THE LAUGHING GIRL

Robert W. Chambers

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FOREWORD

I

Here's a pretty tale to tell
All about the beastly boche—
How the Bolsheviki fell
Out of grace and in the wash!
—How all valiant lovers love,
How all villains go to hell,
Started thither by a shove
From the youth who loved so well,
Virtue mirrored in the glass
Held by his beloved lass.

II

He who grins in clown's disguise
Often hides an aching heart—
Sadness, sometimes worldly-wise,
Dresses for a motley part—
Cap, and bells to cheat the ears,
Chalk and paint to hide the tears
Lest the world, divining pain,
Turn to gape and stare again.

III

You who read but may not run
Where the bugles summon youth,
You who when the day is done
Ponder God's eternal Truth

Ere you fold your hands to rest,
Sheltered from the fierce huns' ruth,
Here within the guarded West
Safe from swinish tusk and tooth
Laugh in God's name, if you can!—
Serving so the Son of Man.

IV

Gorse is growing, poppies bloom
Where our bravest greeted Christ.
Is His dwelling, then, the tomb?
Has the sacrifice sufficed?
What is all we have then worth
In Thy sight, Lord, in Thy sight?
Take our offered heart-sick mirth—
Let our laughter fight Thy fight.

R. W. C.

I

I

AN INHERITANCE

There was a red-headed slattern sweeping the veranda—nobody else visible about the house. All the shutters of the stone and timber chalet were closed; cow-barn, stable, springhouse and bottling house appeared to be deserted. Weeds smothered the garden where a fountain played above a brimming basin of gray stone; cat-grass grew rank on the oval lawn around the white-washed flag-pole from which no banner flapped. An intense and heated silence possessed the place. Tall mountains circled it, cloud-high, enormous, gathered around the little valley as though met in solemn council there under the vast pavilion of sky. From the zenith of the azure-tinted tent hung that Olympian lantern called the sun, flooding every crested snow-peak with a nimbus of pallid fire.

In these terms of belles-lettres I called Smith's attention to the majesty of the scene.

"Very impressive," remarked Smith, lighting a cigarette and getting out of the Flivver;—"I trust that our luncheon may impress us as favorably." And he looked across the weedy drive at the red-headed slattern who was now grooming the veranda with a slopping mop.

"Her ankles might be far less ornamental," he observed. I did not look. Ankles had long ceased to mean anything to me.

After another moment's hesitation I handed Smith his suit-case, picked up my own, and descended from the Flivver. The Swiss officer at the wheel, Captain Schey, and the Swiss officer of Gendarmerie beside him, Major Schoot, remained heavily uninterested in the proceedings. To think

of nothing is bovine; to think of nothing at all, and do that thinking in German, is porcine. I inspected their stolid features: no glimmer of human intelligence illuminated them. Their complexions reminded me of that moist pink hue which characterizes a freshly cut boiled ham.

Smith leisurely examined the buildings and their surroundings, including the red-headed girl, and I saw him shrug his shoulders. He was right; it was a silly situation and a ridiculous property for a New Yorker to inherit. And the longer I surveyed my new property the more worried I became.

I said in English to Major Schoot, one of the ample, pig-pink gentlemen in eye-glasses and the uniform of the Swiss Gendarmerie: "So this is Schwindlewald, is it?"

He blinked his pale little eyes without interest at the low chalet and out-buildings; then his vague, weak gaze flickered up at the terrific mountains around us.

"Yes," he replied, "this is now your property, Mr. O'Ryan."

"Well, I don't want it," I said irritably. "I've told you that several times."

"Quite right," remarked Smith; "what is Mr. O'Ryan going to do with a Swiss hotel, a cow-barn, a bottling factory, one red-headed girl, and several large mountains? I ask you that, Major?"

I was growing madder and madder; and Smith's flippancy offended me.

"I'm an interior decorator," I said to Major Schoot. "I've told you that a dozen times, too. I don't wish to conduct a hotel in Switzerland or Greenland or Coney Island or any other land! I do not desire either to possess kine or to deprive them of their milk. Moreover, I do not wish to bottle spring water. Why then am I not permitted to sell this bunch of Swiss scenery and go home? What about my perfectly harmless business?"

