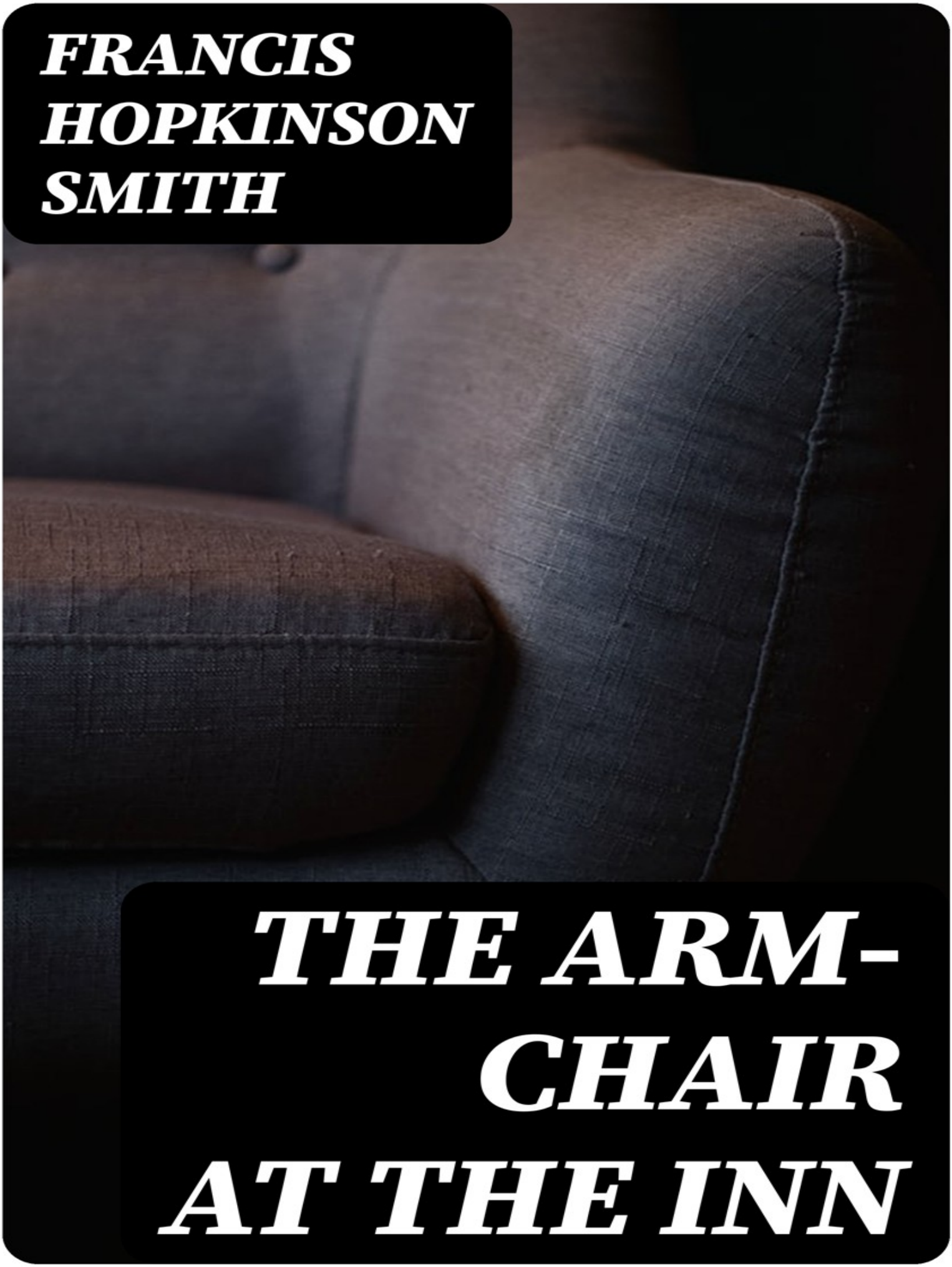

FRANCIS HOPKINSON SMITH

# THE ARM-CHAIR AT THE INN


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**Francis Hopkinson Smith**

# The Arm-Chair at the Inn

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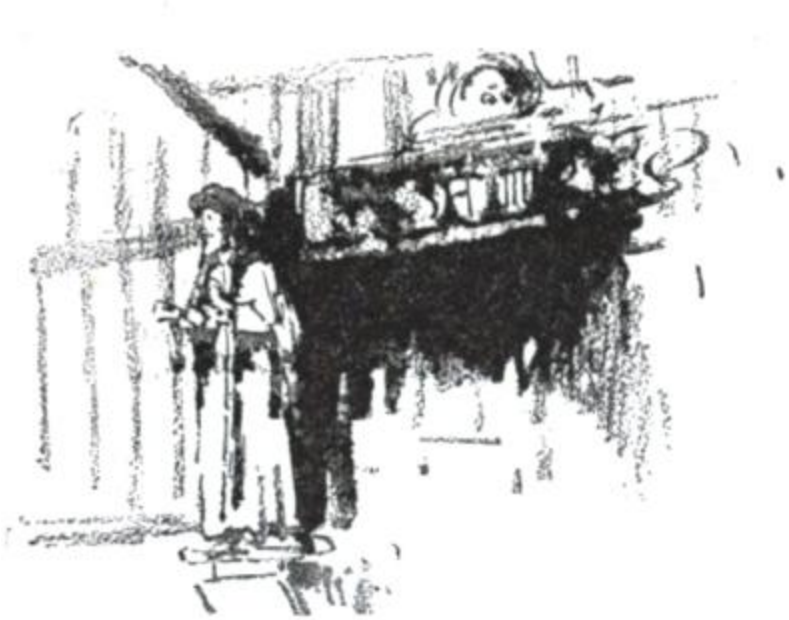

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# THE ARM-CHAIR AT THE INN

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# THE ARM-CHAIR AT THE INN

## I

## THE MARMOUSET

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“How many did you say?” inquired Lemois, our landlord.

“Five for dinner, and perhaps one more. I will know when the train gets in. Have the fires started in the bedrooms and please tell Mignon and old Leà to put on their white caps.”

We were in the Marmouset at the moment—the most enchanting of all the rooms in this most enchanting of all Normandy inns. Lemois was busying himself about the table, selecting his best linen and china—an old Venetian altar cloth and some Nancy ware—replacing the candles in

the hanging chandelier, and sorting the silver and glass. Every one of my expected guests was personally known to him; some of them for years. All had shared his hospitality, and each and every one appreciated its rare value. Nothing was too good for them, and nothing should be left undone which would add to their comfort.

I had just helped him light the first blaze in the big baronial fireplace, an occupation I revel in, for to me the kindling of a fire is the gathering of half a dozen friends together, each log nudging his neighbor, the cheer of good comradeship warming them all. And a roaring fire it was when I had piled high