127

past masters

Laurence Donovan

Bertram Atkey

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PAST MASTERS 127

Produced and Edited by Terry Walker ("Pulpmeister") from short stories in magazines, newspapers and other sources, and all in the Life + 70 years public domain.

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Erle R. Spencer

1897-1937

The Wide World Magazine Sept 1923

Journalist, novelist and short story writer; born Newfoundland, Canada, contracted tuberculosis at fourteen. He moved to Europe aged 25 for further treatment, where he became a journalist on the Daily Express*, and also wrote nine novels and several short stories.*

Erle Rose Spencer

THE islands of St. Pierre and Miquelon, constituting the only colony remaining to France in the Atlantic, are situated eleven miles off the coast of Newfoundland, and about two hundred miles from Canada. Long a bone of contention between the English and French, and later a centre for the French fishing fleet, the little colony has now attained notoriety through being used as a base by the rum-runners who range the three-mile limit of the American coast. It shares with Nassau, a port in the Bahamas, the dubious honour of being the principal rendezvous of hundreds of ships (mostly sailing vessels, but some steam) engaged in this enormous illicit trade.

From May to September, 1922, I was in close contact with St. Pierre and the men who are engaged in this illegal rum-running. Some of these men had been known to me for years, and naturally I soon got to know a great deal more about the business than it would have been wise to mention in speech or in writing.

The following story is one of many which I heard at leisure around the tables in Robierre's, the Café du Nord, and Chiaveri's. Every fact mentioned in it which deals with the extent and character of the liquor-smuggling trade I can vouch for as being correct, and I have no reason to suppose that the details of Captain McB——'s story are not as correct as the more important facts

embodied in it. In fact, having known Captain McB—— for years as the master of a Bank fishing vessel and a man of integrity and courage, I have no hesitation whatever in assuring the reader of the fidelity of this narrative. This also I know— that most of the experiences undergone by Captain McB—— are common to many men who have smuggled liquor inside the three-mile limit of America.

The story was told to me by Captain McB—— at the Café du Nord in St. Pierre, but the names of men and ships mentioned are, for obvious reasons, entirely fictitious.

I DON'T THINK I ever told you how I came to turn rum-runner, and what happened on my first trip. I've never cared to talk about it; there are some things about it I'd just as soon forget.

In the fall of 1920 I took the old *Dauntless* to St. Pierre to put her in dry dock. I'd had a poor year Bank fishing, and was beginning to wonder if it wasn't about time for me to cut loose from the game. I'd been at it for twenty years and still I wasn't exactly a millionaire. While I was feeling that way I happened to meet Lafroise, the broker chap, and we fell to drinking. The talk went from one thing to another, and scon I was cursing Bank fishing and grumbling about hard times.

"You know the American coast pretty well, don't you?" asked Lafroise, suddenly.

"Like a book," I told him.

"And you're a first-class sailor?"

"I'm reckoned as such by men who know," I admitted.

"Well, why don't you try smuggling liquor for a change?"

He laughed as he said it, but something in his eyes told me he was serious, and was testing me.

"Why not?" I said carelessly, "why not? But then I reckon it takes capital to start that business."

"Suppose you had capital?" he asked.

"Smuggling might seem more interesting then," I said.

"And a ship also," he went on.

"In that case I might turn my hand to it," I admitted.

"And a wage of three thousand francs a month, with a commission of a quarter per cent. on all cargoes landed," he ended up.

"Make it American money," I said, for by that time I was wide awake.

"Well, two hundred and fifty dollars a month and commission."

"If I had a chance like that," I told him, "I'd say good-bye to Bank fishing to-morrow."

"Captain," said Lafroise gravely, "come to me in the spring." And not another word would he say.

I left St. Pierre a few days later, and I brooded over the proposition all the winter. Then, in March, I told the owners of the *Dauntless* that they'd have to find another skipper for her, and left for St, Pierre.

I arrived to find Lafroise absent in the States. When I heard that, I very nearly backed out. But I'd given up the *Dauntless* and had to find another berth of some kind, so I waited.

It was two weeks, and near the middle of April, before Lafroise got back. By that time I was getting uneasy. The second morning after he reached St. Pierre I bearded him in his office.

"I've called about that proposition you made last fall," I said, getting to business at once.

"Ah, yes. Sit down, Captain," he said, and smiled. "So you've decided in favour of it?"

"I have," I told him, " providing the terms are the same and that I'm satisfied with the ship."

"The terms are the same," he said; "and the ship is the *Waterwitch*."

"I couldn't wish for a better," I said enthusiastically. The *Waterwitch* was a rakish-rigged fore-and-aft schooner of about a hundred and fifty tons. She was known from Cape Race to Scataree and from there to Cape Cod as one of the smartest ships in the Bank fishing fleet. Seven years old only she was, and six of them had been spent on the Banks.

"But how long has she been in the trade?" I asked. "It's the first I've heard of it. And what's happened to Billy Waters, her skipper?"

'"She's been in the trade a year," said Lafroise. '' Captain Waters died on her last trip. Some trouble with his crew, we think, but we couldn't prove anything against then. He was buried at sea."

That sobered me for a while. Then I went ahead. "Let's get down to business," I said; and he drew up the papers.

I was to be responsible for ship and cargo, my name appearing as owner and master. That meant that if I was caught I stood to get along stretch in jail, and perhaps worse. But I knew I couldn't get a job like that without taking the risks that go with it, so I signed.

"You'll clear for Nassau," he said. "The ship's been ready these three weeks. You'll make for the New York coast and hang well off Montauk Point until the night of the twenty-first, when you'll run in to the three- mile limit, There you'lk heave to and at ten o'clock show a flare once every five minutes for half an hour. At the end of that time a launch from the shore will signal you if all's well. Her green light will be higher than her red. If you don't pick her up

the first time you signal, jog up and down off the coast and then run in again within an hour and repeat. If she still doesn't answer, slack sheet and make for sea as fast as you can, for there will be trouble waiting in that vicinity. When you pick up the launch's signals, run inside the 'limit' until she boards you. The man in charge will then give you your orders. He'll be the representative of the men who own the cargo. Do you understand so far ? "

"I do," I told him, "but to make sure just put it in writing."

He did so. "You'll sail in two days— on the sixteenth," he ordered.

"What about a crew?" I asked.

"The ship has a full crew, the same she had last year."

"Do you mean to say I've got to take over the men you suspect killed poor Waters?" I demanded. " Yes," he said.

"I'm hanged if I can see the sense of that," I told him, feeling hot under the collar.

" Keep cool," advised Lafroise, "and listen to me. The crew are picked men. Scoundrels, I admit, but they know the trade from beginning to end. You're a green hand, and it won't hurt you to have men at the back of you who are experienced. If, when you've run a few cargoes, you still want to get rid of them, you can do so; but until then it's wiser to stick to them. You never know who you are getting in St. Pierre these days, and a new crew might lose you your command and your liberty on the very first trip."

"Looking at it that way, of course, there's something in it," I said, "but I don't like it."

"You'll get used to it. And remember this— we can prove nothing. I'd advise you not to let them think you suspect anything. And I'd handle the mate gently at first. He's been expecting to take charge, and he'll be disappointed."

"There'll be trouble with him for certain."

"Well, I wouldn't have given you the ship if I hadn't thought you could handle the crew," he said, with a kind of sting in his words.

"As to that," I snapped, "I've handled a few tough crews before now."

"Exactly. And that's what makes me think you'll make good at the trade," he went on. "I'm banking on your knowledge of men and ships. The rest you'll soon pick up. But remember this— one lost cargo, and you're finished."

"I understand," I said; "and seeing I'm looking for a good commission, no cargo of mine will be lost easy."

"Good," he said. "That's all. Call for your papers to-morrow morning. In the meantime, knock about the waterfront and cafés and meet some of the men in the business. Mention my name. They'll give you good tips."

I left him and made for the quay, where I ailed a boat and had myself put aboard the Waterwitch.

When I climbed over her rail only two of the crew were on deck. I asked for the mate, and one of them stepped forward. A giant of a man he was, about six feet tall, a fathom wide, and as thick as a bullock.

"I'm your new skipper," I said. "I take it you're the mate?"

"I am," he answered, and he wasn't smiling.

"Beale, by name," I went on,

"Right," he answered.

"Very well, Beale," I said. "Muster the crew, and perhaps I'd better remind you at once that I'm used to being called 'sir' by my mate."

"Aye, aye, sir," he choked, and hurried for'ard.

It took the crew five minutes to get on deck. And what a crew! Six of them there were, including the mate, who was a Gloucester man. Two of them were Swedes, one a mulatto, the other two were north coast of Newfoundland men.

I'd never used a belaying-pin or a pair of knuckle-dusters on a man in my life— my fists are big enough— but when I looked over that crew I began to think I'd need nothing less than a six-foot bar of iron to whip them into shape.

I began by telling them I was their new skipper. Then I mentioned how slow they'd been in getting on deck.

"No doubt you're a little tired after laying up all winter," I said, " but I'll be expecting you to move quicker from this time on."

Then I went aft, and the mate followed. We arranged the watches, and I agreed to advance the crew money for the rest of the time we were in port.

Then I talked to Beale straight from the shoulder. I told him I was depending on him to get the best he knew how out of the crew, and that I'd have no man on board who didn't know how to jump at an order. I mentioned the date we were to sail, and indicated what I wanted done before that time.

He listened glumly to it all (I never saw him smile but once), but when I was through, he said "Aye, aye, sir," as smartly as you'd wish, and I went on shore feeling I'd made a good start.

Although I hadn't mentioned it to Lafroise, I'd been getting acquainted with the men in the game for two weeks. Tom Belbin, Bill Henry, and Jack Strang were fellows I'd known for years— Belbin as the master of a Bank fishing boat, and the other two as men engaged in the coastal coal and lumber trade. They introduced me to others, and in two weeks I'd picked up a great deal of information as to the right way to run a cargo. Belbin had lost one ship and been in jail, but was still money in pocket. Henry had been caught and fined for having a small consignment of liquor on board; Strang had never been caught at all. He usually ran to Sydney and Glace Bay, taking small lots of liquor hid under the ballast in the hold and false floors in the forecastle and cabin. The others were in bigger business, such as I was going to attempt myself.

As soon as I got ashore I went to my boarding house, settled up a few scores, bought some tobacco and other things I needed, and sent my box on board. Later I went to Robierre's to meet Belbin and the rest of the bunch and let them know my luck. I found Henry and Strang in a little room on the second floor, and learned from them that Belbin had left unexpectedly. He had a load of "Martell" for the New Jersey coast.

Then I told them my news, and for the next three hours we spoke of signals and revenue cutters, and I listened to advice on unloading, keeping the crew "dry," and when to "make in," and how.

"That's the trick— making-in and unloading," said Henry. "The cutters are cute, and they'll be sure and pick up a signal if it's too obvious. That's the reason I always wait half an hour or so after I've picked up the launches' signals before I make inside the 'limit.' You'll soon get hold of the ropes. There's two things to remember: Never let daylight catch you inside the 'limit,' and never act suspicious when there's any kind of a ship in sight, but keep on a straight course."

We sailed on the morning of the sixteenth. I'd intended to leave at dawn, but the mate didn't get the crew aboard till late, and by the time we'd sobered the worst of them it was sun-up.

We ran through Hell's Mouth with as pretty a breeze behind us as one could wish for, and in less than forty-eight hours we logged over three hundred miles. Then, as there was no hurry, I slackened her pace a bit for the next day or two, sauntering alcng until the twentieth, when I headed for Long Island, heaving-to fifty miles off it that night.

Towards dusk next day we began to creep towards land, and at ten o'clock we picked up Montauk Point light. I rammed the schooner well in to the 'limit,' where I gave the order to heave to. It was a dirty night. There was a strong off-shore wind, with rain, and the tops were blowing off the waves. I sent two men to the mastheads and two more to the bows, while the mate got the flares ready.

Sharp on time we showed our signals, one of the crew timing them. Eleven o'clock came and no sign of the launch's answering signals. I was getting uneasy and about to slack sheet, when the mate sighted lights to windward. They bore down on us, and after a while we could see the form of a boat with her green light higher than her red. Then a flare showed, and the mate came down, saying that was our signal.

We waited, and in a little while two launches slipped up alongside and hailed us. We gave the word and they came aboard. Ten men stepped on deck and the biggest of them asked for the captain. I made myself known to him, and he gave me the written order to unload.

"I'll take charge if you don't mind, Captain," he said.

"Go ahead," I told him. Rafferty was his name.

"All lights out," he ordered, and the lights on launches and ship were cloaked. In ten minutes the hatches were off and some of my crew and half-a-dozen other men were in the hold. I took the wheel, and two men went to the masthead to watch for cutters.

Then, in the pouring rain and darkness, with the wind howling miserably about us and the coast lights flaring in the distance, we began to unload the stuff. Case after case passed over the rail, and before long the launches were as deeply laden as was safe, with five hundred cases apiece on board.

"Keep jogging along just outside the limit, Captain," said Rafferty. "We'll try and make two trips to-night, for it's a wild one and there are not likely to be any cutters about."

Then they cast off, and I kept the *Waterwitch* just outside the line. The wind stiffened a bit an hour later, and I doubted if the launches would be able to come out again. However, I held on, thinking they might appear. But when two o'clock struck and there was no sign of them, I began to get uneasy, and when the first bit of light showed under the edge of the sky I gave word to slack the sheets and swung the ship off before the wind, not heaving to till we were well out of sight of the coast.

There we hung about until the next night, when we made in again, this time with pleasant weather, although the wind was still off-shore and gusty. We picked up the launches without any trouble, and Rafferty came aboard again. As I thought, there had been too much sea the night before to risk the second trip. But we made two trips of it that night, and I headed the Waterwitch out to sea, feeling happy. We'd had no trouble at all so far. Everything had gone like clockwork— signals, launches, discharging and all— and I was beginning to think we'd make a mighty quick trip of it. And so we should have done if the weather hadn't turned on us. In the afternoon the wind freshened, and just before night it came down a living gale, and we had to heave the schooner to, and tear the sails off her. She rode it out well until morning ; then the seas coming over her bows threatened to sink her, and to save her we had to turn tail and run before it. That gale blew us four hundred miles out to sea before it eased up, and when we hove to to try and get back it died away until it was nearly a flat calm. That was the first of my troubles, and no light one, for the longer we were unloading, the greater the risk. And we had the bulk of our cargo untouched.

It was about this time that I noticed the mate was getting a little too free in his manner, and the crew often went to him for orders when they should have come to me. I didn't say anything, although I had to knock a grin off the mouth

of one of the Swedes one day when I cancelled an order the mate had given him.

Then, on the second day we were beating back to the land, the same man answered me back when I found fault with his work.

"You've been drinking," I told him, after I'd knocked him down, "and you know my orders about no drinking at sea."

I gave the wheel to the mate and went for'ard. If the crew had whisky in the forecastle it meant trouble, and the sooner the stuff was out of it the better.

I got down for'ard, and there in the half- darkness I found the mulatto and the other Swede drunk. I ordered the cook to light a lamp so that I could see their faces. Then I went ahead and beat them sober. I didn't mind taking advantage of their being drunk; they weren't that kind of men. As it was, they made it hot for me for a while, but I managed them, and when we'd put them in their bunks I ordered the cook to fetch out any whisky that was left. There were two bottles: of it, and I carried them aft.

"I don't think there'll be any more trouble of that kind," I told the mate as I took the wheel from him.

He didn't answer for a minute, but if ever a man's eyes turned green with hate his did.

"Waters didn't mind us having a drink now and then," he growled.

"Yes, and he's dead," I answered. He turned on me in a flash, and just stopped his hand in time as it went to his sheath-knife.

"What do you mean?" he asked, his breath coming quickly.

"I mean what I said," I told him. "Waters is dead, and I'm master of this ship. And if any cross-eyed son of a sea-cook begins to think different there's going to be trouble!"

He slouched for'ard without a word. But from that moment I was on my guard. I didn't trust the man and I wasn't sure of the crew.

We made in to land three nights lattr and picked up the launches the second time of signalling. Rafferty was in a terrible state when he came aboard. He had thought we must have gone down in the storm. And, to make things worse, he'd heard of a coming raid on that part of the coast within a week or ten days.

That made us sweat, for we wanted to be unloaded by that time. We landed fifteen hundred cases that night, and when he left, Rafferty told me to make in and pick up the launches every night from that time on, if it was humanly possible. I was as eager as he to do that, so, although the next two nights were muggy and wet, we ran in and continued to unload.

It was wearying work for the nerves, and I aged years every time we sighted a suspicious-looking ship. But we were lucky and never sighted even the smoke of a cutter.

Then came the night when we'd only twenty - five hundred cases left, and Rafferty wanted to make an end of it. We ran in a little earlier than usual and got the first loads off quickly. Then the sea began to get a little choppy and the sky hung low, bringing the wind on top of us. The launches got back all right, however, and though they chewed up every fender we had on board while we were doing it, we loaded them and cast off.

"Stick inside," shouted Rafferty as he was leaving; "we'll send another boat to you before daylight, and you can finish it." There were only two hundred and fifty cases left in the hold.

I wanted to make an end of it myself, so, although it was a big risk, I kept the *Waterwitch* jogging. When an hour went by and there was no sign of a boat, I began to get uneasy. Dawn would break in less than another sixty minutes.

I should have left then, but I didn't; I hung on. Finally the crew began to fidget and the mate came aft.

"I'd leave if I was you, skipper," he said. "If daylight finds us in these waters we're done for."

"I'll wait for Rafferty," I said, and a stubborn streak in me kept me doing that foolish thing.

The mate went for'ard and the crew gathered in a bunch. I didn't like the looks of that, so I ordered one man to the masthead and another to the bow. The mate I called aft. None of them moved for a minute; then I saw the mate nod his head to them, and they came aft on the run.

"Mutiny!" I shouted, and put my hand to my coat-pocket, where I'd carried a gun for days.

What happened came with a rush. I shouted out to them to get for'ard, but they only jeered at me and brandished belaying pins in the air. The mate led them, and when I saw they meant business I drew the gun, although Heaven knows I didn't want to. They stopped when they saw that. Then the mate cursed them for cowards and rushed me, the rest following. I shot him dead.

That shot sounded like a cannon, and the crew shrank back, hesitating.

I knew the position was ticklish; I'd only two shots left. I raised the gun again to try and keep them in check. As it happened, the muzzle was pointing straight for the cook. He turned white and drew back. "Don't shoot, skipper, for Heaven's sake," he begged. " I can tell you—"

The mulatto took him by the throat before he could say more. But the cook was crazy with fear. He tore the negro's hands away. "The mate— Waters," he gasped. Then someone stunned him.

What would have happened then if nothing had intervened is hard to say. But dawn had crept on us unawares, and one of the crew— perhaps with the thought of some such thing in his mind— suddenly spied a streak of smoke to windward.

" A cutter!" he shouted— and the crew forgot their mutiny.

I seized the moment.

"Station your stays," I shouted, and every man leapt to his post.

We slacked off our sheets and the Water witch ran out to sea " with a bone in her teeth." There was plenty of wind, thank goodness, but even so the cutter's hull soon appeared and she began to gain on us. She signalled us to heave to. For answer we piled on sail till the spars threatened to blow out of the ship, but despite all our efforts the cutter gained. I was nearly wild to think Pd been such a fool as to allow daylight to catch me in those waters. Presently the foresail blew off her, but I refused to take in any more sail. If we were going to be captured we'd have a run for our money.

All things must come to an end, and it looked as though we were done for when a miracle happened. We sighted a bank of fog rolling in to the land. It was a race then, and we just made it. We reached the fog, and the cutter faded away behind. Then we altered our course and never slacked sheet for ten hours.

When I thought the danger was past, I hove the ship to and called the crew aft.

"I've got evidence enough to hang the lot of you," I told them. "There's no doubt in my mind that you killed poor Waters. The words of the cook prove it."

"You're wrong, skipper," said the mulatto.

"T'was the mate," put in the cook, and the others cursed him for a yellow dog.

" Maybe it was," I said, "but you all had a hand init. And then there's mutiny. You all know what that means. Hang. or go to jail, it's all one to me. You'll do one or both if I give the word. But I'm willing to overlook everything on one condition. I killed the mate because he mutinied, and I should be cleared of blame in any court. But you know, and I know, the reasons why I don't want to go to court. It.wouldn't be healthy for any of us. So I'm going to enter in the log that the mate was knocked overboard by the main-boom. And my condition for keeping my own mouth shut and not logging the lot of you is that you keep yours shut, too. You can back up my statement about the mate

or you can tell the truth. Then I'll find occasion to say a few words myself. Take your choice."

They consulted among themselves.

"That's fair enough," said the mulatto, who was their spokesman. "Mum's the word."

"You've chose wisely," I said. " And now listen to me. The first man I suspect of mutiny in any form I'll shoot at sight. I'll have no double dealing aboard my ship."

That ended the trouble. We buried the mate a little later with a piece of pig iron tied to his feet and a double roll of four-ounce duck about his body. And when I thought of Billy Waters, one of the best men who ever walked a quarterdeck, I had no regrets.

"Life for life," I thought, and no court of justice could make it fairer.

We didn't attempt to land the little whisky we had left. It was a small lot, and as I suspected that part of the coast would be closely watched for awhile, I decided it would pay me and the owners if I made for port. So I did.

When I got back to St. Pierre I told Lafroise everything.

"You're well out of that," he said. " And you did the right thing. There would be little use in trying to prove anything against the crew in the case of poor Waters, even if we dared He's dead, anyhow, and the matter might as well rest there. There's one satisfaction— the man who killed him paid for it. As to the whisky left, we can let that go in with the next cargo. But what are you going to do about the crew?"

"I'll discharge the cook," I said. "He's yellow. And I'll sign on two good men cf my own choosing. With a cook in the fore- castle I can trust, and a mate I can rely on, there'll be little need to worry about the test of them."

"I don't think so either," said Lafroise. Then he took up a pen and wrote me out a cheque for my wages and commission on the trip.

And what the risks of the business hadn't done, that cheque did. The spirit of the thing entered inta my blood, and I 'knew that while there was such money to be made there would be one man at least ready to take the risks that go with it. I've been at the game ever since— and shall be till I'm caught, or sunk, or smuggling goes out of fashion.

———————————

2: Made To Order

Frank Condon

1882-1940

The Cavalier Oct 11, 1913

MR. TIMOTHY MULREAVY, the Fourteenth Street tailor, carefully poured a gallon of kerosene down the wooden cellar stairs, tossed a bushel of excelsior after the oil, and then lighted the match. He stood thus for an instant while the flame grew in his fingers.

Such is fate.

If Mulreavy's match had instantly flared into a broad flame this history would not be written, because he would have cast it into the oily excelsior and rushed from his shop, but in the instant it required for the bit of wood to glow a figure darkened the entrance to the shop and a deep voice inquired:

"What are you doing, Mulreavy?" The tailor blew out his instrument of arson and turned around.

"When you were born, Mr. Burke," he said, somewhat bitterly, "the stars ordained that you should everlastingly butt into critical events. I was about to burn down the building and grab off enough insurance money to buy bread for the wife and children."

"And you think you could get away with that baby trick?" the newcomer scoffed. "You're a simpleton. You belong to the wrong race for that kind of chicanery. Why are you burning down the shop?"

"Business is rotten. I can make more money selling bone collar buttons from a push-cart. It was either a case of commit suicide or burn up— and suicide is a sin."

Mr. Burke dropped into a chair and smiled.

"It's a lucky thing I happened in at this minute," he continued. "I've had you in mind all morning, and if I'd come two minutes later you would have spoiled my plans with your little bonfire. Did you know I've sold out the hand-book to a man from Speonk, Long Island?"

"I did not," Mulreavy growled.

"I have sold out completely. I am now free to engage in fresh enterprises. I have long believed that there is a bale of money to be made in this tailor business of yours, but not the way you're doing. You're behind the times, Mulreavy. The lads to-day want clothes that you don't sell. What this business needs is a strong injection of sulphate of brains, and that's why I've called in this morning."

"What are you talking about?" the tailor demanded.

"I'm saying that with your consent I'll come into this slowly petrifying business and bring it back to life. We'll make more money in a week than you do in a year; but you've got to do what I say. Your way is no good."

"What'll you do?" Mulreavy asked, with the first show of interest.

"Leave it to me," Burke replied. "Show me your books and tell me what stock you have on hand. Come along. We may as well start at once, because if we wait somebody else may grab this idea."

Then came a change in the appearance of Mulreavy's tailor-shop. The dusty style-cards disappeared from his windows and the dim sign over his door came down, to be replaced by a gorgeous electric affair.

Burke found a boy and dressed him in a suit of green livery. There appeared in the window a monster sign in gold letters announcing:

THIS STORE IS NOW UNDER A NEW MANAGEMENT.

Messrs. Burke & Mulreavy announce a new departure in the production of clothes for men. Come in and get your clothes from the firm that dresses America's greatest citizens. We make clothes for royal princes as well as bootblacks. Look at our uncalled-for suits. We have clothes made by New York's finest tailors for famous people who neglected to send for them. Perhaps one of these suits will fit you. Come in and see. Grand opening next Monday.

When Mulreavy arrived at the store on the day of the "grand opening " he found Burke before him, in animated conversation with a little man in a faded green suit.

"Good morning, Mr. Mulreavy," Burke greeted him. "I want you to meet Mr. McWhortle." Mulreavy shook hands with the little man.

"A funny thing happened," Burke went on, staring at Mr. McWhortle in admiration. "I was standing in the door a little while ago wondering whether to ship that suit to the Duke of Connaught or wait till he calls for it when I saw Mr. McWhortle coming across the street. I want you, Mr. Mulreavy, to take a good look at Mr. McWhortle. The minute he came within earshot I says to him:

"Good morning, Danny Maher, and whatever are you doing here in New York when only the other day I read that you'd won the royal palace stakes for the Emperor of Germany?" Naturally Mr. McWhortle looked at me in astonishment, because he ain't Danny Maher at all. But, Mulreavy, look at the resemblance? If Danny Maher's own mother came along this minute she'd be puzzled to know whether McWhortle is Maher or not."

"You do look like Danny, that's a fact," Mulreavy said, looking at McWhortle's stomach. "What is your business?"

"I'm the circular-knife man in a head-cheese factory," Mr. McWhortle answered in a light tenor voice.

"And he's come in here by just plain, every-day dog luck," Burke went on, "to get a suit of clothes. Some men certainly fall into good things. Mulreavy, go back there in the vault and bring out that brown suit we made for Tod Sloane— the one with the pearl buttons. No, you wait here and I'll get it."

"You'd 'a' made a great jockey," Mulreavy said to McWhortle while his partner went after the suit.

Burke returned, holding aloft the sartorial triumph.

"That," he said, waving the suit before Mr. McWhortle, "was built for Tod Sloane along lines personally suggested to him by the late King Edward. We agreed to make it for two hundred dollars, and we did, but the greatest jockey of modern times was forced to leave it behind him when he started for Europe and it is consequently on our hands, Mr. McWhortle. It'll fit you like the plaster on the wall, and we'll give it to you for eighty-five dollars."

The head-cheese man listened to the siren tongue of Mr. Burke, went home and drew his wife's money from the Bronx Mortgage and Loan Company, and that same afternoon he returned and took away the celebrated suit.

"There," Burke said to his partner, going over McWhortle's money to make certain of the count. "You see what I mean by putting new ideas into the business."

From the moment Mr. Burke became a partner the tailoring business picked up. For the most part, Mulreavy stood aghast and watched his partner make sales, and Mr. Burke, being full of entertaining conversation, was satisfied to do most of the work.

It was Burke's theory that some part of every human body bears a resemblance to some part of another human body, and that, for instance, the lowly street-car conductor on the Third Avenue line may in no other way remind you of Napoleon Bonaparte, but that he may have the exact droop of the shoulders made famous by the Corsican gentleman.

Furthermore, Mr. Burke understood the vanity that is in man, and played upon it with results.

The first day's sales amounted to one hundred and forty dollars. Mulreavy was tickled, but Burke regarded the record as a mere start. The second day the partners sold ten suits and dragged in three hundred. Then business dropped off for a few days.

On Friday morning a citizen appeared in search of a suit, and Burke greeted him with acclaim.

"I've got a suit here," he said, " that ought to please you right down to the ground. Get me the tape, Mulreavy. I want to measure this gentleman." Burke measured and called off the figures while his partner marked them down secretively. Then the two went to one side and held a conference, during which they shook their heads mysteriously. The stranger waited anxiously.

"It's a strange thing about you, mister," Burke finally explained. "You're somewhat of a physical marvel. Did you ever know it?"

"I did not," replied the customer.

" Well, sir," Burke continued, examining his measurements, "you have a wonderful figure. When I went over your shoulders I was at once struck by the unmistakable fact that you and Jim Corbett are exactly alike. But there the resemblance ends, Mr.—"

"Mulheiser," said the man.

"Coming down," continued Burke, "I find that you have Jeffries's stomach and Fitzsimmons's legs, while your neck and head are so much like Bat Nelson's that a microscope couldn't tell the difference. You're not a fighting man by any chance, are you, Mr. Mulheiser?"

"I'm in the retail-liquor business," the customer said, somewhat impressed. "What I want is a stylish suit, but not too loud."

"I wonder," continued Burke timidly, "whether you'd object to wearing a suit that was made for a colored man? Wait a minute before you say no. You see, we've got a remarkable gray-green suit of clothes, made by Heinrich, of Fifth Avenue, for Jack Johnson. Johnson is in Paris, and will not return to America for some time on account of certain matters, and we took the suit off Heinrich's hands.

"It may be that Johnson is just a trifle thicker through the chest than you are, Mr. Mulheiser, but remember that Jack Johnson never even saw this suit, so there's nothing wrong about your buying it. We'll let you have it for an even fifty, and if Johnson had bought it he would have paid a hundred and fifty. Want to look at it?"

"Sure!" said Mulheiser.

"Tim," Burke commanded, "go get that Jack Johnson special."

Half an hour later Mr. Mulheiser owned the gray-green suit and the Burke-Mulreavy firm had agreed to reduce the Johnsonian chest to Mulheiserian proportions.

In the course of time Burke's skill increased. He made it a practise to find out from a prospective customer what line of human endeavor most interested him.

If a man was a baseball fan, Burke found in him resemblances to the diamond stars shining most lustrously at the moment.

He returned one afternoon to find a customer escaping from the artless hands of Mulreavy. The young man was head clerk in a cigar-store, and from his pocket protruded a sporting extra.

"Sorry we couldn't please you," said Burke, taking off his hat. "Come in again some time. That was a great game Pittsburgh put up this morning."

"The Giants were off their stride," retorted the vanishing customer with some heat, because that morning the Pirates had wiped up the bosom of the earth with the prides of Gotham. "There ain't a team in either league can touch them when they're right. I'm tellin' you something. This old boy Matty is the greatest pitcher ever lived. Wait till you read the score to-night."

"Matty's a good pitcher," Burke smiled. "I know him well. Many's the suit we've made for him."

"You have?" exclaimed the prospect, with quickened interest.

"Got two suits waiting for him now. One of them he won't need. You're about his build, aren't you?"

"Oh, I don't know!" answered the flattered cigar clerk. "Matty's a pretty big fellow."

"So are you," replied Burke. "Let's see, just for fun. We've got Matty's measurements on our books."

It turned out as Burke expected. The young man not only had the same waist line as the great pitcher, but he also had Walter Johnson's chest, Ty Cobb's hips, and Frank Baker's arms.

He left the shop of Burke & Mulreavy in a most satisfied state of mind. Behind him was an order for two suits of clothes and a twenty-dollar deposit.

Another young man in the lime-and-cement business on Amsterdam Avenue bought a suit intended for John Drew. As Burke truthfully stated, Mr. Drew had not seen the suit.

"You may or may not know it," explained Mr. Burke, "but John Drew can never wear a suit that allows for the muscular droop of the shoulders. He's not developed through the shoulder muscles and you are. That's why he wouldn't take this suit, and that's what makes it a perfect fit for you. He wanted us to change the shoulders, and I assured him that it would ruin the style of the garment— and rather than do that I preferred to wait until the right man came along. You don't know how lucky you are."

A hapless citizen from Jersey City inadvertently stopped before the Burke-Mulreavy windows to tie a flying shoe-lace, and the book under his arm was the tip-off to the quick-witted Burke.

It was a book of music, and before the Jerseyite escaped he had purchased a snuff-colored fall suit that John Phillip Sousa had neglected to call for.

The citizen had never seen Sousa, but he made up his mind he would do so at the earliest opportunity, because he had never known before that he and Sousa were as alike as peas in the well-known pod.

But, in spite of Mr. Burke's increased skill and persuasiveness, there remained one particular suit of clothes in the shop that would not sell.

Burke had gone through the realm of sport, politics, religion, literature, and war, gathering his heroes as he went, plucking from the dead as well as the living, and still the suit remained in the shop.

It was not a beautiful suit. Black was its color, and some uncaged maniac in the tailor business had inserted a pink stripe that ran through the sober black without regard for regularity.

Burke realized that the selling of that suit would take time and ingenuity. He put it up as a mark to shoot at, realizing that if he could wish it upon some unfortunate New Yorker and get real money for it there was nothing made by man he could not sell.

It was a long time before he could even get a nibble at the pink-striped black, but eventually there came a thin man who looked as though he might be slightly feeble in the pilot-house. To him Burke displayed the horror, speaking his kindest words.

To begin with, the suit did not fit the thin stranger, nor did it come anywhere near fitting him. He was very tall and caved in about the middle, and his legs were rambling and with knobs where the knees should be.

"I don't know whether I can take a chance or not," Mr. Burke said, studying the customer and appearing to suffer mentally. "These athletes are so uncertain, and he might take it into his head to come here and demand it. Then where would I be?"

"I don't get you," said the thin person.

"I'm thinking of Jim Thorpe, the Indian athlete," Burke continued. "He's had a suit here for so long that he may have forgotten it, and, while it's the exact suit that will make you look good to your family, I don't know whether I can let you have it. You know Thorpe, of course— the chap who won the Pentathlon over in Sweden and turned in the greatest all- around athletic record ever made?"

"Everybody knows about him," the stranger agreed.

"You can't afford to offend a customer like that," continued Burke, "but I'm going to take a chance, be- cause it would be a shame to keep this suit away from you. You have the physique that needs this, suit to bring out the good points. Boy, get me Jim Thorpe's suit— the one we had made for him when he returned from Europe."

They brought out the pink-striped nightmare, and Burke waited to see the effect. The stranger looked at it without blinking, and Burke was encouraged.

"If Thorpe had only had your legs in the Olympic games there wouldn't have been any other prize winners," Burke said admiringly. With Mulreavy's assistance, he urged Mr. Jarvis— Mr. Oscar Jarvis, he said was his name— into the suit and with the aid of pins they gathered up the billows until there was the imitation of a fit.

That night Mulreavy worked overtime on the suit, and the next morning Mr. Jarvis called, put on the garments, paid for them, and walked out of the shop. Burke & Mulreavy sighed a glad sigh.

It is customary for one who has made a pleasing purchase to celebrate the event, and Mr. Jarvis steered a straight course for Third Avenue, turned to the south, and, after walking several blocks, he entered a hospitable door and called for a celebrant.

The cafe was crowded with rough men, who, as a rule, pay little attention to the garments of their fellow beings, but the strange object who entered attracted their notice at once.

There were a number of critical comments which escaped the ears of Mr. Jarvis, who stood at one end peacefully libating. Then a large truck- driver looked pointedly at the new suit and remarked to his companion:

"Some suit, hey?"

"It reminds me of something I saw that time I had the tremens," the other answered.

Mr. Jarvis glanced scathingly at the commentors.

"If you two bums only had an education," he said pleasantly, "you would know that this is a high-grade suit, and I may add that it was made for Jim Thorpe, the athlete."

From that point the conversational ball passed back and forth with rapidity.

Mr. Jarvis indulged in some sarcasm, and, not understanding sarcasm, the truck-driver tossed his beer lightly toward the new suit, provoking a howl of rage from its owner.

The rage was all right, but when Mr. Jarvis undertook to sink his right fist in the driver's stomach the situation changed.

The next five minutes were devoted to hasty callisthenics, and at the end of the activity Mr. Jarvis and suit were shot through the swinging doors with extreme force and landed across the sidewalk, with part of the Jarvis person in the gutter.

Mr. Jarvis was suffering from contusions, abrasions, and sundry pains, and the suit was damaged. A crowd of passers-by gathered about his prostrate figure and sympathized with him, and a tall, broad-shouldered man with

bronzed skin leaned over, took Jarvis by the shoulder, and lifted him to his feet.

Being still somewhat dazed, Mr. Jarvis tottered, and the powerful young man kindly placed him against a lamp-post. Then the rescuing citizen walked slowly away.

He was slight about the waist, but there was no mistaking the fact that he was a young Hercules, and, as Mr. Jarvis was scrawny and undeveloped, the man who picked him up was athletic and light on his feet.

"You know who that was, mister?" an impudent newsie inquired, poking his face under Mr. Jarvis's nose.

"No," Jarvis answered weakly. " Who was it? "

"Jim Thorpe," grinned the urchin. "The guy that plays with the Giants!"

3: The Green Hat

V. Omar Whitehead

fl 1919

Saucy Stories, May 1919

THE street was deserted save for the usual berated policeman, and a few amorous cats, which oblivious to all but "*l'amour*," made pledges and sang serenades in their fashion, even though draggled and cold from the fog which mantled all in a diaphanous but disagreeable cloak, through which the moon shone fitfully.

It was in that part of the city which belonged to the Bohemian element, and though eminently respectable to look at, was often the scene of boisterous hilarity; but now even the night hawk had long since wobbled his way home. The fog had put down a dampener against which even the spontaneous spirits of Bohemia could not prevail, and one might, at this hour, imagine that these houses were inhabited by the most sober of longhairs.

On the steps of a house rather more pretentious than its neighbors, two cats sang in melancholy unison, and nearby the policeman seeking what shelter he could find, enjoyed even their companionship, as compared to the deadly hush of the fog blanketed street. Without preface, the door of the house was suddenly flung open, and the cats with one dismal but most vociferous yowl sprang apart, and there followed a silence so profound that the policeman could hear the heavy breathing of the man who stood for a moment in the doorway; a red shaded lamp somewhere back in the interior, throwing his figure into a shadowy silhouette. Leaving the door slightly ajar the man ran swiftly but none too steadily down the steps and turned along the street away from the policeman. Used to such sights, the guardian of the peace watched the man disappear in the mist. And now that the entertaining cats had vanished, the hushed silence, which only a fog can produce, left him no other companionship than that of his own footfalls, so lie continued on his beat.

He had taken but a few steps when the stillness was broken by shrieks, the shrieks of a woman in terror, perhaps in mortal agony, a light in the house flashed on and off, and the screams died down, or as the policeman thought, were choked back, and again there was the peculiar quietness of the fog laden air.

The neighbors used to all kinds of noises, paid no attention, but the policeman, his professional acumen aroused, investigated.

THE following morning Brainerd Bennison was late down to breakfast, and his wife, a little dark-eyed woman, remarked with a suggestion of reproach in her voice, as she handed him the morning paper.

"You had to work late again on that old case last night. I might just as well be a doctor's wife, the little I see of you."

And Bennison snapped back, as a man will when trying to cover his own failings,

"Well, why didn't you marry Doctor Illington, he wanted you bad enough, and you still seem to enjoy his attentions."

After a moment's hesitation which Bennison did not notice, she said: "I think you are horrid, Brainerd. Ever since little Marie came I have seen less and less of you. It's no wonder I—"

"There, Aileen, I'm sorry, I'm upset this morning. I was thinking on my way home last night we would start in studying my cases together again," he propitiated, reaching over and patting her hand which rested on the table beside him.

"Oh, that would be lovely. Do you really mean it? Why what's the matter? You are hurting me, Brainerd!"

Looking down at him she saw beads of perspiration break out on his forehead, as gripping both newspaper and her hand he gazed fixedly at the bold headings which confronted him, and Aileen following his eyes read over his shoulder, "Attempted Murder Of Doris Dacre. Only Clue A Man's Green Hat."

"Why she is your client in the case you were working on last night, isn't she, Brainerd?"

"Yes— I— Good God!" he exclaimed, as he ran his hand back over his head. "It can't be true."

Aileen read aloud; "The Only Clue A Man's Green Hat!"

"You needn't read it aloud, I'm quite capable of reading for myself," Brainerd interrupted irritably, and added nervously. "I must get down to the office they— they may need me."

"But, Brainerd, you haven't eaten any breakfast."

"No, I can't eat any, either. You do not understand how— how this has upset me." He pushed her aside almost roughly as he went past her into the hall.

As he was putting on his coat Aileen opened the door to the hall, which he had closed.

"You are not going without kissing me, are you, dear?"

"Why, no, of course not," he replied, and kissing her somewhat hurriedly, he said,

"There, don't stand in the hall, it's cold," at the same time taking her by the arm he urged her back into the room and closed the door, making sure that it was latched; he turned to the hat rack, took down a hat and left.

Aileen, when she heard the door close, went to the window and looked out after him, then back to the hall where she glanced at the hat rack, and stood pondering a few moments; presently she gave her shoulders a little shake as if to throw off a burden, and went upstairs to little Marie.

Brainerd Bennison did not go to the office that day, but telephoned instead that he would be out of town. His partner, junior in age and action, surmising to the stenographer, remarked,

"Gone on a little detective work in the Dacre case, I expect. I shouldn't wonder if the attack on her was connected with the damage suit."

"Well, I dunno," disagreed the stenographer, who was perhaps a little older than the junior partner. "Maybe he has, but I've a sneaking idea he'd be studying the case at the hospital. Where is this damage suit I'd like to know ? I think it's a cam-u-flage. You know yourself there have been no papers, indeed nothing drawn up, except two chairs in his office. I don't believe there was ever anything damaged but her character and you can't damage what's already spoilt."

The junior partner drew himself up with the dignity which he supposed his position demanded.

"I think, Miss Goran, we are assuming too much. Will you please take this letter?"

And Miss Goran, because stenography was her living, her profession, if you please, said no more, at least not to the junior partner, but— she had many friends who found her quite entertaining as a raconteur.

Contrary to their imaginings, Brainerd Bennison had gone to the hills, where seated with his back to a rock, in a secluded spot some distance from the regular trail, he took out the newspaper and was again confronted by the glaring headlines that seemed to have been seared into his brain.

He read again: "Attempted Murder of Doris Dacre. Only Clue Man's Green Hat." With nerve tensed muscles he continued through the narration which followed.

"Doris Dacre, who won her way into the hearts of the multitude with her wonderful voice and most human portrayals, will never again delight the senses of her patrons and admirers. She was found stabbed, probably to death, and the only clue to her assassin thus far discoverable, is a man's green hat, which he most evidently forgot in his hurry to escape before her screams brought assistance; screams which the knife wound in her throat had suddenly shut off.

"Admired by all men and sought by many, she whose voice and personal charm have brought her many triumphs, is now lying at death's door in St. Bartholomew's Hospital. Unable to speak and according to the doctors never again likely to; though they are still hoping against hope that she will recover sufficiently to give the name of her cowardly assassin.

"Conjecture naturally points to jealousy as the cause; for a woman of her magnetic power, whose beautiful form and sparkling vitality have been the envy of women and the admiration of men, is sure to have lovers, and it is suggested that among them may be found the murderer. The ordinary stage Johnnies may easily be eliminated for they would never have the nerve nor the strength, which, according to the condition of the room and its contents, must have been used in the struggle.

"It might have been a jealous woman, for more than one married man has worshipped at her shrine, but the green hat is mute though convincing evidence to the contrary, and those who have seen Miss Dacre say that everything points to the fact that a man both physically and passionately strong committed the crime.

"The police are sure that it will be easy to trace the owner of the hat and are promising some startling developments before night.

"In an interview, Policeman Leary, who found Miss Dacre, deposed that he was attracted by her screams, and that a short time before hearing them he had seen a man leave her house, but had paid little attention to this.

" 'Them Bohemians have company at all times of the night,' he explained.

"He was unable to see what the man looked like, or to say if he wore a hat, it was too foggy to see. But, he volunteered, there had been one man calling pretty frequently of late, who wore a hat like the one found, whom he thought he could identify should he see him. He believed the man whom he saw leave the house had time to return before he heard the screams, and stated he had stumbled over the green hat as he entered the room where he found Miss Dacre, and upon seeing that she still breathed he had called an ambulance."

There were more details and some suppositions advanced, all of which Bennison read and re-read till his brain seemed dulled and every nerve tingled.

"Fool," he said to the surrounding hills. "Fool! to leave my hat."

Thrusting the newspaper in his inside pocket, he rose and walked off at a nervous speed, he did not know why nor where, only that he was climbing, that the physical exercise was what he needed to offset the turmoil of his brain.

As he walked his brain cleared, and he saw himself in a new light. He became his own denunciator. He tore his character to shreds. He had a vision of himself in court his life held up to public view, and winced.

Women always appealed to Bennison, especially if they gave him a little flattery, but he soon tired of them, he wanted variety, the excitement of the chase; still through every affair he had always loved his wife. No one could take her place.

Women, *et id genus omne*, stirred him, but being aesthetic in his taste, his *affaires d'amour* had been limited.

It was, he accused himself, his fear of public opinion which held him in check, for he had always managed to carry his amours to an exciting pitch, and, well, he had never gotten himself into trouble before.

His common sense had told him to keep away from actresses, but Doris Dacre had been irresistible, and last night had been the culmination. If only he had brought away his hat, no one need have known. Of course, they would find that she had cut her own throat; he had not thought she would do that. The doctors said she might not recover, he hoped she would not, then hated himself for the thought, giving, however, the sop to his conscience that it would be better than to ruin the happiness of his wife and baby.

He saw himself hung by circumstantial evidence; the tracing of the hat and the recognition by the policeman, convicting him.

One moment he was filled with self pity, the next he was blurting out self accusations. Fear of the consequences was followed by resolutions and promises that if he ever got out of this he would forever leave women alone.

He understood for the first time that the sanctity of the home depends as much on the man as on the woman.

Scared and contrite, in this hour he was sure that all women save his wife were anathema. He had walked over mountains and through gullies, paying little attention to where he was going, till tired mentally and physically, his thoughts turned to home and wife. She at least would not believe him guilty of murder. And of the other? If she knew, perhaps she would condone, forgive.

At home comfort awaited for both body and spirit; so like a wayward child who had run away from punishment, and found the terrors mentally conjured worse than the penalty he had fled, he turned back home willing to take the punishment, because he knew it would be tempered by love.

Avoiding frequented places, going by by-ways, he drew near his home. Desiring but fearing to hear what developments had evolved during the day he gave a wide berth to all places where such news might be heard.

As he drew nearer home his thoughts flew thick and fast, wavering between a resolve to make a clean breast of all his actions and relations

between Doris Dacre and himself, to a self-imposed view of the situation which pictured the suffering of his wife and child. He told himself it was for their sake he must avoid any disclosure, but knew it was himself of whom he was thinking.

Half a block from his house he saw the light from the front room glowing across the sidewalk, and knew his wife was waiting for him, that little Marie would be expecting some candy, and after giving him a big "yug" as she called it. would begin searching his pockets, a game they played when he reached home before she went to bed; which, of late, had not been often, he remembered.

For a moment he stood outside, and a wave of love surged through him, love for his home, his wife and child. The travail of his conscience and the rebirth of his love contending with his selfishness seemed as if it would tear him apart. A sob rose in his throat, of love or self pity, possibly of both, but he knew in that moment he loved his wife and child, that their love and respect was more to be desired than all the flatteries and passions of secret paramours.

Quietly he inserted the key in the door, and opened and closed it behind him. The hall was dimly lighted by one small globe set in the ceiling; its one object seemingly to make shadows rather than to give light.

He took off his hat, reached out to hang it on the rack and stopped mid-way, his eyes staring wildly. Was it an hallucination? His green hat hung there! Then they had found him. Gone now was his bravery, he would have run away only he thought detectives had seen him enter the house, and had surrounded it to prevent his escape, perhaps they were in the house. He looked into the shadows.

Trembling he reached out to see if the hat were real, and the nervous shaking of his hand dislodged something which fell with a loud clatter to the floor. He heard whispered words in the room, followed by a silence, then receding footsteps, and his ears attuned by fright, detected lighter ones as if tip-toeing, coming toward him; he distinctly heard the opening and closing of a door in the back of the house. Paralyzed he braced himself against the moment when he should feel the hand on his shoulder and hear a voice proclaim his arrest.

The door to the front room opened, he watched it fascinated, expecting he knew not what, and when his wife stood revealed in the flood of light, he blinkingly looked beyond her seeking that which his fear led him to expect. Conscious that his wife was talking nervously he let her lead him into the dining room, his eyes searching, his senses alert, he heard but did not sense her words. Seated at the table he took the evening paper which she held out to

him, while his eyes searched her face. Supersensitive, he read there that she knew, and because her eyes would not meet his own, supposed she was trying to keep it from him.

As she would have left him, he said in a voice that did not sound like his own.

"Wait, Aileen."

But the look on her face when she returned he could not interpret.

"It is useless," he said looking away and trying to control his voice, "for you to pretend," he paused and cleared his throat— had he been looking he would have seen Aileen grasp the door for support— "to pretend you do not know, it was my green hat which was found at Doris Dacre's. I saw that you suspected it this morning, and, of course, now that the police have brought it back—"

"Brought it back I Your hat?" Aileen stammered.

"Let me finish, dear. I have spent the day in retrospections and self criminations. I have not been as loyal to you as I expected you to be to me. I saw where I might be accused of murder, and it was the faith that you would believe in my innocence which brought me back."

He read relief in her face.

"And, Aileen, I want you to know that the events of the last twenty-four hours have brought me to my senses. I am going to be different, but it is no use my making promises. Will you take me back, at least on probation ?"

"Why, Brainerd I— I— Yes— I—"

She stuttered with a confusion for which at the time he could not account, but waiting no longer, he pushed his chair back so that it fell over, went quickly to her and took her in his arms.

Still ardourously clasping her, he asked, "When did they bring back my hat?" As she hesitated, he added, "I saw it in the hall, you know."

He felt Aileen turn cold in his arms, and saw her eyes grow round with fear.

"Come, dear." he encouraged, "I can stand the worst."

"They didn't bring it," Aileen whispered in a frightened voice. "It— is— was— " she hesitated, sparring for time. Then suddenly:

"You say you saw I suspected about the hat this morning. Well, when I read the paper and noticed you did not wear your green hat, and then later that it was not on the rack, I went out and—"

"Daddy! Daddy, you did come back! Now muwy it's my turn to be yugged." And Marie in her tiny blue pajamas pushed in between them, and clambered up till her soft arms were entwined around his neck.

The tears started from his eyes. There was nothing in all the world worth this, and he held her close to his heart.

"Yere 'at was a big yug," she declared in her baby talk and climbed down. "Now, where is my candy?" she asked.

He let her search for a while, enjoying the ramblings of her tiny hands. Impetuously he picked her up.

"Daddy," he said, "forgot all about your candy, Marie, so he'll have to put some money in your bank." And with much ceremony he deposited "a whole big nickel."

"Now, Marie, must go to bed like a good little girl," he enjoined, and glancing over at Aileen who still stood by the door white and immobile, he added: "poor muvvy's tired."

"Muvvy?" inquired Marie without warning, "Why did the man go 'ivout his pitty green hat?"

Brainerd shot a glance at his wife, who was leaning heavily on the door.

"What man, Marie?" he asked.

"Why, Doctor Illington, he went out the back door like this." She struggled from his arms and tiptoed out of the door looking back over her shoulder.

Brainerd did not look at his wife, instead he chased Marie crying:

"You rascal, run along to bed," and gave her a spank as she ran up the stairs.

Returning he found his wife still standing, but now in a defiant attitude. Ignoring the challenge in her eyes he clasped her in his arms and kissed her, then suddenly burst out laughing.

Aileen pulled away from him.

"I don't see anything to laugh at," she bristled.

He held her at arm's length and Smiled teasingly,

"Don't you? Well, I was thinking that now, it will be Illington who will have to worry about the loss of a green hat."

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4: Kiss of the Flame Blossom

Donald Dale

Mary Dale Buckner fl. 1937-1941

Terror Tales May-June 1938

MARGIE'S soft lips met mine in a sweet, virginal kiss of greeting. Her gentle, white hand patted an imaginary wrinkle from my coat lapel and stretched upward to push my hair back into place.

She was so tiny. As she tiptoed to reach my head, her round, little breasts thrust upward toward my racing heart, and the flowing blue sleeve fell back to reveal the fragrant hollow under her arm, I found myself wishing that sometime she would betray a hint of the same madness I felt raging in my blood; but I suspected, even while I wished, that if she did, I should somehow resent it. Yet I could not stifle the wish.

"Darling," I said, clenching my overeager hands behind me, "let's not wait any longer. Let's chuck the wedding plans and get married this afternoon!"

"Why, Roger"— a tender smile tugged at her red lips— "we can't do that. Besides, I have news."

"News?" I asked vaguely.

"Yes, Lida is coming. I think she will be here in time for the wedding."

"Lida?" Desire was still blurring my mind.

"Yes, Lida. You remember, my stepsister who has spent the last six years in the Orient. She's all the family I have left, you know. Isn't it marvelous for her to be coming at this time!"

"Yes, Yes, of course," I answered, coming out of the fog.

"And now, dear, I know you're tired. Make yourself comfortable and I'll fix something cool to drink.

So I sat in the charming living-room of Margie's ancestral house that hot day in early June and tried to quiet the blood that was pounding in my veins, while somewhere back in the kitchen, Margie set ice clinking in a crystal pitcher of lemonade and arranged homemade cookies on a Dresden plate.

No man ever loved a woman as I loved Margie Clark, the girl I was going to marry in three weeks. I worshipped her. She was so lovely, so unspoiled. There was much about love I could teach her.

A soft movement in the hall stirred me from my exciting anticipation. Abstractedly I looked up. In a flash, I was on my feet, then I started back in sudden surprise. In the hallway stood a strange woman, and her piercing, black eyes were boring straight into me. Neither of us spoke. I just stood there, and my gaze was held to hers if by some malignant magnetic force.

"Good-afternoon." She finally broke the silence with a charming, faintly foreign accent. "I am Lida. And you— Roger?"

Like a gauche country boy, I stared at her, unable to answer. I had often seen women more beautiful, but never one like this. Hot, violent similes whipped through my mind. A sleek, black serpent, I thought, my eyes following the subtle curves of her tall, unbelievably slender body. The daring cut of the black metallic satin sheath-dress revealed every nuance of her vibrant length. The pointed breasts, like restive, twin volcanoes. The supple waist my two hands could have spanned. The smooth flow of rounded thighs.

Again my eyes sought her burning, gold-flecked eyes, and then the glorious, unhatted crown of red hair. Dull red, like embers ready to burst into flame. And from the black shoulder of her dress, a single rich, red flower leaped upward as if in challenge to the smouldering glory ef her hair. Its heavy, insinuating perfume filled the room.

"Are you not going to invite me in?" she asked seftly, seeming to taunt me for my stupid daze.

SLEEP did not come easy that night.

I thought miserably back over the evening at Margie's. Nothing unusual had happened, really. The three of us had talked, Margie questioning Lida eagerly about the romance of the Orient. Lida giving veiled hints of a mysterious existence. Just a wilful, theatrical girl, I thought, trying to dramatize herself. And yet, I could not throw off the exotic spell the first sight of her had cast upon me.

I reviewed, too, the few things I knew of Lida Suban, who had incongruously been thrust into the same family with Margie by the marriage of Margie's gentle mother to Lida's dark, handsome father, Jhara Suban.

Lida, four or five years older than Margie, had been, even as a child, moody, restless, strange. Year by year, she seemed to become more intense, more secretive, more restive— and more than once had I suspected for Margie she felt only hatred and intense jealousy!

When Lida was eighteen, Jhara Suban died. It was then the arrogant girl found that, in her own right, she had nothing. That all these years she had been accepting the bounty of her step-mother. That night, she had disappeared from the house that had so long been home to her.

And now, Margie's mother was seven months dead, and the roving Lida was "home" again. The pretentious little moocher! I thought savagely. I could not bear the idea of having to try, after 'Margie and I married, to treat this interloper as a sister. For never had I seen a woman I hated so much— and desired so violently...

Hours later, I awoke with heavy, exciting fumes crowding my nostrils, and the sense of someone in the room. Jerking myself up in bed, I tried to pierce the almost tangible blackness of the room.

At my movement, there sprang up, near the center of the room, small glowing patches as if of fire. To my dazed mind, they had, at first no meaning. Then I saw the pattern!

A helmet of flaming hair. Two blazing eyes, burning holes in the darkness. A faint, glowing outline— as if traced swiftly by a luminous pencil— of a serpentine body.... And held like a torch in the phosphorescent suggestion of slender hands, a huge blossom of flame!

In a panic, I seized the cord of the night-lamp, keeping my eyes focussed on the apparition. By the sane glow of electricity, I saw standing before me— Lida Suban, her supple body covered from neck to toes with a long, red-velvet cape!

Once more I saw the tantalizing smile and heard the words which that afternoon had mocked my gaucherie: "Are you not going to invite me in?"

A tumult of emotions struggled within me. Resentment. Disgust. Passion. An inexplicable terror. "How did you get in here?" I heard my thickened voice ask as I rose to a sitting position.