Major Schoot rolled his solemn fish-blue eyes: "The laws of the canton and of the Federal Government," he began in his

weak tenor voice, "require that any alien inheriting property in the Swiss Republic, shall reside upon that property and administer it for the period of not less than one year before offering the said property for sale or rent ——"

He already had told me that a dozen times; and a dozen times I had resisted, insisting that there must be some way to circumvent such a ridiculous Swiss law. Of what use are laws unless one can circumvent them, as we do?

I now gazed at him with increasing animosity. In his uniform of Major of Swiss Gendarmes he appeared the personification of everything officially and Teutonically obtuse.

"Do you realize," I said, "that my treatment by the Swiss Confederation and by the Federal police has been most extraordinary? A year ago when my uncle's will was probated, and that German attorney in Berne notified me in New York that I had inherited this meaningless mess of house and landscape, he also wrote that upon coming here and complying with the Swiss law, I could immediately dispose of the property if I so desired? Why the devil did he write that?"

"That was a year ago," nodded Major Schoot. Captain Schey regarded me owlishly. "A new law," he remarked, "has been since enacted."

"I have suspected," said I fiercely, "that this brand new law enacted in such a hellofa hurry was enacted expressly to cover this case of mine. Why? Why does your government occupy itself with me and my absurd property up here in these picture-book Alps? What difference does it make to Switzerland whether I sell it or try to run it? And another thing!—" I continued, madder than ever at the memory of recent wrongs—"Why do your police keep visiting me, inspecting me and my papers, trailing me around? Why do large, moon-faced gentlemen seat themselves beside me in restaurants and cafés and turn furtive eyes upon me? Why

do they open newspapers and punch holes in them to scrutinize me? Why do they try to listen to my conversation addressed to other people? Why do strange ladies lurk at my elbow when hotel clerks hand me my mail? Dammit, why?"

Major Schoot and Captain Schey regarded me in tweedle-dum-and-tweedle-dee-like silence: then the Major said: "Under extraordinary conditions extraordinary precautions are necessary." And the Captain added: "These are war times and Switzerland must observe an impartial neutrality."

"You mean a German neutrality," I thought to myself, already unpleasantly aware that all the banks and all the business of Switzerland are owned by Teutons and that ninety per cent of the Swiss are German-Swiss, and speak German habitually.

And still at the same time I realized that, unless brutally menaced and secretly coerced by the boche the Swiss were first of all passionately and patriotically Swiss, even if they might be German after that fact. They wished to be let alone and to remain a free people. And the Hun was blackmailing them.

Smith had now roamed away through the uncut grass, smoking a cigarette and probably cursing me out—a hungry, disconsolate figure against the background of deserted buildings.

I turned to Major Schoot and Captain Schey:

"Very well, gentlemen; if there's no immediate way of selling this property I'll live here until your law permits me to sell it. But in the meanwhile it's mine. I own it. I insist on my right of privacy. I shall live here in indignant solitude. And if any stranger ever sets a profane foot upon this property I shall call in the Swiss police and institute legal proceedings which——"

"Pardon," interrupted Major Schoot mildly, "but the law of Switzerland provides for Government regulation of all inns,

rest-houses, chalets, and hotels. All such public resorts must remain open and receive guests."
"I won't open my chalet!" I said. "I'd rather fortify it and die fighting! I hereby formally refuse to open it to the public!"
"It is open," remarked Captain Schey, "theoretically."
"Theoretically," added Major Schoot, "it never has been closed. The law says it must not be closed. Therefore it has not been closed. Therefore it is open. Therefore you are expected to entertain guests at a reasonable rate——"
"What if I don't?" I demanded.
"Unhappily, in such a case, the Federal Government regretfully confiscates the property involved and administers it according to law."
"But I wish to reside here privately until such time as I am permitted to sell the place! Can't I do that? Am I not even permitted privacy in this third-rate musical comedy country?"
"Monsieur, the Chalet of Schwindlewald has always been a public 'Cure,' not a private estate. The tourist public is always at liberty to come here to drink the waters and enjoy the climate and the view. Monsieur, your late Uncle, purchased the property on that understanding."
"My late Uncle," said I, "was slightly eccentric. Why in God's name he should have purchased a Swiss hotel and bottling works in the Alps he can perhaps explain to his Maker. None of his family know. And all I have ever heard is that somebody interested him in a plan to drench Europe with bottled spring-water at a franc a quart; and that a further fortune was to be extracted from this property by trapping a number of Swiss chamois and introducing the species into the Andes. Did anybody ever hear of such nonsense?"
The Swiss officers gaped at me. "Very remarkable," said Major Schoot without any inflection in his voice or any expression upon his face.
Smith, weary of prowling about the place, came over and