the logs, swept the hearth, and made it ready for the choice spirits who were to share it with me. For years we have had our outings—or rather our “in-tings” before it—red-letter days for us in which the swish of a petticoat is never heard, and we are free to enjoy a “man’s time” together; red-letter days, too, in the calendar of the Inn, when even Lemois, tired out with the whirl of the season, takes on a new lease of life.

His annual rejuvenation began at dawn to-day, when he disappeared in the direction of the market and returned an hour later with his procession of baskets filled with fish and lobsters fresh out of the sea a mile away (caught at daylight), some capons, a string of pigeons, and an armful of vegetables snatched in the nick of time from the early grave of an impending frost.

As for the more important items, the Chablis Moutonne and Roumanée Conti—rare Burgundies—they were still asleep in their cobwebs on a low Spanish bench that had

once served as a temporary resting-place outside a cardinal's door.

Until to-night Lemois and I have dined in the kitchen. You would too could you see it. Not by any manner of means the sort of an interior the name suggests, but one all shining brass, rare pottery, copper braziers, and resplendent pewter, reflecting the dancing blaze of a huge open hearth with a spit turned by the weight of a cannon ball fired by the British, and on which—the spit, not the ball—are roasted the joints, chickens, and game for which the Inn is famous, Pierre, the sole remaining chef—there are three in the season—ineffectually cudgelling his French pate under his short-cropped, shoe-brush hair for some dish better than the last.

