

Thorne Smith



The Glorious Pool

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1. CONGRATULATIONS

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The old gentleman with the resplendently starched cuffs moved into the room. In the kindly half light of the long, low apartment he stood poised like an ancient ramrod, worn and polished from long years of campaigning. About his person clung a pleasantly subtle suggestion of good soap and even better cigars. An expensive and thoroughly masculine smell.

With meticulous care he began to remove his gloves, releasing each imprisoned finger as if the action were an independent and definitely unrelated operation, requiring individual attention.

It was rather impressive, the way he took off his gloves—that is, if one's nerves and patience were in good working condition. But the woman sitting in one corner of the huge divan had never been heavily endowed with patience, and at present her nerves were not so good. They were very bad nerves indeed.

"If you don't take those gloves off," she said, "I'll drag them off with my own two hands. Your fingers aren't made of china. Why do you wear them, anyway? They make me feel like sweating."

"Give full rein to your animal impulses," suggested the old gentleman in a calm, deep voice. "You might lose a few superfluous pounds hither and yon."

Imperturbably he returned his attention to his gloves. He took them off as if he were really fond of them. And he was fond of his gloves. Always he had been like that, a creature

whose nature was so ebullient with affection that it was generous enough to include even inanimate objects—all the good things of life. Now, at the age of sixty, he still loved the world, although he had learned to regard its creatures with affectionate contempt not untinged with that inner loneliness that comes from utter disillusionment.

He had loved a lot, and to no good end, so far as he could see, had this old gentleman.

With a slight pat of approval he placed the gloves on a rangy grand piano sprawling in the shadows like one of the less unneighborly monsters of the prehistoric past. Then from under his right arm he took a package and placed it neatly beside the gloves. This he also patted, but with a somewhat ironical gesture. Having attended to these little details with fitting solemnity and obviously to his entire satisfaction, he bent two remarkably bright and penetrating eyes upon the woman who sat watching him with an expression of brooding animosity on her faded but still good-looking face. Noiselessly he moved over the heavy carpet, bent with easy gallantry, and lifting one of the woman's fleshy hands, kissed it quite impersonally, as if it were little better than a fish. Furiously she snatched her hand away. He made little effort to retain it—no more than one would to retain a fish unless one were grim about it.

"How do you do, my antiquated trull," he said with unruffled good-nature.

The antiquated trull—a gamely preserved woman in the unreconciled fifties—answered with restrained passion.

"Don't call me a trull, you crumbling ruin," she told him. "What do you think a body can do at my age?"

The old gentleman gave an unnecessarily refined cough of admonition.

"My inquiry," he explained with exasperating patience "had no anatomical significance. Let's skip your body for the moment and totter up to a slightly higher level, if you don't mind."

"I wish I could skip my body," complained the woman "These days I can scarcely drag the thing about."

"That's pitiful," replied the old gentleman unemotionally. "It's your appetite, my dear. You eat like a wolf. It's surprising. But to get away from that for a moment, I might suggest that you're supposed to have also a mind not to mention a bit of a soul knocking about within that gnarled exterior of yours."

"All I have are corns," said the woman, gloomily surveying her feet. "Toes full of corns. They keep me busy cutting them."

"You disgust me," replied the old gentleman. "Honestly you do— actually disgust me."

"Rex Pebble," the woman told him, "don't stand there like an old hypocrite. For twenty-five years I've been trying to disgust you without the least success. I'm too tired now to try any more."

"I don't know about that," Mr. Pebble reminiscently observed. "At times you've been fairly disgusting, my dear. I might even say, revolting."

"But not to you," retorted the woman. "You were born demoralized."

Mr. Pebble selected a long cigarette from a box on a low table, then lighted the slender tube as if from afar he were

watching himself perform the act with profound admiration.

"Birth," he observed through a scarf of smoke, "is a demoralizing transition. Much more so than death, which has at least the dignity of something definitely accomplished. Birth—I don't know—it always strikes me as being so tentative and squirmy."

"You do love to hear yourself talk," said the woman. "Especially when you know it annoys me."

"Sorry," said Mr. Pebble complacently. "If you don't care to talk, Spray, my old decrepit, what do you want to do?"