The contemptuous upquirk of her scarlet lips mocked me, and for answer, she tucked the flame-flower into the red glory of her hair and loosed the gold clasp at her throat. The glowing velvet slipped, caressed the ivory-white length of her, until it sank into a swirl at her feet.

An ivory Aphrodite in a sea of flame! Never was a body more vibrant. I could feel its compelling power, like an electric current as she glided over and sat on the bed beside me. But, though the hot blood pounded in my veins, my heart still spoke of Margie and her clean, pure love. Sharp words of anger rose in my mind for this strange woman who had forced her way into my room, but my tongue could not utter them. She had stretched out her long, glowing hands to stroke my throat, as if exorcising the words of denial that rose there for expression.

I raised my eyes, looked into the queer unfathomable depths of hers, and slowly her gaze wove a net of mad passion around my mind, and thoughts of the worthier love were lost in a hopeless tangle of desire.

THE NEXT morning, by the time I had showered and shaved, I tried to persuade myself that no one had been in my rooms the night before. I had had a fantastic nightmare, induced by this strange, alluring woman.

In the first place, it was absurd— insulting— to believe that my fiancee's guest would do such a thing. Besides, there was no way she could have got in.

Stubbornly, I thrust back the remembrance that she had appeared in Margie's house also, seemingly without being admitted. This morning, certainly, when I had awakened, there had been no sign of her.

From the bedroom arose the usual, impudent mutterings of Pansy, the young colored maid, who came in to clean each morning. But suddenly something she was saying hit me like a blow: "Hit sho do smell funny in heah. Hit sho do."

With a queer catch in my heart, I stuck my head into the bedroom. The girl was right. There was a "funny" smell— the heavy, acrid odor of the flame-flower!

But something else had caught the sharp eyes now, and their plump owner was bending low, seeming to peer at an object that lay on the floor.

She plucked it up between dusky thumb and forefinger, and as she looked at it, her thick lips moved with wonder and foreboding. Becoming aware of my presence, she turned, saying, "Lawsy, Mistuh Roguh, I never seed anythin' like it!"

Then, hastily, she flipped into the air toward me, the thing that had fallen beside my bed. A musty, glowing petal of the scarlet flower!

The days that followed were torture. I worked frenziedly all day at the office. After that, I called on Margie, sometimes having dinner with her and her guest step-sister, sometimes taking them out to dine and dance.

At those times, there was nothing about Lida Suban to which anyone could object seriously. Exotic, but to all appearances normal in every respect—a quiet visitor whose only peculiarity was the strange, Oriental flower she always wore....

But the nights!

They were a confusion of hate and desire— agony and delirious joy. Every night she came to me— this woman of flame, as if wafted in on the pungent odor of that hellish flower. My new double door-lock was as nothing to her diabolic powers.

Not only was my conscience stricken with my infidelity to Margie, but, not able to shut out her step-sister or to detect the means of her coming, I began to lose control of my nerves. Fear of the supernatural was eating at my mind, at my healthy, scientific sanity. No longer able to bear it, one night I shrieked out my terrified queries to this devil woman. She answered only, "Supernatural? Nothing is supernatural. Nothing has to go beyond nature, for nature gave us all powers over our bodies and minds. It is only necessary to learn to realize them. I could teach you—"

"My God! All I ask is to be left alone!"

"Is that— all?"' And her white fingers touched me there in the dark. Her parted mouth pressed my restless head back upon the pillows....

Eons later, she spoke again. "Roger, I love you." I started at the sudden vibrancy of her voice. Never before had I seen her like this. There was something touching, now, in her simplicity— in her seeming sincerity that lacked all touch of the exotic.

She went on, with grave, appealing dignity. "You have remotivated my whole life. I came back here to get the money of this 'good little sister' of mine, whom my father— everybody— loved better than me. I was to be next in heritage so long as Margie remained single. I determined she should never live to be married. When I found out about you, my first thought was to prevent the marriage until I could have time to carry out my plans. But when I saw you, I knew you were meant for me. Let me teach you how to live." For a moment, I felt a sort of pity for her; but in the next breath, all her wistfulness was gone. "Because I love you, it is possible for you to save her. But *if you marry her*..."

As her voice trailed off into silence, the spell her words had cast over me was broken. I pushed her away, sprang from the bed, and began to pace the floor. "Absurd! Stupid threats!' I raged. "You couldn't—"

My protest died, for suddenly she was no longer there. Only the echo of her parting ultimatum hung in the heavy air of the room:

"The choice is yours!"

I TRIED to pretend it was for my fiancee's safety that I opened my arms to passion each night. I told myself, if I refuse this woman's love, she will harm Margie. Yet I don't know even now how much was truth and how much just a rationalization of a primal urge I could not control.

But I do know when I was away from Lida, or when the three of us were together, I hated her enough to beat her cruel brains out. I tried desperately to think of ways to circumvent her. But this was not the kind of thing you take to the police for help, or to your friends for advice.

I began to show signs of the strain. And Margie dosed me with medicines and with diets. "You'll be better," she whispered shyly, her gentle hand stroking my feverish head, "when I can take care of you properly. And it's only six more days now."

Six more days!

In my mind, I heard the echo of Lida's threat: "If you marry her—!" Yet I, too, decided that I should be glad when it was all over. Surely Lida was bluffing. Perhaps after I was married she would go away and leave Margie and me to our happiness. Though I had acceded to Margie's wish that we live in her own

beautiful home, I knew one thing: When I became master of the house, I would demand that Lida leave.

With that decision, my mind began to feel easier. And I took that very afternoon off, and Margie and I went to the marriage clerk to get a license. This definite move would stop Lida's melodramatic, mysterious threats. But how inadequately had I plumbed the depths of her malignity and power!

When we came back from out happy errand, Lida lay languidly on the livingroom divan. She wore scarlet satin in the artfully-cut sheath model she always affected. Its sheen highlighted every sinuous curve of her long body. Involuntarily, remembrance sprang up in me of holding her close in my arms, measuring her height against mine. The inescapable red blossom drooped between the pyramids of her upthrust breasts.

"Oh, Lida darling," Margie trilled in her sweet, confiding way; "look, we've got the license. It won't be long now!"

"No!" Lida's burning echo vibrated in the air. "It will not be long now."

Margie said, "I'm going to mix some drinks. We're going to celebrate!" And started for the kitchen.

A strange, premonitory fear held me speechless. Lida curved into a sitting position. Looked around her as if trying to hit upon an object that would suit some predetermined purpose. Just at that moMargie's huge, white Persian cat, probably having heard his mistress's return, came from the bedroom and started toward the kitchen, edging away, as he invariably did, from Lida and eyeing her with spitting hatred.

The instant Lida saw the animal, she leaped to her feet and stepped swiftly toward it. The beautiful pet forgot his intended visit to his mistress. Great back humped in fear and hatred, and green eyes glued to the strange flower on Lida's bosom, the cat crept toward her, stealthily, as if stalking an enemy, while I looked on, bound to inaction by my own weird thoughts. Suddenly, with an almost human shriek of rage, the big feline catapulted through the air, baring teeth as murderous as those of its jungle ancestors.

Hypnotized by horror, I watched the incredible drama that followed. For a century-long moment, Lida was a flamered statue, moved not a muscle until the cat was in mid-air. Then she whipped her white hands outward. As they swept above the flying white fury, a burst of flame filled the room. In a split second, it was gone— as if it had never been. Only my brain retained the memory of the red blossom flaming like a torch in the white valley between the pointed breasts.

On the floor lay the beautiful, white beast. Not willing to believe my senses, I crept closer, held in the grip of incredulous terror. Gently I touched the limp body with my foot, knowing already the truth.

Margie's pet was dead!

The beautiful animal sprawled like a cast-off tag on the polished floor, its oncesilken belly turned upward. I stooped, closer and still closer, staring and sniffing. God! I was not mistaken!

The white fur was a blackened crisp, and the poor beast's belly cratered with gaping, raw holes. The air was filled with the smell of brimstone and burning flesh!

With deadly quietness, Lida Suban spoke: "I can do the same to her. The choice is yours!"

DURING the days that followed, Margie was so distressed about my increasing bad health that she never probed my lame explanations about the sudden death of her well-loved pet. I will admit that she was justified in her concern about the state of my nerves. I was at the breaking point.

I knew one thing only. I must not marry Margie, for I was convinced now of Lida's malignant power. What it was, where it came from, I did not know. I only knew it was fatal— and hideous.

I tried to use my extreme bad state of health as an excuse to postpone the wedding. But for my fiancée, my illness was only a more urgent reason for immediate marriage. Thwarted in that argument, I urged, with the purpose of escaping Lida, a long wedding trip. But Margie contended that I was not well enough to undertake it.

I learned the tyranny of gentleness....

My wedding was like a hellish dream. The stately chords of the wedding march were a dirge— a funeral dirge for my bride. I was hardly aware of her, so sweetly virginal, coming down the aisle to meet me, for my feverish eyes were pinned to her demoniac maid-of-honor— long, serpentine body sheathed obscenely in white satin, mysterious eyes shadowed by a drooping, scarlet brim, pale hands clasping the malevolent flame-flower.

The unbearable strain of waiting from moment to moment for her to strike! When would the fatal blow come? What satanic form would it take?

"Wilt thou, Roger, take this woman...?"

"I will.' I heard my own voice pronounce Margie's death-sentence.

But nothing happened!... The neverending reception. Nothing.... The intolerable wedding-dinner! Still nothing. ... The evening— and at last, Lida Suban retired to the guest room and my bride and I were alone.

It was not the sort of wedding night a man could have wished. I knew it was not what Margie had dreamed of, during our lovely engagement days. But everything was excused on account of my "health."

"I'm glad all the formalities are over," Margie said, looking tenderly at my drawn face and nervous hands. "My first duty— and pleasure— is to help you get well."

When I lay beside her in the darkness. I clasped her tightly as if mortally afraid of losing her and, laying my head upon her breast, I broke into sobs.

She shielded me in her soft arms, as a mother does a sick child. With little, tender sounds of love and soft, gentle caresses, she soothed me. As the minutes went by, I felt all hurt, all strain of the awful preceding days go out of me, as if by magic. Memory of that woman sleeping in our guest room faded. The hovering, intangible menace drifted away on a tide of love....

My honeymoon began.

"Margie! Margie!"

A VOICE calling my bride waked me from a deep, sweet sleep. At the same instant, Margie, too, was awake. "It's Lida," she whispered; "I wonder what—" She sprang out of bed and started for the door, from beyond which the voice seemed to come.

But, suddenly, Lida stood in the room, as if wafted in on the eddy of sweet, poisonous fumes that drugged the air. The evil flower that hung between her 'breasts lighted her figure like a torch.

Folds of diaphanous, flame-red chiffon billowed about her, revealing her undulant body. She was unearthly— like some heathen goddess of fire. Incandescent, as if alight with an inner flame. She took one swift, gliding step toward Margie.

With a shriek of terror, Margie retreated. The tableau of these two women became an unbreakable fetter, binding me. The tall, menacing woman of flame. My ivory madonna, veiled only by her sheer, white nightgown.

Another tiger-soft stride. Helplessly, I looked on. The red chiffon draperies burst into an aura of living flame. The long, slender arm made a sweeping gesture and Margie's gown hung from her in charred rags.

My wife's agonized scream released me, like a taut spring, and I hurled myself from the bed and toward the living flames. But instantly, her left hand whipped through the air in front of me, and I was thrown back by a blast of scorching wind, held helpless by a wall of roaring heat.

With ghastly, macabre humor, the Flame Goddess toyed with my loved one. First, the hellish hand swept above my bride's head, and the golden curls fell to the floor. Then, she let the blaze play— gently—upon the softly-rounding breasts and, with a cruel sweep, down the curving length of the ivory body.

Margie's screams were almost inhuman now, and I had got beyond making a sound. I had no reason, but plunged, idiotically, over and over, against the unseen barrier that held me.

Gradually, hopelessness laid its heavy hand on me, and out of the calm of despair came a glimmer of reason. The flower, the blossom that blazed so evilly upon the softly-glowing bosom of this she-devil! Did the secret of her power lie in it?

I abandoned my futile plunging against the singeing wall she had with a gesture thrown up in front of me, and began to make a'stealthy circle about the death struggle of these two women. I heard my crazed laughter break out into the room as I pictured myself, a hard-headed, young, American business-man, creeping cautiously around my own bridal chamber trying to outmaneuver an imaginary wall of wind!

But I could not get through! For as I circled, so did the cruel heat-wall. At no point could I penetrate it.

With diabolic cunning, the Flame-demon continued to play her deadly game with my bride. She swept a crisp trail down the lovely curve of back. Left a scorched girdle around the fragile waist.

Fierce anger rose in me. Somehow I must stop this. I looked wildly around me, agony sharpening my wits. Suddenly I had it!

I sprang to the dressing table, seized a huge, cut-glass atomizer. Stepping back to give myself arm-room, I hurled it into the heavy French mirror. The glass shattered into a thousand pieces.

Wildly I surveyed the wreckage. Snatched a razor-sharp lance of it. The natural, earthly feel of it cut cruelly into my tight-gripping palm reassured me.

I knew I had to be careful, or I would strike Margie. I realized, too, that my interference might cause anything. Would we all go up in a sudden burst of unearthly flame? Would the she-devil, with one last violent manifestation, destroy Margie completely?

The answer had no bearing. I knew only that anything was better than this cat-and-mouse game of fire, so cunningly played. Death, annihilation— anything!— would be welcome.

It was not courage that urged me on— it was wild unreasoning terror. I could see the game was almost over. Lida was tiring of her sport, and Margie was swaying on her feet, on the verge of collapse. Her screams of agony had died away into the soft and unintelligible whimperings of a hurt child and it was only the primitive instincts of a wounded animal that kept her trying to avoid the torturing darts of fire. I made a last tormented effort to break through the blasting wall of heat... but I could not do it. My legs crumpled under me and I fell heavily to the floor. For a moment Lida paused in her

torture-game and turned to me with a look that embraced all the evil and malice in this world. It was that glance of concentrated venom that somehow gave me the strength to struggle unsteadily back to my feet. Lida turned away from me contemptuously and slowly raised her arm to loose the withering blast that would mean the end of hope and life for my beloved.

I knew that I could wait no longer— and I must not miss. Lida was taking her time, enjoying to the fullest the pain she was inflicting. As her fingertips were almost in a line with Margie's horrorglazed eyes, I suddenly drew back my arm and, before the Flame-thing could realize my intention, I sent my glass cutlass whizzing through the air— straight at the hellish blossom!

It fell to the littered floor.

THE SUDDENNESS of the result was almost too much for me. The conflagration was turned off as if by magic. The wall of wind was gone. Margie slumped to the floor, a pitiful heap of scorched skin and blackened wisps of cloth.

Lida was no longer a flaming goddess, but a violent, dangerous, disheveled woman at bay. She turned toward me, a look of demonaic hate lashing from her queer, golden eyes. Fear contorted her features.

As I lunged toward her, she whirled, and stooped to snatch wildly at the broken flower at her feet. Suddenly, with an unreasoning flash, I knew what I must do.

I hurled my body through the air, stiff-arming her in my plunge. She was thrown against the wall, but like an angry tigress, she was at me again. But not before I had the red-hot flame-blossom in my bleeding hands.

Fiercely I rent its flaming petals, tore out its demoniac heart. With one hell-ridden scream, the woman dropped to the floor.

Like a man aroused from a nightmare, I looked down at her. Stooped, and laid my hand upon her heart.

Lida Suban was dead.

MARGIE'S golden hair is growing out again and is now an unruly mop of little-girl curls. The burns on her body, with the excellent medical care they had had, are nearly all gone.

As for me, from my horrible experiences with Lida Suban, I have developed an interesting hobby— the study of pyrotechnics and pyro-chemistry, for I have determined to preserve my own peace of mind by working out a natural solution for every manifestation of Lida's seemingly supernatural power.

I accept Lida's boast: "Nothing is supernatural. Nature gave us all powers. All we have to do is to realize them." And from it, I have worked my way, honestly, through the maze of horrible memories.

Lida knew much of the so-called sorcery of the Orient. The luminescence of her body when she appeared in my room and the weird, fiery manifestations on my horrible wedding night are not much more remarkable than many pyrochemical tricks used by "magicians" the world over. As for the flower, a well-known botanist, upon examination of its tattered remnants, pronounced it a giant *dicentra*, native to most of East India. There was nothing unusual about it.

But Lida had appeared in locked rooms, with no reasonable means of ingress; the cat died at a gesture from her evil hands; she herself fell dead when I destroyed her flower. I am determined not to push these inexplicable facts back to fester in some dark corner of my subconscious. So I continue my study.

And in the meantime, I am the happiest man in the world. I have the perfect wife.

5: A Good Old Scout

Theodore Seixas Solomons

fl. 1920-30s

Popular Magazine, Sept 1927

It is possible, even likely, that author Theodore Seixas Solomons is the same man who was an explorer and an early member of the Sierra Club. But the Wikipedia entry for the explorer (1870-1947) makes no mention of his writing fiction. (Then again, it makes no mention of his activities after his explorations concluded in 1897.)

"IT'S a land a-flowin' with milk and money," quoted old "Nock" Whipple, in a high and hopeful voice, "jest as the Good Book says. Only the conditions is different. You got ter stew down the berries to git the honey— and it's some puckery. Fer the milk— why, jest catch a caribou or a cow moose."

He turned his gaunt frame on his elbow to laugh, his gray-bearded head and hollow neck emerging from the dingy blankets of his bed on the bough-strewn floor of the tent. His merriment ended in a fit of coughing.

"Get back under there, old scout!" admonished McAdams severely, striding to him and giving the blankets a jerk into place. "And shut up. You talk too much!" He shoved a stick or two of wood into the battered sheet-iron stove—a fortunate pick-up of the afternoon before, relic of a winter camp of earlier prospecting days.

"Don't be so harsh to him, Aleck," said a third man reprovingly. He was sitting in the corner, hunched over a diary or memorandum book of some sort, in which he was industriously writing.

"Aw, I know how to handle the old guy," returned McAdams good-naturedly, as he slipped through the tent flap, bent on cutting stove wood for the night.

The prospect without was a dreary one. The pleasant, spring-like summer of the Far North had ended weeks before, and: the fall, brief precursor of the long and hard, white time, had already painted the few deciduous shrubs into danger signals, giving to the dun landscape of the arctic highland that little warmth of color the year knew.

Rock and moss filled the near vistas of the landscape, its stream valleys of low relief and intricate contours marked by pencilings of fringing willows, with a hint, southward, of spruce forests where hazy patches of the hue of faded indigo revealed the lower reaches of the Porcupine, most northern tributary of the mighty Yukon.

The three had been out all summer on a prospecting trip through that far, unmapped region of Alaska— Enoch Whipple, pioneer Montanan, pioneer

Alaskan, leading on the last of his once stout legs; Aleck McAdams, for some years his friend and occasional companion; and Mr. Alfred Lawrence Turner, a thirty-year-old mining engineer, rather down on his luck. It was a scoured watershed country— eroding to a new "base level," as Turner put it, with little of the older gravels left. But old Nock Whipple had told them as much, though, in different language. What hadn't been washed away, old pals had said, was sometimes gold bearing. A "pockety" country, hard to get to, and the pockets too rare to tempt any but bold men desperate for a grubstake. Outside of the tent lay two pack saddles, canvas bags, a few prospecting tools. On the bare slope of the stream valley, two old mules, that had been sleek enough some months before, but were now skin-covered skeletons, browsed philosophically on frost-dried herbage.

McAdams browsed for dead willow sticks in drift litter under the banks of the creek. From the tent, hastily pitched the afternoon before, when Enoch Whipple's legs had succumbed to the weakness of fever, came the droning sound of the old scout's voice, high, almost senile, as he "knocked" the country to which he had gone, years before, yet too late in life for a chance to win— and probably lose again— another fortune in the West and Northwest. McAdams, between his cracking of sticks, listened with a quizzical smile, to the old man's ravings.

"Yes, she's a land o' gold, all right, Alfred. Klondike, Forty-mile, Nome, Fairbanks, Iditarod. Fortunes made. Millions of 'em. Well, anyhow, a dozen or two. Natcherly, a few of us didn't get nothin'— leastways a million or two of us didn't. The hull country was covered with gold, the papers said, when the old Klondike strike was boomin'— covered with gold like a old carpet with dust, they told us.

"I 'member a feller camped' near us at Split-up Island at the mouth of the Stewart. He was playin' a lone hand. Had a big awk'erd skiff loaded with s'plies— funniest junk you ever see. Hunnerd and five different articles o' grub, he told us. One I 'member was manioca— somethin' like that. Kinder cousin to tapioca, he says. Build yer up. Great stuff. He was a big, six-foot counterjumper from Kansas City or some'eres. Growed a beard to look like a sure-enough Western man. An' every day while we was all splittin' up, this guy— they called him Willie— would set up a little lookin'-glass against a tree and comb out his whiskers and slick up his long, wavy, brown hair.

"One mornin' he 'pears on the river bank with a pack sack on his shoulders, loaded down with bacon an' manioca and sich. He was startin' to locate his claim. Where was he goin', with the Klondike a hunnerd miles off yet? 'Why,' says he, 'I'm a-goin' up some creek anywheres,' says he, 'before we gets too close to Dawson where the crowd must 'a' staked everything. I'm a-goin' ter

locate me a reg'lar claim. I'll take out enough for to git me home and show the folks the gold, and then I'm a bringin' in some of 'em— mother, mebbe, too— and we'll work her out, and back to old Kansas City,' he says, just like that!"

Old Whipple turned on his elbow for another laugh—and a coughing spell.

"Keep under your blankets, Whipple," admonished Turner, merely pausing a moment in his note-making. "And don't laugh like that, my good man. Bad for you and nerve-racking to me."

"Just like that," repeated old Whipple, when he got his breath. "As easy as fallin' off a lawg. Whole country was covered with gold. All you had to do was find a piece of it without stakes on—and that was easy, in spite o' fifty thousand stampeders. What did they amount to in a hunnerd and fifty thousand million acres o' wilderness, hey? Say, this Willie was one of the guys that used to sing, 'The Klondike Vale Tonight.' Must 'a' heered it on a boat comin' up to Skag-a-way. Had a string thing like a banjo or somethin'. Fine voice Willie had, too. An' he'd bawl her out in the evenin' from his skiff moored to the bank. When the rag chewers was through sawin' their stoves in two, and gittin' ready to sleep to git new strength for quarrelin' afresh in the mornin', Willie would sing it mournful—fer he sure believed the words:

"In fur-away Alaska, whare the Yukon River flows,
An' the mighty boulders stand 'mid wealth and might,
In a land o' wealth untold, in a grave that's decked with g-o-l-d,
He's sleepin' i' th' Klondike Vale tonight!"

Flushed, his faded, blue eyes shining in the deep sockets, old Whipple's laughter sounded again, like mirthless echoes in an empty cavern.

"In a grave that's decked with gold!' Never be my luck, live or dead!"

"Shut up, Nock!" McAdams-appeared with an armful of slender, twisted sticks. "Get yourself all het up, ye old fool!"

"No use abusing the old fellow," remarked Turner. He had put the diary aside and was perusing a small pocket volume of something. "Delirium, I suppose," he added in a lower voice. "Let him die in peace!"

"Aw," McAdams muttered; "he's all right. Tuckered out, tha's all." In a louder voice: "Lay still, old: scout, will yer? They ain't much grub left, and durn little game away up here. How we gonna get yer down to the Yukon 'less you rest up so we kin start again in a day or two? Cut out the gab!"

"Gosh; but you're a rough devil, McAdams!" exclaimed Turner petulantly. "Let him die in peace, can't you?"

"He'll hear yer you durn fool!"

Turner scowled. Comrades though they were, and in a desperate plight, he disliked the unwonted familiarity of the uncouth man more than he objected to the slur.

"He won't. He's only hearing his own maudlin talk. Man, you've got no heart, no sentiment!"

"Sentiment? What's that?"

Turner shrugged.

"What you— haven't got. Let him alone. Don't nag him. It's just a question of hours."

"I'm tryin' to buck him up, tha's all. Got to get him outer here purty soon. Reckon we kin stick him on one mule by bunching what's left of the outfit an' crowdin' it on the other one."

"Impossible," decided Turner, frowning. "We'll simply do what we can for him till he— passes. Please speak to him kindly." He turned again to his handy volume of the classics.

McAdams seized a small-caliber rifle and went after ptarmigan, a sparse few of which they had seen the day before in the bush-like willows of the divide. Their plight for food was desperate. A bird or two would make soup for the old man.

But Enoch Whipple was nearly beyond all help from food when the middle-aged, "unsentimental" McAdams returned belatedly, the early dark of the northern fall upon them. A couple of birds— already turning white to meet the coming winter— were slung over the barrel of his gun. Old Whipple was raving.

"Don't none o' you guys think this old Injun tracker was slow in gittin' to the strikes up here?" he shouted to the solemn-faced engineer. "I was gen'rally before the first stakin's was done. And, gentlemen, I allus pulled a blank. Nome? Say, in Nome, the gold was all around me, first on the beach and then out on old Dexter— a fraction, that was, All around me, boys— an' mine, 'both of 'em, didn't have a color!"

He seemed to doze for a while; but when McAdams roused him to take the ptarmigan broth, he glared crazily into the battered tin bowl and wagged his head refusingly.

"Looks yaller," he muttered. "B'iled-up gold, I reckon. Not fer me. I git mine in a pan or a sluice box. That ain't nothin' but tundra water. Yaller, All over Alaska. Some folks think it's gold— dissolved out by the grass roots. Gold at the grass roots! That's it. That's what they promised us when we come North. '*Land o' wealth untold— grave that's decked with gold—*' "

It was impossible to quiet him. Turner's dignified gentleness, when old Whipple's ravings disturbed his reading, was as unavailing as McAdams' rough admonishings, which turned, finally, into severity. "Shut up and go to sleep,

you!" It was the only way he knew of impressing the wandering mind of the old frontiersman, but it was inexpressibly shocking to Alfred Turner, of finer mold. He glared at McAdams balefully. McAdams only laughed.

"Always been knockin' the country, sence I've known him," he remarked to the engineer, as they sprawled on their blankets, a single fluttering candle between them. "Baptized Enoch, he was; and you kin figger what a grand chance that name gave the boys up here to nickname him. They jest left off the 'e,' that's all. Oh, well, everybody knocks things and places when the luck is all agin' 'em. But old Whipple's always had it wuss than anybody I ever seen up here. Hey there!" he bawled, when the sick man began singing again. "I'll tie you down, you old rascal, if you don't lay quiet!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Mac," protested Turner hotly. "It doesn't do any good. Let him die happy!"

"Does do good," insisted McAdams. "Slinks down, more or less, whenever I holler at him. You got a easy way of killin' him off. Why ain't he got a chance? Fever's passin', mebbe. He's a tough old bird. Keep him quiet, I say!"

But neither Turner's melancholy advice to the passing one not the gruff-voiced commands of McAdams availed to stay the torrent of delirium. Only death stilled the weakly raucous voice. And his last words came in a kind of gasping chant, in high, thin falsetto:

"*In a grave that's decked with g-o-l-d,*
He's sleeping i-n the Klondike Vale to-night!"

Turner made considerable ado over laying out old Whipple in seemly guise, fussing about in the tent; while Alack McAdams took upon himself the grilling task of digging a grave in the hard and rocky soil. The late night was a poor time, and the man was tired. But the two had agreed that an early get-away from that inhospitable barren land was imperative, and McAdams groped about for a nook that offered soil enough for a proper grave, deep beyond the fierce pawings of slinking creatures of the wild. In an angle of the creek bed, yet higher than the marks of the spring freshets, .he found such a place, and with a light pick and short-handled shovel, McAdams went doggedly to work.

When he re-entered the tent, admitting thereto a first faint light of dawn, he found his remaining companion smoothing off a flatted slab of wood.

"For an epitaph for the poor old fellow," explained Turner, fumbling in his coat for his fountain pen.

"I know," nodded McAdams, mopping his face with a grimy bandanna handkerchief. "In a grave that's decked with gold, he's sleepin' in the Klondike Vale to-night! Fine!"

Turner gave a grunt of disgust.

"Doggerel. The word 'wealth,' if you quote the whole verse, is repeated: twice. I suppose in the correct version it isn't, but it's rotten poetry to stick up on a grave, even in the wilderness."

McAdams looked wistfully at the slab.

"Still," he urged, "it was the old man's fav'rite joke— knockin' the gold up here. And that ridic'lous 'grave that's decked with gold— he allus split his sides laughin' at that. Old man was some joker in his time, too. I been with him off and on a number of years."

"Death and graves are solemn matters, McAdams," replied Turner pettishly. "As I've had occasion to remark before. Mac, you've simply got no sentiment. The man was your friend. We'll give him what decent burial we can, and mark his last resting place with something a little more fitting in the way of verse than that maudlin dance-hall stuff!"

"What'll it be?" asked McAdams, abashed.

"I had thought of an epitaph, or a verse, rather, from the tomb of the immortal bard, Shakespeare. It's a bit highbrow, perhaps, for poor old Whipple. It may protect the mound, though. Even you old sour doughs are sometimes superstitious."

McAdams leaned down, his hard hands resting on his clay-slippery overalls, and watched Turner as he printed slowly, beneath the name and date, the words:

Good friend, for Jesus' sake, forbear
To dig the dust inclosed here;
Blest be the man that spares these stones,
And cursed be he that moves my bones.

"It aint' the kind o' langwage old Nock Whipple savvied," commented McAdams soberly. "But I get the idee."

He extinguished the candle with his heavy palm— thriftily.

"Now give me a hand, here—"

By the time McAdams had shoveled back all the gravel and smoothed the oval surface, Turner had ornately rounded the wooden slab and pointed its end. A few strokes with the back of the shovel and the little monument was driven to its place at the head of the grave underneath the high bank. Alfred Lawrence Turner murmured a brief prayer and dropped a silent tear.

It was barely light when they made up the packs, and McAdams brought in the shivering mules and saddled them. The four companions trudged, single file, down the meandering stream bed, where five had come.

Turner clapped his hand to the breast pocket of his coat.

"Wait, Mac! I must have left my fountain pen where the tent was. I'll go back after it."

"Take you half an hour," demurred McAdams, squinting at the rising sun. "We got some job getting outer this part of the world— on half rations."

"Got to have the pen, you know!" Turner walked briskly away.

The little black tube was nowhere to be found among the tramped boughs that marked the site of the tent. Suddenly Turner remembered that he had used the pen last in making a decorative box around the epitaph. At the grave he found the pen— and also something else. The risen sun drew glintings from the fresh-turned gravel. He was amazed. He dug about with his fingers. A little nugget; a larger one; specks of fine gold and coarse. He ran down the creek and found an impatient McAdams feeding choice bits of bunch grass to the gaunt mules.

"Most wonderful thing! Where we camped last night—"

"Well, by heck! what d'ye know about that?" exclaimed McAdams, when the mining engineer had told him. The "pardner" of unlucky Enoch Whipple forgot about half rations, for the time being, and turned the mules back. In ten minutes the two prospectors were sizing up the vicinity of the last resting place of the old Montana scout.

The result, was amazing— and disappointing. McAdams, in the dark, had come upon the only deposit of gravel. It was a pothole shielded by the angular, overhanging rim rock of the creek channel from the denuding forces of erosion that elsewhere had swept the highlands clean of all its old deposits. It had been known as a "pockety" country, as old Whipple had told them. Hereabouts there was one pocket. All that was mortal of Enoch Whipple rested there. The mining engineer and the old sour dough returned to the gold-flecked grave.

Alfred Lawrence Turner's mouth twitched. He lit one of the last of his cigarettes.

"We won't find as easy a place for a— new grave," he remarked: thoughtfully. "But we'll not need' a new one. After we've washed the gravel— cleaned out this pothole completely— why, we can reinter the body and cover it with the tailings. Make it look just as it did—"

McAdams gasped.

"What d'yer mean? Dig him up again? You're joking!"

Turner laughed uncomfortably.

"Of course, if it had been lighter, we'd have seen that this was pay dirt. And naturally we'd have washed it out. Just because it was too dark to see—"

"But we buried him!" exclaimed Aleck McAdams, "This ain't no placer dump. This is a grave. Grave of my old pal. What the devil are we? Body snatchers? Ghouls?"

"I'd hardly thought it of you!" Turner replied, reddening. "About as unsentimental a devil as I ever saw."

"Yeah, you told me I ain't got no sentiment. What have *you* got?"

Turner frowned and bit his lip.

"There's a difference between sentiment and sentimentality. The former—sentiment—is a mighty good thing to use on living people. I didn't roar at him and: jerk the covers over his shoulders as if he was a horse, But he's dead now — clay. It's the most puerile sentimentality to talk about the sacredness of a mere grave."

"Oh, it is hey? Well, I admit I don't know the difference between the sentiment and the 'tality' you stick on it. But I do know I was riz decent, and I know what the homefolks think about graves and graveyards. Why, man, look what you wrote yourself!"

With a stubby finger Aleck McAdams pointed closely to the verse of the epitaph. Painfully squinting, he read out the words:

" '*Blest be the man that spares these stones, and cursed be he that moves my bones*.' Hey, you don't want to be cussed, do yer? Cussed for life fer a grave-snatching ghoul? Your own pal, at that? Poor old Nock!"

Alfred Turner's eyes were averted. He smoked the last half of his cigarette in three long puffs and tossed the stub away with a determined gesture. He was as big, as quick and as strong as McAdams, and younger by fifteen years. However, he would try his wit first. He scooped a handful of the rich pay dirt.

"Do you realize, McAdams, what we have here? Not a dozen buckets of gravel, probably. A couple of hundred pans at the most, and perhaps as much more that you didn't disturb in digging the hole."

"Hole, is it? Just a hole! Sentimental, you are, fer a fact!"

"Just wait a minute. You're a placer miner. You know what gravel goes to the pan when you can see the gold in it— pick out nuggets with your fingers! There's five, six, seven thousand dollars in this pothole, this pocket, just as sure as the world. I need the money— need it bad, if you don't. You're broke, ain't you?"

"What's that got to do with it?" demanded McAdams.

Turner studied him. Was it affectation? No, the fellow looked frankly bewildered: at the question. Was it cupidity? Did he intend later to return and take it all?

"It's all right, this sentimentality— for that's what it is— mere mawkish sentimentality. If you can afford it! Why we'd be just plain fools if we went off without it!"

McAdams had recourse to the grimy bandanna. He mopped his brow.

"Any man can work," he answered doggedly. 'He don't have ter rob graves. I ain't superstitious, Turner. But it's durn funny old Whipple dies with them words on his lips: 'In a grave that's decked with gold.' An' here he is in a grave full of it. If there's anything in sperits, maybe the old man's hovering around and laughin' to beat the dickens. Struck it at last— when it can't do him no good!"

"It's an excellent joke, no doubt," returned the engineer unsmilingly. "But the real joke would be on us if we left thousands of dollars—after all the hardships we've gone through this summer. Left it for the next couple of prospectors to wash up and put it in their buckskin pokes. No, sir!"

McAdams scowlingly flipped his thumb at the epitaph.

"Didn't you write that there po'try to skeer the next man off from tamperin' with the grave? Maybe the next guy, even if he ain't got the decency of a pig to let a grave alone, will be scairt out by the curse."

"Oh, of course," returned the engineer, ironically. 'Prospectors are that way. Men that have got the nerve to take their lives in their hands in a wilderness like this— they're going to be scared off by a verse they can't even understand. With gold glittering under their hands. Why not advertise it? Write the other verse under it— tell 'em it's a grave that's decked with gold, for fear it's a cloudy day when they pass by and they don't catch a gleam in the dirt. Sure, let them have it!"

"You're gittin' sarcastic, now, ain't you? Well, you kin, if you like." McAdams folded his arms. His jaw was set. "This man Whipple didn't amount to much in this country, so fur as success goes, though he always stood fer law and order. But old-timers' that knew him tells me he's been some punkins back in the States in early days. One of the best Injun fighters in the West, and known and trusted by the gov'ment men that come after Custer. If he was back in Montana, now, the old-timers'd plant him proper and give him a headstone with what he done cut on it, 'stead of a moldy old poem from this feller Shakespeare. Just because he cashes in away up here a thousand miles from nowheres is no reason why we oughter treat him like a dead animal. No, siree! Not by a darn sight."

"Do as you damn please!" barked Turner, enraged. "Help me, or I'll take it all!"

He stripped off his coat and walked to the pack mule that bore the short-handled shovel, thrust under the lashing. When he turned he looked into the muzzle of a revolver.

"You'll take it all!" echoed Aleck McAdams. "Every one of the five chambers if you tech this grave. You won't listen ta reason. You'll listen to this, if it talks!"

Turner went white.

"Partners, heh! This is the way you treat a partner because he don't agree with you!"

"Yeh, this is the way I treat pardners. I got more respeck fur a dead pardner than I have fur some live ones I could mention. You kin cut off the slack of that lash rope there and tie your own hands. I'll make a better job of it when you're through."

Aleck McAdams seemed to have had some experience in manhandling. He pocketed the revolver and tied his living partner securely and set him on a rock near by, ignoring Turner's threats and protestations. He got out the pick and pried loose many flat slabs of shale rock on the other side of the creek. These he carried to the grave and set them neatly upon the dirt mound, edge to edge, so that none of the gravel of the pothole remained in evidence to excite the cupidity of a passing prospector—a remote chance in that far land, yet one to be guarded against.

With his jackknife McAdams scraped away the verse and wrote instead, underneath the name and date:

A GOOD OLD SCOUT

He replaced the pick and shovel in the pack. Then he tethered the mining engineer to one of the mules by a ten-foot rope, and tied the red bandanna over Turner's eyes so that he could see only the ground.

"What's this unnecessary insult for?" inquired the man who vainly sought to illustrate the distinction between sentiment and sentimentality.

"You're too durn handy with that there notebook of yours," replied McAdams. "It's a twisty country, yet with the help of sketchin's I reckon you could sneak back here some day an' rob the grave. I aim to put the kibosh on that!"

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6: Broken Images

Lt. Morley Burroughs

fl mid-1930s

Thrilling Adventures March 1932

I could not find out anything about this author, who published a handful of short stories in the mid 1930s

"OH, WE won't go back to Subig any more,
Oh, we won't go back to Subig any more,
Oh, we won't go back to Subig,
'Cause the 'skeeters there are too big,
Oh, we won't go back to Subig any more!"

ONE of the grimy pair sang the song in high affected falsetto, while the man with him beat time with a bottle long since drained of its liquor. The proprietor of the *tindahan*, within the Walled City of Manila, gazed at the two in open disgust.

Then his eyes left them to stare widely at the unobtrusive little man who edged in at the door and moved easily toward the table where the maudlin men sang. The proprietor noticed that the newcomer kept his right hand buried deep in the side pocket of his grimy flannel coat that had once been white.

A livid scar ran down from the hair above his right eye, across the bridge of his nose, to the left corner of his tight-locked lips.

His smile was twisted. He jerked his free hand at the bartender as he approached the pair at the battered table. The bartender dropped his bar towel and turned to the racks of bottles behind the counter.

The newcomer took a chair across the table from the singer and his accompanist smiled at them. They started back from him, for his smile was twisted, and looked more a snarl than a smile.

"And what, gentlemen," he said softly. "is wrong with Subig? I once knew the place, and I rather liked it."

They looked at each other, those two, and their right hands darted to their belts.

"I wouldn't, you know," said the small man, and his diction was plainly American, "for if you happened to be even a split second slow, I should drill you both between the eyes."

GASPING sigh came from the two men. Eyes bored into those of the newcomer. Wintry eyes of the newcomer stared back. His right hand was still hidden in the pocket. They noticed that, hot though it was, the man's coat was buttoned up around his throat.

"Who are you? What the hell you buttin' in here for?" snaried the man who had been singing, and his voice was no longer falsetto.

"I? Oh, call me Scarface. I was wondering why you didn't like Subig. Used to be stationed there, in the Navy, sort of, and a bit sentimental about the place. Plan going back, some time, if I can find a couple of right guys to throw in with me."

"Weill, I dunno," said the second man slowly, "we'd kind of like to go back to Subig ourselves, under certain conditions. And we need another man, if..."

"If what?" said the little man softly.

For a long moment the two who had been seated at the table looked at each other, and their eyes wordlessly asked and answered questions. Finally the singer nodded.

"My name's Giles... er... Pierpont," he said at last. "And my pal's name's Jack Carter— Scarface. We ain't trustin' everybody, but you look like a guy that would do things for money, and has guts. We could use you, but if you double-cross us..."

"Careful, gentlemen," said the little man, "I don't like that word! Not any! What's the lay? If I don't like it I'll keep out, and keep my mouth shut!"

Again that exchange of looks on the part of the two men.

The bottle came, with three glasses. The two drained theirs, while the newcomer sipped his easily. Chairs were drawn up closer, faces almost touched across the table.

Then the two men's hands went to their pockets again. Instantly the muzzles of two guns appeared over the edge of the table, pointing squarely at the singer and accompanist. But when Scarface saw what the two brought forth, and that they were not guns, he smiled his twisted smile and the guns disappeared.

Two white images roiled out upon the table top. Scarface looked at them questioningly, his eyes narrowing slightly. They were images done in some sort of white wood— of two *carabao*, the water buffalo of the Islands. But there was something strange about them.

One image had but one eye, while the other had no horns. The images oddly were incomplete. Scarface extended his hand for them, touched them carelessly. The eye hadn't been cut out of the one, or the horns off the other.

THE two men grinned as Scarface looked over the images.

"There's a story to 'em," said Pierpont, huskily, his little eyes glittering redly below his bushy black brows, "and this is it: there's another figure, you know: of a perfect white *carabao*! They belonged to Captain Jim Kane, of the *Olongapo*, a little schooner with an auxiliary engine. He salvaged the gold from a ship sunk off Balangiga, in Samar, and there were a lot of people after it. When they found that Kane had raised it, they naturally were after him!

"It seems Kane was a character in the Islands. Knew a lot about the natives. Had even been adopted into a tribe of wandering Igorotes near Bataan. Spent some time with 'em, studying 'em, to write 'em up for the magazines. Great friends with 'em. When he left they gave him three white *carabao*, little things no bigger than watch-charms. One was perfect. These we have are the other two. Igorotes told Kane that they would be friends with whoever came with the three figures.

"So, when the others who wanted that treasure, were hot on Kane's trail, he put in at Subig Bay, intending to take refuge among the Igorotes. But... there were traitors aboard the *Olongapo*. It took fire in the hold in the middle of Subig Bay. Pursuers found nothing but wreckage when they came up with the schooner, and a few men floating on the water. The sharks dragged these under, as the pursuers watched. The dead men had been slashed to ribbons with knives. Kane was missing. So was the treasure. Only two of the white images were found."

GENTLE exhaling of breath from Scarface.

"How'd you two get those two dinguses?"

"Got 'em off a couple of the floaters, before the sharks got 'em, if it's any of your business."

"And nothing was ever heard of Kane? Odd! What's your theory about the treasure?"

"Somebody got away with it. Maybe Kane got away, too, and got the stuff to the natives, or maybe they got it some other way. It might have got to them overland. No way of knowing. But Kane couldn't do much himself, with his head almost cut off."

"I thought," said Scarface grimly, "you didn't know what happened to him! No members of the crew were saved ?"

"None! And don't be too damned inquisitive— Scarface!"

With his twisted grin very much in evidence, Scarface leaned back, his liquor still untouched, and unbuttoned the front of his coat. Frowning slightly, Pierpont and Carter watched him,

When the coat was completely unbuttoned, and the lapels flung back, gasps of dismay broke from the throats of Pierpont and Carter. Once more

their hands went to their belts. Once more they found themselves covered before they could bring their hidden weapons into play.

"Who," began Pierpont, "who are you!"

"Just," replied Scarface, "one of the... er— pursuers you spoke about!"

ACROSS the chest of Scarface stretched a gold watch-chain. Pendant from the middle thereof was a little image— of a *carabao*, of white, exquisitely carved wood! It was a perfect figure, without blemish. "I'm in on your show— Pierpont! Odd you almost forgot your name, that way, wasn't it? What say, Carter? And let me tell you something. There isn't a man in the Islands faster on the trigger than lil' ol' Scarface. So don't try any funny business! Keep your guns. You'll maybe need them. But remember this, too! I've got eyes in the back of my head, and nobody gets this white *carabao* off me, see?"

"Oh, we didn't mean anything, Scarface," whined Carter ingratiatingly. "We meant a perfect split, or we wouldn't have told you in the first place!"

"Yeah, I know! Either one of you would crawl through a sewer for a dime! I'm not easily fooled. Besides, for two years I've been looking all over Hades and back for those two gadgets you guys carry! Thought you'd eventually head for Manila, so's to be within striking distance of Bataan. I just waited. We'll be going out of here tonight!"

"Where to, Scarface?" wheedled Pierpont. "Bataan! I'll be walking on the Luneta at nine tonight. Come there. When I see you, and you spot me, l start going. You follow me— and keep your hands in sight!"

Scarface rose from the table, and backed away, hand still in his pocket. He backed out of the door before Pierpont or Carter made a move. They stared after him, then wiped the clammy sweat from their faces.

"Strange gazabo," muttered Pierpont. "His eyes give you the willies. Carter, follow him! We've got to get that *carabao* dingbat!"

"Follow him yourself! Did you hear what he said about being fast on the trigger? I wonder if anybody knows we cold-copped Kane and tossed him to the sharks!"

UNTIL almost dawn the converted *banco*, with coughing balky auxiliary motor thumping rhythmically, lay off Grande Island, at the entrance to Subig Bay. Scarface was at the wheel, and his eyes were wintry, cold as agate or obsidian. His lips were twisted in that snarly smile of his.

It was the scar which twisted his smile, ordinarily; but now his snarl was not of the lips and face only, but a deep rooted thing, out of the man's heart. His hands on the wheel were white-knuckled with the strain he placed upon them,

His eyes looked away beyond Grande Island. To Olongapo on the right, thence followed the rough coast of the bay down to Maquinaya and Subig. The latter place, he knew, was one of the hell holes of the Islands, avoided by most, a haven of refuge for men on the run from the law— or from one another.

Green Jungle growths between Olongapo and Subig, leading back from the sea to the hills. Jungle which hid many strange and terrible things— snakes that could squeeze a man to half his girth, and twice his length in a matter of minutes. Monkeys occasionally, bloodsucking leeches.

The jungle would hide many secrets, as it had in the past. The jungle would erase everything, even evidence of dread double-cross.

Scarface had told Pierpont and Carter that he hated the word, and as he thought of it now the scar on his cheek flamed crimson. He touched it with his fingertips in what was something like a caress, a surgeon's touch on an open wound.

DOWN in the hold Pierpont and Carter were supposed to be sleeping. They had offered to take their tricks at the wheel, but he had refused, and had himself brought the craft out of Manila Bay, past Corregidor, on to the entrance to blue bosomed Subig.

"Seems to know what he's about," whispered Pierpont. "Seems to know a hell of a lot about the Islands. If he does he must know the Igorotes, too, or he wouldn't take a chance hunting them. Like needles in a haystack, too, bumming all over the place. Now here's what we can do..."

"But we'll have to have that gadget Scarface carries, fella. You know the rest of the story, that we didn't tell Scarface? If the guys with only one, or two of those things put in an appearance, the Igorotes will know that treachery has happened somewhere— and the bearers of the images will be shot full of arrows?"

"We'll keep that to ourselves! But those little dog-eaters will give us a hearing, when we bring in those three images. They'll have to. They'll discover we've got no right to 'em, but they'll have to let us come close to make sure— and then we've got a smear of guns against their bows and arrows! There's just a little bunch of 'em, and you and me can shoot! If anybody asks questions, we simply tell 'em the Igorotes jumped us. Besides, the Constabulary is always after 'em, and won't ask too many questions!"

"Yeah, but we've got to do something about Scarface!"

"The first bullet gets him, when he least expects it!"

At the wheel Scarface knew nothing of this, though he could have guessed quite accurately, for Scarface himself knew things he hadn't mentioned.

AS the sun appeared, he turned the prow of his banco into the harbor, and started down the bay. He sailed as one entirely sure of himself, and the faster flew the *banco*, the grimmer became his face, the redder that scar on his cheeks and nose,

"Off there," he muttered to himself, "is Maquinaya! It should be five hundred yards out... ."

But as the craft approached Maquinaya, Scarface studied the coastline carefully.

"There's the native graveyard on the point, and the light. There's the trail over the ridge, and Half Moon Bay. There's the Rifle Range Dock— and Maquinaya!"

He swung the prow of the *banco* sharply to port and stared over the side into the dark green waters of the bay. The bottom could plainly be seen now. Waving green treelike growths. Varicolored rocks, through which swept underwater currents to move to and fro the waving things which grew in the crevasses. Many-hued fishes were there, opalescent in the sun.

STILL Scarface stared over the side. He did not notice, so engrossed was he in his observations, that Pierpont and Carter had come up from the hold and were watching him. His eyes peered into the deep water.

Then he saw what he sought. It looked like an undersea kite on a string. A long, narrow, greenish thing, waving to and fro as the growths on the bottom waved, and like them, its roots also were fastened in the bottom.

Scarface nodded his head in satisfaction, then started as he heard the footfalls of Pierpont and Carter.

"Good morning, gentlemen!" he said softly. "You see, I haven't double-crossed you, as you expected! I've brought you to Subig, as I said I would."

"Yeah?" said Pierpont, grimacing, expectorating over the side. "Yeah? Well, one of us slept while the other kept awake. We ain't trustin' scarcely anybody, see?"

BUT Scarface did not seem to be listening. His eyes were gazing ahead, where a huge rocky promontory, stretching out into the bay, shut off possible view of the dirty little village of Subig.

Then suddenly his eyes came back to Pierpont and Carter, twisted lips shaped themselves in an airy whistle.

"Oh, we won't go back to Subig any more,
Oh, we won't go back to Subig any more...."

As Scarface whistled his eyes, red-rimmed with loss of sleep, bored into those of Pierpont and Carter. He whistled, but behind the twisted shape of his whistling they could see the snarl they remembered from his smile.

For a full minute they stared at him. He finished the silly ditty, then started again, and his eyes never once strayed from the two men.

It was Pierpont, with a crackling curse, who turned away from him, lowering his eyes. Try as he might, he could not out-stare this man of the scarred face.

Carter followed his partner to the prow of the *banco*, and with their backs turned they spoke in whispered asides to each other, while seeming to be studying the green jungle which stretched down to the sea.

"His damn whistling gets my goat!" snarled Carter. "Who won't go back to Subig any more? He looked at us as though he didn't think we would! As though maybe we wouldn't be able to, after..."

"Bullets will kill him, Carter! Don't lose your nerve!"

THE prow of the boat was headed toward that rocky promontory.

Just as it would have struck, Scarface put his wheel hard over, and started to swing farther out from shore. Pierpont turned like a shot.

"Hey, you damned fool, stop it! Swing in here! The trail to Bataan starts at the base of that big rock, on this side!"

Scarface grinned widely, for the first time since he had been with these men. And as Pierpont stared at him he kept on grinning. Then he started his whistling again, as he turned back to starboard, kicking the boat in to the sandy, shelving beach.

Pierpont swore again, and with Carter at his side, walked swiftly up to Scarface.

"You knew where the trail to Bataan was, all the time!" he accused. "What you trying to pull on us?"

"Wanted to see if you knew, gentlemen!" stated Scarface, and began again his whistling. When they stepped ashore at last he was still whistling.

"You chaps go on ahead," he said softly, pointing at the dim trail that led inland, "I don't like strangers behind me! You can trust me not to shoot!"

Then he whistled again.

Fifteen minutes of brisk walking, back from the sea, and Scarface was still whistling, and there seemed a rollicking, vengeful devil in his music— of that same tune these two had been singing in the cantina within the Walled City in Manila's heart.

Pierpont whirled upon Scarface, his face fiery red, his eyes glittering, his right hand on his gun butt.

"Stop that damned whistling!" he yelled. "It gets my goat!"

"Yeah? Why? And keep your hand off your gun! How's the tune get your goat? Rather I'd talk, maybe?"

"Anything, only stop that eternal whistlin'!"

"Okay! What do you guys know about the Igorotes? Do you know they're mighty good with their arrows? Can hit a dime nine times out of ten, as far as they can see it— and they've got darned good eyes! I might tell you that they don't like to be double-crossed, any better than I do— or than Jim Kane liked it, if he lived long enough to know he had been!"

"He didn't," snarled Carter. "He didn't have a chance to... ."

PIERPONT whirled on Carter, and knocked him flat with a savage right hander to the jaw. Neither looked back at Scarface, whose face was redly suffused, whose eyes glittered, but whose twisted lips were wide again in a terrible smile. An hour after leaving the sea,

Scarface called to Pierpont and Carter. They whirled at his cail, to find themselves looking into the muzzles of his guns.

"This isn't a double-cross," he said easily. "I never double-cross anyone! But there's something about those white *carabao* you chaps apparently don't know! All three are supposed to be presented by the same hand!"

"How did you know that?" screamed Pierpont.

"So you knew that, too, eh?" grinned Scarface. "Guess I covered you just in time, eh? Gonna whirl on me and get my *carabao*, after bumping me, weren't you? As soon as I'd led the way to the Igorotes! Well, don't do it! Those *carabao* have to be presented in a certain way, you know. It's something like a password. Did you know that? Toss 'em over, and keep your hands away from your guns!"

"How do you know about how the *carabao* must be presented, Scarface?"

"Toss 'em over, and maybe I'll tell you!"

RIGHT hands hovering just above their gun butts, left hands delving for the imperfect images, Pierpont and Carter complied with the command.

He knew, studying them through narrow eyes, that they were as dangerous as rattlesnakes. When he stooped to pick up the images they would take a chance and draw. They had no intention of sharing that treasure with him, hadn't had from the beginning.

"I might tell you, gentlemen," he said softly, as the images fell at his feet, "that for the last ten minutes we have been watched! Little brown men in the jungle on either side of the trail. If something happens they are in doubt

about... well, they can hit a dime nine times out of ten as far as they can see it!"

Stiffening as though they had been shot, Pierpont and Carter whirled and stared at the green wall of the jungle. Scarface stooped quickly and caught up the images.

"I didn't say, you know," he said easily, "that I knew exactly how these little dinguses should be presented!"

"You tricked us, Scarface," snarled Pierpont. "You'll pay for it, too—sometime!"

"Wouldn't wonder! I always pay my way. Get that? *I always pay my way*! Turn around and get going!"

Ten minutes later there came a peculiar hail from the jungle ahead. It was answered from right and left, and the callers seemed very close. Pierpont and Carter stopped dead in their tracks, stiffening with fear, as though already they felt the tips of barbed arrows in their backs.

From right behind them came another answer to the hail, They whirled, to stare at Scarface.

Then, swiftly, like so many cats, came the little men. Almost naked men, unsmiling agate-eyed. They were led by a man dressed in ragged clothing too large for him. The face of this one was pitted with smallpox scars, and he strode up to Scarface as though he had no fear at all of him, or of anything.

WITH a swift glance at Pierpont and Carter, Scarface sheathed his guns, and drew from his clothing the little white *carabao*. Three images, two imperfect ones, one perfect, exquisite of design. From the lips of the little men burst an excited cackling.

The leader dropped to his haunches, motioned Scarface down beside him.

With his right hand Scarface cleared a place in the trail, sweeping aside the dead leaves and mold. First he took the *carabao* which had no horns, and placed it in the cleared space, head pointing up the trail. Then he took the one with the single eye and placed it beside the first, with a hand-breadth between the two.

The brown men pressed forward, hands gripping bows and arrows, to stare down at the ceremony, For a moment Scarface stared at the ragged leader, as he fingered the perfect image.

Then he lowered it into place.

He set it between the first two images, but with the horned head pointing down the trail!

The pitted face of the brown leader broke into a wide smile, and swiftly he began talking and gesticulating. Neither Pierpont or Carter understood a word

that was said; but Scarface did, for he answered back swiftly, in the same dialect.

PIERPONT and Carter faced each other. Then they stared again at Scarface, who looked up at them grinning, his hands dangling over his knees, his holsters swinging free.

He said nothing. He merely looked at them, and grinned his twisted grin. He even eased back on his heels, carelessly, as though what they did worried him not in the slightest.

Their mouths hung open.

"Kane!" barked Carter. "Kane! Only Kane would be so much at home with these dog-eaters! We thought we had... ."

"Yeah?" said Kane. "Yeah? You thought you'd killed me, didn't you? You got the other four men of my crew all right, and you almost got me. I opened my eyes and saw you, and moved aside, just enough— but you gave me this! Too bad I ditched the stuff before you fired the ship, wasn't it? Then you tossed me to the sharks! Well?"

The brown men were looking curiously from Scarface to Pierpent and Carter, and back again. They understood no word, but they knew expressions of anger, and of fear, when they saw them.

The crooked, talon-like hands of Pierpont and Carter hovered over their pistol butts. Trapped! Without a chance! But these men only had bows and arrows, against their revolvers, and Scarface was off balance, hands many inches from his guns.

There was only one way out, they thought— and without looking at each other, because each knew what was in the other's mind, they went for their guns. With their hands on the butts of their weapons, and the weapons half drawn, Scarface had still made no move to draw.

Out came the guns. Up came their muzzles.

Then, from the jungle, sounded the taut twanging of bow-strings.

Pencils of death came out of the green, a score together, snapping swiftly out, flashing between the standing men, missing all of them— save only Pierpont and Carter.

