

CHAPTER NINETEEN

Jekyll and Hyde

THE crowd had overwhelmed the New York quayside like the sea. For Louis, looking down from the rail of the Ludgate Hill, it was almost enough to make him wish himself back in the sickroom in Bournemouth. There he had been an obscure invalid - here he was a celebrity, the man who'd written *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, a runaway best-seller already turned into a play at the Madison Square Theatre and raking in thousands of dollars a night. New York had gone Jekyll & Hyde crazy - even the two captains of the tugboat that brought the Ludgate Hill into harbour had been nicknamed after the two warring characters trapped in one body. To the sea of upturned faces on the New York quayside that autumn day in 1887, the frank acknowledgement 'that man is not truly one, but truly two' had come as a revelation.

'If Jesus Christ came, they would make less fuss,' exclaimed the slight figure at the rail, dressed in a ragged velvet jacket that looked like it had been ravished by the ape-like Hyde. In fact the culprit had been an over-friendly baboon called Jacko, with whom Louis had made friends on the voyage. The Ludgate Hill was not a normal passenger liner but carried a cargo of horses and apes bound for zoos in the States. Elated by this Byronic entourage, Louis had revelled in the Atlantic crossing, strolling the decks and dispensing champagne to seasick fellow passengers. But by the banks of Newfoundland he had been struck down by a severe cold and arrived in New York an invalid once more. He could not cope with all this hubbub over one little book in which he had somehow allowed Mr Grundy to peer through the keyhole, see nothing very shocking and yet imagine the most deplorable acts going on just outside his line of vision.

The frisson of excitement Jekyll & Hyde produced in the Victorian mind was achieved by separating the man who did the peering and the man who did the deploring, while keeping them both within the same body. To Louis, who had long lived with desires at odds with the mores of respectable Edinburgh, the message was

obvious. To some extent everyone lived aspects of their lives in separate compartments. The Simp, Baxter, Bob, Henley and poor Ferrier had all kept certain secrets in dark, inner closets. None had committed murder like Edward Hyde, yet in Edinburgh Louis had known a sex criminal who had murdered many. Perhaps he had been wise to keep such lurid autobiographical elements out of the book, written so respectably that clerics praised its moral message from their pulpits. Yet at the same time any reader could sense something disturbing between the lines whenever Hyde was at large in Soho – say, wasn't that where they had all the whorehouses?

THE Edinburgh newspapers, full of the shocking news about Eugene Chantrelle, arrived towards the end of February, 1878, at 5 Rue Ravignan, where Louis now spent most of his time in Paris with Fanny and her family. On New Year's Day, eleven years to the day since the callous rape of Lucy Holme, the Frenchman with whom Louis had once passed the time in Edinburgh bars had murdered his wife. Police were called to the house in George Street to question him as the moaning but unconscious form of Elizabeth Chantrelle was taken away to hospital, where she died the following afternoon. It appeared clumsy attempts had been made to fake a gas leak in the house, yet Mrs Chantrelle had shown no signs of coal gas poisoning. In fact a post-mortem could find no obvious cause of death at all.

It was rumoured that Chantrelle had insisted on his wife being buried in her wedding dress, and witnesses at the Grange Cemetery saw him attempt to hurl himself into the open grave in an extravagant display of grief. Five days later there was shocking talk of the body being exhumed for a further grisly examination of the dead woman's intestines. Meanwhile Chantrelle was held in custody, much to the alarm of his acquaintances in polite Edinburgh society. Once the prosecution called witnesses, there was no telling what unlovely secrets might be revealed, and those who had frequented the same brothels as the Frenchman lived in fear of exposure.¹

From Edinburgh came further shocking news, of Louis's artist friend George Paul Chalmers. On February 15th, after a Royal Scottish Academy dinner, the Scottish champion of French Impressionism had been set upon by persons unknown and

robbed. His unconscious form had been found lying in the subterranean entrance to a New Town basement. 'What a pitiful thing about Chalmers!' Louis wrote to his parents from the Hotel Canterbury. 'The bulletin looks bad. I hope he will pull round; for he is one of the best people going.'² Yet by the time Louis wrote this, the artist had already lost his five-day fight for life. Tom Stevenson went to the funeral.