"What did I ever want to do?" she demanded. Mr. Pebble started slightly.

"Let's not go into that," he said with some haste. "You appall me. This is becoming most difficult. At our time of life we should sublimate sex into an anticipation of an air-cooled existence on wings."

"Nonsense!" snapped the woman called Spray. "I'd turn in my wings without a qualm for one good shot of sex."

"How debasing," said Mr. Pebble. "Unadmirable in the extreme. You, Spray, are about the most unreconciled old voluptuary it has ever been my misfortune to encounter."

"You're just a string of long words," Spray retorted. "And that's all there is to you. There's nothing else left. Not," she added regretfully, "that it would do me any good if there was."

"Really," objected Mr. Pebble, "I shouldn't be allowed to listen to this sort of thing. It's far too low for me. My natural elasticity of spirit becomes rigid in your presence."

"Twenty-five years ago —" began Spray.

"That reminds me," said Mr. Pebble. "I called this evening especially to offer you my congratulations."

"For what?" asked Spray in surprise. "For God's sake, don't tell me I'm another year older."

"No," said Mr. Pebble. "It's not as bad as that. Tonight is the twenty- fifth anniversary of your first seduction. I'm rather sentimental about such things. For a quarter of a century now you have had the honor of being my mistress."

"What's honor without pleasure?" Spray demanded bluntly.

"That's a very difficult question to answer honestly," Mr. Pebble admitted.

"I'm your mistress in name only," went on Spray, her eyes clouding. "I've outlived my usefulness." She paused and smiled maliciously at the man. "How do you know," she asked, "I was first seduced by you?"

"I don't," replied Mr. Pebble. "Knowing you as I do, I think it highly improbable. But, if you don't mind, allow me to retain at least one harmless illusion. I'm an old man, you know."

The woman looked up at him thoughtfully. He was tall, slim, and straight, and faultlessly groomed. About him there seemed to linger still something of the insinuating, care-free, insatiable young devil she had known and loved in her way. But his face was lined now; his fine hair was white, and his eyes, though keen and alert, gazed down at her from a lonely height as if from another world. This much she could understand, for she too was lonely now that her fires were spent. Swiftly and regret. fully she traveled back through time, and yet a little proudly. This man had loved her and

kept her, and although she had failed him more than he would ever know—at least, she hoped so—she was glad to remember he had never done a deliberately unkind or dishonest act so far as she was concerned. The years washed about her, and memories drifted among them. Perhaps not admirable memories, but happy ones. And there were some she refused to admit even to herself, for women are made that way. She had been a fair, ripe figure of a girl, and she had not wasted much time. This man still meant more to her than any man who had ever come into her life, although she still regretted a certain young doctor who had been so stupidly decent her charms had left him cold. What a fool that young doctor had been. She had liked him the better for it. Her face softened as she held up a hand to the man standing above her.

"You are an old man," she said, her voice taking on a richer quality. "A distinguished old devil of a man. Sit down. You make my corns ache."

"To relieve those corns of yours," said Mr. Pebble, sinking into the divan beside her, "I would grovel on the floor. Gladly would I grovel."

"And gladly would I let you if it would do any good," she told him. "But nothing helps corns, really. When you grow old your feet grow tired all over. They ache and make you mean."

"I know," he said sympathetically. "I am not without my twinges and disconcerting cracks. There is no sense in crying out against nature, yet I fiercely resent my aged body and its lost powers. The mental tranquillity that comes with age may have its compensations, but one has to be

damnably philosophical to attain them. It grows tiresome at times, being philosophical."

"Give me a cigarette," said Spray.

He lighted her cigarette, and for a moment the woman leaned back, puffing thoughtfully.

"Tell me about it," she said at last. "About what?" asked Rex Pebble.

"About my first official seduction," Spray replied.

"Don't you remember?" asked Mr. Pebble.

"I might," she told him, "if you'd just give me a start."

"It was quite all right," began Mr. Pebble. "As a matter of fact, it was hardly a proper seduction at all."

"Are any seductions proper?" she wanted to know.