said in a low voice: "Cut it out, old chap, and start that red-headed girl to cooking. Aren't you hungry?"
I was hungry, but I was also irritated and worried.
I stood still considering the situation for a few moments, one eye on my restless comrade, the other reverting now and then to the totally emotionless military countenances in front of me.
"Very well," I said. "My inheritance appears to be valuable, according to the Swiss appraisal. I shall, therefore, pay my taxes, observe the laws of Switzerland, and reside here until I am at liberty to dispose of the property. And I'll entertain guests if I must. But I don't think I'm likely to be annoyed by tourists while this war lasts. Do you?"
"Tourists tour," observed Major Schoot solemnly.
"It's a fixed habit," added Captain Schey,—"war or no war. Tourists invariably tour or," he added earnestly, "they would not be tourists."
"Also," remarked Schoot, "the wealthy amateur chamois hunter is always with us. Like the goitre, he is to be expected in the Alps."
"Am I obliged to let strangers hunt on my property?" I asked, aghast.
"The revenue to an estate is always considerable," explained Schoot. "With your inn, your 'Cure,' your bottling works, and your hunting fees your income should be enviable, Mr. O'Ryan."
I gazed angrily up at the mountains. Probably every hunter would break his neck. Then a softer mood invaded my wrath, and I thought of my late uncle and of his crazy scheme to stock the Andes with chamois—a project which, while personally pursuing it, and an infant chamois, presently put an end to his dashing career upon earth. He was some uncle, General Juan O'Ryan, but too credulous, and too much of a sport.
"Which mountain did he fall off?" I inquired in a subdued voice, gazing up at the ring of terrific peaks above us.

"That one—the *Bec de l'Empereur* ," said Captain Schey, in the funereal voice which decency requires when chronicling necrology.
I looked seriously at the peak known as "The Emperor's Nose." No wonder my uncle broke his neck.
"Which Emperor?" I inquired absently.
"The Kaiser."
"You don't mean William of Hohenzollern!"
"The All-Highest of Germany," he replied in a respectful voice. "But the name is in French. That is good politics. We offend nobody."
"Oh. Well, *why* all the same?"
"Why what?"
"Why celebrate the All-Highest's Imperial nose?"
"Why not?" retorted the Swiss mildly; "he suggested it."
"The Kaiser suggested that the mountain be named after his own nose?"
"He did. Moreover it was from that peak that the All-Highest declared he could smell the Rhine. Tears were in his eyes when he said it. Such sentiment ought to be respected."
"May I be permitted to advise the All-Highest to return there and continue his sentimental sniffing?"
"For what purpose, Monsieur?"
"Because," I suggested pleasantly, "if he sniffs very earnestly he may scent something still farther away than the Rhine."
"The Seine?" nodded Captain Schey with a pasty, neutral smile.
"I meant the United States," said I carelessly. "If William sniffs hard enough he may smell the highly seasoned stew that they say is brewing over there. It reeks of pep, I hear."
The two neutral officers exchanged very grave glances. Except for my papers, which were most perfectly in order and revealed me as a Chilean of Irish descent, nothing could have convinced them or, indeed, anybody else that I

was not a Yankee. Because, although my great grandfather was that celebrated Chilean Admiral O'Ryan and I had been born in Santiago and had lived there during early boyhood, I looked like a typical American and had resided in New York for twenty years. And there also I practiced my innocent profession. There were worse interior decorators than I in New York and I was, perhaps, no worse than any of them—if you get what I am trying not to say.

"Gentlemen," I continued politely, "I haven't as yet any lavish hospitality to offer you unless that red-headed girl yonder has something to cook and knows how to cook it. But such as I have I offer to you in honor of the Swiss army and out of respect to the Swiss Confederation. Gentlemen, pray descend and banquet with me. Join our revels. I ask it."

They said they were much impressed by my impulsive courtesy but were obliged to go back to barracks in their flivver.

"Before you go, then," said I, "you are invited to witness the ceremony of my taking over this impossible domain." And I took a small Chilean flag from the breast pocket of my coat, attached it to the halyards of the white-washed flag pole, and ran it up, whistling the Chilean national anthem.

Then I saluted the flag with my hat off. My bit of bunting looked very gay up there aloft against the intense vault of blue.

