

duce the ruddy, blonde face of the Blue Serge Man beaming across a chating-dish; the mournful, sobbing sound of a dog's dream; the crisp, starched Monday smell of the blue gingham aprons that 'Arik's Wife used to wear. The vision was altogether too vivid to be pleasant.

Then the wet wind blew in through the window like a splash of alcohol, chilling, revivifying, stinging as a whip-lash. The tormented candle flame struggled furiously for a moment, and went out, hurdling the black night down upon me like some choking avalanche of horror. In utter idiotic panic I jumped from my bed and clawed my way toward the feeble gray glow of the window-frame. The dark doorway before me was drenched with rain. The tall Linden trees wared and mourned in the wind.

"Of course, of course, there are no ghosts," I reasoned, just as one reasons that there is no mistake in the dictionary, no flaw in the multiplication table. But sometimes one's fantastically faded nerves think they have found the blunder in language, the fault in science. Ghosts or no ghosts—if you thought you saw one, wouldn't it be just as bad? My eyes strained out into the darkness. Suppose—I should—think—that I heard the bark of a dog? Suppose—suppose—that from that black shed door where the automobile used to live, I should think—even T.H.N.K. that I saw the Blue Serge Man come stumbling with a lantern? The black shed door burst open with a bang-bang-bang, and I screamed, jumped, snatched a blanket, and fled for the lamp-lighted hall.

A little dazzled by the sudden glow, I shrank back in alarm from a figure on the top stair. It was the Pretty Lady. Wrapped clumsily like myself in a big blanket, she sat huddled there with the kerosene lamp close beside her, mending the Blue Serge Man's Cap. On the step below her, snothered in a soggy lavender comforter, crouched Arik's Old Mother, her dim eyes brightened uncanonically with superstitious excitement. I was evidently a welcome addition to the party, and the old woman cuddled me in like a meat-sack beside her.

"Naw one could sleep a night like this," she croaked.

"Sleep?" gasped the Pretty Lady. Scorn infinite was in her tone.

But comfortably and serenely from the end of the hall came the heavy, regular breathing of the Partridge Hunter, and from beyond that, Arik's blissful, oblivious snore. Yet Arik was the only one among us who claimed an agonizing, personal sorrow.

I began to laugh a bit hysterically. "Men are funny people," I volunteered.

Arik's Old Mother caught my hand with a chuckle, then sobered suddenly, and shook her wadded head.

"Men ain't exactly—people," she confided. "Men ain't exactly people—at all!"

The conviction evidently burned dull, steady, comforting as a night-light, in the old crone's eighty years' experience, but the Pretty Lady's face grabbed the new idea desperately, as, though she were trying to rekindle happiness with a wet match. Yet every time her fretted lips straightened out in some semblance of Peace, her whole head would suddenly explode in one gigantic sneeze. There was no other sound, I remember, for hours and hours, except the steady, monotonous, slobbery wash of a bursting roof gutter somewhere close in the eaves.

Certainly Dawn itself was not more chilled and gray than we when we crept back at last to our beds, thick-eyed with growsy exhaustion, limp-bodied, multilimbed.

But when we woke again, the late, hot noonday sun was like a scorching fire in our faces, and the drenched doorway steamed like a dye-house in the sudden burst of unseasonable heat.

After breakfast, the Pretty Lady, in her hundred-dollar ruffles, went out to the barn with shabby Arik, to help him mend a musty old plough harness. The Pretty Lady's brains were almost entirely in her fingers. So were Arik's. The exclusiveness of their task seemed therefore to thrust the Partridge Hunter and me off by ourselves into a sort of amateur sorrow class, and we started forth as cheerfully as we could to investigate the autumn woods.

Passing the barn door, we heard the strident sound of Arik's complaining. Straced with his heavy shoulders against a corner of the stall, he stood hurting down his newborn theology upon the glossy black head of the Pretty Lady who sat perched adroitly on a nail keg, with two shiny-tipped fingers prying up

the corners of her mouth into a smile. One side of the smile was distinctly wry. But Arik's face was deadly earnest. Sweat bubbled out on his forehead like tears that could not possibly wait to reach his eyes.