"No," admitted Mr. Pebble, "but some are highly salutary—greatly to be desired, you know. What I mean to say is that both of us knew exactly what we were doing."

"I'm glad I didn't think I was flying a kite," Spray observed innocently. "First impressions are so important in such affairs."

"As I remember it," went on Mr. Pebble, "you seemed to be quite favorably impressed. I hope you don't think I'm bragging."

"A sensible pride in achievement is perfectly permissible," said the woman. "Especially at your age. It's all you have left to brag about."

"You depress me," said Mr. Pebble.

"Go on with that seduction," Spray reminded him.

"Then don't interrupt," Mr. Pebble objected. "And stop making me feel my years. It was a glorious night, as I recall it. Such a night as this. There was something a little mad

about it—something that made important things, such as honor and loyalty, seem quite remote and futile. I had been married to Sue about three months at the time."

"That's a long time for a man to remain faithful," observed the woman.

"Sue never gave me a chance to get started," replied Mr. Pebble without rancor. "The little devil was up to her tricks six weeks after we were married. As a matter of fact, I don't know to this day whether I'm the father of my daughter or not. Neither does Sue. It doesn't really matter. She's a decent sort, anyway, and, thank God, she doesn't take after either of us."

"Then her father must have been a nice man," said Spray. "He couldn't have been you."

"I've about come to that conclusion myself," Mr. Pebble admitted judicially. "He must have been much too good for Sue. Probably didn't even know she was married. I like to think so, at any rate."

"You haven't much of an opinion of either of us, I suppose?" Spray suggested.

"Not much," agreed Mr. Pebble, "but that doesn't keep me from liking you both—I might even go so far as to say, loving you both."

"Even knowing we've both been unfaithful?" Spray asked softly.

For a moment Rex Pebble stared unseeingly into space, then passed a hand across his eyes as if to brush away an unpleasant vision.

"Even knowing that," he replied. "It isn't sinning that counts so much as the concealment of the sin. You, Spray,

and Sue, have been fairly honest with me in so far as your natures would permit. As for me, I have scarcely had the time or inclination to be unfaithful, what with two healthy women at my disposal. You know, the flesh is the frailest of our possessions, and yet we expect it to be the strongest. I'm inclined to believe that too much idealism leads to the cruelest sort of bigotry. Where was I?"

"I was in a fair way of being seduced," said Spray, "and you seemed to think it was a nice night for it."

"It was," said Mr. Pebble. "Couldn't have been better. You were singing at some Egyptian-looking cafe then, and showing as much as the law allowed. Very good stuff it was, too—song and all. I admired your voice as well as your body."

"How about my brains?" asked Spray.

"There was very little about your brains," said Mr. Pebble. "You didn't need any. But to continue. I was exceedingly low in my mind that evening and was finding it difficult to get drunk. So I gave up the attempt and solaced myself in you instead, which was much wiser."

"I remember now," said Spray. "You drove me to your home and introduced me to Sue, then you borrowed some of her things for me, and we went for a cruise on Long Island Sound. She was very sweet about it."

"There was a reason for that," observed Mr. Pebble with a faint grin. "She had a boy friend almost suffocating in the cellar. I nearly packed his trousers by mistake."

"Edifying, we were," said Spray, "the three of us, weren't we?"

"Perhaps not," admitted Mr. Pebble, "but at least we had both the good taste and the good sense not to waste the evening in noisy melodrama. Sue told me later she had spent a very pleasant week-end. She was pointed about it. You may never have realized it, Spray, but it was you who kept my marriage with Sue from going on the rocks. You actually held us together. It was only after I had provided you with a home that she felt inclined to provide me with one."

"Glad to have been of help," said Spray. "And so I was seduced."

"And so you were seduced," agreed Mr. Pebble. "You were even good enough to return my wife's nightgown."

"It was a lovely, daring bit of stuff," Spray observed.

"Yes," said Mr. Pebble almost sadly. "She would never wear it for me."

"So you got another girl to wear it for you," said Spray.

"It seemed the most reasonable thing to do," said Mr. Pebble. He paused and took a small square box from his pocket. "And," he added, presenting the box to the woman, "if you don't mind, I am going to ask you to wear this, also."

