

# UNDER THE HILL

*A ROMANTIC NOVEL*

BY

AUBREY BEARDSLEY

WITH HIS ILLUSTRATIONS

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CHAPTERS ONE, TWO AND THREE

"LA CHALEUR DU BRANDON VENUS"

*Le Roman de la Rose*, v. 22051

TO  
THE MOST EMINENT AND REVEREND PRINCE  
**GIULIO POLDO PEZZOLI**  
CARDINAL OF THE HOLY ROMAN CHURCH  
TITULAR BISHOP OF S. MARIA IN TRASTAVERE  
ARCHBISHOP OF OSTIA AND VELLETRI  
NUNCIO TO THE HOLY SEE  
IN  
NICARAGUA AND PATAGONIA  
A FATHER TO THE POOR  
A REFORMER OF ECCLESIASTICAL DISCIPLINE  
A PATTERN OF LEARNING  
WISDOM AND HOLINESS OF LIFE  
THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED WITH DUE REVERENCE  
BY HIS HUMBLE SERVITOR  
A SCRIVENER AND LIMNER OF WORLDLY THINGS  
WHO MADE THIS BOOK  
**AUBREY BEARDSLEY**

*Most Eminent Prince,*

I KNOW not by what mischance the writing of epistles dedicatory has fallen into disuse, whether through the vanity of authors or the humility of patrons. But the practice seems to me so very beautiful and becoming that I have ventured to make an essay in the modest art, and lay with formalities my first book at your feet. I have it must be confessed many fears lest I shall be arraigned of presumption in choosing so exalted a name as your own to place at the beginning of this history; but I hope that such a censure will not be too lightly passed upon me, for if I am guilty it is but of a most natural pride that the accidents of my life should allow me to sail the little pinnace of my wit under your protection.

But though I can clear myself of such a charge, I am still minded to use the tongue of apology, for with what face can I offer you a book treating of so vain and fantastical a thing as love? I know that in the judgment of many the amorous passion is accounted a shameful thing and ridiculous; indeed it must be confessed that more blushes have risen for love's sake than for any other cause and that lovers are an eternal laughing-stock. Still, as the book will be found to contain matter of deeper import than mere venery, inasmuch as it treats of the great contrition of its chiefest character, and of canonical things in certain pages, I am not without hopes that your Eminence will pardon my writing of a loving Abbé, for which extravagance let my youth excuse me.

Then I must crave your forgiveness for addressing you in a language other than the Roman, but my small freedom in Latinity forbids me to wander beyond the idiom of my vernacular. I would not for the world that your delicate Southern ear should be offended by a barbarous assault of rude and Gothic words; but methinks no language is rude that can boast polite writers, and not a few such have flourished in this country in times past, bringing our common speech to very great perfection. In the present age, alas! our pens are ravished by unlettered authors and unmannered critics, that make a havoc rather than a building, a wilderness rather than a garden. But, alack! what boots it to drop tears upon the preterit?

It is not of our own shortcomings though, but of your own great merits that I should speak, else I should be forgetful of the duties I have drawn upon myself in electing to address you in a dedication. It is of your noble virtues (though all the world know of 'em), your taste and wit, your care for letters, and very real regard for the arts that I must be the proclaimer.

Though it be true that all men have sufficient wit to pass a judgment on this or that, and not a few sufficient impudence to print the same (these last being commonly accounted critics), I have ever held that the critical faculty is more rare than the inventive. It is a faculty your

Eminence possesses in so great a degree that your praise or blame is something oracular, your utterance infallible as great genius or as a beautiful woman. Your mind, I know, rejoicing in fine distinctions and subtle procedures of thought, beautifully discursive rather than hastily conclusive, has found in criticism its happiest exercise. It is a pity that so perfect a Mecænas should have no Horace to befriend, no Georgics to accept; for the offices and function of patron or critic must of necessity be lessened in an age of little men and little work. In times past it was nothing derogatory for great princes and men of State to extend their loves and favour to poets, for thereby they received as much honour as they conferred. Did not Prince Festus with pride take the masterwork of Julian into his protection, and was not the *Æneis* a pretty thing to offer Cæsar?