Smith, although now made mean by hunger, was decent enough to notice and salute my flag. The flag of Chili is a pretty one; it carries a single white star on a blue field, and a white and a red stripe.

One has only to add a galaxy of stars and a lot more stripes to have the flag I had lived under so many years.

And now that this flag was flying over millions of embattled Americans—well, it looked very beautiful to me. And was looking more beautiful every time I inspected it. But the Chilean O'Ryans had no business with the Star Spangled

Banner as long as Chili remained neutral. I said this, at times to Smith, to which he invariably remarked: "Flap-doodle! No Irishman can keep out of this shindy long. Watch your step, O'Ryan."

Now, as I walked toward Smith, carrying my suitcase, he observed my advent with hopeful hunger-stricken eyes.

"If yonder maid with yonder mop can cook, and has the makings of a civilized meal in this joint of yours, for heaven's sake tell her to get on the job," he said. "What do you usually call her—if not Katie?"

"How do I know? I've never before laid eyes on her."

"You don't know the name of your own cook?"

"How should I? Did you think she was part of the estate? That boche attorney, Schmitz, at Berne, promised to send up somebody to look after the place until I made up my mind what I was going to do. That's the lady, I suppose. And Smith—did you ever see such very red hair on any human woman?"

I may have spoken louder than I meant to; evidently my voice carried, for the girl looked over her shabby shoulder and greeted us with a clear, fresh, unfeigned, untroubled peal of laughter. I felt myself growing red. However, I approached her. She wore a very dirty dress—but her face and hands were dirtier.

"Did Schmitz engage you and are you to look out for us?" I inquired in German.

"If you please," she replied in French, leaning on her mop and surveying us out of two large gray eyes set symmetrically under the burnished tangle of her very remarkable hair.

"My child," I said in French, "why are you so dirty? Have you by chance been exploring the chimney?"

"I have been cleaning fireplaces and pots and pans, Monsieur. But I will make my toilet and put on a fresh apron for luncheon."

"That's a good girl," I said kindly. "And hasten, please; my

friend, Mr. Smith, is hungry; and he is not very amiable at such times."
We went into the empty house; she showed us our rooms. "Luncheon will be served in half an hour, Messieurs," she said in her cheerful and surprisingly agreeable voice, through which a hidden vein of laughter seemed to run.
After she had gone Smith came through the connecting door into my room, drying his sunburned countenance on a towel.
"I didn't suppose she was so young," he said. "She's very young, isn't she?"
"Do you mean she's too young to cook decently?"
"No. I mean—I mean that she just seems rather young. I merely noticed it."
"Oh," said I without interest. But he lingered about, buttoning his collar.
"You know," he remarked, "she wouldn't be so bad looking if you'd take her and scrub her."
"I've no intention of doing it," I retorted.
"Of course," he explained, peevishly, "I didn't mean that you, personally, should perform ablutions upon her. I merely meant——"
"Sure," said I frivolously; "take this cake of soap and chase her into the fountain out there."
"All the same," he added, "if she'd wash her face and fix her hair and stand up straight she'd have—er—elements."
"Elements of what?" I asked, continuing to unpack my suitcase and arrange the contents upon my dresser. Comb and brushes I laid on the left; other toilet articles upon the right; in the drawers I placed my underwear and linen and private papers.
Then I took the photograph which I had purchased in Berne and stood it up against the mirror over my dresser. Smith came over and looked at it with more interest than he had usually displayed.
It was the first photograph of any woman I had ever

purchased. Copies were sold all over Europe. It seemed to be very popular and cost two francs fifty unframed. I had resisted it in every shop window between London and Paris. I nearly fell for it in Geneva. I did fall in Berne. It was called "The Laughing Girl," and I saw it in a shop window the day of my arrival in Berne. And I could no more get it out of my mind than I could forget an unknown charming face in a crowded street that met my gaze with a shy, faint smile of provocation. I went back to that shop and bought the photograph labeled "The Laughing Girl." It traveled with me. It had become as necessary to me as my razor or toothbrush.

As I placed it on the center of my dresser tilted back against the looking-glass, for the first time since it had been in my possession an odd and totally new sense of having seen the original of the picture somewhere—or having seen somebody who resembled it—came into my mind.

"As a matter of fact," remarked Smith, tying his tie before my mirror, "that red-haired girl of yours downstairs bears a curious resemblance to your lady-love's photograph."