"There ought to be a separate heaven for ladies and gentlemen," he was arguing frantically. "Tain't fair. Tain't right. I won't have it! I'll see a priest. I'll find a parson. If it ain't proper to live with people, it ain't proper to die with 'em. I tell you I won't have Amy careerin' round with strange men. She always was foolish about men. And I'm breakin' my heart for her, and Mother's gettin' old, and the house is goin' to rack and ruin, but how—how can a man go and get married comfortable again when his mind's all torturin' round and round and round about his first wife?"

The Partridge Hunter gave a sharp laugh under his breath, yet he did not seem exactly amused. "Laugh for two!" I suggested, as we dodged out of sight round the corner and plunged off into the actual outdoors.

The heat was really intense, the October sun dazzlingly bright. Warmth, warmth, warmth steamed from the earth and burnished from the sky. A plucky brown rabbit lolling across the roadway dragged on one's sweating senses like overshoes in June. Under our ruthless, heavy-booted feet the wet green meadow winced like some tender young salad. At the edge of the forest the big pines darkened sumptuously. Then, suddenly, between a scarlet su-

"Nice little tin cup," he affirmed judicially. "The Blue Serge Man gave it to me. It must have cost as much as fifteen cents. And it will last, I suppose, till the moon is mud and the stars are dough. But the Blue Serge Man himself is—quite gone. Funny idea!" The Partridge Hunter's forehead began to knit into a fearful frown. "Of course it isn't so," he argued, "but it would certainly seem sometimes as though a man's things were the only really immortal, indestructible part of him, and that Soul was nothing in the world but just a composite name for the Souvenirs, Ornaments, Utensils, Litter that each man's personality accumulates in the few years' time allotted to him. The man himself, you see, is wiped right off the earth like a chalk-mark, but you can't escape or elude in a million years the wizened bronze elephant that he brought home from India, or the showy red necktie that's down behind his bureau, or the floating, wind-blown, ash-barrel bill for violets that turns up a generation hence in a German prayer-book at a French book-stall."

"And isn't Death a teasing teacher? Holds up a personality suddenly like a map—makes you learn by heart every conceivable, conceivable pleasant detail concerning it, and then, when you are fairly bursting with your happy knowledge, tears up the map in your face and says, 'There's no such country any more, so what you've learned won't do you the slightest good.' And there you'd only just that moment found out that your friend's hair was a beautiful auburn

silly at all. If I had guessed that the Blue Serge Man was going off on such a long, long, never-stop journey, I might have kissed him good-bye. But I certainly can't imagine anything that would have provoked or astonished him more! People can't go round petting one another just on the possible chance of never meeting again. And goodness gracious! nobody wants to. It's only that when a person actually dies, a sort of subtle, holy sense in you wakes up and wishes that just once for all eternity it might have gotten a signal through to that subtle, holy sense in the other person. And of course when a youngster dies, you feel somehow that he or she must have been different all along from other people, and you simply wish that you might have guessed that fact sooner—before it was too late."

The Partridge Hunter began to smile. "If you knew," he teased, "that I was going to be massacred by an automobile or crumpled by an elevator before next October—would you wish that you had petted me just a little to-day?"

"Yes," I acknowledged. The Partridge Hunter pretended he was deaf. "Say that again," he begged. "Y-e-a," I repeated.

The Partridge Hunter put back his head and roared. "That's just like kissing through the telephone," he said. "It isn't particularly satisfying, and yet it makes a desperately cunning sound."

Then I put back my head and laughed, too, because it is so thoroughly comfortable and pleasant to be friends for only one single week in all the year. Independence is at best such a scant fabric, and every new friendship you incur takes just one more tuck in that fabric, till before you know it your freedom is quite too short to go out in. The Partridge Hunter felt exactly the same way about it, and after each little October play-time we ripped out the thread with never a scar to show.

Even now while we laughed, we thought we might as well laugh at everything we could think of, and get just that much finished and out of the way.

"Perhaps," said the Partridge Hunter, "perhaps the Blue Serge Man was glad to see Amy, and perhaps he was rattled, no one can tell. But I'll wager anything he was awfully mad to see Gruff. There were lots of meteors last June, I remember. I understand now: It was the Blue Serge Man raking down the stars to pelt at Gruff."

"Gruff was a very—nice dog," I insisted.

"He was a very growly dog," acceded the Partridge Hunter.