Spray opened the box and gazed down into the flickering fires of a black opal. The glowing beauty of the jewel was transmuted to her eyes.

"When the sun went down behind the green islands in the Sound the sky looked a lot like that," she said. "Cool fire and disturbing beauty— beauty that almost hurts. Thanks, Rex, I'll wear it." She took his hand in both of hers and held it against her cheek. "But I'd much rather be able to wear that nightgown for you again," she added.

"Still harping on the same old subject," said Mr. Pebble, fastidiously brushing some powder from the back of his hand.

"It's been more than a subject to me," she retorted. "It's been a career."

"How awful," observed Mr. Pebble, rising and walking over to the piano. "Why don't you call it a hobby?" "Hobby, hell!" declared Spray. "It's been a craze." Mr. Pebble looked pained.

"Let's try to forget everything you've said," he suggested, "and start afresh. It would be more fragrant. Here's a present Sue sent you."

He took the package from the piano and carried it to the divan. Spray opened the package and read aloud the card enclosed.

"To Spray Summers," she read, "my husband's mistress, from Sue Pebble, your patron's wife. Congratulations!"

Mr. Pebble took the card and looked at it, a faint smile edging his lips.

"Right to the point," he remarked. "No unnecessary words. Rather sporting, I'd say."

A cry of animal ferocity broke in upon his observations. Spray was confronting him with a large pair of carpet slippers in her hands. Mr. Pebble needed only one glance to feel convinced that they were the worst-looking pair of slippers he had ever seen. His wife must have searched with fanatical zeal to find a gift so devastatingly humiliating. He admired her for her perseverance but lamented her shocking taste. He lamented it all the more when he received the slippers with sudden violence in the pit of his

stomach. For a moment Mr. Pebble was forced to abandon his impressive poise. The sheer fury behind Spray's arm did much to make up for the softness of the slippers. With a dull, businesslike thud they struck the stomach of Mr. Pebble, and with a look of utter astonishment he promptly doubled up, his hand pressed to the assaulted spot. However, this undignified posture was of short duration. Summoning to his aid the traditional pride and courage of a long line of Pebbles, he immediately snapped erect and stood regarding the raging woman with a calm and imperious eye.

"I would rather receive an honest kick in the seat of my trousers," he said with stoical self-control, "than have one treacherously hurled at me from afar."

"Well, you just show me the seat of your pants," said Spray, "and you'll get a kick there, too."

"Madam," replied Mr. Pebble, "why should I show you the seat of my trousers? That would be literally asking for it. In your present mood it would be more than a foolhardy gesture of defiance, not to say a grotesque one. It would be actually dangerous, even if your feet are the Bull Run of chiropody."

This remark did nothing to restore tranquillity to the heaving bosom of Spray Summers. If anything, it heaved all the more. She snatched up the slippers and prepared for a second assault.

"If you throw those slippers at me again," Mr. Pebble told her in level tones, "I'll be forced to step on your corns—all of them."

Spray's right arm halted in its swing. The threat had proved effective. The very thought of such retaliation sent twinges of pain through her feet.

"You deliberately helped your wife to insult she said. "I'll never forgive you for this. Look at them. Look at those slippers."

With a tragic gesture she thrust out the slippers for his inspection. Unflinchingly he looked at the horrid things, but was unsuccessful in repressing a smile. Although they shocked his esthetic sense, they immensely appealed to his sense of humor.

"Don't be ridiculous," he said. "I knew nothing about those slippers. What's wrong with them, anyway? For a woman with feet like yours I should think they would be ideal."

Spray choked over this one.

"I'm humiliated," she said bitterly. "Humiliated. Do you know what I'm going to do?"

"I never know," declared Mr. Pebble.

"I'm going to buy a Mother Hubbard—a horrid flannel one — and sent it to that wife of yours on her next birthday. And you are going to take it to her for me. Don't forget that."

"I'm afraid I won't," replied Mr. Pebble a little wearily.

"Wonder who she thinks she is!" went on his mistress. "I'm every day as young as she is, if not younger. I am younger. I know it. Five or ten years younger."