Learning without appreciation is a thing of naught, but I know not which is greatest in you—your love of the arts, or your knowledge of 'em. What wonder then that I am studious to please you, and desirous of your protection. How deeply thankful I am for your past affections you know well, your great kindness and liberality having far outgone my slight merits and small accomplishment that seemed scarce to warrant any favour. Alas! 'tis a slight offering I make you now, but if after glancing into its pages (say of an evening upon your terrace) you should deem it worthy of the remotest place in your princely library, the knowledge that it rested there would be reward sufficient for my labours, and a crowning happiness to my pleasure in the writing of this slender book.

The humble and obedient servant of your Eminence,

AUBREY BEARDSLEY.

# UNDER THE HILL

## CHAPTER I

THE Abbé Fanfreluche, having lighted off his horse, stood doubtfully for a moment beneath the ombre gateway of the mysterious Hill, troubled with an exquisite fear lest a day's travel should have too cruelly undone the laboured niceness of his dress. His hand, slim and gracious as La Marquise du Deffand's in the drawing by Carmontelle, played nervously about the gold hair that fell upon his shoulders like a finely-curled peruke, and from point to point of a precise toilet the fingers wandered, quelling the little mutinies of cravat and ruffle.

It was taper-time; when the tired earth puts on its cloak of mists and shadows, when the enchanted woods are stirred with light footfalls and slender voices of the fairies, when all the air is full of delicate influences, and even the beaux, seated at their dressing-tables, dream a little.

A delicious moment, thought Fanfreluche, to slip into exile.

The place where he stood waved drowsily with strange flowers, heavy with perfume, dripping with odours. Gloomy and nameless weeds not to be found in Mentzelius. Huge moths, so richly winged they must have banqueted upon tapestries and royal stuffs, slept on the pillars that flanked either side of the gateway, and the eyes of all the moths remained open and were burning and bursting with a mesh of veins. The pillars were fashioned in some pale stone and rose up like hymns in the praise of pleasure, for from cap to base, each one was carved with loving sculptures, showing such a cunning invention and such a curious knowledge, that Fanfreluche lingered not a little in reviewing them. They surpassed all that Japan has ever pictured from her maisons vertes, all that was ever painted in the cool bath-rooms of Cardinal La Motte, and even outdid the astonishing illustrations to Jones's "Nursery Numbers."

"A pretty portal," murmured the Abbé, correcting his sash.

As he spoke, a faint sound of singing was breathed out from the mountain, faint music as strange and distant as sea-legends that are heard in shells.

"The Vespers of Helen, I take it," said Fanfreluche, and struck a few chords of accompaniment, ever so lightly, upon his little lute. Softly across the spell-bound threshold the song floated and wreathed itself about the subtle columns, till the moths were touched with passion and moved quaintly in their sleep. One of them was awakened by the intenser notes of the Abbé's lute-strings, and fluttered into the cave. Fanfreluche felt it was his cue for entry.

"Adieu," he exclaimed with an inclusive gesture, and "good-bye, Madonna," as the cold circle of the moon began to show, beautiful and full of enchantments. There was a shadow of sentiment in his voice as he spoke the words.

"Would to heaven," he sighed, "I might receive the assurance of a looking-glass before I make my début! However, as she is a Goddess, I doubt not her eyes are a little sated with perfection, and may not be displeased to see it crowned with a tiny fault."

A wild rose had caught upon the trimmings of his ruff, and in the first flush of displeasure he would have struck it brusquely away, and most severely punished the offending flower. But the ruffled mood lasted only a moment, for there was something so deliciously incongruous in the hardy petal's invasion of so delicate a thing, that Fanfreluche withheld the finger of resentment and vowed that the wild rose should stay where it had clung—a passport, as it were, from the upper to the under world.

"The very excess and violence of the fault," he said, "will be its excuse"; and, undoing a tangle in the tassel of his stick, stepped into the shadowy corridor that ran into the bosom of the wan hill—stepped with the admirable aplomb and unwrinkled suavity of Don John.

