129

past masters

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and more

PAST MASTERS 129

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

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1: A King's Word

Ambrose Pratt

Ambrose Goddard Hesketh Pratt, 1874-1944
Observer (Adelaide) 16 May 1908

Australian author of more than 30 novels and 20 non-fiction books; journalist, traveller.

HENRI IV arose from the couch whereon he had been seated beside the beautiful Gabrielle D'Estrees, and with an embarrassed frown returned the salute of the great Sully, who, accompanied by half a dozen of his captains, had burst unceremoniously into the apartment.

"Has Spain declared war upon us, or has Paris, taken fire?" he demanded curtly.

"Sire," said Sully. "Spain impotently hates us still, and Paris sleeps in peace, yet my abrupt intrusion is not without excuse. Your Majesty's greatest enemy is in the city."

"Mayenne?" cried Henri.

"Aye," said Sully. "The Duke of Mayenne, that proud and contumacious rebel who has succeeded for so long in preventing Your Majesty from enjoying the full fruits of your heritage, and who, although defeated in four pitched battles, is still the most powerful noble in the kingdom."

Henri's eyes flashed and his right hand fell upon his sword hilt.

"What does he here?" he asked, "and how is he attended?"

"He has come disguised and alone, ostensibly to comfort the last hours of his widowed daughter, the Countess de Montfaucon, but without doubt, sire, to have speech with others of his kidney, and to foment a new and dangerous rebellion in your very capital."

"Where is he lodged?"

"At the Hotel de Coutras."

"How have you discovered this?"

"Sire, he was recognised by a female servant of the Countess, who brought me the news a moment since. The woman waits in another room to be examined by Your Majesty, if such be your pleasure"

"You have questioned her?"

"Ay, and am satisfied she speaks the truth."

"What would you have me do?" demanded Henri.

Sully made a gesture of astonishment.

"With the Duke de Mayenne?" he cried.

"Speak!" said Henri.

"Arrest and execute him, Sire."

"And you, gentlemen— what is your opinion?" asked Henri, turning abruptly to the captains.

"He deserves a dozen deaths," answered the Marquis de Couvreur.

"Ay, ay, indeed!" exclaimed the rest.

"While he lives your Majesty will never know true peace," added Sully.

Henri, however, after a moment's deep reflection shook his head.

"I have always found him a brave and honourable enemy," he said slowly, "and even though it should be proved that he has come here to conspire against me, he shall have the trial that is due to his reputation and his rank."

Sully exchanged anxious glances with his , captains, glances which said plainly, "We guessed how it would be," Then he asked, in a tone of indignation he could not conceal:

"At least, Sire, you permit us to arrest him?"

"I permit you to close and guard the gates of Paris," answered Henri, sternly. "My further pleasure I will make known to you to-morrow morning."

Sully flushed to the roots of his hair; the captains angrily lowered their eyes; but no one ventured to oppose a syllable in remonstrance to the cold voice that at the same time rejected their counsel and dismissed them. For Henri of Navarre, in the mood his tone and look evinced, was a person his dearest friend durst not cross, nor even argue with.

When the door closed upon the constable and his satellites, the King turned with a rueful smile to his lovely mistress. "And now," said he, "you, too, will tell me, am I wrong?"

"No, Henri," said Gabrielle, demurely, "not that you are wrong, but that Sully was right. His advice in my poor opinion was prompted by the purest policy. Mayenne is your most powerful and deadly enemy, he has twice contemptuously refused, although defeated, to be reconciled with you. He reigns like a, king over a great part of your kingdom which all your skill and valour has been unable to reduce; and while he lives, even though , you hold him prisoner, and load him with chains, he will never lack a champion among

the disaffected to wage war with you; and his people will never acknowledge your dominion."

"And if I kill him Gabrielle— what then?"

"His son will be your servant, and you will gain a province at the cost of one proud rebel's life. Policy—"

"Ah!" interrupted Henri, "Policy, policy. It gets into the way of every noble thought and generous impulse, it is dinned, into my ear from morn till night, now. *Ventre Saint Gris*! find you, Gabrielle, using it to urge me to commit a crime."

"Henri!" cried the girl. "A crime to take advantage of the rashness of your enemy and serve him as, heaven be my witness, he would serve you, if your positions were reversed."

"Hold!" cried Henri, in tones that rang out through the chamber like the clash steel on steel. "I forbid you to suggest that Mayenne, rebel as he is, and deeply as he hates me, could ever be a murderer."

And heedless of the tears that rose at once to Gabrielle's bright eyes, he swung on his heel and strode, frowning, from the room.

SOME hours later two figures, masked and cloaked, issued from a private door of the Palace of the Louvre, and keeping well within the shadows of the walls, sped silently north-west. Very soon, however, they crossed the road and plunged into a maze of dark and dirty streets with which they seemed familiar, and turning and twisting, finally emerged into the Rue St. Honoré. There, for the first time, their progress met a cheek. The second house which they essayed to pass opened suddenly its doors and belched forth on the street a bar of light and a herd of shouting roysterers. The two night birds drew back instantly into the dark, but were as instantly detected.

"Ho! Ho there!" cried one of the revellers immediately, more sharp-eyed than his fellows. "What brigands have we here. Take care, Francois, or that shade will spit you."

The man named Francois started back and half drew his sword.

"A shade," he shouted, drunkenly. "It is a man and masked!"

"Two men," cried the first, "and food my friends, for frolic, by our Lady. Stand forth, fellows, and disclose your business. Do you know that this is an hour when all honest citizens should be abed. *Ma foi*! it is past midnight."

The mob, shouting with laughter, drew together, facing and half compassing the masks. These stepped forthwith from the doorway of their lurking place, and one, the taller, said—

"I pray you, friends, suffer us to pass on our way, and God be with you."

"God is with us already, retorted the reveller, "for we have just confessed ourselves to the wine cask of a Jesuit, but you, my pigeon, are not so happily devout, I fear, for you are sober— and your speech smacks strongly of the south. Unmask before we take and treat you for a Huguenot."

"Unmask! Unmask!" howled the mob, and swords flashed out on instant.

"Gentlemen, defend yourselves— the watch!" cried suddenly the second mask. The effect was instantaneous. The whole crowd turned, and not too soon, for a flashing front of lights and pikes was charging down upon them at the run. In five seconds the mob had scattered, and not the last to show their heels to the watch were the two masked wanderers. These halted a minute in the middle of a side street, breathless, yet alone and safe.

"A close shave— by Saint Denis!" gasped one.

"*Ventre St. Gris*!" panted the other. "I have not run so quickly or so far on foot since I chased the Grammont in the woods of Bearn.''

"Sire! Sire!" said the first; "I beg you to resign your purpose and return. He has sent you this adventure as a warning. I feel certain. For God's sake, be advised— your life belongs to France— and it is little short of madness, Sire, to risk it thus. Those men the watch dispersed were of your enemies "

"Peace, Guizon!" interrupted the King, for it was he. "When have you known me turn my back upon an undertaking once resolved upon? Lead on— and be silent!"

Guizon shrugged his shoulders and obeyed. Ten minutes afterwards, without further mishap, the journey ended. Guizon stopped and pointed to a tall and gloomy looking building with his hand.

"The Hotel de Coutras, Sire," he whispered.

Henri surveyed the house for a while without reply, then he turned to his companion.

"In one hour," he said, "if I have not returned, make haste to Sully; but not before the hour is up."

Guizon bowed silently, and Henri, without hesitation, marched across the road. A few seconds later his loud summons on the door sent iron echoes sounding and resounding through the quiet street. There ensued a silence deep as death, but at length a window in the building ratt'ed overhead, and a voice hissed out—

"Who knocks?"

"Hist!" cried Henri. "A friend with important news for Monsieur, the guest of Madame de Montfaucon."

"Madame has no guest," replied the voice.

"Fool!" cried Henri. "Would you have your master taken like a rat in a trap? Open, I say! Open at once!"

The window slammed shut and the former silence repeated itself. Nevertheless, before 10 might be eouated, a door in the wall opened softly on a chain, and a voice commanded, in a strident whisper, the midnight prowler to approach.

"And come alone, as you value your life!" it concluded.

Henri stepped forward and was suddenly confronted with a thin dagger shaft of light.

"Unmask!" said the voice.

Henri smiled and complied.

"God save" us!" gasped the unseen doorkeeper. "The King!'

"Ay! Monsieur de Mayenne, your king," said Henri, and with the speed of thought he thrust his foot within the door.

"You shall not take me alive!" hissed the other. "Stand back— or die!" The point of a naked blade menaced the King, but he did not yield an inch.

"Monsieur," he said, "on the honour of a Prince, I am alone. I have come here to speak to you in private. I command you to believe me and admit me."

There was a frightful pause; then the bright steel very slowly was retracted. The light went out, and a chain rattled.

''Enter," said the voice.

Without hesitation the King pushed into the ink-black passage. He heard the door clang behind him, and a strong baud gripped his arm.

"You are a brave man," said the voice— "even braver than I thought."

"It is an honour to be commended on the score of courage by Monsieur de Mayenne!" replied the King.

"Permit me to guide you," said the Duke.

Henri suffered himself to he led along the gloomy passage and into a room at the end. There the Duke struck a light and ignited the taper that he still held in his hand.

"I, too, am alone," he said.

Henri looked his enemy in the eye. "Alone?" he repeated.

"My daughter died an hour since," answered the Duke coldly. "What have you to say to me?"

"But you have your servants in the house?"

"My daughter's servants are all women, sire."

"Sire?" said Henri, with a bitterly ironic smile.

"You are the King— you have made yourself King in spite of me."

"And you have come to Paris absolutely unattended. Why?"

"I had a daughter, Sire,"

Henri saw the lips of the haggard-faced Duke involuntarily twitch and quiver.

"You loved her?" he murmured.

"As much as I hate you, Sire!"

"Monsieur," said the King; "my friends believe that you have come to Paris to conspire against my life."

"With whom ?"

"Will you tell me?"

"I cannot— for your friends are wrong."

"I almost told them so."

"Ah!"

"I found it hard to fancy that a man so proud and fearless as Mayenne could stoop to fill the role of assassin."

"Sire, I thank you!"

"What follows?"

"What would you, Sire?"

"We are two gentlemen, alone together with a mortal enmity between us!" The King stepped back and drew his sword. The Duke eyed him with a gloomy frown.

"Draw, Monsieur!" said the King, "and may God defend the right!"

"I cannot fight the King," said Mayenne, coldly. "What you propose is impossible. Sire— noble, perhaps, but—" he shrugged his shoulders— "theatrical as well. Your friends, moreover, know I am in Paris. I cannot, therefore, escape, and if you fell I should be torn to pieces."

"This ring," said Henri, "will enable you to pass the gates. You may take it from the finger of my corpse."

Mayenne noddled. "The alternative?" he asked.

"Arrest— imprisonment— execution!"

Mayenne smiled and put his taper on the table.

"A last question. Sire. What is the meaning of this amazing condescension, this more than princely generosity?"

"*Ventre St Gris*!" cried Henri. "You are as full of questions as an egg is of meat— but since you have promised this to be the last, I shall answer you. Learn then that I did not cease to be a man when I became the lung of France. Should you be arrested, I shall be compelled by policy to cut off your head. We have, however, been adversaries in arms so long that I prefer, since we must contend to the last, to stick my sword through your body. I should sleep badly were it otherwise."

Mavenne bowed gravely and drew his sword.

"A last word," said the King. "Cuizon waits me in the street. He will wait an hour. I brought him to outmatch a thought of treachery. If you win, depart by the postern— lest he sees you."

"Sire," said the Duke. "It will be a pleasure to kill so thoughtful and chivalrous a gentleman."

Next instant the swords crossed. Henri believed himself as good a blade as might be found in France, and he had never till that moment been obliged to alter his opinion. But with the first pass and parry, he knew that he had met, his match, and with the second he felt that he had found his master.

"You fence well, Sire," observed the Duke, as for the third time they disengaged, "but you grip your hilt too tightly. It is a fault— that— for it robs your wrist of half its suppleness."

Beads of perspiration stood on the King's brow. He foresaw defeat already, ay, and death, but he set his teeth and fought on doggedly with all his strength and courage, hoping against hope. The Duke, on the contrary, appeared to be fencing for the pastime of an idle moment. Calm, cool, and perfectly collected, his lips were parted in a contemptuous smile, and each savage thrust lie parried, he commented upon or criticised with the detached interest of a mere spectator.

"Have done!" cried the tortured King at last. "Be courteous, and cease this mockery. I cannot reach you."

"Well, well!" replied the Duke;. "You have taught me to he generous, I shall pleasure you."

For sixty seconds only the rasping of the blades was heard, then came a dull crash. The King uttered a cry, and his right hand fell to his side, half paralysed and weaponless. His sword flashed overhead behind him. The Duke's point pricked his throat.

"Strike!" gasped Henri.

Mayenne laughed raucously.

''For once I have beaten you in a fight," he said, "your life is at my mercy."

"Strike!" repeated the King.

The Duke for answer stepped back and sheathed his blade.

"Monsieur," said Henri, "I would have killed you."

"Sire," said Mayenne, "I am too poor to despise the ransom you will pay me. Hermit me to restore your sword."

Henri bit his lips and; frowned, but he took the blade and sent it rattling back into its scabbard.

"This ransom?" he muttered hoarsely.

"Give me the ring upon your finger."

Henri, still frowning, held, forth the ring. Mayenne received it with a mocking smile.

"What else?" demanded the King.

"Sire," said the Duke, "I shall tell you at another time and place. Permit us to escort you to the street."

"*Mordieu*!" cried Henri. "When we leave this room I shall be king again— remember that!"

"Sire," said Mayenne. "Five thousand lances wait me at Montreuil. I have yet to pass the gates!"

"You tell me that!"

"Man here," sneered the Duke. "King yonder. " Take your choice. Guizon can forestall me at the gates; yourself may early collect sufficient troops by daylight to surprise my force and overwhelm it. Behold yourself thenceforth a king indeed."

"Devil!" hissed the King. "Wherefore do you tempt me? Your trouble is in vain!"

"We shall see to-morrow." Mayenne gritted the words through his teeth.

'But now get hence. A greater king than you holds judgment here to-night, and I must pay my court to him before I go."

"Death," said Henri.

"You were kind to my daughter— so she said— hence you live still," said the Duke, "but get hence— for she is dead— and I am desperate— the only being that I loved!"

Tears were coursing down Mayenne's furrowed cheeks, but strange to say they only made his face more glistening, hard, and cruel, and implacable. The King sighed, and with a gesture full of sadness and compassion, stepped into the passage. Mayenne followed with the taper. Suddenly a loud unearthly wail rang through the building.

"*Mon Dieu*!" gasped Henri, and stopped, thrilled with superstitious fear.

"It is her dog," said the Duke, and a strangled groan broke from his lips.

The King shuddered, and passed out into the street. The door closed behind him with a mournful, muffled clang, and Guizon hurried from the shadows opposite to meet him.

"Thank God, Sire, you are safe," he cried. "The hour appeared a century."

But Henri did not answer him, for there was that swelling in the throat which rendered speech impossible.

NEXT morning came Sully and an armed following to the Louvre. Henri awaited them in the throne room surrounded by his Court.

"Sire," said Sully, "I have the honour to announce that the Duke of Mayenne has been apprehended. An hour before daylight he attempted to pass the Porte Saint Gervais with a ring which bears a strange resemblance to

Your Majesty's private signet. Fortunately, however, the officer on duty detected the imposture,"

Henri listened with a face of stone. "Where is he?" he demanded.

"Without, Sire, attended by my guard."

"Have him brought here at once."

Sully saluted and withdrew. There followed a period of breathless stillness. The courtiers maintained the silence of absolute amazement; Henri, of reflection; the Queen, of dreams.

Marguerite and Mayenne had fought against the King together more than once. She wondered what manner of revenge her lord and master, who disdained to punish women, would wreak upon a man. She was soon to see. The tramp of soldiers and the clash of trailing weapons broke the silence, waking loud echoes in the corridors without that did not hesitate to insolently to penetrate the Hall of Justice. A moment later, Mayenne appeared, walking with measured steps between his guard. When he saw the King, he threw back his head and laughed scornfully. His face was livid and haggard for the want of sleep, with care and age and grief. But his dauntless eyes, the bearing of his tall thin figure, and the strong set of his grim square jaws, proclaimed his proud and gallant spirit careless of the march of time, and disdainfully indifferent to fate and misfortune.

Henri returned his glance with an inscrutable, chill smile.

"Monsieur de Mayenne," he said, "your scabbard lacks a sword."

"Aye, Sire," replied the Duke on instant. "it is as hollow as a King's word."

Henri sprang to his feet as if overcome with rage and flashed his own blade bare.

"Sire!" cried Sully, in alarm.

"Monsieur de Mayenne," said Henri, disregarding him, "a king's word can be redeemed as easily as your scabbard can be filled. This is a good sword, it must be for it conquered you at Ivry."

"Ah!" cried the duke, his eyes kindled with anger at the insult.

Henri descended the steps of the throne.

"Monsieur," said he, smiling with a right royal kindliness, "wear it for my sake, at since 'tis I who give it, let this remembrance dull the memoried sting of that defeat."

Mayenne flushed scarlet, then turned pale as death. His eyes tried to read the king heart, but the king's eyes, though he to they should have mocked and hated, seemed to bless him.

"Sire— sire," he stammered, in amaze, "what is this you say to me?"

"*Ventre St. Gris*," laughed Henri, "are you deaf, man? Come," and he put the sword into the duke's hand.

Mayenne's fingers half involuntarily close upon the hilt. "Take care, sire, you arm an irreconcilable, a prisoner," be cried.

Sully stepped forward, and terrified by the duke's look of menace drew his on sword as he moved.

But Henri laughed again.

"I never arm a prisoner," he said, "as for the rest, you sure that you and I cannot be reconciled. Think, monsieur!"

"I— I—am free?" demanded Mayenne.

"As air," said the king.

Mayenne stared about him stupidly. Sully, his face dark as night, hastily approached the king.

"Sire," he began. "I have news of a thousand of Mayenne's lances camped Montreuil. Is it possible that—"

But the king held up his hand.

"Silence!" he commanded. "Wait!"

Mayenne was the cynosure of eyes.

Slowly, very slowly, he recovered his composure, and his worn face, which had been working strangely, grew calm again and rigid. He put the king's sword in his scabbard, and pointed to the throne.

"There is your place," he said.

Henri nodded, and mounting the date sat down upon the throne.

Mayenne strode with bent bead to the lowest step, stood there for a space of seconds, and then looking up, full into his king's face, he sank upon his knee.

"Sire, I would kiss your hand!" he muttered, in a hollow whisper,

But Henri sprang afoot again, his countenance transfigured.

"Not thus, Mayenne, but to my heart," he said, and clasped his life-long enemy within his arms.

On the next morning the Duke of Mayenne was appointed by royal Letters patent Governor of the Isle of France— the most coveted domestic post in the king's gift, and second only in importance to that of Constable of the Kingdom, then occupied by the great Sully himself.

2: The Work of Brother Petherick

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Bulletin, 16 Dec 1931

OUT here in the open spaces there was great work to be done, thought John Petherick, with the lust in his veins for activity which other men might have turned to the loose pleasures of life. A strong religious training had turned Petherick's life into different channels; admitted to the Brotherhood, he brought a youthful enthusiasm to the cause, which explained why he was out further than ever the Brotherhood had reached before.

Probably confusing the gladness with which the Great Outback greeted any visitors, he had taken the warmness of the hospitality extended to him as a criterion of the eagerness with which the arrival of religion was welcomed. Coming away from the Caseys, who, apart from emphasising the fact that they were staunch "Cahtholics," had hailed him with approval and reverence— setting aside the prejudices of his training he had even "confessed" the members of the family, seeing that they desired it— he felt an exaltation in the work he was doing.

To go away feeling that he had been able to stir the religious feelings of the Caseys, members of an alien flock, was an achievement.

Getting wind of his advent, the Berrimans had invited him to come to their homestead, and thither he was bound now.

There was joy in the sun-languid air as his horse paced along the track upon which he had been set. Petherick almost dozed in the saddle with the tranquillity of the day. He was roused by a stir of dust on the horizon, the cause of which he made out to be a horse, hard-ridden, coming in a direction which would head him off on his path. He jogged his steed moderately to meet the stranger.

"You're the parson, ain't you?" asked the rider, when nearly a mile further on they met. "Glad ter meet yer, parson. Me name's Egbert— one of old Jacob Holden's sons. They sent me out to meet yer, hearing you were coming to the Caseys an' goin' on to th' Berrimans. The old man'd be glad if you c'd give us a call."

"I'll only be too glad, Mr. Holden," said Petherick. "When I leave the Berrimans—"

"Our place is about sixty miles south-west of the Berrimans," said the boy. He was already dismounted, standing by the parson's saddle; and, stooping down, he started to make a plan of directions in the sand which seemed confusing to the Brother, although the details burnt themselves into his mind.

"Y'see," said Egbert, "'Arold an' Mildred 'as been thinkin' of gettin' married fer three or four years, an' Dad says you might come along an' get it over. Apart from that, we'd all be glad ter see you— at least that's what Dad says."

Petherick sensed a lack of enthusiasm in the boy's manner and resolved to overcome his suspicions.

"I'll come along, Egbert," he said, mindful of the value of familiarity.

"They call me Eg," said the lad.

"Right-oh, Eg!" said Petherick heartily. "I'll be along and do the marrying. Harold's your brother, eh?"

"Yairs," said Eg.

"And Mildred?"

"Millie? Oh, Millie was ole Parkham's daughter. Parkham tried to run Bineroo, but it broke him; an' when he died he just left Millie, 'oo was only a kid of nine. She came to live with us."

"Ah. A boy-and-girl affair! She and Harold have grown up together?" suggested Petherick.

"Yairs, that's about it," said Eg, as if embarrassed, and he changed the subject quickly. "You'll prob'ly wanter stay three days at the Berrimans. If Dad calls the weddin' fer Monday, will that do?"

"I'll be there," said the Brother, heartily.

"Now, are you coming along in my direction? If so—"

"I'll be goin' to the Caseys ter give them an invite," said Eg. "You might tell the Berrimans ter come along."

It was in this manner that Petherick received his invitation to the Holden homestead; and when he arrived there on Monday he was accompanied by the Berriman people in sulkies and on horseback. For all that it had struck him that the Berrimans, who had treated him royally, had shown some reticence in talking about the Holdens, as if there was a coolness between the families. Holden, he learned, was a man who had pushed out into the wilderness and had never gone back on his tracks further than the nearest township. His first wife, who had shared his early battling, had died; the woman-friend who had come out to nurse her in her illness had remained, and was the present Mrs. Holden.

Any coolness that prevailed notwithstanding, it was something like a cavalcade that had set off to the Holden holding, quite satisfied that the informal invitation was a comprehensive one.

Petherick was astonished, on his arrival, to find the homestead surrounded by parked vehicles. Spread out as it was, it looked quite a considerable concourse, and Petherick wondered where in these unpeopled wastes the people came from. The Caseys were there, and others he had met; so

apparently the invitations had been broadcast on a wide range. As the Berriman party added its numbers to the crowd, a bearded giant, his face-whiskers slightly greyed, but vigorous in bearing, detached himself and approached.

"'Ow do, Jake?" said Berriman. "This is Mr. Holden, Brother Petherick." After effecting the introduction he turned away to let the pair transact their business.

"Pleased ter meet you, Mister," said the bearded giant, grasping Petherick's hand in a tremendous and powerful paw. "We're all ready, ye see, an' waitin'. The beer arrived just before you did," he said, jerking his thumb over to where men were rolling kegs from a light waggon, "so there ain't no reason to wait. You might want a wash-up an' a rest first; but 'ow long will it be, d'you think, before you can get to this 'itching?"

"Well"—began Petherick; but a big, youngish man, in many ways like the bearded giant but not so matured, who had been lurking irresolutely in the background, stepped forward with an interruption.

"As long as it don't 'ang over another night," he said. "I ain't goin' to 'ave it 'angin' over another night."

"Mind yer own blarsted business, 'Arold!" cried Holden..

Hearing the name, Petherick turned and extended his hand. "So this is the bridegroom?" he said. "I'm pleased to meet you."

"Yes, I'm the bridegroom," said Harold, "an' I reckon this is my business. Ever since it was arranged that me an' Mildred sh'd get married, they reckoned it wasn't right that we should sleep together till the job was done."

"Shut up, 'Arold!" roared Holden.

"I ain't goin' ter shut up," retorted Harold, sullenly. "Mildred gits nervous sleepin' alone, an' that shake-down on the verandah ain't no blinkin' good ter me."

"Mister Petherick," said Holden, " 'Arold 'as give the show away ; but we was goin' ter make you wise to it, anyway. These young people grew fond of each other, as young people will. When we found out what was goin' on, we made up our mind ter git them married at the first opportunity— an' you was the first opportunity. Now you know the position: the pair'd 'ave been married before, legal, if there d been a parson to marry them. Bein' young they didn't wait fer a parson. Does it make any difference to you?"

A good deal shocked, but quite realising the position, Petherick murmured that in taking the right course it was better late than never. He assured both Holden and Harold that he would lose no time in getting to business, and was taken within the homestead, meeting and shaking hands with many people on the way, to be introduced to Mrs. Holden. She was a large and genial lady who

was busy on the preparations for a big-scale festivity; and she had to wipe floured hands to shake the one Petherick extended.

"Mister Petherick says 'e can get movin' straight away, missus," said Holden; "so directly you've got the tucker fixed, you'd better get dolled up an' give us the word."

"I'm so glad!" cried Mrs. Holden. "I was so afraid there would be trouble about the bands. We haven't got any band 'ere, though old Solly plays the concertina. '

"You mean, reading the banns?" said Petherick, with a smile. "Oh, I think that is quite unnecessary under the circumstances."

"Well, 'ow about 'oldin' the wedding on the verandah where the people can stand down below an' look on?" asked Holden.

"If we 'old it in the 'ouse there's not more 'n a dozen can get a good look in."

"That will do admirably." said Petherick.

"And 'ow about the water?" asked Holden. "Will it do in a tin basin?"

"The water?"

"Yes, you know— fer sprinkling."

Petherick, with a tendency to laugh, realised the mistake. "Oh, water is only required for a christening!" he said. We won't want it for the wedding.

"There! I told 'im, but 'e would 'ave 'is way!" said Mrs. Holden. " 'E's forgot just what does take place at a wedding."

"Even clergymen do that sometimes,"said Petherick smoothly.

An hour later he found himself, arrayed in the surplice he carried with his few belongings, standing on the weather-beaten and sun-dried verandah facing a queer concourse The white garment was the sole religious touch to a picture wholly pastoral, even down to the horses and poddy calves that took a curious interest on the outposts of the gathering. Harold stood stiffly uncomfortable beside the small table provided from the household furniture as an altar, and decorated, with an idea that that was appropriate, with a decanter of water and a glass; but his father, obviously much out of the habit of wearing a coat, from which he bulged wherever it was possible to bulge, looked even more uncomfortable. There really was a considerable prettiness about the bride, Mildred, which not even the out-of-dateness of her simple frock could mar. The normally comfortable Mrs. Holden was in a "best" dress that had no doubt fitted her once.

As Petherick prepared to open the service the crying of a baby which had for some time provided a monotonous annoyance burst out more furiously. Petherick, concerned at a tendency amongst the junior members of the congregation to giggle at the interruption, wondered why the mother did not

quiet her offspring or remove it out of hearing. The interlude held up the proceedings, and Millie looked anxiously back towards the house whence the sound came.

A moment it lulled, and Millie turned again towards the Brother; but immediately the yells restarted with a doubled energy.

"It's not a bit of use," Mrs. Holden spoke suddenly. "Millie, I told you that you would have to give the baby what it wanted before the ceremony if you wished it to keep quiet; and I'm sure now the reverend gentleman won't mind waiting a bit whilst you attend to it. It's hungry, poor thing. You wouldn't mind, would you?"

In a dazed way Petherick heard Harold mutter an appeal to "get the thing over and done with" first; he knew that his face was a flaming scarlet as he nodded his assent to a delay, and Millie hurried away to her maternal duties. Petherick Avas little more than a boy; it was natural for him to be embarrassed. In any case he had never heard of another occasion in which a wedding had been delayed in order to allow the bride to nurse her baby.

"I— I didn't know there was a child," he stammered.

"We were going to tell you, of course," said Holden aAvkwardly, "but we thought it best to wait until 'Arold and Millie were fixed up reg'lar."

"I will have to christen the child."

"We were goin' to ask you— after— to christen the 'ole three of 'em," said Mrs. Holden.

"Three! There are three?"

"The eldest is four," said Mrs. Holden with grandmotherly pride, "an' all fine children, too!"

Petherick was suddenly ashamed of being shocked. It was not for him to judge, these people. He could not estimate the difficulties that stood in their way in getting to the religious aid which had hitherto found it impossible to get to them. Enough for him that they had taken the first opportunity to level their affairs with the religious conventions.

The infant's cries had died down, and shortly Millie returned, and without hitch, but with much bashfulness on the part of the couple and some scarcely suppressed tittering amongst the onlookers, the ceremony went forward. Brother Petherick subsequently went right on with the business of the christening, and found it a bigger one than anticipated; for there were many children present who had not been formally admitted to holy church.

Some of the children, filled with the terrors of the mysterious, Avere anything but passive resisters, and had to be caught and pacified before they were sprinkled and given their names in a Christian fashion. There was a hitch in the case of the Wolton two, Mrs. Wolton considering that this was a

splendid opportunity for substituting names which had struck her fancy in a recently-read story for the old ones, whilst Wolton objected on the score of the confusion likely to arise. Only Holden's whispered counsel that "It's not likely to make any damned difference; they'll still be called Dan and Bill," induced him to withdraw his objection.

"It's as bad as branding a lot of young colts," commented Holden. " 'Ere, Parson, catch 'old. Y' throat must be dry after all that; a mug of this beer won't 'urt you."

Normally Brother Petherick did not drink, but he took the liquor gratefully, and became aware that beer had become general. The congregation had dwindled during the last of the christenings; he found that the men had commenced a procession to the shed in which the liquor had been stored. Now trays of glasses and tin pannikins were being brought to the women, and eatables to stay appetites until the real feast was handed round.

The Brother, feeling that some work had been done that day, was warmed by the spirit of fraternity that prevailed amongst these people of the wide spaces who were making a festivity of the rare meeting-time. There might be an under-current of petty envies and jealousies, but they were submerged in the general feeling of neighborliness. The events of the day had supplied a reason for the reticence the Berrimans had shown in speaking of the Holdens; but Petherick liked to remember they had said no word that might prejudice the Holdens in his eyes,

In the big shed, where the feast was spread on improvised tables, and where the now-boisterous crowd was waited on by a

party of women volunteers who helped Mrs. Holden and Millie, merriment prevailed, and grew when the speech-making started. There was rough banter, but a surprising delicacy was shown in important matters— for instance, Berriman insisted upon referring to Harold and Millie as facing new experiences. The first speeches were made in an embarrassed fashion; but shortly everybody wanted to say a few words; and Holden himself, inspired by the praise of someone who, after his first effort, had declared that be "oughter be a member of Parlyment " rose time after time to propose some new health and offer a few words. He was enjoying himself properly.

The crash of a portion of the improvised tables as someone leaned against it and the nodding of heads heavy with food, excitement, and beer, at length presaged the finish of the feast. Once more Holden rose to his feet.

"I wan' your 'tension, all of yous!" he roared with an urgency that wakened the sleepers. "I think everyone'll adsmit thish weddin' party'sh been a great sussesh."

A hearty roar of approval endorsed the statement; but his hand was held up for silence.

"We gotter thank the parshon fer bringin' us together like thish"— there was a salvo of approval— "an' fer doin' things to ush which should be done." There was more noisy assent.

"Everyshing's been so sussesshful that I gotter importan' announshment ter make. Me an' the missus wants you all not to 'urry away 'ome" (loud applause— there was a general knowledge that there was at least a cask of beer still unbroached) "We want y'll to sthay for a nuzzer sheremony."

The announcement was so portentous that a hush fell on the gathering, all intensely interested. Brother Petherick felt the interest himself, and leaned forward to hear the next words. When they came they brought the worst shock he had received in a ministry he now fully realised was liable to be full of shocks.

"Yes," said Holden earnestly, "the sheremony havin' proved such a shussessh the missus an' I have decided ter get married too."

3: The Strange Occurrence on Huckey's Creek

Ernest Favenc

1845-1908

Bulletin, 11 Dec 1897

Ernest Favenc

THE HEAT haze hung like a mist over the plain. Everything seen through it appeared to palpitate and quiver, although not a breath of air was stirring. The three men, sitting under the iron-roofed verandah of the little roadside inn, at which they had halted and turned out their horses for a mid-day spell, were drenched with perspiration and tormented to the verge of insanity by flies.

The horses, finding it too hot to keep up even the pretence of eating, had sought what shade they could find, and stood there in pairs, head to tail.

"Blessed if there isn't a looney of some kind coming across the plain," said one of the men suddenly.

The others looked, and could make out that an object was coming along the road that led across the open, but the quivering of the atmosphere prevented them distinguishing the figure properly until within half-a-mile of the place.

"Hanged if I don't believe it's a woman!" said the man who had first spoken (Tom Devlin).

"It is so," said the other two, after a pause.

Devlin walked to where the water-bags had been hung up to cool, and, taking one down, went out into the glaring sunshine to meet the approaching figure.

It was a woman. Weary, worn-out, and holding in her hand a dry and empty water-bag. Although only middle-aged, she had that tanned and weather-beaten appearance that all women get, sooner or later, in North Queensland.

With a sigh of gratitude she took the water-bag from Tom's hand and put the bottle-mouth to her lips, bush fashion. There is no more satisfactory drink in the world for a thirsty person than that to be obtained straight from the nozzle of a water-bag.

Tom regarded the woman pityingly. She was dressed in common print and coarse straw hat, and looked like the wife of a teamster.

"Where have you come from, missus, and what brought you here?"

"We were camped on Huckey's Creek, and my husband died last night. I couldn't find the horses this morning, so I started back here."

"Fifteen miles from here," said Devlin. "We are going to camp there to-night, and will see after it. You come in and rest."

He took her back to the- little inn, where she could get something to eat and a room to lie down in. Then they caught their horses and started, promising to look up the strayed animals and attend to everything, according to the directions the woman gave them.

The three men arrived at Huckey's Creek about an hour before sundown. They examined the place thoroughly, but neither dray, horses, nor anything else was visible. The marks of a camp and the tracks bore out the woman's story, but that was all.

"Deuced strange!" said Devlin. "Somebody must have come along and shook the things, but what did they do with the man's body? They wouldn't hawk that about with them."

"Here's the mailman coming," said one of the others, as a man coming towards them with a pack-horse hove in sight.

They awaited his approach, standing dismounted on the bank of the creek. The mailman's thirsty horses plunged their noses deep in the water and drank greedily.

"I say, you fellows," he called out, "you didn't see a woman on foot about anywhere, did you?"

"Yes," replied Tom, "she is back at the shanty."

"Wait till I come up," said the mailman.

When his horses had finished he rode up the bank to the others.

"Such a queer go," he said. "About five or six miles from here I met a tilted dray with horses, driven by a man who looked downright awful. He pulled up, and so did I. Then he said, staring straight before him, and not looking at me, "You didn't meet a woman on foot, mate, did you?"

"I told him no, and asked him where he was going?"

"Oh," he said, just in the same queer way, "I'm going on until I overtake her."

"You'd best turn back," I said. "It's 25 miles to the next water; and I tell you I'd have been bound to see her." He shook his head and drove on; and you say the woman's back at the shanty."

"Yes; it's about the rummest start I ever came across. The woman turned up at Britten's to-day, about one o'clock, on foot, and said that her husband died during the night; that she could not find the horses, and had come in on foot for help."

"I suppose he wasn't dead, after all, and when the horses came in to water he harnessed up and went ahead, looking for his wife, in a dazed, stupid sort of way."

"I suppose that is it," said Devlin. "Are you going on to Britten's to-night?" he asked the mailman.

"Yes."

"You might tell the woman that her husband has come-to, and started on with the dray. After we have had a spell, we'll go after him. He can't be far."

"No," replied the mailman, as he prepared to ride off. "He looked like a death's-head when I saw him. So-long."

The men turned their horses out and had a meal and a smoke; by this time it was dark, and they were talking about starting when the noise of an approaching dray attracted their attention.

"He's coming back himself," said Tom.

The dray crossed the creek and made for the old camp, where the driver pulled-up and got out. The full moon had risen, and it was fairly light.

"Don't speak," said Devlin; "let us see what he is going to do."

The figure unharnessed the horses with much groaning, and hobbled them, then it took its blankets out of the dray and spread them underneath and lay down.

"Let's see if we can do anything for him," said

Devlin, and they approached.

"Can we help you, mate?" he asked.

There was no answer.

He spoke again. Still silence.

"Strike a match, Bill," he said; "it's all shadow under the dray." Bill did as desired, and Devlin peered in. He started back.

"Hell!" he cried, "the man did die when the woman said. He's been dead forty-eight hours!"

4: The Tragerigal Bobgetts

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Bulletin, 29 Nov 1939

Mrs Malaprop Rides Again

"EVEN if they happen to be tragy deans, which I suppose is better than the rest," said Mrs. Parsley decisively, "I don't want any of them tragerical people in my establishment.

"Experience does it; and my experience of them tragerical Bodgetts was enough for me. They had the whole place in a state of terra firma, as the saying is; a sort of diverse case of the Pyrenees of Tears it was, Mr. Slompack said, with everybody scared to death that that there Mr. Bodgett would go and be tragerical somewhere about the place, and they might be irresponsible. And him putting a dampener on the curse of true love and everything, too!

"Very nice people them Bodgetts seemed when they came into Number 8— especially the daughter, which was as pretty as that picture no artist can paint, and went about like one of them zebra breezes of the spring, always as happy as the daisy's long, as they say. I was quite inauspicious when Mrs. Bodgett said that about her husband being one of them tragerical Bodgetts. Which the way she said it she seemed quite proud, though it didn't mean a thing to me.

" 'I'm sorry,' I says, 'I never heard of them. I hardly never go to the circus.'

" 'Circus! ' she cries, quite offended. 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley, what a mistake to make! The Bodgetts are a well-known English fambly which they call the tragerical Bodgetts because of the tragedy connected with their name. From degeneration to degeneration there has always been some Bodgett who has died by his own hand.'

"It seemed a terribly silly thing for anyone to be proud about; but I merely told Mrs. Bodgett I wouldn't have people dying in that way in my establishment and thought no more of it until that fatal day when Mr. Bodgett went out on the roof.

"THE first I knew about it was when I happened to look out of my window and saw people talking all excited-like and looking and pointing; then someone came banging at my door, crying out about Mr. Bodgett being on the roof and she thought he was going to commit suicide.

"It gave me plantations of the heart when I saw him sitting there poised on the very ledge of maternity, as Mr. Slompack's nephew, which was rather a

poet, said. He must have found one of them upper flats open and climbed through the attic window; and everybody in the flats seemed up there pleading with him to come back, and Mrs. Bodgett quite historical with crying.

" 'Oh, I say, come back, there's a good chap,' says Mr. Slompack. 'You're upsetting your wife.'

"But Mr. Bodgett still sat on that there ledge of maternity, which was the brick coping of the old houses before they was turned into these flats, where he might fall into the street at any moment if the bricks gave way; and he talked about being doomed by Fate, and it might as well be now as later. 'Poor Hilda, she will be better off without me,' he says.

" 'Oh, Ned, don't say that! ' wails Mrs. Bodgett.

" 'You come back at once, Mr. Bodgett!' I says, sharp-like. 'I don't permit goings-on like this in my flats— making an exhibition-building of the place.'

"But I might have talked to water on a duck's back for all the notice he took of me, or any of us, which we were all of us ajittertated— especially when he moved and we thought he was going over— and talking about how we could get him back. Young Mr. Slompack, who had come to see his uncle that afternoon, was trying to cheer up Miss Bodgett, who wasn't a bright zebra any more, and she was trying to cheer her mother. We were all on the horns of them tenterhooks; it was Confucius worse confound it, as the Chinese say, when Detective Cassidy came and talked about bringing the fire brigade with a ladder to get him down. Which he said, though, that if we made any move towards him Mr. Bodgett might throw himself into the street.

" 'Yes; and if the fire brigade brings a ladder he might do that, too,' says the Major.

"It seemed we would never deduce him from his position in a degeneration of cats, when Mrs. Bodgett, who had been speaking to Mr. Slompack and Mr. Wassail, undressed him again, as the saying is. 'Do come back, dear,' she says. 'You'll get your death of cold.'

"Which that seemed a funny thing to say, with him sitting on that ledge of maternity.

" 'Come back, darling. The rent has been all fixed up,' she says.

"Well, of all the things that ever happened! Mrs. Bodgett had spoken to me about letting the rent stand over, but never in my born life, or my unborn life either, had it concurred to me that a man would make all that fuss about being behind in his rent, which seems to come natural to some people. Of course I knew that Mr. Slompack and Mr. Wassail must have given Mrs. Bodgett the money, when she told them what it was that made her husband go on like that, as if his mind was disarranged. Even then Mr. Bodgett didn't seem inclined to come back, going on about being doomed by Fate, and it was as

well now as later; and he didn't assent until Mr. Slompack said, when he had talked about only having fresh difficulties to face, that he needn't let a small amount of money worry him.

"After that, he caught the end of a rope that was thrown to him and came back, though my heart was in my mouth, the way he slipped. I thought he would slide off the roof. Which he seemed as frightened as any of us, the way he looked as pale as one of them whitened sepulchures, and panted like the heart that never rejoices. Which it served him right, frightening us all.

"But everybody was so glad that he was safe again that you would have thought he was a hero. Mr. Slompack took him down to his flat and gave him a whisky; which I was very glad when he gave me one, too, for them plantations were still going on in my heart.

" 'By rights we ought to run you up to the station, Mr. Bodgett,' says Detective Cassidy.

" 'But you won't, eh, Cassidy,' says Mr. Slompack. 'You mustn't do that sort of thing again, Bodgett.'

" 'It's the curse of the Bodgetts— the tragerical Bodgetts,' he said, gloomy, but as if he was quite proud of it. 'We Bodgetts are doomed to meet unhappy endings. It is a dark history, ours. When I was on the roof there, I couldn't help thinking of my great-uncle, Colonel Swashwockler Bodgett, who died in the fortress of Jibel-Jibel in India.'

" 'Tell them about it, Ned,' says Mrs. Bodgett, adoring-like.

" 'My uncle,' says Mr. Bodgett, 'was an officer of Hurrahs, but he was transformed to service in India, and when his regimen was cut to pieces in a sudden insectarian amongst the Panthers he held out in the fortress. One by one the men fell, till my uncle was the only revival. The delivered ants that would have saved them did not come, and Colonel Bodgett knew that them Panthers would torture him if they captured him. So he ended his life with his own sword.

" 'And half an hour later,' said Mr. Bodgett, 'that there delivered ants arrived ; a British force, that had been delayed, scattered them Panthers. But that just shows why we are called the tragerical Bodgetts.'

"And there, especially when Mr. Slompack gave him more whisky, he went on talking about indifferent people who had cut off their own heads or stabbed themselves with resolvers; which they was all Bodgetts and they all did it by mistake. Very proud of them he seemed ; and the other people appeared most depressed about him having illustrated aunts' sisters and coming from a fambly which had somebody always committing suicide from the days when they had round heads down to this year of disgrace, as they call it.

"I DIDN'T have the time to stop to listen to all he had to say, but that seemed to be the grist to the mill of it; and it didn't appeal to me at all to have a man in the place who might jump off the roof or drown himself in one of the baths, for that matter, at any moment of the day or night, when he owed a little rent. I couldn't say that at the time, but I took the opportunity by the foresight next day.

" 'It's not, Mr. Bodgett,' I says, 'that I have anything against you or Mrs. Bodgett, which is a very nice woman; but dead corpses are things that I will not tolerate in my establishment. I think it would be better for you to go before you make up your mind to be one.'

" 'Very well, Mrs. Parsley,' he says with a look of that there painted assignation in his eyes ; very queer it seemed to me, and it made me uncomfortable. 'It would not be fair, I daresay, to blame you for anything that may come of this. It is the fate of the tragerical Bodgetts.'

"The way he spoke and the tragerical way he went to his flat gave me the creeps. I ran all the way up them stairs, with the plantations in my heart to see that them upper flats was all locked and he couldn't get out to the roof again; and when I came downstairs there was Mrs. Bodgett come to see me, all in tears, and Mr. Slompack and Mrs. Wassail with her.

" 'Oh, Mrs. Parsley, you shouldn't have said that to my husband! If you had spoken to me first, I could have broken it to him. But he's one of the tragerical Bodgetts. He's so sensitive to the stinging arrears of enrage us fortune that he might have gone out and thrown himself under a tram,' weeps Mrs. Bodgett.

" 'I don't think it was quite wise, Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Slompack. 'Mr. Bodgett has a very peculiar indisposition, and, although it may be very irritating, none of us would care to feel that we were irresponsible for his death. It is a matter of Herod ditty.'

"When Mr. Slompack brought Herod into it like that it gave me quite a scare, because everybody knows what that Herod was like, having a brazen woman doing that Alimony dance before him with the head of John the Baptist on a platter. I was quite relieved when I heard what Mrs. Bodgett said next.

" 'I took the liberty of telling Mr. Bodgett that you didn't want us to go; you had only spoken in a momentum of indication.' Which I didn't like her putting it that way, but as I didn't want to have Mr. Bodgett's death on my conscientiousness I let it go at that.

"SO there I was with a tenant in the house I daren't hardly say a word to because of him being tragerical. I was like those people who daren't say booze to a goose, though why anybody should want to mention likker to a goose I do not know.

"It wasn't that they didn't pay up their rent pretty well; Mrs. Bodgett saw to that, poor soul. Which, although I don't approve of them women as are always nagging their husbands, never seeming to have learned that motter that speech is silver but silence is impossible, I felt sorry for her, frightened almost to debt about doing anything that might make that Mr. Bodgett tragerical.

" 'It's a sort of diverse case of Pyrenees of Tears,' says Mr. Slompack. 'It must be awful for that poor woman, living with a man who's a libel to go off the handlebar at any time. It makes her a slave; I wouldn't like myself to feel I was irresponsible for Bodgett carrying out the urge that comes down from his aunts' sisters, so I can judge what she feels, poor thing. The money he owes me doesn't matter, thank heaven ; but I am very glad my feelings collanade with his regarding my nephew and Gwen.

" 'Not that Gwen isn't a very nice young lady,' says Mr. Slompack hastily, 'but,, you understand, Mrs. Parsley, I wouldn't like a nephew of mine to marry into a fambly which has a tendaciousness to suicide.'

"Which why he said that was that ever since that day when Mr. Bodgett had sat on the roof young Mr. Walter Slompack, who had tried such a lot to comfort Miss Bodgett, started coming regular to see his uncle, which he never had done before, and he never seemed sorry when his uncle was out if he could happen to see Miss Bodgett. Which, somehow, she always seemed to meet him accidental on the stairs, as if she been watching from the window and had seen him coming. They say that love will find a way to go to the pictures, and that's what they were doing soon, even though that Mr. Grabblewit, whom Miss Bodgett's was supposed to be going to marry, was expected to be coming to see her.

"How I learnt the way the wind was blowing no good to anybody was when Mrs. Bodgett came running after young Mr. Slompack and Miss Bodgett as they were going downstairs ; and she was all pale and ajittertated.

" 'Oh, Gwen, where are you going?' she asks. 'Your father heard you go out, and he's talking dreadfully ! I'm sure he's in a mood for something desperate. You know Mr. Grabblewit is coming to-night.'

" 'Oh, mother,' poutered Miss Bodgett, 'I'd much rather go out with Wally than stay to see Bill. Bill's such a bore!'

" 'Gwen, you mustn't say that about your— about Mr. Grabblewit. You know your father has built his hopes on your marrying him.'

" 'She won't if I can help it, Mrs. Bodgett,' says young Mr. Slompack. Mr. Walter Slompack didn't seem to have any of his uncle's diversion to getting married, the way he spoke. 'Mrs. Bodgett, Gwen and I are fond of one another'

" 'Oh, this is dreadful! ' cries Mrs. Bodgett, looking quite terrified, as if a glass of port in the storm would have done her a world of good. 'If ever it comes to your father's ears, that will be the end!'

"Them two young people was standing there before her, holding hands with their fingers all twisted together; and a very fine couple they made.

" 'Of course,' says Mr. Slompack, 'I was going to speak to him.'

"But even Miss Bodgett cried out about that. 'Oh, no, you mustn't!' she says.

" 'Haven't you told young Mr. Slompack that your father is one of the tragerical Bodgetts?' asks Mrs. Bodgett. 'Surely even if it was impossible for him to marry you he would not like to have his father-in-law's death on his unconscientiousness. Neither would you, if you have any feelings as a daughter. And to-day you must come back! I won't answer for the subsidences if you don't,' she says.

" 'I'm afraid I'll have to go back, Wally. You don't know what my father is like,' says Miss Bodgett.

"'I saw him sitting on the roof,' says young Mr. Slompack, sulky a bit. But he agreed when she pleaded about not wanting to be irresponsible for being a murderess as she would be if her father killed himself because she had disobeyed him. He made her kiss him before he'd agree, though, right there at the top of the stairs.

" 'And I do love you, Wally,' she says. 'I'll never marry Bill.'

"All the time there was poor Mrs. Bodgett wringing her hands, and looking round as if she suspected that Mr. Bodgett would come and listen to what was said, and then show how tragerical he was by throwing himself out of the window.

" That's him below , sir . He's wild because you wouldn't let him lead the squadron."

"'Oh, please! Please!' she says. 'You know, Hilda, I'd like you to marry who you like ; but we daren't cause the death of your poor dear father.'

"YOU talk about them Pyrenees of Tears. If ever there was Pyrenee it was the way that Mr. Bodgett had everybody scared about him being likely to commit suicide and them being irresponsible for it. Mr. Slompack said that he had found out where Mr. Bodgett was a clerk, and the firm had wanted to put him in a trench for twenty years and didn't dare to for fear they'd cause him to commit suicide, though why they should want to is far beyond me, as they say.

"He had his fambly properly scared ; and so, soon, was everybody about the place. And when that Mrs. Cruickshank got frightened of speaking to him about him having kicked her little dog, which she said she was going to tell him

off about it, but she didn't when Mrs. Bodgett told her what might happen, it seemed hopeless for them young people. Especially when Mr. Grabblewit began to say that hope defied makes the art thick, and he wanted to get married soon. Which Mr. Bodgett talked more and more about them tragerical Bodgetts every time the poor girl said she didn't want to get married yet. You see, Mr. Grabblewit was as rich as a Crisis, so they said.

" 'It's ridiculous, of course,' says Mr. Slompack. 'That uncorrugated rascal has been getting his own way all his life through this Herod ditty weakness to suicide. I wouldn't like, myself, to give him any chance to kill himself because of anything I've done; I daren't even ask him to pay me back my money. But I wish I'd let you get rid of him when you gave him notice. I won't interfere if you do it again.'

" 'No, thank you, Mr. Slompack!' I says. 'I don't want no dead corpse on my conscientiousness, even if I would sooner not have Mr. Bodgett in the place.'

" 'I'm really sorry for poor Hilda,' says Mr. Slompack. 'I wouldn't like Wally to marry into a fambly like that, but it's terrible to think the poor girl should be forced to marry this Grabblewit just because her father hopes to be kept in comfort. A disgrace. But I don't suppose anyone can stop it.'

"Which it didn't seem that anyone could. Poor Miss Bodgett ceased being the happy zebra she had been, and she was crying often when I saw her with young Mr. Slompack, and saying that surely he wouldn't like her to murder her father. Which he got very bad-tempered about it, and said once that it would be a jolly good job if Mr. Bodgett did throw himself under a tram. He had to come back and hang about to say he was sorry for saying that, after she had run away from him and wouldn't see him again.

"TALK about tragerical Bodgett! It was them young people who seemed tragerical to me. Especially after that night when there was loud voices in the Bodgett flat and Mr. Bodgett came down the stairs looking very gloomy and saying everybody wanted to see him dead. Which the whole fambly came rushing down to coax him back. And when Mr. Grabblewit came down he was smiling.

" 'I'm very happy 'to-night, Mrs. Parsley,' he says, passing me. 'In another week's time I'm going to be married.'

"I wasn't going to tell him I was glad, when I thought it was a shame; I knew that poor Hilda had a heart bowed down with weighty woe, as the song says. I condoled myself by saying in my mind, 'Aha, my friend, you don't know what being a married couple is yet!'

"Young Mr. Slompack was nearly mad as a parched hare when he heard about it; and though his uncle might have been glad that his nephew could not

marry a tragerical he was upset too. That's what made me surprised when I heard Mr. Slompack laughing as he came up the stairs that night. There was another man with him, who laughed louder; in fact, it made me laugh, too, when I heard him—a jolly, stout gentleman he looked.

" 'I beg your pardon, Mr. Slompack,' I says, 'but it was the way your friend laughed that made me laugh ; his laughter was contiguous. He seems to be a jolly Roger gentlemen if ever there was one.'

" 'Mrs. Parsley,' says Mr. Slompack, 'this is a friend whose acquaintance I made to-day. I thought I would bring him home to-night. Mr. Bodgett.'

" 'Mr. Bodgett! ' I cries.

"It seemed to me that Mr. Slompack had a queer look when he said it, as if he was a sort of Namesthis.