Realizing the impossibility of trying to reason with a woman who made such extravagant statements, Mr. Pebble, in spite of years of experience, did the worst thing he could have done. He agreed with her.

"I'm sure you must be right," he said placatingly. "I should say nearer ten."

"To hell with you," blazed Spray. "You chattering old monkey. To hell with you, I say. What are you trying to do, treat me like a child?"

"If you keep on lopping the years off your age," Mr. Pebble assured her, "you'll soon be a babe in arms." "I wish I were," she retorted.

"In whose arms?" asked Mr. Pebble.

"Not in those brittle pipe stems of yours," she answered. "I want to be in my mother's arms."

"Funny thing," casually observed Mr. Pebble, "but I can never picture you as ever having had a mother."

"I never had one," said Spray.

"Then why do you want to be in her arms?"

"Well, you got to be in somebody's arms when you're a mere babe, don't you?" she demanded. "Any fool would know that, even an old one."

"Not necessarily," replied Mr. Pebble. "You could be in a basket or a cradle or a shoe box or even an ash can, for that matter."

"Could I?" sneered Spray. "Well, I wasn't that sort of baby. I was always in my mother's arms."

"But I thought you said just now you did not have any mother," objected Mr. Pebble.

"Will you stop trying to pin me down?" Spray cried fiercely. "I simply meant that we did not carry on long conversations."

"About what?" asked Mr. Pebble.

She started to answer, then stopped with an expression of frustration.

"How should I know?" she said at last. "If we never had any long conversations, how do you expect me to tell you what we didn't talk about?"

"I don't," Mr. Pebble replied rather hopelessly. "I don't even know what we are talking about."

"Neither do I," said Spray. "You've got me completely baffled. Why don't you go home?"

"Aren't you going to give me anything to eat?" Mr. Pebble demanded.

"I don't know where Nokashima is. Haven't seen him for days."

"Is that wretched heathen drunk again?"

"He's always either drunk or telephoning," Spray complained. "Often he's both drunk and telephoning. Then he's just too bad. Also, he suffers from hallucinations. Why don't you take him home to live with you? Whenever I discharge him he simply eats a box of rice and goes to bed. Then he covers his head with the blankets and gibbers back at me in a weird, muffled voice. It's worse than talking to a ghost."

"I should say so," said Mr. Pebble.

At this moment a strange couple entered the room. It consisted of a bloodhound who could not smell and a Japanese houseboy who could scarcely walk.

The bloodhound's name was Mr. Henry, and no one knew why.

"Good-evening, madam," said the more loquacious of these two animals in a slightly blurred voice. "I was shot in

leg by baroness while crossing Fourteenth Street."

"That explains everything," exclaimed Spray Summers with a hopeless waving of arms. "What did I tell you? Hallucinations! I might be able to stand a crazy Jap or a drunken Jap, but certainly not the two rolled into one. You talk to him, Rex Pebble—that is, if you want any dinner."

Mr. Henry lowered himself thoughtfully to the carpet. Once seated he pretended he was smelling something by making his nose quiver. The dog was living a lie. Yet it was a harmless form of deception, for a bloodhound who had lost his sense of smell must do something to overcome his inferiority complex.

Deprived of the support of his companion, Nokashima clung to the back of a chair and stood looking with guilty eyes at the tall, menacing figure of Mr. Pebble.

2. NOKASHIMA AND THE BLOODHOUND

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Rex Pebble had lived far too long and had been told far too many lies to take anyone at his or her own word. The most obvious statement was suspect to him. On the other hand, he had lived quite long enough to know that almost anything was possible, especially when it happened on Fourteenth Street.

Therefore, he did not immediately call Nokashima a liar and a drunkard, although he knew the servant was congenitally both. It was just barely possible that some passing baroness had encountered the dissolute Jap on Fourteenth Street and taken a pot shot at him. Knowing the little man as he did, it struck Mr. Pebble as the most reasonable thing for a baroness to do to Nokashima. Probably the woman had once employed him and become, as a consequence, slightly deranged. Mr. Pebble could well understand that.