Because, however, of the immediate gathering of the clan, I have abandoned the kitchen and have shifted my quarters to the Marmouset. Over it up a steep, twisted staircase with a dangling rope for banisters is my bedroom, the Chambre de Cure, next to the Chambre de Officier—where the gluttonous king tossed on his royal bed (a true story, I am told, with all the details set forth in the State Archives of France). Mine has a high-poster with a half lambrequin, or bed curtain, that being all Lemois could find, and he being too honest an antiquary to piece it out with modern calico or chintz. My guests, of course, will take their pick of the adjoining rooms—Madame Sévigné's, Grèvin's, the Chambre du Roi, and the others—and may thank their stars that it is not a month back. Then, even if they had written ten days ahead, they would have been received with a shrug—one of Lemois' most engaging shrugs tinged with

grief—at his inability to provide better accommodation for their comfort, under which one could have seen a slight trace of suppressed glee at the prosperity of the season. They would then doubtless have been presented with a massive key unlocking the door of a box of a bedroom over the cake-shop, or above the apothecary's, or next to the man who mends furniture—all in the village of Dives itself.

And now a word about the Inn itself—even before I tell you of the Arm-Chair or the man who sat in it or the others of the clan who listened and talked back.

Not the low-pitched, smothered-in-ivy Kings Arms you knew on the Thames, with its swinging sign, horse-block, and the rest of it; nor the queer sixteenth-century tavern in that Dutch town on the Maas, with its high wainscoting, leaded window-panes, and porcelain stove set out with pewter flagons—not that kind of an inn at all.

This one bolsters up one corner of a quaint little town in Normandy; is faced by walls of sombre gray stone loop-holed with slits of windows, topped by a row of dormers, with here and there a chimney, and covers an area as large as a city block, the only break in its monotony being an arched gate-way in which swing a pair of big iron-bound doors. These are always open, giving the passer-by a glimpse of the court within.

You will be disappointed, of course, when you drive up to it on a summer's day. You will think it some public building supported by the State—a hospital or orphan asylum—and, tourist-like, will search for the legend deep cut in the key-stone of the archway to reassure yourself of its identity.

Nobody can blame you—hundreds have made that same mistake, I among them.

But don’t lose heart—keep on through the gate, take a dozen steps into the court-yard and look about, and if you have any red corpuscles left in your veins you will get a thrill that will take your breath away. Spread out before you lies a flower-choked yard flanked about on three sides by a chain of moss-encrusted, red-tiled, seesaw roofs, all out of plumb. Below, snug under the eaves, runs a long go-as-you-please corridor, dodging into a dozen or more bedrooms. Below this again, as if tired out with the weight, staggers a basement from which peer out windows of stained glass protected by Spanish grills of polished iron, their leaded panes blinking in the sunshine, while in and out, up the door-jambs, over the lintels, along the rain-spouts, even to the top of the ridge-poles of the wavy, red-tiled roofs, thousands of blossoms and tangled vines are running riot.

And this is not all. Close beside you stands a fuchsia-covered, shingle-hooded, Norman well, and a little way off a quaint kiosk roofed with flowering plants, and near by a great lichen-covered bust of Louis VI, to say nothing of dozens of white chairs and settees grouped against a background of flaring reds and brilliant greens. And then, with a gasp of joy, you follow the daring flight of a giant feather-blown clematis in a clear leap from the ground, its topmost tendrils throttling the dormers.

Even then your surprises are not over. You have yet to come in touch with the real spirit of the Inn, and be introduced to our jewel of a dining-room, the “Marmouset,” opening flat to the ground and hidden behind a carved

oaken door mounted in hammered iron: a low-ceilinged, Venetian-beamed room, with priceless furniture, tapestries, and fittings—chairs, tables, wainscoting of carved oak surmounted by Spanish leather; quaint andirons, mirrors, arms, cabinets, silver, glass, and china; all of them genuine and most of them rare, for Lemois, our landlord, has searched the Continent from end to end.