"Good Lord!" I exclaimed, intensely annoyed. Because the same distasteful idea had also occurred to me.

II

II

AL FRESCO

Our luncheon was a delicious surprise. It was served to us on a rustic table and upon a fresh white cloth, out by the fountain. We had a fragrant omelette, a cool light wine, some seductive bread and butter, a big wooden bowlful of mountain strawberries, a pitcher of cream, and a bit of dreamy cheese with our coffee. The old gods feasted no more luxuriously.

Smith, fed to repletion, gazed sleepily but sentimentally at the vanishing skirts of my red-headed Hebe who had perpetrated this miracle in our behalf.

"Didn't I tell you she'd prove to be pretty under all that soot?" he said. "I like that girl. She's a peach."

In point of fact her transfiguration had mildly amazed me. She had scrubbed herself and twisted up her hair, revealing an unsuspected whiteness of neck. She wore a spotless cotton dress and a white apron over it; the slouch of the slattern had disappeared and in its place was the rather indolent, unhurried, and supple grace of a lazy young thing who has never been obliged to hustle for a living.

"I wonder what her name is?" mused Smith. "She deserves a pretty name like Amaryllis——"

"Don't try to get gay and call her that," said I, setting fire to a cigarette. "Mind your business, anyway."

"But we ought to know what she calls herself. Suppose we wanted her in a hurry? Suppose the house caught fire! Suppose she fell into the fountain! Shall I go to the pantry and ask her what her name is? It will save you the trouble," he added, rising.

" *I'll* attend to all the business details of this establishment," said I, coldly. Which discouraged him; and he re-seated himself in silence.
To mitigate the snub, I offered him a cigar which he took without apparent gratitude. But Shandon Smith never nursed his wrath; and presently he affably reverted to the subject:
"O'Ryan," he remarked, leaning back in his chair and expelling successive smoke rings at the Bec de l'Empereur across the valley, "that red-haired girl of yours is a mystery to me. I find no explanation for her. I can not reconcile her extreme youth with her miraculous virtuosity as a cook. I cannot coordinate the elements of perfect symmetry which characterize her person with the bench show points of a useful peasant. She's not formed like a 'grade'; she reveals pedigree. Now I dare say you look upon her as an ordinary every-day, wage-earning pot-wrestler. Don't you?"
"I do."
"You don't consider her symmetrical?"
"I am," said I, "scarcely likely to notice pulchritude below stairs."
Smith laughed:
"For that matter she dwells upstairs in the garret, I believe. I saw her going up. I'm astonished that you don't think her pretty because she looks like that photograph on your dresser."
What he said again annoyed me,—the more so because, since her ablutions, the girl did somehow or other remind me even more than before of that lovely, beguiling creature in my photograph. And why on earth there should be any resemblance at all between that laughing young aristocrat in her jewels and silken negligée and my slatternly maid-of-all-work—why the one should even remotely suggest to us the other—was to me inexplicable and unpleasant.
"Smith," I said, "you are a sentimental and romantic young man. You shyly fall in love several times a day when

material is plenty. You have the valuable gift of creative imagination. Why not employ it commercially to augment your income?"
"You mean by writing best sellers?"
"I do. You are fitted for the job."
"O'Ryan," he said, "it would be wasted time. Newspapers are to-day the best sellers. Reality has knocked romance clean over the ropes. Look at this war? Look at the plain, unvarnished facts which history has been recording during the last four years. Has Romance ever dared appropriate such astounding material for any volume of fiction ever written?"
I admitted that fiction had become a back number in the glare of daily facts.
"It certainly has," he said. "Every day that we live—every hour—yes, every minute that your watch ticks off—events are happening such as the wildest imagination of a genius could not create. You can prove it for yourself, O'Ryan. Try to read the most exciting work of fiction, or the cleverest, the most realistic, the most subtle romance ever written. And when you've yawned your bally head off over the mockery of things actual, just pick up the daily paper."
He was quite right.
"I tell you," he went on, "there's more romance, more excitement, more mystery, more tragedy, more comedy, more humanity, more truth in any single edition of any French, English, Italian, or American daily paper published in these times than there is in all the fiction ever produced."
"Very true," I said. "Romance is dead to-day. Reality reigns alone."
"Then why snub me when I say that your red-headed maid is a real enigma and an actual mystery? She might be anything in such times as these. She might be a great lady; she might be a scullion. Have you noticed how white and fine and slim her hands are?"