Meanwhile Louis spent more precious weeks with 'the dear head upon the pillow', living with Fanny at 5 Rue Ravignan. March came, and with it no monthly allowance from San Francisco. Nor would Sam Osbourne send money in April or May. If he suspected his wife had a lover, he was going to let Louis pay for the pleasure. It was as well Louis remained on good financial terms with his family. On May 10th, he left Paris to join them in London before all three went out to Box Hill, staying at the Burford Bridge Hotel. As the author of several published essays and short stories, Louis now had the confidence to introduce himself to the novelist George Meredith, whose home lay nearby. This meeting with a major literary figure would no doubt help convince his parents that Louis had a serious career.

Shortly after returning to Edinburgh, Louis was among the first people in Britain to encounter the miracle of recorded sound. In the March of 1878 the university held a bazaar, at which the star attraction was the display of two working replicas of Edison's phonograph, put together under the direction of Fleeming Jenkin from a description of the machine published in *The Times*. Bazaar-goers could pay a shilling to see Jenkin give a lecture and demonstration, or for half a crown there were private sessions with Mrs Jenkin, who read prepared speeches into the phonograph - 'What's Hecuba to him or he to Hecuba?' - before allowing those who paid for the privilege to hear their own voices. One burly farmer was startled to hear the machine repeat his stentorian tones: 'What a wonderrrrful instrrrrument y'arrre!'

Outside Mrs Jenkin's phonograph salon stood Flora Masson, drumming up custom: 'Walk up, ladies and gentlemen!' Among those to part with a half-crown was Louis. As their eyes met, what shared history passed between them, what painful memory of a letter of proposal that was now better forgotten? As an old lady, Flora would recall simply how 'Louis Stevenson came and went, watching the performance with an amused smile, more interested in the human by-play of it all

than in the science of the toy. For did he not write later that he and Mr Hole treated the phonograph "with unscientific laughter, commemorating various shades of Scottish accent, or proposing to 'teach the poor dumb animal to swear'?"¹³

In April, Louis spent some time in London, dealing with the publication of *An Inland Voyage*. There is no record of Fanny coming with him. Louis met up with Colvin, Mrs Sitwell, his fellow members at the Savile Club and Henley, who had at last scraped together the money to marry Anna Boyle. The wedding on January 22nd had taken place in Edinburgh while Louis was in France, but Charles Baxter was a witness. Louis had sent his felicitations by letter, telling Henley: 'I hope you will have smooth water for the pair of you; and a pair of easy hearts all your lives long; prosperous and full of love and rewarded by the love of others. And you may tell her too, if you will, that you have well deserved happiness by bearing misfortune bravely.'¹⁴

As Louis now was made welcome by the one-legged man and his new wife at their first home in Shepherd's Bush, he cannot have helped feeling a pang of envy. Would he and Fanny ever enjoy married life together? Anna seemed the perfect partner for her noisy, big-hearted husband. Unlike Fanny, she had no literary aspirations and was happy to provide Henley with love and support without interrupting his raucous conversations with friends.

From Henley, Louis had word of Walter Ferrier, now back in Edinburgh but hoping to avoid another drying-out session at the Chalmers Hospital. Mottiscliffe had made him next to no money and he was anxious to write something for London, although he was hardly capable. To Henley he had confided: 'I have had the offer (or chance, I should rather say) as I already told you of doing leaders for the Scotsman. I am totally unable to write anything - least of all a Scotsman leader. O ye gods ! I have a most unaccountable stricture (mental) and cannot get anything said. Perhaps I've nothing to say! ... I am nearly well in health. My rump especially is better, thanks probably to abstinence. But otherwise I have been having many private *mauvais quarts d'heure*. Enough.'

While in London, Louis would have had the opportunity to call on his widowed Aunt Alan, living in Chelsea, and her daughter Katharine, who now had a baby son

Richard to go with her three-year-old daughter Helen, known as 'Snoodie'. Relations with her husband were strained - Louis did not like Sydney de Mattos and thought him a fool, but as a trustee of the marriage settlement he had to deal with him on business matters. Every time Louis said goodbye to his unfortunate cousin, now so changed from the childhood sweetheart with whom he had once galloped across the heather, he left her in a house of unhappiness - and there was nothing he could do about it.