" 'I'm glad you can laugh, Mrs. Parsley,' says this new Mr. Bodgett. 'I like people who can laugh. Laughter's a fambly extradition, as they say. My fambly has been known for degenerations as "the laughing Bodgetts." I didn't tell you about my uncle, Colonel Swashwockler Bodgett, did I, Slompack?'

"You could have knocked me down with the last feather to fly with when that jolly Mr. Bodgett went on to tell Mr. Slompack and me all about that Colonel Swashwockler Bodgett who had been in the Hurrahs, but killed himself with his own sword to escape the Panthers in India. Only, with this Mr. Bodgett, the Colonel emptied a wagon of wine— which I should say was a grocer's exaggeration, as they call it —laughing at them Panthers, who could see him drink it, before he killed hisself.

" 'My goodness! ' I says ; but this Mr. Bodgett didn't know why I said it.

" 'And he was hardly dead before the delivered ants came?' says Mr. Slompack.

" 'Yes ; that was the joke of it. A bit tragerical; but we Bodgetts can see a joke even when it is like that. As long as he died with a laugh on his lips, what better death could a man have? That's why we've been called the laughing Bodgetts.'

"What them two men hadn't noticed was that there was the tragerical Bodgetts on the stairs behind them, held spelling-bound by what was being said, and that tragerical Mr. Bodgett looked very white. Then downstairs he came.

" 'Harry! What do you mean by coming to the place where I live and talking like this?' he says, angrylike.

"'Why, Ned!' cries the jolly Mr. Bodgett. 'Mr. Slompack said I could see you here! It's a treat. I haven't seen you since you were a kid.'

"But the tragerical Mr. Bodgett didn't take any notice of his hand, which he was holding out. 'You know damn' well it's the tragerical Bodgetts,' he says.

" 'Don't be silly, Ned,' says Mr. Harry Bodgett. 'Of course your mother —my stepmother— when she married dad, thought that "tragerical" would be much nicer than "laughing." But dad was proud of his aunts' sisters who had died with a laugh on their lips.'

" 'It's a lie!' says Mr. Ned Bodgett.

"That made the jolly Mr. Bodgett angry, too.

" 'What the blazes do you know about it, Ned?' he said. 'You were only a kid when dad died ; and if it comes to that, you're not a Bodgett! You're a Wranglerotter, only when your mother married dad you took my dad's name.'

"If ever anybody was dumbfloundered after all we'd been standing from that Mr. Bodgett because of that Herod ditty which might have made him commit suicide, when after all he wasn't disentitled to it, it was me! I seemed to come out of a trance when I heard Mrs. Bodgett speaking.

" 'I'm going back to the flat to tell Hilda she can marry who she likes,' she says, looking very angry. 'As for you, you false pretence, you can go out and throw yourself under a tram for all I care. Putting that Pyrenee on your fambly all these years!'

"Which off she went; and so did Mr. Ned Bodgett, too, down the stairs; but he was back before midnight, not a dead corpse but dead drunk if ever a man was that way.

"But it was Mrs. Bodgett who gave me notice next day; and from what I heard she goes on still at other places about them being the tragerical Bodgetts; she's proud of it. The great difference was that Miss Hilda didn't have to marry that Mr. Grabblewit, and we got rid of them.

"I won't have any more tragericals in the place, even tragy deans— no, not even if they're tragy archbishops."

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5: Murder's So Sorry

Laurence Donovan

1885-1948

The American Eagle Dec 1941

Laurence Donovan

TOM MALVIN couldn't miss the murderous intent in the bombing of the U.S. Gunboat *Stralan*. He had been watching the Dornier, the triple-engined flying boat with the black and yellow rings of a deadly hornet painted around its twin-ruddered tail assembly.

"Some yellow stick-pusher who's got himself a proud record of killin' Chinee women an' babies in the rice paddies!" he said to Jeff Holden, just before the Stralan got it.

"Don't misbrand the guy," drawled "Long Jeff" Holden. "Them's markin's to show he's been in a dog-fight with some of the marines on the Shanghai waterfront. But look, Tom!"

For two weeks Tom Malvin and Long Jeff Holden had been seeing the Japs' five-plane patrol formation skirting almighty close to the international line in the troubled Gulf of Siam, a line unmarked, but understood.

The five Nipponese ships were undoubtedly German-designed bombers of the Dornier Do-24 class. They were easy enough for Malvin and Holden to identify, seeing both of them had been flying some of the same type crates in the Netherlands East Indies Air Force.

Only the plane of the flight leader carried the black and yellow hornet rings which, as Tom Malvin had observed, might mark a proud record of bombings among helpless Chinese.

The five-ship formation was low over the bay, and verging toward a shore where a mass of small junks and some fishing boats made a fogged shadow along the Siamese coast. Off to one side, its one cocky funnel spewing black smoke, the U. S. Gunboat Stralan, cruised at slow speed.

Long Jeff Holden's, "But look, Tom!" was the signal for all kinds of unexpected blasting to break loose. And, helpless in their small, hired launch, Tom Malvin and Long Jeff Holden saw all of it happen.

The five vultures of the Rising Sun gave no warning. Perhaps the flight leader wagged the wings of his hornet-tailed ship. The formation spread, and at barely a thousand feet one ship and another side-slipped and dived.

And one after another, at barely more than five hundred feet, the bomb racks were emptied. The Jap Dorniers themselves rocked in the explosions.

Whole sampans, portions of junks, bodies like mutilated dolls seemed to arise slowly, horribly, in the billowing yellow smoke of the close-ranged bombs.

TOM MALVIN stood erect in the cockpit of the roiling launch, his eyes hot and bitter, oaths streaming from his tongue, and his fists beating at the instrument panel of the launch until the skin was torn from his knuckles.

Behind him, Long Jeff was standing, swaying and swearing, his long fingers pulling at his hair.

It seemed to Tom Malvin he had been standing there for Hours, watching the last of the toylike bodies falling from the yellow smoke and splashing into the bleody sea around the blasted shore craft, on none of which was there a single gun.

Then it was that Tom Malvin saw it —that sudden sideward dart of the flight-leading Dornier. Its yellow and black tail assembly was shining between him and the sun.

One, two, and three. The bombs slid from the Dornier's racks like that. Two went into the sea, straddling the U. S. Gunboat *Stralan*. The third never splashed.

"Jimmy! My God, Jimmy!"

Tom Malvin was unaware that the words were ripped from his lips. For he saw the cocky, smoke-belching stack of the Gunboat *Stralan* disappear. And Jimmy Durbin, who was to have been his brother-in-law was on that boat.

The gunboat could never by any stretch of the imagination have been classed as a warship. It had been a Mekong river steamer. Its conversion to neutral patrol duty had been accomplished by equipping it lightly with rapid-fire guns fore and aft, and half a dozen machine-guns. Its American colors were prominently displayed.

There was no armor to resist the bomb that clipped out its stack and neatly tore out its machine inards. The boat started sinking slowly, but grounded, and lay broken in the shoal water.

Even before the third bomb had exploded, the Jap Dornier with the yellow and black tail had slipped to one side. As the smoke cleared, the five yellow assassins of the Rising Sun again were in formation.

Led by the hornet-tailed patrol bomber, the worthy killers displaying the emblem of the Rising Sun faded from view in the general direction of Saigon or Camranh Bay, at either of which they might have been based.

Tom Malvin and Long Jeff Holden piloted their heavily laden launch to the decks of the bombed Gunboat Stralan. There they were helped to unload some of the human cargo they had collected floating in the sea.

Some of the swimming crew they had picked up were alive and unhurt. Others were unconscious from deep, bleeding wounds. Two need never have been picked up at all.

And it was beside one of these two that Tom Malvin knelt with tears streaking the smoke and dirt gumming his cheeks.

"Jimmy!" he whispered. "Jimmy, what am I going to tell Martha? Jimmy, Long Jeff an' me jumped the base an' come all the way across to say 'hello.' "

Gray-haired Captain Carsten stood beside Tom and Long Jeff.

"He's one of seven," said Captain Carsten. "I've made out my report, but there isn't much can be done about it. You, Malvin and Holden— it'd be best if you get back to your base an' don't talk too much. There's no way to prove it was other than an accident, the Japs missing our colors perhaps in the smoke."

Tom Malvin whipped to his feet.

"Jimmy Durbin here was to have married my sister," he said. "I have the job of explaining to Martha how I saw him die. That bombing wasn't an accident. Not any more than

the machine-gunning of the old Panay a few years ago. And by all that's holy—"

"Easy, Malvin!" The hand of Captain Carsten was on his arm. "It all happened too quickly for any of my own men to be sure that we weren't mistaken for some of the Siamese or Chinese boats. You and Holden are absent without leave, and your word would only create an international incident."

"International mess be blowed!" shouted Tom Malvin. "Sure, we are here without leave! All we're doin' anyway, is teachin' some of the Malayans how to shoot the heck out of a floatin' wind sock, which none of 'em ever will! So I'm personally going to—"

"YOU will, for your own good, forget what you have seen," Captain Carsten interrupted firmly. "So far as it can be officially determined, the Japanese in a general bombing of Chinese and Siamese river boats, mistook the *Stralan* for other than an American vessel. It does look Chinese, you know."

"You mean you're not going to raise merry heck and demand the punishment of the blasted yellow murderers of Jimmy Durbin and these others?" exploded Tom Malvin.

"Certainly I shall demand justice," said Captain Carsten. "And just as certainly there will be official communications, and probably an apology. Unfortunately, as much as I would like to do so, I cannot personally go after the killers. Officially, I have no witnesses to prove that the bombs hitting my boat were dropped intentionally."

"Well, I'm a witness, and I say they were!" flared Tom Malvin. "I know which plane, and I can get the pilot!"

"It's too bad, Mr. Malvin and you, Mr. Holden, that you are at present attached to a British flying unit, and that both of you are on this side of the bay without leave," stated Captain Carsten. "Unfortunately, too, the international situation is such that the whole matter must take its routine course through Tokyo and Washington."

Tom Malvin's eyes were suddenly bleak and hard.

"That's what you think, Captain Carsten," he said angrily. "The dirty yellow killers will say it was all a mistake, and the Tokyo government will say it is so sorry... Come on, Long Jeff! Let's get out of here!"

CAPTAIN JAMISON, the C.O., had Tom Malvin and Long Jeff Holden in his baking office. It was a small cubicle of sheet-iron close to a camouflaged hangar. All of the base was little more than a runway hacked out of the Malay Peninsula jungle.

Although British, Captain Jamison had a sense of humor. It was essential in this isolated Malayan air base where some fifty native seekers after war wings were being trained.

In the beginning, these natives could not have driven an automobile on a straight, broad road. Yet today nearly all of the beginners could handle their special Ryans, the lastest American plane being used to train hundreds of new pilots in the vital islands. And some of the native pilots could sometimes find the wind sock target with the tracers from their Brownings.

CAPTAIN JAMISON was holding a flimsy bulletin sheet, as he appeared not to notice the grim lines on the faces of Malvin and Holden, his two Yankee instructors.

"You may be interested, Mr. Malvin and Mr. Holden, in the conclusion of the recent incident of the Gunboat *Stralan*," said Captain Jamison. "Officially, I am not aware that you know much of the Japanese bombing of the United States gunboat. Unofficially, I'll say that I am sorry how it concerned you intimately."

Tom Malvin nodded, and said merely, "Yes, sir." But there was smoldering trouble in his eyes as he glanced at the flimsy report in the captain's hand.

"We have this bulletin concerning the Gunboat *Stralan* incident," said Captain Jamison. "The Imperial government at Tokyo deeply regrets the accident which resulted in the loss of the United States Gunboat *Stralan*, and expresses the deepest sympathy in what must be regarded as an unavoidable tragedy. Suitable reparations will be made to the government of the United States."

Tom Malvin's fingernails dug into the palms of his hands. Long Jeff Holden's shoulders stiffened to an unaccustomed erectness.

"Yes, sir," said Tom Malvin through clenched teeth.

But Captain Jamison laid aside the flimsy.

"Of course," he said, "this closes the incident. Therefore, any vague reports I may have heard concerning utterances on the part of you, Mr. Malvin, and you, Mr. Holden, must herewith be considered without any foundation in fact."

Tom Malvin's blue eyes were level with those of the C.O.

"You have heard, sir, that I have said I will get the yellow devil who killed Jimmy Durbin," Tom said evenly. "The report that the incident is closed only makes my intention all the stronger. The blowing up of the Stralan was direct murder, sir."

Captain Jamison pulled one finger across his clipped mustache.

"Do I understand, Mr. Holden, that you share Mr. Malvin's opinion?" he said.

"You're blessed well— I'm sorry, sir," said Long Jeff. "I mean, yes, sir. I go along with Tom."

"It would be inconvenient to lose the two best instructors the unit has ever had," Captain Jamison said soberly. "However, I cannot have two pilots who admit they are prepared to staft an undeclared war on their own. It leaves me in one deuce of a hole, although I cannot say that I hold it against you."

Tom Malvin spoke up quickly.

"Speaking for both of us, sir, we will give our word there will be no shooting whatever. We would carry on as before, sir, and I would suggest that our own plane, when on target or Other training duty, shall carry only unloaded guns."

A puzzled expression came over Captain Jamison's blunt features. During past weeks he had learned something of the hot-headed American, Tom Malvin, and his slower but equally stubborn flying partner, Long Jeff Holden.

"That is quite extraordinary, Mr. Malvin," said the captain. "I would not consider it necessary, if I can but have your word that you will remain strictly neutral and not in any way seek to carry out an attack upon the Japanese or other potential enemies."

"We would prefer the unloaded guns, sir, and you have our assurance," stated Tom Malvin. "Shall we continue practice as usual?"

"You may carry on, Mr. Malvin and Mr. Holden," said Captain Jamison.

He had been given the assurance he had sought, but as the pair of trim, quick-moving American fliers disappeared into the concealed hangar. Captain Jamison pulled at the corner of his mustache.

"Now what in the devil do you suppose those two Yankees are keeping from me?" he said softly. "That business about the unloaded guns is a bit too much on the balmy side."

TOM MALVIN gave the Hispano-Suiza engine full throttle. He slanted the nose of the Koolhoven FK-58 at a bank of cumulus clouds. In its time, this training plane of the East Indies and British Malay had held the world's diving record.

Tom Malvin pushed it to its quick climbing capacity of three thousand

feet per minute. In the cockpit behind him, Long Jeff Holden looked to the reel of stout manila line attached to the folded target sock.

A dozen native trainees were pegging about in their slower Ryan training ships, equipped especially with both fore and rear cockpit Brownings. The natives were slow to get the feel of their ships, and. slower still to adjust themselves to accurate shooting when peeling from formation in a dive.

At five thousand, Tom Malvin searched the edge of the cloud bank. Although the Koolhoven mounted six guns, Tom Malvin had insisted that their drums be emptied.

"Might as well shake out the sock, Jeff," said Malvin. "This is one heck of a way to be spending a war. The boys we've got up could come closer to pegging the sock with throwing spears than with lead. All right, ripple it out!"

Malvin leveled off, then glided to around four thousand. He cut the throttle to match the slower speed of the Ryans, gave the Koolhoven a wigwag, and the dozen Ryans bunched into awkward formation, that caused Long Jeff to grunt with disgust.

"How the heathens keep from rubbin' wings is beyond me," he complained. "Look at that collection of misfits! When they form a V, it might be any other letter in the alphabet!"

Tom Malvin lifted his hand and barked into the radiophone connection to the flight leader of the mismatched formation.

"All set! Widen your line! And be sure you wait until the ship on the sock has cleared before the next one peels off!"

The elongated wind sock of heavy canvas drifted back of the Koolhoven on a hundred, then two hundred yards of unreeled line. One of the Ryans peeled off and thundered down with tracers smoking.

Long Jeff snorted with disgust. It was plainly evident that the native pilot was making sure that he would not entangle with the floating target sock.

Another Ryan peeled off, and another trainee sent tracers smoking far behind the sock as he took his dive, then pulled out of it too short.

Long Jeff kept up a running fire of abuse directed at the ineffectiveness of the target practice. But Tom Malvin was not hearing any of it. He was silently repeating words to himself :

" 'Remain strictly neutral, and not in any way seek to carry out an attack upon the Japanese or other potential enemies—' "

His eyes were fixed upon the shining edge of the banking clouds. He was glancing occasionally at the dancing gulf below, the Malay Peninsula bordering it, and at the sky.

"Right along about here," he muttered softly. "For two weeks they edged the middle of the gulf at five thousand, then they blasted the Siamese and the Gunboat *Stralan*. And every day for a week since then they have followed that same line of patrol."

Back of him he could hear the diving thunder and the staccato chatter of the Ryans' target salvos. But Tom Malvin kept his eyes fixed higher up, following that rising rim of cumulus clouds.

"Every other day they came over the sky was clear." Malvin was muttering again. "But today, if they hold to the same bearings, we'll get a fast five or six hundred ceiling under that storm."

IN HIS mind Tom Malvin was seeing what he had been thinking about every waking hour, and dreaming of at night. He could see the yellow and black rings around a tail assembly with twin rudders, the Dornier that had led that bomb massacre.

And each time he saw that yellow and black hornet's tail, he could also see the bruised and bloody face of

Jimmy Durbin. The bruised and bloody dead face of Jimmy Durbin, about whom Martha now must know, for the newspaper had carried the names of those who had died in that—

" 'Regrettable incident.' "

"What, Tom?" queried Long Jeff, and Malvin realized that he had shouted the words.

Tom Malvin pushed the Koolhoven up and up this time. The flight leader of the training natives protested over the phone.

"Shootin' won't always be on the ground level!" Malvin snapped back. "See that cloud bank rolling up? Well, Mister, we're doing a drag right along its edges! Now see if they can peel off and find the sock when they can't see it!"

The flight leader of the practice ships started another protest. To his surprise, Tom Malvin's voice cracked into his ears.

"Okay, Mister! Get your boys down! The shootin's all over for the day! Get 'em down, I said!"

Long Jeff heard the abrupt and unexpected order. He was watching the target sock trailing far behind. It was lying close along the white and purple folds of the first of the rolling storm.

"Bring 'er in, huh?" said Long Jeff, and started to turn the reel.

"Stop it, Jeff! Let'er ride! Get set and be ready to bale out! We're going up!"

Tom Malvin had seen them. The Japanese flight of five, the Dornier patrol. The yellow and black of the rings on the leading Dornier's tail seemed to burn through his eyes into his brain.

One hand went out and instinctively gripped a trigger. And he was glad he had insisted upon empty guns.

There they came, that parade of yellow murderers. Flashing along the rim of the storm clouds.

"Ready to blast more women and babies," grated Tom Malvin. "Never once has a single yellow devil of them known what it was to have a man-toman, wing-to-wing fight, or to risk death as a pilot should expect. Never a fighter there. Only killers of the unarmed and the helpless!"

Long Jeff stared at Tom Malvin then. Malvin was pouring everything into the Hispano, reaching toward the high cloud bank so steeply that the Koolhoven seemed to be suspended by its single thundering prop.

Long Jeff glanced back, just as the ship dived from daylight into the ..cold, misty darkness of the storm. And he saw the target sock whipping about crazily.

Tom Malvin had never flown a ship with a nicer degree of calculation. For as he had pushed the plane into the edge of the cloud bank, he had estimated

air speed and wind direction, and the moving position of the Dormer patrol formation now below him.

He could feel the static crackle of storm lightning rippling along the instrument panels. The Koolhoven was capable of twenty-four thousand. Malvin glanced at the altimeter and it was reading fourteen thousand. There was some pressure on his ribs and throat, and a whiff from an oxygen nipple would have helped.

HE COULD not exceed eighteen thousand without special altitude tanks. Yet, as his mathematical mind had diagrammed the next few minutes of flying, he desired nearly to to touch that height.

Now he was out of the storm, with the late afternoon sun blazing. The clouds rolled below like a black-billowed sea. Long, jagged streaks of lightning ran through it.

Long Jeff touched his shoulder.

"We're wallopin' the daylights out of that target sock," he said. "Whatcha mean about bein' ready to bail out?"

"Just be ready, that's all," said Malvin grimly.

His eyes were upon every drifting break of the storm clouds below.

"The yellow sons are now at their Usual turn," he said, checking his time. "And they're gettin' a beltin' from that rain. Okay, Jeff! Hang onto your left ear!"

Once the Koolhoven had held what was then a diving record. That was back in Nineteen Thirty-eight before air speed maniacs instead of plane designers had been introduced into the war plants.

Anyway, this was good enough for Tom Malvin's tortured spirit. The Koolhoven passed three hundred m.p.h. on the air speed indicator. He could envision that target sock whipping behind like the cracking tip of a rawhide whip.

As he rode the thundering air, slashed through the storm clouds, and smashed into the rain with a ceiling of scarcely more than a thousand feet, a wave of exultation flooded through Tom Malvin. No doubt he had miscalculated some on his day-by- day check of the routine of the Rising Sun patrol bombers, or the slashing rain and the low ceiling might have moved the yellow sons of Imperial and apologetic murder a few degrees one way or the other.

But Tom Malvin yelled with a fury that made his voice heard even above the thunderous din of his own strained prop and motor. For there they were! The five Dorniers. The yellow and black- of the flight leader now was obscured

by the slashing rain, but the planes were outlined like prowling, shadowy vultures.

" 'Regrettable incident!' "

Tom Malvin screamed it out. Long Jeff hunched, braced himself, for to his slow mind it had come suddenly that Malvin intended smashing into and through that Rising Sun murder flight of five. Yet no warning came to Long Jeff Holden to bail out. At that height and at that diving speed, it would have been suicide anyway.

Tom Malvin played the controls of that roaring comet with the sensitive skill of a violinist. Under him were the five closely V-ed Dorniers, and with the suddenness of a gun flash in the darkness, Malvin's vision registered the rings of yellow and black on that flight-leading yellow assassin of the sky. *

"Jimmy, boy, here's lookin' at you!"

Long Jeff heard the crazily uttered speech as though Tom Malvin were proposing a toast— and he was. A blistering toast of death to the yellow killers of the Rising Sun.

Long Jeff closed his eyes and opened them again. His stomach bounced into his throat, leveled off, and his nearly collapsed lungs sucked in air. For the Koolhoven was straining its wings to the breaking point as Tom Malvin came out of that incredible dive.

Malvin's eyes whipped around. He saw the stout line on the target sock reel snapping as if it were some angler's line that had suddenly connected up with a fighting monster of the sea. Then that line almost tore the reel from place. The plane rocked and side-slipped. Tom, Malvin looped upward into the rain. Fighting the downpour, feeding the Hispano the last ounce of power it would take, once more he was virtually hanging the ship on its tortured prop.

There, for perhaps ten, or perhaps twenty long seconds, Tom Malvin's speech was frozen in his throat. Long Jeff crouched beside him, trying to see more clearly through the rainswept plexiglass of the window.

A three-engined Dornier, with yellow and black stripes around its twin-rudder tail seemed to have become a living bird. But it was a wounded, dying bird, a great vulture, the power of its wings abruptly paralyzed.

Yards of stout line were caught and wound tightly around the wounded Dornier's middle prop. A flapping, rain-sogged, canvas target sock literally ripped another prop from its place, tearing out the motor for good measure.

Tom Malvin could picture the yellow face of that murder pilot who had so casually bombed the Gunboat *Stralan*. He could vision the faces and the eyes of the crew with him, trapped too far down to bail out, and being whirled around in what had become a coffin of chaos.

Perhaps Tom Malvin had entertained but slight hope that more than the yellow and black bomber would be downed. But that Jap formation was close. That target sock slapping out of the rain to send the flight leader's crazy boat bucking and stalling caught two other pilots unprepared.

The flying boats were cumbersome ships. Originally intended for island transport, then converted into short-range bombers, they were about as maneuverable as flying garbage scows.

Tom Malvin circled low. Fire smoked up from the water. A surprised pilot had neglected to switch off the ignition. The bay boiled from the smash of weight, but no heads of swimmers appeared.

Malvin glanced at the calming water. He looked up at the fast fading storm clouds. Two distant dots there were departing planes, pilots of the Imperial government of the Rising Sun, returning to base to report.

Tom Malvin's right hand raised stiffly.

Long Jeff said nothing. He realized that silent salute was for Jimmy Durbin.

CAPTAIN JAMISON, the C.O., held a flimsy bulletin in his hands. Again he had Tom Malvin and Long Jeff Holden in the sheet-iron oven he called his headquarters. He stroked his clipped mustache and kept his eyes upon the paper in his hands.

"I have received this news from London, gentlemen," he said quietly. "I thought you might be interested in the conclusion of certain correspondence between London and Tokyo and Washington. His Majesty's government, after full investigation, apologizes and expresses its deepest regret for the tragic incident in which one Tomura, a noted flyer of Japan, and others lost their lives.

"Complete reports exchanged between the capitals fully exonerate the British government in the unavoidable accident whereby three patrol planes of the Imperial government of Japan were lost with all on board as the result of the apparent poor judgment of Pilot Tomura. It is stated that Pilot Tomura lost control of his plane after a British training ship piloted by Thomas Malvin had been expertly maneuvered to avoid a collision in the blindness of a sudden storm. The British government expresses the deepest sympathy for what was an unavoidable tragedy."

Captain Jamison folded the flimsy bulletin carefully.

"Mr. Malvin and Mr. Holden," he said quietly, "officially I desire to congratulate you upon the implied praise for your flying judgment contained in the government report."

Captain Jamison caught his clipped mustache briefly between his teeth..

"Unofficially, strictly off the record," he said, "you made one bully job of a wholly unregrettable incident."

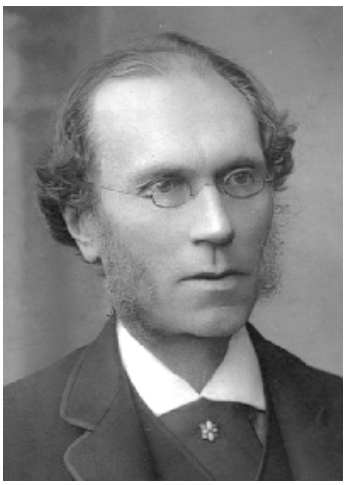
Tom Malvin said merely, "Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."

6: Two Delicate Cases

James Payn

1830-1898

Belgravia, Christmas 1881



James Payn

IF YOU have never read my work— Dr. Dormer's masterpiece, as I am told it is termed by the profession— upon the Skin, in connection with the interesting subject of tattooing, you had better get it, because the book is becoming exceedingly rare. I may say without vanity that it is by far the best monograph on the subject that exists; for it is the only one. Others— hundreds of others— have written, of course, upon skin diseases. Indeed, the question I found myself putting to myself on commencing practice in London as an expert in that branch of the healing art, was, 'What have they *not* written about?' There are nowadays but two methods of getting one's name known and establishing a medical reputation in London: one is by taking a house in Mayfair with an immense doorplate, and setting up a brougham and pair in which you sit well forward and are driven rapidly as if you had not a moment to lose; the other is by the publication of some exhaustive treatise, with coloured plates. Most of these last, though often striking (indeed, once seen, you will never forget them), are to the unprofessional eye by no means attractive, and it was not my object to recommend myself to the profession only. Instead, therefore, of any glowing account of the nature of Carbuncles, or genial essay on Port-wine Marks, I devoted myself to the comparatively unknown but picturesque subject of Tattooing.

It was not, it must be owned, one of very general application, but it had some general interest, and if only that could be aroused and concentrated upon Nicholas Dormer, his future would be assured. I had the honour of being

the first man to introduce to the public (through the columns of the *Medical Mercury*) the case of Matthew Stevadore, the most highly coloured and artistically executed individual known to science. He had been made prisoner in Chinese Tartary and sentenced to be put to death, but his punishment had been commuted (or extended) to tattooing. Five others suffered with him, but he was the only survivor of the operation, which combined the horrors of sitting for one's portrait and vivisection. The victim was held fast by four strong men, while a fifth, the artist, worked away upon him with a split reed, like a steel pen, for hours. At the end of three months he was considered finished, and would doubtless have been 'hung upon the line' if the Chinese Tartars had had a Royal Academy in which to exhibit him.

The pigments used are doubtful; it is certain they were not powdered charcoal, gunpowder, or cinnabar, the colours used by our native artists (chiefly marine) for the same purpose, inasmuch as 'none of the particles remained entangled in the meshes of the true skin (corium),' or 'became encapsuled' (see article in *Medical Mercury* 'in the nearest lymphatic glands.' One must conclude that the work was performed by the simple agency of the juice of plants. Yet the effect produced was perfect. 'So it ought to be,' poor Matthew used to say with a groan of reminiscence, when complimented upon his personal appearance. Indeed, I have no doubt that the operation hurt him very much. If he had known that he was going to be a contribution to science, or even to have formed the subject of an article in the *Mercury*, he might (perhaps) have borne up better. But as it was, those consolatory reflections were denied him. He had only the satisfaction of feeling that (if he survived) he would be the best illustrated man in Chinese Tartary.

He looked, when in nature's garb, as though the whole of his body was tightly enveloped in a robe of the richest webbing. From the crown of his head to the tips of his toes he was covered with dark blue figures of plants and animals, in the interspaces of which were written characters (testimonials, for all I know) in blue and red. The hands were tattooed on both surfaces, but only with inscriptions; probably a condensed biography of the artist himself, with a catalogue of his other works. The blue figures stopped short at the insteps, but the tattooing was continued on the feet in scarlet to the roots of the nails. Through the very hair of the scalp and beard could be seen 'designs' in blue. On the whole body there were no fewer than 388 figures: apes, cats, tigers, eagles, storks, swans, elephants, crocodiles, snakes, fish, lions, snails, and men and women; of inanimate objects such as fruits, flowers, leaves, and bows and arrows, there was also a lavish supply; and upon his forehead on each side were two panthers 'regardant'— that is, looking down with admiration (as well they might) upon this interesting and unrivalled collection.

Such were the attractions of my honest friend Matthew Stevadore, who made a good deal of money by the exhibition of them in Vienna, where I went on purpose to see him. It may certainly be said of him, if of anybody, that 'we shall never look upon his like again.' It has been remarked that 'beauty is only skin-deep,' but in his case it was at all events more lasting than usual. If it was not 'a joy for ever,' he retained it as long as he lived.

Of course I incorporated my notes in the *Mercury* upon this case— after what had been written upon him, Matthew didn't care twopence what was written about him— in my work upon Tattooing, which also contained a full-length portrait of him in colours. It had an immense success, but, strange to say, did not increase— that is, commence— my professional practice. I published another book of a more scientific kind with the same result; that is to say, it had none. It was tolerably successful as medical works go— it cost the author not more than fifty pounds or so; but, as was remarked by the senior surgeon of our hospital, who has the misfortune to be a wag, 'it didn't beat the tattoo;' while the general public of course never so much as heard of it.

One day, however, grim Fortune relaxed into a smile which I took for good nature, though, as it turned out, it was only cynicism. A carriage and pair drove up to my door, out of which stepped an eminent personage. There is a temptation to leave that description of my visitor as it stands; but I scorn to deceive the public, and therefore hasten to add that it was not a member of the Royal Family. He was not at that time even a peer of the realm; but nevertheless he was a man of great importance. I knew him by sight as one of the life-governors of our hospital; and I knew him by report as being one of the greatest financiers in the city. A tall soldier-like fellow, very upright, though he bore on his own shoulders many a gigantic speculation, and with an air of command that was quite Napoleonic, as befitted the master of millions. Being so very rich, there were naturally many stories afloat concerning him, and all to his disadvantage. The same thing happens in the case of all our great men, from statesmen to poets. His mother was in the workhouse; his brother in penal servitude; he had murdered his first wife, and was starving his second. He himself— as a slight drawback to the enjoyment of his illgotten gains— had a disease previously unknown to the human species.

If so, I only hoped he had come to consult me about it. A surgeon's duty is to heal, not to give ear to idle rumours. Still, I could not help regarding him as he took his seat in my study with a certain curiosity. His name was Mostyn, or rather his card asserted as much; his features were Caucasian, and suggested Moses. His speech was very calm and deliberate, either the result of indifference to any change of fortune that might possibly befall him, or a precautionary measure to restrain a natural tendency to talk through his nose.

'My visit here, Dr. Dormer, is a strictly confidential one. I trust to your honour as a member of a chivalrous profession— and I will also make it worth your while— not to reveal the nature of this application to any human being, during my lifetime.'

I gave my promise, and kept it. Mr. Mostyn— Dives Mostyn, as the world once called him— has long since been gathered to his fathers, whoever they were. He died in Paddington Workhouse.

'In my early days,' he went on, 'I bore a very different character from that which I have since acquired.' Here he stopped: he was obviously in a difficulty. I hastened to help him out of it.

'You mean, perhaps,' said I, smiling (as though it were of no consequence), 'that you bore an indifferent character?'

'Just so,' he answered; 'thank you. Not that I ever did anything positively discreditable.'

I waved my hand to intimate that even if it had been so (which was incredible), it would make no matter to me. This kind of 'treatment' in such cases (to speak professionally), I have always found to afford immense relief.

'In youth, however,' proceeded my visitor, 'I was what is called a ne'er-do-well. I could not settle to anything. Finance— of which, if I may say so, I have shown myself to be a master— was a calling not at that time open to me. I never had more than a few shillings to call my own, and any attempt to persuade other people to let me have the management of their shillings would have been hopeless. The man was ready,' said Mr. Mostyn, drawing himself up, 'but the hour had not yet struck. I quarrelled with my family and enlisted.'

Here he stopped again, and I nodded; not exactly approval, I hope, but acquiescence. The thing had happened so long ago that it was ridiculous to censure it; and besides, it was not my business.

'The life of a soldier, Dr. Dormer, is attractive to adventurous spirits, and though I never was an adventurer— far from it— I had my dreams of military glory. They lasted about three weeks, when I deserted.'

'That was serious,' I observed.

'It was very serious, sir, in its consequences. I was detected, brought back again, and— it was in the old times, you see'— he hesitated, and once more I had the satisfaction of helping him out of his embarrassment— 'I think I guess what happened,' I said. ' It may be indicated by a single letter, may it not?'

'You are right. The letter D. It is branded between my shoulders. You are the great authority upon "brands" of this description. I am come here to have it removed.'

'Well, really, Mr. Mostyn,' said I, 4 I'll do my best. But I never did have anything of this precise character to deal with— just let me look at it.'

He took off his coat and things and bared his shoulders.

'What's it like?' he inquired. 'I have cricked my neck a dozen times in trying to look at it. At the time it— it happened — though it was by no means a red-letter day for me in the usual sense— I had an impression— a very strong impression— that it was red.'

'It is white now,' I answered, 'or nearly so ; only when you strike it— see—'

'I can't see,' returned the patient testily.

'Quite true : I beg your pardon. You must take my word for it that when you strike it, it becomes red again.'

'It's quite visible, I conclude, whatever colour it is? eh, doctor?'

'Well, yes, I am bound to say it is.'

'You could read it ten feet off, I dare say? Come, be frank with me.'

'1 am not near-sighted, my dear sir,' I replied, 'and therefore could read it at twenty. It's a very large letter.'

'I don't doubt it,' he answered grimly. 'It seemed to me at one time that I was all D. I must look like one of those sandwich-men who go about with capitals between their shoulders.'

'Well, Mr. Mostyn, of course I should never have ventured to make use of such a parallel, but since you mention it, it does remind one of some sort of advertising medium. There are many things so advertised,' I added consolingly, 'of a most respectable character.'

'No doubt,' he answered drily. 'My D must look like something theological and denunciatory.'

'Or a certain famous sherry,' said I, falling into his humour.

' Ah, but that's not brandied,' he answered bitterly. I confess I compassionated my visitor sincerely. To a man in his position, it must have been very disagreeable to have this tell-tale memento of the past about him. And, after all, I knew for certain nothing worse about him than that he had had a distaste for the army which, indeed, I shared with him. He had evidently a great deal of humour, which, in a private soldier, must be a very dangerous possession.

'There is no discharge in that war,' as the preacher says, unless you can purchase it; so that really he had had no alternative but to desert. I think my visitor read something of my thoughts, for he observed:

'You see, this may be a very unfortunate thing for me, Dr. Dormer. People may say things behind my back and welcome, but if they saw things?'

'Well, you don't bathe in public, I conclude,' said I consolingly.

'No, but there are always risks. I might be run over by a cab and taken to a hospital. The idea of the possibility of disclosure makes me miserable. The higher I get in the financial world, the more dangerous my position appears to

me. I have been twice "decorated" by foreign Governments; just imagine if it should come to be known that I had been decorated by my own, though (as we say in the House of Commons) "in another place." '

I had forgotten that Mr. Mostyn was in the House. Indeed, that circumstance was merely a sort of pendant or corollary to his eminent position. He was essentially a man of mark, though until that morning, of course, I had never known how very literally he was so.

'The question is, doctor,' he continued gravely, 'can you take it out?'

The phrase he used was a ridiculous one; a mark of that sort was not like the initials on a stolen pocket-handkerchief, to be picked out and smoothed away, and I frankly told him so.

'The trace of the branding-iron is then indelible, I conclude?' He was very cool, but I noticed his voice trembled in alluding to the instrument of his disgrace.

'I am afraid so. Science— or at least my science— knows no means of eradicating it. There is, indeed, one method by means of which your secret may he preserved.'

'Name it, and then name whatever fee you please,' he exclaimed excitedly. 'Well, you could be branded again in the same place with something different— some mark of good conduct, for example.'

He shook his head and put on his hat and other garments. 'Thank you for your obliging offer,' he said, 'but I have had enough of that.'

It was obvious that he had quite made up his mind upon the point, so I did not press it, and we parted excellent friends. The great financier's visit, even had I done him any good, could, from the nature of the case, have been of no advantage to me in the way of advertisement; and as matters stood, except for his fee, I was not a halfpenny the better of it.

For six months afterwards I had no patient of any importance, and almost began to think that my studies in tattooing were to have no practical result whatever. And yet the old house-surgeon at St. Kitts Hospital, who was reckoned a sagacious man, had given me this advice: 'My dear Dormer, be a specialist; do not attenuate your intelligence by vague and general studies; apply yourself to one thing only— "the little toe and its ailments," for example— and stick to it.'

One day a young lady called to consult me. She came in a hack cab, but I saw in a moment that she was used to a carriage and pair.

'I cannot give you my name,' she said, 'and I hope you will do me the favour not to seek for it.'

I bowed and assured her that I had no vulgar curiosity of that kind, though, on the other hand, it might be necessary, for professional reasons, to be made acquainted with her circumstances.

'My case,' she said, smiling, 'is scarcely one to require such a revelation. However, my position in life is good. I am engaged to be married to a gentleman of title. It is on account of that circumstance that I am paying you this visit.'

She looked so beautiful and blushed so charmingly, that if I had not been a professional man I should have envied that gentleman very much. Indeed, I could not help building a little romance about her in my own mind: perhaps she didn't like the man, who, being of title, was permitted by her family to persecute her with his attentions; and it might be that she was come to me to be tattooed in some temporary manner in order to choke him off. Her next words, however, showed that this supposition was quite unfounded.

'I love the gentleman, you must understand, doctor, very truly, and all my hopes are centred in him; but,'— here she began to stammer in the most graceful manner, like some lovely foreigner speaking broken English— 'but, a long time ago ' (my visitor was not more than eighteen at most), 'many years, in fact, I formed a girlish affection for my cousin Tom.'

'That very often happens,' I said encouragingly, for she had come to a dead stop. 'First love is like the measles (except that you catch it again), and leaves no trace behind it.'

'I beg your pardon,' she replied; 'in my case, it left a very considerable one.'

'Perhaps you had an exceptionally tender heart,' I said, turning my hands over in professional sympathy; 'such scars, however, are not ineradicable,'

'Quite true,' she said; 'and even if they are, they are not seen, which is, after all, the main point.'

Then I knew of course that she was a young lady of fashion, and that sentiment would be thrown away upon her.

'The fact is,' she continued with some abruptness, 'I may confess at once that I made a great fool of myself with Cousin Tom, and in a moment of mutual devotion we tattooed our names upon one another's arms. In his case it mattered nothing, but as for me, I was very soon convinced of the folly of such a proceeding.'

'You quarrelled with your cousin, perhaps?' I suggested slyly.

'Of course I quarrelled with him ; but whether that happened or not, the inconvenience of such a state of things would have been just the same. The idea of putting on ball costume was out of the question with a big "Tom" on my arm, such as schoolboys cut on the back of a tree. I had to affect a delicacy

of constitution which compelled me always to wear high dresses. Think of that, sir.'

'A most deplorable state of things,' I murmured. 'Well, I got used to that, and might in time have come to regard the matter with calmness; but, notwithstanding this comparative absence of personal attractions, I have had the good fortune to secure the affections of a very estimable young nobleman, and hence the affair becomes much more serious. Some day or another, he is almost certain to find out that hateful "Tom" upon my arm.'

'There is no doubt a possibility of it,' I assented gravely.

'Well, that would be a dreadful blow to him, I'm sure ; he is very sensitive and slightly jealous; and I have come to you to have that dreadful word erased.'

With that she turned up her sleeve, and on her white shoulder it was true enough the word 'Tom' was very legibly engraved, though fortunately not quite so much at large as she had led me to expect.

'It does not look to me to have been done in gunpowder as usual,' observed I after a careful scrutiny.

'It wasn't,' she answered peevishly; 'it was done in slate-pencil, which we scraped together (idiots that we were) on the same plate.'

'It's very well done,' I answered; 'that is, from a tattooing point of view. May I ask if the Christian name of your cousin Tom has any resemblance to that of your intended husband?'

'No, not the least. Why do you ask ?'

'Well, if it had been anything similar— such as John, you see— we might have converted Tom into John, and nobody would have been any the wiser; indeed, the young man would have taken it as a very pretty and original compliment.'

'That would have been a capital plan,' assented the young lady admiringly; 'unfortunately, however, his name is Alexis.'

As substitution was impossible, I was compelled to try erasure, and even that was a very difficult job. I had no idea that powdered slate-pencil could be so permanent. In the end, by persevering with infusions of milk, I contrived to tone down the objectionable 'Tom' to a vague inscription such as to a man of research would have suggested Nineveh or the Moabite stone; in the case of Lord Alexis, however, I suggested that it might be attributed to the result of an unusually successful vaccination, and I have good reason to believe that that was the view he took of it.

As for the young lady, she showed her gratitude in a very practical way, and I owe a considerable portion of my present extensive practice to her good

offices. In my whole experience, however, I have never had a more delicate case than hers.

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7: Hurst of Hurstcote

E. Nesbit

1886–1924

Temple Bar, June 1893

Edith Nesbit

WE WERE at Eton together, and afterwards at Christchurch, and I always got on very well with him; but somehow he was a man about whom none of the other men cared very much. There was always something strange and secret about him; even at Eton he liked grubbing among books and trying chemical experiments, better than cricket or the boats. That sort of thing would make any boy unpopular. At Oxford, it wasn't merely his studious ways and his love of science that went against him; it was a certain way he had of gazing at us through narrowing lids, as though he were looking at us more from the outside than any human being has a right to look at another, and a bored air of belonging to another and a higher race, whenever we talked the ordinary chatter about athletics and the Schools.

A certain paper on "Black Magic," which he read to the Essay Society, filled to overflowing the cup of his College's contempt for him. I suppose no man was ever so much disliked for so little cause.

When we went down I noticed—for I knew his people at home— that the sentiment of dislike which he excited in most men was curiously in contrast to the emotions which he inspired in women. They all liked him, listened to him with rapt attention, talked of him with undisguised enthusiasm. I watched their strange infatuation with calmness for several years, but the day came when he met Kate Danvers, and then I was not calm any more. She behaved like all the rest of the women, and to her, quite suddenly, Hurst threw the handkerchief. He was not Hurst of Hurstcote then, but his family was good, and his means not despicable, so he and she were conditionally engaged. People said it was a

poor match for the beauty of the county; and her people, I know, hoped she would think better of it. As for me—well, this is not the story of my life, but of his. I need only say that I thought him a lucky man.

I went to town to complete the studies that were to make me M.D.; Hurst went abroad, to Paris or Leipzig or somewhere, to study hypnotism, and to prepare notes for his book on "Black Magic."

This came out in the autumn, and had a strange and brilliant success. Hurst became famous, famous as men do become nowadays. His writings were asked for by all the big periodicals. His future seemed assured. In the spring they were married; I was not present at the wedding. The practice my father had bought for me in London claimed all my time.

It was more than a year after their marriage that I had a letter from Hurst.

"Congratulate me, old man! Crowds of uncles and cousins have died, and I am Hurst of Hurstcote, which God wot I never thought to be. The place is all to pieces, but we can't live anywhere else. If you can get away about September, come down and see us. We shall be installed. I have everything now that I ever longed for— Hurstcote— cradle of our race— and all that, the only woman in the world for my wife, and— but that's enough for any man, eurely.—John Hurst of Hurstcote."

Of course I knew Hurstcote. Who doesn't? Hurstcote, which seventy years ago was one of the most perfect, as well as the finest, brick Tudor mansions in England. The Hurst who lived there seventy years ago noticed one day that his chimneys smoked, and called in a Hastings architect.

"Your chimneys," said the local man, "are beyond me, but with the timbers and lead of your castleI can build you a snug little house in the corner of your Park, much more suitable for a residence than this old brick building." So they gutted Hurstcote, and built the new house, and faced it with stucco. All of which things you will find written in the Guide to Sussex. Hurstcote, when I had seen it, had been the merest shell. How would Hurst make it habitable? Even if he had inherited much money with the castle, and intended to restore the building, that would be a work of years, not months. What would he do?

In September I went to see. Hurst met me at Pevensey Station. "Let's walk up," he said; "there's a cart to bring your traps. Eh! but it's good to see you again, Bernard."

It was good to see him again. And to see him so changed. And so changed for good too. He was much stouter, and no longer wore the untidy ill-fitting clothes of the old days. He was rather smartly got up in grey stockings and knee-breeches, and wore a velvet shooting-jacket. But the most noteworthy change was in his face; it bore no more the eager, inquiring, halfscornful, half-

tolerant look that had won him such ill-will at Oxford. His face now was the face of a man completely at peace with himself and with the world.

"How well you look!" I said, as we walked along the level winding road through the still marshes.

"How much better you mean! " he laughed. "I know it. Bernard, you'll hardly believe it, but I am on the way to be a popular man!"

He had not lost his old knack of reading one's thoughts. "Don't trouble yourself to find the polite answer to that," he hastened to add. "No one knows as well as I how unpopular I was— and no one knows so well why," he added in a very low voice. "However," he went on gaily, "unpopularity is a thing of the past. The folk hereabout call on us, and condole with us on our hutch. A thing of the past, as I said— but what a past it was, eh! You're the only man who ever liked me. You don't know what that's been to me many a dark day and night. When the others were— you know— it was like a hand holding mine, to think of you. I've always thought I was sure of one soul in the world to stand by me."

"Yes," I said—"Yes."

He flung his arm over my shoulder with a frank, boyish gesture of affection quite foreign to his nature as I had known it. "And I know why you didn't come to our wedding," he went on—"but that's all right now, isn't it?"

"Yes," I said again, for indeed it was. There are brown eyes in the world, after all, as well as blue, and one pair of brown that meant Heaven to me as the blue had never done.

"That's well," Hurst answered, and we walked on in satisfied silence, till we passed across the furze-crowned ridge, and went down the hill to Hurstcote. It lies in the hollow, ringed round by its moat, its dark red walls showing the sky behind them; no welcoming sparkle of early litten candle, only the pale amber of the September evening shining through the gaunt unglazed windows. Three planks and a rough handrail had replaced the old drawbridge. We passed across the moat, and Hurst pulled a knotted rope that hung beside the great iron-bound door. A bell clanged loudly inside. In the moment we spent there, waiting, Hurst pushed back a brier that was trailing across the arch, and let it fall outside the handrail.

"Nature is too much with us here," he said, laughing. "The clematis spends its time tripping one up or clawing at one's hair, and we are always expecting the ivy to force itself through the window and make an uninvited third at our dinnertable." Then the great door of Hurstcote Castle swung back, and there stood Kate, a thousand times sweeter and more beautiful than ever. I looked at her with momentary terror and dazzlement. She was a thousand times more beautiful than any woman with brown eyes could be. My heart almost stopped

beating. "With life or death in the balance: Right!" To be beautiful is not the same thing as to be dear, thank God. I went forward and took her hand with a free heart.

It was a pleasant fortnight I spent with them. They had had one tower completely repaired, and in its queer eight-sided rooms we lived, when we were not out among the marshes or by the blue sea at Pevensey. Mrs. Hurst had made the rooms quaintly charming by a medley of Liberty stuffs and Wardour Street furniture. The grassy space within the castle walls, with its underground passages, its crumbling heaps of masonry overgrown with lush creepers, was better than any garden. There we met the fresh morning; there we lounged through lazy noons. There the grey evenings found us.

I have never seen any two married people so utterly, so undisguisedly in love as these were. I, the third, had no embarrassment in so being— for their love had in it a completeness, a childish abandonment, to which the presence of a third— a friend— was no burden. A happiness, reflected from theirs, shone on me. The days went by, dreamlike, and brought the eve of my return to London and the commonplaces of life.

We were sitting in the courtyard; Hurst had gone to the Tillage to post some letters. A big moon was just showing over the battlements, when Mrs. Hurst shivered.

"It's late," she said, "and cold; the summer is gone. Let us go in." So we went in to the little warm room, where a wood fire flickered on a brick hearth, and a shaded lamp was already glowing softly. Here we sat on the cushioned seat in the open window, and looked out through the lozenge panes at the gold moon and the light of her making ghosts in the white mist that rose thick and heavy from the moat.

"I am so sorry you are going," she said, presently; "but you will come and skate on the moat with us at Christmas, won't you? We mean to have a mediaeval Christmas. You don't know what that is? Neither do I: but John does. He is very, very wise."

"Yes," I answered, "he used to know many things that most men don't even dream of as possible to know."

She was silent a minute, and then shivered again. I picked up the shawl she had thrown down when we came in, and put it round her.

"Thank you! I think— don't you— that there are some things one is not meant to know, and some things one is meant not to know. You see the distinction?"

"I suppose so— yes."

"Did it never frighten yon, in the old days," she went on, "to see that John would never— was always—"

"But he has given all that up now ? "

"Oh yes, ever since onr honeymoon. Do you know he used to mesmerise me. It was horrible. And that book of his—"

"I didn't know you believed in Black Magic."

"Oh, I don't—not the least bit. I never was at all superstitions, you know. But those things always frighten me just as much as if I believed in them. And besides— I think they're wicked ; but John— Ah, there he is! Let's go and meet him."

His dark figure was outlined against the sky behind the hill. She wrapped the soft shawl more closely around her, and we went out in the moonlight to meet her husband.

The next morning when I entered the room I found that it lacked its chief ornament. The sparkling white and silver breakfast accessories were there, but for the deft white hands and kindly welcoming blue eyes of my hostess I looked in vain. At ten minutes past nine Hurst came in looking horribly worried, and more like his old self than I had ever expected to see him.

"I say, old man," he said, hurriedly, "are you really set on going hack to town to-day? Because Kate's awfully queer— I can't think what's wrong. I want you to see her after breakfast."

I reflected a minute. "I can stay if I send a wire," I said.

"I wish you would then," Hurst said, wringing my hand and turning away; " she's been off her head most of the night, talking the most astounding nonsense. You must see her after breakfast. Will you pour out the coffee?"

"I'll see her now, if you like," I said, and he led me up the winding stair to the room at the top of the tower.

I found her quite sensible, but very feverish. I wrote a prescription, and rode Hurst's mare over to Eastbourne to get it made up. When I got back she was worse. It seemed to be a sort of aggravated marsh-fever. I reproached myself with having let her sit by the open window the night before. But I remembered with some satisfaction that I had told Hurst that the place was not quite healthy.

I only wished I had insisted on it more strongly. For the first day or two I thought it was merely a touch of marsh-fever, that would pass off with no worse consequence than a little weakness; but on the third day I perceived that she would die. Hurst met me as I came from her bedside, stood aside on the narrow landing for me to pass, and followed me down into the little sitting-room, which, deprived for three days of her presence, already bore the air of a room long deserted. He came in after me and shut the door.

"You're wrong," he said abruptly, reading my thoughts as usual; "she won't die— she can't die."

"She will," I bluntly answered, for I am no believer in that worst refinement of torture known as "breaking bad news gently."

"Send for any other man you choose. I'll consult with the whole College of Physicians if you like. But nothing short of a miracle can save her."

"And you don't believe in miracles," he answered quietly. "I do, you see."

"My dear old fellow, don't buoy yourself up with false hopes. I know my trade; I wish I could believe I didn't! Go back to her now; you have not very long to be together."

I wrung his hand; he returned the pressure, but said almost cheerfully— "You know your trade, old man, but there are some things you don't know. Mine, for instance— I mean my wife's constitution. Now I know that thoroughly. And you mark my words—she won't die. You might as well say I was not long for this world."

"You" I said with a touch of annoyance; "you're good for another thirty or forty years."

"Exactly so," he rejoined quickly, "and so is she. Her life's as good as mine; you'll see. She won't die."

At dusk on the next day she died. He was with her; he had not left her since he had told me that she would not die. He was sitting by her holding her hand.

She had been unconscious for some time, when suddenly she dragged her hand from his, raised herself in bed, and cried out in a tone of acutest anguish— "John! John! Let me go! For God's sake let me go!" Then she fell back dead.

He would not understand— would not believe; he still sat by her, holding her hand, and calling on her by every name that love could teach him. I began to fear for his brain. He would not leave her, so by-and-by I brought him a cup of coffee in which I had mixed a strong opiate. In about an hour I went back and found him fast asleep with his face on the pillow close by the face of his dead wife.

The gardener and I carried him down to my bedroom, and I sent for a woman from the village.