Screaming, their half raised weapons pumping bullets into the ground at their feet, the two men staggered back, slender arrows protruding from their chests and stomachs. A half score arrows had struck each of them. Then their knees buckled.

EVEN as they fell, they tried to maintain control of themselves; fought bitterly to keep from falling forward. Those arrows were all in front of them,

and if they fell on them their own weight would make death doubly sure— and faster.

They managed to fall to their backs.

Scarface rose and strode forward to stand over them.

"Two years," he said softly into their contorted faces, "is a long time to hunt for double-crossers! I hate double-crossers! I even hate the word! Or did I tell you that! My brown friends also dislike being double-crossed, and they never take chances. You should have known that! You couldn't play square. If you had... well, I would have given you one week's start, part of the treasure, and then set the law on you for killing my crew. But you didn't think anybody would refuse to double-cross you, did you?"

Carter opened his mouth, the lips flicked with red life blood, to make answer. But no answer came, and so he died.

And after a minute or two, Pierpont followed him.

As Scarface Kane turned away he thoughtfully touched the red weal on his cheeks with his fingertips.

"I'm going to the *banco*," he said to the ragged brown man, "and then go pull up the money at the end of that float! It was hard to find, my friend! Two years have turned it so green it looks just like the water itself. Would you and your friends— and my friends— like to have a little boat ride on Subig Bay?"

Delightedly they cackled, like little children, and headed into the trail. Scarface followed them still fingering the crimson slash, whistling....

And the tune suggested something about never, never coming back to Subig.

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7: The White Brick

F. E. Chase

fl 1900

The Black Cat, Jan 1900

FIGG Street was one of those thoroughfares, so common in American cities, whose houses, all precisely alike, are ranged with military precision as if marshaled in battle array bj r their speculative builders against the army of wage earners for whose occupancy they were designed. Organization and discipline were strongly suggested by the uniform ranks of octagon-fronts, each capped with its formal mansard roof, and accoutred with its high flight of stone steps, and the effect of this suggestion was promptly confessed by their intimidated tenants, who paid an excessive rent with apprehensive alacrity. There were some in the neighborhood who, under a not uncommon stress of pecuniary circumstances, might have defied a solitary landlord in single combat, but to challenge the might of the brigaded proprietor whose capital had brought the street into being was beyond their courage. So the monthly tribute exacted by this besieging force of bricks and mortar was promptly yielded, and thus it came about that tenants stayed on in Figg Street, and were penetrated with a strong sense of fellowship which quickly engendered a friendly intimacy.

I, like all of my neighbors, had moved in when the place was first built, lured by the odor of fresh paint and damp plaster, which is always so inscrutably attractive to the habitual rent-payer. Rumors of open plumbing and porcelain tubs had robbed the adjacent avenues of their choicest tenants, and in an incredibly short time after its establishment Figg Street had become fully populated, with the exception of one tenement. Number Seventeen, eight doors below the house I occupied, and upon the same side, was not immediately taken, and remained mysteriously untenanted for nearly a year.

This circumstance was strongly resented by a neighborhood which had testified so strongly by its impetuous conduct to the desirability of the street, the persistent emptiness of this refractory domicile serving as a kind of standing criticism of its hasty judgment. A kind of hauteur seemed to be expressed by its persistent refusal to come into proper relations with the other houses in the block, and by degrees it became distinctly unpopular. Too new to be plausibly accused of being haunted, it was vaguely slandered as possessing defective drainage, and became the subject of other injurious rumors which tended toward making the agent's placards in its lower windows permanent fixtures. And when, after a year's time, it became known that it had at length

been let, all its accumulated unpopularity was promptly and unanimously transferred to its occupants as a matter of course.

These were an elderly man and his wife, who apparently had no family and kept no servant. Their few belongings had been moved in before it was even noticed that the place had found a tenant, which was in itself generally regarded as an aggravating circumstance. No one knew the man by name or could find out anything about him. It was strongly resented that from the beginning he kept the green blinds on both the front and the rear of his premises constantly closed, and when it became evident that he did not intend to put out a door-plate, popular feeling rose almost to indignation. He did not even permit himself to be seen very much, only occasionally going forth, while his wife was almost never visible. No one ever seemed to visit the couple, whose only caller was an occasional expressman with a parcel. Attempts on the part of the male inhabitants of Figg Street to draw the man into conversation encountered a baffling resistance in his shy reticence of manner, while the few ladies who sought to penetrate the secret of the house through the cunning device of a neighborly call were quite unable to get any response to their repeated rings at the doorbell, though they were painfully conscious of being investigated from within through the blinds of the parlor window.

A fever of curiosity pervaded the neighborhood for a time. Social gatherings, assembled under a thin pretext of whist or music, straightway resolved themselves into deliberative bodies sitting upon the question of Number Seventeen. Certain persons even stooped to the employment of small boys as detectives, but these unworthy emissaries failed as completely as did everybody else to solve the mystery of the house. Finally the fever, having run its course, died out, and Number Seventeen came to be .accepted as an objectionable but stubborn fact.

For nearly two months matters remained in this unsatisfactory condition, but at the end of that period the excitement was renewed by a very peculiar circumstance. Twice a day, on my way to business, I was obliged to pass these mysterious premises, which still strongly piqued my curiosity without ever having once gratified it ever so little. My interest in the house was just beginning to flag a little when one morning as I was going down to the office my always observant eye noticed a slight but startling change. A single white brick had taken the place of one of the common red ones in the sidewalk in front of Number Seventeen. It was precisely the size of an ordinary brick, and had a smooth, enameled surface of glittering white. I was quite sure that it had not been there the evening before when I came up town; so striking and unusual a detail could hardly have escaped my notice. I puzzled over the matter all day and devoted the evening meal to discussing it with my wife, but

without arriving at any satisfactory conclusion. Going down town in the morning I spoke of it to a neighbor, and at night to two more with whom I rode up town. Three or four people called on us that evening to discuss this new phase of the mystery, and as they went home we saw several small parties from the neighborhood walking up and down by this inexplicable object with an elaborate assumption of indifference, evidently engaged in verifying the strange report which had spread rapidly throughout the street.

For a week there was a revival of the original excitement, manifested by much hypocritical sociability. For a week the white brick was always trumps at whist, and was eaten over and over again in the form of Welsh rabbits of parallel indigestibility. Indeed, the formula of invitation during that period might very reasonably have been "The pleasure of your company is requested at a White Brick," had perfect candor obtained.

We were just beginning to get accustomed to the thing when one morning as I was going down town I missed it. I looked hastily up at the door. Yes, it was Number Seventeen without a doubt, but the white brick was gone.

I made a round of calls that evening with my wife and disseminated this startling information. As the bearers of this important news we enjoyed a quite unusual popularity, and went home in a very pleasant frame of mind. The third morning after, the white brick was again in its former place, the exchange having taken place, as before, some time during the night.

I was very absent-minded over my duties that day, and was more than once sharply reprimanded by my employer for my inattention to the routine of the office. If I had had a brick in my hat, as the slang phrase goes, I could not have been more hopelessly muddled than I was by the white brick which I could not get out of my head. This uncanny happening began to suggest to my mind all kinds of dreadful deeds of which it might be the sign and signal. Was Number Seventeen a den of counterfeiters, thus conclusively but silently indicated to interested persons? Was it a haunt of unspeakable vice, masked by the white purity of this symbol? Were deeds too dreadful to name, or an enterprise too criminal for utterance thus proclaimed? I passed the day in a fever of fruitless speculation and went home with but one clear purpose — to find out when and by whom this baleful message was placed and replaced.

To this end I determined upon an heroic measure. I remembered that the brick had been exposed the first time for precisely one week. Now, if there were any uniformity in the purpose which lay behind- it, it should be again removed on the following Tuesday night. I accordingly determined to sit up all of that night, bn this chance, and watch. I passed the interval in a state of great nervous excitement, and upon the appointed evening established myself at my second story front window, which commanded a full view of that part of the

sidewalk, with a plentiful supply of cigars, determined to solve the mystery. Sitting there in the darkness I heard the clocks strike eleven, twelve, one, two, three, four, and, I think, five. I fear I must have dozed for a moment, toward morning, however, for when daybreak surprised me at my vigil the confounded thing was gone.

Nearly two days after this it was replaced, remaining, as before, for a week, at the end of which time it again disappeared. All this period I spent in a miserable state of suspense, reading the criminal items which the enterprise of the daily press provided, and striving by the exercise of all my ingenuity to somehow connect the deeds or their doers with this ominous manifestation ; but to no purpose. I had said nothing to any one about my futile experiment in detective work, but I was gratified to hear it whispered about that several of my neighbors had also sat up all night with a similar purpose and with similar results.

This had gone on for nearly two months when a brilliant idea came to me. Why on earth had it never occurred to me before? Nothing could be simpler or more promising, nothing surer to bring about something significant— something, at least, affording a clue to the mystery of Number Seventeen. That night I went out secretly at two A.M., in a drizzling rain, and, removing the white brick from the sidewalk where it had been placed two days before, set it in a corresponding position in front of my own door, putting in its place an ordinary red brick.

I slept very little the rest of that night, but, rising early, took up my position at the window to await results. In order to miss nothing I sent word to the office that I was at home with a severe sore throat— which was indeed quite time— and ate my breakfast uncomfortably as I sat at the window.

Nothing happened until eleven o'clock, when the elderly tenant of the suspected premises came out of his door and walked down the steps. He had not got half-way down, however, when it became evident that he had discovered his loss. He paused in apparent consternation and after looking earnestly at. the sidewalk for an instant, ran back with unaccustomed sprightliness into the house. Presently his wife came out with him, and together they carefully examined the footway where the brick had been. If ever two people appeared anxious and alarmed it was this guilty looking twain. All my old suspicions came back to me as I triumphantly beheld the manifest disquietude of the pair, who, after a brief search and a hurried consultation, went quickly back into the house, from which neither emerged again that day. The next morning another white brick had been planted in its usual position in front of Number Seventeen.

The exaggerated alarm which my experiment had caused in my mysterious neighbors made me a little uneasy as to the possible consequences of my act to myself, and, as nothing definite had resulted, I determined after a day or two, to remove the borrowed brick, which, being farther up the street than its owner ever had occasion to go, had remained unnoticed by him, though it had begun to cause amused comment among the neighbors. I had planned to do this upon a certain evening after dark, but on my return from the office that night I found my wife in a state of great doubt and anxiety over a large box which a teamster had left at our house just at dusk.

She had first noticed him driving down from the upper end of the street, looking inquiringly at the houses on our side. At the sight of our white brick he had pulled up suddenly, and taking from his cart a large box had rung our bell and delivered it to our servant without a word of explanation, and then had driven away. Our maid had received it as a matter of course, and there it lay upon the entry floor, marked emphatically upon its upper surface

THIS SIDE UP.
HANDLE WITH EXTREME CARE.

It was an ordinary rough packing case, three feet long by two wide and a foot deep, and was lettered in the bold script employed by commercial packers. The corners of a tag which had evidently borne an address were still held down by four large tacks, but the greater part of the middle had evidently been torn off in the process of getting the box in at the door and could nowhere be found. There was no doubt at all in my wife's mind, nor in mine, that the case had been intended for our mysterious neighbor, and that the teamster had been led into this blunder in its delivery by our duplicate white brick, which was the first he would encounter in coming down the street from its upper end, and which he had become accustomed, by habit or instruction, to recognize as the sign of his destination. His mistake had, perhaps, placed in my hands the clue to the secret of Number Seventeen.

All my previous doubts and misgivings vanished in the face of this piece of providential good fortune, and sending for a hammer I prepared to have a look at the contents of the box. My wife's tremulous promptings to be careful and her scruples as to the propriety of such an act were evidently mere sops to her conscience, for she was inspired with quite as lively a curiosity as my own. The idea of any physical danger from an infernal machine never entered our heads, so entirely commonplace had been all the circumstances of the delivery of the case. So, adapting the usual loose-handled domestic hammer as well as possible to the unequal task, I finally succeeded in getting the lid off. Upon the

folds of brown packing paper which covered its contents lay an envelope, blank and unaddressed.

From such a wrapper I felt no scruples about taking the note which it enclosed, and accordingly did so; but my wife spared me the shame of violating another person's letter by snatching it from my hand and reading it aloud. It ran as follows:

Mr. James Millican,

Dear Sir:

The sample sent is a great improvement over the last one, and would, no doubt, be effective against the enemy. We must take no chances in this struggle, however, and when we show our hand it must be to deal a death blow to them. Therefore carry out the improvement you suggest. Do not worry about the cost— at this stage of the game money is nothing. The loss you speak of might be dangerous if the article fell into the right hands, but that is unlikely. We send the chemicals you ask for. Do not take any unnecessary risks. We must guard above all things against a premature explosion. Yours truly,

Sylvester Daft.

At the word "explosion" my wife turned pale and sat weakly down on the edge of a chair looking at me with a frightened face. I, however, with a resolute air, but with many internal misgivings, laid hold of the paper which still covered the contents of the box, and prepared to strip it off. As I turned back the first layer the hammer which I had left upon the edge of the case fell to the floor with a crash, which served to show me conclusively the state of my own nerves. I persisted, however, in my unpacking, and presently laid bare the contents. The box was filled, apparently, with a fine white powder and nothing else. It was tasteless and gritty between the teeth, and bore every physical sign of harmlessness. I was greatly disappointed at this poor answer to my expectations and discontentedly plunged my hand into the yielding mass. As* I did so my fingers encountered a hard object.

Carefully digging away the white powder I presently disclosed the neck of a large bottle, which I pulled carefully forth. The label bore a Latinized name, quite meaningless to me, but below it was the conspicuous legend: "Dangerous. Keep in a cool place." I complied at once by placing the bottle as far as possible from myself, and cautiously continued my search. There were four more bottles, containing different liquids, and several packages of unknown chemicals, including one of common borax, which I recognized with relief, as one meets a friend in a strange land. The removal of these articles left the case about half full of the powder and gave our front parlor, where they

stood about, the appearance of a chemical laboratory. My wife and I could make little out of all this, and after having devoted the evening to vague and profitless discussion, we opened the windows of the room in compliance with the demand printed on the first bottle, and carefully locking the door went upstairs to bed.

But not to sleep. We tossed and turned for several hours, starting at every noise from below, until finally I could stand it no longer, and getting up again I dressed and went down stairs. All was quiet in the parlor, where the chemicals still stood intact. I sat down for an instant in an easy chair where I had them in full view, and there, of all places, fell fast asleep before I had any idea of such a thing.

When I awoke it was half past seven in the morning, and I was stiff with the cold that had poured in all night at the open windows, and had another frightful sore throat. I rose with pain and difficulty to shut out the chilling draught, and as I stood at the open window commanding a view up the street toward Number Seventeen, I saw Mr. Millican, as I now knew him to be, coming in my direction, which I had never before seen him take. He was walking rapidly, his hands behind him, his eyes looking reflectively down upon the sidewalk.

A wave of apprehension crossed my mind. His route would take him past my house, where he had lie ver, to my knowledge, passed before, and he would certainly see the stolen white brick. What would happen? Would he face me, or would he take alarm and flee? If he did face me, what should I do—resolutely pluck his secret from him in the interests of the public welfare, or consult my own personal safety in as plausible an explanation as I could devise?

Before I could decide he had reached my door. Without an instant's hesitation or the least appearance of surprise he turned and walked up my steps, taking something from his pocket as he did so. I heard a key rattle for an instant in the lock, which cheaply furnished article readily yielded to the intruder, and in another instant Mr. Millican walked into the room where I stood in frightened perplexity.

He looked first at me in great surprise, and then glancing hurriedly about him, his eyes fell upon the opened box. A look of utter consternation appeared on his face and he sat down in a frightened way upon the edge of the case, playing idly with the white powder with his hand, and looking at me with a baffled air.

Presently he cleared his throat.

"I see you are working on the same track," he said, in a dejected voice. "Well, I knew something was up when my experimental brick was stolen, but I'd no idea you were so near. How did you happen to locate here?"

The harmless dejection of his manner and appearance had already removed the worst of my suspicions, and I had decided to make the best explanation I could, but his opening puzzled me.

"I— I don't understand," I began.

" Then you are not Babelon's man," he cried eagerly, rising as he spoke. "You are not working for Babelon & Co. in this matter ? "

I hastened to explain that I was not working for Babelon & Co. in any matter, but was in the insurance business; and then, taking advantage of the high good-humor with which this confession seemed to fill him, I made a very frank explanation of the whole matter, to which he listened with great amusement. I returned to him his white brick and the box of chemicals, and during the next two months was privileged to visit him in his laboratory which occupied the cellar of Number Seventeen, where I spent man]' pleasant evenings over a pipe in his interesting company. At the end of this period I received one morning this circular:

MILLIGAN'S ENAMELED BRICK.
For Pavements, Warehouse Flooring and all Building Purposes Demanding
DURABILITY AND CLEANLINESS.
Indestructible by Wear or Fracture, Acid Proof and Hygienically Perfect. The only Flooring that can be Permanently Kept in a State of
CHEMICAL PURITY.
Patented June, 1899, by JAMES MILLICAN.
Manufactured by
SYLVESTER DAFT & CO.,
Dealers in Builders' Supplies and Hygienic Appliances.

Mr. Millican's brick had undergone the practical test of actual wear and tear in the sidewalk of Figg Street, to the consternation of its inhabitants, before it was offered to the public, and so was put upon the market in such a state of perfection as to defy all competition. At any rate, Messrs. Babelon & Co. never, to my knowledge, advertised the competing article which had forced upon Millican so much secrecy in his experiments.

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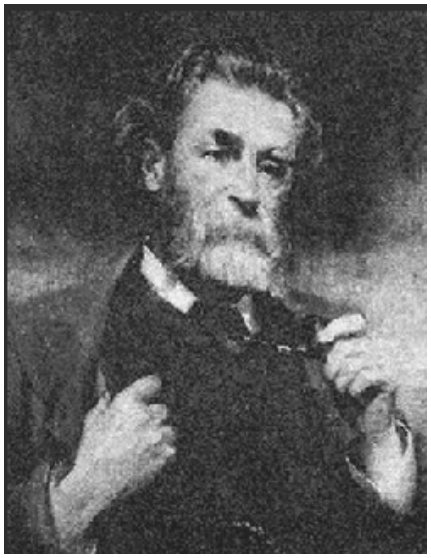
8: The Blue Star

J. E. Muddock

1843-1934

Stories, Weird and Wonderful, 1889



J. E. Preston Muddock

THE FOLLOWING narrative is so strange and startling that possibly some of those who read it may feel a certain reserve about receiving as facts all the incidents as I have given them. Yet I solemnly asseverate that the whole story is true, although I make no attempt to offer an explanation of the weird and awful phenomena that presented themselves to me. Having a strong objection to anything like vagueness, I neither conceal names nor places; and, though for some time it was my misfortune to rest under a terrible suspicion, I shall make no attempt to disguise my identity.

My name, therefore, is Francis Preston de la Motte. I am a member of the De la Mottes of Hampshire. My family are descendants of a very old Huguenot family, many of whom fell victims to the ruthless barbarity of the tyrant and bigot Francis I. Later still, when the royal butcher, the Duke of Guise, formed a triumvirate with Saint Andre and the Constable Montmorency to root out what he was pleased to term ' the heresy of the Huguenots,' my direct ancestors, who had their estates in the Garonne, were amongst those who suffered most, and a broken and disheartened remnant fled to England, and ultimately established themselves in Hampshire. My family, since they rooted themselves in alien but hospitable soil, have been distinguished in literature, arts, and sciences. I was myself born in the academical town of Winchester, where my father owned a small estate, and was well known for his liberality, sound

sense, and broad views. He died universally respected, leaving me a small patrimony, and, as I believe, a fair share of his own good common sense.

I may be pardoned for referring to these strictly personal matters; but what I wish to convey is that I am neither a visionary, a dreamer, nor a monomaniac. At least, I have never been accused of being the one or the other. That I have taken an interest, and, as I venture to hope, an intelligent interest in many of the deeper mysteries of science, I will not attempt to deny; and those things which fall into the category of psychological phenomena have always possessed a fascination for me.

For many years before my father's death I had expressed a strong desire to travel; but he opposed this, saying that it was his earnest wish that my youth should be passed in the classical atmosphere of one of our great public schools. It thus came about that up to the time when I reached man's estate my life was a studious one. But my father's death released me, while the small fortune he was enabled to leave me gave me the chance of at last gratifying my craving to see the world.

I made a tour through India, and had an opportunity of studying some of the occult mysteries of the higher sects of Brahmins, especially those relating to their power to hold converse with the dead; and of their no less wonderful power of themselves being able to simulate death for long periods at a time, during which they are enabled to see the spirits of the real dead. From India I passed to Russia, where I spent two years, and, having fair lingual powers, I acquired a good knowledge of the language, so far mastering its difficulties as to be able to read some of the most abstruse authors in the original.

I had been on the move for some months, when, towards the close of a terribly snowy day, I found myself in the little town of Sergiyevski, about fifty miles to the north of Moscow, whither I was journeying. I had travelled east from St. Petersburg as far as Vologda; thence I had turned my face south.

My going to Sergiyevski was a mere accident. I had been travelling for many hours in a mouldy, damp drosky, and was half frozen. My driver said that it would be dangerous to continue our journey on to Moscow during the darkness, for already there were signs of an increase in the snowstorm, and the road would be impassable. I therefore bade him make for the nearest trakteer, not at all sorry at the prospects of warmth and a good dinner. As the vehicle drew up at the door of the unpretentious inn, I hurried out as fast as the stiffened state of my limbs would allow me. Passing up a long passage, I entered a low-pitched room, the ceiling of which was crossed with massive smoke-blackened beams, from which depended the winter stock of wild boar hams.

As soon as I had been relieved of my heavy furs, I ordered a dish of lemoned tea by way of a preliminary, and then seated myself by the huge stove and proceeded to take stock of the company present. There was a heavily-bearded, black visaged Jew, who puffed huge volumes of smoke from a long wooden pipe; a fierce-looking Cossack soldier, a one-eyed pedlar, and a young man, who, I ascertained, was a student at the college of Moscow, but had come to this town to visit an aunt, who was ill, and from whom he had expectations.

The Jew and the Cossack gave me a surly greeting as I sat down. The one-eyed pedlar did not speak, though he gazed at me with his one eye suspiciously; but the young student put forth his hand, greeting me cheerily, and saying in fairly good English:

'I think I am not in a mistake when I go to suppose that you from England come?'

With a bow and a smile I answered him in Russian, telling him that his supposition was correct, but that I had for some time been travelling, and recently had made a most extensive tour through India. He at once manifested great interest in me; complimenting me on the way I spoke his language, and begging that I would relate my impressions of India, for it was a country which he had an unconquerable longing to see.

'For,' he added, 'it is a land of mystery, a land where one may shake the hand and hold converse with those who have actually been with the dead in their home beyond the grave.'

I looked at him in surprise as he made this strange remark, and from that moment I fell under the spell of this being. Here is a word-picture of his general appearance.

He was a small, delicately-built man, with hands and feet that would have done credit to a woman. His features were faultless, with an expression of dreaminess, though occasionally this gave way to a more spirituelle expression, but the dreaminess, somehow, seemed more natural to him. His skin was of a pure olive tint that flushed with a hectic red under the influence of excitement. The hue of his hair was raven black, and his eyes, wherein all the mystery lay, were like glittering jewels, and yet their light and fire flashed forth no warmth; they were cold— cold as steel, and in some indescribable way they gave you the impression that they were capable of reading your thoughts, of seeing the very secrets of your inner heart. His face altogether was a weird face; such a one as Fuseli or Wiertz would have loved to depict. It was capable of exerting a strange mesmeric influence, and I felt that the moment I gazed upon it. I am free to confess that I was influenced as I had never been influenced before, and I found myself studying him. I soon gathered that he belonged to a type of

man differently organised to the generality of human beings. He was, in fact, a man I had long wished to meet, for he was one of a limited though daring class, who, scoffing at the stereotyped dogmas of the schools, give themselves up to speculative metaphysics, and, striking into original paths of thought, endeavour to penetrate some of the mysteries of the forbidden doctrines of psychomancy.

Before half an hour had passed we were chatting freely, as if we had been old acquaintances. He had been quick to gather that I took an interest in many of the subjects that fascinated him, and though he was a dreamer, an enthusiast, which I was not, there was something in common between us; a something that drew us together, so that we were enabled to throw off all reserve and at once give free expression to our thoughts.

As he had not dined I begged him to do me the honour of joining me in the dinner I had ordered, and which the landlord at that moment announced as being ready. He bowed gracefully, saying it would give him great pleasure to do so, although he was a wretched eater.

We exchanged cards, and I learned that his name was Ivan Vambery, and during dinner he informed me that he had for a long time been studying medicine, but had devoted much of his spare time to the investigation of spiritualism, animal magnetism, electro-biology, and the truly remarkable phenomena that are exhibited by hypnotic subjects.

'And do you know, my friend,' he exclaimed in a halfserious, half -joking tone, 'in the course of my studies in anatomy I have frequently endeavoured to find the soul?'

'And, of course, you haven't succeeded in your quest?'

'Not exactly as the common herd would understand it,' he answered, with a deep seriousness now, 'for our wretched bodies being cold in death can offer us nothing but a complicated network of nerves, sinews, and muscles that quickly resolve themselves into revolting putridity. No, we must look elsewhere for the soul; we must train our eyes to pierce that mystic veil which separates the known from the unknown.'

'And have you succeeded in doing that?' I ventured to inquire.

He paused for some moments before he answered, and during the pause his keen glittering eyes were fixed upon me. Then slowly he answered:

'I have; and I have seen things such as few mortal men are permitted to see and live.'

I could not suppress a slight shudder, for his tone was so sepulchral, his manner so strange. He seemed like one who was verily speaking from the world of shadows. He quickly recovered himself, however, and expressed great delight when I told him I took an interest in the occult wonders of the spirit

world. It is true I had never gone as deeply into the matter as he had done, but still the subject had a fascination for me, and I said he would find me a diligent student if he had aught to teach.

Dinner ended, we smoked a cigar, and then, as the hour was getting late, he bade me good-night, but gave me a pressing invitation to visit him at his lodgings on the morrow.

I don't know how it was, but all night long his strange face with its glittering eyes was before me, so that, notwithstanding I was worn out with fatigue, I could not sleep. I was troubled in an unaccountable manner, troubled as I had never been before; and yet I could not for the life of me have told what I was troubled about. But I know now, alas! that it was the coming of the shadow which since then has never left me. There was closing about me then, though I knew it not at the time, the gloaming of life's night, even before the noon of my existence had been reached. What I mean by that is, that with that night there passed from me all my youth, and henceforth I was to be as one who had grown old before his time. Such a nameless fear, a nervous disquietude, took hold of me, that in the solitude of my chamber I vowed to leave the town with the first dawn of day. But I might just as well have tried to fly. That man had fascinated me; had thrown a spell about me, and so I was at his chambers at the appointed hour.

Why did I go?

I cannot tell. Call it weakness if you like; but a power that has no name drew me there As his friends were well off, and his allowance was liberal, he was enabled to study his tastes in every way. I found him occupying luxurious apartments, and as, by his aunt's request. he was going to make a stay of some months in the town, he had surrounded himself with a choice collection of books; and his library contained rare works on transmigration, ethics, hypnotism, magnetism, &c. The walls of his sitting-room were hung with strange drawings of ghostly subjects. Many of them, he assured me, had been done by spirits from the unseen world. At one end of this apartment was a heavy black velvet curtain, which I subsequently learned screened a small laboratory; for, as he informed me, he took a great interest in chemical experiments.

Ivan Vambery received me with great cordiality. When I entered he was attired in a long fur robe, and wore a smoking cap, trimmed with sable, which served to give his pale face a ghastly appearance. Without preliminary, he commenced at once to converse upon his favourite topics; and though I shuddered at his daring flights into the region of speculation, I experienced a sense of that fascinating pleasure one feels on witnessing the perilous and dangerous feats of a trapezist.

When I arrived in the town, it was my intention to continue my journey the following day, but under the influence of this remarkable man, I found my stay stretching into months, and still I could not go. My intimacy with Ivan ripened into a warm and close friendship, and he told me much of his past history. So absorbed did we become in the investigation of psychological phenomena that he neglected his studies, while I was all forgetful that I had friends and ties in other parts of the world. It did not take me long to discover that Ivan was a peculiarly excitable man. He seemed to be merely a bunch of nerves that were at times affected by the shutting of a door, a puff of wind, or the passing of a vehicle, even the falling of a pin. Some people might have called him unpractical and theorist. Perhaps he was a little of both, but so assuredly he was an earnest and an honest man, who sought for truth in those dark places where most men fear to tread. He had a habit of saying that nature was jealous of her secrets and her mysteries, and would only yield them to him who followed her into the dark by-ways where the common herd never ventured. His enthusiastic researches, however, I saw with alarm, were telling upon his health, and day by day he seemed to grow weaker, so that I begged him to desist, and travel for a short while; but he was obstinate and refused.

We had for a considerable time been engaged in an experiment that must be nameless; but it was as daring as it was awful, and he insisted in carrying this experiment to a successful issue, or proving beyond the possibility of doubt that it was useless.

One night, or rather early morning, for it was past midnight, we sat together in his room. It was bitterly cold without, and the wind wailed like a thing in pain. A large log smouldered on the hearthstone, and a shaded lamp threw a soft and mellow light over the floor, but left the upper part of the room in semidarkness.

For some time we had been sitting silently, while the only external sounds that came to us were that weird wailing of the wind and the slow and measured ticking of a clock. I had noticed with alarm the unusual ghastliness of my friend's face. It was almost as if his soul had gone out of him, and an animated corpse sat in his place. There was a lividness about the face that was appalling, while his eyes were so lustrous and metallic in appearance as to seem unnatural. Unable longer to control myself, I exclaimed:

'Ivan, you are ill!'

'Hush!' he hissed, and his voice was like one who spoke from the tomb— ' Hush!' he repeated; ' I feel that we have not worked for nothing. See, see, there— look!' he almost screamed, as he pointed one of his long white fingers towards the door.

I turned my eyes and saw the door slowly— slowly— slowly— open. Not a sound came from it, although it was a massive door. Gradually it turned upon its hinges, until it revealed the abysmal blackness of the great hall, and out of that blackness came a ghostly sigh. I was spell-bound, fascinated, and dare not turn my eyes away. I knew, however, that Ivan was on his knees by my side, grasping my wrist with a grip of steel; and, bringing his cold lips to my ear, he whispered:

'Speak not, move not, lest you break the spell.'

But I could not have spoken even had I been inclined; my tongue seemed glued to the roof of my mouth; nor do I think I could have moved, for a spell was on me. Then, from out the darkness I saw a star— a pale blue star— evolved. It floated into the room, and the door closed as slowly, silently and ghostly as it had opened. I was conscious then that my friend had fallen forward on his face, and with a suppressed cry I broke the awful spell that had bound me, and, stooping down, raised him up. He had not swooned, as I thought, and he greeted me with a sad smile.

'It is nothing,' he said faintly, as I helped him to his chair; 'I have been a little excited, and am weak, but shall be better directly. Give me a petit verre. That will revive me.'

I poured out a small glass of brandy, and he drank it; then I took some myself, for my nerves were unstrung, and, though I was deadly cold, perspiration was streaming down my face and neck. Under the influence of the liquor, Ivan's strength returned, and the hectic flush lessened the ghastly appearance of his ashen face.

'You saw it?' he asked at last in hoarse tones.

'Yes.'

'Tell me what you saw?' he demanded quickly and with nervous agitation.

'I saw the door open, and I saw a blue star float in,'

'And what did you hear?'

'A sigh, an audible sigh,' I answered.

'My doubts end; my scepticism is removed,' he exclaimed, as he rubbed his hands excitedly together.

I was puzzled to altogether understand his meaning, and I suppose I expressed this in my face, for he said:

' I am talking riddles to you, perhaps; but listen, and I'll explain. I have told you many things about myself, but there is one thing I have not told you. Years ago I loved, and she whom I loved was pure as the unsullied snow and as beautiful as the Madonnas of some of the old painters. Ah ! how I loved her, and how she loved me ! But soon a hideous disease fastened upon her, and when she lay dying I cursed all things. She bade me seek consolation in prayer,

but I laughed the idea to scorn. Then, with unspeakable gentleness, she chided me, and said we should meet in a better world. But I still scoffed. Turning her dying eyes upon me she said with an angelic smile:

' "You are wrong, Ivan, and I will return to you to prove you so."

'They were her last words, and while they still trembled on her lips she died.'

In these few, brief sentences he at once gave me the key to much that had been obscure— that is, obscure to me— and I now understood the strong incentive he had for trying to divine the hidden mysteries of the spirit world.

As he was now thoroughly exhausted I persuaded him to retire, and this he consented to do after exacting a promise from me that I would join him the following night in endeavouring to get some further manifestations,

In accordance with this promise I found myself with him once again, but I was struck, and painfully so, by his altered appearance. The chalky whiteness of his face was emphasised by heavy black shadows under the eyes. He was feeble, too, so that he tottered when he walked. I urged upon him the desirability of having medical advice, but he flouted the very idea. He said that he was jaded with working in his labora-tory all day, but it was nothing more serious than that; and he added that he had a presentiment something remarkable would happen before the night had grown old. For an hour or so we sat and talked, our subjects of conversation being metaphysical and recondite. Midnight sounded from the old belfry tower, and the brazen dong of the bell came like a shudder through the air. As the last stroke died away in a quivering groan Ivan rose, and said in a low voice, and with an air of mystery:

'The time has come.'

On the table he placed a silver dish half-filled with spirits of wine, and applying a match, there instantly shot up a pale blue, lambent flame. He had previously pulled a screen before the fire, though very little glow came from the smouldering ashes. He now turned down the lamp, so that the darkness was only relieved by the burning spirits. I trembled with suppressed excitement, but I remained silent, watching with strained eyes every movement of my friend. I saw him take from his pocket a small box, and slowly and deliberately sprinkle some powder from the box on to the chafing dish, and instantly there arose a dense, aromatic, luminous vapour that spread itself throughout the room, producing on me, if not on Ivan, a delicious sense of dreamy languor. Suddenly he seized my hand excitedly, and in a hoarse whisper cried:

'Look there!'

He pointed to the velvet curtains which screened his laboratory. Towards them I now turned my eyes, and they were riveted there with fascination, if

not with horror, by what they beheld. Standing out distinctly against the darkness of the velvet was a mass of waving nebulous light, that gradually defined itself as a blue star. Then this star expanded and grew, until slowly it assumed a human shape— the shape and features of a young woman of transcendental beauty, but with a look of ineffable sorrow on her young face, Alas ! why should it have been sorrow instead of joy?

I felt Ivan's grasp tighten on my arm, and in strange, hollow tones he spoke in my ear:

'Swear to me by all you hold sacred that if I die to-night you will continue the experiments, and in the interests of science you will endeavour to place yourself en rapport with my disembodied spirit.'

I turned and looked at him, and shrank away with horror at the ghastliness of his face. Filled with terror, I half rose, intending to summon assistance, but he forced me back into my seat again, and said in the same hollow voice, a voice that had no timbre, no resonance in it; it was a voice not of life but death:

'As you love me, as you have an immortal soul, do not move, but swear that you will do what I request!'

Wishing to pacify and calm him, I promised that I would.

'But swear it on your soul!' he said.

'I swear it on my soul,' I answered with a shiver.

'Remember,' he added with awful solemnity, ' the witness to your oath is a spirit from the other world!'

Again I shuddered, and at that moment I saw the spiritfigure slowly raise her white arm and point upward. Then she advanced to Ivan and placed her hand on his shoulder; and at that moment there came to me intuitively the knowledge of why the look of ineffable sadness shrouded that face of unearthly beauty.

A spell was upon me so that I could neither cry out nor move, beyond turning slightly to look at Ivan. At the touch of the spirit he seemed to be suddenly seized with violent convulsions. The sickly, greenish hue of his face deepened. He turned his glowing eyes upon me, then their light suddenly went out, and they were dull, grey, expressionless orbs. He gave a gasp; his head sank on his breast; he slid to the floor, and was dead.

At that instant the spirit-figure lost its outline and identity with the human form— became a mass of nebulous light again that slowly vanished. As it did so a voice solemn and awful sounded through the room, and said:

'Remember your oath!'

In a few minutes the spell of a strange fascination that had bound me and made me dumb was broken, and I uttered a cry of anguish— a cry that was wrung from me by almost more than mortal suffering.

In my excitement I pulled the bell-cord violently, and, with a crash and a clang, alarmed the household. But nothing could be done. Ivan Vambery was too surely dead.

The event caused immense excitement in the town, and I was accused of having been instrumental in bringing about his death, and, notwithstanding that a post mortem examination revealed that he had died from excitement acting on a weak heart, I was thrown into prison, for a suspect in Eussia is shown no mercy by the iniquitous law. For a whole year I languished, and when I asked why I was detained I was told that it was because evidence might yet be forthcoming that I had murdered my friend.

At the end of the year, however, I was set at liberty, and lost no time in leaving the wretched country. I travelled all over the Continent, scarcely staying two days in one place. But my dear Ivan's dying look and the terrible warning voice never left me. Neither travel nor excitement could make me forget them. I grew morbid, melancholy, and ill. My doctors prescribed change of air and scene, but I laughed at them, for they were utterly ignorant of the disease from which I suffered.

Many a time I resolved to make those tests that Ivan and I had been in the habit of making when we wanted spiritual manifestations, but each time my courage failed me, and still the voice sighed in my ear, ' Remember your vow!'

I had now settled down in London, and, unable longer to endure the fearful state of mind, I determined at all hazards to try and call up the spirit of the dead Ivan.

It was a terribly stormy night when I prepared to put my resolution into practice. The wind fairly shrieked, and the rain dashed violently against my window. I drew my chair to the table and put the lamp out. The fire in the grate had burnt to a dull red. The clock on my chimney-piece marked eleven. For an hour I sat gradually bringing myself into the proper state to receive spiritual manifestations. The glow of the fire had faded, an inky darkness filled the room, the silence was death-like, save that I heard my heart beat. I felt ill, and yet the old horrible fascination kept me at the table. I concentrated my thoughts on Ivan. I desired intensely that his spirit should visit me if it were possible. I silently called him, as it were, from the depths of my being, and the more I longed to have my desire gratified the weaker I grew. At last I would have risen and fled, but could not. I was bound there— chained by invisible chains that would not break and set me free. Half after midnight chimed by the

clock. Then I became conscious of *a presence*. It presented no shape to the eye, but I knew *I was not alone*.

Almost involuntarily my lips unclosed, and like a mechanical figure I whispered:

'Ivan Vambery, are you here?'

A cold wind swept across my face, and I interpreted that as a sign in the affirmative. Then a chill foreboding seized upon me— a foreboding of wbat I know not. I was the only living thing in the room, and the dead could not harm me. Why then did I fear? Again I answer, I know not. But I experienced that unutterable terror which men experience when they know that between them and Sheol there is, as it were, but a curtain of air.

Gradually as I peered into the darkness there became visible to my aching eyes a small, pale blue light; and as I watched it its outer edges clearly defined themselves into the five radii of a star, and in the centre of that star I saw the livid face and glittering eyes of Ivan Vambery.

I have a recollection that at the same moment the timepiece proclaimed the hour of one, not with the usual melodious tinkle, but with a stroke that was like the clanging of the huge clapper of an iron bell. Then the star faded and a blank occurred.

When I awoke from my sleep or swoon, whichever it was, the sunlight was streaming in through my window, for the storm had passed. I felt ill, and I knew by a strange intuition that for me peace had fled for ever. So the years have rolled on, but since that terrible night I have been haunted by the appearance of that star, blue and quivering, and in its centre the awful face of the dead Ivan is immovably fixed.

I have travelled from city to city, from country to country, but cannot escape my fate. In the crowded ball-room, or the busy street; in the sanctuary of the church, or the solitude of my chamber, that blue star framing the ghastly face gleams upon me, and so it will ever gleam until the corruptible and incorruptible are separated, and Psyche, freed from her temple, shall soar to the mystic region that is wisely veiled from the eyes of all, save the most daring and peculiarly constituted men.

9: The Un-Punctual Painting

Bertram Atkey

1880-1952

The Grand Magazine Jan 1920

A "Smiler Bunn" story. There are said to be over 40 short stories featuring Smiler Bunn.

THE HARE, abruptly startled from its quiet retreat under a spreading mangold leaf, was so excessively flustered that for a fraction of a moment it paused, thus unwisely forming, as it were, the apex of a triangle comprising Mr. Smiler Bunn, his partner ex-Lord Fortworth and itself.

Then it gave a mighty bound and started for a spot some miles away. It was late.

Mr. Bunn's gun spoke crisply and the hare ceased from troubling and was at rest.

"Pretty," said Mr. Bunn in accents of justifiable pride. "A very pretty shot— as clean as chloroform. I don't know that I've ever made a better shot. I'll eat his meat *à la Royale*," he concluded with a certain cannibalistic gusto, and called across to Fortworth:

"How's that, Squire?"

Fortworth looked up from the gun which he was reloading

"Fine work," he cried, smiling. "I never shot a hare cleaner in my life."

"Hey?" bawled Mr. Bunn. "That was my hare, Squire. Sorry."

Fortworth drew nigh, laughing. They had just finished their day.

"*Your* hare, ha ha! Don't deceive yourself that way, old man! Your shot kicked up the dust a good yard behind his tail. I saw it. I said to myself at the time, That's hard luck— a good shot, too, but short. It's his worst fault. He never will throw far enough! You will find that hare's heart pierced in all directions by the shot from my gun. Does that convey anything to you?"

Mr. Bunn was somewhat purple.

"You are the lad that is deceiving himself," he said emphatically. "That hare was dead before your charge was more than halfway," he expostulated firmy. "There's reason in all things, Squire. A child could see that I shot that hare. It ain't like me to take what isn't mine, and as a general rule I give up what is strictly mine for sake of peace and quietness, but this is stretching it a bit too far. I've got, in sheer common fairness, to insist that I shot that hare, Squire. I'm afraid you'll have to hand it to me this time."

But Fortworth merely roared with angry and scornful laughter.

"Hand you nothing!" he shouted. "If that animal could speak I'm the lad he'd blame for shooting him— but you'd get the credit for frightening him.

Man-alive, d'you think I'd tell a lie for a mere hare? I *felt* myself shoot him. The instant I pressed the trigger I said, '*My hare*!' and a good shot it was, though I say it I heard your gun but I thought it was the echo of mine."

"You make me tired, Squire," declared Mr. Bunn furiously. "Why should I try to claim your hare— I've shot far more than you have to-day, as you know. I'm in form— at the very top of my form—"

"One miserable rabbit is what you were ahead of me— and he was so slow you could have killed him with the butt of your gun," replied Fortworth.

"Beg pardon, gentlemen," said the keeper, coming up. "But the man that shot that hare is going to get away with it if we don't look out. He was hidng in the ditch with a gun— a poacher—most darin' man, gentlemen!"

The partners looked in the direction of the hare and perceived that it had vanished. Dangling over the shoulder of a gipsy-like gentleman, it was moving at an extremely brisk rate towards the thick woods on the right.

"DVou mean to say he shot it?" they demanded simultaneously.

"Yes sir. You all three fired together— your shot, sir, blew a mangold to pieces a yard behind him"— (this to Mr. Bunn)— "and your shot, sir, was a foot too high. I was watching, gentlemen "

They faced him, their mouths opened to blast him where he stood—when at that instant another hare, seeming as big as a jackass, bounded in panic out of his form not twenty feet away. As these remarkable animals sometimes will, he had remained there through all the noise— either scared stiff or merely foolish.

Bang— bang! Mr. Bunn fired in mad haste, swearing as he fired. A little spray of debris leaped into the air a good yard behind the hare,

Bang — bang! Fortworth as nearly as possible had pulled both triggers together— but with no other effect than to frighten the fleeing hare into a furious spurt.

"Haha! You both bossed him!" laughed the keeper, completely forgetting himself.

They turned on him like two grizzlies, drawing breath to sack him, but fortunately for him Fate intervened to save him— Fate in the form of Sing Song, Mr. Bunn's automatic crutch. The Chink was cantering lightly over the mangolds, a telegram in his hand.

Delighted at the opportunity of a more or less graceful "get out" of a slightly undignified position the partners feigned intense interest in his approach.

"What has the yellow gink got hold of now?" growled Smiler.

"Looks like a wire," suggested Fortworth, retailing the obvious.

Sing Song placed the telegram in his master's hand and Mr. Bunn gave his gun to the keeper.

"See that it's properly cleaned this time," he said. "It's been shooting foul all day. Lord de Grey himself couldn't hit a flying barn with it— the gun's filthy."

He opened the telegram, glanced at it, and handed it to Fortworth.

"What d'you make of that, Squire?" he demanded.

Fortworth absorbed the contents of the wire, which were brief but to the point:—

Victor kidnapped. No clue. Detectives useless. Implore you both come Dunes Hall. — Katie Beauray.

"That's the drawback to being the only grandson of a multi-millionaire and pet godchild of a childless billionaire— you're apt to be kidnapped," said Mr. Bunn, pulling out his cigar case. "We'd better go, hey? There's no need to be desperate, though I suppose Dunes Hall is in a pretty fluster about it. I should like to have a bet that the kidnapper, whoever he is, is taking rather more care of Victor Beauray than he would of the Kohinoor if he'd had the luck to kidnap that."

He lit his cigar.

Fortworth acquiesced, and together they strolled back to the comfortable farmhouse they had rented with the shooting.

In spite of the naturally rather frantic nature of the telegram they did not unduly strain themselves in the matter of speed. As Mr. Bunn had said, little Victor Beauray, who some day, with luck, would be one of the richest men on earth, might be kidnapped, but he 'was as safe with his " 'nappers" as he would be at home in his costly little bed. Any man or men with the brains necessary to get away with Victor (as Mr Bunn put it) had sufficient and more than sufficient sense to take care of him, for he was precious.

And in any case, as Fortworth took occasion to observe, there was nothing to be gained by prancing swiftly among the mangold wurzels in an agitated manner. Far better take it steadily— and stroll quietly back to the excellent dinner which awaited them, thinking it over quietly and carefully

"We shall gain nothing by rushing this thing—" said Fortworth

"Or by tackling it on an empty stomach," supplemented Mr. Bunn. "One thing at a time and only one is quite enough for Mr. Bunn— that's poetry, and true, too."

So they sent the keeper to the Post Office with a telegram of two words: "Surely coming," and proceeded to take the necessary steps to guard

themselves against the danger of travelling on empty stomachs— a wise precaution, but a lengthy process.

It was nine o'clock at night before their big limousine, with Sing Song at the wheel, rolled silently out on to the main road for its hundred-mile run.

They discussed their problem between dozes en route, but they knew so very little of the circumstances that they did not arrive at any conclusion of importance during the first half of their journey.

But at about eleven o'clock Fortworth woke up with a start so violent that he woke Mr. Bunn.

Smiler glared under the electric light.

"What's the idea?" he demanded resentfully.

"How idea?" mumbled Fortworth.

"Kicking me on the knee-cap that way! There's no need to hack me on the knee-cap to attract my attention."

"I had a dream," explained Fortworth, "and I dreamed I was kicking somebody else. That's it— somebody else." His voice rose "And I don't mind betting that the man I dreamed I was kicking is the man who has kidnapped Victor Beauray."

Mr Bunn smiled an ironical smile.

"Weil, it's one way of tracking, him down— dreaming of him But it's a pretty poor way, Squire," he said, indulgently— "yes, pretty poor and I guess you've got another dream coming to you. Who was it?"

The dour ex-peer leaned forward

"Prince Rupert of Rottenberg," he said.

An expression of amazement flashed on to Mr. Bunn's face, and unconsciously he nodded. He had not thought of the man who had been Katie Beauray's second husband— until divorced.

"Well, that's not such a bad guess— for a dream," he said, handsomely. "I'll own it. Yes. Rupe certainly is a very likely lad for this business. It's a thousand to one that he's hard up— most of these German war-Royalties must be— and it would be natural for him to think of Ebney Rush's millions when he was planning to make a few more marks for himself. And the thought of Rush would lead him on to the Beaurays and their child. Yes— on the whole, it's likely you've dreamed about right. However, we shall know more later. Meantime," he concluded with rather ponderous humour, "go to sleep and dream again. Squire— dream again. Perhaps you'll dream of the address of the place where Rupert's hiding the lad. And if you dream you're kicking the door in, kick a little more to the right. You want to bear in mind that you're wearing shooting boots, Squire, and that I'm not wearing cricket pads."

And so saying Mr. Bunn lapsed comfortably into his interrupted slumbers.

Fortworth did dream again. He dreamed that he and Mr. Bunn had found little Victor in a field of mangold wurzels, and while they were arguing as to who had seen him first, Prince Rupert of Rottenberg sprang out of a ditch and had seized the boy and vanished into the woods with him while an old jack hare had come up and told them that their guns were foul and their shooting disgraceful, and that Lord de Grey had sent a telegram complaining about it

This dream Fortworth did not mention.

ii

IT WAS in the neighbourhood of one o'clock when the two old rascals arrived at Dunes Hall, for so the beautiful old Manor House on the Norfolk coast which the Beaurays were occupying was named, and the first wave of alarm had died down to an extent The family was there in force— Mr. Ebney Rush, the ferro-concrete substitute monarch, father of Katie Beauray, and grandfather of the missing boy, Mr. Henry le Hay, of Brillingham Castle, (when not in America), the world-famous lard millionaire, and his wife; Major Geoffrey Beauray, D.S.O., M.C. and about four rather hunted-looking detectives, some private some official— all vainly worrying every nook and cranny for signs of some clue.

The partners were met by practically the whole family in the great hall, and the warmth of their reception would have been rather flattering to any couple less free from self-consciousness.

They entered briskly, and smiling— the only people who had dared to smile in that house for the last forty-eight hours— and subdued greetings were made

Mr. Bunn looked at Katie Beauray.

"Come here, my dear," he said, and put his great hands one on each shoulder.

"You're worrying," he said, sternly, "Why? Nobody's going to hurt your baby— that's the last thing that can happen. The people who have taken him don't want to hurt him— they're probably taking far more care of him than of their own children, if they've got any. What they want to hurt is his grandfather's and godfather's great big swelled-up bank accounts. Now, if you start worrying I can't think properly— nor my partner either. And if we can't think properly it will take us a good deal longer to get the little lad back We're going to make you promise. We're going to get Victor back for you and quickly. I can't tell you to an hour exactly when but you; can be sure you won't have long to wait. Do you believe me?"

Mrs. Beauray looked up at the big face, the massive head, of the old adventurer, and nodded. She actually smiled a little

"Yes — oh yes, yes," she said,

"Very well, then. It will probably cost the family a pretty penny, but that'll be all right. Money's no object, thank God!" said Mr. Bunn comfortably. It wasn't his money.

"Take her to bed, Mrs. le Hay— you both ought to be in bed. You're tired out, both of you. I can see it. I'm surprised at you, Geoff, and you, Henry le Hay, permitting them to wear themselves out when it is essential that they should keep fit — 'pon me soul, I'm surprised at men of your ability!"

He was talking to a winner of the D.S.O. and M.C., and to about the third richest man in America— but they looked guilty. Le Hay opened his mouth to explain that American husbands are not expert at sending their wives to bed against the ladies' wishes, but on second thoughts closed it with a metallic click of his gold teeth.

It was noteworthy that the ladies went to bed forthwith, quite meekly. What Mr. Bunn said went in that house. But that he had proved his right to a certain authority neither Katie Beauray nor Mrs. le Hay would have dreamed of denying.

"And now," said he, a few moments later, as he drew a huge and luxurious arm chair up to a blazing fire in the library, "now we can get busy!" He carefully lit a cigar, presumably the first stage of the act of getting busy.

"Now, Geoff, let's have the facts."

Major Beauray (himself largely indebted to the partners for many benefits) gave them full particulars, the two multis sitting silently at the table just behind.

It was quite simple

Little Victor— five years old— had been put to bed as usual in his room adjoining and communicating on the right with his mother's room, two nights before. In the communicating room to the left slept his nurse, a tried and trusted old retainer, who only needed at any hour of the night to touch an electric bell-push in her bedpost to turn out two hefty "guards" (usually camouflaged footmen) who slept within easy reach.

The only entrances to the boy's room were through the nurse's room or his mother's.

At half -past eleven Katie Beauray and her husband had gone in and seen the boy. Everything was in perfect order and quite normal.

In the morning Victor had gone. The room and bed were wholly undisturbed. The nurse had overslept a little and it was Mrs. Beauray who had discovered that the boy's bed was empty.

That was the whole of it.

It was as if a silent hand had reached in through the quarter-opened window of the boy's room and plucked him. No sound had been heard, no sign had been seen.

Lord le Hay and Mr. Ebney Rush had communicated with Scotland Yard and the Home Office— the country Police Station was not for them— and they were quite "big" enough men to put the wind up to an appreciable degree m certain of the places where the Government do their governing. With a four-and-ninepenny dollar grinding its iron heel on the face of an eight-and-sixpenny pound the Government could not fail to realise that nothing was to be gained by failing in courtesy to two really hefty money-captains of the U.S.A.

So a pair of the very best detectives available were promptly hunted down to Dunes Hall— not to mention a brace of private investigators, of whom Mr. Ebney Rush had heard good words spoken.

They had all worked very hard— the detectives. They had examined everybody in the house and everything, but they had not found any clues.

Victor Beauray had disappeared in the night. They were well aware of that, but it was all of which they were well aware.

One— the senior official detective— had committed himself to the statement that it looked like the work of "professionals," and had telephoned to London certain enquiries as to the whereabouts of one "Uncle" John Burton, a kidnapper. But it proved that "Uncle" John was still working off— at Portland— the penalty of a slight miscalculation in the matter of a little "job" which had missed fire some three years before,

Mr. Bunn, rather audaciously, had the official detectives paraded before him. He questioned them kindly and they rather warmed to him. After all, even senior detectives are human and possess nerves, and when the Lord High Chief Topdog is a little "breezy" he usually contrives to pass it on to his underlings. As in the Army, when the Colonel of the regiment is ravening for fresh, hot blood in large quantities, you rarely find a really happy sergeant-major, so in the Police.

Mr. Bunn's questioning of the really competent official detectives was characteristic.

''You've been here nearly twenty-four hours," he said. "When did you eat last? Have you had any sleep?"

The answers were "six hours ago" and "no."

Mr. Bunn gazed coldly at Messrs. Beauray, le Hay and Rush— who looked a little shamefaced.

"*All* men work best with dinners under their belts and the grits out of their eyes," he said rather severely.

"Honestly, now, have you found out anything worth while?" he asked in that man-to-man tone of his, which was well calculated to inspire confidence.

The senior detective shook a worried head.

"Nothing. I never heard of such a case— never. That's why we're here now. There must be something waiting to give us a start. I never heard of a case which didn't have one loose end hanging out. I— we've— questioned the servants minutely— turned them inside out. They've noticed nothing— can think of nothing "

"Except possibly that boot-boy— Cooper, sir," said the junior detective, very diffidently indeed.

"Cooper! What about Cooper?" The whole five of them pounced like hawks.

"Cooper? Who's Cooper?" snapped Ebney Rush. "What does he say?"

The detective consulted his note-book,

"He doesn't seem to be quite all there, but I made a note of his fancy, although it probably has no bearing on the matter. He says that he noticed that the Corot— that picture near the hall clock, gentlemen— here the detective read from his book, "was an hour later in the evening the morning after the night the little boy was kidnapped than it was the afternoon before I tried to get out of him what he meant but he's as shy as a hare and he turned sulky and said he meant nothing— it was the only thing he'd noticed. He seemed to me to be half-witted and I gathered that he had got confused with the Daylight Saving Order. The clocks were put back an hour on the night the child disappeared. I've seen him twice but can make nothing out of him."

Mr. Bunn's eyes were half-closed, but Fortworth was storing at him. The ex-peer knew that steel-like gleam through the eye-lids of old

"Just read again what this lad Cooper said, will you?" requested Mr. Bunn, blandly.

The detective read. —

"The little picture near the clock in the hall was an hour later in the evening the morning after the night the little boy was kidnapped than it was the afternoon before."

"That," said Beauray drily, "is very helpful."

Mr. Bunn turned to him

"Don't you be too sure that it's no good, Geoff. It's only a detail and a little detail at that— but so's the gap of a sparking plug. And you wouldn't get very far along the road without a gap to your sparking plug points, hey?"

"You think, sir, that it means something?" queried the main detective, politely,

"On the whole, I do, yes— sure," said Mr. Bunn guardedly.

Messrs. Ebney Rush and Lord le Hay— both fine judges of a man, though they were perhaps a notch or two below their average concerning Mr. Bunn— began to get excited.

"Say, Geoff, press that bell and send for Cooper," said Mr. Rush

But Smiler stayed him with a large, warning hand.

"If," he said, "if you want to scare the little devil into a fit of meaninglessness you couldn't do better than fetch him out of bed and parade him before the seven of us here. No, Rush, old man— let him alone for tonight, and I will deal with the lad to-morrow."

He graciously dismissed the detectives.