On April 26th he returned to Edinburgh to learn Charles Baxter was soon to be a father. Again, Louis could not suppress a pang of envy. But the Baxters made him welcome and Charles was as witty and convivial as ever, full of Edinburgh gossip. In legal circles and elsewhere, the talk was all of Eugene Chantrelle's impending High Court trial, which began on May 7th and ran for four days. The courtroom was packed with spectators, including Louis and Sam Bough, who sketched the dark, brooding head of the accused.

Since the day of the murder, the prosecution had experienced difficulty. Dr Henry Littlejohn, who conducted the post-mortem, could find no evidence of gas poisoning, nor of the massive overdose of opium which had in fact ended Elizabeth Chantrelle's wretched life. It seems the man responsible for the conviction was Professor Joseph Bell, Louis's old friend and contributor to the college magazine.

Without Bell's contribution, the evidence against Chantrelle was merely circumstantial. Yes, the Frenchman had taken out a large insurance policy on his wife's life. Yes, he had several times threatened to kill her, and was known as a violent man in some of the most disreputable houses in Edinburgh whose windows he had broken with pistol shots.

To pursue this point, the prosecution was prepared to call the brothel mistress Barbara Kay to give evidence, dressed expensively with the proceeds of vice. The lamplit, vicious fairy land she inhabited and the respectable world of New Town professional and family life were about to collide, with who knows what results? In the packed courtroom Louis could almost smell the sexual tension, fear and loathing. Yet as the hard-faced Mrs Kay stepped forward to take the oath, she got no further than telling the judge she was a widow and a brothel keeper. At the last moment,

she was stood down without giving evidence... and the wayward spouses and sons of Mrs Grundy could heave a collective sigh of relief.

It turned out Chantrelle had left more than enough evidence to hang himself, and Joe Bell had taken the trouble to find it. The night-dress worn by Mrs Chantrelle, at first ignored by the police, was sought out and recovered - the bungling Chantrelle had not had the sense to launder it. Vomit stains on the nightdress contained enough opium to kill a woman three times over. Shortly before his wife's death, Chantrelle had purchased a substantial quantity of opium. The conclusion was beyond reasonable doubt.

SENTENCE OF DEATH

Great anxiety was manifested as to the decision of the jury, and when the bell rang announcing that they were about to re-enter the court a flutter of excitement prevailed amongst the audience.

The jury came in at 5.17pm.

The Lord Justice-Clerk then said - What is your verdict, gentlemen?

The Foreman - My Lord, the jury unanimously finds the panel guilty of murder as libelled (Sensation in the Court).

*The Lord Justice-Clerk: 'Eugene Marie Chantrelle, you must be well aware of the painful character of the duty that devolves upon me, and the penalty which you must pay, after the verdict you have heard given. I shall not say one word to aggravate your feelings in the position in which you stand, but only exhort you to make the most of the few remaining days you have to spend upon earth to repent of your past life, and make your peace with God. The sentence of the court is that - "In respect of the foregoing verdict, the Lord Moncrieff, Lord Justice-Clerk, discerns and adjudges the said Eugene Marie Chantrelle, panel, to be carried from the bar to the prison of Edinburgh, therein to be detained, and fed on bread and water only, till the thirty-first day of May current, and upon that day, between the hours of eight and ten o'clock forenoon, within the walls of the said prison, by the hands of the common executioner to be hanged by the neck upon a gibbet until he be dead, and his body thereafter to be buried within the walls of the said prison; and ordains his whole moveable goods and gear to be escheat and inbrought to Her Majesty's use - (and the Judge putting on the black cap) - which is pronounced for doom." And may God have mercy on your soul!'*⁵

Chantrelle was not expecting this and began a long, incoherent speech, while those who knew him looked on with discomfort if not pity. But most of the spectators seemed satisfied justice had been done. Certainly Louis as an advocate had inside information that left him in no doubt that Chantrelle was a serial killer:

He had left France because of murder; he had left England because of a murder; already, since he was in Edinburgh, more than one - as I was told by the Procurator-Fiscal, more than four or five - had fallen a victim to his little supper parties and his favourite dish of toasted cheese and opium. And with all this expense of life, he was only clinging to solvency by his eyelids, he was being forced daily nearer to that last mismanaged crime that was to bring him to the gallows.⁶

As the prison van arrived to take the condemned man to the Calton Jail, Parliament Square was filled with onlookers, eager to get a glimpse of the prisoner. When Chantrelle made his appearance between two policemen, he was received with hooting and yelling until the van drove off. The 'fleering rabble' Louis would describe in *Weir of Hermiston*, as Archie Weir witnesses the fate of Duncan Jopp, condemned to death by the Lord Justice-Clerk, was drawn from life. As the crowd dispersed, Louis turned and walked away in silence with his thoughts.