"I notice they're clean," said I cautiously.
He laughed at me in frank derision, obstinately interested and intent upon building up a real romance around my maid-of-all-work. His gayety and his youth amused me. I was a year his senior and I felt my age. The world was hollow; I had learned that much.
"Her whole make-up seems to me suspiciously like camouflage," he said, "her flat-heeled slippers, for example! She has a distractingly pretty ankle, and have you happened to notice her eyes, O'Ryan?"
In point of fact I had noticed them. They were gray and had black lashes. But I was not going to give Smith the satisfaction of admitting that I had noticed my housemaid's eyes.
"Her eyes," continued Smith, "are like those wide young eyes in that pretty photograph of yours. So is her mouth with its charmingly full width and the hint of laughter in its upcurled childish corners——"
"Nonsense!——"
"Not at all. Not at all! And all you've got to do is to put a bunch of jewels on her fingers and a thin, shimmery silk thing showing her slender throat and shoulders, and then some; and then you can fix her hair like the girl's hair in your photograph, and hand her a guitar, and drop one of her knees over the other, and hang a slipper to the little naked foot that swings above its shadow on the floor——"
"I shall do none of those things," said I. "And I'll tell you some more, Smith: I believe it's your devilish and irresponsible chatter which has put the unpleasant idea into my head that my red-headed domestic resembles that photograph upstairs. I don't like the idea. And I'd be much obliged if you wouldn't mention it again."
"All right," he said cheerfully.
But what he had said about this resemblance left me not only vaguely uncomfortable, but also troubled by a sort of

indefinite curiosity concerning my cook. I desired to take another look at her immediately.
After a while I threw aside my cigarette: "I'm going into the pantry," said I, "to discuss business with my housekeeper. Here's the key to the wine-cellar. There's more of that Moselle there, I understand."
And I started toward the house, leaving him to twiddle his thumbs and stare at the Bec de l'Empereur. Or he could vary this program by smoking his head off if he chose. Or investigate the wine-cellar. But my cook he could not flirt with as long as I was on the job.
He seemed to be a very nice fellow in his way, but he had put a lot of nonsense into my head by his random talk.
Yet he was certainly an agreeable young man. I had first met him in Berne—that hot-bed of international intrigue, where every other person is a conspirator and every other a boche.
Now Smith's papers and passport revealed him as a Norwegian; his reason for being in Switzerland a purely commercial one. He had arrived in Berne, he told me, with a proposition to lay before the Federal Government. This was a colossal scheme to reforest parts of Switzerland with millions and millions of Norway pines and hardwoods—a stupendous enterprise, but apparently feasible and financially attractive.
So far, however, he had made little headway. But somewhere in the back of my head I had a lively suspicion that Shandon Smith was no more a Norwegian than was I; and that he could tell a very interesting story about those papers and passports of his if he cared to. I had lived too long in New York not to recognize a New Yorker no matter what his papers showed.
Anyway we seemed to attract each other and during my enforced and bothersome sojourn in Berne we became companionable to the edge of friendship.

And when I told him about my ridiculous inheritance and the trouble I was having in trying to get rid of it, he offered to come up here with me and keep me company while the Swiss Government was making up its composite mind about his offer to reforest such cantons as required it.
That is how we came to be here in Schwindlewald together. I was to stay until the prescribed time elapsed when I should be allowed by law to sell the place: he was willing to remain with me until his offer to the Swiss Government had been either accepted or rejected.
I had begun to like Smith very much. We were on those terms of easy and insulting badinage which marks the frontier between acquaintances and friends.

Now as I entered the house I turned on the threshold and glanced back to see what Smith was doing. His hat was off; the Alpine breeze was ruffling his crisp, blond hair. He sat at ease beside the fountain, a fresh cigar balanced between his fingers, a cork-screw in the other hand. Beside him on the grass stood a row of bottles of light Moselle. He had investigated the cellar. And as I watched what appeared to me a perfectly characteristic type of American from Manhattan Island, his voice came across the grass to me, lifted in careless song:—
—"My girl's a corker,
She's a New Yorker,
She plays the races,
Knows the sporty places
Uptown, downtown,
Always wears a nifty gown."—

"Yes," said I to myself, "you're a Norwegian—aye don' t'ank!" which is good Norwegian for "I don't think."
And I smiled subtly upon Smith as he drew the first cork from the first bottle of that liquid sunshine called Château

Varenn, and with which one may spend a long and intimate afternoon without fear of consequences.
As I entered the house his careless song came to me on the summer wind:
"My girl's a corker,
She's a New Yorker——"

"Such a saga," said I to myself, "could be sung only by that sort of Viking. Now why the deuce is that young man in Switzerland?"
But it didn't matter to me, so I continued along the wide hallway toward the kitchen in the rear.