"If you growl all the time, it's almost the same as a purr," I argued.

The Partridge Hunter smiled a little, but not very generously. "Something was on his mind. 'Poor little Amy,' he said. 'Any man-and-woman game is playing with fire, but it's foolish to think that there only two kinds, just Hearth-Fire and Hell-Fire. Why, there's 'Student-lamp' and 'Cook-stove' and 'Footlights.' Amy and the Blue Serge Man were playing with 'Footlights.' I guess. She needed an audience. And he was New York to her, great, blessed, shiny, rackety New York. I believe she loved Arik. He must have been a pretty picturesque figure on that first and only time when he blazed his trail down Broadway. But happy with him—H-E-R-E? Away from New York? Five years? In just green and brown woods where the posies grow on the ground instead of on hats, and even the Christmas trees are trimmed with nothing except real snow and live squirrels? G-O-O-Y! Of course her chest caved in. There wasn't kniky air enough in the whole state of Maine to keep her kind of lungs active. Of course she starved to death. She needed her meat flavoured with harp and violin; her drink aerated with electric lights. We might have done something for her if we'd liked her just a little bit better. But I didn't even know her till I heard that she was dead!"

He jumped up suddenly and helped me to my feet. Something in my face must have stricken him. "Would you like my warm hand to walk home with?" he finished quite abruptly.

Even as he offered it, one of those chill, quick autumn changes came over the October woods. The sun grayed down behind huge, windy clouds. The leaves began to shiver and shudder and chatter, and all the gorgeous reds and greens dulled out of the world, leaving nothing as far as the eye could reach but dingy squirrel-colour tawny grays and



Cook (to her darling): Now, you'd better take this piece of beef with you, too. Poor cat!

Soldier: But what has the cat to do with it?

Cook: She'll get whacked for it afterwards.

mach and a slim white bitch, the cavernous wood-path opened forth mysteriously, narrow and tall and domed like the arch of a cathedral. Not a bird twittered, not a leaf rustled, and, far as the eye could reach, the wet brown pine-needles lay thick and soft and padded like tan-bark, as though all Nature waited hushed and expectant for some exquisitely infinitesimal tragedy, like the travail of a squirrel.

With brain and body all a-whisper and a-tiptoe, the Partridge Hunter and I stole deeper and deeper into the Colour and the Silence and the Witchery, dazed at every step by the material proof of autumn warring against the spiritual insistence of spring. It was the sort of day to make one very tender toward the living just because they were living, and very tender toward the dead just because they were dead.

At the gurgling bowl of a half-hidden spring, we made our first stopping-place. Out of his generous cerudroy pockets the Partridge Hunter tinkled two drinking-cups, dipped them deep in the icy water, and handed me one with a little shuddering exclamation of cold. For an instant his eyes searched mine, then he lifted his cup very high and stared off into Nothingness.

"To the—All-Gone People," he toasted.

I began to cry. He seemed very glad to have me cry. "Cry for two," he suggested blithely, "cry for two," and threw himself down on the twiggly ground and began to snap metallically against the cup in his hand.

instead of 'a horrid red'; that his blessed old voice was hearty, not noisy; that his table manners were quaint, not queer; that his morals were broad, not 'bad.'"

The Partridge Hunter's mouth began to twist. "It's a horrid thing to say," he stammered, "but there ought to be a sample shroud in every home, so that when your husband is late to dinner, or your daughter smokes a cigarette, or your son decides to marry the cook, you could get out the shroud and try it on the offender, and make a few experiments concerning—well, values. Why, I saw a man last week dragged by a train—jerked in and out and over and under, with his head or his heels or the hem of his coat just missing. Death every second by the hundred millionth fraction of an inch. But when he was rescued at last and went home to dinner—shaken as an aspen, sicker than pulp, tongue-tied like a padlock—I suppose, very likely, his wife scolded him for having forgotten the oysters."

The Partridge Hunter's face flushed suddenly.

"I didn't care much for Arik's Wife," he attested abruptly. "I always thought she was a trivial, foolish little critter. But if I had known that she was never, never, never going to see her again—while the sun blazed or the stars blinked—I should like to have gone back from the backboard that last morning and stroked her brown hair just once away from her eyes. Does that seem silly to you?"

"Why, no," I said. "It doesn't seem