Chantrelle had appeared to lead a normal life as a citizen of Edinburgh, no better or worse than many others whose marriages were less than blissfully happy. Yet behind the facade he was capable of ignoring all codes of honour or concepts of morality and of following his own desires in secret with no thought for any harm done to others. This blind, animal selfishness struck an uneasy chord somewhere deep inside Louis - the same sense of unease he experienced when he scrutinised his own pale image in a mirror. As he listened to the death sentence, he may even have reflected: 'There, but for the grace of God, go I.'

From the horror of the courtroom, Louis went out to Swanston and spent the weekend roaming the hills. That summer would see him in good health, declaring: 'I eat well, sleep well and walk with enjoyment from ten to fifteen miles a day.'⁷ On the Monday morning, the first copy of his first book arrived. *An Inland Voyage* was a slim volume with a frontispiece of Pan among the reeds by the artist William Crane. The proud author inscribed copies to friends and relatives and awaited the verdict of

the critics. There were positive reviews from the Athenaeum and, of course, from Henley in the columns of London, although to annoy the author he delighted in finding two typographical errors. Vanity Fair, however, was disparaging: 'The making of bricks without straw is weariness of the flesh, and this is what Mr Stevenson has essayed...'

Louis was learning the hard way that the critics were best ignored. Undaunted, he pressed on with a project for Henley, who was hard-pressed to fill London each week. Louis had agreed to write him a series of short stories inspired very loosely by the Arabian Nights. The first three originated in a wild idea of Bob's whereby those who were weary of life could buy a railway ticket for a suicide train heading over a cliff. This was taken up and refined into the idea of a Suicide Club whose members would draw lots to decide who would kill whom. Despite the macabre subject, the stories were delightfully silly and full of the kind of absurdist pranks which the two cousins had played on Edinburgh during the age of jink. Bob was the inspiration for the Young Man with the Cream Tarts, touring city bars with a tray of tarts which he offers to strangers and which, if they decline, he must eat himself. Having encountered Prince Florizel of Bohemia and his henchman Colonel Geraldine, he persuades them to accompany him to the Suicide Club. When the lots are drawn, the Young Man finds himself selected to kill the most loathsome person in the room.

He was probably upwards of forty, but he looked fully ten years older; and Florizel thought he had never seen a man more naturally hideous, nor one more ravaged by disease and ruinous excitements. He was no more than skin and bone, was partly paralysed, and wore spectacles of such unusual power, that his eyes appeared through the glasses greatly magnified and distorted in shape.⁸

The unspeakable Mr Malthus's death at the hands of the Young Man is so cunningly contrived that the next morning's papers report it as an act of God:

MELANCHOLY ACCIDENT - This morning, about two o'clock, Mr. Bartholomew Malthus, of 16 Chepstow Place, Westbourne Grove, on his way home from a party at a friend's house, fell over the upper parapet in Trafalgar Square, fracturing his skull and breaking a leg and an arm. Death was instantaneous. Mr. Malthus, accompanied by a friend, was engaged in looking for a cab at the time of the unfortunate occurrence. As Mr. Malthus

was paralytic, it is thought that his fall may have been occasioned by another seizure...⁹

Having the dead man domiciled in the same street as Mrs Sitwell was Louis's little joke, but other aspects of the story appear more sinister. If Bob, no stranger to 'ruinous excitements', was the inspiration for the Young Man, it is disturbing to find him killing a middle-aged gentleman struck down by paralysis, the fate of his father Alan Stevenson. In this symbolic act of patricide by Bob, Louis may also have been claiming his own small psychological victory over the dark disease lurking within himself and the uncomfortable prospect of dying paralysed or insane.

