128

past masters

M. P Shiel

J Allan Dunn

Arthus Gask

Francis Stevens

Val Jameson

Waif Wander

Ernest Favenc

Arthur Conan Doyle

and more

PAST MASTERS 128

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.

21 May 2023

Contents

_____

1: The New Super of Oakley Downs

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

The Bulletin, 29 March 1890

OAKLEY DOWNS, as it was called by courtesy, was noted throughout the district as a station warranted to ruin the proprietor quicker than any other two in the neighbourhood. The number of times it had changed hands was not on record, but the many men who had lost small piles on it were to be found all over the colonies. Why in bitter irony it was called Downs nobody could understand, as from start to finish it was nothing but one mass of brigalow and gidya scrub. As for the cattle— well, the constant change of ownership and resulting neglect had rendered them notorious as the wildest scrubbers in Australia.

But in Sydney or Melbourne Oakley Downs was quite a different place. There, in the hands of the plausible stock and station agent, it became a gem of the first water. "Scrub, sir, of course there are small belts of scrub on it, and they form one of the most attractive features. All the best kinds of saltbush grow in the scrubs, and on Oakley Downs want of feed is never felt; fat cattle when you couldn't get a beast elsewhere, and, as for water, why, on some of the holes you could float the *Orlando*. Certainly there was plenty of water. The Bignargo river ran through the centre, a river of billabongs, wherein were long, serpentine holes of milky, clayey water, bordered on either side by the grey monotony of the brigalow. A more depressing, melancholy spot never existed than Oakley Downs.

It was with a feeling of commiseration, then, that the news was heard in the district that one more unfortunate had invested in the ill-starred place. Various rumours were afloat concerning the new proprietor. Some said he was an innocent new-chum, who had been shamefully taken in. Others would have

it that it was a confident old hand, who had vowed to make the place pay when everybody else had failed, and altogether speculation was rife to an alarming extent. The old hutkeeper only grinned to himself. He was a fixture on the place and was passed on from one to another as the successive owners retired stone broke; as a rule, he gave each man eighteen months to get sick of his bargain, and then he calculated on six months of inglorious ease.

This misanthropic guardian sat outside the hut smoking his evening pipe and wondering when the new owner would make his appearance, when his eye was caught by a thin trail of dust rising over the scrub giving notice of the approach of a traveller. It was a feature of Oakley Downs that it was either bog up to the girths or dust. Presently the rider came in sight leading a pack-horse, and the nearer he came the more old Bill the hutkeeper stared. Such a peculiar figure had never been seen on Oakley Downs before. A sallow youth of about two-and-twenty, riding all over his moke as though he had never had much practice in horsemanship, and painfully pulling along a reluctant packhorse. He was dressed in black clothes, wore low shoes, had on a white shirt-collar, &c., and, to complete the "flabbergastion" of old Bill, a tall silk hat!

Bill was bereft of all powers of speech, hut managed to come forward and take the packhorse, while the newcomer awkwardly and stiffly dismounted.

"This is Oakley Downs station?" he asked.

Bill intimated that it was.

"I've come up to take charge of it for my uncle," was the astounding answer. Bill could only gasp in silence. Oakley Downs, that had scared the best scrub-riders of the continent, in charge of this strange object!

"Are you a stockman?" was the next query. Bill replied that he was everything just then, and, overcome with pity, he led the two horses up to the verandah of the house, followed by the new Super., who walked very uncomfortably.

Bill unpacked and unsaddled the horses, and then told his new boss that he would bring him in some tea directly. The stranger thanked him effusively.

"You know," he said, "I get so confused with all those straps and things on the saddle; I had such a job to get that tail strap on this morning."

"That what?" asked Bill. The Super indicated the article which Bill recognised as the crupper, yet he said nothing, he was too far gone for surprise; but straightway went on to the kitchen and lay down on his bunk to enjoy the situation for five minutes.

When Bill took the tea in he found Mr, Melrose, for that, he informed Bill, was his name, seated reading a book. He had brushed his clothes and hair, and, as Bill said, "reminded him of church more than ever."

"I will get you to come over and talk to me a little after tea," he said to his astounded assistant, "I want to learn something about the run, and I suppose you know all about it."

In obedience to this summons Bill proceeded to the house and found Mr. Melrose with a number of books on the table, evidently produced from his voluminous pack-bags.

"I hear the oxen are considered very intractable," he said, after Bill had sat down.

Bill pondered a minute. "Do you mean, he said, "that the cattle are as wild as hell?"

The young man flushed painfully. "Do not use such strong expressions," he remarked. "Now I have been thinking over several devices whereby we might manage to bring them to subordination, and I should like your opinion of them. Here is an account of a man meeting a lion unexpectedly, and how, retaining his presence of mind, he stared fixedly at the animal, when the king of beasts slunk back into the jungle. How do you think that would work ?"

"Is that a true bill, mister?" said Bill.

"Certainly; it's in a book published by the Religious Tract Society."

"Well," returned the puzzled cook, "if you regoing to walk through these blooming scrubs until you meet a bullock, and then stare at him till he gets into the yard, you'll be a thundering old man before you get the first one in."

"Here is another plan which with the aid of some of our black brethren may be effectual. You see this engraving— it is in a book of African travel. The natives dig a great pit and put sharp stakes in it. Then they form a half-circle and drive all the game to this point and the game fall into the pit. Do you think we could do this with the cattle?"

"And how do you get 'em out of the pit?" asked Bill.

"They would have to be left there, I suppose," replied the young man, "I only thought of this as a last resource. Then there are pitfalls we might dig in the forest; traps we might set so that the ox would be caught by the leg when his bellowing would attract attention."

Bill began to feel uncomfortable. What did all this point to ? Was he alone on the station with a howling lunatic?

"And now, before we separate for the night, I will read prayers, and then we will supplicate that the hearts of these savage beasts may be tamed and rendered gentle as they will be during the millennium."

Bill said afterwards he was afraid to cross him, so he sat out meekly half-an-hour of reading and praying and then departed.

About twelve o'clock, when all was silent, the noise of a horse leaving the station might have been heard. It was Bill, making tracks to the next station as

hard as he could to report the arrival of a hopeless monomaniac. Cameron Vale, the next station, was only eight miles away, and when the owner, who was a good-natured fellow, heard Bill's strange story, he determined to ride over and investigate matters the first thing the next morning. Bill accompanied him, and the two of them arrived about seven o clock. Bill went to the kitchen to prepare breakfast, and Dermott (the owner of Cameron Vale) introduced himself to Melrose as his neighbour. Melrose, in spite of his strange attire, was evidently a gentleman and as they sat at breakfast he returned to the subject of the cattle.

"I think," he said, in his feebly solemn voice, "that you trust too much to skill in horsemanship to gather the herds in. I was thinking of stretching fencing-wire from tree to tree throughout the forest at about two feet from the ground. It would thus form a perfect maze in which the animals would be compietely bewildered, and over which they would constantly stumble. Do you not think they would speedily become frightened and tame?"

Dermott thought not, and, without betraying surprise, turned the conversation into the subject of the purchase of the station. Melrose informed him that the purchaser was his uncle, Dean Melrose, of Culquone, and that the place was bought cheaply for himself and his brother.

"Do you expect your brother up?" asked Dermott.

"I hope not," was the reply; he will interfere a good deal with my plans. You see he has been used to station-life and got all the old-fashioned notions."

"Have you ever been on a station before?" asked Dermott.

"No," replied the other, with the first symptoms of irritability he had shown. "I have had a great disappointment. I was dedicated to quite a different work, but it matters not— I have my talent. I understand there is a large supply of water," here he continued after a pause.

"Yes, you've plenty of water," said Dermott

"So I understood; now I think that we could utilise it this way. Pump it into reservoirs high up in the trees in different places, then, by means of hose, use it to drive the cattle to where you wanted them to go. They would not face a strong stream of water. Do you understand?"

"Well, not quite," returned his companion.

"Ah! perhaps so, I know I am a good deal ahead of the time."

Dermott soon after took his leave, reassuring old Bill that there was no harm in the supposed lunatic, and he would probably have easy times of it. He himself determined to wire down to the agents and find out the truth of the matter, but in this design he was frustrated. Just as he was preparing to leave a horseman came riding rapidly up to the station. Whenever Melrose caught sight of him he uttered an exclamation of disgust.

"Now, here's Ned come to upset everything!"

The newcomer dismounted and saluted his brother laughingly. "You stole a march on me, old man, but I've managed to come up to tune after all." Melrose turned into the house with a dejected air, and Dermott introduced himself to the stranger, who was evidently the brother.

"Has Jim been saying anything funny?" asked the new-comer. "Fancy his riding up to the station in such a rig! I expected to pick up his pieces on the road."

Dermott said that some of his remarks showed a decidedly strong imagination.

"Ah, yes," said the younger man, "he was going to be a clergyman, but he overdid it. Broke down and had brain-fever from overwork. Since then he's got an idea that he can invent anything. He was coming up here with me, as we thought the change would do him good, but at Port Royal he gave me the slip and started off by himself, to commence some of his experiments, I suppose."

Oakley Downs was quite true to its name. Eighteen months quite satisfied the younger Melrose; but the next occupant found all manner of strange fixtures about the place, which Bill told him were due to the misdirected genius of the would-be cattle-tamer.

2: Bill Somers

Ernest Favenc

The Bulletin, 16 Feb 1895
My Only Murder and other Tales, 1899

BILL SOMERS cheated me out of a nice little fortune of some fifty or sixty thousand pounds. Now, I never saw Bill Somers in my life; and he never saw or heard of me, and did not gain a single cent by the transaction. Nevertheless, Bill Somers is the man I have to thank for the present unsatisfactory condition of my finances.

I was managing my uncle's station— it ought to be mine, now. He lived in Sydney, paying only an annual visit to the place. He was a bachelor, and as he was a crusty and most argumentative old dog, I used to think it was just as well we only met occasionally.

Now, I myself am not argumentative except when people don't agree with me; still, one cannot live with a Sir Oracle for long without feeling obliged to differ from him occasionally. Naturally, my uncle supposed himself an authority on nearly every question under the un, and I have no doubt he persuaded himself that he had really gone through the many experiences he used to relate. He was never at a loss for information to bolster his inventions; for he could always quote a man he used to know who knew all about it. That's how I came to hear about Bill Somers.

I was in Sydney for a few days on station business, and was dining with my uncle. Charming cottage and grounds (ought also to be mine).

Having finished all the "shop" we had to talk about, the old gentleman was holding forth on some sharp practices lately brought to light amongst the provision-shipping merchants.

"Why," he said, "in my time we would as soon—" There he hesitated, and I chipped in, jocularly, as I filled my glass: "Come, governor! you know you were never in the provision-shipping line."

My uncle was speechless for some time, whether from rage or because he was making something up I don't know; the latter, I suspect.

"No, sir," he said slowly at last; "I was never in the provision line, as you justly remark. But, was not my friend, Bill Somers, one of the leading provision-merchants in Sydney, and—" here he almost shouted—"don't I know all the ins and outs of the business from him?"

My uncle glowered at me for the rest of the meal, and I was glad to get back to town.

I was engaged at that time to one of the nicest girls in Sydney (who also ought to be mine). She was a great favorite of my uncle's; and as I was then

fully justified in considering myself his heir, I had not much thought for the future. I told Kate all about my taking a rise out of the old man, and, to my surprise, she told me that I was very foolish. What was the good of contradicting my uncle about such a trivial thing? This annoyed me; and although, as I said before, I am not at all of an argumentative disposition, still I feel it my duty to assert myself and not allow statements to pass unchallenged when I know them untrue. I told Kate something like this; but she did not agree with me, and we parted rather coldly.

I went out to lunch at Nardoo Cottage next day; but, as ill-luck would have it, we had not got half-way through the meal when my uncle a subject on which I hold strong views— strong, simply because they are right. I like meat well-done, and contend that is the proper and healthy way to cook it. My uncle likes meat underdone— raw, I call it; and most absurdly insists that it is more nutritious when taken so. Over this apparently insignificant subject we fell out ; and, my uncle being somewhat bitter and personal in his remarks, I retorted rather smartly (I can be very sarcastic when it pleases me):

"I suppose Bill Somers liked his meat raw?"

I thought he was going to throw something at me.

"Bill Somers was not a jackanapes like you, so he liked his food properly cooked," he growled.

"Let me see," I returned, reflectively, as I opened a bottle of sodawater. "You say he traded down to the Cannibal Islands. I suppose that is where he acquired the taste."

"Leave my house!" shouted my uncle at the top of his voice. I laughed, and remarked that I would look rather queer appearing in the street bareheaded, with a glass in one hand and a bottle of soda in the other. This maddened him still more, but I did not let it disturb me, for we had rows like this whenever we met. Really, I must admit that the old fellow had been very kind to me.

When I met Kate that evening she said, "How can you be so silly as to keep irritating your uncle? He called here this afternoon, and I could see that you have offended him very deeply. You will go too far some day."

This annoyed me very much. Kate evidently meant that my conduct might make a difference in my prospects; and this, I consider, hardly showed a proper appreciation of me. I knew that my uncle had in reality far too much admiration for my talents and ability to quarrel seriously. In fact, I was quite sure that he respected me all the more for my sturdy independence. Kate did not agree with me, and made a most uncalled-for remark to the effect that my conceit would be the ruin of me. We parted still more coldly than before, but I felt that Kate needed a lesson as well as my uncle.

I had to return to the station in a day or two, but was invited to dinner at Nardoo Cottage, to meet a few friends of my uncle. He was a forgiving old boy, I must say.

"Now, Harry," said Kate, "do not go out of your way to contradict your uncle this evening. Remember the difference in your ages and positions, and what you owe him."

I gave Kate a bit of my mind in return, and reduced her to tears before I left.

There were a bank-manager and two squatters at dinner that evening, and the talk was mostly "shop." I rather flatter myself on having stated my opinions upon stock-breeding and station-management confidently and in a way that left an impression. We were smoking with our wine, and the subject of cigars came up. Now, l am as good a judge of a cigar as any man, so, when my uncle praised those we were smoking, I lost my patience, for they were really nothing to brag about.

"They aren't bad," I commenced, "but—"

Here the old gentleman snapped in: "Confound your impudence! Not bad, indeed! You conceited young blockhead! do you know the difference between a cigar and a cabbage?"

All the other old fogies chuckled; and, very naturally, I felt nettled. However, I knew how to rub it in, so I exhaled a long puff of smoke and drawled out: "I presume Bill Somers selected them."

My uncle went purple. If apoplexy had only carried him off just then, I should have been right. He gasped, and then restraining his passion by a great effort, said quite quietly, " I have a word to say to you later on."

I was very facetious the rest of the evening. Emboldened by the way I had put the old man down, I had two or three more sly little hits about Bill Somers, until I felt that I must not wear the joke threadbare. That's the best of my wit—l always know when to stop ; I don't run a thing to death like most men. At a sign from my uncle, I stayed behind when the others left.

"Henry Jamison," he said, "you appear to have deliberately gone out of your way to insult me every time you have accepted my hospitality. To-morrow you will return to Grimgums (the station), and remain there until you hear from me. Good night."

He certainly had the last word, and as I strolled townward I felt very wroth at the mean and unjust accusation he had brought against me. Just because he was too dense to understand my perhaps rather subtle humor and certainly harmless chaff, he said that I "insulted" him. I returned to Grimgums feeling very sure that my uncle would be extremely sorry for his conduct.

Scarcely had I been a week on the station when I received the following astounding epistle:

Dear Mr. Jamison.

If you look back, as I have done, you will, I am sure, agree with me that our tempers are not sufficiently sympathetic to hold out any prospect of happiness in the future. I have no wish to enter into details, as I know a little reflection will convince you that I am acting for the best. Your uncle, who was always in favor of our engagement, reluctantly admits that lam right. We will, therefore, consider the engagement at an end, but I shall always remain your sincere friend,

Kate Denby.

Was there ever such a shameful thing? Just because a girl cannot have everything her own way, she deliberately throws a man over. This letter was enough to give me food for thought, but I was fairly puzzled by one I received from my uncle a few days later. In it there was the following passage:

So through your infernal conceit and foolish want of tact you have lost one of the best girls in the world; but there is one thing I can tell you: you will be the only loser in the matter— she certainly shall not.

Fancy! I, conceited! A more modest man does not live. I may have sufficient self-respect to estimate myself at my right value, but that is all.

Explanation of my uncle's remark came to me in the form of a newspaper with a marked paragraph some six weeks later. My uncle and Kate Denby were married!!!

I was so justly incensed that I resigned my billet at once.

This happened three years ago, and the other day my uncle died— leaving a widow and a son and heir.

I suppose the brat's godfather was Bill Somers.

---

3. Peter Addie and the Ju-Ju

Mary Gaunt

1861-1942

From *Ends of The Earth*, 1916

Mary Eliza Bakewell Gaunt

Australian novelist and short story writer, and author of travel books. She travelled extensively in Africa and Asia

"OH MOTHER!" said Addie, mopping his bald head, "why did I leave my happy home in Stepney?" But he spoke in English, and the deputation didn't understand what he meant. What they did understand, and what they feared, was that the white man who had come to their village was going to take his incalculable benefits away from them. The headman leaned forward a little; a little fringe of white hair grew on his chin, and he was clad in a sopping blue toga-like garment which in his agitation he was screwing up into a rope round his waist.

"What the dickens do they want?" asked Addie of his servant, who acted as interpreter.

He sat in the doorway of a palm-thatched hut. The weeping sky was grey and sodden, and the rain came straight down as if it were poured out of a bucket. The narrow village street was worn into little waterways down which raced the water; the shade trees in the open dripped ceaselessly, so did the eaves of the huts; the forest which pressed in on the village was shrouded in a heavy mist; even the scavenger vultures had given up work and were perched forlornly on the tops of the huts with drooping wet wings.

"So they want the benefits of my sweet society," said Addie, scratching his head, "an' it's suthin' to be wanted even by a nigger; but Lord love you, my friend, what have you got to offer?"

The headman had a great deal to say about the advantages of the village, and Addie listened patiently. "Kola nut," said he to himself. "I believe you, my boy, there's money in kola nut; but the attentions of thirty-five different varieties of skeeters an' twenty-two different sorts of flyin' ants sorter tones things down, an' when I ain't got no whisky, nor flour, nor sugar, an' it's rained every day an' all day long for a week— no, my friend, unless you have suthin' better to offer," and he put his remarks into forcible and much more grammatical Hausa, which Benjy interpreted into the jargon of the men before him.

"The great master," said the headman, bowing humbly, "will bring prosperity to the land."

"Well, the land at present," said Addie, "is keepin' me mighty short of commons. I don't feel the land is doin' its share."

The headman bowed again.

"Oh master," he said, "the chickens shall be brought in."

"An' seein' I'm about as sick of chicken as I well could be of anythin' 'cept jam," opined Addie, "you might exercise your inventive genius. But where are all the blamed chickens?"

He might be sick of chicken, but he had to fill up with something, and he evidently had no faith in the inventive genius he invoked.

"The master shall have chicken, very good chicken, plump—"

The man at the headman's elbow had taken up the tale volubly, but he was cut short by a sound— wild, weird, long-drawn and ear-piercing. It swept right across the village. From the damp, sodden forest on one side it came, and went quavering away into the damp, sodden forest at the other. The deputation turned grey, and rushed, trembling, to hide its face against the streaming mud walls of the white man's hut, as if only safety could be found there.

"Mother, look at Dick!" cried Addie, starting up. The wail came again, rose to its full height and then, quavering, died away. Even Addie's own headman had grown ashen with terror and came a little closer to his master.

Addie gripped him by the collar of his shirt and shook him.

"There," he said, "if your teeth must chatter, let 'em do it with a will. What is it, Benjy?"

"Master," said Benjy, "it is an evil spirit that afflicts the village."

"An evil spirit is it? He makes noise enough about it. The evil that I've met comes along quiet. Talk about the heathen in his blindness; this spirit's evidently found him deaf. An' what does the evil spirit do?"

"He has smitten the headman's mother so that her eyes fail to see, his brother's wives have no children, and he has sent a crying—"

"You needn't go into the cryin'," said Addie in English. "I've heard that. Anythin' else?"

"There is disease in the plantains—"

"There is," acquiesced Addie solemnly; "nastier I never met. Don't mention it."

"The rain—"

"An' you needn't tell me about the rain," he added with suffering patience.

"And they have offered chickens—"

"Oh they have, have they? That accounts for the shortage."

"Master, to-night they make big Ju-ju, and then the evil spirit will go."

"Oh will it?" said Addie resignedly. "For heaven's sake let 'em make big Ju-ju, or anythin' else they like, but if I'm to stay I must have chicken. If the Lord knows the African pullet, which is doubtful, He knows I don't ask much, but if I'm to stay I must have it."

And that night in the steaming heat and the pouring rain Addie, looking out on life from his hut door, was startled to see a procession tramping slowly along the village street. A couple of grass torches sputtered in the rain, the tom-toms beat insistently, now loud and strong, now dying away, and the procession was led by the chief medicine man, a wrinkled, white-headed old negro with an apron of grass and leopard tails, a necklace of human small bones and his hair decorated with leopard claws. In his hands he held a couple of human skulls, which he clashed together, chanting a low and monotonous chant.

"Nice old party," said Addie, looking to his revolver.

Behind him walked the headmen of the village, with heads bowed. Raised aloft in their midst was a platform, and on it, shown up clearly in the flickering torchlight, was a small and chubby, naked child. Round her neck was a string of red beads, and the little body was all painted with some white pigment. She did not look happy, poor mite, and had been wailing bitterly. The little fists had rubbed rings round her eyes, and the rain had run the white pigment into streaks.

"What the h—" cried Addie, stepping forward, but the faithful Benjy pulled him back so hastily that he slipped and fell on the slippery clay and came into the hut on his hands and knees. By the time he had corrected Benjy in a manner suited to the offence, the procession had passed on; the people were

but murky smudges on the misty darkness, and there was only the beating of the tom-toms and the yellow blur of the torches to tell that anything unusual had happened.

"Do that again, Benjy," said Addie, "an' I'll put the fear of the Lord into you," and he went back for his revolver.

"Master," apologised the man, "it no be good look upon 'em Ju-ju."

"That," said Addie, "is all very well, but what are they doin' with that poor little nipper? The others were wadin' in an' havin' a good time, but she worn't."

"Master," implored the man, "you go die. Dere be plenty more mammy picken lib."

Addie stopped for a moment with an uncomfortable feeling. "Benjy," he said, and the tubby little trader sank his voice before the horror of the thing, "they're not goin' to kill the poor little nipper?"

He asked the question, but he did not need the answer. He knew. The village was in dire straits: the rains were prolonged unduly, the plantains were rotten, other food there was none, and he knew, none better, that to these people the time seemed now to have arrived for strong measures. Something more valuable than a goat or a hen must be offered to the offended deity if things were to mend. That is how it would appear to the African mind. And he was the only white man, as far as he knew, within miles of the place.

"Dey no go kill him," said Benjy, sinking his voice and looking round as if he feared he should be overheard; "he belong Ju-ju."

Addie sat himself down on the only stool the hut contained, and looked out on the pouring rain with a troubled countenance.

Benjy offered such consolation as occurred to him.

"He no be your picken."

"No, he ain't my picken," laughed Addie ruefully. "What a blamed nuisance a conscience is. To think twenty years of tradin' ain't got rid of mine," and he shook his head solemnly. He rose and put his revolver in his belt.

"Now, Benjy," he said, "you can please yourself. I'm goin' to inspect the Ju-ju."

"Master," protested the man again, "you go die."

"Well, life ain't been that pleasant of late," reflected Addie aloud, "an' addin' an uneasy conscience to it—"

"Master," cried Benjy vehemently, "dis be bad palaver. Some white man go for Ju-ju house, an' Ju-ju vexed too much."

"A white man!" Addie stopped in astonishment. He thought he was the first white man who had visited this village. "A white man! Where did he come from?" That Benjy did not know. He rather thought he had come from the big water, meaning the Niger, and he had no doubt as to his fate. There could be

but one fate for the white man who meddled with so great a Ju-ju. "He lib for dead. And," he dropped into Hausa, "Ju-ju had torn the flesh from his bones and scattered it." He did not wish his master to share the unknown man's fate.

His master was much his way of thinking, but, as he said, he was troubled with a conscience, and he resolutely went out into the rain, with Benjy following reluctantly at his heels. He feared lest his master should risk too much, but he feared to be left alone without him.

The faint light of the flickering torches was blotted out now; the rain was coming down steadily, and fainter and fainter and more distant came the sound of the tom-toms. In their direction Addie followed. The sound of the rushing rain blotted out all other sounds; the pouring water and the dark night wrapped him round like some living thing, and inspired him with awe and fear for all his sound common sense, and thankful was he that his servant kept so close.

Narrower and narrower grew the path they followed; the forest pressed in on them, the rain took their very breath away, and then the leaves overhead closed in and it was a tunnel— a leafy tunnel that he could feel and not see— and the water was coming in at every interstice, and the sound of it was dull, monotonous, all-pervading, the want of air was stifling.

Addie plodded on, hardly knowing where he was going or what he expected to see. Then, just as the path was widening a little, there burst on the sound of the rain another, ear-piercing, blood-curdling, the sound that had disturbed the deputation of the morning. Benjy, with a muffled yell, clutched at his master, and Addie jumped back fully five feet. But a very pressing and a very material danger brought his wits to work. He heard the sound of hurried flight ahead, and in a second had pressed Benjy back against the dense tangled mass of the forest wall that held them in; and not one moment too soon, for presently, in full flight, tumbling over one another in their fear, came the procession that had passed his hut but a short time before.

In the dense darkness he could not see them; their torches were gone, it was evidently each man for himself. He could hear their cries of fear, the plashing of their hurried footsteps in the water; he could smell the rank smell of the negro above the dank, close vegetable smell of the forest; and more than one touched him as he fled, but none seemed to realise that the secrets of their ghastly faith were in danger.

When the tumultuous array had rushed past, Addie stood up with a long - drawn sigh, and turned his face resolutely in the direction whence the disorganised company had fled.

"Master, master," implored Benjy frantically.

"You cut, Benjy, if you don't like it," said his master imperturbably; "do you think I hanker after the job? Mother! You bet I don't. But where's that picken? I didn't hear her comin' along." And he marched resolutely on, Benjy, afraid to go back by himself, and afraid to stay there alone, following reluctantly in his wake.

The forest cleared a little. He could see that even in the gloom. Instead of dense leafage there was a little sky overhead, the rain came straight down out of it instead of percolating through the branches, and there came to his nostrils an offensive odour— organic matter rotting. He thought he could see in the centre of the clearing a thatched hut, and he knew he must have reached his goal.

"A tall smell like that—" he began, but Benjy clutched him, imploring silence, and the wisdom of it appealed to Addie. He did not want any man who might have been brave enough to stay behind to know that he, the white man, had endeavoured to penetrate their mysteries unless he was sure it would do some good. Out of the rain and darkness came the piercing cry again, much louder this time, and Benjy, terror getting the better of respect, clutched at his master. Addie felt his courage ebbing. A street training is good up to a certain point. Rain and loneliness and darkness, Addie had suffered them all in his youth, and why— why he asked himself should he let such simple things terrify him here. But there is a vein of superstition in all of us who have imagination, a fear of the unreal and unknown that will not be stifled and kept down, and, uneducated child of a great city as he was, Addie had it in a greater degree than he knew himself. He feared, though what he feared he could not have told. He said to himself that he only feared the violence of the people of the village, but he walked warily, he looked to right and left, he listened intently, and he almost forgot the good revolver at his belt. After all, what can weapons do against the powers of darkness? But he walked steadily on. The ground was soft with the beating rain, and soft, too, with something else. Addie knew he was walking over decay. He knew not what he might tread on next; every footstep made him shudder, and he realised with dismay that every nerve in his body was shrinking with fear lest there really might be something in that gross superstition of the natives.

He forgot the child he had come in search of in his effort to keep his fears under proper control, to force himself to go forward, to hide from the man at his heels how near he was to giving way. Slowly, slowly, and the filth and rottenness under foot grew more horrible, the stench more stifling. There was something sinister in the steady plash of the falling rain.

But he went on though his heart was in his throat and there was a beating in his ears that drowned all other sounds. The rain was on his face and on his

bare head, the warm rain of the Tropics, and behold it was cold and clammy, and then the Ju-ju hut loomed up a darker splotch on the darkness. Could he go in? Could he? Dare he?

He would gladly have turned and fled now from the uncanny place, but that close behind him he could hear Benjy gasping and gurgling with terror. It sounded so human it encouraged him to go on. His courage was in both hands, clasped tight. Another step across the rotting filth, another, another. Peter Addie had known what fear was before, but always he had feared a tangible foe, now he feared something he could neither see nor hear nor understand.

The other white man who had dared this thing had died— died— so his thoughts ran in painful jerks, and how long had he suffered, how long had he taken to die— what had he suffered? They were close against the Ju-ju house now. He could see the loom of it against the darkness and the falling rain, and— oh comforting sound!— he could hear Benjy's teeth chattering. Nothing had happened—of course nothing would happen. Presently when he was sheltered he would strike a match.

What was that?

Surely it was another sound beside their own stealthy movements, a still, slow movement inside the Ju-ju house. He heard Benjy give a sob of terror, a sob that reassured him because of the humanity of it. He turned to reprove him, and then when he turned again something had altered. He saw a gleam of light, weird and unearthly, guarding the threshold. It rose, it hung in mid air, it seemed to come forward. Addie had a sensation as of clutching hands, of some mighty thing bending forward. He felt a cold sweat break out on his forehead, his tongue clove to the roof of his mouth, there was a horrible creepy sensation at his spine, something was crushing his heart; a ghastly spell was upon him. Whatever happened he knew he could not lift a finger to defend himself. The unearthly light grew, widened, it rose higher in the air. Addie crouched before it. What must be, must be, even if the end were death.

And then help came.

Benjy's nerves and his pluck and his faith in his master gave out together, and with a wild yell he turned and fled. It broke the spell. If he could do nothing else Addie felt all at once that he could run away, and he followed in the footsteps of his servant across filth and rottenness and decay. At the edge of the forest he caught him up, and the man let out another shriek as he felt his hand on his shoulder.

Addie shook him well, and into his arms he put all the force of his own disappointment.

"Blamed if I didn't scoot like a bloomin' frightened rabbit," he said to himself; but when Benjy twisted himself out of his wrathful hands and flew like

the wind in the direction of the village, Peter Addie found it took him all his courage to retreat soberly and quietly. Not for all the kola nut in Africa would he have dared go back. If he had heard but the slightest movement behind him that he could not trace to the rain forcing its way through the leaves, he knew he would have fled in a panic; but nothing did happen, and he reached the safety of his leaky hut and kicked off his filthy boots. But he did not kick Benjy.

"Oughter be kicked meself," he said remorsefully. "I ain't no better than a heathen nigger. Who'd 'a thought I'd enjoyed the blessin's of civilisation? An' what's become of that poor little nipper? She ain't nothen to me. Oh Lord! Oh Lord! What a bloomin' noosiance a conscience is! I guess I must send for the Commissioner."

He felt cheap and small and mightily ashamed of himself. But there was nothing else for it. Next day there wasn't even a chicken to be had, and he was reduced to eating bad kenky like the men. The rain was persistent, and terrifying cries came out of the forest. Addie thought of departing bag and baggage, but whether he would or no, the thought of the forlorn little child offered for sacrifice came between him and his ease of mind.

"Oh d—n it," said the little trader, "a black picken too," and he wrote off to the nearest district Commissioner.

"Come at once," was the tenor of his note; "they're sacrificing little girls, and I'm blessed if I know what becomes of them."

And the D.C. on the whole was glad to have something to relieve the deadly monotony of his life, and sooner than Addie could have believed possible, on the first fine day they had had for weeks, down the tunnellike path that led to the village came a hammock with John Everad, D.C., lolling back in it, and at his heels half-a-dozen workmanlike black policemen with red fezes on their heads and carbines over their shoulders.

Addie went out to welcome him.

"Glad to see you," said the Commissioner.

"I'm damn glad to see you," said Peter Addie, holding out his hand. "An' I'm sorry I've nothen to offer but jam. We're out of chicken."

"What's the row?"

"Hanged if I know. I just dassent raid the beastly place on my lonesome. If it warn't for that blessed little picken who after all ain't nothen to me, I'd clear out an' leave the bloomin' hole. Blest if I know what a trader's doin' with a conscience."

"Well, I've come hell for leather to help you, Addie," said the Commissioner cheerfully, "and I don't see myself doing that for most of the traders on this coast. Now suppose we—"

Out of the forest again came that long-drawn, weird cry. The villagers, crowding to look at the white men, raised a howl of terror, and the representatives of law and order jumped in the most unseemly manner.

"Now I call that obligin'," said Addie.

The Commissioner was out of his hammock like a shot. "Six policemen, you and I," he said briskly. "We ought to be able to hold all this village off if they object to our investigating."

"Lord love you!" said Addie, and he did not think it necessary to mention his own terrors; they had vanished before the daylight, the D.C., and the policemen, "they're in such a blessed funk, they'll be almost glad for a couple of white men to look into things."

"Come on then." And once more Addie found himself tramping along the path that led to the village Ju-ju house, and it was very different to creeping through alone in the darkness and the rain as he had done before.

"The last time I gave it up as a bad job," he said remorsefully, "an' I've had the poor little picken on me conscience ever since."

"Here we are, I think," said the Commissioner as the forest lightened, the hard cobalt blue sky showed through the all-pervading green, and there rose to their nostrils the horrible smell of decay.

"Phew!" said Everad, "there's something to be said for the missionary!"

"That's a matter of taste," said Addie imperturbably. "The nigger likes his stinks tall, and, bless you, the nigger don't get much that he likes in this village."

"Well, he gets stinks," said the D.C. solemnly. "Now the question is, couldn't we make it a comfort to the people to have the place burned down. I always work by the barometer myself. The glass is going up."

"You're goin' to run in a miracle on 'em an' fetch the fine weather?"

The lean brown young fellow looked up into the hard blue sky. "The fine weather's come. They can see that for themselves. You arranged for that. I'll ensure it. Now that old rotten cotton tree—"

Out of the forest close beside them came again that long-drawn cry. Addie started, but it was not half so terrifying in the broad daylight, with the sunshine flickering down between the leaves and the British Empire in bush shirt and sun helmet beside him.

"I believe," said the D.C., one hand on the Ju-ju house, the other switching his stick lightly against the posts of the door, "I could do that with a cab whistle."

"Mother, look at Dick!" cried Addie, and on the other side of the little clearing the leaves of the dense forest parted and out of the gloom into the brilliant tropical sunshine there stalked a tall figure simply clad in a very

battered helmet and the ragged remains of a red shirt. His lean brown legs were bare, and on his feet were rough attempts at sandals.

The two white men stood stock still, and the figure came straight towards them.

"Good Lord!" said the Commissioner with a gasp.

"It's I who should say that," said the newcomer.

"English, by the Lord Harry!" cried Addie.

The D.C. had his eyes on the man's hands.

"A flute," he said, "so you did it with a flute?"

"Broken," said the stranger, as if he would not take too much credit, and he held up a musical instrument as damaged and forlorn as himself.

"I said a cab whistle," murmured the D.C. with infinite satisfaction, for your Government official, however good a fellow he may be in private, does like to show himself right in the eyes of those he rules over.

At the entrance to the clearing now were pressing a little crowd of the villagers. They were taking the disturbing of their holy places quietly; things had apparently gone so badly of late that it might be they were of opinion they could hardly be worse. Addie thought of his hurried flight a night or so ago, and was bitterly ashamed.

"An' now may I ask," said he, "what the dickens you mean by scarin' the life out of a decent quiet countryside, bringing his Majesty's Commissioner sixty mile from his happy home, an' makin' your meals of innercent little black pickens?"

"And what do you mean?" asked the stranger whimsically, "by letting them feed me up with black pickens when all I asked was a decent rooster. I've the beginnings of a baby farm behind there, and the job it's been to keep that nursery going. Such an appetite as it's got! I was not intended for a family man."

"Mother!" cried Addie.

"What's the meaning of it all?" asked the D.C., not as if he were asking for information for himself, but just in order that Addie and the policemen and the villagers crowding into the open might have the thing explained to them, for a Government official does not need anything explained, he knows everything.

"My name's Thomas Gregory," said the stranger; "I've been looking into the fetish worship and—" He hesitated.

"Got yourself into trouble," said the D.C. "Of course you would. Are you the white man who meddled with the Ju-ju here?"

"I merely satisfied my curiosity," said Gregory, "at least I tried to."

"And what are you doing here now?"

"Sounds as if you thought I were having a good time. I'm stopping now because I can't get away. I scared them with the whistle, and they kindly sacrificed chickens; but I tell you it got on my nerves when they took to sacrificing little girls."

Addie gave a sigh. "That little gal has been awful on me conscience."

"Not half as bad as having her on your hands," retorted the stranger. "It was pretty nearly finished though when two of them got up sufficient courage to come back and see how Ju-ju liked his gift. I thought I was done for."

The little trader groaned.

"Oh Lord! The things we don't know! You don't mean to say it was you scared me that night I came to investigate."

The lean face under the battered helmet broadened into a smile. "Never—never was so scared in my life. I thought I was done for. I reached for the god himself, and went for the intruder. My word, it was lucky you fled! The faithful have stuck him full of nails, and I'd have let you have it. You never spoke. How could I guess you were a white man?"

"The light," said Addie shamefacedly.

The other laughed. "He does show up in the dark, doesn't he? Phosphorescent light from decaying wood I take it. They anoint their god with all sorts of nastiness. Now what am I to do with that picken?"

"Hand her over to the missionaries," said the Commissioner. "I'll see about that. Unless," he turned to Addie, who was still meditating sadly on his own lack of pluck, "the village will take her back."

"Wouldn't touch her with a barge pole."

"Cheer up," said Gregory, "it was worse for me than you. If I could only have guessed there was a white man so close! You're thinking it was bad for you, but you'll never realise the awful time I put in. Now if either of you gentlemen will give me a pair of trousers and help me down to the coast, I guess I've done with Africa."

4: The Ghoul and the Corpse

G.A. Wells

fl 1917-1938

Weird Tales March 1923

An American pulp writer from the hey-day of the pulps, mostly western, crime and adventure. Nothing else can be discovered.

THIS is Chris Bonner's tale, not mine. Please remember that I positively will not stand sponsor for it. I used to have a deal of faith in Chris Bonner's veracity, but that is a thing of the past. He is a liar; a liar without conscience. I as good as told him so to his face. I wonder what kind of fool be thinks I am!

Attend, now, and you shall hear that remarkable tale he told me. It was, and is, a lie. I shall always think so.

He came marching into my igloo up there at Aurora Bay. That is in Alaska, you know, on the Arctic sea. I had been in the back-country trading for pelts for a New York concern, and due to bad luck I didn't reach the coast until the third day after the last steamer out had cone. And there I was marooned for the winter, without chance of getting out until spring, with a few dozen ignorant Indians for companions. Thank heaven I had plenty of white man's grub in tins!

As I said, here came Chris Bonner marching in on me the same as you would go down the block a few doors to call on a neighbor.

"And where the devil did you drop in from?" I demanded, helping him off with his stiff parka.

"Down there," he answered, jerking an elbow toward the south. "Let's have something to eat, MacNeal. I'm hungry as hell. Look at the pack, will you?"

I had already looked at the pack he had cast off his shoulders to the fur-covered floor of the igloo. It was as lean as a starved hound. I heated a can of beef bouillon and some beans, and made a pot of coffee over the blubber-fat fire that served for both heat and light, and put these and some crackers before my guest. He tore into his meal wolfishly.

"Now a pipe and some tobac, MacNeal," he ordered, pushing the empty dishes aside.

I gave him one of my pipes and my tobacco-pouch. He filled and lighted up. He seemed to relish the smoke; I imagined he hadn't had one for some time. He sat silent for a while staring into the flickering flame.

"Say, MacNeal," he spoke at length; "what do you know about a theory that says once on a time this old world of ours revolved on its axis in a different

plane? I've heard it said the earth tipped up about seventy degrees. What d'you know about it?"

That was a queer thing for Chris Bonner to ask. He was simon- pure prospector and I had never known him to get far away from the subject of mining and prospecting. He had been hunting gold from Panama to the Arctic Circle for the past thirty years.

"No more than you do, probably," I answered his question. "I've heard of that theory, too. I'd say it is any man's guess."

"This theory holds that the North Pole used to be where the Equator is now," he said. "Do you believe that?"

"I don't know anything about it, Chris," I replied. "But I do know that they have found things up this way that are now generally recognized as being peculiarly tropical in nature."

"What, for instance?"

"Palms and ferns, a species of parrot, saber-tooth tigers; and also mastodons, members of the elephant family. All fossils and parts of skeletons, you understand."

"No human beings, MacNeal? Any skeletons or fossils of those up this way?"

"Never heard of it. Prehistoric people are being found in England and France, however."

"Huh," he said.

He pondered, puffing at his pipe, his eyes on the fire. He looked perplexed about something.

"Look here, MacNeal," he said suddenly. "Say a man dies. He's dead, ain't he?"

"No doubt of it," I laughed, wondering.

"Couldn't come to life again, eh?"

"Hardly. Not if he were really dead. I've heard of cases of suspended animation. The heart, apparently, quits beating for one, two or possibly ten minutes. It doesn't in fact, though; it's simply that its beating can't be detected. When a man's heart stops beating he's dead."

Bonner nodded.

"'Suspended animation,'" he muttered, more to himself than to me. "That must be it. That's the only thing that'll explain it; nothing else will. If it could cover a period of ten minutes, why not a period of twenty or even a hundred thousand years—"

"If you'd like to turn in and get some rest, Chris, I'll fix you up," I broke in.

He caught the significance of my tone and grinned.

"You think I'm crazy, eh?" he said. "I'm not. It's a wonder, though, considering what I've seen and what I— here, let me show you something!"

He thrust a hand into his lean pack and brought forth an object that at first glance I thought to be a butcher's knife.

He handed it to me and I at once saw that it was not a butcher's knife as I knew such knives. It was a curious sort of knife, and one for which a collector of the antique would have paid good money.

It was a very dark color, almost black; corroded, it seemed to me, as if it had lain for a long time in a damp cellar. It was in one piece, the handle about five inches long and the blade perhaps ten inches. Both edges of the blade were sharp and the end was pointed like a dagger. And it certainly wasn't steel. I scratched one side of the blade with my thumbnail and exposed a creamy yellow under the veneer of black.

"Part of that's blood you scraped away, MacNeal," Bonner said. "Now what's that knife made of?"

I examined the yellow spot closely. The knife was made of ivory. Not the kind of ivory I was acquainted with, however; it was a very much coarser grain than any ivory I had ever seen.

"That came out of a mastodon's tusk, MacNeal," Bonner said.

I looked at him. He was nodding, seriously. He apparently believed what he said, at any rate.

"Nice curio, Chris," I commented, handing the thing back to him. "Heirloom, no doubt. Picked it up in one of the Indian villages, eh?"

He did not speak at once. He sat puffing, looking at the fire. Once he puckered his brows in a deep frown. I waited.

"I've been prospecting, as usual," he said at length. "Down there around the headwaters of the Tukuvuk. It's in awful place; nobody ever goes there. The Indians tell me the spirits of the dead live there. I can believe it; it's an ideal place for imps and devils. And I was right through the heart of it. I believe I'm the first. No matter how I got there; I came up from the south last summer. You see, I had idea there was gold in that country.

"The place where I finally settled down was in a little valley on one of the branches of the Tukuvuk between two ranges of hills running from five hundred to maybe three thousand feet high. Messy-looking place, it was; all littered up, as if the Lord had a few sizable chunks of stuff left over and just threw 'em down there to be out of the way.

"But the gold was there; I could almost smell it. I'd been getting some mighty nice color in my pan; that's what made me decide to stay there. I got there about the middle of July, and spent the rest of the summer sinking holes in the edge of the creek and along the benches above. What I found indicated

that there was a mighty rich vein of the yellow metal thereabouts, with one end of it laying in a pocket of the stuff. If I could locate that pocket, I thought, I'd have the United States treasury backed off the map. But I wasn't able to run the pocket down by taking bearings from my holes, because the holes didn't line up in any particular direction.

"What with my interest in trying to get a line on that pocket, I didn't notice that the season was getting late. But I'd brought in enough grub to last the winter through, so that didn't matter. Just the same it was up to me to get some sort of shelter over my head, so I hustled up a one-room shack about twelve by twelve. I cut from the timber on the slopes with my hand-ax. Nothing fancy, but tight enough. I put in a fireplace and cut and stacked a lot of wood outside.

"That done, winter was on me; I simply couldn't resist the temptation to have one more try at finding the pocket that spewed the yellow metal all around there. As I said, I got no information from the holes sunk, and it was pure guesswork. I guessed I'd find my pocket on the side of a certain hill, about two hundred feet above creek-level. A glacier flowed down the side of that hill through a little gulley, and my idea was that the ice ground away at the pocket and brought the metal down to the creek, and the creek scattered it This theory was borne out to some extent by the fact that my best showings of color always came from a point a little below the conjunction of the creek and glacier.

"It was snowing the morning I took my pan and shovel and started up the side of the hill, keeping to the edge of the glacier. It wasn't much of a glacier for sure; say, about fifteen feet wide. I could see it winding up the side of the hill until it went out of sight through a cleft about a thousand feet up. Fed by a lake up there, probably.

"I had climbed the hill maybe a hundred feet, following the edge of the glacier, when I caught sight of a dark blotch in the edge of the ice. It was about two feet under the surface. I brushed away the film of snow to have a look. The ice was as clear as a crystal, of a blue color. And what d'you think, MacNeal? It was a man's body!"

He paused and gave me a quick glance. He wanted to see how I took that, I presume.

"The body of a man," he went on. "And the queerest-looking man I ever saw in my life. He was lying on his belly and I didn't get a look at the front of him just then, but I knew it was a man all right. He was covered all over with long hair like a—well, like a bear, say. Not a stitch of clothes."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Why. I was that surprised I let my pan and shovel drop and stared at the damn thing with the eyes near popping out of my head. What would anybody do, finding a hair-covered thing like that frozen in a glacier? I won't deny I was a bit scared, MacNeal.

"Well, I stood there staring at the thing for I don't know how long. It didn't occur to me, then, to ask myself how the thing got there. Certainly the idea of fossils or prehistoric men didn't enter my head. I didn't think much about anything; I just stood there gaping.

"You know me, MacNeal; I guess I'm pretty soft-hearted in some respects. I'd stop to bury a dead dog I found in the road. I knew I wouldn't rest easy until I'd cut that thing out of the glacier and given it decent burial. Moreover, I didn't want it where I'd be seeing it when I went to work on that hillside in the spring, because I imagine that glacier didn't move an inch a year.

"So I went back to the shack and got my ax, and with none too good a heart for the job turned to and made the chips fly. It took me about three hours to get the thing out of the glacier. You see, as I came down to it I went slow; I don't care to hack even a dead man.

"Say, MacNeal, can you imagine what it meant to me, digging a corpse out of a glacier down there on the side of a hill in that devil-ridden country? No, you can't, and that's the truth. You'd have to go through it to know. It was hell. I don't want any more of it in mine. Nor what followed, either."

"What was that?" I asked when he deliberated.

"You'll hear," he answered, and went on: "I got the thing out at last, little chunks of ice clinging to it, and dragged it ashore, if a glacier has a shore. It froze me to look at the thing with those little chunks of ice sticking to the long hair. Once, at Dawson, I'd seen a man pulled out of the Yukon, ice clinging to him. That was different, though; at Dawson there was a crowd to sort of buck a man up. I turned the thing over on its back to see what it looked like in front."

"Well?" said I.

"You've seen apes, MacNeal?"

"This thing looked like that?" I countered, beginning to connect up his first queer questions with what he was telling me. "You don't mean it, Chris!"

"I'm telling you," he nodded solemnly. "An ape man, that's what it was. More man than ape, if you ask me. For instance, the face was flatter than an ape's, and the forehead and chin were more pronounced. The nose was flat, but it wasn't an ape's nose. And the hands and feet were like those of a man. Oh, it was a man, all right. The thing that convinced me, I think, was the knife gripped in its hand."

"The knife you have there?" I inquired.

"This very knife," he answered.

"What then, Chris?" I urged him to go on.

"I had a good look at that thing and then started for my shack. Yes, MacNeal, I ran, and I'm not ashamed to say so. It scared me. Ugliest thing I ever saw. Eyes wide open, glaring and glinting, and the thick lips parted to show the nastiest set of fangs I ever saw in the mouth of man or beast Why, I tell you the damned thing looked alive. No wonder I scooted. You would have done the same. Anybody would.

"Back in the shack, I sat down on my bunk to think it over. And it was while I sat there trying to puzzle it out that I remembered that theory about the earth tipping over. That gave me a hint of what I had run up against. Of course, I'd heard about fossils and parts of the skeletons of prehistoric men being found. Had I found, not a fossil or part of a skeleton, but the prehistoric man himself? That knocked the wind out of me. If that were the case my name would go down in history and I would be asked to give lectures before the scientific societies and such. Consider it, MacNeal.

"I tell you, I couldn't quite grasp the thing. It was incredible. There I was in this year of our Lord, with the intact corpse of a man who had lived God only knows how many centuries ago. That body, understand, could well be the key to the mystery of the origin of mankind. It might possibly settle the Darwinian theory forever, one way or the other. It was a pretty serious business for me, don't you see?

"Well, I decided to preserve the thing until I could get out and make a report of the find. But how to preserve it? Of course if I had left it in the glacier it would have kept indefinitely, like a side of beef in cold storage. I was afraid to put it back in the hole in the glacier and freeze it in again with water I carried from the creek; the creek water might exert some chemical action that would ruin the thing. And if I let it lay where it was the snow would cover it, form a warm blanket, and probably cause it to decompose, then I'd have nothing left but the skeleton. I wanted to save the thing just as I'd found it; maybe the scientists would find a way to embalm it.

"I finally hit on the plan of keeping it in an ice pack. That would turn the trick until the weather took on the job. It hadn't turned bitter cold yet. I tell you, it was a nasty job keeping that thing iced with chunks I chopped from the glacier, and to make it worse the weather stayed moderate for a couple of weeks. Then, suddenly, the mercury in my little thermometer went down with a rush and it got stinging cold. I carried the thing to the shack and stood it up against the wall outside where it couldn't be covered with snow, and lashed it there.

"Can you imagine me going to sleep in my bunk in the shack every night after that, with that thing standing against the wall outside not two feet away?

Of course you can't. It frazzled my nerves, and more than once I was tempted to cut a hole in the ice on the creek and chuck the damn thing in where I'd never see it again. But no, I had to save it for the scientists and get my name in history; that idea got to be an obsession with me. I knew well enough that if ever I told people the tale I'm telling you now, without some proof of it, I'd get laughed at."

"No doubt of it," I sneered.

"The days went by," he continued, ignoring my sneer, "and more and more that thing outside kept getting on my nerves. The sun went south, and from one day to another I never saw it The never- ending night was bad enough, but when you add the northern lights and the howling of the wolves you've got a condition that breaks a man if he's not careful. Furthermore, there was that ugly- looking devil outside to think about.

"I was thinking about that thing constantly, and got so I couldn't sleep. If I shut my eyes I'd see it, anyhow, and if I went to sleep I'd have a nightmare over it Now and then I'd go out and stand there in the starlight or the aurora looking at it. It fascinated me, yet the sight of the thing save me the creeps. Finally I began taking a club or my rifle along when I went to look at it; got afraid the thing would come alive and try to murder me with that knife.

"And that's the way of things for maybe three months and more. My thoughts all the time on that thing outside.

"Well, that couldn't go on, you know. One morning I woke up with the worst headache a man ever had. I thought my head would split wide open. My blood was like molten iron flowing through my veins. I knew what it was. Fever. I had thought and worried about that thing outside until it got me, and I was in for a brain-storm. I was as weak as a cat, but managed to build up a good fire and pack my bunk with all the blankets and furs I had and crawl in. I only hoped I wouldn't freeze to death when the fire went out.

"I no sooner got all set in the bunk than things let go; I went completely off. I can't say positively what happened for a few days after that. Seems like I remember, though, periods when I was semi-rational. I think once I got up to put more wood on the fire. Another time I saw that thing standing in the doorway grinning at me like the devil it was. I shot at it with my rifle and later found a bullet in the door. My shooting couldn't have been a delusion, at any rate. But the door was still fastened against the wolves and there were no tracks in the snow outside."

Bonner paused to light his pipe, and then went on:

"I don't know exactly how long I was out of my head. I'd wound my watch before I crawled into the bunk the first time, and I half remember I wound it again when I got up to put wood on the fire, and it was pretty well run down. It

goes forty hours without winding, yet when my head cleared it had stopped. I must have been off my nut about four days.

"Well, you can lay your bottom dollar I'd had enough of prehistoric men hanging around the shack by that time. Let the scientist be damned; I was determined to get rid of that thing the quickest way possible. The quickest way, I thought, would be to get the corpse warm so it would decompose rapidly, then I'd put it outside where the wolves and ravens would pick the bones clean. The scientists would have to be satisfied with the skeleton.

"So I made a big fire in the fireplace and got the shack good and hot, then went out and brought in the corpse. I got sick at the stomach on that job, but that was the only way. I didn't have the heart to leave the thing outside and build a fire over it out there. I try to respect the dead, even if the corpse is that of a man who had been dead several thousand years and looked more like an animal than a human being.

"I laid the thing on the floor before the fireplace, then sat down on the bunk to wait. I watched it pretty close, because, being dead so long, I thought when it got warm and started to decompose it would go like butter; I didn't want the shack to be all smelled up with the stink of it. Probably half an hour went by, then all of a sudden I saw the thing quiver—"

"Your brain-storm returning," I interposed.

"Wait," said Bonner sharply. "It quivered; not much, but enough to notice. That sort of got me, then I reasoned that anything thawing out like that would naturally quiver a little. Maybe another fifteen or twenty minutes passed, then one of the legs moved. Jerked, sort of. It startled me. Remember, there I was down there in those hills alone with that thing. I was pretty susceptible to weird influences, understand. Anyhow, the leg moved, and—"

"It sat up and asked for a drink of water." I could not help putting in.