He slept for twelve hours. When he awoke his first words were— "She is not dead! I must go to her!"

I hoped that the sight of her, pale, and beautiful, and cold, with the white asters about her, and her white hands crossed on her breast, would convince him; but no. He looked at her and said— "Bernard, you're no fool; you know as well as I do that this is not death. Why treat it so? It is some form of catalepsy. If she should awake and find herself like this the shock might destroy her reason."

And, to the horror of the woman from the village, he flung the asters on to the floor, covered the body with blankets, and sent for hot water bottles.

I was now quite convinced that his brain was affected, and I saw plainly enough that he would never consent to take the necessary steps for the funeral. I began to wonder whether I had not better send for another doctor, for I felt that I did not care to try the opiate again on my own responsibility, and something must be done about the funeral.

I spent a day in considering the matter— a day spent by John Hurst beside his wife's body. Then I made up my mind to try all my powers to bring him to reason, and to this end I went once more into the chamber of death. I found Hurst talking wildly, in low whispers. He seemed to be talking to someone who was not there. He did not know me, and suffered himself to be led away. He was, in fact, in the first stage of brain fever. I actually blessed his illness, because it opened a way out of the dilemma in which I found myself.

I wired for a trained nurse from town, and for the local undertaker. In a week she was buried, and John Hurst still lay unconscious and unheeding; but I did not look forward to his first renewal of consciousness. Yet his first conscious words were not the inquiry I dreaded. He only asked whether he'd been ill long, and what had been the matter. When I had told him he just nodded and went off to sleep again.

A few evenings later I found him excited and feverish, but quite himself, mentally. I said as much to him in answer to a question which he put to me—

"There's no brain disturbance now? I'm not mad or anything ? " " Ho, no, my dear fellow. Everything as it should be."

"Then," he answered slowly, "I must get up and go to her."

My worst fears were realised. In moments of intense mental strain the truth sometimes overpowers all one's better resolves. It sounds brutal, horrible. I don't know what I meant to say; what I said was— "You can't; she's buried."

He sprang up in bed, and I caught him by the shoulders.

"Then it's true!" he cried, "and I'm not mad. Oh, great God in heaven, let me go to her, let me go ! It's true! It's true!"

I held him fast, and spoke. "I am strong— you know that. You are weak and ill; you are quite in my power— we're old friends, and there's nothing I wouldn't do to serve you. Tell me what you mean; I will do anything you wish." This I said to soothe him.

"Let me go to her," he said again.

"Tell me all about it," I repeated. "You are too ill to go to her. I will go, if you can collect yourself and tell me why. You could not walk five yards."

He looked at me doubtfully.

"You'll help me? You won't say I'm mad, and have me shut up? You'll help me?"

"Yes, yes— I swear it!" All the time I was wondering what I should do to keep him from his mad purpose.

He lay back on his pillows, white and ghastly; his thin features and sunken eyes showed hawklike above the rough growth of his four weeks' beard. I took his hand. His pulse was rapid, and his lean fingers clenched themselves round mine.

"Look here," he said, "I don't know— There aren't any words to tell you how true it is. I am not mad, I am not wandering. I am as sane as you are. Now listen, and if you've a human heart in you, you'll help me.

"When I married her I gave up hypnotism and all the old studies; she hated the whole business. But before I gave it up I hypnotised her, and when she was completely under my control I forbade her soul to leave its body till my time came to die."

I breathed more freely. Now I understood why he had said "She cannot die."

" My dear old man," I said gently, "dismiss these fancies, and face your grief boldly. You can't control the great facts of life and death by hypnotism. She is dead; she is dead, and her body lies in its place. But her soul is with God who gave it."

"No!" he cried, with such strength as the fever had left him. "No! no! Ever since I have been ill I have seen her, every day, every night, and always wringing her hands and moaning, 'Let me go, John—let me go.' "

"Those were her last words, indeed," I said; "it is natural that they should haunt you. See, you hade her soul not leave her body. It has left it, for she is dead."

His answer came almost in a whisper, borne on the wings of a long breathless pause.

"She is dead, but h er sold has not left her body."

I held his hand more closely, still debating what I should do.

"She comes to me," he went on; "she comes to me continually. She does not reproach, but she implores, 'Let me go, John, let me go!' And I have no more power now; I cannot let her go, I cannot reach her; I can do nothing, nothing. Ah!" he cried, with a sudden sharp change of voice that thrilled through me to the ends of my fingers and feet: "Ah, Kate, my life, I will come to you! No, no, you shan't he left alone among the dead. I am coming, my sweet."

He reached his arms out towards the door with a look of longing and love, so really, so patently addressed to a sentient presence, that I turned sharply to see if, in truth, perhaps— Nothing— of course— nothing.

"She is dead," I repeated stupidly. "I was obliged to bury her."

A shudder ran through him. "I must go and see for myself," he said. Then I knew— all in a minute— what to do.

"I will go," I said; "I will open her coffin, and if she is not —is not as other dead folk, I will bring her body back to this house."

"Will you go now?" he asked, with set lips.

It was nigh on midnight. I looked into his eyes. "Yes, now," I said, "but you must swear to lie still till I return."

"I swear it." I saw I could trust him, and I went to wake the nurse. He called weakly after me, "There's a lanthorn in the tool-shed, and Bernard—"

"Yes, my poor old chap."

"There's a screwdriver in the sideboard drawer."

I think until he said that I really meant to go. I am not accustomed to lie, even to mad people, and I think I meant it till then. He leaned on his elbow, and looked at me with wide eyes. "Think," he said, "what she must feel. Out of the body, and yet tied to it, all alone among the dead. Oh, make haste, make haste, for if I am not mad, and I have really fettered her soul, there is but one way!"

"And that is?"

"I must die too. Her soul can leave her body when I die."

I called the nurse, and left him. I went ont, and across the wold to the church, but I did not go in. I carried the screwdriver and the lanthorn, lest he should send the nurse to see if I had taken them. I leaned on the churchyard wall, and thought of her. I had loved the woman, and I remembered it in that hour. As soon as I dared I went back to him— remember I believed him mad— and told the lie that I thought would give him most ease.

"Well?" he said, eagerly, as I entered. I signed to the nurse to leave us.

"There is no hope," I said. "You will not see your wife again till you meet her in heaven."

I laid down the screwdriver and the lanthorn, and sat down by him. "You have seen her?"

"Yes."

"And there's no doubt?"

"No doubt."

"Then I am mad; but you're a good fellow, Bernard, and I'll never forget it in this world or the next." He seemed calmer, and fell asleep with my hand in his. His last word was a "Thank you," that cut me like a knife.

When I went into his room next morning he was gone. But on his pillow a letter lay, painfully scrawled in pencil, and addressed to me.

"You lied. Perhaps you meant kindly. You didn't understand. She is not dead. She has been with me again. Though her soul may not leave her body, thank God it can still speak to mine. That vault— it is worse than a mere grave. Goodbye."

I ran all the way to the church, and entered by the open door. The air was chill and dank after the crisp October sunlight.

The stone that closed the vault of the Hursts of Hurstcote had been raised, and was lying beside the dark gaping hole in the chancel floor. The nurse, who had followed me, came in before I could shake off the horror that held me moveless. We both went down into the vault. Weak, exhausted by illness and sorrow, John Hurst had yet found strength to follow his love to the grave. I tell you he had crossed that wold alone, in the grey of the chill dawn; alone he had raised the stone and gone down to her. He had opened her coffin, and he lay on the floor of the vault with his wife's body in his arms.

He had been dead some hours.

THE brown eyes filled with tears when I told my wife this story.

"You were quite right, he was mad," she said. "Poor things, poor lovers!"

But sometimes when I wake in the grey morning, and between waking and sleeping, I think of all those things that I must shut out from my sleeping and my waking thoughts, I wonder was I right, or was he? Was he mad, or was I idiotically incredulous?

For— and it is this thing that haunts me— when I found them dead together in the vault, she had been buried five weeks. But the body that lay in John Hurst's arms, among the mouldering coffins of the Hursts of Hurstcote, was perfect and beautiful as when first he clasped her in his arms, a bride.

8: Checkmate

Albert Richard Wetjen

1900-1948

Adventure 15 July 1929

Albert Richard Wetjen

THE SKY was a hard blue, unflecked by any cloud. The sea was a sheet of blued steel, motionless, glazed. Far off to starboard the coast of South America was a vague dark line along the horizon. There was no wind and the heat was terrific. The little and ancient steamship *Barrachus* plodded wearily to the north, the foul and greasy smoke from her squat smokestack lying in a heavy wide pall dead astern, casting an uneasy shadow upon the water.

In the shade of the patched awning above the lower bridge Captain Downs rested. He always rested. There were men who declared that roots had spread from his wide stern deep into the withes of the comfortable, long cane chair in which he invariably reposed. He was a very large and very fat man, dressed this time of the forenoon in pink and white striped cotton pajamas, unbuttoned half way down his hairy chest. In one hand he slowly waved a fan of split banana leaf : while the other was lovingly folded round a tall glass in which ice tinkled and lemon peel floated palely yellow. His lips, parted in a sort of genial, half absent smile, were thick and coarse, betraying teeth stained with tobacco juice. His nose was a glorious sunburst, veined with purple. His speech was crude, his manners atrocious, his fat round arms generously tattooed. He was, decidedly, no gentleman, but his worst enemies conceded he was a first class sailor, and an even better pot comrade. As master and owner of the little Barrachus, he had done some quite surprising things.

This particular hot and weary morning, two days out from Puayquil, which is renowned for its mines, sins and fevers, Captain Downs was roused out of his placid reveries by a step on the companion that led from the main deck. Soon

after there appeared a tall, lean and sallow man with neat black mustaches and rather piercing dark eyes.

"It's hot," said the newcomer with a very polite smile. He spoke excellent English, except for a queer sounding consonant now and then, and he seemed entirely at his ease.

"Damned 'ot," agreed the captain. He surveyed the newcomer lazily and decided he did not like him. He was too smooth, too graciously polite. His name was, as far as Captain Downs knew, Nicholas Martin, but that was probably borrowed. A great many of the passengers the little *Barrachus* picked up for transportation between the coast ports, had borrowed names, and wished only to change their environment as rapidly as possible without too many questions being asked.

"Excuse the intrusion," murmured Nicholas Martin, still smiling.

He dropped unasked into the canvas deck chair opposite the captain, which the mate sometimes sat in when the master of the *Barrachus* requested speech or a drink with him.

"I thought I'd have a chat with you."

"Elp yerself," said the captain.

He wondered whether he should offer the other a drink, but decided it was too hot to bellow for the steward. Nicholas Martin produced a handkerchief, all bundled up, and dabbed at his seemingly cool brow with it. He looked very graceful and lithe in his spotless whites, with a cream colored panama hat far back on his head to keep the sun from his neck. Captain Downs sighed and remembered when he too had been lithe and lean and graceful. Long ago, long ago. He blinked once or twice, and stared fish-like at nothing in particular out of watery blue eyes.

"I understand," commenced Nicholas Martin, once he settled himself, "that you are carrying the biggest bullion shipment ever sent from Puayquil. There was some gossip to that effect along the Boca anyway, before we sailed."

"Four 'undred thousand in bar silver," agreed Captain Downs absently. "It's all stacked in me rooms so I c'n 'ardly move about. An' there's near a 'undred thousand in native diamonds an' gold in th' safe. Fat freight."

"Ah," said the other pleasantly. "Quite alot. But isn't it dangerous to place so much on board a small craft like this, without a strong room or even a wireless?"

"Never thought of it," admitted Captain Downs. "Don't see why. There ain't goin' t be any risk "less the old packet founders. Besides, I gotta contrac' with th' mines an' I've carried their stuff afore."

"Very interesting,' observed Nicholas Martin.

HE DABBED at his brow again and his eyes grew blank for a moment, as if he were listening. He consulted a gold wrist watch, smiled and then laid the bundled handkerchief in his lap, his sinewy brown hands lightly covering it. For a fraction of a second the captain's banana leaf fan checked in its waving and the watery blue eyes of the stout man rested upon those hands and the handkerchief beneath. Then with a sigh, as if contented, he allowed the fan to resume its normal swing.

"I was just thinking last night, Captain, how easy it would be to get all this stuff. I had nothing else to do so I worked out several plans. Tell me what you think of this one."

"D'you think it'll work?" asked Captain Downs reflectively. "Y'know a lot things like that 'ave been tried an' it ain't always they—"

"But I'm sure this plan is airtight," protested Nicholas Martin. "Just listen ... Now, supposing six or seven determined men were to take a passage on this vessel from Puayquil to the next port, a run of five days. Men, say, like myself and your other passengers. You carry a mixed crew and a very small one, easily overpowered. You have two mates, three engineers and yourself, who might put up a resistance. If the prospective attackers awaited the right time, they would be sure to find two of the engineers and one of the mates asleep in their watch below. It would be very easy to lock them in their rooms, supposing the keys had first been obtained. A visit on the part of two of the passengers to the navigation bridge would quite easily dispose of the unsuspecting mate there. The crew would quite obediently retire to the fo'c's'le, if persuaded with a gun or so.

"The ship now being entirely under the attackers' control, what next? AsIseeit, it would be foolish to be burdened with her as it would be foolish to leave witnesses who might quickly raise an alarm. The logical thing would be to work the vessel in as close to the coast as possible, and then blow a few holes in her, say with a small time bomb or two. The bullion, in the meantime, could be transferred to two of the boats, the other boats being staved in. Of course, a very lonely and barren part of the coast would have to be fixed upon for all this maneuvering, so the crew, after swimming ashore or reaching the beach by other means, would have a great deal of trouble getting in touch with civilization and its annoying telegraphs and gunboats. By the time they succeeded, the bullion would have been landed and the traces covered. Don't you see how simple it all is?"

Captain Downs laid his banana leaf fan carefully in his lap and then finished his drink. He blinked once or twice at Nicholas Martin, smiling and at his ease, and then slowly nodded.

"An' when," he asked pleasantly, "is this to 'appen?"

Nicholas Martin consulted his wrist watch.

"Say in about fifteen minutes."

"Well," said Captain Downs admiringly, "I'm glad it's all peaceable. If there's a thing I 'ate it's trouble."

"I am delighted," said Nicholas Martin. "It's a pleasure to meet a gentleman who agrees with my own views. I wonder if you would care to lay down in your room? No more noise than necessary will be made rearranging the— er— furniture. It may be rather inconvenient for a few hours, as the particular barren and lonely part of the coast I mentioned is to the north of us yet. However, the cook will function as usual and I shall have him prepare a recipe or two of my own for luncheon and dinner."

"Well!" said Captain Downs genially. "Well!"

Nicholas Martin raised his bundled handkerchief again and dabbed at his cool brow, the captain's watery blue eyes following the motion and going strangely blank. After a brief hesitation he smiled again.

"It's 'ot," he grumbled.

He rose from his chair with a prodigious grunt, straightened, yawned, gazed mildly out to sea for a few moments and then waddled into his room.

"Damned hot," agreed Nicholas Martin.

He unwrapped his handkerchief from the neat black automatic it had covered, mopped his now perspiring brow with the limp cloth and with a sigh of relief, slipped the gun into his side pocket. He glanced at his watch again, and then, producing a silver whistle, gave one sharp blast. There was no following confusion nor any great deal of noise at all. The wheel on the navigation bridge above creaked as it turned over, the engine thump remained steady. A short swarthy man in a gray flannel shirt and stained white pants, with a black woollen scarf for a belt, came up from the main deck, caught Nicholas Martin's eye and nodded briefly. *The Barrachus* was heading for the coast.

A FEW minutes after noon, there was a light kick on the cabin door and the ship's cook entered the room bearing a black tin tray, upon which were the laden plates of a substantial meal. Captain Downs lay in his bunk, perspiring vastly, his pajama jacket unbuttoned to expose his massive breast and stomach, his fat hands gripping an ancient San Francisco newspaper, and a pair of steel rimmed spectacles perched precariously upon his nose. He stared over his spectacle tops when the cook appeared, glanced toward the doorway where lounged the short swarthy man in the gray flannel shirt, a brown paper

cigaret between his lips and a large revolver stuck prominently inside his black woolen sash.

"Lunch, sir," said the cook.

He was an ancient baldheaded man, attired merely in a torn white cotton singlet, faded blue dungaree pants and a large stained white apron. He had few remaining snags of teeth so that his jaws were almost of the nutcracker variety, while his nose, broken in some past fight, had a distinct list to port. His throat was scrawny, his tattooed arms scrawny, his voice an irritable rasp.

"Joe," said Captain Downs solemnly, " 'ave you mutineered."

"I been ordered about an' hinsulted," said Joe querulously. "Fine goin's on. Am I a blasted stooard t' lug trays aroun' fer a lot o' dago tripe?"

"Joe," said Captain Downs placidly. "Do you call t' mind th' time we wus caught by them chink pilgrims off the Yangtze?"

Joe set the tray on the captain's desk and turned, half stooped because of his age, wiping his gnarled hands on his apron. The swarthy guard lounged against the door lintel to hear what was said, though his command of English was small. Not that it mattered. Nicholas Martin did not see that any harm could come from a stout and genial old man and an aged cook. The whole plan was airtight.

"Them chinks?" echoed Joe. "Oh, aye... Forty years I bin cookin'— fifteen fer you—an' I never 'ad t' act asa stooard afore nor make up grub from a dago's ideas. What I says—"

"You'd better bring me dinner early, Joe," interrupted Captain Downs.

He sat up in his bunk with a groan and a jerk, adjusted his spectacles and stared solemnly at his old cook.

"I'm a-goin' to' get 'ungry about five."

"Oh, aye," said the cook.

He wiped his nose with the back of his hand and nodded and then, without another word, hobbled from the cabin. The swarthy guard blew cigaret smoke contemptuously after him. He turned back to the cabin after a moment or so to discover Captain Downs planted firmly in his swivel chair before the desk, stolidly eating.

It was about three o'clock when Nicholas Martin was summoned from the poop, where he was superintending the stowage of bar silver in the boats. He came to the lower bridge, smiling and pleasant, spoke a few words in a low tone to the guard, and then stepped to the door of the captain's room. Captain Downs was standing before his wash basin, winding a towel tightly about his forearm, which was red with blood. One side of his face was covered with

lather, the other side shaved clean. A razor, stained red, with; lather on it, was laying half in the water the basin held.

"Started t' get th' seaweed off," Captain Downs grumbled, "an' then cut meself. Iallus strop me razor on me arm an' th' old sow rolled so I gast.ed pretty deep. I gotta 'ave th' medicine chest an' some bandages. Seems t' me this sentry of yours ought t' be able t' get that without raising all this fuss."

"Thats too bad, Captain," said Nicholas Martin with a semblance of conern. "The trouble is, he doesn't understand English very well. And in any case, I told him to send for me if you wanted anything. Where is the medicine chest?"

"Sort of big wooden box," responded the captain, holding his forearm. Blood was already oozing through the towel. "You'll find 'er in th' lower right drawer in th' saloon buffay. 'Ave you got th' keys?"

"I think so," said Nicholas Martin.

HE PRODUCED a large bunch of keys from his pocket and handed them to the guard with a brief order. The man hurried away and Nicholas Martin came into the cabin.

"Would you like me to help you, Captain," he inquired solicitously.

Captain Downs made a magnificent gesture.

"I ain't a kid, mister. Drag that chest up 'ere an' Ill fix things... Got quite a slice."

He uncovered his arm enough to show the half suspicious visitor the ugly cut, then wrapped it up again. The guard returned in a few minutes carrying the compact mahogany stained box that was supposed to hold everything for first aid work, and also medicines to treat all possible ills that might befall a deep water man far from a doctor. Nicholas Martin unlocked it, looked through it carefully and then smiled.

"Guns have been hidden in queer places, Captain," he apologized. "We searched your room thoroughly but one never knows. You are sure you can manage?"

"I'll get that sentry of yours t''elp me if I can't," grumbled the captain.

The other nodded, spoke briefly to the guard again and then hurried aft. Captain Downs sat heavily in his swivel chair, surveyed the medicine chest and mumbled to himself. He found some mild disinfectant, some lint and bandages and beckoned the guard to help him wind and tie the stuff.

"I might flop on you an' get that gun," observed the captain placidly, "but I ain't no fighting man an' I always 'ate trouble."

The guard scowled and once his services were no longer required, retreated to the doorway again to roll and light another cigaret. If he had been arranging all this affair he would have set this foolish fat man adrift in a boat

with the others and so dispensed of the necessity of watching them. Time drowsed along.

A few minutes before five, Joe, the cook, appeared once more with his laden tray and many querulous complaints on his lips.

"Ow much longer is this a-going to last, I'd like to know? Seems t' me you oughta be able t' handle your ship same as I handle me galley. They comes in an' tries to order me around an' I chases 'em out right smart with a carving knife... Sich goings on!"

"Put th' tray there," said the captain mildly, pointing to the desk. "An' don't talk so much... I 'opes you 'aven't forgot those chinks off the Yangtze."

"It ain't a bit likely I would," snapped Joe, wiping his hands in his apron. His back was toward the door guard and his left eyelid drooped just a trifle. "But where's th' needings?"

Captain Downs brushed against him as he made for his swivel chair and for a fraction of a second, one of his fat hands touched the cook's. The next moment he was seated before his meal and Joe was hobbling off, complaining as usual. The swarthy guard grinned and sniffed in the fragrance of the food. In a very short time he would be relieved so he could eat too. And soon after that, about dusk, the *Barrachus* would be off that precise spot on the coast agreed upon, the time bombs would be set, the boats launched and they would be pulling off to the north and that little cove where they could get mules and some Indian help to transport the great treasure. And after that, there would be pleasant days in Quito, or maybe Bogota, with señoritas, with roulette and the lotteries. A great man, Nicholas Martin!

ONE DAY behind her usual leisurely schedule, the little *Barrachus* entered her next port of call from Puayquil. She was flying, besides the yellow quarantine flag, her house flag and the ensign of her nationality, the very suggestive police flag. The doctor, the police and the consul arrived almost simultaneously and fora while the ship was in confusion. In the shade of the patched awning over the lower bridge, Captain Downs rested. He was comfortably settled in his long cane chair, a split banana leaf fan in one fat hand, the other folded lovingly round a tall glass in which ice tinkled and lemon peel floated paly yellow.

He was attired, this time of the afternoon, in baggy white duck pants, a rather worn white cotton shirt, white shoes and socks. His nose was a glorious sunburst in the mellowness of his weather-beaten face, and his thick, coarse lips were curved in a genial smile. There was also a strip of white bandage round his forearm. Magnificently, he held court. Officials waved and talked excitedly, clanked their swords, twisted their mustaches. In execrable Spanish

Captain Downs answered and explained. And then, through the babel, came the consul's clear American voice.

"But say, old man, how did you manageit? We know you've got 'em in irons and the bullion's safe, but how in the world did you manage it? Without hloodshed, too."

"Well" said Captain Downs comfortably, emptying his glass with a sigh, "it was sort of up to Joe an' me. We 'ad a similar bust-up off the Yangtze some years back an' Joe an' me figured things out then. Y'see, these lootin' parties almost never bothers th' cook 'cause they figures on eatin' regular, an' that makes things easy. I 'ates trouble an' so does Joe, 'less you start fiddling around in 'is galley...

"So I 'as a bad cut in th' arm an' gets th' medicine chest up 'ere. Only a 'ard 'earted man'd refuse th' medicine chest to a poor guy what's bleeding t' death...

"Anyway, when Joe trots up with th' dinner grub, I slips 'im th' laudanum. It don't take much in coffee t' knock birds like these out... Which reminds me, I'm a injured man. Pass th' bottle."

9: Dickon the Devil

Sheridan le Fanu

1814-1873

London Society, Christmas Annual 1872

Joseph Thomas Sheridan Le Fanu

ABOUT thirty years ago I was selected by two rich old maids to visit a property in that part of Lancashire which lies near the famous forest of Pendle, with which Mr. Ainsworth's "Lancashire Witches" has made us so pleasantly familiar. My business was to make partition of a small property, including a house and demesne to which they had, a long time before, succeeded as coheiresses.

The last forty miles of my journey I was obliged to post, chiefly by cross-roads, little known, and less frequented, and presenting scenery often extremely interesting and pretty. The picturesqueness of the landscape was enhanced by the season, the beginning of September, at which I was travelling.

I had never been in this part of the world before; I am told it is now a great deal less wild, and, consequently, less beautiful.

At the inn where I had stopped for a relay of horses and some dinner-for it was then past five o'clock-I found the host, a hale old fellow of five-and-sixty, as he told me, a man of easy and garrulous benevolence, willing to accommodate his guests with any amount of talk, which the slightest tap sufficed to set flowing, on any subject you pleased.

I was curious to learn something about Barwyke, which was the name of the demesne and house I was going to. As there was no inn within some miles of it, I had written to the steward to put me up there, the best way he could, for a night.

The host of the "Three Nuns," which was the sign under which he entertained wayfarers, had not a great deal to tell. It was twenty years, or

more, since old Squire Bowes died, and no one had lived in the hall ever since, except the gardener and his wife.

"Tom Wyndsour will be as old a man as myself; but he's a bit taller, and not so much in flesh, quite," said the fat innkeeper.

"But there were stories about the house," I repeated, "that, they said, prevented tenants from coming into it?"

"Old wives' tales; many years ago, that will be, sir; I forget 'em; I forget 'em alL Oh yes, there always will be, when a house is left so; foolish folk will always be talkin'; but I han't heard a word about it this twenty year. "

It was vain trying to pump him; the old landlord of the "Three Nuns," for some reason, did not choose to tell tales of Barwyke Hall, if he really did, as I suspected, remember them.

I paid my reckoning, and resumed my journey, well pleased with the good cheer of that oldworld inn, but a little disappointed.

We had been driving for more than an hour, when we began to cross a wild common; and I knew that, this passed, a quarter of an hour would bring me to the door of Barwyke Hall.

The peat and furze were pretty soon left behind; we were again in the wooded scenery that I enjoyed so much, so entirely natural and pretty, and so little disturbed by traffic of any kind. I was looking from the chaise-window, and soon detected the object of which, for some time, my eye had been in search. Barwyke Hall was a large, quaint house, of that cage-work fashion known as "black-and-white," in which the bars and angles of an oak framework contrast, black as ebony, with the white plaster that overspreads the masonry built into its interstices. This steep-roofed Elizabethan house stood in the midst of park-like grounds of no great extent, but rendered imposing by the noble stature of the old trees that now cast their lengthening shadows eastward over the sward, from the declining sun.

The park-wall was gray with age, and in many places laden with ivy. **In** deep gray shadow, that contrasted with the dun fires of evening reflected on the foliage above it, in a gentle hollow, stretched a lake that looked cold and black, and seemed, as it were, to skulk from observation with a guilty know ledge.

I had forgot that there was a lake at Barwyke; but the moment this caught my eye, like the cold polish of a snake in the shadow, my instinct seemed to recognize something dangerous, and I knew that the lake was connected, I could not remember how, with the story I had heard of this place in my boyhood.

I drove up a grass-grown avenue, under the boughs of these noble trees, whose foliage, dyed. in autumnal red and yellow, returned the beams of the western sun gorgeously.

We drew up at the door. I got out, and had a good look at the front of the house; it was a large and melancholy mansion, with signs of long neglect upon it; great wooden shutters, in the old fashion, were barred, outside, across the windows; grass, and even nettles, were growing thick on the courtyard, and a thin moss streaked the timber beams; the plaster was discolored by time and weather, and bore great russet and yellow stains. The gloom was increased by several grand old trees that crowded close about the house.

I mounted the steps, and looked round; the dark lake lay near me now, a little to the left. It was not large; it may have covered some ten or twelve acres; but it added to the melancholy of the scene. Near the centre of it was a small island, with two old ash-trees, leaning toward each other, their pensive images reflected in the stirless water. The only cheery influence of this scene of antiquity, solitude, and neglect was that the house and landscape were warmed with the ruddy western beams. I knocked, and my summons resounded hollow and ungenial in my ear; and the bell, from far away, returned a deep-mouthed and surly ring, as if it resented being roused from a score years' slumber.

A light-limbed, jolly-looking old fellow, in a barracan jacket and gaiters, with a smirk of welcome, and a very sharp, red nose, that seemed to promise good cheer, opened the door with a promptitude that indicated a hospitable expectation of my arrival.

There was but little light in the hall, and that little lost itself in darkness in the background, It was very spacious and lofty, with a gallery running round it, which, when the door was open, was visible at two or three points. Almost in the dark my new acquaintance led me across this wide hall into the room destined for my reception. It was spacious, and wainscoted up to the ceiling. The furniture of this capacious chamber was old-fashioned and clumsy. There were curtains still to the windows, and a piece of Turkey carpet lay upon the floor; those windows were two in number, looking out, through the trunks of the trees close to the house, upon the lake. It needed all the fire, and all the pleasant associations of my entertainer's red nose, to light up this melancholy chamber. A door at its farther end admitted to the room that was prepared for my sleeping apartment. It was wainscoted, like the other. It had a four-post bed, with heavy tapestry curtains, and in other respects was furnished in the same old-world and ponderous style as the other room. Its window, like those of that apartment, looked out upon the lake.

Sombre and sad as these rooms were, they were yet scrupulously clean. I had nothing to complain of; but the effect was rather dispiriting. Having given some directions about supper— a pleasant incident to look forward to— and made a rapid toilet, I called on my friend with the gaiters and red nose (Tom

Wyndsour), whose occupation was that of a "bailiff," or under-steward, of the property, to accompany me, as we had still an hour or so of sun and twilight, in a walk over the grounds.

It was a sweet autumn evening, and my guide, a hardy old fellow, strode at a pace that tasked me to keep up with.

Among clumps of trees at the northern boundary of the demesne we lighted upon the little antique parish church. I was looking down upon it, from an eminence, and the park-wall interposed; but a little way down was a stile affording access to the road, and by this we approached the iron gate of the churchyard. I saw the church door open; the sexton was replacing his pick, shovel, and spade, with which he had just been digging a grave in the churchyard, in their little r
epository under the stone stair of the tower. He was a polite, shrewd little hunchback, who was very happy to show me over the church. Among the monuments was one that interested me; it was erected to commemorate the very Squire Bowes from whom my two old maids had inherited the house and estate of Barwyke. It spoke of him in terms of grandiloquent eulogy, and informed the Christian reader that he had died, in the bosom of the Church of England, at the age of seventy-one.

I read this inscription by the parting beams of the setting sun, which disappeared behind the horizon just as we passed out from under the porch.

"Twenty years since the Squire died," said I, reflecting, as I loitered still in the churchyard. "Ay, sir; 'twill be twenty year the ninth O' last month. "

"And a very good old gentleman?"

"Good-natured enough, and an easy gentleman he was, sir; I don't think while he lived he ever hurt a fly," acquiesced Tom Wyndsour. "It ain't always easy sayin' what's in 'em, though, and what they may take or turn to afterward; and some O' them sort, I think, goes mad. "

"You don't think he was out of his mind?" I asked.

"He? La! no; not he, sir; a bit lazy, mayhap, like other old fellows; but a knew devilish well what he was about. "

Toni Wyndsour's account was a little enigimatical; but, like old Squire Bowes, I was "a bit lazy" that evening, and asked no more questions about him.

We got over the stile upon the narrow road that skirts the churchyard. It is overhung by elms more than a hundred years old, and in the twilight, which now prevailed, was growing very dark. As side-by-side we walked along this road, hemmed in by two loose stone-like walls some-thing running toward us in a zig-zag line passed us at a wild pace, with a sound like a frightened laugh or a shudder, and I saw, as it passed, that it was a human figure. I may confess, now, that I was a little startled. The dress of this figure was, in part, white: I

know I mistook it at first for a white horse coming down the road at a gallop. Tom Wyndsour turned about and looked after the retreating figure.

"He'll be on his travels to-night," he said, in a low tone. "Easy served with a bed, *that* lad be; six foot o' dry peat or heath, or a nook in a dry ditch. That lad hasn't slept once in a house this twenty year, and never will while grass grows."

"Is he mad?" I asked.

"Something that way, sir; he's an idiot, an awpy; we call him 'Dickon the devil,' because the devil's almost the only word that's ever in his mouth. "

It struck me that this idiot was in some way connected with the story of old Squire Bowes.

"Queer things are told of him, I dare say?" I suggested.

More or less, sir; more or less. Queer stories, some. "

"Twenty years since he slept in a house? That's about the time the Squire died," I continued.

"So it will be, sir; not very long after. "

"You must tell me all about that, Tom to-night, when I can hear it comfortably, after supper. "

Tom did not seem to like my invitation; and looking straight before him as we trudged on, he said:

You see, sir, the house has been quiet, and nout's been troubling folk inside the walls or out, all round the woods of Barwyke, this ten year, or more; and my old woman, down there, is clear against talking about such matters and thinks it best— and so do I— to let sleepin' dogs be. "

He dropped his voice toward the close of the sentence, and nodded significantly.

We soon reached a point where he unlocked a wicket in the park wall, by which we entered the grounds of Barwyke once more.

The twilight deepening over the landscape, the huge and solemn trees, and the distant outline of the haunted house, exercised a sombre influence on me, which, together with the fatigue of a day of travel, and the brisk walk we had had, disinclined me to interrupt the silence in which my companion now indulged.

A certain air of comparative comfort, on our arrival, in great measure dissipated the gloom that was stealing over me. Although it was by no means a cold night, I was very glad to see some wood blazing in the grate; and a pair of candles aiding the light of the fire, made the room look cheerful. A small table, with a very white cloth, and preparations for supper, was also a very agreeable object.

I should have liked very well, under these influences, to have listened to Tom Wyndsour's story; but after supper I grew too sleepy to attempt to lead him to the subject; and after yawning for a time, I found there was no use in contending against my drowsiness, so I betook myself to my bedroom, and by ten o'clock was fast asleep.

What interruption I experienced that night I shall tell you presently. It was not much, but it was very odd.

By next night I had completed my work at Barwyke. From early morning till then I was so incessantly occupied and hard-worked, that I had no time to think over the singular occurrence to which I have just referred. Behold me, however, at length once more seated at my little suppertable, having ended a comfortable meal. It had been a sultry day, and I had thrown one of the large windows up as high as it would go. I was sitting near it, with my brandy and water at my elbow, looking out into the dark. There was no moon, and the trees that are grouped about the house make the darkness round it supernaturally profound on such nights.

"Tom," said I, so soon as the jug of hot punch I had supplied him with began to exercise its genial and communicative influence; "you must tell me who beside your wife and you and myself slept in the house last night. "

Tom, sitting near the door, set down his tumbler, and looked at me askance, while you might count seven, without speaking a word.

"Who else slept in the house?" he repeated, very deliberately. "Not a living soul, sir;" and he looked hard at me, still evidently expecting something more.

That *is* very odd," I said, returning his stare, and feeling really a little odd. "You are sure *you* were not in my room last night?"

"Not till I came to call you, sir, this morning; I can make oath of that. "

"Well," said **I,** "there was some one there, *I* can make oath of that. I was so tired I could not make up my mind to get up; but I was waked by a sound that I thought was some one flinging down the two tin boxes in which my papers were locked up violently on the floor. I heard a slow step on the ground, and there was light in the room, although I remembered having put out my candle. I thought it must have been you, who had come in for my clothes, and upset the boxes by accident. Whoever it was, he went out, and the light with him. I was about to settle again, when, the curtain being a little open at the foot of the bed, I saw a light on the wall opposite; such as a candle from outside would cast if the door were very cautiously opening. I started up in the bed, drew the side curtain, and saw that the door *was* opening, and admitting light from outside. It is close, you know, to the head of the bed. A hand was holding on the edge of the door and pushing it open; not a bit like yours; a very singular hand. Let me look at yours. "

He extended it for my inspection.

"Oh no; there's nothing wrong with your hand. This was differently shaped; fatter; and the middle finger was stunted, and shorter than the rest, looking as if it had once been broken, and the nail was crooked like a claw. I called out, "Who's there?" and the light and the hand were withdrawn, and I saw and heard no more of my visitor. "

"So sure as you're a living man, that was him!" exclaimed Tom Wyndsour, his very nose growing pale, and his eyes almost starti
ng out of his head.

"Who?" I asked.

"Old Squire Bowes; 'twas *his* hand you saw; the Lord a' mercy on us!" answered Tom. "The broken finger, and the nail bent like a hoop. Well for you, sir, he didn't come back when you called, that time. You came here about them Miss Dymock's business, and he never meant they should have a foot o' ground in Barwyke; and he was making a will to give it away quite different, when death took him short. He never was uncivil to no one; but he couldn't abide them ladies. My mind misgave me when I heard 'twas about their business you were coming; and now you see how it is; he'll be at his old tricks again!"

With some pressure, and a little more punch, I induced Tom Wyndsour to explain his mysterious allusions by recounting the occurrences which followed the old Squire's death.

"Squire Bowes, of Barwyke, died without making a will, as you know," said Tom. "And all the folk round were sorry; that is to say, sir, as sorry as folk will be for an old man that has seen a long tale of years, and has no right to grumble that death has knocked an hour too soon at his door. The Squire was well liked; he was never in a passion, or said a hard word; and he would not hurt a fly; and that made what happened after his decease the more surprising.

"The first thing these ladies did, when they got the property, was to buy stock for the park.

"It was not wise, in any case, to graze the land on their own account. But they little knew all they had to contend with.

"Before long something went wrong with the cattle; first one, and then another, took sick and died, and so on, till the loss began to grow heavy. Then, queer stories, little by little, began to be told. It was said, first by one, then by another, that Squire Bowes was seen, about evening time, walking, just as he used to do when he was alive, among the old trees, leaning on his stick; and, sometimes, when he came up with the cattle, he would stop and lay his hand

kindly like on the back of one of them; and that one was sure to fall sick next day, and die soon after.

"No one ever met him in the park, or in the woods, or ever saw him, except a good distance off. But they knew his gait and his figure well, and the clothes he used to wear; and they could tell the beast he laid his hand on by its color— white, dun, or black; and that beast was sure to sicken and die. The neighbors grew shy of taking the path over the park; and no one liked to walk in the woods, or come inside the bounds of Barwyke; and the cattle went on sickening and dying, as before.

"At that time there was one Thomas Pyke; he had been a groom to the old Squire; and he was in care of the place, and was the only one that used to sleep in the house.

"Tom was vexed, hearing these stories; which he did not believe the half on 'em; and more especial as he could not get man or boy to herd the cattle; all being afeared. So he wrote to Matlock, in Derybshire, for his brother, Richard Pyke, a clever lad, and one that knew nout o' the story of the old Squire walking.

"Dick came; and the cattle was better; folk said they could still see the old Squire, sometimes, walking, as before, in openings of the wood, with his stick in his hand; but he was shy of coming nigh the cattle, whatever his reason might be, since Dickon Pyke came; and he used to stand a long bit off, looking at them, with no more stir in him than a trunk o' one of the old trees, for an hour at a time, till the shape melted away, little by little, like the smoke of a fire that burns out.

"Tom Pyke and his brother Dickon, being the only living souls in the house, lay in the big bed in the servants' room, the house being fast barred and locked, one night in November.

"Tom was lying next the wall, and, he told me, as wide awake as ever he was at noonday. His brother Dickon lay outside, and was sound asleep.

Well, as Tom lay thinking, with his eyes turned toward the door, it opens slowly, and who should come in but old Squire Bowes, his face lookin' as dead as he was in his coffin.

"Tom's very breath left his body; he could not take his eyes off him; and he felt the hair rising up on his head.

"The Squire came to the side of the bed, and put his arms under Dickon, and lifted the boy— in a dead sleep all the time— and carried him out so, at the door.

"Such was the appearance, to Tom Pyke's eyes, and he was ready to swear to it, anywhere.

"When this happened, the light, wherever it came from, all on a sudden went out, and Tom could not see his own hand before him.

"More dead than alive, he lay till daylight.

"Sure enough his brother Dickon was gone. No sign of him could he discover about time house; and with some trouble he got a couple of the neighbors to help him to search the woods and grounds. Not a sign of him anywhere.

"At last one of them thought of the island in the lake; the little boat was moored to the old post at the water's edge. In they got, though with small hope of finding him there. Find him, nevertheless, they did, sitting under the big ash-tree, quite out of his wits; and to all their questions he answered nothing but one cry— 'Bowes, the devil! See him; see him; Bowes, the devil!' An idiot they found him; and so he will be till God sets all things right. No one could ever get him to sleep under roof-tree more. He wanders from house to house while daylight lasts; and no one cares to lock the harmless creature in the workhouse. And folk would rather not meet him after nightfall, for they think where he is there may be worse things near. "

A silence followed Tom's story. He and I were alone in that large room; I was sitting near the open window, looking into the dark night air. I fancied I saw something white move across it; and I heard a sound like low talking, that swelled into a discordant shriek— "Hoo-oo-oo! Bowes, the devil! Over your shoulder. Hoo-oo-oo! ha! ha! ha!" I started up, and saw, by the light of the candle with which Tom strode to the window, the wild eyes and blighted face of the idiot, as, with a sudden change of mood, he drew off, whispering and tittering to himself, and holding up his long fingers, and looking at them as if they were lighted at the tips like a "hand of glory. "

Tom pulled down the window. The story and its epilogue were over. I confessed I was rather glad when I heard the sound of the horses' hoofs on the courtyard, a few minutes later; and still gladder when, having bidden Tom a kind farewell, I had left the neglected house of Barwyke a mile behind me.

10: In the Dark

Edith Nesbit

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IT MAY have been a form of madness. Or it may be that he really was what is called haunted. Or it may— though I don't pretend to understand how— have been the development, through intense suffering, of a sixth sense in a very nervous, highly strung nature. Something certainly led him where They were. And to him They were all one.

He told me the first part of the story, and the last part of it I saw with my own eyes.

i

HALDANE and I were friends even in our school-days. What first brought us together was our common hatred of Visger, who came from our part of the country. His people knew our people at home, so he was put on to us when he came. He was the most intolerable person, boy and man, that I have ever known. He would not tell a lie. And that was all right. But he didn't stop at that. If he were asked whether any other chap had done anything— been out of bounds, or up to any sort of lark— he would always say, 'I don't know, sir, but I believe so. He never did know— we took care of that. But what he believed was always right. I remember Haldane twisting his arm to say how he knew about that cherry-tree business, and he only said, 'I don't know— I just feel sure. And I was right, you see.' What can you do with a boy like that?

We grew up to be men. At least Haldane and I did. Visger grew up to be a prig. He was a vegetarian and a teetotaller, and an all-wooler and Christian Scientist, and all the things that prigs are— but he wasn't a common prig. He knew all sorts of things that he oughtn't to have known, that he couldn't have known in any ordinary decent way. It wasn't that he found things out. He just knew them. Once, when I was very unhappy, he came into my rooms— we were all in our last year at Oxford— and talked about things I hardly knew myself. That was really why I went to India that winter. It was bad enough to be unhappy, without having that beast knowing all about it.

I was away over a year. Coming back, I thought a lot about how jolly it would be to see old Haldane again. If I thought about Visger at all, I wished he was dead. But I didn't think about him much.

I did want to see Haldane. He was always such a jolly chap— gay, and kindly, and simple, honourable, uptight, and full of practical sympathies. I longed to see him, to see the smile in his jolly blue eyes, looking out from the

net of wrinkles that laughing had made round them, to hear his jolly laugh, and feel the good grip of his big hand. I went straight from the docks to his chambers in Gray's Inn, and I found him cold, pale, anaemic, with dull eyes and a limp hand, and pale lips that smiled without mirth, and uttered a welcome without gladness.

He was surrounded by a litter of disordered furniture and personal effects half packed. Some big boxes stood corded, and there were cases of books, filled and waiting for the enclosing boards to be nailed on.

'Yes, I'm moving,' he said. 'I can't stand these rooms. There's something rum about them— something devilish rum. I clear our tomorrow.'

The autumn dusk was filling the corners with shadows. 'You got the furs,' I said, just for something to say, for I saw the big case that held them lying corded among the others.

'Furs?' he said. 'Oh yes. Thanks awfully. Yes. I forgot about the furs.' He laughed, out of politeness, I suppose, for there was no joke about the furs. They were many and fine— the best I could get for money, and I had seen them packed and sent off when my heart was very sore. He stood looking at me, and saying nothing.

'Come out and have a bit of dinner,' I said as cheerfully as I could.

'Too busy,' he answered, after the slightest possible pause, and a glance round the room— 'look here— I'm awfully glad to see you— If you'd just slip over and order in dinner— I'd go myself— only— Well, you see how it is.'

I went. And when I came back, he had cleared a space near the fire, and moved his big gate-table into it. We dined there by candle light. I tried to be amusing. He, I am sure, tried to be amused. We did not succeed, either of us. And his haggard eyes watched me all the time, save in those fleeting moments when, without turning his head, he glanced back over his shoulder into the shadows that crowded round the little lighted place where we sat.

When we had dined and the man had come and taken away the dishes, I looked at Haldane very steadily, so that he stopped in a pointless anecdote, and looked interrogatively at me. 'Well?' I said.

'You're not listening,' he said petulantly. 'What's the matter?'

'That's what you'd better tell me,' I said.

He was silent, gave one of those furtive glances at the shadows, and stooped to stir the fire to— I knew it— a blaze that must light every corner of the room.

'You're all to pieces,' I said cheerfully. 'What have you been up to? Wine? Cards? Speculation? A woman? If you won't tell me, you'll have to tell your doctor. Why, my dear chap, you're a wreck.'

'You're a comfortable friend to have about the place,' he said, and smiled a mechanical smile not at all pleasant to see.

'I'm the friend you want, I think,' said I. 'Do you suppose I'm blind? Something's gone wrong and you've taken to something. Morphia, perhaps? And you've brooded over the thing till you've lost all sense of proportion. Out with it, old chap. I bet you a dollar it's not so bad as you think it.'

'If I could tell you— or tell anyone,' he said slowly, 'it wouldn't be so bad as it is. If I could tell anyone, I'd tell you. And even as it is, I've told you more than I've told anyone else.'

I could get nothing more out of him. But he pressed me to stay-would have given me his bed and made himself a shake-down, he said. But I had engaged my room at the Victoria, and I was expecting letters. So I left him, quite late— and he stood on the stairs, holding a candle over the bannisters to light me down.

When I went back next morning, he was gone. Men were moving his furniture into a big van with somebody's Pantechnicon painted on it in big letters.

He had left no address with the porter, and had driven off in a hansom with two portmanteaux— to Waterloo, the porter thought.

Well, a man has a right to the monopoly of his own troubles, if he chooses to have it. And I had troubles of my own that kept me busy.

ii

IT WAS more than a year later that I saw Haldane again. I had got rooms in the Albany by this time, and he turned up there one morning, very early indeed-before breakfast in fact. And if he looked ghastly before, he now looked almost ghostly. His face looked as though it had worn thin, like an oyster shell that has for years been cast up twice a day by the sea on a shore all pebbly. His hands were thin as bird's claws, and they trembled like caught butterflies.

I welcomed him with enthusiastic cordiality and pressed breakfast on him. This time, I decided, I would ask no questions. For I saw that none were needed. He would tell me. He intended to tell me. He had come here to tell me, and for nothing else.

I lit the spirit lamp— I made coffee and small talk for him, and I ate and drank, and waited for him to begin. And it was like this that he began:

'I am going,' he said, 'to kill myself— oh, don't be alarmed,'— I suppose I had said or looked something— 'I shan't do it here, or now. I shall do it when I have to— when I can't bear it any longer. And I want someone to know why. I

don't want to feel that I'm the only living creature who does know. And I can trust you, can't I?'

I murmured something reassuring.

'I should like you, if you don't mind, to give me your word, that you won't tell a soul what I'm going to tell you, as long as I'm alive. Afterwards... you can tell whom you please.' I gave him my word.

He sat silent looking at the fire. Then he shrugged his shoulders.

'It's extraordinary how difficult it is to say it,' he said, and smiled. 'The fact is— you know that beast, George Visger.'

'Yes,' I said. 'I haven't seen him since I came back. Some one told me he'd gone to some island or other to preach vegetarianism to the cannibals. Anyhow, he's out of the way, bad luck to him.'

'Yes,' said Haldane, 'he's out of the way. But he's not preaching anything. In point of fact, he's dead.'

'Dead?' was all I could think of to say.

'Yes,' said he; 'it's not generally known, but he is.'

'What did he die of?' I asked, not that I cared. The bare fact was good enough for me.

'You know what an interfering chap he always was. Always knew everything. Heart to heart talks-and have everything open and above board. Well, he interfered between me and some one else— told her a pack of lies.'

'Lies?'

'Well, the things were true, but he made lies of them the way he told them-you know.'

I did. I nodded.

'And she threw me over. And she died. And we weren't even friends. And I couldn't see her— before— I couldn't even... Oh, my God... But I went to the funeral. He was there. They'd asked him. And then I came back to my rooms. And I was sitting there, thinking. And he came up.'

'He would do. It's just what he would do. The beast! I hope you kicked him out.'

'No, I didn't. I listened to what he'd got to say. He came to say, No doubt it was all for the best. And he hadn't known the things he told her. He'd only guessed. He'd guessed right, damn him. What right had he to guess right? And he said it was all for the best, because, besides that, there was madness in my family. He'd found that out too-'

'And is there?'

'If there is, I didn't know it. And that was why it was all for the best. So then I said, "There wasn't any madness in my family before, but there is now," and I

got hold of his throat. I am not sure whether I meant to kill him; I ought to have meant to kill him. Anyhow, I did kill him. What did you say?'

I had said nothing. It is not easy to think at once of the tactful and suitable thing to say, when your oldest friend tells you that he is a murderer.

'When I could get my hands out of his throat— it was as difficult as it is to drop the handles of a galvanic battery— he fell in a lump on the hearth-rug. And I saw what I'd done. How is it that murderers ever get found out?'

'They're careless, I suppose,' I found myself saying, 'they lose their nerve.'

'I didn't,' he said. 'I never was calmer, I sat down in the big chair and looked at him, and thought it all out. He was just off to that island— I knew that. He'd said goodbye to everyone. He'd told me that. There was no blood to get rid of— or only a touch at the corner of his slack mouth. He wasn't going to travel in his own name because of interviewers. Mr Somebody Something's luggage would be unclaimed and his cabin empty. No one would guess that Mr Somebody Something was Sir George Visger, F.R.S. It was all as plain as plain. There was nothing to get rid of, but the man. No weapon, no blood— and I got rid of him all right.'

'How?'

He smiled cunningly.

'No, no,' he said; 'that's where I draw the line. It's not that I doubt your word, but if you talked in your sleep, or had a fever or anything. No, no. As long as you don't know where the body is, don't you see, I'm all right. Even if you could prove that I've said all this— which you can't— it's only the wanderings of my poor unhinged brain. See?'

I saw. And I was sorry for him. And I did not believe that he had killed Visger. He was not the sort of man who kills people. So I said:

'Yes, old chap, I see. Now look here. Let's go away together, you and I- travel a bit and see the world, and forget all about that beastly chap.'

His eyes lighted up at that.

'Why,' he said, 'you understand. You don't hate me and shrink from me. I wish I'd told you before— you know— when you came and I was packing all my sticks. But it's too late now.

'Too late? Not a bit of it,' I said. 'Come, we'll pack our traps and be off tonight— out into the unknown, don't you know.

'That's where I'm going,' he said. 'You wait. When you've heard what's been happening to me, you won't be so keen to go travelling about with me.'

'But you've told me what's been happening to you,' I said, and the more I thought about what he had told me, the less I believed it.

'No,' he said, slowly, 'no— I've told you what happened to him. What happened to me is quite different. Did I tell you what his last words were? Just

when I was coming at him. Before I'd got his throat, you know. He said, "Look out. You'll never to able to get rid of the body— Besides, anger's sinful." You know that way he had, like a tract on its hind legs. So afterwards I got thinking of that. But I didn't think of it for a year. Because I did get rid of his body all right. And then I was sitting in that comfortable chair, and I thought, "Hullo, it must be about a year now, since that—" and I pulled out my pocket-book and went to the window to look at a little almanac I carry about— it was getting dusk— and sure enough it was a year, to the day. And then I remembered what he'd said. And I said to myself, "Not much trouble about getting rid of your body, you brute." And then I looked at the hearth-rug and— Ah!' he screamed suddenly and very loud— 'I can't tell you— no, I can't.'

My man opened the door-he wore a smooth face over his wriggling curiosity. 'Did you call, sir?'

'Yes,' I lied. 'I want you to take a note to the bank, and wait for an answer.'

When he was got rid of, Haldane said: 'Where was I—?'

'You were just telling me what happened after you looked at the almanac. What was it?'

'Nothing much,' he said, laughing softly, 'oh, nothing much— only that I glanced at the hearthrug— and there he was— the man I'd killed a year before. Don't try to explain, or I shall lose my temper. The door was shut. The windows were shut. He hadn't been there a minute before. And he was there then. That's all.'

Hallucination was one of the words I stumbled among.

'Exactly what I thought,' he said triumphantly, 'but— I touched it. It was quite real. Heavy, you know, and harder than live people are somehow, to the touch-more like a stone thing covered with kid the hands were, and the arms like a marble statue in a blue serge suit. Don't you hate men who wear blue serge suits?'

'There are hallucinations of touch too,' I found myself saying.

'Exactly what I thought,' said Haldane more triumphant than ever, 'but there are limits, you know— limits. So then I thought someone had got him out— the real him— and stuck him there to frighten me— while my back was turned, and I went to the place where I'd hidden him, and he was there— ah!— just as I'd left him. Only... it was a year ago. There are two of him there now.'

'My dear chap,' I said 'this is simply comic.'

'Yes,' he said, 'It is amusing. I find it so myself. Especially in the night when I wake up and think of it. I hope I shan't die in the dark, Winston: That's one of the reasons why I think I shall have to kill myself. I could be sure then of not dying in the dark.'