That summer, however, he was as fit as a fiddle and on May 22 went down to London to bask in the glory of being a published author and hold court at the Savile Club, where his friends included the minor poet Edmund Gosse, to whom he had been reintroduced by Colvin the previous year. Gosse still recalled their first meeting on the steamer in the Western Isles and found getting to know Louis better a delight: 'A childlike mirth leaped and danced in him; he seemed to skip upon the hills of life. He was simply bubbling with quips and jests.'¹⁰

Louis spent the evening of May 25th at the Savile with Colvin, who had with him some prints on approval from a London art dealer. It was after midnight when Colvin emerged from the club with the porter, who put his bag and the prints into a cab. Suddenly, the cab driver whipped up his horse and clattered away, leaving Colvin dumbstruck. The prints were never recovered - with disastrous repercussions for Colvin and Louis. The losses were not covered by the dealer's insurance, nor by that of Colvin's employer, the British Museum. He found himself liable for their full value of £1,537 10s - a colossal sum which he did not have. Fortunately the Museum stumped up on the understanding that the money would be deducted from the salary of its careless Keeper of Prints. This left him uncomfortably short of funds, and Louis, after fruitlessly briefing Baxter to alert print dealers to the stolen items¹¹, would end up lending Colvin substantial sums.

That summer Louis would need all the money he could lay his hands on. With no allowance from Sam Osbourne, Fanny's finances were in crisis. Louis's income from his pen was limited - An Inland Voyage had brought him a piffling £20, while he could not expect much more from Henley for the Latter-day Arabian Nights, as they

were originally titled. After a week in London, he returned to live cheaply in Edinburgh.

The cheap public entertainment on May 31st was the execution of Eugene Chantrelle. Although his was to be the first private hanging in Scotland, an early-morning crowd covered the Calton Hill above the jail like a swarm of bees, hoping for a glimpse of the macabre procession to the execution shed. Did Louis rise early and climb to his favourite vantage point above the city, from which he had once looked down on the female prisoners 'taking exercise like a string of nuns'¹²? Or would he wait for the newspapers to read of the last moments of the sinister Frenchman with whom he once whiled away the afternoons over a jar? The condemned man had slept well and had to be woken at 5am to dress in mourning black. A light breakfast of eggs and coffee was followed by a quiet smoke and a glass of brandy to steady the nerves as he was pinioned by Marwood the hangman. After a short religious service during which Chantrelle joined in the singing of the 51st Psalm - 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean...' - he inspected the gallows with interest before taking up his position on the trap. Marwood gave him an eight-foot drop, ensuring a more rapid passage to Eternity than Chantrelle afforded any of his victims. A black flag was hoisted over the jail to let Edinburgh know the murderer was dead¹³.

That evening, Chantrelle's execution was the talk of the night houses, where the girls perhaps noticed a slight falling-off in trade. Some of their more queasy customers, mindful of their narrow escape, had 'got religion' and resolved to spend more time with their families. Those who did mount the stairs to divert themselves with the girls were full of the gossip about Chantrelle. It was rumoured that when asked if he had any last requests, he'd replied: 'Three bottles of champagne and a whore.'¹⁴ Bravo! That was the spirit, game to the end... and how like mealy-mouthed Edinburgh to deny him that final pleasure, 'one more good taste in the mouth, one more smack of the lips, before the devil got the soul'.

Louis's financial difficulties were alleviated by Fleeming Jenkin, whose pre-eminence in the field of electrical engineering and telegraphy had secured him a place as a juror at the 1878 Paris Exposition. When Jenkin asked Louis to accompany

him as his secretary, the Stevensons could hardly object - particularly when Louis's father was in the running to win a gold medal. An all-expenses-paid trip to France was just what Louis needed. On June 8th, the day the Latter-day Arabian Nights began their run in London, he and Jenkin arrived in Paris and checked into the well-appointed Hotel Mirabeau.

From there Louis wrote to Baxter in Edinburgh with the first of several requests to borrow large sums. He knew his father would probably end up paying his debts, but what was money when he faced permanent separation from the woman he loved? A telegram had arrived for Fanny from her husband, stating bluntly: 'Come home.' The weight of financial worry and all Fanny's fears for Belle, who it seemed O'Meara could not marry right now, were more than she could keep at bay. There was nothing for it but to return to San Francisco - perhaps in just three weeks' time.