Bonner continued, paying no attention to my sarcasm. He seemed to be talking aloud to himself:

"I watched it like a hawk for some time after that, then as I didn't see it move any more I stepped outside to get some more wood for the fire and to pull a few good breaths of cold air into my lungs. That shack was like the inside of an oven.

"When I went in again I saw that the damned thing had turned over on its back.

"Turned over on its back, I say. And there was a change in the eyes, too; they had a half-awake sort of look in them; a more alive look, understand. And breathing! Yes, sir, breathing! Why the thing didn't see me when I came in and shut the door I don't know, but apparently it didn't. And, believe me or not,

the hand that had held the knife was open and the knife was lying on the floor apart from the body.

"Crazy? I tell you no! I was as sane as I am now. I tell you I saw these things with my own two eyes; saw them just as plain as I see you now. I see you don't believe me, MacNeal. Oh, well, I don't blame you; I hardly believe it myself sometimes."

He uttered a little laugh.

"But there it was, just as I'm telling you. And I was that gone when I saw that the thing had turned over on its back that I dropped the wood I had in my arm. The crash of it on the floor brought the thing to its feet on the jump. You needn't look at me like that; I tell you it did. I take my oath it did! There it was, crouched like a panther ready for the spring, the eyes of it flashing like fire, its lips pulled back tight across the gums and the yellow fangs showing. Can you see that? No, you can't."

Bonner made an expressive gesture with one hand.

"Remarkable, but the thing hadn't seen me yet. It was looking at the fire; it was half turned toward me so I could see that. Suddenly it screamed in an outlandish gibberish and leaped to the fireplace and tried to gather in an armful of flames. I take it the thing had never seen fire before; didn't know what it was; probably imagined it some kind of wild animal. Naturally the only thing it got out of that play was burned arms and bands, and the long hair sizzled and curled. It leaped back with a snarl, spitting that funny gibberish. Talk, I guess it was; it came from way down in the belly and sounded like pigs grunting.

"I tell you, MacNeal, I was fair dazed. But I had the sense left to try to help myself. My rifle was leaning against the bunk and I made a quick dive for it Then, apparently, the thing saw me for the first time. The way it glared at me with those glittering eyes was a caution. I didn't stop to argue; I snatched up the rifle, cocked it and made a snap shot. The bullet caught the thing in the left breast and the blood gushed. Of course you don't believe it. But blood, I tell you, gushed from the breast of a thing that had been frozen in a glacier for thousands of years!

"Well, here it came like a cyclone. I didn't have time to shoot again. Smell? That thing smelled like carrion; almost strangled me. Maybe you know how the cage of a wild animal stinks if it ain't cleaned out for a week or two. This thing smelled like that, only worse. I can smell it yet. Lord!"

Bonner wrinkled his nose and shivered.

"But there we were at grips, the thing making those belly noises and smelling like a thousand garbage piles. It had the strength of ten men; I sensed that. It jerked the rifle from me and bent the barrel of it double with a twist of

the wrists. The barrel of a thirty-eight caliber Winchester rifle— bent it as easy as you or I would bend a piece of copper wire.

"Then we were at it, fighting like a couple of wild cats all over the shack. I'm no slouch of a man myself, MacNeal, when it comes to a rough-and-tumble; but that thing handled me like a baby. I could see my finish. We threshed about the floor, me fighting like a devil, it fighting like forty devils. We kicked into the fire and out again and scattered live coals all over the place, and the shack took fire.

"I was just about gone when my hand accidentally fell on the handle of the knife the thing had dropped on the floor. I hung on to it and poked away at that thing for all I was worth, driving the blade clean up to the hilt with every punch."

"That knife?" I broke in.

"This knife," answered Bonner. "There's the dried blood on it yet But I think it was really the bullet that did the work. It must have cut an artery. Anyhow, the blood kept gushing out of the thing's breast; it got on my hands and made 'em slippery. I knew the thing couldn't pour out blood like that and keep going; that's what put the heart in me to keep on fighting. And, as I say, I think it was the bullet that did the work in the long run. A lucky shot, otherwise I wouldn't be here now.

"I felt the thing sagging and going limp in my hands, and its grip began to relax. I saw my chance and put up a knee and broke the grip and kicked it away. It staggered around a moment or two, clutching its breast with its bloody paws, gnashing its fangs and staring murder at me; then it crashed own to the floor and fell smack into the flames.

"I saw plain enough there was no chance of saving the shack, so I snatched up what I could lay my hands on in the way of food and clothing and blankets, and tore out. I don't remember putting the knife in my pocket, but that's where I found it later. The shack burned down to nothing, and that thing burned with it; probably not a bone of it left. The scientists were out of luck and the mystery of mankind would remain unsolved.

"I didn't stop to investigate, of course; my job was to make tracks. I knew about this village and came on. How I got here I don't know; this is a terrible country to cross afoot in the winter. I'd turned my ten huskies adrift to shift for themselves when I reached the valley where all this happened; I didn't have the grub to keep them going. I had to walk here.

"And that's all, MacNeal. You can say what you please; I know what I saw with my own eyes and you can't change my mind about it. Suspended animation? Yes, for a period covering many centuries. It would be a mighty fine

thing if we could picture what happened away back there when this old earth tipped over.

"Perhaps we'd see a man, a man that was half ape, crossing a creek with a knife in his hand on the way to murder an enemy sleeping on the opposite bank. Then suddenly the earth tipped over— climatic conditions in those days were such as to freeze things up in a flash— things are held in the grip of the ice just as the dust and lava held 'em in the days of Pompeii, and—

"Well, who's to say what happened? Anything was possible. We don't know the conditions of those days. Anyhow, here I come thousands of years later and dig a man, with a knife in his hand, out of a glacier. I heat his body in order to decompose the flesh. Instead of decomposing, he comes to life and I have to kill him. He's been hibernating in a glacier for centuries. I don't know what to think about it."

Bonner refilled and lighted his pipe, then looked at me questioningly.

"Chris," I said, "I tell you frankly that I don't believe a word you have said. You tell me you were out of your head for a few days. That accounts for it. You had the jim-jams and imagined all that, then try to spring it on me as actual fact."

He looked hurt. He looked at the knife in his hand steadily for several long moments, then thrust it toward me, his eyes boring into mine.

"Then where in hell," he demanded, "did I get this knife?"

———————————

5: The Miniature

J. Y. Akerman

John Yonge Akerman, 1806-1873

Bentley's Miscellany April 1844

CALLING one day on a friend, who had amassed a large collection of autographs, and other manuscript curiosities, he showed me a small quarto volume, which had been bequeathed to him by a relative, a physician, who for many years had been in extensive practice in London.

'He attended the patients at a private asylum for insane persons of the better classes,' said my friend, 'and I have often heard him speak of the writer of that beautiful MS, a gentleman of good family, who had been an inmate of —— House upwards of thirty years,' at the time he was first called to attend him.

On looking over the volume, I found it filled with scraps of poetry, extracts from classic authors, and even from the Talmudic writers; but what interested me most was a narrative of several pages, which appeared so circumstantially related as to leave little doubt of its being partly, if not wholly, founded on fact. I begged permission to make a transcript, which was readily granted, and the result is before the reader:

'WE LAUGH at what we call the folk of our ancestors, and their notions of destiny, and the malignant influences of the stars. For what will our children deride us? Perhaps for dreaming that friendship was a reality, and that constant love dwelt upon earth. I once believed that friendship was not a vain name, and thought, with the antique sage, that one mind sometimes dwelt in two bodies. I dreamt, and woke to find that I had been dreaming!

'George S— was my chum at school, and my inseparable companion at college. We quitted it at the same time, he to proceed to London, where he was in expectation of obtaining a lucrative appointment in one of the English colonies, and I to return for a short period to the family mansion, When I reached —— Hall, I found several visitors, among whom was my cousin, Maria D——. She had grown a woman since I had last met her, and I now thought I had never seen a more perfect figure, or a more bewitching countenance. Then she sang like a siren, and was an elegant horsewoman. Will those who read this wonder that I fell in love with her, that I spent nearly the whole of the day in her company, and that I could think of nothing in the world besides.

'Something occurred to delay my friend George's departure from England, and, as he was idling about town, I invited him to —— Hall. Great as was my regard for him, I now, however, discovered that I could live less in his

company. No marvel! I preferred the society of my lovely cousin, upon whose heart, I had the happiness to learn, my constant attentions had already made a sensible impression. I hesitated to make her an offer, though I had even reason to believe our attachment was mutual, partly, perhaps, from that excessive delicacy which constantly attends on true love, and partly because I wished to do so when my friend should have left us less exposed to intrusion. Would that the deep sea had swallowed him up, or that he had rotted under a tropical sun, ere he had come to —— Hall!

'One morning I arose earlier than usual, and was looking from my chamber window on the beautiful prospect which the house commanded. Wrapped in a delightful reverie, of which my lovely cousin was the principal subject, I paid but little attention to the sound of voices below.

Suddenly, however, I awoke to consciousness: for the sweet tones of a woman in earnest conversation struck on my ear. Yes, it was hers— it was Maria's. What could have called her forth at so early an hour? As I looked earnestly towards the walk which ran through the plantation, I saw emerge from it my cousin and my friend! My heart rose to my lips, and choked my utterance, or I should have cried out at the sight. I withdrew from the window, and threw myself on the sofa, tormented with surmises a thousand times more painful even than realities.

'At the breakfast table I was moody and thoughtful, which my friend perceiving, attempted a joke; but I was in no humour to receive it, when Maria, in a compassionating tone, remarked that I looked unwell, and that I should take a walk or ride before breakfast, adding, that she and George S— -had walked for an hour and more in the plantation near the house. Though this announcement was certainly but ill calculated to afford perfect case to my mind, it was yet made with such an artless air, that my more gloomy surmises vanished, and I rallied; but I wished my friend would take his departure. Right truly says the Italian proverb, "Love's guerdon is jealousy."

'After breakfast, George S—— proposed a stroll on foot to the ruins of the Cistercian Abbey, about a mile distant from the Hall, to which I at once assented. As we walked along the beautiful and shady lane which led to the ruin, George was as loquacious as ever, talked of everybody and everything, and of his confident expectation of realizing a fortune abroad. I was, however, in no humour for talking, and made few remarks in reply; but he appeared not to heed my taciturnity, and, when he arrived at the spot, broke forth into raptures at the sight of the noble ruin.

And truly it was a scene the contemplation of which might have lulled the minds of most men!

A thousand birds were caroling around us; the grass near the ruin was not long and rank, but short, close, studded with trefoil, and soft as a rich carpet. Luxuriant ivy climbed the shattered walls, bleached by the winds of centuries; and the lizards, basking in the sun, darted beneath the fallen fragments at the sound of our footsteps as we approached the spot.

'We both sat down on a large stone, and surveyed the noble oriel. I was passionately fond of Gothic architecture, and had often admired this window, but I thought I had never seen it look so beautiful before. My moody thoughts fled, and I was wrapped in the contemplation of the exquisite tracery, when I was suddenly roused by my friend, who, patting me familiarly on the back, exclaimed, '"It is a beautiful ruin, Dick! How I wish thy sweet cousin, Maria, had accompanied us!"'

'I was struck dumb by this declaration; but my look was sufficiently eloquent to be understood by him, and he did not fail to interpret it aright. He appeared confused, and I, regaining my self-possession, arose from my seat with the laconic remark, "Indeed!"

'George S—— attempted a laugh, but it failed; he was evidently as much disconcerted and disquieted as myself How lynx-eyed is love! We mutually read each other's hearts at the same moment.

'"I am sorry for you, Dick," said he, after a short pause, affecting very awkwardly an air of indifference; "'pon my soul, I am; but I'm over head and ears in love with the girl, and should die at the bare thought of her encouraging another."'

'I wished for the strength of Milo, that I might have dashed out his brains against the huge stone on which we had been sitting. I felt my very blood seethe and simmer at the declaration, and with my clenched fist I struck him a violent and stunning blow, which, though it did not beat him to the ground, sent him staggering several paces backward.'

'"Liar!" screamed I frantically, "take that! You dare not proceed with your folly."'

'Recovering his feet, George S—— laid his hand on his sword, which he half unsheathed; but, as if conscious of there being no witness present, or wishing, perhaps, still further to convince me of the advantage he possessed, he did not draw..' "Nay," said I, "out with your weapon; nothing less will do. I would rather lose my birthright than yield to thee one, without whom life would be valueless."'

'He smiled bitterly, wiped his bruised and bloody face, and slowly drew from his bosom a small miniature, encircled with diamonds, which he held before my eyes. One glance was sufficient, it was a portrait of Maria! It was that face which, sleeping or waking, has haunted me these thirty years past.

' "Villain!" I cried, clutching at the portrait with my left hand, while I snatched with my right hand my sword from its sheath, "you have stolen it."

'With assumed coolness, which it was impossible he could feel, he smiled again, put back the miniature in his bosom, and drew his sword. The next moment our weapons crossed with an angry clash, and were flashing in the morning's sun.'

'My adversary was a perfect master of his weapon, and he pressed upon me with a vigour which any attempt to retaliate would have rendered dangerous in one so much inferior to him in skill. Maddened as I was, I yet restrained myself, and stood on my guard, my eyes fixed on his, and watching every glance: my wish to destroy him was intense. The fiend nerved my arm, and, while he warmed with the conflict, I became more cool and vigilant. At length he appeared to grow weary, and then I pressed upon him with the fixed determination of taking his life; but he rallied instantly, and, in returning a thrust, which I intended for his heart, and which he parried scarcely in time, his foot slipped, and he fell on one knee, the point of my sword entering the left breast by accident. It was not a deep wound, and perhaps he felt it not; for he attempted to master my sword with his left hand, while he shortened his own weapon, and thrust fiercely at my throat, making at the same time a spring to regain his feet. But his fate was sealed: as he rose, I dashed aside the thrust intended for me, and sheathed my weapon in his left breast. I believe I must have pierced his heart; for he sank on his knees with a gasp, and the next moment fell heavily on his face, with his sword still clutched tightly in his hand.'

'Wearied, and panting from the effects of the violent struggle, I threw myself on the large stone which had so recently served us for a seat, and looked on the body of my adversary. He was dead!— that fatal thrust had destroyed all rivalry, but at the price of murder, the murder of one who had been my friend from boyhood upwards! A thousand conflicting emotions racked me as I beheld the piteous sight. Hatred was extinguished, and remorse succeeded; yet I still thought of the audacity of him who had provoked such deadly resentment. Fear, too, fear of the consequences of this fatal encounter in a solitary spot, without witnesses, added to the intensity of my misery, and I groaned in anguish. What was to be done? Should I go and deliver myself up to justice, and declare the whole truth? Should I fly, and leave the body of my friend to tell the dismal tale?— or should I bury him secretly, and leave it to be supposed that he had been robbed and murdered? As each suggestion was canvassed and rejected, in my despair, I even thought of dying by my own hand.'

' "Ah! miserable wreteh!' I exclaimed, 'what hast thou done?— to what dire necessity has a fair and false face driven thee? Yet I will look once more on those bewitching features which have brought me to this wretched pass!"

'I stooped, and turned the dead man on his back. His pallid face was writhen and distorted, his lips were bloody, and his eyes, which were wide open, seemed still to glare with hatred and defiance, as when he stood before me in the desperate struggle for life and death. I tore open his vest, and discovered the wound which had killed him. It had collapsed, and looked no bigger than the puncture of a bodkin: but one little round crimson spot was visible, the haemorrhage was internal. There lay the miniature which, a few minutes before, had been held up exultingly to my frantic gaze. I seized, and pressed it to my lips, forgetting in my transports how dearly I had purchased it.'

'This delirium, however, soon subsided, and my next thoughts were of the dead body. I looked about me for some nook where I might deposit it. There was a chasm in the ground among the ruins a few yards off, where the vaulted roof of the crypt had fallen in. It was scarcely large enough to admit the corpse; but I raised it in my arms, bore it thither, and with some difficulty thrust it through the aperture. I heard it fall, as if to some distance, with a dull, heavy sound; and, casting in after it my adversary's hat and sword, I hurried from the spot like another Cain.'

'At dinner, one glance from Maria, as I replied, in answer to her enquiry after George S——, that he was gone to make a call a few miles oft— one glance, I say, thrilled through my very soul, and almost caused me to betray myself. All noticed my perturbed look, and, complaining of violent headache, I withdrew from the table ere the meal was ended, and betook myself to my chamber.'

'How shall I paint the horror of that evening, of the night that succeeded it, and the mental darkness which fell upon my wretched self ere the morning dawned! Night came; I rang for lights, and attempted to read, but in vain; and, after pacing my chamber for some hours, overpowered by fatigue, I threw myself on the bed and slept, how long I know not. A succession of hideous dreams haunted my slumbers, still I was not awakened by them; the scenes shifted when arrived at their climax, and a new ordeal of horrors succeeded, yet, like him who suffers from nightmare, with a vague consciousness that all was not real, I wished to awake. Last of all, I dreamt that I was arraigned for the murder of my friend. The judge summed up the evidence, which, though purely circumstantial, was sufficient to condemn me; and, amidst the silence of the crowded court, broken only by the sobs of anxious and sympathizing friends and relatives, I received sentence of death, and was hurried back to my

cell. Here, abandoned by all hope, I lay grovelling on my straw bed, and cursed the hour of my birth. A figure entered, and in gentle accents, which I thought I recognized, bade me arise, quit my prison-house, and follow. The figure was that of a woman closely veiled, She led the way, and passed the gaolers, who seemed buried in profound sleep. We left the town crossed the common, and entered a wood, when I threw myself at the feet of my deliverer, and passionately besought her to unveil. She shook her head mournfully, bade me wait a while till she should return with a change of apparel, and departed.'

I cast myself down at the foot of an aged oak, drew from my bosom the portrait of Maria, and, rapt in the contemplation of those lovely features, I did not perceive the approach of a man, the ranger of the forest, who, recognizing my prison-dress, darted upon me, exclaiming, "Villain! you have escaped from gaol, and stolen that miniature from the Hall!"

I sprang to my tact, thrust the fatal portrait into my bosom, and would have fled; but he seized, and closed with me. In the struggle which followed we both fell, I undermost. At that moment I awoke; I was in reality struggling with some one, but whom I could not tell; for my candles had burnt out, and the chamber was in total darkness! A powerful, bony hand grasped me tightly by the throat, while another was thrust into my bosom, as if in search of the miniature, which I had placed there previous to lying down.

'With a desperate effort I disengaged myself and leaped from the bed; but I was again seized, and again my assailant attempted to reach my fatal prize. We struggled violently; at one time I seemed to be overpowering him, and for several moments there was a pause, during which I heard my own breathing, and felt my own heart throbbing violently; but he with whom I contended seemed to breathe not, nor to feel like a warm and living man. An indescribable tremor shook my frame; I attempted to cry out, but my throat was rigid, and incapable of articulation. I made another effort to disengage myself from the grasp of my assailant, and in doing so drew him, as I found by the curtains, near to the window. Again the hand was thrust into my bosom, and again I repelled it.'

'Panting with the violence of the struggle, while a cold sweat burst out at every pore, I disengaged my right hand, and, determined to see whom I was contending with, I dashed aside the curtain. The dim light of the waning moon shone into the chamber; it fell upon the face of my antagonist, and one glance froze the blood in my veins. It was he!— it was George S——;— he whom I had murdered, glaring upon me with eyes which no mortal could look upon a second time! My brain whirled, a sound like the discharge of artillery shook the place, and I fell to the ground, blasted at the sight!'

HERE follows a few incoherent sentences, which I have not deemed it necessary to transcribe. The reader will probably supply the sequel to this sad story.

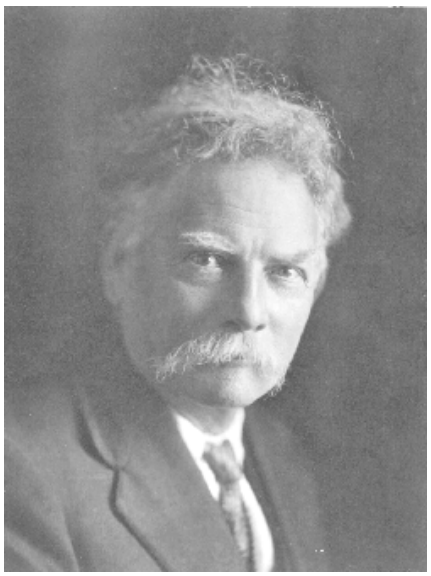
_____

6: A Day on the Road

E. S. Sorenson

1869-1939

Weekly Times, 16 May 1925



Edward Sylvester Sorenson

IT WAS just after lunch on a scorching hot day in December. Our mob of 700 bullocks, which we had travelled from the Barcoo; were feeding along the bank of the Hoganthulla. The men had stripped off for a swim, and were sitting shoulder-deep in water, lazily smoking. It was the only way they could enjoy a smoke. The idea was suggested by two swagmen, who were lying back in the shallows with their heads pillowed on a log, one reading a book, the other a newspaper.

Mr Mr Striker, the boss, was sitting under a tree, tenderly swabbing a bunged eye with a wet handkerchief.

"Fly stung him awhile ago," Potts, the cook, explained.

The sting put Swiker in a bad humor. His gaze rested for a brief space on the easeful group in the creek. He had told the men to let the cattle camp for an hour or two; now he swelled at the top of his voice.

"Hey! Is that what I'm payin' you for?" He could not bear to see a man idle for two consecutive minutes. The virtue of continuous activity was impressed in particular on Jim Wire-whiskers, horse-tailer, who had been the longest in his service. If there was nothing else to do he would ask that person how many links he dropped on Yarramon's hobbles; if James said none, he would be told to go and drop a couple; if he had dropped a couple Mr Swiker would tell him to give the brute the full length.

Mr Swiker was a big corpulent man with a flowing beard. He was not an expert cattleman. He had mismanaged a squattage for a bank for a brief period, and had graduated from that to drover-in-charge of this mob for another bank. He was a hard boss, with superior airs and a vile temper that seemed at times to explode spontaneously. At meal times the cook laid a separate table for him— an unusual departure from the customs of the stock route. It was a flat packing case, carried for the purpose and was made conspicuous with a white cloth, serviette, and wild flowers stuck in a pickle-bottle. This, set under a tree while the men's table was a bag on the grass, made travellers stare. Consequently Mr Swiker was not highly respected on the road.

Shortly after we had ridden away from the dinner camp he had a row with the cook, who promptly rolled up and left. We were sorry to lose Potts. Nobody would have described him as a rattling good cook, but he was good company. Whenever he had a bad spread for us, he told us a humorous story by way of sauce.

Almost immediately one of the swagmen, who gave the name of Jabez Jopp, came out of the cool recesses of the creek and took the job. He had the look of a French chef and the manner of a Bolshevik. He regaled himself and his mate with a good dinner; then loaded the mate, with rations, behind the off hind wheel of the waggonette, and said good-bye to him.

Mr Swiker, after instructing the new cook in packing up, hooked his horse to the tail of the waggonette, and helped with the harness horses. Then he stood by the dying fire to light his pipe. The cook, unaware that, the boss's hack was tied behind, mounted the box seat and started off smartly. He was eager to show what a master hand he was with a coach team.

Swiker turned and eyed him for a while, thinking that he only intended to straighten his team on the track; but when the horses trotted briskly away he yelled after the driver. Jabez was more than slightly deaf; the rattle of chains and campware and the jingle of bells made him deafer. He was showing a commendable solicitude for the aged vehicle by continuously watching the rutty track in front.

Swiker put his hands to his mouth and made astonishing noises. He coo-eed and bellowed, but all in vain. Jabez wasn't the sort of man that took risks by looking behind when he had a rough track in front. The horse-tailer had been rounding up the spare horses half a mile ahead, and he jogged along in advance of the caravan, deaf also to the wild yells and frantic hat-waving in the rear.

Mr Swiker set after them at a fast walk, cursing loudly and puctuating with fortissimo yells. Timbered ridges in front impelled him to frantic efforts. He

roared and shrieked till he had a painful feeling that he had split his windpipe. But the drivers disappeared front view in blissful ignorance of his plight. Being a man unused to much exertion, the scorching midsummer sun soon had him like a wet lobster. He took his coat off and tucked it under his arm. A little farther on he took off his vest; then he undied shirt collar and rolled up his sleeves. Still the heat played on him like a flame on a wax candle; the perspiration stung his eyes, and trickled down his legs, whilst the flies buzzed around him like a swarm of bees.

Mile after mile, he trudged, blaspheming up and down hills, wobbling breathlessly over broken gullies, jolting with embellishments in rough ruts and tussocks till at last he came up with the cattle. Some righteous wrath was exploded on the second-in-charge for travelling too fast, and not noticing the boss's hack was tied behind the waggonette, and realising at something must have happened when the boss was missing—

"I didn't see the waggonette," the second-in-charge interrupted.

"What the L 'ave you got eyes for?" Mr. Swiker demanded. "Cut ahead there, and tell that idiot to fetch my horse back."

Then he lay down in the shade— and fell asleep.

The horse-tailer cantered back along the road, leading the hack. Seeing nothing of Swiker, he continued right on to the lunch camp, where Swiker's walk had commenced.

Meanwhile that gentleman had been rudely wakened by a stinging green-head ant. He looked at his watch, delivered a sulphurous oration on stupid and dilatory men, and started after the cattle again, swinging a small bough to keep the flies off his perspiring face. He had now developed a sore heel and a throbbing head, and with a bunged eye from the fly-bite he looked an apoplectic-wreck.

Near sundown the horse-tailer overtook him. Realising that he had been at fault again, Wire-whiskers adroitly kept out of reach as he delivered his boss's horse. Swiker by that time had lost his voice, but in his eyes was the angry gleam of a wounded reptile. When he had climbed wearily into the saddle, he pulled his hat down with a vimful action, and rode savagely after his astounded henchman, waving a dead gum-stick.

Wire-whiskers, leaning forward and looking over his shoulder, worked his tentacles with desperate energy. In a little while there was a streak of dust between them, and a great clatter of hoofs along the road. The horse-tailer reached the camp alone, breathless with fright and hard riding. Seeing that be was not followed, he guessed that fresh disaster had overtaken his pursuer, which would make the big man a still more undesirable person to encounter just then.

Wire-whiskers was a meek little man— a bearded boy, in fact, who thought discretion the better part of valor, and preferred to evaporate in stormy times rather than precipitate a tragedy. He ate his supper in a hurry, then took up his blankets, and disappeared for the night. The cook, who remarked that he would not be wanted any further, filled his ration bags, rolled up his swag, and disappeared for ever.

Mr Swiker's wild ride had ended in a sousing buster through his horse blundering in a boggy gully. From that unpleasantness he emerged to find himself compelled to walk again, and he went fuming down the road in a muddied and murderous condition.

The farther he went without meeting somebody returning with his horse the more unaccountable he became for his impending actions. As night had closed down, he uttered a shrieky, broken coo-ee at intervals to locate the camp.

The absence of a guiding blaze was another exasperation. They had made camp in a bend beyond a strip of thick timber. Swiker passed it in the dark and went on till he came to a swagman's fire, about two miles below. It was the runaway cook's.That person was sitting alongside it in his shirt, sewing a rent in his trousers, which he had torn in his exit through the darkened bush.

Swiker stopped with a half-stunned expression, and glared at the base deserter.

"What's the meaning of this?" he gasped. "Where's my property?"

"Up the road," answered the cook, uncivilly. "What the L have you got eyes for?"

That stirred Swiker into raging fury again. "How dare you talk to me like that?" he roared. "What are you doing here?"

"Mindin' my own business," said Jopp. "What are you doin' here?"

Swiker half choked. "You impudent scoundrel!" he snorted. "You want gaoling."

"You want stiffenin'," retorted Jopp.

"Get off my premises!" Swiker boiled with indignation, bubbled and spluttered and cursed. But Jabez Jopp was annoyed too. After a torrential exchange of insults, he accompanied the big man a part of the way back— running close behind him with a firestick.

When Swiker eventually staggered home, breathing like a knocked-up sheep, he boiled the billy without a word, and ate his supper on the grass, with his bootless heels resting comfortably in the ashes.

Jim Wire-Whiskers re-appeared at daylight, and quietly attached himself to the pots and pans. Swiker eyed, him with a sullen frown.

"Where did you get to last night?" he demanded.

"I got thrown an' must have been stunned," Jim answered without a blush. He rubbed his hip, and limped painfully around the fire.

"Hm!" grunted Swiker. "Served you d— well right!"

———————

7: Kisses in the Dark
W. Clyde Young
fl 1923-1939
Paris Nights April 1929

American pulp writer who appeared in many little-known magazines such as Paris Nights*,* Scarlet Adventuress*,* True Gang Life*,* Bed-Time Stories*,* Zippy*, etc. Nothing else is known.*

IF LUCILLE and I had not quarrelled while at Monte Carlo this adventure of mine would never have taken place. But we did quarrel, and as a result of it, Lucille left immediately for Paris, where divorces are notoriously easy to obtain. Instead of jumping off Suicide Rock, as my friend, Anton D'Arsy, had first suggested— in order that he might later prove his friendship by persuading me not to do so— I followed Lucille on to Paris. For all of her bad temper and our two years of married life, I was still very much in love with her.

That was how it came about that a week later Anton and I sat in the tea garden of the Hotel St. Petersburg, and while Anton watched the chorus girls in their risque costumes doing a delightful Can-Can dance, I watched the haugthy blonde head of Lucille on the far side of the garden. Several times she had looked in my direction, and once she had smiled faintly. But for all of that I knew she would not speak, for she was as strongly under the impres- sion that I had been the cause of the quarrel as I was that she had been to blame. I could tell from her man- ner, however, that she was quite willing to forgive and forget if I would only make the first advance. But I was equally determined that some of the forgiving should be done by me, and there the matter rested for half an hour.

At the end of that time my Spartan spirit left me, and to save myself further torture I considered her sufficiently punished. Penning a lengthy note to her, in which I declared my undying love, I asked her to come to my room as soon as possible in order that I might demonstrate the full depths of my affection. After a few of the endearing names in the note had been made even more endearing to suit the artistic taste of Anton, I signaled the maitre d'hôtel— when one is in love nothing but the highest will do— and dispatched the note to Lucille by him. I silenced his protests about the matter being against the regulations of the hotel with a five-franc piece.

Breathlessly I watched him as he crossed the crowded tea garden, then my heart seemed to Stand still as he stopped at the table next to Lucille's and, under the pretext of pouring a glass of vin ordinaire for a blonde-haired girl who sat there, he passed the note to her. He looked at the girl's burly

companion for a moment, then turned in my direction and winked wisely. I answered the salute with a wave of my fist.

"Good Lord, Anton!" I exclaimed, "he has given the note to the wrong girl A fine example of head-waiters you have here in Paris!"

"But, *mon ami*," protested the imperturbable Anton, "is the girl not pretty? And look at her big escort. Is he not the very personification of jealousy? Ah, you Americaines! Never must you recognize the artistic setting for a grand affaire."

"But for Lord's sake, Anton; I don't want an affaire, as you call it. Neither do I want some other girl. All I want is Lucille. Here, loan me your pen again while I send another note. Maybe we can find a garçon who isn't as stupid as the maitre d'hôtel."

"Of a certainty we shall, *mon ami*. But why send the garçon? I have no quarrel with Lucille, and is it not possible that I can tell her better than your note of the longings that are in your heart? Bah! Stupid and brainless pig that I am, why did I not think sooner? Go to your room, Andre, and I promise that she shall come to you in a few minutes, loving you better than ever before."

"Anton, youre a godsend!" I declared, as I arose from the table and thumped his back affectionately. "Don't forget to tell her how re pentant'[am and how much I want her to come back."

"I am the good liar, mon enfant," replied Anton with a laugh. "Also that girl who re- ceived your note is sitting near Lucille, and she is most exquisite? _

Leaving the matter in his hands and feel- ing sure of-a favorable outcome, I left the tea garden and went up to my suite. For more than ten minutes I waited, then came a timid knock upon the door. Believing that Anton had accomplished his task of convincing Lucille that I wanted her more than anything else under the sun, I rushed to the door and flung it open. The hallway was a bit dark, but not too dark for me to miss catching sight of a mass of blonde hair and two large blue eyes.

*Lucille!? I exclaimed, and without waiting for further ceremony, I gathered her to my breast and covered her face with kisses. For several long moments I held her tight in my arms, then put her at arm's length to see her dear face. Instantly I became like one para- lyzed, for it was not my Lucille, but the blonde girl to whom the maitre d'hotel had given my note.

For nearly a minute I stood staring at her, too stunned to speak or make apologies. Then the girl smiled and spoke.

"Merci, Monsieur, but you make many loves to me most quickly!" she declared in a de- lightfully exquisite voice, though I was still too stunned for it to have any effect upon me. Then, when I only continued to stare at her in

silence, she snuggled a bit deeper in my arms and murmured softly. "But-I like it very, very much, mon cher!"

"T—I'm afraid there has been a slight—er— mistake," I' finally managed to say. "The maitre d'hotel—"

"Oui, that blundering cow!" declared the girl hotly. "He was most indisereet in hand- ing me your note. Monsieur my husband al- most saw him. But there is no need for the worry, mon cher, for I made quite sure that Pierre did not know of it. He is quite jealous of me, is my Pierre, but he cannot make love to me like you ean. Do you truly love me as much as you say in your note?"

"Why I—that is, the note—" I began, still too unnerved to explain the situation to her coherently. The fact that she had a jealous

husband did not make me feel any better about the matter, either. `

*Ah, oui, the note was for to make the introduction," she interrupted. "I under- stand, Monsieur. But how did you know that my name is Lucille?

"T didn't," I denied, beginning to feel a little more sure of myself and intending, to explain everything to her so that she would leave the room before my own Lucille came or her husband discovered where she was. *Lucille is the name of the girl I love better than anyone else in the world. I had—" But again the girl interrupted me.

"Ah, Monsieur, it is so sweet of you to tell me that. You guessed my name because it is one you like, is it not?" But before I could deny that it was so, she continued: "If only Pierre could do and say such clever things. But I shall forget Pierre when I am with you, that I shall promise you. Kiss me again, mon cher."

Without waiting for me to take her in my arms, the girl put her hands behind my head and drew my face down to her own. For a brief moment I looked into her eyes, then, „because she was very pretty and her lips were

' quite close to mine, and because I was not

an abnormal man, I kissed her. Or, rather, I only half kissed her, for as my lips met hers the door was flung open and Lucille, followed by Anton and the burly companion of the girl I held in my arms, entered the room.

Instantly the girl freed herself and tried to hide behind me. For several long moments there was an unpleasant silence, then my own Lucille spoke. :

"So!" she declared. It was all she said, but it was too much. Placing one hand on her hip, and tapping a dainty little foot on the floor, she stood eyeing me accusingly through narrowed eyes. :

"But, Lucille, you don't understand," I said. "It—it's all a mistake. I—"

"Madame may not understand, but I do, Monsieur," interrupted the burly companion of the blonde-haired girl, whom I guessed to be her jealous husband, Pierre. "Monsieur, I feel sure, will grant me satisfaction."

"Satisfaction?" I repeated with a frown of perplexity. "You mean for me to pay you heart balm or testify as co-respondent in a divorce case?"

"It shall be my seconds and not my attorneys who will call on Monsieur," replied the portly Pierre.

"Your seconds? I'm afraid I don't understand," I complained.

"Monsieur means that you must meet him on the field of honor, Andre," Anton explained. "Leave the matter to me, *mon ami*, and I shall arrange the time and place."

"You mean that I shall have to fight a duel with him, Anton?"I demanded with horror, for my only knowledge of duels had been gained from the cinema.

"*Oui*, most certainly, *mon ami*. No other satisfaction will do for gentlemen, especially where a woman is concerned." Then he turned to the portly Pierre. "If you will have your seconds wait on me, Monsieur, I shall be pleased to make full arrangements with them."

"To you I offer thanks, Monsieur," replied the other. "I shall leave the choice of weapons in your hands, though I prefer either rapiers or single-action pistols."

"It shall be arranged with satisfaction to both," agreed the imperturbable Anton. Since he had only to stand by and watch me get killed, why should he become excited?

The other bowed in reply, then turned to the girl who still stood behind me. "Come, Lucille, I shall attend to your side of the affaire when we get to our rooms."

Preceded by my own Lucille, he turned and left the room. His wife paused for a moment, then, pressing my hand warmly in assurance of her loyalty to me, though I certainly did not want it, she followed them out into the hall.

Standing before the, closed door, which seemed to bar me forever from my own Lucille, I absently lighted a cigaret, then dropped dejectedly into a chair. How long I sat there with my head in my hands I do not know, for my mind was a complete vortex of wild thoughts, but at last I became aware that Anton was still in the room and was speaking to me.

"Ah, *mon ami*, you Americaines are the clever ones," he declared with a light laugh. "Who would think that the quiet Andre Smith, who boasts of loving only one woman, should be found with another in his arms? But you were most careless in allowing her to come here when you expected: Lucille."

"Good Lord, Anton; you don't think the same thing they do, do you?" I demanded.

"But what else can be thought, Andre?" he asked. "*Violà*! You sneer when I say that the girl is pretty and pretend that she does not interest you, then when I come to your room I find her in your arms. It is too much, *mon ami*, even for old Anton, who is accustomed to such things."

"But I tell you that it's all a mistake, Anton. It's all the fault of that infernal chief garçon. The note I wrote to Lucille was given to this girl, and because her name is also Lucille: she thought that it was intended for her and that I was trying to make love to her. Then she came up here and practically flung herself in my arms. Now perhaps you can tell me what to do."

"You should have told her to come back when you were not expecting Lucille."

"But I don't want her to come back," I protested. "I didn't want her to come here in the first place."

"But she did come," pointed out Anton. "Not only did she come, but she also left the note you wrote lying on the table and her husband saw it. Lucille and I met him coming up on the elevator and he was all set to draw blood. So whether you are guilty or not, you have let yourself in for a lot of trouble."

"I have let myself in for trouble?" I repeated hotly. "I think you are the one who has done that. If you had let me alone I would have explained everything, but instead you have to go and arrange for me to fight a duel. What do I know about fighting duels?"

"I am not familiar with all your accomplishments, *mon ami*, but I do know that Monsieur Pierre Odette is reputed to be one of the best duelists in Paris, with both the gun and sword. If you can't use either of those weapons I shall most likely have to bury you tomorrow."

"But can you and I go and explain the thing to him? You know about the mistake the garçon made. Here, get my hat and find Lucille at once and explain the whole affair to her, then she can get me out of it."

"You forget, *mon ami*, that the girl was found in your arms and that you were kissing her. Even Lucille will not see you after that. The only thing left to do is to pray for your soul and fight the duel. I know a priest who lives a short distance from here, and if you like I shall send him to you."

That ended my patience, and picking up a book I threw it at him. He dodged in time for it to miss hitting his head. "Get out and stay out!" I shouted, but the remark was useless, for he was already hastily closing the door behind him.

For the balance of the afternoon I remained in my room, absently drinking white wine and smoking strong Turkish cigarets. Toward evening I decided that it was time to take matters in my own hands, and sitting down to a desk I

penned a letter to Lucille, explaining the situation fully and agreeing to assume all blame for the quarrel at Monte Carlo if she would only come back to me.

Dispatching the letter to her by a bellhop, for I discovered she was also occupying a suite at the Hotel St. Petersburg, I sat down and waited. At the end of five minutes the letter came back— unopened. With it, however, came another note, which I almost tore in my haste to read.

My own Andre—

I shall forgive the presence of that other woman if you will promise to love me always and not to allow any other to come between us in the future. Come to my room in two hours and I shall be ready to go with you wherever you wish. I am in room No. 47.

Eternally yours, Lucille.

I read the note through three times before I fully understood that she had not read my letter because she wanted me to know that she continued to love me without that. Some women, I have heard, are that way. Then I looked at my watch and saw that it lacked five minutes of being seven o'clock.

Without bothering to hunt up Anton, for he had gotten me into enough troüble, I started packmg my luggage at once. Since Lucille was willing, I decided that we would go to Biarritz and spend the balance of the season there. Those two hours, however, were the longest I had ever known, and long before nine o'clock I had packed and repacked all my luggage three times.

At last, however, the two hours had dragged themselves into history, and after I had made all preparations for the trip to Biarritz, I went in search of room No. 47. After tipping several bellhops and porters, I finally found myself standing before the door of the room in question. Knocking lightly, I waited with wild expectancy, then slowly the door opened and a blonde head peeped out at me from the dark room beyond.

"Come in softly, *mon cher*," whispered a feminine voice quietly.

The room was quite dark, and for a moment after I had entered I could distinguish nothing. Then I felt two soft arms steal around my neck and warm lips pressed tightly to my own. Realizing that this was Lucille's way of offering forgiveness, I gathered her tightly in my arms and returned kiss for kiss. For more than five minutes we stood in the dark, locked tightly in each other's arms. Then our love-making was suddenly interrupted by someone switching on the electric light.

Whirling quickly about I saw the portly Monsieur Pierre Odette standing just inside the doorway staring at us accusingly.

"So, Monsieur le Americaine, again I find you with my wife in your arms," he declared.

"Your wife? Why this is—" I turned about as I spoke and as I caught sight of the woman I had been holding in my arms I stopped suddenly. It was Lucille, but not my own Lucille.

"I suppose," declared Odette, "that this is another mistake."

"It most certainly is, Monsieur," I replied.

"Mistakes seem to happen most conveniently for you, Monsieur," he said with a sneer. "I see where I shall be forced to take double satisfaction in the morning. In the meantime, Monsieur, I must request that you leave this room."

"You'll not have to wait until morning, Monsieur, for I intend to give you some satisfaction right away," I replied hotly, for by this time my patience was completely exhausted. Grabbing him by the breast of his shirt, I drew him quickly to me with my left hand, then stopped his forward journey with a sharp punch of my right fist.

The blow sent him sprawling across the floor, and almost instantly I was over him and had dragged him roughly to his feet. When he was able to stand I waited for a moment, hen hit him again, and once more he traveled several feet across the room before he fell.

"Does Monsieur wish further 'satisfaction'?" I asked after I had assisted him to his feet and stood him up ready to hit him again. "If Monsieur has not had enough I shall be pleased to have him consider me at his service."

He made no answer, but his look was sufficient to indicate that he did not wish any further "satisfaction." A ring of deep purple was beginning to form around his left eye and his nose was bleeding profusely. During the brief, one-sided shuffle his coat had been split up the back, the breast of his shirt was torn out and his collar left hanging by the rear button. He looked at me for a moment through his one good eye like a man in a trance, then staggered over to a sofa and dropped dejectedly upon it.

Lucille— his Lucille— who had stood in a corner of the room and watched the fight with wide, fearing eyes, ran sobbing to him and threw herself at his feet. Then, suddenly, she turned upon me like a tigress.

"You— you beast!" she exclaimed. "Go away where I shall never see you again. Don't stand there as though you thought I was still in love with you, for I don't love, ever! Go away, I say, for you have hurt my poor Pierre."

"Don't worry, he'll get over it," I replied. "And you don't need to fear about me coming back, for if I had known that you were here in the first place I'd never have come. You little fool, I tried to tell you that my wife's name is Lucille and it was she whom I sent that note to. The infernal garçon gave it to you by mistake. Then when I received your letter tonight I thought it was from her;

that's why I'm here now. If you and your husband had only listened to my explanation everything would have been all right. Instead of that, your husband had to demand 'satisfaction' I think he has received enough. If he wants more when he wakes up, tell him to come to my rooms and I'll be glad to oblige him."

"I sent you no letter, Monsieur," she denied quickly.

"Tell that to your husband, maybe he'll believe you," I replied brutally.

With that, I turned to leave the room, but stopped suddenly before I had taken the second step. In the doorway stood Anton and my own Lucille. For a moment we stared at each other, but for a moment only. With a sharp cry of delight, Lucille rushed into my arms.

"Ah, my Andre, I saw and heard everything, and you were so wonderful!" she exclaimed after I had kissed her several times. "I shall never forgive myself for doubting you. I would have come to you sooner, but Anton told me—"

"What did Anton tell you?" I demanded, beginning to see a little light on the whole affair.

"He came to my table early this afternoon, when we were all seated in the tea garden, and told me that you had sent a love note to this horrible creature here, and for me to follow her and see for myself. I did, and you know what I saw. Then when you didn't write to me later—"

"But I did send you a letter," I declared.

"I thought you had when the bellhop came to my door, but Anton answered the knock, and instead of taking the letter the boy handed him, he gave him another. He told me that it was only a letter to him from some woman whom he did not eare for. Then tonight he tried to make love to me and asked me to run off with him. I was very angry with you, but I still doubted that you had done all the things he told me, so he brought me here to prove that you were unfaithful. I was so glad to hear you say what you did to that awful man who wanted to hurt you."

I made no reply, but looked around for Anton, intending to give him a little American "satisfaction" also. I sighted him hastily entering an elevator at the end of the hall. Before I could reach him he was gone, and I have never seen him since.

"Do not worry about him, amour," soothed Lucille with a kiss, "for now everything is— what you call him, Hunky Doory?"

I turned and looked back into the room where the second Lucille was nursing the battered head of her portly Pierre in her arms. "Yes," I replied, taking my own Lucille in my arms, "everything is hunky doory."

———————

8: A Voice From The Dead

Arthur Gask

1869-1951

Chronicle (Adelaide) 30 Sep 1942

IT was quite late at night, and they had just returned from a bridge party. The two of them were discussing the people who had been present, as they were drinking a nightcap cup of tea.

"And then Camilla Brendon," said Mrs. James, a lively little woman, seemingly full of the joy of life, "isn't she smart and hasn't she kept her good looks? Do you know, dear, she's turned forty-two? Oh, yes, I know it for certain! We went to the same school together and she's a year older than I, and I'm forty-one."

"Well, she could have passed for thirty tonight," commented the other. "Hasn't she got a clever face?"

"And she is clever, Lucy; the cleverest woman I know. She's well read and highly intellectual. She's the president of our Literary Society and none of the men can take her down."

"But her husband looks very ordinary. I mean he's not a bit clever. I can't imagine her marrying a man like him."

"Neither can anyone else," commented Mrs. James, "but then Ted Brendon's a dear old chap. As you say, he's not a bit clever, but he's an ideal family man, and he just worships Camilla and the children."

Lucy smiled. "Then, of course, she married him for money. I remember old man Brendon left plenty when he died."

Her friend shook her head. "No, dear, you're wrong there. Camilla never was that sort. Besides, she was doing journalistic work then, and must have had quite a good salary." She looked thoughtful. "No, Lucy, she didn't marry him for money and I'm certain she didn't marry him for love. I rather think she married him out of gratitude for his kindness to the man she'd been engaged to before. That one died as the result of a terrible accident when they were miles away from everywhere, and Ted had nursed him and cared for him until he was dead."

"Then she had had a lover before her present husband!" exclaimed Lucy. She nodded. "And I suppose she loved him!"

"Yes, passionately," replied Mrs. James with emphasis. She smiled. "Under the mask of that proud and cold face of hers, Camilla hides what is left of feelings of the deepest passion.

"As a girl, as you can guess, she was very lovely, but no man appealed to her until Ransom Hellingsby came into her life. Then from an icicle she became

the burning fiery furnace. I knew her intimately then, and she confided in me more than she did in anyone else. She just idolised this Ransom of hers."

"And what sort of man was he? An Adonis superman, with all the virtues!"

Her friend sighed. "At any rate, she thought so. Oh, yes, he was good-looking, right enough, and very clever, too. He was a barrister, and everyone said he had a great future. He just swept Camilla off her feet and she loved him with every nerve and drop of blood in her."

"And he worshipped her in return?"

Mrs. James hesitated. "Yes and no. He couldn't help being fond of her in a man's sort of way, for she was so lovely to look at. Still, he'd been fond of many others before her, and, even when he was engaged to Camilla, he's supposed to have had other girl friends." She shook her head. "He wouldn't have made her the husband Ted Brendon has." She nodded again. "There were tales, too, that he drank."

"Well, what happened to him? You haven't told me."

"Oh, he was killed on a holiday! He and Ted Brendon and Michael Barling, now His Honor Judge Barling, were away shooting and fishing on Kangaroo Island, and in the wildest and most desolate part, Ransom fell over a cliff and got terribly hurt. His injuries were so bad, they daren't move him. Their car was 20 miles away, and, leaving Ted to look after him, Michael started to tramp 20 miles to get help. He sprained his ankle on the way, however, and it was two days before he was able to direct the rescue party to where Ransom was lying. Ted had done everything he could for him, but only a skilful surgeon could have saved him, and he was dead when they arrived."

"What a dreadful tragedy!" exclaimed Lucy. "I wonder it didn't kill Camilla."

"It almost did. She was heart-broken, and it was only to Ted Brendon she could ever bring herself to talk about what had happened. He often saw her, and, as Ransom's greatest friend, I suppose she thought he was all of Ransom that was left to her. At any rate, she must have been so grateful to him for his devotion to her dead Ransom and become so accustomed to him, that in the end she thought she could put up with him always. She could see, as everyone else did, that he was desperately in love with her. So two years later she married him."

"Is she happy?"

"Oh, yes, I think so— in a way. She's got two boys, the elder is 17, and a lovely girl of 15, and everything in the way of money she could want. Still, although it's more than 20 years ago, I think she still lives a bit in the past. When no one's watching her, her face in repose is sad."

The next morning the object of their conversation was seated alone in the breakfast room of her beautiful and well-appointed house. She had just seen

her husband off in his car, but had returned to the table to finish her cup of coffee and glance through the morning newspaper.

As her old school friend had stated, she was still, at 42, a very handsome woman. She was well and tastefully dressed, and everything about her spoke of the woman of refinement. She had a good profile and perfect complexion. Her eyes were large and of a deep blue. She held herself gracefully and her general poise was as of one who was very sure of herself.

It happened to be the 18th anniversary of her wedding, and she smiled faintly as she thought of the warm good-bye her husband had just given her.

Dear old Ted, she had known him since she was a little child, but had never given it a thought that he had been in love with her in those far-off years when she was only a long-legged girl just out of pigtails!

But then Ted had always been shy, and one to keep himself in the background. Even all that time after her great trouble he would have never dared to speak of his feelings for her if she hadn't taken pity on him and met him three parts of the way.

Well, he had proved the kindest of husbands for her, and she could not wish for anyone more considerate. He was so unselfish, too, and without a trace of jealousy. He had not minded in the least when she had asked if their first little one could be called Ransom, whereas most men would not have liked it that their son should be named after an old lover of their wife's, but he had just smiled and bowed his head in sorrowful memory, she had known, for the dead. Of course, he had loved Ransom, too. David and Jonathan they had been called at school, and in their college life, later, they had been inseparable.

Then that awful tragedy when Ransom had been killed! What torture it had been for Ted to give her all the ghastly details. But she had insisted she should know all at once, so that there should never be anything more terrible to tell her.

Her thoughts wandered then to her children and her mother's heart warmed within her. What a splendid man her elder son Ransom the second was going to be! Strong, masterful, and capable as the other Ransom had been. Indeed, she always liked to think he was not unlike him in appearance, too. And that must be, so her secret thoughts ran, because her first lovers image had remained so vivid in her mind.

Then her daughter, 15, only two years younger than Ransom, how lovely she was, and what a sweet disposition was hers. She had her father's ways, and what a treasure she would be for some man one day! She was— but her thoughts were interrupted by the entrance of the maid with the letters.

She ran through them carelessly, and then her face brightened as she saw one in the handwriting of her one-time lover's sister. She had always liked old Miss Hellingsby, who had been ten years older than Ransom.

The letter was a thick one in a big envelope, and, opening it, she found another envelope wrapped round with a piece of white paper, upon which was written, "Do not open this until you have read my letter." Miss Hellingsby's letter read:—

Dearest Camilla—

I was clearing out an old cupboard yesterday and came across a jacket of poor Ransom's. It was the spare one he must have taken with him on that dreadful holiday. As I was handling it, I felt something which had slipped down in the lining. It was this letter from him to you, which I now enclose. Of course, I have not opened it, and at first was inclined to burn it. But, then, I realised it really belonged to you, and so send it along.

Your affectionate friend,

Clare Hellingsby.

Camilla caught her breath, and, even after all those years, her heart beat much quicker. She opened the enclosed letter with trembling fingers, and her eyes wonderingly devoured what was written. It was dated Thursday, December 29. "The day before the accident," she murmured. "It was on the Friday he fell over that awful cliff."

After a few lines of endearment, and his declaring he was quite well, except for an occasional bout of neuralgia which bothered him a little, she came to a part which made her face blanch, and almost choked her as she breathed.

"Now here's something very strange, sweetheart, (she read,) *and I can't make it out. It sounds incredible, but something's happened to Ted, and I believe that for some reason he has come to hate me. Yesterday I had caught him several times looking very queerly at me when he thought I wasn't watching, and last night I half think he wanted me to do myself an injury.*

It was like this. Our camp is in a hollow just behind a big cliff, with a bit of a creek on the land side, where one can often get a duck when they come over about dusk. Well, after tea I went out by myself to try and pot some, and was in hiding behind some bushes. Of course, I had got my gun loaded. Then something, I don't know what, made me take the cartridges out and have a squint down the barrels of the gun. Perhaps I thought I hadn't cleaned them the previous day after we had been out after quail. At any rate, to my horror, I

found one of the barrels was choked up hard with caked mud. Only one of them, that was the funny part, but if I had fired the gun, then, good God! I might have got my hand blown off or even worse than that.

I knew the day before that the ground had been very muddy after the rain, and I had certainly put down my gun once or twice, but I couldn't credit the barrel having got in that state. Of course, that Ted has really been looking at me queerly and that he put the mud in the barrel of the gun may be all imagination, and I only tell you so that when you write back you may tell me what an ass I am. I have such great faith in your good sense. Some days fishing boats come in close to the shore, and I may get one to take this tomorrow.

The letter finished up with more endearing terms.

Camilla sat on with a white, set face. It was inconceivable, but what if Ransom had been pushed over that cliff and had not fallen over as had been made out?