'Is that all?' I asked, feeling sure that it must be.

'No,' said Haldane at once. 'That's not all. He's come back to rue again. In a railway carriage it was. I'd been asleep. When I woke up, there he was lying on the seat opposite me. Looked just the same. I pitched him out on the line in Red Hill Tunnel. And if I see him again, I'm going out myself. I can't stand it. It's too much. I'd sooner go. Whatever the next world's like, there aren't things in it like that. We leave them here, in graves and boxes and... You think I'm mad. But I'm not. You can't help me— no one can help me. He knew, you see. He said I shouldn't be able to get rid of the body. And I can't get rid of it. I can't. I can't. He knew. He always did know things that he couldn 't know. But I'll cut his game short. After all, I've got the ace of trumps, and I'll play it on his next trick. I give you my word of honour, Winston, that I'm not mad.'

'My dear old man,' I said, 'I don't think you're mad. But I do think your nerves are very much upset. Mine are a bit, too. Do you know why I went to India? It was because of you and her. I couldn't stay and see it, though I wished for your happiness and all that; you know I did. And when I came back, she... and you... Let's see it out together,' I said. 'You won't keep fancying things if you've got me to talk to. And I always said you weren't half a bad old duffer.'

'She liked you,' he said.

'Oh, yes,' I said, 'she liked me.

iii

THAT was how we came to go abroad together. I was full of hope for him. He'd always been such a splendid chap— so sane and strong. I couldn't believe that he was gone mad, gone for ever, I mean, so that he'd never come right again. Perhaps may own trouble made it easy for me to see things not quite straight. Anyway, I took him away to recover his mind's health, exactly as I should have taken him away to get strong after a fever. And the madness seemed to pass away, and in a month or two we were perfectly jolly, and I thought I had cured him. And I was very glad because of that old friendship of ours, and because she had loved him and liked me.

We never spoke of Visger. I thought he had forgotten all about him. I thought I understood how his mind, over-strained by sorrow and anger, had fixed on the man he hated, and woven a nightmare web of horror round that detestable personality. And I had got the whip hand of my own trouble. And we were as jolly as sandboys together all those months.

And we came to Bruges at last in our travels, and Bruges was very full, because of the Exhibition. We could only get one room and one bed. So we

tossed for the bed, and the one who lost the toss was to make the best of the night in the armchair. And the bedclothes we were to share equitably.

We spent the evening at a café chantant and finished at a beer hall, and it was late and sleepy when we got back to the Grande Vigne. I took our key from its nail in the concierge's room, and we went up. We talked awhile, I remember, of the town, and the belfry, and the Venetian aspect of the canals by moonlight, and then Haldane got into bed, and I made a chrysalis of myself with my share of the blankets and fitted the tight roll into the armchair. I was not at all comfortable, but I was compensatingly tired, and I was nearly asleep when Haldane roused me up to tell me about his will.

'I've left everything to you, old man,' he said. 'I know I can trust you to see to everything.'

'Quite so,' said I, 'and if you don't mind, we'll talk about it in the morning.'

He tried to go on about it, and about what a friend I'd been, and all that, but I shut him up and told him to go to sleep. But no. He wasn't comfortable, he said. And he'd got a thirst like a lime kiln. And he'd noticed that there was no water-bottle in the room.

'And the water in the jug's like pale soup,' he said.

'Oh, all right,' said I. 'Light your candle and go and get some water, then, in Heaven's name, and let me get to sleep.'

But he said, 'No-you light it. I don't want to get out of bed in the dark. I might— I might step on something, mightn't I— or walk into something that wasn't there when I got into bed.'

'Rot,' I said, 'walk into your grandmother.' But I lit the candle all the same. He sat up in bed and looked at me— very pale— with his hair all tumbled from the pillow, and his eyes blinking and shining.

'That's better,' he said. And then, 'I say— look here. Oh— yes— I see. It's all right. Queer how they mark the sheets here. Blest if I didn't think it was blood, just for the minute.'

The sheet was marked, not at the corner, as sheets are marked at home, but right in the middle where it turns down, with big, red, cross-stitching.

'Yes, I see,' I said, 'it is a queer place to mark it.'

'It's queer letters to have on it,' he said. 'G.V.'

'*Grande Vigne*,' I said. 'What letters do you expect them to mark things with? Hurry up.

'You come too,' he said. 'Yes, it does stand for Grande Vigne, of course. I wish you'd come down too, Winston.'

'I'll go down,' I said and turned with the candle in my hand.

He was out of bed and close to me in a flash.

'No,' said he, 'I don't want to stay alone in the dark.'

He said it just as a frightened child might have done.

'All right then, come along,' I said. And we went. I tried to make some joke, I remember, about the length of his hair, and the cut of his pajamas— but I was sick with disappointment. For it was almost quite plain to me, even then, that all my time and trouble had been thrown away, and that he wasn't cured after all. We went down as quietly as we could, and got a carafe of water from the long bare dining table in the *salle à manger*. He got hold of my arm at first, and then he got the candle away from me, and went very slowly, shading the light with his hand, and looking very carefully all about, as though he expected to see something that he wanted very desperately nor to see. And of course, I knew what that something was. I didn't like the way he was going on. I can't at all express how deeply I didn't like it. And he looked over his shoulder every now and then, just as he did that first evening after I came back from India.

The thing got on my nerves so that I could hardly find the way back to our room. And when we got there, I give you my word, I more than half expected to see what he had expected to see— that, or something like that, on the hearth-rug. But of course there was nothing.

I blew out the light and tightened my blankets round me-I'd been trailing them after me in our expedition. And I was settled in my chair when Haldane spoke.

'You've got all the blankets,' he said.

'No, I haven't,' said I, 'only what I've always had.'

'I can't find mine then,' he said and I could hear his teeth chattering. 'And I'm cold. I'm... For God's sake, light the candle. Light it. Light it. Something horrible...'

And I couldn't find the matches.

'Light the candle, light the candle,' he said, and his voice broke, as a boy's does sometimes in chapel. 'If you don't he'll come to me. It is so easy to come at any one in the dark. Oh Winston, light the candle, for the love of God! I can't die in the dark.'

'I am lighting it,' I said savagely, and I was feeling for the matches on the marble-topped chest of drawers, on the mantelpiece— everywhere but on the round centre table where I'd put them.

'You're not going to die. Don't be a fool,' I said. 'It's all right. I'll get a light in a second.'

He said, 'It's cold. It's cold. It's cold,' like that, three times. And then he screamed aloud, like a woman— like a child— like a hare when the dogs have got it. I had heard him scream like that once before.

'What is it?' I cried, hardly less loud. 'For God's sake, hold your noise. What is it?' There was an empty silence. Then, very slowly:

'It's Visger,' he said. And he spoke thickly, as through some stifling veil.

'Nonsense. Where?' I asked, and my hand closed on the matches as he spoke.

'Here,' he screamed sharply, as though he had torn the veil away, 'here, beside me. In the bed.' I got the candle alight. I got across to him.

He was crushed in a heap at the edge of the bed. Stretched on the bed beyond him was a dead man, white and very cold.

Haldane had died in the dark.

It was all so simple.

We had come to the wrong room. The man the room belonged to was there, on the bed he had engaged and paid for before he died of heart disease, earlier in the day. A French *commis-voyageur* representing soap and perfumery; his name, Felix Leblanc.

Later, in England, I made cautious enquiries. The body of a man had been found in the Red Hill tunnel— a haberdasher man named Simmons, who had drunk spirits of salts, owing to the depression of trade. The bottle was clutched in his dead hand.

For reasons that I had, I took care to have a police inspector with me when I opened the boxes that came to me by Haldane's will. One of them was the big box, metal lined, in which I had sent him the skins from India— for a wedding present, God help us all!

It was closely soldered.

Inside were the skins of beasts? No. The bodies of two men. One was identified, after some trouble, as that of a hawker of pens in city offices— subject to fits. He had died in one, it seemed. The other body was Visger's, right enough.

Explain it as you like. I offered you, if you remember, a choice of explanations before I began the story. I have not yet found the explanation that can satisfy me.

———————————

11: The Dragon Tamers

Edith Nesbit

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THERE was once an old, old castle— it was so old that its walls and towers and turrets and gateways and arches had crumbled to ruins, and of all its old splendour there were only two little rooms left; and it was here that John the blacksmith had set up his forge. He was too poor to live in a proper house, and no one asked any rent for the rooms in the ruin, because all the lords of the castle were dead and gone this many a year. So there John blew his bellows, and hammered his iron, and did all the work which came his way. This was not much, because most of the trade went to the mayor of the town, who was also a blacksmith in quite a large way of business, and had his huge forge facing the square of the town, and had twelve apprentices, all hammering like a nest of woodpeckers, and twelve journeymen to order the apprentices about, and a patent forge and a self-acting hammer and electric bellows, and all things handsome about him. So that of course the townspeople, whenever they wanted a horse shod or a shaft mended, went to the mayor. And John the blacksmith struggled on as best he could, with a few odd jobs from travellers and strangers who did not know what a superior forge the mayor's was. The two rooms were warm and weather-tight, but not very large; so the blacksmith got into the way of keeping his old iron, and his odds and ends, and his fagots, and his twopenn'orth of coal, in the great dungeon down under the castle. It was a very fine dungeon indeed, with a handsome vaulted roof and big iron rings, whose staples were built into the wall, very strong and convenient for tying captives up to, and at one end was a broken flight of wide steps leading down no one knew where.. Even the lords of the castle in the good old times had never known where those steps led to, but every now and then they would kick a prisoner down the steps in their light-hearted, hopeful way, and, sure enough, the prisoners never came back. The blacksmith had never dared to go beyond the seventh step, and no more have I— so I know no more than he did what was at the bottom of those stairs.

John the blacksmith had a wife and a little baby. When his wife was not doing the housework she used to nurse the baby and cry, remembering the happy days when she lived with her father, who kept seventeen cows and lived quite in the country, and when John used to come courting her in the summer evenings, as smart as smart, with a posy in his button-hole. And now John's hair was getting grey, and there was hardly ever enough to eat.

As for the baby, it cried a good deal at odd times; but at night, when its mother had settled down to sleep, it would always begin to cry, quite as a matter of course, so that she hardly got any rest at all. This made her very tired. The baby could make up for its bad nights during the day, if it liked, but the poor mother couldn't. So whenever she had nothing to do she used to sit and cry, because she was tired out with work and worry.

One evening the blacksmith was busy with his forge. He was making a goat-shoe for the goat of a very rich lady, who wished to see how the goat liked being shod, and also whether the shoe would come to fivepence or sevenpence before she ordered the whole set. This was the only order John had had that week. And as he worked his wife sat and nursed the baby, who, for a wonder, was not crying.

Presently, over the noise of the bellows, and over the clank of the iron, there came another sound. The blacksmith and his wife looked at each other.

"I heard nothing," said he.

"Neither did I," said she.

But the noise grew louder— and the two were so anxious not to hear it that he hammered away at the goat-shoe harder than he had ever hammered in his life, and she began to sing to the baby— a thing she had not had the heart to do for weeks.

But through the blowing and hammering and singing the noise came louder and louder, and the more they tried not to hear it, the more they had to. It was like the noise of some great creature purring, purring, purring— and the reason they did not want to believe they really heard it was that it came from the great dungeon down below, where the old iron was, and the firewood and the twopenn'orth of coal, and the broken steps that went down into the dark and ended no one knew where.

"It can't be anything in the dungeon," said the blacksmith, wiping his face. "Why, I shall have to go down there after more coals in a minute."

"There isn't anything there, of course. How could there be?" said his wife. And they tried so hard to believe that there could be nothing there that presently they very nearly did believe it.

Then the blacksmith took his shovel in one hand and his riveting hammer in the other, and hung the old stable lantern on his little finger, and went down to get the coals.

"I am not taking the hammer because I think there is anything there," said he, "but it is handy for breaking the large lumps of coal."

"I quite understand," said his wife, who had brought the coal home in her apron that very afternoon, and knew that it was all coal-dust.

So he went down the winding stairs to the dungeon, and stood at the bottom of the steps holding the lantern above his head just to see that the dungeon really was empty as usual. Half of it was empty as usual, except for the old iron and odds and ends, and the firewood and the coals. But the other side was not empty. It was quite full, and what it was full of was Dragon.

"It must have come up those nasty broken steps from goodness knows where," said the blacksmith to himself, trembling all over, as he tried to creep back up the winding stairs.

But the dragon was too quick for him— it put out a great claw and caught him by the leg, and as it moved it rattled like a great bunch of keys, or like the sheet-iron they make thunder out of in pantomimes.

"No you don't," said the dragon, in a spluttering voice, like a damp squib.

"Deary, deary me," said poor John, trembling more than ever in the claw of the dragon; "here's a nice end for a respectable blacksmith!"

The dragon seemed very much struck by this remark. "Do you mind saying that again?" said he, quite politely. So John said again, very distinctly: "Here— Is— A— Nice— End— For— A— Respectable— Blacksmith."

"I didn't know," said the dragon. "Fancy now! You're the very man I wanted."

"So I understood you to say before," said John, his teeth chattering.

"Oh, I don't mean what you mean," said the dragon; "but I should like you to do a job for me. One of my wings has got some of the rivets out of it just above the joint. Could you put that to rights?"

"I might, sir," said John, politely, for you must always be polite to a possible customer, even if he be a dragon.

"A master craftsman— you are a master, of course?— can see in a minute what's wrong," the dragon went on. "Just come round here and feel my plates, will you?"

John timidly went round when the dragon took his claw away; and, sure enough, the dragon's off wing was hanging loose and all anyhow, and several of the plates near the joint certainly wanted riveting.

The dragon seemed to be made almost entirely of iron armour— a sort of tawny, red-rust colour it was; from damp, no doubt— and under it he seemed to be covered with something furry.

All the blacksmith welled up in John's heart, and he felt more at ease.

"You could certainly do with a rivet or two, sir," said he; "in fact, you want a good many."

"Well, get to work, then," said the dragon. "You mend my wing, and then I'll go out and eat up all the town, and if you make a really smart job of it I'll eat you last. There!"

"I don't want to be eaten last, sir," said John.

"Well, then, I'll eat you first," said the dragon.

"I don't want that, sir, either," said John.

"Go on with you, you silly man," said the dragon; "you don't know your own silly mind. Come; set to work."

"I don't like the job, sir," said John, "and that's the truth. I know how easily accidents happen. It's all fair and smooth, and 'Please rivet me, and I'll eat you last'— and then you get to work and you give a gentleman a bit of a nip or a dig under his rivets— and then it's fire and smoke, and no apologies will meet the case."

"Upon my word of honour as a dragon," said the other.

"I know you wouldn't do it on purpose, sir," said John; "but any gentleman will give a jump and a sniff if he's nipped, and one of your sniffs would be enough for me. Now, if you'd just let me fasten you up?"

"It would be so undignified," objected the dragon.

"We always fasten a horse up," said John, "and he's the `noble animal.'"

"It's all very well," said the dragon, "but how do I know you'd untie me again when you'd riveted me? Give me something in pledge. What do you value most?"

"My hammer," said John. "A blacksmith is nothing without a hammer."

"But you'd want that for riveting me. You must think of something else, and at once, or I'll eat you first."

At this moment the baby in the room above began to scream. Its mother had been so quiet that it thought she had settled down for the night; and that it was time to begin.

"Whatever's that?" said the dragon, starting so that every plate on his body rattled.

"It's only the baby," said John.

"What's that?" asked the dragon— "something you value?"

"Well, yes, sir, rather," said the blacksmith.

"Then bring it here," said the dragon; "and I'll take care of it till you've done riveting me and you shall tie me up."

"All right, sir," said John; "but I ought to warn you. Babies are poison to dragons, so I don't deceive you. It's all right to touch— but don't you go putting it into your mouth. I shouldn't like to see any harm come to a nice-looking gentleman like you."

The dragon purred at this compliment and said: "All right, I'll be careful. Now go and fetch the thing, whatever it is."

So John ran up the steps as quickly as he could, for he knew that if the dragon got impatient before it was fastened up, it could heave up the roof of

the dungeon with one heave of its back, and kill them all in the ruins. His wife was asleep, in spite of the baby's cries; and John picked up the baby and took it down and put it between the dragon's front paws.

"You just purr to it, sir," he said, "and it'll be as good as gold."

So the dragon purred, and his purring pleased the baby so much that it left off crying.

Then John rummaged among the heap of old iron and found there some heavy chains and a great collar that had been made in the days when men sang over their work and put their hearts into it, so that the things they made were strong enough to bear the weight of a thousand years, let alone a dragon.

John fastened the dragon up with the collar and the chains, and when he had padlocked them all on safely he set to work to find out how many rivets, would be needed.

"Six, eight, ten— twenty, forty," said he; "I haven't half enough rivets in the shop. If you'll excuse me, sir, I'll step round to another forge and get a few dozen. I won't be a minute."

And off he went, leaving the baby between the dragon's fore-paws, laughing and crowing with pleasure at the very large purr of it.

John ran as hard as he could into the town, and found the mayor and corporation.

"There's a dragon in my dungeon," he said; "I've chained him up. Now come and help to get my baby away." And he told them all about it.

But they all happened to have engagements for that evening; so they praised John's cleverness, and said they were quite content to leave the matter in his hands.

"But what about my baby?" said John.

"Oh, well," said the mayor, "if anything should happen, you will always be able to remember that your baby perished in a good cause.".

So John went home again, and told his wife some of the tale.

"You've given the baby to the dragon!" she cried. "Oh, you unnatural parent!"

"Hush," said John, and he told her some more.

"Now," he said, "I'm going down. After I've been down you can go, and if you keep your head the boy will be all right."

So down went the blacksmith, and there was the dragon purring away with all his might to keep the baby quiet.

"Hurry up, can't you?" he said. "I can't keep up this noise all night."

"I'm very sorry, sir," said the blacksmith, "but all the shops are shut. The job must wait till the morning. And don't forget you've promised to take care of that baby. You'll find it a little wearing, I'm afraid. Good-night, sir."

The dragon had purred till he was quite out of breath— so now he stopped, and as soon as everything was quiet the baby thought everyone must have settled for the night, and that it was time to begin to scream. So it began.

"Oh dear," said the dragon, "this is awful."

He patted the baby with his claw, but it screamed more than ever.

"And I am so tired, too," said the dragon. "I did so hope I should have had a good night."

The baby went on screaming.

"There'll be no peace for me after this," said the dragon; "it's enough to ruin one's nerves. Hush, then— did 'urns, then." And he tried to quiet the baby as if it had been a young dragon. But when he began to sing "Hush-a-by, dragon," the baby screamed more and more and more. "I can't keep it quiet," said the dragon; and then suddenly he saw a woman sitting on the steps. "Here, I say," said he, "do you know anything about babies?"

"I do, a little," said the mother.

"Then I wish you'd take this one, and let me get some sleep:" said the dragon, yawning. "You can bring it back in the morning before the blacksmith comes."

So the mother picked up the baby and took it upstairs and told her husband, and they went to bed happy, for they had caught the dragon and saved the baby.

The next day John went down and explained carefully to the dragon exactly how matters stood, and he got an iron gate with a grating to it, and set it up at the foot of the steps, and the dragon mewed furiously for days and days, but when he found it was no good he was quiet.

So now John went to the mayor, and said: "I've got the dragon and I've saved the town."

"Noble preserver," cried the mayor, "we will get up a subscription for you, and crown you in public with a laurel wreath."

So the mayor put his name down for five pounds, and the corporation each gave three, and other people gave their guineas, and half-guineas, and half-crowns and crowns, and while the subscription was being made the mayor ordered three poems at his own expense from the town poet to celebrate the occasion. The poems were very much admired, especially by the mayor and corporation.

The first poem dealt with the noble conduct of the mayor in arranging to have the dragon tied up. The second described the splendid assistance rendered by the corporation. And the third expressed the pride and joy of the poet in being permitted to sing such deeds, beside which the actions of Saint

George must appear quite commonplace to all with a feeling heart or a well-balanced brain.

When the subscription was finished there was a thousand pounds, and a committee was formed to settle what should be done with it. A third of it went to pay for a banquet to the mayor and corporation; another third was spent in buying a gold collar with a dragon on it for the mayor, and gold medals with dragons on them for the corporation; and what was left went in committee expenses.

So there was nothing for the blacksmith except the laurel wreath, and the knowledge that it really was he who had saved the town. But after this things went a little better with the blacksmith. To begin with, the baby did not cry so much as it had before. Then the rich lady who owned the goat was so touched by John's noble action that she ordered a complete set of shoes at 2s. 4d., and even made it up to 2s. 6d. in grateful recognition of his public-spirited conduct. Then tourists used to come in breaks from quite a long way off, and pay twopence each to go down the steps and peep through the iron grating at the rusty dragon in the dungeon— and it was threepence extra for each party if the blacksmith let off coloured fire to see it by, which, as the fire was extremely short, was twopence-halfpenny clear profit every time. And the blacksmith's wife used to provide teas at ninepence a head, and altogether things grew brighter week by week.

The baby— named John, after his father, and called Johnnie for short— began presently to grow up. He was great friends with Tina, the daughter of the whitesmith, who lived nearly opposite. She was a dear little girl, with yellow pigtails and blue eyes, and she was never tired of hearing the story of how Johnnie, when he was a baby, had been minded by a real dragon.

The two children used to go together to peep through the iron grating at the dragon, and sometimes they would hear him mew piteously. And they would light a halfpennyworth of coloured fire to look at him by. And they grew older and wiser.

Now, at last one day the mayor and corporation, hunting the hare in their gold gowns, came screaming back to the town gates with the news that a lame, humpy giant, as big as a tin church, was coming over the marshes towards the town.

"We're lost," said the mayor. "I'd give a thousand pounds to anyone who could keep that giant out of the town. I know what he eats— by his teeth."

No one seemed to know what to do. But Johnnie and Tina were listening, and they looked at each other, and ran off as fast as their boots would carry them.

They ran through the forge, and down the dungeon steps, and knocked at the iron door.

"Who's there?" said the dragon.

"It's only us," said the children.

And the dragon was so dull from having been alone for ten years that he said: "Come in, dears."

"You won't hurt us, or breathe fire at us or anything?" asked Tina.

And the dragon said, "Not for worlds."

So they went in and talked to him, and told him what the weather was like outside, and what there was in the papers, and at last Johnnie said: "There's a lame giant in the town. He wants you."

"Does he?" said the dragon, showing his teeth. "If only I were out of this!"

"If we let you loose you might manage to run away before he could catch you."

"Yes, I might," answered the dragon, "but then again I mightn't."

"Why— you'd never fight him?" said Tina.

"No," said the dragon; "I'm all for peace, I am. You let me out, and you'll see."

So the children loosed the dragon from the chains and the collar, and he broke down one end of the dungeon and went out— only pausing at the forge door to get the blacksmith to rivet his wing.

He met the lame giant at the gate of the town, and the giant banged on the dragon with his club as if he were banging an iron foundry, and the dragon behaved like a smelting works— all fire and smoke. It was a fearful sight, and people watched it from a distance, falling off their legs with the shock of every bang, but always getting up to look again.

At last the dragon won, and the giant sneaked away across the marshes, and the dragon, who was very tired, went home to sleep, announcing his intention of eating the town in the morning. He went back into his old dungeon because he was a stranger in the town, and he did not know of any other respectable lodging. Then Tina and Johnnie went to the mayor and corporation and said, "The giant is settled. Please give us the thousand pounds reward."

But the mayor said, "No, no, my boy. It is not you who have settled the giant, it is the dragon. I suppose you have chained him up again? When he comes to claim the reward he shall have it."

"He isn't chained up yet," said Johnnie. "Shall I send him to claim the reward?"

But the mayor said he need not trouble; and now he offered a thousand pounds to anyone who would get the dragon chained up again.

"I don't trust you," said Johnnie. "Look how you treated my father when he chained up the dragon."

But the people who were listening at the door interrupted, and said that if Johnnie could fasten up the dragon again they would turn out the mayor and let Johnnie be mayor in his place. For they had been dissatisfied with the mayor for some time, and thought they would like a change.

So Johnnie said, "Done," and off he went, hand-in-hand with Tina, and they called on all their little friends and said: "Will you help us to save the town?"

And all the children said, "Yes, of course we will. What fun!"

"Well, then," said Tina, "you must all bring your basins of bread and milk to the forge tomorrow at breakfast-time."

"And if ever I am mayor," said Johnnie, "I will give a banquet, and you shall be invited. And we'll have nothing but sweet things from beginning to end."

All the children promised, and next morning Tina and Johnnie rolled the big washing-tub down the winding stair. "What's that noise?" asked the dragon.

"It's only a big giant breathing," said Tina; "he's gone by, now."

Then, when all the town children brought their bread and milk, Tina emptied it into the wash-tub, and when the tub was full Tina knocked at the iron door with the grating in it, and said: "May we come in?"

"Oh, yes," said the dragon; "it's very dull here."

So they went in, and with the help of nine other children they lifted the washing-tub in and set it down by the dragon. Then all the other children went away, and Tina and Johnnie sat down and cried.

"What's this?" asked the dragon, "and what's the matter?"

"This is bread and milk," said Johnnie; "it's our breakfast all of it."

"Well," said the dragon, "I don't see what you want with breakfast. I'm going to eat everyone in the town as soon as I've rested a little."

"Dear Mr. Dragon," said Tina, "I wish you wouldn't eat us. How would you like to be eaten yourself?"

"Not at all," the dragon confessed, "but nobody will eat me."

"I don't know," said Johnnie, "there's a giant—"

"I know. I fought with him, and licked him—"

"Yes, but there's another come now— the one you fought was only this one's little boy. This one is half as big again."

"He's seven times as big," said Tina.

"No, nine times," said Johnnie. "He's bigger than the steeple."

"Oh dear," said the dragon. "I never expected this."

"And the mayor has told him where you are," Tina went on, "and he is coming to eat you as soon as he has sharpened his big knife. The mayor told

him you were a wild dragon— but he didn't mind. He said he only ate wild dragons— with bread sauce."

"That's tiresome," said the dragon, "and I suppose this sloppy stuff in the tub is the bread sauce?"

The children said it was. "Of course," they added, "bread sauce is only served with wild dragons. Tame ones are served with apple sauce and onion stuffing. What a pity you're not a tame one: he'd never look at you then," they said. "Good-bye, poor dragon, we shall never see you again, and now you'll know what it's like to be eaten." And they began to cry again.

"Well, but look here," said the dragon, "couldn't you pretend I was a tame dragon? Tell the giant that I'm just a poor little, timid tame dragon that you kept for a pet."

"He'd never believe it," said Johnnie. "If you were our tame dragon we should keep you tied up, you know. We shouldn't like to risk losing such a dear, pretty pet."

Then the dragon begged them to fasten him up at once, and they did so: with the collar and chains that were made years ago— in the days when men sang over their work and made it strong enough to bear any strain.

And then they went away and told the people what they had done, and Johnnie was made mayor, and had a glorious feast exactly as he had said he would— with nothing in it but sweet things. It began with Turkish delight and halfpenny buns, and went on with oranges, toffee, cocoanut-ice, peppermints, jam-puffs, raspberry-noyeau, ice-creams, and meringues, and ended with bull's-eyes and ginger-bread and acid-drops.

This was all very well for Johnnie and Tina; but if you are kind children with feeling hearts you will perhaps feel sorry for the poor deceived, deluded dragon— chained up in the dull dungeon, with nothing to do but to think over the shocking untruths that Johnnie had told him.

When he thought how he had been tricked the poor captive dragon began to weep— and the large tears fell down over his rusty plates. And presently he began to feel faint, as people sometimes do when they have been crying, especially if they have not had anything to eat for ten years or so.

And then the poor creature dried his eyes and looked about him, and there he saw the tub of bread and milk. So he thought, "If giants like this damp, white stuff, perhaps I should like it too," and he tasted a little, and liked it so much that he ate it all up.

And the next time the tourists came, and Johnnie let off the coloured fire, the dragon said, shyly: "Excuse my troubling you, but could you bring me a little more bread and milk?"

So Johnnie arranged that people should go round with cars every day to collect the children's bread and milk for the dragon. The children were fed at the town's expense— on whatever they liked; and they ate nothing but cake and buns and sweet things, and they said the poor dragon was very welcome to their bread and milk.

Now, when Johnnie had been mayor ten years or so he married Tina, and on their wedding morning they went to see the dragon. He had grown quite tame, and his rusty plates had fallen off in places, and underneath he was soft and furry to stroke. So now they stroked him.

And he said, "I don't know how I could ever have liked eating anything but bread and milk. I am a tame dragon, now, aren't I?" And when they said "Yes, he was," the dragon said: "I *am* so tame, won't you undo me?" And some people would have been afraid to trust him, but Johnnie and Tina were so happy on their wedding-day that they could not believe any harm of anyone in the world. So they loosed the chains, and the dragon said, "Excuse me a moment, there are one or two little things I should like to fetch," and he moved off to those mysterious steps and went down them, out of sight into the darkness. And as he moved more and more of his rusty plates fell off.

In a few minutes they heard him clanking up the steps. He brought something in his mouth— it was a bag of gold.

"It's no good to me," he said; "perhaps you might find it come in useful." So they thanked him very kindly.

"More where that came from," said he, and fetched more and more and more, till they told him to stop. So now they were rich, and so were their fathers and mothers. Indeed, everyone was rich, and there were no more poor people in the town. And they all got rich without working, which is very wrong; but the dragon had never been to school, as you have, so he knew no better.

And as the dragon came out of the dungeon, following Johnnie and Tina into the bright gold and blue of their wedding-day, he blinked his eyes as a cat does in the sunshine, and he shook himself, and the last of his plates dropped off, and his wings with them, and he was just like a very, very extra-sized cat. And from that day he grew furrier and furrier, and he was the beginning of all cats. Nothing of the dragon remained except the claws, which all cats have still, as you can easily ascertain.

And I hope you see now how important it is to feed your cat with bread and milk. If you were to let it have nothing to eat but mice and birds it might grow larger and fiercer, and scalier and tallier, and get wings and turn into the beginning of dragons. And then there would be all the bother over again.

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12: Bulldog

Max Brand

Frederick Schiller Faust, 1866-1946

Collier's, 23 Feb 1924

Frederick Schiller Faust

WHEN Zinn came home from prison, no one was at the station to meet him except the constable, Tom Frejus, who laid a hand on his shoulder and said: "Now, Zinn, let this here be a lesson to you. Give me a chance to treat you white. I ain't going to hound you. Just remember that because you're stronger than other folks you ain't got any reason to beat them up."

Zinn looked down upon him from a height. Every day of the year during which he swung his sledgehammer to break rocks for the state roads, he had told himself that one good purpose was served: his muscles grew harder, the fat dropped from his waist and shoulders, the iron square of his chin thrust out as in his youth, and, when he came back to town, he would use that strength to wreak upon the constable his old hate. For manifestly Tom Frejus was his archenemy. When he first came to Sioux Crossing and fought the three men in Joe Riley's saloon— oh, famous and happy night!— Constable Frejus gave him a warning. When he fought the Gandil brothers and beat them both senseless, Frejus arrested him. When his old horse, Fidgety, balked in the back lot and Zinn tore a rail from the fence in lieu of a club, Tom Frejus arrested him for cruelty to dumb beasts. This was a crowning torment, for, as Zinn told the judge, he'd bought that old skate with good money and he had a right to do what he wanted with it. But the judge, as always, agreed with Tom Frejus. These incidents were only items in a long list that culminated when Zinn drank deep of bootleg whiskey and then beat up the constable himself. The constable, at the trial, pleaded for clemency on account, he said, of Zinn's wife and three children; but Zinn knew, of course, that Frejus wanted him back only

that the old persecution might begin. On this day, therefore, the ex-convict, in pure excess of rage, smiled down on the constable.

"Keep out of my way, Frejus," he said, "and you'll keep a whole skin. But some day I'll get you alone, and then I'll bust you in two... like this!"

He made an eloquent gesture, then he strode off up the street. As the sawmill had just closed, a crowd of returning workers swarmed on the sidewalks, and Zinn took off his cap so that they could see his cropped head. In his heart of hearts he hoped that someone would jibe, but the crowd split away before him and passed with cautiously averted eyes. Most of them were big, rough fellows, and their fear was pleasant balm for his savage heart. He went on with his hands a little tensed to feel the strength of his arms.

THE dusk was closing early on this autumn day with a chill whirl of snowflakes borne on a wind that had been iced in crossing the heads of the white mountains, but Zinn did not feel the cold. He looked up to the black ranks of the pine forest that climbed the sides of Sandoval Mountain, scattering toward the top and pausing where the sheeted masses of snow began. Life was like that— a struggle, an eternal fight, but never a victory on the mountaintop, which all the world could see and admire. When the judge sentenced him, he said: "If you lived in the days of armor, you might have been a hero, Zinn... but in these times you are a waster and an enemy of society." He had grasped dimly at the meaning of this. Through his life he had always aimed at something that would set him apart from and above his fellows; now, at the age of forty, he felt in his hands an undiminished authority of might, but still those hands had not given him the victory. If he beat and routed four men in a huge conflict, society, instead of applauding, raised the club of the law and struck him down. It had always done so, but, although the majority voted against him, his tigerish spirit groped after and clung to this truth: to be strong is to be glorious!

He reached the hilltop and looked down to his home in the hollow. A vague wonder and sorrow came upon him to find that all had been held together in spite of his absence. There was even a new coat of paint upon the woodshed, and a hedge of young firs was growing neatly around the front yard. In fact, the homestead seemed to be prospering as though his strength were not needed. He digested this reflection with an oath and looked sullenly about him. On the corner a little white dog watched him with lowered ears and a tail curved under its belly.

"Get out, cur!" snarled Zinn. He picked up a rock and threw it with such good aim that it missed the dog by a mere inch or two, but the puppy merely pricked its ears and straightened its tail.

"It's silly with the cold," said Zinn to himself, chuckling. "This time I'll smear it."

He pried from the roadway a stone of three or four pounds, took good aim, and hurled it as lightly as a pebble flies from the sling. Too late the white dog leaped to the side, for the flying missile caught it a glancing blow that tumbled it over and over. Zinn, muttering with pleasure, scooped up another stone, but, when he raised it this time, the stone fell from his hand, so great was his surprise. The white dog, with a line of red along its side where a ragged edge of the stone had torn the skin, had gained its feet and now was driving silently straight at the big man. Indeed, Zinn had barely time to aim a kick at the little brute, which it dodged as a rabbit turns from the jaw of the hound. Then two rows of small, sharp teeth pierced his trousers and sank into the flesh of his leg. He uttered a yell of surprise rather than pain. He kicked the swaying, tugging creature, but still it clung, working the puppy teeth deeper with intent devotion. He picked up a fallen stone and brought it down heavily with a blow that laid open the skull and brought a gush of blood, but, although the body of the little savage grew limp, the jaws were locked. He had to pry them apart with all his strength. Then he swung the loose, senseless body into the air by the hind legs.

What stopped him he could not tell. Most of all it was the stabbing pain in his leg and the marvel that so small a dog could have dared so much. But at last he tucked it under his arm, regardless of the blood that trickled over his coat. He went down the hill, kicked open the front door, and threw down his burden. Mrs. Zinn was coming from the kitchen with a shrill cry that sounded more like fear than like a welcome to Zinn.

"Peter! Peter!" she cried at him, clasping her hands together and staring.

"Shut up your yapping," said Peter Zinn. "Shut up and take care of this pup. He's my kind of a dog."

His three sons wedged into the doorway and gaped at him with round eyes and white faces.

"Look here," he said, pointing to his bleeding leg, "that damned pup done that. That's the way I want you kids to grow up. Fight anything. Fight a buzz saw. You don't need to go to no school for lessons. You can foller after Blondy, there."

So Blondy was christened; so he was given a home. Mrs. Zinn, who had been a trained nurse in her youth, nevertheless stood by with moans of sympathy while her husband took the necessary stitches in the head of Blondy.

"Keep still, fool," said Mr. Zinn. "Look at Blondy. He ain't even whining. Pain don't hurt nothing. Pain is the making of a dog... or a man! Look at there... if he ain't licking my hand! He knows his master!"

A HORSE kicked old Joe Harkness the next day, and Peter Zinn took charge of the blacksmith shop. He was greatly changed by his stay in the penitentiary, so that superficial observers in the town of Sioux Crossing declared that he had been reformed by punishment, inasmuch as he no longer blustered or hunted fights in the streets of the village. He attended to his work, and as everyone admitted that no farrier in the country could fit horseshoes better, or do a better job at welding, when Joe Harkness returned to his shop, he kept Zinn as a junior partner. Peter Zinn did not waste time or money on bootleg whiskey, but in spite of these and manifold virtues some of the very observant declared that there was more to be feared from the silent and settled ferocity of his manner than from the boisterous ways that had been his in other days. Constable Tom Frejus was among the latter. And it was noted that he practiced half an hour every day with his revolver in the back of his lot.

Blondy, in the meantime, stepped into maturity in a few swift months. On his fore and hindquarters the big ropy muscles thrust out. His neck grew thicker and more arched, and in his dark brown eyes there appeared a wistful look of eagerness that never left him saving when Peter Zinn was near. The rest of the family he tolerated, but did not love. It was in vain that Mrs. Zinn, eager to please a husband whose transformation had filled her with wonder and awe, lavished attentions upon Blondy and fed him with dainties twice a day. It was in vain that the three boys petted and fondled and talked kindly to Blondy. He endured these demonstrations, but did not return them. When five o'clock came in the evening of the day, Blondy went out to the gate of the front yard and stood there like a white statue until a certain heavy step sounded on the wooden sidewalk up the hill. That noise changed Blondy into an ecstasy of impatience, and, when the big man came through the gate, Blondy raced and leaped about him with such a muffled whine of joy, coming from such depths of his heart, that his whole body trembled. At meals Blondy lay across the feet of the master. At night he curled into a warm circle at the foot of the bed.

THERE was only one trouble with Blondy. When people asked— "What sort of dog is that?"— Peter Zinn could never answer anything except— "A hell of a good fighting dog... you can lay to that." It was a stranger who finally gave them information, a lumber merchant who had come to Sioux Crossing to buy timberland. He stopped Peter Zinn on the street and crouched on his heels to admire Blondy.

"A real white one," he said. "As fine a bull terrier as I ever saw. What does he weigh?"

"Fifty-five pounds," said Zinn.

"I'll give you five dollars for every pound of him," said the stranger.

Peter Zinn was silent.

"Love him too much to part with him, eh?" asked the other, smiling up at the big blacksmith.

"Love him?" snorted Zinn. "Love a dog! I ain't no fool."

"Ah?" said the stranger. "Then what's your price?"

Peter Zinn scratched his head, then he scowled, for when he tried to translate Blondy into terms of money, his wits failed him. "That's two hundred and seventy-five dollars," he said finally.

"I'll make it three hundred, even. And, mind you, my friend, this dog is useless for show purposes. You've let him fight too much, and he's covered with scars. No trimming can make that right ear presentable. However, he's a grand dog, and he'd be worth something in the stud."

Zinn hardly heard the last of this. He was considering that for three hundred dollars he could extend the blacksmith shop by one-half and get a full partnership with Harkness, or else he could buy that four-cylinder car that young Thompson wanted to sell. Yet even the showy grandeur of an automobile would hardly serve. He did not love Blondy. Love was an emotion that he scorned as beneath the dignity of a strong man. He had not married his wife because of love, but because he was tired of eating in restaurants and because other men had homes. The possession of an automobile would put the stamp upon his new prosperity, but could an automobile welcome him home at night or sleep at his feet?

"I dunno," he said at last. "I guess I ain't selling."

And he walked on. He did not feel more kindly toward Blondy after this. In fact, he never mentioned the circumstance, even in his home, but often, when he felt the warmth of Blondy at his feet, he was both baffled and relieved.

In the meantime, Blondy had been making history in Sioux Crossing hardly less spectacular than that of Zinn. His idea of play was a battle; his conception of a perfect day embraced the killing of two or three dogs. Had he belonged to anyone other than Zinn, he would have been shot before his career was well started, but his owner was such a known man that guns were handled but not used when the white terror came near. It could be said in his behalf that he was not aggressive and, unless urged on, would not attack another. However, he was a most hearty and capable finisher of a fight if one were started.

He first took the eye of the town through a fracas with Bill Curry's brindled bulldog, Mixer. Blondy was seven or eight pounds short of his magnificent maturity when he encountered Mixer and touched noses with him; the bulldog reached for Blondy's foreleg, snapped his teeth in the empty air, and the fun

began. As Harkness afterward put it: "Mixer was like thunder, but Blondy was lightning on wheels." Blondy drifted around the heavier dog for five minutes as illusive as a phantom. Then he slid in, closed the long, pointed, fighting jaw on Mixer's gullet, and was only pried loose from a dead dog.

After that the Great Dane that had been brought to town by Mr. Henry Justice, the mill owner, took the liberty of snarling at the white dog and had his throat torn out in consequence. When Mr. Justice applied to the law for redress, the judge told him frankly that he had seen the fight and that he would sooner hang a man than hang Blondy. The rest of the town was of the same opinion. They feared but respected the white slayer, and it was pointed out that although he battled like a champion against odds, yet when little Harry Garcia took Blondy by the tail and tried to tie a knot in it, the great terrier merely pushed the little boy away with his forepaws and then went on his way.

HOWEVER, there was trouble in the air, and Charlie Kitchen brought it to a head. In his excursions to the north he had chanced upon a pack of hounds used indiscriminately to hunt and kill anything that walked on four legs, from wolves to mountain lions and grizzly bears. The leader of that pack was a hundred- and-fifty-pound monster— a cross between a gigantic timber wolf and a wolfhound. Charlie could not borrow that dog, but the owner himself made the trip to Sioux Crossing and brought Gray King, as the dog was called, along with him. Up to that time Sioux Crossing felt that the dog would never be born that could live fifteen minutes against Blondy, but, when the northerner arrived with a large roll of money and his dog, the town looked at Gray King and pushed its money deeper into its pocket. For the King looked like a fighting demon, and, in fact, was one. Only Peter Zinn had the courage to bring out a hundred dollars and stake it on the result.

They met in the vacant lot next to the post office where the fence was loaded with spectators, and in this ample arena it was admitted that the wolf dog would have plenty of room to display all of his agility. As a matter of fact, it was expected that he would slash the heart out of Blondy in ten seconds. Slash Blondy he did, for there is nothing canine in the world that can escape the lightning flash of a wolf's side rip. A wolf fights by charges and retreats, coming in to slash with its great teeth and try to knock down the foe with the blow of its shoulder. The Gray King cut Blondy twenty times, but they were only glancing knife- edge strokes. They took the blood, but not the heart from Blondy, who, in the meantime, was placed too low and solidly on the ground to be knocked down. At the end of twenty minutes, as the Gray King leaped in, Blondy side-stepped like a dancing boxer, then dipped in and up after a fashion

that Sioux Crossing knew of old, and set that low, punishing jaw in the throat of the King. The latter rolled, writhed, and gnashed the air, but fate had him by the windpipe, and in thirty seconds he was helpless. Then Peter Zinn, as a special favor, took Blondy off.

Afterward the big man from the north came to pay his bet, but Zinn, looking up from his task of dressing the terrier's wounds, flung the money back in the face of the stranger.

"Dogs ain't the only things that fight in Sioux Crossing," he announced, and the stranger, pocketing his pride and his money at the same time, led his staggering dog away.

From that time Blondy was one of the sights of the town— like Sandoval Mountain. He was pointed out constantly, and people said— "Good dog!"— from a distance, but only Tom Frejus appreciated the truth. He said: "What keeps Zinn from getting fight-hungry? Because he has a dog that does the fighting for him. Every time Blondy sinks his teeth in the hide of another dog, he helps to keep Zinn out of jail. But some day Zinn will bust through!"

This was hardly a fair thing for the constable to say, but the nerves of honest Tom Frejus were wearing thin. He knew that sooner or later the blacksmith would attempt to execute his threat of breaking him in two, and the suspense lay heavily upon Tom. He was still practicing steadily with his guns; he was still as confident as ever of his own courage and skill; but, when he passed on the street the gloomy face of the blacksmith, a chill of weakness entered his blood.

THAT dread, perhaps, had sharpened the perceptions of Frejus, for certainly he had looked into the truth, and, while Peter Zinn bided his time, the career of Blondy was a fierce comfort to him. The choicest morsel of enjoyment was delivered into his hands on a morning in September, the very day after Frejus had gained lasting fame by capturing the two Minster brothers, with enough robberies and murders to their credit to have hanged a dozen men.

The Zinns took breakfast in the kitchen this Thursday, so that the warmth of the cook stove might fight the frost out of the air, and Oliver, the oldest boy, announced from the window that old Gripper, the constable's dog, had come into the backyard. The blacksmith rose to make sure. He saw Gripper, a big black-and-tan sheepdog, nosing the top of the garbage can, and a grin of infinite satisfaction came to the face of Peter Zinn. First, he cautioned the family to remain discreetly indoors. Then he stole out by the front way, came around to the rear of the tall fence that sealed his backyard, and closed and latched the gate. The trap was closed on Gripper, after which Zinn returned to

the house and lifted Blondy to the kitchen window. The hair lifted along the back of Blondy's neck; a growl rumbled in the depths of his powerful body. Yonder was his domain, his own yard, of which he knew each inch— the smell of every weed and rock; yonder was the spot where he had killed the stray chicken last July; near it was the tall, rank nettle, so terrible to an over-inquisitive nose; and, behold, a strange dog pawing at the very place where, only yesterday, he had buried a stout bone with a rich store of marrow hidden within.

"Oh, Peter, you ain't... ?" began Mrs. Zinn.

Her husband silenced her with an ugly glance, then he opened the back door and tossed Blondy into the yard. The bull terrier landed lightly and running. He turned into a white streak that crashed against Gripper, turned the latter head over heels, and tumbled the shepherd into a corner. Blondy wheeled to finish the good work, but Gripper lay at his feet, abject upon his belly, with ears lowered, head pressed between his paws, wagging a conciliatory tail and whining a confession of shame, fear, and humility. Blondy leaped at him with a stiff-legged jump and snapped his teeth at the very side of one of those drooped ears, but Gripper only melted a little closer to the ground. For, a scant ten days before, he had seen that formidable warrior, the Chippings's greyhound, throttled by the white destroyer. What chance would he have with his worn old teeth? He whined a sad petition through them, and, closing his eyes, he offered up a prayer to the god that watches over all good dogs: Never, never again would he rummage around a strange backyard, if only this one sin were forgiven.

The door of the house slammed open; a terrible voice was shouting: "Take him, Blondy! Kill him, Blondy!"

Blondy, with a moan of battle joy, rushed in again. His teeth clipped over the neck of Gripper, but the dreadful jaws did not close. For, even in this extremity, Gripper only whined and wagged his tail the harder. Blondy danced back.

"You damn quitter!" yelled Peter Zinn. "Tear him to bits! Take him, Blondy!"

The tail of Blondy flipped from side to side to show that he had heard. He was shuddering with awful eagerness, but Gripper would not stir.

"Coward! Coward! Coward!" snarled Blondy. "Get up and fight. Here I am... half turned away... offering you the first hold... if you only dare to take it!"

Never was anything said more plainly in dog talk, saving the pitiful response of Gripper: "Here I lie... kill me if you will. I am an old, old man with worn-out teeth and a broken heart."

Blondy stopped snarling and trembling. He came a bit nearer, and with his own touched the cold nose of Gripper. The old dog opened one eye.

"Get up," said Blondy very plainly. "But if you dare to come near my buried bone again, I'll murder you, you old rip." And he lay down above that hidden treasure, wrinkling his eyes and lolling out his tongue, which, as all dogs know, is a sign that a little gambol and play will not be amiss.

"Dad!" cried Oliver Zinn. "He won't touch Gripper. Is he sick?"

"Come here!" thundered Zinn, and, when Blondy came, he kicked the dog across the kitchen and sent him crashing into the wall. "You yaller-hearted cur!" snarled Peter Zinn, and strode out of the house to go to work.

His fury did not abate until he had delivered a shower of blows with a fourteen-pound sledge upon a bar of cold iron on his anvil, wielding the ponderous hammer with one capacious hand. After that he was able to try to think it out. It was very mysterious. For his own part, when he was enraged, it mattered not what crossed his path— old and young, weak and strong, they were grist for the mill of his hands and he ground them small, indeed. But Blondy, apparently, followed a different philosophy and would not harm those who were helpless.

Then Peter Zinn looked down to the foot that had kicked Blondy across the room. He was tremendously unhappy. Just why, he could not tell, but he fumbled at the mystery all that day and the next. Every time he faced Blondy, the terrier seemed to have forgotten that brutal attack, but Peter Zinn was stabbed to the heart by a brand-new emotion— shame. And when he met Blondy at the gate on the second evening, something made him stoop and stroke the scarred head. It was the first caress. He looked up with a hasty pang of guilt and turned a dark red when he saw his wife watching from the window of the front bedroom. Yet, when he went to sleep that night, he felt that Blondy and he had been drawn closer together.

The very next day the crisis came. He was finishing his lunch, when guns began to bark and rattle— reports with a metallic and clanging overtone which meant that rifles were in play, then a distant shouting rolled confusedly upon them. Peter Zinn called Blondy to his heels and went out to investigate.

The first surmise that jumped into his mind had been correct. Jeff and Lew Minster had broken from jail, been headed off in their flight, and had taken refuge in the post office. There they held the crowd at bay, Jeff taking the front of the building and Lew the rear. Vacant lots surrounded the old frame shack since the general merchandise store burned down three years before, and the rifles of two expert shots commanded this no man's land. It would be night before they could close in on the building, but, when night came, the Minster

boys would have an excellent chance of breaking away with darkness to cover them.

"What'll happen?" asked Tony Jeffreys of the blacksmith as they sat at the corner of the hotel where they could survey the whole scene.

"I dunno," said Peter Zinn, as he puffed at his pipe. "I guess it's up to the constable to show the town that he's a hero. There he is now!"

The constable had suddenly dashed out of the door of Sam Donoghue's house, directly facing the post office, followed by four others, in the hope that he might take the defenders by surprise. But when men defend their lives, they are more watchful than wolves in the hungry winter of the mountains. A Winchester spoke from a window of the post office the moment the forlorn hope appeared. The first bullet knocked the hat from the head of Harry Daniels and stopped him in his tracks. The second shot went wide. The third knocked the feet from under the constable and flattened him in the road. This was more than enough. The remnant of the party took to its heels and regained shelter safely before the dust raised by his fall had ceased curling above the prostrate body of the constable.

Tony Jeffreys had risen to his feet, repeating over and over an oath of his childhood— "Jiminy whiskers! Jiminy whiskers! They've killed poor Tom Frejus!"— but Peter Zinn, holding the tremblingly eager body of Blondy between his hands, jutted forth his head and grinned in a savage warmth of contentment.

"He's overdue," was all he said.

But Tom Frejus was not dead. His leg had been broken between the knee and hip, but he now reared himself upon both hands and looked about him. He had covered the greater part of the road in his charge. It would be easier to escape from fire by crawling close under the shelter of the wall of the post office than by trying to get back to Donoghue's house. Accordingly, he began to drag himself forward. He had not covered a yard when the Winchester cracked again, and Tom crumpled on his face with both arms flung around his head.

Peter Zinn stood up with a gasp. Here was something quite different. The constable was beaten, broken, and he reminded Zinn of one thing only— old Gripper cowering against the fence with Blondy, towering above, ready to kill. Blondy had been merciful, but the heartless marksman behind the window was still intent on murder. His next bullet raised a white furrow of dust near Frejus. Then a wild voice, made thin and high by the extremity of fear and pain, cleft through the air and smote the heart of Peter Zinn: "Help! For God's sake, mercy!"

Tom Frejus was crushed, indeed, and begging as Gripper had begged. A hundred voices were shouting with horror, but no man dared venture out in the face of that cool-witted marksman. Then Peter Zinn knew the thing that he had been born to do, for which he had been granted strength of hand and courage of heart. He threw his long arms out before him as though he were running to embrace a bodiless thing; a great wordless voice swelled in his breast and tore his throat; and he raced out toward the fallen constable.

Some woman's voice was screaming: "Back! Go back, Peter! Oh, God, stop him! Stop him!"

Minster had already marked his coming. The rifle cracked, and a blow on the side of his head knocked Peter Zinn into utter blackness. A searing pain and the hot flow of blood down his face brought back his senses. He leaped to his feet again, heard a yelp of joy as Blondy danced away before him, then he drove past the writhing body of Tom Frejus. The gun spoke again from the window; the red-hot torment stabbed him again, he knew not where. Then he reached the door of the building and gave his shoulder to it.

It was a thing of paper that ripped open before him. He plunged through into the room beyond, where he saw the long, snarling face of the younger Minster in the shadow of a corner with the gleam of the leveled rifle barrel. He dodged as the gun spat fire, heard a brief and wicked humming beside his ear, then scooped up in one hand a heavy chair, and flung it at the gunman.

Minster went down with his legs and arms sprawled in an odd position, and Peter Zinn gave him not so much as another glance for he knew that this part of his work was done.

"Lew! Lew!" cried a voice from the back of the building. "What's happened? What's up? D'you want help?"

"Aye!" shouted Peter Zinn. "He wants help. You damn' murderer, it's me... Peter Zinn! Peter Zinn!"

He kicked open the door beyond and ran full into the face of a lightning flash. It withered the strength from his body. He slumped down on the floor with his loose shoulders resting against the wall. In a twilight dimness he saw big Jeff Minster standing in a thin swirl of smoke with the rifle muzzle twitching down and steadying for the finishing shot, but a white streak leaped through the doorway, over his shoulder, and flew at Minster.