Louis's letter to Baxter was friendly but terse: 'You see you were right. I only write to ask a service. £100 must be had. You choose any interest. But send me any necessary papers to sign at once to above address. God bless you. This is the last twenty days of my passion. 'Twill then be over for good. They are steep...'¹⁵

It seems Louis had made contingency plans for borrowing money before leaving Edinburgh, and now he told Baxter: 'I shall most likely require nearly the whole 400 before I am done; and all this within a month.'¹⁶ Since all Louis's expenses were paid by Jenkin, this colossal sum can only have been needed for the Osbournes, or possibly Colvin - how Louis intended to pay it back, when his allowance from his father was just £25 a quarter, not even God could tell. It seems some of the money forwarded by Baxter might be needed for a last-ditch bid to make Belle's dream of marriage to O'Meara a reality. In the same letter, Louis asked: 'Can a man, a British subject of age, marry an American girl (of age, if necessary) in Scotland? If so, with what delay and under what conditions?'¹⁷ By now Belle was cutting up rough at her mother's plan to drag her away to the States, and it may be to her that Louis addressed the following cryptic note: 'My dear B. You remember what you said to me as we walked down to the studio: that you were ashamed of your complaints. You knew then as you know [now] you were treated much as you asked. One thing in that treatment, I regret; for I hope I will be honest. You on your side have tried to

raise trouble about nothing; and I shall not forget it. Nor should you forget many things which I fear are not enough in your mind.'

By now Louis was being bombarded with telegrams from Edinburgh, asking when he was coming home. Protesting that such emergency communications were 'bad for the digestion'¹⁸, he announced he was going off to Grez. Fortunately, after Jenkin had 'lectured the French jury', Tom Stevenson could be palliated with news that the coveted gold medal was his.

The village of Grez with its ancient bridge was a sad place that summer. Since the halcyon days of the previous autumn, the Bohemian idyll had been satirised by Fanny's American journalist friend Margaret Wright, whose article in Scribner's magazine had reduced the cast list of Olympians to figures of fun as they came and went in the low, wide hall of the Hotel Chevillon.

One might have fancied it a moving gallery of fantastic pictures, where every artist had tried to outdo his neighbor in delirium of conception and convulsiveness of execution. Turner was outdone in incoherence, Nicholas Poussin in gloom, Titian and Rubens in splendor, Michael Angelo in grandiose forms... it was in reality only a lively group of young artists with Turkish fezzes, jaunty fishermen's barrettes, Spanish sombreros, Phrygian caps, rakish berets, shapely legs, knickerbockers and knee-breeches. Upon the backs of the flannel and velveteen blouses of almost every one were the huge daubs and splashes of paint that suggested distorted landscapes and demoniac figures...

Up from the garden came a sound of revelry by night. In a large arbor, under clustering vines and dewy blossoms, the Bohemians were dining... Near one end of the table, her flowing hair surmounted with the rakish little cap of a vivoandiere, her black eyes peeping out from a fringe of not very neat curls, sits the Queen of Bohemia [Fanny]. She is not so young as one might think, knowing only her rank and state. There are hundreds of silver threads in her hair; and further down the table sits her daughter, the princess royal, grown to womanhood. Fairy in size, like humming-bird in movement and in purpose of life, Her Majesty seems, to the not too clear-sighted observer, in spite of her thirty-eight years, scarcely more than a girl. Her Majesty is not a sumptuous queen, as her raiment proves, though her Moorish blood, streaming for centuries through conquered Spain and invaded Netherlands, to reach by many strange channels far-off California, and leave its swarthy stain upon her complexion and its

fiery gleam in her eyes, gives impression that she has a barbaric taste for splendor, for leopard and tiger hues, and glories of flamingo and bird-of-paradise in all her appertainings... Her Majesty is generally smoking a cigarette when she is not sleeping, and when dining usually has her little feet upon the rungs of her neighbor's chair, while she tells strange stories of wild life among the Nevada mines...

Next the queen comes a neutral-tinted blonde [sic, the Simp], with ashen eyes, ashen hair, ashen complexion, ashen mustache. He has funny little fat legs, that look about three years old, and as if cheated of a right of their babyhood in not being ensphered with fluffy ruffles and dainty white pantalets, instead of being rudely encased in brown stockings and knee-breeches. There are the wrinkles of fifty years about his eyes, although he repudiates everything beyond thirty-five. This is Sir Salter Wimpson, the grandson of a baker and the son of a Scotch baronet, who loves a four-dollar suit of clothes and the freedom of Bohemia, where he can read Kant and Fichte and Lessing in their native tongues, better than the prim decorum of his baronial halls.