## CHAPTER II

BEFORE a toilet that shone like the altar of Nôtre Dame des Victoires, Helen was seated in a little dressing-gown of black and heliotrope. The coiffeur Cosmé was caring for her scented chevelure, and with tiny silver tongs, warm from the caresses of the flame, made delicious intelligent curls that fell as lightly as a breath about her forehead and over her eyebrows, and clustered like tendrils round her neck. Her three favourite girls, Pappelarde, Blanchemains and Loreyne, waited immediately upon her with perfume and powder in delicate flaçons and frail cassolettes, and held in porcelain jars the ravishing paints prepared by Châtelaine for those cheeks and lips that had grown a little pale with anguish of exile. Her three favourite boys, Claud, Clair and Sarrasine, stood amorously about with salver, fan and napkin. Millamant held a slight tray of slippers, Minette some tender gloves, La Popelinière—mistress of the robes—was ready with a frock of yellow and yellow, La Zambinella bore the jewels, Florizel some flowers, Amadour a box of various pins, and Vadius a box of sweets. Her doves, ever in attendance, walked about the room that was panelled with the gallant paintings of Jean Baptiste Dorat, and some dwarfs and doubtful creatures sat here and there lolling out their tongues, pinching each other, and behaving oddly enough. Sometimes Helen gave them little smiles.

As the toilet was in progress, Mrs. Marsuple, the fat manicure and fardeuse, strode in and seated herself by the side of the dressing-table, greeting Helen with an intimate nod. She wore a gown of white watered silk with gold lace trimmings, and a velvet necklet of false vermillion. Her hair hung in bandeaux over her ears, passing into a huge chignon at the back of her head, and the hat, wide-brimmed and hung with a vallance of pink muslin, was floral with red roses.

Mrs. Marsuple's voice was full of salacious unction; she had terrible little gestures with the hands, strange movements with the shoulders, a short respiration that made surprising wrinkles in her bodice, a corrupt skin, large horny eyes, a parrot's nose, a small loose mouth, great flaccid cheeks, and chin after chin. She was a wise person, and Helen loved her more than any

other of her servants, and had a hundred pet names for her, such as Dear Toad, Pretty Poll, Cock Robin, Dearest Lip, Touchstone, Little Cough Drop, Bijou, Buttons, Dear Heart, Dick-dock, Mrs. Manly, Little Nipper, Cochon-de-lait, Naughty-naughty, Blessed Thing, and Trump. The talk that passed between Mrs. Marsuple and her mistress was of that excellent kind that passes between old friends, a perfect understanding giving to scraps of phrases their full meaning, and to the merest reference a point. Naturally Fanfreluche the newcomer was discussed a little. Helen had not seen him yet, and asked a score of questions on his account that were delightfully to the point.

The report and the coiffing were completed at the same moment.

"Cosmé," said Helen, "you have been quite sweet and quite brilliant, you have surpassed yourself to-night."

"Madam flatters me," replied the antique old thing, with a girlish giggle under his black satin mask. "Gad, Madam; sometimes I believe I have no talent in the world, but to-night I must confess to a touch of the vain mood."

It would pain me horribly to tell you about the painting of her face; suffice it that the sorrowful work was accomplished; frankly, magnificently, and without a shadow of deception.

Helen slipped away the dressing-gown, and rose before the mirror in a flutter of frilled things. She was adorably tall and slender. Her neck and shoulders were wonderfully drawn, and the little malicious breasts were full of the irritation of loveliness that can never be entirely comprehended, or ever enjoyed to the utmost. Her arms and hands were loosely, but delicately articulated, and her legs were divinely long. From the hip to the knee, twenty-two inches; from the knee to the heel, twenty-two inches, as befitted a Goddess. Those who have seen Helen only in the Vatican, in the Louvre, in the Uffizi, or in the British Museum, can have no idea how very beautiful and sweet she looked. Not at all like the lady in "*Lemprière*."

Mrs. Marsuple grew quite lyric over the dear little person, and pecked at her arms with kisses.

"Dear Tongue, you must really behave yourself," said Helen, and called Millamant to bring her the slippers.