Before the sick eyes of Peter Zinn, the man and the dog whirled into a blur of darkness streaked with white. There passed two long, long seconds, thick with stampings, the wild curses of Jeff Minster, the deep and humming growl of Blondy. Moreover, out of the distance a great wave of voices was rising, sweeping toward the building.

The eyes of Peter cleared. He saw Blondy fastened to the right leg of Jeff Minster above the knee. The rifle had fallen to the floor, and Jeff Minster, yelling with pain and rage, had caught out his hunting knife, had raised it. He stabbed. But still Blondy clung. "No, no!" screamed Peter Zinn.

"Your damned dog first... then you," gasped Minster.

The weakness struck Zinn again. His great head lolled back on his shoulders. "God," he moaned, "gimme strength! Don't let Blondy die!"

And strength poured hot upon his body, a strength so great that he could reach his hand to the rifle on the floor, gather it to him, put his finger on the trigger, and raise the muzzle, slowly, slowly, as though it weighed a ton.

The knife had fallen again. It was a half-crimson dog that still clung to the slayer. Feet beat, voices boomed like a waterfall in the next room. Then, as the knife rose again, Zinn pulled the trigger, blind to his target, and, as the thick darkness brushed across his brain, he saw something falling before him.

HE seemed, after a time, to be walking down an avenue of utter blackness. Then a thin star ray of light glistened before him. It widened. A door of radiance opened through which he stepped and found himself—lying between cool sheets with the binding grip of bandages holding him in many places and, wherever the bandages held, the deep, sickening ache of wounds. Dr. Burney leaned above him, squinting as though Peter Zinn were far away. Then Peter's big hand caught him.

"Doc," he said, "what's happened? Gimme the worst of it."

"If you lie quiet, my friend," said the doctor, "and husband your strength, and fight for yourself as bravely as you fought for Constable Frejus, you'll pull through well enough. You *have* to pull through, Zinn, because this town has a good deal to say that you ought to hear. Besides...."

"Hell, man," said Peter Zinn, the savage, "I mean the dog. I mean Blondy... how... what I mean to say is..."

Then a great foreknowledge came upon Peter Zinn. His own life having been spared, fate had taken another in exchange, and Blondy would never lie warm upon his feet again. He closed his eyes and whispered huskily: "Say yes or no, Doc. Quick!"

But the doctor was in so little haste that he turned away and walked to the door, where he spoke in a low voice.

"He's got to have help," said Peter Zinn to his own dark heart. "He's got to have help to tell me how a growed-up man killed a poor pup."

Footsteps entered. "The real work I've been doing," said the doctor, "hasn't been with you. Look up, Zinn!"

Peter Zinn looked up, and over the edge of the doctor's arm he saw a long, narrow white head, with a pair of brown-black eyes and a wistfully wrinkled forehead. Blondy, swathed in soft white linen, was laid upon the bed and crept up closer until the cold point of his nose, after his fashion, was hidden in the palm of the master's hand. Now big Peter beheld the doctor through a mist spangled with magnificent diamonds, and he saw that Burney found it necessary to turn his head away. He essayed speech, which twice failed, but at the third effort he managed to say in a voice strange to himself: "Take it by and large, Doc, it's a damn' good old world."

13: The First Class Passenger

Evelyn Everett Green

1856-1932

Australian Town and Country Journal 23 Feb 1910

"HANG it all!" exclaimed Everard Vale, as the creeping train drew up once again in a cutting, "I shall lose my connection at Bindon Junction if this sort of thing goes on, and I shan't get to town to-night."

He was alone in his first-class carriage — a fine-looking, bronzed man of some eight-and-twenty to thirty years.

"Hello! What in fortune's name is this?" He had let down the carriage window, and was thrusting forth head and shoulders into the frosty rawness of the fog, when his quick eyes were arrested by the sight of something moving on the bank. The fog disguised the character of the object till it was within a few yards of him. Then he saw that it was a girl, laboriously descending into the cutting, carrying in her arms a large white and black pointer dog.

The astonished man heard the girl's sobbing breath, accompanied by little moans of pain from the poor beast. Next moment he had flung open the carriage door, leaped out, and, risking the restarting of the train without him, made one bound towards the panting girl. He gently lifted the dog into his own strong arms.

"Come along in— jump into that carriage. The train will be starting, and you might get into trouble on the line here."

As though this was exactly the girl's object, she sprang light of foot up the steep steps into the railway carriage, and sank down upon the cushioned seat with a long-drawn breath of exhaustion and relief. The traveller, with the dog, followed her. The animal was laid upon one of the seats, the arms of which were turned up for his better accommodation, and Everard, passing strong, friendly, capable hands over the creature, gave his verdict.

"He is badly bruised and knocked about, and one fore-leg is broken."

"I know— I know. O! it was wicked— cruel, hateful! And he left him there to die. He kicked him as he lay helpless, poor darling, and told him he'd shoot him if ever he found him sneaking about his place again! And it's his own dog, too— one of his sporting dogs. And he treated him like this just because he made a mistake with the guns! O! it's awful— it's too awful!"

The girl was shaking all over, more unnerved than seemed quite to be accounted for by the nature of the adventure. Everard had never had much to do with girls or with women in his life, and felt a bit puzzled. how to act now. He busied himself with the poor dog. He rummaged out from his bag some bits of stiff cardboard, and, tearing a long muffler into lengths, he proceeded to set

the broken leg, with no small skill, in the rough but effectual splint which he improvised.

The girl, rousing herself to consciousness of what he was doing, lent assistance. By the time the surgical operations were completed she had calmed down very considerably. Certainly that was rather an interesting happening in the fog. Everard began ro find himself singularly indifferent as to whether he caught his connection at the junction or not. The dog had ceased to moan; he was trying tp lick the kindly hands that ministered to his comfort. The girl bent down and kissed him between, the eyes. Everard found it in his heart to think that the dog was a lucky fellow.

"How good you are," she said, raising her lustrous eyes to his kindly, bronzed face. "I was almost praying that the train might stop and that somebody might be kind to me. Guards and railwaymen are very nice generally; but of course it's breaking the laws to be on the bank like that. And even now, if they come and ask for tickets, I haven't got one!"

"Oh yes, you have!" said Everard, laughing, and extracting a small oblong of pasteboard from his own pocket he stuck it into the breast pocket of her coat. "It's I and the dog who are the illicit passengers. I'll show you how we get out of scrapes of that, sort, we old-seasoned travellers, when the awful crisis comes."

She laughed deliciously; hsr tremors had subsided. She sat opposite him with the dog's head upon her lap. The train was crawling on through the fog at about two miles an hour. Everard had no desire to hasten its progress one jot.

"How good you are," she said. "How can I thank you for it all?"

"By telling me the story of this incident," he said; "for I am simply bursting with curiosity. Can't you see the question marks sticking out of my head?"

He wanted to hear her laugh, and the sound was like music; but then the littla piquant face grew grave, and the brown eyes clouded over.

"I'll tell you everything— because you have been so kind. I live at Bindon, and I wanted to take a long walk and see some of my friends in different places. I thought, if I was tired, I could take the train at Bindon Bottom:— we are just getting there now. I paid my visits and had lunch with a friend, and then I started off through a nice woody piece of country, much nicer for walking than the muddy roads. And the railway cutting runs through it. I knew I should have to follow that by a little track along the top to get to the station."

"Had you the dog with you?"

"Oh, no; he is Mr. Rain's dog. Rain's Hall is over yonder in the woods, and Mr. Rain was shooting. I heard the guns, and hid in a big hollow tree. I didn't want to be shot, and I didn't want to meet Mr. Rain, or any of them."

A sudden crimson dyed her face, and Everard's curiosity received a sudden fresh filip.

"And whilst you were in hiding, something happened, and you saw it?"

"Yes, yes. I don't know what the poor dog had done. It was getting very foggy. But I heard Mr. Rain's voice, very angry, shouting at him. Then the dog crouched down terrified, just where I could see, and Mr. Rain rushed at him with his gun and hit him again and again. O! it was dreadful, and the dog yelled. I knew he had hurt him horribly."

"The brute— don't think any more about it. And when he was gone you stole out and carried that heavy creature away all by yourself?"

"You see, the cutting was very near, and trains are often signalled to stop just there, and the fog made it all the more likely today. Only I didn't know if I could get into the train with the dog— he got heavier and heavier as we went on. I heard the train coming along, and then I heard it stop, and I hurried and hurried to be in time; and then— O! it was as if you were a sort of angel when you jumped down and came to help me!"

"First time I've been called that!" confessed Everard with his frank, friendly smile. "Well, some fellows want a taste of the cat-o'-nine-tails across their backs! And now, about this poor old chap there. What are we going to do with him next?"

Her big eyes lighted at the pronoun.

"O! if you will help me through, I'm sure something can be done!"

"I'll see you through, never fear. Do you mind telling me your name, and where you live in Bindon?"

"My name is Beatrice Vale, and my father is the Vicar of St. Saviour's— 'the church belonging to the poor part of the town. We are quite poor people ourselves—" She stopped, because he was gazing at her so hard. His eyes seemed full of surprise.

"Vale— what an astonishing thing! My name is Everard Vale, and the name isn't a common one. What relations do you happen to have going about the world, Miss Vale?"

"We haven't any that we know of. Father says that the only Vales except ourselves are most likely in Australia, if there are any left. His great-uncle went out there, but he never knew anything about him "

"That's so? Then, little friend Beatrice, it strikes me very forcibly that you and I are cousins of a remote description. I came from Australia, where my grandfather made a modest pile. My father trekked to California and ranched there. He prospered, and I'm his only child. When I was left alone in the world I had a fancy to come Home— as we always call it. One of my objects was to see

if I could unearth any relations over here. I guess this is the kind of thing the writing chaps call the long arm of coincidence!"

"Oh! Cousin Everard! Oh!" cried Beatrice.

"That's right, little 'un— take me as a cousin, as I've taken you! Mighty pleasant to find a cousin so quick— and such a pretty one too."

She blushed charmingly as she bent over the dog.

"O, it's like a fairy tale— like the sort of game we used to play as little kiddies—"

"What sort of game, little Beatrice?"

"O, you know what children like to play at— things that never can come true. We have always been poor. Daddy can't do half what he wants for us— there are such a lot of us, and so many poor in the parish. And we used to play games about the rich old uncle from Australia who was to come and be a fairy godfather— if ever there was such a thing!"

She stopped short, laughing and rosy— altogether charming. His eyes dwelt upon her face with a wonderful pleasure, and satisfaction.

"Beatrice!" he said suddenly, "is there anything that I can do for you?" Suddenly her face changed and grew grave. A new look came into her eyes, a look difficult to understand; there was a certain desperation in it— a certain element of horror.

"O, Cousin Everard— if you really are a cousin — you are a man, and understand about men— and the world— and everything. If you could advise me— tell me what I ought to do."

"Little cousin, I'll do the very best I can for you, if you'll only tell me what the trouble is."

"It's Mr. Rain, that dreadful man who hurt the dog. I've never liked him; I've always been afraid of him; he makes me feel creepy all over. But I don't know anything against him, and he is rich, very rich, and he always come to church. He tips the boys, and gives them treats, and talks of the things he could do for them as they grow up, if— if— oh; don't you understand? He wants to— marry — me!"

Everard's face grew a little tense.

"Oh, that's it, is it? He wants to marry you. Do you happen to want to marry him?"

"Oh, no— no! I never did, and after what I saw this afternoon, oh, how could I? But think of the others— the boys, father and mother, the difference it would make to all of them— the relief! They will never try to make me; but I know how they must feel"

"Hold hard, little cousin. Here we are at Bindon Junction. I'll take the. liberty of driving you and your poor old man here home in a cab. I've lost my

connection, and must put up for the night here. My traps can go to the Railway Hotel, and I'll see you and this fellow home first."

The ways of an experienced traveller with well-lined pockets were new to. Beatrice. She watched and listened with interest to all his arrangements, and was quickly transferred, with the, dog, into a comfortable pair-horse carriage, into "which Everard followed her.

"Has this fellow asked you to marry him Beatrice?" Everard inquired, as they neared the house.

"He asked me last week. I promised him an answer soon. I think he is going to come; for it to-morrow."

"We'll have it ready for him," quoth Everard.

What excitement and rejoicing there was over the advent of this wiohderful Cousin Everard from the other side of the world! They took him as one of themselves from the first, and very quickly Mr. Vale was satisfied that there could be no mistake. His likeness to an old Vale family portrait spoke for itself; and so soon as supper was ended the girls were flying round getting ready the one spare room. Two of the boys set out to get Everard's luggage from the hotel, whilst the others "hustled" all they knew, under his personal supervision, knocking up a suitable shelter for Ponto, as they called the injured dog.

"Dear old fellow," said Beatrice softly, as she bent once more to kiss him between the eyes.

"Lucky old chap," quoth Everard this time, and the laugh and blush of the "little cousin" were alike charming.

Mr. Vale and Everard sat up late together that night.

During the early hours of the following day Everard and Beatrice held consultations over Ponto, bandaged up afresh the broken limb, and finally carried him between them into the drawing-room, laying him gently down upon the rug. Then Everard stood up, and took the girl's two hands in his clasp.

"Beatrice, that fellow Rain is coming today for his answer."Well, let him take it here."

"Ah, yes; it will be easier— with Ponto there. Oh, Everard, dear, Daddy has told me. I don't know how to thank you— about your ranch, and the boys, and the openings for them out there, under you. He will not hear of me marrying a man I do not love. O! how could I ever have thought of it. It seems too awful now."

"It is too awful! No fellow could stand by and see it done. Are you afraid of meeting that chap?"

He still, held her hands, and now he felt the clinging clasp of her slender fingers.

"Oh, Everard, if you would help me, then I shouldn't be afraid. If you would be— like a brother.

"Little Bee, I don't think I want to be your brother, if you don't mind. But if . you'll give me the right, I'd like to be here in another capacity. No, I'm not going to ask anything of you, dear! But let me be the kinsman you trust yourself to. That will do to go on with. Can you grant me that much?"

Her face, all in a glow, was, downbent. Her hands lay willingly in his.

"Oh, Everard— yes! It is so lovely to have a strong, splendid kinsman— like you!"

"All right, little Bee. That'll do for today. You give me the right to protect you from this brutal fellow, and, if need be, kick him into the gutter!"

Her tremulous, musical laugh, was music to his ears.

"Oh, Everard, "how splendid if you did!"

Mr. Rain, of Rain's Hall, presented himself in due course. He bowed low over the hand of Beatrice (before he was aware of two other presences in the room), as though he would have pressed it to his lips; but she snatched it away, and, with flaming eyes, pointed to the dog upon the rug. which cowered and whined at sight of his former master. Mr. Rain also started rather violently, and gazed at the girl with a shadow of apprehension in his eyes.

"Yes, you may well look like that!" she said. "I saw everything yesterday— your cruel, wicked treatment of that poor dog. Do you think I would marry a man who could be so cowardly, so brutal! Never! I should hate and, despise and fear you always. I could never respect you— never like you. Like! When I saw you yesterday in the wood, I hated you— hated—"

"Take care how. you provoke me!" began Rain, fury at this disclosure robbing him of his suave, self-command. "As for that wretched brute yonder, he is my dog still, and I will—"

He advanced upon the unoffending creature with murder in his eyes, and ithe dog howled in terror.

But the heavy boot never touched the victim, for, quick as thought, Everard's grasp was on Rain's collar, and he was whirled completely round and propelled first to the door of the room and then to the door of the street; before he could so much as gather breath to expostulate or resist.

"You have had your answer, sir, now go!"

"Who and what are you, sir? I'll have the law on you for this assault! I will— "

"You will do exactly as you please about that, my good fellow. If you want to make your name a by-word through the country, no one will regret it! There is my card. Miss Vale has done me the honor to entrust herself and the dog to

my protection. I will take care that neither she nor the poor brute suffers molestation from you again. I wish you a very good day!"

The door was firmly banged. Everard walked back into the room with a grim smile on his face.

"Oh, Everard!" she cried; and then, with a little catch in her breath, "he won't really have you up, will he?"

His laugh was good to hear.

"I'm afraid not, little Bee."

"You mean you would not be afraid! Oh, you are so brave, so; strong. How can I thank you, Everard?"

He held her hands, and lifted them a little higher. He looked down straight into her eyes, and her face was all one lovely blush.

"You would not let Rain kiss your hand, Beatrice. Will you let me?"

He bent his head lower towards her; but after all it was not her hand he kissed.

14: Whistle Thrice

Max Brand

All-American Fiction Feb 1938

AT three o'clock Jones had lunch. After that he lounged in the shade, vaguely wondering when mosquito-time would begin, watching the tree shadows on the farther margin of the lake with the white feet of the birches stepping out before the rest, and dimly concerned as to whether he would go out in the boat or simply remain where he was and do some bait-casting from the rocky point. This mild quandary put him to sleep; when he wakened, he found himself in a moment of mysterious and silent beauty. No whisper came from the trees; not a frog croaked; and never a ripple stirred on the golden lake.

Jones, sitting up, felt his spirit journeying deep into this moment of delight and far from the vision of Gorilla Smith, the head of his firm, whose voice had entered the dream of Jones and brought with it all the hot uproar of Manhattan's summer.

A fisherman loves silence but he always uses it. Jones, as he felt the sunset quiet sifting down around him, automatically reached for his rod. A small island lay like an ornament of jade on the golden breast of the lake, and at the tip of the island appeared a soft design of lily pads exactly such as small-mouth bass delight in. Jones cast toward it but his eagerness made him overshoot the mark, bearing a little to the left, so that the bait splashed just past the end of the island.

What followed brought him startled to his feet. A tremendous tension set the line quivering; ther'e was a great thrashing of water; and then a girl's voice cried:

"Cut the line! You've caught me by the hair!"

But Jones kept the rod bent with the power of his strong wrist. He began to reel in, and something came around the end of the island, still striking the water into a smother, a wavering brightness just beneath the surface of the lake. At a point where rushes lifted well above the lip of the water and made a semi-transparent screen, the figure was stayed.

"This is a private lake," said Jones to the invisible figure. "What are you doing here?"

"Curse the lake! There's not much privacy about it," answered the voice. "How long have you been over there, peeping?"

"I've just waked up," said Jones. "Stop trying to break my line."

THE efforts ended with an exclamation. "I've cut my hand on that infernal leader!" she cried. "Pay out some slack and let me get back to my island, will you?"

"*Your* island?" said Jones. "What are you? A mermaid or a siren or what?"

"No matter what I am, I've got to get out of here," she told him.

"You're a trespasser," said Jones. "Come on in and we'll talk it over."

"I tell you, I can't be seen!"

"You're not as invisible as all that," said Jones. "I had a glimpse."

"What?" cried a voice of agony.

"Dimly— under the water," said Jones. "Haven't you anything on at all?"

"What do mermaids and sirens generally have on?" she demanded with anger.

"Naturally," said Jones.

"Are you going to pay out some slack?" she asked. "Are you going to let me out of this?"

"This is the only luck I've had for years," said Jones. "Why should I let go of it?"

"Do you mean, actually...?" she said.

"I actually do," said Jones. "Exactly what sort of luck do you have in mind?" she asked.

"You can find it in a lot of the old books," said Jones. "The fisherman who catches a water-spirit always gets his wish."

There was a pause.

"What wish?" asked the voice behind the rushes.

"By your voice, you're a siren," said Jones. "And a first-rate siren ought to be able to grant quite a wish while she's about it."

"I'm not the kind of a siren you have in mind," said she. "When sailors hear my song, it makes them homesick, and they go away."

"You've never sung to my kind of sailor before," said Jones. "I intend to stay. I like your sort of music. What are you paying if I let you go?"

"Will you tell me in two words what you're driving at?" asked the siren. "What do you want?"

"I only want to be made an emperor, or something like that," said Jones.

"Oh, that's quite simple," said the siren.

"What can you make me emperor of?" asked Jones.

"Whatever you please. Russia, for instance," she told him.

"Russia isn't an empire any more," said Jones.

"That's true. I forgot," said the siren.

"I don't suppose you keep in touch with history," he replied.

"Ever know a siren that did?" she asked.

"True," said Jones. "But what other empire have you in mind?"

"How about Ethiopia?" she asked.

"It would fit me," said Jones, "like old shoes."

"It's yours then," said the siren, "unless I think of something better in the meantime.... Will you pay out some slack now?"

"Certainly," said the emperor, and let the line run.

The gold had vanished from the lake, by this time, and a twilight wind was speaking quietly to the trees when sudden exclamations came from the rushes. "That wretched bait is so tangled that I'll have to cut it out of my hair!" cried the siren.

The line pulled taut.

"Shall I bring a knife out to you?" asked Jones.

"Certainly not!" she answered.

"Will you come and get it, then?" said he.

"Good heavens, no!" said the siren. "What can I do?"

"You could make yourself invisible," said Jones.

"I wish you wouldn't talk like a complete idiot," she answered.

"Or we can wait till it's dark," said Jones.

"Does it ever get that dark?" she asked.

"Certainly," said Jones, "to nearsighted people like me."

"There's nothing wrong with your eyes," said the siren.

"An incurable astigmatism," said Jones, "with a cast in the left eye and a cataract on the right. That's why I missed the lily pads and hit your hair."

"Well," said the siren, sadly, "I don't suppose there's anything else for it. I'll be hideously late for din-

"Where do you live?" asked Jones.

"In the sea, of course," said the siren.

"Naturally," agreed Jones. "But how do you happen to be in a lake?"

"Sirens are very much like salmon," said she. "Part of our life is spent in the salt, and part in the fresh water."

"I understand," said Jones. "The purpose for which salmon ascend rivers is....."

"I wish it were dark!" said the siren.

"To all intents and purposes," said Jones, "I already hardly can see my hand before my face."

"I haven't the slightest faith in your intents," said the siren, "but it's getting terribly cold."

"It really won't grow any darker to speak of," said Jones. "You can see where that half-moon is rising."

"Great heavens!" said the siren.

"Ah," said Jones, "do sirens have a heaven?"

"Certainly," she answered.

"The angels must make very pretty fish," said Jones.

"They're no more fishy than others," said the siren. "Will you tell me what on earth I can do?"

Jones took off his coat, laid it on a rock, and turned his back.

"I am looking in an opposite direction," he assured her.

"Well..." said the siren, desperately, and presently water sounds began to splash toward the shore. A faint noise of dripping rustled on the rocks just'behind Jones.. He sighed. "All right," said the siren.

HE turned. His coat covered most of her. Besides, it really was quite dark, so that he stuck his fingers painfully when he set to work on the disentangling of the barbs of the bait. He was only sure of one thing, which was that the siren was trembling, and yet the air still kept the warmth of the summer day.

"What color is your hair?" asked the emperor.

"Green," said the siren.

"It would be, of course," said Jones. "The bright glints in it must be moonshine; or some of the sunset gold, perhaps. What's your name?"

"Sirens don't have names," she answered.

"I mean, your father's name," said Jones.

"Sirens don't have fathers," she replied.

"What the devil do they do, then?" asked Jones.

"It's all a matter of parthenogenesis, with us," she answered.

"As with the rotifers?" he suggested.

"Yes, or some of the hymenoptera," she said. "What is your name?"

"Since I'm an emperor," said Jones, "only my first name counts. You can think of me as the Emperor Dexter."

"Are you the Dexter Jones who played in the golf tournament?" she asked.

"What have sirens to do with golf?" said Jones.

"We walk invisible on grass," she said, "unless someone has caught us by the hair with a fish-bait."

"If you walk invisible," said Jones, "maybe you laid me that stymie at the seventh hole. By the way, I suppose that I can see you again whenever I want to?"

"What makes you think so?" asked the siren.

"In the book," said Jones, "all the fisherman has to do is to come to the water's-edge and whistle thrice, at the same hour. Would you rise from the sea?"

"I won't know till I hear the whistle," said the siren.

"Ah, there we are," said Jones, and finally removed the bait from the tangle of hair.

"May I borrow that boat and the coat while I row back to the island?" she asked.

"Take everything you want," said Jones.

She rowed the boat away on silent oars and did not return. After a half hour, he whistled thrice but there was no answer, so Jones went back to the hotel, ate a solitary meal, and then sat for hours in the moonlight until it began to enter his brain, storing away bale after bale of the gossamer stuff out of which dreams are woven.

The next morning, nothing happened, but in the afternoon he received a letter neatly typewritten and without a signature.

My dear Emperor,

When I had a chance to think things over, I saw that Ethiopia was not half good enough and I decided on a much more famous empire. I enclose your insignia which all your subjects will be able to recognize at once.

That was all the note contained except for the enclosure, which consisted of a little square fragment of worn tapestry on which appeared a capital "N" with the golden bees of Napoleon crawling over it. Jones put the "insignia" in his pocket and went, at sunset, to the shore of the lake again. He waited until the gold had slid away from the water and the images of the tree had drawn back from the margin of the lake before he whistled thrice.

THEN he listened with bent head and his back to the beach, staring into the tree-shadows until something bumped against the rocks of the little point. Turning, he saw the dim outline of a rowboat, together with a bundle on one seat that might be his coat. Nearby he saw the slim shadow of a canoe, with one gleam beside it where the paddle dipped. "Ah, there you are again," said Jones.

"Yes, Imperial Majesty," said the siren.

"One of these days you'll catch the devil for poaching on this lake," said Jones.

"Why? Who owns it?" asked the siren.

"A hard-boiled old gal called Miss Darnell," said Jones. "Elizabeth Darnell."

"What are you doing here, then?" demanded the siren.

"I'm invited," said Jones, "because I handle some of her investments now and then."

"If I get into trouble," said the siren, "you can help me out, then."

"Or else you can disappear," said Jones, "the way you did last night."

"It wasn't my fault'," said the siren. "The moon grew too bright, and I dissolved in it, suddenly. Did you need the coat?"

"Not a great deal. When I warn you about Elizabeth Darnell, though, I'm telling you something. She keeps a stable of Great Danes as tall as stags and feeds 'em with the flesh of trespassers, if you know what I mean."

"I could dive into the lake and disappear," said the siren.

"She'd have a warrant waiting for you when you got home," said Jones.

"You'd better get that canoe of yours back to your own landing. But wait a minute. I haven't thanked you for the empire."

"You don't find it a little dead, do you?" she asked.

"Not at all," said Jones. "I played tennis with Murat, and Josephine dropped in for tea this afternoon."

"I thought you'd divorced her," said the siren.

"No. I haven't gone that far in my career," answered Jones. "I'm back there at the Peace of Tilsit, pulling Russia's hair with one hand and punching the nose of Spain with the other and kicking the shopkeepers in the shins, in between."

"It must be fun," said the siren.

"Tremendous," said Jones. "By the way, it's getting so dark that it's hard to keep my mind on you. Will you come ashore?"

"Why?" asked the siren.

"To talk," said Jones.

"I can talk from here," said the siren.

"My mind keeps wandering, at this distance," said Jones. "And I have important things to say."

"Have you?" said the siren.

"There are several subjects I'd like to touch on," said Jones.

"I'm already late for dinner," said the siren. "I have to go, now. And thank you for everything."

"Do you mean you're going to do a fadeout like this?" asked Jones. "Do I have to say goodbye?"

"You could whistle thrice some other evening," suggested the siren.

"This is my last evening," said Jones. "I have to go back to work tomorrow."

"I thought you were an emperor," said the siren. "Who can make you do anything?"

"Even emperors have people behind their thrones," said Jones.

"Who's behind yours?" asked the siren.

"Some people call Him 'Gorilla' Smith because he has hair on his chest and such a grip on things," said Jones. "He hates New York in the summer heat unless he has someone to kick around. It's my turn to be kicked."

"If I were an emperor," said the siren, "I'd slap him down.... I really have to go, now."

"May I light a match as I say goodbye?" asked Jones.

"And you wearing the cocked hat and riding the white Arab?" she asked.

"No, I'm on the Bellerophon sailing into exile," said Jones.

"Good heavens," said the girl, "has Waterloo come and gone?"

"Just now, I think," said Jones.

"Then we'd better say goodbye in the dark," said the siren. "I don't want you to see my tears."

There was a faint splash.

"By the way," said J ones, "I forgot to ask for another gift."

"Gift?" said the siren.

"Certainly," said Jones. "Whenever the fisherman whistles thrice he gets whatever he wishes for."

"Very well," said the siren, "what is your wish?"

"Why, a golden treasure, of course," said Jones.

"You shall have it," said the siren.

He did not hear the paddle strokes, but the canoe began to fade into the dark.

"Goodbye," said Jones, "and look out for Miss Darnell and the Great Danes!"

"Tell me what she looks like so I'll recognize her," said the siren.

"I've never seen her," said Jones. "You'll know her by her dogs."

Her laughter came through the dark in silvery music. '

"Goodbye!" she called, and the canoe vanished under the thicker night beside the trees.

JONES went back to the hotel again, ordered a fish dinner, failed to eat it, tried scotch-and-sodas for a few hours, tried bed but could not sleep, and reached ten o'clock the next morning with half an hour to train-time and his suitcases still not closed. Then he came to a pause during which the summer sounds bore drowsily in upon him through the open window with the smell of new hay sweetening the air.

A bellboy brought up his mail. One letter contained a blank fold of paper, and inside the fold lay a paper-thin little horseshoe, of gold. Jones held it for a moment and regarded the empty spaces of the future.

He picked up the telephone and called New York. Presently he was saying: "Hello. Mr. Smith?"

"Hello! Hello! Hello!" rumbled Gorilla Smith. "Why aren't you back here? I expected you yesterday."

"I'm not due till tomorrow," said Jones.

"Then what d'you want, ringing me up?" demanded the Gorilla. "I don't care what the weather is up there and you don't care what the weather is down here. Goodbye!"

"I wanted you to know that I'm extending my vacation," said Jones.

"Extending what? I'm not extending it," said the Gorilla. "I'm cutting it short. Take the next train and' get back here on the run."

"I'm not taking the next train," said Jones. "I may not take a train for a week."

He listened to the silence. He could feel it in his heart and in his head. "Are you drunk, or a fool, or only crazy?" shouted the Gorilla.

"I'm simply waking up," said Jones.

"If you've got anything to say, say it!" roared the Gorilla.

"All I have to say is: To hell with you!" said Jones, and hung up.

It was as though he had cut a life line, or the string of a balloon which now soared into dizzy heights and would burst at any moment. Even in the stillness of his room he felt as though a wind were blowing in his face and through him.

He went over to Jackson Pond and played tennis with Dick Waterson. He played with a singular indifference and clarity of eye and mind. Waterson's flat, acing serve shot bullets into the corners of the service court. He picked those bullets up on his racket and turned them into winners. Waterson's great sliced drive was wiping off the face of the baseline; forehand or backhand, he murdered those drives with a dreamy precision.

"Say, what have you been doing to yourself?" asked Waterson after the second love-set. "Have you gone crazy or something?"

"Yeah. Crazy," said Jones.

IN the middle of the afternoon he got back to his hotel. The desk waved him frantically forward. "It's New York again!" called the clerk. "Fourth or fifth time since you've been out. Please hurry!"

"Tell New York I'm in, now," said Jones, "but I'm not interested. I'm going up to my room and don't want to be disturbed."

He went up to his room and slept till dark. Then he got up, ate an omelet for supper, and walked into the night. It was much too late for sirens but his feet carried him of their own volition to Darnell Lake. Whatever wind there was, the trees shut away and the stars lay with untrembling brightness in the

still face of the water. A fish broke the surface with a sound like the smacking of wet lips. Far away, deep-voiced dogs were barking.

After a moment, Jones lifted his head from his thoughts and from the empty vision of the future. He whistled thrice.

And she was there.

"I thought you'd never come," said the siren, from behind him; "or else I thought you were clear off there on St. Helena."

"I turned back the hands of the clock," said Jones. "I've grown young and thin; Barras is lifting my star in the East; I've got the army in the mountains; 'beyond the Alps lies Italy!' That's the proclamation I made to the army today."

"And New York?" asked the siren.

"New York? I never heard of it," said Jones. "Or wait— no— isn't that some little town in the English colonies?"

"But the Gorilla?" asked the siren.

"We've said goodbye," said Jones.

"Do you mean that?" asked the siren. "Do you mean," she asked, coming suddenly close to him, "that you've snapped off your career— short?"

"My dear," said Jones, "an emperor with a siren and a golden treasure. What more career do I care about?"

"But you haven't done it!" she protested.

"I have, though," said Jones. "It came over me that an emperor ought to have higher things to think about than the Stock Market and what Steel is doing and what will the Old Man say?"

"Ah," she said, "there is something wild and delicious about you!"

"Of course there is," said Jones. "There's a siren about me. What's that you're wearing?"

"It's a muslin sort of a fluffy, silly thing," said the siren.

"I mean, the perfume," said Jones. "No, it isn't you; it's the breath off the hayfields, and the whole green and the coolness of the summer... and you're a lovely thing, you know."

"But you've never seen me," said the siren.

"Certainly not," said Jones, "but I've heard your song, and that's all I'll ever care to see or hear. But wait a moment. There's the moon—you see it coming up like a fire through the trees? I'll see you by that."

"I'll have to go!" said the siren. "Please let me!"

"I'm sorry," said Jones, "I haven't asked for a gift yet, you know."

"Ask for it, then," said the siren.

"I wish," said Jones, "that you should stay here with me until the moon is above the trees."

"That's a ridiculous wish, for an emperor," she said.

"That's because most emperors know nothing about sirens," said Jones.

While he was standing with her, the deep-throated barking of dogs had been ranging through the woods and now, suddenly, like noise breaking into a room with the opening of a door, the chorus came sweeping upon them.

"Get behind me!" said Jones. "By Harry, *the murdering fools have turned the dogs loose in the woods*!"

HE saw them then come sweeping out of the shrubbery with their heads close to the ground—as big as young lions—five of them striding like huge shadows over the ground. Their chorus turned into a wild riot of noise as they served and came straight toward him.

Jones picked up a chunk of rock and braced himself. If he had been alone, he would have taken to the water, but there was the siren.

"Get back to the lake— dive in!" he ordered.

And then he saw, staggered by the sight of it, that she was running out ahead of him, calling out: "Down, Jim! Down, Bess! Good boys!"

They rose up in a great, tangled wave around her, over her. He saw a monster with forepaws on her shoulders, as tall as a tall man, but there was no question about the joyous nature of their uproar. And she, with a few strokes of the voice, made them drop down, panting, on the ground. Then she came back to Jones.

"You mean to say that those dogs know you?" he asked.

"I'm sorry; it was a horrible shock," she said, "but you were wonderful about it. You were wonderful!"

"Wonderful, my foot!" said Jones. "Are you Elizabeth Darnell, or what?"

"I'm sorry," said she.

"Well," said Jones, "goodbye. I've been a damned fool. I thought— Well, goodbye."

"I thought you were going to stay?" said the siren.

"For what?" asked Jones.

"For the moonrise," she answered.

But it was already there, and the light which first had printed the tree shadows in ink upon the lake now lighted her as far as the bare throat.

"It isn't true," said Jones. "The real you is old and sallow and hard and has a damned snappy, mean voice over the telephone. You're not lovely, and perfect, and glorious, and beautiful like this, are you?"

"Do I please you?" asked the siren. "Ah, that makes me happy!"

When Jones reached the hotel that night the night clerk said: "But if you please—Mr. Jones. I mean singing at this hour of the night. . ."

"Damn the night! I mean, God bless the night," said Jones. "And here's ten dollars I've been meaning to give you...."

When he got to his room and threw the door open, he was surprised, first, to find the lights were burning, and then in a corner of the room, in a hard, straight-backed chair, he saw a big old man with a sawed-off chunk of grey beard stuck on his chin. He had a mouth made for biting and holding on, not for speech. As he spoke now, he used only half of that grim stretch of lips.

"Now what in blazes is the matter with you?" he demanded. "You blithering young jackass, what do you mean by it? Is it more money you want?"

"Chief," said the emperor, "there's nothing in the whole world that I want. If you were to fence in the whole of Eurasia with a steel fence and offer it to me, I wouldn't take it. I wouldn't need it."

"Then why the devil did you leave me?" asked Gorilla Smith.

"I didn't leave you, did I?" asked Jones happily.

"You're drunk," said the Gorilla, "or else you're crazy."

Jones looked at the ceiling and half closed his eyes. "I want to tell you a wonderful thing. You won't believe it, but it's true. She loves me!"

"The Darnell gal?" asked the Gorilla.

"Yes— loves—" said Jones, reeling slightly. "But how did you know who it was?" he demanded, rallying himself.

"Why do you think I sent you up here, except to marry that account?" demanded the Gorilla.

"Why?" asked Jones. "You—! Marry..."

He stared helplessly at the huge, iron face; he was seeing in it things of which he never before had dreamed.

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15: A Hairbreadth 'Scape for Euphemia

Kennett Harris

1863-1929

The Blue Book, Aug 1916

"GEE!" ejaculated Euphemia Regan as the door of the board-room closed behind the last of the Association members. "Gee! they're an elegant bunch! Will you tell me how they're ever going to make a gentlemen's agreement?"

Miss Regan wrinkled her nice nose scornfully, as she spoke, and with a vicious stab thrust the pencil that she had just sharpened, into a coil of her plentiful golden hair. Her friend and co-laborer, Sadie Sanders, nodded acquiescence, and stripping the foil from a package of gum, she tossed a stick to the golden-haired one.

"Bite on that, dearie, and you won't wear the edges off your teeth," she advised.

Euphemia took the gum and the advice, and then, deftly inserting a sheet of paper in her machine, began to type Form-letter 16a at top speed. Miss Sanders busied herself in like manner, and for several minutes nothing was heard but the clean staccato of the keys under their nimble fingers. Then the door of the inner room opened and let out a burst of loud guffaws, together with Willie, the office-boy, who was grinning widely and doubling himself with mirth as he came.

"That was a peach," gurgled Willie, as soon as he had closed the door. "Want me to tell it to you, girls?"

"You dare to, and I'll slap you dizzy." warned Miss Sanders with an earnestness that evidently impressed the youth. "G'way, you imp, and get busy, or I'll report you to Mr. Wenloek. — Ain't the male sex the limit!" she continued, appealing to Euphemia. "Even an infant in arms like that!"

"They give me sharp, darting pains in the back of my neck." agreed Euphemia. "They were four days in session last quarterly. Four two-hour days, and the tiredest lot of business men that ever sagged into a front-row seat at a musical comedy! Talk about reporting! I'd like to report them to their home towns — and their trusting wives. Ugh!

"Maybe they haven't all got trusting wives," suggested Miss Sadie.

"Well, I wouldn't undertake to say about the trusting part," Miss Euphemia conceded. "They're all married.

"How do you know, dearie?"

Euphemia smiled a Mona Lisa smile. "How long have you been stenogging in this bustling little burg?" she inquired. "If you can't pick 'em by this time, you'd better get back to the sheltered life."

"There's Riggs— the Detroit man."

"Sure. He doesn't count, though: he ain't a human being. And there's Whntshisname from Keokuk; I don't count him, either. He's fairly decent. I heard some of them talking about his engagement. About time, at that."

"How about the one they call Dick— Luttrell? None of the earmarks about him. And you can't say he's fresh." Miss Sanders looked mischievously at her friend, who slipped another sheet of paper into her machine and began to write with an air of great concentration. She stopped at the first line, however.

"I've got his number," she murmured— and then, with an access of energy: "They've got on my nerves. His leering, fat-headed old frauds! I'd like to—" She bit her ruddy underlip and made another spirited attack upon her machine. Miss Sanders Watched her for a moment, smiling, and then, with a half-suppressed giggle, turned to her own work.

IT may have been Horatio J. Joplin, the member from Silsbury, Indiana, who had particularly got on Euphemia's nerves. The rest of them seemed inoffensive enough, even if they did take notice of the extremely personable stenographer. It may he here mentioned that Miss Sanders herself was, as Johnson of Racine expressed it, "no revolting spectacle," but undoubtedly Miss Regan was unusual.

The trouble with Mr. Joplin of Silsbury was that his face was too pink and his eyes too little and slitty. Also his neck overflowed his collar, and his waistcoat was grossly protuberant in its lower region. Euphemia might have pardoned that, if he had not made a point of stopping at her desk on his way to and from the board-room and trying to be conversational. During the last quarterly session he had complained to her most pathetically of his loneliness in the big city — particularly in the evenings — and told her how gratefully he would appreciate the charity of bright, youthful companionship. Euphemia had looked at him with her clear and candid Irish blue eyes— eyes of a glacial clearness and blueness and a contemptuous candor— and remarked that he should have brought his family with him. "Cut you might hire one of the bright young bell-hops at die hotel to talk to you when you get too lonesome," she suggested, and added, "—if you paid him enough,"

"Expense wouldn't be any object," Mr. Joplin had said. "But it's a belle I want, not a bell-hop."

"I wish you had one long enough to ring off," Euphemia had replied.

That was a little discouraging, hut Mr. Joplin was not altogether discouraged, for only two days after, he had come to the office rather late and laid a two-pound box of candy on her desk. "Sweets to the sweet," he had observed originally, with a greasy smile that almost obliterated his eyes. Then he had passed on to the meeting in the inner office. Five minutes later, Willie,

the office boy, had come into the boardroom, bearing the opened box. which he passed around the big table, beginning with the president.

"Mr. Joplin's treat," Willie had explained, grinning; and that little incident actually had discouraged Mr. Joplin for the remainder of the session. But he seemed to be beginning again.

ELEVEN-THIRTY! There was a stir in the board-room, and then the door opened and the members flocked out, some talking with the intense seriousness demanded by questions of business interest and some with the boisterous jocularity of schoolboys newly released from intellectual occupation. Altogether, they were a fine, representative lot of business men, well groomed, well clad and. with a few dyspeptic exceptions, well fed. They all made for the long hat-rack that flanked the stenographers' desks (the lockers were for the regular office force) and donning hats and coats, straggled out by twos and threes. Mr. Joplin settled a glossy silk hat on his sleek, pearshaped head, but removed it with a flourish as he paused by Miss Regan's desk.

"And how are the young ladies standing the fatigue of the morning's labors?" he inquired with a smirk.

He addressed himself to Miss Sanders, but his little eyes shifted to Euphemia, who was laboring without any sign of fatigue whatsoever.

"Fainting for food," Miss Sanders responded with a long-drawn sigh. "Did you notice it? Were you going to ask us— but no, it cannot be!"

"It could be," said Mr. Joplin. "Anywhere you say and whatever you like. How about it, Miss Regan ?" He looked at Euphemia hopefully.

The clicking of Euphemia's machine stopped abruptly as she arched her eyebrows and smiled at the portly Joplin.

"And any time we say?" she asked.

"The surest thing you know."

Euphemia turned to her friend. "Let's do, Sade," she said, and as Mr. Joplin's smirk broadened, she continued: "This is February twenty-fifth. S'pose we take Mr. Joplin up and make a date with him for the thirty-first?"

"Couldn't suit me better," replied Miss Sanders. "Reely, it's the only evening I aint spoke for."

"Same here," said Euphemia. "The thirty-first of this month, then, Mr. Joplin. We'll be duh-lighted."

Joplin's pink deepened, and his smirk stiffened until it became absolutely rigid. He bent over Euphemia's desk and waggled a fat forefinger at her. "Naughty!" he whispered hoarsely. "Naughty!"

"You don't happen to have such a thing as an egg about you, do you? Euphemia asked coldly.

"She thinks you might be able to beat it, if you had," Miss Sanders explained.

Just then Mr. Richard Luttrell of Birmingham, Alabama, appeared at Mr. Joplin's elbow. One of the youngest members of the Association, Mr. Luttrell, but arrived and still going strong. Core-boy, helper, puddler, molder, foreman and finally independent founder, he had supplemented the industrious work of his hands by remarkably judicious headwork, and his rise had been rapid. He was not quite so natty as most of his associates, and his big, sinewy hands and finger-nails, clean and well tended as they now were, still showed marks made by the pinch of castings and grubbing for "jaggers" in those early days of his apprenticeship. He was further distinguished from the present quorum by an athletic build and a complexion neither too florid nor pasty. His eyes were brown, set well apart and usually harboring a twinkle, although just then they were somber enough. As a general thing, too, he smiled easily, a quick, illuminating smile in pleasant contrast with his normally grave expression; but while his voice sounded passably good-natured, he did not smile as he gripped Mr. Joplin's arm.

"Going my way, Joplin?" he inquired briskly. "Come along!" With which he propelled Mr. Joplin to the door, out into the corridor and into an already crowded elevator that was just closing its gates.

"I'll take the next down, Joppy," he called as the elevator descended ; but he turned away almost as he spoke, and reentered the office. Miss Sanders saw him and smiled at him with friendly approval. Euphemia saw him too and gave him a rapid and very stony glance, upon which Mr. Luttrell murmured, "Oh well!"— one might say sighed— and went back to the elevator. He saw nothing of Mr. Joplin in the lobby, but he hardly expected to.

"WHAT'S eating you, Phemie?" inquired Miss Sanders as Mr. Luttrell's broad shoulders vanished.

"What do you mean?" demanded Euphemia crossly.

"The gent'mun from Alabama. I thought you were strong for him, but he seems to have gut in bad with you somehow, and he's all broke up about it, if you should ask me."

"Trying to kid somebody, ain't you?" said Euphemia.

"Oh, I don't know." replied her friend. "Did you get that look of dumb anguish when you put him on long distance? Well, I did, and if sobbing in office hours wasn't against the rules, I'd be soaking up my handkerchief with salty tears right now."

"Chop it!" snapped Euphemia.

"Oh, *vurry* well! but if you aint got any further use for him, I'm not too proud to do my little best. There's many a heart is caught on the rebound, and I've got a fair catching average m'self."

"You don't need to jump for a foul," said Euphemia. "Look here." She glanced around the office and then opened the drawer of her desk and fished out a folded sheet of note-paper covered with writing in an angular feminine hand. Miss Sanders took it and read as follows:

forget little Eddie's shoes and be sure to get them at Kinder & Garten's, and if you see a nice little silk sweater— garnet, and eight-year-old size— for Phoebe, I wish you'd get it, with the understanding that I can return it. There isn't a thing in the shops here, and the poor child will be so disappointed if you come back without it. Kinder & Garten's, remember. Meadows might have one. but everything we have got at K. & G.'s for the children has been so satisfactory. Dick, boy. it doesn't seem like home without—

Miss Sanders handed the note back. "Aint that the limit!'' she exclaimed indignantly.

"I guess he's within his rights." said Euphemia indifferently. "Being a married man is no crime.

"Just a misfortune, I suppose he'd say," sneered Miss Sanders. "But when they make out they're carefree bachelors and—"

"Mr. Luttrell never gave out that he was single," Euphemia interrupted nastily. "I'll say that for him. And he never acted like anything but a gentleman. I hadn't got any reason to think—" She stopped, and something in her face made Sadie hasten to change the subject. But she recurred to it later, being human.

"Where did you get that note?" she asked. "Maybe it belongs to some of the others. Old Wingate's name is Richard."

"I— I saw him drop it," Euphemia answered, "—out of his pocket."

"Why'n't you tell him he dropped it?"

"Well," replied Euphemia defiantly, "how could I tell for certain it was his, without reading it? It wasn't in an envelope."

MR. RICHARD LUTTRELL found he needed some cigars, and being rather particular about the quality of the tobacco that he smoked, he took plenty of time to make his selection at the lobby cigar-stand. Incidentally he entered into conversation with the proprietor of the stand, finding a starting topic of interest in the decline of the Pittsburgh stogie. In spite of his interest, he kept

the tail of his eye on the elevators and did not fail to notice when Mesdemoiselles Regan and Sanders came down, although he did not look at them openly.

"Well," he observed to the cigar man, as the young women left the building, — and the remark may have been a mere coincidence, —"well, this won't buy the baby shoes."

As soon as he was outside, he glanced up and down the street and caught sight of Euphemia's black velvet, beaver-fur-trimmed toque bobbing southward; but, alas! Sadie's putty-grey hatter's-plush sailor was bobbing conipanionably along heside it, and he decided that under the circumstances he would ask Miss Regan for an explanation on some other occasion. But he meant to have that explanation. When a girl has always shown herself friendly to a man, and when she suddenly and without any earthly reason becomes blankly oblivious of his existence, or at the best acknowledges it grudgingly and with chilling disapproval— then certainly a man is entitled to know the reason why.

But the moment for demanding that reason was clearly inopportune, and so Mr Richard Luttrell turned northward and then eastward to State Street and, locating Kinder & Garten's, bought the baby shoes.

OUT of the tail of her eye Euphemia had not failed to notice Mr. Luttrell at the cigar-stand. If she had overlooked him, Sadie's sharp pinch would have properly directed her attention. But Euphemia expected that the Alabama man would be sticking around, and Sadie was with her to render the sticking futile. It was against her preference, really, that Euphemia presently found herself lunching in Stoggin's Cafeteria, though Sadie was a daily habitue of Stoggin's.

"And you'll come again to-morrow, wont you?" asked Sadie.

"Not after that, though, Sade," Euphemia answered.

"Being as to-morrow is the last of the session, I s'pose."

"I don't get you," said Euphemia, and it was an untruthful thing to say.

But the next morning's meeting was to be the last of the special session, and that suggested another idea to Miss Sanders. With much giggling, she broached it when they got back to the office, and it is fair to say that Euphemia objected.

"I thought you were aching to frame up something on them." Sadie observed scornfully. "You need a charcoal stove for your feet."

"You need something for your head," Euphemia retorted.

"Listen, Phemie," the other urged: "Nobody's going to know a thing about it— ever. The deenoomong is sprung in their happy homes— see? And the next meeting they'll get together at eight AM and adjourn *sine die* at six with a

session's work done. Meantime, their wives will do a little Chicago shopping. Phemie, you've gotta come in on this. You've gotta!"

"I don't see where I come in, anyway." said Euphemia, relenting, nevertheless.

"If I had your yellow mop, you wouldn't have to, but I'm brownhaired; and brown hair stands for wifely devotion and all the domestic virtues. You haven't ead much, if you don't know that, I bet you Mrs. Joplin has brown hair and a low, gentle voice. Oh, fudge! Brown wouldn't be noticed, in the first place, and it would be all right if it was. Hubby would just stall about the way she sheds it. No, dearie, yours is the real siren shade— the genuine trouble-breeding vampire hank."

"Much obliged, but I'll fool you just the same. You must think I'm easy."

"It won't hurt. Le' me show you."

Mr. Wenlock had gone home, and they were practically alone in the anteroom; so Sadie showed Euphemia, and Euphemia cried "Ouch!"

"I got hold of three at once," explained Sadie contritely. "Now keep still. There, that didn't hurt, did it?"

"Not more than pulling a tooth," Euphemia replied sarcastically. But she submitted, and it was quite a sizable hank that Miss Sanders locked in her desk about five minutes later.

THERE was no apparent necessity for chaperonage that evening. Sadie boarded an Ashland Avenue car; Euphemia lived with her Aunt Norah in a small North Avenue flat near Wells Street, and so they only walked together for a couple of blocks. It was a cold, wet evening with a threat of snow in the flurries of rain, and Euphemia had to struggle to keep her inadequate umbrella at a protective angle She was so occupied with this that Mr. Joplin had to cough two or three times and finally take her by the arm before she became aware of his presence.

She disengaged her arm with a quick jerk when she saw who it was, and the look that he got ought to have been enough for him. But it was not. He only leered at her.

"G'd evenin', li'lle bright-eyes." said he, clipping his words curiously and speaking with a certain huskiness. "Whither 'way?" He repossessed himself of her arm, and this time Euphemia knew that she was not going to shake him off easily. She saw that his face was very red, and he was close enough to allow her to analyze his breath. This did not alarm her— to speak of— but she was distinctly annoyed.

"I'll be obliged to you if you'll let go of me and chase yourself," she said as calmly as she was able, deeming plain language best

"Anything in world t' blige you, 'cep'in' that!" said Joplin. "Two 'mbrel's not ness'r'y. Put yours down and c'm up close und' mine, No? Pu' mine down, then, and come close und' yours. Where you think you going to?"

"I'm going to my car." Euphcmia answered with rising indignation. "See here, Mr. Joplin: I know you're not yourself, so you might as well try to be a gentleman. If you don't let me go, I'm going to slap you and then have you arrested right here."

"Bluff!"Mr Joplin chuckled hoarsely. And he was right about that. Euphemia had a sharp tongue upon occasion; indeed, she had found it indispensable, but in spite of that and her always assured manner, she was as modestly averse from a street scene as any shrinking young highly-cultivated creature secluded in a ladies' seminary. At that moment all her fortitude could not keep the tears from her eyes.

"Bluff!" Joplin repeated. "And you've got it wrong about that car. No night f'r young girlsh in stree'-carsh. Li'le dinner com fly with y' Uncle Dudley. Atta girl! Tackshy home. Been waiting all aft — "

THEY were crossing the intersection of an alley, and Joplin seemed to stumble on its rough paving, relinquishing his clasp of her arm. Euphemia instantly quickened her pace almost to a run, but at the same moment she cast a frightened look backward and saw, to her astonishment, there was no Joplin behind her. lie had vanished!"

Yet not altogether, perhaps, for she had a fleeting glimpse of a figure that might have been his. It was hard to tell, though, for another figure was immediately behind it, and the alley quickly swallowed both in its gloom. Nor did Euphemia linger, but made what speed she might to her car comer. There, however, she was obliged to wait. There were a dozen others waiting, and when the second overflowing car had passed, Euphemia, recovering from her natural agitation, surveyed them casually. Then she had a relapse.