Yes!—a great inn this inn of William the Conqueror at Dives, and unique the world over. You will be ready now to believe all its legends and traditions, and you can quite understand why half the noted men of Europe have, at one time or another, been housed within its hospitable walls, including such exalted personages as Louis XI and Henry IV—the latter being the particular potentate who was laid low with a royal colic from a too free indulgence in the seductive oyster—not to mention such rare spirits as Molière, Dumas, George Sand, Daubigny, as well as most of the litterateurs, painters, and sculptors of France, including the immortal Grèvin, many of whose drawings decorate the walls of one of the garden kiosks, and whose apartment still bears his name.

And not only savants and men of rank and letters, but the frivolous world of to-day—the flotsam and jetsam of Trouville, Houlgate, and Cabourg—have gathered here in the afternoon for tea in the court-yard, their motors crowding the garage, and at night in the Marmouset when, under the soft glow of overhead candles falling on bare shoulders and ravishing toilettes, laughter and merry-making extend far into the small hours. At night, too, out in the gardens, what whisperings and love-makings in the soft, starry air!—what

seductive laughter and little half-smothered screams! And then the long silences with only the light of telltale cigarettes to mark their hiding-places!

All summer this goes on until one fine morning the most knowing, or the most restless, or the poorest of these gay birds of passage (the Inn is not a benevolent institution) spreads its wings and the flight begins. The next day the court is empty, as are all the roosting-places up and down the shore. Then everybody at the Inn takes a long breath—the first they have had for weeks.

About this time, too, the crisp autumn air, fresh from the sea, begins to blow, dulling the hunger for the open. The mad whirl of blossoms no longer intoxicates. Even the geraniums, which have flamed their bravest all summer, lose their snap and freshness; while the blue and pink hydrangeas hang their heads, tired out with nodding to so many passers-by: they, too, are paying the price; you can see it in their faces. Only the sturdy chrysanthemums are rejoicing in the first frost, while the more daring of the roses are unbuckling their petals ready to fight their way through the perils of an October bloom.

It is just at this blessed moment that I move in and settle down with my companions, for now that the rush is over, and the little Normandy maids and the older peasant women who have served the hungry and thirsty mob all summer, as well as two of the three French cooks, have gone back to their homes, we have Leà, Mignon, and Pierre all to ourselves.

I put dear old Leàfirst because it might as well be said at once that without her loving care life at the Inn, with all its

comforts, would be no life at all—none worth living. Louis, the running-water painter, known as the Man in High-Water Boots—one of the best beloved of our group—always insists that in the days gone by Leà occupied a pedestal at the main entrance of the twelfth-century church at the end of the street, and is out for a holiday. In proof he points out the empty pedestal set in a niche, and has even gone so far as to pencil her name on the rough stone.

Mignon, however, he admits, is a saint of another kind—a dainty, modest, captivating little maid, who looks at you with her wondering blue eyes, and who is as shy as a frightened gazelle. There is a young fisherman named Gaston, a weather-tanned, frank, fearless fellow who knows all about these eyes. He brings the fish to the Inn—those he catches himself—and Mignon generally manages to help in their unpacking. It is not a part of her duty. Her special business is to make everybody happy; to crack the great white sugar-loaf into bits with a pair of pincers—no machine-made dominoes for Lemois—and to turn the coffee-roaster—an old-fashioned, sheet-iron drum swinging above a brazier of hot coals—and to cool its contents by tossing them in a pan—much as an Egyptian girl winnows wheat. It is a pity you never tasted her coffee, served in the garden—old Leà on the run with it boiling-hot to your table. You might better have stopped what you were doing and taken steamer for Havre and the Inn. You would never have regretted it.

Nor would you even at this late hour regret any one of the dishes made by Pierre, the chef. And now I think of it, it is but fair to tell you that if you repent the delay and show a fit appreciation of his efforts, or come properly endorsed (I’ll

give you a letter), he may, perhaps, invite you into his kitchen which I have just vacated, a place of such various enticing smells from things baking, broiling, and frying; with unforgettable, appetizing whiffs of burnt sugar, garlic, fine herbs, and sherry, to say nothing of the flavors of bowls of mayonnaise, heaps of chopped onions, platters of cream—even a basket of eggs still warm from the nest—that the memory of it will linger with you for the rest of your days.