When he had been killed there had been practically no enquiry at all. The island sergeant of police had made his report, and the coroner, to save himself trouble, everyone said, had not thought it necessary to hold any inquest.

But Ted— a murderer! It was incredible! Still, who could fathom the secrets of a man's heart where the passion for a woman was concerned? Had not history told over and over again how the natures of the gentlest and most inoffensive of men could harden and become brute-like when baulked in their pursuit of one of the other sex. They, too, then had lost all sense of conscience.

And Ted had been loving her all the time! He had told her so and how miserable his life had been, believing as he did then, that she could never be his!

Oh, how sorry she was she had been given that letter! Her affection for her husband had never merged into real passion, and she would loathe him now if she learnt he had had any part in Ransom's death.

Again she told herself it was impossible, but she added she could not let the matter rest there. No, she would go and see Michael Barling, the judge, and get the truth out of him that very day. He had been there with Ted when the accident had occurred, and so she would spring the letter upon him, being confident that, from the expression upon his face, she would be able to make out whether her husband had been guilty or not. It was vacation time, and the judge would probably be working in his garden in the afternoon. He was a bachelor, and flowers were the absorbing hobby of his life.

As she had expected, she found the judge at home, and he took her at once into his study.

"Michael," she said solemnly, "I can trust you, can't I? You'll always tell me the truth."

A distinguished looking man, with a keen, intellectual face and calm grey eyes, he regarded her curiously. "Certainly, Camilla," he replied, and he added, "there should surely have been no need for you to ask me that?"

"Well, here's a letter of Ransom's," she went on quickly, "and it was only given me this morning. His sister found it in the lining of the spare jacket he took away with him when you all went on that dreadful holiday." Her voice shook. "It is dated the day before he died. Here it is. Yes, read it right through and then you'll be sure it's his letter."

The judge took the letter from her with a calm impassive face, but he was soon frowning heavily. A long silence followed, for he read the letter twice before he looked up at her.

He spoke very quietly. "I don't know what to tell you, Camilla," he said. He tapped the letter disdainfully. "But, of course, what he suggests about Ted is all nonsense. All our guns were liable to get muddied, and Ransom was notoriously careless about his."

"Then what do you mean by saying you didn't know what to tell me?" asked Camilla sharply. "Are you keeping anything back?" Her voice shook. "Didn't Ransom die in the way it was given out?" She almost broke down. "Did my husband push him over the cliff?"

The judge's face was dark with indignation. "Don't be a fool, Camilla, and don't give way to hysteria. How dare you think such a thing about Ted?" He spoke scornfully. "I thought time had made you into a sensible, level-headed woman, and that—"

"But you said just now you didn't know what you ought to tell me," broke in Camilla tearfully, "and I thought you meant you were keeping something back."

"And so I was," commented the judge sternly, "but now I see I'll have to tell it you." He pointed to the letter he had given back to her. "For that neuralgia he refers to there, Ransom had been drinking heavily. He wasn't responsible for what he wrote, and, to make no bones about it, the next day he was drunk when he fell over that cliff."

Camilla covered her face with her hands. "Oh, but I can't believe it," she choked. "Ransom was always such a particular man. I'm sure he never drank too much."

"But he did," retorted the judge sharply. "He broke out occasionally when he was away. It wasn't often, but then he was as bad as anyone." He spoke regretfully. "I'm sorry, Cam, I had to tell you this, but you forced me to. I couldn't let the very faintest suspicion of anything rankle on in your mind."

"Then Ted wasn't near him when he fell over the cliff?" she asked faintly.

"Half the length of this room away," replied the judge. "I was much closer." He patted her kindly on the shoulder. "Look here, little woman, go back home and be the very nicest wife in the world to Ted. He's worth it, I tell you, every inch of him."

She began to mop her eyes. "I know that, Michael. He's been an ideal husband and father. I'll forget all about this letter, and burn it directly I get home. I've been very foolish."

"Yes, you have," smiled the judge, "but don't wait until you get home to burn this letter. Burn it straightaway in this grate. Here, give it to me and I'll set a match to it. That's right. There— it's all gone up in smoke," he raised his finger warningly, "and now you never breathe a word to your husband that you received it. Promise me, now. Good, you're a sensible woman again!"

He saw her out of the house, and then, returning to his study, sank back wearily into an armchair and wiped over his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Whew, that was unpleasant," he murmured with a wry face, "and may God forgive me for the lie!" He nodded. "Still, he was drunk right enough two nights before, or else, with Ted present, he'd have never let out about that other woman he was carrying on with. The brute, going to be married within a month to an innocent and lovely girl like Cam., and yet boasting about the mistress he'd got! Gad, how Ted glared at him, the devoted Ted who up to then had always regarded him as his hero! But with Ted's secret adoration of Cam. Ransom's admission was sacrilege of the vilest nature."

He sighed heavily. "Yes, I had to tell her that lie, or else their two lives would have become one long drawn-out misery. She'd have never forgiven Ted because, indirectly, of course, everything was due to him. He certainly provoked the fight by suddenly blurting out to Ransom what he thought of him. Still, the fighting was perfectly fair, I saw to that, and there'd have been no accident at all if Ransom hadn't staggered back too far under that blow and lost his balance." He sighed again. "But it was best for Cam that he was killed. He'd have made her a shocking husband, and I don't wonder old Ted told me the other day that he regretted nothing."

Then, suddenly, the judge's eyes happening to rove round the room, fell upon the ashes of the burnt letter in the grate and, with a gesture as if of great annoyance, he strode over and ground them to powder under his foot.

All at once, then, he started and stood stock still. His jaw dropped and his forehead became all puckered up in a puzzled frown. He stared into vacancy and held his breath as if he were listening. But he was not listening— it was only that a sudden thought had come to him, and for the moment he would not give it expression.

"God, I had quite forgotten about that!" he exclaimed at last. "What about the choked-up barrel of the gun? Men have been killed by less than that."

With seeming reluctance he followed up the train of thought. "Was Ransom purposely lying about it to prejudice Camilla against Ted, in case Ted told her anything? He could tell by Ted's manner what he thought of him. Or did Ted really block up that barrel? Did he deliberately intend to—"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, I'll never ask him, anyhow. Goaded by Ransom's treachery to Camilla, it would have been a sort of wild justice, and with a man of Ted's kind and gentle disposition"— he half smiled— "the wrath of the sheep."

9: The Midnight Express

L. McQuaid

fl 1890s

Belgravia January 1898

IT WAS the day before Christmas, and I had been more than busy, shopping in town, not only the many gifts for the family party at Denham s which I was taking down with me, but my sister had also sent me a long list of things to buy for the villagers and the school children, as she is quite the Lady Bountiful of that part of the world, and delights in keeping up the old-time ways of making the whole neighbourhood share in the Christmas festivities at Denham Court.

The shops were crowded with people on the same errand as myself, and it was no easy matter to get served, though the overworked shopmen were doing their best, so by the time I had completed my purchases and got to the station with my many and various packages, the eight o'clock train that I had hoped to catch was gone, and there was nothing for it but to exercise what patience I could and wait for the next train which left at ten o'clock. So telegraphing to Denham to let him know I should not be home until after one o'clock in the morning, I sat down to amuse myself as I best could with the hurrying, pushing throng, that passed me constantly on the platform of the station.

Men with their coat collars turned up— for it was a cold night— running to catch their trains, their arms laden with bundles, out of the wrapping papers f which stuck the shafts of small carts, horses' legs, the uncovered heads of drums, and now and again the flaxen hair and blue eyes of some doll that would give joy to some small mother on the morrow. Women with tiny babies in their arms, and dragging a dozen small children at their skirts, would get hopelessly entangled in the hurrying mass, and one wondered how the much burdened officials managed to separate them and get them into their proper trains.

Among those who attracted my notice most was a tall, foreign-looking young man, he was not hurrying as the others were, but came and took up his stand under the clock, near me, and it was this very quietude among the frantic rush that first drew my eyes to him; that, and a sort of strange fascination I felt in looking at him.

He wore a circular Italian cloak made of a dark cloth which fell to his knees, the fur collar of which was turned up around his long thin neck, a soft black felt hat was pulled down somewhat over the sombre eyes that looked out so darkly from under the brim. For half-an-hour he must have stood there without moving, except for a rapid stealthy look over his shoulders when any

one approached closely to him; and once or twice during the time he lifted his hat, and ran his fingers rapidly through his long black hair, which hung down in a heavy mass below his cloak collar. At last my weary waiting was over, and the porter picking up my many packages, and piloting me along the platform saw me safely into a first class carriage at the front of the train, where, as I had the compartment to myself, I was able to make myself comfortable for the long journey. I unstrapped my rugs, made a pillow for my head out of my muff, and covering myself up well, lay gazing out of the window as we slowly steamed out of the station.

I was glad to be alone, and thankfully remembered that the ten o'clock train was an express, so I should be able to take an undisturbed nap when I felt sleepy. It was a clear, cold night with a most brilliant moon, almost at its full, and the landscape when we finally got out into the country away from even the last straggling suburbs, stood out most clear and distinct in the white light; a slight fall of snow had covered the ground to the depth of an inch or two, rounding and smoothing all its inequalities and causing the leafless trees that were silhouetted sharply against its whiteness, to look like fine etchings draw n on the pure background.

After a while I took out one of my books and tried to read, but the lamp gave a very uncertain light, indeed I began to suspect that on this high pressure day it had been overlooked by the man who should have trimmed it, and as it grew dimmer and dimmer I shut my book and settled myself down more comfortably in my corner and in a few minutes I fell fast asleep.

How long I slept I do not know, but I suddenly awakened to a feeling of not being alone in the compartment, and opening my eyes I saw that two other passengers must have got into the carriage while I slept. Being Christmas eve no doubt the arrangements of the line were altered, and the ten o'clock train was not an express as I had fancied. The lamp had quite gone out, but the moonlight was, if anything, brighter than before, and as it shone directly into the windows of our compartment, everything was to be seen almost as plainly as by day, and by its light I looked lazily at my companions. On the opposite side, in the corner furthest from me, close to the window, sat a young girl, with fair golden hair and blue eyes, that looked frankly at me across the carriage; she was well dressed, and her bag and rugs, and various travelling necessities had that nameless air of wealth that is so hard to describe but so readily seen; a book, which she had evidently been trying to read by the moonlight, lay on the seat beside her, and one ungloved hand supported her head.

The other passenger sat directly opposite to me in the other corner; he was somewhat in shadow, as the moonlight did not reach up to his face as he leant back against the cushions, but I could see enough to make out a tall man

wrapped up in a coat or cloak, and a hat drawn somewhat down over his brows; he was evidently asleep, at least he sat so still I imagined so. And lying there I began to idly speculate on the two passengers, and if they had any connection with each other; they must at least have entered the train together, as it was hardly possible we could have stopped at more than one station during my sleep, and, yes— she was a married woman, for on her hand held up to her face I could see the plain gold ring that showed it; most probably the man in the corner was her husband, not newly married, or they would not have put the distance of the carriage between them. Yes— certainly he must be her husband, for at this moment he leant a little forward, though still in shadow, and with a long slim hand lifted one of the rugs on the seat close beside her and threw it over his own knees. At the same moment she turned her head a little m ore towards him, and gave him a cold look of disapproval.

Poor little wife, looking more closely at her, she did not look happy, a little frown drew the pretty eyes together, and the corners of the small mouth had a discontented droop. She looked very young, too, and so pretty, with a little sort of foreign air, in spite of her fair hair and quite English-looking face. Presently I saw her settle herself more comfortably back in her corner, and her heavy eyelids gradually closing, she seemed to fall asleep. I was about doing the same, when I was attracted b y the m an opposite, moving restlessly and yet stealthily; once or twice he leant forward towards the girl as though to make sure she w as really asleep, and as he did so he left the shadow of the corner and the full moonlight fell upon his upturned face, so I was able to see him most distinctly, and to my surprise I recognised the same man who had attracted my attention in the station during my long wait; but now the face I had thought so calm and statuesque seemed to work with a strange passion, and the sombre eyes were flashing like a tiger's when ready to spring.

He did not seem to notice me, but his movements had thoroughly awakened me, and I lay watching him closely, while at the same time a strange feeling of evil seemed to weigh upon me, and I felt as if a heavy hand of ice was laid upon my heart. Sinking back in his corner again, he unfastened with long white fingers the clasp of his cloak, which, released from its fastening, fell in heavy folds around him.

It was the same cloak I had noticed him wearing in the station— a long Italian circular, of heavy cloth and handsome fur collar; then sliding his hand into the pocket of the cloak, he drew something out, and bending over it, seemed occupied with it for some time; then suddenly rising, with the step of a panther, stepped out into the moonlight, and I saw the naked blade of a short dagger gleam as he raised it in his hand.

Merciful heavens! we were shut in with a madman; and hurriedly disentangling myself from my wraps, I tried to rise to my feet. At the same moment, I saw him throw himself on the poor girl in the corner, and clutching her throat, bury the dagger into her side. With a loud shriek, and without thought of the con sequences, I sprang to the floor to rush forward to try and save the unfortunate creature, but at the same moment, with a shrill whistle, the train dashed into a tunnel, which after the moonlight, seemed doubly dark in our unlighted carriage. I felt how powerless I was to cope with this madman, and when the dark fell so suddenly on us I was quite overcome by a frantic feeling of fear, and crouched back in my corner, trying to cower under the rugs to protect my self at least from his violence.

Can you imagine the horror of it— the intense darkness and this awful deed taking place so close to me? The terror of it will remain with me always, and seemed at that moment to turn me into stone. Every minute was an age. I could fancy the man creeping softly along the carriage to clutch my throat too in his deadly grasp, when with another whistle the train dashed out o f the tunnel into the broad moonlight again, and I was alone!— alone! Think of it

He must have, in the short time, thrown her poor body out on to the track; but where was he? and, quite dazed, I flew to the side of the carriage to thrust my arm out and pull the alarm. Heavens! what was this? Both windows were closed and the door, on that side, at least, locked, for I tried it in my horror, and, looking wildly about the carriage, no marks of violence, no rugs, no cloak— nothing to show that any other being had been in the compartment but myself; only the calm moonlight lay over all. Weak and dazed, I sank back on the seat. Was it *I* that was mad? Could I disbelieve the sight of my own eyes? Ah! it was terrible! and I was still sitting, almost incapable of thought and with heart beating violently, when the train ran into the little station of Denham. I gathered my rugs up mechanically as the guard opened the door. I must have shown in my face what I had gone through, for the man said in an alarmed tone as he helped me out—

"Would you like anything, ma'am? You look faint. Or shall I help you to the carriage? it is just outside."

I refused his kind offer, but stopped him to ask what stations we had stopped at since leaving London. He shook his head and said— "None. It is the ten o 'clock express; though, to be sure, it is main late."

On reaching home I told my sister and brother-in-law , but I could see they thought that, tired out with my long day in town, that I had slept the whole journey, and had had a troubled dream. However, the horror of the night had made me thoroughly ill, and for many days I kept my room, with nerves quite shattered and suffering from a sort of low fever, to which I was predisposed

from my many years spent abroad. Our own doctor was away from home on a holiday, but his clever young partner visited me, and took much interest in my account of all that had occurred, and his belief in my sanity, and the realising of what I had seen, comforted me, though after the first confidence he forbade me talking of it, and advised me to put it from my thoughts as far as I could. So gradually I got back my peace of mind, and ceased to constantly dwell upon the mystery. I was helped in this by the bright young party that was about me. All the nephew s and nieces were home from school, and the nursery children were full of fun and frolic.

About the middle of January, when I was in the sunny morning room, helping arrange the lovely flowers that the gardener had just brought in from the hothouse, the butler came to know if I would see Dr. Sands and a person he had brought with him, and directly afterwards the young doctor made his appearance, accompanied by a quiet-looking, gentlemanly man of somewhat solemn demeanour. As soon as we were alone he was presented to me as a well-known detective from Scotland Yard, who wished to ask me a few questions about my Christmas Eve experience, and I was surprised to have him beg I would minutely describe the appearance and dress of the man who had taken the leading part in my night of terror; and, taking out his note-book, he jotted down every item, and then, begging me not to be shocked, told me that he had every reason to believe that the strange occurrence I had witnessed had actually taken place— not on the night I saw it, but twelve months before. A murder had been committed in the ten o'clock express from London on that same line, and, strangely enough, in the same carriage in which I had journeyed down from town. Since the occurrence it had not been used, having been placed on a siding, but the pressure on Christmas Eve was so great that every carriage available had been pressed into service.

That night, twelve months ago, when the train reached its destination, the carriage was empty, though the porter in the London station swore to putting two people into it before starting, a lady and gentleman; though in the hurry of departure and the crowded state of the platform, he had hardly time to observe him. The compartment, how ever, showed signs of a terrible struggle— rugs, umbrellas, and various travelling necessities were strewn about, and the blood-marked cushions were pulled on to the floor; the carriage window was broken and the door unfastened.

Telegraphing down the line, the body of a young girl was found, lying on the rails, quite dead, stabbed to the heart.

"A beautiful young thing she must have been," said the detective, "with fair golden hair; a broad gold wedding ring was on her finger, but nothing on or about her that could lead to her identification."

The papers were full of the murder and inquest for some days ; but being in India at the time, I had not heard anything of it.

Every means had been taken to discover the murderer, but all had failed, and at Scotland Yard they had begun to look upon it as one of those mysteries that would never be found out; but oddly enough their attention had again been attracted to the subject by a communication from the Italian police, who begged their help to discover the whereabouts of an Italian Count, who was supposed to be in hiding in London, and their description of the man tallied in every particular with mine, and they had no doubt he was the long-looked for murderer of the poor young creature.

According to the account from Italy, he was a well-known man, belonging to an aristocratic family in one of the northern provinces. They owned a fine old castle and considerable lands in the Apennines, but were thought proud and poor; and the present Count was, on account of dissipated habits, more straightened than most of the family.

A little over a year ago he had married a young and beautiful German girl, the orphan daughter of a wealthy banker, who had a large fortune of her own.

After six months of married life, which seemed far from happy, owing to his violent temper, they had left the castle to travel; the Count telling everyone that he and his wife intended spending some little time in England. But they had been absent only a fortnight or so when the Count returned alone, telling the household that the Countess had been taken suddenly ill while in London, and died, and that he had only waited for the funeral to return.

By a will made at the time of the marriage, the whole of the Countess's money came to the Count, and on his return he threw himself once more into his wild and dissolute life, which much scandalized his household, who had grown very fond of the young Countess during her short life at the castle, and who felt aggrieved that the Count had not let them know of her illness and death while he was away.

Some months after he had gone to Florence taking his valet with him, and the man, whose name was Santro, had made friends with an English valet whose master was staying at the same hotel, and who had brought down for the benefit of the other servants a pile of English papers that had accumulated in his master's room s during some months. On looking them over Santro had been struck with the account of the murder in the train, an account of which was given fully in the paper, and became more and m ore convinced as he read that the poor young creature so minutely described was his poor mistress, particularly when he remembered that his master had stopped all enquiries they had made as to their mistress's illness and death, in a most violent manner, which had caused great suspicion in the servants' minds. Determined

to satisfy himself Santro took the paper up to his master's room with his afternoon cup of coffee, and folding it so that he could not avoid seeing the account, laid it down in front of him.

The result was more than Santro anticipated. The Count rose to his feet as pale as death, then flying into a terrible passion and heaping upon Santro's head every possible malediction, he seized his hat and cloak and abruptly left the room. Santro, frightened at what had occurred, but more than ever convinced of the Count's guilt, waited in great alarm for his return; but as hour after hour passed he became anxious and went to consult with his brother who was in the police force, who insisted upon laying the whole story before the proper authorities, and they deeming it most suspicious sent at once to apprehend the Count at his castle, to which he was supposed to have gone. However he had not been there, but had at once gone to his Florence bankers, and drawing out a very large sum of money had evidently left Italy, and after some weeks of search the police became convinced that he had made his way to England, and so communicated with Scotland Yard.

My description of the murderer— strangely enough as I had come by it— so tallied with that of the Italian police that there was no doubt but the Count must be the murderer of the poor young creature.

Also my having seen him on the platform on Christmas night eve showed that he was still in London, and once on his track the police followed him persistently, until they came up with him in one of the western cities of America whither he had fled to escape them. Brought to bay, how ever, he managed to escape justice by shooting himself while the police were endeavouring to secure him, perhaps better for himself and far better for his family, who were spared the disgrace of one of their members meeting with a felon's death.

10: The Infallible Eye

Arthur P. Hankins

1880-1932

Argosy Allstory Weekly, 28 Nov 1925

Arthur Preston Hankins

Foreword

LANIER KARNAK, forty years of age and comfortably well-to-do, lives in the hills that stand between San Anselmo and the sea, across the bay to the north of San Francisco. Studious, pretty much of a hermit, a bachelor, he spends the greater part of his time on his wooded acres, puttering around with tools, feeding squirrels and birds, buiiding trails with pick and shovel, and attending to his garden. But when he decides to break his hermitry and go to the city across the bay, nothing gives him more pleasure than to watch the crowds in the various gathering places of mankind. An insatiable desire to know the life secrets of some of the interesting people he looks upon often leads him to follow them to see what they will do. Then it is that he calls himself the Shadow. These strange trips lead him into many queer adventures, the second of which is set forth in the narrative that follows.

1: Karnak Crosses The Street

KARNAK left the Pelicans' Club at half past seven in the evening. His dinner had been remarkably good— the companions with whom he had chatted had seemed exceptionally clever and entertaining. He felt fine as he started forth for a walk about the great gray city, swinging his cane and drawing slowly on an aro- matic cigar.

For three solid weeks he had kept to his home in the hills across the bay. There with his books and his cigars, his tools and his games of chess, billiards, and poker with occasional friends who dropped in on him— there with his music and his paintings and his pets— he had been content for the twenty-one days just past.

Then suddenly there had come over him a longing for contact with his fellow man. And promptly he had ordered his Chinese chauffeur, Fook Gee, to get out the big closed car and drive him to San Francisco.

Dinner in his favorite club had followed, and now, having begged off with difficulty from the many friends who wanted more of him after so long an absence, he sallied forth on one of his nocturnal prowlings in search of the curious in life.

As he strolled along in his neat-fitting evening clothes, with his topcoat over his arm and his slender stick in his gloved hand, he presented a figure that many paused to gaze at. Strong, healthy, prosperous looking, good-natured, genuine, he commanded the respect of all who glanced his way. All of which was in no way displeasing to Lanier Karnak.

He reached Mason Street at last and ambled along with the crowds, his eyes coasting here and there for some clew that gave promise of an interesting and profitable evening. But though he gazed mildly into hundreds of faces, he saw none that made him wish to follow its owner. Not until he reached O'Farrel Street.

Here on the corner, however, he came up to a man who was looking this way and that with some expectancy. And he varied his glances into the faces of passers-by with frequent consultations of his thin-cased watch. Like Karnak, he wore a dress suit and carried a cane.

Now, there was nothing particularly strange in a man's standing at the corner of O'Farrel and Mason Streets, looking at the dial of his watch occasionally and scrutinizing the faces of the passing throng. Quite apparently he was expecting somebody— had an appointment with some one at that hour and place.

Countless thousands of men, perhaps, had done the same thing on that same corner since the days when San Francisco was a — mining camp. And there was nothing characteristically striking or unusual about this man in evening clothes. But Karnak, on the lookout for a subject, paused a short way off and watched him.

Immediately the pale-gray eyes of the stranger settled on him, and in the eyes came a questioning expression. The man looked at him with such studious expectancy that Karnak became embarrassed.

It struck him that the other was waiting for someone with whose face he was not quite familiar. Else he would not have picked on Karnak as possibly the person he was due to meet simply because Karnak. had paused on that corner.

The man took three steps toward the dis- comfited watcher, halted, and glanced at his watch again.

Karnak took out his own watch and looked at it to hide his perplexity, It was three minutes after nine.

Karnak looked up to witness a gleam of resolve in the other's eyes. The man smiled faintly and started toward him again. Whereupon Karnak, in order to disabuse the other's mind of the thought that he was the person he was looking for, turned about and started up the street.

The man did not follow him. He completed the block, crossed Mason Street, and started back in the direction whence he came. And when he reached O'Farrel again, but at an opposite corner from the one on which the well-dressed man had stood, he encountered another individual in evening clothes who was engaged in the same pursuit.

In other words, he too was looking patiently into the faces of the passing crowd and occasionally glancing at his watch.

Now Karnak knew the plot. These two men, whose faces were not very well known to each other— or not at all— had made an appointment to meet on the corner of O'Farrel and Mason Streets at nine o'clock. But they had neglected to designate which corner of Mason and O'Farrel was to witness their meeting— and, like all intersecting streets, O'Farrel and Mason had four corners. Hence one man was waiting and watching on one corner, while the other half of the combination was holding down the corner opposite.

Karnak essayed to relieve the rather stupid situation.

"Pardon me," he said, stepping up to this second restive waiter. "You have an appointment at the corner of O'Farrel and Mason at nine o'clock with some one, haven't you?"

The man's face brightened. " Sure have," he returned. " With eight some ones. Are you one of the eight? Your face seems sort of familiar, but eight years is a long time, you know. Which one are you?" And he took from his pocket a small notebook and thumbed the pages.

He found what he was looking for be- fore Karnak could explain that he was not included in the eight people whom the other was to meet. The man looked up from his notebook, a comradely smile on his face, and Karnak found himself growing interested in the promising situation of one man meeting eight others whose faces he was not sure of. So he did not interrupt as the stranger began to speak.

"Let's see," he said, reading from the little book. " 'Joseph Langhorne, Maximilian Bozeman, John Sterrett, Fred Muir, Walter Loomis, Abijah Warbranch, George Sullivan, Ralph Hoard.' One of those names is yours. Now, which one are you?"

Karnak smiled and started to correct him, but he held up a hand for silence. "Don't tell me," he cautioned. "Let me see if I can remember. Come over here in the light."

Karnak followed. him to a spot before the show window of a store, still holding his peace. His business was to study humanity, and here was a likely subject. The man scrutinized his face carefully, then was obliged to shake his head.

"I can't name you," he confessed. "But, as I remarked a moment ago, eight years is a long time. Eight years works marked changes in a fellow's mug. And you don't know me either. I'm Felix Van Zant. Now which of the eight are you?"

It was time for Karnak to set him right.

"I'm not any one of them," he said. "My name is Lanier Karnak, and I haven't any appointment with you here at nine o'clock. I merely noticed you watching the faces of the crowd and consulting your watch, and stopped to tell you that another man is doing precisely the same thing on the opposite corner.

"You see, when you made your appointment you neglected to state, no doubt, the exact corner of Mason and O'Farrel on which you were to meet. I'm sorry to have disappointed you, Mr. Van Zant. Please accept my card." And Karnak opened his case and tendered one.

The man took it with a crestfallen countenance. Then he smiled good-humoredly.

"I'm mighty sorry you're not one of the eight," he said. "Or, rather, one of the nine— which includes myself. I like your face, if you'll pardon me, and can only wish that you were one of us. However— thank you. I'll hurry across the street and see who is waiting there."

Laughing lightly, he stepped into the roadway, dodged a potential murderer in the shape of a taxi driver, and crossed diagonally.

Karnak's glance followed him. Should he drop the trail and hunt for someone else? No, the situation still looked promising.

What nine men, not sure of one another's looks, were to meet on some corner of Mason and O'Farrel? And why? Two of them he had seen. The other seven remained a challenging mystery.

Karnak crossed the street.

2: The Romping Earls

WHEN Karnak reached the other corner of Mason and O'Farrel he found five men—two of whom were those he had previously seen— laughing and slapping one another on the back. He stepped into the shadow of a building and watched them.

Apparently three more of the nine had joined the first two. Now came two others, one at a time, reaching forth their hands in greeting and laughing boyishly. They looked one another over carefully, made good-naturedly, caustic remarks about one another's appearance, and seemed to be enjoying the situation hugely. For five minutes the seven remained on the corner, but were not joined by the missing two. Then Karnak heard one of them say:

"Well, it's nearly fifteen minutes after nine, The appointment was for nine sharp. There are seven of us here— seven true ones. The other two may be dead or in heathen China, for all we know. Let's give 'em up and go to Trent's before it is too late for them to seat us all together. We'll find taxi-cabs in front of the Hotel Stewart. It's less than two blocks; let's walk it." Locking arms, four abreast in front and three abreast in the rear, they started along Mason Street, turning at Geary and strolling down toward Powell. And when they had all piled into two yellow taxicabs in front of the Hotel Stewart, the Shadow slunk into a third and told the driver to follow. Through Chinatown the trail led him— through Chinatown and onto the old Barbary Coast. Before Trent's, an old landmark resort which was still struggling for existence on near-beer and near-Scotch, the seven alighted. When they had passed a through the garish doors Karnak paid his fare and followed them.

Inside, with the jazz orchestra blaring in his ears, Karnak discovered that the head waiter had been claimed by the seven celebrants. With head bowed deferentially, he was listening to explicit instructions given him by one who seemed to have taken command.

Karnak stopped a passing waiter of lesser caliber and hypnotized him with a five-dollar bill as he twiddled it in his fingers.

"See those seven gentlemen talking with your boss?" he asked.

"Yes, sir."

"They will be seated together, I think. Do you know where that will be?"

"Seven of them? Let's see, sir. On the mezzanine floor, I think. Yes, sir— there's a vacancy there for a large party." Karnak drew the bill tantalizingly between his fingers. It made a dulcet sound.

"Can you seat me near them, where I can hear?"

"Yes, sir— I think I can manage it. The table is in an alcove— a sort of large booth. I can seat you close to it, I think, sir."

"This is yours when you've done so," Karnak bribed.

"Thank you, sir. In just a moment. Will you stand at the bottom of the stairway to the mezzanine, sir, until I've finished with a party I'm serving now?"

"I'll stand," Karnak informed him, "without being tied."

The waiter forced his avid glance from the crinkly bill and whisked himself away. The head waiter was leading the seven up the stairway mentioned. Karnak followed and, taking up a position at its base, casually studied the gathering throng in Trent's.

When the corrupted waiter finally led Karnak to the mezzanine floor, the seven were already gathered around a table in the alcove. It didn't offer much privacy, but the young men seemed content.

Karnak was seated at a table near the edge of the mezzanine railing, directly in front of the alcove. He could look over and down at the crowd, while not ten feet from him stood the table of the seven diners, with not even a curtain to shield them.

He could hear the medley of their voices plainly, and when any one of the group raised his tones to address the entire gathering every word that he spoke was distinguishable.

Karnak thought that such speeches from one to all were likely to convey more information than the casual conversation of the party.

As usual in cases like this, Karnak suffered from a feeling of guilt over his astonishing effrontery in spying on these men; but he promptly stepped on the serpent's head. He was out to study humanity, to find out what life was about, and his conscience must not be allowed to interfere.

A man was now addressing the gathering in the alcove. Karnak listened.

"Well, gentlemen, were all here but two," began the speaker. "And to be quite frank with you, when I walked to O'Farrel and Mason this evening I didn't expect to find a single man waiting there for me. " Eight years of a man's life is a long period—a goodly fraction of his threescore years and ten. We are all eight years older than we were on the 15th of April, 1917. We are all, no doubt, eight years more serious. So, as I have said, I am surprised that the pact was kept by as many as seven of us, and—"

Just here the head waiter bustled past Karnak and stood in the arched entrance to the alcove.

"Pardon me, sir," he said, apparently addressing the speaker, "but the manager received a cablegram early this evening, and he's wondering if it is for you gentlemen. It is addressed"— he consulted the yellow envelope— "to 'The Romping Earls, in care of Trent's Café, San Francisco.' "

"Thats us!" roared several voices. "We're the Romping Earls. Shoot the news to us."

The waiter handed the cablegram to the man whose address had been interrupted: There was a short space of silence except for the sound of tearing paper, and then the speaker's voice was heard again. He read:

Paris, France, April 15, 1925.
To The Romping Earls,
Care of Trent's Café,
San Francisco, Calif., U. S. A.:
Brothers—
I greet you from Paris. My spirit will be with you on the night of the 15th of April, 1925, as you sit about the table in Trent's and recall that other 15th of April when the nine of us romped the streets of San Francisco, so young, so foolish, so gay. I cannot join you, for I am a slave to the lamp of duty and to the ring of ambition here in Paris, but my heart and my thoughts are yours.
Maximilian Bozeman

"Good!" shouted his listeners. " One more heard from. That's eight of us. Now where's the ninth?"

The speaker claimed attention again.

"I started in to make a wonderful speech," he said, " but this interruption has made me forget what I was going to say. However, that doesn't matter. We're going about this in an unmilitary manner anyway. The first thing in order should be a roll call. I forgot that. I'll call the names:

"Joseph Langhorne!"

"Here with bells on!"

"Walter Loomis!"

"Heah!"'

"John Sterrett!"

"Here! "

"Maximilian Bozeman!"

"That's the guy in Paris, Just heard from him. Fellow that cabled," came explanations from several throats.

" Fair enough!" replied the master of ceremonies. "Fred Muir!"

There was no answer.

"Guess he's the missing ninth," remarked the speaker. "Abijah Warbranch! I'll answer to that myself. Here, by golly! Felix Van Zant!"

"Here!" piped the voice of the man Karnak had spoken with on the corner of Mason and O'Farrel.

"Ralph Hoard!"

"Here, sir!"

"George Sullivan!"

"Right here!"

"That's nine. Fred Muir and Maximilian Bozeman are absent. Bozeman has explained his failure to keep the pact, but it must be remembered that, eight years ago, we nine earls solemnly swore that — nothing but death should keep us apart tonight."

"We were all lit," somebody reminded him.

"Pardon me, we were half lit. We were as the Lord meant us to be— happy. We were right. And when a man is right— when a right man is right— the best that's in him comes to the surface. So of the nine of us, seven have proved themselves to be nature's noblemen. And from now on, if we decide to get together in the future, we will be known as the Seven Romping Earls instead of the nine. Bozeman and Muir are herewith forever excommunicated, expelled, sprung, fired, and stepped upon. But, gentlemen, isn't it really remarkable that even seven of us should be here?

"We had never met, as a whole, before that memorable night of the 15th of April, 1915. Two or three pairs of us were already friends, if I remember correctly. But we were not knighted as earls until we formed the combination. We were out for a good time— to make a night of it. San Francisco was having a big carnival— I— don't remember what it was all about. But I know that the United States hadn't as yet entered the World War, so it couldn't have been a militaristic demonstration.

"Yes, I see that you, over there, remember what it was, and want to tell me. But never mind. It's immaterial what we were celebrating. The point is that we were celebrating something, and celebrating it right!"

Here his six listeners clapped their hands.

"Anyway," continued the man who had named himself Abijah Warbranch, "we realized that in numbers there was strength. In some mysterious way, as we were romping down the streets, throwing confetti and blowing horns and generally making fools of ourselves, we got together. We formed a wedge and went through the crowds like a football team. The city was ours. We made regular asses of ourselves, but we harmed nobody. Then when the drinks started coming a little faster, in celebration of some coup that we had just pulled off in the street somebody suggested that we all go to Trent's and have something to eat.

"Trent's was as lively, or more so, than the streets outside; and, to make a long story short, we had one helluva time. We had a big, fine dinner and quarts and quarts of champagne. And we became so friendly that, in a romantic and somewhat maudlin mood, we swore to meet again every 15th of April, at the corner of Mason and O'Farrel— where the fun started— and to go from there to Trent's for our annual blowout.

"All nine of us kept the pact twice. But in the same month of our second annual party the United States had entered the World War, and we realized that most of us would go to France and that we might never meet again.

"So, not knowing how long the war would last, we made a pact that, eight years from that night, we would resume the proceedings and meet once more at, the old corner on our way to Trent's. And here we are— seven of us.

"So far as I personally am concerned, I have met only one of you during that lapse of time. But, as some of you were already acquainted with one another, my case is not representative of the general situation. I knew Felix Van Zant before that night. In fact, we were together when we joined the rest of you and did our part to make the Romping Earls notorious. And we have kept in touch with each other since.

" And now, beginning on my left, I am going to ask each man to rise to his feet and tell what changes have come to him. But before we begin let's recall our battle cry which we used that night when we were bulling our way through the crowds. Who remembers it? I think it was composed for the occasion by the man who calls himself John Sterrett. Mr. Sterrett, kindly rise and refresh our memories."

Near the foot of the table a tall man, whom Karnak was just able to see from his position, rose to his feet.

"Here it is," he announced:

"Were the Romping Earls, the Romping Earls!
Nine of us— count 'em— nine!
We romp all night when the lights are bright,
And our principal prey is girls— romping girls!
Nine of us— count 'em— nine!"

A buzz of laughter and conversation followed, which was interrupted by the master of ceremonies.

"Now, all together!" he encouraged. "The Romping Earls— here we go—"

And solemnly they repeated the nonsensical verse in unison.

Karnak smiled. He could picture that carnival night, could picture these men, ten years younger— twenty-one might have been their average age then— making the night hideous as they tramped the streets in a body and skylarked with the pretty girls. Karnak was a college man himself. He remembered.

"IT'S a wonder we didn't all get pinched," remarked one of the Romping Earls, as the verse was finished.

Then came the head waiter to find out if they were ready for dinner to be served, and a pause ensued. Afterward, one at a time, while the dinner was in progress, they rose from their chairs and told of where life had called them in the eight years past.

These recitals were intensely, humanly interesting. All of them had prospered, it seemed, and many had wandered to the far corners of the earth. Most of them had participated in the World War. "But not one confessed to being a bootlegger, at which the chairman marveled greatly.

Then it came the turn of the man with whom Karnak had talked on the street corner, Felix Van Zant. He rose from his chair and talked in an easy, charming manner. But the master of ceremonies, at the head of the table, was in full view. And Karnak noticed that his eyes were blazing, and that, as they remained steadily on Van Zant's face in an insolent, cruel look, he leaned forward tensely.

Karnak remembered that this man, Abijah Warbranch, claimed to have been in touch with Felix Van Zant during the eight-year period just passed.

Felix Van Zant had just resumed his seat at the banquet table amid the applause of his six brother earls, when a wizened little man came up the stairway to the mezzanine and stepped to the alcove entrance. He carried a camera and tripod.

"Here he is now!" cried Abijah Warbranch, from the head of the table. "You're late, Eli."

"I know it—I— couldn't help it," pleaded the little man, who at once began setting up his camera.

Warbranch addressed his fellow diners.

"Gentlemen," he told them, "I have taken the liberty of engaging a photographer for the occasion. This is Mr. Eli Smedley, an old acquaintance of mine— a professional photographer and newspaper reporter. Were going to have a flashlight picture of ourselves gathered about the table, and the picture and a little write-up will appear in the papers to-morrow. But, Eli, the table's all messed up now. You should have been here before we began to eat."

"I know it— I couldn't help it," reiterated the man with the camera.

"Well, I guess it will be all right after this course has been cleared away," said Warbranch. " We'll have things straight- ened up for that picture. Go ahead and get the thing focused, Eli— or whatever you do with it— while we finish the course. And let's see. Were to hear from Mr. Loomis next. Mr. Loomis, kindly take the floor."

While the man who sat next to Van Zant was speaking the little photographer monkeyed with his camera, moving it here and there, and peering through it at the gathering, with a black cloth over his head.

Then came two waiters who cleared the fish course from the table and, at a com- mand from Warbranch, readjusted the silver and other appointments in readiness for the photograph to be taken. Then Warbranch sent one of them for the manager, who appeared, and, after listening carefully to something that Warbranch said, nodded his head in acquiescence.

"Get ready, fellows," Warbranch told the others. "He's going to get the attention of the crowd below and ask 'em to be patient a few minutes while the lights are turned off, so that we can get our flashlight."

The little photographer stepped forward and arranged the earls to his satisfaction. The manager had stepped to the edge of the mezzanine floor. In his hand was a megaphone.

He succeeded in getting silence down below, and then he explained what was about to take place. The diners received the announcement: good-naturedly, and preparations went ahead on the mezzanine.

Then the lights went out and the café was in total darkness. There was a brief delay, followed by the warning from the little photographer for the seven earls to prepare themselves for the flash.

"I'll count three," stipulated the photographer, "then set her off. Look happy, please. Here we go: One— Two— Three!"

A blinding white light filled the alcove, then all was blackness once more. But while that instantaneous flare was lighting the scene, Karnak saw a man, who seemingly had come from nowhere, standing close to Felix Van Zant, but just outside the alcove. His sudden appearance there in the darkness was mystifying, and but for the flash his presence would have escaped Karnak entirely.

"All right," from the photographer. "I think she's a bear. You can turn on your lights now."

Then the café was as brilliant as day once more.

Immediately the seven began talking and laughing. But Karnak's glance was for the néwcomer who had appeared so mysteriously in the dark.

He was still there, but he had taken several steps and now stood directly before the alcove.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I am Fred Muir, one of the Nine Romping Earls. I was detained unavoidably, so I didn't go to O'Farrel and Mason at all, but hurried Straight here instead. I regret that I am too late to be included in the photograph. I had just learned from a waiter down below where I couid find you, and was on my way up to the mezzanine floor when the manager

announced that the lights were to be turned out. I called, but my voice was drowned by the talk and laughter of the crowd. I hurried on up, but arrived too late. The flash came just as I reached this spot.

Abijah Warbranch arose from his chair. "Fred Muir," he said, "we greet you. The fact that you are late, though a grave deviation from rectitude, will be forgiven if the earls assembled will consent to—"

A hoarse scream interrupted him. It came from the other end of the table— from the lips of Walter Loomis. He was on his feet, staring at the diner next to him— Felix VanZant.

Van Zant sat with his head lopped over on his right shoulder, his body inclined to the right at an unbelievable angle. His eyes were fixed, and the pupils dilated.

"Look at him!" cried Loomis. "What's the matter with him?"

And as the 'Romping Earls gazed at the slumped figure and sprang to their feet. Felix Van Zant slipped from his chair and would have fallen to the floor had not Loomis grabbed him.

Two men bent over Van Zant— straightened him. Mumbled words were the only sounds. Then a man looked up and gazed in consternation at the others.

"He's dead," he said. "There's not a sign of a heart beat. My God, men— what happened to him?"

Karnak was on his feet, staring into the alcove, from which the acrid smoke of the explosion was drifting slowly. His brain was working clearly.

An outsider, he was not so deeply concerned as the Romping Earls. His keen eyes darted this way and that. They noted that the newcomer, who had named himself Fred Muir, was gazing in a manner as bewildered as the others at the gruesome sight. He knew that this man had stood at Van Zant's left side when the flashlight photograph was taken. Was it murder?

"Here's a man that needs investigating!" he cried, leaping forward and grasping Muir by the arm. "This may not be a natural death. I saw what the rest of you could not see, since you were looking at the camera. I saw this man standing at the dead man's left side when the flashlight was burned! Hold him! And send for the po- lice. And here— what's this?"

He rushed into the alcove and plucked from the floor a tiny bottle, empty, and without a cork. He lifted the phial to his nose.

"Peach blossoms! That means hydrocyanic acid. This is murder, men!"

But even Karnak, the coolest of any of them, didn't realize that the wizened little photographer and his camera had vanished utterly.

THE excitement in the alcove where the dead man sagged in his chair was communicated to the diners below.

In almost no time at all the news that a murder had been committed on the mezzanine floor had spread to all parts of Trent's Café.

Several women screamed. Men crowded on the stairs. Somebody, Karnak never knew who, sent for the police. They arrived in a remarkably short space of time, bulging through the curious throng and herding men back downstairs.

"Well, now, what's all this?" blustered one of them. "Murder, eh? Who knows anything about it?" He fixed an accusing eye on Karnak, who chanced to be the handiest man. "What do you know about it? Speak out!"

Another policeman was examining the body. In a wrinkle of the dead man's waistcoat he found the tiny cork, and held it up. A third officer was shooing men and women back to their tables.

Being addressed, Karnak told what he had seen and passed over the tiny phial. One or two of the earls chimed in now and then to help him out, so that, altogether, it was a pretty confused story that the officer heard. But he wheeled on the man who had announced himself as Fred Muir and demanded speech from him.

"It looks pretty bad for you, brother, he he told him. " What 'a' ye got to say for yourself?"

Muir's face was white and drawn and his lips twitched, but he cleared his throat and replied:

"I know no more about it than anybody else here. I had already explained why I was standing here before it was discovered that Van Zant was dead."

Warbranch stepped forward.

"Let me explain about Muir," he offered. "I imagine it is pretty much as he said. He came late and was on his way up here when he heard the manager telling people that the lights were about to be turned off in preparation for a flashlight. He says he shouted and tried to let us know that he was coming and wanted to be in the photograph, but was unable to make himself heard above the laughter and conversation of the crowd. He had reached the foot of the stairs when the lights went out. He hurried on up in the darkness, and apparently reached the alcove just before the flare came. That is, if this man here saw him when the flashlight was touched off."

"Standin' right there, was he?" the policeman asked of Karnak. "Right there by the side of the dead man, eh?"

"Yes," answered Karnak. "But he was outside of the alcove."

"Under the arch, though— eh?"

"No— not quite."

"Only a step from the dead man?"

"Yes, quite close."

"Where were you sitting?"

Karnak turned and pointed to his chair and table.

"You wasn't in the party, then?"

"No. "

"Ain't acquainted with any of these men. Didn't know the dead man?"

"No to both questions," Karnak answered, with a lack of memory which he regretted later.

"What else did you see when the flash-light was fired?"

"I saw all these gentlemen looking at the camera. No one else except this new-comer, who had reached the alcove in the dark. Of course the flash was instantane ous. It was black again in the winking of an eye. I hadn't time to see much."

"Listen here," sternly commanded th officer. "Are you positive you saw all seven of these men seated when the light flashed?— Think hard, now! Are you *positive*?"

"Wel-l-l," Karnak hesitated. "No, I can't say for sure. But I thought I saw every chair filled. It was too quick— too blinding— for me to be sure of anything. And the photographer and his camera shut off a part of the view."

" No; I guess you couldn't see much," the officer agreed. "But you saw this bird standin' right here, did you? And he wasn't standin' there before the lights went out?"

Karnak nodded. He was growing weary: of answering the same questions again and again.

"What's your name? "Where d'ye live?"

The answers were written in a notebook. Next, the policeman secured the names and addresses of the seven remaining earls. Then came the abrupt question:

"Where's the guy that shot the picture?"

It seemed that, in the excitement following the discovery of the crime, the wizened little photographer had been entirely forgotten. The seven earls and Karnak looked about for him fruitlessly.

"He's gone," said some one, which plainly could be seen by all.

"What's his name? Who hired him? Where'd he come from?" Nobody replied at once. Then the earl named Walter Loomis, who had been seated on the dead man's right, made answer by addressing Warbranch.

"You hired him, didn't you, Mr. Warbranch?"

"Yes," the master of ceremonies responded. "I can't imagine what has become of him. I've known him for some time. His name is Eli Smedley. I think

he must have hurried off directly after the flashlight was taken, in order to develop the plate and get the picture in the various editors' offices in time for the morning papers."

"Where's he live?"

"His place of business is— Let's see; I think I have his card in my pocket."

Abijah Warbranch fished in his pocket and brought out a card. He handed it to the spokesman of the police, who read aloud:

DO YOU NEED A CAMERAMAN?
Call Western 119
Publicity Campaigns, Out-of-Town Trips, Sporting and Society News, Press Photos
ELI SMEDLEY PHOTO SERVICE
615 Tekram Street

"I think I know that bird," observed the cop. "Little dried-up wienie, ain't he?"

"Yes," answered Warbranch.

The policeman swung about on Karnak again.

"Did this man look dead to you when the flash came on?" he quizzed.

"No," said Karnak. "There wasn't time for details."

An exclamation from the policeman who was investigating the alcove turned all eyes toward him.

"Same smell in the wine glass beside the dead man's plate," he said.

"All right. Get a bottle from the waiter and pour the wine into it. That's evidence enough for murder. Analysis will prove it."

The gong of the police ambulance sounded outside in the street.

"All right, fellows— let's be gettin' outa this. Take the body out first. You men stick here— understand? You're all under suspicion. Ye'll all have to go to the station and be searched. Then it's up to the sergeant whether you'll be held pending investigation or not. Right up here, boys!" he raised his voice to the ambulance men, coming in.

So that was the breaking up of the party of the seven earls. All of them, including Lanier Karnak, were herded into a police patrol and rolled to the station. There they were quizzed and searched by the sergeant on duty and several plainclothes detectives. But no incriminating evidence of any description was found on any of them.

They were all able to give a good account of themselves. There were telephoning and establishing of identities and reputations, and in the end all of them, excepting Fred Muir, were released on their own recognizance.

For to the last individual they proved themselves to be men of consequence in and about San Francisco. But Muir was held on suspicion despite proofs of his responsibility.

Karnak was on the point of leaving when a heavy set man in a neat gray suit of clothes accosted him.

"Aren't you Mr. Karnak?" he was asked.

Karnak admitted his identity.

"I'm Nicholas Mason," said the other, and his look implied that Karnak ought to be familiar with the name.

"I'm sorry," Karnak told him, "but I can't recall either your name or your face."

"Criminologist— private detective," explained the man.

Karnak smiled. "I know no more than I did before," he said.

The big fellow looked a trifle crestfallen. "Well, no matter. I guess your interests in life haven't been along my lines. You telephoned to the Pelicans' Club a short while ago, to Mr. Golden, didn't you?"

"Yes, I wanted him to vouch for me. He's a particular friend of mine."

"Uh-huh. And Ned Golden is a particular friend of mine, too. He called me up afterward— I was at home— and asked me to come down here and help square you. But it seems I wasn't needed, after all. I'd like to know something about this business, Mr. Karnak. The case looks unique, judging from the little I've overheard. How would you like to go to some quiet place with me and tell me what you know about it?"

"I don't in the least mind," Karnak assured him.

"Come on, then. We'll get a sandwich and a bottle of real five per cent beer. Where? Ask Dad— he knows! My car's outside."

In a short time they were seated opposite each other in a remote little place on Eddy Street, with chicken sandwiches and the forbidden amber fluid close to their hands.

"Now," said Nicholas Mason, "shoot!"

Karnak repeated the story of what he had observed, and not once was he interrupted. When he had finished the detective leaned back, puffing at a cigarette, deep in thought.

"Its funny— mighty funny," he said at last. "It's the most interesting case I ever heard of, I believe. Now what do you make of that photographer beating it away so fast?"

"It only puzzles me," Karnak replied.

For several moments more Nicholas Mason sat dreaming. Then he suddenly roused himself, drained his glass, and leaped to his feet.

"Come on," he said. " Let's beat it down to that photographer's place and see if he's developed that plate yet. Hope we can get there before the cops do, but I doubt if we will. Are you game? Let's see if we can find out who murdered Felix Van Zant ourselves."

"All right," Karnak agreed.

He was well pleased at the sudden turn of affairs, for had he not accosted Felix Van Zant at the corner of Mason and O'Farrel Streets in the hope that the encounter might lead to a night's adventure?

But as he rose to his feet a girl, wrapped in furs, entered the restaurant, and, after glancing hurriedly about, walked straight up to him.

"You're the gentleman who— who saw it, aren't you?" she asked through colorless lips. "I mean the— the— murder in Trent's Café."

"Why, yes," Karnak, greatly amazed, made answer.

"I was there," she stated. Down on the main floor with some friends. Fred Muir was my escort. We all came in when he did— just as the manager was announcing that the lights were to be put out. Fred left us on the run for the mezzanine, and—"

Here Nicholas Mason interrupted her. "You were there, you say? You're interested in this fellow Muir?"

"I'm engaged to marry him," she answered simply.

"Heavens and earth! How did you know Mr. Karnak and I were here in this restaurant?"

"I followed you from the police station in a taxicab.

"M'm-m! Where are the rest of your friends?"

"There were only two more— a man and a girl. The excitement made the girl ill, and the man had to take her home. So— so I followed Fred, in the police patrol, to the station. There I saw you and Mr. Karnak— is it?— just as you were leaving. I was too timid, I guess, to speak to either of you. So I got a taxicab that was standing at the curb and followed. I've been hesitating outside there, trying to get up courage to come in. Then I did, and—"

"Yes, yes, I understand all about it now. You'd better come with us. We're going to work on this case, Mr. Karnak and I. Maybe you can help us. But we've no time to talk now. Gotta see that photograph as soon as possible. Will you come with us? In my car?"

"Yes, I'll do anything to help Fred. I know he's innocent even if he did have reason to hate Felix VanZant."

"Hated 'im, eh? That helps a lot. Well, maybe he's innocent and maybe he isn't. That's what we want to find out. Personally, I think there's a good chance that he is innocent. What's your name please?"

"Loris Fowler."

"M'm-m— glad we got hold of you before the police did. Come on. Let's find out whether the developed plate shows Van Zant dead or alive. We ought to be able to tell. That'll prove whether he poisoned before the picture was taken or afterward. By afterward I mean between the flash and the moment the café lights were turned on again and the murder was discovered. And it may show something more important still."

5: Eli Smedley

615 TEKRAM STREET proved to be an upstairs number, and a stairway led to it in an old two-story building a good many years behind the times. And the rooms occupied by Mr. Eli Smedley were in the rear.

The three had climbed the long flight of dusty steps to find themselves in a dark, smelly hall. It was not lighted, and Mason flashed his electric torch to locate the signs painted on the various doors. A dim radiance, however, emanated from the transom over the last of them. And the torch pointed out the fact that they had found the business quarters of Eli Smedley.

Mason turned the knob, but the door was locked. Then he knocked. From inside there came a sound, but the door was not opened at once. Not until after the detective had knocked a third time.

Then the key grated in the lock, the door was swung open to a narrow crack, and the weird face of the crooked little photographer peered out at them.

"Well," Smedley asked, "what do you want this time o'night?"

"Are you Mr. Smedley?" Mason asked him.

"Yes, I am."

"I'm Nicholas Mason, of the Wilkes Detective Bureau. I'd like to come in and have a look at the photograph you took a short while ago in Trent's Café."

"I haven't got it," said Smedley. "It's already gone to the news editors of the morning papers."

