

"Don't!" pleaded her father. "Don't make that awful noise. You sound like some sort of animal."

"Over here!" shouted Hebe with unabated enthusiasm. "We'll take you home."

The legs paused in their progress, altered their course, and came forward attractively in spite of the bundles.

"That ear would have such legs," thought Lamb.

There was something startlingly personal about them. They were vicious legs—suggestive. Lamb decided he had never seen such demoralizingly feminine legs. And Lamb was not elated. He had a premonition of change, of some complication arising to disturb the comfortable regularity of his life. He seriously resented this. He was Lamb of Lamb & Co., a contented, successful man. He was all set—had his own interests. Why should those legs come walking into his life? With characteristic thoroughness he washed his hands of the legs. Nevertheless, washed or unwashed, the legs continued to approach.

"Swarm in," said Hebe urgently to the girl. "Slither over the major and drop your bundles in the back."

"Why do we all have to huddle up here in the front seat like so many immigrants?" asked Lamb inhospitably. "Let me get out. I'll sit behind. Willingly. Gratefully." In spite of his protest, the legs brushed past Mr. Lamb's knees and arranged themselves alarmingly beside him.

"This is your father—yes?" asked the girl. "Is he a nice father? He doesn't sound very. Is he?"

"He's too long," answered Hebe briefly.

"And drawn-out, perhaps?" suggested the other.

"Exactly," agreed Hebe. "That's just it. He's too long and drawn-out. Take his neck for instance."

"Me take his neck!" cried her friend. "You suggest I should take your father's neck. How amiable!"

Mr. Lamb noticed that her voice was surprisingly deep and rich and that she spoke with an insinuatingly rising inflection. An unwholesomely foreign type, he decided.

"You're mistaken," he hastened to assure the girl. "My daughter didn't mean for you literally to take my neck. She meant for you merely to look at it. She seems to think it's too long."

The girl scrutinized Mr. Lamb's neck avidly. Mr. Lamb thanked God that he was a cleanly man.

"Why, I love that neck!" she suddenly exclaimed, and Lamb was both relieved and outraged. "I think I could neck with that neck."

"What sort of friend is this, Hebe?" asked Lamb. "Something imported?"

His mood was waxing retaliatory.

"Her name's Sandra," replied his daughter, "and in a manner of speaking she is imported. Russian on her mother's side. A nice girl but prone to folly."

"Name doesn't sound quite real," observed Lamb. "Does she work in an office?"

"Not Sandra," he was informed. "She's a swell model. Underwear and things."

"You should see me," put in Sandra enthusiastically. "Then I am at my best. Then you would make me much. But to return to the neck, tell me, Hebe, your father doesn't neck, perhaps?"

"Not sure," said that young lady impersonally. "I doubt it. His sex life is practically nil."

"Well, I'll be damned!" ejaculated Lamb, rapidly changing color.

"Such a big man too," replied the other girl sympathetically. "The poor thing must be starved for some loving."

"Hear that, major?" said Hebe. "What you got to say?"

"I wash my hands of the both of you," came the emphatic response. "Never did I hear such stuff. Do all young women go on nowadays like you two?"

"This is mild," his daughter calmly informed him. "So far, we have respected your feelings."

"But I won't any longer," cried Sandra tragically. "He is trying to go back on himself. He is taking a flat leave of me. I must tell all. For weeks this man has been devouring with hungry eyes the back of my head. Do not deny it, major. I have watched you in my mirror. Today I regarded him with these eyes."

Here she cast these eyes wildly about the automobile, and Mr. Lamb became slightly dizzy. He was glad he was not driving.

"Today I observed him eye to eye, so to speak, and he wilted—wilted before my gaze. Now he would wash his

hands of me. Do not let him do that, Hebe. Do not let him wash. I shall not be washed by this long Lamb, do you hear? I shall remain unwashed forever."

On this high note of resolve the emotional young woman paused for breath and gazed magnificently about her. Mr. Lamb was filled with amazement and consternation. The complication had arrived. He was embroiled.

"You may remain unwashed forever, so far as I am concerned," he remarked soothingly. "I shall make no attempt to wash you."

"Good!" she exclaimed with a pleased expression. "I knew you would make me much. And now I depart."

The car drew up before a small, neat-looking home of the modest order, and the girl quickly slipped out.

"Bring him yourself the first time, Hebe," she said. "After that he will come alone."

"By stealth and at night," added Hebe.

"I shall do nothing of the sort," Mr. Lamb retorted emphatically. "Neither alone nor accompanied do I come. The two of you have gone far in depravity. I wash—"

"For goodness' sake, no more washing," protested Hebe. "We're all washed out as it is."

The other girl stood gazing soulfully at Lamb for a moment, then she observed complacently, as if addressing the world at large, "The Long Lamb will come, never fear. I shall have him."

"Stop talking like an adultress in a French farce and go away," urged Lamb. "I want to get home and snatch a drink."

"I shall make you suffer for that," she retorted.