Accordingly he greeted Mr. Henry, the non-smelling bloodhound, with a casual nod, then bore down on the wavering Nokashima, whose expression of quiet was immediately replaced by one of protective stupidity.

"Nocka," said Mr. Pebble with friendly incredulity, "do you mean to stand there swaying before me and to tell me to my face that you've actually been shot?"

"Yes, boss," replied Nocka with stolid conviction. "I been shot all right. Through and through. Also," he added, so that there might be no misunderstanding, "up and down."

"Literally riddled," murmured Mr. Pebble. "Sure you're not just half shot, Nokashima?"

"That too," agreed the Jap, visibly brightening. "Half shot—all shot. Leg of the worst. There are holes in it."

"But why a baroness, Nocka?" asked Mr. Pebble.

"Titled ladies like me," Nocka explained.

"So they shoot you out of sheer affection," said Mr. Pebble.

"That's right, boss," replied Nocka. "They shoot me up.

"I'd rather they shot you down," observed Mr. Pebble, "and out. However, one can't have everything. Any blood?"

"No, boss," said Nocka. "Just holes. Blood all gone." "Do you mean to tell me you're bloodless, Nocka?"

"Yes," vouchsafed the servant. "I am without blood."

"How do you keep on living?" asked Mr. Pebble, interested in the Jap's mental processes.

"I don't," said Nocka simply. "I am dying. Soon I will be good and dead."

"You may be dead," remarked Mr. Pebble, "but I very much doubt if you'll be much good."

"Oh, I'll be all right, boss," said Nocka encouragingly.

"I'm glad you take that view of it," observed Mr. Pebble. "Of course, after you're dead we can't keep you on here. What do you want us to do with you?"

"Put me in jug," said Nocka, "and send me home as token."

"What sort of jug, Nocka?" Mr. Pebble wanted to know.

"An ash jug," declared the Jap. "I want to be burned all up."

"Nothing would give me more joy," put in Spray Summers. "If I had my way I'd set fire to you right now."

"Only after I am all dead," said Nokashima firmly. "I burn then."

"You'll burn in hell," Spray assured him, "you black-hearted heathen."

"Don't scold at me, madam," Nocka said quite seriously, "or I'll become nervous breakdown."

"Ha!" cried Spray bitterly. "I like that. You'll become a nervous breakdown. Why, you've made me a gibbering idiot. Go on and die, sottish little ape."

"Soon," said the sottish little ape. "But no words, madam."

"No," retorted Spray. "Just cheers."

Mr. Pebble decided that this sort of thing would arrive at no good end.

"Nocka," he said, shifting his attack, "how old are you?"

"I am of no years," replied the Jap surprisingly. "I am all things to all men."

"You're a pain in the neck to me," cut in Spray Summers. "And elsewhere," she added with characteristic abandon.

"Show me those holes in your leg," Mr. Pebble demanded rather hastily.

"What holes, boss?" asked the servant.

"What holes?" Mr. Pebble repeated. "Didn't you tell me a baroness shot your leg full of holes?"

"You thought I did," said Nokashima, now in his most baffling stride.

A groan of mental anguish escaped Spray Summers' lips.

"He can throw you every time," she told Mr. Pebble.

"The horrid little beetle plays jujitsu with the English language."

"Are there no holes at all in your leg?" Mr. Pebble asked a trifle wearily.

"In which leg?" was the cautious answer.

"In any leg," replied Mr. Pebble, who was rapidly losing control.

"In some legs, yes," declared Nocka.

"But not in yours?" insisted Mr. Pebble.

"All gone," replied the Jap. "I am weak from the loss of holes."

By this time Spray was laughing comfortably on the divan.

"My god," she said, "how you two can talk. I don't know which is the most unintelligent. The heathen is weak from the loss of holes, is he? Well, I've got a gun upstairs. Shall I get it and make him strong with holes?"

"I'd like to make him nonexistent with holes," grated Mr. Pebble. "I'd like to make him just one hole in space."

"Like baroness," suggested Nokashima. "Cocktail, boss?"

The servant's question was timed to the exact second. Mr. Pebble checked his mounting wrath and struggled back once more to his poise.