Not Mr. Joplin, this time, but Mr. Luttrell. He was standing within ten feet of her, apparently as ignorant of her proximity as she had been of his. He carried no umbrella, but wore a rain-coat and a cloth hat with its brim well pulled down and looked quite equal to resisting the elements. One thing Euphemia noticed: that his rain-coat— a new and expensive-looking garment— was torn, a long strip of the cloth with a button attached dangling from his breast below the collar-fastening. Obviously this was the result of a recent accident ; Euphemia , caught herself wondering why he had not pinned it up. What could he be doing here?

Another car came up, and Euphemia was aboard of it before it had fairly stopped. Making her way through the rear-platform jam with an insinuating

skill due to long practice, she secured a strap just inside the door. The next moment Luttrell swung to the step and the car moved on.

They were at Chicago Avenue before Euphemia ventured another glance at him. He was on the platform now. standing half a head at least above the rest, and yet she almost persuaded herself that he had not seen her. He seemed unusually grave, almost stern, just as he had looked when she first noticed him at the corner. Several times after that Euphemia looked at him— quickly and furtively, at first, but soon with a more sustained regard; yet not once did she delect anything in his expression to indicate that he was aware of her. His face was half averted, but only as he happened to be standing— not purposely, she was sure. But at North Avenue he turned and unhesitatingly jumped off the car; and when she struggled out to the step, he was waiting to help her to descend.

"NOW," said Luttrell coolly, as they crossed the street, "now you're going to tell me what's the matter. Let me take that umbrella first I"

"I don't know what you mean, Mr. Luttrell!" Euphemia's heart was beating fast, but her tone was as cool and matter-of-fact as his own— and she allowed him to take the umbrella. It was still blowing hard, but he held it quite easily against the wind.

"Yes, you do," he contradicted bluntly. "What's the matter, Miss Regan?"

"Why are you following me this way?" Euphemia flared out.

"To ask you that question. You haven't given me any other chance. What's the matter, Miss Regan?"

"Nothing's the matter," Euphemia snapped. "Now that I've answered your question, perhaps you'll let me take my umbrella and leave me alone." In a gentler tone, she added: "I didn't think this of you, Mr. Luttrell."

"Don't get me wrong," said Luttrell earnestly. "I certainly wouldn't want to pester you. but -I thought — We seemed to be on friendly terms, but lately — If I have done anything to offend you, I haven't meant to, I know that. I want to be — friends, Miss Regan. Wont you tell me, please — "

"How did you tear your coat?" asked Euphemia.

Luttrell looked down at the dangling strip and was clearly surprised. "I didn't know it was torn," he said, "but I reckon that hasn't anything to do with the question."

Again Euphemia broke out angrily: "Why is it that you *gentlemen* think that any girl who works for her living— This is the second time this evening. Mr. Joplin—"

"Mr. Joplin won't bother you any more. I promise you that," interrupted Luttrell grimly. "And I'm sorry to have you even me with trash like him, Miss Regan. Did I ever act up like him?"

"No," Euphemia admitted, "you haven't, Mr. Luttrell. Don't begin now; and let it go at that."

THEY had reached the entrance to the modest little flat-building where Euphemia lived, and she ran quickly up the steps and into the shelter of the vestibule. Luttrell deliberately closed her umbrella, shook it and then followed her.

"Give me a minute, please," he said. He smiled for the first time, and Euphemia wished he wouldn't, because when he smiled it was hard— oh, very hard— to feel what it was proper to feel under the circumstances.

"Then, if I haven't done anything, we're friends again?"

"Why— yes," Euphemia faltered. She almost took his extended hand, but the proper feeling came on her with a rush. "No," she said with spirit, "we're not friends, and we're not going to be. "What do you want with my friendship? Why don't you amuse yourself with girls of your own class? Oh, I know!"

Luttrell laughed, honestly amused. "My own class!" he exclaimed. "Why, girl, there's no class to me. That's the trouble with me, I guess. I'm plain as an old shoe— just home folks. Miss Regan."

Euphemia's eyes sparkled with anger. "Home folks," she echoed with bitter emphasis. "Yes, I know you are. Well, if you ask me, I think you'd better go home — and stay there."

She almost whirled to the door, opened it and darted up the stairs. The door swung back, and its latch clicked viciously.

Luttrell stood staring blankly for a full minute and then reluctantly left the building. He almost slouched back to Clark Street, and it may also be said that he looked the foiled villain to a marvel.

"Didn't make much by that," he muttered.

IT was quite evident the next morning that Euphemia had caught cold in the rain. Her eyes showed it, and so did the swollen condition of her nice little nose. Sadie was all sympathy and immediately produced a menthol inhaler for present relief, and Euphemia was obligingly sniffing at it when the members of the Association began to arrive. Then she took up her work and at once proved that the unpleasant malady had not affected her fingers. She was so intent upon what she was doing that she noticed neither Mr. Luttrell's arrival nor Mr. Joplin's failure to arrive. Sadie presently informed her of the latter circumstance.

"All here but him," she said dolefully. "The curtain up, and all set for the play, and no *Hamlet*. Wouldn't that jar your sensibilities! But cheer up," she continued hopefully. "Maybe hell come in after a while, staggering under a load of hot-house flowers. Still, we wont wait for him."

She took something from her desk and was starling for the coat-rack when Euphemia called to her. "Lay off that, Sade," she said sharply. "I won't stand for it. Bring that hair back here."

Miss Sanders stopped, and then seeing that her friend was in earnest, stuck out her tongue and began to busy herself among the coats.

"Oh, well," said Euphemia with a sort of listless resignation. She went on with her work, but in a moment or two she straightened up and beckoned imperatively. "Sade!"

As Sadie refused to come, she got up and went to her. "Don't put any in Mr Luttrcll's coat, anyway," she requested earnestly.

Sadie gave her a queer look. "Which is his coat?" she asked, and Euphemia pointed it out— a shaggy ulster.

"lust as you say," Sadie consented, and Euphemia went back to her desk and paid no further attention to the matter. Sadie resented that. Euphemia was not acting in a sportsmanlike manner, she considered, leaving it all to her. Nevertheless she went on with it zestfully and she did it artistically— not so that the long golden hairs would be at once perceived, but that from their concealment beneath coat-collars, in sleeve-linings, behind lapels and under pocket-flaps, they would in time work out to the confusion of those who had unknowingly harbored them. And she put an extra allowance in and about the shaggy ulster belonging to Mr. Richard Luttrell.

ELEVEN-THIRTY arrived. Out came the victims, but they did not, as Mesdemoiselles Sanders and Regan expected, linger to exchange handshakes and farewells. That was the usual thing at the end of a session, but now the members assumed their coats and hats without any indication that they were parting to meet no more until the first Monday in April; and presently, amid the babble, arose the voice of Legette. of Marion:

"You can make the six-thirty easy enough, Peterson. Well be all through here by four o'clock."

The young women looked at one another in consternation. "Gee!" whispered Sadie, "they're coming back this afternoon."

It was only too true Willie, the office-boy, confirmed it. Some little measure was still to be debated and voted upon— little but important.

"Can't be helped," said Sadie, "and maybe it won't make any difference, anyway. We'll hope so."

But it did make a decided difference, for the afternoon debate had not begun when Riggs, of Detroit, discovered a long golden hair on Mr. Luttrell's shoulder and gleefully proclaimed his discovery. Euphemia and Sadie heard the jovial uproar that ensued, and their faces blanched with apprehension. Presently the hoard-room door opened and disclosed Mr. Riggs, who held his closed finger and thumb delicately before him. He looked narrowly at Miss Regan,— at her coiffure particularly,— and a roseate flood of color overspread Miss Regan's attractive young face; whereupon Riggs grinned broadly and withdrew, closing the door carefully. Again noisy laughter, and above it Luttrell's voice in sharp remonstrance. Comparative silence then, but only for a minute. Somebody uttered a yell of delight and shouted, "Here's one on Bristow, too!" and another burst of laughter greeted the announcement.

Euphemia started up, nearly overturning her chair, and hurried to her locker. In record time she jammed the beaver-trimmed toque down atop of her shining tresses, pinned it and slipped into her coat. Her face was still crimson, and she dabbed quickly at her eyes" with her handkerchief before she slammed the locker door— at which instant Sadie came up. Sadie was thoroughly alarmed.

"Where are you going, dearie?"

"I'm going home," Euphemia answered, with an effort to control her emotion. "You can say that I am sick— and you bet I am. Oh, see what you've done!"

"But dearie—"

Euphemia broke from her detaining hand and fled.

IN the parlor of Mrs. Hennessey's select boarding-house on Ashland Avenue, Sadie Sanders, that evening, related the story of the following events to Mr. Art Brenker, who was lucky enough to be her steady company.

"I was sorry for the poor kid," said Sadie, "but believe me, I was some twittered when I thought of what was going to happen to little me. Mr. Wenlock, our manager, is easy dispositioned most of the time, but when he gets sore, he aint got no more chivalry than a rabbit, and I didn't lose time getting to those coats to gather up the circumstantial evidence. But no, I hadn't picked half a dozen hairs when out he comes and I'm caught in the act. He just looks at me like a wooden Injun for about an hour and threequarters — it might have been less, but that's my guess ; then he asks me where is Euphemia, and I tell him she's gone home with the lagrippe.

" 'A very good place for her,' says he, and walks up to the coat-rack and begins investigating. 'What were you doing here just now, Miss Sanders?'

" 'Picking 'em off,' says I, 'It was me put 'em on,' I says nobly.

" 'Oh, did you indeed?' he says— just like that. 'Did you, indeed? Willie, come here and carry these coats into the board-room.' He takes an armful himself, and Willie takes the rest. When he comes back, he fires me in a few well-chosen words; so here I am.

"I should worry!" said Art, happily. "Kiddo, how long is it going to take you to get good and ready? I'll give you till the day after to-morrow morning."

"Make it a week from now and you're on," was Miss Sadie's blushing response. "But Art, dear, don't you never think that two can live as cheap as one. This recklessness is going to put an awful crimp in your pay envelope."

A little later Sadie said: "I feel mean about Euphemia. It ain't the job so much, because she can get another 'most anywhere, but it's that skate Luttrell I was telling you about. Art, the cold gray dawn will soon be breaking, and this has been my busy day, so I'm going to let you go and treat rn'self to— to— a n-nice little w-weep!"

EUPHEMIA'S cold was worse the next morning. Her eyes, her Aunt Nora told her. were "like two burned holes in a blanket," and her nose "a sight to behold." Going to the office was out of the question. Euphemia agreed that it was out of the question, Sadie having acquainted her by telephone with what had transpired there; so she kept her room and submitted to Aunt Nora's ministrations. It was hard to be obliged to lie and think and fight against thinking and then think again all through the day with no other distraction than quinine capsules, herb tea and beef broth. There was so much to think of that hurt. It was not, as Sadie had said, so much the loss of her position; yet that was to be considered. But that humiliation of the afternoon before! Her body tingled with the shameful recollection.

And she had laid herself open to it. Sadie had proposed the mischief, but she, Euphemia, had consented to it; it had even seemed quite justifiable to her at the time, aside from the joke of it. Now the thing appeared in its true light— an unmaidenly folly whose consequences might have been serious enough. Those men were not all Joplins. Some of them were decent, so far as she really knew. That was a bitter thought, too, and she had to think of it.

But, as Sadie had said, it wasn't so much that, as that skate Luttrell; and the worst of it was Euphemia had come to the conclusion that he was not a skate. She had fancied admiration in his eyes,— or something more,— when it was nothing hut pure kindliness and good nature. Thinking it over, it was not until she found that note and basely read it that she had really thought— And now. Oh, why was he so tall and strong, and why did he smile in that quick, sunshiny way and let that little twinkle come into his eyes even when he seemed most grave? And why did she so like to hear him laugh or speak, when—

Hard to be obliged to lie and think.

The day went, somehow. Once, during Aunt Nora's absence for necessary marketing, Euphemia went to the telephone and called up the office. Ed Rogers, one of the clerks, answered the call and told her that Mr. Wenlock was out.

"Will you please tell him that I'm not able to get down to the office and that he had better, please, get somebody in my place. Say I'm sorry, please. Mr. Rogers, and— have they got through with the session?"

"Got through yesterday afternoon. Miss Regan," Rogers answered. "They are all home by this time. Is there anything I can do?"

"Thank you very much," said Eupheniia, "—just the message to Mr. Wenlock. That's all."

"That's settled," said Euphemia to herself. "I couldn't go back."

NEXT morning, Euphemia decided she would start out on her search for new employment; but with the morning came rain in torrents with the usual late February admixture of sleet; and although her cold was much better and her eyes and nose of nearly normal appearance. Aunt Nora sternly forbade any out-of-doors nonsense; so Euphemia contented herself with a careful perusal of the advertisements in the morning paper. The paper exhausted, she tried a novel, hut there was no thrill in the hook now, and it hardly carried her though the morning. Then there was lunch, and some little domestic tasks that were better than none. Shooed from the kitchen, she discarded her apron, rearranged her hair and got into a pretty little house-dress— which was an inspired proceeding, for she had hardly made the change before the hell rang and Aunt Nora at the speakingtube said : "Yes, she's in. Mr. Luttrell, is it? Well, come right up."

Euphemia flew to stop her, but it was too late. There was nothing for it but to open the door and admit him, which she reluctantly did. Mr. Luttrell had been quite obviously exposed to the weather, and this circumstance removed some of the awkwardness of the meeting.

"Why. you're wet through!" exclaimed Euphemia with real concern. "Haven't you an umbrella?"

"Yes, but I didn't need it," Luttrell answered with a smile. "I'm not wet underneath my coat. Here's the umbrella. It's yours. I— er— thought I'd bring it to you." It was quite embarrassing to Euphemia, the way he looked at her. He had never stared before; but then he'd never seen her in that particular little dress and with her hair in that particular style,

"You should have worn your raincoat," said Euphemia when they were seated. "Couldn't you get it mended?" She was still a little confused.

"I suppose I could have, but I didn't think of it," Luttrell answered. "It's good to have you talking to me again like this," he continued with sudden warmth. "Like old times."

"Not very old times." said Euphemia a little coldly.

"No." he agreed in a regretful tone. "But— we're friends now, aren't we?"

Why not ? Euphemia thought. Yes, they could part friends— perhaps. But—

"Perhaps you wouldn't want—" she began nervously. And then: "Will you excuse me for a minute, please?"

She left the room, but returned almost immediately and handed him the fatal note. "This is something of yours." she said very steadily. "I saw you drop it, but I picked it up and read it. Do you think that you would want to be friends with a girl that would do such a thing as that?

Luttrell, who had given the note the merest glance, answered that he thought he would. "And that— that— the day before yesterday— in the office— " Euphemia continued, not quite so steadily. "I didn't mean — at least I did mean to, but it was more on Mr. Joplin's account. He was so horrid and I thought it might teach him It" lesson and— and—"

"And teach me a lesson too?" asked Luttrell. looking gravely at the note in his hand.

"Sadie didn't put any in your coat, did she?" Euphemia exclaimed, her eyes widening with horror.

Luttrell nodded.

"Truly. I told her not to."

"I'm glad she did. Anyway. Joplin has had his lesson. I took him away from you the other night (I don't think you saw me then)— took him into a quiet alley and bumped it pretty thoroughly into his understanding." Luttrell spoke indifferently— absently. Apparently he was reading the note. Suddenly he looked up, and his eyes seemed to blaze with understanding as they met Euphemia's.

"Lord!" he cried. "You thought I was a married man!"

He laughed and crumpling the note, let it fall to the floor. "That's from my sister Bessie." he explained. "She and the kids came to me when her husband died." He got up, and Euphemia would have got up too, but all at once she felt too weak for the effort— too weak to resist when he took her hand and turned her averted head toward him.

"I believe there's a chance for me. Phemie. Phemie, is there?"

He would have been very dull indeed if he had had to ask the question twice.

BUT presently Euphemia pushed him away in a panic of doubt and fear. "You didn't really care until just this minute," she breathed. "It's an impulse. You haven't thought what it means to you— and to me. Mr. Luttrell— please!"

"Listen," said Luttrell earnestly. "I've been in love with you from the first minute I fairly saw you, and I never gave a girl or woman a second thought in that way in mv life. Listen to me, Phemie, darling. Perhaps I was too busy with other things, but it's so. And it didn't make me happy to be in love with you, because it seemed to me I was too rough and too homely, and maybe, too old for a girl like you to care for. I was afraid of you— afraid to speak to you, almost. And when I did speak to you, and you were nice to me— why, I thought, maybe, if I was very careful, went very slow, perhaps—

"But it got too much for me. I fixed up this special session because I couldn't wait any longer to see if I had a show. I said, 'I'll ask her to marry me anyway;' but I held myself in pretty well, didn't I, dear? And then you stopped me— short. Then I thought there was somebody else, maybe, and that you had guessed how I was feeling about you. I thought that even when I came into this room just now— honest!"

He fumbled in his waistcoat pocket. "I don't often buy jewelry but— this is something that belongs to you. Phemie, but I wasn't going to return it to you. Look."

It was a massive locket, gemmed outrageously, that he showed her. His big thumb pressed its spring, and it opened. Behind the gold-edged circle of glass was more gold— a thick coiled strand, every thread of which had made Euphemia wince with pain as it was plucked from her head for the disruption of possible happy homes.

"It's all there," cried Luttrell triumphantly. "I got it all. and I meant to take it back with me, anyway. I can take all this back with me, too, can't I, Phemie— dear little Phemie?"

He put his hand gently on her head, and the locket fell to the floor with a thump, entirely unregarded. In fact, it was Aunt Nora who picked it up— some little time later.

"And what may this be?" she asked.

"It's a locket." answered Euphemia, blushing.

Luttrell showed some little embarrassment too, as he took the trinket : but he leaned to Euphemia and quoted Hood:

"The next time I come, love, I'll come with a ring."

16: The Revolving Head

John Regnault Ellyson

?—1922

The Black Cat, Aug 1900

THE miserable-looking creature must have fallen asleep as he sat by the mile-stone on the edge of the road. Culberson, in fact, did not see him until he uncoiled his slim figure and rose like a spectre above the low tangle of vine and bramble. The sound of Culberson's footstep? must have startled him greatly, for as soon as he gained his feet he fell again upon his knees, his hands lifted in mute appeal.

Scarcely more than half clad in shreds and patches, he looked the image of adversity. The attire proclaimed the tramp, yet surely the meekest of the roving fraternity, and the face— sunburnt, thickly bearded, full of dust and grime— had yet a scholarly cast. It was pinched and pathetic, and the tears and the wofully hungry look proved irresistible to Culberson, who put his hand in the back pocket where he carried his loose coin.

As though that hand had touched a spring somewhere in the tramp, he made a most extraordinary movement— a movement that raised him at once in his observer's esteem to the rank of an unrivalled mime.

It was a movement of the head— glancing backward, sidewise and forward again— swiftly and eagerly, while the body and limbs, meanwhile, remained completely at rest. Only the head moved, but that seemed to turn around a dozen times in as many seconds, twirling like a ball on a well-oiled socket.

The performance would have astonished its beholder, even in a side show, and on a quiet country road it was more than astonishing. Culberson stepped back a few paces and caught his breath. He had seen an owl turn its head till he thought it would twist it off, but never a man. The strange oscillations continued rapidly, until the sight made the observer dizzy. Then he said: "There, that will do, thank you— that is quite enough!"

But the motion of the man's head did not cease. Culberson raised his cane and advanced with a threatening motion, when the stranger sobbed out:

"Oh, I mean no harm. Don't you see I can't help it? I onlyask your pity."

Culberson paused.

"Is this really no ingenious stage trick?"

"Indeed no, I assure you, sir. I am no buffoon— only the most luckless dog on all the byways of the world— one who lurks in solitude and dodges every passing shadow, and trembles as the leaves tremble!"

The gentleman rested upon his cane and stared.

"Tell me, then," he said in a softer voice, "what it is that stirs you so powerfully and so strangely."

“It is that worst of fears— the fear of being caught unawares— the fear of coming face to face with those I have eluded for many a year.”

As he spoke he held his hands to the sides of his head, as though to steady that restive member.

Culberson was a man of the world, and asked no further question. It must be a weighty crime, he thought, to so shatter a strong man’s nerve.

“Come, old fellow,” he said, “you talk well, and I like your face. Shake off your fear, get on your feet, pluck up some spirit!”

The tramp arose, brushed the thickest of the dust from his knees with his ragged hat, and gathered his tatters about him. His countenance brightened as the gentleman pointed to a little white cottage nestling among the green shrubbery of a hill-top.

“It’s a quiet place,” Culberson said, “and in fair weather like this I take my meals under that oak, where one has a view of the only path by which the point is reached. You see the advantage of the position!”

“Aye, I see,” replied the vagrant, grimly. “People can’t drop upon you suddenly!”

“Exactly! So, if you see fit, we’ll go up there, where you may sit at your ease and eat something, and rest for an hour or so.”

“How good of you,” murmured the stranger; “how very kind.”

Seated under the oak on the hill-top, with a small table laden with cold chicken, fruit and other things before him, the man with the revolving head ate as if it were his last repast, while his host mixed cracked ice, mint and whiskey in a large glass as only it is mixed in Virginia. The eyes of the tramp sparkled and moistened as this delectable compound was set within his reach, but he did not touch it till the luncheon was finished, and then he sipped it sparingly, with appreciative relish.

“Bourbon,” he said, “real old Kentucky— and the best! It’s years since I tasted such, but one never loses his taste— whatever else has gone!”

“Will you smoke?” enquired Culberson, drawing a cigar from his case.

“I can’t refuse,” he said, with the accent of refinement, “though—”

Just then a very common incident occurred in Culberson’s poultry yard, some distance behind them. A pullet, having laid an egg, made the customary note of it, and her solo was, as usual, reinforced by the whole feathered chorus.

The hand extended for the cigar dropped limply to the stranger’s side; again he sank to his knees, trembling in every limb, and his singular head seemed to rotate as if set upon a pivot.

“Really, you must pardon me,” he exclaimed as he regained his seat and his composure. “But it was so— well, so very reminiscent!”

“Indeed! ” answered his entertainer, with curiosity doubly aroused concerning the peculiar malady, for he could not otherwise regard it, of the cultured tramp. “May I venture to ask more definite particulars of your misfortune?”

“How can I refuse you anything, you— you are so kind!”

And the wanderer of the highways, lighting his cigar, tossed off the last sip from the tall glass, and, leaning back in his chair, began his narrative in a style befitting one who, while he may not have been a mountebank, could hardly have been always a very serious person.

“Though I cut a sorry figure now, sir,” he said, “I was once a man of affairs. Money came to me by inheritance, and I made money. I was flattered and courted, and numbered my friends by the score. I adored my wife, and kept at my own expense the whole flock of her relatives. I make no boasts— I’m dealing in facts.

“My wife was the handsomest woman in the world— accomplished and clever also. Blessed with a genial nature myself, I believe, I gave my wife the reins, and did not refuse to join her in her follies and caprices, for she had her caprices— like other women— but unlike them in originality. They were never scandalous, though people gossipped. Some said that I had no initiative; others that I had lost whatever individuality I once possessed. However, I was charmed with my choice, full of confidence in her and sure of her applause. And so I was happy.

“Had not she, the regal one, favored me above all other men? At the last, as between Bradford, the artist, and myself, had she not jilted him and taken me? And yet any woman might well have chosen him. He was extremely bright, had many talents besides his art, and had made a high mark in that. He was uncommonly eccentric, every one will admit, and in many of his ways carried eccentricity to the point of grotesqueness, but his great gifts none could deny.

“I retained my liking for him for twenty years, during which my wife lost nothing of her vivacity, none of her charms— nor any of her relatives. They increased, rather. To the sister who was to be her home companion in my hours of absence was soon added another sister. Then the venerable father and mother came to sit by our fireside. They were of a hardy and vigorous stock. An uncle and two brothers, one by one, joined the family circle, and the advent of each of the later accessions was signalized by more or less friction with the earlier comers. I have said that my wife possessed remarkable vitality. It was on such occasions, and at other times when affaire didn’t glide with satisfactory smoothness, that this abounding vitality seemed to react against the nervous centres and dominate my wife like a veritable tempest. My wife’s

relatives resembled her in this characteristic, and I— well, as an intelligent being, I was obliged, as the years went and the relatives came, to neutralize this excess of vital force by a judicious system of correlative energy. For example, if occasion compelled, I pitted my wife or one of the servants against one or more of the relatives, and escaped the storm myself by slipping into some corner under cover, where I often witnessed rare comedies in real life, at the mere cost of some china and bric-à-brac, of which the house was full. I could afford luxuries in those days, and my wife was a fine judge of such matters. When a woman comes within an ace of wedding an artist— an eccentric one— she is sure to have an exceedingly nice sense of color and form. She'll furnish the house with taste, decorate it admirably and fill it with choice and dear-bought vases and bronzes— marbles and paintings and tapestries. Her people approved. In candor, I must say that they were no mean critics.

"Now, perhaps you'll know what I mean when I say that I managed to live twenty years in the midst of life's blessings— and my wife's kin—and only once brought down the temple about my ears. Only once, but—

"Well, let me tell you how it happened. An agreeable project took my fancy concerning my wife's approaching birthday. Straightway I consulted Bradford. I let him into the scheme because I couldn't work it without him. My idea amused him immensely, but he seemed to hesitate. I urged, cajoled, named a good sum— and secured his services.

"I was to procure my wife's full-length portrait— painted by Bradford himself— under the pretext that the artist declared that it needed retouching, and he, with a shapely model who posed for him, was to depict my wife at full length as Juno, in the purest classic style. The details I left to him. I've said that he was an eccentric man, and I think I have stated it moderately. For instance, he seldom permitted his pictures to be viewed until completed, even by his closest friends. Knowing this, I of course was not surprised when he coolly told me that I should not see the portrait till he himself unveiled it in my chamber on my wife's birthday.

"My plans went well. I got the picture, bulky as it was, into my apartment unobserved. I hoodwinked my wife's people and felt confident of springing upon them all a profound surprise. My wife made a partial discovery when she saw the large frame, covered with a double thickness of burlap, stitched securely at the edges, but she did not seem to connect it in any way with her own portrait. I owned that it was a masterpiece by Bradford, who had reserved the privilege of unveiling it himself.

"The eventful night came— the night of nights. My wife's kinsfolk, of course, were always with us. A chosen few, the pick of her friends, gathered

for the occasion. But the artist didn't arrive. However, that was simply his way— he was always late. But when an hour passed, two hours, and he was still absent, I was much annoyed. I felt that he had forfeited the privilege for which he had stipulated, as I could not keep the invited guests waiting all night in ignorance of the delayed surprise.

"So, dropping a hint of what was to come, I led the way into the— yes, the fatal— chamber, drew the drapery from the curtained recess, mounted the ladder that stood beside it, and prepared to uncover the picture. Not for years had I appeared more fully myself. My eyes and neck— accustomed by long practice to act independently, almost with contrariety, in watching the trajectory of a flying ornament or calculating the angle of incidence of a bursting vase— had never seemed more unanimous or more obedient to my will. As I stood on the top step of that library ladder, I felt myself complete master of the situation.

"I clipped the threads, beginning at the top, and gradually revealed the beauties of Bradford's Juno.

"I can't conceive of such another glad, chirping cry of surprise as went up when the picture was but half in sight. But it was as nothing to the yell that arose, or the scene that followed, when the burlap cover dropped to the carpet. The artist had employed his consummate skill— he had surpassed himself— in the drawing and coloring of the figure, from the diademed hair to the gem-encrusted girdle— but there the figure ended— ended in something worse than deformity— for the nether limbs were clad, not in the drapery of a goddess, not in Grecian raiment at all, but in ordinary, everyday, masculine trousers— yes, even in 'pants'— and a conspicuous pair, of the very pattern I most affected!

"You know there's one thing, at least, that a married woman can never be told— a truth that's a jest everywhere except at home— and when a great artist tells it in a bold way, the telling of it stings sharper than a serpent's tooth.

"Excuse me. I was saying that from the picture I looked below. What faces! What a glare of eyes ! And then what a bedlam! Everything swam before me and around me. It was some distance to the floor— perhaps that alone was sufficient to account for the fracture of the skull which kept me for many days in a hospital, hovering between life and death. Perhaps—

"However, as soon as I could crawl once more, I escaped from the nurses and the drowsy watchers, and went forth into the world and the night. And I've since followed obscure paths, as far as possible. Years have gone by, but memory endures, and the horror of it, and the dread of a similar inglorious pommelling.

“Do you understand now why I fall on my knees at the slightest noise, and look about me so timorously, on all sides at once?”

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17: The Mysterious Treasure of Mme Humbert

William Le Queux

1864-1927

Great Stories of Real Life, No. 5, 1924

William Tufnell Le Queux

A True Crime story. One of the most colossal frauds of modern times was that which was finally exposed on May 9th, 1902, and was known as 'The Humbert Millions.'

BEFORE the great swindle had been disclosed it had been the means of ruining some thousands of people, at least five of whom committed suicide, and there were three other deaths which have never been satisfactorily explained.

As I had some personal knowledge of the perpetrators of this gigantic imposture it may, perhaps, be of interest if I relate the circumstances in which I became acquainted with them.

One day in August 1900, at the invitation of Madame Sarah Bernhardt, I went to a luncheon party at her big white villa close to the lake at Enghien-les-Bains, just outside Paris. Before lunch I, with two other men, took a vivacious, dark-haired girl— whom I had met at a country house near Tours a few months before, and whose name was Marie d'Aurignac— out for a row upon the picturesque lake. We had arrived from Paris a little too early, and as the lawn sloped to the lake we paddled about till lunch was ready.

At the meal I sat next to my old friend Madame Zola. On my right was a stout, rather overdressed, and by no means prepossessing woman to whom I had not been introduced. We began to chat. To me she appeared to be a rather unintelligent and uncultivated woman, for she spoke with a distinctly

provincial accent, and her conversation was interlarded with words of Parisian argot.

Presently Madame Zola said:

'I do not think you have been introduced,' and she told the stout, well-preserved woman who I was, adding that I was a friend of her husband, 'dear Emile,' and also a writer.

In a moment her attitude towards me entirely changed. From formal frigidity she became all smiles and geniality. I learnt that she was Madame Thérèse Humbert. But to me it then conveyed no unusual meaning. One meets many people at luncheon parties, and at those given by Sarah Bernhardt celebrities were present by the dozen; and several Parisian operatic stars.

The assembly in that long, old-fashioned dining room, the open French windows of which looked out upon the lake sparkling in the summer sunlight, was a brilliant one, and the chatter was equally vivacious and entertaining. The Divine Sarah was then at the zenith of her popularity, and had just returned from a long tour in the United States and Canada. But the stout woman on my right seemed morose and thoughtful. At last she said:

'What are your movements, Monsieur? I know your name very well. Your father was introduced to me long ago. Sarah told me all about you! You are a friend of Emile Zola, our greatest novelist. And you write too! Ah! I wish you all success. I envy you writers. It is all so clever to publish a book. You know my sister Marie. You took her out on the lake before lunch. So now you know who I am.'

Later, when we walked out upon the lawn and sat beneath the shadow of the trees at the lake-side, I asked Madame Zola about the stout lady who had been my companion at table.

'Oh!' she exclaimed. 'She's a widow— one of the richest women in Paris. She is Madame Humbert. If she invites you to her house in the Avenue de la Grande Armée you must go. All Paris goes there to her dinners and receptions. Frederic Humbert, her husband, was son of the late Minister of Justice, Gustave Humbert; who died five years ago. She is not chic by any means— but she is immensely wealthy.'

'I know her sister, Mademoiselle d'Aurignac, very slightly,' I said. 'But I did know that she was related to Madame Humbert.'

Who in Paris had not heard the fame of the great hostess of the Avenue de la Grande Armée? Hardly a day passed but one read in the newspapers lists of her guests, which included persons in the most exclusive sets in Parisian society, with diplomats, cabinet ministers, writers, lawyers, dramatists, and the like. If Madame was not in Paris she entertained at her fine old Chateau de

Vellexon, near Vesoul, or at the Villa des Cyclamens, on the road between Beaulieu and Monte Carlo.

Possibly it was through Madame Zola's good offices that a week later I received a card for Madame Humbert's reception.

The great mansion was profusely decorated with choice flowers, and the spacious *salons* were filled with the elite of Paris. I sat in a corner with Emile Zola, Henri Lamorre, Prefét of the Puy de Dôme, and Jules Guyon, the famous painter, and we chatted. Presently, Lamorre, a thin, grey-haired man, mentioned something about a safe.

'What safe?' I asked in my ignorance.

'Why, the safe in the next room,' he replied. 'The safe which contains over four millions sterling! Come and see it,' and he led me to a smaller apartment wherein a few people were seated near the open window, for it was a hot, close night. In a corner against the wall I saw a great fireproof safe about seven feet high and four feet across. There were three keyholes, each being sealed with huge red seals upon broad tapes which had once been white but were now discoloured with age.

I asked my friend what it meant. Whereupon, in an awed voice, he told me of the great fortune therein contained, a mysterious story which, I confess, greatly impressed me as a writer of romance.

As we stood there passed by us the President of the Court of Appeal, chatting with the famous lawyer, Maitre WaldeckRousseau, and the Italian Ambassador and his wife. Truly Madame Humbert's receptions were the most wonderful in Paris since the downfall of the Empire.

That autumn I was Madame Humbert's guest at the famous old Chateau de Vellexon, and there again met her sister, Mademoiselle Marie d'Aurignac, and her brother Romain, who was three years her senior. There were some sixteen others of the house-party, and as at that time I was a fair shot— before my eyesight played me false— I enjoyed some good sport in the great woods surrounding the splendid Chateau.

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FROM THE first the secret of that great safe with its three big seals laid hold of my imagination. Indeed, that safe, with the mysterious millions it was thought to contain, had captured the imagination of all Paris; as it would naturally attract any novelist.

I am now going to tell the beginning of one of the most impudent frauds ever imposed upon a credulous public. So strange were the whole circumstances that, if written in the form of fiction, they would have been

dismissed as being absolutely incredible. But what is here related is actual fact, as was afterwards proved in the Assize Court of the Seine.

It seems that two years after the Prussian invasion there was living at Bauzelles, a village near Toulouse, a young country girl of commonplace appearance. Her father, whose name was Aurignac, was a drunken, incorrigible old peasant, who in his elated moments was fond of declaring himself to be of noble birth. In his cups in the village estaminet each night he assumed the self-styled title of Count d'Aurignac. His cronies always addressed him as Monsieur le Comte, and his fame spread far and wide, even into Toulouse itself. At that time there were many scions of noble houses ruined by the Prussian invasion and reduced to beggary, therefore it was not considered very remarkable.

'The Count' lived with his daughters, Thérèse and Marie, and his sons, Romain and Emile. Thérèse did the housework, and the two boys worked in the fields and did odd jobs for anyone who liked to employ them. But the father, obsessed with the idea of his noble ancestry, one day bought for ten francs in the Rue St. Etienne, in Toulouse, an old oak chest studded with brass nails. It was that purchase which was the beginning of the extraordinary sham of the Humbert millions.

The old peasant, who had for years boasted of his noble ancestry, now exhibited to his neighbours the old carved chest, which he had locked and sealed, and which he solemnly declared contained the title-deeds of the great Chateau d'Aurignac, in Auvergne, and proofs which, upon his death, would entitle his children to a fortune. His friends, ignorant as are most French peasants, were much impressed by his story, but it brought in no money except a few odd francs as loans, so Thérèse was compelled by her father to accept the lowly position of laundry-maid to a family named Humbert, who had befriended the queer old fellow. The family in question consisted of Monsieur Gustave Humbert, Mayor of Toulouse, his wife, and their son Frederic, a slim, impressionable young man with a sloping forehead. Old Madame Humbert took Thérèse into their service out of charity a week after her father died, in January 1874. He did not possess one *sou*, and when the famous oak box was broken open, only a brick was found in it!

But Thérèse, though not in any way prepossessing, had a sly manner about her, and her eyes were ever open for the main chance. She had been educated to the belief that she was of noble birth, and at length she succeeded in attracting the attention of Frederic, her employer's son, who was then a law student in Toulouse.

All this time the Aurignacs were being laughed at by their neighbours, who knew of the discovery of the sealed-up brick, but so persistent were they all to

their claim to nobility that the countryside began to wonder whether, after all, they were not descendants of the great house of d'Aurignac, in Auvergne.

The legend thus born was now to grow, thanks to 'La Grande Thérèse'— as she was later dubbed by the Paris press. She started to carry on the fiction of her absinthe-drinking father and evolved, in her imagination, a great ancestral home, the Chateau de Marcotte, in the Tarn. In strictest secrecy she disclosed to her lover that the octogenarian Mademoiselle de Marcotte, a very wealthy old lady, who was owner of the chateau, had bequeathed her entire fortune to her, together with her vast estate. The chateau, however, never existed, except in Thérèse's imagination, but the story impressed the Humbert family and especially Frederic's father, the Mayor of Toulouse.

Soon afterwards Monsieur and Madame Humbert left Toulouse for Paris, to take up their abode there, where a month later, to their chagrin, they learnt that their son Frederic intended to marry their ex-washerwoman, the girl Thérèse! Frederic had been left in Toulouse to conclude his law studies, and the wily girl had very cleverly entrapped him.

So far the facts all read like a sensational novel. But the events which followed and the denouement are far more amazing still.

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MONSIEUR Gustave Humbert had, by dint of hard work and considerable shrewdness— some say that his conduct as a lawyer was not altogether above suspicion— come to the fore in politics, and certain of his friends had hinted at his appointment as Minister of Justice. In such circumstances it was but natural that he should be horrified at the suggestion of a laundry-maid becoming his son's wife. He travelled post-haste to Toulouse, and there was a heated scene between father and son. The father threatened to cut off Frederic's allowance, but was only met with defiance. The young man was determined, and so cleverly did Thérèse play her cards that, despite all entreaties, Frederic married her.

There was a queer circumstance on the day of the wedding. Just as she was going to the Hotel de Ville an official of the Court of Toulouse arrived with a warrant for the arrest of the adventurous Thérèse on account of a debt incurred with a hairdresser. Mademoiselle met the man with perfect sangfroid and told him that she was about to be married, and that in an hour's time if he returned she would obtain the money from her husband and discharge the debt. Thus assured, the warrant was not executed. Indeed, the official could not bring himself to arrest a bride on the eve of her marriage. But on returning

at the appointed hour he found that the pair had been registered as man and wife and were already on their way to Paris.

From the first moment of Thérèse's married life her whole career became one of amazing duplicity and adventure. She possessed a subtle cunning, a wheedling manner, a vivid imagination and an utter disregard of honesty or fair dealing. From her reprobate father she seems to have, with her brothers, inherited that same idea of pretence of nobility, an all-absorbing ambition and the gain of money from the credulous. The sealed oak box which was supposed to contain proofs which would secure for his heirs a title and valuable estates and which had only contained a brick— but which had during its existence brought in petty loans from neighbours— had impressed itself upon the mind of 'La Grande Thérèse,' so gradually she evolved from her fertile brain a greater and much more grandiose scheme.

For a time Frederic Humbert and his wife lived in humble circumstances in Paris, occupying a three-roomed flat au troisieme in the Rue Provence. Her husband, who had now passed his examinations, managed to earn a modest income at his profession, and for several years their existence was quiet and uneventful. From time to time Frederic questioned his wife about the £5000 a year which was coming to her from Mlle de Marcotte, but she was always evasive concerning it, as she well might be. Thérèse had entered the Humbert family and was daughter-in-law of Monsieur Gustave, who had now been appointed Minister of Justice, therefore she had taken a considerable step forward. But, alas! there was no money.

Creditors pressed them in the Rue Provence, so they moved to another flat in the Rue Monge, where her plausible story to the local grocer concerning her expectations from the owner of the mythical Chateau de Marcotte quickly spread about the neighbourhood, and because of it the pair existed for quite a long time upon credit.

The Marcotte myth proved a very profitable one, but without any tangible proof and no substantiation except the word of the amazing Thérèse it was soon doomed to failure. The local tradesmen began to question the locality in which the Chateau de Marcotte was situated. The Prefect of the Department was written to, and his reply was that he had no knowledge of any such estate within his jurisdiction. The farm, it may be mentioned, adjoins the Haute Garonne, the capital of which is Toulouse. Sometimes Thérèse had told people that the Chateau was near Albi, and at others she had mentioned Carmaux and Castres as the nearest towns. The creditors were bewildered, though greatly intrigued. So one of them, who was a native of a village near Castres, went on his summer vacation to his home, and on his return declared that there was no such estate in the Tarn.

Upon that things grew very ugly for the pair. Threats of prosecution for swindling if bills were not paid arrived in a crop, and so serious was the position that Thérèse was compelled to admit to her husband that the whole story was a fabrication. Frederic, greatly alarmed, went to his father, the Minister of Justice, told him the truth, and His Excellency— who could not afford the scandal of his son being arrested for swindling— paid the whole of their debts, much to the relief of 'La Grande Thérèse.'

The latter was sly, unscrupulous and highly ambitious. The sealed oak box with its brick was ever in her mind. For three or four years she slowly evolved plans by which she might, just as her father had done in his own small way to obtain money for drink, impose upon an ever credulous public but on a grander scale.

By this time she had gauged the mind of the French public to a very fine degree. She knew that persons dealing in high finance could not be imposed upon except by some great scheme with enticing profits, and if a little romance were mixed with it then the more certain of success it would be. It was proved in Court that Frederic Humbert had no knowledge that the Marcotte fortune had no foundation until his domineering wife confessed, and that it was he who implored his father to save the family from disgrace.

Yet a few months after the episode, in March 1881, astounding whispers went around Paris— whispers that were not to be repeated. At the salons each evening Paris society discussed the romantic story that M. Gustave Humbert, Minister ofjustice, had told his friends vainly that his daughter-in-law had met with a most romantic adventure while travelling on the Ceinture Railway, and that by her brave conduct towards a perfect stranger, an American she had inherited eighty thousand pounds.

His Excellency the Minister had dined at the Elysee, at several of the houses of the great hostesses of Paris, and at one of the Embassies, and had told the story. His son's wife had come into a fortune by reason of her courage and sympathy. The affair at once became the gossip of all Paris. Like all such stories it was not reduced in the telling, so its embroidery increased day by day, just as Thérèse had hoped, until all Paris was gossiping regarding the mysterious fortune of His Excellency's daughter-in-law.

It now became a question, never satisfactorily settled, by the way, whether the Minister of Justice really believed it, or whether in order to increase his own social advancement he readily accepted Thérèse's story, yet believing it to be untrue. He knew the Marcotte myth to have no foundation in fact, therefore it seems incredible that he, a very accomplished lawyer, should have swallowed the strange, romantic tale which the imaginative ex-laundry-maid should have told him.

BRIEFLY related, the story, as told by 'La Belle Grande Thérèse,' was as follows: About two years after her marriage she had one hot September afternoon entered a train on the Ceinture Railway in Paris at the Grenelle station to go to Bel-Air. She was in a compartment alone when she heard groans in an adjoining compartment just after they had left Montsouris. She shouted, but there was no response. The cries were of a man in agony. Therefore, at great risk to herself, she got out of the carriage, climbed along the footboard, and in the adjoining compartment found a white-haired old gentleman who had been taken ill. She gave him her smelling-salts, unloosened his collar, and lifting him from the floor dragged him into a corner where, in a sitting position, he soon regained consciousness. He had apparently suffered from a severe heart attack, but it quickly passed. Indeed, before they arrived at Bel-Air the old gentleman thanked her profusely and inquiring her name and address, had written it down upon a scrap of paper.

'We shall meet again one day, Madame, I hope. If not, I wish you to accept my heartfelt thanks for what you have done for me. I happen to have in my pocket a considerable sum of money, and in the hands of unscrupulous folk I might very easily have lost my money— and perhaps even my life!'

They shook hands after the old gentleman had told her that he was an American named Robert Henry Crawford, of Chicago, and assured her that he was quite well and able to continue his journey to the next station, which was Avenue de Vincennes. For two years she had forgotten all about the romantic meeting until one day she received a letter from a firm of lawyers in New York enclosing a copy of old Mr Crawford's will, by which she had been left £80,000. That was the original figure which Thérèse stated, but through gossip— no doubt started by His Excellency— the fortune was swiftly increased, first to a million pounds sterling, and then to four millions. This figure the Humbert family never questioned, and for nearly twenty years that followed all Paris believed that Thérèse Humbert was entitled to that sum— after certain divisions.

Whoever prepared the copy of the will, or whoever were the lawyers in New York— these things were never ascertained. It is sure, however, that the documents bore the stamp of authenticity, and were not questioned for the many years the imposture lasted.

The old man from Chicago died suddenly in Nice— the death certificate of a man named Crawford who lived in the Rue de France being produced— and by the conditions of the will his fortune was to be divided between Marie

d'Aurignac, Thérèse's sister, who was then a child at school at Neuilly, and two nephews, Robert and Henry Crawford, while out of the fortune the three were to pay Thérèse Humbert fourteen thousand pounds a year.

Madame Humbert at once employed a very reputable firm of Paris lawyers to investigate, and according to their report it was found that the brothers Crawford who lived in America were both millionaires and that the legacy was of but little account to them.

Their American lawyers wrote to Madame's lawyers in Paris, expressing a wish that the money should remain in the Crawford family if possible, that it should remain intact in a safe in Madame Humbert's custody, except for the payment to her of fourteen thousand pounds annually, as the will provided. It was also suggested that as both brothers had seen a photograph of the schoolgirl, Marie d'Aurignac, one or the other of them should marry her w hen she left school. Then the safe should be opened and the fortune of four millions be divided.

Such was the curious, romantic story that went about Paris and which, coming, as it did, from the lips of the Minister of Justice, nobody dared to doubt. The invention, on the face of it, was ridiculous, though certainly there were letters from lawyers— forged, no doubt— to give it an appearance of fact, which set all Paris agog, and brought Thérèse Humbert fame and credit, so that from her humble home in a side street and her stream of creditors, she assumed the position of a wealthy grande dame and the guardian of her young sister's destinies until the marriage of convenience should take place.

Thus it was, in 1881, that the mythical story of the Crawford millions was launched with the connivance of Frederic Humbert and his wife's two brothers, Romain and Emile d'Aurignac— both ne'er-do-wells— and aided and abetted by His Excellency the Minister of Justice. A great white mansion was taken in the Avenue de la Grande Armee and luxuriously furnished as a fitting home for a woman of such great fortune, and in the downstairs room the largest fireproof safe procurable was set up for all to see— the sealed safe containing the four millions sterling, of which Robert Henry Crawford had died possessed.

Because the Minister of Justice himself was a relative and had testified to the truth of the romantic story, not a soul disbelieved it. Madame Humbert became the centre of smart society in Paris, and to be seen at her receptions, or to be a visitor at one or another of her famous country homes was a hall-mark of notoriety. As soon as she was firmly established in that magnificent house in the Avenue de la Grande Armee, the extravagances of the ex-washerwoman became astounding. The most famous people of both sexes in France scrambled for her invitations, and the state she kept up was almost regal. Her dresses and jewels were constantly being described in the Paris

Press, for everyone became dazzled by the luxury with which she surrounded herself.

Whence did the money come to keep up that expensive establishment? I will explain.

In 1883, rumours were afloat that Madame had quarrelled with the Crawford brothers, but only after the publication in one of the minor newspapers of an article which threw doubt upon the whole story. An ingenious journalist had summoned courage to question the statement of the most powerful woman in France. As a matter of fact, the journalist in question had been born in Toulouse, had known old Aurignac and his story of nobility, and also of the Marcotte myth.

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IN THIS article, Thérèse scented danger lest several people who had lent her money on the security of the safe and its millions should make secret investigations. Therefore she invented the quarrel between old Crawford's nephews and herself. It proved to be a pretty quarrel. The Crawford brothers first began to worry her over small matters of details, one of which was that the money should be removed to the Credit Lyonnais for safer keeping. To this Madame objected. The matter came to Court, and after much bickering it was at last settled by Madame consenting to have three armed guards placed over the safe from sunset to sunrise each day. It seemed reasonable to suppose that the Crawfords were not imaginary, for nonexistent persons do not embark upon expensive law-suits. Indeed, there started an amazing series of actions; some by the Crawfords, and others by Madame Humbert, which were fought out sometimes in the American Courts, and more often in Paris. And so the 'Humbert Millions' became a stock heading in the French newspapers, and the public began to follow the interminable lawsuits which were constantly cropping up.

Huge fees were paid to some of the most famous lawyers in France to defend Madame Humbert's rights, while similar fees were paid to other legal luminaries of equal distinction by the two American millionaires. In her defence, Thérèse was actively aided by her husband's father, the Minister ofjustice, and so clever were her poses that everyone believed her to be in the right in resisting the unjust claims of old Crawford's nephews. Indeed, for nearly a generation, these constant law-suits were reappearing, together with occasional affidavits, sworn by either Robert or Henry Crawford, both of whom were in America, and all sorts of information, evidence taken on commission in Chicago, and squabbles in the French Courts, until such a mass ofjudgments

were obtained and appeals quashed that when the bubble burst nobody could make head or tail of what was the actual commencement of the great litigation upon which lawyers had fattened for years. Indeed, the most ludicrous part of it was that the lawyers themselves very often did not clearly know what they were actually fighting about! But the litigation achieved its purpose, for it seemed to show that the Crawford brothers did actually exist, and that they were endeavouring to obtain possession of the formidable-looking safe.

And all this time Marie d'Aurignac, Thérèse's sister, who had now left school, was the fiancee of Henry Crawford, whom she had, according to her story, met three times while he was on flying visits to Paris to see his French lawyers. During one of the trials in which Maitre Waldeck-Rousseau was engaged, he referred to Mademoiselle Marie as 'the eternal fiancee,' a title which stuck to her until the eventual exposure of the swindle.

As was afterwards proved, she had been introduced to an American by her sister, Thérèse, at the Hotel Continental. The man was represented to be Mr Crawford, and the girl, in her innocence, believed him to be the person whom she was destined to marry. The bogus Crawford was evidently of an engaging character, and good-looking, for Marie seems to have taken a liking to him, and to have met him on other occasions, and had, indeed, sung his praises to her friends. All of this went, of course, to bolster up the great fiction.

Meanwhile 'La Grande Thérèse' had become the most imposing figure in Parisian society. Her expenditure was lavish. Her accounts were investigated after the debacle , and it was discovered that in the year 1897 she spent upon gowns £3,780 at Doucet's and £1,400 at Worth's, while her hats alone cost her over £850 in the Rue de la Paix. Truly the washerwoman turned adventuress was reckless in her expenditure, and further, such extravagance showed people how very wealthy she really was.

The public never dreamed that from the first moment that great mansion had been rented and furnished, Madame, who gave such expensive and exclusive parties, had existed always upon credit— or rather, upon the credulity of her dupes. That she found level-headed bankers, financiers and business men ready to advance large sums simply upon her assurance that the sealed safe contained four millions sterling in cash and securities was utterly amazing. If the story of Madame's clever duplicity had been written as a novel it would surely have been dismissed as fiction. But in this case we are faced with hard, yet astounding facts. Never in the history of crime had there been such an impudent and colossal fraud, and none so ingeniously conceived. The never-ending series of actions in the Courts between the Crawford brothers and herself established a confidence that the two sons of her late benefactor were alive, yet, as a matter of fact, they had no existence save in the

imagination of the public. The whole proceedings, so complex that no lawyer has ever been able to unravel the tangle, was merely 'La Grande Thérèse' fighting herself. And she was paying for it all.

Imagine, then, how cleverly she hoodwinked the lawyers who appeared both for and against her, and how extremely careful she must have been in the preparation of every detail. In this she was assisted by her brothers, Emile and Romain d'Aurignac, who acted as her agents in many of her affairs. But, after all, it was her father's trick of the old oak chest being played again, but this time the harvest was not to be counted in single francs, but millions. Tempted by the promise of high rates of interest, hundreds of people lent Thérèse money in secret, all being assured that when the safe was opened at Marie's marriage they would receive back their loans with profit. The very lawyers who had appeared for her in the Courts became her agents for the borrowing of money, and to anyone who was sceptical, Madame, in great secrecy, would produce a bundle of letters purporting to be from the non-existent Crawfords— a trick which rarely failed to extract money. The time came, of course, when certain creditors desired their money, and became impatient to see the contents of the ponderous safe. But, no! The agreement with the Crawfords was that it was not to be opened until Marie's marriage, and she was not yet out of her teens. So, its creditors became unduly pressing, Madame paid the interest out of further loans from other people. And thus the game proceeded.

v

THE FIRST person of importance who seems to have had his suspicions seriously aroused was a banker from Lyons named Delatte, who had lent a considerable sum upon the strength of Madame's story and sight of the sealed safe. To several other creditors he declared that the whole affair was a fraud, but one and all disbelieved him. Madame's behaviour, her plausibility, her proof of the existence of the Crawfords, and her generosity in the matter of dinners and entertainments disarmed suspicion.

But Monsieur Delatte, pretending that he was reassured and satisfied, played a waiting game until one day, while guest of Madame Humbert at the Chateau de Vellexon, he quite innocently asked where Henry Crawford was. She declared that he was living in Boston. He could obtain no further information except that he had a house in Somerville, a suburb of Boston, but he acted as nobody else seems to have thought of acting, for, a week later, without telling anyone of his intentions, he left Havre for New York, and duly arrived in Somerville. Though he made every inquiry he could discover nobody

of the name of Crawford, either in Somerville or in Boston itself. He engaged a well-known firm of private inquiry agents, but their search in Chicago also proved futile. To a friend in Paris he wrote declaring that the Crawford brothers did not exist, and that he was returning to expose the swindle. His friend awaited his return, but he never came. A month later, however, news was received in Lyons that the body of a man who, from papers found upon him, was identified as M. Delatte, had been found in the East River between New York and Brooklyn. Whether the unfortunate man met with an accident, was the victim of foul play or committed suicide has never been cleared up. In any case, had he returned to Paris, as was his intention, he could, no doubt, have made things very uncomfortable for Madame and her accomplices.