"What you need, m'friends, is a good square meal and some sleep. After that, I've got an idea I can keep you busy," he informed them. They went out, grateful but puzzled, and stared very hard at the clock in the hall which had been put back an hour, and at the picture that was "an hour later in the evening the morning after the night," and so forth

"There's no sense in it, Alfred, that I can see," said the main detective— one Rufton. "Everything is an hour late in the evening if you put your clock back an hour— and if you put it back two hours, well, everything's two hours later. He's a decent old bird, that chap Flood" (you remember Mr. Bunn was known as 'Wilton Flood')— "a very sensible, decent old bird, indeed, but when he's seen that little boiled owl Cooper I fancy he'll realise that when we turned Cooper down we turned down nothing."

They wandered on down the corridor to the butler's room

"Everything's an hour later— from the clock in the hall to the mousetraps in the larder— you're fool enough to look at it in that light," came the puzzled muttering of the chief sleuth, gradually dying out over his shoulder— "except our supper— and that's a good six hours later."

"Yes, sir," said the junior detective, feelingly. "That's right, sir."

"And you were a bit above yourself to mention it at all. Why don't you keep your mouth shut when I'm reporting? Everything in this house is an hour later than it was— except your mouth. And that's a good hour too early."

"Very sorry, sir "

"All right. Cut it out in future."

"Certainly I will, sir..."

They halted at the "butlery."

Meantime things in the library were interesting.

The "multis" and Beauray possessed what was now an ingrained and growing belief in Mr. Bunn, and not unnaturally they were keenly anxious to learn as much as his somewhat mysterious manner led them to believe he knew.

But he was not to be drawn.

He beamed round upon them kindly enough, but he was firm.

he said. "Until I've seen this lad, Cooper, there will be nothing doing. Not because I won't, but because I don't want to raise a lot of false hopes. You don't want to get any idea that I'm churlish about this business. I'm not. It hurts me to hold my idea up— but it's got to be."

He gazed at Ebney Rush.

"There you are, Ebney, just itching to offer me thousands of pounds for getting the little lad back— and you, Henry le Hay, with your finger on the trigger of your cheque book and the cheque book itself aimed dead true at my breeches pocket for the same service— you too, Geoff— ain't that so?"

"That's so," chorused the millionaires crisply.

"Well, I'm sorry. We like money, my partner and me, as well as the next man— but we can't take money for nothing. When we've got young Victor comfortably straddling across his rocking horse flogging the hide off it, then— and not till then— we'll say 'Shoot!' but not before— no, sirs. That's right. Squire, ain't it?"

"Sure," said Fortworth faithfully. "Poor— compared with some of you— we are. But we're proud, hey. Flood?"

"Proud as Lucy Firr— whoever she was," acquiesced Mr. Bunn. "Friend of Charles the Second, wasn't she?"

And with that the party broke up to get the rest they all needed.

iii

BOOT-BOY Cooper was busy upon his lawful occasions. That is to say, upon the following morning he had collected from various dressing rooms such articles as the valets of the gentlemen of the house had put out for his early morning attention, prior to their own efforts later, and was en route to the scene of his daily labours. He was not hastening, for he was one of the earliest risers in the house. Boot-boy Cooper, indeed, usually rose much earlier than he need have done— in order to gratify a passion which is infrequently part of the psychological equipment of boot-lads.

Mr. Cooper's passion was all for art in the form of painted pictures. The son of poor but not actively dishonest parents, Mr. Cooper, at the age of fourteen, was unanimously considered by the entire staff of Dunes Hall to approximate

to half-wittedness, and it was due solely to the kindness of the housekeeper's heart that the shy, undersized lad was permitted to earn a few shillings a week at the big house.

He could have improved himself. He had, indeed, been approached by the bailiff of a local agriculturist with offers of higher emolument for duties connected with the cleaning out of stables and cowsheds, but this he had refused on the ground that there would be no oil-paintings to look at in the cow department. He had, in short, sacrificed material advancement for the sake of art. He had informed his mother, with tears, that he would certainly die if he was torn away from his daily passionate, but furtive study of the pictures at Dunes Hall. Whence had sprung his fierce, half-crazy devotion to painting nobody knew. It was thought by his father, a cowman of no great intellect, that Mrs. Cooper's descriptions of the pictures of an artist who had been lodging at her mother's cottage in the village some little time before the lad had made his appearance in this vale of tears, had first stirred his enthusiasm in this direction — an opinion shared by Mrs. Cooper. But however that may have been, it is certain that the boy knew every picture in Dunes Hall by heart. There were many pictures there and they were good— and it was to stare at them and blindly to adore them that Boot-boy Cooper rose early six days out of seven.

One figures to oneself the poor little devil— sleepy-eyed, creeping about the great house through the grey dawn in his stockings, gazing at the pictures he loved without knowing why, rapt wonder on his oddly delicate, refined, girlish face (so quaintly unlike the practically featureless visage of his bucolic father) understanding the carefully painted work without knowing that he understood it, with marvels in his brain though none guessed it yet, furtive as a mouse, timid as a fawn, ready to bolt for the boot-hole at the sound of a tread....

He was staring at the Corot landscape in the hall, with puzzled eyes, on the morning after Messrs. Bunn and Fortworth arrived, when some instinct urged him to look round He did so— and was startled almost to the screaming-point.

For a large man, and fat, was watching him. He had not heard the man approach. But the panic died down quickly— for the man was smiling in a very friendly way. Also he looked good natured. Also he was eating a large, handsome, excessively curranty rock cake (Mr Bunn always maintained that eating that rock cake at that hour of the morning was The Bravest Deed He Ever Did)

"Hello, sonny. Looking at the pictures, hey?" said Mr. Bunn.

"Y-yes, sir," faltered Boot-boy Cooper

"And very nice, too, sonny, very nice, too. Now, that's a very pretty picture. Have a rock cake, sonny?" He produced a paper bag.

"T-thank you, sir." Timidly the boy took it. Too shy to eat it, he stared solemnly at this fairy godfather

Mr. Bunn bit a large piece off his cake, and moved closer to the Corot, affecting not to notice the boy

"Eat your cake before it gets stale, son. I must say I do like a good rock cake, don't you, hey?"

"Yes, sir." The mouse nibbled— while Smiler stared at the picture.

"Yes, that's very pretty. You can see that it's getting on towards supper-time in that picture, can't you, sonny?— on a kind of misty evening. Is that mist— or is it smoke from a fire in somebody's garden—"

"It's mist, sir— But it isn't so much like mist as it used to be. It's mistier, sir."

"Mistier, hey, sonny? How's that?"

"It's later in the evening than it used to be, sir."

"Later, is it?"

"Yes, sir— last week the picture was like the evening is at six o'clock in September— now it's like it is at seven o'clock, sir."

"It's different, is it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Supposing somebody had changed the picture, sonny— taken away the six o'clock one and put this one in its place— hey, sonny?"

The boy gaped. Clearly this had not occurred to him. No doubt he had subconsciously regarded the picture belonging to the high, powerful, god-like people spoken of reverently even by the Butler Himself, as "Billionaires!" as something no more likely to be changed than the church tower or the kitchen range. He had accepted the idea that it could change in the manner that the twilight changes— but that the one which depicted six o'clock could be taken and another which depicted seven o'clock substituted had obviously never occurred to him.

He looked sharply at the picture, then back to Mr. Bunn, and his face changed. He smiled like a child who has solved a puzzle.

"How's that for an idea, sonny. Is it the same picture as the one which was hanging up here two nights ago?"

"No, sir." Boot-boy Cooper's voice was as definite and decisive as the sharp edge of an axe.

"You're sure of it, hey, son. Point out one or two things which are different."

Airily, the lad did so— a dozen things— "The shadows under the leaves here was different, sir—and the colour of the place where the sunset was showing is colder— " he was running on, when Mr. Bunn stopped him.

"That'll be all right, my son," he said, eyeing him with a certain admiration. "You may be a boot-boy, laddie, but you've got an eye like a hawk for a picture. Here, take this, my boy—" He crammed some silver in the small fist. "You're a good little lad, and— you've dealt yourself a better hand than you know. Yes, my boy— four aces and the joker. All right, sonny. Finish your rock-cake and— er— you may as well finish mine for me while you're at it."

And so saying, Mr. Bunn ruffled the boy's hair with a clumsily friendly gesture and moved away towards his room.

"I knew it," he muttered. "Yes, sir, the old man knew it. They've got to rise early if they're going to catch any early worms belonging to the old man— me. Nose like a point-blank bloodhound— eyes like a condemned old crow!"

And so proceeded to Fortworth's room.

"Wake up, Squire— this is our busy day," he said loudly in his irascible partner's ear— and Fortworth woke in no uncertain manner....

THE AUTUMN mists still hung like grey veils upon all, wet and heavy and salt with the smell of the sea that was crawling languidly about the fiats, when the partners' big limousine, driven by Sing Song, with Mr Bunn, Fortworth, two detectives, and Boot-boy Cooper aboard, rolled silently away from Dunes Hall, nosing out to the London road.

Fortworth was in a contrary mood.

"Perhaps now you've got us out of bed, out of the house, and travelling as hard as the car can take us away from breakfast," he remarked, "it wouldn't strain you to give us some idea of what it's all about and what sense there is in it?"

"Sure, sure," said Mr. Bunn. "Sure, I will."

Mr. Bunn selected a cigar, carefully lit it, and settling comfortably down in his fur coat, surveyed his little company with a benign and fatherly gaze.

"We're going to fetch little Victor Beauray back to his mamma," he said. "I've decided that he's been away quite long enough."

Detective-Inspector Rufton gurgled surprisedly.

"D'ye mean to say you know where he is, sir?"

"No, I can't say I definitely know, Inspector. But Cooper and I have got a hunch that we can lay our hands on the missing boy and the missing Corot very shortly— yes, very shortly— hey, sonny?"

Boot-boy Cooper broke off his solo upon the ginger beer bottle long enough to agree shyly.

"You mean to say, sir, you have found out how he was stolen and by whom?" persisted the detective.

"I guess I have. Maybe the old man is wrong— maybe not. We shall see."

"You say 'the missing Corot.' D'you mean that the picture in the hall was changed— the original stolen and another put in its placed"

"We do that— don't we, son?"

"But both Mr and Mrs. Beauray, and Mr. Rush and Mr and Mrs le Hay, all large buyers of good pictures, have seen the picture in the hall a dozen times since the night of the kidnapping, and they have not noticed the exchange. Are you sure, sir?"

"Me sure? No. I don't understand pictures, myself."

"Then, if you don't mind my asking, sir, how do you know the genuine Corot has been taken and a substitute left?"

"Cooper says so," said Mr. Bunn.

"Cooper!" The detectives turned to gaze upon the shrinking boot-boy, as if he were a small beetle that had crept out from under the seat to express an opinion upon art matters.

"Cooper!... Do you know anything about pictures, my lad?"

"No, sir," said Cooper.

They all turned in amazement upon the blandly smiling Mr. Bunn.

Who waved his cigar.

"That's all right," he said cheerfully. "He knows more about pictures than the total population of Dunes Hall and this car combined— but he doesn't know he knows it. Instinct— gift— genius— born with it."

They stared, obviously doubtful.

"But what's it got to do with little Victor Beauray anyway?" said Fortworth, interested in spite of himself.

Mr Bunn gazed reproachfully at Ms partner.

"Listen, Squire," he said, "listen while I quote something a man once said to you and me. This is what he said— and I always think he put it very well, very well indeed: *My artistic passion carried me away, I have always suffered from an obsession for those little things by Constable, the art of De Wint to me is a perpetual joy, and I love to bask in the rays of the genius of Prout*—"

"Paradix Dix, by G— d!" shouted Fortworth. "He said that when we found him stealing pictures at le Hay's place at Brillingham!" The detectives were staring meaningly at each other.

"Correct!" smiled Mr. Bunn.

"And you think he exchanged this Corot?"

"I do. Killed two birds with one stone. Kidnapped the boy and pinched the Corot at the same time. Probably he had a copy of the Corot. I shouldn't be

surprised if le Hay gave the picture to the Beaurays. Dix probably saw it at Brillingham Castle, where he was a guest— until we ran him out— but didn't get the chance to make the exchange at Brillingham. He learnt that the Corot has gone to Dunes Hall, and when he made his plans to kidnap the boy, decided to get the picture as well. He would have pulled it off if Cooper hadn't had a better eye for a picture than our friends back at Dunes. But the man was greedy— and greed gets it in the neck nine times out of ten. He's a smart lad, is Paradix Dix— I always said so— but he's greedy. If he'd left the picture alone he would never have been suspected As it was I smelt a badger the moment I heard a picture— a good picture— mentioned. That's all. You only need to keep your brains simmering in a case like this and it's simple, hey? Ever heard of this Dix, Inspector?"

The detectives smiled.

"We call him 'Buttery Ben ' He's as slippery as an eel. He's a crook we've been watching for a long time. But I think we've got him this time "

"Yes, I think so, too," said Mr Bunn complacently. "I'm glad I took the trouble to ferret out where he lives some time back."

(Mr. Bunn had done this shortly after their Ascot adventure, at some expense to himself and much profit to the private inquiry agent who had shadowed Dix from the Astoritz Hotel, where he frequently dined, one night. But he did not tell the detectives this.)

"You know his address, sir?"

"I do," said Mr Bunn, and gave it— a village some fifteen miles north-east of London "And unless I have backed the worst also-ran that every spoiled good turf that's where we shall find Victor Beauray and the painting by the late Mussoor Corot! And that's that."

The detectives were smiling and happy.

"You ought to have been a detective yourself, sir," said the Inspector.

"I'll say so," agreed the old rascal. "But on the whole I prefer to be a gentleman of private means, close friend and trusted adviser of several millionaires "

"Yes— "you're right, of course, sir, on the whole," said the detective, wistfully....

THE REST was simple.

It was without any attempt at concealment that the partners' big car drove up to the entrance of a quiet, unpretentious house lying a little back from the road half hidden by shrubberies, in the Essex village which Mr. Paradix Dix utilised as his country headquarters. And it was without any loss of time that

the competent five, including Sing Song, the Chink, swiftly posted themselves at all the immediately apparent bolt holes.

"If I know anything about Paradix, he won't be out of bed yet," said Mr. Bunn, as with sleuthhound Rufton he arrived at the front door

There was no immediate answer to their knock.

It was very silent in the morning sunshine. They waited a moment.

From somewhere at the back came the sound of Fortworth and the junior sleuth knocking at the back door, and a powerful motor bicycle said "tuff-tuff-tuff" as it came out of a lane on to the main road. But these noises died out and the silence fell again

"Nobody up, hey?" said Mr. Bunn, and was at the point of repeating his fantasia on the knocker when the door was opened by a woman— a hard-looking, healthy, but worn woman, quite obviously a "daily" woman from the village.

"Is Mr. Dix at home?" asked the Inspector.

"No, sir."

"Do you know where he is? I am a police detective, so please answer carefully."

"No," said the woman, not much moved by the Inspector's manner.

"That's very helpful," said Mr. Bunn, sarcastically. "Is Mrs. Dix in?"

"No, sir. She went with Mr. Dix. They've not been gone ten minutes. They went in a great hurry— on the motorbicycle. I wonder you didn't hear it."

The detective ground his teeth.

"I did," he snarled.

"Well, is the little boy here still?" asked Mr. Bunn, quite casually.

Her hard face lighted up.

"Yes, sir— having his breakfast."

"Hah! Good— very good!" exploded Mr. Bunn.

"He's a dear little boy, sir," volunteered the daily lady, leading the way.

"He is," agreed Smiler. "In fact, you might almost say expensive."

Victor Beauray was at the moment heavily in action with porridge and jam. He did not desire to be interrupted, and was obviously prepared to resist most lungfully any disturbance. That may have been the chief reason why the Dixes, when, on catching one glimpse of the Bunn cohort, they made their frantic dive for safety, via motor-bicycle, did not take Victor with them. They had perhaps ten seconds to get out of the house to their motor-bicycle and away. It takes at least that time to separate a healthy, hungry, five-year-old from porridge and jam. They did not risk it. They did not even risk waiting long enough to fetch the Corot from the dining-room.

According to the story of the daily woman, as subsequently gleaned by Mr. Bunn, they had been in the room with Victor when Mr. Dix, glancing out of the window, saw Mr. Bunn and Co. alighting from the car.

"Come," he had said briefly to his wife.

And they had gone forthwith....

THEY WERE back at Dunes Hall just about in time for lunch— with the exception of the junior detective, left in charge at Mr. Paradix Dix's late residence, but it not until he and his partner had disposed of a meal which went far to make up for the omission of breakfast from their day, that Mr. Bunn, enthroned in a gigantic easy chair in the library with a cigar in full blast gave them all particulars

The Beaurays, le Hays, and Mr. Rush listened attentively, admiringly, in silence.

"—but at the same time you want to understand," concluded Mr, Bunn, generously, "that if it hadn't have been for Boot-boy Cooper it would probably have taken us a good deal longer to get the little lad back, hey, Squire."

"Squire" Fortworth agreed.

"That young fellow is a very remarkable cock," said Smiler. "And nobody need feel offended when I say that he knows by instinct more about pictures than all the rest of us put together. That's how it goes, of course. The wealthy own these works— which is as it should be, to my mind— but the quaint classes, artists, cranks, geniuses, vegetarians, antique sharps, story writers, and Boot-boy Cooper understand 'em. If anyone steals a mid-summer scene by Bill Corot, say, and puts a skating scene by Jim Constable, say, in its place, we should probably notice it. But it calls for a Boot-boy Cooper to notice an hour's difference in the colour of the mist and shadows, due to bad copying. So I'm going to ask you to give the lad a lift. Give him a chance to put paint on canvas— it's more in his line than putting polish on your boots. The lad's a genius."

Henry le Hay, the lard billionaire, spoke impressively.

"*I* will take hold of Boot-boy Cooper," he announced, T am god-father to Victor, and I guess I'm entitled to make some contribution to the reward. Boot-boy Cooper can be regarded as provided for. His future is assured. If he is afflicted with artistic genius he shall have his chance. If he is not afflicted with genius he shall be put into the lard business and other benefits bestowed upon him."

IT was a long speech for Lord le Hay, but it was good for Boot-boy Cooper.

And while on the subject of "rewards" it may be mentioned that Messrs. Bunn and Fortworth allowed themselves no grounds whatever for regret at the size of the colossal hack which they themselves took at the teeming financial resources controlled by the families to which they had been of such service.

Ebney Rush and Lord le Hay were the broad-minded kind of millionaires who, in such a matter, would say, in effect, ''Name your reward!"

And Messrs. Bunn and Fortworth were the broad-minded kind of rascals who would— and did— name it in no uncertain nor over-modest fashion....

Paradix Dix was not arrested. The Beaurays weren't vindictive enough about him; Detective-Inspector Rufton wasn't encouraged enough to catch him; and the Bunn Co. weren't interested enough in him to put him into a position of any great jeopardy.

So that the exact means by which he achieved the kidnapping was not discovered. Probably he had found it comparatively simple— for he was a very ingenious and fertile-minded gentleman, though, as Mr. Bunn put it, "greedy— a little greedy— and on the whole, unlucky."

And that was true. He was unlucky— when he ran up against such a skilled and experienced brace of fish-hooks as Mr. Bunn and ex-Lord Fortworth. But then, as Mr. Bunn said, "we cannot all be lucky— if we were there would be no such thing as luck."

10: The Case of the Forged Letter

Harvey J. O'Higgins

1876-1929

The Red Book Magazine, April 1925

Harvey Jerrold O'Higgins

A John Duff case, a detective short story series which ran in American "slicks" such as Red Book *and* Ladies' Home Companion *in the 1920s.*

"I NEVER take divorce cases," Duff said. "I'm a detective, not a Peeping Tom. There's nothing interesting in a divorce case for anyone but a smut-hound. Take it to the Society for the Suppression of Vice."

He said it jocularly, with his most engaging smile— the smile of a jovial parish priest on the face of a fat sceptic. There was a genial astuteness about that smile. It forgave cynically all the sins of the flesh. But the man on whom it beamed and twinkled did not yield to it. He continued to regard Duff with a frown wrinkling his high legal forehead and his mouth professionally severe.

"A divorce," he protested, "is just what Dunbar doesn't want. It's to try to avoid a divorce that I've brought him to you. He needs help— of a kind that I can't give him."

He was a lean and keen and dark young lawyer, precociously bald and sober for his years. He looked foreign, but his name was Allan— John Glendenning Allan. He had come to Duff before, to ask aid in gathering evidence for a case in court, but Duff had never before seen him look so worried. "This Dunbar's a client of yours, is he?"

"Yes, and an old friend."

"What's he been doing?"

"Nothing at all," Allan assured him. "That's the mystery."

"Oh, there's a mystery, is there?" Duff settled back in his swivel chair, at his old office desk, in all the majesty of his bulk and muscle. "What's the mystery?"

He was a huge man, a great mastiff of a man in comparison with the slim alertness of Allan's breed; and he watched Allan, and listened ponderously to him, with a deceptive air of slow placidity. He had a feeling that Allan's manner was "off normal," as he would have said— that Alan had some secret concern in Dunbar's troubles which he was concealing. It was for the explanation of this concern that Duff watched, behind his own mask of benign composure.

The "mystery," Allan explained, came from a letter. Mrs. Dunbar had found a letter that apparently had been written by her husband to another woman— a love letter so conclusively guilty on its face that she had left him and refused to return. He had not written the letter. No, he had not written it. But she would not listen to him. She would not even see him to hear what he had to say. She had gone to live with her sister, and he was afraid that she was going to move for a divorce.

"Where's the letter?" Duff asked.

Ah, that was the difficulty. The letter had been destroyed. "Her sister was visiting her when she found it," Allan explained. "She's very devoted to Dunbar— the sister is. And as soon as she saw what the letter was, she threw it in the fire, on the impulse, to protect him."

"I see," Duff said. "Who is this sister? And who is Dunbar?"

"WELL, Dunbar was A. Burton Dunbar, the only child of Archibald J. Dunbar who had been a "traction magnate" in the days when electric street railways paid large dividends. The elder Dunbar had been wise enough to foresee what the automobile was likely to do to the trolley car, and he had sold out all his street-railway holdings in the early nineteen-hundreds and invested his fortune in New York real estate. Burton Dunbar had inherited that fortune. He had also inherited the services of a very loyal and clever secretary, named Beulah Root, in his father's office; and after his father's death, he had put Beulah Root in charge of the office and left to her all the business of rents, leases and repairs in connection with his property. She had under her an office force to take care of his correspondence and his book-keeping, as well as a superintendent and a staff of workmen to inspect and repair the houses and buildings that he owned. He appeared at his office, once a week or so, as a matter of form, to approve what had been done and to sign the pay checks. If anything arose that could not wait for his weekly appearance, she brought it to him at Blue Hills, New Jersey, where he lived. She had arrived on some such mission, one Saturday of the previous month, and she had stayed over Sunday, on Mrs. Dunbar's invitation. The incriminating letter was found on Sunday night, and Mrs. Dunbar— who had been Laura Root before her marriage— left with her sister Beulah on Monday morning.

"Wait a minute," Duff interrupted. "Dunbar had married his secretary's sister?"

"Yes."

"How come?"

"Well," Allan admitted, "I was a good deal mixed up in that. Dunbar and I were at Columbia together, and he used to take me with him when he went to call on the two Root girls. He'd met Laura through Beulah, I think. I know he was in love with her quite a long time before his father would let them marry. I understand the father consented to it, at last, because Burton as a married man would be exempt from the first draft. They were married in the summer of 1917."

He had become noticeably more guarded in his manner, but Duff pretended to be unaware of it. He asked only, "How did the sister, Beulah, feel about that?— about the marriage?"

"She stood out against it as long as his father did."

Duff nodded, thoughtfully. "Bring Dunbar in," he said, "and let me have a look at him."

They were in Duff's public office, an office which he had rented as it stood— furniture and all— from a discouraged patent attorney who had retired from practice. It was a sedate and shabby office that looked as little as possible like the consulting room of a private detective, purposely. Behind it, and on the floor above, were the file rooms, the stenographers' rooms, the operatives' rooms and the rest of the office plant of a modern detective agency; but these were all concealed from the public so that Duff might, if he wished, invite "suspects" to his sanctum as a shyster lawyer, or a promoter of doubtful enterprises, or in whatever other character he chose to assume.

Allan went briskly to the door to summon his friend Dunbar from the waiting room. He went with relief and, to Duff, it seemed to be the relief of a man who was getting rid of an unpleasant responsibility. Duff watched him and narrowed his eyes in a puckered speculation.

"Burt," Allan called. "Come in here, will you?" And Dunbar entered with a large, slow diffidence.

He was a full-blown, handsome blond, dressed as if he had come direct from the links in tweeds and golf stockings, thick-soled outing shoes, a soft collar— and an all-over coat of tan that did not whiten under the thin fluff of hair on the top of his head. That hair was a dark dandelion yellow, and even where it was thinnest it had the ripple of fine wool freshly washed and carded. He looked, indeed, as chemically clean and sweet as if he had been sponged in chlorides. He had softly staring, shy blue eyes, of which the whites were a trifle bloodshot, his mouth was a little loose and he was growing somewhat heavy in

the waist; but he had not the appearance of dissipation so much as an air of over indulgence— of comfortable over indulgence in too many alcoholic drinks on the verandas of country homes, looking out over flowering shrubs and garden borders to green-upholstered lawns and the shadows of well-trained trees that had spent their lives in the service of the family.

He was not the type of man whom you would expect to find involved in a mystery, for although he was silent with Duff and Allan it was the sad and innocent silence of an injured child among its helpful elders. He let Allan speak for him, trustfully; and when he had to answer a question from Duff, he glanced at Allan first, like a younger brother looking to his natural protector. He was large, helpless, sweet, simple and direct. Obviously, he would appeal to anyone for aid, with no shame in asking for it, and no reticences.

It appeared, from his replies and Allan's, that there was no one whom Dunbar could suspect of having forged the letter; and there was no one whom his wife could definitely suspect of being the woman to whom it had been written. He had no special woman friends. He was evidently of that type of arrested development which is commonly called "a man's man"— shy with women, undoubtedly afraid of them, and consequently uncomfortable with them. He had been a good golfer and a better tennis player until an automobile accident crushed his right wrist and ended his career as an athlete. He was now secretary-treasurer and general head of the Blue Hills Country Club, and his particular hobby was collecting the "three-cent '51'", which is an American postage stamp issued from 1851 to 1856 when the plates were destroyed by a fire.

Duff had never heard of anyone collecting specimens of a single postage stamp. Allan explained how you could distinguish the issues of the various years by slight variations in the color of the stamps; how you identified a stamp as printed from one plate or another by microscopic differences in design or by little threadlike cracks that had developed in the plates; and how, in the end, if you were expert, you could say, for instance, "This stamp was printed in 1853 from plate number one, and it was the third stamp of the fourth row on the plate." Dunbar owned "one of the most complete collections in existence." There was only one larger collection, and that belonged to a man who had devoted his life to a study of the three-cent '51 and written a book about it.

DUNBAR listened to his friend's account of his stamps politely, but he did not speak. He listened to Duff's interested questions in the same silence; and if Duff had counted on a collector's enthusiasm to draw him out, Duff failed. Dunbar said nothing.

"Well," Duff said, "it sounds like good training for a detective. If you can tell where a three-cent stamp came from seventy years ago, you ought to be able to trace a letter that arrived last week."

Dunbar tried to smile but he did not quite succeed.

"The trouble is," Allan explained, "that he has never seen the letter."

"Are they sure it was in your handwriting?"

Dunbar shook his head. "It was typewritten. I don't write— not since I broke my wrist. I just sign my name— with my left hand."

"Typewritten?" Duff sat up. "Now, that's interesting."

"Why?"

"It makes the forgery so much easier— for the forger. And the temptation so much greater."

Dunbar nodded sadly. He seemed not so much depressed by the talk about the letter as heavily resentful when he thought of the injustice that had been done him.

"Well," Duff said, "here we are. Some unknown person, for some unknown reason, has forged a compromising letter in your name, and the letter's been destroyed. There's no evidence to prove that you're innocent. In a case of this sort, all we can do is to induce them to come again."

"Come again?" Allan asked. "What do you mean?"

"Write another letter."

"Oh, I see. How will you do that?"

"I don't know yet. That's the problem." He began to shift around the pens, the pencils, the ink and the papers on his desk, as if he were setting the problem in order before him. "We can assume that whoever wrote this letter, they intended to make trouble between you and your wife. It's our best lay to encourage them to continue. We'll have to prepare a little plant of some sort."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And for that purpose," Duff said, "I'd better be a lawyer— not a detective. You've put this difference with your wife in my hands, to arrange a separation or a divorce, or whatever else she wants—"

"Oh no!" Dunbar was horrified. "I don't—"

"No, of course. We understand that, Burt," Allan assured him. "This is just Mr. Duff's method of investigating."

"And meanwhile," Duff cut in, "you'll take Mr. Dunbar and put him on a boat to Europe, without letting him see his secretary or anybody else. He'll have to promise not to write or answer any letters or any telegrams about this business, and not to discuss it with anyone he meets on his travels. Otherwise, I'll not take the case."

"Oh, but I say!" Dunbar protested.

"All right. I'll attend to that," Allan promised.

"The important thing," Duff explained, "is not to let him see or communicate with his secretary, because anything he confides to her will reach his wife. You can let him make out a check to cover the office salaries and expenses for a month. After he's sailed, mail this to Miss Root with a note from him saying that he's put his affairs in my hands, as his lawyer. I'll get a housekeeper to take charge of his home during his absence, and he'll leave a note saying that she can't be discharged by Mrs. Dunbar if she comes to Blue Hills while he's away." He turned to Dunbar. "You may be the victim of a serious conspiracy— a conspiracy in which this compromising letter is only the first step. You'll have to be very careful and absolutely silent. I'll have your house watched so that no more letters can be planted on you there. And I'll find some way, if necessary, to get an operative put in to watch your office."

Dunbar looked thoroughly alarmed and bewildered.

"Fortunately, you've got your lawyer here to rely on." He referred to Allan. "I'll report to him regularly, and I'll do nothing without his advice. Good-bye. I hope you have a pleasant voyage."

He went back to the papers on his desk. Dunbar turned helplessly to Allan.

"Come along, Burt, and reserve your stateroom," Allan said. And at Dunbar's hesitation, he added confidently: "He'll probably have the whole thing straightened out before you reach the other side."

DUNBAR went. And, in the end, he went to London. But he went with a weakly stubborn reluctance that kept Allan as busy, for several days, as a nurse-maid with a spoiled child; and he kept coming to Duff for advice and assistance as if Duff were the father or the guardian of his charge. Duff used the interviews to put together the story of Beulah and Laura Root in such detail as he could get. And he used the interval also, to establish a woman operative in authority over Dunbar's house at Blue Hills and to obtain from her such information as she could glean from the gossip of the servants.

Duff had a peculiar way of working on a "mystery." He yawned over it. He idled on it. He gathered information about it in the lazy manner of an artist who is waiting for an idea to strike him before he begins work. He did not really think of it at all, nor try to plan out any theory of it. He loafed and waited on it, and busied himself with other routine things.

In that way he accumulated details about the Root sisters. And their story seemed simple enough. They were the daughters of a Brooklyn newspaper man who had been divorced by his wife in 1907, when the girls were still in their teens. In 1908, he disappeared in the West, to avoid paying inconvenient alimony, and Beulah went to work to support her mother and her sister. She

found work in Archibald J. Dunbar's office, and she became his confidential secretary. When the mother died, in 1911, Beulah continued to support her sister Laura, six years younger than she, while Laura studied music, took singing lessons, and prepared herself for a career. Then, in 1913, when Burton Dunbar was in his final term at college, he saw a photograph of Laura Root on the desk of his father's secretary. He and Beulah were already quite friendly. He took advantage of that friendship to meet the pretty sister; and before Beulah understood what was going on, he and Laura had arrived at a secret engagement. Beulah promptly told her employer, and for four years she and the elder Dunbar tried to break off the match. In vain. Finally, in 1917, the father developed Bright's disease; Burton threatened to enlist unless he were allowed to marry; and the elder Dunbar, facing his own decay and the probable extinction of his family, withdrew his opposition. Laura Root gave up her musical ambition to marry a fortune; Burton, when his father died, put Beulah in charge of his office at a salary of twelve thousand dollars a year; and everyone seemed settled in happiness forever after.

ALL their prospects of happiness had now gone glimmering, but it was impossible to find out why. Duff's operative, planted in the house at Blue Hills as a housekeeper, discovered nothing in the gossip of the servants to explain the catastrophe. Mrs. Dunbar had been jealous, yes. She had been jealous to such a degree that Dunbar had always carefully avoided giving her any cause for it. His open indifference to women and his good looks had naturally encouraged them to plague him with mischievous attempts at country-club flirtations, but he had fled from them all. He had devoted himself to the masculine activities of the membership, arranged gymkanas and golf and tennis tournaments, organized a "good roads association" and served on a township committee of local patriots in a league for better government. His life had been apparently as dull as it was innocent. His wife danced and dined and played bridge, remodelled the house, laid out a formal English garden, and competed in the local flower show. She had been busy and popular, with nothing much to do and plenty of time and lots of money with which to do it. She had no children to worry her and no relatives. Her sister Beulah kept to herself, living alone in a Brooklyn apartment and refusing to come to Blue Hills except as a secretary, to see Dunbar. She had done this with no ill-feeling whatever. She had simply avoided the embarrassments of a complicated social situation. The sisters continued friendly, but Beulah, on her twelve thousand a year, did not propose to figure in Blue Hills as a subsidized poor relation of the Dunbars, and the Dunbars respected her independence.

The only detail of any possible significance which the housekeeper supplied to Duff was this: Allan, Dunbar's friend and lawyer, had been a frequent visitor at Blue Hills for two years after their marriage, and he had then abruptly ceased to come there. Duff put this piece of information away in the back of his mind to let it hatch if it had any life in it. And he was conscious of it hidden there when Allan came to report that he had seen Dunbar off on his Atlantic liner.

"Well," Duff said, with a yawn, "I haven't even discovered, yet, why his wife seized on this fool letter so eagerly. It may be, of course, that she found her life too placid. She may have just fastened on the letter to give herself a little emotional excitement. In that case, we'll see if we can't provide her with enough to last her for the rest of her life."

Allan made no comment.

DUFF asked: "Did you post Dunbar's letter to his secretary?"

"Yes," he said, "I posted it on my way back from the boat."

"And I don't discover the origin of Mrs. Dunbar's continual jealousy," Duff reflected. "That sort of thing's usually due to the fact that a woman's giving her husband cause for jealousy herself and naturally suspects him of doing the same."

Allan continued mutely attentive.

"Or," Duff said, "it may come from her childhood. It may be an unconscious imitation of her mother's experience with her father. In either case, a good jolt may do her good. I'll have to see her, and I don't see how I can reach her except through her sister. Tell me: why hasn't Mrs. Dunbar consulted you?"

This was all given in the one tone of gossipy frankness, and Allan replied— in a good imitation of the same tone— "She did come to consult me. And I told her I couldn't advise her."

"Why not?"

"Because Dunbar had already appealed to me, and I couldn't act for both parties."

Duff yawned. He asked, indifferently: "Was that your only reason?" And he rose, fatigued and bored and heavy, from his desk, to stretch himself and walk up and down the room.

"It was the only reason I cared to give her," Allan said.

Duff asked: "And me?"

Allan glanced at him suspiciously. "I beg your pardon?"

Duff was looking out the window, his hands in his pockets. "Is that the only reason you care to give me?"

And Allan answered, cold and defensive: "Yes."

Duff nodded and walked away with his thoughts, and sat down at his desk moodily, and strummed on his blotter. "Can you tell me this: When you and Dunbar used to call on the two Root girls, which one were you interested in?"

"Now, look here," Allan said hotly. "There's nothing going on between me and Mrs. Dunbar and there never has been! And if you think I know anything about who forged that letter, or why, you might as well come out of it!"

HE WAS red with anger and mortification and resentment against Duff's stupidity. Duff continued to regard him as abstractedly, for all his rage, as if he were a patient who had lost his temper when the doctor asked him about his symptoms. "I see," he said. "You were more interested in Beulah Root, were you?"

Allan swallowed his wrath, but it stuck in his throat. He said through it, thickly: "Yes."

"Did you ask her to marry you?"

"Yes."

"Did she say why she wouldn't?"

"No."

"Was that before Dunbar was engaged to the sister?"

"Yes. What the devil—?"

"All right," Duff cut in. "I'll wait." He began to clear up the disorder of his desk, at the end of his day's work. "If either Mrs. Dunbar or her sister comes to you, refer her to me. All you know is that Dunbar's tired of the way his wife's been behaving, and he's gone abroad and left it to me, as his lawyer, to arrange a divorce or a separation or whatever else she wants."

"Who do you suppose wrote that letter?" Allan asked impatiently.

"I haven't any idea," Duff assured him. "I'll have to wait till I see his secretary."

AND he had not long to wait. The letter from Dunbar, which Allan had posted, must have reached her on the following morning, and at midday she telephoned to Duff's office to ask for an appointment to see him. He gave her three o'clock that afternoon. "And keep everyone away from me," he ordered his office manager, "phone calls and everything else, as long as she's here. I'm a divorce lawyer, on the shady side of the practice, and I don't have clients consulting me by phone or crowding in to see me at three o'clock in the afternoon. And tell the girl, out there, not to announce Miss Root. When she comes, let her walk right in."

He cleared all the correspondence off his desk, and when, after having disregarded a knock on his door, he saw a woman in brown enter slowly, he

looked over his glasses at her, without raising himself from his elbows, bending his broad back above his work in a sinister sort of crouch.

"Miss Root?" he asked gruffly.

"Yes."

"Sit down." He pretended to finish scrawling out the sentences which she had interrupted.

She sat down composedly in a chair near his desk and looked around her while he wrote: "Beulah Root, age about 35, height 5 ft. 8 in., weight 145 to 150, eyes greenish grey, no glasses, hair brown turning grey, schoolteacher type, high-shouldered, long-waisted, mouth large, small wart on cheek beside left nostril." He wrote this chiefly to appear busy while he kept her waiting. "Takes pride in hands and feet. Brown tailor-made business suit, silk stockings, patent leather pumps with sensible heels, probably pretty and expensive underclothes. Good legs. Keeps herself fit probably by long walks."

He said, occupied: "I suppose you came to see me about this Dunbar divorce?"

"Divorce?"

"Well, divorce or separation or whatever it is she wants."

"There's no question of a divorce. Nor of a separation." She sat at her ease, her knees crossed, swinging one foot, an arm outstretched to rest a hand on the old-fashioned ivory handle of a brown silk parasol. The only sign she gave of nervousness was in the swinging of the foot.

"There seems to be plenty of question of it in my client's mind," Duff said sharply, and put down his pen. "She walked out and left him— didn't she?— because of a letter that he wrote to another woman."

"Does he admit that he wrote it?"

"Naturally not. And the letter needn't enter into the case at all, for that matter. We needn't discuss it. We can arrange a divorce without going into that."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, there's a county judge up state who handles cases like this when we make it worth his while. The papers are sealed so's the evidence doesn't get into print. We provide the usual statutory grounds. There's a detective agency here that attends to that. It's costly, but it's cheaper than going to Reno."

"Mrs. Dunbar would never consent to it."

"What does she want then?"

"She wants him to prove that he never wrote the letter."

"I see."

WHEN Duff had first heard from Allan, how the letter had been found by Dunbar's wife and destroyed by his secretary, the detective naturally supposed that Dunbar had written it to the secretary and that she had destroyed it to protect herself as much as to shield him. But, after seeing Dunbar, it was impossible to believe him guilty of having written the letter at all; and Duff concluded that Beulah Root, out of jealousy, had probably forged the letter, placed it where Mrs. Dunbar would find it, and then destroyed it in order to get rid of any evidence of her plot. If she had done this, it must have been with the intention of breaking up Dunbar's marriage; and Duff had intended to lead her into a little trap by first pretending that Dunbar was willing to proceed to a divorce and by then proposing that she should assist in manufacturing the evidence for the case.

She refused to be led.

"Why did Mr. Dunbar come to you?" she demanded. "Why didn't he go to his friend, Mr. Allan?"

"He did," Duff said suavely, "and Allan refused to handle it."

"Why?"

"Probably for the same reason that a doctor doesn't like to treat members of his own family. He knows you all, too well. Do you think Dunbar wrote this letter?"

"Certainly not," she said.

"Have you any idea who did write it?"

"None whatever."

"But you think it was a forgery?"

"I'm sure of it."

"And you can't convince Mrs. Dunbar?"

"No. The more I try to convince her, the more she seems to think that I'm merely trying to shield him."

"I see." Duff took off his glasses and polished them thoughtfully. "My orders were to give Mrs. Dunbar whatever she wants, a divorce, a separation, or anything else. If she wants to become convinced of Dunbar's innocence, perhaps I can arrange that."

"How?"

"In the same way that we'd have convinced our friend, the judge, of his guilt— by producing the necessary evidence."

"I don't understand."

"No? Well, someone has written a compromising letter and forged Dunbar's name to it. We'll have a woman write some more letters and forge his name to them, and then make her confess that she wrote the first one, too. The detective agency would have given us a woman to act as confidential co-

respondent in the divorce suit. They'll give us someone to take the blame for the letters. That'll be easy enough."

"And do you think," she began scornfully, "that Burton Dunbar—"

"Fortunately," Duff interrupted, "Dunbar needn't know anything whatever about it. He doesn't know now who wrote this one letter to him. I'll never tell him who wrote the others."

"Are you joking?"

"Certainly not. Does Mrs. Dunbar know all the girls who work in her husband's office?"

"No."

"Does Dunbar?— even by sight?"

"I don't believe he does."

"Suppose, then, I tell Mrs. Dunbar that one of these girls is secretly in love with Dunbar and that she's been writing herself imaginary letters from him and signing his name to them. Suppose I tell Mrs. Dunbar that detectives have searched the girl's rooms and found a number of these letters. I produce them. I produce, also, a girl who I tell Mrs. Dunbar, is from your office, and this girl confesses that she wrote the letters— all the letters, including the one that Mrs. Dunbar found. The girl explains that this one letter, by some accident, got among the mail she gave you to take to Dunbar, and Mrs. Dunbar discovered it. You confirm the story. I confirm it. The girl begs for mercy. She begs Mrs. Dunbar not to tell her husband. The whole thing is a silly sentimental bit of girlish nonsense, for which Dunbar is in no way responsible. You insist that the girl must be discharged but you undertake to get her another position. Mrs. Dunbar, if she ever tells her husband, will never tell him who the girl was, for fear he might be tempted to hunt her up. I'll merely cable Dunbar that we've found out who forged the letter and convinced his wife of his innocence. And the whole thing will be settled."

MISS Root took this strange proposal in a strange way. Her foot ceased swinging. She kept her gaze fixed on Duff in a pale, defensive stare. She sat stiffly motionless. She did not betray herself by so much as the blinking of an eyelash. But, before he had finished, her forehead was moist with perspiration. She made as if to find a handkerchief in her bag, and she stopped herself guiltily.

"Don't you think we could work a scheme like that?" Duff asked.

And she answered, in a strained voice, "Yes."

"Good," he said. "Then I'll provide the girl, if you'll furnish the letters."

"Me?" The word almost died on her lips.

"Yes. Of course." He was heavily blind and unsuspecting. "You've often signed his name to business letters, haven't you? And the body of the letter, fortunately, can be typed. You can easily imagine the sort of letter a girl like that would write to herself. It needn't be very convincing— just the day-dream of a starved girl, who's never had a real love-affair in her life. It's perfectly natural that a working girl would cheat herself with dreams of the sort about a rich and handsome fellow like Dunbar. I'll bet, if we could see inside the heads of all the girls in your office, we'd find more than one who might have written herself imaginary love letters from him. The world's full of that sort of thing. A woman— a business woman's a human being. She has to have some sort of love in her life— even if it's only imaginary. I ran across a case, the other day— "

He rose and went to his book shelves of law reports as if to find a record of the case. His back was turned to her, but he could see her reflected in the glass of an engraving that hung above the books. He watched her secretly while he took down a volume and rustled the pages. She found her handkerchief, and dabbled at her forehead with it, and pressed it against her lips, breathing as laboredly as if she had been holding her breath in the effort to conceal her agitation, and had now come to the surface, to gasp her lungs full.

"Well, it doesn't matter," Duff said, putting the book back on its shelf as if he had failed to find what he was looking for. "We don't have to have any precedent. We're going to settle this out of court." He smiled at her, conspiringly, as he sat down again.

"I don't think," she said, "that I would care to— to join in a— a forgery. I don't think it's honest."

DUFF laughed, settling back comfortably in his chair. "Maybe not," he said, "but, you see, there's this difficulty. I'm not a lawyer. I'm a detective. And a detective's allowed to do lots of things a lawyer couldn't do."

"A detective?" Her voice cracked on it. She began to tremble again in spite of herself, watching him in an agony of apprehension that made it impossible to move or to speak.

"Yes," he said lazily. "A detective. And if I can't get the case settled for Mr. Dunbar in this way, I'm afraid I'll have to go to what you might call the Root of the matter. That might be more inconvenient for all concerned." He reached out to his office phone. "I think we'd better arrange it between ourselves as quietly as we can and say no more about it. Hello? Is Miss Kennedy there? Ask her to come here a minute."

He got up and walked to his window, to look out of it, in silence. She sat with her eyes closed, as white as despair, completely helpless. He glanced at her once and then turned away again, mercifully.

Miss Kennedy entered, behind her, from an inner door— a small dark woman with a tragic face. She worked usually in the file room, and she was dressed for the office. She closed the door behind her and stood waiting with her hand on the door knob.

"Miss Kennedy," he said, "we have a case here in which we have to work a little plant. A young woman in a downtown office under Miss Root—" He indicated Miss Root with a warning movement of the eyes—"has been forging a number of compromising letters in the name of a client of ours. We've got a confession on the promise that we'll not betray her, and we have to find a substitute for her, to take the blame of the letters. It'll be all quite private. The only person to whom you'll have to admit having written the letters is our client's wife, Mrs. Burton Dunbar. The girl's in love with the husband. She's been writing imaginary love letters to herself from Dunbar— quite innocently, you understand— but unfortunately she lost one of them, and it came into Mrs. Dunbar's hands. Dunbar doesn't know who the girl is. You'll not be required to see him— we've sent him abroad while we fix the thing up. If you'll go with Miss Root, she'll give you the letters, and explain what you have to do, and take you to Mrs. Dunbar."

Miss Kennedy asked, in a deep and hollow voice, "What was I— a stenographer?"

"Yes, a stenographer in Dunbar's office."

They turned to the silent woman in the chair beside his desk. At the sound of Miss Kennedy's voice, she had made an effort to rise, but sank back again unable to get to her feet.

"The whole case," Duff explained, "has been very trying for Miss Root. I'm afraid it's been too much for her. You might just take her inside and let her rest while you're getting ready. Want to run out a minute and find a bite to eat. I've not had time to get my lunch."

He had the manner of a doctor who has finished a physical examination and leaves his exhausted patient to his office nurse. And Miss Kennedy, as if she were such a nurse, bent down to put an arm around Miss Root and murmured compassionately to her: "Will you come with me?"

AND like the doctor who becomes insulated against his patient's pain, Duff was almost indifferent to Beulah Root's emotion. He saw what her story had probably been; and it was a terrible story; but he saw it coldly, as a case, on which he had been called in. She had undoubtedly been in love with Dunbar

from her earliest days in his father's office. When the two college boys came calling on her and her sister, she must have flattered herself that the handsome young heir to the Dunbar millions was interested in her. She was as scornful of Allan, the clever but penniless law student from the East Side, as her sister was indifferent to the stupid son of wealth: but by a perversity of fate, it was Allan who fell in love with Beulah and Dunbar who fell in love with the sister. Allan was promptly rejected when he proposed, but a marriage with the Dunbar fortune was not to be so lightly refused by the beautiful Laura. What years of anguish must have followed for the loyal and subservient and self-sacrificing sister— those years in which Laura accepted Dunbar, though she had no illusions about him, and Beulah joined with the father to prevent the marriage, and yet tried to act unselfishly and not treacherously towards the younger girl. And after Dunbar's marriage, what miseries of loneliness she must have suffered before she yielded to the mirage of her own imagining and wrote crazy letters to herself as if they had come from him!

Duff could see all that, even if he did not attempt to appreciate it. And he could see that Mrs. Dunbar still preferred Allan to the handsome bore who was her husband. That would account for her jealousy. It also accounted for the sudden cessation of Allan's visits to Blue Hills. And it most certainly accounted for the eagerness with which she had seized the letter, as a proof of her husband's infidelity— and for Allan's embarrassment when she, and then Dunbar, appealed to him for aid. Duff grinned to himself. Well, he was returning Laura to her husband, and Beulah to her desert, and Allan to his law without a scandal and that was all that could be expected of him.

He had no doubt that Beulah Root would provide the necessary letters. It was her only way to avoid a shameful disgrace. And he knew that his "Miss Kennedy" would play her part convincingly as the heart-broken girl who had been living a fairy-tale of love with Dunbar, in her imagination. She had been an amateur actress in her school-days; she had married a tubercular poet and tried to write, unsuccessfully; when he died, and left her with a baby boy, she was willing to do anything to keep her child from starving. She had answered an advertisement of Duff's in which he pretended to need a lady's maid— a lady's maid, however, who was to report to him the private affairs of her mistress— and she had taken the work because it was all that she could find to do. She had been with him ever since, regularly in the filing room but going out on cases whenever he needed her. He knew her ability. She would deceive Mrs. Dunbar easily.

AND yet Duff was enough of an artist to feel dissatisfied with this conclusion of his case. It was too inconclusive. It settled nothing. Mrs. Dunbar

would still be dissatisfied with her husband and sentimentally inclined toward an affair with Allan. Her miserable sister would be only more miserable than before— miserable to the point of carrying her dreams of Dunbar into the borderland of insane delusions. And Allan would still be the victim of that fate which had frustrated his affection for Beulah Root. In these circumstances would the case remain closed? Or would something more serious than a forged letter come out of it?

"Well," Duff assured himself, "I'm only a detective, not a little tin god. I can't get a new deal for these people. I'm only paid to see that they play their cards without cheating."

When his Miss Kennedy reported by telephone that Beulah Root had furnished the needed letters, he said: "Good. Go to it. Let me know how you get along with Mrs. Dunbar. Good luck." And when she came to tell him of her scene with Mrs. Dunbar— who had been at last unwillingly convinced of the origin of the forged love-letter— he congratulated her heartily. "Cheer up," he said. "You look as if you were all in. Take a week's holiday and I'll charge it on Dunbar's bill. He can afford it."

She smiled with a painful weariness. "You ought to do something for that poor woman— that Miss Root," she replied. "It's a terrible thing for her. I'm afraid it will break her down."

"I'm afraid so, too," he agreed. "We ought to get her out of that office, eh?"

"Oh, if you only could!"

"Perhaps I can," he said. "You run along. Take your boy and beat it to the seaside for a week. Put it on your expense account and I'll pay it if Dunbar doesn't." He had reached out to his office phone. "Call in Mrs. Davenport from Blue Hills," he ordered his office manager on the wire. "The Dunbar case is closed." He nodded to Miss Kennedy. "That's all right," he replied to her grateful murmur of thanks. "And call up their lawyer, Allan," he continued into the phone, "and ask him if he can get in to see me right away."

"Good-bye, girl," he said, to Miss Kennedy. "Run along now. And tell them to send in those people out there."

HE HAD clients to receive, letters to answer, operatives to listen to, reports to dictate; and he was busy with cases, detectives and stenographers until word was brought to him that Allan was in the waiting room. "Just a minute," he said. He took a few brisk turns up and down his room with the tread of a cheerfully preoccupied elephant. "All right," he told the girl from the outer office. "Send him in."

He was seated at his desk reading letters when Allan entered— his worries still heavy on his brow— and closed the door behind him to shut in his secret concern, and turned slowly to cross the room to Duff.

"Well!" Duff tossed aside the letter with a gesture that was a welcoming wave of the hand. "We've solved your Dunbar mystery."

"No!"

"Sure as you live! Sit down here. The letter was written by a girl in his office. She's confessed. We've had her repeat her confession to Mrs. Dunbar and she's now convinced of Dunbar's innocence."

"No!" His first "No!" had been half incredulous. His second was wholly relieved. "I'll send a wireless to Dunbar right away." He made as if to start for the door.

"No. Wait a minute," Duff laughed. "Not so fast. This has to be handled. Sit down."

He sat down on the edge of his chair, smiling in a way that made him look suddenly boyish and unsuspecting. And Duff proceeded to take advantage of that trusting mood in him.

"In the first place," he said, "Dunbar's not to be told who the girl was. We got her to confess on the promise that no one was to know about it except Miss Root and her sister. In the second place Miss Root doesn't know the whole truth, and I don't want her to know it. I don't even know how much I can tell you. Wait a minute. This is rather complicated."

He passed his hand over his forehead and rubbed the back of his head, perplexed, as if he were trying to decide how much of the story he might honorably tell the lawyer. As a matter of fact he was improvising what he would have called "a little plant."

"Anything you tell me," Allan volunteered, "can be as confidential as you please."

"Well, you see," Duff explained, frowning, "we've led Mrs. Dunbar to believe— and her sister, too— that a love-sick girl in the office was writing imaginary letters to herself as if they came from Dunbar. We've made out that one of these letters accidentally got itself into the mail that Miss Root took to Blue Hills and that this was the letter Mrs. Dunbar found."

"Yes?"

"YES. Well, the truth is that the girl was sore at Miss Root. She's been accusing Miss Root— to the others in the office— of having an affair with Dunbar. And she forged two of the letters, and showed them to one of the other girls, as letters that she'd found in Miss Root's desk."

"The devil you say!"

"Yes." He studied Allan's sympathetic expression of distress, calculatingly. "We've kept this from Miss Root and we've kept it from Mrs. Dunbar. The situation's kind of complicated. Something else has happened that's given Miss Root a jar about Dunbar. Her position in the office is going to be impossible."

"Can't we get her out of there?"

"I wish we could. You seem to be the only friend she has in the world. Naturally, she doesn't trust me. I had to tell her I was a detective— when I found out who the girl was that wrote the letters."

"I think I'd better see her." He stood up, hesitating.

"Well, be careful what you say to her," Duff warned him. "You can say I told you that a love-sick girl wrote herself imaginary letters from Dunbar, but don't let her guess that you've heard she was suspected of being mixed up in them."

"No, no. Certainly not." He put that aside impatiently. "I believe I could get our firm to put her in charge of a department of the office, if she'd take it."

"Go to it," Duff rose to pat him on the shoulder. "She'll be glad, anyway, to have somebody show a little friendly interest in her, if I know her state of mind."

Allan did not seem to hear. He stood gazing into his hat as if he saw in it some sentimental secret that made him flush a little, tenderly, and slowly smile. When he looked up and caught Duff's eye, he was embarrassed. "All right. Thanks," he said. And he hurried out.

Duff thought to himself: "If she doesn't take him now, she doesn't need to go crazy— she's crazy already."

SHE took him. Before Dunbar could get back from Liverpool, Allan had married her. Duff read it in the newspapers, but that was the only word of it that he received.

"We ought to put it on our bill," he told Miss Kennedy, "but I suppose we can't. It's one of the by-products of the case that has no market value. What's more, we'll lose a client by it. She'll never let Allan come near me again— not if she can prevent it. And she'll never let Dunbar. I wonder what she'll tell them."

Whatever it was, it had its effect. Dunbar paid his bill, but Duff never saw any of them again.

11: The Lady with the Carnations

Marie Corelli

Mary MacKay, 1855-1924

Temple Bar, Jan 1887

Marie Corelli

IT was in the Louvre that I first saw her— or rather her picture. Greuze painted her— so I was told; but the name of the artist scarely affected me— I was absorbed in the woman herself, who looked at me from the dumb canvas with that still smile on her face, and that burning cluster of carnations clasped to her breast. I felt that I knew her. Moreover, there was a strange attraction in her eyes that held mine fascinated. It was as though she said "Stay till I have told thee a ll!" A faint blush tinged her cheek,— one loose tress of fair hair fell caressingly on her halfuncovered bosom. And, surely, was I dreaming?— or did I smell the odour of carnations on the air? I started from my reverie,— a slight tremor shook my nerves. I turned to go. An artist carrying a large easel and painting materials just then approached, and placing himself opposite the picture, began to copy it. I watched him at work for a few moments— his strokes were firm, and his eye accurate; but I knew, without waiting to observe his further progress, that there was an indefinable something in that pictured face that he with all his skill would never be able to delineate as Greuze had done— if Greuze indeed were the painter, of which I did not then, and do not now, feel sure. I walked slowly away. On the threshold of the room I looked hack. Yes! there it was— that fleeting, strange, appealing expression that seemed mutely to call to *me*; that half-wild yet sweet smile that had a world of unuttered pathos in it. A kind of misgiving troubled me,— a presentiment of

evil that I could not understand,— and, vexed with myself for my own foolish imaginings, I hastened down the broad staircase that led to the picture galleries, and began to make my way out through that noble hall of ancient scuplture in which stands the defiantly beautiful Apolln B e llid e re and the world-famous Artemis. The sun shone brilliantly; numbers of people were passing and repassing. Suddenly my heart gave a violent throb, and I stopped short in my walk, amazed and incredulous. Who was that seated on the bench close to the Artemis, reading? Who, if not "the Lady with the Carnations," clad in white, her head slightly bent, and her hand clasping a bunch of her own symbolic flowers! Nervously I approached her. As my steps echoed on the marble pavement she looked up; her gray-green eyes met mine in that slow wistful smile that was so indescribably sad. Confused as my thoughts were, I observed her pallor, and the ethereal delicacy of her face and form— she had no hat on, and her neck and shoulders were uncovered. Struck by this peculiarity, I wondered if the other people who were passing through the hall noticed her *deshabille*. I looked around me enquiringly— not one passer-by turned a glance in our direction! Yet surely the lady's costume was strange enough to attract attention? A chill of horror quivered through me,— was I the only one who saw her sitting there? This idea was so alarming that I uttered an involuntary exclamation; the next moment the seat before me was empty, the strange lady had gone, and nothing remained of her but— the strong sweet odour of the carnations she had carried! With a sort of sickness at my heart I hurried out of the Louvre, and was glad when I found myself in the bright Paris streets filled with eager, pressing people, all bent on their different errands of business or pleasure. I entered a carriage and was driven rapidly to the Grand Hotel, where I was staying with a party of friends. I refrained from speaking of the curious sensations that had overcome me— I did not even mention the picture that had exercised so weird an influence upon me. The brilliancy of the life we led, the constant change and activity of our movements, soon dispersed the nervous emotion I had undergone; and though sometimes the remembrance of it returned to me, I avoided dwelling on the subject. Ten or twelve days passed, and one night we all went to the Theatre Français— it was the first evening of my life that I ever was in the strange position of being witness to a play without either knowing its name or understanding its meaning. I could only realize one thing— namely, that "the Lady with the Carnations" sat in the box opposite to me, regarding me fixedly. She was alone; her costume was unchanged. I addressed one of our party in a low voice:

"Do you see that girl opposite, in white, with the shaded crimson carnations in her dress?"