"By all means," he said. "That is the best way out of everything. Are you able also to cook dinner?"

"Shake first, then cook," replied the Jap. "We must all be hungry."

"Go on and shake your head off," Spray flung after him as Nokashima left the room, Mr. Henry acting in the double capacity of guide and support.

When Nocka returned with the frosted shaker all sense of guilt appeared to have departed from his soul. His eyes had lost their expression of protective stupidity. They were now alert and gleaming. He even walked with Mr. Henry as an equal.

"He must have made a good one," Spray observed. "How are the cocktails, Nocka?"

"I am all recovered, madam," replied the Japanese. "I have no years at all."

"I feel somewhat younger myself," remarked Mr. Pebble after he had emptied his glass. "That was an honest cocktail mixed by dishonest hands, which goes to show that through evil great good can accrue. How are your wounds, Nocka?"

"I have no holes either," the small man replied proudly.

"I wouldn't brag about that," commented Spray Summers.

"I suggest we avoid the subject," interposed Mr. Pebble. "These cocktails are actually buoyant, Spray. Have another."

Spray did. Then she offered the slippers to the non-smelling bloodhound. Realizing what was expected of him, Mr. Henry came over to the divan and went through the elaborate pretense of sniffing them.

"Too bad he can't smell," Spray observed sadly. "If he could, the scent of these slippers would so infuriate him he'd tear the things to pieces."

"I wonder why that dog can't smell?" Mr. Pebble wondered without much interest.

"He does smell at times," replied Spray, "but never with his nose. I think his mother dallied with a Pekingese."

"You can cram more unsavory suggestions in the smallest space," protested Mr. Pebble, "of any woman I know."

"Mist' Henry," put in Nokashima, "him must have smell something very shocking when small babe of pup. It stultify his nose."

"Nothing should be too shocking for a bloodhound to smell," remarked Spray Summers. "That's their sole purpose in life—to take it on the nose, so to speak."

"Not when babe of pup," said Nocka. "When smell is too awful young nose declines to play part. It withers like delicate flower beneath blast of sun."

"That's the way I like to have things put," declared Mr. Pebble, pouring himself another drink. "Fine poetic frenzy evoked by a dog's nose."

"Well, I've lived with that dog and that Jap for five long years," said Spray, "and I defy William Shakespeare to do as much and retain one whiff of poetry in his soul."

She too poured herself another cocktail, and looked defiantly about her. Mr. Henry, as if sensing his defective part was under discussion, put an end to a trying situation by taking the slippers in his mouth and stalking from the room. With a quick bow Nokashima followed the dog.

"Exit three unsightly objects," said Spray with satisfaction, "but of the three those slippers are the worst."

"Sue can think up some dirty tricks," observed Mr. Pebble. "She has a perverted sense of humor."

"I don't mind an occasional dirty trick," replied Spray. "I've pulled a few myself in my time, but those slippers were

wicked. It's the first time in twenty-five years she has ever got the better of me."

"Wish I could say the same," responded Mr. Pebble. "She's got the better of me more than once—both of you have."

"Oh, I don't know," said Spray. "You haven't been so desperately treated, considering the chances you took. You've had more than most men—two lovely homes with a lovely woman in each. In addition, you've had the privilege of bringing up another man's daughter and of making a home for your nephew. What more could you ask?"

"I've had more than enough," was Mr. Pebble's enigmatic rejoinder. "Lots more."

"How is Kippie, by the way?" Spray wanted to know. "Haven't seen him for some time."

"He's growing more divertingly worthless every day," said Mr. Pebble. "He's twenty-six now, and in the three years since he left college he hasn't earned an honest dime. As a matter of fact, he's virtually ruined that advertising agency of mine."

"If he ruins only advertising agencies," remarked Spray, "no great harm will be done. Does he stop there?"

"I fear not," said Mr. Pebble. "The other morning I took one of the cars out for an early spin and found myself sitting on a pair of so-called step- ins." He paused and sighed a little wistfully. "Women's undergarments have taken vast strides since our day. There's nothing to them at all now except speed. They're very nice."

"I wear all the latest things," said Spray Summers. "For all the good it does me."