Best of all at this season, we have quite to ourselves that prince of major-domos, our landlord, Lemois. For as this inn is no ordinary inn, this banquet room no ordinary room, and this kitchen no ordinary kitchen, so, too, is Monsieur Lemois no ordinary landlord. A small, gray, gently moving, low-voiced man with thoughtful, contented face, past the prime of life; a passionate lover of animals, flowers, and all beautiful things; quick of temper, but over in a moment; a poet withal, yet a man with so quaint a humor and of so odd a taste, and so completely absorbed in his pets, cuisine, garden, and collection, that it is easy to believe that when he is missed from his carnal body, he will be found wandering as a ghost among these very flower-beds or looking down from the walls of the Marmouset—doubtless an old haunt of his prior to this his latest incarnation. Only here would he be really happy, and only here, perhaps, among his treasures, would he be fully understood.

One of the rarest of these—a superb Florentine chair—the most important chair he owns, stood within reach of my hand as I sat listening to him before the crackling blaze.

“Unquestionably of the sixteenth century!” he exclaimed with his customary enthusiasm, as I admired it anew, for,

although I had heard most of it many times, I am always glad to listen, so quaint are his descriptions of everything he owns, and so sincerely does he believe in the personalities and lineage of each individual piece.

“I found it,” he continued, “in a little chapel in Ravenna. For years it had stood outside the cabinet of Alessandro, one of the Florentine dukes. Think of all the men and women who have sat in it, and of all the cruel and anxious thoughts that raced through their brains while they waited for an audience with the tyrant! Nothing like a chair for stirring up old memories and traditions. And do you see the carved heads on the top! I assure you they are alive! I have caught them smiling or frowning too often at the talk around my table not to know. Once when De Bouf, the great French clown was here, the head next you came near splitting itself in two over his grimaces, and when Marcot told one of his pathetic stories that other one wept such tears that I had to mop them up to keep the velvet from being spoilt. You don’t believe it?—you laugh! Ah!—that is just like you modern writers—you do not believe anything—you have no imagination! You must measure things with a rule! You must have them drawn on the blackboard! It is because you do not see them as they are. You shut your eyes and ears to the real things of life; it is because you cannot understand that it is the *soul* of the chair that laughs and weeps. Monsieur Herbert will not think it funny. He understands these queer heads—and, let me tell you, they understand *him*. I have often caught them nodding and winking at each other when he says something that pleases them. He has himself seen things much more remarkable. That is the

reason why he is the only one of all who enters this room worthy to sit in it.”

“You like Herbert, then?” I interrupted, knowing just what he would say.

“How absurd, my dear friend! You like a filet, and a gown on a woman—but you don’t like a man. You *love* him—when he is a *man*!—and Monsieur Herbert is all that. It is the English in him which counts. Since he was fourteen years of age he has been roaming around the world doing everything a man could to make his bread—and he a gentleman born, with his father’s house to go home to if he pleased. Yet he has been farm-hand, acrobat, hostler, sailor before the mast, newspaper reporter, next four years in Africa among the natives; then painter, and now, at forty-five, after only six years’ practice, one of the great sculptors of France, with his work in the Luxembourg and the ribbon of the Legion in his button-hole! Have I not the right to say that he is a *man*? And one thing more: not for one moment has he ever lost the good heart and the fine manner of the gentleman. Ah! that is most extraordinary of all, when you think of the adventures and hair-breadth escapes and sufferings he has gone through! Did he ever tell you of his stealing a ride in Australia on a locomotive tender to get to Sydney, two hundred miles away?”

I shook my head.

“Well—get him to tell you. You will be so sorry for him, even now, that you cannot keep the tears from your eyes. Listen! There goes the scream of his horn—and I wager you, too, that he brings that delightful wild man, Monsieur Louis, with him.”

# II

# THE WOOD FIRE AND ITS FRIENDS

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Two men burst in.

Herbert, compact, wellknit, ruddy, simple in his bearing and manner; Louis, broad-shouldered, strong as a bull, and bubbling over with unrepressed merriment. Both were muffled to their chins—Herbert in his fur motor-coat, his cap drawn close over his steady gray eyes; Louis in his big sketching-cloak and hood and a pair of goggles which gave him so owlish a look that both Mignon and Leàbroke out laughing at the sight.