Then comes Shaughn O'Shaughnessy [O'Meara], and next, a face which might have come down from the clustering columns and soaring arches of some thirteenth century cathedral to write for the 'Nineteenth Century' London magazine, and bear the name of St. Louis [Stevenson]. Shaughn wears an Irish peasant's dress, even to the corduroy knee-breeches; albeit, he is a university man, born of a goodly lineage. St. Louis has a yachting-suit of blue, punctured like a colander by the bristling shrubs of the forest.

Then comes a red-fezzed Turk from Brooklyn, then the princess royal [Belle], with eyes so large that the artists always declare them 'out of drawing,' although 'horrid fetching'. She is a figure-painter, with brushes inclined to sprawl and spatter, and canvases given to riots of color, more barbaric than her mother, the queen. She flames and flashes all over with gorgeous hues, and reminds one somehow of Victor Hugo's Esmeralda. She wears a flat, red beret, stuck jauntily upon one side of her head. A crimson scarf is wound gracefully over her blue blouse, her short skirts betray an opulence of red stocking, and the golden tassel which hangs from her cap is never still...

The Cambridge graduate, known generally only as Bob [Stevenson], is a brown-eyed, graceful, Spanish-looking young fellow, who is tormented to death by petitions to pose for his friends as troubadours, mediaeval Italian lovers, and modern Castilian ones. He himself

*paints the tenderest, dreamiest landscapes that go from Bohemia to the exhibitions. Suddenly he is aroused by a somewhat peculiar smile about the queen's mouth. Immediately the whole table is called upon for its views upon the matter of 'woman's smile'. First, words are poured forth; then crayons are whipped out of blouse-pockets, and soon around each plate, all over the white table-cloth, spring up charcoal illustrations of each artist's ideas of the loveliest smile that could dawn upon a woman's face...*¹⁹

Such frivolous remarks about those he held dear had scarcely brought a smile to the countenance of 'St Louis', who told Henley: 'As for the newspaper slip, thank God it's no worse... It is written by a woman, and the worst of women.'²⁰ But in these last precious days of his 'passion', Louis wanted to be happy. It seems he left Grez ahead of Fanny and her family, who travelled without him to London and were met at Dover by Bob, who escorted them to lodgings he had found for them at 7 Radnor Street, Chelsea. There they would spend their last two weeks in Europe before taking the train to Liverpool for their transatlantic voyage, perhaps never to return.

To relieve the misery, Louis hurled himself into hard work. Henley had his hands full with London, whose future looked precarious following the death of Glasgow Brown, and Louis now spent long hours at the office, scribbling verses to fill the columns. As Fanny would recall: 'In such emergencies poem after poem would be dashed off by Mr Henley and my husband until the blanks were filled. "Hurry, my lad," Mr Henley would shout; "only six more lines now!" My husband would scratch off the six lines, hand them to the printer's devil, who stood waiting with outstretched hand, and the situation was saved for another week.'²¹

From such exhilarating challenges, Louis would arrive breathless at Radnor Street, and was hero-worshipped by ten-year-old Sammy:

When RLS finally came I was conscious of a subtle change in him; even to childish eyes he was more assured, more mature and responsible. I was quite awed by his beautiful blue suit with its double-breasted coat, and the new stiff felt hat he threw on one side; and there was much in his eager talk about 'going to press' and 'closing the forms', and Henley 'wanting a middle'... He was constantly dashing up in cabs, and dashing away again with the impressive prodigality that apparently journalism required...

I was greatly fascinated by the cane he carried. In appearance it was just an ordinary and

*rather slender walking-stick, but on lifting it one discovered that it was a steel bludgeon of considerable weight. RLS said it was the finest weapon a man could carry, for it could not go off of itself like a pistol, nor was it so hard to get into action as a sword-cane. He said that in a tight place there was nothing to equal it, and somehow the impression was conveyed that journalism often took a man into very dangerous places. When he forgot it, as he often did, I was always worried until he returned.*²²

Belle's feelings as she kicked her heels in that dreary little lodging house can only be imagined. O'Meara had summoned neither the courage nor the funds to marry her after all. He had given her his portrait by the American artist John Singer Sargent, but the heartbroken Belle needed flesh and blood to cling to, not oil and canvas. They would never meet again and, just ten years hence, O'Meara would die without ever marrying.