Within two months another of Madame's dupes came to an untimely end. In this case it was the manager of an important commercial house in Paris named Henri Vincendon, who, four years before, had lent Thérèse half a million francs. Since then he had been hard pressed for money, and had embezzled one hundred thousand francs belonging to the company which employed him. The books were, he knew, being examined, and soon his defalcations would be discovered, so he rushed to Madame and implored her to at least return him that sum. But he only received the same reply that all creditors' obtained, for Madame, without even expressing regret, told him that the safe could not be opened before the marriage of Marie, 'the eternal fiancee.' He pleaded with her, but although that very day she had obtained a further quarter of a million francs from a fresh victim, she would give him nothing. Therefore in despair the poor fellow went forth, and beneath a tree in the Bois he shot himself. Of almost similar cases there were several, though the actual cause of suicide never leaked out. It was only the ring of creditors themselves who knew.

A German journalist named Haberler, the Paris correspondent of a Berlin newspaper, having met Madame Humbert, considered that she behaved insultingly towards him, so in retaliation began to spread reports to the effect that the Crawford affair was a bogus one. At first nobody took any notice, but Madame's secret agents, her two brothers, came very soon afterwards and declared that the position was perilous, for many people were beginning to believe Haberler's statements. In consequence, Madame very quickly made peace with the journalist by paying him a very large sum, showing him the forged letters of the Crawford brothers, and inviting him to her parties, thus closing his mouth. To those who asked the reason of his change of opinion, the man replied that he had now seen proofs of the existence of the Crawfords, and he deeply regretted that he had defamed the much-criticised holder of the four millions sterling. This was not the only case in which Madame was

blackmailed by those who thought they might obtain money by exhibiting animosity, for, of course, to sustain the fiction was vital to her schemes.

Marie d' Aurignac was exhibited everywhere, at Trouville, at Longchamps, at Monte Carlo, Aix, Pau and other places, for in company with her sister she went the usual round of watering-places, where the world gaped at the girl who was affianced to the American multi-millionaire, and at whose marriage the great safe would be opened and the stuffed-in four millions sterling would tumble out upon the floor. This was all a clever ruse on the part of Thérèse, who was nothing if not theatrical in her display. Besides, sight of the fiancee was calculated to attract further moths to the candle. It seems utterly incredible that any woman should carry on such a gigantic swindle against the shrewdest and most competent business men and financiers in France. But the fact was that Madame Humbert's two brothers— who were the forerunners of the modern press-agent— had boomed her to such an extent that, with her father-in-law as Minister of Justice, nobody dared doubt her word.

And so nightly those who were fortunate enough to receive invitations to the great white mansion in the Avenue de la Grande Armée— myself included— stared in awe at the safe containing the huge fortune.

No swindler, however clever he or she can be, can ever carry on the game for all time. A slip of the tongue must come some day, perhaps in a moment of confidence or perhaps after a post-prandial liqueur. Madame Humbert was no exception, despite her marvellous ingenuity and her grasp of complicated legal proceedings. It seems that late one night, while sitting with Jules Bizat in the great conservatory— which led out from the big panelled dining-room which, by the way, I well remember— she was guilty of a very grave indiscretion.

Bizat was a high official of the Banque de France, and though he had not lent Thérèse any money, he was a little inquisitive, because his father-in-law was deeply involved as one of Madame's creditors. Conversation turned upon the contents of the safe, as it so often did, and quite artlessly he asked:

'You, of course, saw what was placed in the safe by Henry Crawford. Of what did the securities mainly consist?'

To this she replied, 'French Rentes.'

That was the first indiscretion which eventually led to her undoing. Hitherto she had always remained silent, declaring complete ignorance. But this admission caused Monsieur Bizat to reflect. If French Rentes were sealed in that safe it would be necessary for her to cash French Rente coupons each year! So pretending ignorance, he at once instituted inquiries at the Banque de France and soon ascertained that no coupons had been cashed. Jules Bizat was a wise man. He held his tongue. But he was the first man to discover the actual fraud.

THÉRÈSE, however, at once discovered her mistake. She had put into the man's hands a weapon against herself. Further, creditors were pressing, and from day to day she did not know when the bubble might burst. For several weeks she existed in hourly anxiety, when once again her fertile brain evolved a further plan by which she might raise money from the public and thus pay the creditors now pressing on every hand for the formal opening of the sealed safe.

To Romain and Emile she disclosed her plans, as result of which another enormous fraud was launched upon the public under the name of the Rente Viagère. Romain d'Aurignac was put up as the figure-head of this new concern, though Thérèse, the ex-washerwoman, had worked out all the details. She had gauged the public of Paris very accurately, and she knew that ultra-luxurious offices would be one of her best assets. So, in the Boulevard des Cappucines, great offices were opened with departments so numerous as to be bewildering, while discreet uniformed attendants wearing white gloves directed clients hither and thither. The place was the biggest 'bluff ever attempted in modern history.

Now inside those gorgeous offices, which only a genius of make-believe could have ever conceived, a wonderful business was in progress— a business to bolster up the clever manoeuvres of the ex-laundry-maid of His Excellency the Minister ofjustice. The Rente Viagère was nothing else than a big bogus insurance company who promised you annuities without any capital to meet its liabilities. Thérèse had started this wonderful insurance company— with the backing of the well-known lawyers who were fighting for her against the inexorable Crawfords— with one object only. It was her master-stroke. She badly wanted money by which to be able to buy French Rentes, cash the coupons and thus set aside any suspicions which had arisen in the mind ofjules Bizat. If he found that the coupons were cashed, he would surely remain satisfied then!

There is no doubt that when 'La Grande Thérèse' started the Rente Viagère she had no idea of how rapidly the swindle would grow, or of the thousands of people who would invest their small savings in it. The prospectus, drawn up in consultation with her two brothers, was so alluring, and so full of unusual benefits, that thousands of people of the middle classes invested their hard-earned savings, purchased annuities and insured their lives in a concern which was absolutely bogus. The great offices, with their big staff and liveried

porters, never had more than a thousand pounds' balance at the bank, though often they took over the counter four or even five thousand pounds a day.

The Rente Viagère was the pet secret scheme of'La Grande Thérèse.' To those who came each evening to her salon she sang its praises as an aid to the poor of France to save and to benefit. But nobody knew of her connection with it. Her brother Romain was full of details as to what they were accomplishing for the benefit of La Belle France, while Gustave Humbert, Minister of Justice, when questioned, expressed the greatest admiration of the scheme.

So the name of Thérèse Humbert became— after the death of her husband Frederic— a name to conjure with. Her critics had been silenced by bribery, or by counter-blackmailing cleverly carried on by her shrewd brothers who were, after all, adventurers after her own heart, and sons of the old peasant who adventured with his battered old box to obtain a few francs from the credulous.

Business went well. Millions of francs poured into the ever-open palm of Thérèse — alias the Rent Viagère. Every person who entered the magnificent portals of those fine offices, after being interviewed by suave, black-coated 'directors' who in their gorgeous rooms exuded financial credit— came out the poorer. From every corner of France thrifty working folk invested money in the corporation, bought annuities or insured their lives. With the money thus falling into the lap of 'La Grande Thérèse' she bought French Rentes, the coupons of which she began to cash each quarter-day and thus allayed the suspicion aroused in the mind of M. Bizat. Thus she started a second fraud in order to bolster up the first, and for several years the two big swindles ran side by side. We know that in the first year of the existence of the Rente Viagère Madame paid, in two months, for gloves alone £32, and £220 for hats at shops in the Rue de la Paix, while her florist's bill in the same sixty days amounted to well over £1000.

No doubt the Rente Viagère was much more profitable to Thérèse and her brothers than the sealed safe, the truth of which might at any moment be exposed, even though the Courts had decided that it could not be opened before Marie's marriage. Some say that M. Gustave Humbert, being Minister ofjustice and aware of the fraud, had contrived that the Court should make that decree and thus protect his daughter-in-law. There were, however, still people who, unable to get their money back, and seeing no prospect of it, had grown very angry and impatient, and even though the proceeds of the Rente Viagère swindle were being used to stave off such people, they were growing inadequate. Madame Humbert had borrowed three million pounds from unsuspecting people upon no other security than her well-told story of her meeting with old Crawford in the train, and it was becoming clear that the day

of reckoning was fast approaching. Yet the creditors were always faced with the decree of the Supreme Court that the safe might not be opened. And at the same time 'the eternal fiancee' was going about Paris happy, smiling, and certainly in ignorance of the part she was playing in the big conspiracy which her sister had engineered so successfully.

In the Courts several persons adjudged bankrupt attributed their insolvency to loans made to Madame Humbert, until at last, early in 1901, a number of her creditors held a meeting, when it was agreed that they had been swindled. One of these pointed out that after Madame had upon borrowed money paid for the defence of those never-ending lawsuits which had gone on for nearly fifteen years, there could not be very much left even if the safe were opened and the money divided. And, after all, the Crawfords would have to have their share. So on the face of it, they argued, Madame had borrowed more than her share of the money, with the result that they, the creditors, would probably obtain nothing.

Unfortunately for Madame Humbert this argument was placed before the great lawyer, M. Waldeck-Rousseau, who had appeared against Madame Humbert many times in Court— though, in his ignorance, paid by 'La Grande Thérèse'— and who had not great liking for her. He had all along been suspicious, being one of the few notable men who would listen to a word said against her genuineness and honesty. In fact, he had for a long time past become convinced that the whole thing was a huge fabrication, and, moreover, he had learnt that in secret the brothers d'Aurignac were the moving spirits in the Rente Viagère, though they were never seen at the offices and their identity was carefully concealed from everyone concerned.

vii

AFTER making a number of secret inquiries, M. Waldeck-Rousseau felt that the time was ripe to prick the bubble. His son-in-law, who had been badly 'bitten' by Madame, had died, leaving his wife in sore straits, and there were other friends of his who had been wickedly imposed upon. Besides, the great game had been in progress for nearly twenty years, and though some people had received interest at times, yet nobody had, in all that period, seen the shadow of the money advanced. Therefore he went to the *Matin* newspaper and placed all the facts he had collected before the Director, who promised to make, in a series of articles, a direct attack upon the myth of the sealed safe.

By some means Madame Humbert heard of this and went boldly to the editor of the *Matin* and threatened an action if he dared to publish anything calling her honesty into question. But the editor coolly replied that he should

act as he thought best, and next morning there appeared an article inspired by M. Waldeck-Rousseau, demanding the immediate opening of the safe. For nine days these virulent articles continued, declaring that the story of the Crawford millions had not foundation in fact, until the creditors were practically forced by public opinion to unite and take an action against Madame Humbert for a reversion of the decision against the opening of the safe.

For some months the case was delayed by counsel who defended Madame, and in the meantime the investors in the Rente Viagère suddenly awakened to the fact that they had lost their money, though even at that time there was no suspicion that Madame Humbert had been implicated in the bogus concern.

M. Waldeck-Rousseau was actively assisted in his investigations by M. Emile Zola and an able *juge d'instruction* named Borsant. At length the hearing of the creditors' appeal could no longer be delayed, and the presiding judge who heard the case decided that the only way by which the truth, so long delayed, could be ascertained was to have the seals broken and the safe opened. Notwithstanding a vigorous defence on the part of two famous counsels retained by Madame, May 9th, 1902, was the date fixed for the opening of the mysterious safe, and Madame was ordered to give the key into the custody of the Court.

'La Grande Thérèse,' seeing that the game was up, remained at home until the day before the opening, when, with her two brothers and her young sister Marie, she quietly left the Avenue de la Grande Armée and disappeared.

Next morning four officials of the Court, with M. Waldeck-Rousseau, the editor of the *Matin*, M. Emile Zola, and creditors representing just over three millions sterling, assembled in the room, the seals were broken, the time-stained tapes torn away and the safe was opened!

It was not empty, yet its sole contents consisted of an English halfpenny and a brick— evidently in imitation of the old oak chest trick!

Instantly the news got abroad that the Humbert millions only existed in Madame's imagination. One half of the creditors were furious, the other half hung their heads in shame that they should have been so cleverly imposed upon, while Paris, which always enjoys a good joke, laughed at the unfortunate creditors' plight.

Warrants were issued that day for the arrest of the fugitives. It was known that they had fled to London, but, though three French detectives were sent over, Scotland Yard could discover no trace of them. M. Goron, at that time Chef de la Surete, has told me of the world search he ordered for Madame and her brothers— her sister not being included in the charges— yet through seven months no trace of them could be found. In the middle of December, however,

a cheque upon the Credit Lyonnais, bearing the name of Romain d'Aurignac, came to Paris, and showed that it had been cashed in Malaga, in Spain. The Spanish police were at once informed, and on December 20th, 1902, 'La Grande Thérèse' and her two brothers were found living in rather poor circumstances in a back street in Madrid.

It seems that the house was surrounded by the police, as the brothers were known to carry firearms, and they first caught sight of Madame's pale, anxious face peering at them from behind a blind. A ring at the door-bell resulted in the appearance of Romain d'Aurignac, who, with a laugh, said: 'I know why you are here! You want me! Here I am!' and he gave himself up, evidently in the hope of allowing his brother and sister to escape. This ruse failed, and all three were promptly arrested, and, after the extradition formalities were concluded, were brought to Paris by six of M. Goron's agents, and eventually tried at the Assize Court of the Seine on February' 6th, 1903.

viii

ALL THREE prisoners preserved an amazing calm, while Paris still enjoyed the huge joke, and the creditors were furious. How much Madame Humbert really did borrow on the strength of her unsubstantiated story will never be known, for many creditors of high standing, bankers and others, dared not come forward and confess themselves victims of what was a variation of the old confidence trick. Hence they made no statement or claim. It is, however, estimated that in one way or another five million pounds passed through the ex-washerwoman's hands.

In the trial there were many delays and adjournments, as is usually the case in France, so it dragged on from February until August. To all questions 'La Grande Thérèse' remained mute. She would make no admission. The President of the Court asked her to say where the Chateau de Marcotte was situated, but she only smiled. And again she smiled when asked for the addresses of the Crawford brothers. Only once did he obtain a direct reply to a question. He asked: 'Who were the Crawfords?' In reply, Madame Humbert, with great dignity, answered: 'Monsieur le President, I shall tell my secret in due course, when the Public Prosecutor has spoken his last word.'

This attitude amazed all Paris, and the story she told a week later was certainly most astounding. It was decidedly clever, and in telling it she evidently thought she would be believed because of French prejudices against the Germans. She confessed that old Crawford had never existed, but that the person who had bequeathed to her the four millions was none other than

Marshal Bazaine, who had surrendered the fortress of Metz to the Germans, the money being the sum paid to him by the enemy as price of his treachery.

'For a long time I was not aware of this, Monsieur le President,' she went on. 'But as soon as I knew the truth I felt that I could not retain the blood-money. I am a patriotic daughter of France, so I destroyed both the will and the bonds, and burned the many packets of bank-notes which were English, German and French. That, Monsieur, accounts for the emptiness of the safe.'

'Exactly, Madame,' was the judge's retort, 'but it does not account for the brick! '

At which the Court roared with laughter. Of course, not a soul believed her statement, and in the end the jury found her guilty of fraud and she was sentenced to five years' solitary confinement, but, strangely enough, the jury decided that her guilt was in 'extenuating circumstances.' Her brother Romain was also sent to solitary confinement for three years, and Emile for two years, while the celebrated safe was on view for a year or more in a second-hand shop in the Rue Blanche.

Thus ended a most colossal fraud which, engineered by a shrewd and resourceful woman, who must also have possessed great courage and a remarkably clear brain, ran its course for nearly twenty years before final exposure, and which will for ever remain one of the most amazing of all gigantic swindles.

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18: James Illinois Bell
Harvey J. O'Higgins
1876-1929
The Red Book Magazine June 1925

One of the "John Duff" series

Harvey Jerrold O'Higgins

DUFF suspected, at once, that the man was lying to him, though there was no obvious reason why he should lie. He had come to Duff's office, to consult the detective, voluntarily, and Duff knew nothing whatever about him or his case. His story was entirely plausible. He answered Duff's questions with none of the ingratiating nervousness of deceit. There was nothing to be gained by misleading Duff— as far as Duff could see— quite the opposite, in fact. Yet Duff remained suspicious of him and in doubt.

His name, he said, was James Illinois Bell. He was a Westerner, an oil man from Oklahoma, and he wished to engage Duff to find his daughter. He had lived in Denver, he explained, from 1903 to 1914, and during the autumn of one of those years— about 1905 or 1906— he had met a show-girl named Mabel Dodgett and had an affair with her that lasted "for the week that she played Denver." He was, at the time, a reporter on the *Denver Republ*ican, and he met her through a theatrical publicity man in the Denver Press Club. After the show moved on to the coast, she sent letters to him at the Press Club, but he did not reply to her; and when she wrote to him from New York, next summer, telling him that she was in the Maternity Hospital and asking him to send money for his child, he did not answer that letter either.

"I was cleaned out," he said. "I hadn't a nickel. And, of course, I couldn't be sure that the baby was mine, anyway. So I let it ride."

There was a boom in farmland around Denver, especially in apple orchards, and he began to speculate in fruit ranches. He made enough money, in that way, to promote some fake mining schemes; and when "the goldmine graft petered out," he moved on into oil. Here, at last, he "struck it rich." He made several millions, but in the meantime he lost track of Mabel Dodgett and her daughter.

"When she wrote me from the hospital, she said she was calling the girl 'Bell' after me. And last year, I saw in the papers that she'd been killed in a joy ride over on Long Island somewhere— the mother, I mean— and I wanted to come on and find the girl, but I wasn't able to get away then, and now I don't know where to look for her. She must be about eighteen or nineteen, and she's on the stage by this time, probably."

Duff kept murmuring, "I see, I see. Yes, of course. Of course," in his best professional manner— the manner of a tolerant giant with a sympathy as broad as his immense shoulders. He sat back in his swivel chair, at his shabby old desk, genial, experienced, and thoughtfully receptive; and his eyes seemed to look at Bell's story rather than at Bell himself; but, all the time, he was noticing that Bell told his story as impassively as a gambler playing his hand, and this professional impassivity had the air of being somehow guarded and defensive.

He spoke the Western vernacular in a slow drawl but with a broad "a" that was either English or Bostonian. He wore his hair in a bang across his forehead; and under that bang his eyes were a colorless grey and stony while he spoke. His clean-shaven face was as hard as bronze and heavy with jaw-muscles. It was a face that reminded Duff of some antique bust of a vicious Roman emperor— a face that showed a sort of debased culture— the face of a man who knew the worst of himself and of the world, and dominated others more easily than he controlled himself.

" 'Bell Dodgett,' " Duff said. "Would she use that name on the stage?"

"Probably not," he admitted. "Her mother used the name of Cornish— Constance Cornish."

"The daughter would probably be Cornish, too?"

"Maybe."

"You have no description of her at all? Blonde or brunette?"

He shook his head.

"Do you suppose she knows that you're her father?"

"I don't know it myself."

"Would her mother tell her you were?"

"I don't see why."

"Do you intend to tell her?"

"I'll face that after you find her."

"I see."

DUFF was enjoying himself. Here was a formidable and astute man who had come to him, all carefully buttoned up, with an innocent-looking project that might very easily be wearing a mask. It delighted Duff to have anyone try to deceive him. It awoke a hunting instinct in him. And Bell was wary big game, having made his living, for years, as a superior sort of confidence man exploiting the public. He was curt to the point of tacit contempt in the indifference of his manner, and there was something coolly arrogant in the way he replied "I'll face that after you find her" when Duff tried to probe him about what he intended to do with Constance Cornish's daughter.

"Well," Duff said, "let's see what I've got to work with. Back about 1905, a girl named Mabel Dodgett— was she married?"

"I don't know. She didn't have any husband with her."

"Probably not married, eh?"

"Probably not."

"A girl named Mabel Dodgett— what was the name of the play she was in?"

"I don't remember."

"Remember any of the scenes, or the plot or anything?"

"Not a thing. It hadn't any plot. It was a musical show. She just sang in it."

"Remember any of her songs?"

"No. What's all this got to do with it?"

"If we could find out the name of the play, we might look up the cast and get hold of some friend who remembered her— and her daughter."

"Oh!" He thought it over. "I never really saw the show. I just went in to watch her once in the last act while I was waiting to pick her up at the stage door."

"Would your friend remember?"

"What friend?"

"The press-agent that you met her through."

"I lost track of him years ago."

"Remember his name?"

"He was just one of the newspaper boys that did the publicity work for the Tabor Grand. He left Denver before I did. Went to 'Frisco, I think."

"What was his name?"

"Hall. Tommy Hall. But there's no chance that he'd remember her or the show or anything else about it. He wasn't interested, and he didn't know I was."

"I see. I might wire our correspondent in Denver to look up the newspapers around that time, and see if he could find Constance Cornish in any of the casts."

"I should think it'd be a damn sight easier to look her up in some of the casts she played in here."

"That's a good idea."

Bell eyed suspiciously the simplicity with which Duff accepted the suggestion; and Duff, realizing that he had overplayed the role of innocent stupidity, smiled knowingly at Bell. "Who sent you to me?" he asked.

BELL regarded the smile and the question until he had evidently made up his mind what was behind them. Then he drew from his waistcoat pocket a roll of yellow-backed bills, counted off five hundred dollars, and dropped them on the desk. "You can reach me at the Marbridge any time you want me," he said as he rose.

He put on his hat and walked out.

Duff maintained that he always knew when anyone was lying to him, but he could not explain how he knew it. "They're what I call 'off normal,' " he would say; yet, if you asked him what "normal" was, he could not tell you. "I know if a man's going to lie to me by the way he crosses the room," he declared. "There's something about him— all sorts of little ungovernable movements— things he's not aware of. They're different in different people, but you get to recognize them. It's like bad acting in a way. You can tell whether a man's a good actor or not— can't you?— on the stage. How can you tell? You don't know usually, unless he's a complete flivver. You just know he doesn't convince you. As a matter of fact, you've stored up in your memory a million observations of how people speak and look and behave, naturally. You know what's 'normal' in a given scene, and you know that your actor's a bum actor because he's off 'normal,' eh? Well, that's the way I am about a man who tries to lie to me."

In the case of James Illinois Bell, however, the matter was not so simple. Bell had not betrayed himself by any "little ungovernable movements"; he had sat back in his chair, grasping the arms of it firmly, and giving Duff a cold and thoughtful gaze. True, his attitude in the chair had made him look like a defendant on the witness stand, and his manner to Duff was the defendant's manner to the plaintiff's lawyer— a manner that seemed to say "I've nothing to conceal and I'm not going to let you make me look as if I were concealing something." Added to that, his blank indifference to Duff resembled the professional indifference of a confidence man who knew how to get what he wanted from his victim by treating him "like he was dirt under your feet," as a

notorious wire-tapper had once expressed it to Duff. But both of these attitudes in Bell were only slightly "off normal" for a man in his circumstances and way of life. If he had been a real Western crook confronting New York for the first time, Duff might have excused his defensive air as due to the natural constraint of a swindler before the master-craftsmen of his profession. But Bell, in spite of his name, was obviously not a real Westerner. His accent and his voice belied him. They made it probable that his name was assumed. He looked like the sort of English "remittance man" you see in Colorado. He could not possibly be suffering from any of the tensions of a disprized ego in New York. No, it must be that he was definitely— no matter how slightly— off normal because he had something to conceal.

Duff frowned over it a moment before he took up his office phone. "Find Bilkey," he ordered, "and tell him I want to see him."

Bilkey was an operative who made a specialty of confidence men, but it was not for this reason only that Duff wished to put him on the case. Bilkey, out of office hours, was a devotee of the theatre. He was as devout a first-nighter as Diamond Bill Brady. As a boy he had collected cigarette pictures of stage favorites; now, with the same enthusiasm, he accumulated acquaintanceships with the actors and actresses themselves, with show girls and chorus ladies, specialty dancers, pony ballets, producers, stage directors, house managers, box-office boys, door keepers, ushers and even chorus men. It was his private boast that there was no theatre in New York to which he could not go, during the last act, call the doorman by his first name and walk in unchallenged to find a seat in the last row, with a nod to the usher. They knew him as a Central Office man, who had long since left the force, having saved a lot of easy money. They did not know that he was on Duff's staff.

He looked like an actor. He looked, indeed, as if it were his ambition to look like John Drew at forty. He dressed in the most quiet good taste, and he preserved always the simplest sort of interested and observant silence. When he came to Duff's room, now, in answer to Duff's summons, he entered from the outer office, with his hat and his gloves in one hand and a light walking-stick in the other, as if he had been called in from the street.

Duff was busy with a file of reports that concerned a case on which he was engaged, but he put it aside eagerly. He enjoyed Bilkey. The man was an artist in spite of his affectations. "Sit down," Duff said. "I think I've got a job that'll interest you."

BILKEY laid his hat, his cane and his gloves on a chair by the wall and seated himself silently in another chair near Duff's desk. It was a comfortably padded leather armchair, and he sank back in it and crossed his legs without freeing his

trousers at the knees. He understood that a gentleman of leisure, with an unlimited wardrobe, did not worry about bagging his trouser legs.

"I've just had a bunk artist in here," Duff explained, "named James Illinois Bell. He says he's made a fortune in Oklahoma oil. He's stopping at the Marbridge. He wants us to locate the daughter of an actress named Constance Cornish. Ever hear of her?"

"Constance Cornish." Bilkey put his elbows on the arms of his chair and rested his finger-tips on either side of his nose. It was a prominent and bony nose, and he was accustomed to fondle it in thought, as another man might stroke the chin. "Constance Cornish."

"She was in a musical show, on the road, in Denver, about 1905 or 6. So he says. She was killed in an automobile accident somewhere on Long Island, a year or so ago. Her real name, he says, was Mabel Dodgett."

Bilkey rubbed his nose. "Constance Cornish. Mabel Dodgett."

"There's something phoney about him, but I don't know what it is."

"I never heard of her," Bilkey said, as if he were surprised that such a thing could be.

"He says she had a daughter by him, the year after she was in Denver— a girl named 'Bell'— named after him. He wants us to find this 'Bell'— 'Bell Cornish' or 'Bell Dodgett.' He thinks she's probably on the stage."

Bilkey shook his head. "Never heard of her."

"Well, it shouldn't be hard to find her. The mother's probably been off the stage for years. He didn't seem to know anything about that. But there must be someone around that trouped with her in the old days, and they ought to be able to put you on her trail."

"Sure."

"And I want you to get a line on Bell himself, if you can. You'll have to go slow on it, of course. He's foxy. I think he's trying to use us. If we locate the girl, we'll have to find out what he wants with her. See?"

Bilkey nodded. "All right, Chief." He gathered up his hat, his gloves and his stick. "See you later."

ii

HIS FIRST move was simple enough. He went to the Hotel Marbridge and consulted the house detective, McGraw, who was, of course, an old professional friend of his; and, in half an hour, McGraw had gathered everything concerning James Illinois Bell that was known to the clerks at the desk, the bell boys, the elevator men, the telephone and telegraph girls, the chamber maids and the dining-room staff. It amounted to nothing. No one had

called on Bell by telephone or otherwise. He had received no telegrams and no mail. He usually rose late, ate his breakfast alone in his room, went out to attend to whatever business had brought him to New York, and did not return until about six o'clock in the evening. He dined alone in a quiet corner of the basement grill, took a taxi to the theatre, and returned to his room by midnight. He had a wardrobe trunk full of "case goods," and he ordered nothing from the bell-hops but ice water for highballs. He asked no questions. He did not talk even to the waiters. A girl on the newsstand who sold him theatre tickets was the only person who had especially noticed him, and she had been struck by the fact that he bought only one theatre seat and bought it always for the same play, an unpopular comedy of manners called "Modern Marriage." He had been to see that three times.

"Thanks, Mac," Bilkey said. "I guess I'll have to take him from the other end."

"Nothing serious against him, is there?" McGraw asked.

"Oh, no," Bilkey assured him. "He's trying to put over a deal here, and the people concerned just asked us to look him up. See you later."

HE WENT from the Marbridge to the Columbus Theatre, where "Modern Marriage" was billed to play a matinee that afternoon; and he found, on the program, the name of "Isabel Cornish" in a minor part.

He reported, at once, to Duff by telephone, and Duff said: "This guy's good, eh? Well, let's see. The poor simp! We'll have to run a few rings around him. Get in with the man who's producing the play. Pretend you want to buy a piece of it. Or no! Tell him you have a sucker with money and you think you can sell an interest to him. When you get the producer hooked, let me know, and we'll work out the rest of it. Go slow, now, and don't stub your toe."

BILKEY sat through two acts of the afternoon performance in the stolid aloofness of expert contempt and looked for Isabel Cornish. There she was— a tall, dark girl of nineteen or twenty, overgrown and drooping, with a wistful and sensitive face.

His eyes remained on the play for two acts, but his thoughts were elsewhere. They were occupied with Bell, and the producer, whose name was Livingstone. He knew Livingstone. Livingstone was a newspaperman who had come into the theatre as a press-agent for a play in which he took a five per cent. interest in lieu of salary. That play had run a year and paid him like a hundred-to-one shot. He had then bought a quarter interest in a second play that made him a little money, and he had now staked all his winnings on this

third play which he owned outright. Bilkey judged that he was probably on the high road to bankruptcy.

AT THE end of the second act, he went to see Livingstone in his private office, upstairs, on the front of the theatre building; and bankruptcy was evidently staring Livingstone in the face. It was a pale, fat face, and clean-shaven— the face of a man who always got what he wanted from the world by appearing ill and worried and pathetic. He had a touchingly mild manner, a gentle voice, and a way of looking at you that was distressed and winning.

Bilkey sat down, uninvited. "I've got a chance," he said, "to make some money for myself— and you— if you'll help me with it."

Livingstone did not change the hopeless stare of his pale eyes.

"There's a sucker on here from the West with a roll bigger than his head, and I think I can sell him a piece of this play if you'll give me a good commission."

It was in an exhausted, death-bed voice that Livingstone murmured: "Five per cent. do?"

"No," Bilkey answered harshly, "nothing less than ten."

Livingstone closed his eyes, put his hat back from his moist forehead, drew a long breath, and sighed deeply. "All right," he said. "Bring him around."

"Not till I know how much you can sell us," Bilkey retorted, "and how much you want for it."

That led to a long negotiation in which Livingstone finally showed his books and allowed Bilkey to make elaborate notes from them. Bilkey wanted to find out how much the play had lost on the road before it reached New York and how much it was losing now. "You're about twenty-three thousand dollars in the hole to date," he summed it up, "and you're going down at the rate of twelve-hundred dollars a week. You could afford to turn nothing at all and save money. The play's a flivver, and the theatre's always been a morgue. Anything you can get from us is pure velvet. You can't hang on much longer, can you?"

Livingstone looked, despairingly dumb, at the figures he had added on his scratchpad.

"All right," Bilkey said. "I'll see what I can do. The play's no good for the movies, and a few thousand dollars would cover all we'd ever get out of stock rights. Goodbye." He held out his hand.

Livingstone rose unexpectedly to dismiss him. "I haven't said I'd sell," he murmured.

"No. And I haven't said we'd buy," Bilkey replied. "I'll have to do some tall lying if I'm to put the deal over. I'd never try it if it weren't that this poor mutt had gone sweetie on a girl in your cast."

HE HURRIED back to report to Duff, and Duff summoned into conference another operative named Colburn— a distinguished looking moron with an impressive forehead who could pass either as a butler or a bishop. He was to act, for the evening, as a banker to whom Bilkey wished to sell an interest in "Modern Marriage," and they coached him in his part for a patient half-hour. When they sent him home, at last, to put on his dinner clothes, it was with instructions to be at the Hotel Marbridge by seven o'clock.

"He'll be all right," Bilkey complained as he gathered up his notes, "if he doesn't forget himself and call me 'Sir.' "

"Well, don't worry," Duff encouraged him. "If this doesn't work, we'll try something else. We can bring Bell out into the open, any time, by notifying him that we've located his daughter."

"What do you suppose his game is?"

"You run along and find out," Duff advised him.

iii

WHEN the head-waiter in the Marbridge's basement grill ushered James Illinois Bell to his accustomed corner, for dinner that evening, Colburn and Bilkey were already seated at the adjoining table, busy with their soup and a discussion of "Modern Marriage." Bilkey was talking to Colburn, who had his back to Bell's table; and, at first, Bilkey lowered his voice at Bell's arrival, in a natural desire to keep their conversation private, but as he got deeper into his account of what business the play had done on the road, he became more unguardedly enthusiastic. "If they'd taken this show into a small house," he argued, "it'd probably have made money from the start, but it's lost in the Columbus. It'll never get over while it's there. The Columbus has never made money with anything but a musical show, and it never will. Never. Look at what they did with 'Modern Marriage' in Albany. Here's the box-office statement. And here's Schenectady, before that. Look at this." He was plying the silent Colburn with papers. "The newspaper notices were so good that they thought the play could carry anything, and they loaded this white elephant on its back, and it hasn't been able to do more than crawl since. I tell you, Mr. Hemingway, if you'll put up the money to take this play to a small up-to-date theatre, you can make a clean-up on it."

Colburn looked at the papers and grunted, unconvinced.

"What's more," Bilkey continued persuasively, "you could put a musical show into the Columbus and make five-thousand a week easily. Livingstone's got a lease for a year at next to nothing a week. He could clean up, himself, if

he hadn't run so low that he hasn't enough left to turn round on. If someone doesn't buy him out pretty soon, he'll have to close the play. There's no use lending him money. He's a poor showman. What you ought to do is to buy him out. Then you'd be in a position to put Miss A. in any part you pleased, without asking anyone to do it for you. As it is, you're paying out money for her and getting nothing but a little gratitude. If you owned the play, so as to be able to star her or fire her as you chose, it'd make a big difference in the way she felt."

Colburn grumbled some inaudible protest.

"Well," Bilkey said, "there's no use deceiving ourselves about these girls. They're on the make, and nobody looks quite as good to them as a manager. Your name needn't come out at all. You could be a sleeping partner."

Colburn said, "Let me see those figures again."

BILKEY began all over from the beginning, with the original cost of building the sets, hiring the stage director, rehearsing the play, and trying it out on the road. He never let his eyes wander for a moment from Colburn to the man behind Colburn, but he could see that Bell, while he pretended to read his evening paper, was getting what detectives call "an ear full."

"A play like this," Bilkey explained, "usually costs the management ten thousand dollars, at least, before they get it opened in New York. It can't make any real money on the road until it's had a New York run, you understand. Livingstone did so well on the road that he was only five-thousand dollars behind when he reached the Columbus. If the theatre'd been right, he could have made that up in a week. As it is, of course, he's been losing ever since, but, at that, he's got the theatre so cheap that if he had any real money behind him, he could shift his play to a smaller house, put a musical show into the Columbus, and make a clean-up. Look at this. Here's his lease on the theatre, and here's his salary list for everything in front of the stage. It's a cinch, Mr. Hemingway, for anyone who has the money to swing it."

Colburn ate, and listened, and studied Bilkey's figures, and ate some more. Bilkey snatched his mouthfuls of food— in the pauses when Colburn was reading his memoranda— and talked and talked and talked. It was one of those interminable business conferences between a voluble salesman and a "prospect" who cannot make up his mind. It lasted through the soup and the meat and the salad, and came to the coffee tired but doggedly dragging along. Colburn ended it by glancing at his watch, on a signal from Bilkey. "I've got to go," he muttered.

"Well, I'll leave it with you," Bilkey continued undiscouraged. "You can reach me at the Bryant Park any time, but you'll have to give me a decision in a

day or two if you want to take it up. Goodbye. Don't wait if you're in a hurry. I'll take care of the check."

COLBURN grumbled an apology and moved ponderously out. Bilkey sat down again, to light a cigarette and finish his coffee, staring down into his cup. James Illinois Bell cleared his throat. Bilkey did not look up.

"Are you in the theatrical business?" Bell asked.

Bilkey blinked at him as if he had been wakened from a day dream. "I beg your pardon?"

Bell was settled back in his chair, smoking a thick cigar. He eyed Bilkey a moment in a sort of sulky challenge. Then he leaned forward across the table, and said, through the cigar smoke: "Do you want to make that proposition to me?"

Bilkey was naturally surprised. "What proposition?"

"The one you made to him." He indicated the departed Colburn with a sideways jerk of the head towards the door.

Bilkey looked down at his papers, embarrassed. "That was confidential," he said.

"All right." Bell settled back in his chair again. He drank his coffee and looked around him for a waiter, taking out a pencil to sign his check.

There was no waiter in sight and the pencil, consequently, was an obvious bluff. Bilkey studied his cigarette a moment, dropped it in his coffee cup, gathered up his memoranda deliberately, rose without a glance at Bell— and joined him at his table. "Are you stopping here? At this hotel?"

"Yes. My name's Bell. James Illinois Bell."

Bilkey put out his hand. "Chester Bilkey. I didn't know I was talking loud enough for you to hear me." They shook hands on it indifferently, regarding each other with no pretense of anything but wariness. "Are you in the theatre?" Bilkey asked.

"No. And I haven't been for years. I'm in oil. Out West. I've cleaned up there and quit it. I came to this damn town, thinking I could find something to get interested in, and I haven't found anything yet that wasn't a con game." He mumbled it, scowling, as if he were disgusted with New York and aggrievedly suspicious of it— and of Bilkey.

Bilkey smiled a metropolitan smile. His varnished black hair was brushed back from his forehead in the style. His dinner jacket was smooth and snug on his shoulders. He looked sleek and expert and self-confident before the shaggy informality of Bell's mode and manner. "Well, if you're afraid of con games," he said, "I don't want to sell you into the New York theatre."

"Pretty crooked, are they?"

"They'd sooner cheat you than play straight any day."

Bell nodded. "I guess I can take care of myself. What've you got?"

"The trouble is I can't very well sell it to a stranger?"

"What do you want to know about me?"

Bilkey thought it over, fingering his notes. "Well," he decided, at last, "I'll show you what it is and take you over to the theatre and let you look into it for yourself and then, if you want to go ahead, we can discuss the personal end when we come to it."

Bell nodded again. "Shoot!" he said.

BILKEY shot, but not with the continuous rapid fire that he had used on Colburn. He took his time, in the manner of a man entrenched who intended to await the attack, not make it. Bell was reluctantly compelled to offer the advances, ask the questions, and leave the shelter of his silence to feel out Bilkey's position. It gave Bilkey an advantage, and he kept it. He was polite and smiling, but he maintained the unconvinced attitude of having something to sell which Bell wished to buy, and he affected to be silently skeptical of Bell's credit and good faith. He forced Bell to propose that they should go to the Columbus Theatre together, that evening, to look at the play. "I'll not introduce you to Livingstone," he said, "until we get a little further along."

He did not introduce him to Livingstone or to anyone else. He left Bell in the theatre lobby while he got seats from Livingstone, and between the acts he sat in Livingstone's office and allowed Bell to wait alone in his orchestra chair. He made no attempt to "sell" the play to Bell; he showed no interest in Bell's opinion of it, or in Bell's emotional reactions to it, although he was acutely aware that whenever Isabel Cornish appeared on the stage Bell at once became secretly tense in an unblinking attention that was as still and staring as an animal's. When the final curtain fell, it was Bell who suggested that they should go to his room in the Marbridge to talk matters over. And when they were sitting in Bell's bedroom, with highballs in one hand and cigars in the other, it was Bell who began: "Well, what do you want to know about me?"

AT FOUR o'clock next morning, they separated. Or rather, at four o'clock, Bilkey rose slowly from his seat, glanced at the empty bottles on the bedroom table, and, with the same air of final and indifferent appraisement, looked at Bell sunken in his low armchair, with his chin on his chest and his hands hanging down to the floor on either side of him. Bell had been rather maudlin towards the end. He had wept at his story of his early life, his struggles, his hardships, and the malevolence of the world. He slept now, as exhausted as the empty bottles. "Well," Bilkey said to himself, "I guess I've got everything."

He poured himself a glass of ice water unsteadily. "I'll have to go to a Turkish bath," he thought, "and get this booze boiled out of me. If Duff wants anything else, I'll pick it up later."

His one difficulty had been in deceiving Bell about drinking the whiskey, and that deceit had been progressively easy after the third highball. He was only fuddled in his feet as he made his way to the elevator; his head seemed clear enough; and he was solemnly absorbed in trying to rearrange, in some logical sequence, the long, rambling and muddled story that Bell had told him. By the time he reached the baths on Forty-second Street, his report to Duff was beginning to take a coherent shape. "That'll be all right," he assured himself. "Once you get sobered up, that'll come straight from there on— if you don't forget some of it."

He clung to his memory through the long ritual of the bath, fighting to clear his mind. And lying under his sheet, with his predatory beak pointed to the ceiling, he struggled against sleep for fear that some of his recollections might be blotted out before he could fix them. Sleep came, in spite of him, but it was only a cat-nap; he awoke in a moment, as alert as a wild animal and as refreshed. He remembered everything; he continued to sort it out and pick it over while he took his cold shower, dressed absentmindedly, and drifted out, for his morning coffee, to a hotel restaurant where he began to make cryptic little notes in his microscopic handwriting, on the pages of a loose-leaf diary, with a gold pencil that was dainty enough for a social secretary.

AT EIGHT-THIRTY, when Duff arrived in his office, Bilkey was ready and waiting for him, as fresh as the new day, his whole report arranged and accurate in his mind. Duff listened with the twinkle of amused congratulation that was his usual expression when he was working with Bilkey. The affectations of the man were combined with a sober precision of thought and a conscienceless accuracy of method to make a contrast that was as amusing to Duff as the profanity of a dowager duchess. "Well, Bilk," he said, "you've certainly turned this poor long-horn inside out. We ought to have some fun with him now. Do you want to go on with his theatre scheme?"

"I'd like to make the ten per cent. out of Livingstone."

"That'll be all right with me," Duff assured him. "I can frame Bell without tipping off your hand. Drop in at his hotel and phone me as soon as you find he's up and doing. I'll call him over here and give him a surprise. We can't let any Oklahoma con man put up a game like this on us and get away with it, eh?"

Certainly not. But Bilkey considered that this part of the affair was "off his beat," as he would have said; and having waited in the lobby of the Marbridge till McGraw reported that Bell had ordered his breakfast brought to his room,

Bilkey phoned the news to Duff and went home to get another nap. He had the happy faculty of being able to sleep whenever he wished to sleep, and to sleep for as long as circumstances permitted.

James Illinois Bell was evidently not so adaptable. He answered Duff's phone call as if he had had a bad night. "You can drop the case," he said irritably, when Duff reported that he had located Isabel Cornish. "I don't need you. I've found her myself."

"Yes," Duff replied, "but something else has turned up that may make trouble for you. I'd like to have a talk with you."

"What about?"

"I can't tell you over the phone. It's too serious. We ran into it, last night, after we found the girl. I'll expect you here right away."

"You can expect what you damn please," Bell replied, at his surliest. "I can't get over there for an hour any way."

"Good," Duff said. "I'll expect you in an hour, then." And he hung up.

Bell showed his independence by taking not one hour but two, and he came at last with an air of sulky indifference that evidently covered a suppressed and angry apprehension. He would not sit down. "I'm in a hurry," he said. "What've you got?"

Duff sat and smiled at him in a pose of gigantic placidity. "There's something wrong about this case of yours," he said. "Our correspondent in Denver phoned us that the only time Mabel Dodgett played Denver she had her daughter Isabel there with her— an infant four months old."

"Who the hell— He's crazy!"

"No. He says you never had an affair with Mabel Dodgett at all. She turned you down flat and you were furious about it. You kept hanging around—"

Bell clapped his hat on. "You can go to the devil," he said. "I don't need you—"

"No," Duff cut in, "but Isabel Cornish may."

"What do you mean by that?"

"That you can't tell Isabel Cornish you're her father. I'll not let you get back at her mother by any such dirty trick."

Bell stuck out a venomous forefinger and shook it at him, enraged. "You rotten Welsher! If you try to double-cross me—"

"You poor boob!" Duff said. "Did you think you could come in here and play me for a sucker? I knew you were lying before you'd talked to me two minutes. Sit down there. I'm going to tell you something about yourself."

"Sit down nothing," Bell blustered. "I'm through with you. You're like the rest of these private detectives— you're a blackmailer."

"Shut up and listen to me. When you ran away from your home in Boston, as a boy, you took your little sister with you, and you went crooked for the sake of that girl. You lied and begged and cheated and stole for her, because you had to have money and you didn't know how to get it honestly. It wasn't until after she'd died, in Denver, that you quit gambling and the race-track, and became a sports reporter. Isn't that true?"

"What the hell!" It was so true, and it was so unexpected— coming from Duff— that Bell stared at the detective as if Duff had suddenly summoned up the ghost of this sister out of a past of which no one in the world knew anything.

Duff pointed to the chair. "Sit down!" he ordered. And Bell sat down as if his body obeyed and his mind did not know it.

"Didn't Constance Cornish remind you of your sister when you saw her in Denver? Didn't she look like her?"

If the ghost had asked him, he could not have been more unable to reply.

"And doesn't this girl, this daughter here, Isabel— doesn't she look exactly like her mother?"

He answered only with the blink of his bloodshot eyes, evidently so confused by the thousand questions in his mind that he could not get past a bewildered amazement.

"Well," Duff said, "this Mabel Dodgett, or Constance Cornish, or whatever you called her— the moment you saw her in Denver, it gave you a terrific kick. You got hold of the publicity man and went after her, but you started to treat her like a chorus girl, and she turned you down flat. You spent the rest of the week mooning around the theatre, and trying to waylay her, so as to put yourself right with her, and she wouldn't look at you. You were so sore you wanted to shoot her— or yourself— and you ended up by getting drunk and making a fool of yourself all over the place— at the stage door and in the Press Club."

Duff was feeling his way through the story in the manner of a fortune-teller, ready to hedge at once if he saw, by any change of expression in his client's fascinated gaze, that he was failing to guess the inner truth of the incidents which Bilkey had reported.

"Then you decided that if you'd been a millionaire, she wouldn't've been able to resist you, and you started out to make a fortune— a crooked fortune— in farmland swindles and fake gold-mines and wildcat oil stock. You made the fortune, and I don't know how many women you tried to buy with it, but I can guess that it didn't get you what you wanted, because you threw it all up, at last, and came to New York to get away from it. Well! Here you run across Constance Cornish's daughter, and she's enough like her mother to start

you off again where her mother left you, and you think you're going to get your revenge on the mother by blackening her memory to this girl. You think you're going to get even with the mother by pretending to her girl that she was your mistress. And you try to plant the story with me, as part of some crazy scheme to use me on the girl. You try to get me to find her and tell her that you're her father. You big dumb-bell! You don't seem to know what you're trying to do— nor why you're trying to do it. If you don't get wise to yourself, you'll end in a worse smash than you made of yourself in Denver!"

Bell asked, hoarsely, "Where did you get this stuff?"

"What stuff?"

"This stuff about me."

"That's my business," Duff replied, contemptuously. "And I'll tell you something else about yourself. Last night, you happened to hear a theatrical man, named Bilkey, trying to sell a piece of a play to that crooked old Wall street angel, Angus Hemingway. And when you found out that the play was the one that Isabel Cornish is in, you took Bilkey in to camp and started to use him the way you wanted to use me— as an approach to this Cornish girl. And I want to warn you that I'll tip Bilkey off to your whole dirty game if you try to go an inch further with it."

BELL swallowed, like a guilty small boy about to make a repentant confession. "I'm not."

"You're not going ahead with it?"

"No."

"You're not going to tell her you're her father."

"No."

"No! And I'll tell you why you're not," Duff said, with a sneer. "You act on a pattern that you don't understand. You act according to that pattern without knowing why you do it. And then you invent reasons and motives to explain your actions to yourself— fool reasons that would be disgusting if they weren't so ridiculous. Shut up! When you saw Mabel Dodgett, out in Denver, you wanted to act towards her as you'd acted towards your sister. You wanted to help her and protect her, but you're such a damn fool about yourself that you didn't know it. You tried to play the regular stage-door Johnny with her, and you couldn't get away with it. She gave you the air. And you started out, with her in your mind, to go crooked again— the way you went crooked for your sister— and every woman that you fell for, instead of realizing that you wanted to help her and protect her, you tried to get your revenge on her. And you couldn't do it. And when you saw Mabel Dodgett's daughter, you began the same boob programme with her, instead of understanding that what you really

wanted was to behave to this girl as if you were her elder brother. You come in here to me, full of bad whiskey, and plant a story that would ditch you both if I'd fallen for it, and then when you've got that off your chest and you're feeling ashamed of yourself, you run into a chance to buy in on this play and get next to Isabel Cornish in the way you really want to get next to her, and naturally you jump at the chance. You poor fish, you don't even know that you're not naturally a crook. You don't even know that you're still a kid on the streets, lying and cheating and swindling because you've never learned how to make a good living honestly. And if you try to cheat, now, for this Cornish girl, the way you cheated for your little sister, these hard-shell crooks like Bilkey will skin you alive. You're the cheapest imitation of a con man that I ever ran across— and I've known a lot of them— and unless you're going into this theatrical game to do the square thing by the girl and Bilkey and all the rest of them, you'd better go back to Denver and drown yourself in Cherry Creek."

BELL had listened to this tirade exactly as if he were the bad little boy whom Duff described. He looked silly. He looked sheepish, with his boyish bang, and his shamed eyes, and his faltering attempts to interrupt and defend himself. And when he pulled himself together, at last, it was with a boyish bravado that he spluttered: "Is that so! You think you're a hell of a fellow, don't you? You can go and chase yourself. I'm not asking for any advice from you, and I— "

"Run along and sell your papers," Duff cut in. "I'm busy." He took up his telephone. "All right," he said, to his outer office. "Who's next out there?" And when Bell had risen and started out, he added: "I'll keep an eye on you, and if I find you're not doing the square thing by Isabel Cornish, I'll trip you up so quick— "

"Aw, you go to hell," Bell muttered, without turning, as he went out.

"WELL, BILK," Duff asked, some weeks later, "how's your friend Bell getting on?"

"All right," Bilkey said. "The play's paying expenses over at the Forty-Fourth street theatre, and 'Yours Truly's' cleaning up two thousand a week at the Columbus."

"Good. How's he getting on with the girl?"

"All right. I don't know whether he intends to marry her or adopt her. He wants to give her the lead in '*Modern Marriage*,' and I'm using that as an excuse for selling out my interest to him."

"Don't intend to stick and make a fortune in the theatre, eh?"

"No. You'd have to have a flock of oil wells behind you to play the game the way Bell plays it. I'm getting out."

"Good. I want you to go to Chicago on a case as soon as you're free."

19: The Grave of Pierre Lamont

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

Bulletin, 13 Jun 1918

Harold Mercer, Journalist and author, served with the Australian forces on the Western Front in WW1.

Harold Mercer

IT lay beside the uneven mounds of red bricks, with here and there a fragment of wall still standing, in what had been a garden but was how merely rough ground broken with shell-holes and cumbered with debris. It bore a simple cross with an inscription that it was the resting place of Pierre Lamont, died of wounds, September, 1914. The cross was decorated, as usual, with one of the tricolor cockades which mark the graves of French soldiers. There are many such graves; but this, isolated in the wilderness of the deserted village, was conspicuous.

Not that the village was empty. Cavalcades of horse- and motor-transports passed through it daily, and its shattered streets were full of soldiers, from the neighboring camps, or the billets improvised in the least broken houses. In an estaminet, with boarded window-places, its roof patched with strips of corrugated-iron and tarpaulin, the Y.M.C.A. served them with tea at 10 centimes a jam- or milk-tin, and assured its customers that there were no more candles, but some were expected to-morrow; while upstairs, in the crowded writing-room, letters tor home were being written by the hundred.

The Hotel de Ville, buttressed with sand-bags, held a canteen in one doorway, and was disposed otherwise, as far as its reduced condition would

allow, in military offices. At its front, where a fountain may have played formerly, was a. water-tank with its notice that the water must be boiled or chlorinated and required an unmentioned quantity of bleaching powder to 100 gallons; and there were always some horses or mules at the water-trough hard by.

And now the inhabitants were returning to the village. Some of them came unnoticed, like the man who hung the sign "Barber Done Here" outside his shop, and who, apparently, had formerly been a butcher ; like the little woman in black, with two children looking much too young to be anything but her grandchildren, whose presence was made known by the unexpected opening of shutters which showed a window with glass in it, and, behind, a few packets of cigarettes and tobacco, some tinned goods and an assortment of violent-hued gelatine postcards. One egg, placed adroitly in the centre of the confusion of other goods, gave indication that fried eggs and coffee might be obtained within— an assurance that was received with enthusiasm, restrained somewhat until pay-day, when a packed doorway testified to popular approval. The growing congestion was relieved by the intimation that another shop where fried eggs were cultivated had burst into flower in another quarter.

Some, however, came heralded. There were strange carts bearing loads of furniture, now and then with a coop of fowls showing amongst them; and a handcart or so, laboriously propelled over the muddy roads. Sandbag embrasures and boarded windows began to disappear, and glass, with wonderful clean little window-curtains, and plants in pots, to take their place. Unsightly structures, erected for military exigencies, vanished. The military were moving out to new camps ahead. Children appeared in the streets, splashing their wooden shoes in the mud by the roadside. They were at home again— with, the stray mongrels and the cats that had arrived from nowhere to do or shirk their duty regarding the rat nuisance.

It was the barber who noticed my interest in the grave of Pierre Lamont. Something in its solitariness, I suppose, appealed to me, for I scarcely ever passed without pausing to look at it and speculate.