“Fifty miles an hour, High-Muck” (I am High-Muck) “this brute of a Herbert kept up. Everything went by in a blur; but for these gig-lamps I’d be stone blind.”

The brace and the snap of the crisp autumn air clinging to their clothes suddenly permeated the room as with electricity. Even slow-moving Lemois felt its vivifying current as he hurriedly dragged the Florentine nearer the fire.

“See, Monsieur Herbert, the chair has been waiting for you. I have kept even Monsieur High-Muck out of it.”

“That’s very good of you, Lemois,” returned the sculptor as he handed Leà his coat and gloves and settled himself in its depths. “I’m glad to get back to it. What the chair thinks about it is another thing—make it tell you some time.”

“But it has—only last night one of the heads was saying ——”

“None of that, Lemois,” laughed Louis, abreast of the fireplace now, his fingers outspread to the blaze. “Too many wooden heads talking around here as it is. I don’t, of course, object to Herbert’s wobbling around in its upholstered magnificence, but he can’t play doge and monopolize everything. Shove your high-backed pulpit with its grinning cherubs to one side, I tell you, Herbert, and let me warm up”—and off came the cloak and goggles, his broad shoulders and massive arms coming into view. Then tossing them to Mignon, he turned to me.

“There’s one thing you’re good for, High-Muck-a-Muck, if nothing else, and that is to keep a fire going. If I wanted to find you, and there was a chimney within a mile, I’d be sure you were sitting in front of the hearth with the tongs in your hand”—here he kicked a big log into place bringing to life a swarm of sparks that blazed out a welcome and then went laughing up the chimney. “By thunder!—isn’t this glorious! Crowd up, all of you—this is the best yet! Lemois, won’t you please shove just a plain, little chair this way for me? No—come to think of it, I’ll take half of Herbert’s royal throne,” and he squeezed in beside the sculptor, one leg dangling over the arm of the Florentine.

Herbert packed himself the closer and the talk ran on: the races at Cabourg and Trouville; the big flight of wild geese which had come a month earlier than usual, and last, the season which had just closed with the rush of fashion and folly, in which chatter Lemois had joined.

“And the same old crowd, of course, Lemois?” suggested Herbert; “and always doing the same things—coffee at nine, breakfast at twelve, tea at five, dinner at eight, and bridge

till midnight! Extraordinary, isn't it! I'd rather pound oakum in a country jail."

"Some of them will," remarked Louis with a ruminating smile. "And it was a good season, you say, Lemois?" he continued; "lots of people shedding shekels and lots of tips for dear old Leà? That's the best part of it. And did they really order good things—the beggars?—or had you cleaned them out of their last franc on their first visit? Come now—how many Pêche-Flambées, for instance, have you served, Lemois, to the mob since July—and how many demoiselles de Cherbourg—those lovely little girl lobsters without claws?"

"Do you mean the on-shore species—those you find in the hotels at Trouville?" returned Lemois, rubbing his hands together, his thoughtful face alight with humor. "We have two varieties, you know, Monsieur Louis—the on-shore—the Trouville kind who always bring their claws with them—you can feel them under their kid gloves."

"Oh, let up!—let up!" retorted Louis. "I mean the kind we devour; not the kind who devour us."

"Same thing," remarked Herbert in his low, even tones from the depths of the chair, as he stretched a benumbed hand toward the fire. "It generally ends in a broil, whether it's a woman or a lobster."

Louis twisted his body and caught the sculptor by the lapel of his coat.

"None of your cheap wit, Herbert! Marc, the lunatic, would have said that and thought it funny—you can't afford to. Move up, I tell you, you bloated mud-dauber, and give

me more room; you'd spread yourself over two chairs with four heads on their corners if you could fill them."