My friend looked, shook her head, and rejoined: "N o; where is she sitting?"

"Right opposite!" I repeated in a more excited tone. "Surely you can see her! She is alone in that large box *en face* ."

My friend turned to me in wonder.

"You must be dreaming, my dear! That large box is perfectly empty!"

Empty!— I knew better. But I endeavoured to smile; I said I had made a mistake— that the lady I spoke of had moved— and so changed the subject. But throughout the evening, though I feigned to watch the stage, my eyes were continually turning to the place where she sat so quietly, with her steadfast, mournful gaze fixed upon me. One addition to her costume she had— a fan— which from the distance at which I beheld it seemed to be made of very old yellow lace mounted on sticks of filigree silver. She used this occasionally, waving it slowly to and fro in a sort of dreamy, meditative fashion; and ever and again she smiled that pained, patient smile which, though it hinted much, betrayed nothing. When we rose to leave the theatre tjie Lady with the Carnations rose also, and drawing a lace wrap about her head, she disappeared. Afterwards I saw her gliding through one of the outer lobbies; she looked so slight and frail and childlike, alone in the pushing brilliant crowd, that my heart went out to her in a sort of fantastic tenderness. "Whether she be a disembodied spirit," I mused, "or an illusion called up by some disorder of my own imagination, I do not know; but she seems so sad, that even were she a Dream, I pity her!"

This thought passed through my brain as in company with my friends I reached the outer door of the theatre. A touch on my arm startled me— a little white hand clasping a cluster of carnations rested there for a second,— then vanished. I was somewhat overcome by this new experience; but my sensations this time were not those of fear. I became certain that this haunting image followed me for some reason; and I determined not to give way to any foolish terror concerning it, but to calmly await the course of events, that would in time, I felt convinced, explain everything. I stayed a fortnight longer in Paris without seeing anything more of "the Lady with the Carnations," except photographs of her picture in the Louvre, one of which I bought — though it gave but a feeble idea of the original masterpiece— and then I left for Brittany. Some English friends of mine, Mr. and Mrs. Fairleigh, had taken up their abode in a quaint old rambling chateau near Quimperle on the coast of Finisterre, and they had pressed me cordially to stay with them for a fortnight— an invitation which I gladly accepted. The house was built on a lofty rock overlooking the sea; the surrounding coast was eminently wild and picturesque; and on the day I arrived, there was a boisterous wind which lifted high the crests of the billows

and dashed them against the jutting crags with grand and terrific uproar. Mrs. Fairleigh, a bright, practical woman, whose life was entirely absorbed in household management, welcomed me with effusion— she and her two handsome boys, Rupert and Frank, were full of enthusiasm for the glories and advantages of their holiday resort.

"Such a beach!" cried Rupert, executing a sort of Indian war-dance beside me on the path.

"And such jolly walks and drives!" chorussed his brother.

"Yes, really!" warbled my hostess in her clear gay voice; "I'm delighted we came here. And the chateau is such a funny old place, full of odd nooks and corners. The country people, you know, are dreadfully superstitious, and they say it is haunted; but of course that's all nonsense! Though if there were a ghost, we should send you to interrogate it, my dear!"

This with a smile of good-natured irony at me.

I laughed. Mrs. Eairleigh was one of those eminently sensible persons who had seriously lectured me on a book known as *'A Romance of Two Worlds*,' as inculcating spiritualistic theories, and therefore deserving condemnation. I turned the subject.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

"Three weeks— and we haven't explored half the neighbourhood yet. There are parts of the house itself we don't know. Once upon a time— so the villagers say— a great painter lived here. Well, his studio runs the whole length of the chateau, and that and some other rooms are locked up. It seems they are never let to strangers. Not that we want them— the place is too big for us as it is."

"What was the painter's name?" I enquired, pausing as I ascended the terrace to admire the grand sweep of the sea.

"Oh, I forget! His pictures were so like those of Greuze that few can tell the difference between them,— and—"

I interrupted her.

"Tell me," I said, with a faint smile, "have you any carnations growing here?"

"Carnations! I should think so! The place is full of them. Isn't the odour delicious?"

And as we reached the highest terrace in front of the chateau I saw that the garden was ablaze with these brilliant scented blossoms, of every shade, varying from the palest salmon pink to the deepest, darkest scarlet. This time that subtle fragrance was not my fancy, and I gathered a few of the flowers to wear in my dress at dinner. Mr. Fairleigh now came out to receive us, and the conversation became general.

I was delighted with the interior of the house; it was so quaint, and old, and suggestive. There was a dark oaken staircase, with a most curiously carved and twisted balustrade— some ancient tapestry still hung on the walls— and there were faded portraits of stiff ladies in ruffs, and maliciously smiling knights in armour, that depressed rather than decorated the dining-room. The chamber assigned to me upstairs was rather bright than otherwise— it fronted the sea, and was cheerfully and prettily furnished. I noticed, however, that it was next door to the shut-up and long-deserted studio. The garden was, as Mrs. Fairleigh had declared, full of carnations. I never saw so many of these flowers growing in one spot. They seemed to spring up everywhere, like weeds, even in the most deserted and shady corners. I had been at the chateau some three or four days, when one morning I happened to be walking alone in a sort of shrubbery at the back of the house, when I perceived in the long dank grass at my feet a large grey stone, that had evidently once stood upright, but had now fallen flat, burying itself partly in the earth. There was something carved upon it. I stooped down, and clearing away the grass and weeds, made out the words

"*Manon Coeur perfide*!"

Surely this was a strange inscription! I told my discovery to the Fairleighs, and we all examined and re-examined the mysterious slab, without being able to arrive at any satisfactory explanation of its meaning. Even enquiries made among the villagers failed to elicit anything save shakes of the head, and such remarks as "*Ah, Madame! si on savait*..." or "*Je crois bien qu'il y a une histoire la*!"

One evening we all returned to the chateau at rather a later hour than usual, after a long and delightful walk on the beach in the mellow radiance of a glorious moon. When I went to my room I had no inclination to go to bed— I was wide awake, and moreover in a sort of expectant frame of mind; expectant, though I knew not what I expected. I threw my window open, leaning out and looking at the moon-enchanted sea, and inhaling the exquisite fragrance of the carnations wafted to me on every breath of the night wind. I thought of many things— the glory of life; the large benevolence of Nature; the mystery of death; the beauty and certainty of immortality; and then, though my back was turned to the interior of my room, I knew,— I felt, I was no longer alone. I forced myself to move round from the window; slowly but determinedly I brought myself to confront whoever it was that had thus entered through my locked door; and I was scarcely surprised when I saw "the Lady with the Carnations" standing at a little distance from me, with a most

woebegone, appealing expression on her shadowy lovely face. I looked at her, resolved not to fear her; and then brought all my will to bear on unravelling the mystery of my strange visitant. As I met her gaze unflinchingly she made a sort of timid gesture with her hands, as though she besought something.

"Why are you here?" I asked, in a low, clear tone. "Why do you follow me?"

Again she made that little appealing movement. Her answer, soft as a child's whisper, floated through the room:

"You pitied me!"

"Are you unhappy?"

"Very!" And here she clasped her wan white fingers together in a sort of agony. I was growing nervous, but I continued:

"Tell me, then, what you wish me to do?" She raised her eyes in passionate supplication.

"Pray for me! No one has prayed for me ever since I died— no one has pitied me for a hundred years!"

"How did you die?" I asked, trying to control the rapid beating of my heart. The Lady with the Carnations smiled most mournfully, and slowly unfastened the cluster of flowers from her breast— there her white robe was darkly stained with blood.. She pointed to the stain, and then replaced the flowers. I understood.

"Murdered!" I whispered, more to myself than to my pale visitor— "murdered!"

"No one knows, and no one prays for me!" wailed the faint sweet spirit voice— "and though I am dead I cannot rest. Pray for me— I am tired!" And her slender head drooped wearily— she seemed about to vanish. I conquered my rising terrors by a strong effort, and said:

"Tell me— you must tell me ''— here she raised her head, and her large pensive eyes met mine obediently— "who was your murderer?"

"He did not mean it," she answered. "He loved me. It was here"— and she raised one hand and motioned towards the adjacent studio— "here he drew my picture. He thought me false— but I was true. '*Manon coeur perfide*!' Oh, no, no, no! It should be '*Manon coeur fidele*!' "

She paused and looked at me appealingly. Again she pointed to the studio. "Go and see!" she sighed. "Then you will pray— and I will never come again. Promise you will pray for me— it was here he killed me— and I died without a prayer."

"Where were you buried?" I asked, in a hushed voice.

"In the waves," she murmured; "thrown in the wild cold waves; and no one knew— no one ever found poor Manon; alone and sad for a hundred years, with no word said to God for her!"

Her face was so full of plaintive pathos, that I could have wept. Watching her as she stood, I knelt at the quaint old *prie-dieu* just within my reach, and prayed as she desired. Slowly, slowly, slowly a rapturous light came into her eyes; she smiled and waved her hands towards me in farewell. She glided backwards towards the door— and her figure grew dim and indistinct. For the last time she turned her now radiant countenance upon me, and said in thrilling accents—

"Write, '*Manon coeur fidele*!' " I cannot remember how the rest of the night passed; but I know that with the early morning, rousing myself from the stupor of sleep into which I had fallen, I hurried to the door of the closed studio. It was ajar! I pushed it boldly open and entered. The room was long and lofty, but destitute of all furniture save a battered-looking, worm-eaten easel that leaned up against the damp stained wall. I approached this relic of the painter's art, and examining it closely, perceived the name "Manon" cut roughly yet deeply upon it. Looking curiously about, I saw what had nearly escaped my notice— a sort of hanging cupboard, on the left-hand side of the large central bay window. I tried its handle— it was unlocked, and opened easily. Within it lay three things— a palette, on which the blurring marks of long obliterated pigments were still faintly visible; a dagger, unsheathed, with its blade almost black with rust; and— the silver filigree sticks of a fan, to which clung some mouldy shreds of yellow lace. I remembered the fan the Lady with the Carnations had carried at the Theatre Français, and pieced together her broken story. She had been slain by her artist-lover— slain in a sudden fit of jealousy ere the soft colours on his picture of her were yet dry— murdered in this very studio; and no doubt that hidden dagger was the weapon used. Poor Manon! Her frail body had been cast from the high rock on which the chateau stood "into the wild cold waves," as she or her spirit had said; and her cruel lover had carried his wrath against her so far as to perpetuate a slander against her by writing "*Coeur perfide*" on that imperishable block of stone! Full of pitying thoughts I shut the cupboard, and slowly left the studio, closing the door noiselessly after me.

That morning as soon as I could get Mrs. Fairleigh alone I told her my adventure, beginning with the very first experience I had had of the picture in the Louvre. Needless to say, she heard me with the utmost incredulity.

"I know you, my dear!" she said, shaking her head at me wisely; "you are full of fancies, and always dreaming about the next world, as if this one wasn't good enough for you. The whole thing is a delusion."

"But," I persisted, "you know the studio was shut and locked; how is it that it is open now?"

"It isn't open!" declared Mrs. Fairleigh— "though I'm quite willing to believe you dreamt it *was*."

"Come and see!" I exclaimed eagerly; and I took her upstairs, though she was somewhat reluctant to follow me. As I had said, the studio *was* open. I led her in, and showed her the name cut on the easel, and the hanging cupboard with its contents. As these convincing proofs of my story met her eyes, she shivered a little, and grew rather pale.

"Come away," she said nervously— "you are really too horrid! I can't bear this sort of thing! For goodness' sake, keep your ghosts to yourself!" I saw she was vexed and pettish, and I readily followed her out of the barren, forlorn-looking room. Scarcely were we well outside the door when it shut to with a sharp click. I tried it— it was fast locked! This was too much for Mrs. Fairleigh. She rushed downstairs in a perfect paroxysm of terror; and when I found her in the breakfast-room she declared she would not stop another day in the house. I managed to calm her fears, however; hut she insisted on my remaining with her to brave out whatever else might happen at what she persisted now in calling the "haunted" chateau, in spite of her practical theories. And so I stayed on. And when we left Brittany, we left all together, without having had our peace disturbed by any more manifestations of an unearthly nature. One thing alone troubled me a little— I should have liked to obliterate the word "*perfide*" from that stone, and to have had "*fidele*" carved on it instead; but it was too deeply engraved for this. However, I have seen no more of "the Lady with the Carnations."

But I know the dead need praying for— and that they often suffer for lack of such prayers,— though I cannot pretend to explain the reason why. And I know that the picture in the Louvre is not a Greuze, though it is called one— it is the portrait of a faithful woman deeply wronged; and her name is here written as she told me to write it—

"Manon
Coeur Fidele!"

12: The Greater Plot

Clarence Herbert New

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IN the Rue Vignon, up back of the Madeleine, a small wrought-iron hanging sign projects over the narrow entrance of a restaurant which has become famous during the last few years— particularly since the beginning of the war. The quaint old French letters inform passers-by that it is the Café des Trois Gascons— the name having come down from a small hostelry in the fields outside the walls of Old Paris, in the fifteenth century. Inside, after one has gone some twenty paces and passed the cage where the stout proprietress sits, the passage opens into a large room with a mezzanine balcony, lighted during the day by a skylight over the center. To-day the place is a popular rendezvous for officers on weekly furlough from the trenches— and for war correspondents, government officials and the sprinkling of outside civilians who are permitted by the police to remain in Paris for legitimate purposes.

The waiters, who formerly knew and were known to most of the patrons, are in shallow graves back of the firing-line or in the trenches around Verdun. Their places are filled in the Café des Trois Gascons by girls in short black skirts, white aprons and caps— girls, between eighteen and twenty-five, who possess the wit to be entertaining, as they serve, and do not underestimate the responsibility which rests upon every woman of France to provide the nation with its soldiers of the future.

At the table in a rear corner, one evening, were four officers who had come down from the front on a week's furlough— three of them Irish and the other a Gordon Highlander. They were in high spirits— making the most of their brief respite from the soul- deadening trench-life. They joked with arie, their waitress, and exchanged anecdotes of various engagements and discussed the entertainments to be seen in Paris, with the absorbing interest of men who do not know whether to-night's comedy or opera may be their last. Presently two more Irish officers came in with three ladies and a well-known member of the Chamber— seating themselves at a near-by table and bowing to the group in the corner as Marie came in from the kitchen with a paté and four "bocks."

For a moment or two she stood by the corner table, easily holding her own in the duel of repartee; then she moved on to take the order of a couple who had just entered the room. Subconsciously, however, she was noticing a subtle change in the talk among the Irish officers. As soon as she left them, the voices

of at least two dropped to a more confidential tone; they appeared to be discussing something which they preferred not having overheard.

Now, for one memorable year, Marie had lived in London as the assistant of a Bond Street modiste, and had picked up enough English to follow any ordinary conversation. By occasional words that reached her from the table in the corner she sensed the fact that the officers were referring to some undertaking in which a number of their fellow countrymen were interested— some approaching day upon which certain plans would be carried out with the cooperation of all.

There was nothing said which indicated a treasonable element in whatever it was they were planning; in fact, it was far more likely to be some preliminary concentration for a summer offensive against the German lines. After some consideration she decided that what little she had overheard could have no other application, and almost forgot the intensely patriotic curiosity which prompted her to listen so closely— almost, but not entirely. After a while, passing the table of the Deputy, Henri Couramont, she noticed that he was talking in much the same confidential manner to one of the officers at his table— which also bore out the supposition of an impending army campaign.

WHEN Couramont and his party left the Trois Gascons, the comer group of Irish officers were not long after them. Three hours later, Deputy Couramont came walking along through the arcades of the Rue de Rivoli with Captain Tim Delaney, who had followed him from the cafe. As they reached the Rue Castiglione, the light from an arc-lamp shone down upon their faces with a bluish-green reflection that distinctly revealed every line and feature to a tall man in evening clothes— Sir Francis Lammerford of the English diplomatic service— who was coming down the other arcade from the Place Vendome. At first, he noticed them in merely a casual way as they stopped for a second or two before crossing to the Hotel Continental; then a fleeting expression upon the Deputy's face held his attention sufficiently to make him study the man closely. He recognized the two men in the second glance, but the expression he had caught reminded him of some one who was not Couramont, some man whom he couldn't remember to have seen for years, a person whose name and identity escaped him, spur his memory as he might.

Lammerford's mind was still occupied with the evasive resemblance when he dropped in at the Café Sylvain and found there Gaston de Marais, of the Corps Diplomatique. In the years preceding the war, De Marais and Sir Francis Lammerford had been diplomatic adversaries, but each man respected the other's ability, and their interests were now identical, at least until the final readjustment of European boundary lines. As Sir Francis had been in Russia for

nine or ten months— had been twice reported dead— the Frenchman was genuinely pleased to see him.

"My dear friend! Is it really thou? Come! This is a happy meeting! We will exchange experiences— with champagne to stimulate the memory— eh?"

For a while, they chatter of various campaigns and the political undercurrents which, more than the taking or losing of trenches, moved the warring nations this way and that toward the final showdown upon which a return to peaceful life was possible. After a while. Lammerford casually mentioned having seen the Deputy, Henri Couramont.

"The man appears to be gaining in political strength— if I'm a judge of stray gossip and the manner of people toward him."

"Ah— *oui*. Couramont's leaders in *Le Courier du Matin* have been most daring; he has fought seven duels in consequence. He is a man to be reckoned with, and the Cabinet are well aware of the fact — they even mention him for the Postes et Télégraphes portfolio."

"Lets see: he was from the Côte d'Or, wasn't he— originally?"

"I thought it was Haut-Sâone— pretty well over toward the Rhine valley, at that. Was he not running a small weekly sheet at Belfort before he came to Paris— eighteen years ago? It is said he gets his extreme hatred of the '*boche*' from having lived within a stone's throw of him so long."

"Seems pretty thick with the English and Irish officers !"

"Ah ! That makes itself to be understood, my friend. Officers are not permitted to say too much, you know— but one may smile, affirmatively, when another makes a tentative statement which is known to be true. One hears that much of Couramont's accurate information concerning matters at the front comes from his frequent *dejeuners* with people of that sort. And. besides— one hears that his mother was the daughter of an Irish baronet, which makes the accounting for his excellent English— as his early years on the German border gave him German which is practically without accent."

LAMMERFORD'S mind was flashing from one half-remembered face to another— groping, considering, fitting together the various points in this gossip concerning the Deputy and trying to construct inferences that would prove up.

"There's no question as to his patriotism, I suppose? No chance of his having imbibed Prussian ideas from having lived so long in close touch with them ?"

"*Pouf*! You should hear him speak of the '*boche*,' my friend) He spent a day, last month, in the trenches at Verdun— and sat in a puddle of water for hours,

potting at every German head he could see! One hears that he got two of them— the man is an artist with rifle or pistol!"

"Humph! From what you say, De Mantis, the man appears to be one of those tried and proved individuals to whom no possible suspicion can attach? Eh?"

"It makes itself obvious that one's actions influence the opinions of others— more than the spoken word! The man has given proof, at the risk of his life— and more than once! Is it that you have something in mind concerning this Couramont, *mon ami*?"

"No. There's nothing upon which I could base a fragment of suspicion against him. Only— when you mentioned his early years upon the German border. I thought of the many instances which show the extent to which a Prussian will risk his life, unhesitatingly, if, at some crucial moment, he may find himself in position to do the one vitally important thing for his Government— the one thing impossible were he known to be German. With Couramont, as you say, one has proofs enough as to where his sympathies lie— and he's half English, or Irish, so that removes even the possibility of any German taint in his blood, n'est ee pas? Well,"— yawning slightly— "I've had but six hours' sleep in two days ; I shall have to make some of it up. You must tell me where I may find you most frequently— I may be in Paris for a week or so."

DESPITE De Marais' information, however, Lammerford was by no means wholly reassured concerning Couramont. And when he studied a half-tone portrait of Couramont which appeared in one of the popular illustrated papers, Lammerford felt again that haunting impression that the Deputy was not what he seemed— was convinced that he had at some previous time, in some other environment, seen the face that looked out at him from the page of the journal.

Sir Francis knew that Couramont's early life was a matter of little interest to him if it had been passed in France. If by any chance, however, it should prove that the man's previous life had been spent in Germany or Austria? Ah! Here was the short-cut in his theoretic reasoning. If a man achieves prominence in any German city, it's a foregone conclusion that he will spend more or less time in Berlin. If his face and personality stand out from the mass in Berlin, even for a brief period, it is morally certain that one of three or four great illustrated weeklies will reproduce his first obtainable photograph. And the greatest of these weeklies in size and popularity, is the *Illustrirte Zeitung*.

At ten next morning, therefore. Lammerford walked down to the old Palais Mazarin and made out a "bulletin" of the volumes he wanted, in the

Bibliotheque Nationale. He had taken with him the copy of *Le Monde Illustré* in which Couramont's portrait appeared— entering it upon his "bulletin" as personal property which he might afterward carry out of the building.

For over an hour, Lammerford rapidly turned page after page of the big volumes— dismissing each half-tone portrait with a single glance, as he passed it. Then— in the second volume— his hand paused. At the head of a paragraph recording a scandal which had been the talk of Berlin society for a week or more, was the picture of a young captain in one of the Uhlan regiments. Hauptman Heinrich Schmaltz had, by his good manners and soldierly appearance, attracted the attention of the Imperial family— being given a very desirable command at the Schloss. After a few months, he was frequently seen with a handsome Viennese countess who had been five years married, but detested her husband. Then there was a duel in which the count was killed. Captain Schmaltz was sent to America on a mission promptly arranged with the Wilhelmstrasse— and the countess disappeared at the same time.

The incident and the gossip came back to Lammerford as he read the paragraph. So far as he knew, Berlin never heard of the young captain again.

Yet the expression he had noticed upon Couramont's face in the glare of the arc- lamp had been identical with the one caught in a glimpse of Captain Schmaltz, as he stood under one of the arched entrances of the Schloss in Berlin, nineteen years before— with the light from one of the park lamps falling upon his head and sharply outlining it against the deep shadow under the arch, behind him.

Lammerford placed the two half-tones side by side. That of the young captain showed merely a small mustache, while the Deputy wore a thin Van Dyck; but the lines of the face, the prominent chin and forehead, the eyes, the whole expression, were unmistakable. The popular member of the French Chamber— supposed bitterly to detest everything German— was, in fact, Heinrich Schmaltz, formerly captain in a Berlin regiment of Uhlans, and in the service of the Wilhelmstrasse at the time he disappeared.

For perhaps the thousandth time in his diplomatic career. Sir Francis knew that his sense of intuition had been vindicated — that what seemed an absurdly groundless suspicion had been based upon that inner consciousness of his which automatically recorded impressions and stored them up for future use. Making a memorandum of the volume and page-numbers in the big German weekly, he left the Library and went back to his apartment.

THAT afternoon. Sir Francis went down to the Isle de la Citie and called upon his old acquaintance, Lcpine, at the Prefecture. Without implying that he was interested in one, more than others, he asked for brief resumes of the

careers of certain French politicians— including the Cabinet ministers, two Senators and three Deputies. Knowing Sir Francis Lammerford to be associated with the British Foreign Office, it was— to Monsieur Lepine— a perfectly natural inquiry. Since the conference of the Allies, at which it was agreed that they should act in concert during the remainder of the war, each of the chancelleries has been vitally interested in the membership of the other governments. A rather unusual harmony prevailed— but, under the surface, there was necessarily a close observation of opinions and actions among government officials, everywhere, in order that anything which seemed to threaten this harmony might be promptly dealt with.

With the vast amount of minute information at his disposal, Lepine was able to give an accurate account of what each man's private life had been, as well as that recorded in the daily prints. If anything, Lammerford seemed less interested in Henri Couramont's biography than those of more prominent men— the Prefect couldn't decide whether his friend's request had been actually what it appeared on the surface, or not. But Lammerford left the Boulevard du Palais with data concerning the Deputy which gave him more than one clue as to where he might look for evidence of nefarious activities. For one thing, he learned that Mlle. Obregon, of the Folies Bergère— said to be Couramont's *bien aimée*— was an intimate friend of Mrs. Boyle Fitzpatrick, wife of a captain in one of the Irish regiments, and that the four dined frequently with other officers and their wives at the Cafe des Trois Gascons in the Rue Vignon.

Lammerford had taken a table at the Trois Gascons at the rear of the larger room, and was finishing his soup when they arrived that evening. While studying the party in casual glances, he was conscious that his pretty waitress looked at him rather intently as she brought in his meat-course. The only other diners in their vicinity were a group of Irish officers — too much occu- pied with their own conversation to overhear anything said in guarded tones. After glancing at them to estimate how far her voice might carry, she leaned over the handsome Englishman — arranging his dishes.

"M'sieu' does not, then, remember me? Behold— I am that Marie Latour whom *les bêtes Apaches* were dragging up the Rue Pierre Sarazin from the Boul' Mich' one night, three years ago— when *le bon M'sieu Anglais* knocked them down, and shot the one who drew a knife!"

"*Ma foi*! One has the great pleasure in seeing thee again, *ma fille*! In the darkness of little streets, it makes itself very difficult to see a face distinctly. One remembers we had a bock in one of the Boul' Mich' cafes, to restore thy nerfs, and that one accompanied thee to thy apartment, for safety, afterward. My affairs made it necessary that I should depart from Paris next morning— so

I had but the little souvenir of cerise ribbon to remind me of the adventure. You have now a husband— *oui*?"

"Ah, *non*— M'sieu'. For two months, only! He was killed at the Marne. For a year, before. I was in your big foggy London— where one acquires the Anglais with much labor; then I returned, before the war. M'sieu' is perhaps of the Corps Diplomatique?"

"And why think you that, *ma belle*?"

"Because one observes that M'sieu came out of the Prefecture this afternoon, and spoke to M'sieu de Marais on the Pont Neuf. M'sieu' has the bearing of the *soldat*; yet he is never in uniform. One observes little things in a place like this, concerning which it is desirable to speak with some one who is of the Government. *Oui*!"

Lammerford was apparently paying more attention to his dinner than to the pretty waitress. "*Par exemple*?" he inquired.

"Behold the Irish officers at the corner table! They talk of the trenches— the Opera, the amusements of Paris— when one is within hearing. The moment one is at a little distance, they mumble among themselves of other matters."

"Possibly orders for a new 'offensive' — which must not be known! Regimental gossip of their own— affairs of the army in general, *ma fille*!"

"*Oui— oui*— one thinks of all those things. They do not altogether explain. *Par exemple*, M. Couramont, the Deputy, dines frequently with some of their party, and ladies— as he does this evening. Those at each table bow to the others— also, to people in different parts of the cabaret. When they leave here, most of the Irish officers go by different streets to the apartment of M. le Capitaine Fitzpatrick— where they play at cards until midnight. M. Couramont I have three times seen there with them. While they play, it is evident they discuss other matters of great importance. Me— I am *chez moi*, *au cinquieme*, in the rear of that house which is on the other street. From my window, one looks into those of M. le Capitaine, one floor below, across the court. Upon four evenings of the week, I leave Les Trois Gascons at six o'clock; upon the other three, I am here earlier and leave before the dinner."

"H-m-m — you have not fear of me, *ma fille*?"

"But no, M'sieu' le Chevalier! …. "*Pourquo*i? It is that you rescued me, that time! It is that you are *gentil- homme*!"

"*Peste*! It is not that which I meant ! You believe that, me, I have the love of France, the love of my England? That I despise and am ever suspicious of *le boche*?"

"Ah! *Oui*! *Oui! M'sieu'*! *Ma foi*— it is of a certainty— that!"

"*Tres bien*! Then— you will permit that I accompany thee to thy apartment when thou leavest— at ten. o'clock?"

"But certainly, M'sieu'! It is my wish! Me— I am but a girl who knows little of State affairs — *mais une fille de France, de tout temps*. Perhaps I am foolish, that I watch the officers so closely and suspect— ah, one does not know what to suspect in such times!

At least, one does no harm to be alert."

LATER, at a corner three blocks away, Marie met Sir Francis and they rode in a taxi to her apartment. As she had her own keys, there was no occasion to disturb the concierge; they climbed the five flights of stairs in silence and bolted her outer door after entering the suite. In order that no attention might be directed their way from the apartment across the court, she didn't turn on a single electric. Motioning him to an easy chair by the window, she perched herself upon the broad arm of it while he drew from his pocket a pair of powerful opera-glasses.

The night had proved warmer than usual, and so all three windows of Captain Fitzpatrick's apartment were open. Through a passage, they could see the card-players in a further salon, but men and women drifted back to the living-room at the rear, from time to time, examining pictures upon the wall, books and curios upon the table, or refreshing themselves from a cellaret in one corner. As Lammerford focused his opera-glasses, a group of three were examining the paintings, and one called to Fitzpatrick in the other room:

"I say, old chap! Is this the picture you did on the Meuse?"

"Aye— an' I can assure you I've painted under more favorable conditions! We had a bomb-proof dug from clay in front of the trench, with a floor of misfit planking about six inches off the ground. It was right enough in good weather— but after a day's rain, our feet were always in the water. To get a decent light, I had my easel stuck up at the trench-opening— had a narrow escape, once or twice, before I finished the picture. Y'see that bit of a patch on the canvas, where the color is laid on thick with a palette-knife? That was done by a fragment of shrapnel which missed my forehead by a quarter of an inch an' made an awful hole in Tommy O'Brien, just beyond me, in the bomb-proof. It was two days before we could, get his body to the rear."

"I see you've a bunch of new records! Taking them up with you on Thursday?"

"Aye— as far as commissary headquarters. Pat O'Donnel is the last of our crowd to be stuck with trench-detail; we'll have him back of the lines, next week. Then every man will be available when the time comes—"

"Faith, Doyle— be careful! One never knows how far a voice may carry, ye know!"

"True for you, Phaidrig! But there's no harm done. 'Tis understood that we talk a bit among ourselves on what we hear of the Staff plans, an' everyone knows there'll be somethin' afoot before long."

FOR an hour, Lammerford and Marie Latour caught no remarks from the other apartment which might be construed as having a double meaning. Then Couramont came into the rear room with one of the women for a glass of wine. They were chatting upon commonplace topics, but in the midst of it, Sir Francis noticed her lips moving in an undertone. Having had a good deal of practice in lip-reading, he had little difficulty in understanding the question she asked: "When is it to be, *mon ami*?" But as the Deputy was standing with his back to the window, the watchers could make nothing of his answer. In a few moments, the party broke up— and Marie whispered:

"Is it that some danger threatens France, M'sieu'?"

"*Oui, ma belle*! One which is serious, of a certainty! And it's a question whether one may discover the details in time to kill the whole of it. Me— I know, now, of a dozen people who must be watched from hour to hour; yet if one speaks of the matter to M. le Prefect, it is possible that plans of the War Staff may be disarranged in consequence. As yet, we have no proof that it is not some portion of the summer campaign which they have been discussing with so much secrecy— but me, I convince myself that it is some- thing more serious than that. You will continue to watch, *ma belle*— both at Les Trois Gascons and here. I will write down the number of my own *pied-a-terre* in the Faubourg St. Honoré— so! You will come to me if you learn anything of importance. My concierge, Madame Fauvette, will admit thee to wait, if I am not *chez moi*. In the meanwhile, I will find others to keep our friends over there under observation."

As he picked up his hat and gloves, there was an expression upon her pretty face which indicated the extent to which his service, three years before, had won her affections. He kissed her in friendly camaraderie— and went down the stairs.

IT was but eight or ten blocks to the Rue Royale, where he dropped in at the Automobile Club— happening to overhear a remark in the foyer which indicated a bit of unexpected good luck. A member was speaking of the English Admiral and European celebrity, Lord Trevor of Dartmoor (known to intimates like Lammerford as "the Diplomatic Free Lance"), as having left the club not fifteen minutes before.

Calling a taxi, Sir Francis motored out to His Lordship's modest but perfect house on the Avenue de Neuilly— maintained in constant readiness for occupancy, the year around, by his staff of English and Afghan servants. As Lammerford was considered practically a member of His Lordship's family, the Afghan *khansamah* welcomed him with deep respect and ushered him up to the room he usually occupied— His Lordship not having arrived. Within a few moments, however. Trevor came in— followed by Sabub Ali, more companion than servant, with the suit-cases. Joining Sir Francis in the library, he lighted one of his famous long cigars and drew a breath of quiet satisfaction.

"Gad, Lammy, it's a bit of luck, findin' you here— what!"

"That's the remark I made to myself when I heard you were in Paris! I lost no time getting out here!"

"Why ? Have you picked up another thread— when nobody in the city appears to dream that anything's amiss, yet?"

"Humph! I don't know what you've happened upon! I've learned since morning that a prominent Deputy— an intensely loyal Frenchman for eighteen-years, mind you— is actually a Wilhelmstrasse agent, and is now planning some *coup* so far-reaching and unexpected that I'm more nervous than I've been in a good many months ! What do you know about it?"

"As to anything at this end— nothing! Of course, there'll be little in the Paris papers for several days; we're keeping the thing as quiet as possible for obvious reasons. But— Sinn Feiners captured the Dublin post office, the Metropole and practically all of Sackville Street, yesterday— shot a number of officers as they were returning from the races, are sniping off soldiers and civilians in every direction and have burned hundreds of buildings— and scattered mobs of them are rising all through the South of Ireland. We knew, of course, that they were armed and drilling, but didn't look for any such treacherous outbreak while the Empire was fighting for its life! It'll take fifteen or twenty thousand of the army to handle the thing— an' there's no telling in how many other directions it may show itself! Sir Roger Casement was arrested near Tralee, after being put ashore from a German submarine— and convoying a supply-ship with enough arms to have set half Ireland ablaze, or at least all the disaffected lot. Fortunately, three-quarters of the country is loyal to His Majesty's Government, an' will remain so! But—"

"Aye— *but*! Now listen to what *I've* stumbled upon!" As briefly as possible, he sketched the haunting resemblance in Couramont's face as he came out of the Rue Rivoli arcade, and what he had since learned. "There's not one of those officers, or the women, either, who isn't Irish— and, to the best of my knowledge, from the southern counties. Couramont, or Schmaltz, we know to be a Wilhelmstrasse spy who has been waiting eighteen years to do, at some

critical moment, what he is ordered to do by his superiors in Berlin— probably serving the Auswärtiges Amt many times to good purpose, during those years, as well. And, undoubtedly, there are a dozen or more like him in this thing! From what you tell me, it's rather obvious that what they and those Irish officers are planning is the more serious part of the Sinn Fein plot— and they've worked in the surest possible way to avert suspicion."

"We've certainly no proof to act upon yet, Lammy! Wait a bit! I think I know of a way to get some! Do you know— or do you remember hearing about— Corporal Dennis Corrigan, of that Limerick regiment? He lost his left hand and wrist in the early retreat— the rear-guard action— and was decorated for an act of conspicuous bravery. Being disabled, of course, he couldn't serve any more, and he opened a gambling club for officers in the Rue de Savoie, south of the Seine. It is winked at by the Prefecture because he maintains a quiet, orderly place where there is seldom any very high play— catering, largely, to the foreign element in Paris, though his rooms are patronized by journalists and members of the Chamber, as well.

"I happen to know that Corrigan was an old-time Fenian— he's nearer sixty than forty-five, though you'd never imagine it from his appearance. I also know practically all the signs and passwords of the old Fenian organization and the Sinn Fein. One of my press syndicate editors obtained them for me at the risk of his life. Now, it'll be a simple matter for me to obtain any sort of special passport I wish, for one of my syndicate war correspondents— say, an Irish-American New Yorker. Eh— what?"

"Humph! .... We'd best let no word of this reach Lady Nan! She'd see the necessity, of course— but she'd have not a moment's peace until you were back in London. I'd undertake it myself— but your knowledge makes, discovery less likely. I can watch the Trois Gascons and that apartment of Marie Latour's. It's even possible that I may be able to conceal myself in Fitzpatrick's rooms, during the next twenty-four hours."

NEXT evening the usual habitues of Corrigan's Club in the Rue de Savoie observed with respectful interest the skillful play and almost unbelievable luck of a well set-up, middle-aged stranger whose manner and occasional remarks indicated the American war correspondent now becoming so familiar to the Parisians. The *banque* had been winning heavily from its regular patrons when the New Yorker arrived with Lieutenant James O'Connor— down for a two-day furlough— who had run across him in the Café des Trois Gascons. The smile of half-recognition upon the American's face convinced O'Connor that they had met before— "Reilly" (none other than the disguised Lord Trevor) being so thoroughly conversant with the families of Kerry and Cork, so prompt with

certain words and signs which such a man should know, thai the Lieutenant was anxious to have him meet Corrigan without delay. His sitting-in at the game and winning so irresistibly was merely incidental— but it won the admiration of every Irishman in the room, most of them having some knowledge of the deadly game a Tammany politician learns to play in New York.

Reilly at last cashed in for thirty thousand francs, the bulk of which had been won by the house from a Russian diplomat and one of the wealthy journalists of Paris, before his arrival. Afterward O'Connor and a Major Phelan escorted him through a concealed passage into another building, where the one-handed Corrigan was smoking in a little private den. The ex-corpora! appeared to be thoroughly informed as to Reilly 's winnings and his supposed antecedents— greeting him with a grin of appreciation.

"Faith, 'tis said a Tammany Irishman bates the worrld, me fri'nd— an' it's mesilf believes it! Sit ye down an' smoke a seegyar with me! Tell me. now, Misther Reilly— how's the b'ys in New Yorrk, an' what ye'll be doin' over here in the newspaper line?"

Reilly— whom Lord Trevor's intimate friends would not have recognized, so completely misleading were the subtle changes he had made in dress and facial expression— named several papers of the syndicate he represented, exhibited very unusual credentials in the way of passport and special permits to visit the trenches, and implied, more by looks than words, that his errand in France was not altogether a journalistic one. He delighted them by handing over to Corrigan the entire thirty thousand francs he had just won— to be expended in any worthy cause which the ex-corporal might have in mind— and casually remarked that he had left Dublin two days before, completely disgusted with the impatience which had fed to an outbreak there at a moment when it was practically certain to fail.

THEY listened to this in amazement— then put a sinister question or two which would have cost him his life had he answered with the slightest hesitation. But he exhibited such a grasp of details— having received by radiogram, three hours before, reports of the Dublin situation which they would have no means of getting for several days— that he convinced them by what appeared to be absolute knowledge of far more than local conditions. After demonstrating the force of his contention until they saw it clearly, he risked a shot in the dark.

"I suppose you'll agree with me that the business over yon changes matters a good bit? For, d'ye see, if you attempt to go on with this end of the plan now, 'tis likely that many of ye are bein' watched! Before ye can act together, in one grand series of blows, they'll be nipping first one and then another of ye— till

'tis the devil's own mess you'll be in, and a file of sharp- shooters against the first wall, for every man !"

It was a chance. He scarcely dared hope it would draw them; yet it had been done with such consummate naturalness that they must have been gifted with almost superhuman telepathy to have avoided the trap. They fell into it with no suspicion of the bait.

"But— domn it all. man! There'll be never another such chance in years ! 'Tis ourselves has schamed for months— has watched this one an' that one till we know the day an' the hour they'll be in certain places! 'Tis the wires we've laid an' the frame-ups we've planned to lure thim all into five cliff rent places the same hour— so we may make a clane job of it! They'll be two min doggin' every Mimber of the British Cabinet— fourteen l'aders of thepeers an' commons— six admirals — an' eight major-ginerals over here— whin the hour strikes!"

"An' that night? Ye've set it for less than two weeks away, of course! That's why I'm tellin' ye 'tis madness— after the fools' work in Dublin!"

"Man — 'tis one wake from this night has been set f'r the job!"

"Aye! While our own leaders are bein' shot in Dublin or the Tower ! When the eyes of Europe are watchin' every Irishman in the British Isles and on the Continent! Go on with it, if ye will! This day, two weeks, ye'll all be rottin' four feet under the sod! Send out the worrd, I tell ye! Send out the worrd to-morrow! Put off the day two months! Then 'twill come upon them like a blow in the dark— from heaven knows where— and ye'll paralyze the Entente ! Do it now, an' the Entente'll snuff ye out like so many candle-wicks! Go awn— any way ye like! I'm tellin' ye— that's all!"

They were impressed, convinced even; yet the sudden disarrangement of their plans threw them into momentary panic. How to inform each member of their organization in time? It seemed an impossible task.

"An' who'll carry the worrd to England, I'm wishin' to know?" (This, from Corrigan.) " 'Tis possible, no doubt, to pass the word through France. But, d'ye see, the most of us is detailed, here an' yon, behind the firin'-lines. They get away for a bit of furlough to rest from the strain of constant fightin'— but they must account for every move they make. We've no way of givin' the whisper to those in England unless one of us bears it there! 'Tis no aisy job to go an' come as ye plaze in these days— as ye well know, Reilly!"

O'REILLY lighted a fresh cigar and spread open his special passport upon the table.

"Faith, 'tis myself can do the job, if ye wish! My papers'll pass me with little trouble, d'ye see. I would not be sittin' idle an seein' a lot of the finest men old

Ireland ever grew— God bless her!— lined up against a wall an' shot for makin' the mistake of strikin' before 'twas possible to drive the stroke home!"

The offer was made so naturally, so spontaneously, that it carried them off their feet and banished every particle of suspicion they might have had. In half an hour he had committed to memory a dozen names and addresses in London, Manchester and Liverpool, with additional passwords, and the cards of three officers which had little pencil-dots under certain engraved let- ters in each name.

Reilly was stopping at a little hotel frequented by Americans in the Rue de l'Echelle, and O'Connor went there with him when he left. In the morning, the war correspondent assumed that he would be shadowed by some of the organization, and so, after making a few purchases, he walked along to the Café des Trois Gascons for a late breakfast, casually sitting down at one of Marie Latour's tables as if he pre- ferred the quieter part of the room. She had no consciousness of ever hav- ing seen the man before ; yet something in the glance he gave her appeared familiar. When she brought his ome- lette and coffee, he said — in so low a tone that it couldn't have been over- heard ten feet away :

"You remember M. le Chevalier— who was in your apartment last evening, *ma belle*?"

"M'sieu" is insulting! One does not comprehend I"

"*Tres bien, ma fille*. Me— I make my apologies, and I entrust a message to your care. M. le Chevalier will be here for his coffee and rolls very soon. Whisper to him: '*The Calais boat— this afternoon— without fail*!' He will understand perfectly— and you will have served France better than you know. Another *café-au-lait*, if you please— and bacon with the kidneys."

The message was delivered in his exact words— Marie feeling much relieved at Lammerford's assurance that it was from one of the great ones in the Corps Diplomatique. So it came about that Sir Francis was in the Gare du Nord when the Calais train pulled out— having barely time to run along the platform and jump into a compartment in which there was but one otherjwi&scnger, an American war correspondent who was reading an afternoon journal. After the guard had inspected their tickets— proceeding along the running-hoard outside of the coupes— Lammerford borrowed a light for his cigar from the American, and they fell into a casual discussion of the situation in the trenches. Long before the train readied Calais, he was asleep by the window at one end of the compartment— and Rally, at the other; yet Lammerford was now conversant with the whole plot and knew just what action to take upon his return to Paris by the morning train.

WHEN Reilly arrived at Charing Cross, a telegram from Sir Francis had preceded him. Consequently, after registering at the Piccadilly Hotel, he was given a room and bath on the second floor which, if required for such a purpose, could be made part of a suite— there being a communicating door on the opposite side of the bath-room. He had assumed that Corrigan was telling only the simple truth when he said it was practically impossible for one of their organization to leave for England without a good deal of red tape which was sure to attract undesirable attention. Bat he was also convinced that the Sinn Feiner would manage in some way to have him followed at every step if it were possible to do so— hence the precautions which Lammerford had taken for him.

He reached the hotel about midnight— too late to see the men whose names he had memorized; so, after a supper in the grill, he went to bed, turning off the lights within fifteen minutes after locking the door of his room. Meanwhile a wealthy mine-owner from the Cape— secretly connected with Downing Street— had been given the suite adjoining Reilly's. At ten o'clock. Sir Edward Wray, Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, had arrived at the Piccadilly in his motor and sent up a card to the mine-owner, who received him in his suite. When Reilly opened the door from his bathroom at half-past twelve. Sir Edward was smoking in the dark, while his mining friend had shut himself into the further room of the suite. During that half-hour interview in the dark, Sir Edward was given names and addresses which he jotted down in pencil to avoid mistakes.

For the next forty-eight hours Reilly was busy motoring about London in a taxi, leaving cards, as a war correspondent desiring interviews, at the houses of various people more or less prominent in the army or London society. In several instances, he found the men at home and gave them Cornwall's instructions— the Londoners seeing the danger of immediate action in carrying out their prearranged plan more quickly than had the men in France. The fiasco in Dublin was having its effect upon them, and the military executions had a very sobering influence even while they enraged the conspirators almost beyond endurance.

IN each interview Lord Trevor— as the pseudo-Reilly— had the feeling that the man with whom he had been talking was merely an executive, that the brains of the whole movement was a person of much greater influence and prominence. Consequently his casual glances about the different rooms took and recorded every little detail which might be of use in tracing the chief conspirator. In one house, the gentleman was obliged to leave the room for a few moments in response to a message from one of the ladies of his family.

During his absence Trevor noticed a fragment of paper covered with fine handwriting, upon the flat-lopped library desk— a half -page apparently torn from some letter. The writing appeared curiously familiar, but he couldn't place it— so he pocketed the scrap for more careful examination later.

He knew that anyone who might be following him about during the day would consider his calling upon one or two prominent men not connected with the conspiracy a clever blind to cover the work he was actually doing, and so he motored around to the handsome Park Lane mansion of Lord and Lady Trevor, about six in the afternoon. As soon as he was inside and had been recognized by his Afghan *khansomah*, he went into the big library to search through half a dozen great scrap-books which contained many thousands of handwriting-specimens, arranged and indexed according to their style— their heavy or light strokes, peculiar formations of vowels and consonants, and general alignment. In the course of an hour he came upon two pages of specimens very closely resembling the scrap he had managed to secure— but not exactly. Upon the next page he found a facsimile— with a well-known signature under it.

"Lord Kilimainine! My word! A Kerry man, to be sure— and yet— who'd have thought it! A man who has served for years in the diplomatic service— has received honors and preferment from the Crown!"

THE man who left the Trevor mansion and motored away in his taxi resembled Mr. Reilly in a general way. The chauffeur didn't look at him closely, but drove him back to the Hotel Piccadilly, where he paid the taxi-fare and went in as if stopping there. At the desk, however, he merely asked for a gentleman whom he knew was not in at the time— and went out by the Regent Street entrance. That was the last ever seen of Reilly, the New York war correspondent. His suit-case was held by the hotel people for a month or so, and Scotland Yard notified, but it was finally assumed that he had been waylaid and killed in some mysterious manner.

At nine o'clock the evening Reilly disappeared, Lord Trevor, with Sir Edward Wray and two officers of the General Staff, called upon Lord Kilimainine at his luxuriously furnished town house. He received them courteously, escorting the party back to his den and smoking-room at the rear of the house, overlooking a walled garden. Lord Trevor indicated the object of their visit by expressing his undcrstanding that Kilimainine was rather well acquainted with the French Deputy, M. Henri Couramont— asking if he could give them any information as to the man's antecedents. The Irishman's eyes narrowed slightly as he glanced from one to another of them. Subconsciously, he noticed that none of the four had lighted the cigars he offered them.

"I've met the man. Your Lordship, more than once— but in a purely social way. Do you mind telling me your object in asking such a question?"

"Why— er— Couramont was executed this afternoon, in Paris, in a rather sensational way. He was arrested at his offices in the Courier du Matin building— placed, handcuffed, in an open cart, driven up and down the Champs Elysees and Boulevards for several hours, with a placard on his back. This placard stated that for eighteen years he had posed as a loyal Frenchman, gaining honors and position in Paris, while all the time he was actually Captain Heinrich Schmaltz, a secret agent of the Wilhelmstrasse. At sunset, in the Place de la Concorde, which was packed with one of the largest crowds ever gathered there, he was shot. It had been discovered that he was one of the chief instigators of a Sinn Fein plot which contemplated a good deal more serious and widespread action than the Dublin affair. The other leader is known to be a certain Irish peer."

With a smile of sardonic incredulity, as they supposed, Kilimainine opened a drawer of the table by which he sat— and reached in, apparently, for a document which they could see at the back of it. When his hand came out. however, there was a flash— a stunning report.

Lord Trevor winced a little as the ball went through the inner muscles of his left arm— though the eye behind his monocle continued to gaze inquiringly at his would-be assassin. Then there came an answering flash from the vicinity of his right hip. Lord Kilimainine sank back in his chair, shot through the heart— and Trevor was hurried out of the house by one of the generals before the arrival of the doctor or members of Kilimainine's family. As the starched front of the dead man's evening-shirt was somewhat blackened by powder-grains, it was assumed that he had committed suicide.

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13: The Tentacles of Evil

Beatrice Redpath

1886-1937

MacLean's, 1 Jan 1926

Beatrice Constance Redpath

IAN sat opposite Is'bel eating his breakfast in silence, in the comfortable little dining room over the second-hand bookstore. There had been no quarrel between them; their marriage was a happy one; but still a sense of fear kept continually pulling at his elbow ever since he had realized the gradual encroaching menace of the slums. The little shop was in a backwater that was being engulfed by the poorer districts surrounding it.

Ian was a dreamer, wrapped up in his books. An enthusiastic reader of adventures in unheard of places, he got many a vicarious thrill from the horrors of the unspeakable jungle. For him the jungle held a fascination that obtruded on his everyday life. To him the jungle was a living force, treacherous, magnetic, gruesome.

In the midst of his reading one evening, Is'bel had appeared, precipitated by a sudden thunderstorm. She became to him, this little slum child, a symbol of the jungle. A strange denizen, too, an anomaly in slum land. For in spite of her lack of moral values, with all the curiosity of a wild thing, she had the charm of the snowdrop growing in some dingy backyard. That had been the first of many meetings, till gradually he had begun to find the jungle not so interesting unless it were shared with her.

The agony of the time when she had been absent. That dreadful time when they had convicted her of shop-lifting. Well, that was past. He had finally determined that she should not become one of the jungle folk. So he had

married Is'bel and taken her away from the jungle which threatened to engulf her.

It was too much to expect a complete reclamation on the instant. Habits, unlike fetters, cannot be so easily cast aside. Is'bel loved him with all the passion of her fierce nature and if she had failed him as in that case of the customer's bag, which fortunately he had been in time to prevent her stealing, he had realized the insidious call of the jungle and had patiently fought with and for her, sure of the final outcome; certain that in the last summation love would be the weapon with which good would triumph over evil.

But now the jungle was creeping up on them. He felt sure that Is'bel would be happier away from everything that reminded her of the past. He had seen the house he wanted to buy across the park, a tall, narrow building on a broad, well paved street. It was well aired and faced the open spaces of the park. He had taken Is'bel to see it one day. She had been delighted with everything about it. Her quick mind had grasped immediately the possibilities of the large rooms upstairs which could easily be converted into living quarters. Ian felt that it was just what he wanted, but he would have to wait until he could dispose of his old property.

"I'm going to see that house agent again this afternoon," he finally roused himself to say, going over to the mantelpiece for his pipe. "Would you mind being left alone to look after the store for a while?"

"Why would I mind?" Is'bel asked, lifting her face with its sweet, irregular features as he paused beside her chair; "isn't it my business as well as yours to look after the store? You'd think I was just a doll to be fussed up and put in a chair to sit still the way you treat me."

He laughed down into her clear, amber eyes.

"No one could turn you into a doll. You work too hard altogether."

"It's only ladies who can do nothing elegantly, and I'm no lady," she said, shaking her head solemnly.

A spark of laughter flashed into Ian's gray eyes.

"Well, don't turn yourself into one if it's going to make you different. I like you just the way you are."

"I'm not so sure that I like myself," she said with a shadow flitting over her face. Ian knew instinctively that she was recalling what had happened three months ago, and he laid his hand very tenderly on her copper-colored hair.

"I won't have you disparaging what belongs to me," he said, trying to dispel that shadow, and bring the flashing light back into her face.

IAN WENT that afternoon to see the house agent.

Something had happened in the neighborhood several days before, which had made him decide that he would sell the store at any price and move away from that locality. A jeweller had been shot in his shop and a large quantity of jewels had been stolen. Ian had no fear that his store would be robbed, for bookstores were no temptation to thieves, but he didn't like the idea of Is'bel living in a neighborhood where that kind of thing was going on.

The house agent gave him very little hope, however, of an early sale. People were not buying in that locality; stores were moving further uptown. The tide of progress was swiftly sweeping north and west. On the south-east side of the city only the dregs would remain. If Ian sold he would have to accept a loss, but he was prepared to do so. This recent event had made him feel that he must get rid of the store even if it went for a very low figure. The agent promised to try his best to bring about a sale, and with that Ian was obliged to be content.

It was dusk as he came back through the park, a gentle blue that melted substance into shadow until even the wrought-iron gates of the park appeared soft and vaporish. Ian walked quickly, his footsteps ringing out sharply on the hard, gravelled paths which were deserted at this hour. As he turned out of the park he noticed that a house at the corner of his own street had hung out a "for sale" sign. Soon a dozen families would be habited there and the house would have all the appearance of a slattern with unwashed face and uncombed hair. That was what was happening on all sides, even in the streets which had until recently held themselves aloof from the encroaching slums. Tiny shops were springing up like fungi of evil growth, places where queer-looking foreigners gathered in the evenings, and where there was always the sound of rattling bottles and the tinkle of glasses coming through the open doorways.

Yes, decidedly he wanted to get Is'bel away from this locality. His thoughts flashed back to that first evening when she had come into his store for protection from the rain-slashed night. Even that first evening his heart had gone out to her brave, gay courage. Little child of the slum. How much she had grown to mean to him since then! Was he really as sure as he told himself he was that Is'bel would never return to the old ways?

As he passed the jeweller's store that had been the scene of the late robbery he saw a group of idlers lounging in front of it, discussing the robbery. Ian felt that in all probability some of them knew a great deal more than they pretended to know. He quickened his steps as he went by. Yes, he would be more than thankful to leave this neighborhood.

THE LIGHTS shone out from his own bookstore, making squares of light on the pavement, and as he came nearer he saw the door open and a man came out and stood looking down the street. As Ian passed under a street lamp the man rapidly crossed the road and was swallowed up in the mouth of a lane opposite. Ian looked after him curiously, wondering who it would be. Ian's customers did not belong to this neighborhood. They usually came in motors. It was seldom that anyone living in this neighborhood visited the store.

Is'bel was standing beside the magazine table, turning over the pages of an illustrated magazine. Her vivid face brightened as he came in.

"Who was only going to be gone an hour?" she cried.

"I know. The agent kept me talking and I had no idea it was so late. Who was that who just went out?"

"How could anyone go out when no one came in?"

Ian looked at her in astonishment.

"Why, I saw a man just come out and go across the street. He went into the lane opposite."

She shook her head, fluttering the pages of the magazine with nervous, restless fingers.

"There's been no one here since you went out. Not a soul."

"But I saw him. A small man wearing a cap. I was coming along on this side of the street when he came out. I saw him standing looking down the street. I couldn't possibly have been mistaken."

Again she shook her head.

"You were seeing things, I guess. There was no one here at all."

Ian stared at her averted face and saw that the color had risen in her cheeks. He stood hesitating, not knowing what to say or do. She was lying. There had certainly been a man in the store. What motive could she have for lying about it? Thoughts rushed upon him like a dark flight of evil wings, beating against his mind. Was this an old lover of Is'bel's? Was he perhaps someone out of her past who had some hold upon her? Who was he and where did he come from? What was his business in the store?

HE WENT away to hang up his hat and when he came back Is'bel had gone to prepare the supper.

He opened some letters, filed some bills, his mind always busy with the perplexity of Is'bel's lie. He couldn't make it out; he didn't know what to think or how to act.