"But you have the plate, or film, haven't you?"

"Yes, o' course. But the police have already seen it. Why are you horning in?"

"Come, come, Mr. Smedley," soothed Mason. "Were not going to harm you. Let's have a look at that plate. We won't take up much of your time."

"Come on in, then," offered the photographer grudgingly. "But remember it's late. I don't want to be kept up all night. Confounded reporters have been houndin' me to death!"

Loris Fowler preceded the two men into Smedley's place of business.

It proved to be one of the most cluttered set of rooms that any of the trio had ever seen. It looked more like a junk shop than a photographic studio. It was unspeakably dirty, too. A peculiar, offensive odor hung in the atmosphere of the place.

They followed the little man into a second room. He led them to a bench on which were countless photographic plates, cameras of several descriptions, dirty trays, tools, and odds and ends of brass and iron, printing frames, and other paraphernalia of the photographer's craft.

Smedley picked up a plate and handed it to Mason without a word. »

The detective held it to the electric light which struggled with a coat of grime on the glass bulb. The girl and Karnak looked over his shoulder.

"M'm-m— good exposure, all right," Mason muttered. "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven— all there. Now which is the man who was murdered, Mr. Karnak?"

"Right there, at the foot of the table—" and Karnak pointed.

"M'm-m! Looks just as alive as I am this minute. He'd be flopped over in his chair, if he were dead when this plate was exposed. Or, if he were dying, his figure would be blurred, perhaps, and his eye- balls popping from the spasm brought on by the poisoning. But he's alive and well and smiling.

"That means that he took a drink of the poisoned wine after the picture was taken. He would hardly take a drink in the dark, would he? Certainly not. But the poison was slipped into his glass while the lights were out.

" Here— let me reconstruct it for you: There the seven of them sat, all primed for the picture. Then the lights went out. Immediately the murderer left his seat at the table, stepped softly through the dark to Van Zant's side, and poured the contents of the phial into his wine.

"He dropped the empty bottle on the thick carpet and hurried softly back to his seat. So that he was there in his place when the flashlight torch was lit.

"Then the picture was taken. The lights of the café were turned on again. Everybody was talking and laughing, perhaps, and Van Zant took a drink of the poisoned wine.

"It knocked him cold, like the winking of an eye. He lost consciousness immediately, no doubt, and shook with a brief spasm. This went unnoticed by the man next to him. (And that's a point we must keep in mind, too.) Then he flopped over, and this man next to him saw his condition and shouted to the others. What name did the man give who sat next to him, Mr. Karnak?"

"Walter Loomis," Karnak replied.

"It would have been an easy matter for Loomis to pour the deadly contents of that phial into his wine, wouldn't it? Here— look! Is this Loomis, right here on his right?"

"Yes."

"Yet Loomis wasn't suspected at all, it seems— that is, no more than the rest of the men at the table. The cops were all for fixing the crime on this here Fred Muir. Now, Muir doesn't show in the picture at all, does he?"

"No," said Karnak. '" He was standing right there, just outside the alcove. He was out of the picture entirely. See, only the least bit of the wall outside the arch of the alcove shows. Six inches, maybe."

"Yet Muir could have taken a step or two, dumped the poison in Van Zant's wine, and stepped back out of the picture, couldn't he?"

"Yes, that's possible."

"But he didn't!" protested Loris Fowler.

"My dear young lady, I didn't say he did!" snapped Mason. "I'm saying what he could have done. Now, Karnak, you were the one who led the police to suspect Muir. Didn't it occur to you that one of the men at the table might have committed this murder?"

"No, it didn't," Karnak told him. "Muir's sudden and mysterious appearance made me suspect him alone. I never thought of the others."

"I would have suspected Walter Loomis, after hearing Muir's explanation of his seemingly miraculous appearance there," stated Mason. "And Muir's explanation is borne out by Miss Fowler, here. But at the same time, we must remember that any one of the six other diners, if he was lucky, might have left his seat, poured the hydrocyanic acid into Van Zant's wine glass, and got back into his seat again before the flash. That is, if there was time enough.

"This plate is mighty disappointing to me. Frankly, I expected to see the likeness— of the murderer, standing close to Van Zant or on his way back to his seat. He was lucky— that's all. If Muir has done it, wouldn't he have beat it away from there in the dark, before the flashlight powders were lighted?"

"And you think, then, that Fred is innocent?" asked the girl.

"I'm almost sure of it. I will be certain of it, Miss Fowler, when you have taken me to the friends who were with you to-night and I have heard them corroborate your account of Muir's reason for arriving late."

"It was all the fault of Clarice Warden," said Loris Fowler. "She took too long to dress. She and the man she is engaged to marry, Giles Wilkie, and Fred Muir and I were to dine at Trent's this evening. Fred and I went to her house, where we found Giles Wilkie already waiting for her. When we reached Trent's, Fred was going to leave our party for a time and visit with these men, then make his excuses and join us again. But Clarice was late—"

"Yes, they usually are," interposed Mason. "I understand all that. And I wouldn't worry, if I were you. We're going to clear Mr. Muir. Don't ask me how, but we're going to."

He turned to the silent photographer. "Why did you beat it so soon after you took the picture?" he snapped.

"I was in a hurry to get it developed, printed, and in the hands of the editors, so that it would appear in to-morrow morning's papers," replied Smedley easily.

"That's the way I make my living. I didn't beat it. I just picked up my stuff and walked away."

"And you saw nothing peculiar about Van Zant?"

"No, I didn't notice him or anybody else. I got nothin' to do with those birds, so I didn't stick around. I only know Warbranch, who hired me to go there."

"I see. I see. And you didn't know that a murder had been committed until the police came here to see the photograph?"

"No."

"I'd like to buy one of the prints."

"Two dollars," said Smedley promptly.

"I'll mail it to you, mounted, to-morrow morning."

Mason produced the money and gave his address.

"Did the police see prints, or only this plate?"

"Just the plate. The prints were on their way to the newspaper offices when the cops got here. I sold 'em right and left to the reporters who flocked in."

"You're a fast worker, Mr. Smedley."

"That's the way I make my livin'," repeated the photographer.

"Couldn't you print another one for me now?"

"I could, but I won't. I'm tired."

"All right. Mail me one first thing in the morning, special delivery. Thanks for your time. Good night."

And Mason wheeled and led the others out.

"Well, what do you think of Eli Smedley?" asked Karnak as the three emerged into the street below.

"I think he's a damned liar," Mason replied inelegantly. "But I'll have to prove it."

6: The Empty Chair

AS LORIS FOWLER, Nicholas Mason, and Karnak crossed the sidewalk to the detective's car, a hand fell upon Karnak's arm. He wheeled about in some surprise, to find himself looking into the steady, penetrating eyes of a large, heavy set man who wore a wide-brimmed Stetson.

"You're Mr. Lanier Karnak?" asked the man.

"Yes; what can I do for you?"

The man's left hand threw back the lapel of his coat, and a metal shield on his vest twinkled in the street lights.

"You're wanted at police headquarters again," he announced. "I'm a plain-clothes man, and I've been hunting for you for over an hour."

"Well, what's the matter now?" puzzled The Shadow. "Has it been decided that *I* committed the murder?"

"Not exactly that, I guess," the detective told him. " But since you were released something has come to light that makes it necessary to question you further. I have orders to bring you in."

Mason stepped forward then. "Hello, Tetterton," he said. "What's the row?"

"Why, hello there, Nick," the plainclothes officer responded. "What are you doing here with Mr. Karnak?"

"We're interesting ourselves in the murder of Felix Van Zant at Trent's Café," Mason replied. "This isn't a pinch, is it, Tet?"

"Well, I hardly know. I was ordered to bring Mr. Karnak in for further questioning. I called up both of his clubs, but found that he wasn't at either of them. I was scouting about, and it was by the merest chance that I lamped him crossing the sidewalk here. I was on my way up to the studio of the photographer who took the flashlight picture at Trent's. The chief of detectives had also ordered me to get a print from the plate.

"The photographer's place is just upstairs here. Some of the boys came here directly after those birds were herded in from Trent's, but the photographer said that he had already disposed of all his prints to the reporters of the various papers. He showed them the plate, but that didn't satisfy the chief. He told me, on my hunt for Mr. Karnak, to drop in and make this fellow Smedley run off another print for us. And here, right at Smedley's door, I stumble upon Mr. Karnak. I guess you've just seen Smedley."

Nichoias Mason had stepped close to the two. He gave Karnak a warning nudge in the ribs, but did not reply to Tetterton.

" That's a strange coincidence, Tet," he remarked. "Mr. Karnak and I, as I said before, are investigating this case on our own. Just for curiosity's sake, you know. Unless this young lady with us; Miss Loris Fowler, wishes to employ me to find the murderer and remove suspicion from the man you are holding, Fred Muir. She is engaged to marry Mr. Muir."

"That so? Humph! Well, I guess you'll have to struggle along without Mr. Karnak's help for a time, Nick. I've got orders to bring him in, and I'll do my darndest."

"We'll go along— Miss Fowler and I," announced Nicholas Mason. "My car will carry the four. Come on— I'll shoot you around there."

"I never walk when I can ride," laughed the plainclothes man. "Put the lady beside you in the front; Mr. Karnak and I will sit behind and look haughty."

They entered the car, and Mason turned about and drove to police headquarters.

"Guess there won't be any objection to Miss Fowler and me going in, too, will there, Tet?" suggested Mason, as the car slowed down at the curb.

"Well I can't keep you from coming inside, anyway," replied Tetterton. " But whether you'll be permitted to overhear the questioning of Mr. Karnak or not, I can't say."

"We'll try to horn in, anyway. Come on, Miss Fowler. Keep a stiff upper lip, Karnak, old boy. Don't let 'em put anything over on you."

They filed into the building, Detective Tetterton and Karnak in the lead.

Mason at once left Miss Fowler and went into the office of the chief of detectives. He came forth almost immediately, intercepting the plainclothes man and Karnak on their way toward the rear of the building.

"I'm a good little fixer," he told them. "The chief says he has no objection to my being present at this hearing. I'll act as Karnak's legal adviser. I think we won't trouble to take Miss Fowler in. You fellows go ahead. I'll tell her to wait."

"I doubt if she'll get out without being questioned," said the plainclothes man grimly, "when I've told the chief who she is."

"You needn't do that on our account, you know, Tetterton," Mason threw back at him.

"Humph!" was the other's only answer,

It was the chief of detectives himself, who, in a small room at the rear of the building, poured a stream of rapid-fire questions at Lanier Karnak. It was not exactly a third degree process, but it was none the less discomfiting to the victim.

"Mr. Karnak," he began, "didn't you tell the police officer who questioned you in Trent's Café, something like a couple of hours ago, that you were not acquainted with any of the men who call themselves the Romping Earls?"

"Yes."

"Was that the truth?"

"Certainly. I am not in the habit of saying anything but the truth."

"You are not acquainted with any of hem? Think hard, now!"

"You have my answer."

"All right. How about the murdered man, Felix Van Zant? Weren't you acquainted with him? Think carefully before you reply."

Karnak realized that he had been led into a trap. Knowing that it would be a difficult matter for him to explain how he had accosted Felix Van Zant on the corner of Mason and O'Farrel, and trailed him and the other earls to Trent's Café, he had purposely refrained from mentioning the brief meeting.

"I had met Van Zant earlier in the evening," he admitted. "But that is the first time I ever saw him in my life. Therefore I am telling the truth when I say that I am not acquainted with him,"

"Um-m— now we're getting a little closer to the truth, anyway. Is this your card, Mr. Karnak?"

The chief of detectives suddenly whisked before Karnak's eyes a small white rectangular slip of pasteboard, on which was Karnak's name in Old English letters.

"Yes, it is," the victim admitted. "I suppose that it was found on the body of the dead man after I was brought here the first time."

"Exactly, Mr. Karnak. It was discovered on the body after it had been taken to the receiving hospital. Somehow or other the investigation at Trent's failed to reveal it. Now, did you give Mr. Van Zant your card?"

"Yes, sir."

"When?"

"Shortly after nine o'clock to-night."

"Where?" "At the corner of O'Farrel and Mason Streets."

"Where you met him for the first time in your life?"

"Yes."

"Tell me the occasion for presenting Van Zant with your card on a street corner, Mr. Karnak."

This was the demand that Karnak had been dreading. But he drew a deep sigh and made the best of the situation, telling in detail what had occurred.

The chief of detectives laughed uproariously as he concluded.

"Mr. Karnak, do you expect me to believe that cock-and-bull story?"

"Why not, chief?" quickly interposed Nicholas Mason. "What's so hard to believe about that?"

"You keep out of this, Nick!" sternly ordered the chief. "You'll either keep out or get out. Take your choice."

"Now, now, now, chief! Don't get hot under the collar about nothing! Don't forget that you and I are friends, and that we've helped each other a lot. If you could afford to turn me down as you threatened, I wouldn't be in here now. Give Mr. Karnak a chance. I demand it." It was at once apparent that, in Nicholas Mason, Karnak had a friend at court. Evidently he was considered a personage of some consequence by the chief of detectives.

"Well," the chief snapped at him, "what's the grand idea, anyway, of a man of Mr. Karnak's wealth and position chasing about the streets at night, following people whom he doesn't know? It's a stupid as well as a dangerous practice, to say the least. I can't imagine a man of Mr. Karnak's standing making such an idiot of himself."

"Just the same, chief, you'll have to admit that his story is plausible. Yowl kave to admit it. Confound it, Karnak is a man of wealth and reputation— a member of two of the most exclusive clubs in San Francisco— a citizen above reproach! Can't you imagine that such a man, who is obliged to guard his reputation and his pocketbook all the time, has to blow off steam some way now and then?

"You must give him credit for being original in picking something unique as a safety valve. There's no possible chance of Karnak's being the murderer, or connected with the man who did commit the murder. And I don't want him held to-night on such a flimsy item as the fact that his card was found in the dead man's pocket."

"Oh, you don't?" sarcastically.

"No, I don't, chief. I want him to help me unravel this mystery. We're going to do it before the sun shines on this old burg again. We're going to show you that Fred Muir had no more to do with the killing of Van Zant than you had. We're going to produce the murderer and convince you that he is guilty. I'm going to do this, with the help of Mr. Karnak. So you mustn't hold him."

"Well, well, well!" drawled the chief. "You talk as if you knew the murderer's name, Nick."

"I do," came the astonishing reply. "I only ask a little time in which to prove it. A little time— and Mr. Karnak."

"But why didn't Karnak tell about giving his card to Van Zant before I drilled it out of him?" the chief demanded.

Mason laid a hand on his shoulder. "Pete," he said, "if you had followed the Romping Earls to Trent's as Mr. Karnak did, would you tell about it, in view of what happened, unless you had to? Think hard, now!"

The chief of detectives grinned.

"Maybe you're right, Nick," he said. "Anyway, you've helped me a lot in the past, and I can depend on you. Will you agree to deliver Mr. Karnak into our hands when we want him, if I release him now? In other words, will you be responsible for his reappearance here on demand?"

"Surest thing you know."

"Then take him and get out. But I'll bet you a hundred dollars we've got the murderer in a cell this very moment!"

"Oh, no, you haven't, chief. Fred Muir is innocent."

"I didn't mention Fred Muir's name, did I? I said I'd bet you a hundred dollars we have the murderer in a cell this moment, Want some of it?"

Nicholas Mason was staring at him. "Who is it?" he asked. ''Not—" He bit his lower lip to stop the disclosure that was on his tongue.

"Not who?" bantered the chief.

"Never mind. What's the name of the alleged murderer?"

"Youll know when the proper time comes. Want to bet that hundred?"

"Not until I know the name of the suspect you're holding," Mason declined.

"All right. His name is Walter Loomis, and he sat next to the man who was poisoned in Trent's Café. He was one of the Romping Earls."

"I'll take the bet," clicked Mason. "Tetterton here can hold the stakes. Dig, old-timer!" And Mason pulled from his pocket a roll of bills, passing five twenties to the man who had brought Karnak in.

The-chief of detectives handed his subordinate a like amount, grinned at his friend, and waved him out of the room.

"Take your assistant and get busy," he said. "The night isn't so young as it was."

"Just a moment, chief," put in Tetterton. "There's a lady outside that Nick Mason told me is engaged to marry this fellow Muir. Do you want to question her?"

The chief leaped to his feet. "Not Miss Loris Fowler? You don't mean she's outside! I've had several men hunting her for an hour."

"You're on the job, after all, aren't you, chief?" laughed Mason apparently a bit chagrined.

The chief ignored this thrust. "Is Miss Fowler out there?" he demanded again of Tetterton.

"She sure is."

"Then I want her in here immediately."

They all went out together the chief in the lead, hurrying. But the seat which Loris Fowler had occupied was empty.

7: The Infallible Eye

A BRIEF search on the part of the chief of detectives and Tetterton failed to reveal Loris Fowler in police head-quarters. She was not in Nicholas Mason's car before the entrance. Tetterton made the rounds of the block without finding her.

"I guess she got scared and beat it," suggested Mason. "Can't blame her. She would naturally shrink from being questioned, and I guess she was afraid

that was about to happen. I noticed she looked pale around the gills when I walked up the steps with her."

"Find her again, Tetterton, after you've got that photograph from Smedley," was all the chief said as he stalked indoors.

Nicholas Mason and Karnak stepped into the car and the detective started it.

"Now where?" asked Karnak as they left the block.

"Guess we'd better glide 'round to the Palace Hotel and pick up Miss Fowler again," laughed Mason. ' When she and I were entering the police station together I told her, if I should slip her the wink, to beat it there and wait for us. I thought maybe the chief would want to question her after I made the break to Tetterton who she was, so I was prepared for the worst."

Karnak laughed. He was interesting and ingenious, this bluff, good-natured detective, and he liked him. Karnak was having the time of his life, despite the thought that these interesting events revolved about a tragedy.

"Find Miss Fowler after he's got the photograph from Smedley, eh!" Mason was chuckling. "That's good! I've got Miss Fowler, and Smedley has left his place of business."

"How do you know he has left his studio?" asked Karnak.

"He came down right behind us," Mason replied. I saw him leave the entrance just as Tetterton pinched you. Remember when I stepped up and gave you the office to let me do the talking? I killed two birds with one stone that shot. I not only nudged you and kept you silent, but I placed my body between Tetterton and Smedley. Oh, I make breaks sometimes— and sometimes I'm able to mend 'em. What's that kid yelling? Listen!—"

"Mawning papers! Mawning papers!" came from the sidewalk close at hand. "All about de murder at Trent's Café. Mawing papers!"

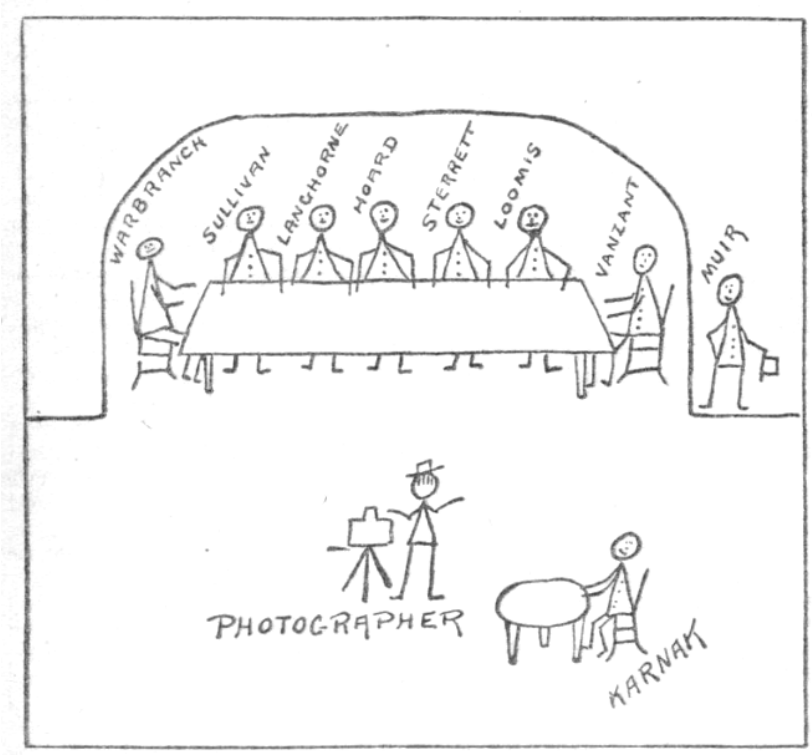
"That's us," said Mason, shooting in to the curb. " Here, kid! Give us a *Chronicle* and an *Examiner*. Two copies of each."

And they were away again for the Palace Hotel and Loris Fowler.

Both men left the car when they reached the Palace and went in to find the girl waiting in the lobby. Nicholas Mason led the way to a soft divan, where the three seated themselves to read the papers.

Presently, while the girl and Karnak were deep in the somewhat muddled account of the tragedy, the detective left them and sought a writing desk. Karnak saw him bending over it with a pencil, alternately committing something to a piece of hotel paper and consulting the news sheet in his left hand. Then he arose abruptly and hurried back to the others.

"Here— give this the once-over," he asked of Karnak, and presented the hasty drawing which is here reproduced, except that Karnak later added the names:



" There you all are," he explained, "in the same positions as are indicated in the reproduced photograph. The figure that represents Muir, of course, I added myself, as he isn't in the picture. And I added your figure and the photographer's, too. Have I got Muir placed about right?"

"That's exactly where he was standing when I first saw him," Karnak said.

"All right— that's fine. Now, Karnak, old boy, take your pencil and write the name of each of the others over his head."

"I don't know that I can place all of them accurately," Karnak told him. "But I am positive about certain ones. The man on the left, at the head of the table, is Abijah Warbranch, of course."

"Then label him so," Mason commanded.

"The figure at the foot represents the man who was murdered—Felix VanZant "— and Karnak wrote the name above the figure's head.

" Now, Loomis— Walter Loomis— sat on his right." And Karnak wrote "Loomis " above the figure under discussion. "Next to Loomis sat Sterrett, if I'm not mistaken." He named the second figure from the foot. "That leaves three to be named." He looked at the newspaper account of the affair to refresh his memory. "That leaves Langhorne, Sullivan, and Hoard," he added. "And I'm not just sure how they were arranged at the table."

"Well that's all right. Name them hit or miss."

Karnak, beginning at the left, penciled "Sullivan," "Langhorne," and "Hoard."

"All right. Now we have a sketch of ten men all named. The one named Van Zant was killed by one of the remaining nine. We'll exclude you entirely. So we'll amend that statement to eight men."

"You're not excluding the photographer," Karnak reminded him.

"I am not excluding the photographer," said Mason. "He has a direct connection with the party, since one of them engaged him to go there and take the picture. You were not connected with the party in any way. You are eliminated."

"All right. Proceed."

"It is most logical to assume that either Muir or Loomis, one on either side of Van Zant and closest to him of the eight, is the man who dropped the poison in the wine when the lights were out. However, what strikes me as logical isn't always absolutely true. We know, however, that Muir was acquainted with VanZant. That is, he was closer to him than perhaps any of the others. ;

"That throws suspicion on Muir, Loomis, on the other side of him, was not connected with VanZant in any way beyond the slight acquaintance he had with him by reason of being one of the Romping Earls. That is, so far as we know at present.

"But Loomis, it seems, has been rearrested by the police. I am of the opinion that, when they got their wits together, they decided that they had made a mistake in letting him go, since he sat directly on the dead man's right. They'll pump him hard and discover whether or not he had any connection with Van Zant other than infrequent association with him at the banquets of the Romping Earls.

"But I suspect all of them. I suspect Sterrett, Hoard, Langhorne, Sullivan, and Warbranch as much as I do the others. And I may say that I suspect them more.

"Because, Karnak— look here: Would Loomis, sitting on VanZant's right, take such a risk? If he had any reason to kill VanZant, wouldn't he realize that, when the man was discovered to be poisoned, he would likely be the first one suspected?

"And it's the same way in the case of Muir, as I have pointed out before, If Muir came there purposely to poison Van Zant, and if the lights had been conveniently turned off just when he was ready for the act, wouldn't he have

done his work and hurried away in the darkness, instead of standing there till the place was light again and announcing himself?"

"That all rings pretty good," Karnak encouraged him.

"Fine! I'm glad you see it that way. Therefore, Karnak, I suspect any one of the remaining six more than I do Muir and Loomis.

"Now, just for the sake of convenience, let's eliminate Muir and Loomis altogether. If our future deductions prove unsatisfactory, we can retrace our steps and pick them up again.

"So now we have six suspects— Sterrett, Hoard, Langhorne, Sullivan, Warbranch, and Smedley the photographer. The immediate question is, then, which of the six seems to most likely to have been the slayer of Felix Van Zant? Which do you say, Karnak?"

The Shadow thought a little. "Well," he replied finally, "Warbranch claimed to have been in touch with Van Zant during the eight years since the earls banqueted together last."

"Ah! So he did. But how could Warbranch contrive to leave his place at the head of the table, after the darkness came, go to the foot of the table, empty the contents of the phial into Van Zant's wine glass, and return to his seat again before the flashlight torch was lit? Was it at all possible for him to have done so? The answer depends entirely on the length of time between the dousing of the café lights by the manager and the firing of the flashlight torch. Now, Karnak, how long was that?"

"It was a very short space of time indeed," was Karnak's opinion. "There was no need for any delay at all. I can say positively that there was not time for War- = branch to make his way through the blackness to VanZant's side and poison his wine, then get back and seat himself, present a smiling countenance to the camera when the flashlight was fired."

"Impossible, eh? Couldn't be done? Altogether out of reason?"

"That's my personal opinion." Mason studied the reproduction or the photograph in one of the newspapers. "Warbranch certainly looks happy, unperturbed, and natural in this picture," he said. "He's a cool one if he managed, in some way, to do what we have just described and then present such a smiling countenance to the lens. Should we eliminate Warbranch on those grounds?"

"I should," Karnak told him.

"Then out goes Warbranch. That leaves five suspects.

"Now it's possible for Sterrett, sitting on the right of Loomis, to have reached across in front of Loomis and deposited the deadly liquid in Van Zant's glass. In his case, we must discover a motive. And as it seems that he had no

close connection with the dead man, a motive will be hard to find. However, we'll hold Sterrett for the present.

"Now, if it was impossible for Warbranch to leave his seat, commit the crime, and return in time for the flashlight, would be almost equally impossible for any for Sullivan to have accomplished it. Langhorne and Hoard might have done it a little easier than Sullivan. We have eliminated Warbranch, remember, because it would be more difficult for him to pull the trick than one of the others.

"But as to Langhorne and Hoard, we are again confronted with the fact that, so far as we know, they were not connected with Van Zant except as a fellow member of the Romping Earls.

"And now we come to Eli Smedley, the photographer, who, remember, admitted being an acquaintance of Warbranch. Could the photographer have poured the poison in VanZant's glass?"

"Yes," answered Karnak thoughtfully, "it would seem that he might have stepped forward as soon as the lights were out and turned the trick, then tripped softly back to his camera. But the fact remains that I heard his voice, his movements, beside the camera all the time the lights were off."

"Can you say that positively?"

"Well, anyway, I was conscious of his presence there."

"Yes, yes; I understand what you mean."

"And I doubt," added Karnak, "if even he had time enough in which to do it."

" All right. Then suppose we eliminate all of them. Who then?"

"Tm sure I can't answer that," Karnak laughed.

"Take a look at this picture in the paper," went on Mason; and, as he passed it to Karnak he offered, in his other hand, a magnifying glass. "Give it a careful scrutiny, from side to side and from top to bottom," he suggested.

After a long study of the picture Karnak looked up. "I don't get your drift," he confessed.

"Don't see anything new?"

"Not a thing."

"Look directly behind Van Zant's chair," Mason commanded. "Between the right side of the arch and Van Zant's chair, on the floor. Do you see anything there in the shadow?"

Karnak looked lengthily. "By George!" he cried suddenly. "I seem to see—see something!"

Loris Fowler glanced over his shoulder. "So do I," she announced. "I see a small bulk that seems to be just a little darker than the background."

"What, does it look like?"

Another long pause. Then came in a startled exclamation from Loris, "My goodness! It looks something like a foot!"

"Gosh, it does!" Karnak breathed.

Nicholas Mason grinned with huge satisfaction. "If it isn't a foot," he stated, "both of mine are cut off at the ankles."

"But whose foot?" demanded Karnak.

"The murderer's foot," said Nicholas Mason. "I didn't notice it when I looked at the plate. I wouldn't have noticed it iu this picture if I hadn't used the mag- nifer. But I'm of the opinion that it'll show rather plainly when we see the print to-morrow morning. The murderer, my dear newfound friends, was standing directly behind Van Zant, shielded from the eyes of the photographer and Karnak and the camera lens by the wall at the end of the arch, when the flashlight picture was taken. And the diners, all looking at the camera—naturally—did not see him either. But he didn't have time to withdraw that foot, it seems, after putting it forward to balance himself as he leaned over to deposit the poison in the wineglass. It was still thrust out when the flashlight flared. And the infallible eye of the camera caught it."

"Why— why that clears every one of the Romping Earls: and the camerman, too!" cried Loris jubilantly.

"In the eyes of the police it will, I think," drawled Mason. "Now tell me, Miss Fowler, why your fiancé, Fred Muir, had reason to hate the dead man. And then we'll take another automobile ride in the early morning hours, while the city sleeps."

8: Karnak Loses His Temper

"IN the first place," Nicholas Mason continued, "did you know Felix Van Zant, Miss Fowler?"

"No, I never met bim," Loris replied. "But Fred Muir left something in his care when he went to China last year. I am afraid that I can't explain it at all, for I know nothing about business matters. Anyway, Fred left something for Van Zant to do for him, and— and I guess he didn't do it right. Something about some stocks. Van Zant was to sell them for Fred, I think. And Fred says he sold them at a very low figure, and split the difference with the man who bought them. That's really all I could get out of it— that Fred thought Mr. VanZant had cheated him out of a lot of money."

"I see. And how long has Muir been back from China?"

"Why, he returned only day before yes- terday on the steamer Southern."

"Oh-ho! I'm beginning to see a little light. Now, Abijah Warbranch claimed to have known Van Zant. That is, he said at the banquet, according to Karnak,

that he had kept in touch with Van Zant during the eight years that the Romping Earls had been separated. Do you know Warbranch, Miss Fowler?"

"No, I have never met him, but I have heard Fred mention his name."

"Were he and Muir connected in any close way?"

"Well, hardly that. But they have met many times during the past eight years."

Mason turned to Karnak.

"Abijah Warbranch claimed to have been in touch with only one of the earls during that period— Van Zant himself?"

"He made that statement," Karnak replied

"Which was an untruth, apparently. He knew Muir quite well, according to Miss Fowler. That would make two of the earls whom he had been in touch with since the last banquet, eight years ago. Why did he lie? I can't answer that, but I can tell you why he dared to lie. He thought Muir was still in China, and had no idea that he was to present himself in Trent's last night. Now why did he want to lie?"

Both Loris Fowler and Karnak shook their heads.

"Do you suppose that he knew Muir, whom he thought still in China, and Van Zant were on the outs?"

Neither of his auditors could answer. But Karnak ventured: "Being in touch with VanZant, he doubtless knew that VanZant was in touch with Muir."

"Not necessarily," said Nicholas Mason. "Suppose that Van Zant and Warbranch were engaged in some secret enterprise— maybe something out of the bounds of the law. In that case they might not mention to their fellow earl, Fred Muir, that they were in touch with each other. Is that fair enough?"

"It's acceptable," was Karnak's reply.

"All right, then. Now it seems to me that it's up to us to discover this connection —which we will hypothetically call a secret connection—between Warbranch and Van Zant."

"But why pick on Warbranch?" asked Karnak. "We had already eliminated him before the discovery of that mysterious foot caused us to eliminate all of the earls and the photographer as well."

"He lied," Mason reminded him. "He said that he had been in touch, in the eight years past, with only one of the Romping Earls— Van Zant. Van Zant himself probably knew that he was not telling the truth, but did not rise to correct him. A secret between them— see? Then up flopped Muir, just returned from China, to give Warbranch the lie. Besides, Warbranch was the only one at the banquet who claimed to have been in touch with Van Zant. So well put Warbranch back into our puzzle again."

"But look here," cried Karnak, finding it difficult to follow him, "I heard you tell the chief of detectives that you know the murderer's name. And when you discovered that mysterious foot peeping into view behind Van Zant's chair, you claimed that it was the foot of the murderer. If you knew the murderer's name before, and if you are now sure that it is his foot which is showing in the picture, why don't you find him? According to your statements, he is not one of the Romping Earls nor is he Smedley, the photographer. Then who is he?— and why bother further with any of the Romping Earls?"

Nicholas Mason smiled indulgently. "I didn't state, my dear Karnak, that the murderer was not one of the Romping Earls. It was Miss Fowler, if I mistake not, who said that. He must be one of the Romping Earls. How could anybody else have got into that alcove undiscovered? There were no waiters about when the picture was taken, were there?"

"No."

"It would be utterly impossible for an outsider to get-to the position behind Van- Zant's chair, pour the poison into his wine, and get away again before the lights came on. He would be unfamiliar with the sur- roundings entirely. He couldn't accomplish it, unless he had eyes that could see in the dark. No, one of the Romping Earls or the camerman killed Van Zant, and it's up to us—"

Karnak sprang to his feet in his exasperation. This man was off his balance.

"You're absolutely illogical, stupid, crazy!"' he accused, while Mason stood spread-legged and smiled at him in a superior way. "You state that the camera-man or one of the Romping Earls killed Van Zant— that that is the reproduction of his foot sticking out there behind Van Zant's chair. We know positively that the poison was placed in Van Zant's glass before the flashlight. The flashlight shows every one of the Romping Earls in his chair at the banquet. And the photographer, of course, was beside his camera. You're wasting my time. I'm going to get a taxi and take Miss Fowler home, and then I'm going to my club and go to bed."

"Dear, dear, dear! What an impulsive man you are, Mr. Karnak! And just when I thought I was convincing you that I am an expert reasoner. Well, I like you, Karnak. You're a good fellow, a gentleman, and a scholar. I'll have to convince you, I guess, because I don't want to lose your friendship or your respect. I did want to look up a motive for the crime, in order to made my case complete, but since you have become so impetuous, I'll let that slide. So if you and Miss Fowler will come with me to police headquarters, I'll show you the murderer in a short space of time."

"To police headquarters!" gasped Loris. "You don't mean Fred, after all?"

"Will you come— both of you?"

"Yes, we'll give you one more chance," said Karnak. "Lead the way."

"All right. But before I go, take another long look at that reproduction in the paper— both of you— and tell me which of the men pictured is the murderer. He's there, right in front of you. And the evi- dence that he is the murderer is there, plain as the nose on your face. Look! Think!"

Loris Fowler and Karnak spent fully five minutes studying the reproduction, but at last Karnak handed the paper back with a sigh.

"You'll say, 'How simple!' when I show you," growled Mason. " And just for that I'm not going to show you, until the end. You have eyes, but can't use 'em. That's not my fault. Come on— we'll go for another ride."

The police station again— and Nicholas Mason asked Loris Fowler and Lanier Karnak to remain in the car. Then he ran up the broad stone steps and was inside for some little time.

Out in the car, Loris and Karnak held an indiggation meeting, and resolved that, whereas Nicholas Mason acted like a lunatic, he was a lunatic.

Then the lunatic came down the steps with two plain clothes detectives at his heels.

"Guess we can all squeeze jnto the old bus," he remarked lightly. "Miss Fowler, I think you'll find it more comfortable in front with me."

The plain clothes men clambered in. Mason took the wheel.

Then, to Karnak's surprise, he drove to 615 Tekram Street, where he ordered all hands out.

Karnak was more surprised than ever when Mason led the way up the dark stairs that ascended to the odoriferous photographic studio of Eli Smedley. For, though he had not seen Smedley leave the building to go home, Mason had assured him that the photographer had left while they were talking with Detective Tetterton before his door.

But as they reached the dark hall above a thin smear of light was showing through the transom over Smedley's door.

Mason walked to the door and knocked. It was not until then that Karnak missed one of the plain clothes men.

Mason knocked again and again, without receiving a response. Finally, as nobody came, he began throwing his shoulder against the door, but not hard enough, Karnak noticed, to strain the lock or the hinges. He kept this up at intervals, making quite a bit of noise.

Ten minutes passed. Nobody had said a word. Then suddenly there came the sound of footsteps on the stairs, and presently an electric torch pointed the way along the dusty floor of the hall for two men who had ascended from the street.

Another electric torch, in the hands of the plain clothes man who was with them, cast a shaft of brilliancy in the direction of the approaching pair.

Loris Fowler gasped. They were the missing detective and Eli Smedley.

"Caught 'im monkeyin' down the fire-escape, Nick," announced the captor. "He raised an awful holler when I nabbed him. Now what'll we do with 'im?"

"Unlock, the door, Smedley," commanded Mason. "We want to go in your dump, and have a talk with you."

Smedley grumbled to himself, but he was plainly frightened. He fitted a key in the lock with trembling fingers and opened the door.

They all filed in, passed through the main room, and into the one where Karnak and Mason had talked with the photographer the first time.

Mason found a chair and set it forward for Miss Fowler. Then he stepped before Smedley and leveled a finger at his nose.

"Now, Mr. Smedley," he said, "you're up against it, and you might as well come clean. You're a bootlegger, aren't you?"

"I am not!" denied Smedley indignantly.

"Tut, tut, man! Don't you think I know the smell of a whisky still? I smelled it when I was here before. Your still was going then. Thats why I expected to find you here at this time in the morning, instead of at home in bed. Illicit distillers usually work at night, when other folks are asleep and can't smell the fumes. I knew you sneaked down the stairs after Karnak and I left before, to make sure that we were going away for good.

"When I told you I was a dick, you got excited. Then, seeing us still at the curb before this building, and in company with a police detective, you walked away up the street, throwing the bluff that you were going home. Your still's right in that room, Smedley"— and Mason pointed to a door that was closed. "I knew you were in here, and I thought you would refuse to open the door. So I pretended that I was on the point of breaking my way in, in order to scare you down the fire-escape. Detective Willock was waiting for you in the alley, and nailed you. Just as I planned. Now let's see your still, Smedley."

"You're not enforcement officers!" growled the little photographer. " You got no search warrant. I refuse to open that door or any other door."

"All right, Smedley," Mason gave in. "You're talking like a sea lawyer now. You're within your rights. We won't force our way into that room. Between you and me, Smedley, we're not interested in your actvities as an illicit distiller of hooch. 'We want to know who poisoned Felix Van Zant in Trent's Café last night."

The man's face, already pale, grew ghastly white. "I don't know a thing about it," he protested, licking his lips with a swift tongue in his perturbation.

"Let's see the original plate you used to make that exposure, Smedley," Nicholas Mason persisted relentlessly.

"I showed it to you once, didn't I?"

"I said the original plate, Smedley! You'll either show it to us now, or we'll take you to the station and give you the third degree. Do you realize what that means, Smedley?"

The wizened little fellow licked his lips furiously again.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about!" he howled. "I tell you I showed you the plate! That's the only plate there is. It's the original. How could there be any other?"

"Listen, Smedley," said Mason sternly. "I happen to know something about photography myself. I was a newspaper a reporter at one time in my career. I know what can be done to a photographic plate by an expert. Now will you come across? I've got you, Smedley."

Smedley sank weakly to a chair and threw his arms on his workbench, burying his face against them.

"Come! Talk!" Mason ordered.

But just then there was a knock at the outer door, and two more plain clothes police officers came in, preceded by Abijah Warbranch, the master of ceremonies at the banquet of the Romping Earls.

"Good evening, Mr. Warbranch— or, rather, good morning," Mason greeted him. "Allow me to introduce myself. I am Nicholas Mason, of the Wilkes Detective Agency. Sorry to have to get you out of your warm bed in the St. Ignatius Hotel at this ungodly hour of the morning, but our business is pressing. I want to know how long you have known Mr. Smedley, here, and what you can tell us about his general behavior."

Warbranch looked stupefied, glancing from one to the other of the occupants of the room.

"Why, I've known Eli for some time," he stated. "We're pretty good friends. I think he's honest and straight. You're not trying to connect him with that terrible affair at Trent's last night, are you?"

"Yes, in a way," replied Mason. " But before I ask you any more questions about him, will you kindly give this young lady here a good look and tell me whether or not you have ever seen her before? Her name is Mary Dover."

9: Misplaced Legs

LORIS FOWLER gasped, it was so sudden and unexpected. She turned startled brown eyes on Mason, utterly at a loss to know what he had in mind.

Warbranch, equally nonplused, looked at the embarrassed girl closely.

"I am positive," he said, "I have never met her before."

"Never met Mary Dover? She has charge of the hat-and-coat stand in Trent's Café."

Warbranch elevated his eyebrows politely, as much as to say: "Well, what of that?"

"Last night, while the Romping Earls were dining in the alcove on the mezzanine floor at Trent's," Mason went on, "Miss Dover had occasion to leave the checking stand and go to the mezzanine. This was just before the flashlight picture was taken. She went up the stairs, walked past the alcove where you gentlemen were at dinner, and entered a room at the other end of the mezzanine floor. Shortly after this, as she was on her way back to her stand, the manager had the café lights extinguished. She was caught in total darkness halfway between the door from which she had just came and the alcove.

"She stopped, of course wondering what had happened to the lights, for the manager of the café had made his announcement while she was in the room which she had had occasion to visit. Then, while she was standing there, waiting for the lights to come on again, the flashlight torch was fired, and the picture taken.

"And what, Mr. Warbranch, do you suppose that Mary Dover saw? She had a slanting view of the interior of the alcove. From where she stood, she could see the man who was poisoned, Felix Van Zant, and only two more of the diners. But what is more important still, she tells me that she saw another man standing directly behind Van Zant's chair, hidden from everybody except herself by the wall which forms the arch before the alcove. He was standing in that little corner, directly behind Van Zant's chair, leaning forward just a trifle. Isn't that remarkable, Mr. Warbranch?"

"It's remarkably stupid of you to be telling me all this," Warbranch snapped. "I suppose you suspect my friend Eli Smedley of this murder. That's why you've lured me here, to help incriminate him. But I myself, sitting in my chair at the head of the table, plainly saw Eli standing beside his camera when the flash came. How could he be anywhere else? Wasn't it he who made the exposure? Wasn't it he who fired the flashlight torch? This Mr. Karnak here— I think I have the right name— knows that as well as I do."

"Mr. Warbranch," Mason continued "Eli Smedley did fire the torch, and he did stand beside his camera at the time of which you speak. But if the man hiding in the corner behind Van Zant, unseen by the Romping Earls because they were looking at the camera, unseen by Karnak because the wall of the arch concealed him— if this man was not Smedley, I ask, who in the devil was he?"

"How should I know?"

"He was one of the Romping Earls— one whe left his seat as soon as the lights were out, darted to a position behind Van Zant's chair, poured the poison in the wine-glass, and stood erect just in time to prevent his figure from

being exposed to the photographic plate when the light flashed. But, in leaning forward to pour the acid in the wineglass beside Van Zant's plate, he was obliged to thrust out a foot to balance himself. Before the flash light flared he was able to jerk his body back out of sight, but not that foot. It shows in the reproduction of that picture in the morning papers, Mr. Warbranch. Have you seen the papers yet?"

"No."

Mason handed him a copy, together with his magnifying glass. "Take it to the light and look closely," he said. "You'll see the dim outlines of a man's foot protruding beyond the wall that forms the archway on the right. See it?"

"Yes, I believe I do," returned Warbranch after a lengthy scrutiny. He looked straight at Mason again. "But what have Eli Smedley and I to do with that?" he asked. "Here's the picture"— he tapped the newspaper with his knuckles— "and in it every one of the Romping Earls appear. If there was a man standing behind Van Zant's chair, he undoubtedly is the poisoner. But he can't be one of the Romping Earls, because all of them are in their respective places. This picture proves that."

Warbranch, however, glanced nervously at Loris Fowler— just one fleeting, expectant glance. Loris lowered her eyes.

An ominous silence fell. The breathing of every one in the room could be heard. Through the cracks of the door which medley had refused to open issued the - pungent smell of distillation.

Then suddenly there came from Eli Smedley a hoarse scream. "I can't stand it!" he cried. "I'm gonta tell! They've got us! He understands photography, that fellow does. I've got to tell or I'll go crazy! I—"

"Shut up, you fool!" shouted Warbranch. " He knows nothing. He's bluff-ing you! Shut up, I tell you!"

Mason had risen and stepped to the side of the wailing photographer. He laid a hand gently on his shoulder.

"Show me the original plate, Eli," he said soothingly, "and save yourself the trouble of an explariation. I know all about it, anyway, you know."

Smedley was weeping nervously. "I— I destroyed it," he faltered.

"I thought maybe you had done that. Then tell me. It 'll go easier with you if you do, Smedley."

"Don't say a word!" yelled Warbranch. "Close your trap! Let him do his worst. He doesn't know anything."

Smedley looked up at him. "I'm gonta tell,' he said. "I know which side my bread's buttered on. It ain't me— it's you! I'm gonta save myself."

The words were barely out of his mouth when Warbranch crashed a fist to the jaw of the nearest police officer and made a dash for the door. He

wrenched at the knob, but, unbeknown to him, the door had been locked by the last plainclothes man to enter. He reeled back into the arms of two of them.

Handcuffs flashed on his wrists. He stood there, tragedy in his face, held by two indifferent and bored-looking officers.

Mason was speaking softly.

"You don't need to tell me, Eli," he declared. "I'll tell you what was done, and you may corroborate what I have to say. Later, when you feel better, you can write a complete confession and sign it before witnesses. It 'll go much easier with you if you do."

Mason smiled at the others.

"There," he said, pointing a finger at Abijah Warbranch, " stands the murderer of Felix Van Zant. I knew hours ago that he was the murderer, but I wanted to get absolute proof before I made any state- ment. I knew it after I'd studied the plate that Smedley showed me here in his studio. I wanted one of the prints, however, so that I could see things more clearly. But we don't actually need even the plate. Abijah Warbranch is plainly labeled as the mur- derer in that reproduction in the papers. I know, because I was once, when working in a newspaper office, quite familiar with the tricks of expert photographers.

"If you will look at the reproduction in the papers, you will note that the figure of Warbranch is blacker than the others. Just a trifle. It is also a little clearer, a little more distinct. But not one man in a thousand would notice it.

"That gave me my first clew, and I looked for additional evidence. I discovered it at once. Karnak, Miss Fowler— all of you who are not engaged— please examine the reproductions in these papers. Look closely at the figure of Warbranch. Do you notice anything else besides the extra clearness of his picture?"

Those who had responded to his request shook their heads, after a long examination. Mason sighed.

"It's so evident," he said. "Look at Van Zant's picture. He is seated at the foot of the table, directly opposite Warbranch. The table is a long, narrow one. Its ends are perhaps four feet wide. Naturally, the men at the ends of the table should be , seated in the middle. Let's say that their bodies occupy a foot and a half of space in the middle of the ends. That leaves a foot and a quarter of table space on each side of them.

" Now, if one of you gentlemen should sit in the middle of the end of a table four feet wide, would you find it convenient to spread your feet apart so that they would be on the outside of the table legs?

"Notice Van Zant. His legs do not show. They are inside of the table legs, of course. But notice the picture of Warbranch. His right leg shows outside of the table leg. An undignified position for a man to keep his legs in at a banquet, to say the least. Don't you see that it would be almost impossible for him to sit in the middle of the end of the table and have his right leg showing outside the table leg? Don't you see that, Karnak?"

"Yes, it's clear,' admitted Karnak. "But still I don't understand—"

"How it condemns Warbranch as the murderer, eh? But it does. If Smedley hadn't destroyed the original plate I could show you in an instant. But here's the plot in a nutshell:

'"Warbranch left his seat at the head of the table the instant the manager turned off the lights. Catfooting over the soft carpet of the alcove, he slipped behind his fellow earls to a place back of Van Zant's chair. He leaned over and poured the deadly contents of his phial into Van Zant's wineglass. He had hoped that there would be sufficient time for him to return and re- sume his seat before the torch was fired. But something went wrong. Smedley worked too fast for him, or—"

"I didn't have anything to do with it!" shouted Smedley. " Not then, anyway. I didn't know anything about it, then, Mr. Mason."

"All right, Smedley. I believe that. Anyway, Smedley began counting one, two, three before Warbranch could dart back to his own end of the table. But he was prepared for just such an emergency. He stepped back quickly into the corner, thinking that there he would not show in the photograph, and believing that the other earls would have. their eyes glued to the camera and not notice him. But he failed to retrieve that balancing foot in time, The flash came and his foot was photographed, though very dimly.

"Immediately after the flash, and before the café lights were turned on again, he hastened back to his chair and was there in his seat when the place was again illuminated:

"The flash was so quick that Karnak, even, sitting directly before the subjects of the photograph, was unable to tell whether all of the chairs were occupied when the torch was lighted. Warbranch thought that he was virtually safe, for he had purposely seated Van Zant at the foot of the table, had purposely taken the other end himself, so that he would be the last man to be suspected of the crime becaus of his distance from his victim.

"Then in some way he got in touch with Smedley, after the crime had been discovered. He needed Smedley's aid now to save him from the gallows. His life was in Smedley's hands. He may have telephoned from the police station, under the pretext of getting somebody to vouch for him, or he may—"

"That's what he did," sniffed Smedley. "And I got word just in time. I lied to you fellows when you were here. And to the police, too. I hadn't finished with the work— yet. The prints weren't on their way to the newspapers. I came back, finished up, and sent them in later— just in time to get 'em in."

"I thought as much," Mason told him. "But I didn't say anything about it. I wanted you to go ahead and hang yourself— and Warbranch."

"And Warbranch was hidin' in that room there when you were here," Smedley added.

"I suspected that, too," smiled Mason, "But what was done, folks, was this," he continued. "Over the phone Warbranch told Smedley all that had happened, and begged him, for the sake of the connection between them— which I think is the bootlegging game— to save his life. Smedley agreed to it. So when Warbranch hurried over here, after being released by the police, they got to work.

"Here in his studio Smedley and Warbranch in an ordinary dining chair— this one right here, maybe. He aimed his camera at his profile. He inserted the plate of the exposure made at Trent's, which showed the empty chair. Then, with his black cloth over his head, he looked through the camera, moving the camera here and there, backward and forward, until Warbranch's figure appeared just where it ought to be if he had been in the original exposure, correctly focused and of the proper size.The empty chair was covered by Warbranch and the chair in which he was seated.

"Then he slipped the original plate out and inserted an unexposed plate. He took a flash light of Warbranch. He hastily de eloped this plate, made a print, dried it, and with a pair of scissors cut out the figure, following the outlines carefully. This cut-out figure he pasted on the print of the original photograph of the banquet, which showed Warbranch's chair empty. He pasted it in just where Warbranch should have been, at the head of the table. But he was confronted with a dilemma, or else he was obliged to work too fast, so that he didn't notice details. For in pasting in the figure of Warbranch in its proper place he was obliged to paste the man's leg on the outside of the table leg.

"If the tablecloth had been longer, and hung clear to the floor, he could have cut off Warbranch's leg entirely, and those who saw the print would think his leg was hidden in the gloom under the table. But café tablecloths are notoriously short.

"However, that was the way it was done. Then Smedley, with an enlarging camera, took a photograph of the patched-up photograph, and lo and behold, the empty chair was occupied when the prints went to the newspaper offices! It was all carefully planned by Warbranch before the crime, to be done if he

failed to get back to his chair before the flash. light. It was designed to be a perfect alibi— but it failed. Now, Warbranch, why did you kill Van Zant?"

Warbranch, white of face, glared at Mason. His lips moved spasmodically, but he did not speak.

"He'd double-crossed us in the bootleg game," muttered Smedley. "Not only once, but several times. Warbranch and I made the booze; Van Zant peddled it. Oh, he was smooth and polite and gentlemanly acting, but he was all for Van Zant. He claimed he had to make up to certain police officials, but we found he was lying and was putting the money in his pocket. There is a girl, too, of course. They hated each other like poison for the past few months. Hooch and a woman— that's what killed Van Zant."

Mason rose.

"All right, Smedley— thank you," he said. " You'll have to come with us to head-quarters now, of course. There you can write a confession of your small part in the plot, and sign it before witnesses. I hope they make it light for you— you're only a tool.

"Let's be going, boys. The chief of dicks owes me a hundred bones that I want to collect before I go to bed. Karnak, you're as sleepy as a puppy. The Pelicans' for you, my son. And I'm sure Miss Fowler wants to see Fred Muir released so that he can take her home. He's been in China for a year, and was snatched away from her the second day after he came back."

"Miss Fowler?" Smedley stared. "I thought you said her name was Mary Dover."

"I'd forgotten that," said Nicholas Mason with a grin.

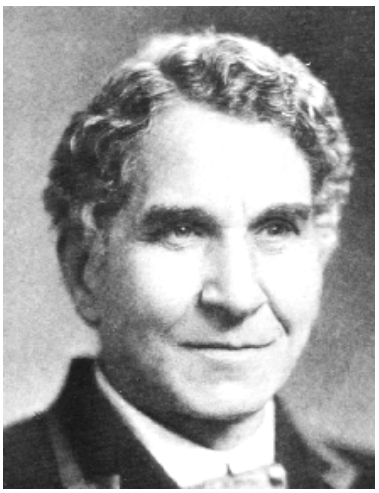
———————————

11: Orasio Calvo

M. P. Shiel

1865-1947

The Belgravia Annual, Christmas 1895



Matthew Phipps Shiel

Le leggi son fatti pei coglione.
Laws are made for dullards.
—Corsican Proverb.