Whereupon there followed one of those good-natured rough-and-tumble dog-plays which the two had kept up through their whole friendship. Indeed, a wrestling match started it. Herbert, then known to the world as an explorer and writer, was studying at Julien's at the time. Louis, who was also a pupil, was off in Holland painting. Their fellow students, noting Herbert's compact physique, had bided the hour until the two men should meet, and it was when the room looked as if a cyclone had struck it—with Herbert on top one moment and Louis the next—that the friendship began. The big-hearted Louis, too, was the first to recognize his comrade's genius as a sculptor. Herbert had a wad of clay sent home from which he modelled an elephant. This was finally tossed into a corner. There it lay a shapeless mass until his conscience smote him and the whole was transformed into a Congo boy. Louis insisted it should be sent to the Salon, and thus the explorer, writer, and painter became the sculptor. And so the friendship grew and strengthened with the years. Since then both men had won their gold medals at the Salon—Louis two and Herbert two.

The same old dog-play was now going on before the cheery fire, Louis scrouging and pushing, Herbert extending his muscles and standing pat—either of them could have held the other clear of the floor at arm's length—Herbert, all his sinews in place, ready for any move of his antagonist; Louis, a Hercules in build, breathing health and strength at every pore.

Suddenly the tussle in the chair ceased and the young painter, wrenching himself loose, sprang to his feet.

“By thunder!” he cried, “I forgot all about it! Have you heard the news? Hats off and dead silence while I tell it! Lemois, stop that confounded racket with your dishes and listen! Let me present you to His Royal Highness, Monsieur Herbert, the Gold Medallist—his second!” and he made a low salaam to the sculptor stretched out in the Florentine. He was never so happy as when extolling Herbert’s achievements.

“Oh, I know all about it!” laughed back Lemois. “Le Blanc was here before breakfast the next morning with the *Figaro*. It was your African—am I not right, Monsieur Herbert?—the big black man with the dagger—the one I saw in the clay? Fine!—no dryads, no satyrs nor demons—just the ego of the savage. And why should you not have won the medal?” he added in serious tones that commanded instant attention. “Who among our sculptors—men who make the clay obey them—know the savage as you do? And to think, too, of your being here after your triumph, under the roof of my Marmouset. Do you know that its patron saint is another African explorer—the first man who ever set foot on its western shores—none other than the great Bethencourt himself? He was either from Picardy or Normandy—the record is not clear—and on one of his voyages—this, remember, was in the fifteenth century, the same period in which the stone chimney over your heads was built—he captured and brought home with him some little black dwarfs who became very fashionable. You see them often later on in the prints and paintings of the time, following

behind the balloon petticoats and high headdresses of the great ladies. After a time they became a regular article of trade, these marmots, and there is still a street in Paris called ‘The Marmouset.’ So popular were they that Charles VI is said to have had a ministry composed of five of these little rascals. So, when you first showed me your clay sketch of your African, I said—‘Ah! here is the spirit of Bethencourt! This Monsieur Herbert is Norman, not English; he has brought the savage of old to light, the same savage that Bethencourt saw—the savage that lived and fought and died before our cultivated moderns vulgarized him.’ That was a glorious thing to do, messieurs, if you will think about it”—and he looked around the circle, his eyes sparkling, his small body alive with enthusiasm.

Herbert extended his palms in protest, muttering something about parts of the statue not satisfying him and its being pretty bad in spots, if Lemois did but know it, thanking him at the same time for comparing him to so great a man as Bethencourt; but his undaunted admirer kept on without a pause, his voice quivering with pride: “The primitive man demanding of civilization his right to live! Ah! that is a new motive in art, my friends!”

“Hear him go on!” cried Louis, settling himself again on the arm of Herbert’s chair; “talks like a critic. Gentlemen, the distinguished Monsieur Lemois will now address you on ——”

Lemois turned and bowed profoundly.

“Better than a critic, Monsieur Louis. They only see the outside of things. Pray don’t rob Monsieur Herbert of his just rights or try to lean on him; take a whole chair to yourself

and keep still a moment. You are like your running water—you——”

“Not a bit like it,” broke in Herbert, glad to turn the talk away from himself. “His water sometimes reflects—he never does.”

“Ah!—but he does reflect,” protested Lemois with a comical shrug; “but it is always upsidedown. When you stand upsidedown your money is apt to run out of your pockets; when you think upsidedown your brains run out in the same way.”

“But what would you have me do, Lemois?” expostulated Louis, regaining his feet that he might the better parry the thrust. “Get out into your garden and mount a pedestal?”