"Supper's ready," she called to him and he dropped the letters which he was making a mere pretense at reading and rose with a sigh. "I've laid the table

beside the fire in your study. It seems sort of damp and chilly to-night. I thought it would be kind of nice to have it down here."

She had lighted the candles in a tall, black, iron candelabrum, and the little book-lined room glimmered in the dancing lights. Ian stood on the threshold for a moment looking at the model of a ship over the mantelpiece which his father had made in his spare time. In the shadows over the fireplace he thought it was like a ghostly ship with sails set drifting into the further shadows of the unknown. An occasional gleam from the fire lit the sails like the reflection of a dying sun. He, too, felt himself to be sailing towards unknown waters, drifting into the shadows that were dark and impenetrable.

"Doesn't it all look pretty?" Is'bel cried gleefully, straightening a crease in the white cloth which covered the small, round table she had drawn up before the fire. "The candles make it seem like a party."

Ian wondered at her gay spirits. She did not even appear to be conscious that she had lied to him. He sat down heavily at the table and as he listened to her cheerful tones he became more and more sunk in a dark depression. Was it of such small concern to her then that she had tried to deceive him? Why, he might believe anything of her— he might believe—

He drew himself up sharply and tried to rivet his attention upon what she was saying. He noticed that she had taken extra pains with the supper to-night. There was delicious fried sole, with slices of lemon and sprigs of parsley; fluffy tea biscuits; preserved apricots swimming in golden syrup in a fluted amber dish; a tall chocolate cake decorated with nuts. Is'bel loved to cook, and he always praised her for her proficiency, but to-night he had such a leaden weight upon his heart that he scarcely made even a pretence at eating.

"Isn't it what you want?" Is'bel inquired in distressed tones as Ian laid down his knife and fork and sat staring moodily into the fire.

"Why yes, of course," he said rousing himself, "everything's delicious."

He was glad when she began to clear it away and he could return to the comfort of his pipe. The tobacco cleared his brain and helped him to think. He wouldn't ask her again who had been in the store. He wouldn't force another lie to her lips. He remembered as he sat looking into the dancing, golden flames what she had confessed to him once— "it's just as though someone was whispering to me all the time, telling me to lie, telling me to steal, telling me to do anything that's dirty and mean"— and he had promised her then that they would fight it out together. They weren't through the jungle yet; it would be foolish to imagine they were. He wouldn't help her by standing aloof and being coldly critical of her conduct.

As he watched her passing in and out of the room there was such an ache in his heart that it seemed to ache through every muscle in his body. Why must

the evil and the fine be so inextricably mixed? Is'bel, who had come like sunlight into his life, Is'bel, so sweet, so generous, so dear— with a lie on her lips, and who knew what depths of darkness hidden away in her heart. Pitiful things, human beings— pitiful.

He was afraid to speak to her again lest he should drive her quite away from him. When she came to him at last, after having straightened the room, and laid her hot cheek against his, he drew her closer with hands that trembled.

"Is'bel— little Is'bel," he murmured helplessly.

And over the fireplace, in the shadows, the little ship with set sails drifted out into the unknown.

HE WAS obliged to go to the bank the following morning and he was averse to leaving Is'bel alone in the store. He didn't want to think that that man might be dropping in again while he was away. He suggested that she should go uptown to do some shopping, but she appeared to be disinclined to do so.

"What's the good of spending money when I have everything I want?"

He saw that she was unwilling to go and his mind immediately seized on the idea that she had reason for not leaving the store that morning.

"Then perhaps you wouldn't mind doing some messages for me," he said, hurriedly trying to invent some immediate needs. A dark fit of depression took hold of him. Was it always to be like this? Wasn't he ever going to be able to leave the store without fearing what would take place in his absence? Life would be impossible if that were to be the case.

"I don't think I want anything very urgently after all," he said, slowly turning away.

Immediately her two arms were around his neck.

" 'Course I'd like to go shopping. I don't know why I didn't want to go when you first spoke of it. Just laziness, I guess."

She went out shortly afterwards and Ian was just preparing to leave the store when a shadow darkened the doorway. He turned, expecting to find a customer entering, but no one came in. He went curiously to the door and looked out. He was certain that someone had come right up to the door and looked in, and seeing him, had gone away.

He opened the door and went outside, looking up and down the street. He was turning back into the store when he caught sight of a small figure wearing a gray cap disappearing into the lane opposite.

It was the same man undoubtedly. Ian's first impulse was to run after him and demand what it was he wanted. Yet he could scarcely do that. The man had a perfect right to look in the store. It was quite clear that he must have

been looking for Is'bel. Perhaps Is'bel had expected this visit and that was why she had been so reluctant to go uptown this morning.

Was he an old lover? In that event it wasn't a case for the police. It was his own affair to find out who this man was who was hanging around the bookstore. Was Is'bel afraid of this man? was she trying to shield him? She might even care for him; might already be regretting her impulsive marriage with himself.

Ravaged and tormented with these thoughts, Ian left the store and walked listlessly down the street. This worry seemed to be sapping all the energy from his mind and body. He felt sure that there was some danger threatening Is'bel; but danger of what he did not know.

Is'bel complained early that evening of feeling tired.

"It was so crowded in the stores," she said nervously, pushing back the heavy hair from her forehead. "I'm tired. I think I'll go to bed."

Ian followed her upstairs soon afterwards. He was tired himself. All day he felt as though he had been carrying around a weight which he could not shake off. He wanted to go to sleep and shut it all away.

IT WAS just before midnight that he awakened from a restless sleep, wondering whether a dream had awakened him, or some unaccustomed sound. He sat up in bed, listening intently. Light streamed into the room from the street light at the corner, lying in a broad, silver band across the bed. Is'bel was lying on her side, her cheek pillowed on her hand. As he looked at her he saw her eyelashes flutter, then fall again.

"Is'bel. Are you awake?"

No answer. He could have sworn that she was as wide awake as he was himself. He looked towards the bedroom door, which was slightly ajar, and fancied that he saw a faint light flicker for an instant over the white woodwork. He could hear the clock whirr before it struck then the slow, solemn strike. Twelve o'clock. The silence that engulfed the last strike seemed to Ian pregnant with terror.

It was absurd, he told himself, waking in the night like a terrified child. Perhaps a mouse had run across the floor; a shutter swung back; a board creaked. His nerves were in a bad way when he could start up from his sleep in such a state over nothing at all. He would go downstairs and have a look around to see that everything was all right, otherwise he would lie here listening for imaginary sounds half the night.

In the light from the street he found his clothes, slipped on his trousers, thrust his arms into the sleeves of a coat, then hesitated over his bedroom slippers. If there was anyone in the store they would hear him on the stairs

unless he went noiselessly. He crept across the room to the cupboard and found a pair of running shoes and slipped them on his feet.

"Ian."

It was just the breath of a whisper from the bed.

"Ian."

"It's all right. Don't be frightened. I'm just going downstairs for a minute."

"You mustn't. Oh, you mustn't."

"I'll be back in no time."

"You mustn't go. Ian— you mustn't go."

She was sitting up in bed, her eyes wide open, staring at him in evident alarm. It was no use standing here arguing with her. Ian moved past the door and drew it closed behind him, then crept slowly to the top of the stairs and cautiously began to descend.

THE DOOR into the shop was open. As he stood on the threshold a flicker of light from the front of the store startled him. So, it hadn't been just fancy after all. There was someone in the store. But what would anyone be doing over there by the window? There was nothing there but books and magazines. The till was further back, but it was empty. There weren't even any books of value in the store at present. No one would be fool enough to steal books. If it had been a month ago when he had that first edition of Boccaccio he wouldn't have been so surprised. But that had been sold some time ago.

As Ian's eyes grew accustomed to the darkness he could make out a small figure wearing a cap. It was the same man; there was no doubt of that. But what could he want? He appeared to be searching for something quickly and quietly, drawing the books out of the shelves and putting them back again.

Ian stood puzzled, watching the tiny, round eye of the flashlight the man was holding in his left hand. The man wasn't there to steal money; he couldn't be such a fool as to steal books. Had Is'bel left something there for him? That appeared to be the only solution to the problem.

Suspicion and jealousy beat upon him in strong waves. Rage was like a rocket exploding inside of him. He stole slowly forward, stealthy and noiseless as a cat, all the time keeping his attention fixed on that small, busy figure over near the bookshelves. He had no conception of what he intended to do; he had no revolver, no weapon of any sort.

As Ian came opposite he saw the man draw something out from behind the last handful of books and turn swiftly towards the door. Ian sprang, his body like an uncoiling spring. A vase fell with a terrific shattering of pottery; a pile of books tumbled to the floor.

The man was like a shadow slipping between Ian's hands. The door swung back and the sharp crack of an automatic shook the air. A warmth ran down Ian's hand, numbing the fingers. He clung for a moment to the partly opened door while the silence of the street was broken by the sound of quickly running feet.

With a great effort Ian pulled himself together, a hard rage tearing at him. He had never felt such strong passions rising in him before. It was like something primitive, coming up from the profoundest depths of his being. It was mixed up with his love for Is'bel, savagery that was made up of jealousy and suspicion and a desire to protect where he loved. It poured a new strength into him, it fixed his determination to follow this thing through and find out the truth.

Starting after the man, he was just in time to see his shadow disappear into a lane near the upper end of the street. He realized that this man must know the neighborhood better than he himself knew it. But he had no intention of allowing him to escape.

His light running shoes beat a thin staccato on the pavement as he ran at top speed towards the mouth of the lane. He was able to catch a glimpse of a flying figure between himself and a light far down the alley.

The lane opened into a mean street, one of those tributary streams whose wandering course finally emptied into the very heart of the slums. An instinct told him to turn to the right, and as he rounded a turn in the street he could make out the flying figure ahead.

A black shape leaped out at him on his left. He dodged, just in time to escape a blow dealt from an open doorway. He stumbled and slid, face down on the filthy pavement. The echo of a laugh wavered through the stillness as he gathered himself up and sped forward again. It was safer to keep to the middle of the road. He was in a neighborhood which was more friendly to the pursued than to the pursuer.

At moments his own sanity mocked him. Why this mad run through unknown streets, into the very heart of terror? Why not return to his warm bed, the security of locked doors, the shelter of his own surroundings? But he knew that it was not only this man in the gray cap whom he was hunting down. It was all the rest of the jungle folk— he would show them that Is'bel was not to be drawn back into their ways; he would teach them that they must leave her alone; that she belonged to them no more.

A hot writhing tongue of flame leapt up in the darkness of a lane ahead. Something whined over Ian's shoulder and simultaneously a thud sounded behind him. The bullet had sunk harmlessly into a tree or fence. Would the next bullet go home as harmlessly? Sweat broke out in cold drops on his

forehead; his lips were dry and parched. But the madness of the pursuit still possessed him, regardless of this new danger.

Again came the warning flash, the whine, the thud. Ian plunged towards a doorway that was suddenly lit by the flash.

HE WAS in a small backyard. A door opened ahead of him, letting out a stream of light and a confused clamor of voices. He pushed the door further open and stepped inside.

A long bar ran lengthwise on his left. A few nondescript-looking men were lined up against it, and they turned to stare at him as he stood in the doorway, his eyes blinded after the darkness of the streets. A curious silence spread over the room. The bartender's small eyes were insolent and staring as he continued to pour some liquid from a thick-necked bottle into a glass.

Ian looked along the line of men sprawling at the bar and then searched the small tables that were scattered about the room. There was no sign of the man in the gray cap. Then, in that curious silence, he heard the sound of a man taking long, painful breaths as though he had been running. He looked around again and this time noticed a small figure crouched over one end of the bar, his shoulders rising and falling. Ian sprang forward, indifferent to everything except that small figure in the gray cap.

Instantly the room broke into confusion. The bartender shouted some remark to the man in the gray cap. Ian saw a door at the end of the room open, and then everything went spinning before him in black circles. Dizzily he knew by an exploding crash behind him that someone had flung a bottle at his head. It had grazed his temple before it struck the wall, falling in splinters of broken glass.

Blindly he made his way towards the door through which the man in the gray cap had gone. It would be wise to escape as quickly as possible from this unfriendly room. The door swung easily open beneath his hand and slammed behind him. He found himself on the threshold of a small room lit by a lamp. He leaned back against the door through which he had come, breathing heavily and painfully from exhaustion. Very faintly came the muffled sounds of shouting and confusion from the room he had left.

"Well, what's your trouble?"

Ian blinked rapidly. He had thought the room was empty. Now he saw a huge, bloated figure sitting at a desk in one corner, his chair tipped back against the wall, a thick cigar sticking aggressively out of the corner of his mouth. Ian recognized the figure instantly. He had seen photographs of the man too often not to know him at once for the notorious Boss Tucker, the leader of the Riverside district.

He stood staring at Tucker, while the man watched him, through half-closed eyes, slowly twisting his cigar from one side of his mouth to the other. There was something ominous and horrible in that enormous, bloated figure, something that silenced him, making words seem futile and ineffectual. It slowly dawned upon him that he must be in that notorious hotel on the river of which Tucker had been the proprietor before he had made himself prominent in politics.

"Were you born dumb?"

Ian moistened his lips. His throat felt dry and words wouldn't come. He stared fascinated at the man, his eyes falling to the thick, red hand on the edge of the desk that looked so much like raw beef.

"I want to know— where the man in the gray cap went," Ian stammered, feeling foolish before that insolent stare. "He came in here. A small man in a gray cap. I want to know what he was doing in my store just now."

Tucker removed the cigar from his mouth and languidly contemplated the ash before flicking it off with a thick finger. Then he abruptly jerked his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of a door half concealed by a dingy, red curtain.

"He's gone in there. If you get a move on you might catch him."

IAN turned towards the door Tucker had indicated, perceiving the repulsive grin that spread over the man's face. He wanted to get away as fast as possible from that gross animal. Tucker rose as Ian pulled at the handle of the door. There was no light beyond; cool, damp air flowed up into his face from what appeared to be a cellar. Ian could just make out the beginning of a steep flight of steps before the door behind him was suddenly slammed, precipitating him forward. He clutched wildly at the rail to keep himself from falling into that pit of darkness below. Tucker was apparently not averse to the idea of him breaking his neck.

The railing just saved him from falling. He reached the bottom of the steps and searched in his pockets for a match. By the fitful, flickering light he could make out the vague outlines of packing boxes, piled high on all sides with a narrow passage way between which led on to further darkness beyond. These cases probably contained contraband of all sorts; goods smuggled into the city by way of the river. Or again they might be stolen goods, fruits of robberies in the city. It struck him with sickening force that it was not likely that Tucker would let him come down here if there were any means of escape. Either there was no way out, or there was danger lurking for him just outside. His chase was leading him further than he had intended.

The match died out. He struck another, but it broke off short. His heart was pounding violently. He kept telling himself that he was not afraid. There were small sounds all around him in the darkness; footsteps overhead. At any instant Tucker might appear at the head of the steps, peering down to see what had become of him. With a great effort at control over his trembling hands he struck another match and started down the passage way between the tall crates. At length he found himself before a small door. He turned the handle and to his relief and surprise found that it was unlocked.

The fresh night air was like a plunge into cold water. It seemed to splash in his face and revive him. He stared around curiously and found that he was on a small landing place just above the level of the river. On both sides of him rose the slimy piles of a pier, while in front he could see the black shine of the river, almost turgid at this point.

The flare of a match struck away to his left made him start and look in that direction. A small figure with a cap was seated with his back turned to Ian, smoking a cigarette. It was the man whom he had chased; the man he wanted. Ian crept noiselessly forward along the water-logged planks and with a quick spring had both arms around the man's neck. They both came sprawling to the ground.

Ian clapped his hand over the man's mouth to prevent any outcry.

"You're the man I want. What the devil were you doing in my store?"

His muscles tightened as he strove to hold the struggling figure down.

The man jerked his head violently to one side to escape the smothering hand on his mouth.

"Let go, you! Let go."

"What were you doing in my store? You'll tell me first why you were hanging around there before I let you go."

"You poor fool. You better get out of this while the going's good. I don't know why the devil Tucker let you through. You haven't got the chance of a snowball unless you go quick. I'm telling you this for Is'bel's sake. She's not mixed up in this."

Ian released his hold. The man's tones were sincere. If Is'bel were not mixed up in some affair with this man, then he had no more concern with him. By the light of a lantern hanging on the pier he could see the man's face quite distinctly. He was scarcely more than a boy, with a weak, dissolute face.

"They're coming for me in the launch. For Is'bel's sake I'm going to show you a way out. You can sneak between those piles to the left, and there's a ladder to the top. Quick, I hear the boat coming."

Ian heard the faint sound of a motor boat in the distance. The boy's agitation communicated itself to him. There was nothing to be gained by

staying until the launch appeared. He slipped between the piles and found the ladder. In a moment he had swung himself to the top. He was in a narrow lane beside the hotel. He passed along it and soon found himself in a maze of crooked streets.

His head reeled with the experiences of the last hour. He was still no nearer an understanding of what it all meant. He had no idea of what had brought the boy to the store. He had spoken of Is'bel. It was clear then that he knew her. Is'bel could not be quite innocent of some conspiracy.

He cursed himself for not having made the boy divulge what it was all about. He had accomplished nothing. He felt foolish and ineffectual. He hailed a passing taxi and climbed in, for his legs seemed as though they were giving way beneath him, and his arm was growing stiff from the bullet wound in his hand. He gave the address of a doctor in his neighborhood, realizing in his utter weariness that he had better have it attended to at once.

Leaning back in one corner of the taxi little stabs of thought pierced his weary brain. He had been a fool not to have forced the truth from the boy. He felt sick and disgusted at his failure to accomplish anything. The jungle had defeated him.

AT LENGTH he arrived back at the bookstore, his hand bandaged and feeling slightly revived. The store was in darkness, but as he opened the door he saw that there was a light in his study. As he walked soundlessly in his light shoes he trod on something sharp, and stooping picked up something that glittered in the semi-darkness. It was a jewelled pendant.

Understanding flashed upon him, like a blaze of clear light. The jewel robbery. One of the thieves had hidden the jewel in the store. He had come to ask Is'bel to help him. To-night he had come to get the jewels. It was as clear as though it were written in flaming letters on the darkness before him. Why hadn't he thought of it before?

Is'bel was crouched in his large leather chair, her head buried on her arms. As Ian stood for an instant on the threshold she threw up her head. Her eyes were like a startled deer's in her panic-white face.

A little moan escaped from her white lips.

"I thought... you were killed."

For a moment he thought she was going to faint. Then color came slowly into her cheeks. Her eyes fell on his bandaged hand and again fear leaped into her eyes.

"It's nothing," he said, "only a scratch."

"I suppose you know all about it. I should never have let Jake put the jewels in the store. He offered me a pendant and I thought it was kind of pretty. I

never knew how wrong I had done until I saw you going down stairs. You'd best let me go back to where I belong."

She looked at him with eyes filled with such pain that he felt suffocated with pity. He sat down on the arm of her chair and took her cold hands between his own.

"It was the jungle folk, dear, coming out of the jungle with their wiles to try and draw you back into it again. But they haven't got you— and they won't get you, for you're mine... just mine."

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14: Green Ink

J. S. Fletcher

1863-1935

Cosmopolitan, Jan 1925

Joseph Smith Fletcher is remembered as a prolific writer of detective and crime novels, but he was even more prolific as a short story writer. Many of his shot stories were collected into book form in his lifetime, but this is one of the many that were not. And the photograph is the only one I could find of him.

EPISCOPUS LANE in Wrychester, running between High Street and Chancellory Garden, was a short, narrow, dark alley, along which few people ever passed. The houses on either side were so old that their timbered fronts leaned towards each other, shutting out sun and sky save in occasional glimpses and patches; consequently the paneled and wainscoted chambers and rooms within their walls were somber, gloomy and provocative of silence. In nearly every house law was practised; you had only to walk down either side of the street to observe that on each deeply inset doorway was affixed a brass plate bearing the name of some solicitor.

Inside these doorways there was a perpetual smell of parchment, sealing-wax and old leather; the older men whom you met there had parchment faces; the younger ones showed signs that the bleaching process had already begun. And whether in summer or winter there was always a mysterious dimness, a sort of half-twilight in and around the lane, which seemed as proper to it as the dim religious light in nave and choir was to the time-worn cathedral whose spire rose high above the wide space which faced its narrow entrance.

Into that entrance there walked, about four o'clock one November afternoon, a man who, from his appearance, you would have taken to be the

last man in the world to seek the society of lawyers. He was not at all the sort of person one meets in English cathedral cities, and such Wrychester folk as were about and noticed him as he turned out of High Street into the lane stared at him as only something particularly noticeable is stared at. A big, broad-shouldered, great- limbed man this, with a roll in his walk and a swagger of his arms; bronzed of face as if he knew much of burning suns and hot winds, and altogether so suggestive of the sea and the tropics and far-off sweltering beaches that you would have been surprised if, going close to him, you had not smelled the salt-laden breezes and the aromatic odors of Far-away.

He wore a great slouch hat over his rather long hair, and a big grizzling beard swept down upon his blue reefer coat; in one hand was a stick which had certainly never been cut from an English coppice, and it seemed a wonder that in the other he did not carry a red and green parrot in a gaily gilded cage. That hand, however, was empty, and with it he presently thrust open the door of one of the old houses in the center of the lane and strode, as if quite familiar with his surroundings, into the office within.

That office was pretty much like half a dozen offices on either side. There was a sort of counter, with a table behind it, and a chair or two, of the hard and uninviting pattern, and there were bills on the dusky walls, relating to the sale of desirable property, and shelves full of law books, and parcels of papers tied up with faded red tape, and tin boxes inscribed with the names of clients, and in the rear there was a door covered with green baize. The caller gave a glance at these things as he walked in, and he sniffed as if he recognized an atmosphere.

But in the same second his eyes went straight to a young man who sat writing at the table, a fellow of perhaps twenty-two or three years, spare of figure, meager of face, whose black hair was brushed straight back off a high, intellectual forehead, and whose thin lips and sharp nose betokened watchfulness and reserve. He was slow in looking up from his writing; when he did so and saw what stood on the other side of the counter, he laid down his pen, put the tips of his fingers together and let out one word.

"Yes?"

"Knyvett?" said the big man bruskly.

"Dead!" answered the clerk.

"Raper?" continued the caller.

"Buried!" said the other.

"Then what d'ye mean by saying Knyvett and Raper on that there brass plate outside?" demanded the big man. "If it says Knyvett and Raper—"

"If you'd looked closer," interrupted the clerk coldly, "you would have seen that it says Carsdale, late Knyvett and Raper. Mr. Knyvett's been dead ten

years and Mr. Raper six. Mr. Carsdale's their successor. He's alive— and he's in!"

The big man stared: first at the clerk. then at the green door. when it wath put before you, Me. "In— there?" he asked.

"Precisely!" replied the clerk. "Wish to consult him?"

The caller pulled reflectively at his great beard.

Well, I dunno!" he said at last. '"Knyvett and Raper, now... But this chap? Is he good? Is he sharp? Up to date? 'Cause if he isn't—"

"Mr. Carsdale is a smart man," said the clerk. He rose and went towards the inner door. "What name?" he inquired, turning on the caller.

"My name?" said the big man. "Name, eh? What may yours be, now?"

"That's neither here nor there," retorted the clerk sharply. "But it happens to be Grice— Mark Grice."

"Well, mine's Flapp,"' replied the caller. "John Flapp. And Flapp's a Wrychester name, young feller, and Grice, it ain't! Leastways I never heard of no Grices in my days. But Flapps! Lord love'ee, go and look in St. Pancridge Churchyard— and in St. Pancridge himself! Flapps, now—"The clerk shrugged his shoulders, made a grimace indicative of his contempt for the subject, and opening the green door passed into an inner, softly lighted room; the caller, drumming his big fingers on the counter, heard a murmured exchange of question and answer. Then another voice than Grice's hailed him.

"Step in, Mr. Flapp!"

Flapp voyaged forward; Grice held the door open for him. When he had negotiated the entrance, the clerk shut him in, sniffed the air and grimaced again.

"Three sheets in the wind!" he muttered sneeringly. "Rum! With lemon in it."

He sat down again at his table and went on with his writing. From the inner room came a continual murmur of sound; Carsdale's accents, suave, professional; Flapp's deep, disjointed. Now and then there was a laugh; Carsdale laughed politely, good-humoredly; Flapp laughed joyously. Ten minutes passed; twenty; thirty. And Grice began to wonder. What did this man— who looked as if he had come out of a wood in the middle of Brazil, but who evidently knew Wrychester and had known Knyvett and Raper— want in that office?

The door opened at last. Flapp appeared. He stood half in, half out of the inner room. He looked as if he were about to leave and yet didn't know whether he would leave. Carsdale spoke— coaxingly, softly; Grice just caught the words.

"Now be a sensible man, Flapp!— be advised. Leave it with me!"

Flapp looked into the room and out of the room, cocking a shrewd eye alternately at the master within and the man without. Then he suddenly went back to Carsdale... and Carsdale, rising from his desk, crossed over and closed the door. After that Grice heard nothing.

Five minutes went by. Then Flapp appeared again, lumbering in his massive way to the outer door. With his hand on the latch he turned, making a face at the clerk, who was watching him narrowly from behind his table.

"Name of Grice, eh, young feller!" he said satirically. '"Not Wrychester born, then? Never were no Grices in Wrychester, not in my time! My name's Flapp, d'ye see?— good old Wrychester name, mine is!"'

Then he went off, chuckling in his beard, and a breath of wind blowing past him from the street, Grice once more sniffed the fragance of rum and lemon. Presently, too, Carsdale emerged from his private room, in his neat overcoat and silk hat, and with his smart umbrella nattily rolled in his carefully gloved fingers, and went homewards with his usual curt farewell. And at that Grice got up from his writing and went into his master's sanctum, and turning up the light above the desk glanced at the diary which lay there, open. It was Carsdale's habit— and he was a man of strict method— to enter up in that diary the particulars of any business done during the day, no matter how trifling or unimportant. There were two or three entries relative to that day, carefully written. But there was nothing about John Flapp— nothing! And Grice stood staring, thinking, recalling Carsdale's words to his strange visitor.

"*Now be a sensible man, Flapp!— be advised. Leave it with me*!"

Leave what with him? Money? Valuables? Papers? Something, at any rate, for Flapp had gone back and the door had been shut. What had Flapp left with Carsdale? Grice figured it out like this— Carsdale saw that Flapp had been drinking; knew that he would go on drinking again that evening; had found that Flapp had something of value on him, had persuaded Flapp to leave it with him for safe custody; Flapp had consented. What was it? Where was it? Grice looked, mechanically, at the safe in the corner. But Carsdale had the key to that; Grice never had it. And Grice shook his head, got into his well worn overcoat, turned out the lights in both rooms and having locked the outer door went away to his lodgings and his tea-supper.

While he ate and drank he reflected that as far as he remembered this was the first time since his coming to Wrychester two years previously that there had been any secrecy about any of Carsdale's transactions. It was not a big practise, Carsdale's; there was a bit of county court work, and a bit of conveyancing, and sometimes a police court case, and always there was an entry of everything in that desk diary. Why had Carsdale omitted to enter up

John Flapp? Was it purposeful?— or was it an over- sight? But Carsdale was not the man to deal in oversights.

Grice was the owner of an inveterate and ineradicable inquisitiveness. He had nosed into affairs ever since he was fifteen. He had been in three offices during his eight years of business life as an unarticled clerk, and he could have boasted, had he chosen, that he knew everything about the various transactions that had gone on in all three. It bothered him that he did not know what had occurred between Flapp and Carsdale. And as a rule Carsdale left him nothing to find out; usually he told the clerk all the details of all the business. It was Grice's nature to worry at a thing until he satisfied his curiosity about it, and now, between each mouthful, he kept asking himself over and over again— what did Flapp leave with Carsdale, and why?— and why had Carsdale made no note of the matter?

Grice had habits. One of them was to take a walk every evening outside the city to a village that lay a mile or so away. There was a quaint, old-fashioned tavern there, the Barleycorn, with a snug, raftered parlor, where you could sit for an hour over a pipe and a glass, talk to the rustics, if any happened to be in, or commune with your own thoughts over a dancing fire if you were alone. Thither, on this evening, Grice duly repaired, still bothering his inquisitive brains about the event of the afternoon, and the first person he saw on entering the fire-lighted parlor was Flapp.

Flapp sat in the chimney-corner, in an elbow chair, very much at his ease. He had a churchwarden pipe in one hand; the other held a tumbler three-quarters full of a ruby liquid in which some- thing golden-yellow floated. He was raising this to his lips when the clerk entered, but at sight of Grice he set it down and pulled the bell-rope by the mantelpiece.

"Name of Grice, eh, young feller!" he exclaimed. ''My name's Flapp— Wrychester born! And what're you going to have, my lad? Name your poison— my expense!'

Grice cocked a sly eye at the girl who appeared in answer to the bell.

"Very kind of you, Mr. Flapp," he answered as he took a chair and pulled out his pipe and tobacco. ''Mary knows my taste— drop of the usual, Mary. So you've found your way out here, eh?" he continued, when the girl had gone. "Stopping here, perhaps?"

"Not me, my son," said Flapp. 'Stopping at the Mitre, I am! Best hotels for me, d'ye see— what? Slap-up dinner there tonight, my boy— the best! A lot of nobs!— lords and ladies, no doubt. Then came a-strolling along here— knew this place when I was a young'un! Wrychester born,I am! Left th' old place!— years ago!"

"And come back—years after," said Grice. He lifted his glass and nodded. ''You'll see some changes, Mr. Flapp, no doubt?"

"Deal of change! Not in the place, though, young feller. People! They die off, d'ye see? Same as your firm. Knyvett dead. Raper dead. And, of course, buried. But Carsdale carrying on th' old business. Smart feller, Carsdale apparently."

"Get on all right with him?" asked Grice.

"Satisfactory. Wise man— close man. That's the sort to do business with— my business. Tell you what I came to see him about?"

"Not a word!" answered Grice. "Of course not!"

"Good feller! You'll be surprised when you hear. Will hear— some day. Great secret, d'ye see? Worth— piles o' money. Good money— golden money. Ah!"

"Quite safe with Mr. Carsdale," remarked Grice reassuringly. "Couldn't have gone to a better man, Mr. Flapp."

Flapp stroked his beard, sipped his rum and after relighting his pipe, stared at his company.

"Look more like a lawyer than he does, you do," he said. "Sharp-nosed devil you are! Like to stick your nose into other people's affairs, what? Them eyes o' yours, too. I seen eyes like them in a many places— been all over the world, I have. You take care you don't get hanged, voung feller."

"I'll take care, Mr. Flapp," replied Grice. "Thank you for the advice. I'll take great care!"

"Known a many fellers with noses and eyes like yours as got hanged," said Flapp meditatively. "Bad'uns! But I reckon you could keep a secret as well as your master."

"I reckon I could— if I were tried,"' replied Grice dryly.

Flapp consulted his glass again, and bent forward.

"Make them eyes o' yours stand an inch out o' your poor white face if I was to tell you what I left with Carsdale this afternoon," he said. 'Make your long nose a foot longer— see?"'

"Would it?" laughed Grice. ''That's interesting, Mr. Flapp. Very interesting!"

"But I ain't going to tell you,'' declared Flapp suddenly. "No!— tell nobody. You wait, young feller. And have another drink."

Grice had another drink, and so had Flapp, but the well of Flapp's confidence dried up when the replenished glasses arrived. He switched off to emotional reminiscences of dead and gone Flapps, and repeated various epitaphs which he said appeared on their tombstones, and Grice got no more out of him. Nine struck from the ancient clock in the corner, and the clerk rose.

"Going my way, Mr. Flapp?"' he asked as he buttoned his overcoat.

"Not at present, my son," replied Flapp. 'Comfortable, this here is— and good stuff. Better rum than they have at the Mitre. And what's your hurry— sit down."

But Grice went. He forsaw opportunities of bettering his acquaintance with Flapp. Flapp would be at the Barleycorn again next evening— sure as fate. So he walked home and retired to bed at his usual hour, ten o'clock; he was up at his usual hour, seven, next morning, and as the cathedral clock struck a quarter to nine he turned into High Street on his way to Episcopus Lane. And there a policeman hailed him.

"Mr. Grice! Just a word!" He came close up and instinc- tively lowered his voice. "Have you heard what's happened during the night, Mr. Grice? Gentleman that was staying at the Mitre's been found drowned in the canal, between West Gate and the Barleycorn Inn, out Selbourne way. And one of our men says he directed him to your office yesterday afternoon. Do you know anything of him?"

Grice answered the question with another.

"Did you say— drowned?" he asked quietly. "Dead?"

"They say— the doctors— he'd been dead some hours," replied the policeman. "He was found at seven o'clock this morning, near Ashford Bridge— they think he fell over the parapet and struck his head against a pier. The body's in the mortuary, Mr. Grice— if you'd step across..."

Grice stepped across, and presently stood looking at John Flapp, carefully laid out and colder than the slab on which he lay. He made a mechanical reply to the police questions and presently went away, wondering. Would Carsdale tell him anything?

Carsdale told Grice nothing. And Grice told Carsdale nothing— at any rate as regards his encounter with Flapp at the Barleycorn. But he did tell him what the policeman had told him, and that he had seen the man's dead body at the mortuary, and having told him that much he waited to hear what he would say. Carsdale said little.

"Only to be expected, Grice," remarked Carsdale, with a sardonic smile. "At least, nothing to be surprised about. The fellow was on the drink, and I suppose he fell off the towing-path into the canal. Of course there'll be an inquest."

Grice knew that well enough, and he looked forward to it. He remembered what the policeman had said, that another police- man had directed Flapp to the office in Episcopus Lane. That would come out. And the coroner would want to know why the dead man went to Knyvett and Raper's, as the business was still commonly called in Wrychester, and what he did there— Carsdale would have to answer that little question. His conclusions on this point were

correct; during the day Carsdale was duly summoned to the inquest next morning, and thither Grice accom- panied him, expectant.

But Grice got no satisfaction for his curiosity. The proceed- ings were as dull, lifeless and ordinary as could be. Flapp's brother from London turned up and said he knew that John was expected home and had probably landed at Southampton the day before he was seen in Wrychester; he himself had not seen him for many years, but he identified him easily. The landlord of the Barleycorn said that Flapp left his house at ten o'clock; he had taken several glasses of rum during the evening, but he seemed sober and in full command of himself. The doctor said Flapp had met his death by drowning, and in his opinion he had fallen over the low parapet of a bridge and severely injured his head by concussion with the stone masonry below before striking the water. All this was good evidence, but poor hearing— for Grice. He waited to hear what Carsdale had to say, and he got his chance when the coroner put a direct question to the solicitor.

"What business had he at your office, Mr. Carsdale?"

Carsdale smiled and spoke straight out.

"None! If he wanted anything, it was to gossip. He was certainly under the influence of liquor. He told me he had been brought up in Wrychester and that a brother of his had been employed by my predecessors, Knyvett and Raper, and that he'd just called in to say how d'ye do and talk of old times. He said he'd been all over the world, and especially in South America, had made a lot of money and had now come home and was taking a look round Wrychester before going on to his brother in London. I humored him and talked to him— but he had no business."

"Ah, a very simple case!'' observed the coroner, and turned to his jury. "No difficulty about finding a verdict here, gentlemen..."

Grice listened and said nothing. But he knew that of all the men in that court he was the only one who, had he liked, could have introduced sensation, excitement, suspicion into the atmosphere by standing up and saying a few words. He was not going to do it; his motives were otherwise; he was going to watch Carsdale. He had always known Carsdale to be one of those men who will sail as near the wind as ever they can safely get; now he knew him to be a liar.

Flapp had left something with Carsdale; something of value; something that meant money, golden money, as Flapp had phrased it; and Carsdale, believing that nobody knew anything about it, and ignorant that his clerk had met Flapp at the Barleycorn, meant to keep the thing for himself. He was a needy man, Carsdale; Grice knew that well enough. The practise wasn't worth five hundred a year, and instead of improving, it was deteriorating.

Oh, clearly enough, Carsdale had got hold of a good thing! All right, said Grice, but it should go hard if he didn't find out what that good thing was. And in his own crafty way he set to work to watch Carsdale, day in and day out, certain that some little movement, some chance word, would give him a clue to the solicitor's secret.

But Grice got scant opportunity of watching Carsdale. Three weeks after Flapp's brother from London had laid the traveler to rest with the dead and gone Flapps in St. Pancras churchyard, Grice, going to the office at his usual hour one Monday morning, found to his astonishment that the outer door was unlocked. He pushed it open and went in. There was nothing unusual visible in his own room, but there was a lot to see in Carsdale's. Carsdale himself was there. He lay across the hearthrug, face downwards, arms thrown out, hands clutching nothing. There was a pool of blackening, coagulated blood on the floor near his head, and his sandy-colored hair was stained with blood. Before ever he laid a hand on him, Grice knew, not only that Carsdale was dead, but that he had been dead some time.

In that first moment of surprise, Grice became subconsciously aware of certain things. One was that Carsdale's private room had been ransacked from top to bottom. The safe was open. Its contents were in disorder. Every drawer in the dead man's desk had been pulled out and turned over. The tin boxes which held clients' documents had been forced and the documents themselves were strewn about. There was nothing in the place that had not been searched. Evidently the murderer, whoever he was, had spent much time, hours, in the room after committing his crime. And during all that time he had not bothered him- self to pick up and restore to its place the weapon with which he had struck Carsdale dead— a heavy iron poker, which belonged not to that but to the outer office. There it lay, thrown down by the dead man's side. All this Grice saw within the first minute of entrance to that gloomy death hole. In the next he saw something else. Carsdale's desk, usually kept with pride, care and tidiness, was a mass of papers, books, small boxes, all sorts of things. But across it, and still sticking in places, though dry on the papers, ran a flood of green ink. Carsdale had been a faddist in many things; he had a fad for green ink, and he made it himself out of some patent powder or other. There was always a big bottle of it on his desk; the murderer had knocked it over in his search; the stopper had come out; the desk was deluged with it; it had run down on Carsdale's cushioned chair and on the carpet below. Somehow or other the sight of that green ink made Grice feel queer he turned, shot out of the place and ran, panting, for the police.

THE POLICE surgeon gave it as his considered opinion that Carsdale had been dead about thirty-six hours when he was called to see his body. Therefore, said the police, he must have been murdered late on Saturday evening. Inquiry at the residential hotel in which he lived, not far from Episcopus Lane, proved that at eight o'clock on that evening he went out carrying a small suitcase and saying that he was going away for the week-end. On that the police built up a theory. Carsdale, they said, must have called to his office for some reason and had been followed into it by the murderer, who had probably struck him down at once, and then, fastening himself in and securing the various blinds and shutters had proceeded to ransack the place in a search for something.

What was that something?

That was the question which every policeman and detective and every man and woman in Wrychester went about asking of themselves and their acquaintances. The only living soul who could have given an answer to it, based on probability, was Grice. Grice, as soon as he recovered his wits, knew well enough that what the murderer had been after was the thing that Flapp had left with Carsdale. He might have said as much— he ought to have said as much— to the police, and the eminent men from the Criminal Investigation Department who came nosing round Episcopus Lane; he ought, in duty bound, to have told them that if they wanted to clear up the mystery they must go back to John Flapp.

But the mind of the official policeman is as mysterious as the problems presented to it, and it did not occur to anybody in this instance that the visit of Flapp, deceased, to Carsdale, murdered, was at all relative. Consequently they asked Grice no question about Flapp, and Grice volunteered no information. In point of fact, Grice would not have helped them, however much they had pressed him, for a simple reason. Once the nine-days' wonder of the affair had blown over, Carsdale's relatives commissioned Grice, as clerk, to clear things up at the office, and there Grice was left alone. And Grice was glad of his job— for he had a firm conviction that the murderer had not discovered what he wanted to discover, and he believed that the thing was still there and still open to discovery. If so— he was going to discover it, for himself.

And suddenly, some two or three weeks after he had found Carsdale lying battered to death on his own hearth-rug, Grice came upon the secret. He had steadily tidied up that disordered room. The papers and documents were restored to their tin boxes; the contents of the safe were examined and stored away; everything was becoming as spick-and-span as it was when Carsdale walked into the room and the night of his death. And Grice, in furtherance of his own schemes, had given a thorough investigation to everything, spending

leisurely days in research where the murderer had spent hurried hours. But he had found nothing up to the time when his task was near completion.

Then, one afternoon, he tidied out Carsdale's private drawer— the top drawer in the table desk over which the green ink had been spilled. He had never opened it until then; he now found that it must have been open when the ink was knocked over, for the fluid had run over all sorts of things, private things that Carsdale kept there; cigars, cigarets, tobacco. It had soaked into some of these. There was a small bag, a linen bag, of Transvaal tobacco, which the dead man had been very fond of smoking; the green ink had soaked right through it. Grice picked it up to throw it into the fireplace as ruined and useless. But he paused as his fingers closed on it... and the next instant he had thrust those fingers into the sticky mess and had drawn out, and was staring with amazement and also with comprehension, at what he knew to be a magnificent uncut diamond.

The first thought that came to Grice as he sat there with the stone in his hand was not of its probable value, nor its history, nor of it as a diamond at all— it was of something vastly more important. It shaped itself into a question, and the question rang and rang through his head like the beating of a clock that has suddenly begun to strike and won't be stooped... *Who was the man who knew that Carsdale had the diamond and had murdered him— fruitlessly— in the hope of securing it for himself? Who*?

Other questions sprang out of that. Was the murderer a Wrychester man— to whom, perhaps, Carsdale had confided his secret? Or was he some friend or acquaintance of Flapp's, who had come on purpose to Wrychester in quest of the diamond after Flapp's death? Anyway, whoever the murderer was, he had failed to discover the diamond; there it was in the hollow of his, Grice's hand. But— would he come back? Was he even now somewhere about, watching, waiting?

Grice, however, was not temperamentally inclined to abstract speculation. He had already seen through the whole thing. Flapp, in the course of his world wanderings had somehow or other become possessed of this diamond; whether honestly or not, Grice cared little. Flapp had brought it home; had shown it to Carsdale; possibly had asked Carsdale's advice about disposing of it privately; Carsdale had persuaded Flapp to leave it with him for safe custody. Then Flapp had died, and Carsdale, believing that no one knew of the diamond's existence, had stuck to it. Now it had fallen into Grice's hands— very well, said Grice, it should go hard but that he would stick to it. And when he went to his lodgings at the end of the day, he took the diamond with him and hid it in a safe place where, if anything happened and a search was instituted, it would be impossible for anybody to find it.

And now Grice made plans. His job of clearing up was almost through; in another fortnight he would be out of an engagement; Carsdale's next of kin had sold the practise to another Wrychester firm as a going concern, but Grice was not included in the sale. He decided that he would leave Wrychester, take the diamond with him, find out by guarded inquiry how and where to dispose of it to the best advantage, and with the proceeds would leave the country. All cut and dried, this plan— but in the meantime he wanted to know all he could learn about diamonds, their characteristics, quality, value. And being fertile in ideas and swift in execution he gave— under an assumed name and at a temporary address in an adjacent town— a commission to a London bookseller for a supply of technical books about precious stones, and when he had received these, set to work to read up diamonds.

He read much at the office. There was little to do there by that time; he was merely attending at it until the day came for closing altogether. And as he sat poring over one of his books one morning, with other books lying open on the table around him, some of the wide-spread pages showing colored illustrations of famous stores, the door opened and in walked a little Jew whom Grice knew well enough by sight as a vendor of jewelry, and by name as Issy Goldmark.

Issy Goldmark held some papers in his hand and waved them at Grice as he leaned across the counter. He smiled widely out of his cunning eyes and his voice was soft as new milk when he spoke.

"Mornin', Mithter Grithe!" he said. "Thith ith the firtht time I've ever been in a tholithitorth' offith in Wrychethter, but I've jutht got to come! Thereth people that won't pay me, Mr. Grithe, won't nohow, and I must put them in the court. Thethe ith the accounth, Mr Grithe— can you thee to them?"

Grice rose unwillingly and took the papers.

While he was looking them through, the Jew's eyes went past him to the table and his gaze ran over the books and pictures. But eyes, lips and nose were innocent enough when the clerk turned on them.

"Yes, I can do that for you," answered Grice. "This practise is being transferred, Mr. Goldmark, but I can put this matter in with others. I'll enter these at the County Court this afternoon if you'll give me the money for the fees. Let's see— they'll come to three pound six altogether."

The Jew counted out the money, in silver, from a well filled bag which he produced from a hip pocket.

"Much obliged, Mither Grithe," he said. "Then— I'll hear about it in due courthe?"

"You'll hear about it," assented Grice, sweeping the half-crowns and florins up. "You'll have to appear in court and prove your claims, you know. I suppose you've got books?"

"Oh yeth, bookth and paperth— orderth, Mr. Grithe!" replied the Jew. "I can prove my claimth clear enough."

"That's all, then," said Grice. 'You'll get notice of the date. Bring your books."

Then he returned to his own books, and for a moment wondered if his visitor had noticed them. But what matter if he had?— he knew nothing. He went on with his reading. Quite apart from the special purpose for which he had taken it up, he had by this time become pro- foundly interested in diamonds, and just then he was absolutely absorbed in one particular book— so much so that on that very evening he remained late at the office, snug in Carsdale's old room and at Carsdale's desk, deep in a study of diamond values... so deep, so unconscious of his surroundings that he let out a sharp cry of something like terror when a light but firm hand suddenly gripped his shoulder. He slewed round in his chair— and saw the Jew.

Goldmark looked straight at Grice and for a second said nothing. Grice gripped the arms of the revolving chair and stared at Goldmark. He too said nothing, though his lips were drawn back from his teeth. Then the Jew spoke.

"Mithter Grithe! You've got the diamond!" he said in a low, even voice. "Don't go for to deny it, Mithter Grithe! I knew you'd got it ath thoon ath I come into your offith thith morning and thee you a-reading of them bookth. And don't be frightened, Mithter Grithe— we're all alone, and your street door'th fatht— and I've come to do bithneth. Good bithneth, Mithter Grithe!"

Grice was slowly recovering his wits. But his voice was shaky enough when he found it.

"Wh— what diamond?"' he demanded. "What d'you mean by sneaking in here—"

"I mean the diamond that Flapp left with Carthdale," interrupted Goldmark coolly. "Mithter Grithe, I come acroth Flapp in the train between Thouthehampton and Wrychethter. Flapp, he wath talkative— rum, Mr. Grithe. Him an' me, we had a compartment to ourthelvth. I wath looking over my thtock— jewelry. And all of a thudden he pulled out hith diamond and athked me if I'd ever theen anything like it. Th'elp me, I never had! And then, Mr. Grithe, when thingth developed here, of courthe I knew that Flapp had depothited it with Carthdale, and thomebody done in Carthdale for it but didn't find it. But you've found it, Mr. Grithe!— and let'th do bithneth!"

Grice sprang up from his chair and gave signs of violence. But Goldmark stepped back; his hand came out of his pocket and Grice found himself looking into the barrel of an automatic pistol.

"Bithneth, Mr. Grithe— quietly," said the Jew. "All for your own good. You can't do nothing with that diamond, for all your book-reading! But I can. You thee, if you move you're thure to be found out, and they'll thay you murdered Carthdale. P'rapth you did— I thouldn't wonder, but if you did, I don't care. You thee—"

"Damn you!" burst out Grice. "What d'you mean by suggesting— why, you fool, I could prove an alibi in two minutes!"

"No, you couldn't— ath it happenth, Mithter Grithe," retorted Goldmark. "You wath in and about the town that night about the time that Carthdale wath done in. What wath to prevent you thlipping in here after him, doing for him and coming back Thunday to thearch? Mithter Grithe— if I wath to accuthe you, you ain't got a cat'th chanthe!"

Then, with a swift smile, he nodded at Grice, confidently.

"You've got the diamond!" he whispered. "Come, Mithter Grithe— do bithneth! There ithn't a thoul but you an' me knowth of the exithtenth of that diamond. Let'th go thares in it. I can thell it— to advantage. Be withe! There ithn't a bit of rithk in what I propothe. But you're running no end of rithk! Take my advithe, Mithter Grithe, now— do bithneth!"

Grice stood staring at his captor for a full moment.

"Put that pistol in your pocket!" he said at last. "Listen! I'll do business. I'll sell you the diamond, if—"

Goldmark smiled and slipped the automatic back to his pocket. He began to rub his hands.

"What do you want, Mr. Grithe?" he asked urbanely.

"Can you give me five hundred pounds in cash, tonight?" demanded Grice. "No check, mind you— cash!"

"Where ith the goodth, Mithter Grithe?" asked the Jew quietly. "Here?"

"No—at my lodgings," answered Grice.

"Then come and get 'em, Mithter Grithe, and walk with me to mine," said the other. "I'll give you five hundred poundth— in bank- noteth. Bank of England noteth!"

Without another word Grice put on his overcoat, turned out the light and left, the Jew, at his direction, going a little ahead. It was only a few minutes' walk to Grice's rooms, and presently he emerged from them with the diamond in his hand.

"Now— your place!" said Grice.

That too was only just behind High Street, and in five minutes more Grice found himself in a little upstairs parlor in the corner of which stood a safe. The Jew produced a bunch of keys and went towards it.

"Glad to do bithneth with a thenthible man, Mr. Grithe!'' he said suavely. "I felt thure you'd thee reathon when it wath put before you."

Grice made no answer.' He was staring straight before him—at a row of miscellaneous coats and overcoats which hung from pegs in a recess. But his eyes were riveted on one coat only— an old fawn-colored melton cloth covert coat. Underneath the cuff of the right sleeve was a discoloration, a broad patch. Green ink!

"Five hundred, Misthter Grithe," said the Jew, turning round. "I have to keep ready money thometimeth for bithneth purpotheth— it'th lucky I had tho much. If you'll hand over the diamond—"

Grice came back to earth with a start and laid the diamond on the table. Mechanically he took up and counted the roll of bank-notes.

"Quite correct!" he said, and moved towards the door. "Good night."

"Good night, Mithter ithe,'" said the Jew quietly. "And— mum ith the word, Mithter Grithe. Abtholute thilenth, Mithter Grithe!"

"Yes!" answered Grice. "Yes!" He went downstairs, let himself out and walked slowly into High Street. There, the bank-notes in his and, ne stood for several minutes absorbed in his own thoughts. Then he suddenly turned, made swiftly round a corner and entering the police station, walked. unannounced, into the Superintendent's private room and laid the bank-notes under his nose.

"Listen!" he said quietly. "I know who murdered Carsdale! You can put your hands on him just now. And as for proof..."

And while the Superintendent sat open-mouthed, listening greedily, Grice dropped into a chair and began a clear, carefully phrased account of all that had happened since John Flapp first walked into Episcopus Lane.

15: The Ghost of Ranqueralles

Anonymous

Newcastle Morning Herald (NSW) 8 May 1926

This story had no title, and no author; I made up the title.

YOUNG DOUVRY lives with his family at Ranqueralles, a small village in the centre of France. For the last month the house they inhabit was believed haunted by an amazing spirit. The house has just one room downstairs, and an attic above.

Knowing that the family reside in the big room, the ghost would perform nightly the piano on the floor of the attic. This item on the programme would be a series of rappings, as if someone were playing the piano on the floor of the attic. This would upset the household terribly. The piano lesson over, the spirit would scratch the wood of the ceiling like a cat sharpening its claws.

Very soon after this had started, the neighbours who at first did not believe anything about the ghost stopped laughing at Madame Douvry's tales, taken in by her earnestness. They allowed themselves to be persuaded to come in for an audience, and were convinced the first night that the house was indeed haunted.

The next day the police were summoned. An adjutant and three men spent the night in the room of the little house, but were unable to locate the ghost. And when on the second day the adjutant boldly declared that he did not believe in the ghost. a voice shouted:

"Shut up!"

The adjutant's hair stood right up with fear. From that time on all the wagons of the vicinity would bring loads of morbid onlookers who wanted to see the haunted house.

Some of the smartest element of titled French society left the sunny Riviera where any self respecting person should be at this time of the year to come and see Ronquerolles and its little house. Amateur detectives sprang up from everywhere.

One night, a very dark night, a school teacher who had been reading detective stories, decided to wait near the house for the ghost. At the same time, a labourer who was also under the impression that someone was fooling the rest of the world by faking the noises in the house was scouting around with the same purpose as the school teacher. Both saw each other at the same time.

"Here's the ghost," thought the workman. "I see the spirit coming my way," mused the more educated school teacher. One second later, both had leaped

at each other's throats, and administered unto each other a first class beating, the only victims of this clash being their miserable bodies.

Meanwhile the police were watching within.

"It comes from the ceiling," the adjutant would say.

"It comes from the floor," one policeman would answer.

A few minutes later, the policeman would change his opinion.

"It comes from the ceilings, as you said, adjutant."

"No," the superior would answer, "you were right the first time, I am positive it comes from the floor."

A retired officer by the name of Noyelles, who lives at Ranqueralles, was very soon suspected of camouflaging every night and mystifying the people by making all the noises in the Douvry home. Being a cavalry officer, the old gentleman got on his high horse and protested with Indignation that he never did anything of the sort. and filed a complaint for defamation of character against an unknown party.

And the adjutant declared: "When I catch the spirit, he is in for a first-class beating."

Meanwhile, people kept on coming from everywhere. Some English people crossed the channel to see if the spirit resembled in any way the old ghosts that haunt the old castles. Many would cable their arrival ahead of time, announcing that they would arrive the next day, to kindly see that the ghost would be there the next night, and had no intention of taking the week-end for a trip to some other part of the country. The villagers were more and more emotioned, and some kind people, understanding their plight, tried their best to relieve them, or at least share their troubles. Letters of advice poured in, telling the Douvry family to do away with the nuisance.

"I don't mind the ghost." Madame Douvry once declared. "It can stay here as long as it likes, as long as it does no harm.

One letter told Madame Douvry that she ought to boil some nails in oil. That was a sure way of driving away the spirit. Other advices were also given, arriving every day in huge bundles of mail. Workmen were then sent for and looked every where around to discover if there were any secret passages below the house, or hidden recesses where some wit could have hidden and fooled the household. When their investigation was finished, the villagers of Ronquerolles knew about as much about the house as they had before the search had started.

And the spirit kept on coming every night.

Expert spiritists came and were all greeted as deliverers. All they delivered, however, was comment on the situation. The police, after over a month spent searching every possible clue leading to the unmasking of the

spirit, took young Paul Douvry aside and cross examined him very closely on the matter.

The boy at first denied having anything to do with the whole affair, but finally was persuaded into admitting that he was the perpetrator of the joke that had kept the whole village in suspense for over a month. He explained that he had managed to make all the noises from the very room where everybody sat up and listened.

Once in a while he would leave in the room his brother, whom he had trained in three lessons to take his place in his absence.

"He was a smart little pupil," Paul declared.

Of course, the law could not do anything against Douvry except fine him for showing contempt toward the upholders of the public order. Whereas for the people who had taken trips to the haunted house, they had no claim at all. They had come to him, he had not gone to them.

The chief of police in Paris then issued an order forbidding Paul to appear in any theatres, circuses, or motion picture houses. The French press, however, did not share the chief of police's views in the slightest, and declared it was a shame forbidding the young ventriloquist from appearing on the stage. The reason given for this tabooing was that the young boy was a fake.

After all, what had the young boy done that was so wrong, Parisian journalists wanted to know. He had caused a legion of foolish people and a regiment of police to come to his little village, the name of which, unheard of before, had become famous. And if one was going to start forbidding the fakers from appearing on the stage, how about all the singers whose voices never existed; how about the dancers who know nothing about dancing; or the playwrights who ought to be cleaning streets for a living; or the painters, whose works might as well come from an alcoholic ward. Why shouldn't they be suppressed?

Everybody in France, with the exception of a few mystified ones and the chief of police is in favour of the young man exerting on the stage those talents he used in Ranqueralles, the inhabitants of which will now sleep in peace.

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16: "The Man Who Was—"

Gwyn Evans

1898-1938

Daily Herald (London), date unknown

Australian Worker (Sydney), 27 June 1928

A London journalist, Evans wrote numerous Sexton Blake stories, as well as numerous non-series tales.

IN HIS frowsty bed sitting-room in Bloomsbury, Jimpson sat pounding a jazz obligato on the keys of a battered typewriter. He finished his story with an exultant grin and drew out the final page with a flourish and a protesting squeak from the ratchet. Lovingly he gathered his typewritten pages together and fastened them with his last clip. He groped in his pocket of his shabby blue coat and unearthed a sad-looking cigarette end which he regarded dubiously.

"Oh, well," murmured Jimpson, "shan't be broke much longer. When this yarn clicks—"

He lit his crumpled gasper and scanned his story with shining eyes. "*The Man With the Green Face*! A darned good title," said Jimpson. "And that twist at the end is better than any-thing Bill Japp's ever done, curse him!"

Jimpson hated Bill Jap with a hatred that went right through him and buttoned up at the back. He didn't know Mr. Japp. In fact he'd never even seen the star author of that phenomenally popular magazine *'Tec Tales*. For all he knew, Bill Jap might be the best of good fellows, but it made no difference to Jimpson's hatred. It was Bill Japp who was responsible for the frowsty room, the shabby suit, the crumpled gasper, according to Jimpson.

Bill Japp was his hoodoo— his evil genius.

"That's just what he is— and has," thought Jimpson, bitterly. "An evil genius."