The tray was freighted with the most exquisite and shapely pantoufles, sufficient to make Cluny a place of naught. There were shoes of grey and black and brown suède, of white silk and rose satin, and velvet and sarcenet; there were some of sea-green sewn with cherry blossoms, some of red with willow branches, and some of grey with bright-winged birds. There were heels of silver, of ivory, and of gilt; there were buckles of very precious stones set in most strange and esoteric devices; there were ribbons tied and twisted into cunning forms; there were buttons so beautiful that the button-holes might have no pleasure till they closed upon them; there were soles of delicate leathers scented with maréchale, and linings of soft stuffs scented with the juice of July flowers. But Helen, finding none of them to her mind, called for a discarded pair of blood-red maroquin, diapered with pearls. These looked very distinguished over her white silk stockings.

Meantime, La Popelinière stepped forward with the frock.

"I shan't wear one to-night," said Helen. Then she slipped on her gloves.

When the toilet was at an end all her doves clustered round her feet loving to frôler her ankles with their plumes, and the dwarfs clapped their hands, and put their fingers between their lips and whistled. Never before had Helen been so radiant and compelling. Spiridion, in the corner, looked up from his game of Spellicans and trembled.

Just then, Pranzmungel announced that supper was ready upon the fifth terrace. "Ah!" cried Helen, "I'm famished!"

### CHAPTER III

SHE was quite delighted with Fanfreluche, and, of course, he sat next her at supper.

The terrace, made beautiful with a thousand vain and fantastical things, and set with a hundred tables and four hundred couches, presented a truly

splendid appearance. In the middle was a huge bronze fountain with three basins. From the first rose a many-breasted dragon and four little loves mounted upon swans, and each love was furnished with a bow and arrow. Two of them that faced the monster seemed to recoil in fear, two that were behind made bold enough to aim their shafts at him. From the verge of the second sprang a circle of slim golden columns that supported silver doves with tails and wings spread out. The third, held by a group of grotesquely attenuated satyrs, was centered with a thin pipe hung with masks and roses and capped with children's heads.

From the mouths of the dragon and the loves, from the swans' eyes, from the breasts of the doves, from the satyrs' horns and lips, from the masks at many points, and from the childrens' curls, the water played profusely, cutting strange arabesques and subtle figures.

The terrace was lit entirely by candles. There were four thousand of them, not numbering those upon the tables. The candlesticks were of a countless variety, and smiled with moulded coquetteries. Some were twenty feet high, and bore single candles that flared like fragrant torches over the feast, and guttered till the wax stood round the tops in tall lances. Some, hung with dainty petticoats of shining lustres, had a whole bevy of tapers upon them devised in circles, in pyramids, in squares, in cuneiforms, in single lines regimentally and in crescents.

Then on quaint pedestals and Terminal Gods and gracious pilasters of every sort, were shell-like vases of excessive fruits and flowers that hung about and burst over the edges and could never be restrained. The orange-trees and myrtles, looped with vermillion sashes, stood in frail porcelain pots, and the rose-trees were wound and twisted with superb invention over trellis and standard. Upon one side of the terrace a long gilded stage for the comedians was curtained off with Pagonian tapestries, and in front of it the music-stands were placed.

The tables arranged between the fountain and the flight of steps to the sixth terrace were all circular, covered with white damask, and strewn with irises, roses, kingcups, columbines, daffodils, carnations and lilies; and the

couches, high with soft cushions and spread with more stuffs than could be named, had fans thrown upon them.

Beyond the escalier stretched the gardens, which were designed so elaborately and with so much splendour that the architect of the Fêtes d'Armailhacq could have found in them no matter for cavil, and the still lakes strewn with profuse barges full of gay flowers and wax marionettes, the alleys of tall trees, the arcades and cascades, the pavilions, the grottoes and the garden-gods—all took a strange tinge of revelry from the glare of the light that fell upon them from the feast.