"The people are returning; but it will be more better when the war is over," he said— his usual preface to all remarks. "Old Pierre Lamont he come to-day; but he went away again, some more, I think."

"Pierre Lamont?" I asked, momentarily puzzled.

"I saw you look at the grave, M'sieur; the grave of his son."

I nodded understanding.

"So the old man has returned— to visit the grave, I suppose? A sad visit!"

"But, yes! More sad for him! Old Pierre was— what you call? — a miser. He and his son were— were — not friends."

Butcher that he was, he had the barber's trick of talking. He asked if the razor was all right, M'sieur, and then, regarding it as a courtesy question that made no real difference, went on talking.

"Young Pierre he was debonair; but old Pierre— no! The father of the old man, he, too, was of the money too fond; but with him it was a fondness for making riches, and when his son became old enough, he showed him how to make the money also, and they worked together. But with old Pierre it became a madness. Of nothing else could he think; no, not of the boy, even, who had no mother, for Madame died. That was for the boy good, perhaps. A little— what you call?— wild lie became, perhaps, running about with the holes in his clothes and nobody caring; but he grew a *bon* young man, who spent a franc when he got it, and had not the money-sickness; handsome and brave and strong. With him I played when a boy, though I was much more old; but no shame have I in saying that we fought, and it was not I that won, M'sieur. But, he getting a franc, we spent it together, M'sieur.

"Old Pierre, he went on counting his money, and young Pierre he went on being happy. It is said that the old man spent his time making schemes for more money, and preparing his deeds of mortgage and reading them again and again ; and, that being done, he would count up his money for the love of it. At least once in the day. he counted it; at sometimes, more. And, because it pleased him so much, he got the love of having the money itself, besides the deeds, just to count it, centime by centime."

He shook the cloth from beneath my chin, and indicated to me the hanging towel, that I might rub over my face if I desired; but went on talking as he lathered another customer, and I lingered, listening.

"Young Pierre, he became 17, 18, 19. Nobody know what will become of young Pierre; least of all he know himself. Certainly sometimes he did wring money from the old man, but not enough, and spent it; but tiring of little money and poor clothes, he took work— all sorts of work; on the farms, in shops, and sometimes clerk— to clothe himself and have the money to spend. He did spend it free: what you call chuck it about; drinking wine, and singing songs, and making love. But, still, old Pierre he seemed to not notice.

"Only when Pierre, as a young man will, fell in love, did Pierre *pere* notice. It was Marie Duboisin at the Estaminet du Nord that Pierre loved. She was petite and good; what you call *bonsare*. But no; old Pierre meant not for Pierre to marry her. For what of the *dot*? The Duboisins had money very little, and old Pierre, who thought of nothing but money, meant his son to marry a *dot*. He stormed and he swore; and that, of course, made Pierre love Marie very much.

So Peirre *pere* and Pierre *fils* they quarrel; and Madame Duboisin she say no daughter of hers will sweetheart with a man whose father likes her not; and Pierre says the devil! he will do as he likes, and he likes Marie; and Marie she says she will always love him; and old Pierre says to his son, in a great fury, at last, that he could go to the Devil. So he went to Paris. But Marie he kiss before he go away.

"I saw him," he added, with pride. "And she weeping about him, too, and crying that she loved him. That is all, M'sieur," he concluded abruptly.

To me it seemed but the beginning.

"But the grave?" I hinted.

"Oh— ah, the grave!" he cried, as if he had found a new subject. "Young Pierre he was buried there. The towel, m'sieur. Tuppence, please. Thank you very much, please!"

This to his customer; but I lingered as he tucked his cloth under the chin of a new client.

"He came back to die, fighting, about here?" I asked.

"But yes! The war he come— ah, that was very bad. At first the people stay; but not after the Uhlans came riding in, and go away again; then more come, patrols only. Then come our army— patrols too— only afterwards the British ; and with them, when they come, the shells commence to fall, fall, fall, until the people run away. Only some stayed, hoping it would pass; but no, and then the whole of us that remained we went also. Ah, but —to leave your home, M'sieur! All you have!....And the sights, M'sieur!"

"How about Marie?" I inquired.

"Ah, she was of the lucky ones! Some scandal was made because of Pierre, and, therefore it was thought more better she should go to a convent and become a nun. So she was there, though not a nun— not yet. And the people of the Estaminet du Nord were all killed, and the house ruined. Ah, there has been much people killed: it will be more better when the war is over!"

"But how did Pierre—" I began.

"Ah, yes! Pierre, M'sieur! It was that I would tell you! Old Pierre did not go; perhaps he knew that Pierre was with the French army, and hoped, if he was near, he would come home; for old Pierre had aged, and he fretted sometimes about his son, though nothing said. His home was shelled, and caught fire, but he remained: we were here between the armies, M'sieur. Then, one night came a soldier, much wounded, stealing through the village; and we who knew him knew it was Pierre. Yet he had no words for any, only 'Where is my father? Has he not gone? How dare you let him stay?' "

He paused to steady himself.

"For he had come back, he whom his father had disowned, in his fear for him. Brave, M'sieur; for he risked much from his own army, too, adventuring here; and he had come with cost of sore wounds. Scarce could he reach his father's house; and-in the morning was this grave that you know of, M'sieur. And old Pierre that day went.

"He was as one mad; for when a German patrol came in the town, he cursed at them and threw money at them, crying: 'Dirty dogs! That is all you want.' Money that he so much loved! The Germans said it was not much money, but hearing of his son and seeing the new grave, they took some pity and left him; but they came back at night, the dogs.

"For the Germans knew, even when they came, of old Pierre and his money. The first patrols would stop, and bully him, trying to make him yield them bribes for peace and security; and later they would search his house and demand his money openly. But old Pierre was shrewd; he must have sent it away; but even many of us thought he had hidden it in his cellars. Did I not, myself, catch Peter Bascelle searching for it with pick and hammer, hardly had old Pierre left the village."

"And the Germans caught you?" I suggested, shrewdly.

"I did but think that, knowing the Germans would search, it would be a pity if old Pierre had left it where a seeker could find," said the barber, unabashed. "Had I found it and the old man wanted it— why, it was his! But the Boches ordered me away from the town; yet not before I knew that they could never find the money, for old Pierre had beaten them. And there are now many holes, besides those the shells have made. It was Jean Nicolas who first returned, and I know that his hurry was to search, too."

Another man took the chair.

"Look here," I commenced; but the barber had commenced an entirely new conversation with his latest patient. I went out.

It was late when I thought of returning to camp. Passing what had been the residence of old Pierre Lamont I came upon a unique crowd grotesquely illuminated by a pair of lanterns. An old man stood in the group, and facing him were some excited figures standing out from a background of soldiers, late wanderers like myself, amongst whom I recognised the barber. Between them was a man in uniform.

"He has the permission of the town commandant," said the man in uniform, decisively. The old man, ignoring the excited people round him, opened what seemed like a box, and taking out a paper held it to the flame of one of the lanterns. He dropped it to the ground as it flared and poured more papers upon it.

"Deeds!" he said, as though talking to himself. "These people are beggared— why should I make their burdens more? And these— my country also will be poor." More papers went on the flames.

"Old Pierre purifying himself of his sins by fire!" I said, also to myself.

"But," vociferated the barber, "to violate his son's grave—his son, Pierre!"

"Yes, that is it!" cried several voices.

There was a grim silence. Then another box was carried into the circle of light and laid on the ground. The tall young figure that had borne it straightened itself, and advanced so that the light fell on a handsome face seared by a bullet wound.

"Pierre!"

Then Pierre explained.

"My father would not go till he had hidden his money. So I rejoined the troops, sure that he would follow."

We knew then what had been buried in the grave.

"The grave was yours, Pierre," said the old man. "So is the money"— he pointed to the heavy box— "yours and Marie's."

Behind the figure of the tall young man I saw the face of a girl, newly a woman.

20: Christmas Eve Long ago at Braidwood

Mary Fortune (as by "Waif Wander")

1833-1911

The Portland Guardian, Victoria, 25 Dec 1879

"WELL, I suppose we part soon, Mr. Woolston. This is your land we're on now, I think?"

"It is and it is not, friend," the young gentleman addressed replied. "See, there is the homestead," and he pulled up his horse and pointed to a gabled dwelling among some trees at a little distance up on the hill. "I am proud of Braidwood. I came to it ten years ago when it was a wilderness, and to-day I have sold it for fifteen hundred pounds."

"Sold it!"

"Yes, I have just been depositing the money in the bank; so I don't mind telling you, as I'm not worth robbing." He laughed gaily as he spoke, but a suspicious scowl came over his companion's face like a dark cloud.

"Robbing? Do you go about the country taking every man you meet for a robber?"

"Oh, dear! no, but you know we are in the days of bushranging. I was only joking, and, you see, I am in such good spirits that I can't help joking. This is the very last Christmas I shall pass in Australia, and I mean to make it a merry one. If you were stopping anywhere in the neighbourhood I should ask you to drop in and smoke a cigar toward evening."

"Thanks; well, I shall be coming back this way towards evening. I don't mind dropping in. You won't have any strangers with you?"

"No, not to night. To-morrow we expect a few to bid good-bye to Braidwood. Well, I shall expect you. So long."

"So long." And Mr. Woolston turned inside to open the gate admitting him to his own paddock. When he was closing it he fancied he heard a long laugh from the road, and paused, but the noise was not repeated, and his curiosity died as quickly as it had arisen.

EDWARD WOOLSTON was a fine, handsome, fair-haired young man of under thirty, dressed in the simple, easy attire of a well-to-do country gentleman. The man he had just parted from was his opposite in every respect. He was tall and muscular, and black-haired; whiskers and moustache were dark also, and hands and feet were large and coarse-looking. He was dressed in tight-fitting cord breeches and long riding boots; and over a crimson plaid Crimean shirt he had a coarse tweed coat. A bright handkerchief was tied loosely round his neck, and a Panama hat, with a black ribbon around it, finished his attire. He was quite a stranger to Mr. Woolston, who had fallen in with him at the table

d'hôte of the Braidwood Arms, and discovered in the course of conversation that their roads lay in the same direction.

"Well, Soo, dear, its all arranged," he said to his young wife, who hastened to meet him as he dismounted. "Braidwood is sold and paid for, and the money in the bank. One more Christmas day under the old roof, and then hurrah for old England and the dear old mother!"

He was light-hearted as a boy. He could have tossed his hat up in the air as he had done in the breaking-up of school before the Christmas vacation in the dear old home. He almost felt as if neither time nor ocean intervened, but that on the very morrow he should look into his widowed mother's eyes once more, and read there the undying love he know she felt for her boy. Alas! the shadow of death lay between him and home that night, though he knew it not.

"And who is the gentleman you expected, Ned?" asked Soo, as they sat an hour or two after in the pretty sitting-room, whose long French window was open and faced the road. "What is his name?"

"I'm blest if I know, darling. That's just like me, isn't it? We were neighbours at table, and the landlord called him Mason, I think; but I'm not sure. At all events, he's a fine looking chap, though not exactly what you would call gentlemanly.

"I am afraid that I half-offended him by an allusion I made to my deposit in the bank, and the fact that I was not worth robbing. By the by, I might as well have left my revolver at home, Soo. I met no bushrangers."

He was sitting, or rather lounging a little distance from the window as he spoke, and drew the revolver from an inside pocket of his coat; but just at that instant he caught sight of an approaching horseman up through the paddock, and he dropped the revolver and the hand with it into the outside right-hand pocket as he hurriedly got up.

"Here he is, Soo, Isn't he a fine looking chap, and did you ever see a finer bit of blood than he rides? I must go out and send Jim round for his horse."

Mrs. Woolston stood at the window—a perfect picture herself—and watched the approaching stranger. She was tall and slender, with dark, lovely hair, and a sweet earnest face, with a shade of deep thought in it. She had not been many months married to the man whose name she bore, and she loved him with a love all the deeper that it was not frittered away in words. She was of humble birth and humble fortune, and he had chosen her as the dearest of women to walk by his side through life, so that in her earnest, grateful heart, gratitude and love went hand in hand.

When Edward introduced the stranger to her as Mr. Mason, she met his dark eyes with a long, inquiring gaze, and there was for an instant in his look a doubt or suspicion, though unnoticed by her.

The decanters were on the table, and rich cake provided for the season by the careful hands of the young wife herself. As Ned filled the glasses and passed his to "Mr. Mason," who still stood near the window, he laughingly alluded to their morning ride and his fear of the bushrangers.

"Here is many happy returns of the season to you, sir. This day twelve months, if I am alive, I shall drink to your health in dear old England. Just fancy, Soo, dear, I had very nearly taken our friend for a bushranger, Why, who are these—?"

The glass was lowered to the table before Mr. Woolston's lips had touched it. Standing at the open window, nay, crowding through it, were three men in riding-breeches and boots and flannel shirts, and with each a revolver at his belt and in his right hand. They were fierce and determined looking, though all young and by no means bad-looking men. Mrs. Woolston fell back from them with a face white as death, and went close to her husband, whose right hand dropped between her and himself into his pocket.

"These, Mr. Woolston, are a few of my friends come to join us," said Mason, coolly, as he filled some glasses on the table. "They will take a glass with us, and then we will talk a little about business, I see you guess the truth. We are come to relieve you of that bit of money you banked to day."

"You shall never have it!" cried Woolston, all his strong nature aroused by the clearness of the danger. "Never, while I live! Stand back villains! If you lay a finger within a yard of my wife, take the consequences!"

"And pray what are the consequences, Mr. Woolston?" Mason asked with a sneer. "Gilbert, seize that fool. Stand back, missus, or maybe you will come in for some of the consequences your husband is so glib about," but as the man stopped forward, as if to push Mrs Woolston from her husband's side, there was a loud report, a shout of pain mingled with frightful curses, and when the smoke cleared away Mason was seen leaning on the table with his right hand hanging helplessly by his side and the blood pouring from it in a rapid stream.

"The scoundrel has maimed me for life!" he shouted, while his face was transformed with passion. "Seize him! rope him! Drag him outside and shoot him like a dog! By ——,I'll have his heart out for this?"

Before he had half finished, two of his comrades had disarmed Edward Woolston and dragged him from the room, while the third had torn the clinging wife from her hold. Meanwhile, with a face like a fiend's and a thunder of awful curses between his lips, the wounded bushranger was tying up his arm, through the fleshy part of which Woolston's bullet had passed, with his handkerchief. This roughly accomplished, he strode to the window and called out to the man, heedless of poor Soo's prayers behind him.

"Stop! Bring back that crawling wretch. Let him go. Here, I brought this cheque for the purpose; you want to draw that fifteen hundred, do you see? Sign this before more is said. "

"I won't," said Edward Woolston, who saw himself face to face with death and was desperate.

"Oh! Edward, do! Oh my darling husband, what is money in comparison to your life? Sign it, for the love of the living God!"

She clasped her hands, and with her sweet lips rigid with agony she gasped into his face

"Never, my love; I will not leave you a beggar. The double-eyed villains will kill me whether or not, but I defy them to rob my widow."

"I'll give you while I count three," cried Mason," and by ——, if you don't do it then, I'll shoot you where you stand!"

"You needn't count one, man of blood. I'll never sign it."

"Stand out of the way, Gilbert! No, drag him out. Keep back the woman. Here! out in the open ground, by the living God above me, I'll make a target of him! If I don't shoot fair, let him blame himself that my right hand is gone. One, two—"

Here he paused. There was a death-like and terrible stillness, and Edward, who had been upon his knees, closed his eyes, and whispered to himself one great cry to God for hope and mercy. Then it seemed to him that he felt his mother's hand on his forehead, cool and sleep inducing, and his wife's farewell whisper in his ear. He was going to sleep—should he awaken in heaven?

Mrs. Woolston's eyes glared with horror upon the wretched man's lips as he was about to utter the fatal "three," and an inspiration from the God her poor husband was praying to came to her from heaven. Her face lighted up, and, darting from the man who vainly tried to bar her way, she confronted Mason and his rising weapon.

"John Corrigan!" she gasped, "do you remember where you were this Christmas Eve five years?"

"Five years?" The muzzle of the pistol dropped, and he stared into the woman's face strangely.

"This night five years I stood by your mother's death-bed. She was alone, and you were far far away for many long months following the courses that have led you to this. Who walked for miles day after day to take her food? Who sat up night after night in the lonely bush hut with her when she was ill? Who prepared her for her coffin and laid her in it? Who followed her to the grave, ay, and wept there when your own eyes were dry? May God forgive you, John Corrigan! Is it the way you repay me, to murder my husband?"

"Are you Louisa Mayfield?" he said in a changed voice, and with a face that had paled as she spoke.

"Yes, I am Louisa Mayfield. I am the girl that your mother blessed with her last breath, and told you to remember in your dying prayers. If you do this thing, John Corrigan, what will you say to her before the judgment seat of God, where she will accuse you of blood?"

He fell back and turned away his face. One of his mates laid a hand on his shoulder and said, "Let us go Jack; a curse would follow such work as this," and as Corrigan waved his unwounded hand toward the man who had covered Woolston with his weapon to let him go, his wife's arms were around him, and he fainted in them.

IT is some sixteen or seventeen years since these events happened, and this is a true record of them, though, for obvious reasons, the names are altered. Many who read these lines will remember the occurrence, which was but too well known in the colonies. It was this very man whom I have named Corrigan that some months after fell in an encounter with the police, with thirty bullets through him. And as in his happy English home, the following Christmas Eve, Edward Woolston drank many happy returns of the season of himself and dear ones, he told the story of his dreadful escape, and remembered sadly his promise to the bushranger who was dead.

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21: My Aunt's Excursion

Richard Marsh

Richard Bernard Heldmann, 1857-1915

Collier's Weekly, 10 Feb 1900

Richard Bernard Heldmann

"THOMAS," observed my aunt, as she entered the room, "I have taken you by surprise."

She had. Hamlet could scarcely have been more surprised at the appearance of the ghost of his father. I had supposed that she was in the wilds of Cornwall. She glanced at the table at which I had been seated.

"What are you doing?— having your breakfast?"

I perceived, from the way in which she used her glasses, and the marked manner in which she paused, that she considered the hour an uncanonical one for such a meal. I retained some fragments of my presence of mind.

"The fact is, my dear aunt, that I was at work a little late last night, and this morning I find myself with a trifling headache."

"Then a holiday will do you good."

I agreed with her. I never knew an occasion on which I felt that it would not.

"I shall be only too happy to avail myself of the opportunity afforded by your unexpected presence to relax for a time, the strain of my curriculum of studies. May I hope, my dear aunt, that you propose to stay with me at least a month?"

"I return to-night."

"To-night! When did you come?"

"This morning."

"From Cornwall?"

"From Lostwithiel. An excursion left Lostwithiel shortly after midnight, and returns again at midnight to-day, thus giving fourteen hours in London for ten shillings. I resolved to take advantage of the occasion, and to give some of my poorer neighbours, who had never even been as far as Plymouth in their lives,

a glimpse of some of the sights of the Great City. Here they are— I filled a compartment with them. There are nine."

There were nine— and they were about the most miscellaneous-looking nine I ever saw. I had wondered what they meant by coming with my aunt into my sitting-room. Now, if anything, I wondered rather more. She proceeded to introduce them individually— not by any means by name only.

"This is John Eva. He is eighty-two and slightly deaf. Good gracious, man! don't stand there shuffling, with your back against the wall: sit down somewhere, do. This is Mrs. Penna, sixty-seven, and a little lame. I believe you're eating peppermints again. I told you, Mrs. Penna, that I can't stand the odour, and I can't. This is her grandson, Stephen Treen, aged nine. He cried in the train."

My aunt shook her finger at Stephen Treen, in an admonitory fashion, which bade fair, from the look of him, to cause an immediate renewal of his sorrows.

"This is Matthew Holman, a converted drunkard who has been the worst character in the parish. But we are hoping better things of him now." Matthew Holman grinned, as if he were not certain that the hope was mutual, "This is Jane, and this is Ellen, two maids of mine. They are good girls, in their way, but stupid. You will have to keep your eye on them, or they will lose themselves the first chance they get." I was not amazed, as I glanced in their direction, to perceive that Jane and Ellen blushed.

"This," went on my aunt, and into her voice there came a sort of awful dignity, "is Daniel Dyer, I believe that he kissed Ellen in a tunnel."

"Please ma'am," cried Ellen, and her manner bore the hall-mark of truth, "it wasn't me, that I'm sure."

"Then it was Jane— which does not alter the case in the least." In saying this, it seemed to me that, from Ellen's point of view, my aunt was illogical. "I am not certain that I ought to have brought him with us; but, since I have, we must make the best of it. I only hope that he will not kiss young women when he is in the streets with me."

I also hoped, in the privacy of my own breast, that he would not kiss young women while he was in the streets with me— at least, when it remained broad day.

"This," continued my aunt, leaving Daniel Dyer buried in the depths of confusion, and Jane on the verge of tears, "is Sammy Trevenna, the parish idiot. I brought him, trusting that the visit would tend to sharpen his wits, and at the same time, teach him the difference between right and wrong. You will have, also, to keep an eye upon Sammy. I regret to say that he is addicted to picking and stealing. Sammy, where is the address card which I gave you?"

Sammy— who looked his character, every inch of it!— was a lanky, shambling youth, apparently eighteen or nineteen years old. He fumbled in his pockets.

"I've lost it," he sniggered.

"I thought so. That is the third you have lost since we started. Here is another. I will pin it to your coat; then when you are lost, someone will be able to understand who you are. Last, but not least, Thomas, this is Mr. Poltifen. Although this is his first visit to London, he has read a great deal about the Great Metropolis. He has brought a few books with him, from which he proposes to read selections, at various points in our peregrinations, bearing upon the sights we are seeing, in order that instruction may be blended with our entertainment."

Mr. Poltifen was a short, thick-set individual, with that in his appearance which was suggestive of pugnacity, an iron-grey, scrubby beard, and a pair of spectacles— probably something superior in the cobbling line. He had about a dozen books fastened together in a leather strap, among them being— as, before the day was finished, I had good reason to be aware— a "History of London," in seven volumes.

"Mr. Poltifen," observed my aunt, waving her hand towards the gentleman referred to, "represents, in our party, the quality of intelligent interest."

Mr. Poltifen settled his glasses on his nose and glared at me as if he dared me to deny it. Nothing could have been further from my mind.

"Sammy," exclaimed my aunt, "sit still. How many times have I to request you not to shuffle?"

Sammy was rubbing his knees together in a fashion the like of which I had never seen before. When he was addressed, he drew the back of his hand across his mouth, and he sniggered. I felt that he was the sort of youth anyone would have been glad to show round town.

My aunt took a sheet of paper from her hand-bag.

"This is the outline programme we have drawn up. We have, of course, the whole day in front of us, and I have jotted down the names of some of the more prominent places of interest which we wish to see." She began to read: "The Tower Bridge, the Tower of London, Woolwich Arsenal, the National Gallery, British Museum, South Kensington Museum, the Natural History Museum, the Zoological Gardens, Kew Gardens, Greenwich Hospital, Westminster Abbey, the Albert Memorial, the Houses of Parliament, the Monument, the Marble Arch, the Bank of England, the Thames Embankment, Billingsgate Fish Market, Covent Garden Market, the Meat Market, some of the birthplaces of famous persons, some of the scenes mentioned in Charles Dickens's novels— during the winter we had a lecture in the schoolroom on

Charles Dickens's London; it aroused great interest— and the Courts of Justice. And we should like to finish up at the Crystal Palace. We should like to hear any suggestions you would care to make which would tend to alteration or improvement— only, I may observe, that we are desirous of reaching the Crystal Palace as early in the day as possible, as it is there we propose to have our midday meal." I had always been aware that my aunt's practical knowledge of London was but slight, but I had never realised how slight until that moment. "Our provisions we have brought with us. Each person has a meat pasty, a potato pasty, a jam pasty, and an apple pasty, so that all we shall require will be water."

This explained the small brown-paper parcel which each member of the party was dangling by a string.

"And you propose to consume this— little provision at the Crystal Palace, after visiting these other places?" My aunt inclined her head. I took the sheet of paper from which she had been reading. "May I ask how you propose to get from place to place?"

"Well, Thomas, that is the point. I have made myself responsible for the entire charge, so I would wish to keep down expenses. We should like to walk as much as possible."

"If you walk from Woolwich Arsenal to the Zoological Gardens, and from the Zoological Gardens to Kew Gardens, you will walk as far as possible— and rather more."

Something in my tone seemed to cause a shadow to come over my aunt's face.

"How far is it?"

"About fourteen or fifteen miles. I have never walked it myself, you understand, so the estimate is a rough one."

I felt that this was not an occasion on which it was necessary to be over-particular as to a yard or so.

"So much as that? I had no idea it was so far. Of course, walking is out of the question. How would a van do?"

"A what?"

"A van. One of those vans in which, I understand, children go for treats. How much would they charge, now, for one which would hold the whole of us?"

"I haven't the faintest notion, aunt. Would you propose to go in a van to all these places?" I motioned towards the sheet of paper. She nodded. "I have never, you understand, done this sort of thing in a van, but I imagine that the kind of vehicle you suggest, with one pair of horses, to do the entire round would take about three weeks."

"Three weeks? Thomas!"

"I don't pretend to literal accuracy, but I don't believe that I'm far wrong. No means of locomotion with which I am acquainted will enable you to do it in a day, of that I'm certain. I've been in London since my childhood, but I've never yet had time to see one-half the things you've got down upon this sheet of paper."

"Is it possible?"

"It's not only possible, it's fact. You country folk have no notion of London's vastness."

"Stupendous!"

"It is stupendous. Now, when would you like to reach the Crystal Palace?"

"Well, not later than four. By then we shall be hungry."

I surveyed the nine.

"It strikes me that some of you look hungry now. Aren't you hungry?"

I spoke to Sammy. His face was eloquent.

"I be famished."

I do not attempt to reproduce the dialect: I am no dialectician. I merely reproduce the sense; that is enough for me. The lady whom my aunt had spoken of as "Mrs. Penna, sixty-seven, and a little lame," agreed with Sammy.

"So be I. I be fit to drop, I be."

On this subject there was a general consensus of opinion— they all seemed fit to drop. I was not surprised. My aunt was surprised instead.

"You each of you had a treacle pasty in the train!"

"What be a treacle pasty?"

I was disposed to echo Mrs. Penna's query, "What be a treacle pasty?" My aunt struck me as really cutting the thing a little too fine.

"You finish your pasties now— when we get to the Palace I'll see that you have something to take their place. That shall be my part of the treat."

My aunt's manner was distinctly severe, especially considering that it was a party of pleasure.

"Before we started it was arranged exactly what provisions would have to be sufficient. I do not wish to encroach upon your generosity, Thomas— nothing of the kind."

"Never mind, aunt, that'll be all right. You tuck into your pasties."

They tucked into their pasties with a will. Aunt had some breakfast with me— poor soul! she stood in need of it— and we discussed the arrangements for the day.

"Of course, my dear aunt, this programme of yours is out of the question, altogether. We'll just do a round on a 'bus, and then it'll be time to start for the Palace."

"But, Thomas, they will be so disappointed— and, considering how much it will cost me, we shall seem to be getting so little for the money."

"My dear aunt, you will have had enough by the time you get back, I promise you."

My promise was more than fulfilled— they had had good measure, pressed down and running over.

The first part of our programme took the form, as I had suggested, of a ride on a 'bus. Our advent in the Strand— my rooms are in the Adelphi— created a sensation. I fancy the general impression was that we were a party of lunatics, whom I was personally conducting. That my aunt was one of them I do not think that anyone doubted. The way in which she worried and scurried and fussed and flurried was sufficient to convey that idea.

It is not every 'bus which has room for eleven passengers. We could not line up on the curbstone, it would have been to impede the traffic. And as my aunt would not hear of a division of forces, as we sauntered along the pavement we enjoyed ourselves immensely. The "parish idiot" would insist on hanging on to the front of every shop-window, necessitating his being dragged away by the collar of his jacket. Jane and Ellen glued themselves together arm in arm, sniggering at anything and everything— especially when Daniel Dyer digged them in the ribs from behind. Mrs. Penna, proving herself to be a good deal more than a little lame, had to be hauled along by my aunt on one side, and by Mr. Holman, the "converted drunkard," on the other. That Mr. Holman did not enjoy his position I felt convinced from the way in which, every now and then, he jerked the poor old soul completely off her feet. With her other hand my aunt gripped Master Treen by the hand, he keeping his mouth as wide open as he possibly could; his little trick of continually looking behind him resulting in collisions with most of the persons, and lamp-posts, he chanced to encounter. The deaf Mr. Eva brought up the rear with Mr. Poltifen and his strapful of books that gentleman favouring him with totally erroneous scraps of information, which he was, fortunately, quite unable to hear.

We had reached Newcastle Street before we found a 'bus which contained the requisite amount of accommodation. Then, when I hailed one which was nearly empty, the party boarded it. Somewhat to my surprise, scarcely anyone wished to go outside. Mrs. Penna, of course, had to be lifted into the interior, where Jane and Ellen joined her— I fancy that they fought shy of the ladder-like staircase— followed by Daniel Dyer, in spite of my aunt's protestations. She herself went next, dragging with her Master Treen, who wanted to go outside, but was not allowed, and, in consequence, was moved to tears. Messrs. Eva, Poltifen, Holman and I were the only persons who made the ascent; and the conductor having indulged in some sarcastic comments on

things in general and my aunt's protégés in particular, which nearly drove me to commit assault and battery, the 'bus was started.

We had not gone far before I had reason to doubt the genuineness of Mr. Holman's conversion. Drawing the back of his hand across his lips, he remarked to Mr. Eva—

"It do seem as if this were going to be a thirsty job. 'Tain't my notion of a holiday–"

I repeat that I make no attempt to imitate the dialect. Perceiving himself addressed, Mr. Eva put his hand up to his ear.

"Beg pardon— what were that you said?"

"I say that I be perishing for something to drink. I be faint for want of it. What's a day's pleasure if you don't never have a chance to moisten your lips?"

Although this was said in a tone of voice which caused the foot-passengers to stand and stare, the driver to start round in his seat, as if he had been struck, and the conductor to come up to inquire if anything were wrong, it failed to penetrate Mr. Eva's tympanum.

"What be that?" the old gentleman observed.

"It do seem as if I were more deaf than usual."

I touched Mr. Holman on the shoulder.

"All right— leave him alone. I'll see that you have what you want when we get down; only don't try to make him understand while we're on this 'bus."

"Thank you kindly, sir. There's no denying that a taste of rum would do me good. John Eva, he be terrible hard of hearing— terrible; and the old girl she ain't a notion of what's fit for a man."

How much the insides saw of London I cannot say. I doubt if any one on the roof saw much. In my anxiety to alight on one with room I had not troubled about the destination of the 'bus. As, however, it proved to be bound for London Bridge, I had an opportunity to point out St. Paul's Cathedral, the Bank of England, and similar places. I cannot say that my hearers seemed much struck by the privileges they were enjoying. When the vehicle drew up in the station-yard, Mr. Holman pointed with his thumb—

"There be a public over there."

I admitted that there was.

"Here's a shilling for you— mind you're quickly back. Perhaps Mr. Poltifen would like to come with you."

Mr. Poltifen declined.

"I am a teetotaller. I have never touched alcohol in any form."

I felt that Mr. Poltifen regarded both myself and my proceedings with austere displeasure. When all had alighted, my aunt, proceeding to number the party, discovered that one was missing; also, who it was.

"Where is Matthew Holman?"

"He's— he's gone across the road to— to see the time."

"To see the time! There's a clock up over the station there. What do you mean?"

"The fact is, my dear aunt, that feeling thirsty he has gone to get something to drink."

"To drink! But he signed the pledge on Monday!"

"Then, in that case, he's broken it on Wednesday. Come, let's get inside the station; we can't stop here; people will wonder who we are."

"Thomas, we will wait here for Matthew Holman. I am responsible for that man."

"Certainly, my dear aunt; but if we remain on the precise spot on which we are at present planted, we shall be prosecuted for obstruction. If you will go into the station, I will bring him to you there."

"Where are you going to take us now?"

"To the Crystal Palace."

"But— we have seen nothing of London."

"You'll see more of it when we get to the Palace. It's a wonderful place, full of the most stupendous sights; their due examination will more than occupy all the time you have to spare."

Having hustled them into the station, I went in search of Mr. Holman. "The converted drunkard" was really enjoying himself for the first time. He had already disposed of four threepennyworths of rum, and was draining the last as I came in.

"Now, sir, if you was so good as to loan me another shilling, I shouldn't wonder if I was to have a nice day, after all."

"I dare say. We'll talk about that later on. If you don't want to be lost in London, you'll come with me at once."

I scrambled them all into a train; I do not know how. It was a case of cram. Selecting an open carriage, I divided the party among the different compartments. My aunt objected; but it had to be. By the time that they were all in, my brow was damp with perspiration. I looked around. Some of our fellow-passengers wore ribbons, about eighteen inches wide, and other mysterious things; already, at that hour of the day, they were lively. The crowd was not what I expected.

"Is there anything on at the Palace?" I inquired of my neighbour. He laughed, in a manner which was suggestive.

"Anything on? What ho! Where are you come from? Why, it's the Foresters' Day. It's plain that you're not one of us. More shame to you, sonny! Here's a chance for you to join."

Foresters' Day! I gasped. I saw trouble ahead. I began to think that I had made a mistake in tearing off to the Crystal Palace in search of solitude. I had expected a desert, in which my aunt's friends would have plenty of room to knock their heads against anything they pleased. But Foresters' Day! Was it eighty or a hundred thousand people who were wont to assemble on that occasion? I remembered to have seen the figures somewhere. The ladies and gentlemen about us wore an air of such conviviality that one wondered to what heights they would attain as the day wore on.

We had a delightful journey. It occupied between two and three hours— or so it seemed to me. When we were not hanging on to platforms we were being shunted, or giving the engine a rest, or something of the kind. I know we were stopping most of the time. But the Foresters, male and female, kept things moving, if the train stood still. They sang songs, comic and sentimental; played on various musical instruments, principally concertinas; whistled; paid each other compliments; and so on. Jane and Ellen were in the next compartment to mine— as usual, glued together; how those two girls managed to keep stuck to each other was a marvel. Next to them was the persevering Daniel Dyer. In front was a red-faced gentleman, with a bright blue tie and an eighteen-inch-wide green ribbon. He addressed himself to Mr. Dyer.

"Two nice young ladies you've got there, sir."

Judging from what he looked like at the back, I should say that Mr. Dyer grinned. Obviously Jane and Ellen tittered: they put their heads together in charming confusion. The red-faced gentleman continued—

"One more than your share, haven't you, sir? You couldn't spare one of them for another gentleman? meaning me."

"You might have Jane," replied the affable Mr. Dyer.

"And which might happen to be Jane?"

Mr. Dyer supplied the information. The red-faced gentleman raised his hat. "Pleased to make your acquaintance, miss; hope we shall be better friends before the day is over."

My aunt, in the compartment behind, rose in her wrath.

"Daniel Dyer! Jane! How dare you behave in such a manner!"

The red-faced gentleman twisted himself round in his seat.

"Beg pardon, miss— was you speaking to me? If you're alone, I dare say there's another gentleman present who'll be willing to oblige. Every young lady ought to have a gent to herself on a day like this. Do me the favour of putting this to your lips; you'll find it's the right stuff."

Taking out a flat bottle, wiping it upon the sleeve of his coat, he offered it to my aunt. She succumbed.

When I found myself a struggling unit in the struggling mass on the Crystal Palace platform, my aunt caught me by the arm.

"Thomas, where have you brought us to?"

"This is the Crystal Palace, aunt."

"The Crystal Palace! It's pandemonium! Where are the members of our party?"

That was the question. My aunt collared such of them as she could lay her hands on. Matthew Holman was missing. Personally, I was not sorry. He had been "putting his lips" to more than one friendly bottle in the compartment behind mine, and was on a fair way to having a "nice day" on lines of his own. I was quite willing that he should have it by himself. But my aunt was not. She was for going at once for the police and commissioning them to hunt for and produce him then and there.

"I'm responsible for the man," she kept repeating. "I have his ticket."

"Very well, aunt— that's all right. You'll find him, or he'll find you; don't you trouble."

But she did trouble. She kept on troubling. And her cause for troubling grew more and more as the day went on. Before we were in the main building— it's a journey from the low level station through endless passages, and up countless stairs, placed at the most inconvenient intervals— Mrs. Penna was *hors de combat*. As no seat was handy she insisted on sitting down upon the floor. Passers-by made the most disagreeable comments, but she either could not or would not move. My aunt seemed half beside herself. She said to me most unfairly,

"You ought not to have brought us here on a day like this. It is evident that there are some most dissipated creatures here. I have a horror of a crowd— and with all the members of our party on my hands— and such a crowd!"

"How was I to know? I had not the faintest notion that anything particular was on till we were in the train."

"But you ought to have known. You live in London."

"It is true that I live in London. But I do not, on that account, keep an eye on what is going on at the Palace. I have something else to occupy my time. Besides, there is an easy remedy— let us leave the place at once. We might find fewer people in the Tower of London— I was never there, so I can't say— or on the top of the Monument."

"Without Matthew Holman?"

"Personally, I should say 'Yes.' He, at any rate, is in congenial company."

"*Thomas*!"

I wish I could reproduce the tone in which my aunt uttered my name! it would cause the edges of the sheet of paper on which I am writing to curl.

Another source of annoyance was the manner in which the red-faced gentleman persisted in sticking to us, like a limpet— as if he were a member of the party. Jane and Ellen kept themselves glued together. On Ellen's right was Daniel Dyer, and on Jane's left was the red-faced gentleman. This was a condition of affairs of which my aunt strongly disapproved. She remonstrated with the stranger, but without the least effect. I tried my hand on him, and failed. He was the best-tempered and thickest-skinned individual I ever remember to have met.

"It's this way," I explained— he needed a deal of explanation. "This lady has brought these people for a little pleasure excursion to town, for the day only; and, as these young ladies are in her sole charge, she feels herself responsible for them. So would you just mind leaving us?"

It seemed that he did mind; though he showed no signs of having his feelings hurt by the suggestion, as some persons might have done.

"Don't you worry, governor; I'll help her look after 'em. I've looked after a few people in my time, so the young lady can trust me— can't you, miss?"

Jane giggled. My impression is that my aunt felt like shaking her. But just then I made a discovery.

"Hallo! Where's the youngster?"

My aunt twirled herself round.

"Stephen! Goodness! where has that boy gone to?"

Jane looked through the glass which ran all along one side of the corridor.

"Why, miss, there's Stephen Treen over in that crowd there."

"Go and fetch him back this instant."

I believe that my aunt spoke without thinking. It did seem to me that Jane showed an almost criminal eagerness to obey her. Off she flew into the grounds, through the great door which was wide open close at hand, with Ellen still glued to her arm, and Daniel Dyer at her heels, and the red-faced gentleman after him. Almost in a moment they became melted, as it were, into the crowd and were lost to view. My aunt peered after them through her glasses.

"I can't see Stephen Treen— can you?"

"No, aunt, I can't. I doubt if Jane could, either."

"Thomas! What do you mean? She said she did."

"Ah! there are people who'll say anything. I think you'll find that, for a time, at any rate, you've got three more members of the party off your hands."

"Thomas! How can you talk like that? After bringing us to this dreadful place! Go after those benighted girls at once, and bring them back, and that wretched Daniel Dyer, and that miserable child, and Matthew Holman, too."

It struck me, from her manner, that my aunt was hovering on the verge of hysterics. When I was endeavouring to explain how it was that I did not see my way to start off, then and there, in a sort of general hunt, an official, sauntering up, took a bird's-eye view of Mrs. Penna.

"Hallo, old lady what's the matter with you? Aren't you well?"

"No, I be not well— I be dying. Take me home and let me die upon my bed."

"So bad as that, is it? What's the trouble?"

"I've been up all night and all day, and little to eat and naught to drink, and I be lame."

"Lame, are you?" The official turned to my aunt. "You know you didn't ought to bring a lame old lady into a crowd like this."

"I didn't bring her. My nephew brought us all."

"Then the sooner, I should say, your nephew takes you all away again, the better."

The official took himself off. Mr. Poltifen made a remark. His tone was a trifle sour.

"I cannot say that I think we are spending a profitable and pleasurable day in London. I understood that the object which we had in view was to make researches into Dickens's London, or I should not have brought my books."

The "parish idiot" began to moan.

"I be that hungry— I be! I be!"

"Here," I cried: "here's half-a-crown for you. Go to that refreshment-stall and cram yourself with penny buns to bursting point."

Off started Sammy Trevenna; he had sense enough to catch my meaning. My aunt called after him.

"Sammy! You mustn't leave us. Wait until we come."

But Sammy declined. When, hurrying after him, catching him by the shoulder, she sought to detain him, he positively showed signs of fight.

Oh! it was a delightful day! Enjoyable from start to finish. Somehow I got Mrs. Penna, with my aunt and the remnant, into the main building and planted them on chairs, and provided them with buns and similar dainties, and instructed them not, on any pretext, to budge from where they were until I returned with the truants, of whom, straightway, I went in search. I do not mind admitting that I commenced by paying a visit to a refreshment-bar upon my own account— I needed something to support me. Nor, having comforted the inner man, did I press forward on my quest with undue haste. Exactly as I expected, I found Jane and Ellen in a sheltered alcove in the grounds, with Daniel Dyer on one side, the red-faced gentleman on the other, and Master Stephen Treen nowhere to be seen. The red-faced gentleman's friendship with

Jane had advanced so rapidly that when I suggested her prompt return to my aunt, he considered himself entitled to object with such vehemence that he actually took his coat off and invited me to fight. But I was not to be browbeaten by him; and, having made it clear that if he attempted to follow I should call the police, I marched off in triumph with my prizes, only to discover that the young women had tongues of their own, with examples of whose capacity they favoured me as we proceeded. I believe that if I had been my aunt, I should, then and there, have boxed their ears.

My aunt received us with a countenance of such gloom that I immediately perceived that something frightful must have occurred.

"Thomas!" she exclaimed, "I have been robbed!"

"Robbed? My dear aunt! Of what— your umbrella?"

"Of everything!"

"Of everything? I hope it's not so bad as that."

"It is. I have been robbed of purse, money, tickets, everything, down to my pocket-handkerchief and bunch of keys."

It was the fact— she had. Her pocket, containing all she possessed— out of Cornwall— had been cut out of her dress and carried clean away. It was a very neat piece of work, as the police agreed when we laid the case before them. They observed that, of course, they would do their best, but they did not think there was much likelihood of any of the stolen property being regained; adding that, in a crowd like that, people ought to look after their pockets, which was cold comfort for my aunt, and rounded the day off nicely.

Ticketless, moneyless, returning to Cornwall that night was out of the question. I put "the party" up. My aunt had my bed, Mrs. Penna was accommodated in the same room, the others somewhere and somehow. I camped out. In the morning, the telegraph being put in motion, funds were forthcoming, and "the party" started on its homeward way. The railway authorities would listen to nothing about lost excursion tickets. My aunt had to pay full fare— twenty-one and twopence halfpenny— for each. I can still see her face as she paid.

TWO DAYS afterwards Master Stephen Treen and Mr. Matthew Holman were reported found by the police, Mr. Holman showing marked signs of a distinct relapse from grace. My aunt had to pay for their being sent home. The next day she received, through the post, in an unpaid envelope, the lost excursion tickets. No comment accompanied them. Her visiting-card was in the purse; evidently the thief, having no use for old excursion tickets, had availed himself of it to send them back to her. She has them to this day, and never

looks at them without a qualm. That was her first excursion; she tells me that never, under any circumstances, will she try another.

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22: The Man With Hair Like Mine

Harold Mercer

1882-1952

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IT seemed ridiculous to associate bloodthirsty violence with Arnoldo Bertilli. At Melchisadek Mansions, one of those places where a few partitions help disguise mere rooms as flats, I sometimes passed the little man on the stairs, and in spite of his obvious devotion to garlic I liked him.

Perhaps his loneliness stirred a feeling of compassion; there was something attractive in the shyly cheerful manner of his salute in passing. Then there was the way he amused the children who lived awhile in one of the flats on his floor; his dignified protest when someone carelessly referred to him as "the fiddle-player."

"It ees, surely, m'sieur, because you do not know. I am not ze feedle-player— no! I am ze musician, ze arteest!"

My own acquaintance with him was mainly a matter of things heard, until my landlady told me of his blood-lust.

"Would you mind trying not to meet Mister Bertilli to-night?" she said nervously, intercepting me at the foot of the stairs. "He is a little upset; in fact, I am afraid he has been drinking, and he is excited. You see, he's furreign," she added. That, to her, was enough to account for anything.

"It's your 'air, if yer'll excuse my sayin' it," she went on. "A man with your colored 'air did 'im a great wrong at one time. I think 'e was in love with the man's wife, an' the man took 'er away. Which was quite a respectable an' proper thing to do, *I* should say ; but you never know what these foreigners think. That's why 'e is in Australia. 'E follered 'is enemy 'ere, an' "—her voice dropped to a whisper— " 'e says 'e will kill 'im when they meet."

"He seems such an inoffensive little man."

"So 'e is—quite respectable ; there's not another tenant pays 'is rent more regular. But for fourteen years— so 'e told me— 'e 'as sworn revenge."

It struck me, as she dropped her voice again, that she was enjoying the thrill of it.

"For fourteen years! 'E 'as a little image in 'is room, an' 'e swears— with a knife in 'is 'and— that 'e will kill the other man when 'e finds 'im."

BERTILLI was only a handful, and the warning merely amused me until one day, having left my door ajar, I turned to a sound to see Bertilli standing in the doorway, vibrant with fury, with a knife gleaming in his hand.

"A-a-ah!" he exclaimed with a gasping breath. "Zose hair! Zat eyes! At la-ast!"

There was so much seriousness in the gleaming eyes that it was a relief indeed to see the darkness clear from his face.

"No, it is not you," he said suddenly, slipping the knife away. " 'Ow much apology do I owe you, my frien', 'oo I meet on the stair!"

He advanced into the room. In my relief I pushed the whisky-bottle towards him.

"I drink to you; I also drink to ze *revanche*! " he cried. "Ah, you do not drink? Is eet zat"

"Yes, yes—I'm drinking. The revenge, certainly!"

I said hurriedly, and his sudden ferocity was calmed.

"To ze *revanche*! "he cried. "Some day, m'sieur, I will keel a man wis 'air like yours."

"As long as it is not me," I said amiably.

"Let us 'ope, m'sieur, zat eet ees not you," he said darkly.

To assure him of my friendliness I indicated the whisky-bottle again, and he took a seat as he helped himself.

"Leesen," he hissed, leaning towards me. "Eet ees not to make ze monee zat I come to Australie! Think eet not, m'sieur! I am 'umble I will not boast, m'sieur; but, m'sieur, I am ze great arteest, great musician! In Paris, in Europe, I make ze great name. Kreisler, vot ees'e? *Pouf*! Eet is I, Arnoldo Bertilli, zat shall be Kreisler. But eet is not so. My life, eet ees spoil. By a man wis ze 'air like you! "

I really wished he would forget about my hair.

"Leesen, m'sieur: I love ze lady—oh, ze perfect lady— ze Madonna, ze Venus! lam at 'er feet; but no, she ees 'ard— only because I am marry, my wife ees alive, I cannot marry wis 'er. She ees 'ard! An' me ze gre-at arteest! What is marriage to an arteest? Ees not Arnoldo Bertilli more zan marriage? 'No,' she say; 'you wait; your wife, maybe, she divorce you.'

"Oh, ze cruelty! Zee agonee! 'Ow can a man— ze arteest —wis ze 'eart on fire wis jealousy, be hees best? An' wis my torn chest where ees my art? 'Ee go. I vill not boast, m'sieur, but lam a genius; I am ze greatest composer in ze world! But 'ow can ze greatest composer write, upset-down wis passion?

" '*Non, non*, Arnoldo; you must wait,' she say to me— ah, cruel! 'You must prove yourself. I cannot love a man in ze so bad temper.'

"I am despair. I moan. I take ze knife an' say I steek eet in 'er 'eart; but no, eet does not make 'er love me. No, she laugh ; an' then she go suddenlee. I find out. My frien'— ze man I 'ad not suspect— 'e ask 'er to marry heem, an' she chose zat to an arteest zat cannot marry 'er! An' 'e was ze man wis ze 'air"

"Like mine," I said quickly; "but not me."

"Leesen, my frien'," he said ; "I have 'ere ze daggare zat will go t'roo hees ribs like so— ooah! when I see him, ze man wis ze 'air"

"Like mine," I finished for him. "But why not forget it, old man?"

His eyes flashed furiously. "Forget? I, Arnoldo Bertilli, forget? Ah, nevare— nevare! I have sworn to 'ave *revanche*. Come, you will see!"

He overwhelmed me, dragging me by the elbow; and so I was introduced to that little shrine before which the frail musician kept the flame of his vengeance burning. Having sworn his oath again with dramatic intensity, he swore a new oath that, in spite of my hair, he knew I was his friend and he was mine.

AFTER that a growing liking gave me a genuine concern for the little chap. There was a childish innocence about his conceit of himself that had an appeal of its own. Except for his hunger for revenge, his was a remarkable simplicity. It seemed pathetic and absurd that such an impulse should obsess his whole life.

I even became anxious about him, especially in what my landlady called his "excited moods," but my concern was much more for Bertilli himself than for the man he hunted. The idea of the little musician dangling on a rope was unpleasant. It would be like hanging a child.

He had a supreme confidence that one day he and his enemy would meet. He did not hurry matters ; he went on with his work in an orchestra. But the thought of his revenge was constantly before him.

It can be understood, then, what my feelings were when Hartley turned up— Hartley, the man with hair like mine.

ONE day as I rode past on the William-street tram I saw the musician's dapper figure, the violin-case in his hand, making a way along the pavement, and the idea that this was a dangerous character seemed more ridiculous than ever.

"Look! Look! The man with the violin-case! Surely that is our little friend of Paris— little Bertilli!"

The woman's voice was well-bred and sweet. Turning to look into the

next compartment, I caught a view of a pleasant-faced pretty woman, rather ample in figure, inclining towards a comfortable middle age. The man with her was leaning forward eagerly, and I noticed he had hair— like mine!

"Arnoldo Bertilli? You must be mistaken. What would he be doing here in Australia?"

"He's gone now; but, Harry, I'm sure I wasn't mistaken."

"I'd have jumped off to speak to him if I had seen him," said Harry, "if you are sure it was he we must look him up."

"Of course I'm not mistaken," said the lady. "Don't you remember? He used to make love to me! I'm sure I wouldn't have married you so soon if I hadn't been a little frightened of him. I had no idea that he had taken it so seriously. You know, Harry, I really cared for the little fellow in a way."

"Well, so did I," Harry agreed heartily. "You couldn't help it. He was so like a child with his big ambitions and his conceit— and his little shyness. You felt he was a chap you had to look after— the sort of fellow you had to help."

Precisely my own feelings! They were lost in the bustle of the emptying tram at the top of William-street, leaving me with a feeling that I ought to have spoken to them, conveyed some warning. Apprehension seized me ; and yet it seemed ridiculous to go tothe police.

I LEFT matters to chance, and was given a shock I when my landlady entered my flat less than a week after the incident in the tram.

"Oh, please, please keep your door shut," she said. "Mr. Bertilli has come home, and he is excited— very excited ; and there is a friend with him."

Bertilli certainly was excited. I could hear him, apparently trying to sing, shout and laugh at once. I closed my door.

But Bertilli did not let that stop him. He entered boisterously, and at his heels came another man— the big, wholesome-looking man I had heard addressed as Harry in the tram.

"My frien'— both my frien's," said Bertilli, "permit me to present my ol' frien' M'sieur 'Artley. I have not seen him for fourteen years!"

There was a note of exultation in his voice. The situation, to me, was tense; all the more so because Hartley was heartily jolly, oblivious of the fate in store for him, and Bertilli on the top note of excitement.

"Sit down while I get the whisky," I said, trying to cover my nervousness. "No, you sit over there, if you don't mind."

It was something to get the table between Hartley and the avenger; I sat near Bertilli, prepared to spring if I saw his hand go towards the hidden knife.

"Well, here's to more meetings," toasted Hartley. "Just fancy me running across old Arnoldo after all these years! We knew one another in Paris— and he knew my wife, too."

"Did I not love 'er?" laughed Bertilli; but only I, apparently, sensed the danger in his voice.

"Of course ; anyone would love her," said Hartley heartily. "What did you think of her this morning? I always say she keeps as charming as ever. A bit stouter, of course, but that makes her all the jollier."

Poor fool, unconsciously goading the fury already stirred against him!

"It is because she ees 'appee," said Bertilli. "I forgive you for taking 'er from me, for 'ave you not made 'er 'appee? Ees eet not all a man can ask, if 'e love a woman— that she ees 'appee?"

"It's the right spirit, but I don't know that I could feel that way," said Hartley, standing up suddenly. Surely it must come now! Alert for action, I watched Bertilli for a moment; but he apparently wanted to play with his enemy for a little longer.

"I'll get some water if you don't mind," said Hartley.

I had been watching the situation so keenly that I had not noticed the deficiency; even now, instead of apologising and getting the water myself, I merely motioned him to the kitchenette.

Bertilli leaned towards me. I was watching every movement he made.

"What an escape!" he whispered. "The girl I lof, she was sleem, so like ze fairee; but now oh, *mon Dieu*!— oh, so fat! And it is only for the M'sieur 'Artley I would have marry her!"

He laughed suddenly, took the knife from its hiding and flung it under the couch.

"A healt'!" he cried. "May we all bee sateesfied— zose who marry ze girl, and zose who dont!

End