III

IN THE CELLAR

She was peeling potatoes in the kitchen when I entered;—she did it as daintily, as leisurely as though she were a young princess preparing pomegranates—But this sort of simile wouldn't do and I promptly pulled myself together, frowning.

Hearing me she looked up with a rather sweet confused little smile as though aroused from thoughts intimate but remote. Doubtless she was thinking of some peasant suitor somewhere—some strapping, yodling, ham-fisted, bull-necked mountaineer——

"I have come to confer with you on business," said I, forestalling with a courteous gesture any intention she might have had to arise out of deference to my presence. I admit I observed no such intention. On the contrary she remained undisturbed, continuing leisurely her culinary occupation, and regarding me with that engaging little half-smile which seemed to be a permanent part of her expression—I pulled myself together.

"My child," said I pleasantly, "what is your name?"

"Thusis," she replied.

"Thusis? Quite unusual,—hum-hum—quite exotic. And then—hum-hum!—what is the remainder of your name, Thusis?"

"There isn't any more, Monsieur."

"Only Thusis?"

"Only Thusis."

"You're—hum-hum!—very young, aren't you, Thusis?"

"Yes, I am."

"You cook very well."

"Thank you."

"Well, Thusis," I said, "I suppose when Mr. Schmitz engaged you to come up here, he told you what are the

conditions and what vexatious problems confront me."
"Yes, he did tell me."
"Very well; that saves explanations. It is evident, of course, that if I am expected to board and feed any riff-raff tourist who comes to Schwindlewald I must engage more servants."
"Oh, yes, you'll have to."
"Well, where the deuce am I to find them? Haven't you any friends who would perhaps like to work here?"
"I have a sister," she said.
"Can you get her to come?"
"Yes."
"That's fine. She can do the rooms. Could you get another girl to wait on table?"
"I have a friend who is a very good cook——"
"You're good enough!——"
"Oh, no!" she demurred, with her enchanting smile, "but my friend, Josephine Vannis, is an excellent cook. Besides I had rather wait on table—with Monsieur's permission."
I said regretfully, remembering the omelette, "Very well, Thusis. Now I also need a farmer."
"I know a young man. His name is Raoul Despres."
"Fine! And I want to buy some cows and goats and chickens ——"
"Raoul will cheerfully purchase what stock Monsieur requires."
"Thusis, you are quite wonderful."
"Thank you," she said, lifting her dark-fringed gray eyes, the odd little half-smile in the curling corners of her lips. It was extraordinary how the girl made me think of my photograph upstairs.
"What is your sister's name?" I inquired—hoping I was not consciously making conversation as an excuse to linger in my cook's kitchen.
"Her name is Clelia."

"Clelia? Thusis? Very unusual names—hum-hum!—and nothing else—no family name. Well—well!"
"Oh, there was a family name of sorts. It doesn't matter; we never use it." And she laughed.
It was not what she said—not the sudden charm of her fresh young laughter that surprised me; it was her effortless slipping from French into English—and English more perfect than one expects from even the philologetically versatile Swiss.
"Are you?" I asked curiously.
"What, Mr. O'Ryan?"
"Swiss?"
Thusis laughed and considered me out of her dark-fringed eyes.
"We are Venetians—very far back. In those remote days, I believe, my family had many servants. That, perhaps, is why my sister and I make such good ones—if I may venture to say so. You see we know by inheritance what a good servant ought to be."
The subtle charm of this young girl began to trouble me; her soft, white symmetry, the indolent and youthful grace of her, and the disturbing resemblance between her and my photograph all were making me vaguely uneasy.
"Thusis," I said, "you understand of course that if I am short of servants you'll have to pitch in and help the others."
"Of course," she replied simply.
"What do you know how to do?"
"I understand horses and cattle."
"Can you milk?"
"Yes. I can also make butter and cheese, pitch hay, cultivate the garden, preserve vegetables, wash, iron, do plain and fancy sewing——"
I suppose the expression of my face checked her. We both laughed.
"Doubtless," I said, "you also play the piano and sing."