The frockless Helen and Fanfreluche, with Mrs. Marsuple and Claude and Clair, and Farcy, the chief comedian, sat at the same table. Fanfreluche, who had doffed his travelling suit, wore long black silk stockings, a pair of pretty garters, a very elegant ruffled shirt, slippers and a wonderful dressing-gown; and Farcy was in ordinary evening clothes. As for the rest of the company, it boasted some very noticeable dresses, and whole tables of quite delightful coiffures. There were spotted veils that seemed to stain the skin, fans with eye-slits in them, through which the bearers peeped and peered; fans painted with figures and covered with the sonnets of Sporion and the short stories of Scaramouch; and fans of big, living moths stuck upon mounts of silver sticks. There were masks of green velvet that make the face look trebly powdered; masks of the heads of birds, of apes, of serpents, of dolphins, of men and women, of little embryos and of cats; masks like the faces of gods; masks of coloured glass, and masks of thin talc and of india-rubber. There were wigs of black and scarlet wools, of peacocks' feathers, of gold and silver threads, of swansdown, of the tendrils of the vine, and of human hair; huge collars of stiff muslin rising high above the head; whole dresses of ostrich feathers curling inwards; tunics of panthers' skins that looked beautiful over pink tights; capotes of crimson satin trimmed with the wings of owls; sleeves cut into the shapes of apocryphal animals; drawers flounced down to the ankles, and flecked with tiny, red roses; stockings clocked with fêtes galantes, and curious designs; and petticoats cut like artificial flowers. Some of the women had put on delightful little moustaches dyed in purples and bright

greens, twisted and waxed with absolute skill; and some wore great white beards, after the manner of Saint Wilgeforte. Then Dorat had painted extraordinary grotesques and vignettes over their bodies, here and there. Upon a cheek, an old man scratching his horned head; upon a forehead, an old woman teased by an impudent amor; upon a shoulder, an amorous singerie; round a breast, a circlet of satyrs; about a wrist, a wreath of pale, unconscious babes; upon an elbow, a bouquet of spring flowers; across a back, some surprising scenes of adventure; at the corners of a mouth, tiny red spots; and upon a neck, a flight of birds, a caged parrot, a branch of fruit, a butterfly, a spider, a drunken dwarf, or, simply, some initials.

The supper provided by the ingenious Rambouillet was quite beyond parallel. Never had he created a more exquisite menu. The *consommé impromptu* alone would have been sufficient to establish the immortal reputation of any chef. What, then, can I say of the *Dorade bouillie sauce maréchale*, the *ragoût aux langues de carpes*, the *ramereaux à la charnière*, the *ciboulette de gibier à l'espagnole*, the *pâté de cuisses d'oie aux pois de Monsalvie*, the *queues d'agneau au clair de lune*, the *artichauts à la grecque*, the *charlotte de pommes à la Lucy Waters*, the *bombes à la marée*, and the *glaces aux rayons d'or*? A veritable tour de cuisine that surpassed even the famous little suppers given by the Marquis de Réchale at Passy, and which the Abbé Mirliton pronounced "impeccable, and too good to be eaten."

Ah! Pierre Antoine Berquin de Rambouillet; you are worthy of your divine mistress!

Mere hunger quickly gave place to those finer instincts of the pure gourmet, and the strange wines, cooled in buckets of snow, unloosed all the décolleté spirits of astonishing conversation and atrocious laughter.

As the courses advanced, the conversation grew bustling and more personal. Pulex and Cyril, and Marisca and Cathelin, opened a fire of raillery, and a thousand amatory follies of the day were discussed.

From harsh and shrill and clamant, the voices grew blurred and inarticulate. Bad sentences were helped out by worse gestures, and at one table Scabius expressed himself like the famous old knight in the first part

of the "Soldier's Fortune" of Otway. Bassalissa and Lysistrata tried to pronounce each other's names, and became very affectionate in the attempt; and Tala, the tragedian, robed in roomy purple, and wearing plume and buskin, rose to his feet, and, with swaying gestures, began to recite one of his favourite parts. He got no further than the first line, but repeated it again and again, with fresh accents and intonations each time, and was only silenced by the approach of the asparagus that was being served by satyrs dressed in white.