For Fanny, the prospect of returning to San Francisco and her husband's humiliating affairs with other women seemed like living death. Her artistic bid for freedom had been a failure, leaving her with no more than a few happy memories and the haunting spectre of her dead child now in a pauper's grave at Pere Lachaise. There was nothing good in the future, so she did her best to live in the present with Louis. In a brave attempt to cheer everyone up, each evening he would read his new stories aloud. If Lloyd's memory serves correctly, these included an early, unpublished version of *The Suicide Club* which was more akin to Bob's original idea than the tale that would appear in book form.

Later he brought a story that was the germ of the 'Suicide Club' and was about a stranger who had taken a train for some commonplace destination, and who, falling into conversation with his talkative and very queer fellow passengers, suddenly discovered that they were a band of would-be suicides. The train in an hour or more was to fly at full speed over a precipice. The point of the tale was less its sensationalism than the startling conversation of men suddenly freed from all reticences.

My principal recollection of it was the unquenchable laughter it provoked; it was unheard of at that epoch to take such liberties with fiction; everybody was convulsed except my rather wondering self, who was in a shiver about the unfortunate man who thought he was going to Canterbury or some such place, and who was being persuaded, very much against his will -

but with incontrovertible logic - that life was a failure, and that he was very lucky to be on such a train...

*Meanwhile the hour of parting was drawing near. I had not the slightest perception of the quandary my mother and RLS were in, nor what agonies of mind their approaching separation was bringing; and doubtless I prattled endlessly about 'going home', and enjoyed all our preparations, while to them that imminent August spelled the knell of everything that made life worth living. But when the time came I had my own tragedy of parting, and the picture lives with me as clearly as though it were yesterday. We were standing in front of our compartment, and the moment to say goodbye had come. It was terribly short and sudden and final, and before I could realise it RLS was walking away down the long length of the platform, a diminishing figure in a brown ulster. My eyes followed him, hoping that he would turn back. But he never turned, and finally disappeared in the crowd. Words cannot express the sense of bereavement, of desolation that suddenly struck at my heart. I knew I would never see him again.*²³

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¹ The Trial of Eugene Chantrelle, ed. A Duncan Smith. Molly Whittington-Egan, Scottish Murder Stories, Chapter XII.

² RLS to his Parents, Paris, February 22, 1878 and Yale edition footnote. Yale 515, MS Yale.

³ Flora Masson, I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson, ed. Rosaline Masson.

⁴ RLS to WE Henley, February 15, 1878. Yale 512, MS National Library of Scotland.

⁵ The Trial of Eugene Chantrelle, ed. A Duncan Smith.

⁶ RLS, Memoirs of Himself, Memories and Portraits and Other Fragments.

⁷ RLS to WE Henley, Edinburgh or Swanston, early June, 1878. Yale 531, MS National Library of Scotland.

⁸ RLS, Story of the Young Man with the Cream Tarts, The Suicide Club, New Arabian Nights.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Edmund Gosse, Robert Louis Stevenson: Personal Memories, Critical Kit-Kats.

¹¹ RLS to Charles Baxter, London, c May 27, 1878. Yale 529, MS Yale.

¹² RLS, Edinburgh Picturesque Notes, Chap VIII.

¹³ Molly Whittington-Egan, Scottish Murder Stories, Chapter XII.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ RLS to Charles Baxter, Paris, June 1878. Yale 536, MS Yale.

¹⁶ RLS to Charles Baxter, Paris, June 26, 1878. Yale 538, MS Yale.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ RLS to his Mother, Paris, July 10, 1878. Yale 542, Colvin's Galley Proofs, Silverado Museum.

¹⁹ Margaret Bertha Wright, Bohemian Days, Scribner's Monthly, May 1878.

²⁰ RLS to WE Henley, Edinburgh or Swanston, early June 1878. Yale 531, MS National Library of Scotland.

²¹ Fanny Stevenson, Preface to New Arabian Nights.

²² Lloyd Osbourne, *An Intimate Portrait of RLS, Stevenson at Twenty-Eight*.

²³ *Ibid.*