There was no doubt about it. Bill Japp could write— and write well. So could Jimpson. Both of them specialised in crime stories, thrilling yarns ingeniously contrived with a brilliant plot and the queer little O. Henry twist at the end which gladdens the editorial heart. The only difference was that Bill Japp's name appeared in large letters on the cover of *'Tec Tales*, while Jimpson's only ornamented the stamped addressed envelope of the returned MSS.

Old Jimpson's grouse was legitimate enough.

"Twice armed is he, says the poet, "who has his quarrel just, but better still to get your blow in fust."

That's where Bill Japp scored. At first Jimpson put it down to coincidence. When the, magazine first came out nobody admired Bill Japp's yarns more

than Jimpson. Each man's style , was very similar, and, curiously enough, Jimpson found that Bill Japp had got the same sort of plot as he contemplated using.

That was all right to start with. No author can be sure his plot has not been used by somebody else, but the thing went on and on.

When Jimpson turned in his powerful crook story, *The Man Who Died Twice*, the editor wrote a kind little letter pointing out that he had already a story in hand by Mr. William Japp with the same theme. Jimpson cursed, and promptly wrote an other yarn, *The Man With the Twitching Lip*, and sent it off by return.

The same day; passing a, bookstall, he saw the current issue of *'Tec Tales*, on the cover of which was the picture of a saturnine individual who seemed to be in the last throes of delirium tremens. Beneath it was the caption, "*The Man With the Twitching Lip*! Bill Japp's Latest and Greatest Story."

Jimpson saw red after that. This was more than coincidence. He called on the editor and made rather a fool of himself.

"Our magazine goes to press three months in advance," said the editor, coldly. "You say you wrote your story last week. The question of plagiarism is ridiculous— and," he added, darkly, "it cuts both ways."

Crestfallen, Jimpson went back and worked out another story, one of the best ideas he had ever had. It was full of action, the plot was clever the mystery well sustained to the final chapter.

He posted it to Carmichael, the editor, and waited. In less than a week *The Man With the Yellow Beard* came back with the editor's regrets that clever as the story was, Mr. William Japp had already used the same idea for his forth-coming series.

In the months that followed Jimpson had the mortification of seeing Bill Japp's name grow bigger and bigger on the cover of *'Tec Tales*, and, what was worse, every story was similar in theme, often bearing the same title, as Jimpson's own yarns which never saw print.

It was uncanny.

There was absolutely no question of plagiarism or foul play. Even Carmichael, the editor, felt sorry for Jimpson, and admitted it was queer.

Jimpson began to, study books on telepathy. He wondered if there was some sort of a rapportment between Bill Japp and himself. He began to brood over the matter. He gave up taking *'Tec Tales* because Bill Japp's triumphant name made him sick and besides he couldn't afford the price of it.

Grimly Jimpson persevered against his hoodoo, and now *The Man With the Green Face* was his final challenge to the malignant Fate that seemed to dog his foot-steps. He was obsessed with the idea of appearing in *'Tec Tales*.

No other magazine interested him. He knew his stuff was good. Carmichael had no complaints on that score but—

Jimpson rose to his feet and placed his MSS. in a dog-eared envelope. He couldn't afford the postage, and he determined to foot it to Fleet Street. *The Man With the Green Face* was a Christmas story with a queer, supernatural atmosphere. It was now the end of April— eight months before Christmas.

"Hang Bill Japp!" muttered Jimpson as he donned his hat and let himself out. "He won't beat me to it this time!"

He walked down Kingsway oblivious of everything save his latest story and the possibility of at last beating Bill Japp.

"The Street of Peradventure!" he murmured bitterly in Fleet Street, as he as-cended the steps of the imposing building that housed *'Tec Tales* and a score of other periodicals. A be-medalled commissionaire showed him into the waiting-room. He filled in a slip with his name for the editor, and sat down. A depressed-looking artist gloomed before the fire, hugging a shabby portfolio.

On the table were spread a dozen brightly colored magazines.

Impelled by some overmastering urge, Jimpson reached out for *'Tec Tales*. The lurid cover was in green and block. Across it, in blood red letters, ran the legend:

THE MAN WITH THE GREEN FACE.
Bill Japp's Great Serial Starts This Month.

"Great Heavens!'', gasped Jimpson. "This is the end." His mouth worked convulsively, and with a frenzied gesture he flung the maga-zine on the floor, and danced on it. Rage shook him, as he ground his heel into the cover and obliterated the hateful name of Bill Japp. The depressed-looking artist looked round and blinked.

"Here, go easy, old man. I admit, it's a bad cover, but I drew what the editor wanted."

Jimpson did not heed the mild protest. "Pah!" he ejaculated venomously, 'I— I could kill the brute. He's a vampire— sucking other men's brains when they sleep. He's— he's—"

He was getting hysterical, but the commissionaire's quite voice steadied him.

"Mr. Carmichael will see you, sir. Third floor."

Like one in a daze Jimpson entered the lift and suddenly, as he emerged on the third floor, the brilliant idea flashed into his mind.

"By Heaven! I've got it," he muttered. "I'm first this time, anyway." He tapped on the editorial doorway and entered. Carmichael, a grey-haired, dour

faced, man, swung round in his chair and pushed back his green eyeshade. "Ah, Mr. Jimpson. Sit down. You've written another story, for me I hear."

Jimpson gulped. "No— that, is— yes, Mr. Carmichael," he floundered. "The fact is I believe I'm bewitched— or that Bill Japp is a clairvoyant or something. Look at that!"

He flung down his MSS. and pointed at the title with a trembling finger. "I—I haven't seen the magazine for months. I don't know Bill Japp from Adam, and yet he's thought of a man with a green face!"

"Extraordinary!" said Carmichael, scratching his chin. "You'really are most unfortunate, Mr. Jimpson. It's a pity, too. I like your style. If you could only hit on some idea that—"

"I have," gasped Jimpson, excitedly. "Thank Heaven, I'm first with in with it. The idea was born two minutes ago in the lift!" He leant forward, his face alive with eagerness. "I've just thought of doing you a psychological murder story," he began. "Where an author— like me, for instance— has all his stories anticipated by another author he's never seen.

"He begins to brood about it. It happens again and again, until finally the first man's reason gives way. He believes the other man is a sort of vampire, who— who—"

Carmichael cleared his throat, and tapped his desk with a blue pencil. "One moment, Mr. Jimpson!', he began, slowly "I'm very sorry, but—"

He paused and took up a neatly-typed manuscript, and handed it to the other. "This arrived from, Mr. Japp yesterday morning," he said with a queer expression in his eyes. Jimpson stared at it with a dazed look. "The plot of that yarn is precisely the same as the idea you have just told me," said Carmichael, slowly. "It is certainly queer. That is the last story I'm afraid we shall ever get from Mr Japp."

"The—the— last story!" echoed Jimpson, and a strange feeling of exultation surged through his veins. "You mean—?"

"Haven't you seen the papers?" demanded Carmichael, sharply. He pulled out an early edition of the *Evening Wire*, and pointed to the head lines:

FAMOUS AUTHOR MURDERED.
Tragic End of William Japp.
Unknown Assassin

Jimpson stared at the type with blood shot eyes. He licked his dry lips and tried to speak; but no sound came. His gaze fell on the last MSS. of Bill Japp, and he laughed queerly as he saw the title, *The Man Who Was Forestalled*!

———————

17: The Convict's Revenge

Waif Wander

Mary Helena Fortune, 1833-1911

North Melbourne Advertiser, 18 and 25 April, 2 and 9 May 1884

One of a very long series of 19th century Australian police stories, as told by retired detective Mark Sinclair as he leafs through an old album of mug shots. The series was "The Detective's Album".

I ALWAYS look back with pleasure to the times when I used to be stationed in the bush, far from the greedy, grasping, false excitement of a town life, and often at a considerable distance from even the small imitation of city vices which a " township" of half a dozen houses presented. Pretty spots were often chosen for our camp, for the very simple reason that in some districts it would have been impossible to have selected one that was not pretty, but the one to which I am about to lead you was the very pleasantest in situation of any I can recall during my long career as a policeman in these colonies.

The station was called Coondarra Police Station, from the name of the district in which it was erected, and over which we were supposed to keep watch and ward. I say supposed, advisedly, for excepting when especially called on, which event but rarely happened, we scarcely left the camp but for our own amusement. There were some rare fine plains in Coondarra, and our most especial recreation was kangaroo hunting. There was only two of us stationed at Coondarra, and my mate, whose name was Pyne Rollington, was half-crazy with relation to that sport, and kept a couple of hounds, which were almost invariably the subject of barter or sale whenever he could get an opportunity of indulging his caprice and love of change.

I don't know whether or not you have had an opportunity of remerking that, in the early days at least, almost every member of the mounted police force was well-born and educated. Many of them were the remains of the old cadets, and to get into the cadet force at one time was considered rather a desirable thing. How much this anxiety to don their nice uniform had to do with the numbers of good-looking and very young fellows who gladly permitted themselves to be enrolled as mounted cadets, I cannot say; but the fact remained, and gentlemen bred and born, and very young gentlemen too, formed the greater proportion of the force.

And among the mounted troopers of the present day are still to be found many men who, from the advantages of birth and education, might have hoped to fill positions in a higher grade of society; but the old prestige of the cadet hangs no longer around the trooper of to-day, and the admission of

many less-favored individuals has been the means of lowering the status of the mounted police to something more assimilated with that of their foot brethren.

I have entered into this explanation simply to make you comprehend how it was that I had a young and rather aristocratical mate at Coondarra in Pyne Rollington. He was the son of a clergyman of the Church of England, and having become smitten with the gold fever, determined on coming to Victoria, in spite of all the entreaties and persuasions of his family. Accomplishing his purpose of gaining his father's reluctant consent at length, he was consigned to a merchant friend in Melbourne, who induced him to join the cadets under the supposition that the position was a much better one than it really was; however, the gold fields were dull, and Pyne, to tell the honest truth, was rather lazily inclined, and he preferred on a close encounter, to ride in a saddle in a pretty uniform to picking and shovelling in hard ground, and so he became a cadet.

Just before the force was abolished, l though, and at the period of my story, Pyne Rollington had merged into a mounted trooper, with a determined dislike to police duty, and a determined fondness for such field sports as the colony afforded him. The principle of these was, of course, kangaroo hunting and the breeding and purchase of kangaroo hounds in a state of pupdom. He devoted the energies and time which her Majesty's ten shillings and sixpence per day failed to secure on behalf of her loving subjects in the district of Coondarra.

He was a handsome young chap was Pyne; about twenty-two, with glossy fair wavy hair, blue eyes, and aristocratic-looking aquiline, although rather delicate and feminine features. He was one of the very laziest fellows, too, that ever crossed a horse; and except in the one line of kangaroo business, it was almost impossible to get him off the broad of his back on his bed. He would lie for hours on the hot summer days, alternately snoozing and reading some novel that he procured, and it took one of my determined fits to make him do his fair share of camp work. But for all that, Pyne was one of those harmless chaps that are always liked, and I liked my mate in spite of his lazy and useless proclivities.

Days, and weeks, and months, passed pleasantly with myself at Coondarra. I had my books too, although they were of a different calibre to those patronised by my mate Pyne ; and although I did occasionally accompany Pyne and some kindred spirit in one of their hunting expeditions, I did not neglect my duty, and my patrol to township or around to each of the neighbouring stations was not neglected.

It was on a February afternoon that I occupied the camp alone, Pyne having left in the early morning for a raid on the kangaroos at some miles distance. It was a hot hazy afternoon, when the air trembled in the fiery sun, and the glitter of the creek was unpleasant to see only under the shade of the huge box trees we had left standing around the camp was the heat at all endurable, and there, at full length on the shaded grass I watched the sun gradually fall, until at last he crept under the drooping branches of my shelter, and forced me to rise.

Coondarra Police Station looked strangely pretty at the edge of that broad undulating plain, where the tall peppermint and drooping box trees threw long shadows on the grass. The green loneliness around it, the tortuous course of the creek where the tall sedges grew, and whose banks were clustered thick with young gum and green wattle bushes; the far away outline of blue hill and sweeping forest, with not a sign else of man's habitation, made a strange and yet not unlovely contrast with the panelled wooden walls and iron roofs of the police barracks.

I might have been unconsciously noticing all this for the thousandth time, when I heard the dull thuds of a galloping horse's feet on the firm grass, and in a few moments after perceived a horseman rapidly approaching the station. As the horse bore its rider nearer, I recognised him as a sort of handyman, or stable help, I had seen during my occasional visits, in a professional way, to Coondarra Station. I only knew him as "Black Bob," which he was known by in the neighbourhood, and I was aware that he had been for some considerable time in the employ of Mr. Rath, the owner of the station in question.

Before I had much time to speculate upon this probable business at the camp, the man had pulled up within a few yards of me, and commenced to speak rapidly and to the point.

"Look here, mate," he said, "I'm an old hand, I am, and you know me over at the station, and I hope I'll never come to split on mates and turn informer, but Rath and his folks have been kind to me, so I can't stand by and lend a hand to seeing them wronged, and so I'm off. That's how it is, you see."

"But I don't see at all," I answered, observing the man's anxious watch all over the plain as he spoke. "You'll have to tell me something more before I see anything, mate."

"I'm a goin' to," he said, "but I'm afraid some one may be on the look out, and if that's so, I'm a dead man. All I've got to say is, that there's going to be mischief over at Rath's to-night, and I advice you to warn them to keep a bright look out. That's all I've got to say, for I'm off. I never thought it could come on me like this, but I can't stand by to see it done, and I can't split on old chums,

and so I'll bolt for it. Good-bye, mate. I'm riding my own horse, as any one at Rath's will tell you. And mind, to-night, don't let them sleep at the station."

And, putting spurs in his fresh and spirited animal, Black Bob, a rough and determined looking customer, darted from my side, and was almost across the plain before I half understood the drift of his strange warning. And yet, as far as it went, it was plain enough; there was to be "mischief" of some sort perpetrated by some old band chums at Rath's station, and it was my bounden duty to give them the warning I had myself received.

I was in a pickle. It was between four and fire o'clock, and I had barely time to reach the station before sundown; and yet I did not expect Pyne back before the time I ought to be at the homestead. It would never do for me to wait his return, so there was nothing for me but to leave a note of instructions for him, and start. And so I entered the barrack-room and hastily scribbled on a scrap of paper words to the following effect:-

Come to Coondarra station at once. I have received information that something dangerous is to be up there to-night. Well armed.

Leaving these lines in a conspicuous place on the table, I went out and saddled my horse, and was soon in full swing for the homestead. But the rapidity of my animal's progress did not prevent me from wondering of what nature the danger of Rath's station might consist, for, strange to say, I did not doubt the genuineness of Black Bob's warning for one moment. He was too evidently in earnest, and too evidently afraid of being seen in communication with me; and, besides, what object could the man have in giving me a useless trip to Rath's— a trip which, to a chap so idle and isolated as I was at Coondarra, could only be looked on in the light of a pleasant ride.

I knew but little of the Raths, although I had been for a considerable time stationed in its vicinity. My visits there had been principally for the purpose of procuring forage for the camp; but I knew that I had seen and spoken to every member of the family, and that it consisted only of three individuals. Rath and his wife were plain but shrewd people, who had been fortunate enough to work their way upwards from a very humble position in life, and they had given the benefit of their success to their only daughter in an education that had only taken effect by making her fancy herself too superior an article altogether for the society of her own parents.

You will perceive that Ann Rath had not, during my few opportunities of observing her, made a favourable impression on me; and I readily acknowledge that such was the ease. She was dark and tall, and well enough looking as girls go, but she had a haughty and unbecoming manner, and a way of treating you

as if she considered you immeasurably her inferior; and such a way is not, in either man or woman, a way likely to will friends. And now, as you know almost as much of a family at the station, I shall dismount at the door of the homestead, and, having fastened my horse to a hook in the verandah pillar, enter, and introduce you more personally to each of them.

Very rarely indeed will you find the doors of a homestead in the green bush shut while the sun shines— never, indeed unless the weather is unfavorable; and so I entered the hall, and rapped with the handle of my whip at the front door. In a moment Rath himself made his appearance from a room on the right, and requesting my entrance, although with some surprise evident in his countenance, preceded me into the apartment, where were seated both Mrs. and Miss Rath.

The mother was seated, stiffly and upright, on a chair near the window. She was an old fashioned looking old woman, and attired in very homely garb. She was busily engaged in knitting a rough woollen sock, and the huge worsted ball from which her fingers were rapidly weaving it, lay on a clean checked apron that guarded her cotton dress. The daughter lounged in a large arm-chair at another window, with a cheap novel in her hand, and her bold black eyes met mine inquiringly as her father ushered me into the room.

Mr. Rath had apparently, been reading the newspaper that lay upon the centre table, and which he instinctively took up again even as he was about to open his mouth and enquire my business. He was a short, thin, wiry little man, with a keen black eye like his daughter's, and a shrewd, careful expression of countenance.

"In the first place, Mr. Rath, be good enough to order my horse under cover immediately. It is perhaps better that he should not be seen and recognised at your door."

Rath laid down the paper at once, and went to give the necessary orders; he was doubtless observant enough to see that t had some good reasons for the wish I expressed. Not so Miss Rath. She appeared inclined to be impertinent.

"What odds is it who sees a policeman's horse at Coondarra?" she asked, laying down her book upon her knee, and looking at me rather disdainfully. "What is your business here to-day, sir?"

"That I shall explain to your father." I replied, tartly enough I dare say. " Suffice it to say, it is not with Miss Rath."

"Oh!" the young lady exclaimed. looking daggers at me; but what-ever further attack she might have made upon me was prevented by the entrance of Mr. Rath.

"I have received some rather strange information concerning your place this evening, Mr. Rath," I said, "and I have lost no time in coming over to give you the benefit of it, and do what I can for you. Is Black Bob about your place now?"

"Well, I sent for him just now, and Jim tells me that he has taken his horse out of the paddock, and gone. It seems he told the lad he was off for good, and I can't understand it, for we haven't had a word of complaint."

"Well, he rode over to the camp this evening, and told me that there was going to be mischief at your homestead to-night. From what I could gather, some old mates of his were in it; and, as he would neither split on them or help to see you wronged, he has bolted. Have you any enemies, or any idea what sort of danger you might have to fear from them?"

A strange look passed from one to the other of the two— a look of doubt and terror. Mrs. Rath's knitting fell from her hands to her lap, her daughter sat upright in her chair, and the novel fell to the floor unheeded, while, after a terror-stricken, as it seemed to me, pause, the old man himself darted to a side table, and consulted a book, which I observed to be an almanac, with finger that trembled as he turned over the rustling leaves. At last he lifted up his head, and looking his wife in the face nodded.

"Is he really out ?" inquired Anne, frightened, and consequently more womanly than I had yet seen her.

"Yes, a fortnight ago," answered Rath unsteadily.

"Perhaps you had better explain to me, Mr. Rath," I suggested, "I am in the dark and time is precious."

"Yes, I'd better tell you all about it, but we may be frightened about nothing after all. Sit down, sir," and I did so, while Miss Rath followed my example, the old woman resuming her knitting.

"A year and a half ago," commenced the squatter, "a young chap on horseback came to Coondarra, looking for work. He was a gentleman looking sort of a chap, and indeed I believe he was a gentleman as far as rearing went, though he didn't act like one in the long run. He said he had only just come to the colony, and as I never was any hand at writing, and the like of that, I took him on as clerk and overseer. Well we got on first-rate, although he was a sulky black fellow when the fit was on him, until Anne came home, and he took it into his wise head to fall over head and ears in love with her."

At this portion of her father's story Miss Rath thought it proper to lift her novel between me and her face, but she let it drop fast enough again at the old man's next insinuation.

"That is of course be gammoned to take a fancy to her, for of course it is well-known than Anne is an only child, and that she won't be left penniless; but

I don't believe the fellow cared for her no more-no more than I do for that poker, and—"

"Indeed you're quite mistaken, father," broke in the young lady, "I'm very sure."

"And I'm very sure that we're no time to waste over such nonsense," I interrupted, "Go on, sir."

"At any rate he proposed to Anne, and did his beat to get round the soft side of her; but she, as might have been expected from her boarding school manners, insulted the lad, and made an enemy of him for life, for if ever there was a revengeful vindictive chap in this world, John Conway was one.

"I trusted him pretty well by this time, and used to send him to the bank regularly, in shearing time or the like of that, to get cheques cashed; and one day he coolly forged my name to a bill for a hundred and twenty pounds, but luckily for me, the bank clerk at Tooma suspected all was not right, and although he cashed the cheque, he had the young chap followed by the police, and he was arrested here at Coondarra."

"He went down on his knees here to Anne, I believe, though I didn't see him, and begged of her to ask me to let him off. He said the disgrace would ruin him for ever, and kill his father if he heard it. I never heard a word of this though it was all over; if I had I believe I would have tried hard to get him off, but he was black and hardened looking to me, and Anne there was as hard as him, and she gave evidence against him, that settled the case; at any rate between us we got him twelve months on the roads."

"And not half enough for him either!" said Mrs. Bath, for the first time opening her mouth since my arrival.

"But what was all this to do with Black Bob's story?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm not done yet Before he was taken to gaol he was brought into this room handcuffed, and he stood there just by the table, with his manacled wrists resting on it. Anne was standing by the window there, very near where she is sitting now, and he swore the most dreadful oath that after he was released he would live only to be revenged on her. I'll not forget him in a hurry; just before the troopers dragged him away he lifted up his fastened arms and shouted at Annie, 'I'll bring you lower than ever a woman was brought on this earth, I swear it. Your pride shall be rolled out of you in the dirt, and by the lowest scum of the earth.' "

"He was a very handsome young chap," observed Mrs. Rath, picking up a dropped stitch very philosophically.

I looked at the girl who had been the subject of these terrible threats, and saw that every drop of blood seemed to have faded from her face; her frame, too, was trembling, and her whole aspect denoted a dreadful fear.

"And this Conway's time is served then? do you think it is some attack, or intended attack, of his, that Black Bob hinted at?"

"Goodness knows; to tell the truth I never gave his bounce a thought until you told us of the warning. But Black Bob I'd depend my life on, though he is an old hand, for he's been a good and trustworthy servant for two years. What do you think of it, Anne?"

"I don't know what to think. Like you, I never troubled about what he said until now. What are we to do?"

The question was partially addressed to me, but I made no direct reply to it.

"How many men have you about the homestead?" I asked Rath.

"Not one," he answered in a tone of consternation, "only that lad Jim; and the home flock are not coming in tonight either, for I told big Jerry to hurdle them at Spring Flat hut. What can we do? If any attack should take place, there is not a man within fire miles. Where's your other chap?"

"He's away from the camp, but I left a note that will bring him over as soon as he comes back."

"I should like to go away," said Miss Bath, rising from her seat and holding on by the back of the chair she had occupied. "I should like to go to Tooma at once, father?"

Mr Bath looked at the girl with unfeigned astonishment. "Afraid I" he exclaimed. "Well I wouldn't have believed it. But what harm can come of you here? Can't four of us— there will be four of us, counting Jim— can't four men keep you all safe in a stone house? Faugh, girl I I'm ashamed of you."

Annie Rath fell into her seat again, and it seemed to me from perfect incapacity to stand any longer on her feet; and once there, she burst into tears.

"Oh, you don't know him as well as I do," she cried, "John Conway is capable of any revenge; and I certainly did treat his presumption in the manner it deserved."

"Yes, you were always an impudent slut," the nonentity of a mother coolly observed. drawing another roll of wool off her ball."

Now I had little sympathy with the ordinary bouncible young lady, but I would, under the circumstances, gladly have seen her in safety miles away from Coondarra had it been possible, but I dared not advise such a measure.

"It is rapidly approaching dusk, Miss Rath," I said, "and Tooma is nine miles from this spot. If it is as we fear, and young Conway is about to attack the homestead to-night, he and his mates are most probably lying in wait in the neighbourhood at this moment. To send you out on the fleetest horse would be almost a certain way to throw you into their hands. So I think you are far safer where you are."

"Do you really think it is probable that Conway will try to be revenged on us?" she asked anxiously.

"Not knowing the man at all, I can hardly give an opinion," I said. "If he is determined and vindictive, and really feels the disgrace that his sentence will attach to him through life, and blames you rather than his own conduct for that sentence, nothing would be easier than for him to organize a party in such a place as a gaol. There he will meet with the very worst characters the colony can produce, and such men are only too ready to assist any project in which revenge is the motive of the leader, and plunder that of his band. But we have no time to lose, sir, let us go out and see what measures we had better take, although I should say there was but little danger of any attack until you are supposed to have gone to rest."

All we could do was easily done. As soon as darkness had fairly set in, all the windows were barricaded, and the doors locked and barred. We made the two female servants take up their quarters in the principal building from which the offices were entirely detached, and we collected and loaded all the firearms Mr. Rath could boast of; but as the night wore on and Pyne did not put in an appearance, I began to be seriously decomposed, for what could we do did the attackers come in numbers; two men and a useless boy— for such indeed was Jim— who could not even load a gun and was shaking with fear. I had taken the precaution to "plant" my horse, so that an inspection of the stable might not discover him. After he had been fed I took him down to the creek, which was almost close to the offices, and having watered him, tied him under a sheltering and hiding wattle bush. I knew I could trust him to be quiet there for any length of time, and so was easy as to the means of locomotion in case of necessity.

Mrs. Rath went to bed as usual, and as little put about concerning what was going on around her as anyone could possibly be. As she lighted her bedroom candle, she favoured us generally with her opinion, that we were all fools and me, personally, with the information that she'd advise me not to interfere with her knitting and worsted on the table there or she'd let me know, and then she walked off and left us in peace.

As for Anne Rath, she sat upright and stony looking on the sofa near us, and no persuasions would induce her to join her mother.

"Even in the event of any men breaking in," I said, half a dozen times " this is the very worst place for you to be; you are just in their way, where the first that comes can seize you."

"With you and father by?" she questioned.

"We might manage two or three, but the fourth would be sufficient for you Miss Anne."

"I shall not go."

"Very well," and so ended my attempt to influence this obstinate girl, who was yet a coward to her very heart.

At ten o'clock, all the lights, save that in Mrs. Rath's bedroom, were extinguished. She would not put hers out— no, that she wouldn't— until Rath came to bed, an old fool that he was like his father before him, and so it remained burning; but as the shutters were closed, we hoped it might not be noticed from the outside.

I took the precaution, however, to have a single lamp kept burning in a half closed cupboard in the room we occupied, which could be brought into use at any moment; and my own dark lantern I had alight and attached to my belt is the usual manner.

I don't think I ever spent a more wretched hour than that which elapsed after everything was still in the Coondarra homestead that night, yet it was not my own position that occasioned my uneasiness, but that of my mate Pyne. I was in misery about him, and dreaded every moment to hear the gallop of his horse, and the shot, perhaps, which would terminate his young life. Of course it was a certainty that, if Black Bob's story was true, the intended outragers were in the vicinity, at any rate by that time, and in coming to obey my call, Pyne would be rushing into the very jaws of destruction. How I prayed heaven that his horse might have gone lame, or his favourite dog Spring got ripped open by an old man's kick, and that he might be camped under a gum tree ten miles off, without either a blanket or a bit to eat.

But my prayers were ineffectual, for within fifty yards of me was Pyne himself at that moment. I daresay it was eleven o'clock, and there we were sitting in the darkness as silently as if were dumb, when I heard a rattle like that of stones on glass, some where at the back of the house. We had every inner door open, so that the least sound from any part of the house might be heard more easily, and as the rattle was apparent, I rose to my feet quietly.

"It's at the buttery window,' whispered Aunt Rath, tremulously.

"Most likely my mate wanting admittance," I answered in the same tone: "and I pray it is," I added to myself, as I stole on tiptoe in the direction of the sound.

When I reached the small pantry sort of place indicated by Miss Rath, I cautiously turned on my lantern and at the same moment, almost, a stone was thrown violently at the small window over my head, breaking a pane of glass to pieces and falling at my feet. I stooped down to examine the missive, and at once perceived that it was rolled in a bit of paper. You may be sure I lost no time in going away from the dangerous vicinity of the window, and examining the paper so unexpectedly received. I recognised at once a line or two in

Pyne's handwriting, traced apparently in haste and with difficulty and I could not doubt the genuine nature of the note, for it was written on a leaf from a small note book, the dandy nature of which I had often chaffed him about, (To be continued).

"You needn't be afraid of any attack," it said*, "the mob are gone; but for God's sake come out to me quickly. I'm bleeding to death down behind the stable. Pyne Rollington."*

When I look back to this episode in my-police career, I candidly own to you that I'm ashamed of myself. My affection for Pyne was so great, and my anxiety at that moment so much excited on his behalf, that Coondarra and its residents gave me scarce a thought. Enough that the mob were gone, and that they had left my poor young mate lying bleeding to death. I stayed neither to wonder at what had caused their flight, or by what means Pyne's communication had reached me, I simply opened the door, and forgetting everything, rushed in the direction of the creek, where was the spot indicated by Pyne. Nay, I did not even stop to catch the door behind me; was not Pyne dying, dead perhaps by this time?

I had reached my horse, who welcomed me with a whinny, when a smothered shout reached me from the opposite bank of the creek.

"Go back, Mark I I'm a prisoner! It's all a trap!" and then a sharp pistol crack; and silence. They were murdering Pyne, and in a minute I was on my horse's back and dashing him into the creek like a madman. Fortunately he was a good swimmer, and soon scrambled up the bank. What was I to do there? It was pitch dark and as silent as the night breeze would permit the bush to be.

"Pyne!" I shouted at the top of my voice, and the echoes of Coondarra answered "*Pyne*!"

"Pyne!" I repeated, heedless, and indeed thoughtless of my own danger, and I listened while my panting animal trembled under me: but there was no reply, until a second after shrieks and shots and horrible noises that awoke me to a sense of the folly of which I had been guilty, came from the homestead, and once more I spurred my horse into the creek and dismounting in the yard, rushed to the door from which I had effected my departure. But there was not now a sound to be heard, not *one* after all the hideous screams of a moment or two before. I think I was half crazy just then; I walked as a man in a dream, dreaming all the time though of Pyne— my fair-haired young mate who was murdered.

I felt the wall of the passage, as I groped toward the room where the I had left Rath and his daughter; but my thoughts were in the bush all the time, and

it was a mechanical movement that turned on my dark lantern as I reached the door. It was open, and there was nobody there, at least nobody that I could see on my first entrance.

The table was overturned, the curtains were torn and hanging in shreds from the windows. There was a heavy smoke in the room, and a sharp smell of gunpowder; and there was a black crape mask lying upon the floor. This was all I saw at the first step, but my next brought me in view of old Rath, stretched on the ground insensible.

Almost at the same instant that this object met my horrified eyes, a shock head was protruded from under the valence of the old-fashioned sofa, and the lad Jim's face came in view, every feature expressing terror and dismay.

"What has happened?" I cried. "Come out of that and tell, you coward! What has happened?— Where is Miss Rath?"

"Oh they took her off!" exclaimed the lad, emerging fearfully; "and the master's killed."

While he was slowly extricating himself from his hiding place I had raised the old man partially, and finding about him no wound, save a contusion on the head, I proceeded to try and recover him from what was, fortunately, only the insensibility produced by a blow. In this I had the satisfaction of succeeding, and with the assistance of the lad, had just lifted him to the sofa, when a strange figure appeared at the door.

It was Mrs Rath, in a most singular costume, with her chamber candle in her hand, and a cap with voluminous borders upon her head.

"A pack of fools!" she said, sniffily. "What are you shooting and firing for, and skirling like idiots ? And the table and my knitting!—eh, what's the matter?"

She had just caught sight of her husband's death-like face, and some idea of trouble seemed at last to strike her selfishness.

"Where's Anne?" she asked, looking from one to the other of us helplessly—"where's Anne, Jim?"

"Oh the bushrangers have taken her away!" answered Jim, looking at the door fearfully.

"Tell us all about it," I said, as I lifted Mr. Rath up once more, and administered a few drops of spirits, of which I had found a bottle in the cupboard, "and be quick about it, for I must be off.

"Yes, yes, follow them!" exclaimed the old man, weakly.

"Well ?" I cried, sharply, to the lad. '

"They rushed in, four of them, a minute after you left," he said, " an' all of 'em had black things on their faces. I runned under the sofa while two of 'em wor draggin at Miss Anne, with every screech out of her you might hear a mile

off. The master he fired five or six shots at 'em, till one chap knocked him down with the butt end of his pistol."

"What sort of men were they? Would you know then again?"

"One of 'em, when they had gagged Miss Anne, dashed off his hat and his mask, and asked her if he kept his word an' what did she think of herself now. He was like a wild beast he was; an' God help Miss Anne."

"It was John Conway." groaned old Rath, while Mrs. Rath dropped her candlestick, fell against the wall, and, after sliding down it slowly, drooped helplessly on the floor.

I let her lie there. I was no more fit to attend to her at that moment than was the man who was slowly recovering on the sofa.

"I can do nothing till daylight," I said, sitting down despairingly; "there is no earthly use in my going in the dark I don't know where. And my mate poor Pyne, most likely murdered by the wretches!"

And so I sat until day could not be far from breaking, and not a word was spoken by either the squatter or myself. Jim, indeed, was interested, had time to observe the bottle from which I had administered to Mr. Rath, and, as an excuse for his own libation, or perhaps from real pity, he poured out a glass, and carried it to the helpless nonentity on the floor. She drank it mechanically looked in his face, but did not speak. It seemed as if the very spirit of silence had sealed up the lips of every soul in the room.

At length day did break, and I was I startled by a loud neigh from my own horse. I had left him in the yard, as It have mentioned, and I could have sworn as to his well-known voice; but the utterance of that neigh betokened a strange presence of his own species, and snatching up the revolver I had laid on the I sofa, I hastily left the room and went to see what it was.

Reaching the back door, and looking a out, I saw my own horse standing at the door of the stable, where he had doubtless been making himself at home; but his ears were pricked up, and his full eyes were fixed on an object that quickly drew my attention from the faithful animal.

Entering into the yard by the wide gate that was used as a cart entrance was a horse, who, evidently at his own free will, carried upon his back the most pitiable object, and yet my l heart bounded at the sight of, for some premonition of the truth made itself felt by me at once. It was a man who sat, or rather lay, on the animal's back, for he lay forward in the saddle, and held on with his arms sound the animal's neck. Every movement of the horse, gentle as his noble instinct made it, swayed the helpless body on his back, and down the shoulder of the animal was dripping a red stream, broad, and well defined on his coat, which happened to be gray.

I ran forward at once to support the poor wretch who in another few moments, must have fallen from his position from sheer weakness, and as I did so I shouted loudly for Jim, who made his appearance and came to my assistance with very considerable hesitation. However, he helped me to carry the man into the stable, where we laid him on a heap of hay in a corner, and then I proceeded to search for his wounds, having despatched the lad for the brandy bottle to the house. The wretch had three bullets either in or through him. One had passed through the fleshy part of his neck ; another appeared to be buried in his shoulder, while a third had smashed the fingers of his left hand in a most pitiable manner.

By the Jim returned, the terrified servant women made their appearance from their room in the attic, and I succeeded in procuring some linen to bind up his wounds. A glass of brandy much revived him, and he was able to reply to my questions. As for the poor horse, who had served him so well at need, he had found his way into the stable, and was quietly munching the hay from a race in one of the stalls.

"Yes, I'm one of 'em," the stranger said, and a villainous-looking wretch he was, in spite of his weakness and pallor; "and John Conway put these bullets into me! He left me for deal in the bush; but if I *had* been dead, I'd have got up to be revenged on him for this job!"

"Tell me about it as quietly as you can," I said, "and don't excite yourself. But before you say another word, tell me if Pyne, the young trooper, my mate, is he dead?"

"Not he, there's not a hair turned on him yet, but he wouldn't hold his tongue wanting to give you warning; so they gagged him and took him off to the cave, Oh, we didn't want no traps; it was the girl we came for, and the cash."

"And you got the girl?"

"Yes, Conway's got her safe enough! But he wouldn't wait for us to get the swag; and when I swore I'd go back again and get it on my own hook, he turned round and put the bullets in me. I thought I was done for as I fell an the grass, but after a bit I managed to crawl into the saddle. Oh, I'll pay him for it!"

There is no use in giving you this wretch's story, word by word, as I can explain it myself with far less circumlocution. According to his statement which was afterwards found correct on the whole, Conway had organised a party to assist him in his revenge, while still serving his time on the roads. All he claimed for his share was the girl, for whom the informer swore he had vowed a terrible fate, and his assistants were to have all the plunder, of which they were informed there was plenty at Coondarra. One of the villains had been an old mate of Black Bob's who had been communicated with, but not placed

much dependence on, from his evident disinclination to harm an employer who had treated hint kindly. At this stage of the wounded man's statement came its greatest interest for me.

"I was put on to watch Black Bob," he continued, "and was not a hundred yards away when he gave you information at the camp. I watched you off, and then coolly got into the station and found your note to your mate on the table. nothing was easier after that than to nab him as he came home, and it was with a revolver at his ear that we made him write you that note which I threw in the window to you. If he hadn't tried to give you warning over the creek that time last night, we shouldn't ha' taken him with us, but he was near getting— scragged then."

By the time the man had, with the assistance of the brandy, got to this point of his relation, Mr Rath, looking ill indeed, but much recovered, joined us.

"And now," I said, "for your information, "and I'm off to help out your revenge at once."

"Mind I'm Queen's evidence," he cried, trying to sit up. "I'll live to see him hanged yet! You'll find Conway not a mile from this spot. We'd a fine plant there. Do you know a gully that runs right through Coondarra range, where a bit of creek creeps out and runs into this here creek?"

"Of course I do," I said, "but that's not a creek— it's a spring, that rises under the range. Pyne and I have drank at it twenty times on our way to Spring Flat."

"Oh, much you know about it!" the man said. "It runs right through the range, I say, and it's our entrance into one of the finest plants in the colony. But take your time, mate, for my pals won't stir out of it this day ; they've got plenty of grub and grog in the cave, and Conway's girl, and they're as drunk as blazes by this time."

My future proceedings will, however, explain the remainder of the wounded informer's directions, and in half an hour I had mounted my horse and was on my way to discover the cave where John Conway had taken up. his quarters, and from whence I hoped to rescue Pyne and Rath's daughter.

I own that I was far more anxious about my young mate than about the girl, although it may be heartless to say so; still, I shuddered when I thought of the fate she was most likely to meet at the hands of such inhuman monsters.

The hope of rescuing his daughter almost cured Mr. Rath; and, after hastily swallowing some breakfast, we parted in front of the homestead— he to organise a party of friends to join me at an indicated spot, and I to make myself acquainted with the convicts' hiding-place with as much secrecy as I could; so that once in force, we might lose no time in attacking them from the best

point. The informer almost fainted with his exertions to give me unmistakable instructions as to my best means of proceeding, so anxious was he to be revenged on the leader who had repaid his assistance with an attempt at his life.

And so I started. Such a lovely morning it was, with the dew glittering upon every blade of grass so heavily, that my horse's hoofs left traces behind as though they had fallen upon fine snow, and hanging upon every leaf and branch in such abundance, that showers fell upon my head as the chirping green parrots hopped from spray to spray. Strange to know that over this very sward where the dew now glittered in the pure morning sun's rays, and under those fresh green branches, full of birds' sweet twittering, had but a few hours before passed the robber and the murderer, with the spoil of innocence and blood of the victim on his red hands.

A very short space of time brought me to the entrance of the gully in question, and there I dismounted and carefully bestowed my horse behind a thick clump of trees and rocks. Cautiously then I proceeded to the spot from whence the stream indicated by the informer issued, and which, even as I neared it, I could yet scarcely believe to have travelled half a mile before it crept through the rocks and bushes on the face of the broken range. But had I wanted confirmation of the wretch's story even more than I did, it would have met me in an object that, as I watched the water trickle down the stones, slowly glided under my eyes.

That object was a fresh cork, with Hennessy's brand on it, and I thought I was dreaming when I saw it emerge, in a little eddy, from around the corner of a boulder, over which hung heavy pendant strays of a glossy-leaved shrub. I thought I was dreaming I say, but when I captured the tell-tale cork, and smelt, even after its bath, the strong odour of spirits upon it, I felt that I was wide awake, and that Pyne would soon be free.

"They are drinking, as the fellow said," I thought, " and thank heaven, their capture will be easy;" and then I cautiously pushed aside the bush, and stepped boldly behind it into the stream.

For some little distance the way was confined and blocked up with fallen rocks and rich growth of underwood that flourished wildly in the half light that penetrated the confined passage; but after a bit I came to a more open spot, which had been carefully described to me by my informer, and also following his instructions, I paused and listened. And very easily indeed I heard the sounds for which I listened, for proceeding apparently from the very bowels of the range on my left land, I heard such a row as men will make who drink until they are lower than brutes, and are naturally the vilest and most depraved. Snatches of song, wild oaths and shouts, and, oh my God, such woman's

screams at last, that my brain whirled. and I had to think of my poor lad Pyne, or I should have been mad enough to have dashed in among them single-handed, to my own certain destruction.

However, I remembered that Mr. Rath would lose no time in collecting his men and that they would be awaiting me at the appointed spot before I had made myself sufficiently acquainted with the approaches of the cave; and so I aroused myself, and followed the course of the stream until I reached a peculiar rock which he had mentioned, and there I turned to the left and found myself only separated from the mouth of the cave by a cluster of thick bushes. Under these I cautiously crept, the noise inside, with the exception of the woman's screams, which had ceased, continuing and found myself in a position which, had it been constructed for the very purpose of espionage, could not have been more adapted to my purpose.

It was before the mouth of the cave, I have said, but I do not think the word mouth descriptive of the entrance; which was a lofty arch-like-opening, partially filled with broken rocks and water-worn boulders, that had evidently been dislodged by time from the heights above. My loophole of observation was one of the interstices between a rock and the sheltering bushes, and through it I had a full view of the interior of the cave.

It was tolerably spacious, and very lofty, and was littered with broken and empty bottles, saddles, and the scattered remains of several riotous meals. One man lay in a stupid sleep of intoxication. Another sat upon the ground supporting his back against the side of the cave; he had a bottle and a pannikin between his legs, the latter grasped in his hand; and he was shouting at the top of his voice a beastly, obscene song. From the man's scarlet visage and unsteady movements, it was evident that he would soon be in the same condition as his mate.

But these wretched objects attracted but little of my notice, they were but the subordinate figures of a horrible picture. At the opposite side of the cave, leaned against the wall, a tall, dark-complexioned young man, with the devil's brand under his lowering brow, if ever a man carried it. His face was flushed; his attire disordered; and he was gazing on an object at his feet with such a sneer around his lips as only a fiend could wear; that the object was the wretched girl, Rath, and for one moment I forgot Pyne while noting the misery and despair of her attitude.

She was on the ground, and had turned partially over on her face, will, hier arms clasped aroud her head and entangled amid her long hair, that fell disordered around on the floor. Her dress was torn into shreds, and the arms were partially exposed, with which she tried to hide herself in the sand of the floor as it were, were covered with blood and bruises. She did not utter a

sound, and I might have feared or hoped that she was dead, but for the occasional convulsive movement of her chest against the ground, that surged up every portion of her frame. God, how I longed to revenge her.

But where was Pyne? Nearer than I thought. When I was convinced that he was not in the cave, and dreaded the very worst, a heavy sigh almost close to me drew my attention to the rock, at the side of which was my opening.

There I discovered in the shadow something like portions of a recumbent figure which was stretched against the very rock I speak of, only, of course, on the inside. My heart leaped with joy as I recognised the fair curls of my mate lying within a foot of my eye; and I determined to communicate with him at any hazard a before I left to bring the avengers into a this den of infamy.

"Oh, come!", cried the young devil, in whom I had recognised the convicted felon John Conway. "Oh, come!" he cried, just as I made this discovery. "Don't be hiding your face there all day. You ought to be d—d glad to have three such fine chaps waiting on you! Come, turn up!"

And the wretch gave the unfortunate woman a kick which still further disarranged the tatters around her limbs.

But I did not listen or look. I took the chance to whisper to Pyne.

"Pyne?" I said, "don't stir. Its me Sinclair. Cheer up, you'll be free in half an hour. Are you all right ?"

"Bruised and weak that's all."

"Thank heaven."

"Oh, Mark I" ' What !"

" That wretched girl. Oh, to live and see such things !"

"Hush ! it is all over," and after a whispered conversation, I stole out once more, and once free from the vicinity of the cave, dashed quickly through the stream, and into the gully.

Five minutes more brought me to the spot where I had left my horse, and there silent as the grave, I found Mr. Rath and ten men each standing by his horse's head, and fully armed.

"Is it all right?" cried Rath. "I was lucky in getting all these friends at Bedson's, and they will help us to the last drop of blood. Oh, tell me of my girl!"

Alas! I could not tell him no better news than that she was alive; but it was satisfactory to be able to say that we should have no trouble in arresting the villains.

"In fact, we have only Conway to contend with," 1 said. " I beg of you, for mercy sake, not to let him escape. As for me, I shall leave the wretch to you, and get my poor mate out of harm. You, sir, I would advise to select the friends you may choose to carry your daughter from the cave."

A few words arranged it all, though several of the men who had volunteered to assist Rath expressed their disappointment at missing a brush with the wretches.

"I should just like to have shot Conway down like a bullock," said one huge fellow in a stockrider's dress. "It would have been better than a hunt to have seen him kicking the last breath out of him."

"Let him kick it out at the drop," I said, and my sentiments appeared to coincide with the most of my followers.

Of course, ten men required to be more cautions in approaching the cave than one; but we did it in single file, and at last mustered within twelve yards of the entrance of the cave. There was not a sound within, save the clinking of a pannikin and a bottle, and I concluded that Conway was refreshing himself with another nobler, and his mate had at last fallen asleep.

"Now for it !" I whispered. "I'll lead; but mind, I'll leave him to you after the first surprise."

"For heaven's sake, let me in first!" urged the big stockrider to whom I have alluded. "I'd give a month's pay to get the first grip of that fellow!"

"But would you bargain for the first shot from his revolver?"

"I'll risk it."

"All right, onward!"

A rush, a crash through the bushes, shouts and cries and oaths and blasphemy; shots reverberating in the cave and out on the range, and a terrible struggle between our stockrider and the desperate convict, Conway.

All this while, I was cutting the ropes with which they had tied my poor mate, and as I carried him out in my arms and laid him near the stream, and then I rushed hack to find the struggle over, and the three men lying, bound with their own bridles and tether ropes, on the floor of the cave. Anne Rath was lying out on the grass, where one of the men had assisted her father to carry her, but it was only too evident that her last moments were approaching.

Conway was behaving most fearfully; words that sounded horribly even to my accustomed ear. Even our threat of gagging him only served to increase the wretch's determination; and his one great triumph, was the condition to which he had reduced the proud girl who had consigned him to a gaol.

All the details of the indignities she had endured at the hands of himself and his drunken mates, were detailed in the spirit of a demon, until a length we were obliged in real earnest to fulfil our threat of gagging him. A mournful procession it was to Coondarra after that scene in the cave. We carried our prisoners bound, and thrown like dogs on horses volunteered for the purpose, to Tooma, where only was a safe lock-up in which to dispose of them; but a

few of the neighbours accompanied poor Rath and his dying daughter to the station, and the girl I never saw again.

She died before the trial of the convicts took place. The informer lived long enough to give evidence against his mates; but nature eventually succumbed to his severe wounds. Conway was hung, hardened to the last; but his wretched companions escaped with imprisonment for life.

It is the portrait of this cold-blooded young criminal that is before me in my album as I write; yet it is a fine intelligent face, with a frank, noble look about it, that God only knows, but he might have carried to the grave, had Fate placed his young life under more propitious circumstances.

18: The Butler's Revenge

Anonymous

Queensland Times, 17 Aug 1895

WE were lolling in a couple of easy chairs on the veranda one evening after dinner, Stansfield and I, when my friend sent the glowing stump of his cheroot pirouetting down the steps, and, turning in his chair, said abruptly:

"Do you know, Dick, a man was shot once just were you were sitting?

Naturally I was startled, and instead of replying to Stansfield's remark glanced uneasily down the long, ghostly veranda, of which the outer edge lay in bright moonlight, while the inner portion was wrapped in the deep shadow of the partly drawn bamboo jalousies.

''I know the feeling," said Stansfield, noting my uneasiness. "I never sit here of an evening without getting a creepy sensation all over me. The servants say the. old bungalow is haunted, and I shouldn't wonder if they are right. Anyhow, if it isn't ought to be; for the story connected with it an uncanny one altogether. See the hole in the jalousie there on the right?"

"Did you mean the oblong slit just above the balustrade? 'Pon my word, against the moonlight it looks for all the world like a malignant eye!"

"So it is," said Stansfield, with a slight shudder. "It was through that hole Judge Robertson, my predecessor, was shot."

"Ah! I've heard there was a strange story connected with his death, but I know none of the particulars. Suppose you light another weed and talk me out of this creepy fit."

"Talk you into a worse one, more like," retorted Stansfield, striking a fusee. "I wager you never heard a weirder story, but you shall have the facts and then judge for yourself."

With that he settled himself in the chair, and after puffing reflectively at his cheroot for some seconds went on to tell the story of the shot through the jalousies.

ROBERTSON, you must know, was an Eton boy. We were chums in the old days and that is how I know of a peculiar tradition that is said to have been in his family for centuries. It seems that for hundreds of years no Robertson has ever died without having a distinct premonition of his approaching end, and, what is more remarkable still, this warning always comes in the form of an odour— an earthly smell—the smell of a new-dug grave.

Well, about a week before his death, when he was on his way to take up his appointment here in fact, Robertson passed through Malariabad, where I

was at that time stationed as collector, and of course I put him up for the night After dinner we were sitting smoking just as you and I are now, when presently he says

" 'Stansfield,' says he, 'there's a devilish queer smell about. Been having any digging done on the premises?'

" 'No,' said I, 'I haven't and for the life of me I can't smell anything except these Dindiguls we're smoking."

" 'Perhaps that's what it is,' he said doubtfully.

"Just as we were making a move for bed, however, he suddenly gripped my hand and 'Stansfield,' says he hoarsely, 'for God's sake tell me that your people have been digging somewhere near, or that there's been a shower. I can't get that earthy smell out of my nostrils. It's like standing over a new-made grave.'

"Well all of a sudden it flashed upon in what the poor fellow was driving at, and, just to reassure him, I said I thought there must have been a shower somewhere to windward, and probably it was that he smelled.

"Just one week later to a day I was at work in my office one morning, when a peon brought in a telegram. Dick, that telegram brought me the news that Robertson had been shot dead by his own butler at eight o'clock the evening before!"

"By his own butler!" I exclaimed, horrified, for while Stansfield was relating this tragic tale, I had heard the voice of his butler giving orders to the table boys in the dining-room at our backs.

"Yes, his own butler," resumed Stansfield, "and on the very spot where you sit. Indeed," consulting his watch, "it happened just at this time for it's now eight o'clock to the minute."

"But," I cried, "why his butler? for Heaven' s sake explain."

"I will," continued Stansfield, "but first I must hark back a bit and tell you that the telegram ordered me at once to proceed to the station as Robertson's' successor: well, I did so and almost my first duty as a judge was to try the poor fellow's murderer."

"The butler?"

"The butler: and that brings me to the explanation. Robertson, it appears, had had a case before him in which a native was charged with maltreating his wife in such a brutal manner as to cause her death. Robertson did what almost any other English judge would have done under the circumstances— gave the scamp his deserts and sentenced him to death.

"Now this occurred only a few hours before he was murdered y in passing sentence of death upon the brutal native he virtually passed sentence upon himself. Robertson had in his service, at the time, a butler who was related to the man he had just condemned. Whether he was aware of the relationship

existing between the two I don't know, but I am inclined to think not. As a matter of fact, when Robertson sat down to dinner that night after sentencing the native to death, he was waited upon by the convict's own brother.

"You observed a rifle on the dining-room wall, I have no doubt, just opposite your place at table. It was from that rifle the fatal shot was fired. Not while Robertson was at dinner, though. The butler bided his time until his master had seated himself on the veranda, taken his coffee and smoked his cheroot. Then, when these had began to make him drowsy, the fellow took the rifle from the wall— it was always kept loaded— and crept through the bedroom to the far end of the veranda, where, as you see, the shadow lies so deep.

"Sitting as we are now, you observe that the steps between the far end of the veranda and the jalousie with the hole in it are concealed by a row of pillars; and you will readily understand how a barefooted native might creep along those stems under cover of the pillars and apply his eye to the hole without being either seen or heard. Well that is just what the butler did. Only he did something more.

"After applying his eye to the hole he noiselessly inserted the muzzle of the rifle in the aperture, took deliberate aim at his master's heart, and fired. Poor Robertson! He never knew what hurt him."

Stanfield ceased speaking and a painful silence fell upon us both. So awfully real was my conception of the whole evening and the very hour that I spoke, and so broke the spell.

"Hadn't Robertson a wife?"

"He had, and speaking of her reminds me that my story is unfinished. About a year before her husband's death Mrs. R. went home to England for her health; and when I last saw Robertson alive— the night he had that strange premonition— he was daily expecting her back. Well, it is a singular coincidence that the steamer she was a passenger on entered Bombay harbour on the very evening and at the very hour when Robertson was shot.

"Mrs. R had gathered all her traps together, intending to disembark that night, and as soon as she heard the anchor drop she left her cabin to go on deck. Just as she reached the foot of the companion stairs she saw that the hour was exactly eight o'clock. At the same moment an indescribable terror seized her: she looked up quickly, and there, on the steps above her, stood her husband.

"She sprang up the steps to meet him, but he suddenly and mysteriously disappeared. At the top of the steps she ran against the purser.

" 'There as no hurry, madam,' said he, 'the tender's not alongside yet.'

" 'But my husband?' cried Mrs. R. 'I saw him here just now. How did he come aboard?'

" 'Madam,' replied the purser, 'must be mistaken; not a living soul had boarded the ship to-night.'

"And he was right, for if Mrs R. saw anything, as she declared she did, it must have been the spirit of her dying husband."

"Let us go in," said I, rising hastily. "This night air has given me a chill".

19: Dennis Starpool's Windfall

C. J. Dennis

1876-1938

Bullfinch Budget (WA) 31 Dec 1910

Clarence Michael James Stanislaus Dennis

Australian poet, best known for the verse-novel The Song of a Sentimental Bloke. *By odd coincidence, the newspaper I found this story in was that of the small West Australian mining town I grew up in, albeit I came along 40 years later.—T Walker*

I HAD always had a sneaking regard for Dennis Starpool, ne'er-do-well and waster as he was generally considered by the respectable denizens of the provincial town in which we both lived. There was really nothing bad about Dennis except his impecuniosity, and for that I could forgive him, having several years ago been guilty of the same sin myself, in their eyes to be hard up was to be disreputable, and Dennis Starpool found scant favor with them accordingly. If you had challenged any of these good people to his, or her, face, not one of them, probably, would have admitted his conforming to the pecuniary standard of social values. In Snobchester we don't give ourselves away like that, even to our own consciences, but there the standard is, all the same; and the fact was made tolerably evident In the case of Dennis Starpool.

When he first came among us, a seemingly prosperous young man, he had been generally taken up. The elect of the place pronounced him quite the sort of person to know; and, though the said elect were not by any means infallible judges, for once in a way their verdict was in accordance with the evidence. Everybody called on him. All the tradesmen were anxious to serve him. Other mercantile persons, in the shape of mothers with daughters to dispose of, betrayed a conspicuous eagerness to plant their wares upon him.

Chief among these matrons was Mrs. Pigspoke, wife of a wealthy retired draper and mother of Selina Pigspoke, the official belle of Snobchester. I say "official," because Selina's claims to pre-eminence in beauty were rather *de jure* than *de facto*. As the only daughter of the uncrowned social monarch of the town, her charms were accepted as an Article of Faith that it would have been blasphemous to dispute. Princesses, you know, are always beautiful. It is at once the natural consequence of their birth and the accepted creed of all well-disposed persons in regard to them. So Selina Pigspoke, the reigning princess of the locality, was *ipso facto* its reigning beauty.

The Pigspokes, father, mother, and daughter, began by being very civil to Dennis Starpool. They asked him there good deal, and made quite a lion or him. Indeed, everybody was momentarily expecting to hear an interesting matrimonial announcement, when one day Dennis's name appeared in a local newspaper as defendant on a judgment summons in the County Court. This of course, altered the situation considerably. From that moment Starpool stood revealed in his true colors as a disreputable. The front door of The Cedars (Pigspoke's suburban mansion), as well the front doors of all other self-respecting residences, were closed against him. The local shopkeepers, also, at once became uncivil and disobliging. The manager of the local bank, where Dennis kept his small account, turned back his cheque for £3/10/- because there was only £2/15/9d to his credit when it was presented. In short, he found himself, at one fell stroke, cast outside both the social and commercial pale of Snobchester.

For my own part, however, I still remained friendly with Starpool,. partly because I have always had a fellow-feeling for lame dogs, having once been a lame dog myself, and partly also because he was an amusing and entertaining companion, as well as a really good hearted chap. It was therefore with a genuine sense of pleasure that I learned the news of Dennis's windfall. A handsome windfall it was, too— nothing less, indeed, than a legacy of £30,000, bequeathed to him by his rich uncle, Andrew Starpool, of Glasgow, whose whole estate was sworn at upwards of £200,000.

Dennis did not tell me this himself. He was always secretive about his private affairs. I was first made aware of it by reading the brief notice of old Andrew's will that appeared in my daily paper. I took the earliest opportunity of congratulating him.