AT A considerable height above the sea level, in the middle of a chaos of mountains, and not very far from Monte Cinto, the culminating point of the chain which traverses Corsica, stands the Villa Calvo. It is a great pile, half castle, half palace— half northern Italian Gothic, half southern Italian Byzantine— rising sheer from the brink of one of those stupendous ravines which are the commonplaces of the island. The ever-growing tale of tourists who sip absinthe and black coffee in the Hotel Continental or *al fresco* in the *piazza* at Ajaccio during the early spring, have not seen it. Its solitude, in fact, could not be more complete. In some of its aspects it conveys the impression of a natural outgrowth of the landscape. Around it stretch those primal forests of ilex and laricio pines, which from of old 7 9 8 caused the island to be described as "thick, and, as it were, *savage* with wood;" and towering above it— nearly always clad in snow— great crags of gneiss, of granite, of porphyry, and of mica-slate. Four miles away, seated lower down on a ridge, and swept in season by the frigid Tramontana wind, dozes the squalid village of Spello, with its white-washed box-houses, gutter tiles, scavenger-army of wild dogs, and windows paned with paper smeared in oil of olives.

The Villa Calvo itself is now the most forbidding of desolate places. The flags of the courtyard are seamed with wild lavender, and cistus, and the rich

grasses of the heights; the two gardens are jungles of lentisk and walnut, the scarlet berries of sarsaparilla, and every kind of sub-tropical bindweed; shutters left open by the retainers as they fled from the house still groan to the highland Levante, or rot in the sun; buzzards and ravens, the deadly spider *malmignata*, and the black bat know it well; roofs buried in mosses show a tendency to fall in. The place is the very sanctuary of gloom. It is situated, too, on the more deserted side of the island, called by the Corsicans the "near," i.e., the east or Italian side.

The noble house of the Calvi, Venetian in origin, had established themselves as great territorial *signori* (technical for our "nobleman," and so quite different to the Italian word) in Corsica by means of some one or other of their sons at a very early date. The original stock indeed, after playing a turbulent part in the history of the Republic, extirpated itself by the very exuberance of its own passions, the last of their number perishing by the poisoned dagger of his jealous wife in 1605. The off-shoot, however, found in the still greater insanity of Corsican political warfare a congenial life-element, and grew fat. The fortress-town of Calvi still bears their name in the north-west. Corsica passed under the suzerainty of Pope, Marquis of Tuscany, Pisa, Genoa, France; and with each change the house of Calvi knew how, by its adroitness, to find a stepping-stone to still greater power. From their sinister activities sprang the factions of Red and Black (*Banda Rossa* and *Banda Nera*), and taking the Black side, they became the mysterious centre of those intrigues and massacres which for centuries turned the province into a little hell. Considering the proverbial poverty of Corsica, the revenues of this violent race became enormous; their influence boundless; till at last they grew to be regarded by the peasants with a profoundly superstitious awe. Their power indeed received a check when, joining the popular party in the insurrection of Paoli in '55, they suffered some loss of territories, but most of these were regained under the more favourable *régime* of the earlier period of the Convention. They were till lately regarded in Corsica as the last surviving of the great feudal *signori*, who migrated from the mainland between the tenth and sixteenth centuries.

It is, however, of the very latest scion of all of this volcanic family that I wish to speak. I first met Count Orazio Calvo in the midst of a bewildering Maelstrom of light and music and colour at a *masque* in his own Hôtel in the Rue de Rome. All the world was there, and I could not for the life of me imagine why he singled me out for the patronage of his talk ; I remember, however, that it was his whim to profess a deep admiration for the English, whose language, indeed, he spoke perfectly. I at once set myself to the study of a man whom I saw to be not only remarkable, but unique. To find such a

person— a rude Corsican grandee— profoundly Learned, of course astonished me, though years of Paris failed to add an atom of real polish to his manners; and though his hardly-concealed contempt for all men and things included a contempt for his own acquirements also. Of the license of the Paris of his day he was the high priest, acknowledged and consecrated. He was known to be an atheist, yet he had his religion— the religion of excess ; only, the possible excess of a Mephistopheles, not the excess of a: Heliogabalus. It was easy to see that he despised what he did, and did it only because he despised it somewhat less than anything else. Yet he was the opposite of *blasé*; for an altogether abnormal energy was written on every feature of his body. His prodigality was in all cases distinguished by a certain *furore* of daring and originality; but the feeling he inspired was not so much admiration as *fear*. His rage was the very rage of the tiger; and though I feel sure he cherished a secret bitterness at the interval which divided him from the rest of men, yet a wise instinct warned the gayest of his satellites in the midst of the wildest Bacchanal never to address him with familiarity. He had a leonine habit of roaming far and wide through the slums of Paris in the small morning hours; and stories of mad munificences performed by him at such times were circulated; but his charities, I thought, if they existed, could only be the stony, if prodigal, charity of the gargoyle which vomits for the thirsty. Of lovers' love he knew, of course, nothing; and the possibility of little Cupid coming to shoot baby arrows at such a heart, would have been a notion so exquisitely comic, that, had it occurred to anyone it must have set the entire Calvo Olympus in a flare of quenchless laughter. Round such a man, the *décadents*, the artist-class, the *flaneurs* and *étoiles*, and all the unfathomable *demi-monde* of Paris flocked— he was too volcanic a rough *Naturkind* to tolerate the *monde*— calling him king. He received in addition the *sobriquet* of *la petite comète*. None of his friends, I was given to understand, had ever seen on the lips of *la petite comète*— a smile.

In personal appearance he strongly resembled several other Italo-Corsicans whom I have met, and was not unlike that specimen of his singular countrymen who happened to become world-famous. He was below the middle height, and not too stout; yet he gave an impression of extraordinary weightiness, as though molten of lead. His face was of perfect classical beauty; black hair streaked with grey; skin hairless, and of the dirty olive of waxen effigies not yet painted pink. His brow was puckered into a perpetual frown; eyes cold as moonlight, glancing a downward and sideward contempt; forehead *bastionné*, columnar; jaws ribbed, a hew of graven brass; lips definite and welded ; the whole face, the whole man, one, knit, integral— an indivisible sculpture. Four or five times I met Orazio Calvo in Paris, and always he evinced

the same disposition to take me, as it were, by the hand; while I, imagining a distinct element of doubt and even danger in his friendship, rather avoided *la 'tite comète*. I shortly afterwards returned to England, and though rumours of the excessive splendour of his revels sometimes reached me, the count, in the course of some three years had pretty well passed out of my active memories.

Suddenly, one morning, he stood before me in my chambers in London.

He seemed unconscious of my amazement, and informed me with the old air of sultan majesty that he had travelled in his yacht *incognito* and alone to England, and a friend being, for certain reasons, indispensable to him, he had sought me out. *Health* was the jewel which he sought; and, in truth, he looked haggard enough. "The bracing country air of Britain "— could I assure him that under conditions of perfect quiet and seclusion?

Noting in him a tendency to puff and corpulence, I suggested vigorous exercise. Something that I took to be a laugh rattled in his throat. But why not?— I insisted. If he would not walk, had he never heard of such a thing as the bicycle? I myself took an annual tour through parts of England by that means, and should be delighted to accompany him now.

With this suggestion he finally fell in, and we started. It was the beginning of the red-ripe Autumn time. The count, it is true, took somewhat unkindly to his machine, once flying into a hurricane of passion and making it the object of a rain of kicks from his rather short legs. But he quickly began to show signs of the connection between this method of locomotion and bodily well-being. The journey became more and more pleasant, till we reached a delightful retreat in Dorsetshire— a little farm belonging to a widow lady, whom I had long numbered among my friends.

This lady, of comparatively humble social position, was also of that entirely lovable type of English woman characterised by a profound natural piety— sedately gay, puritan, perennially fresh— whose qualities unite to remind one of the wholesomeness and sweetness of home-made bread. The two extremely lovely young ladies, her daughters— Miss Ethel and Miss Grace— added to her odorous home something of the colour and the charm of Paradise. I may mention incidentally that the two girls were twins, though they possessed none of the resemblances so often accompanying this condition. Grace, with a complexion of dawn-tinted snow, was dark, rather tall, with a superb neck; Ethel was the sweetest flower in the world, fair and winsome.

Into this shadeful and quiet home I, with my friend Orazio Calvo, intruded. I had previously put up for considerable periods at the farm; but our present stay was only timed to last three days. When these had passed, however, others followed, a week, two.

My companion showed no disposition to depart. It was the golden season of harvest, and with remarkable gallantry for *him*, the count daily escorted the ladies on their walks in the lanes and fields, entering with them into the life of the country, and watching by their side in the evening the Pan-ic levities of the reapers. His tongue was loosed, and he spoke to them of the world, and its glory. I know not what of misgiving, foreboding, gradually took possession of my mind.

As he sat under the porch by moonlight listening to the pure and simple songs of the ladies, I could see how the cynical man of the world— whose notions of Woman had been derived from the peasant-girls of Corsican villages, and the *étoiles* of the Ambigu and Variétiés— how he, now first in his life's course, realized that an earthly creature may yet be of heaven. I could see him revelling in the transport of an entirely new, a divine impression. I proposed departure. He refused. I strongly insisted.

"I shall go," I said.

"In which case," he replied, "nothing is so certain as that you go alone."

Then, after a while, a new discovery filled me with new alarm. I believed I could detect in the virgin eyes of both the girls the very abandonment of love for Orazio Calvo. And one night, after I had retired to sleep, he walked into my room and stood at the foot of the bed, leaning over the rail. The glimmer of a lamp showed me his extreme pallor, the fire that swelled and inflamed his stern eyes. I dreaded to break the long silence between us.

"I *love* them!" he suddenly exclaimed, paroxysmal in passion.

Love *them*! Every nerve in my body rose shuddering in revolt against him. Love *them*! Yet the trill of his voice, the trembling bed-rail, left no doubt of the genuineness, the intensity of his meaning.

"But *which* of them, in God's name?" I asked.

"Which? Miss— Grace— I think."

I *think*!

The enigma utterly confounded me. But my vague presentiments were laid to rest when, two months later, the dark-haired Grace was led by him to the altar of the village-church hard by. The young wife was immediately carried off to the Continent. From widely divergent points of the earth's surface— from Delhi— from Memphis— her mother heard from her. Finally she took up her residence in the mountain home of her husband's race. Her constant promise to revisit England she never fulfilled.

During the space of two years I received several illegible letters from Count Calvo (the vehemence of his temperament hardly permitted his writing to be read; for a steel nib immediately broke to splinters under his hand; and his attempt to write many a word with the quill resulted in nothing but a thick

dash)— and two from his wife, in both of which latter I fancied— though I do not say it was more than fancy—that I could detect a note of deep, and even weird, melancholy. And once again, at the end of these two years, Count Orazio Calvo stood unexpectedly before me in my house. A glance told me that he was a changed man. Some disease surely— I thought. The hungry eyes, no longer cold, shifted incessantly, His fingers clutched continually at some phantom thing in the palm of his hand. My lips formed the word, "Orestes."

"But the countess?" I enquired.

"Is dead."

"*Dead*!" "I say it. Dead!"

I shuddered as he uttered the word.

The same hour he proceeded to the farm, I with him. The news of Grace's death had shortly preceded him by letter. He had sent, too, a lock of her hair, several little mementoes. The little home, when we reached it a second time, was a house of woe.

I soon returned to London, leaving the Count behind me. Five months later, I received a letter begging me to go back to the farm on a matter of some delicacy.

Now, I may as well say at once that I am by no means what would be called a *squeamish* person; that in general I regard the notions of Clapham with so much, and only so much, attention as the superstitions of ancient Egypt. Yet, for some reason or other, I now felt impelled to protest with the most heart-felt ardour against the projected marriage of Count Calvo with the fair-haired Ethel. An instinct— illogical, perhaps, but deep— told me of something uncanny, awesome, in the union. Earnestly did I implore the dear mother, now heart-broken and bereft, to interpose her will. She, too, felt all I fe lt; but dared not, she said, coerce the overmastering inclinations of the girl. I accordingly accompanied Miss Ethel to Paris, and on a dark December day, in the gloomy church of St. Sulpice, saw her united to the object of her ecstatic love. From her, as from a nature more affectionate and sunny than that of her sister, the letters I received came more regularly. They were dated from the various capitals of Europe, and then for some time from Venice; and in them, too, I found— or thought I found— a tone of heart-sickness, of disappointment. But this feeling, if it existed at all, must have been short-lived; for on taking up her residence at the Villa Calvo, her letters became suddenly voluminous and frequent. Ethel, it was now clear, was happy. In one epistle, I received a long and very comical history of the only visit which ever disturbed her solitude, paid by the podesta and staff-general of Bastia; in another, a gay account of the eccentricities of a haughty old Corsican peasant who did duty as butler. Every trifle seemed to make her joyful; and every sentence began or ended

with "her dear lord"; his condescending love for her; her worship of him. Quite suddenly the letters ceased altogether.

It may have been a year and a half after the second marriage that I found myself at Marseilles en route for Southern Italy. That I felt a certain relief when I entered the station to see my train steaming away is certain ; but so secret are sometimes the workings of the Will, that I was only half-conscious of the feeling, nor could I explain it. Half an hour later, however, as I sauntered in la Canabiere, I was able to read myself. From this point the harbour is fully visible, and looking westward, I caught sight of a little steamer making her way out from Port la Joliette. I was too salted a *Marseillais* not to know *her*— it was *La Mite*, a boat of the old Valery line not yet grown into the Compagnie Transatlantique: in eighteen hours she would be lying at anchor in the harbour of Ajaccio. I hastened to the quai region; the vessel was then puffing under the guns of St. Nicolas. I accosted a group of propped watermen:

"Tell me— is it at all possible to catch her now?" They looked lazily at her.

"She's off," said one, "*le bon diable même ne saurait*—"

My desire must have been *very* great, if it was at all equal to my disappointment. I continued my way eastward; again and again finding it necessary to prove to myself that it was absurd to go out of one's way to visit forgetful friends. Frejus, Genoa, Pisa— keeping always to the coast— I reached at last the central point between Pisa and Rome. Here, at Follonica, I stopped short— over-mastered— and travelling by horse, reached the coast village of Piombino, opposite the singular island, tombstoneshaped, called by the Romans Oethalia, and now *Ile d'Elbe*; there made terms with the *padrone* of a small *speronare*, and in twelve hours landed at Bastia. I was bent upon visiting Count Orazio Calvo in his fortress home.

Mounted on a small Corsican pony, and accompanied by a guide on a mule, I turned southward, and began the ascent. The fever-mists of the low-lying east coast hung heavy, and under this pall, interminable stretches of *makis* (thick copse) flamed with arbutus leaves, and the purple of maple fruit, and were aromatic with the myrrh of cisti. Here and there on the dizzy edge of a ravine, a solitary hut; or in the depths of the wood, the dole of a shepherd's bagpipe; now the tinkle of goat-bells from afar, now the flap of a raven's wing, or the momentary phantom of a brown wild sheep (*mufri*). My guttural companion spoke continually on the subject of the brigands. Twice only we passed through mountain villages, and in the afternoon of the second day reached Spello. The short remainder of my upward way I continued in accordance with verbal directions. Before long the Villa Calvo rose sternly before me.

I crossed a dry flat moat, and made fast my animal to a staple in one of the granite pillars of the gateway. Silence pervaded the place. I noticed a decided rankness in the garden on each side of the forecourt. Ascending a flight of marble steps, I rang an iron bell hanging beneath one of the two front porticoes. Its clanging made a sharp break in the stillness. But to my repeated summonses there came no answer. At last I boldly pushed back the unfastened portal, and entered the house.

So long I wandered about, that at last, in a complexity of long velveted corridors and dim chambers, I lost my bearings. The impression wrought on me by the deserted bigness of the mansion was intense. Even my own footfall was inaudible. The evening was now darkening toward night. From where I stood I heard the chirping of a cicada. By an effort I raised my voice and called, but only echoes answered me. In an elliptical apartment, I found a table spread— the white cloth, wines, all the *restes* of a meal, gold and silver plate, faded grapes; a clock on a pedestal of ebony, it had ceased to tick; in another chamber I came on a lady's garden-hat on a divan. And over all the dreariness of Gethsemane. Trembling hesitancy to proceed further possessed me.

In a remote wing I came at length to a passage, in the wall of which was a nail-studded Gothic door. It occasioned my surprise, for though it now stood ajar, it was provided *on the outside* with shot-bolts, and from this side a large key still projected. I entered the suite to which it admitted. The rooms were furnished with exceptional splendour, and here a piece of music, there an article of jewellery, seemed to betoken the habitual presence of a lady. Then in the middle of a carpet something chanced to meet my careful outlook which fully confirmed me in this supposition— two very long hairs. At this sight I found it necessary to call up all my courage. With the daring of despair I picked up one of the filaments, and held it to the just dying violet light filtered through the stained glass of the casement. I expected— I must, I think, have *expected*— to find it of the blonde *nuance* of the Countess Ethel's hair. A sob of horror burst from me when I saw it lie on my palm dark as the brown of Vandyke.

Yet another long, heart-torturing search, and in a loftier part of the building I faced a draperied door. On attempting to push it back, I discovered it to be locked. Yet *this* door I determined to open, if I could; and again I bent all my strength to the effort. It remained closed, hiding its mystery. It was only when on the point of moving away that I noticed, just projecting from under the bottom, a white substance. I stooped and drew it out. It was now dark, but I could see that it was a large envelope, and, peering close, detected my name in the writing of the count. With this in my hand I hurried from the spot—

through the vast house of desolation— beyond the bounds of the whole gloomy and terror-haunted domain.

"MY friend," thus ran, in the somewhat explosive, Aischylian style so characteristic of him, the all but indecipherable MS. of Count Orazio Calvo— "this document which I address to you will in all probability never reach you. I write it, however, rather by way of monument to my own integrity, than with the hope that it will be read by other eyes.

"My friend, that foul and hellish monster, Pope Clement V II., pronounced in 1525 a curse against the sons of my race. It has been a secret tradition with my uncultured fathers to believe albunwillingly in its ultimate fulfilment. Perhaps even I myself, in spite of a life of search into the make and meaning of the universe, have been unable wholly to expel some lingering half-credence in this ancient superstition.

"That the malediction has at last overtaken us is now a certainty. With me my race expires. I write this as a protest— and a defiance— against a fate wholly unmerited.

"You cannot doubt that I loved— you could not be so lunatic. And you know, too, that I never withheld my hand from any joy. To desire, with me and the stock of which I come, has always been to possess.

"But soon after realizing my passion, I was confronted by a stupendous problem. In order to solve it I made a leap into the dark, and married— the Countess Grace. I expected happiness. Happiness was far from me. The poor lady, seeing my bitter disappointment, pined. The splendour of her beauty dimmed. After a time I refused to look upon her; to see her face increased my fever. A fire scorched my chest. I traversed the continents, seeking rest; I consulted the greatest physicians; I puzzled them; they pronounced me mad— rabid with the bite of the tarantula. My mysterious malady took only deeper root. I was devoured by the longings of Tantalus— a passion more fervid, and more pure, than the holy rage of the seraphim consumed me.

"When my agonies had reached the intolerable degree, I extorted from my wife, who greatly loved and also feared me, a vow to hold no communication with any of her former friends during the space of ten years. On her knees she implored me to pity her mother, her sister, who would suppose her dead. But in her eyes my bare will had by this time acquired the dignity and force of law, and I moreover soothed her with invented reasons which partially satisfied her intellect. Leaving her among the mountains, with desperate resolve I announced her death, and returned to England. I wedded— the Countess Ethel.

"The gross word 'bigamy' perhaps rises to your mind. My friend, it is immaterial. I, too, at the time, was slightly troubled by some such thought This second marriage I now know to have been the most sacred, just, and essential that was ever consummated.

"And now at least, my friend, I looked for peace ; and again— again— the mawkish after-taste of the new-awakened glutton filled my mouth. I felt, it is true, some sensible alleviation of my disorder. But my Ethel, observing me still cold, unrestful, grew sad. I found her often in tears. We passed together from city to city, till for a time, we settled in my palazzo on the Canal Grande in Venice.

"The great problem, you perceive, was still unsolved. I loved— with a love of which ordinary men can never dream. But whom?— what? Not Grace, that had been proved. Not Ethel, that was being proved. Then whom? The discovery that waited for me was doubtless accelerated by the wild, brief joy that filled me whenever I left Venice to visit Corsica, or Corsica to visit Venice. Faint glimpses of the truth must have lighted me then; but many months passed before, on a starry night, as a gondola floated me slowly over the Canalazzo, I started up with a shout, my soul flooded with the whole supernal secret of the mystery.

"The very next day I returned to Corsica. My friend, attached to the Villa Calvo is a wing wholly cut Off from communication with the rest of the house, save by a single door. It was used in former centuries by some of the women of my race— for periods sometimes of several years— as a place of penitential retreat. These erring souls were careful, however, that their hermitage should be wide and luxurious; the high-walled little garden at the end afforded them a place of exercise; a separate kitchen and staff of attendants compensated for a too rigorous devotion to their rosaries, their *prie-dieu*, and their breviaries; a door bolted on the wrong side guarded them from contact with a world they had too much loved. Into this wing I now introduced the Countess Grace. Her love was thereby tested to the utmost; not, I tell you, without a struggle did my will subdue her high soul. 'Am I then— a free Englishwoman— a prisoner in a Corsican castle?' she asked. 'Aye—a prisoner,' I replied, 'but a prisoner to her prisoner.' Seeing me foam and grovel at her feet, she had pity and yielded. An aged servant of my father, sworn to secrecy, a captive with her, supplied her wants. The other menials, save two, I dismissed. Then I set out for the mainland, and returned to Corsica— with Ethel.

"It was a step bold, but necessary to my sanity. For of the full nature of my passion I was now aware. I did not, as I have said, love the two countesses severally, but— and here was the tremendous secret of my destiny— I loved them conjointly. I write, you think, the drivel of a maniac? If you think so, be

sure that the reason is your own shallowness, your own folly. Can it be that you have investigated the nature of things to so little purpose as to imagine that you know? Strange births, multiple births; the mystery of chemical combination; of all welding processes, from the welding of metals, to the adhesion of flesh to bone, to the welding of spirits; what is a unity, what a duality; the mystery of the thing named soul—have you then probed these matters? There is none, my friend, wholly dark but him who dreams that he knows! Tell me only this: which of the halves would you love were your wife bisected by a thunderbolt? Neither much, I think? Yet the two together—? So I, too, loved an entity, not either of the parts which composed it. The woman I adored was the woman who would have been born, had the birth of which Grace and Ethel were the product been single and not double. It happened indeed to be double; but do not imagine that that in any way affects the original aggregation either of spirit or of matter. It became clear to me that when the two countesses stood shoulder to shoulder the woman I loved was *there.* They, in respect of me, completed each other. Upon such secrets does the daily sun shine. One— a mystic one, a dual one, if you will— but not two— was my bride. To my soul, now made *clairvoyant* by its passion, they formed, though divided in the flesh, a single being.

"And as the copper and the zinc, kept asunder, remain ineffectual, but put into approximation, evolve the most potent motive in the universe— so they. The effect of rapture which nature had rendered them capable of producing upon me depended, it was clear, upon their physical juxtaposition. So it was in the first instance at the farm, where the impression wrought upon me was an impression not effected by either, but by *both*; and it was this impression which had caused me to *love*. It was therefore essential to my happiness that they should dwell within the same walls— house beneath the same roof— that I should pass straight from the goddess grandeur of the one to the laughter and the love of the other.

"This I accordingly accomplished. And now began a life— for me, for them— of such exceeding bliss as earth contained not beside. No longer could either doubt the genuineness of my passion. My fever vanished. Each revelled in my new-born tenderness. Ah! they loved. Some of the letters written by the Countess Ethel to you at this time I saw; did they not speak of an existence crowned with joy? Grace, too, forgot her repinings, the gloom of her seclusion, in the wealth of the affection I lavished upon her. A shade of anger might cross me if Ethel would revert to the forbidden subject of the decease of Grace, urging me to describe her death-bed. Otherwise all was halcyon. I spent by the side of my Grace those hours of the day during which Ethel supposed me engaged in study; and though my beauteous captive still gently chid me for

concealing the secret reasons which moved me to debar her from the rest of the house, she seemed little by little to grow reconciled to my whim, and in her dark eye shone only the light of love and peace.

"My friend, one day in this azure sky the blackness of hell arose.

"I beheld my Ethel stand by night— in the part, too, of the house most remote from her apartments— before the bolted door, and listen. Observing my eye upon her, she moved stealthily, guiltily away. I stood rooted— struck by a thunderbolt'— to the spot. So then, she knew— she knew— that there was something— something hidden, forbidden— behind those bolts and bars!

"This incident unloosed once more in me the demon of gloom. I grew acutely suspicious. Suppose, I whispered to my heart, suppose— The thought dimmed my eyes. I turned myself into a lynx's eye to watch.

"My moodiness fell straightway upon them both. Grace grew silent, once again resentful, carping; Ethel dreamy, pensive. She ceased to write to you. The laughter was quenched. Weeks passed. I tracked shadows in the dark ; I probed to the bottom the creak of a plank at midnight. That vague suspicions, presentiments filled the mind of Grace, I could no longer doubt. One day, throwing off her fear of my anger, weeping on my shoulder, the gentle Ethel boldly questioned me as to what dreadful secret I hid from her '*in the western wing*.' Great God! I silenced her with a reproof.

"But that the catastrophe to happen was inevitable, I should have known. The situation was all too tempting for the forbearance of the Parcae. Here were all the elements of a disaster, needing but the touch of Fate, the match to the mine, to blow our lives into annihilation. And when the tragedy came, it came with an all-destroying suddenness!

"For as I sat and read in the dead of the night, I knew that a gentle tread went swiftly past my door. I arose and, crouching cat-like, followed. I could discern a bent form in the gloom of the unlighted corridor. God! and now the moonlight streamed in from a window, and beamed athwart a female figure draped in loose attire. I was convulsed with earthquake shocks of rage. Ethel, I hissed to the floor on which I crawled— Ethel again— spying by night! She took the way to her own bedchamber, of old occupied by her sister. And now she reached it— drew open the door— the light from within gushed out upon her: I saw— by the powers of blackest hell!— the arrogant throat, the ponderous cataracts of dark-brown hair— *Grace*! And in that room was Ethel! I rushed forward. For one insensate moment only they stared crazily, crazily into each other's eyes—then from their two throats a shriek so shrill that it must have pierced even to distant Spello— and they flew like maniacs to each other's straining arms.

"It is curious that at this supreme instant, my first unconquerable instinct— the instinct of the Corsican vendetta blood-hound— was to plunge a sword into the bosom of the ancient servant through whose betrayal this woe had befallen us. I crept away in the darkness, and ran towards the western wing, pausing only to take a loaded blunderbuss from the armoury. The bolted door I found secured as usual, and indeed, I alone kept the key; the countess had escaped then through the gate in the wall of the garden, and of this the old man was the guardian. He had thus been either false or careless. As I passed inward, there was light. I noticed lying on an escritoire a scrap of paper. I took it, and read: 'I have chanced to hear a soft sound of singing at nightfall. Whoever you are, try, if you are sorrowful, to escape— to see me. Help, if my help can save, shall not be wanting.' It was unsigned, and the writer, dreading the chance of my eyes, had carefully disguised her hand— yet I knew. With redoubled fury I ran from room to room to find my faithless servant; he presently sighted me, and darted with the alacrity of youth down the steps into the garden, screaming his innocence. He hid among the trees, till marking him well, I fired. Loudly bellowing, he fell. I found later that the others too, hearing the screams and turmoil, and fearing my frenzy, had fled the house.

"I returned to the chamber of the fatal meeting. The two ladies, hand in hand, rose and confronted me. In the gentle eye and the bold eye alike I read my doom— resistance active, resistance passive to my will, even to the death. I know their mother— her quiet but adamantine resolution in matters where the religious *motif* intervenes. And as she, so they. I did not at all doubt that I could sooner turn the sun to ice than move them from their purpose of rebellion.

" 'We have no avenger,' said the stately countess Grace, 'but with our own hands we shall protect ourselves from outrage,' and she raised a jewelled dagger as if to strike my breast.

" 'Oh, no, no, Grace,' cried Ethel interposing, 'not him, my love— strike me.' Then turning to me with tears— 'Oh, why, why did you wrong us, who love you, thus?'

" 'To your own apartments, madam,' I said to Grace.

"Not yet had my voice lost its intonation of command. Struggling to disobey, with face of ashen hue, she slowly relinquished the hand of her sister— and obeyed.

"And so ended for ever our dream of joy. What further life was now possible for any of us? An hour later, in pity, I waited upon my first-wedded with a goblet of wine. Knowing my meaning, she refused— not angrily, lovingly rather— to drink from my hand; but sweetly yielded up her glorious form when with forceful tenderness I seized it. Alas! the crack, and her sigh, ring like

a lunacy in my brain. Ethel, on the other hand, drank without a murmur of the cup I offered, from beneath her lids gazing steadily upon my face with her most blue reproachful eye. She drooped dead upon my breast, smiling, lisping the words:

" 'Orazio— *husband*!' No *Voceradori* of my land shall wail strange *alalas* over their silence. They lie together on the couch to which I bore them. The first cold grey of the dawning day steals in upon me as I write. The half-emptied goblet is by my side. My friend, their bed is wide! I go— to pass with them— with *Her*— into the Kingdom of Forgetfulness. Farewell!"

So ended the count's narrative.

12: On the Back of an Envelope

Ernest Favenc (as by "Dramingo")

1845-1908

Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser 22 Dec 1883

Humorous misundertandings in a Sydney boarding-house.

I WAS living in a boarding-house in Sydney, let us say Gower-street. I was one of seven, five males and two females.

I was a bushman transplanted to town. How I came to be there was simply from pure vanity. I had an idea that I was too good to be thrown away in the bush: let it pass— it was years ago, and I was younger then and more foolish. I am only writing as a witness of the events that happened then; I was not an actor— I may say 'Thank God.'

There were five of us only when I first pitched my camp in Gower-street. Our hostess was of the usual 'widowish' type. A portrait of the dear departed hung over the mantlepiece, and the regulation chairs and tables graced the other rooms with their well-known presence, and the daily mess was of the quantity and quality known to every sojourner in lodgings in Sydney.

It was some six months after I had been domiciled in the lodgings that the strange things happened that lead me to write this narrative. As I said, I was young, vain, countrybred, and labouring under the mistaken delusion that I only wanted a fair show amongst my fellow-men to come to the fore. It was a vain delusion. I had just come to that conclusion when two new boarders entered our select little assembly.

I was then a clerk in a woolbroker's office— I may as well state my social status. The new comers were man and wife, Mr. and Mrs. Tuckett. She was good-looking, and we— viz., the old boarders— all admired her. I need scarcely say we all disliked him. Bribson, our great masher, used to pretend a Platonic affection, and affect to despise 'the brute of a husband;' but we all knew the amount of side he invariably put on in his little love affairs, and understood him accordingly.

Now, I am not going to describe Mr. and Mrs. Tuckett; let me abide by my former description, that he was the Beast and she the Beauty. Also that their room was underneath mine, and, owing to the scandalous way in which cheap houses are run up in Sydney, I got the benefit of a good deal of conversation not meant for alien ears. I could not help it. I vow on my honour that I often stuffed the bedclothes in my ears until suffocation was imminent, but through it all I heard! I heard! The first thing I heard was about half-past 10 one night, and then I heard 'the Beast' say in a gruff tone: 'Bring me the boot -jack.'

'Would not any other Jack suit you, dear?' said a soft voice in persuasive accents. 'Ha!' I heard, ground through clenched teeth; 'you dare to play upon that hated name! But no matter— my time will come.'

Then I heard a heavy sigh and naught but whispered mutterings. What could it mean? Bribson was not the man meant; his Christian names were 'Vane Harcourt;' at least he said so. Who was this hated Jack? I was soon to find out.

It was a week after this that in mounting the stairs to my room I saw a used envelope lying on the landing. I picked it up; it was directed to 'J. C. Tuckett, Esq.' But that was not all. On the back was pencilled the following awful memo: 'He dies at five.'

When I descended to dinner I looked to see some marks of coming trouble on the features of either the Beauty or the Beast. There were none. Unblushingly he glanced around and indulged in his usual remarks. Unconsciously she looked at her plate and drove us all frantic with her distracting beauty.

Perhaps it was five in the morning when the tragedy was to take place. I made up my mind to wake and watch.

I noted Bribson that evening; he was calm outwardly, but the evidences of a slumbering volcano were apparent beneath that tight stiff collar. I dared not take him into my confidence, for he had often told me of the violence of his temper when rendered uncontrollable by stories of unredressed wrongs. And I thought it would not be safe to let him know what was about to happen. There might be two victims instead of one. Meantime who was 'Jack?'

I examined the envelope again and again, but beyond seeing that it was in a man's handwriting could get no further clue. 'He dies at five,' I muttered as I went to bed; 'I will see that he does not,' was the solemn oath I administered to myself. That night I heard voices again.

The Brute said: 'Has Jack some yet?'

The Beauty said: 'No, I have not seen him.'

'Then bring me my poison,' said the Beast, and I heard no more. Poison then was the weapon to be resorted to, and how could I combat that? I made up my mind finally that I would seek Bribson and get advice from him. I sought him; that is to say I invaded the sanctity of his bedchamber.

I am sorry to have to relate that he was lying on his back, snoring great guns, and looking as little like a 'masher' as anybody could. I felt rather nervous about awakening him for fear he would on the impulse of the moment fly at my throat and strangle me.

However, I touched him and said: 'Wake up, old man; I have something to say to you.'

He woke up, but his first words were incoherent. He muttered something about his watch being outside the door and his boots under the pillow; beyond that I could make no sense of it.

I aroused him thoroughly; in fact I shook him regardless of danger until he sat up and was able to converse with me rationally. Then the whole nature of the man awoke. I had always regarded him as a humbug connected with the little love affairs, but I must say that under present circumstances he behaved like a man.

After I had told him of all I dreaded and suspected, he got up, sought after an ancient foil he had in his possession, and which— as he said— his great grandfather had fought two duels with. With this in his hand, and, to tell a true story, a short and scanty night raiment, he solemnly assured me that no harm should be done under that roof that night whilst he lived and wore a sword.

I remember his shifting the foil from his right hand to his left, and shaking me by the hand, saying, 'Rely on me, old fellow; just you go to sleep and I'll see that no mischief happens.'

Then I left. I was frightened that he might hurt himself with the foil; but he assured me that there we s a button on tbe end of it, and Bubsided into bed calmly embracing it. I retired— not exactly comforted, but still hoping that nothing desperate would happen. I listened anxiously for several hours, but heard no sound of strife, and finally fell into a deep slumber until the birds awoke me in tbe early morning. Then the terrors of the day flashed upon me.

'Jack' was to be poisoned at five. Was it now five or half-past? I was uncertain which. Providentially it was only ten minutes to five. I made up my mind to go down and see Bribson. He would probably be awake and on the watch with his deadly foil.

What were my feelings as I stole down the stairs?

Could Mrs. Tuckett have an old sweetheart of the name of Jack? Could the 'Brute' or the 'Beast' (for by each name was he known) have got to feel a jealous hatred, that nothing but blood would quench? Should I be the means of rescuing a fellow-creature from a violent death impending?

I stole softly downstairs; as softly I knocked at Bribson's door, and was rewarded by the appearance of that warrior, armed and ready.

We waited. In fact we waited hours. We heard the 'boots' come up and collect the boots. We heard him bring them back again. We listened and waited; no signs ot bloodshed, no poison.

At last the breakfast bell rang; then we agreed to go and dress. We descended to the breakfast room, looking hurt and gloomy. Mr. and Mrs. Tuckett were in their usual places, looking— as always— Beauty and the Beast.

Bribson was calmly silent— watching; but I knew now what a fearful volcano— in fact, a perfect 'Straits of Gunga' or somewhere else— lay smouldering beneath.

'Jack' apparently had not been killed ; at Ieast, if so, his death had been noiseless. We had no facts to go upon hitherto.

Then a brilliant idea struck me. What if I confronted Tuckett with that letter which I felt sore was endorsed on the back in his own handwriting?

I determined to do so.

In my blandest manner I addressed the man whose life I felt was at my mercy. Bribson, like the man he was, edged up and stood ready for any emergency with the foil of his grandfather in waiting.

'Mr. Tuckett,' I said, 'is this your envelope ; and do you know the meaning of the memo thereon?' He looked at it— this man of iron nerve. Then he laughed gaily.

'Of course I do; I dropped this on the stairs the other day, and have been rather put out by missing it. I was wondering who could have found it.'

'Sir,' I said— and I trust in that supreme moment I preserved the dignity of manhood— 'can you dare to acknowledge the awful weight of crime conveyed by the notice on the back of that envelope?'

'Certainly,' he replied. 'What in the name of fortune do you mean?'

I stared at him in awful horror at his guilt. He glanced at the envelope.

'Jack dines at five,' he said. Then he turned to again. 'What is the meaning ot this?' he asked. 'My old friend Jack Milson asks me to dinner. I pencil a memo on the back of the envelope, and you find it and calmly accuse me of some awful crime. What do you understand?'

I think I'll draw a veil over the rest of this story; but I wish people would write a little plainer.

13: The Waif of the Bush

Val Jameson

fl 1900s-1920s

Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser, 6 Dec 1911

'WHIST!'

The sleepy lizard turned a curious eye on its tormentor— it had never been told to whist in its life before. Stretched on the span of bare earth, between thick clustering shrubs, was a wisp of humanity. Great watchful blue eyes peered from a small freckled face almost lost in a mop of tangled but beautiful hair.

Rich gleams of a red-gold tint caught the lustre of sunlight. Never a hat could rest on Molly Bryan's head. Her slim, brown limbs had outgrown the frock that fitted her two years before, when they forced away form her passionate embrace the silent form of the mother who had fashioned it.

Motherless at the age of eight, depending solely on the fitful affection of a father, whose drunken habits unfitted him for such a charge, Molly's chance in life seemed, at this point of her career, precarious.

But there was an expression of mischievous joy on the elfish face as she peered down through the bushes. Her eyrie was situated on a thickly-wooded hill-side, redolent with the odours of sum and wattle. This hill trailed gently into a gully where the paraphernalia of shaft-sinking gave evidence of optimistic enterprise. Someone was seeking for gold.

Close to the stranger's claim in the near scrub, was a canvas tent, his simple roof-tree. Fully twenty chains distant stood a shingle- and- bark hut surrounded by a small cultivation-paddock, with vegetable growth and fruit trees in rank profusion. At the door of this gazabo stood a man clad in moleskins, belted at the waist over a coarse grey shirt. His hair, rank and luxuriant as the weeds of his vegetable patch, was also grey. His scarred hands and bloated face proclaimed him a disciple of the Great Unwashed.

He brandished a frying pan and beat it with a long iron spoon; to the accompaniment of this improvised gong he yelled:

'Molly, Wheer are ye, gurrl? The divil of a hidin' ye'll git if yez don't come at wanst!'

'You be blowed,' was the unfilial response, *sotto voce*, from the waif on the hillside. 'You ain't goin' to spoil my game.'

Molly had no childish sayings. Her only models were men of her father's type. She made her own games and chose playmates from those of Nature's bush creatures that could not escape her sharp eyes and covetous fingers. The threatened hiding had no effect. Hidings were too plentiful to dread, and Molly

had learned by native cunning to avoid her parent when in a hiding mood. He was indulgently kind when sober, but that was rare.

Close to the young rebel in her place of ambush was a parcel of loot— a man's coat and hat, a billy, a pannikin, and frying pan. Evidently she had raided the camp below and was awaiting the appearance of the owner; who must leave his work at mid-day to prepare a meal.

'He'll be poppin' up presently,' said the astute Molly. But the lizard, having been tickled to a frenzy by his captor in malicious amusement, expressed his disgust of the whole proceeding by creeping stealthily into ambush, while the vigilant blue eyes were off guard.

THE stranger, who worked in the gully, was an inoffensive man. Molly had never seen him at close quarters, She knew he was hated by her father, and, faulty as that parent was, his creed of hatred and friendship was hers. So she worked this malevolent trick to gratify her unreasoning childish hatred.

But retribution was already on the trail. Retribution on all fours. Jerry, the prospector's faithful terrier, had returned from a short expedition and instantly missed his master's purloined possessions. Growling ominously, he proceeded in a business-like manner to trace the thief.

Molly saw the yellow-streaked back advancing rapidly up the hillside. Not being aware of the unerring scent of dogs, she still hoped that her hiding-place would escape Jerry's observation. But, with a savage yap of triumph, the enraged terrier pounced through the concealing shrubs, and buried his sharp little teeth in one slim, sun-tanned limb.

Jerry's master, a fine specimen of young Australian manhood, was just emerging from his shaft at this painful moment. Mystified and distressed by the agonised shriek above; he hastened to discover the cause, leaping like a. vigorous kangaroo over all obstacles.

Satisfied with his own administration of justice, Jerry sat on guard beside his master's goods.

The waif, petrified with terror and subdued by pain, was a pitiful spectacle. Tears streamed from her eye's and the print of Jerry's teeth was plainly visible on the wounded limb. One crimson drop, released by the incision, trickled slowly from the wound. Compassion for the child's hurt blinded Edgar Giles to the fidelity of his dog.

'You vicious brute!' he exclaimed, 'Get out of this!'

A vigorous boot-lift, adroitly dodged by Jerry, accompanied these words. But he departed obediently with dejected tail, burdened, no doubt, with a sense of injustice.

Edgar, making a ligature of his pocket handkerchief, gently bound the wounded limb. Molly's tears soon ceased. Her tongue as silent, but her mind was busy reconstructing an opinion of the enemy. The impressionable, warm bush temperament was hers, and she was secretly won by the kind comely face and gentle touch. She had not felt the touch of a kindly hand since her mother's' death.

Then, unconsciously of course; she was possessed of an innate sense of justice. She had stolen the stranger's possessions to make fun for herself. The Buddhistic law of Karma was beyond her comprehension; likewise, the Christian law of returning good for evil. But the fact was within her grasp. This man she had molested was sorry for a punishment she well merited. His face was grave, but the light of laughter shone in his honest blue eyes, as He took in the situation.

'You couldn't wear 'em,' he said, nodding at the pilfered garments.

'No!' agreed Molly, drooping her head, either in shyness or reluctance to explain.

'Well, what's the game?' persisted her inquisitor.

'F'r you,' she mumbled, rooting the earth with her bare toes, to relieve anxiety.

'The dog's had most of the fun, this time,' commented Edgar. Perhaps it will be a useful lesson, eh Coppatop?'

'I'm Molly,' corrected the waif, in evident distaste for the nickname.

'I've seen you diving about the bush often,' continued her new acquaintance, 'like a shy emu.'

Molly's scanty skirt made the comparison not unlikely.

'You never came close enough for definite recognition, so I named you by your most conspicuous feature. And now, you're as wise as ever, eh Cop— I mean Molly? I know more about you than you think,' he went on, while the waif's eyes widened with solemn surprise and unconscious admiration.

'You live in the shingle-hut yonder with your father. He works odd times in that claim, but for the most part he and Bill Rogers fossick about the surface. They shirk deep sinking, and as you know, poor child, their chief occupation is deep drinking. Poor little motherless waif,' he reached a sympathetic hand to stroke her tumbled locks, 'You're as wild as a young colt. Your father thinks he owns this whole gully,' he added, 'And hates a stranger to win what he is too lazy to work for.'

This first conversation with the stranger was mostly one-sided, but when they parted the child laid her small, brown fingers in his great work-roughened palm, and pledged a vow of friendship. 'Buried the hatchet,' to quote Edgar's words. So many words he spoke that were new and strange to Molly.

She sped down the hillside with music as of joy bells in her ears, with a new warm glow of childish affection tingling through her small body. Ignorant little soul, she could not have expressed her emotions in words, but certainly, to her, a wonderful transformation had taken place in the gully.

Once a recruiting parson had strayed into the gully. Bryan was sober, and treated the wandered civilly and hospitably until a suggestion to send his neglected child to more suitable guardians in civilisation was mooted.

Violent and profane opposition terminated the parson's visit. His horse was lamed in the retreat by a hostile send-off, in the form of flying mullock and gagged quartz. No one had since ventured from remote civilisation to interview Bryan on the subject of Molly's education. Her mind was almost a blank until the coming of Giles. Then, attracted by his kindly ways and apparent interest in herself, the waif eagerly absorbed every scrap of knowledge orally delivered by her new acquaintance.

His description of Doris, a sister, of about Molly's age, who lived in Melbourne, was intensely interesting to the little bush waif. Doris, he explained, could read and write, had learned to sew neatly, and kept her hair smooth and tidy. Her frocks covered her knees. This item of information drew Molly's fingers to the hem of her shrinking skirt, and for the first time in her life she frowned on her bare brown knees. Flushed and eager, she asked question upon question, took a pencil and book from the hands of her kindly instructor, and diligently practised the elementary studies he gave her.

The association was beneficial for both. Giles lost the sense of solitude that previously oppressed him, and thoroughly enjoyed the role of schoolmaster. Molly was anxious to emulate the belauded Doris, and, pricked on by ambition, proved a most entertaining student.

But Molly dared not parade her educational opportunity at home, if the wretched hovel could be so termed. Her favourite perch on the hillside served as schoolroom, and Giles needed no prompting from his pupil to evade the paternal eye when school was in. The secrecy necessitated by the fact of the dreaded paternal prohibition added the flavour that is welcome always to the human palate of forbidden fruit.

Bryan and his mate hated the new prospector with the unreasoning hatred of ignorant and inferior humanity. Too lazy and habitually stupefied by drink to do any systematic prospecting, they grudged success in another. Young Giles was a well-bred lad, fond of roving in the unbeaten paths of Fortune. He was positive, by unerring indications, that he was going to strike it rich in the Gully. And had sent word to an old chum in Western Australia to join him in the venture.

ONE night, awakened by. the entrance of her father and his mate, Rogers, Molly caught scraps of their conversation in the adjoining, room, intermingled with dreadful oaths, more familiar than repulsive to her accustomed ears. Keenly curious at the mention of Edgar's name, she crept to the hessian wall and listened.

'Well, we'll finish Jim,' was the terrifying remark that kept her chained to the wall till the whole vile plot of the proposed assassination filtered through.

Molly had not learnt the restraint of patience, and impetuously she resolved to warn the intended victim of his danger. Her father, she knew, would thrash her if she attempted to plead with him to renounce his vile purpose. She dared not admit overhearing it. No, the only way was to warn Edgar to keep out of the shaft on the morrow. Yes, and before the morrow dawned.

Like some sprite of the forest, she perched upon the windowsill, waiting for the stupor of sleep to seize upon the men that they might not hear her light footsteps fleeing on their mission of mercy. The night was dark, but the daughter of the bush knew no fear. She could have found her way, blindfolded, to Edgar's camp, and Jerry was no longer antagonistic to her small brown calves. Many a friendly romp had they enjoyed together since the burial of the hatchet.

It was Jerry's friendly greeting that wakened Giles, and brought him out to hear the eager, whispered warning from childish lips beneath the midnight stars. Then, with a grateful kiss he raised her in his strong arms carried her back through the sleeping bush, and watched her glide like a little shadow through her open window.

Above the gully hung a pall of gathering clouds, ominous signs of coming storm. The air, unstirred by breeze, weighed heavily on all; birds, beasts, and trees were silent. Nature, warned by the warrior host above, retired to her innermost fortress, questioning in her heart which of her creatures should fall before the swords of destroying angels.

Giles, kneeling in the leafy covert, was pale and silent, oppressed by a greater cause than the threatening storm. The child, whose hand he clasped, was pale, too, and silent. Both were heedless of the warring elements. Both were intently watching the actions of two men in the gully.

Equally oblivious of the coming storm, they were laboriously rooting a huge boulder from its grip of the soil. Then, with fiendish purpose, they commenced pushing it toward the mouth of the shaft where Edgar Giles was believed to be delving below; where he assuredly would have been but for Molly's warning. Here was diabolical evidence of her story. Not aware, poor child, that the price of Edgar's rescue would in all probability be a prison-cell for her father. Not

even fully conscious of the gravity of his attempted crime, only obeying the impulse of a grateful, loving heart to shield one who had been kind.

'See, Edgar; dad's shovin' it down the shaft. Ain't it a wopper?'

Deeply agitated, Edgar's hand tightened upon the child's. Mutely he was thanking Providence for his escape. The war in the air had commenced. Rank upon rank of cloud warriors closed in deadly combat, flashing their bright spears hither and thither as the dome of heaven rattled and the earth vibrated to the shock of their violent collisions. Suddenly, before the startled eyes of Giles and Molly, a ball of fire dashed from heaven to earth. Bryan, in the act of intended murder, tilted the mass of stone into the shaft, and, in that instant, became the butt of the unseen Marksman. Both men fell like stricken trees, blasted to the root.

With a piercing scream, more terrifying than all else, Molly snatched her hand from Edgar's, and ran to fling herself upon her father's blackened corpse, in a passion of grief and affection.

'Daddy, my Daddy!'

The experience of death, its unresponsive chill, and rigidity, had come to Molly once before, and the truth was quickly grasped.

'Oh, oh,' she moaned. 'My daddy's dead.'

Tears streamed over her forlorn little face. Great drops commenced to fall from above, as if in pity for the tragic deed. But Edgar knew these were the heralds of the deluge.

'Come,' he said gently attempting to draw the tiny mourner away to a place of shelter. He knew that in after years the waif would recognise the hand of a guiding Providence in this calamity. His resolution was already formed to send her to the maternal care of his married sister.

Molly saw only the stroke of desolation. All cruelty forgotten, the blood that is thicker than water calls for its own. Before her eyes her father was stricken down by some mysterious foe. Thrusting back the arm of the comforter, she stood, this stripling of humanity, with eyes ablaze in passionate rebellion, seeking the inscrutable slayer.

Her tiny hands were clenched in the lust for vengeance— an atom challenging the infinite. Then, as if to sweep the rebel from the face of the earth, the floodgates above released their burden....

Molly, in after years, recalled the welcome clasp of the strong arms that bore her through deluge and tangling scrub to the sheltering camp.

14: Give Every Man A Chance

Waif Wander

Mary Helena Fortune, 1833-1911

Bendigo Independent 13 Dec 1906

BREAKFAST was over, and the five persons who had partaken of it had reached the broad verandah of the plain yet comfortable homestead of Yaramoo. Mr. Charles Probyn seated himself, his genial face all aglow with sly enjoyment, while Mrs. Northcote, his widowed sister and housekeeper, for the squatter was a bachelor, stood near him, and watched discontentedly the progress of the young people down toward the creek.

There were three young people— two girls and one young gentleman, if we may so call him. Of the former, Anna Northcote, the widow's daughter, was tall and fair, with a finely-developed figure, and a stately, graceful carriage. Barbara Belton was a visitor, and a perfect contrast in every way to Miss Northcote. Bab as her friends called her, was short and petite, dark enough to be called a brunette, and as perfect a flirt as lively young ladies who know they are pretty are wont to do.

The young man was older than either of his companions— perhaps twenty-eight or nine— and he evidently aped the man of fashion, as witness his well-cut suit of grey tweed, with patent-tipped boots more fitted for the drawing-room than the green pasture-lands of Yarramoo; an expanse of white shirt front, with gleaming studs in it; a low, turned-down collar, under which was slipped a necktie of delicate hue and texture; a soft, grey, felt hat jauntily sat on the carefully brushed and perfumed hair; and a sparkling diamond ring on the rather well-shaped hand that caressed his soft, brown moustache as he affectedly addressed the ladies.

"Brother," asked Mrs. Northcote crossly "What is that young man from town making such long visit for?"

Mr. Probyn's naturally merry face grew merrier, and his eyes twinkled. "Need you ask, my dear Anna? Can't you see that the poor young fellow is over head and ears in love?"

"With whom? Until yesterday he was quite a nuisance to my Anna, who did not, I assure you, Charles, appreciate his attentions. Last night and this morning Mr. La Franche— if that be his name— has eyes only for poor Bab."

"And my sister is jealous for her girl, eh?" laughed the squatter.

"Ridiculous! Jealous indeed! And of the attentions of a creature like that! You know well that our child's choice is made."

"And well made!" Probyn said heartily.

"There is not a better fellow in Victoria than Mark Sellinger— he will make a husband in a thousand."

"Indeed, yes, and she will not be far from his," Mrs. Northcote added, with a little sigh. "Mark's station is almost as near, as we could wish it to be."

"Not almost, but quite as near, Anna. If Bellinger's boundary was any nearer it would cut off a slice of my run— he marches with us."

"Yes, but about this young man from town having transferred his attentions from Anna to Bab? You seemed about to explain, but you are so full of fun that you find cause for laughter in everything.

"That's because I had the sense to remain single, Anna. But about the change .ft in our town visitor I told him yesterday, in response to a little attempt at pumping on his part, that Barbara was a great heiress!" And here the merry master of Yarramoo gave way to his hilarity, and laughed with such enjoyment that the verandah chair on which he was seated creaked ominously.

"For shame, Charles! How do you know but that Bab might take his attentions seriously?"

"Not she! Bab take any fool's attentions seriously? Why, she has never even taken mine seriously, and I have been devoted to Bab since she was a baby!"

The widow looked doubtfully at the handsome face of her forty-five years old bachelor brother.

"One never knows how to take you, Charles."

"I'm such a humbug that you can't believe me even when I tell the truth, eh? Well, my dear, take warning, and fancy that some day pretty Bab and your ancient brother may surprise you!"

"A truce to your fun, brother. Tell me where you picked up this young man, with the ridiculous dress and the free manners? To tell you the truth, I do not at all approve of him, and will be glad to know that his visit is terminated. Where, I ask, did you make his acquaintance?"

The squatter's pleasant face clouded, and he answered somewhat after the manner of a schoolboy suddenly brought to account by a strict master for some breach of discipline.

"Blest if I know exactly, Anna. You know I'm a jolly sort of a chap, and apt to give myself bit of rope when I get to town after a long spell on the run. As well as I remember, I met La Franche first at a billiard match in Sherrard's, and then somehow I seemed to meet him everywhere during the week. I found him a pleasant companion, and asked him up. He plays a first-rate game of billiards."

"That's no credit to him. Perhaps he's one of those swindling men who make their living by it?"

"Nonsense, my dear. He says he has town property, and was always flush of money."

"Another bad sign!" commented the determined widow; "these sort of swindling young men are always flush of money. I never knew a bad man yet that wasn't flush of money."