“Not at this season, you dear Monsieur Louis; it is too cold. Oh!—never would I be willing to shock any of my beautiful statues in that way. You would look very ugly on a pedestal; your shoulders are too big and your arms are like a blacksmith’s, and then you would smash all my flowers getting up. No—I would have you do nothing and be nothing but your delightful and charming self. This room of mine, the ‘Little Dwarf,’ is built for laughter, and you have plenty of it. And now, gentlemen”—he was the landlord once more—both elbows uptilted in a shrug, his shoulders level with his ears—“at what time shall we serve dinner?”

“Not until Brierley comes,” I interposed after we were through laughing at Louis’ discomfiture. “He is due now—the Wigwag train from Pont du Sable ought to be in any minute.”

“Is Marc coming with him?” asked Herbert, pushing his chair back from the crackling blaze.

“No—Marc can’t get here until late. He’s fallen in love for the hundredth time. Some countess or duchess, I understand—he is staying at her château, or was. Not far from here, so he told Le Blanc.”

“Was walking past her garden gate,” broke in Louis, “squinting at her flowers, no doubt, when she asked him in to tea—or is it another Fontainebleau affair?”

“That’s one love affair of Marc’s I never heard of,” remarked Herbert, with one of his meaning smiles, which always remind me of the lambent light flashed by a glowworm, irradiating but never creasing the surface as they play over his features.

“Well, that wasn’t Marc’s fault—you *would* have heard of it had he been around. He talked of nothing else. The idiot left Paris one morning, put ten francs in his pocket—about all he had—and went over to Fontainebleau for the day. Posted up at that railroad station was a notice, signed by a woman, describing a lost dog. Later on Marc came across a piece of rope with the dog on one end and a boy on the other. An hour later he presented himself at madame’s villa, the dog at his heels. There was a cry of joy as her arms clasped the prodigal. Then came a deluge of thanks. The gratitude of the poor lady so overcame Marc that he spent every sou he had in his clothes for flowers, sent them to her with his compliments and walked back to Paris, and for a month after every franc he scraped together went the same way. He never called—never wrote her any letters—just kept on sending flowers; never getting any thanks either, for he never gave her his address. Oh, he’s a Cap and Bells when there’s a woman around!”

A shout outside sent every man to his feet; the door was flung back and a setter dog bounded in followed by the laughing face of a man who looked twenty-five of his forty years. He was clad in a leather shooting-jacket and leggings, spattered to his hips with mud, and carried a double-barrelled breech-loading gun. Howls of derision welcomed him.

“Oh!—what a spectacle!” cried Louis. “Don’t let Brierley sit down, High-Muck, until he’s scrubbed! Go and scrape yourself, you ruffian—you are the worst looking dog of the two.”

The Man from the Latin Quarter, as he is often called, clutched his gun like a club, made a mock movement as if to brain the speaker, then rested it tenderly and with the greatest care against one corner of the fireplace.

“Sorry, High-Muck, but I couldn’t help it. I’d have missed your dinner if I had gone back to my bungalow for clothes. I’ve been out on the marsh since sunup and got cut off by the tide. Down with you, Peter! Let him thaw out a little, Herbert; he’s worked like a beaver all day, and all we got were three plover and a becassine. I left them with Pierre as I came in. Didn’t see a duck—haven’t seen one for a week. Wait until I get rid of this,” and he stripped off his outer jacket and flung it at Louis, who caught it with one hand and, picking up the tongs, held the garment from him until he had deposited it in the far corner of the room.

Howls of derision welcomed him

“Haven’t had hold of you, Herbert, since the gold medal,” the hunter resumed. “Shake!” and the two pressed each other’s hands. “I thought ‘The Savage’ would win—ripping stuff up and down the back, and the muscles of the legs, and he stands well. I think it’s your high-water mark—thought so when I saw it in the clay. By Jove!—I’m glad to get here! The wind has hauled to the eastward and it’s getting colder every minute.”

“Cold, are you, old man!” condoled Louis. “Why don’t you look out for your fire, High-Muck? Little Brierley’s half frozen, he says. Hold on!—stay where you are; I’ll put on another log. Of course, you’re half frozen! When I went by your marsh a little while ago the gulls were flying close inshore