"Dash it all! How the deuce did you know anything about it?" he ejaculated, with a certain air of vexation. "I have carefully refrained from mentioning it to a soul."

"I saw the report of your uncle's will in this morning's *Mail*," I explained.

"Confound it," he muttered, throwing away his half-smoked cigarette, with a gesture of annoyance. "Why the deuce can't these papers leave one's private affairs alone? What business is it of theirs whether my uncle has left me money or not, I should like to know?"

"But why should you object?" was my surprised rejoinder. "There's nothing to be ashamed of in having come into £30,000—"

"No. Nothing to be ashamed of, of course," he interposed. "But— well, you see what it means. I shall have to go through the whole of the beastly thing again."

"What beastly thing?"

"Oh, you know. The Pigspoke thing and all the rest of it. All these Snobchester rotters making up to me again, when I thought I thought I had done with the woman— and thankful for it to," he added, with some bitterness.

"Ah, I see," I replied, beginning to get an inkling of his meaning.

"I have a little of self-respect about me," he continued, "and I don't want to be courted and fawned on by those meagre brutes who chucked me when they thought I was hard up."

I replied that I quite understood his feelings, and that, in the circumstances, they were only natural.

"However," he went on, brightening up a little, "none of 'em may have read that announcement in the *Mail* after all, or, if they have, they may not have connected it with me. I am not the only Dennis Starpool in the world, I dare say."

"I shouldn't fancy you have many namesakes," I rejoined, smiling at the idea. "Besides, you may be sure it will be in several of the other papers as well. Someone who knows is bound to spot it."

"I hope they won't, anyhow," he answered. "And look here, Carruthers, don't you go talking about it to anybody, will you, as a favor to me?"

"Certainly I won't, since you had rather not," I promised. "Though I fear that my silence won't make much odds one way or the other."

Before I went to bed that night I had proof that my view of the position was correct. Dining out the same evening, I happened to meet Pigspoke. When the ladies had retired he came and sat next to me in the friendliest manner possible.

"By the way," he remarked casually, after a few desultory observations on the Budget, "seen our friend Starpool lately? Can't think what he's been doing with himself, keeping out of the way of all his friends."

Then I knew that Ephraim Pigspoke had seen the account of Andrew Starpool's will in that morning's papers.

A few evenings later I looked up Starpool again at his diggings. He made me cordially welcome, as he always did, and having provided me with cigarettes and whisky, proceeded to talk.

"See those?" he inquired, waving his hand in the direction of the pier glass.

I looked and saw a liberal assortment of cards and notes stuck all round the frame.

"Invitations." he remarked with a smile. "Twenty-three of them. It is astonishing how popular I have become all of a sudden."

Then he took a little morocco-leather case from his pocket and handed it to me.

"Open it," he said.

I did so. It contained a gipsy ring, all set with brilliants and sapphires.

"Where did you get this?" I asked.

"From Mullington's," he answered, naming our leading local jeweller. "The fellow seems to have made up his mind that I shall want an engagement ring for Selina Pigspoke before I am much older; so he came round here with an assortment of them, and was so insistent that I had to take this to get rid of him. The price of the thing is fifty guineas. I told him he would have to wait for his money, but he appeared rather to like that than otherwise. Yet only a fortnight ago he wouldn't hand back a watch he was cleaning for me until I paid him the 3/6 due for the operation. It Is really a wonderful metamorphosis."

He paused a moment to light a fresh cigarette. Then he inquired with the same grim smile:

"How do you like this suit I'm wearing— eh?"

"Rather neat," I answered.

"It is polite of you to say so." he returned. "Don't think much of the cut myself. But I had to have it built. Wreford" (naming the leading tailor of the town) "positively insisted upon it. In fact, he wouldn't let me off under a couple of lounge suits, a frock coat and vest, and a new lot of dress clothes. Yet less than three weeks ago he was threatening me with a county court summons for a little matter of twenty-five bob. By the way, do you like champagne?"

"Very much, when I can get it."

"Then you must come round one evening and sample mine. I've just had my cellar replenished by that oily rascal Bayley, the wine merchant. He was here the other morning touting for an order and simply wouldn't go until I had reluctantly consented to his sending me in four dozen of Bollinger. He, too, has undergone a strange metamorphosis. Up to a week ago, he wouldn't trust me with a bottle of Bass. And there's another example of the kind even more striking. You know Stanford?"

"The manager of Pluckey's Bank?"

He nodded.

"Not long ago," he proceeded, "as I think I may have told you. he turned back my cheque because it exceeded the assets to my credit by 15/9d. Subsequently he insisted on the account being closed. Well, the day before yesterday, he was around here, as civil as you please, inviting me to re-open it. I told him I couldn't, as at the present moment I hadn't any funds to pay in. But he waived the objection aside as though it wasn't worth considering, and absolutely insisted In placing £1,000 on loan, to my credit. In the end I was compelled to accept his offer in sheer self-defence."

What further revolutions of the kind he might have had in store for me, I cannot say, for at that moment Pigspoke was announced.

The worthy man's smile was one of the most effusive I have ever beheld. His manner was cordiality itself. He seemed, as it were, to ooze blandness from every pore. At me. however, he hardly looked. His whole attention was concentrated on Starpool.

"I've just come round, my dear fellow," he exclaimed, "to carry you off for a game of bridge. We want a fourth, and Selina is dying for a rubber."

Dennis began to make excuses. but Pig-spoke simply wouldn't listen to him. In the end, my friend had to succumb. He winked at me expressively us he took his departure, with Pigspoke's arm affectionately linked through his own.

Nothing worthy of recording happened for the next month or so. But one evening somewhere about the end of that period Dennis Starpool looked me up.

"Engaged for next Friday night?" he inquired.

I replied in the negative.

"That's all right, then," he said. "The fact is, I've been asked to stand for the Town Council, and some of my supporters, of all classes, are giving a little reception in my honor at the Assembly Rooms, and I want you to come and help and support me."

"With pleasure." I replied.

"The company will be a bit mixed," he exclaimed. "Bui you've too much sense to mind that. I know Bayley the wine merchant, and Mullington, the Jeweller, and Wreford the tailor, as well as one or two other shopkeepers, will be there. But you needn't talk to them unless you like. There'll be Pigspoke for you to hob-nob with.

"Pigspoke," I ejaculated. "Well, If he doesn't mind meeting your shopkeeping friends, I'm sure I needn't."

"Oh! He doesn't mind a bit. At least, he says he doesn't," replied Dennis. "Well, good-bye, old man. Don't forget Friday."

ON the day appointed I duly attended the reception at the Assembly Rooms. It happened that I had been detained overtime at the office and so I was rather late in arriving; in fact, when I got there I found the best of the company already assembled. Dennis, who was engaged in conversation with a worthy butcher of the town, desisted for a moment to greet me.

"So glad you've come," he said, with a cordial handgrip. "I was afraid you weren't going to turn up. Order yourself something to drink, won't you? and then find a seat. We shall be getting to the speechifying in it few minutes."

I deposited myself on the nearest vacant chair, which happened to be next to Pigspoke, and, having exchanged greetings with that individual, looked around me.

"Rather scratch pack— eh?" he whispered to me behind his fat hand. I assented with a nod. The statement was one that disputatiousness itself could not have contested.

At this moment the master of the ceremonies— an ex-mayor and a well-known local grocer— stood up, and proceeded to address the company. He didn't propose (he said) to trouble them with a long speech. They had met rather for conviviality than for speech-making. So he would content himself by proposing the health of the guest of the evening— their highly esteemed and popular fellow townsman and future town councillor, Mr Dennis Starpool. The toast was drunk with enthusiasm.

Then Dennis got up to return thanks.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it affords me peculiar gratification to be received by you with so much friendliness, and to know that I have regained that place in your esteem which I feared at one time that I had forfeited for ever." (Loud cries of "No, no!" from everybody, and loudest of all from Pigspoke.)

"In view of those convincing marks of your favor and affection, gentlemen, I am able with a lighter heart to unbosom myself to you of little secret that has been troubling me for some time. I don't know whether any of you happened to see an announcement in the papers to the effect that I had come into a handsome legacy under Mr. Andrew Starpool's will. For the benefit of those of you who may have seen it, I wish to say that the announcement was the silly practical joke of a facetious journalistic friend of mine. Gentlemen, Andrew Starpool is a myth; so is his will; ii my legacy. But that fact doesn't trouble me in the very least. Rich in your esteem and affection I want no other wealth. Blessed with such treasure I have an endowment more than equal to that of Rockefeller or Rothschild. Gentlemen, once more I thank you for the cordial way in which you have drunk my health."

He resumed his seat amid dead silence. Not the ghost of a hand-clap or a cheer was anywhere to be heard. Every man in the room sat stonily solemn; every face appeared suddenly to have grown inches longer. Longest of all, perhaps, was Pigspoke's; but the faces of Mullington, the Jeweller; Wreford, the tailor; Bayley, the wine merchant; and Stanford, the bank manager, ran it very close. It did not, of course, escape Dennis, and he rose once more to his feet, all smiles and urbanity.

"Gentlemen," he said, "some of you appear to be looking rather unhappy. There is really no occasion. If those of you who have pressed goods upon me will send round to my rooms for them to-morrow, they shall be returned. I may also add, Mr. Stanford, that I have made due provision to repay that loan or £1,000 with which you insisted on accommodating me."

It was astonishing how quickly after that the assembly melted away, and how many of the worthy townsmen, in the hurry of their departure, forgot to wish Dennis good-night. Pigspoke, for the sake of appearances, remained till last.

"Ha, ha!" he cackled, with a transparent affection of amusement. "You have given those time-serving bounders a very neat lesson, my dear Starpool."

"I hope so," said Dennis blandly. "It was my intention to prove what worms these Snobchester rotters could be if they gave their minds to it. And I think I have proved it pretty effectually. By the way, Mr. Pigspoke, in the somewhat improbable event of my calling at the Cedars, your butler needn't trouble to say 'Not at home' to me. He has only to slam the door in my face. I shall quite understand."

20: Mind Over Murder

Laurence Donovan

1885-1948

Popular Detective October 1942

Laurence Louis Donovan

1: Murder's a Chestnut

DEATH came silently to the little gray man. Murder just removed him without sound or fury. Other, nearby pedestrians in were not at the moment unduly alarmed.

The little man, dressed all in gray, fell upon the sidewalk. Two home-going office workers with bundles under their arms were the first to bend over the victim. The pair had been near the little gray man when he had dropped.

Too close. But that had escaped notice. The rustle of a paper bag being suddenly transferred from the victim's topcoat pocket to the coat of one of the "good Samaritans" also escaped attention.

"Sweet patooties!" exclaimed the delectable, red-headed cashier in the window of the corner lunchery. "Joey! You musta given one of your customers a lopsided haircut and it wore him down!"

"Little Joe" Bunt brought all of his five-feet-nothing, hundred-pounds-ditto out of the chair where he was having a rush snack off the arm.

Little Joe took a personal as well as a professional interest in his clientele. He was barging into the storm door when the delectable redhead said:

"Psst! Rules is rules! Your check's thirty cents, Joey! Pay as you go, Mr. Bunt!" Then, *sotto voce*, "I'll be waitin', and don't try standin' me up again, Joey, precious!"

"I never did—"

The crash that came then started air raid wardens for ten blocks around blowing their shrill whistles. Only a few yards from the fallen gray man, a neat, two-seater jalopy was all tangled up with the cart of a roast chestnut and pretzel man,

Under cover of this, Little Joe ducked through the lunchery door to the street, leaving the red-headed menace to her squawking. His bright, black, shoe-button eyes took in the wreckage of the chestnut cart, the front fender stripped from the attacking jalopy, and a quick-moving fellow in the midst of the jam.

It seemed for perhaps ten seconds that the man mixed up in the crash might be trying to help the chestnut vendor who showed a pair of feet sticking out from under splinters, chestnut bags and pretzels.

BUT the seemingly helpful stranger scooped up several paper bags of the vendor's chestnuts and sprang back into the coupé with the missing fender. The driver, still at the wheel, became a hit-and-run driver as the jalopy rasped away in fast second gear, leaving the chestnut vendor to his fate.

"Of all the mean thieves!" grated Little Joe. "Bat a poor guy over and wreck his business, and even steal some of his chestnuts! Hit-and-run, huh?"

Little Joe's ever-ready notebook and stub of a pencil were whipped out. He caught the license number of the departing coupé under a street light.

The more spectacular crash pulled pedestrians away from the fallen man in gray. An apparent victim of "smoke," which is alcoholic dynamite strained from canned heat, scarcely held the casual attention of hard- boiled Greenwich Villagers.

Little Joe discovered he was stand- ing beside the inert little gray man as he noted the offending hit-and- runner's car number. Thus he was the only bystander who observed at the moment that a reddish damp spot had appeared on the fallen man's overcoat between his shoulders.

"Hey!" yelled a citizen near the smashed chestnut cart, as a police whistle shrilled somewhere. "This poor mug's finished! Get the junk offa him!"

Unobserved, Little Joe went to a knee beside the undoubtedly dead man on the sidewalk. Known as the "Mad Barber" by many in Greenwich Village, Little Joe now gave forth strange words like some form of incantation.

"In the presence of emergency, the reasoning individual will dispense with all normal conventions and restrictions, and act solely upon the intuitive impulse which seems most desirable."

Little Joe had that from "Chapter VIII," entitled "Mind over Matter," jn the thick and enlightening volume entitled *Applied Criminal Psychology and*

Persuasion. This great book, reposing on a table in Little Joe's one-chair tonsorial parlor at a nearby cubbyhole corner, was his mentor and guide, his sure road to ultimate renown as a detective. And a surer means into one jam after another.

Having swiftly salved his conscience which admitted a general knowledge of the law, with oblique reasoning, Little Joe glanced furtively about, to make sure he was unobserved. His slender, artistic hands dipped expertly into the pockets of a gray overcoat and suit. That act was witnessed only by the unseeing, staring eyes of the corpse in the case.

And Little Joe's transgression against the rigid law that none but an accredited officer shall touch the victim of homicide yielded him exactly nothing but a pack of cigarettes and a book ef paper matches.

"Now who could have taken everything off him that quick?" muttered Little Joe. "Someone wanted him unidentified might have done it, but he couldn't have got at the pockets I've pried into. So he did it himself."

Little attention was being given to the fallen gray man and Little Joe. For new excitement arose when clamoring voices over by the wrecked chestnut vendor's cart were lifted indignantly.

"Lookit! He's croaked sure!"

"It's a dirty, hit-and-run murder, that's what it is!"

"Hey! That fella who stole the chestnuts musta conked him after he was down! What won't these hit-and-runners think of next to make sure of their job!"

AMID rising expletives, the realization that the chestnut vendor also was dead percolated to Little Joe's consciousness. The police whistle was coming closer. Someone had phoned the precinet station. A squad car siren wailed into the block. Balked at finding any identifying articles upon the little gray man who had without doubt been stabbed in the back, Little Joe suddenly noticed that one of the dead man's hands was tightly gripped about something.

In the final few seconds before his personal investigation might be regarded as an infraction of the statutes, Little Joe pulled open the clenched fingers of the corpse. He came to his feet with a small object in his hand.

This was a glossy brown chestnut. He thrust it into his pocket.

"Poor devil," murmured Little Joe. "Must've been hungry and swiped a chestnut off that cart as he passed. Naturally he got one that hadn't been roasted and isn't split open. By jiminee! That won't fit either, seeing this *corpus delicti* is wearing a benny he could have hocked for five bucks easy, and it isn't cold."

The continued clamor drew Little Joe to the corner. He easily wedged his small person to the forefront of the gaping peasantry of the Village. He was just in time to see and hear a talkative citizen point out:

"Hey— look! This ain't just a hit- and-run killin'! This guy has his head under the cart, and he was on the wrong side to be hit by that car! His face struck the sidewalk, but it's the back of his skull that's smacked in! It's premeditated murder, that's what it is!"

In Little Joe's book "Chapter VIII," entitled "Mind over Matter," advised:

Discreet silence under stress, especially when persons of lesser reasoning powers are divulging their trivial and random thoughts, is always advisable.

Little Joe maintained discreet silence under stress. His fingers touched the smooth, round chestnut in his pocket. Other chestnuts and many huge pretzels surrounded the corpse of the vendor.

Little Joe scrutinized the spot closely. He was surprised to notice that all of the scattered chestnuts were those that had been roasted and split open. He could not see a single chestnut that was still intact.

Murphy, who had this tour— and a tough one it was on Saturday nights — made his way through, dividing the crowd with his blue uniform and appropriate language. Little Joe remained aloof from Murphy.

He had an idea that these mere pavement pounders were envious of his knowledge of the higher forms of criminology, and he well knew by sad experience that this only earned him a pushing around from such minions of the law as were dependent upon brute strength.

Murphy was swearing some as he moved the chestnut vendor's head just enough to have a look at the face.

"An' who is the poor fella?" demanded Murphy. "An' who of you saw the blighted murderer?"

An instant and complete lack of memory developed among the bystanders. Apparently no one had seen it happen, and everyone had arrived after it was all over. Like other Manhattanites who had gained wisdom under such circumstances, the Villagers present wanted none of it. Time in court may be dead loss.

Little Joe Bunt's long occupancy of his barber shop corner had given him a wide and varied acquaintance with Village residents. Had he cared to, therefore, he could have informed Murphy of something that had caused him to think quickly of the "Cause and Effect" chapter in his book of "Applied Criminal Psychology and Persuasion."

For he had identified the ratty face of one "Tinker" Modoc, a shady character if there ever was one. And this was the first time Little Joe had known that the nefarious Tinker Modoc ever engaged in such an honest occupation as vending chestnuts and pretzels.

Lifting leathers in subway crowds or acquiring highly valuable automo- bile tires had always been much more in Tinker Modoc's line. Only Murphy of all the police who pounded beats in this vicinity would have failed to connect Tinker Modoc's face with a record. But Murphy was somewhat green on this tour.

Some observant citizen just then called out from up near the lunchery: "Say! This fella back here ain't been smoked up! He's been bumped off!"

Little Joe, the Mad Barber, had his own methods. He knew this was his cue to exit quietly in the direction of his one-chair shop.

In front of the lunchery, the persistent redhead stepped in front of Little Joe.

"Two bits and a nickel, Joey," she demanded. "And don't try givin' me the brush-off when you shut up shop tonight after work."

2: Strange Hold-Up

LITTLE JOE BUNT hoped he had not been detected by anyone as he had briefly searched the pockets of the little gray man who was a corpse on the sidewalk. Nevertheless, he took precautions. He retired to a convenient doorway where he remained until the police cars and the black wagons had come and gone, and the crowd had thinned out. It was not until half an hour later that he reached his one-chair "Tonsorial Parlor, Haircut to Fit Any Face," in a corner cubbyhole, a block from the scene of the sudden murders.

Wall chairs were occupied. Jefferson Davis Lee, all-around boy, was shining shoes. Little Joe glanced in, but turned toward a short, broad man with a queerly mottled face who was pacing up and down the sidewalk, off to one side of the shop window light.

"Waitin' long, Mr. Parks?" Little Joe asked. "I was held up by watchin' a car crash up the street."

Mr. Parks' hands were clasped be- hind his back. As he walked over to Little Joe, his shabby overcoat flapped back from worn trousers, baggy at the knees.

"Don't mind waiting, Joe," he said in a husky, whispering voice which indicated that perhaps his residence should be Arizona. "I am still looking them over. Seeing your customers, I'll bet you that half of them would kill a man for ten bucks."

Little Joe smiled, but he felt uneasy under the fixed stare of Mr. Parks' pale eyes, which seemed too big for his mottled face. Having just come from attending two murders, and having a lot of thinking to do about it, Little Joe was oppressed by the cheerless attitude of Mr. Parks.

"You've got the neighborhood wrong, Mr. Parks," said Little Joe. "Even if some of my customers appear peculiar, and dress queerly, they're just being Villagers. Most of them only murder the Muse."

Mr. Parks managed a skeptical, husky laugh.

"I'll still stay away from dark alleys while I'm pursuing my experiments that keep me down here," said Mr. Parks. "I'll drop in when the shop's empty, a little later, Joe."

Little Joe was facing Mr. Parks and barely heard the scuffling of feet behind him. A hard, heavy hand was clamped over his mouth. A fist drove into his ribs from the side and his breath went out with a whoosh.

Little Joe saw a long arm that seemed to shoot past his head, with bunched knuckles that clipped Mr. Parks on the chin. The hand over Little Joe's mouth relaxed suddenly, but just as abruptly the soft but solid thock of a sapper took him behind one ear.

Little Joe got groggily to his hands and kvees. His customers were rushing ou of the shop. Jefferson Davis Lee looked as if his ebony face had been painted with green chalk.

"Fo' the luva Pete, Mista Joe?" he wailed. "What happened?"

One of the barber shop customers was coming out with a wet towel. Instead of putting it on Little Joe's aching head, he applied it to the man lying on the sidewalk a little distance away.

Little Joe saw that Mr. Parks had been knocked out cold. The towel brought him around, and the mottled- faced man sat up blinking.

"Perhaps you can explain, Joe?" said Mr. Parks, his angry voice wheezing in his throat. "Why did you have to sock me when those two fellows grabbed you?"

"I socked you, Mr. Parks!" exclaimed Little Joe.

"Well, didn't you? All I saw was one man with a hand over your mouth, and another behind him in the darkness, and up come your fist, Joe. Possibly it was just reflex action."

"That reflex action was from someone behind me, Mr. Parks," said Little Joe. "Did you see the men's faces?"

"I didn't have time to see anything but a million colored lights," whispered Mr. Parks, rubbing his chin. "Lord, what a wallop. But I wonder why."

HE WAS running his hands into pockets. He brought out his wallet and a watch.

"No, it wasn't robbery," he said. "Looks as if they were after you, Joe, and I just got in the way."

Little Joe found everything in his pocket intact, except— one glossy brown chestnut taken off the dead little man in gray was missing.

He had to think fast though to avoid explaining. He smiled sheepishly at Mr. Parks and his other customers.

"I think I know what it is," he said. "I guess we all have blonde troubles sometimes, and at a dance the other night—"

Little Joe permitted his quickly contrived suggestion to trail off. A voice that was pitched intentionally on a high nasal and scornful tone said: "At a dance the other night? Yes, Joey, go on! That wouldn't be last Wednesday night when you stood me up to go work out in the gym, would it, precious?"

Little Joe's customers beat a hasty retreat into the barber shop. Even Mr. Parks muttered hurriedly:

"I'll drop back for my trim later, Joe." And he walked quickly away up the street.

"Well, at a dance— you take it from there?" said the redhead.

"Now wait a minute, honey," said Little Joe, rubbing his sore head. "A psychological criminologist has to think up things like that in a hurry. You see— Red-headed Della Corcoran, the little lady of the lunchery, was in no mood to see. For she had something more on her mind than her fiery hair.

"I see," she cut in, "that maybe it has something to do with a green-eyed, painted, sleazy-looking doll who dropped into the beanery just after you tried to play detective an' walk out on your supper check."

"I don't get you, sweetheart," said Little Joe truthfully. "There wasn't any dance, and there wasn't any blonde—"

"This green-eyed doll's as blond as they bleach 'em," fired back the red-head. "An' all she was wantin' to know was what time you shut up your shop tonight? So I took a minute off to drop over and see what you had on your mind, if anything?"

"I never heard of any such person. I—"

The redhead was on her way, but she shot back over her shoulder :

"And if she wants to look the same, there won't be any such person at ten o'clock when I come back! So you guess we all have blonde troubles, you tell the boys!"

Little Joe wondered if he would have to make it a wrist-watch to square this rap?

But he was wondering more now about the strange and sudden attack upon Mr. Parks and himself, all over a glossy brown chestnut that had been in a dead man's hand.

"Wish Big Jim would come along, but he won't be on duty until midnight," Little Joe was thinking, as he entered the shop.

"Big Jim" O'Grady, first-grade detective out of Headquarters, was Little Joe's friend and mentor. For years Little Joe had tried every means of getting on the Force. But five-feet-nothing and an even one hundred pounds balked him.

Nevertheless, Little Joe Bunt had become a detective all on his own, and a headache much of the time to duly appointed minions of the Man-

hattan public guard. He had read a book.

That book was the same thick volume of "*Applied Criminal Psychology and Persuasion*" from which he always quoted, and which reposed on a table in his barber shop.

ONLY Little Joe did not refer to it as a barber shop. Gilded letters announced to the world this was:

JOE BUNT'S TONSORIAL PARLOR
HAIRCUTS TO FIT ANY FACE

Little Joe's razor flew, and his shears snicked fast. It was twenty minutes before ten o'clock when the shop was cleared. He had double trouble on his mind.

Red-headed Della Corcoran would be along. And Little Joe more than imagined that "the eye" was still upon him, the same eye that had brought about that quick knock-down hold-up, merely for the theft of a brown chestnut.

"Keep your eye on the shop a few minutes, Jeff," he said to Jefferson Davis Lee, the porter. "I'm grabbing a cup of coffee."

"Mista Joe's sure a sucker for takin' it on the chin," said Jeff, as Little Joe went out.

Little Joe was cautious. He was reasonably sure he was not being tailed as he slipped past the lunchery without the redhead seeing him.

The wrecked chestnut cart, merely moved to one side, gave mute testimony to where Tinker Modoc had given up the ghost. And few persons were moving about as Little Joe kicked about in the gutter, scattering some opened roasted chestnuts which were still lying there.

He had almost given up finding what he sought, when one glossy brown unroasted chestnut was kicked out, Little Joe pocketed it in haste.

He was unlucky going back past the lunchery. The redhead never seemed to overlook a bet. She glanced out the window just in time to see Little Joe passing, coming from the wrong direction.

Little Joe hurried on. He had tried to dismiss Della Corcoran's story of a green-eyed blonde asking about him as one of her blufis. Yet he had been held up, and Mr. Parks had also been knocked out, and neither of them could identify the two men who had taken the chestnut which had been gripped in the hand of the little gray man who had been murdered on the sidewalk.

Mr. Parks was waiting as Little Joe came in. He had a bump on his chin, and Little Joe put a cold towel on it. "The usual, Mr. Parks?" said Little Joe.

"A little more than usual, Joe," said Mr. Parks, lying back in the chair. "I may not get in next week, and this new kind of haircut is the only one that seems to go with these scars of mine. That dropping it at the sides sort of hides the cuts."

"Sure does," said Little Joe.

He was thinking of a month ago when Mr. Parks had first come into his shop. At that time Mr. Parks said he had just been in an auto accident, and his face had been almost obscured by taped bandages. Some remarkable surgery evidently had been required to partly straighten a broken nose, and to prevent his mouth from hav- ing a permanent twist to one side.

The kind of a short, rounded haircut Mr. Parks had had at that time would have made the scars more prominent. So Little Joe, with his "Haircuts to Fit Any Face," had really been remedying that by reshaping the kind of a haircut that the man had been used to for years.

3: The Unknown Corpse

SOE paid off Jefferson Davis Lee and let him go. As Mr. Parks sweated under a hot towel, he turned on the radio.

He desired mightily to have a police report on the strange murders, but he was too smart to call the precinct station. Unless the radio gave forth something, Little Joe would wait for Big Jim O'Grady.

The radio was suddenly obliging. A news bulletin came through.

"Police have been unable to identify a youngish man stabbed to death in Circle Street, Greenwich Village, at about the same time a known character, Tinker Modoc, a minor criminal, apparently was slugged to death after a chestnut vending cart was wrecked by a hit-and-run driver. The man who was stabbed had no marks of identification on him except clothing labels. He was well-dressed, but it is supposed that his wallet was taken as he lay dead, before the stabbing was discovered."

There followed a detailed description of the murdered man.

"Turn that blasted thing off, Joe," Mr. Parks said irritably. "I don't want to hear any more. After what happened to me tonight, I'm moving out of this dangerous neighborhoed."

Little Joe argued some for his neighbors, but he was working fast on that hair trim. It was but five minutes to ten. The red-headed unshakable would be showing up five minutes after.

"You've just about lost all that swell sun-tan you had when you first came here, Mr. Parks," said Little Joe. "I suppose that work on your face bleached it out a lot. You're a different man."

"Sure— sure," said Mr. Parks. "Used a lot of antiseptics, and it feels as I'd been boiled."

Little Joe pulled the apron from around Mr. Parks' neck. As he did, his special customer's neck was well exposed. Little Joe said nothing of an idea that had suddenly hit him, but he asked a question.

"You mean you're leaving the neighborhood right away, Mr. Parks? If so, I'd like to know how the haircut and everything works out. I try to keep track of unusual customers. You moving uptown?"

Mr. Parks climbed stiffly out of the chair. It was exactly ten o'clock.

"I'll give you a ring, Joe," he said. "Don't know where I'll be located."

He walked behind a corner for his topcoat and hat. Little Joe heard the door open. When he turned around, there she was.

She was a green-eyed blonde. She was wearing her clothes with the same general effect of a bubble dancer doing her act. Her mouth was a red slash, and too many bits of ice flashed from her fingers and wrists as her hands moved.

She hadn't spoken when Mr. Parks came into view with his coat. Mr. Parks looked straight at the girl, then glanced at Little Joe. The girl stood there, one hand arranging golden yellow hair.

It was the first time Little Joe had seen Mr. Parks amused. Mr. Parks uttered a quick, wheezy laugh.

"Then you weren't putting on an act when you said those thugs might be the result of blonde troubles," he said, then added, "but I think you're making a mistake meeting a strip-teaser in your own neighborhood, Joe. And"— his words were slow and seemed almost menacing— "the stripper is making a bigger mistake coming here. Good-night, Joe."

LITTLE JOE saw the girl's hands clench. She was looking at Mr. Parks' bleached-out, scarred face, as if she thought she should know him, but didn't, and only resented what he had said.

"You can keep your grand advice to yourself, chum," she said venomously, in Mr. Parks' direction.

She turned to Joe as Mr. Parks shrugged his broad shoulders, and went on out.

"So you're Little Joe Bunt, the one they call the Mad Barber detective?" the girl exclaimed. "You know me, Joe?"

Little Joe's memory had picked up after Mr. Parks had mentioned strip-teaser.

"Sure, I know you, Carmelita," said Little Joe. "Or have you another name? And I'm closing, so I haven't any time."

The clock said two minutes after ten, and was about three minutes to a red-headed tornado. The yellow-haired threat undulated toward him and Little Joe moved away abruptly.

"This isn't the Red Goose Club, Carmelita, and I have no idea why I should be honored," he said.

"I'll come to the point, Joe Bunt," said Carmelita, gliding still nearer. "They tell me that you're a wizard with hair, male or female. There's a new Hollywood hairdo I like, and I've been told you designed it for a hairdresser out there. So I'm having you do my hair that way."

"I'm not in that business," said Little Joe, desperately watching his last minute before the redhead started to slip by. "Sorry, but now will you go? I'm expecting—"

"You're expecting no one, because you'll do my hair tonight," said the stripper softly. "And we're going to my apartment row, where you will find every convenience."

Little Joe had an automatic, but it was over in the table drawer. Not that he expected to have any use for it now.

"Sorry again, but—"

The little gun had a bright silver silencer which stood out against Carmelita's brilliantly red purse. She had the gun within inches of Little Joe's stomach. She put it into her purse then, but kept her hand upon it and the purse close to Little Joe's side.

"My own car's half a block up the street," she said. "Let's go. Too bad for you that you had finished with your last customer."

"Has this anything to do with—" began Little Joe.

"You are going to do my hair in my apartment, that's all!"

Little Joe shut up. He conned over a dozen passages from the chapter on "Mind over Matter." It didn't seem to have anything that might apply to mind over murder.

Little Joe saw the redhead coming along as they started up the street. He saw her stop and stare after him and the murderous stripper, and then come on, half running. Carmelita heard her and she turned.

"Here's where you have a chance to put the girl-friend in her place," said the stripper quietly. "I have my reasons for not giving a care whether I have to quiet one or both of you. So you do the talking."

"Della, honey, listen!" Little Joe tried to make it sound all right. "I've a big job that just came along. I'm going—"

"To the devil in a hand basket!" snapped Delle Corcoran. "So this is the blonde, and there was a dance! I suppose I should scratch her eyes out, but I won't! If you're down to the level of a stripper from the Red Goose! Now I remember her! Well, she's all yours, Joe Bunt! You can have her!"

Little Joe blinked. He couldn't quite figure the redhead. Then he caught the glint of her eyes, and they were looking straight at Carmelita's purse, her hand inside it, and the purse touching Little Joe's ribs.

THE redhead turned, walked stiffly away. "Keep going, Joe," said the stripper. "The big car this side of the corner. You'll drive."

Little Joe was trying to make sense of this, but he couldn't. There was something though in a taxicab and another closed car that seemed to stick in the rear-view mirror clear across town.

"Take the Hudson River Parkway north at Seventy-second," said the stripper. "Turn off Fifth Avenue and west through Central Park"

"Listen, baby," argued Little Joe. "What do you think this will get you? What do you want? Is it—"

"It might have been the chestnut, yes," interrupted Carmelita. "But not any more, not after I came into your shop. It's you, Little Joe, just you that's wanted now. Turn west at the next block and cross over to West Seventy-second Street."

Little Joe waited until they were in Central Park. The road was winding, with no traffic in sight. He thought it was about time he made his play. He speeded up, thinking that a fast brake and a quick arm would wash this up fast.

The big car came from behind, booming along at sixty or better. Little Joe couldn't make the next turn quickly enough to keep ahead or to cut it off. And the big car took the right-hand side suddenly.

The two cars ground fenders, raced side by side, and Carmelita first tried to pull the gun in her purse around. She didn't scream and Little Joe liked her a bit better for that.

Joe had no time to close either door window. It would have made but slight difference. Chopper steel never even hesitates for anything except shatter-proof glass.

Little Joe saw the black snout of the machine-gun, Rocks at one side looked better to him than the deadly muzzle, He swerved the big car, but he was too late to do anything for Carmelita.

As the front wheels of their car climbed the rocks, the blond strip- teaser was almost decapitated by chopper slugs. The wheel cracked under Little Joe's hands, but his size was in his favor.

He slid down under the wheel, with Carmelita's life blood bathing his face as more steel tore wickedly through the car. Then the murder car was gone, whirling around a curve toward West Seventy-second Street.

By one of those curious freaks of fate, the wrecked car had escaped being set afire, and its instrument lights still burned. Little Joe had the silenced automatic out of the stripper's purse. A compact and some other doodads fell out.

A package of letters and some newspaper clippings caught Little Joe's eye. He had only time enough to glance at a photograph in a clipping from a Miami, Florida, newspaper. It was enough.

Little Joe heard a car coming and judged it might be the taxicab he was sure Della Corcoran was riding in. He made a swift decision. Blood stained his clothes as he got Carmelita's body out and pulled it to one side.

He went back, took a long chance. He was running as the fuel tank exploded. The taxicab came into sight as fire rolled over the wrecked car of Carmelita, the strip-teaser.

4: Bring Back a Blonde

IT turned out as Little Joe Bunt hoped it would. The driver of the taxi in which Della was following the Mad Barber was Mike Corcoran, Della's huge, red-headed brother. Being in the approximate middle of Central Park, even the chopper explosions had gone unnoticed outside the park, for their sound had also been merged with the unmuffled roar of the big car when it had swung in alongside the blonde's car. But of course Della and her brother had heard.

Little Joe anticipated that this would be a tough spot. You can't dash up to the red-headed girl of your heart and say:

"I've got a dead blonde in a wrecked car, and we have to get her out of the park."

But that was about the way Little Joe put it. And the redhead's big brother towered over him, while for a moment or two the redhead herself said

nothing. She was still somewhat awed by the gun explosions she and her brother had been close enough to hear, and was surprised to find Little Joe alive and kicking. She just stared at him as he came racing around a bend, to flag them down.

"An' a blonde is it, Joey, me boy?" big Mike was saying, as Little Joe spoke a word or two of hasty explanation. "An' I suppose you got so mixed up with the dame that you was forgettin' the road turns here an' there?"

Carmelita's automobile was a flaming mass by now. There was no doubt but that policemen of one kind or another would shortly be arriving. Little Joe led the way toward the burning car and pointed.

"Holy saints!" Mike Corcoran said, gaping. "You're after treating your blondes rough! How come?"

"There's no time to tell about it now," said Little Joe. "Help me get her into the taxi. We have to get her out of here. And Mike, you've got to get in touch with the cops and tell them you saw a crash here, and you think two persons were burned in that car, and that there was a shoot- ihe keae

"Well, I like that!" blazed the red-headed sister. "Come on, Mike! Joey plays around with blondes, and look what it gets him. We know nothing about this."

"I see what Joey means, Sis," said Brother Mike. "Maybe he is facing a murder rap... All right, Joey, I'll take a chance."

He picked up Carmelita who was not nearly so attractive as she had been in her exotic life. With Della Corcoran still protesting and refusing to be convinced, they managed to start moving as the first of the police sirens hooted into the park.

Mike Corcoran was a wise hackie. With the woman's corpse in the rear and his sister beside him, Mike pulled a smart one. He was meeting a police car and he suddenly ran his taxi up on a bank, tipping it perilously.

The police car halted. Little Joe crouched down beside the body of the stripper. As a squad man came striding up, swearing, Mike Corcoran was outdoing him with oaths.

"The so-and-sos! Runnin' me offa the street! If I ever run onto that bunch of hoodlums, I'll make 'em think they've landed on Wake Island! The blasted killers!"

"Here, fella! What's this! Think you're out for a picnic on the park grass!"

"Picnic, is it?" snapped Mike. "You'd think it was a whole fool jamboree! See that fire back there! First them hoods turn a chopper on a man an' girl in that bus an' burn 'em down! Then they run me offa the road!"

"A man and a girl in that car?"

"Yeah, an' deader'n mackerel, even if the bus ain't turned into one of them funeral pears! There ain't much chance o' gettin' their bodies out, there ain't!"

"Okay, fella! Name an' number?"

"Mike Corcoran, Number Forty- six, seventy-nine, Copper. An' if this eab's busted—"

"Oh, Mike Corcoran," said the policeman. "Just another good Swede. Okay, Mike, be around in the morning. Where's your stand?"

"Circle Street, Greenwich Village. An' ask anybody—"

MIKE was perspiring freely as he backed the taxi into the drive- way and started out of the park.

"If you don't lay off that fishology readin', Joey, we'll all be in a hearse instead of runnin' one," grunted Mike.

Little Joe was sweating, too. Only the moisture sliding down his back was cold.

Red-headed Della was coldly, ominously silent as the taxicab worked its way back downtown. Mike Corcoran never had been a hackie to miss jumping red lights close. He stopped, even when he mistook a red neon sign for a traffic signal.

"An' what're we supposed to do with the corpse, Joey?" he said out of the corner of his mouth, as they came into Greenwich Village. "We can get thirty years for movin' a corpus delecter in a murder. What if I just take a chance and dump the body in the East River?"

"We'll find a blanket at your place, Mike, and carry the girl into my sleepin' room at the shop," suggested Little Joe.

The redhead put out a bit of sarcasm for the first time.

"This blonde's awfully dead, Joey— er— Mr. Bunt. Remember?"

Nevertheless, the mortal remains of Carmelita were reposing in the back room of Little Joe's barber shop half an hour later.

"It'll cost you ten for cleanin' the cab," said Mike Corcoran.

"Now if I can be alone," said Little Joe. "No, Mike. You wait. Delia you go on home. I'm sorry, but our date's off."

"You're calling our date off? You're calling nothing off except what this cheap chunk of ice means, You take it, Joey. I have no further use for it."

The redhead flounced out, leaving Brother Mike with Little Joe.

"I'm bettin' when you two have kids, you'll have to keep 'em in sep- arate cages," said Mike.

Little Joe was listening on the radio.

"How about calling the police precinct station?" he said to Mike. "It'll be a couple of hours before they find out there are no bodies in that wreck."

"Okay, Joey. But I ain't spillin' who I am. What should I be tellin' the law?"

In a moment, Mike, talking from a public phone booth outside, was saying:

"From the description of that burned car on the radio, I'm afraid a friend of mine, Joseph Bunt, the barber of Circle Street, Greenwich Village, was in it with Carmelita, the strip-teaser at the Red Goose Club. Is there any hope?"

When Mike came back in, Little Joe was thumbing through the thick book of *Applied Criminal Psychology and Persuasion*. Beside the book lay a smooth, glossy brown chestnut. A plug had been removed from a hole bored in one end of the chestnut.

Little Joe was looking at a candid camera snapshot between pages of the book. He was comparing the photo with two pictures in clippings from Miami newspapers.

"There ain't no hope that you an' Carmelita are alive, the cops say," announced Mike. "Now what do we play? Ma didn't bring me up to be an undertaker."

"Mike," said Little Joe, "you've seen that funny-looking Mr. Parks who has been coming here for the past month?"

"Sure, I seen him. So what?"

"I think he moved tonight, an' havin' no car, he probably called a taxi. He didn't say where he might be moving. I thought he might remember something about two boys who knocked him out and held me up tonight."

"I'll do some checkin'," said Mike. "But, Joey, before this blows up in vour face, whyn't we get rid of the corpse?"

LITTLE JOE shook his head. The radio blared out a news bulletin. "Latest information of the police is that Carmelita, a tease dancer at the famous Red Goose Club, and Joseph Bunt, better known as the Mad Barber, of Greenwich Village, are in the wreck of the burned car in Central Park. From a reliable witness, it has been stated that Carmelita and Joseph Bunt probably were victims of a machine-gun which ran their car off the driveway." Mike Corcoran was gone, checking. Little Joe had carefully turned out the light in his shop. That didn't keep a heavy foot from kicking the door open, breaking the lock.

Little Joe couldn't see the face, but he knew that bulky figure and the weight of the foot. Big Jim O'Grady, first-grade detective.

"Psst! Jim! Easy!"

"Mother mine!" exclaimed Big Jim. "Joe, that you? Why, I just heard—"

"Back this way, Jim," cut in Little Joe,

He closed the door of his sleeping room before he switched on the light. The ghastly body of Carmelita lay across the couch.

"Holy heaven, Joe! You'll get life for this! An' what is it all about? You killed the poor girl, huh, an' think you can get away with murder!"

"Jim, you've got to help," said Little Joe. "This is big. It reaches all the way from Florida to South America to New York, and—"

"Right into the little brick house in the middle of the Sing Sing yard where they've wired a chair, an' not for sound," groaned Big Jim. "Joey, I got to take you in until this is cleared up."

Little Joe had a murder to solve. Well, three murders, thus far.

"Jim," he said, "just between us, who was the man in the gray clothes who was killed down here tonight? The police haven't given out anything."

"I wouldn't be divulgin' department confidences, an' that you well know, Joe," said Big Jim righteously. "If the inspector an' the F.B.I. are wantin' to keep the name o' John Macklin one of the Feds, under cover, I would be violatin' my oath of office—"

"And I wouldn't be wanting you to, Jim," said Little Joe. "But if you'll tail me close when Mike comes back, if he's lucky, an' I don't hand you the hottest case you ever had, all wrapped up, then you can be taking me in, Jim, for killing Carmelita with an overdose of sleeping tablets."

"Killing Carmelita with—" Big Jim started to roar, but Mike Corcoran clumped into the front shop.

"The address he gave was Fordor City Apartments in the Fifties," was Mike's information. "He only had one suitcase, so the hackie who took him up there didn't get the apartment number."

"If they stumble onto the corpse, Joe, it'll mean my badge," said Big Jim O'Grady.

"They'll not stumble onto the corpse, Jim," said Little Joe suddenly. "The 'Mind over Matter' chapter, 'Chapter Eight,' in 'Applied Criminal Psychology and Persuasion,' Says the surprise of unexpected possession of some undesired object will often confuse the impressionable individual. So—"

When Little Joe finished talking, Big Jim was mopping sweat from his red face.

5: The Mad Barber

SOME lone individual in Greenwich Village may have failed to believe in Little Joe Bunt's right to the title of the "Mad Barber", but not Big Jim O'Grady, detective first-grade. He was more sure of that when he had ridden with Little Joe to the new apartment to which Mr. Parks had moved—the Fordor Apartment Hotel.

"An' I don't even dare to call out a squad or tip off the precinct, me bein' off duty," groaned Big Jim. "I can't do more than back you up, Joe, so I'll go up to this Parks' rooms with you."

"I'll go up alone," said Little Joe. "I only want to inquire if Mr. Parks has by now remembered the faces of the mugs who hit him and held me up. And I have a chestnut to give him."

Big Jim looked as if he would have preferred the hottest spot in the Malay jungles at this moment. Which might have been no hotter than the trunk he had to watch the unsuspecting hackie lug out of the taxi to be delivered to Mr. Parks. The hackie— Little Joe had managed to run down the same taxi man who had driven Mr. Parks away from Greenwich Village to his new home— protested at the weight of the trunk, but a fiver shut him up.

Little Joe went straight to the desk of the apartment hotel. The hackman, following him, was groaning under the burden of the small trunk, and a bell-hop helped him lower it to the floor. Little Joe gave the desk clerk a detailed description of Mr. Parks.

"My friend is peculiar," he explained, "and doesn't like to be swamped by all of his acquaintances as soon as he gets into town. So I wouldn't know the name he's registered under. But he left orders for this trunk to be brought from my place right away."

The clerk reached for the phone.

"And your name, sir?" he asked.

"Just say a friend from the Red Goose Club," supplied Little Joe. "And tell him the trunk with the stuff in it is on the way up by the freight elevator. And send it right along."

Little Joe Bunt had never taken a bigger gamble. If he had guessed wrong, Mr. Parks might make a break for it. But he judged Mr. Parks would wait. Mr. Parks did.

"Mr. Parks says to come right up," said the clerk, and then Little Joe knew that Mr. Parks must have at least stuck to his Greenwich Village name,

The clerk was about to add something else, but closed his mouth. If he had spoken, he might have saved Little Joe a big headache. He said only:

"It's Four-o-four, to the left of the elevator."

The fourth floor corridor seemed quiet, but Little Joe had an idea that eyes were upon him, He was alone, and he felt smaller than he actually 'was when he was in front of the solid door of Room 404,

Mr. Parks himself opened the door. He had on a dressing gown, and his hand was in one pocket. If Mr. Parks was surprised to see Little Joe, reported by radio to be burned to death, a report now in the latest newspaper editions, he never batted his pale eyes.

"Joe!" he exclaimed. "Well, I don't know how you did it, but come in. After I saw that blonde in your shop, I didn't think you'd be in circulation again tonight."

Little Joe was tense, expectant. Either he was dead wrong, or Mr. Parks was the coolest number he had ever met. But he couldn't be wrong. And he wasn't.

Mr. Parks led the way from the small foyer into a big living room. Two strangers sat upon a lounge.

Each stranger had a silenced automatic held casually upon his knee.

MR. PARKS chuckled softly, starting to turn back toward Joe.

"You see, Joe, I found out I'd made a mistake hunting a one-man barber shop a few days after I first had you go to work on me," said Mr. Parks. "I heard all about you being known as the Mad Barber. So I took precautions. Some of the boys seem to have made a mistake tonight in the park, but I'm sure they will remedy that when you leave with them."

Little Joe sighed resignedly. His face was the picture of dejection. He didn't lift his hands as Mr. Parks took an automatic from his side pocket.

"I happened to know that Carmelita didn't recognize me, Joe," said Mr. Parks. "She was hunting you up for a different reason— not to look for me, though she has done a lot of that since I decided to give her the air. You see, Joey, there was another girl— but we needn't go into that. I guess you know how it is, though.

"Carmelita was useful to me— very useful. But the best of them can be done without when they get— well, too personal, shall we call it? Or too possessive? Besides, Carmelita had a vindictive streak, you could never tell what she might do or say, and she was getting bothersome. She didn't know me with my new face, but she did not believe I was dead, and kept trying to find me, and... Well, we needn't go into that either, seeing she's out of the way now.

"And that being the case, I take it you're figuring how much what you know is worth to you. I don't deal that way. By the way, I'm interested to know how you happened to escape in Central Park."

"Luck tossed me out— or maybe it was bad luck," Little Joe said disconsolately. "Look, Mr. Parks, have I said a word to the cops or anybody about Carmelita being bumped and burned in the car?"

"How much did Carmelita spill?" Mr. Parks asked huskily.

"Well, enough to make me think I might join up with you, Mr. Parks," Little Joe said. "And she did come to my barber shop with the idea that I might know something about where you were— though the name of the man she was

looking for was not Parks. She kidnaped me, said I was to give her a hair-do at her apartment, but I guess she wanted to find out a few things.

"From what she did say, though, I got some ideas of my own. In a way, now that she's gone, and I know what she used to be doing for you, I could take her place. I know hundreds of people, and even a better way for doing what you want done than using chestnuts."

"Then what was this gag about the Red Goose and a trunk?" said Mr. Parks.

"Well, I'm puttin' myself in your hands, Mr. Parks," said Little Joe. "Just to prove myself, I have some junk cached in that trunk. And some stuff that will prove I know a slicker way than the roasted chestnut gag to get it around and sold to the right people. Only I haven't any way to get an organization like you have, Mr. Parks. Slick it is, I'm here to say, like when that chestnut vendor was about to get taken in, and got rubbed out before he could break down and talk. If you—"

Knuckles pounded on the door, and the buzzer also sounded.

"What the devil is this?" wheezed Mr. Parks. "You're not suggesting that perhaps the barber shops—"

"No, not that way, Mr. Parks," said Little Joe. "The whole system I've worked out is in the trunk."

"Open that door, Spike," wheezed Mr. Parks. "Watch your step. Ruddy, put Joe in that closet. We'll see."

TWO bell-hops deposited a trunk in the middle of the big room. In the clothes closet, Little Joe heard Mr. Parks exclaim as the bell-hops went out and the door closed.

"Possibly this crazy barber thinks he has something. Okay, let him out. We'll see what this is."

When they let Little Joe out he said:

"I have the key. I'll open the trunk for you." He stepped toward it.

"No, you don't," said Mr. Parks shoving Little Joe to one side. "We'll do the opening."

"Boss, look!" exclaimed one of the mugs. "At the bottom of the trunk!"

A red line had formed along the trunks' bottom. It had just started and was spreading to the rug.

"Keep a rod in his belly!" wheezed Mr, Parks. "If it's what I think it is, we'll have to—"

One mug pushed his rod into Little Joe's ribs. But Little Joe was watching the mug's eyes. The red fluid from the trunk was beginning to spread more rapidly.

"Gosh, Boss!" the frightened lug holding a gun on Little Joe shouted. "It'll mark the room! We have to get that trunk out!"

"Be quiet," ordered Mr. Parks. He lifted the trunk lid.

Seeing the gangster beside him with the gun in his ribs staring at the rising trunk lid, Little Joe dropped. The surprised mug tried to snap his rod down, but the back alleys had been a tough spot for the fighting education of a kid who had been known as a runt.

Little Joe's weight was behind the fist that blurred into the mug's stomach. The rod exploded, but Little Joe rolled, as there came another, but mushier blast. It came from the trunk as Mr. Parks lifted the lid. The dozen or more tear gas eggs that Little Joe had taken the precaution to pack in that trunk when he had prepared it for this moment, exploded. The very act of lifting the lid had released the bomb pins. Blinding, yellowish tear gas vapor mushroomed through the room.

It came too fast for Mr. Parks or either of his boys to dodge it. And the container of red ink which Little Joe had placed where it would do the most good had soaked tnrough the bottom of the trunk just in time to give Mr, Parks and his nice killers the wrong idea of what that trunk contained.

Undoubtedly they had expected to see the body of Carmelita, the strip-teaser.

Little Joe, rolling, had a folded gas mask from under his shirt and over his head before he either opened his eyes or breathed. He came up, as the cursing Mr. Parks and the other two boys fought their way toward the windows,

Little Joe moved quietly, having fixed the position of the room tele- phone. He made no sound whatever until he upset the phone table with a crash and sprang swiftly to one side.

A rod smashed in the blinding haze, but Little Joe was not there.

"We've got to get out!" yelled Mr. Parks, and his voice was no longer husky.

Little Joe's accurately timed fist smashed the exact spot from which the words issued and Mr. Parks went down with a thump. Little Joe was flat on the floor again as he heard the man's two henchmen collide.

HE HAD the automatic Mr. Parks had taken from his pocket. He cracked out two shots with it, shooting purposely low. One mug groaned and fell and the other one apparently took a header over a chair.

The corridor door opened and Little Joe felt the cool breeze from outside.

"Joe!" Big Jim O'Grady's voice roared. "You all right, Joe?"

Little Joe walked into Big Jim's thick arms.

It was some time later before the room could be cleared of the gas, to collect Mr. Parks and his two mugs, one with a broken leg. It was a little later then that when Little Joe Bunt did his explaining at the precinct station.

"It's all in knowing how to cut hair to fit the face," he pointed out. "But to begin at the beginning. Three or more months ago, the Federals learned that Arthur Loden, a well-known and respected chemist, probably was the head of a dope ring. But by the time they had collected some evidence, Arthur Loden was in Florida."

"And collected a beautiful sun-tan," said Big Jim O'Grady.

"He got wise the Feds were looking for him, so he checked out, saying he was going on a fishing trip south. That was the last the Feds heard of him, but they are still looking. Some word came to certain members of his gang that he had been killed in an automobile accident, but none of them knew for sure.

"When 'Mr. Parks' appeared at my shop a month ago, his face was bandaged. He said he had been badly cut in an auto wreck. There would be scars. But from the scars I saw it looked to me more as if he had recently undergone a face-changing operation. I didn't let on, though, that I had noticed that when he said he wanted his hair trimmed differently to conceal some scars near his ears.

"I did some snooping, and one of the things I learned was that a girl I knew, a girl nearly everybody in the Village knew— Carmelita, the Red Goose Club strip-teaser— had been the girl-friend of this Arthur Loden who had been killed or had taken it on the lam. I also found out that for some time Carmelita had been the tip-off to dope addicts that certain roasted chestnut vendors would sell them the stuff in whole chestnuts concealed in bags of roasted ones.

"And that was what caused the killing of John Macklin, the Fed. Carmelita had misjudged him, had believed he was an addict, and had tipped him off to buy from Tinker Modoc in Circle Street. The gang that were always on the watch, though, recognized Macklin when he showed up to buy chestnuts from Tinker— so they blasted him. It was also a good idea to rub out Tinker, who was a weak sister who might talk, and to remove all the loaded chestnuts.

"I found one in the hand of the Fed after he had been murdered, but was robbed of it. I don't know why I was not killed at the same time, unless it was thought I had just happened to find that chestnut, and didn't know what it was all about. The fact that Mr. Parks— Arthur Loden— was with me at the time, may have been coincidence. I don't know. But I do know that Parks wanted to get from under, didn't even want to be a witness, for his one idea was to go on with his racket with a new face and new name."

BIG JIM O'GRADY scratched an ear, his frown puzzled.

"But how did Parks, or Arthur Loden, plan to get away with it?" he asked.

"Simply enough," said Little Joe. "He wrote to Carmelita that he was going to South America. She was to join him when he sent for her. He had no intention of ever seeing her again, of course, for by now there was another girl.

"Naturally I didn't know that— then— but I did know, from trimming Mr. Parks' hair, that he was having more than accident scars removed from his face. He had a new face, and was having all the sun-tan bleached from his body as well. With the different type of haircut, low on the cheeks to conceal some of the sears, and tapered instead of rounded at the back, Arthur Loden would be as dead as if he had been cremated."

"Facial surgery and a different haircut could do that?" asked Big Jim.

"Well, when Carmelita came to my shop and met him face to face, she failed to identify him as Arthur Loden, her ex-boy-friend, the man she had suspected by now had double-crossed her. Some of the gang who liked her better than they liked Loden had tipped her off that Loden had had another girl before he was supposed to have been killed, so she was not sure he was dead.

"Also, she had picked up an idea that I might know something about Loden— just what, neither she nor the gang knew. But they did know I still had one of the chestnuts that had been in Tinker's cart when the Fed was killed.

"When Macklin was killed, Carmelita got scared, afraid she might be involved. She had been watching when I found that other loaded chestnut, So she came to my place to take me for a ride— after she found out how much I knew, and whether I did know anything about Loden. And because she thought I would never have a chance to talk again, she talked freely herself, before she was bumped off. She was pretty bitter at Arthur Loden."

"And in the meantime, either as Mr. Parks, or under some other name, Arthur Loden was all set to again take up some legitimate business as a cover for a new dope ring," supplied Big Jim. "As a matter of fact, we found papers on him showing that, as Truman Parks, he had bought a cleaning and dyeing shop. Having never been pinched as Arthur Loden, and the Feds finding no prints at his chemical lab or in his room, after he went to Florida, Truman Parks was all set to become a new character altogether, with those of his old dope ring he wanted, and new members.

"The chestnut dope racket having been nailed, the ring would have switched to some other device. What's more, we found other papers on him that showed where he'd had his new face made, and was being bleached. That was a big mistake— keeping that kind of a doctor's bill."

"His biggest mistake," said Little Joe, "was in double-crossing his girl-friend, Carmelita, and having her rubbed out. Evidently he feared that in some

manner she might discover him, in spite of his new identity, and he certainly knew her vindictiveness."

"Joey, precious," said red-headed Della Corcoran, "you wouldn't ever doublecross me, would you? You're supposed to be a hero again, but how about the night you stood me up and said you had blonde troubles? How about it?"

"Some of these days," muttered Little Joe, "the Village will have plenty of reason to call me the Mad Barber."

End