"Oh, lord! do you hear that!" cried the amused squatter; "I think it's about the most original idea ever I heard! Here's Mark. I'm glad to see you, Sellinger; my sister has just said something ft that's too good to keep."

Mark Sellinger had left his horse at the stables ere he presented his stalwart form and bright, sun-browned face to his friends. His first look was not, however, to the verandah, but down across the broad, English-grassed pasture lands, where the winding course of the limpid creek could be traced for miles by its fringing wattles, now in their full dress of sweet spring bloom.

"Anna has gone on her wattle expedition, I see; I will join them—"

And then he turned suddenly to his friend and asked, almost in the same words, the question Mrs. Northcote had so lately put to her brother: "Where did you pick up that young chap from town, Probyn?"

"Oh, bother it! Anna's just been at me about him. What does it matter? He'll be gone in a day or two. You'd better run after the girls, Sellinger, and help Anna to carry her wattle— she's sure to cut a load of the blossoms. I never knew anyone so devoted to our 'spring blossom by the gliding creek' in my life."

While the conversation between Probyn and his sister had been carried on, the subjects of it were walking down by a sheep-track, to the nearest bend of the full creek, Miss Northcote in advance, her svelte figure erect, and her air somewhat defiant.

As soon as she reached the spot where she knew the younger wattles were in richest flower, she stopped, and began to cut the richest sprays of yellow bloom and soft, green, feathery foliage.

"Pray allow me?" cried the young men from town affectedly, as he advanced, while he commenced to turn up his broad, white cuffs.

"By no means," Anna replied, shortly. "I wouldn't trouble you for the world. Bab, take Mr. La Franche somewhere to sit down— he looks quite fatigued!"

Bab laughed merrily, and neither girl noticed the quick, angry, change of expression in the young man's deep-set eyes.

"I don't think it would be quite safe to sit down anywhere here," Miss Belford said, primly, as she gathered her dainty skirts about her pretty feet and

ankles. "This is just the time that snakes come out. I suppose they are as fond of the water as we are."

"Snakes!" Mr. La Franche ejaculated, with a sharp look around his feet; "do you mean to say that—"

"We are not afraid," Anna said, grimly; "they know us. But as for strangers— well, Mr. La Franche, perhaps you would be safer up at the homestead?"

The visitor's eyes flashed. "I see a certain gentleman approaching who is evidently acclimatised. Doubtless the snakes will not molest him. Will Miss Belford give me her company to the homestead, as I am apparently *de trop* here?"

Knowing that the betrothed lovers would be glad to be alone, good-natured little Barbara allowed the visitor from town to escort her to the homestead, Where, on the verandah, the disconcerted young man tried to comfort himself with a smoke. Meanwhile. Anna and the young grazier remained at the creek. The young girl was seated on a log, her bunch of wattle bloom on her knee, and she had been recapitulating to Mark the annoyance caused to herself and her mother by their guest

"Uncle is so easy-going and kind," she declared, "and he so much enjoys tho ridiculous side of things, that this young man's greatest absurdities only amuse him."

"I have something to tell you that I am afraid bears on the cause of your annoyance, my darling," said Mark, seriously. "I had a little adventure this morning that I must relate to you. You know I am fond of a ride before breakfast, and I went down to Garrett's to get my mail. As I was alighting, a youngish man addressed me."

"What might be the age of a youngish man?" asked the lady, with a mischievous smile.

"Oh, well, older than I, at any rate. The follow in question was over thirty."

"Well?"

"Ho asked mo if I lived in the neighborhood, and could direct him to Yarramoo? Of course, I replied in the affirmative, and gave him the information. Then he proceeded to ask me if I could tell him if there was a young man from the city on a visit to Mr. Probyn just now?"

"Well, what did you say in reply?"

"I told a lie, Anna— I said I didn't know."

"Told a lie! In the name of all wonder, what did you do that for?"

"Because somehow it occurred to me that the fellow was a detective. I think I have seen his face before. You remember that time we had the trouble

about stolen cattle? I think he was one of the fellows who was sent up about that affair."

"Do you mean to say that you want to shield a villain that the police are after! I wouldn't have believed it of you, Mark! And a hateful creature like that, too!"

"I'd give the worst a chance, Anna," the kindly young fellow said, seriously ; "and you must remember that we know nothing against La Franche. I rode over as hard as I could, and, as the inquiring man had arrived by coach, and had some difficulty about a horse, there is time for the young man to clear out if he wants to. I came down on purpose when I saw him here with you, but he went away with Bab before I could get so far."

"And you are really going to warn him? Well, go, you great soft fellow! I'll stop here till he's gone."

The "great soft fellow" kissed his lady love fondly ere he hastened up to join the town visitor, who was still sitting frowningly on the verandah. Mark Sellinger lost no time in explanation.

"If you have any reason to fear the police," he half-whispered, "it will be as well for you to get away! I'm almost sure that there is a detective from Melbourne inquiring for you in this neighborhood!"

The effect of the words were magical. La Franche stood up suddenly, and looked wildly around him.

"Yes; it is me they're after. In which direction had I better go?"

"Come round to the stables; you can take my horse. I will show you the way out back. You will strike the railway in five miles. When you are done with the horse, fasten the bridle and let him go— he will make his way straight to his own stable."

With murmured thanks ringing in his ears, Mark saw the pseudo La Franche ride away long before the disappointed D. put in an appearance. Mark kept out of the way, and, having told all to Mr. Probyn, that merry gentleman informed the officer that his visitor had departed.

For many days the subject of the hasty flight of that "young man from town" formed the topic of wondering conversation at Yarramoo. Who was La Franche? and what had been his offence against the law?

And at last, a week-old city paper told the story in the following paragraph:—

A young man, named Peter Moran, alias "La Franche," was brought before the City Court yesterday on a charge of having picked the pocket of Morris Handfield. Moran had been billiard marker at Sherrard's, and took the opportunity of robbing Mr. Handfield of a pocket-book, containing £40, while

that gentleman was sleeping off the effects of a too-liberal indulgence in stimulants. The prisoner was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

Mr. Probyn laughed, though somewhat constrainedly, when this information regarding his late guest was read to him.

"The idea!" cried Mrs. Northcote— "the idea of taking up a thieving billiard-marker, and inviting him to Yarramoo!"

"All's well that ends well!" said Probyn; "He didn't rob me, anyhow— not even of Bab! Eh, my dear? Have you settled your wedding day yet, Mark?"

"Yes, uncle— I suppose I may call you uncle now? Anna has at last agreed. The fourteenth, sir; before the wattle blossom is all gone."

"All right. Boy! Do you hear, Bab? It's to be the fourteenth! Two weddings on one day, my pet! You wouldn't take a hint, sister! I told you I had been in love with little Bab ever since she was a baby; and so I have! And now I am going to stop at home and invite no more young men from town to Yarramoo!"

They were two happy weddings on the appointed day, and the little country church was decorated with the sweet-smelling, golden wattle. Anna even insisted on a spray of wattle among her white flowers; and Mark had one in his button-hole, too, in spite of the annoyance of Mrs. Northcote, who declared that such a thing would not have been tolerated when she was a girl.

The kind squatter often indulged his happy little wife in a trip to the city, and on one of these occasions they again fell in with Mr. La Franche, alias Peter Moran. The late prisoner was honestly employed in a barber's shop, into which Probyn dropped during one of his rambles.

"Bless me, is it you!" he cried to the abashed assistant. "Well, I'm jolly glad to see you are doing and acting straight! It's a good old saying: 'Always give a follow a chance!' "

15: The Other Mrs Brewer

As by "Binghi"

Ernest Favenc

Bulletin, 14 Dec 1895

My Only Murder and other tales, 1899

BREWER convulsed society, such as it was, on the Upper Bass River, by bringing a young and pretty wife with him when he returned to the station after a prolonged visit to Melbourne. It was not thought fair that he should thus take everyone unprepared, for society on the Bass was, in those days, exclusively male and in a very primitive state. However, his neighbours accepted the situation with the best possible grace, and blue-eyed Mrs. Brewer, plunging into bush-life with all the ardour of a young bride, was generally voted a jolly little woman.

Unfortunately, she was young and comparatively innocent of the ways of the wicked world, and there was no discreet matron to “let her down easily.” Which brought trouble on Brewer, although it was mainly his own fault for holding himself up to his admiring wife as a man superior to the common failings of humanity.

It was one of those beautifully clear mornings which usually follow a heavy thunderstorm. Brewer, now two months married, was in a most contented frame of mind. The thunderstorm had come just when needed, and had fallen so exactly where it would do most good that Brewer, as he stood in the verandah and watched the black-boy bring up the paddock horses, felt that Providence must have had an especial eye for his interests.

Little Mrs. Brewer was in the kitchen preparing breakfast, and, as her husband turned to enter the living-room, he was astonished to see her hasten into the house with a very perturbed countenance and rush into her bedroom. Brewer followed, full of anxiety. Mrs. Brewer had thrown herself face-downwards on the bed and was sobbing as though her heart was broken.

Deeply distressed and alarmed, Brewer flew to her side, and, while attempting to raise her, begged earnestly to know the cause of her trouble. It was only after half-an-hour’s petting, when the big, convulsive sobs had grown somewhat less, that she consented to turn her wet face round and gasp out:

"There s a wo-wo-man in the kit-kitchen who says she’s Mrs. Brew- Brew-Brewer!”

"What! cried Brewer, "what can you mean? What is she like?”

“Oh! do-do-don’t ask me. She’s a b-br-brunette, and I heard you say once you li-li-liked dark women. O! I want to die!"— and with a fresh burst of weeping she again cast herself down

Brewer was aghast. However, plainly the only thing to do was to go and investigate, so he hurried to the kitchen. A comely, buxom black gin, attired in the usual costume of a short skirt, was squatting by the fire. She looked over her shoulder and grinned pleasantly at Brewer

"Hang you, Betty!" he cried, "what for you come here? Mine bin tell it blackfellow no more walk about alonga station."

"Yowi," she returned, "me want baccy, me want see-em white Mary."

"I'll baccy you," screamed Brewer, talking nonsense in his wrath. "Clear out to camp! you bin saucy fellow alonga Missy Brewer!"

The gin arose, sulkily. "Bal mine bin saucy fellow; only yabba name belonging me. Missy Brur alsame sit down alonga white Mary."

"The devil you did!" said Brewer, and, snatching a stockwhip from a nail on the slabs, he threatened his visitor, who retired slowly and scornfully. Then Brewer went back to his weeping wife.

"Why, Rosie, you silly little woman! it's only one of the blacks from the camp. When they first came in, years ago, we nicknamed them all, and it was some stupid joke of one of the fellows to call this woman 'Mrs. Brewer.' Why, there's Mr. Gladstone, and Sam Griffith, and Lady Loftus, and all names like that amongst them; and very proud of them they are. "

By this time Brewer had got her on to his knee, but she still persistently hung her head over his shoulder and moaned: "Send me home to mother, Harry. I am sure I shall— booh— die soon."

Gradually the storm was spent, like the thunder-storm of the night before, and, at last, she consented to wash her face and come to breakfast.

But although a newly-married man like Brewer flattered himself that it was all over, anyone more experienced in the ways of women would have seen at a glance that Mrs. Brewer accepted her husband's lame explanation with much salt, and intended pursuing private investigations on her own account.

After breakfast Brewer went out on the run, and his wife, having finished her domestic duties, started out with Buck, the blackboy, who was to conduct her to the blacks' camp a couple of miles away. Poor little Mrs. Brewer, brought up in a country part of Victoria, had never seen any but the "civilised" blacks of that province. Brewer had banished all the aborigines from about the station.

They came upon the camp suddenly and unexpectedly, and there she saw, for the first time, the noble savage on his native heath, One horrified glance was enough— to Buck's astonishment she turned her horse's head and fled back to the homestead. Before reaching the slip-rails she recovered herself and allowed Buck to catch her, as she had a few questions to ask. First, what was the name of the gin who had come up to the kitchen in the morning?

“Betty.”

Secondly, were any of the blacks called “Mr. Gladstone,” or “Sam Griffith”? Buck shook his head hopelessly— he had never heard of such names.

Mrs. Brewer bit her lip and rode straight home.

Brewer returned lifting a song— for was not “confidence” once more restored?

Mrs. Brewer met him in her new character of iceberg. He interviewed Buck and found out about the visit to the camp; having given poor Buck a sound hiding to relieve his feelings, he went in and lectured Mrs. Brewer on the impropriety of her conduct until she burst into tears and locked herself in her bedroom. Brewer felt better after that; he had asserted himself.

He passed a miserable evening. Mrs. Brewer refused either to see or to speak to him, although he yelled through the keyhole that he was going down to the men’s hut to play euchre all night, which was the direst threat he could think of. He did not go there, however— he just got some rum out of the store and went to sleep in a verandah until he awoke with the sun in the morning, covered with mosquito-bites, but radiant with an idea, a perfect inspiration. After a swim down in the river he returned in the sunniest of tempers. Mrs. Brewer came to breakfast without an appetite, and with a martyr’s face.

"I have been thinking,” said Brewer, “that until we can get a married couple up, one of the black gins would be very handy to help you in the kitchen. The one who was up yesterday morning has been in the kitchen at Tomkins’ place.”

The guileless woman walked right into the trap, but she threw her little stone first.

“The one who was christened *Mrs. Brewer* as a joke?”

“Yes. Betty, her name is. She might be very useful to you.”

Rosie, with suppressed excitement, signified her assent to the arrangement, and next day Betty was installed as kitchen-maid.

Betty was a talkative gin with a great gift of blacks patter, and, flattered by the preference shown her, she rattled on with scores of anecdotes about all the whites in the district which, fortunately Mrs. Brewer did not half understand. Artfully, as she thought, she questioned Betty about herself. Had she a piccaninny? O yes Betty had a budgeree boy. Would she bring it up for Mrs Brewer to see? Betty brought the budgeree boy up that afternoon, and, with a jealous scrutiny, Mrs. Brower eagerly inspected.

He was two years old, and the blackest, ugliest young combo ever seen. The most suspicious individual could not have traced any white blood in him.

“And who’s your husband, Betty?” inquired the now-smiling Mrs. Brewer.

Betty stared without answering.

"Piccaninny, father?” explanatorily continued the repentant Rosie, pointing to the child, which had, of course, been borrowed from the camp for the occasion.

“Mine bin lose-em,” muttered Betty, who had not forgotten her lesson. “That one Sam! Sam Grissif! Yowi, Sam Grissif.”

BREWER and his wife have lived happily ever since. And Brewer always asserts that the foundation of domestic felicity is to have no secrets from your wife.

_____

16: The Mermaid

George A Birmingham

James Owen Hannay, 1865-1950

The Pall Mall Magazine, May 1914

James Owen Hannay

WE were on our way home from Inishmore, where we had spent two days; Peter O'Flaherty among his relatives— for everyone on the island was kin to him— I among friends who give me a warm welcome when I go to them. The island lies some seventeen miles from the coast. We started on our homeward sail with a fresh westerly wind. Shortly after midday it backed round to the north and grew lighter. At five o'clock we were stealing along very gently through calin water with our mainsail boom out against the shroud. The jib and foresail were drooping in limp folds. An hour later the mainsheet was hanging in the water and the boat drifted with the tide. Peter, crouching in the fore part of the cockpit, hissed through his clenched teeth, which is the way in which he whistles for a wind. He glanced all round the horizon, searching for signs of a breeze. His eyes rested finally on the sun, which lay low among some light, fleecy clouds. He gave it as his opinion that when it reached the point of setting it "might draw a light air after it from the eastward." For that it appeared we were to wait. I shrank from toil with the heavy sweeps. So, I am sure, did Peter, who is a good man in a boat but averse from unnecessary labour. And there was really no need to row. The tide was carrying us homeward, and our position was pleasant enough. Save for the occasional drag of a block against the horse we had achieved unbroken silence and almost perfect peace.

We drifted slowly past Carrigeen Glos, a low, sullen line of rocks. A group of cormorants, either goiged with mackerel fry or hopeless of an evening meal, perched together at one end of the reef, and stared at the setting sun. A few terns swept round and round overhead, soaring or sliding downwards with easy motion. A large seal lay basking on a bare rock just above the water's edge. I pointed it out to Peter, and he said it was a pity I had not got my rifle with me. I did not agree with him. If I had brought the rifle Peter would have insisted on my shooting at the seal. I should certainly not have hit it on purpose, for I am averse from injuring gentle creatures; but I might perhaps have killed or wotmded it by accident, for my shooting is very uncertain. In any case I should have broken nature's peace, and made a horrible commotion. Perhaps the seal heard Peter's remark or divined his feeling of hostility. It flopped across the rock and slid gracefully into the sea. We saw it afterwards swimming near the boat, looking at us with its curiously human, tender eyes.

"A man might mistake it for a mermaid," I said.

"He'd have to be a fool altogether that would do the like," said Peter.

He was scornful; but the seal's eyes were human. They made me think of mermaids.

"Them ones," said Peter, "is entirely different from seals. You might see a seal any day in fine weather. They're plenty. But the other ones— But sure you wouldn't care to be hearing about them."

"I've heard plenty about them," I said, "but it was all poetry and nonsense. You know well enough, Peter, that there's no such thing as a mermaid."

Peter filled his pipe slowly and lit it. I could see by the way he puffed at it that he was full of pity and contempt for my scepticism.

"Come now," I said: "did you ever see a mermaid?"

"I did not," said Peter, "but my mother was acquainted with one. That was in Inishmore, where I was born and reared."

I waited. The chance of getting Peter to tell an interesting story is to wait patiently. Any attempt o goad him on by asking questions is like striking before a fish is hooked. The chance of getting either story or fish is spoiled.

"There was a young fellow in the island them times," said Peter, "called Anthony O'Flaherty. A kind of uncle of my father's he was, and a very fine man. There wasn't his equal at running or lepping, and they say he was terrible daring on the sea. That was before my mother was born, but she heard tell of what he did. When she knew him he was like an old man, and the heart was gone out of him."

At this point Peter stopped. His pipe had gone out. He relit it with immense deliberation. I made a mistake. By way of keeping the conversation going I asked a question.

"Did he see a mermaid?"

"He did," said Peter, "and what's more ht married one."

There Peter stopped again abruptly, but with an air of finality. He had, so I gathered, told me all he was going to tell me about the mermaid. I had blundered badly in asking my question. I suppose that some note of unsympathetic scepticism in my tone suggested to Peter diat I was inclined to laugh at him. I did my best to retrieve my position. I sat quite silent and stared at the peak of the mainsail. The block on the horse rattled occasionally. The sun's rim tottdicd tiie horizon. At last Peter was reassured and began again.

"It was my mother told me about it, and she knew, for manys the time she did be playing with the young lads, her being no more than a little girleen at the time. Seven of them there was, and the second eldest was the one age with my mother. That was after herself left him."

"Herself" was vague enough; but I did not venture to ask another question. I took my eyes off the peak of the mainsail and fixed them inquiringly on Peter. It was as near as I dared go to asking a question.

"Herself," said Peter, " was one of them ones."

He nodded sideways over the gunwale of the boat The sea, though still calm, was beginning to be moved by that queer restlessness which comes on it at sunset The tide eddied in mysterioudy oily swirls. The rocks to the eastward of us had grown dim. A gull flew by overhead uttering wailing cries. The graceful terns had disappeared. A cormorant, flying so low that its wing-tips broke the water, sped across our bows to some far restingplace. I fell into a mood of real sympathy with stories about mermaids. I think Peter felt the change which had come over me.

"Anthony O'Flaherty," said Peter, "was a young man when he saw them first. It was in the little bay back west of the island, and my mother never rightly knew what he was doing there in the middle of the nighi; but there he was. It was the bottom of a low spring tide, and there's rocks off the end of the bay that's uncovered at the ebb of the springs. You've maybe seen them."

I have seen them, and Peter knew it well. I have seen more of them than I want to. There was an occasion when Peter and I lay at anchor in that bay, and a sudden shift of wind set us to beating out at three o'clock in the morning. The rocks were not uncovered then, but the waves were breaking fiercely over them. We had little room for tacking, and I am not likely to forget the time we went about a few yards to windward of them. The stretch of wild surf under our lee looked ghastly white in the dim twilight of the dawn. Peter knew what I was thinking.

"It was calm enough that night Anthony O'Flaherty was there," he said, "and there was a moon shining, pretty near a full moon, so Anthony could see plain. Well, there was three of them in it, and they playing themselves."

"Mermaids?"

This time my voice expressed full sympathy. The sea all round us was rising in queer round little waves, though there was no wind. The boom snatched at the blocks as the boat rocked. The sail was ghostly white. The vision of a mermaid would not have surprised me greatly.

"The beautifullest ever was seen," said Peter, "and neither shift nor shirt on them, only just themselves, and the long hair of them. Straight it was and black, only for a taste of green in it. You wouldn't be making a mistake between the like of them and seals, not if you'd seen them right the way Anthony O'Flaherty did."

Peter made this reflection a little bitterly. I was afraid the recollection of my unfortunate remark about seals might have stopped him telling the story, but it did not.

"Once Anthony had seen them," he said, "he couldn't rest content without he'd be going to see them again. Many a night he went and saw neither sight nor light of them, for it was only at spring tides that they'd be there, on account of the rocks not being uncovered any other time. But at the bottom of the low springs they were there right enough, and sometimes they'd be swimming in the sea and sometimes they'd be sitting on the rocks. It was wonderful the songs they'd sing— like the sound of the sea set to music was what my mother told me, and she was told by them that knew. The people did be wondering what had come over Anthony, for he was different like from what he had been, and nobody knew what took him out of his house in the middle of the night at the spring tides. There was a girl that they had laid down for him to marry, and Anthony had no objection to her before he seen them ones; but after he had seen them he wouldn't look at the girl. She had a middling good fortune too, but sure he didn't care about that."

I could understand Anthony's feelings. The air of wind which Peter had promised, drawn from its cave by the lure of the departing sun, was filling our head-sails. I hauled in the main-sheet gently hand over hand and belayed it. The boat slipped quietly along close-hauled. The long line of islands which guards the entrance of our bay lay dim before use. Over the shoulder of one of them I could see the lighthouse, still a distinguishable patch of white against the looming grey of the land. The water rippled mournfully under our bows and a long pale wake stretched astern from our counter. "Fortune," banked money, good heifers and even enduringly fruitful fields seemed very little matters to me then. They must have seemed still less, far less, to Anthony

O'FIaherty after he had seen those white sea-maidens with their green-black hair.

"There was a woman on the island in those times," said Peter, "a very aged woman, and she had a kind of plaster which she made which cured the cancer, drawing it out by the roots, and she could tell what was good for the chin cough, and the women did like to have her with them when their children was born, she being knowledgable in them matters. I'm told the priests didn't like her, for there was things she knew which it mightn't be right that anyone would know, things that's better left to the clergy. Whether she guessed what was the matter with Anthony, or whether he up and told her straight my mother never heard. It could be that he told her, for many a one used to go to her for a charm when the butter wouldn't come, or a cow, maybe, was pining; so it wouldn't surprise me if Anthony went to her."

Peter crept aft He took a pull on the jib-sheet and belayed it again; but I do not believe that he really cared much about the set of the sail. That was his excuse. He wanted to be nearer to me. There is something in stories like this, told in dim twilight, with dark waters sighing near at hand, which makes men feel the need of dose human companionship. Peter seated himself on the floorboards at my feet, and I felt a certain comfort in the touch of his arm on my leg.

"Well," he went on, "according to the old hag— and what she said was true enough, however she learnt it— them ones doesn't go naked all the time, but only when they're playing themselves on the rocks at low tide, the way Anthony seen them. Mostly they have a kind of cloak that they wear, and they take the same cloaks off of them when they're up above the water and they lay them down on the rocks. If so be that a man could put his hand on e'er a cloak, the one that owned it would have to follow him whether she wanted to or not If it was to the end of the world she'd have to follow him, or to Spain, or to America, or wherever he might go. And what's more, she'd have to do what he bid her, be the same good or bad, and be with him if he wanted her, so long as he kept the cloak from her. That's what the old woman told Anthony, and she was a skilful woman, well knowing the nature of beasts and men, and of them that's neither beasts nor men. Youll believe me now that Anthony wasn't altogether the same as other men when I tell you that he laid his mind down to get his hand down on one of the cloaks. He was a good swimmer, so he was, which is what few men on the island can do, and he knew that he'd be able to fetch out to the rock where them ones played themselves."

I was quite prepared to believe that Anthony was inspired by a passion far out of the common. I know nothing more terrifying than the chill embrace of the sea at night-time. To strike out through the slimy weeds which lie close

along the surface at the ebb point of a spring tide, to clamber on low rocks, half awash for an hoar or two at midnight, these are things which I would not willingly do.

"The first time he went for to try it," said Peter, "he felt a bit queer in himself and he thought it would do him no harm if he was to bless himself. So he did, just as he was stepping off the shore into the water. Well, it might as well have been a shot he fired, for the minute he did it they were off and their cloaks along with them; and Anthony was left there. It was the sign of the cross had them frightened, for that same is what they can't stand, not having souls that religion would be any use to. It was the old woman told Anthony that after, and you'd think it would have been a warning to him not to make or meddle with the like of them any more. But it only made him the more determined. He went about without speaking to man or woman, and if anybody spoke to him he'd curse terrible, till the time of the next spring tide. Then he was off to the bay again, and sure enough them ones was there. The water was middling rough that night, but it didn't daunt Anthony. It pleased him, for he thought he'd have a better chance of getting to the rocks without them taking notice of him if there was some noise loud enough to drown the noise he'll be making himself. So he crept out to the point of the cliff on the south side of he bay, which is as near as he could get to the rocks. You remember that?"

I did. On the night when we beat out of the bay against a rising westerly wind we went about once under the shadow of the cliff, and, almost before we had full way on the boat, stayed her again beside the rocks. Anthony's swim, though terrifying, was short.

"That time he neither blessed himself nor said a prayer, but slipped into the water, and off with him, swimming with all his strength. They didn't see him, for they were too busy with their playing to take much notice, and of course they couldn't be expecting a man to be there. Without Anthony had shouted they wouldn't have heard him, for the sea was loud on the rocks and their own singing was louder. So Anthony got there and he crept up on the rock behind them, and the first thing his hand touched was one of the cloaks. He didn't know which of them it belonged to, and he didn't care. It wasn't any one of the three in particular he wanted, for they were all much about the same to look at, only finer than any woman ever was seen. So he rolled the cloak round his neck, the way he'd have his arms free for swimming, and back with him into the water, heading for shore as fast as he was able."

"And she followed him?" I asked.

"She did so. From that day till the day she left him she followed him, and she did what she was bid, only for one thing. She wouldn't go to mass, and

when the chapel bell rang she'd hide herself. The sound of it was what she couldn't bear. The people thought that queer, and there was a deal of talk about it in the island, some saying she must be a Protestant, and more thinking that she might be something worse. But nobody had a word to say against her any other way. She was a good enough housekeeper, washing and making and mending for Anthony, and minding the children. Seven of them there was, and all boys." The easterly breeze freshened as the night fell. I could see the great eye of the lighthouse blinking at me on the weather side of the boat. It became necessary to go about, but I gave the order to Peter very reluctantly. He handled the head-sheets, and then, instead of settling down in his old place, leaned his elbows on the coaming and stared into the sea. We were steadily approaching the lighthouse. I felt that I must run the risk of asking him a question.

"What happened in the end?" I asked.

"The end, is it? Well, in the latter end she left him. But there was things happened before that. Whether it was the way the priests talked to him about her— there was a priest in it them imes that was too fond of interfering, and that's what some of them are— or whether there was goings-on within in the inside of the house that nobody knew anything about— and there might have been, for you couldn't tell what one of them ones might do or mightn't Whatever way it was, Anthony took to drinking more than he ought. There was poteen made on the island then, and whisky was easy come by if a man wanted it, and Anthony took too much of it."

Peter paused and then passed judgment, charitably, on Anthony's conduct "I wouldn't be too hard on a man for taking a drop an odd time."

I was glad to hear Peter say that I myself had found it necessary from time to time, for the sake of an old friendship, not to be too hard on Peter.

"Nobody would have blamed him," Peter went on, "if he had behaved himself when he had a drop taken; but that's what he didn't seem able to do. He bet her. Sore and heavy he bet her, and that's what no woman, whether she was a natural woman or one of the other kind, could be expected to put up with. Not that she said a word. She didn't Nor nobody would have known that he bet her if he hadn't taken to beating the young lads along with her. It was them told what was going on. But there wasn't one on the island would interfere. The people did be wondering that she didn't put the fear of God into Anthony; but of course that's what she couldn't do on account of his having the cloak hid away from her. So long as he had that she was bound to put up with whatever he did. But it wasn't for ever.

"The house was going to rack and ruin with the way Anthony wouldn't mind it on account of his being three-parts drunk most of the time. At last the

rain was coming in through the roof. When Anthony saw that he came to himself a bit and sent for my grandfather and settled with him to put a few patches of new thatch on the worst places. My grandfather was the best man at thatching that there was in the island in them days, and he took the job though he misdoubted whether he'd ever be paid for it Anthony never came next or nigh him when he was working, which shows that he hadn't got his senses rightly. If he had he'd have kept an eye on what my grandfather was doing, knowing what he knew, though of course my grandfather didn't know. Well, one day my grandfather was dragging off the old thatch near the chimney. It was middling late in the evening, as it might be six or seven o'clock, and he was thinking of stopping his work when all of a sudden he came on what he thought might be an old petticoat bundled away in the thatch. It was red, he said, but when he put his hand on it he knew it wasn't flannel, nor it wasn't cloth, nor it wasn't like anything he'd ever felt before in all his life. There was a hole in the roof where my grandfather had the thatch stripped, and he could see down into the kitchen. Anthony's wife was there with the youngest of the boys in her arms. My grandfather was as much in dread of her as every other one, but he thought it would be no more than civil to tell her what he'd found

" 'Begging your pardon, ma'am,' he said, 'but I'm after finding what maybe belongs to you hid away in the thatch.'

"With that he threw down the red cloak, for it was a red doak he had in his hand. She didn't speak a word, but she laid down the baby out of her arms and she walked out of the house. That was the last my father seen of her. And that was the last anyone on the island seen of her, unless maybe Anthony. Nobody knows what he saw. He stopped off the drink from that day; but it wasn't much use his stopping it. He used to go round at spring tides to the bay where he had seen her first He did that five times, or maybe six. After that he took to his bed and died. It could be that his heart was broke."

We slipped past the point of the pier. Peter crept forward and crouched on the deck in front of the mast I peered into the gloom to catch sight of our mooring-buoy.

"Let her away a bit yet," said Peter. "Now luff her, luff her all you can."

The boat edged up into the wind. Peter, flat on his stomach, grasped the buoy and hauled it on board. The fore-sheets beat their tattoo on the deck. The boom swung sharply across the boat

Ten minutes later we were leaning together across the boom gathering in the mainsail.

"What became of the boys?" I asked.

"Is it Anthony O'Flaherty's boys? The last of them went to America twenty years ago. But sure that was before you came to these parts."

_____

17: Bones

Arthur Conan Doyle

1859-1930

London Society, April 1882

Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle

This is an early story, while he was was still a hopeful M.D. Sherlock Holmes did not appear for another six years.

ABE BURTON'S cabin was not beautiful. People have been heard to assert that it was ugly, and, even after the fashion of Harvey's Sluice, have gone the length of prefixing their adjective with a forcible expletive which emphasised their criticism. Abe, however, was a stolid and easy-going man, on whose mind the remarks of an unappreciative public made but little impression. He had built the house himself, and it suited his partner and him, and what more did they want? Indeed he was rather touchy upon the subject.

'Though I says it as raised it,' he remarked, 'it'll lay over any shanty in the valley. Holes? Well, of course there are holes. You wouldn't get fresh air without holes. There's nothing stuffy about my house. Rain? Well, if it does let the rain in, ain't it an advantage to know its rainin' without gettin' up to unbar the door. I wouldn't own a house that didn't leak some. As to its bein' off the perpendic'lar, I like a house with a bit of a tilt. Anyways it pleases my pard, Boss Morgan, and what's good enough for him is good enough for you, I suppose.'

At which approach to personalities his antagonist usually sheered off, and left the honours of the field to the indignant architect.

But whatever difference of opinion might exist as to the beauty of the establishment, there could be no question as to its utility. To the tired wayfarer, plodding along the Buckhurstroad in the direction of the Sluice, the warm glow upon the summit of the hill was a beacon of hope and of comfort. Those very holes at which the neighbours sneered helped to diffuse a cheery atmosphere of light around, which was doubly acceptable on such a night as the present.

There was only one man inside the hut, and that was the proprietor, Abe Durton himself, or 'Bones,' as he had been christened with the rude heraldry of the camp. He was sitting in front of the great wood fire, gazing moodily into its glowing depths, and occasionally giving a faggot a kick of remonstrance when it showed any indication of dying into a smoulder. His fair Saxon face, with its bold simple eyes and crisp yellow beard, stood out sharp and clear against the darkness as the flickering light played over it. It was a manly resolute countenance, and yet the physiognomist might have detected something in the lines of the mouth which showed a weakness somewhere, an indecision which contrasted strangely with his herculean shoulders and massive limbs. Abe's was one of those trusting simple natures which are as easy to lead as they are impossible to drive; and it was this happy pliability of disposition which made him at once the butt and the favourite of the dwellers in the Sluice. Badinage in that primitive settlement was of a somewhat ponderous character, yet no amount of chaff had ever brought a dark look on Bones's face, or an unkind thought into his honest heart. It was only when his aristocratic partner was, as he thought, being put upon, that an ominous tightness about his lower lip and an angry light in his blue eyes caused even the most irrepressible humorist in the colony to nip his favourite joke in the bud, in order to diverge into an earnest and all-absorbing dissertation upon the state of the weather.

'The Boss is late to-night,' he muttered as he rose from his chair and stretched himself in a colossal yawn. 'My stars, how it does rain and blow! Don't it, Blinky?'

Blinky was a demure and meditative owl, whose comfort and welfare was a chronic subject of solicitude to its master, and who at present contemplated him gravely from one of the rafters. 'Pity you can't speak, Blinky,' continued Abe, glancing up at his feathered companion. 'There's a powerful deal of sense in your face. Kinder melancholy too. Crossed in love, maybe, when you was young. Talkin' of love,' he added, 'I've not seen Susan to-day;' and lighting the candle which stood in a black bottle upon the table, he walked across the room and peered earnestly at one of the many pictures from stray illustrated papers, which had been cut out by the occupants and posted up upon the walls.

The particular picture which attracted him was one which represented a very tawdrily-dressed actress simpering over a bouquet at an imaginary audience. This sketch had, for some inscrutable reason, made a deep impression upon the susceptible heart of the miner. He had invested the young lady with a human interest by solemnly, and without the slightest warrant, christening her as Susan Banks, and had then installed her as his standard of female beauty.

'You see my Susan,' he would say, when some wanderer from Buckhurst, or even from Melbourne, would describe some fair Circe whom he had left behind him. 'There ain't a girl like my Sue. If ever you go to the old country again, just you ask to see her. Susan Banks is her name, and I've got her picture up at the shanty.'

Abe was still gazing at his charmer when the rough door was flung open, and a blinding cloud of sleet and rain came driving into the cabin, almost obscuring for the moment a young man who sprang in and proceeded to bar the entrance behind him, an operation which the force of the wind rendered no easy matter. He might have passed for the genius of the storm, with the water dripping from his long hair and running down his pale refined face.

'Well,' he said, in a slightly peevish voice, 'haven't you got any supper?'

'Waiting and ready,' said his companion cheerily, pointing to a large pot which bubbled by the side of the fire. ' You seem sort of damp.'

'Damp be hanged! I 'm soaked, man, thoroughly saturated. It's a night that I wouldn't have a dog out, at least not a dog that I had any respect for. Hand over that dry coat from the peg.'

Jack Morgan, or Boss, as he was usually called, belonged to a type which was commoner in the mines during the flush times of the first great rush than would be supposed. He was a man of good blood, liberally educated, and a graduate of an English university. Boss should, in the natural course of things, have been an energetic curate, or struggling professional man, had not some latent traits cropped out in his character, inherited possibly from old Sir Henry Morgan, who had founded the family with Spanish pieces of eight gallantly won upon the high seas. It was this wild strain of blood no doubt which had caused him to drop from the bedroom-window of the ivy-clad English parsonage, and leave home and friends behind him, to try his luck with pick and shovel in the Australian fields. In spite of his effeminate face and dainty manners, the rough dwellers in Harvey's Sluice had gradually learned that the little man was possessed of a cool courage and unflinching resolution, which won respect in a community where pluck was looked upon as the highest of human attributes. No one ever knew how it was that Bones and he had become partners; yet partners they were, and the large simple nature of the

stronger man looked with an almost superstitious reverence upon the clear decisive mind of his companion.

'That's better,' said the Boss, as he dropped into the vacant chair before the fire and watched Abe laying out the two metal plates, with the horn-handled knives and abnormally pronged forks. 'Take your mining boots off, Bones; there's no use filling the cabin with red clay. Come here and sit down.'

His gigantic partner came meekly over and perched himself upon the top of a barrel.

'What's up?' he asked.

'Shares are up,' said his companion. 'That's what's up. Look here,' and he extracted a crumpled paper from the pocket of the steaming coat. 'Here's the *Buckhurst Sentinel*. Read this article— this one here about a paying lead in the Conemara mine. We hold pretty heavily in that concern, my boy. We might sell out to-day and clear something— but I think we'll hold on.'

Abe Durton in the mean time was laboriously spelling out the article in question, following the lines with his great forefinger, and muttering under his tawny moustache.

'Two hundred dollars a foot,' he said, looking up. 'Why, pard, we hold a hundred feet each. It would give us twenty thousand dollars! We might go home on that.'

'Nonsense!' said his companion; 'we've come out here for something better than a beggarly couple of thousand pounds. The thing is bound to pay. Sinclair the assayer has been over there, and says there's a ledge of the richest quartz he ever set eyes on. It is just a case of getting the machinery to crush it. By the way, what was to-day's take like?'

Abe extracted a small wooden box from his pocket and handed it to his comrade. It contained what appeared to be about a teaspoonful of sand and one or two little metallic granules not larger than a pea. Boss Morgan laughed, and returned it to his companion.

'We sha'n't make our fortune at that rate, Bones,' he remarked; and there was a pause in the conversation as the two men listened to the wind as it screamed and whistled past the little cabin.

'Any news from Buckhurst?' asked Abe, rising and proceeding to extract their supper from the pot.

'Nothing much,' said his companion. 'Cock-eyed Joe has been shot by Billy Reid in McFarlane's Store.'

'Ah,' said Abe, with listless interest.

'Bushrangers have been around and stuck up the Rochdale station. They say they are coming over here.' The miner whistled as he poured some whisky into a jug. 'Anything more?' he asked.

'Nothing of importance except that the blacks have been showing a bit down New Sterling way, and that the assayer has bought a piano and is going to have his daughter out from Melbourne to live in the new house opposite on the other side of the road. So you see we are going to have something to look at, my boy,' he added as he sat down, and began attacking the food set before him. 'They say she is a beauty, Bones.'

'She won't be a patch on my Sue,' returned the other decisively. His partner smiled as he glanced round at the flaring print upon the wall.

Suddenly he dropped his knife and seemed to listen. Amid the wild uproar of the wind and the rain there was a low rumbling sound which was evidently not dependent upon the elements.

'What's that?'

'Darned if I know.'

The two men made for the door and peered out earnestly into the darkness. Far away along the Buckhurst road they could see a moving light, and the dull sound was louder than before.

'It's a buggy coming down,' said Abe.

'Where is it going to?'

'Don't know. Across the ford, I s'pose.'

'Why, man, the ford will be six feet deep to-night, and running like a mill-stream.'

The light was nearer now, coming rapidly round the curve of the road. There was a wild sound of galloping with the rattle of the wheels.

'Horses have bolted, by thunder!'

'Bad job for the man inside.'

There was a rough individuality about the inhabitants of Harvey's Sluice, in virtue of which every man bore his misfortunes upon his own shoulders, and had very little sympathy for those of his neighbours. The predominant feeling of the two men was one of pure curiosity as they watched the swinging swaying lanterns coming down the winding road.

'If he don't pull 'em up before they reach the ford he's a goner,' remarked Abe Durton resignedly.

Suddenly there came a lull in the sullen splash of the rain. It was but for a moment, but in that moment there came down on the breeze a long cry which caused the two men to start and stare at each other, and then to rush frantically down the steep incline towards the road below.

'A woman, by Heaven!' gasped Abe, as he sprang across the gaping shaft of a mine in the recklessness of his haste. Morgan was the lighter and more active man. He drew away rapidly from his stalwart companion. Within a minute he

was standing panting and bare-headed in the middle of the soft muddy road, while his partner was still toiling down the side of the declivity.

The carriage was close on him now. He could see in the light of the lamps the raw-boned Australian horse as, terrified by the storm and by its own clatter, it came tearing down the declivity which led to the ford. The man who was driving seemed to see the pale set face in the pathway in front of him, for he yelled out some incoherent words of warning, and made a last desperate attempt to pull up. There was a shout, an oath, and a jarring crash, and Abe, hurrying down, saw a wild infuriated horse rearing madly in the air with a slim dark figure hanging on to its bridle.

Boss, with the keen power of calculation which had made him the finest cricketer at Rugby in his day, had caught the rein immediately below the bit, and clung to it with silent concentration. Once he was down with a heavy thud in the roadway as the horse jerked its head violently forwards, but when, with a snort of exultation, the animal pressed on, it was only to find that the prostrate man beneath its fore-hoofs still maintained his unyielding grasp.

'Hold it, Bones,' he said, as a tall figure hurled itself into the road and seized the other rein.

'All right, old man, I've got him ;' and the horse, cowed by the sight of a fresh assailant, quieted down, and stood shivering with terror.

'Get up, Boss, it's safe now.' But poor Boss lay groaning in the mud.

'I can't do it, Bones.' There was a catch in the voice as of pain. 'There's something wrong, old chap, but don't make a fuss. It's only a shake; give me a lift up.'

Abe bent tenderly over his prostrate companion. He could see that he was very white, and breathing with difficulty.

'Cheer up, old Boss,' he murmured. 'Hullo ! my stars !' The last two exclamations were shot out of the honest miner's bosom as if they were impelled by some irresistible force, and he took a couple of steps backward in sheer amazement. There at the other side of the fallen man, and half shrouded in the darkness, stood what appeared to Abe's simple soul to be the most beautiful vision that ever had appeared upon earth. To eyes accustomed to rest upon nothing more captivating than the ruddy faces and rough beards of the miners in the Sluice, it seemed that that fair delicate countenance must belong to a wanderer from some better world. Abe gazed at it with a wondering reverence, oblivious for the moment even of his injured friend upon the ground.

'O papa,' said the apparition, in great distress, 'he is hurt, the gentleman is hurt;' and with a quick feminine gesture of sympathy, she bent her lithe figure over Boss Morgan's prostrate figure.

'Why, it's Abe Durton and his partner,' said the driver of the buggy, coming forward and disclosing the grizzled features of Mr. Joshua Sinclair, the assayer to the mines. 'I don't know how to thank you, boys. The infernal brute got the bit between his teeth, and I should have had to have thrown Carrie out and chanced it in another minute. That's right,' he continued, as Morgan staggered to his feet. 'Not much hurt, I hope.'

'I can get up to the hut now,' said the young man, steadying himself upon his partner's shoulder. 'How are you going to get Miss Sinclair home?'

'We can walk,' said that young lady, shaking off the effects of her fright with all the elasticity of youth. 'We can drive and take the road round the bank so as to avoid the ford,' said her father.

'The horse seems cowed enough now; you need not be afraid of it, Carrie. I hope we shall see you at the house, both of you. Neither of us can easily forget this night's work.'

Miss Carrie said nothing, but she managed to shoot a little demure glance of gratitude from under her long lashes, to have won which honest Abe felt that he would have cheerfully undertaken to stop a runaway locomotive.

There was a cheery shout of 'Good-night,' a crack of the whip, and the buggy rattled away in the darkness.

'You told me the men were rough and nasty, pa,' said Miss Carrie Sinclair, after a long silence, when the two dark shadows had died away in the distance, and the carriage was speeding along by the turbulent stream. 'I don't think so. I think they are very nice.' And Carrie was unusually quiet for the remainder of her journey, and seemed more reconciled to the hardship of leaving her dear friend Amelia in the far-off boarding school at Melbourne. That did not prevent her from writing a full, true, and particular account of their little adventure to the same young lady upon that very night.

'They stopped the horse, darling, and one poor fellow was hurt. And O, Amy, if you had seen the other one in a red shirt, with a pistol at his waist ! I couldn't help thinking of you, dear. He was just your idea. You remember, a yellow moustache and great blue eyes. And how he did stare at poor me! You never see such men in Burke-street, Amy—' and so on, for four pages of pretty feminine gossip.

In the mean time poor Boss, badly shaken, had been helped up the hill by his partner and regained the shelter of the shanty. Abe doctored him out of the rude pharmacopoeia of the camp, and bandaged up his strained arm. Both were men of few words, and neither made any allusion to what had taken place.

It was noticed, however, by Blinky that his master failed to pay his usual nightly orisons before the shrine of Susan Banks. Whether this sagacious fowl

drew any deductions from this, and from the fact that Bones sat long and earnestly smoking by the smouldering fire, I know not. Suffice it that as the candle died away and the miner rose from his chair, his feathered friend flew down upon his shoulder, and was only prevented from giving vent to a sympathetic hoot by Abe's warning finger, and its own strong inherent sense of propriety.

A casual visitor dropping into the straggling township of Harvey's Sluice shortly after Miss Carrie Sinclair's arrival would have noticed a considerable alteration in the manners and customs of its inhabitants. Whether it was the refining influence of a woman's presence, or whether it sprang from an emulation excited by the brilliant appearance of Abe Durton, it is hard to say—probably from a blending of the two. Certain it is that that young man had suddenly developed an affection for cleanliness and a regard for the conventionalities of civilisation, which aroused the astonishment and ridicule of his companions.

That Boss Morgan should pay attention to his personal appearance had long been set down as a curious and inexplicable phenomenon, depending upon early education; but that loose-limbed easy-going Bones should flaunt about in a clean shirt was regarded by every grimy denizen of the Sluice as a direct and premeditated insult. In self-defence, therefore, there was a general cleaning up after working hours, and such a run upon the grocery establishment, that soap went up to an unprecedented figure, and a fresh consignment had to be ordered from McFarlane's store in Buckhurst.

'Is this here a free minin' camp, or is it a darned Sunday-school?' had been the indignant query of Long McCoy, a prominent member of the reactionary party, who had failed to advance with the times, having been absent during the period of regeneration. But his remonstrance met with but little sympathy; and at the end of a couple of days a general turbidity of the creek announced his surrender, which was confirmed by his appearance in the Colonial Bar with a shining and bashful face, and hair which was redolent of bear's grease.

'I felt kinder lonesome,' he remarked apologetically, 'so I thought as I'd have a look what was under the clay;' and he viewed himself approvingly in the cracked mirror which graced the select room of the establishment.

Our casual visitor would have noticed a remarkable change also in the conversation of the community. Somehow, when a certain dainty little bonnet with a sweet girlish figure beneath it was seen in the distance among the disused shafts and mounds of red earth which disfigured the sides of the valley, there was a warning murmur, and a general clearing off of the cloud of blasphemy, which was, I regret to state, an habitual characteristic of the

working population of Harvey's Sluice. Such things only need a beginning; and it was noticeable that long after Miss Sinclair had vanished from sight there was a decided rise in the moral barometer of the gulches. Men found by experience that their stock of adjectives was less limited than they had been accustomed to suppose, and that the less forcible were sometimes even more adapted for conveying their meaning.

Abe had formerly been considered one of the most experienced valuators of an ore in the settlement. It had been commonly supposed that he was able to estimate the amount of gold in a fragment of quartz with remarkable exactness. This, however, was evidently a mistake, otherwise he would never have incurred the useless expense of having so many worthless specimens assayed as he now did. Mr. Joshua Sinclair found himself inundated with such a flood of fragments of mica, and lumps of rock containing decimal percentages of the precious metals, that he began to form a very low opinion of the young man's mining capabilities. It is even asserted that Abe shuffled up to the house one morning with a hopeful smile, and, after some fumbling, produced half a brick from the bosom of his jersey, with the stereotyped remark 'that he thought he'd struck it at last, and so had dropped in to ask him to cipher out an estimate.'

As this anecdote rests, however, upon the unsupported evidence of Jim Struggles, the humorist of the camp, there may be some slight inaccuracy of detail.

It is certain that what with professional business in the morning and social visits at night, the tall figure of the miner was a familiar object in the little drawing room of Azalea Villa, as the new house of the assayer had been magniloquently named. He seldom ventured upon a remark in the presence of its female occupant; hut would sit on the extreme edge of his chair in a state of speechless admiration while she rattled off some lively air upon the newly-imported piano. Many were the strange and unexpected places in which his feet turned up. Miss Carrie had gradually come to the conclusion that they were entirely independent of his body, and had ceased to speculate upon the manner in which she would trip over them on one side of the table while the blushing owner was apologising from the other.

There was only one cloud on honest Bones's mental horizon, and that was the periodical appearance of Black Tom Ferguson, of Rochdale Ferry. This clever young scamp had managed to ingratiate himself with old Joshua, and was a constant visitor at the villa. There were evil rumours abroad about Black Tom. He was known to be a gambler, and shrewdly suspected to be worse. Harvey's Sluice was not censorious, and yet there was a general feeling that Ferguson was a man to be avoided. There was a reckless *élan* about his

bearing, however, and a sparkle in his conversation, which had an indescribable charm, and even induced the Boss, who was particular in such matters, to cultivate his acquaintance while forming a correct estimate of his character.

Miss Carrie seemed to hail his appearance as a relief, and chattered away for hours about books and music and the gaieties of Melbourne. It was on these occasions that poor simple Bones would sink into the very lowest depths of despondency, and either slink away, or sit glaring at his rival with an earnest malignancy which seemed to cause that gentleman no small amusement. The miner made no secret to his partner of the admiration which he entertained for Miss Sinclair. If he was silent in her company, he was voluble enough when she was the subject of discourse. Loiterers upon the Buckhurst-road might have heard a stentorian voice upon the hillside bellowing forth a vocabulary of female charms. He submitted his difficulties to the superior intelligence of the Boss.

'That loafer from Rochdale,' he said, 'he seems to reel it off kinder nat'ral, while for the life of me I can't say a word. Tell me, Boss, what would you say to a girl like that?'

'Why, talk about what would interest her,' said his companion. 'Ah, that's where it lies.'

'Talk about the customs of the place and the country,' said the Boss, pulling meditatively at his pipe. 'Tell her stories of what you have seen in the mines, and that sort of thing.'

'Eh? You'd do that, would you?' responded his comrade more hopefully. 'If that's the hang of it I am right. I'll go up now and tell her about Chicago Bill, an' how he put them two bullets in the man from the bend the night of the dance.'

Boss Morgan laughed.

'That's hardly the thing,' he said. 'You'd frighten her if you told her that. Tell her something lighter, you know; something to amuse her, something funny.'

'Funny,' said the anxious lover, with less confidence in his voice. 'How you and me made Mat Houlahan drunk and put him in the pulpit of the Baptist church, and he wouldn't let the preacher in in the morning. How would that do, eh?'

'For Heaven's sake don't say anything of the sort,' said his Mentor, in great consternation. 'She'd never speak to either of us again. No, what I mean is that you should tell about the habits of the mines, how men live and work and die there. If she is a sensible girl that ought to interest her.'

'How they live at the mines? Pard, you are good to me. How they live? There's a thing I can talk of as glib as Black Tom or any man. I'll try it on her when I see her.'

'By the way,' said his partner listlessly, 'just keep an eye on that man Ferguson. His hands ain't very clean, you know, and he's not scrupulous when he is aiming for anything. You remember how Dick Williams, of English Town, was found dead in the bush. Of course it was rangers that did it. They do say, however, that Black Tom owed him a deal more money than he could ever have paid. There's been one or two queer things about him. Keep your eye on him, Abe. Watch what he does.'

'I will,' said his companion.

And he did. He watched him that very night. Watched him stride out of the house of the assayer with anger and baffled pride on every feature of his handsome swarthy face. Watched him clear the garden paling at a bound, pass in long rapid strides down the side of the valley, gesticulating wildly with his hands, and vanish into the bushland beyond. All this Abe Durton watched, and with a thoughtful look upon his face he relit his pipe and strolled slowly backward to the hut upon the hill.

MARCH was drawing to a close in Harvey's Sluice, and the glare and heat of the antipodean summer had toned down into the rich mellow hues of autumn. It was never a lovely place to look upon. There was something hopelessly prosaic in the two bare rugged ridges, seamed and scarred by the hand of man, with iron arms of windlasses, and broken buckets projecting everywhere through the endless little hillocks of red earth. Down the middle ran the deeply rutted road from Buckhurst, winding along and crossing the sluggish tide of Harper's Creek by a crumbling wooden bridge. Beyond the bridge lay the cluster of little huts with the Colonial Bar and the Grocery towering in all the dignity of whitewash among the humble dwellings around. The assayer's verandah-lined house lay above the gulches on the side of the slope nearly opposite the dilapidated specimen of architecture of which our friend Abe was so unreasonably proud. There was one other building which might have come under the category of what an inhabitant of the Sluice would have described as a 'public edifice' with a comprehensive wave of his pipe which conjured up images of an endless vista of colonnades and minarets. This was the Baptist chapel, a modest little shingle-roofed erection on the bend of the river about a mile above the settlement. It was from this that the town looked at its best, when the harsh outlines and crude colours were somewhat softened by distance.

On that particular morning the stream looked pretty as it meandered down the valley; pretty, too, was the long rising upland behind, with its luxuriant green covering; and prettiest of all was Miss Carrie Sinclair, as she laid down the basket of ferns which she was carrying, and stopped upon the summit of

the rising ground. Something seemed to be amiss with that young lady. There was a look of anxiety upon her face which contrasted strangely with her usual appearance of piquant insouciance. Some recent annoyance had left its traces upon her. Perhaps it was to walk it off that she had rambled down the valley; certain it is that she inhaled the fresh breezes of the woodlands as if their resinous fragrance bore with them some antidote for human sorrow. She stood for some time gazing at the view before her. She could see her father's house, like a white dot upon the hillside, though Bones, strangely enough it was a blue reek of smoke upon the opposite slope which seemed to attract the greater part of her attention. She lingered there, watching it with a wistful look in her hazel eyes. Then the loneliness of her situation seemed to strike her, and she felt one of those spasmodic fits of unreasoning terror to which the bravest women are subject. Tales of natives and of bushrangers, their daring and their cruelty, flashed across her. She glanced at the great mysterious stretch of silent bushland beside her, and stooped to pick up her basket with the intention of hurrying along the road in the direction of the gulches. She started round, and hardly suppressed a scream as a long red-flannelled arm shot out from behind her and withdrew the basket from her very grasp. The figure which met her eye would to some have seemed little calculated to allay her fears. The high boots, the rough shirt, and the broad girdle with its weapons of death were, however, too familiar to Miss Carrie to be objects of terror; and when above them all she saw a pair of tender blue eyes looking down upon her, and a half-abashed smile lurking under a thick yellow moustache, she knew that for the remainder of that walk ranger and black would be equally powerless to harm her.

'O Mr. Durton,' she said, 'how you did startle me!'

'I'm sorry, miss,' said Abe, in great trepidation at having caused his idol one moment's uneasiness. 'You see,' he continued, with simple cunning, 'the weather bein' fine and my partner gone prospectin', I thought I'd walk up to Hagley's Hill and round back by the bend, and there I sees you accidental-like and promiscuous a-standin' on a hillock.'

This astounding falsehood was reeled off by the miner with great fluency, and an artificial sincerity which at once stamped it as a fabrication. Bones had concocted and rehearsed it while tracking the little footsteps in the clay, and looked upon it as the very depth of human guile. Miss Carrie did not venture upon a remark, but there was a gleam of amusement in her eyes which puzzled her lover.

Abe was in good spirits this morning. It may have been the sunshine, or it may have been the rapid rise of shares in the Conemara, which lightened his heart. I am inclined to think, however, that it was referable to neither of these

causes. Simple as he was, the scene which he had witnessed the night before could only lead to one conclusion. He pictured himself walking as wildly down the valley under similar circumstances, and his heart was touched with pity for his rival. He felt very certain that the ill-omened face of Mr. Thomas Ferguson of Rochdale Ferry would never more be seen within the walls of Azalea Villa. Then why did she refuse him? He was handsome, he was fairly rich. Could it—? no, it couldn't; of course it couldn't; how could it! The idea was ridiculous— so very ridiculous that it had fermented in the young man's brain all night, and that he could do nothing but ponder over it in the morning, and cherish it in his perturbed bosom.

They passed down the red pathway together, and along by the river's bank. Abe had relapsed into his normal condition of taciturnity. He had made one gallant effort to hold forth upon the subject of ferns, stimulated by the basket which he held in his hand, but the theme was not a thrilling one, and after a spasmodic flicker he had abandoned the attempt. While coming along he had been full of racy anecdotes and humorous observations. He had rehearsed innumerable remarks which were to be poured into Miss Sinclair's appreciative ear. But now his brain seemed of a sudden to have become a vacuum, and utterly devoid of any idea save an insane and overpowering impulse to comment upon the heat of the sun. No astronomer who ever reckoned a parallax was so entirely absorbed in the condition of the celestial bodies as honest Bones while he trudged along by the slow-flowing Australian river. Suddenly his conversation with his partner came back into his mind. What was it Boss had said upon the subject?

'*Tell her how they live at the mines*.'

He revolved it in his brain. It seemed a curious thing to talk about; but Boss had said it, and Boss was always right. He would take the plunge; so with a premonitory *hem* he blurted out, 'They live mostly on bacon and beans in the valley.'

He could not see what effect this communication had upon his companion. He was too tall to be able to peer under the little straw bonnet. She did not answer. He would try again.

'Mutton on Sundays,' he said. Even this failed to arouse any enthusiasm. In fact she seemed to be laughing. Boss was evidently wrong. The young man was in despair. The sight of a ruined hut beside the pathway conjured up a fresh idea. He grasped at it as a drowning man to a straw.

'Cockney Jack built that,' he remarked. 'Lived there till he died.'

'What did he die of?' asked his companion.

'Three star brandy,' said Abe decisively. 'I used to come over of a night when he was bad and sit by him. Poor chap! he had a wife and two children in

Putney. He'd rave, and call me Polly, by the hour. He was cleaned out, hadn't a red cent; but the boys collected rough gold enough to see him through. He's buried there in that shaft; that was his claim, so we just dropped him down it an' filled it up. Put down his pick too, an' a spade an' a bucket, so's he'd feel kinder perky and at home.'

Miss Carrie seemed more interested now. 'Do they often die like that?' she asked.

'Well, brandy kills many; but there's more get's dropped— shot, you know.'

'I don't mean that. Do many men die alone and miserable down there, with no one to care for them?' and she pointed to the cluster of houses beneath them. 'Is there any one dying now? It is awful to think of.'

'There's none as I knows on likely to throw up their hand.'

'I wish you wouldn't use so much slang, Mr. Durton,' said Carrie, looking up at him reprovingly out of her violet eyes. It was strange what an air of proprietorship this young lady was gradually assuming towards her gigantic companion.

'You know it isn't polite. You should get a dictionary and learn the proper words.'

'Ah, that's it,' said Bones apologetically. 'It's gettin' your hand on the proper one. When you've not got a steam drill, you've got to put up with a pick.'

'Yes, but it's easy if you really try. You could say that a man was "dying," or "moribund," if you like.'

'That's it,' said the miner enthusiastically. "Moribund"! That's a word. Why, you could lay over Boss Morgan in the matter of words. "Moribund!" There's some sound about that.'

Carrie laughed.

'It's not the sound you must think of, but whether it will express your meaning. Seriously, Mr. Durton, if any one should be ill in the camp you must let me know. I can nurse, and I might be of use. You will, won't you?'

Abe readily acquiesced, and relapsed into silence as he pondered over the possibility of inoculating himself with some long and tedious disease. There was a mad dog reported from Buckhurst. Perhaps something might be done with that.

'And now I must say goodmorning,' said Carrie, as they came to the spot where a crooked pathway branched off from the track and wound up to Azalea Villa.

'Thank you ever so much for escorting me.'

In vain Abe pleaded for the additional hundred yards, and adduced the overwhelming weight of the diminutive basket as a cogent reason. The young

lady was inexorable. She had taken him too far out of his way already. She was ashamed of herself; she wouldn't hear of it. So poor Bones departed in a mixture of many opposite feelings. He had interested her. She had spoken kindly to him. But then she had sent him away before there was any necessity; she couldn't care much about him if she would do that. I think he might have felt a little more cheerful, however, had he seen Miss Carrie Sinclair as she watched his retiring figure from the garden-gate with a loving look upon her saucy face, and a mischievous smile at his bent head and desponding appearance.

The Colonial Bar was the favourite haunt of the inhabitants of Harvey's Sluice in their hours of relaxation. There had been a fierce competition between it and the rival establishment termed the Grocery, which, in spite of its innocent appellation, aspired also to dispense spirituous refreshments. The importation of chairs into the latter had led to the appearance of a settee in the former. Spittoons appeared in the Grocery against a picture in the Bar, and, as the frequenters expressed it, the honours were even. When, however, the Grocery led a window-curtain, and its opponent returned a snuggery and a mirror, the game was declared to be in favour of the latter, and Harvey's Sluice showed its sense of the spirit of the proprietor by withdrawing their custom from his opponent.

Though every man was at liberty to swagger into the Bar itself, and bask in the shimmer of its many coloured bottles, there was a general feeling that the snuggery, or special apartment, should be reserved for the use of the more prominent citizens. It was in this room that committees met, that opulent companies were conceived and born, and that inquests were generally held. The latter, I regret to state, was, in 1861, a pretty frequent ceremony at the Sluice; and the findings of the coroner were sometimes characterised by a fine breezy originality. Witness when Bully Burke, a notorious desperado, was shot down by a quiet young medical man, and a sympathetic jury brought in that 'the deceased had met his death in an ill-advised attempt to stop a pistol-ball while in motion,' a verdict which was looked upon as a triumph of jurisprudence in the camp, as simultaneously exonerating the culprit, and adhering to the rigid and undeniable truth.

On this particular evening there was an assemblage of notabilities in the snuggery, though no such pathological ceremony had called them together. Many changes had occurred of late which merited discussion; and it was in this chamber, gorgeous in all the effete luxury of the mirror and settee, that Harvey's Sluice was wont to exchange ideas. The recent cleansing of the population was still causing some ferment in men's minds. Then there was Miss Sinclair and her movements to be commented on, and the paying lead in

the Conemara, and the recent rumours of bushrangers. It was no wonder that the leading men in the township had come together in the Colonial Bar.

The rangers were the present subject of discussion. For some few days rumours of their presence had been flying about, and an uneasy feeling had pervaded the colony. Physical fear was a thing little known in Harvey's Sluice. The miners would have turned out to hunt down the desperadoes with as much zest as if they had been so many kangaroos. It was the presence of a large quantity of gold in the town which caused anxiety. It was felt that the fruits of their labour must be secured at any cost. Messages had been sent over to Buckhurst for as many troopers as could be spared, and in the mean time the main street of the Sluice was paraded at night by volunteer sentinels.

A fresh impetus had been given to the panic by the report brought in to-day by Jim Struggles. Jim was of an ambitious and aspiring turn of mind, and after gazing in silent disgust at his last week's clean up, he had metaphorically shaken the clay of Harvey's Sluice from his feet, and had started off into the woods with the intention of prospecting round until he could hit upon some likely piece of ground for himself. Jim's story was that he was sitting upon a fallen trunk eating his mid-day damper and rusty bacon, when his trained ear had caught the clink of horses' hoofs. He had hardly time to take the precaution of rolling off the tree and crouching down behind it, before a troop of men came riding down through the bush, and passed within a stone-throw of him.

'There was Bill Smeaton and Murphy Duff,' said Struggles, naming two notorious ruffians; 'and there was three more that I couldn't rightly see. And they took the trail to the right, and looked like business all over, with their guns in their hands.'

Jim was submitted to a searching cross-examination that evening; but nothing could shake his testimony or throw a further light upon what he had seen. He told the story several times and at long intervals; and though there might be a pleasing variety in the minor incidents, the main facts were always identically the same. The matter began to look serious. There were a few, however, who were loudly sceptical as to the existence of the rangers, and the most prominent of these was a young man who was perched on a barrel in the centre of the room, and was evidently one of the leading spirits in the community.

We have already seen that dark curling hair, lack-lustre eye, and thin cruel lip, in the person of Black Tom Ferguson, the rejected suitor of Miss Sinclair. He was easily distinguishable from the rest of the party by a tweed coat, and other symptoms of effeminacy in his dress, which might have brought him into disrepute had had he not, like Abe Durton's partner, early established the

reputation of being a quietly desperate man. On the present occasion he seemed somewhat under the influence of liquor, a rare occurrence with him, and probably to be ascribed to his recent disappointment. He was almost fierce in his denunciation of Jim Struggles and his story.

'It's always the same,' he said; 'if a man meets a few travellers in the bush, he's bound to come back raving about rangers. If they'd seen Struggles there, they would have gone off with a long yarn about a ranger crouching behind a tree. As to recognising people riding fast among tree trunks— it is an impossibility.'

Struggles, however, stoutly maintained his original assertion, and all the sarcasms and arguments of his opponent were thrown away upon his stolid complacency. It was noticed that Ferguson seemed unaccountably put out about the whole matter. Something seemed to be on his mind, too; for occasionally he would spring off his perch and pace up and down the room with an abstracted and very forbidding look upon his swarthy face. It was a relief to every one when suddenly catching up his hat, and wishing the company a curt 'Good-night,' he walked off through the bar, and into the street beyond.

'Seems kinder put out,' remarked Long McCoy.

'He can't be afeard of the rangers, surely,' said Joe Shamus, another man of consequence, and principal shareholder of the El Dorado.

'No, he's not the man to be afraid,' answered another. 'There's something queer about him the last day or two. He's been long trips in the woods without any tools. They do say that the assayer's daughter has chucked him over.'

'Quite right too. A darned sight too good for him,' remarked several voices.

'It's odds but he has another try,' said Shamus. 'He's a hard man to beat when he's set his mind on a thing.'

'Abe Durton's the horse to win,' remarked Houlahan, a little bearded Irishman. 'It's sivin to four I'd be willin' to lay on him.'

'And you'd be afther losing your money, a-vich,' said a young man with a laugh. 'She'll want more brains than ever Bones had in his skull, you bet.'

'Who's seen Bones to-day?' asked McCoy.

'I've seen him,' said the young miner. 'He came round all through the camp asking for a dictionary— wanted to write a letter likely.'

'I saw him readin' it,' said Shamus. 'He came over to me an' told me he'd struck something good at the first show. Showed me a word about as long as your arm— "abdicate," or something.'

'It's a rich man he is now, I suppose,' said the Irishman. 'Well, he's about made his pile. He holds a hundred feet of the Conemara, and the shares go up every hour. If he'd sell out he'd be about fit to go home.'

'Guess he wants to take somebody home with him,' said another. 'Old Joshua wouldn't object, seein' that the money is there.'

I think it has been already recorded in this narrative that Jim Struggles, the wandering prospector, had gained the reputation of being the wit of the camp. It was not only in airy badinage, but in the conception and execution of more pretentious practical pleasantries that Jim had earned his reputation. His adventure in the morning had caused a certain stagnation in his usual flow of humour; but the company and his potations were gradually restoring him to a more cheerful state of mind. He had been brooding in silence over some idea since the departure of Ferguson, and he now proceeded to evolve it to his expectant companions.

'Say, boys,' he began. 'What day's this?'

'Friday, ain't it?'

'No, not that. What day of the month?'

'Darned if I know!'

'W ell, I'll tell you now. It's the first o' April. I've got a calendar in the hut as says so.'

'What if it is?' said several voices.

'Well, don't you see, it's All Fools' day. Couldn't we fix up some little joke on some one, eh? Couldn't we get a laugh out of it? Now there's old Bones, for instance; he'll never smell a rat. Couldn't we send him off somewhere and watch him go maybe? We'd have something to chaff him on for a month to come, eh?'

There was a general murmur of assent. A joke, however poor, was always welcome to the Sluice. The broader the point, the more thoroughly was it appreciated. There was no morbid delicacy of feeling in the gulches.

'Where shall we send him?' was the query.

Jim Struggles was buried in thought for a moment. Then an unhallowed inspiration seemed to come over him, and he laughed uproariously, rubbing his hands between his knees in the excess of his delight.

'Well, what is it?' asked the eager audience.

'See here, boys. There's Miss Sinclair. You was saying as Abe's gone on her. She don't fancy him much you think. Suppose we write him a note— send it him to-night, you know.'

'Well, what then?' said McCoy.

'Well, pretend the note is from her, d'ye see? Put her name at the bottom. Let on as she wants him to come up an' meet her in the garden at twelve. He's bound to go. He'll think she wants to go off with him. It'll be the biggest thing played this year.'

There was a roar of laughter. The idea conjured up of honest Bones mooning about in the garden, and of old Joshua coming out to remonstrate with a double-barrelled shot-gun, was irresistibly comic. The plan was approved of unanimously.

'Here's pencil and here's paper,' said the humorist. 'Who's goin' to write the letter ?'

'Write it yourself, Jim,' said Shamus.

'Well, what shall I say?'

'Say what you think right.'

'I don't know how she'd put it,' said Jim, scratching his head in great perplexity. 'However, Bones will never know the differ. How will this do? "Dear old man. Come to the garden at twelve to-night, else I'll never speak to you again," eh?'

'No, that's not the style,' said the young miner. 'Mind, she's a lass of eddication. She'd put it kinder flowery and soft.'

'Well, write it yourself,' said Jim sulkily, handing him over the pencil.

'This is the sort of thing,' said the miner, moistening the point of it in his mouth. ' "When the moon is in the sky—" '

'There it is. That's bully,' from the company.

' "And the stars a-shinin' bright, meet, O meet me, Adolphus, by the garden- gate at twelve." '

' His name ain't Adolphus,' objected a critic. ' That's how the poetry comes in,' said the miner. ' It's kinder fanciful, d'ye see. Sounds a darned sight better than Abe. Trust him for guessing who she means. I'll sign it Carrie. There!'

This epistle was gravely passed round the room from hand to hand, and reverentially gazed upon as being a remarkable production of the human brain. It was then folded up and committed to the care of a small boy, who was solemnly charged under dire threats to deliver it at the shanty, and to make off before any awkward questions were asked, him. It was only after he had disappeared in the darkness that some slight compunction visited one or two of the company.

'Ain't it playing it rather low on the girl?' said Shamus.

'And rough on old Bones?' suggested another. However, these objections were overruled by the majority, and disappeared entirely upon the appearance of a second jorum of whisky. The matter had almost been forgotten by the time that Abe had received his note, and was spelling it out with a palpitating heart under the light of his solitary candle.

THAT night has long been remembered in Harvey's Sluice. A fitful breeze was sweeping down from the distant mountains, moaning and sighing among

the deserted claims. Dark clouds were hurrying across the moon, one moment throwing a shadow over the landscape, and the next allowing the silvery radiance to shine down, cold and clear, upon the little valley, and bathe in a weird mysterious light the great stretch of bushland on either side of it. A great loneliness seemed to rest on the face of Nature. Men remarked afterwards on the strange eerie atmosphere which hung over the little town.

It was in the darkness that Abe Durton sallied out from his little shanty. His partner, Boss Morgan, was still absent in the bush, so that beyond the ever-watchful Blinky there was no living being to observe his movements. A feeling of mild surprise filled his simple soul that his angel's delicate fingers could have formed those great straggling hieroglyphics; however, there was the name at the foot, and that was enough for him. She wanted him, no matter for what, and with a heart as pure and as heroic as any knight-errant, this rough miner went forth at the summons of his love. He groped his way up the steep winding track which led to Azalea Villa. There was a little clump of small trees and shrubs about fifty yards from the entrance of the garden. Abe stopped for a moment when he had reached them in order to collect himself. It was hardly twelve yet, so that he had a few minutes to spare. He stood under their dark canopy peering at the white house vaguely outlined in front of him. A plain enough little dwelling-place to any prosaic mortal, but girt with reverence and awe in the eyes of the lover.

The, miner paused under the shade of the trees, and then moved on to the garden-gate. There was no one there. He was evidently rather early. The moon was shining brightly now, and the country round was as clear as day. Abe looked past the little villa at the road which ran like a white winding streak over the brow of the hill. A watcher behind could have seen his square athletic figure standing out sharp and clear. Then he gave a start as if he had been shot, and staggered up against the little gate beside him. He had seen something which caused even his sunburned face to become a shade paler as he thought of the girl so near him.

Just at the bend of the road, not two hundred yards away, he saw a dark moving mass coming round the curve, and lost in the shadow of the hill. It was but for a moment; yet in that moment the quick perception of the practised woodman had realised the whole situation. It was a band of horsemen bound for the villa; and what horsemen would ride so by night save the terror of the woodlands— the dreaded rangers of the bush? It is true that on ordinary occasions Abe was as sluggish in his intellect as he was heavy in his movements. In the hour of danger, however, he was as remarkable for cool deliberation as for prompt and decisive action. As he advanced up the garden he rapidly reckoned up the chances against him. There were half a dozen of

the assailants at the most moderate computation, all desperate and fearless men. The question was whether he could keep them at bay for a short time and prevent their forcing a passage into the house.

We have already mentioned that sentinels had been placed in the main street of the town. Abe reckoned that help would be at hand within ten minutes of the bring of the first shot. Were he inside the house he could confidently reckon on holding his own for a longer period than that. Before he could rouse the sleepers and gain admission, however, the rangers would be upon him. He must content himself with doing his utmost. At any rate he would show Carrie that if he could not talk to her he could at least die for her. The thought gave him quite a glow of pleasure, as he crept under the shadow of the house. He cocked his revolver. Experience had taught him the advantage of the first shot.

The road along which the rangers were coming ended at a wooden gate opening into the upper part of the assayer's little garden. This gate had a high acacia hedge on either side of it, and opened into a short walk also lined by impassable thorny walls, Abe knew the place well. One resolute man might, he thought, hold the passage for a few minutes until the assailants broke through elsewhere and took him in the rear. At any rate, it was his best chance. He passed the front door, but forbore to give any alarm. Sinclair was an elderly man, and would be of little assistance in such a desperate struggle as was before him, and the appearance of lights in the house would warn the rangers of the resistance awaiting them. O for his partner the Boss, for Chicago Bill, for any one of twenty gallant men who would have come at his call and stood by him in such a quarrel! He turned into the narrow pathway. There was the well-remembered wooden gate; and there, perched upon the gate, languidly swinging his legs backwards and forwards, and peering down the road in front of him, was Mr. John Morgan, the very man for whom Abe had been longing from the bottom of his heart.

There was short time for explanations. A few hurried words announced that the Boss, returning from his little tour, had come across the rangers riding on their mission of darkness, and overhearing their destination, had managed by hard running and knowledge of the country to arrive before them.

'No time to alarm any one,' he explained, still panting from his exertions; 'must stop them ourselves— not come for swag— come for your girl. Only over our bodies, Bones,' and with these few broken words the strangely assorted friends shook hands and looked lovingly into each other's eyes, while the tramp of the horses came down to them on the fragrant breeze of the woods.

There were six rangers in all. One who appeared to be leader rode in front, while the others followed in a body. They flung themselves off their horses

when they were opposite the house, and after a few muttered words from their captain, tethered the animals to a small tree, and walked confidently towards the gate.

Boss Morgan and Abe were crouching down under the shadow o f the hedge, at the extreme end of the narrow passage. They were invisible to the rangers, who evidently reckoned on meeting little resistance in this isolated house. As the first man came forwards and half turned to give some order to his comrades both the friends recognised the stem profile and heavy moustache of Black Ferguson, the rejected suitor of Miss Carrie Sinclair. Honest Abe made a mental vow that he at least should never reach the door alive.

The ruffian stepped up to the gate and put his hand upon the latch. He started as a stentorian 'Stand back!' came thundering out from among the bushes. In war, as in love, the miner was a man of few words.

'There's no road this way,' explained another voice with an infinite sadness and gentleness about it which was characteristic of its owner when the devil was rampant in his soul. The ranger recognised it. He remembered the soft languid address which he had listened to in the billiard-room of the Buckhurst Arms, and which had wound up by the mild orator putting his back against the door, drawing a derringer, and asking to see the sharper who would dare to force a passage.

'It's that infernal fool Durton,' he said, 'and his white- faced friend.'

Both were well-known names in the country round. But the rangers were reckless and desperate men. They drew up to the gate in a body.

'Clear out of that!' said their leader in a grim whisper; 'you can't save the girl. Go off with whole skins while you have the chance.'

The partners laughed.

'Then curse you, come on!'

The gate was flung open and the party fired a struggling volley, and made a fierce rush towards the gravelled walk. The revolvers cracked merrily in the silence of the night from the bushes at the other end. It was hard to aim with precision in the darkness. The second man sprang convulsively into the air, and fell upon his face with his arms extended, writhing horribly in the moonlight. The third was grazed in the leg and stopped. The others stopped out of sympathy. After all, the girl was not for them, and their heart was hardly in the work. Their captain rushed madly on, like a valiant blackguard as he was, but was met by a crashing blow from the butt of Abe Durton's pistol, delivered with a fierce energy which sent him reeling tack among his comrades with the blood streaming from his shattered jaw, and his capacity for cursing cut short at the very moment when he needed to draw upon it most.

'Don't go yet,' said the voice in the darkness. However, they had no intention of going yet. A few minutes must elapse, they knew, before Harvey's Sluice could be upon them. There was still time to force the door if they could succeed in mastering the defenders.

What Abe had feared came to pass. Black Ferguson knew the ground as well as he did. He ran rapidly along the hedge, and the five crashed through it where there was some appearance of a gap. The two friends glanced at each other. Their flank was turned. They stood up like men who knew their fate and did not fear to meet it. There was a wild medley of dark figures in the moonlight, and a ringing cheer from well-known voices. The humorists of Harvey's Sluice had found something even more practical than the joke which they had come to witness. The partners saw the faces of friends beside them— Shamus, Struggles, M'Coy. There was a desperate rally, a sweeping fiery rush, a cloud of smoke, with pistol-shots and fierce oaths ringing out of it, and when it lifted, a single dark shadow flying for dear life to the shelter of the broken hedge was the only ranger upon his feet within the little garden. But there was no sound of triumph among the victors; a strange hush had come over them, and a murmur as of grief— for there, lying across the threshold which he had fought so gallantly to defend, lay poor Abe, the loyal and simple hearted, breathing heavily with a bullet through his lungs.

He was carried inside with all the rough tenderness of the mines. There were men there, I think, who would have borne his hurt to have had the love of that white girlish figure, which bent over the blood-stained bed and whispered so softly and so tenderly in his ear. Her voice seemed to rouse him. He opened his dreamy blue eyes and looked about him. They rested on her face. 'Played out,' he murmured; 'pardon, Carrie, morib—' and with a faint smile he sank back upon the pillow.

However, Abe failed for once to be as good as his word. His hardy constitution asserted itself, and he shook off what might in a weaker man have proved a deadly wound. Whether it was the balmy air of the woodlands which came sweeping over a thousand miles of forest into the sick man's room, or whether it was the little nurse who tended him so gently, certain it is that within two months we heard that he had realised his shares in the Conemara, and gone from Harvey's Sluice and the little shanty upon the hill for ever.

I had the advantage a short time afterwards of seeing an extract from the letter of a young lady named Amelia, to whom we have made a casual allusion in the course of our narrative. We have already broken the privacy of one feminine epistle, so we shall have fewer scruples in glancing at another.

'I was bridesmaid,' she remarks, 'and Carrie looked charming' (underlined) 'in the veil and orange blossoms. Such a man, he is, twice as big as your Jack,

and he was so funny, and blushed, and dropped the prayer-book. And when they asked the question you could have heard him roar "I do!" at the other end of George-street. His best man was a darling' (twice underlined). 'So quiet and handsome and nice. Too gentle to take care of himself among those rough men, I am sure.'

I think it quite possible that in the fullness of time Miss Amelia managed to take upon herself the care of our old friend Mr. Jack Morgan, commonly known as the Boss.

A tree is still pointed out at the bend as Ferguson's gum-tree. There is no need to enter into unsavoury details. Justice is short and sharp in primitive colonies, and the dwellers in Harvey's Sluice were a serious and practical race.

It is still the custom for a select party to meet on a Saturday evening in the snuggery of the Colonial Bar. On such occasions, if there be a stranger or guest to be entertained, the same solemn ceremony is always observed. Glasses are charged in silence; there is a tapping of the same upon the table, and then, with a deprecating cough, Jim Struggles comes forward and tells the tale of the April joke, and of what came of it. There is generally conceded to be something very artistic in the way in which he breaks off suddenly at the close of his narrative by waving his bumper in the air with 'An' here's to Mr. and Mrs. Bones. God bless 'em!' a sentiment in which the stranger, if he be a prudent man, will most cordially acquiesce.

18: The Legend of Westry Court

Violet A. Simpson

fl 1898-1927

Temple Bar, Dec 1902

(Although I do not claim to account for the following incidents by supernatural agency, yet so odd a series of coincidences seems to me not unworthy of record.
— Dahlia Caryll.)

"THERE, that's the picture," said Roger to me. "And now I'll explain it all to you, Cousin Dahlia." He pushed away the intervening chairs, vaulted over a table and stood right up against the big full-length portrait of two people which hung just opposite to where I was sitting. We were in the hall having tea— General and Mrs. Caryll, Roger and myself. It was January, and I had only just arrived on my visit to the Priory and my cousins.

"Father, you must please supply the facts when my imagination gives out, and mother the sentiment."

"You'll certainly puzzle the child if you talk as fast and as much nonsense as you generally do," put in Mrs. Caryll.

I had not been in the house five minutes before she told me to call her Cousin Alice, but this I really hardly liked to do, for it was the first time I had ever met her. Our branch of the family had quarrelled and broken off all connection with theirs centuries ago, and somehow, even up to now, we had never had much to do with our cousins. On our side it had come about very naturally, for my father being in the Diplomatic Service, all my childhood had been spent abroad, and we had only just come back to settle down in England. But it so happened that mother and I met Cousin Roger staying in the same country house and made friends at once, and we had hardly got home again before General Caryll's letter came asking us to go and see them at the Priory.

"Of course the notion of feuds between us in these days is ridiculous, but certainly circumstances have been against our meeting.... Now, however, that chance has brought this generation together, will not you and your wife cement good fellowship by a visit to the old family place?"

"Ah, they've got the place, but we the money, I fancy," commented my father.

"Perhaps because we've no family place to spend it on," said mother. But I could see the invitation had pleased them both very much, and we had settled to accept it when father got one of his bad sciatica attacks. Mother would not

leave him, but they seemed so vexed lest I should lose my pleasure, that at last I was actually sent off by myself; it was really the very first time I had ever been away alone!

"Tell me, oh! do tell me," I said. "What was it all about ? "

"You really don't know! " Roger wheeled round in his quick, impulsive fashion, and then smiled as he glanced from me to the picture again.

"Yet it's even more your history than ours. Mother, Cousin Dahlia is like her, isn't she? I told you so, and you can see the likeness now, can't you?"

"Likeness!" I repeated vaguely. "But to whom?"

"Come and look yourself," said my cousin, and he moved a chair so as to face the portrait.

"That girl was an ancestress of yours— of your branch— and her name was Dahlia, too. I thought directly I met you and Mrs. Caryll how like it you were, and do you remember my telling you how you reminded me of one of the portraits here ? This is the one."

I got up and took the chair he had put for me, and which was in a position to let me look right into the very eyes of the two figures. So life-like were they that I could almost have fancied they were stepping down out of their frame to meet me. The girl, my namesake, was standing a little in the background, as if timidly shrinking from observation. Her face was so much in shadow I seemed only to see the great pathetic dark eyes, full of some haunting under-current of sorrow.

"Was she very unhappy, Roger?" I asked, looking round.

"Not when this was painted. Afterwards she was, as I'll tell you."

My eyes sought hers again. It is strange how often people doomed to tragedy bear its impress from the first— her expression could never have been carelessly gay. And against the dark background she stood like some pale shadow from another world, in her white satin frock, whose folds shimmered like moving water, while the diamonds wound in ropes about her neck and waist glittered like strings of little stars in a summer twilight sky. It seemed to me almost as if they might have been tears fallen from those mournful, frightened eyes. The man was of quite another type of character, evidently— eager and alert he held her hand, as if to urge her forward, while he seemed to be pressing on towards us out of the canvas, his bright face and blue eyes, with a glint in them like a steel blade, turned full to the light. It was impossible for me not to see that likeness! I turned to my cousin impulsively.

"Oh, how like you, Cousin Roger!"

"He may well be. You know that he was a Roger, too! Roger Caryll, and that's the Marchesa! Look at her well!"

"And the story?"

"Oh! it goes back to the Civil Wars. Your people fought for Cromwell, you know, and mine— we were the senior branch— for the King. So Noll kicked us out and gave your family the property. We ought to have come in again with the Restoration, but Charles, as everyone soon found out, was much too lazy to bother himself about doing for the sons as the fathers had done for him, and one of his foreign pets, an Italian Marchese, wanted to marry this girl." He nodded at the picture. "She was the heiress, and they arranged that your branch might stay in possession here provided she consented to the match. *She* didn't want to; she was engaged to this cousin Roger. Here they are. However, that was soon disposed of, poor girl! She doesn't look very resolute, does she? She was forced to marry the Marchese. And *then*—"

Roger stopped to drink off a cup of tea.

"I'm afraid, then, the tragedy followed of course. They settled down at the Court— Westry Court, out yonder, you know, this Priory was only the Dower-house then. Come to the window, Cousin Dahlia, you can see the old place from there. Oh no, it's too dark, but we'll take you to-morrow and go over it. No one lives there now, we only use it for meetings and concerts and so on. We can't let it—"

"Too much out of the way," put in General Caryll rather hastily. "What was I saying? Oh, well, poor Roger was almost crazy with grief— no wonder indeed after losing his bride and estates and everything else, and unluckily could not keep quiet. They tried to hustle him out of the country soldiering in Tangiers, but he either couldn't or wouldn't keep away; they say he haunted the place day and night just to get passing glimpses of her, and at last finding it was no use forbidding him the place, the 'authorities' simply got him marching orders, and he had to go. However, the story goes that these two were determined to say good-bye whatever happened, and he slipped in one night under cover of a masquerade. The Marchese was immensely proud of his wife, and filled the place with his Court-set, so that there were festivities always going on. Of course everyone ought to have been much too busy amusing themselves to interfere with these poor things' farewells. But the Marchese heard of it somehow. He had always been cruelly jealous— perhaps naturally— and this seems to have simply maddened him. They say he stopped her then and there as she was slipping out through the hall to the rendezvous, and without waiting for a word of explanation, ran her through. He must have been really mad, poor fellow, and didn't realise what he was doing. Then he started to meet Roger outside, sprang at him out of a window, fell on his own sword and died of his wounds. Roger got off, took service under William of Orange, and only came back to England when he did. He got this property back then. There

was a younger brother of the Marchese's, the son of a second marriage, who had succeeded.

"But Roger never would live at the Court, and we've been here ever since. That's the history, isn't it, father? We'll walk down and look over the place to-morrow, Dahlia, and I'll show you just how it all happened."

I THINK I almost counted the hours to our expedition, for there's a strange fascination about real bygone family romance which seems to take hold of one's very being. For though our Yorkshire home is filled with rare and beautiful things, here I was right in the midst of all the familiar traditions and records and relics of the house. The portraits looking down upon me from every wall were those of my ancestry; the armour in the galleries had been worn by my own forebears, indeed every time I passed the mailed figures standing like silent sentinels on guard it seemed to me they must be tenanted by living people who were only waiting an opportunity to speak to me; the brave deeds they had done, the honour and glory, yes, they were my heritage too, just as their name was! It was not till I came to Caryll that it was borne irresistibly in upon me how closely after all the deeds of past generations belong to the present, to be held in trust for those of the future. Home was home to me in another sense; here it meant a never-ending stream of life filtering through everything. And when I thought of Westry Court, the original home of the undivided family, these dinging influences of race and blood seized with double power upon my imagination.

It was a still damp morning when we set out; there were several other guests by that time at the Priory, and we called on the way for our near neighbour little Mrs. Lynchwood and her house-party. I could see the high belt of elm trees swaying their top branches gently in the upper current of air long before we were near enough to get sight of the building. It was ringed dose round with them, standing on the crest of the hill while all about the ground sloped gently down and away.

"How desolate, and oh! how unpretentious it is after all!" exclaimed someone.

To me, empty and isolated as it was, it was peopled already, and the very absence of grand architectural design strengthened the impression. The simplicity conjured up at once the daily routine of domestic life going on as it might be before our very eyes.

The front of the house rose straight and level, built of very small red bricks and covered with luxuriant green ivy. Rows upon rows of even-sized windows were set flat and plain in the walls without ornamentation or even the smallest sill. The door, exactly in the middle, nail-studded within a foot of the edge all

round, was of oak, carved magnificently in its four large panels, but absolutely without porch or lintel; it was flush with ground and wall, and the grass grew close up, unbroken except where brick-laid paths shaped it into fantastic designs. We could see tall clusters of chimney stacks over the upstanding wall parapet but barely a foot of roof from where we stood, though Roger told me there were secret chambers hidden away in it, and passages running round and in and about like a veritable rabbit-warren. Then we went in. Everyone was chatting and laughing, and the echoes rang out.

"It's all hollow panelling; there are secret rooms everywhere," said Roger, and he tapped with his stick till the loud reverberations answered. "They are six feet through, these walls."

Opposite to us, as we stood in the entrance-hall, which was merely a long very wide passage, doors led away to the kitchens and back regions. One, just within, to the left, opened into suites of sitting rooms, while a little lower still a shallow flight of steps, some half-dozen perhaps, with double balustrades finely turned, went to the upper floors. As we stood at the foot, the light streamed down from a window low set on the first landing exactly facing us.

"That's where the old Marchese hopped out," observed Roger at my elbow jestingly. "And you're standing now exactly where the Marchesa was murdered. You can see marks which they say are of blood, if you look closely. But now come to the banqueting-hall."

I stooped to feel over the worn stone flags, and the dark stains— certainly there were marks— seemed to glow redly under my fingers. I turned and followed.

The banqueting-hall was to the right of the main entrance, and glass folding-doors opened into it, while exactly opposite, through similar ones on the other side, appeared another short flight of equally shallow steps.

"There's only one room just at the top to the left until you get right up to the attics," said my cousin, following the direction of my eyes as I paused, and divining my thoughts with ready instinct. "It's called the White Room and supposed to be haunted. We use it for a green-room when we have concerts or theatricals— suppose, oh, good idea! We will have a show for you!"

"Oh, make it a dance!" cried out Mrs. Lynchwood. She was a dark-eyed little creature, quite young and very bright. "Oh, Mr. Caryll, do. Do let's have one. Just the place."

"Oh, but fancy hideous stiff collars and swallow-tails here! Ruffles and swords and hoops would be more the thing."

"A costume dance! A masked dance, that is what it must be. Now, Mr. Caryll. Do— do say yes!"

They were all talking at once. Certainly, as we stood there, it did seem incongruous: streams of gay cavaliers would undoubtedly have been more in keeping with the place.

High up to the roof went the panelling till it was lost in the shadows, but from east and west the quadruple rows of windows threw conflicting streams of light, and the stone flags, cold and hard beneath our feet, were woven into fretted trelliswork.

"A masquerade with all the old dominoes and masks we got from the carnival at Madrid last year. A drugget laid down, and a pair of fiddlers over in that corner. Myself as chaperon," cried Mrs. Lynchwood. She was running to and fro on a tour of inspection. "And all come over to Lynchwood for supper. We're so close, and no need then for disturbing Mrs. Caryll. Use your influence, Miss Caryll. Mr. Roger, your cousin, ought to see it lighted up."

"Would you like it, Dahlia?" Roger flashed round in his impetuous fashion. "Yes? We'll have it."

We passed out through a side door into the sloping terraced gardens. The wind was rising, and the elms began to sway noisily. Roger took me back through the hall.

"Is the place haunted?" I asked, glancing round rather unhappily, I'm afraid. He turned right round to search my face with his keen bright blue eyes.

"You are not frightened, dear? Of course it's all fiddle-de-dee about ghosts here. We'll have an impromptu dance to-night, and dress up in some of the old finery mother's got put away, and it'll look quite different. It's beastly now! How pale yon look, you're frozen! Come, we'll be off!"

He went on talking all the way, with my arm tucked under his. "We'll get the Rectory people, and the Dashwoods. Then with your party, Mrs. Lynchwood, we shall be as many as we need—"

"And what shall you go as, Dahlia?"

We were all standing in the Priory hall round Cousin Alice then, ransacking in anticipation the old chests full of brocades and laces which she had instantly promised to open and place at our disposal.

"Go as?" I repeated. I looked vaguely round, and involuntarily glanced at the picture. Roger's eyes followed mine.

"Of course, I know," he said promptly. "The Marchesa. There's a lot of genuine old things of that period upstairs, and very likely some of hers. You'd look exactly like her, I do believe, in a white satin like that! Picture complete!"

He spoke lightly and only in jest, and I think we scarcely realised how complete the illusion would be, till on our coming down to show ourselves before starting Roger stepped forward and placed himself at my side.

"What do you say to the picture now, Cousin Dahlia?" he asked. He was in the highest possible spirits, and immensely pleased with the success of his enterprise. I do not think it occurred to him for an instant, the underlying tragedy in the chance likeness that I could not help realising the moment I saw him in his masquerading clothes. For he stood there the exact image of the painted Roger, mulberry-coloured suit, sword, short cloak, and ruffles. And his features and expression, blue eyes, dark hair, the same alert daring.

"I knew we'd a choice of braveries stowed away. Here's a posy of namesakes for you, cousin mine!"

Lady Caryll had dressed me in a white gown she had found packed away, and I had simply acquiesced in her choice without giving it a thought. Now as we stood together opposite the picture, the sadness in the girl's eyes seemed to be reproaching us for thus turning her terrible life-history into a play. But I did not like to say anything, and fastened the flowers silently to my domino, only wishing somehow it was otherwise.

So we started. There were fifteen of us from the Priory, ten from the Rectory, in all some five-and-twenty couples. Everyone was in some sort of costume, though eighteenth-century brocades paired off with Elizabethan ruffs: cavalier plumes waved above Blucher boots, there were full-bottomed wigs beneath steeple-crowned Puritan hats, and powdered perukes with doublet and small hose. However it made a vary gay sight

"But you're the queen of the company," whispered Roger my ear as he tucked the white satin folds of my frock carefully round me in the carriage as we drove off, "The 'Marchesa,' you know! Queen and all to me—"

The wind had risen to a gale. The great elm trees rocked and clashed as their branches were swept together; the roar echoed and re-echoed through them like the long, low growling of distant artillery gun-practice heard across hills, and broken into every now and again by sudden loud outbursts of furious thunder. Every nook and cranny had a voice to answer, while from the unshuttered windows the blaze of light inside sent long unsteady shafts across the interlaced boughs and quivering trunks. Inside all was warmth and gaiety. Half a dozen fiddlers had been chartered, the floor of the banqueting-hall laid with felt and drugget, and the glass door flung back on either side. Little Mrs. Lynchwood in powder and patches ran like a lapwing before us across the hall, and up the shallow steps into the White Room. It was in fact but a very few feet above the ground floor.

"Cloaks off in the old place, girls," she cried. "I saw to it all myself. We'll smother the ghosts."

And she flung off her wraps, pirouetting round on her high, red heels as she fixed her mask, with a pause every now and again to tap the panelling with her

mittened fingers. "They say, you know, that the real door to this room opens out of one of these panels with a spring. But the secret's lost, and so this door had to be cut! How I wish I could find it!" And picking up her skirts very daintily away she tripped, the fiddlers struck up, and in a few moments the hall was one moving kaleidoscope of colour.

I danced with Roger— and only Roger, it seemed to me afterwards, all the time. Nobody even offered to part us, they seemed by tacit consent to leave us to each other. We wanted no one else. There seemed to be no one else. Or was it the wildness of the storm outside that had got hold of me— those uncanny voices calling till we were deafened to oblivion— the fiddlers were only playing the refrain that sang in our own hearts; the dancers might laugh and talk as they pleased— we had got into a world of our own. There was magic in the air. Roger seemed to have caught its infection too. He looked down at me with bright irradiating triumph in his eyes, a very recklessness of happiness, as he talked in his low vibrating tones close to my ear, and we waltzed slowly round and round together.

And now— even now, looking back calmly and dispassionately I cannot truthfully say exactly when it was I began to dream— I say dream, because that is what they all called it; or when, at what moment, reality melted into the insubstantial workings of fancy. Or, shall I put it plainly, at what precise point it was that I passed from the company of the living to that of creatures of hallucination! To me it was all equally real, but whatever they were, I think the influences were beginning to draw round me from the first. All I wish is to put down truthfully what I remember appeared to take place. What it was, or how it came about I cannot pretend to decide.

It was close on midnight; the storm had been gathering in strength, and was raging with terrific fury. Then there came a sudden lull, and Mr. Lynchwood recommended our taking instant advantage of it to get home. Someone was sent for the carriages, and we all went up to put on our wraps; Roger was already dismissing the fiddlers and directing the candles and lamps to be put out as we crossed the banqueting-hall again. One by one the carriages were filled and drove off. It was hard work keeping the door open on account of the wind, which swept in long, raking blasts; the candles in the entrance hall had all to be put out, and we stood and shivered in comparative darkness while Roger went to and fro with a lantern.

"Stay for me, Dahlia," he whispered, coming up to me and catching my hand for a moment. "I can't get off till the last, as I must see the lights all safely out, and the doors locked."

So I stood aside in a corner and let the others go first. Then all at once I recollected having left my domino cloak with Roger's posy pinned on it up in

the White Boom: I could not bear the idea of servants touching it, or having occasion to comment. There would be plenty of time. I glanced at Mrs. Lynchwood chattering with two or three girls and looking as though she did not expect to get off for hours to come. I would just run up and get it myself. I slipped again into the deserted banquet-hall, sped up the steps and opened the door of the White Room.

There was a light still burning, and it did not take me a moment to snatch up my domino. Then Roger's voice, calling me, warned me to hurry. I had the door-handle in my fingers, when a sudden draught of wind through the far window tore it from my grasp and banged the door to. The light was very dim; I fumbled about for the handle fruitlessly, I could not find it, could not see it; grope as I might, there met me nothing but the smooth panelled surface. Roger's voice, raised to a shout as he called again for me, came up from the hall below; I threw myself with all my might upon the door; it would not yield. I screamed, called— beat the wood frantically with my fists— screamed again!

Then I heard, as it were in the distance, the clang of the heavy entrance door as it shut to, the crack of a whip, and the sound of carriage-wheels driving away. No one had seen me leave, evidently they thought I had gone on. They had left me behind!

I flew to the window and dashed it open; the wind only caught my voice to toss it mockingly from tree to tree. I stood for some moments breathless, panting, frightened, almost to unconsciousness. Then all at once the gale suddenly dropped, dropped right down into a still, lifeless silence, and upon that silence there fell upon my ears the bright rippling of fiddles from the hall below, a quick, lively gavotte, to which my foot involuntarily began to beat time. Certainly, too, I could hear the scraping of the dancers' feet!

"Oh, of course," I said aloud, scrambling down from the window, and with a sigh of relief. " How stupid of me! That wasn't the last carriage at all, and they're just having a little farewell dance till it can come back for them. Now the wind's dropped, too, they'll be able to hear me. I'll call again."

But one casual glance out of the open window I did give as I turned away, and I remember it struck me that while the wind had certainly dropped, the elms were still swaying and rocking just as wildly as before. It never occurred to me then to think it weird, any more than to be frightened now I knew I had not been left behind. I went to the door again, and called very loud:

"Roger!"

"Hush! Not so loud, dear. You'll bring them all here. Here I am. I couldn't come before."

And there he was, eager, flushed and breathless, close behind me.

"How did you come in?" I exclaimed. "Did you hear me calling you?"

"Of course I did. Didn't you expect me, *ma belle*?"

"But how did you get in?"

"Up by the ivy; you had the window open all ready. The usual means of entrance when we mayn't have stairs. Didn't you see me? The horses are below. What's wrong with the door?"

"I can't open it."

"You've forgotten the spring. Silly little child. See here! " He ran his finger along a panel. It opened readily. "Mrs. Lynchwood said it was a panel. She said—"

"Hark!" he said, and in the dim light I saw his face suddenly change, and the reckless fire give place to hard-set resoluteness of line.

"They're calling for you. You must go. Put on the domino, quick!"

"But you're coming?"

"No. No. Not this way. Not with you— though we'll meet again! I'll come down presently."

Round the open door I could catch a glimpse of the hall, fully lit up once more, blazing, indeed, upon the bright variegated figures winding in and out. There came up a cry— "The Marchesa! Where is the Marchesa?"

"Go! You must go— or they'll be up here— I shall expect you later— presently. Kiss me once, Dahlia! You'll come? You trust me ?"

"The Marchesa! the Marchesa!" they cried again and again, from below.

"I don't understand, quite!— oh, how cold your hands are, Roger, and all wet!"

" 'Tis the rain and wind. Are my lips cold, too?" He laughed strangely over my hands as he held them, then drew the domino hood over my head and pushed me through the door. I stood for a moment perplexed and wondering, then the extraordinary brilliancy of the hall below riveted my attention.

There were branching candelabra all down the walls, between portraits and shining designs in steel spears and swords, which sent back a flashing network of light. Antlers, flags and hanging tapestry covered the panelling too, right up to the roof. And such a lot of people were moving about— surely far more splendidly dressed than any who had come with us, and their clothes all seemed to be of the same pattern as Roger's and mine. Only my frock was richer than any other there, the shimmer of the satin folds as I moved slowly down the steps reminded me of nothing so much as rivulets of bright moonlit water, though the women's dresses were studded with jewels flashing in ruddy waves of fire, and the richly-chased sword-hilts of the men sparkled with them too, and there was a profusion of glittering gold lace and twinkling diamond shoe-buckles.

But there were two things that puzzled me. The fiddlers were put up all by themselves in a little overhanging gallery which I had never noticed before; and bright as the hall was, I could not distinguish anyone's features amongst the dancers. Each face seemed a black shadow.

"How stupid of me! Of course, they've put on their masks again!" I thought, and just then they all turned at sight of me, and began waving their arms in greeting.

"Here she is! Here's the Marchesa!"

As I paused, a little puzzled— what were they doing it for?— a tall big man detached himself from the others and came harrying towards me. I waved him back, I wanted to make haste and cross the hall to find Roger again.

"Where's Roger?" I said. "It's Roger, my cousin, I want." He only stopped in front of me, and with his sword barred my way, repeating my words and Roger's name in a sort of rising crescendo. It made me feel vexed and even frightened. Was it some game, some silly game?

"Let me pass, please! He's waiting for me. I most go." He only laughed; and each a horrible laugh. All the echoes began to answer, and the fiddlers at once stopped playing and the people began to crowd round, pressing every minute nearer and closer, but still I could not distinguish anyone's face. And the man went on laughing, holding his sides and rocking to and fro, while they all seemed to be waiting, waiting for something.

"Who are you?" I cried, and I made as if to push him to one side angrily with both hands. " Why are you playing this trick on me? Who are yon?"

"What, Marchesa! Not know me? "

I turned helplessly from one to the other.

"No, I don't. None of you. And—"

And then suddenly as I looked, there glided out of the shadows a figure. A figure of a woman, a girl just like me, dressed just like me, beneath her long domino cloak I caught the sheen of white, a figure which came slipping, slipping round through the hall as if trying to escape notice. The man barring my way all at once wrenched at my domino, and tore it from shoulder to hem; the staff ripped out in a long triangular strip. His fingers burnt like fire, he seized my arm, and glared with red staring eyes in my face, close, closer, and then with a bound suddenly flung me away, and dashed after the shadowy, shrinking replica of myself.

His naked sword was in his hand, horror was in the air; what impulse moved me I do not know, but after him I went. Behind us rose a clamour beyond all description— voices, clashing swords, and sounds of scuffling feet. At the doorway I intercepted them, she fled through as he struck at her, and his sword came down on my wrist. Before I could recover myself, he had

overtaken her at the foot of the staircase; the steel flashed and plunged deep, she fell in a heap.

"Roger, Roger!"

Was it I who cried?— or she? I was at her side. Upon the front door there came a crash of furious knocking, there was another just above me of broken glass, and scurrying footsteps.

"Dahlia!"

My cousin stood in the doorway; but his voice broke upon dim dark silence, and the flickering stream of his lantern full turned upon me alone pierced the shadows. Lights, voices, people, all had gone. I was standing at the foot of the central staircase, I saw his pale face, that was all. But illusion was strong upon me yet, I looked for the figure at my feet, the crash of glass rang still in my ears.

"Quick! Oh, Roger, she's dead!"

"Dead! What's all this. How was it you got left? What—?"

He strode impetuously in.

"She's dead—oh, look at the blood!" I seemed to be standing in a pool.

"The blood's on your own dress! You've cut yourself! " He bit back whatever was rising to his lips. I had still no sense of what he meant.

"The sword. He hit me instead of her. Oh, Roger, go. Go quick after him ! Where is she?"

I tell this as it seemed to me. What Roger thought I do not know. But he gripped me hard, and set down the lantern, and began tying up my arm with his sword scarf.

"No wonder you're imagining all sorts of things. Keep still, Dahlia. Inexcusable to have left you here."

He spoke very roughly and almost angrily, and went on tying up my arm, talking determinedly and in a quick hard way, without letting me utter a syllable.

"Oh, Roger, why are you angry? Why didn't you come before?"

"Thought you were at the Rectory— that you'd gone on by mistake with them. They said you had."

"But where are they all?" I looked fearfully round. It was all so bewildering.

"Gone home, long ago. Now we'll go. Come at once." He would not loosen his grip one second, and literally carried me away. I noticed the wind had got up again, and it almost swept us off our feet, but at the gates the carriage was waiting.

"Oh, Roger," I said, "do go back and try to find him. It was that window on the stairs. You heard the glass—"

"I 'm going back," said Roger shortly.

He put me into the carriage, and spoke to one of the men with him who got in with me, and began rearranging the rags, talking volubly all the time. It seemed long before my cousin came back.

"Did you find him?"

Roger only pulled up the window.

"How's your hand?" He took it in his. "But why didn't you come down with me?"

"I did, directly I found you were left behind."

"But before, when you climbed up by the ivy?"

Roger only put his arm strongly round me. "How the wind blows! Didn't Mrs. Lynchwood look pretty?"

"She was wrong about that panel. You found it quite easily. Oh, Roger, what's become of the Marchesa, the real Marchesa? They thought I was the real Marchesa."

The carriage stopped for a moment at the lodge gates, and their lamps threw a gleam on Roger's face. I saw it full. All at once illusion died— this was reality. He was gripping me closer and harder as my eyes scanned his.

What then of the rest? And all at once there swept over me the most awful paralysing sensation of fear, sickening, terrible, clutching fear, unlike anything I had felt before that night with all its horrors, fear such as I hardly know how to describe. Roger pressed my head down on his shoulder, and held it there with his other hand. I don't know what he was saying, but had it not been that he literally held me by force I would have jumped headlong out.

And I do not recollect anything more till I woke to find my own mother sitting beside me.

I TOLD my story when we next all met in the library.

"Poor child! You must have been dreadfully frightened left all alone! It was enough to make you imagine anything!" said my mother, caressing my wounded wrist.

"It was most wrong of Roger to be telling you all his foolish stories!" added Cousin Alice quickly. "No wonder you fancied you saw the whole thing acted before you! Now, Roger, let this be a lesson to you. You might have most seriously injured your cousin! "

"Dahlia's such an excitable child, too," added my mother. "I suspect, dear, you cut your wrist trying to force open that window."

"Very likely it was the pain made you feel faint, too, most probably indeed. And you got downstairs, not knowing quite what you were doing, fancying all these things, half-unconsciously."

But somehow their voices did not ring very true.

I looked at Roger.

"Tell me," I said. "You will tell me exactly, won't you? What happened when you missed me?"

"I thought you were in one of the other carriages. Mrs Lynchwood said she had seen you getting in, she thought. When I didn't find you at Lynchwood, I thought you must have got in the Rectory carriage by mistake— they decided to go straight back on account of the weather, you know— and drove round at once to fetch you."

"Then why did you stop at the Court?" Roger was playing with a paper-knife: he hesitated, and then met the challenge to truth which filled my eyes.

"We pass it, you know, on the way. There seemed to be lights— yes, father, it's no use glossing it over— the men, Muffins and James, saw them too. That's exactly why we did stop, thinking that some of the party must have gone back to have a little private hop to themselves. You see I'd seen to the lamps being put out myself."

"And did you hear anything, Cousin Roger?"

"Yes, I did. The music had begun again. I was inclined to be angry, I can tell you, at the idea of anyone having gone back again once I'd locked up the place and we'd all said good-bye, so I pounded hard with my sword-hilt on the door just to frighten them well before I unlocked it. Then, well, it all stopped. There was nothing and nobody but Dahlia. Her wrist was out as you saw, and was bleeding all down her dress. I got her to the carriage and went back at once."

"You thought probably there had been burglars or persons of that sort who had possibly got in before, and been in hiding till they fancied you were all gone?" put in General Caryll anxiously.

Roger glanced at him. "Possibly so," he said with great deliberation. "The place was empty, however, by the time I got back, for I went all over it. Only the White Room I couldn't open. The wind was whistling inside to such an extent however, that I guessed the window must be open, so I went round outside and climbed up the ivy easily enough. There was a candle burning, otherwise the place was as I presume the ladies had left it. I broke the door open with my sword, smashed the panel right in, and went through the hall that way. The glass doors were closed and locked as I had left them."

"But I saw no glass doors, Cousin Roger. And didn't you see the gallery?"

"I added the doors, and the gallery came down in my father's time," began General Caryll, and then as hastily cheeked himself.

Roger went on evenly. "I found the stairs window smashed; on the grass outside— I went outside all round— I found this—" He pointed to a rusty old sword, of antique make, lying on the table before him.

"One of our party probably dropped it," he added steadily. "But I show it to you, Dahlia, because I make no doubt there was someone in the house with you. Tramps very likely, in hiding, as father says, in some of those old chambers I told you of. For aught we know there may be a whole colony squatting there who know the ins and outs. Of course, that I shall make it my business to find out: there are subterranean passages to the church, I know. And I would rather yon were able to feel convinced that part of what happened was true. You probably conjured up a good deal with the fright."

"And my torn domino?" I said. "I've brought it down to show you." It had just been rolled up and flung anyhow into my wardrobe, and was stained and crumpled and torn. I shook it out. The long triangular piece of rent stuff, jagged-edged, fell away, hanging but by a few strands to the hem. Where it had been wrenched from the shoulder were marks of fingers.

"You tore it when you cut your hand, dearest," cried my mother. But I turned it over silently, and showed again on the back another distinct impress of a hand. It had the appearance of having been scorched in upon the material. None of us spoke, but General Caryll suddenly walked across to the book-shelf and pulled out a volume. It bore the title 'Records of East Kent,' and under the heading Westry Court, he found the pages he wanted.

"It is said," he quoted, reading aloud, "that on the anniversary of this sad and shocking tragedy, January 11th, the scene is re-enacted in every detail. No well authenticated testimony to the truth of this legend has yet been proffered, but it is said to hold good until the spell is broken by—" He stopped reading. My mother and Cousin Alice and Roger were all looking at each other.

"It *was* the 11th!" exclaimed Roger. "How could we have forgotten!"

"It never occurred to me!" added my Cousin Alice, agitatedly.

"Let me see the book," cried my mother, springing up.

General Caryll silently pointed with his finger to the place, and her eyes followed it as it went down the page till she too stopped. And up into his face she looked for a moment with a smile, and then across at Cousin Alice. They both glanced at Roger, still smoothing out the folds of the domino with knitted brow. And then at me! I crept up behind her, and so I read for myself:

"Will hold good till the two rival branches of the Caryll family shall once again find their claims respectively vested in a son and a daughter whose fortunes united by marriage shall restore the unity of the house."

I knew then why General Caryll had ceased to read aloud, and why they smiled, and why they suddenly seemed to have forgotten to care to explain away my story any more. And though I begged Roger to take away and destroy

both that domino and that sword, yet I do not mind visiting Westry Court now— with him. The whole place was searched and sounded for his satisfaction, but for mine— well, now the legend is fulfilled in every detail, I do not mind believing any part of it.

_____

19: The Curious Experience of Thomas Dunbar

Francis Stevens

1883-1948

The Argosy March 1904

First published in 1904, under her own name (Gertrude Mabel Barrows), and later reprinted as by Francis Stevens. It was published when she was 21.

Gertrude Mabel Barrows

I CAME back into conscious existence with a sighing in my cars like the deep breathing of a great monster; it was everywhere, pervading space, filling my mind to the exclusion of thought.

Just a sound— regular, even soothing in its nature— but it seemed to bear some weird significance to my clouded brain. That was thought trying to force its way in.

Then waves and waves of whispering that washed all thought away— till I grasped again at some confused and wandering idea.

It was the definite sensation of a cool, firm hand laid on my brow that lifted me up at last through that surging ocean of sighs. As a diver from the depths I came up— up— and emerged suddenly, it seemed, into the world.

I opened my eyes wide and looked straight up into the face of a man. A man— but everything was swimming before my eyes, and at first his face seemed no more than part of a lingering dream.

And fantastic visions of the Orient! What a face! It was wrinkled as finely as the palm of a woman's hand, and in as many directions.

It was yellow in hue, and round like a baby's. And the eyes were narrow, and black, and they slanted, shining like a squirrel's.

I thought that of them at first; but sometimes when you just happened to look at him, they seemed to have widened and to he possessed of strange depths and hues.

In height he was not more than four feet five, and, of all contrasts, this little, weazened curiosity with the countenance of a Chinese god was clad in

the very careful and appropriate afternoon attire of a very careful and appropriate American gentleman!

The long sighing was still in my ears, but no longer at war with thought. I lay in a neat white bedstead in a plainly furnished room. I lifted my hand (it took an astonishing effort to do it), rubbed my eyes, and stared at the man who sat beside me.

His expression was kind, and in spite of its ugliness there was some thing in the strange face which encouraged me to friendliness.

"What— what's the matter with me?" I asked, and I was surprised to note the question was a mere whisper.

"Nothing now, except that you are very weak."

His voice was full, strong, and of a peculiar resonant quality. He spoke perfect English, with a kind of clear cut clip to the words. "You had an accident— an automobile went over you— but you're all right now, and don't need to think about it."

" What is it— that whispering noise? Are we near the sea?"

He smiled and shook his head. His smile merely accentuated the wrinkles— it could not multiply them.

"You are very near my laboratory— that is all. Here, drink this, and then you must rest."

I obeyed him meekly, like a child, weak of mind and body. I wondered a little why I was with him instead of at a hospital or with friends, but I soon dropped off. I was really quite weak just then. Yet before I slept I did ask one more question. "Would you tell me— if you don't mind— your name?"

"Lawrence."

"Lawrence what?" I whispered. "Just—?"

"Yes," he smiled (and his face ran into a very tempest of wrinkles) "just Lawrence. No more."

Then I slept. And I did little but sleep, and wake, and eat, and sleep again, for some five days. And during this time I learned marvelously little of my host and his manner of life.

Most questions he evaded cleverly, but he told me that it was his auto which had nearly ruined my earthly tenement; Lawrence had himself taken me from the scene of the accident with out waiting for an ambulance, telling the police and bystanders that I was an acquaintance. He had carried me to his own house, because, he said, he felt somewhat responsible for my injuries and wanted to give me a better chance for my life than the doctors would al low me.

He seemed to be possessed of a great scorn for all doctors. I knew long after that he had studied the profession very thoroughly, and in many

countries, and truly held the right to the title he contemptuously denied himself.

At the time I considered only that he had cured me up in wonderfully short order, considering the extent of the injuries I had received, and that I had suffered not at all. Therefore I was grateful.

Also he told me, on I forget what occasion, that his mother was a Japanese woman of very ancient descent, his father a scholarly and rather wealthy American. And for some eccentric reason of his own, his dwarfed son had chosen to eschew his family patronym and use merely his Christian name.

During the time I lay in bed I saw no servants; Lawrence did all things necessary. And never, day or night, did the humming and sighing of the machines cease.

Lawrence spoke vaguely of great dynamos, but on this subject, as on most others, he was very reticent. Frequcntly I saw him in the dress of a mechanic, for he would come in to see me at all hours of the day, and I imagine must have inconvenienced himself considerably for my welfare.

I had no particular friends to worry about my whereabouts, and so I lay quiet and at peace with the world for those five days in inert contentment. Then an hour came— it was in the morning, and Lawrence had left me to go to his laboratory— when I became suddenly savagely impatient of the dull round. Weak though I was, I determined to dress and get out into the open air— out into the world.

Mind you, during those five days I had seen no face save that of my dwarfed host, heard no voice but his. And so my impatience overcame my good judgment and his counsels, and l declared to myself that I was well enough to join once more in the rush of life.

Slowly, and with trembling limbs that belied that assertion, I got into my clothes. Very slowly—though in foolish terror lest Lawrence should catch me putting aside his mandates—I hurried my toilet as best I could.

At last I stood, clothed and in my right mind, as I told myself, though I had already begun to regret my sudden resolve.

I opened the door and looked into the bare, narrow hall. No one in sight, up or down.

I made my way, supporting myself, truth to tell, by the wall, toward a door at the far end, which stood slightly ajar.

I had almost reached it when I heard a terrible screaming. It was harsh, rough, tense with some awful agony, and to my startled senses pre-eminently human.

I stopped, shaking from head to foot with the shock. Then I flung myself on the door, from behind which the noise seemed to issue. It was not locked, and

I plunged almost headlong into a great room, shadowy with whirring machinery under great arc lights.

Before a long table, loaded with retorts and the paraphernalia of the lab oratory, stood Lawrence. His back was toward me, but he had turned his head angrily at my sudden entrance, and his queer, narrow eyes were blazing with annoyance.

In the room were two or three other men, evidently common mechanics. and none save Lawrence had more than glanced round. The screaming had ceased.

"Well?" his voice was little better than a snarl

"That— that noise!" I gasped, already wondering if I had not made a fool of myself. "What was it?"

"Eh? Oh, that was nothing— the machinery— why are you—" He was interrupted by a crash and splash from the far end of the place, followed by an exclamation of terror and horror, and a nice collection of French and English oaths from the men.

Lawrence had been holding in his hand while he spoke to me what looked like a peculiar piece of metal. It was cylindrical in shape, and little shades of color played over its surface continually.

Now he thrust this into my hands with a muttered injunction to be careful of it, and rushed off to the scene of the catastrophe. I followed him, at my best pace, with the thing in my hand.

At the end of the room were two immense vats of enameled iron, their edges flush with the floor, half filled with some livid, seething acid mixture, through which little currents writhed and wriggled.

The farther side of the largest vat sloped up at an angle of about thirty degrees, a smooth, slimy slide of zinc about ten feet from top to bottom and extending the full length of the vat.

The surface of this slide was covered to about half an inch in thickness with some kind of yellowish paste, whose ultimate destination was the mixture in the vat.

Above towered an engine of many wheels and pistons, and this operated two great pestles or stamps, slant-faced to fit the slide; these, running from one end of the zinc to the other, worked the paste with a grinding motion, as an artist mixes his paints with a palette knife. The grinding motion was quite swift, but the lateral movement was comparatively slow. I should say that it must have taken about four minutes for the two stamps to pass from one end of the fifteen-foot vat to the other.

In the vat floated a plank. On the surface of the slide, almost in the middle, sprawled a man, his arms spread out on either side, not daring to move an inch

on the slippery paste, for the slightest motion meant a slip down ward into the hissing acid.

Worst of all, there seemed to be no means of getting across to him. The great engine occupied one side entirely to the wall— on the other the second vat barred passage. Beyond the vats the room extended some little distance, and there was a door there, open, through which one could see a fenced yard piled high with ashes and cinders.

And the great stamps, twenty cubic feet of solid metal in each, were making their inevitable way toward the man. When they reached him— well, their smooth surface would afford him no finger hold, even if their rapid movement allowed him to clutch them. They must push him down— they might stun him first, but most certainly they would push him down.

I need hardly say that I did not take in the full significance of all this at the time— it was only afterward that I fully understood the details.

Even as Lawrence ran he shouted: "Stop that engine! Quick, men!" I saw two stalwart workmen spring at the levers of the stamp machine— saw them twisting at a wheel— heard another crash, and a deep groan from all! The guiding mechanism had slipped a cog, or broken a rod, or something. In my excitement, shaking so from weakness that I could hardly stand, I had half fallen against a piece of machinery that seemed to be at a stand still. Unconsciously my fingers grasped at a sort of handle.

I heard a whirring noise, felt something like a tremendous shock, and a burning pain. I let go the handle in a hurry, just as Lawrence wheeled on me with the cry, "For God's sake, you fool "

But I could give no heed either to what I had done or to him. My eyes were still fixed on the unfortunate man on the slide.

The stamps were not more than five feet from his body now, and their low rattle and swish sounded in my ears loud as the tread of an army.

"A rope! " cried Lawrence in despair. And then, in my horror, and in the sheer impossibility of standing by quiescent and seeing a fellow-being done to death in this manner, I did a mad thing. Wild with resentment, as if it were a living thing I could have fought, I flung myself on the great, swiftly revolving fly-wheel of the engine, seized its rim in my fingers, and braced back with all the force in my arms and shoulders.

By all precedent and reason my hands should have been crushed to a jelly in the maze of machinery, but to my intense astonishment the wheel stopped under my grasp with no very great effort on my part.

For a moment I held it so (it seemed to me to pull with no more force than is in the arms of a child), and then there was a loud report somewhere within the intestines of the monster, I saw a guiding rod as thick as my wrist double

up and twist like a wire cable, things generally went to smash inside the engine, and the stamps stopped— not three inches from the man's head!

And even as they ceased to grind, men came running in at the door on the farther side of the vats— they had had to go clean round the work-shop to reach it— and were at the top of the slide with a rope which they let down.

In a moment the fellow was drawn to safety out of the reach of as horrible a death as a man can die— death in a bath consisting largely of sulphuric acid!

I stood as one in a stupor, still grasping the eccentric, dazed by the suddenness of it all— hardly able to believe that the danger was over.

A touch on my shoulder roused me, and I turned to look down into the narrow eyes of Lawrence. He was gazing at me with something very like awe in his expression.

"Well," I said, smiling shakily, "I'm afraid I've spoiled your engine."

"Spoiled the engine!" he said slowly, but emphatically. "What kind of a man are you, Mr. Dunbar? Do you know that that is a three hundred horse-power Danbury stamp? That the force required to stop that wheel in the way you did would run a locomotive— pick up the whole mass of that engine itself as easily as I would a pound weight?"

"It stopped very easily," I muttered. For some ridiculous reason I felt a little ashamed— as if such an exhibition of strength were really a trifle indecent. And I couldn't understand.

Of course, I thought, he exaggerated the power used, but though I am naturally quite strong, still I could, before my accident, boast of nothing abnormal— and was I not just up from a sick bed, only a moment ago barely able to stand or walk without support? I found that I was nervously clenching and unclenching my hands, and be came suddenly conscious that they felt as if they had been burned— the minute I began to think about it the pain became really excruciating.

I glanced at them. They were in a terrible condition— especially my right. They looked as if they had been clasped about a piece of red-hot iron.

"What is it? " asked Lawrence quickly. He bent over my hands, peering at them with his little black eyes. Then he looked up quickly, and I saw the dawning of a curious expression in his wrinkled face— a strange excitement, a pale flash of triumph, I could have sworn.

Then, "Where is it?" he cried imperatively, his voice sharp and strenuous. "What have you done with it?"

He dropped my hands and fell quickly to his knees on the floor, his head bent, and began searching— feeling about in the shadows of the engines.

"Here— you there!" he cried to one of the men. "A light here! God! If it should be lost now— after all these years— all these years!"

"What?" said I stupidly.

"The new element," he cried impatiently. "Stellarite, I call it. Oh"— glancing up quickly— "of course you don't know. That little piece of metal I gave you to hold— the iridescent cylinder—don't you remember?" He spoke irritably, as if it was al most impossible for him to restrain himself to civil language.

"Oh, yes— that." I looked around vaguely. "Why, yes, I had it in my hand— of course. I must have dropped it when I grabbed the fly-wheel. It's on the floor somewhere probably; but, if you don't mind, could I have something for my hands? They hurt pretty badly."

Indeed, the air was full of black, swimming dots before my eyes, and iridescent cylinders had very little interest for me just then. He almost snapped at me.

"Wait! If it's lost— but it couldn't be! Ah, the light at last. Now we can see something."

Still he was hunting, and now the men were helping him. I looked on dully. Then an unreasonable anger seized me at their neglect— their indifference to my very real agony. I leaned forward, and, in spite of the added pain the raw flesh of my hand gave me, I took hold of Lawrence's collar and started to shake him. He felt curiously light— rather like a piece of cork, in fact. I picked him up from the ground as you would a kitten and held him at arm's length. Then suddenly I realized that what I was doing was somewhat unusual, and let go of his collar. He lit on his feet like a cat.

I expected anger, but he only said impatiently, "Don't do that—help me hunt, can't you?" quite as if it were an ordinary incident. The queerness of it all came over me in full force; I felt as if I were in a dream. I stooped down and helped him search. But it was no use. The little cylinder of stellarite seemed to have disappeared.

Suddenly Lawrence rose to his feet, his face, whose multitudinous wrinkles had a moment before been twitching with mingled triumph and despair, wiped clean of emotion, like a blank slate from which all significance has been erased.

"Come, Mr. Dunbar," he said quietly, "it is quite time those hands of yours were seen to. You, Johnson, Duquirke, go on hunting. But I'm afraid it's no use, boys. That vat of acid is too near."

"You think—"

"I'm afraid it rolled in," he said. I was silent, dimly conscious that I stood, as it were, just inside the ring of some great catastrophe whose influence, barely reaching me, had this little wrinkled man in the grip of its vortex. I followed him to a small office, opening off the laboratory; fitted up much like a doctor's, it was, with its cabinet of shining instruments. He explained its

convenience while he bound up my hands with all the skilled gentleness of an experienced surgeon.

"Accidents are always on view in such a place as mine out there," he observed, with a nod of his head toward the laboratory.

"I wish you'd tell me what I've done," I said at last when the thing was over. I felt no weakness, nor any desire for rest, which was odd, seeing the excitement I had been through and my recent illness.

"Two things, then, to be brief," he replied, smiling rather sadly, I thought. "You've accidentally stumbled on a magnificent fact, and you've at the same time destroyed, I fear, all results that might have flowed from that fact."

I stared at him, puzzled.

"You lifted me just now like a feather," he said abruptly. "You think, possibly, that I don't weigh much— I'm not a giant. Duquirke," he called, "come here a minute, will you, please?"

Duquirke appeared, a very mountain of a man, all muscle, too. I am up to the six-foot mark myself, and fairly broad in the shoulders, but this fellow could better me by three good inches in any direction.

"You can't use your hands, of course," said Lawrence to me; "but just stoop down and stretch out your arm, will you? Now, Duquirke, just seat yourself on his arm. That's it. Oh, don't be afraid— he can hold you all right. Ah, I thought so! "

We had both obeyed him, I in some doubt, the Canadian with stolid indifference. But what was my amazement to find that this great big man weighed really comparatively nothing. I rose, still with my arm out stretched, with perfect ease, and there the fellow sat, perched precariously, his mouth open, his eyes fixed on his master in almost a dog-like appeal.

"What are you all made of?" I gasped. "Cork?"

I let my arm drop, really expecting to see the man fall light as a feather— instead of which he tumbled with a crash that shook the house, and lay for a minute, swearing violently. Then he got to his feet in a hurry and backed out of the door, his eyes on me to the last, his tongue, really un consciously I believe, letting go a string of such language as would have done credit to a canal-boat driver.

"What is the matter with you all," I cried, "or" — my voice sank with the thought— "with me?"

"Sit down," said Lawrence. "Don't lose your head."

His eyes had widened, and the strange colors I had sometimes caught a glimpse of were blazing in their depths. His wrinkled face was almost beautiful in its animation— lighted as by a fire from within.

"There's nothing at all astonishing or miraculous about any of it— it's the simple working of a law. Now listen. When we heard La Due fall (the fool had tried to walk across a plank laid over that death trap to save going round the shop— he was well repaid by the fright), I handed you the cylinder of stellarite. I did not lay it on my work table, because that is made of aluminum, and this cylinder must not come into contact with any other metal, for the simple reason that stellarite has such an affiliation for all other metals that for it to touch one of them means absorption into it. All its separate molecules interpenetrate, or assimilate, molecules, and— stellarite ceases to have its 'individual being.' So I gave it to you, because I wanted my hands free, and ran down to the vats with you at my heels. I confess I would never have been so careless if I had not allowed myself to become unduly excited by a .mere matter of life and death." He paused regretfully. "However, to continue, you for some reason seized hold of the lever of a dynamo of very great voltage and started the armatage revolving, at the same time stepping on to the plate of its base. New, in the ordinary course of things you would probably be at this moment lying on that couch over there— dead!"

I looked at the couch with sudden interest.

"But you are not."

I murmured that such was indeed the case.

"No— instead of that thunderbolt burning the life out of you, like that"— he snapped his fingers melodramatically— "it passed directly through your body into the cylinder of stellarite, which, completing the circuit, sent the current back through your chest, but possessed of a new quality."

"And that quality?" "Ah, there you have me! What that quality was I fear it is now too late for the world ever to know. Well, you dropped the lever, and, I think, the cylinder, too, when I shouted. A moment after you seized the fly wheel of the stamp machine, stopped it as if it had been the balance of a watch— and, well incidentally you saved La Due's life."

He ceased, the light faded out of his wrinkled face, his eyes darkened and narrowed. His head sank forward on to his chest.

"But to think of it— years— years of effort thrown away just at the moment of conquest!"

"I don't understand," I said, seeming to catch little glimpses of his full meaning, as through a torn veil.

"Do you intend to say—"

"I intend to say," he snapped, with a sudden return of irritability, "that in that minute when you held the stellarite and the lever of the dynamo you absorbed enough of the life principle to vivify a herd of elephants. Why, what

is strength, man? Is a muscle strong in itself? Can a mere muscle lift so much as a pin? It's the life principle, I tell you— and I had it under my hand!"

"But this stellarite," I protested. "You can make more, surely?"

"Make!" he scoffed. "It's an element, I say! And it was, so far as I know, all there was in all the world!"

"Maybe it will be found yet," I argued. "Or— if it went into the acid vat, would it have been absorbed by the metal— or what?"

"No— at the touch of that bath it would evaporate into thin air— an odorless, colorless gas. I have but one hope— that it rolled against some of the iron machinery and was absorbed. In that case I may be able to place it by the increased bulk of the assimilating metal. Well, I can but go to work again, test every particle of machinery in the vicinity of the vats— and work— and work. If I had but known be fore that it was electricity and animal magnetism that were needed to complete the combination— but now, it means years of patience at best." He shook his head dismally.

"And I?" I mused, rather to myself than to him.

"Oh— you!" he smiled, and his face ran into that tempest of wrinkles. "You can pose as Samson, if you like! Your strength is really almost limitless! "

_____

20: Wild Justice

J. Allan Dunn

1872-1941

Adventure. 10 Feb 1923

DIVING was over for the day. Smoke curled from the galley pipe of the pearling-lugger *Halcyon*, lying off Thursday Island. The ever chafing currents of Torres Straits swirled in the change from ebb to flood, flashing under the gathering brilliance of the sunset.

Two whale-boats were overside, fended off by a native in the stern, sulky at the job. The skin divers and pearl-workers were gathered together in two groups by the rail. They looked with uneasy eyes toward the cabin or at the second mate, who stood lounging by the mainmast, his gaze upon them, a gun ostentatiously prominent in a belt holster. Their usual cheeriness at the day's end, work over, food and leisure in prospect, was absent. There was court martial in the cabin, summary justice to be served. The Kanakas, quartered ashore, were detained to see sentence passed and carried out.

In handcuffs and leg-irons Oku, best diver of the outfit, squatted on an empty box in the trade room, stolidly awaiting his fate. Oku was from Tahiti, one of the five Polynesians of the pearling-crew. Tiri, his brother, was in the bows with three com patriots. The fifth, Vaiki, cousin to Oku, was in the cabin with the skipper and the first mate, giving testimony against Oku.

The rest of the native workers were in the waist of the lugger, Melanesians all, plum colored, breech-clouted, with frizzy, fuzzy mops of hair ranging in color from dirty orange to black. Strips of bone and shell were thrust through their noses With their ragged ear-lobes trailing al most to their shoulders, short clay pipes, safety pins and ornaments of brass and shell fitted to holes in the leathery flaps; their flat nostrils dilating nervously, their blubbery lips parting with a glimpse of betel stained teeth, muttering to each other in low gutturals, they were a wild-looking lot. Their splayed toes picked at the crumbling deck putty with the deftness of baboons. Their shallow eyes shifted constantly, like those of monkeys. Some were red-eyed with years of reef-diving in ten, twelve, even sixteen fathoms. They seemed more like half-trained animals than men, avoiding the cool and masterful look of the mate. Most of them were scarred with tribal wales. All of them carried their pearl knives, suspended about their necks on sennit cords.

The Tahitians were different— lighter of skin, better featured, better in form and muscle, less furtive of manner. They too talked in low tones, and the fine eyes of Tiri flashed now and then as he glanced aft or at the second mate, who regarded them all with a placid scorn, born of experience. He was one of

their masters, a dominant white, together with the skipper and the first mate in Supreme authority over in fractions of all rules.

Behind the skipper was the Pearling Commission; but Captain Meeker of the *Halcyon*, like other masters of the pearling fleet, exercised the right of dealing with offenders, and the commission seldom interfered with such prerogatives, save in extreme cases. The crime of Oku was a serious one. He had stolen a pearl of great value, according to Vaiki.

There was a stir among the Melanesians, and the Tahitians turned and watched where they pointed. Nosing about in search of garbage, a shark displayed its unusual length by the position of back fin and the top lobe of his tail. The tossing overboard of galley scraps and “burley,” or oyster offal, from the luggers of the fleet, invariably attracted the sea tigers; and some of them, attaching themselves to certain vessels, became known to the divers through various characteristics.

Rightly or not, the cruising shark that was prowling about the *Halcyon*, marked by the white scar of an ancient wound from spear, knife or harpoon, was considered a man-eater. Its presence excited the Kanakas, speculating upon the punishment to be given Oku, guessing that the shark would be used in its carrying out.

Captain Meeker was hard of feature, hard of hand and hard of heart. His one object was to get all the work possible out of his divers and all the shell and pearls possible from the reefs at the least expense. The Melanesians were signed on for the season, the Tahitians paid by the tonnage of the shell they collected.

Many skippers gave a premium on pearls. Meeker did not. He was handier with fist, rope's end, foot and belaying-pin than he was with rewards; and his two mates were of the same hard-boiled, hard-shelled school. His only largess was in curses and blows, and his system of fines for any lack in the scale he had established as a fair day's work saved him the payment of many a fairly earned dollar. He was a cheat and a bully.

Oku, best diver, was worst treated. He was sent to fourteen, fifteen, sixteen-fathom reefs that proved most prolific in pearls; but he was paid by shell rating. The more frequent the gems, the better their quality, the sicker were the oysters, with shells deep-wrinkled and distorted, with nacre of scant surface and dull luster. The deeper the water, the more exhausting the work and the smaller the contents of the diver's bag.

The Melanesians were contract laborers. The Tahitians had been wooed to service with many promises, none of which Meeker intended to carry out, many of which he had already welshed on. The complaints of Oku, backed by Tiri as spokesmen for their crowd, had been met by the threat that they would

not be carried back to Papeete but left on Thursday Island. They had been shipped on at Sydney with this understanding, for they had been three years from Tahiti, and their hearts were sick for its pleasant groves of palm and breadfruit and banana, for its crystal streams and bright lagoons, the cozy village, the palatable food, the flowers, the songs, the laughter of their own people.

Meeker had never entertained the slightest idea of sailing four thousand miles to Papeete unless an exceptional find of pearls and the prospect of a paying market in that South Sea clearing-house for those gems offered him a distinct advantage. Neither did he propose to pay out passage money for his divers.

This Oku and his fellows first suspected, then believed; and it had soured their natures. Their spirits were heavy, and they pined for home. Their pay had been docked and delayed; they had been swindled on the weighing of the shell, shortened in tobacco and other rations. If Oku had taken a pearl, it would, to his reasoning and sense of justice, have merely helped to adjust the balance between him and the skipper.

To Meeker, the brown man and the black was merely a machine of bone and muscle and certain capacities for earning him money. His rule was the rule of iron, of the steel hand ungloved by velvet, the steel automatic and the leaden bullet, with the mysterious *mana*— the spirit power— of the white man backing it all.

VAIKI fawned in the cabin, making a bargain.

"If I speak what I know, you send me back along Papeete, you give me all my *tala* (money) come along of me?"

"All that I give," Meeker lied glibly.

"Suppose you no tell I give you nothing. Maybe you try get piece of that pearl. Oku no give, you get mad along Oku."

"No. I no want. I no steal along of you. Every one speak Vaiki good boy."

Meeker winked at his mate.

"Hanged if I see just why he peached," he said. "They usually stick with their own."

"Oku's got a girl back at Papeete," said the mate. "He figgers on havin' her when he gits back with his wages. Vaiki wants the same girl."

"Oh! That's what sp'iled the soup! How d'you know?"

"Heard 'em talkin'. That's my business."

"Sounds reasonable. Go on, Vaiki."

"Three time he come up, Oku no open shell."

This was the rule of the lugger.

“Oku he heap smart along shell. Plenty he *sabe* pearl oyster. Four time he empty bag, he put foot quick on one shell. Think I no see. Bimeby he put shell in *pareu* (loincloth). Bimeby he rest. I make believe I sleep. Bimeby Oku open shell, take out fine pearl. I see. He look quick. I close eye. I no see where he put pearl but I hear shell go along water.

“Oku no good,” he went on passionately, emphasizing all his words with telling pantomime. “Vaiki good boy. I speak. *Kapitani* fix me up along *tala*, *tabaki*, maybe *kini-kini*,” he added, with a look at the bottle of Hollands.

“Give him a drink, Jim,” said Meeker. “Then go an’ git Oku.”

“You bring Oku along of me in here?” demanded Vaiki.

“We sure do. Take a drink, you white livered skunk, an’ see you speak the same talk.”

Vaiki gulped down the gin and folded his arms. It was plain that he did not fancy facing Oku, bound though the latter was. The shark was still cruising near the lugger, the Kanakas regarding him fascinatedly.

“Chuck him some burley to keep him up, Mr. Simmons,” said the first mate. “I’ve a notion we’ll be needin’ him.”

“It’s the *kai-kanak*,” (man-eater).

“What of it? So much the better. Keep those beggars in hand.”

Below deck, Oku had seen the shark through the port-hole and guessed what might be coming to him. They had taken his knife from him. If only they would let him have it! That, and a word with his brother. He knew that suspicion was equivalent to guilt with the skipper; the mere thought of having lost a valuable pearl would bring out all his brutality.

They had searched Oku as thoroughly as a Kimberley foreman searches a Kaffir suspected of concealing a diamond— and they had found nothing. It made small difference. He was to be used as an example for the maintenance of what Meeker called discipline.

Across the glowing water he looked at Thursday Island, mean and small and comparatively barren; but he saw only the glowing crags of Orohena with its twinned battlements, the heights of Aorai and all the lovely shoreland of *Tahiti-uni*, the verdant stream-fed vales, the emerald groves where the smoke of the fires curled up from the villages.

He saw Tatua, deep-eyed, firm-breasted, with a flower in her black and shining tresses standing on the white sand, watching for the return of Oku, the traveler, bearing gifts and riches.

And then— that vision faded as the burley flung by the mate's orders spattered into the water and the *kai-kanaka* came gliding up, leisurely but swift, turning over so that his whitish belly showed and his maw opened in a

serrated crescent; jaws wide enough to swallow a man, rows of teeth sharp enough to shear off a limb as an ax lops off a bough.

Oku showed no sign of fear when the first mate entered and roughly ordered him to follow. He went with his irons clinking. At the head of the companionway he looked for Tiri and gave him a meaning glance. The three Tahitians started to move aft, and the jabbering Melanesians shifted uneasily, checked by a barked, imperative command from the second mate, whose hand rested on the butt of his gun.

The Chinese cook stood in the galley door, his yellow, shining face craned out. Behind the second mate the burly negro quartermaster grinned at Oku disdainfully. Oku drew himself up to his full height and gazed scornfully at Vaiki, who tried to return the look defiantly but failed and winced at the few words of low, hot anger that Oku flung at him.

“If I live, you shall die. Your blood is not of my blood. You are a bastard and a coward.”

The approaching triumph of Vaiki, in which Oku was to be left maimed on Thursday Island— dead perhaps, swallowed by the shark— while he, Vaiki, alone of all the Tahitians returned to Papeete and so to Tatua, a wealthy wooer, suddenly lessened and crumpled like a stuck balloon. For a moment he saw himself as Oku saw him, traitor to his blood, informer, a thing whose name would be forgotten among the villages if the truth was ever learned!

The lingering spur of the alcohol revived his courage. His victory reinflated, and he beheld himself talking dowry with the father of Tatua.

She was a stake well worth playing for. She had been only fourteen when they left. Now she was seventeen, an opened bud, a ripened fruit. And she had sworn to wait for Oku, not knowing she was thus keeping herself for Vaiki, whom she had affected to despise. It would be good to possess her.

Some day he might whisper in her ear why it was that Oku did not return. He could say she lied if she repeated it. It would only be a whip in reserve for a wife who was not sufficiently loving— or dutiful. He stole a sidelong glance at Oku, standing upright, his face disdainful, listening to the captain.

Again a doubt assailed him. Suppose the *kapitani* did not keep faith with him for his information? He felt the tremor of the player whose last stake is on the table and who fears the fairness of the man who holds the cards.

“You give up that pearl, Oku,” said Meeker, “and I'll let you off this time with a fine. If you don't—” He paused significantly. Oku's great chest, the cage of the tremendous bellows that furnished him with resistance to stay down deep nearly four minutes while he robbed the coral of gem bearing shells, rose and fell slightly. His nostrils lifted, but he said nothing.

“I’ve got it all down in the log-book,” went on Meeker, striving for special entertainment in making the diver show some fear. “Witness all sworn reg’lar. Jest what you did. Hid the shell under yore foot, then opened it an’ took out the pearl when you thought Vaiki was sleepin’.”

Oku's eyes turned toward Vaiki, showing the white, the glance eloquent of contempt.

“You chucked the shell overboard an' hid the pearl. I want it.” Meeker leaned forward across the table, “I want it, you —— Kanaka, or I'll take it out of yore hide an’ body. You come across along of that pearl. You speak where you hide or overside you go. We've burleyed up the *kai-kanaka* with the white scar an’ there'll be more along in a minute. If they leave you alone I'll say you're innercent. If not, by ——, you’re guilty, an’ you deserve what you git.”

In all South Sea tribes there were, as Meeker knew, various ordeals by poison, boiling water and such a test as he was going to use, to determine guilt in witchcraft or adultery. He was not the first skipper to apply it, and the fact that there was such an elemental custom made it more impressive, less likely to be challenged by the natives.

“I think maybe that all same murder, *kapitani*,” said Oku. “I think maybe the commission no like that.”

“Commission!” Meeker rose Snarling. “You’ll talk commission to me, you thieving dog! I'll swing you up or I'll flay you alive if you rob me, and no blighted commission will tell me where to tack an’ veer.”

He came from behind the table and shook his fist in Oku's face, then struck him open handed. The marks of his fingers showed dull purple on the Tahitian's golden-brown cheek. Every muscle of the native's magnificent body seemed to tense at once, as if he would break his irons and brain or strangle the skipper.

Meeker recoiled a little before the fury he had evoked. His hand reached back of him for his gun, and the first mate grasped Oku's arms from behind. The diver freed himself with a twist and then stood still, facing the muzzle of the captain's weapon.

Meeker himself was making a struggle for restraint. He could not go too far. Oku’s mention of the commission was a lash that at once irritated him and reminded him of authority that had already warned him for alleged unnecessary cruelty. He had his mates to stand back of him, the *Halcyon*'s own crew to swear as he bade them; but he was not on the high seas; Thursday Island was now a fortified coaling station where the tale of murder might find a hearing and an awkward sequel. But he was determined to go through with what custom permitted.

“I’ll put a rope round you an' give you yore knife,” he said. “Then you can talk it out with the sharks.”

A faint gleam came into Oku's eyes as he heard that he would not be denied his knife. He was conscious of it and lowered his lids. He knew that if he won through the ordeal that would be the end of the matter, if his wounds healed.

“You let me speak along Tiri” he asked. “Maybe I die.”

He spoke with no semblance of begging a favor. Though his attitude won none from Meeker, the skipper fancied that he might be weakening, that his brother might counsel him to give up the pearl.

“Take him on deck and let his brother chin with him,” he said to the mate. “Then give him his knife and rig the line. I'll be out in a minute.”

He motioned Vaiki from the cabin with a jerk of his head and swallowed half a glass of neat Hollands. The informer went to the rail to watch the tragedy he had invoked. The Melanesians regarded him apathetically; the three Tahitians glowered at him.

Tiri, summoned by the mate, passed him with two words hissed in a fierce whisper. Vaiki's enjoyment was by way of being spoiled. The salt of hatred, jealousy and revenge had lost much of its savor in his mouth, which was suddenly dry when he tried to moisten it. Tiri's words were those of South Sea vendetta. It was fortunate that the season was nearly over. He would have to be wary of Tiri, night and day. But in the end he would triumph when he sailed away and left them on Thursday Island, doomed to live as best they could for another season, to enter that in debt and so work on in exile while he, Vaiki, would be back in the village near Papeete, with Tatua preparing fish, pounding taro, weaving mats, fawning upon the favor of her lord.

THE talk between the brothers was brief. The sun was nearing the horizon. Meeker was impatient to get through with the thing. He had lost his pearl; but he did not mean to lose his supper, which was nearly ready, nor to forego the appetizer in the example he was going to make of Oku.

A rope was tied about the diver's waist, held by the negro quarter-master and the mate. His irons were taken off, his knife restored to him.

Oku took the blade and stood poised on the rail like a bronze statue against the sun. The shark had finished the offal and now swam up and down with an expectant eye. He knew that sundown would bring him more garbage. This was his lay. Everything that came overboard from the *Halcyon* was his perquisite. The other luggers had their scavengers. As yet no other sharks were ranging near.

Oku breathed deep, filling his lungs, stretching his limbs, cramped by the iron and his confinement. Once he looked at the land, then at his brother. Vaiki he did not deign to notice.

All seemed to hold their breath. The lapping of the turning tide-sounded like a series of chuckles.

There came a swift tapping. Meeker was knocking out the ashes from the bowl of his pipe on the head of a belaying-pin. He filled and lighted it carefully and mounted the rail for a better view, steadying himself to the roll by the mainstays.

Oku jumped feet first, sinking down in a swirl of bubbles. The sun was too low for much transparency; but they could see him sinking far down as the shark, attracted by the splash, glided toward the disturbance, then with a tail stroke headed downward.

The ordeal was not a fair one, even to natives. In their minds sharks were allied with the gods, imbued with intelligence. Not all of them were man-eaters. Ordinarily there would have been a good chance of Oku not being attacked, even by a brute that hung around a ship for scraps. There in lay the test of guilt. But this one was a notorious *kai-kanaka*. Man-meat to him was a dainty.

Tiri, his hands clasping the rail until the knuckles showed white, strained out to watch the combat. Meeker, puffing his pipe, waited to give the word to the mate to haul in. He did not want Oku killed. He was not sure if he wanted him maimed. That would lose him a diver.

But whenever he thought of the pearl his resentment flamed. As described by Vaiki, even allowing for exaggerations, it was the best of the season, worth a good many hundred dollars. Oku would have selected his shell unerringly.

Oku, poised in the water, legs and arms apart, like a great frog, awaited the rush of the shark. His knife had been in his left hand when he went over. He shifted it to the right, the sennit loop about his wrist. He stripped off his loin-cloth and wound it round his left hand and wrist. He was almost as much at home in water as he was on land.

For three, perhaps four, minutes, though he had not had time properly to “take his breath,” he did not fear the odds against him of the monster in its own element.

After that, if he had to come to the surface the odds became heavier. That he could continue to elude the beast for some time was certain.

Left to himself, he held no doubt that he could dodge and climb aboard unscathed. That would not be allowed. And to play tag with the grisly, cold-blooded brute was not his intention. The rope that might prove his salvation was also a handicap.

The light was rapidly failing. The surface of the sea was still bright, though marred by the rip of the tide. He could see the shark coming down toward him in a gray bulk with just a hint of phosphorescence in its trail.

He was out of position; and, as the *kai kanaka* rolled with open mouth, Oku clipped his lower legs together and stroked with one hand, passing beneath the baffled fish. He made no wasted motion. His skin scraped against the pebbly hide; and once more he spread-eagled, almost motionless, watching the monster turn with a great surge and drive for him again, its long snout pointed a little downward, its cunning prompting it to keep the man uppermost.

Oku waited, dribbling air from his lungs. The great hazard, the rope, had traded clear. His attitude was that of a duelist, his swathed left arm a little extended, the right curved, ready for a stroke. Along the rail black men and white strained outward, seeing little but whorls of yeasty water, tiny bubbles of Oku's precious air breaking on the tide.

The shark turned, lunging upward. Oku, with automatic adjustment of his balance almost as perfect as that of the fish, up ended. A mighty scissors-clip sent him straight toward the widening jaw with its rows on rows of back-set, fast-embedded teeth.

He thrust his bound left arm fairly into the open maw, deep into the gullet of the shark. And, before the jaws could close, he lunged his knife to the hilt in its belly, ripping viciously. His hand and wrist slid into the wound and he turned the knife before he withdrew it and slashed again.

The jaws clamped on his arm, tearing the flesh, but he felt no pain. Neither did the sea tiger, yet it felt the knife in its belly, severing its entrails, plunging through its hide in fierce stroke after stroke.

It thrashed the water, dragging Oku with it through the turmoil that was streaked with blood. The crimson, oily fluid floated to the surface, hardly distinguishable in the gold and purple of the sunset painting the sea.

But the watching natives saw it, and a guttural, “Eyah!” came from the Melanesians. The Tahitians closed their lips. The mouths of the rest were open as they thrilled with the excitement of the fight.

The skipper's pipe went out, and he swore in his eagerness, the lust of cruelty in his eyes, stamped on his weather-burned features.

“Keep that rope slack, blast your black soul!” roared the mate at the negro quarter master. “Give him a chance!”

The man obeyed. In his mental ferment he had unconsciously started to tauten the rope. Suddenly Tiri sprang to the rail, knife in hand. The skipper's pistol was out in a flash while he bellowed at him.

Tiri hesitated; and then out of the seething waters there popped a black-sleek head, and a wild shout went up. It was Oku, his eyes flashing as he stroked with one arm, gulping down the welcome air. His knife still swung from the sennit loop on his wrist.

Rising more slowly be side him came the great bulk of the *kai kanaka*, belly up, the whitish skin pink in the sunset, rent in half a score of places, from which the blood ran as the monster feebly struggled. It intestines protruded; it had lost control, partly paralyzed by Oku's vicious stabs which had reached some vital spot, swiftly dying from that and the loss of blood.

The divers were beside themselves with excitement. Meeker swore and spat into the sea, then turned away.

“Haul in,” called the first mate. now, you lubber! Easy!”

Oku's face was drawn and gray, but he smiled up at his brother as the line drew him alongside and a dozen hands gripped him and drew him over the low freeboard. The cloth was gone from his left arm, which was terribly lacerated from elbow to wrist. Blood spouted from flesh rips and severed veins. It dripped on the deck as he stood weakly against the foremast, Tiri helping to support him.

The shark was beginning to drift slowly shoreward with the tide. The same current carried the blood away from the rest of the fleet and the scent of it from the other sharks that were patrolling the luggers for galley refuse.

“Take him below,” said the first mate to Tiri.

Oku's brother and the two other Tahitians “Easy picked up the wounded victor and carried him to the forward companion.

“I’ll be down,” added the mate. “I’ll fix him up. By all that's holy, he's a man!”

The mate's own manhood, roused by the plucky fight, had reversed his sympathies. The second mate ordered the divers into the shore boats.

“Goin' to keep him aboard?” he asked the first. “Yep— for tonight anyway. Wait for his brother and the others.”

The first mate hurried aft and en countered the skipper.

“What's the idea?” asked the skipper.

“I want the permanganate,” said the mate. “And a shot of squareface. You ain’t goin' to let him bleed to death. If he dies you ain't goin' to keep this thing quiet, Meeker.”

“That don’t git me my pearl.”

“To —— with the pearl! If he's got it I'm here to say he earned it.”

Meeker gave the mate a sullen look but said nothing. The mate had shares in the *Halcyon*, and his words had weight besides reason. As he disappeared

into the cabin for disinfectant and stimulant the skipper slowly followed. He met Vaiki, skulking on the starboard side, away from the boats.

Meeker cursed at him and accompanied every oath with a kick. “You git along where you belong. For’ard!” he yelled, venting his spleen. “Git ashore, you sneak! And stay there!”

But Vaiki was not in the boats when they left. He kept out of the way in the growing dusk, disconsolate and afraid. He knew that the skipper had repudiated him and that Oku was still alive. More, there was Tiri; and the words of Tiri were still plain in their meaning.

Tiri was in the second boat with his fellow Tahitians. He had the steering-oar and guided the boat alongside the dead shark, slipped a bight about the root of its tail, and they towed it to the beach. When the boats had been hauled up and the divers started for their quarters Tiri remained be hind with the shark, motioning his comrades ahead.

The Melanesians gazed at him with dull curiosity. They fancied that he wanted to perform some ritual over the *kai-kanaka*, perhaps to cut out its teeth or to take some of its hide for a knife-haft or the head of a conjure drum. The swift twilight had vanished. Lights had broken out on the pearling fleet and ashore.

Tiri was alone with the dead shark.

ON THE Halcyon Oku lay in a bunk, his wounds cleaned and dressed. His arm might not recover full strength, never its symmetry; but the mate was sure he would not lose it. The blood of Oku was healthy; his injuries would heal quickly. The salt water had started to cleanse them; the loin-cloth had helped; the permanganate had completed the asepsis. He had pleasant thoughts, and he was well content.

Vaiki ventured to the galley to beg for supper. The Chinese cook showed him a knife longer and sharper than his own, an Oriental fury that completely routed Vaiki's despondent soul. He coiled up on a cable in the bows, where Meeker presently found him.

The skipper had supped, and he had washed down his meal with plenty of liquor. He was in better mood; but the sight of Vaiki roused him again to fury.

“I told you go along shore,” he said.

Vaiki whined— “I plenty 'fraid go along that place.”

Meeker laughed. “The —— you are! Wal, you're goin'. Git up! Now then, over you go, an’ swim for it.”

Vaiki shivered. He was not very much afraid of the swim. It was not far, the tide was with him and the *kai-kanaka* was dead; but the land looked very

inhospitable to him beside the comparative safety of the lugger. He cowered close to the cable.

Meeker, with a burst of anger, seized him by the loin-cloth and the scruff of his neck. Vaiki clawed at the cable. The skipper shifted his grip from neck to bushy hair, and Vaiki yelled with pain and let go of the rope. The captain hauled him to the side and bundled him overboard.

Vaiki hit with a resounding splash amid a burst of the seafire that was rising and breaking in luminous stars all over the anchorage. He struck out reluctantly for the shore, trailing flame, with Meeker's lurid prophecies of what would happen to him if he tried to board the *Halcyon* again stringing after him. He was hungry and dispirited, and he let the flood direct his Course.

Ashore, under the stars, Tiri worked with his knife, expertly dissecting the head and gills of the shark. In the gullet he found a pulpy string of loin-cloth and then some thing that gently shimmered in the palm of his hand, rounded, perfect, silvery-white, with a faint suggestion of iridescence that would glow radiant under the sun or, beneath artificial lights, against the white skin of a beautiful woman.

Tiri's teeth gleamed almost as brightly as he turned it with a forefinger, admiring its symmetry, then swiftly tucked it in his own *pareu*.

Something was coming up from the sea, rising on all fours from a receding wave. The shark had been hauled well up; but the flooding tide had brought the margin of the water within a few feet of it. Tiri dropped like a dispelled shadow behind the body of the shark. He had been kneeling, and he did not believe that this man with the water in his eyes had noticed him. Now he crouched, his bent legs gathered under him, tense for a spring if the man was the one he wanted, the one he hoped for.

Back of the man, straightening himself while the withdrawing water swirled about his ankles, mounted the next incoming wave. Its crest was charged with the same flaming sea-stars, so that a greenish flame was reflected in the stream of the backwash.

The wave broke and thundered, and the man hurried to escape the undertow. He came over the hard sand to the body of the shark and peered over it, straight into the eyes of Tiri, before the latter leaped with a bloody knife that showed only a vague gleam.

Vaiki sprang back, then sidewise with the automatic agility of a cat, slipping free his own weapon. But he was in greater mood to run than fight. His heart was pounding; he felt himself predestined to defeat—to death.

“So,” said Tiri. “You have come, you bastard. Now the name of Vaiki will go out with the soul of Vaiki, forgotten in the uttermost darkness.”

He jumped over the shark, his left arm out on guard, expecting a thrust, expecting that Vaiki would squat as the other leaped and slash upward. But Vaiki veered and ran, refusing combat, his coward's soul in dismay. This landing by the shark, by the ambush of Tiri, was not to him a trick of the tide but magic, the magic of Tiri, who had conjured him ashore by superior mana.

Vaiki raced swiftly over the hard, wet sand, faster than he had ever run, because he believed Death joined in the pursuit with Tiri. And Tiri, next to Oku, was the swiftest runner of *Tahiti-Uni*.

Fast as Vaiki flew he heard the pad of feet behind him, gaining, gaining. Once he set his head on his shoulder and looked back. Tiri was running easily, too easily, with long strides from the hip; and Tiri laughed at him as he lengthened the stride.

The shaken will of Vaiki interfered with the best coordination of his body. He tripped, staggered, recovered himself and went on with his recreant heart pounding at his ribs and his lungs laboring. There was a pain in his side. He could have run better if he had supped; but Tiri had not eaten, and Tiri ran lightly as a Molokai deer.

A low promontory loomed up ahead, a dyke of lava rock. Vaiki shrank from attempting it. He would have to slow up; and the knife of Tiri, the avenger, would be plunged between his shoulder-blades. He slowed up and heard that Tiri had spare breath enough to laugh again tauntingly.

When Tiri was almost upon him Vaiki doubled like a hare and passed Tiri on the latter's left, shifting his knife, slashing out. Tiri laughed and parried, catching Vaiki's wrist with his left hand, flinging him down with aside trip.

“Get up, bastard,” said Tiri. “Get up and fight.”

Vaiki lay there on one arm, breathing, taking grace. The courage of a cornered rat came back to him. He made a sudden swipe at Tiri's ankles to sever a tendon, and Tiri jumped backward over the stroke.

“Get up,” he said. “This is the knife of Oku. It has tasted blood, but it is still thirsty. It has spoken to my *aitu* (familiar spirit) and it has said that it must drink the blood of Vaiki, the bastard.”

He gave Vaiki clear space, standing with arms hanging. Vaiki read his thoughts. Tiri did not want to strike a murderer's blow. His lust for blood would be satisfied only with the killing of Vaiki man to man. And his supreme confidence leached away all remnants of Vaiki's.

Tiri would boast of this avenging, he would make a song of it, to chant on the beaches of *Tahiti-Uni*, with Oku listening, Tatua by his side. For he was sure that Oku, or Tiri, had the pearl.

The strength had gone out of his legs; his knees would not support him; but at the thought of Oku triumphant a desperate sort of bravery came to him and he sprang up, circling about Tiri, crouching; waiting for an opening.

Tiri gave it to him, and he leaped in. Tiri's left fist struck his right elbow in paralyzing counter, his knife hand went high over Tiri's shoulder and the avenger stepped inside his guard. The knife of Oku went home. It hit Vaiki's breast-bone with a skreek and then sank deep, assuaging its thirst.

The two Tahitians, coming down to the beach after they had eaten, found Tiri by the shark. He showed them the loin-cloth of Oku, and he showed them the pearl that Oku had thrust deep in the gullet of the shark.

“It belongs to Oku,” he said. “It is the property of Oku,” they agreed.

“We will send him back to Papeete with our wages,” said Tiri. “Back to Tatua. We can get no price for the pearl in this place.”

“It is agreed,” they answered.

“What of Vaiki?”

“The name of Vaiki is to be forgotten. It is better that we bury him. The tide may refuse him— and the sharks.”

He took them to where the body of Vaiki lays, face down, with the surf lapping at his feet.

“I slew him with the knife of Oku,” he said. “It is a good knife. Behold.” He gave a sharp twist to the carved handle, and it came apart, showing the cleverly concealed cavity where Oku had hidden the pearl, whence he had taken it when he dived.

Presently the three walked up the beach. The tide came in, with sea stars radiating in the shallows. It packed hard the grave of Vaiki and tugged at the butchered body of the *kai-kanaka*. Presently the ebb tugged at it and took it out to sea, where its roving fellows found an early breakfast.

End